1857 and the Indian Intelligentsia

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Received historiographic wisdom has ossified the belief that Indians educated in English, the intelligentsia who ushered in New India, were for the first fifty years categorical in their condemnation of 1857. They condemned it as a mutiny of disgruntled soldiers and as a last desperate attempt by dispossessed, backward looking feudal interests to get rid of the British. Only after Savarkar's dissenting intervention did they tend to move from their settled adverse verdict towards a positive view of 1857.

This paper seeks to examine the historical basis of received historiographic wisdom about the attitude of the emergent Indian intelligentsia towards 1857. It shows that what is seen as the attitude of the intelligentsia during the first fifty years was something more multivalent than can be expressed by a categorical term like condemnation. That multivalence was obscured, though not altogether obliterated, rather swiftly by a dominant note that sounded clearly condemnatory.

This change was brought about by the increasing political and, equally importantly, cognitive control that the ruling dispensation exercised over the new intelligentsia. Political control made loyalty to the British connection an essential constituent of the emerging political consciousness. Cognitive control inured the intelligentsia to what may roughly be described as a modernist teleology, one in which India's regeneration could be conceived of solely in relation to the British connection. Loyalty, given this inuring, was not only a pragmatic stance but also a pre-requisite for the country's progress. Because the modernist teleology survived the political disappearance of the colonial presence, the pre-Savarkar image of 1857 continued well into Independence. In fact, that teleology virtually foreclosed all but one 'rational' way of viewing 1857. Consequently, for all the significant shifts within it, the dominant historiographic view of 1857 even during its centenary celebrations carried the marks of the first fifty years.

There is admittedly a grain of truth in the belief about the new intelligentsia's initial unqualified hostility to 1857. To begin with the beginning, we may recall by way of illustration the reaction of the *Hindoo Patriot*, an independent, fearless and well-informed weekly from Calcutta.[1] Writing in the very moment of the outbreak in Meerut and Delhi, the weekly eloquently remarked that the 'rebels' were 'as brutal and unprincipled a body of ruffians as ever disgraced a uniform or stained the bright polish of a soldier's sword with the blood of murder. Straightaway convinced that 'the country is thrown backward by the present disturbances', it recommended the rebels for 'signal chastisement'.[2]

A decade later, with Pax Britannica firmly in place, scholar-statesman Raja Rajendralala Mitra (1824-91) looked back in righteous anger on 1857 as 'a war of anarchy against established Government'. It was a war in which 'Nana Sahibs and Azimoollas and the other monsters of inequity' had 'brought into foul play' 'some of the worst passions of the human mind'.[3]

By the late 1870s, this hostility had developed into a nationalist narrative of 'the dark days of the Indian Mutiny'. The narrative found powerful articulation in a speech by Surendranath Banerji (1848-1924). Addressing a mammoth public meeting in Calcutta, the nationalist master orator said:

> It was essentially a military revolt, with which the people at large had no sympathy, and from which they sedulously kept themselves aloof. . . . When the hour came, they manfully stood by their English rulers, and rendered them important services. . . . Deo Narain Singh does not live, but we invoke his shade to bear witness to his trials and sufferings, his gigantic

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exertions to crush out the seeds of rebellion and restore peace and order. But for the memorable services of that great man, the last vestige of British power would, in the days of the Mutiny, have disappeared from the sacred and ancient city of the Hindoos. Those were days when loyalty displayed itself to the greatest advantage, and was appreciated most.[4]

The image the narrative projected of 1857 was not confined to the emerging nationalist political discourse. It had begun to enter the general consciousness of the new intelligentsia and to form part of their commonsense. This is evidenced in the *Yamalok ki Yatra*, a literary work written in 1880 by a budding twenty-one year-old Radhacharan Goswami (1859-1923), who would later be counted among the pioneers of modern Hindi literature. As its title suggests, the work describes the journey of its 'enlightened' young protagonist to the kingdom of Yama, the God of Death. Of the various hells and heavens catalogued in this fantasy along with the deeds they are earmarked to punish or reward, a particularly fearsome hell is reserved for those who in 1857 had revolted against our mighty government'.

Young Radhacharan was seeking in *Yamalok ki Yatra* to tackle an issue that was tearing him apart from inside even as it was splitting contemporary Indian society: the conflict over the new and the old. Distinguishing things that deserve to be punished from those that must be rewarded, the journey to Yamalok was a literary device to chart a course between the new and the old for India's journey into a desirable future. Much in *Yamlok ki Yatra* was unresolved, even contradictory. But its verdict on 1857 was unequivocally damning.[5]

I would like to focus on the shaping of the after-life of 1857 among the new Indian intelligentsia during the pre-Savarkar years and also venture to make a larger point about the cognitive near-closure that facilitated the persistence of that after-life even during the post-Savarkar half-century.

There can be no better illustrations of that persistence than Nehru's proclaimed view and, subsequently, the observations made during the centenary year of 1857. A representative *par excellence* of the Indian intelligentsia, and a scholar in his own right, Nehru believed that 1857 'was much more than a military mutiny'. It 'spread rapidly and assumed the character of a popular rebellion and a war of Indian independence. ' Nonetheless, in Nehru's studied opinion, 'Essentially it was a feudal outburst, headed by feudal chiefs and their followers and aided by the widespread anti-foreign sentiment. . . . It brought out all the inherent weaknesses of the old regime which was making its last despairing effort to drive out foreign rule.

Nehru was ready here with modernity's dirge for the old order. 'The feudal chiefs', he wrote, 'had already played their role in history and there was no place for them in the future. ' 'Nationalism of the modern type', he continued, 'was yet to come; India had still to go through much sorrow and travail before she learnt the lesson which would give her real freedom. ' 1857 could be 'a popular rebellion'. It could even be 'a war of Indian independence'. But it could not have ushered in freedom. As the modernist teleology, voiced by Nehru, would have it: 'Not by fighting for a lost cause, the feudal order, would freedom come.[6]

An equally telling illustration is the centenary year of 1857. Centenary celebrations are, by definition, occasions for whipping up enthusiasm. In any case, considering that the euphoria of 1947 had not spent itself entirely by 1957, whipping up enthusiasm for the 'first war of national independence' should not have been difficult in its centenary year. What in the event happened is emblematized in R. C. Majumdar's brave 'revolt' on behalf of academic objectivity, as also in the official historian S. N. Sen's tepid *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*.

Also telling, by a reverse process, is the fate of S.B. Chaudhuri. In the centenary year and subsequently as well, Chaudhuri questioned the very assumptions of received historiographic wisdom. Knowing the cognitive potential of his intervention, he sanguinely dedicated his *Theories of the Indian Mutiny (1857-59)* to 'all the historians of the Mutiny in the hope of a new and deeper understanding'. Far from entering popular consciousness, Chaudhuri remains a marginal presence even in the world of scholarship.

With this prelude, I should like to return to the beginning, when the *Hindoo Patriot* was condemning the rebels and giving reasons why their defeat was foredoomed. Precisely then, the *Friend of India*, a prominent Anglo-Indian weekly, was calling the *Hindoo Patriot* 'the organ of the sepoys', and demanding the forfeiture of its licence. In the beginning, at least, going by the *Friend*'s angry reaction, the *Patriot*'s – and the educated Indians' – response to 1857 was more complex than its flat description as pro-British would suggest. It carried resonances and emphases that we may try to tease out.

The *Hindoo Patriot* was indeed not 'an organ of the sepoys. ' That scurrilous Anglo-Indian labelling was an effect more of the panic that had possessed the paranoid European community in India – especially the non-official Europeans – than of what actually appeared in the *Patriot*. More than what Indians of the class represented by the *Patriot* did or said, it was panic that made the Anglo-Indians see danger all around. It was in panic that they lumped together all Indians as bloodthirsty rebels. Their

anger was not confined to the 'Pandys'. It implicated the English-educated Indians *en masse*. Popularizing the fearful stereotype, the London *Times* described Nana Saheb as 'the true barbaric ideal', the 'type of the revolt'. It represented him as the symbol of 'Young Asia' in that he revealed 'what we are to expect from communicating European arts and accomplishments to Hindoos without our religion or our manly character.' Quoting the *Times*, the *Friend of India* sealed the stereotype with the approval of Indian experience as it observed:

> There is the whole truth. The sleek, polished, educated native who speaks English like Englishmen, and quotes Milton and Shakespeare, is a savage, with a cruelty such as savages never feel. That, the conviction of the Anglo-Indians, is at last the conviction of Great Britain.[7]

It was panic that made the Europeans in Calcutta, the heavily guarded capital city, hear the advance of murderous mutineers in the crackers fired at a suburban wedding.[8] Forming themselves into the Indian Reform League, they hatched quixotic plans of seizing the government and shipping the pusillanimous Canning 'home'. Even in relatively quiet Bombay, they believed that 'political discussion has for many months past been rife throughout the Presidency and the state of public feeling thereby evinced is in the last degree unsatisfactory', and insisted that 'the young men of our colleges' were 'nearly the most disloyal'.[9] Specific charges of conspiracy were made against Jagannath Sankersett, the harmless business magnate and president of the loyal Bombay Association. Suspicion, the *Patriot* reported, had become 'another name for conviction.'[10]

Yet, there was in that suspicion a slender basis of truth, enough to appear amplified as sedition in the febrile Anglo-Indian and British imagination. As if confirming the equation between the English-educated and the Pandys, the *Rast Goftar* wrote that 'subjects will be rebels from principle when rulers are tyrants from policy.'[11] It is noteworthy that, to counter the flood of Anglo-Indian attacks on Indians following the outbreak of 1857, the *Rast Goftar* converted itself in January 1858 from a Gujarati into an Anglo-Guajarati weekly.[12] It did not hesitate to implicate the non-official Europeans and charged them with having done 'all that lay in them to convert the present Military, into a national revolt.'[13] Reflecting similar courage, and also resentment about having been led on through disinformation, the *Hindoo Patriot* lamented that while the atrocities attributed to the rebels were either gross exaggerations or 'unreal creations of morbid imaginations, the retributive excesses were sad realities.'[14]

Sentiments so sympathetic to the rebels took a few months to form. But even the early reaction, notwithstanding its loyalty to the British and condemnation of the rebels, was not uncritical of the alien dispensation. A remarkably lucid exposition of this reaction came from the *Hindoo Patriot* less than a month after the May outbreak. It was in the context of Bengal. But reading 'Bengali', *a la* Gokhale,[15] as a metonym for the Indian intelligentsia, it is actually an articulation of the position – material and ideational – of the emerging Indian intelligentsia. In an article entitled 'The Sepoy Mutiny and its action upon the people of Bengal', the *Patriot* began with a rationale for their loyalty to the ruling dispensation:

> The Bengallees never aspired to the glory of leading armies to battle or the martyrdom of the forlorn hope. Their pursuits and their triumphs are entirely civil. A strong and versatile intellect enables them to think deeply and to think foresightedly. They are aware that the British rule is the best suited to their quiet and intellectual tastes; that under it they might achieve the greatest amount of prosperity compatible with their position as a conquered race. They are in hopes that by lawful and constitutional appeals to the good sense and justice of the English people sitting by representatives in a sovereign Council or Parliament, they, when the fitting moment arrives, will rise yet further in the scale of equality with their foreign rulers and divide with them the honor and the responsibility of administering the affairs of the largest and the most well-established empire in Asia.

Against such people, whose temperament and interests combined to make them loyal, it was insinuated, the *Patriot* complained, that they 'sympathise with the mutineers. That they are disaffected towards the Government. That they ought not to be trusted.' This 'venom' came from two sources. The *Patriot* described the first as the 'birth-rights men' and the other was the bureaucracy.[16] The birth-rights men were the 'placeless' Europeans who, by virtue of belonging to the ruling race, claimed special rights and exemptions as against the subject 'natives'. The rights these 'exemptionists' claimed included the right to carry arms, to be above whatever laws were promulgated to regulate freedom of expression, and, when they committed crimes, the right to be tried by European, never by 'native', magistrates. They claimed their 'rights of impunity'[17] also because, as they saw things, India could be 'retained under English rule much more easily by the aid of a truly loyal [European] adventurer class than through the imaginary affections of the natives.'[18] The country, 'won as it was by the sword of the adventurer, can only be kept by the same sort of stuff.'[19] The adventurers, therefore, demanded that they be treated with dignity, organized into a 'Garde Nationale', and 'allowed some voice' in the

government instead of being 'shut out from the only places in the public service which are associated with profit and distinction.'[20]

Turning to the second source of venom, and risking almost certain official reprisal, the *Hindoo Patriot* wrote:

> The bureaucracy who find in the growth of intelligence and property among the natives of the country the greatest danger to their absurd claims to social pre-eminence are not unwilling to bring them into discredit. To attain this end means are selected with no other scruple than as to efficacy.[21]

The loyal Indians' only hope, in the circumstances, lay in the 'Government'.[22] Whatever remained of 'Government' after counting the powerful bureaucracy out, was the governor-general with a handful of close advisers. That 'Government' had already exposed its weakness, on the eve of the May outbreak, by its capitulation to the European violence against the 'miscalled' Black Act, which had sought to empower 'native' magistrates to try Europeans. Post-outbreak, that weakness would increase, making life difficult for Indians in general and exceptionally stressful for the independent-minded loyalists of the *Hindoo Patriot* and *Rast Goftar* variety.

Ironically, the rectitude that moved them to defy all risks and speak up in those abnormal times, also pitted them against the same skeletal 'Government' which, they knew, did possess, for all its weaknesses, an inner core of strength and sense of justice. Summing up the sequence of developments, the *Patriot* wrote in the first quarter of 1858:

> Indeed the rebellion was a godsend to them. The Anti-Black-Acts-ites were not slow to take advantage of these, and in a moment of Hindu humiliation endeavoured to create for themselves a political superiority. From this desire alone sprung up the institution of the Volunteer Guards. Having succeeded – what wonder they should? – in producing a panic in Calcutta, these believers in race antagonism went and offered their services ostensibly for the defence of the city, but really for the repression and coercion of native freedom. The government at first refused their request and then in a moment of listless impatience yielded to the clamour. And capitally did these brave warriors protect the city, in so much that they were well nigh successful in getting up a riot and outbreak here, when the legislature interfered and curbed their power. . . . They are at the present moment running amuck of everything native, and have entered into a regular crusade against the Hindu race.[23]

By the very normality of human diffidence in the face of the kind of terror the Europeans let loose in 1857-58, the courageous sense of vocation displayed by a *Hindoo Patriot* or *Rast Goftar* could only have been rare. That makes their testimony particularly valuable, for it can be presumed to articulate what many among the new intelligentsia must have felt and thought even as they were constrained into silence and, worse, sycophancy.

In June 1857, the *Patriot* was ready to 'proclaim' that the call for revenge was 'just'; except that it questioned 'the equity of avenging the murdered and outraged of Meerut, Delhi and Allahabad in Calcutta'.[24] But by September of the same year, it was beginning to see, and attack, the reality of revenge, which was criminality masquerading as patriotism. Citing the *Bengal Hurkaru* as an example of what the call for revenge meant to the Anglo-Indians, the *Patriot* wrote:

> If Europeans emulate, nay exceed the sepoy murderers of Meerut and Cawnpore. . . [*Bengal Hurkaru*] would not touch their head, but would encourage their butchery. If European troops massacre in cold blood – not people whom a false religion teaches its followers to regard as enemies – but their faithful and unsuspecting comrades, and their wives, such massacre should go unpunished.

The *Patriot* dismissed the Anglo-Indian valorization of revenge as a patriotic obligation. Itself accused, in those frenzied times, of want of 'patriotism' – patriotism vis-ë-vis the Empire – the *Patriot* countered that it was no 'patriotism that is not based on philanthropy'. There could, therefore, be no justification for the Anglo-Indians' 'intense patriotism', 'which would wage a war with civilization and humanity'.[25]

Still, however, save for its outbursts against the 'system of terror', or 'drunken European anarchy', unleashed in Calcutta by the European volunteers, the *Patriot*'s criticism was at a generalized normative level. But by March 1858, the weekly had seen much in Bengal26 and learnt enough about the war zone to have a concrete basis for its painful disillusionment with the British. 'If', it wrote, 'as many of our English contemporaries pretend, the rebellion has brought out some new phases of native character in India, it has added not a little to *our* knowledge of the character of our British fellow-subjects.'[27]

Of the many articles it carried on this discovery of British character and administration, each saturated with righteous sarcasm, I have chosen one to indicate a marked shift in the attitude of the English-educated Indians towards their alien rulers and their rebellious fellow-subjects. Entitled 'The Position of the European', the article refers to a document, 'a veritable state paper', to expose the rulers and empathetically reach out to the rebels. The contents of the document, the *Patriot* warns the reader at the outset, 'are like unto nothing that they have seen or heard of since Menu published his penal code, or, at least, since a Roman Emperor commanded his subjects to worship his mule. ' It is a 'perwannah', issued in Urdu, 'from that exalted seat of wisdom and justice, the Cantonment Joint Magistrate of Agra. ' Then

follows, in English translation, the text of the document. It reads:

> Whereas it has been ascertained by statements made by diverse saheblogues, that Hindoostanees, on meeting them in the public thoroughfares, do not salute them, or stop their horses or conveyances in token of respect when such saheblogues are passing by; and whereas such conduct is highly unbecoming and may be counted as impertinence on the part of Hindoostanees: Be it therefore notified, under order of the Officer commanding the station, that every Hindoostanee driving in a carriage, riding, or walking within the limits of the Cantonment, must salute every Saheblogue of rank and every Gorah whom he may meet on his way, and if riding or driving in a carriage must take to one side of the road so as to allow such Saheb or Gorah to move on; a non-compliance with the order rendering the offender liable to arrest and punishment. And be this Notification proclaimed by beat of drum daily for an entire month and weekly for the three following months, and let a copy hereof be forwarded to the Magistrate of Agra, that its purport may be known in the city of Agra.

In a rhetorical move to impress upon its readers the ominous significance of the document, the *Patriot* begs them to believe that 'the foregoing is a genuine order passed by a British officer holding the office of a magistrate under the Government of India.' It adds: 'The strictest obedience is enforced to it; and that not always by the aid of the police.' Itself extra-legal, the order is enforced in extra-legal ways as well. The horror is not confined to Agra: 'Similar orders have been passed in other parts of the North Western Provinces.'

Bad as they are, the *Patriot* is upset not so much by the 'intense meanness or wretched puerility' of the 'rescript'. It is most upset by what the rescript shows of those dark, hitherto hidden aspects of British character which the rebellion has brought out into open. More so because those aspects run across the board, characterizing not just the 'Have-Nots' but also the 'Haves' among the British:

> We had . . . hitherto believed that they were a haughty race, but never deficient in self-respect. We knew that there was a class among Englishmen, as among other nations, who, destitute of every claim to social consideration, sigh for that state of lawlessness in which alone their importance is recognised. . . . We knew also that a better class of Englishmen hold fast to the faith that the European as such is a superior being to the Indian as such. But we did not know that there existed in the classes which fill the highest grades of the civil and military services of the Government of India the consciousness that they were excluded from the benefits of all conventional rules of civility and politeness except such as could be enforced by 'fine and imprisonment'.

The *Patriot* ends with 'one thing more' that the rebellion has taught. The weekly had not so far believed 'a great part of the accounts given of atrocities committed in India during the mutinies.' Now it would. Having seen the 'delirious love of blood or rather a reputation for blood-thirstiness which has thrown so many official minds in Upper India out of order' and, as its sequel, the lowering of 'official morality in the rest of the continent. Acceptance of the reality of the atrocities it had earlier not accepted brings with it a thought for the sufferers of those atrocities. The *Patriot* is obliged to conclude: 'Any land may produce rebels, but a land where men like the authors of this order hold power can alone breed such rebels as executed Nana Sahib's commands.'[28]

So forthright an acknowledgment of the naturalness of the rebels' resistance and disapproval of the arbitrary power they were resisting is more than simple sympathy for the victims of atrocities. Its intensity manifests, though the *Patriot* does not say so explicitly, a sense of rapport with those victims, an identification with them as fellow-sufferers, as *people of India* under common subjection. The quick shift from condemnation to such empathetic reaching out to the rebels, and further to disillusionment with, even alienation from, the British was, indeed, a function of the unfolding of the rebellion. But, even if brought to the surface by it, the fellowship of suffering as a subject people was independent of the experience of 1857.

A phrase in an article in the *Hindoo Patriot* may help us understand this. Reacting to the *Westminster Review*'s view 'that the people of India have no existence save "in the brains of Mr. Bright"', the *Patriot* expatiated upon, *a la* Comte, the 'positivity' of 'the national existence of the people of India.' It was a view that offered a convenient political and psychological basis for the Empire. That the *Patriot* needed to contest this view is significant. Obviously it hurt to have one's very existence, national existence as a people, denied. What is not obvious is the depth and acuteness of the hurt. That comes out particularly poignantly in one of the arguments the *Patriot* employed to counter the *Westminster Review*, and even more so in the mode of its articulation. It invoked 'the fact of national suffering' to prove the reality of 'the national existence of the people of India.' Reflecting the pathos of a people's identity resting on their shared suffering, the *Patriot*'s usual bantering tone gives way to acute anguish for the brief moment that it needs to make this particular point.[29] The poignancy of 'the fact of national suffering' suggests the already evolved emotive power of the sentiment of being Indian. It offers a clue to understanding the easy shift from condemnation to fellow feeling during 1857-58.

The rapport was deepened by the realization that, unlike the atrocities suffered by the rebels, the atrocities attributed to them were largely invented by Anglo-Indian

'atrocity-mongers'. 'The assiduity of industrious truth-seekers and truth-speakers', the *Patriot* asserted, 'has discovered that the stories of massacres aggravated by violation and outrage upon British women and children in the North Western Provinces, so industriously circulated during the mutinies, are in a great measure inventions.'[30]

It is the shift towards empathy for the rebels and disenchantment with the British that lends complexity to the otherwise loyalist response to 1857 of English-educated Indians. These seemingly contradictory constituents of that complex response are the same as the fusion of patriotism and loyalism that for long years defined the very character of Indian national consciousness. The *Rast Goftar*, having earlier in January 1858 invoked Burke to make the point about subjects being rebels from principle when rulers are tyrants from policy, could thus later in the month quote the much admired Scottish missionary, Dr Wilson, to declare that the 'educated natives':

> know as much of the power and resources of Britain and the advantages to be derived from its benign administration in India . . . as makes them desire the continuance and prosperity of that administration.[31]

After peace and order had been established, and especially in response to the Queen's Proclamation, which seemed to snub the 'birth-rights men', a quick reverse shift occurred. With the increase in the political and cognitive control that the British exercised over them, English-educated Indians now tended to recall 1857 the way it was seen immediately in the moment of its outbreak. The citations given above from Rajendralala Mitra, Surendranath Banerji and Radhacharan Goswami bear ample testimony to this. Yet, even as the pre-Savarkar nationalist narrative of the Mutiny was gaining dominance, the empathy felt for 1857 was not completely obliterated. It was driven underground, into the sub-conscious. Generally kept out of discursive writings, public speeches and pronouncements of political formations during the decades of 'constitutional' agitation, the sub-conscious unexpectedly found elaborate expression in a major work of fiction in 1898. This was in the third volume of Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi's (1858-1907) Gujarati classic, *Sarasvatichandra* (1887-1901).

Govardhanram, as a witness, is a historian's delight. Possessed of a formidable intellect, which he had systematically cultivated with wide-ranging readings and acute observation, he was a passionate but critical patriot. His overriding 'aspiration' was to 'produce, or see produced . . . a people who shall be higher and stronger . . . who shall be better able to look and manage for themselves than does the present generation of my educated and uneducated countrymen. ' 'What kind of nation that should be', he noted in the privacy of his diary, 'and how the spark should be kindled for that organic flame: these were, and are, the problems before my mind. I lay down this as, for the present, the only fixed objective before me, and my studies will be my "skirmishers" and "support". . . .'[32]

Govardhanram's insistence on study was part of his conviction that 'seeing must precede acting'. Wary of good intentions not backed by proper understanding, he warned against 'the evil consequences which we may inflict on our country by our well-meaning follies. ' Consequently, he wanted his 'thoughts and opinions' to be given 'public or permanent currency' only after adequate 'external research and internal deliberation'. His ideal was a level of objectivity that entitled him to talk of 'my judgment against myself'. Backed by study and introspection, he wished to be a *sakshi*, a witness who could record things like a *sthitprajna*, with detachment, equanimity and clarity.[33]

An epic of the times that took the self-styled *sakshi* seventeen years and a little under two thousand pages to finish, the four-volume *Sarasvatichandra* offers precisely such a testimony. To provide a spark for the organic flame, and to transform his people from the 'pigmies' they were into 'giants', which is what their rulers were,[34] Govardhanram had initially planned a series of essays. But on 'second thoughts' he 'discovered' that 'the reading class in Gujarat were, for various reasons, difficult to reach through abstruse or discursive matter, and the illustrations of real or ideal life would be the best medium, best in the sense of being attractive and impressive. ' So he decided to offer both the real and the ideal 'in flesh and blood under the guise of fiction' in order to 'supply the ordinary reader with subtler moulds and finer casts for the formation of his inner self.'[35] *Sarasvatichandra*, thus, contains testimony not just about the unhappy actuality of the Indian people, but also about their dreams of future greatness.[36]

The third volume of the novel is, among other things, a meditation on the meaning of British rule. Covering the entire nineteenth century, from the Subsidiary Alliance System to the present of the novel's appearance, it records the unbearable humiliation of subjection even as it recognizes the inexorability of the loss of freedom. In the process it offers a daring treatment of 1857.

The defeat of the 'rebels' is here an occasion for profound grief. It is described as the widowing of 'Rajputi'. To appreciate the anguish packed into this expression, we have to recall what a powerful metaphor

Rajputi had become in the emerging Hindu-Indian nationalist discourse of the period. Obliterating the image of the Rajputs as marauders – 'baragis' and 'ghanims' – the new Hindu-Indian nationalist remembrance valorized, and was overwhelmed by, Rajput valour and chivalry. A metaphor for Indian spirit, Rajputi was now a source of nostalgia, pride and hope. Even the exponents of what, mistakenly, is isolated as economic and secular Indian nationalism – eminent figures like R. C. Dutt (1848-1909) and M. G. Ranade (1842-1901) – had used their most stirring prose to elaborate on this metaphor. It is in this context that we must appreciate the affective power of Rajputi being widowed in 1857.

The meditation on British rule in the third volume of *Sarasvatichandra* shows 1857 to have been the last decisive blow to Indian freedom. It suggests that the first blow came in the form of the Subsidiary Alliance System. But not many at the time had the clarity or prescience to understand that. Instead, the princes who fell into the trap and joined the System believed that they had got a good bargain. But the defeat of 1857 removed not only those illusions but also the possibility of a similar fight.[37]

There is, further, a telling reflection on the term 'rebel' as used for the 'antagonists' of 1857. Commenting on the term, a wise Brahman says wistfully: 'If only a successful united struggle could be waged against the British, there would remain no need for using the term rebel. ' The comment is an unveiled reminder that, no matter what the rulers' logic, the vanquished of 1857 deserve, of their own people at least, a different and more honourable remembrance.

Much of this meditation revolves around three generations of rulers in a model Indian State, evocatively named Ratnanagari. But what it seeks to present is an enlightened Indian point of view. This is achieved by engaging two young, English-educated patriots from 'British' India in a series of animated, even contentious, dialogues with the best representatives of 'Native' India. The dialogues for the most part remain inconclusive. But they help the two sides discover, and feel bound in, a community of interests as against their alien rulers. This is put rather starkly by Vidyachatur, the sagacious Dewan of the model State, as he winds up the first round of discussion with the visiting patriots: 'The substance of what I have said is that the houses of us all are mortgaged to the [alien] government. If this realisation can dissolve our mutual discord, and we can manage our own affairs, we will be able to stand up to the government.'[38]

The foregoing is but one aspect, rather neatly abstracted, of a complex meditation. In fact, the meditation is marked by that internally irreconcilable wholeness which seems to have defined the new Indian intelligentsia. It is haunted by subjection, and it hails the same subjection as the instrument and the beginning of the country's future greatness.[39] Thus it echoes in its fullness the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Rast Goftar* kind of paradoxical response to 1857. This happens after forty years of a selective silencing in which the pro-1857 half of the response had been eclipsed by the loyalist half. With a creative writer's abilities, and with the *sakshi*'s resolve to sense even the unsaid and the barely felt, Govardhanram had voiced the intelligentsia's sub-conscious. And offered intimations of the Savarkarite intervention.

He could do this because, fortunately for us, he was unaware of the riskiness of his enterprise. He soon discovered what he had done. Emanating from Ahmedabad, the capital city of Gujarat, a 'strong rumour' began circulating that Govardhanram had been arrested for sedition in Bombay. The rumour travelled to Nadiad where his wife, mother and sister spent an agonizing two days before Govardhanram telegraphed them that all was well.

It is possible that the rumour was occasioned by an adverse official assessment of the third volume of the novel. I have not done the kind of detective research that can settle the point one way or the other. Worthwhile as that research will be, it is sufficient for our present enquiry that, with or without basis in actual official reaction, there was much in the novel's third volume to lend credence to the rumour that its author had been arrested for sedition. Even in the relatively calm dying years of the century, so different from the frenzied 1857-58, *Sarasvatichandra* could invite a seditious reading.

Also important for our purpose is the novelist's response to the rumour. It set him thinking. 'Was it a mistake', he asked his *Scrap Book*, 'to have written a book which has so disturbed the peace and happiness of my family? What is my duty? To boldly write such a book for my people or secure the peace of my family against such contingency?'[40] He could expose himself to whatever danger he chose, but he could not do that to his loved ones. It did not matter that he stood self-acquitted in his *Scrap Book*. 'My book', he was convinced, 'is not only loyal, but my innermost soul feels that it is written for and must tend to the welfare of both the rulers and the ruled.'[41]

The indivisibility of loyalty and patriotism, the conjunction of the welfare of the rulers and the ruled, this was for the emerging intelligentsia a genuine belief and also a sentiment intended to placate the rulers.[42] In as much as it was a belief, there operated a cognitive limit to what could be *thought* against the rulers. In as much as it meant placating the rulers, it involved limits to what could be *said* against them. The significance of

Sarasvatichandra lies in laying bare what the intelligentsia had virtually stopped saying about 1857 without ceasing to carry, deep down, traces of the tabooed unsaid.[43]

The *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Rast Goftar* cannot be the only contemporary sources that offer the kind of testimony about 1857 that they do. Nor is *Sarasvatichandra* a one-off exception in the following decades. Maybe there is need to search for similar material. More crucially, there is need to read the relevant material in ways not dominated by the modernist teleology that, paradigmatically, did to Nehru's evaluation of 1857 what it did. Examining seriously an all but forgotten aspect of the world-view of progressive public figures like Ranade, K. T. Telang (1850-93) and Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) may facilitate such alternative readings. They accepted modernization, but questioned the assumption that pre-colonial India was incorrigibly feudal and without its own resources of transformation. Indians, as Malabari put it, needed to realize that 'the rigid pressure of British rule' had arrested 'the spontaneous tendency towards growth and improvement which was going on in Hindu society as long as it was left to itself.'[44]

True, that alternative cognitive mode could not become the dominant mode of the thinking of even Ranade, Telang and Malabari themselves. But at least they retained the awareness of internal possibilities of development. Subjection to the British, as Ranade's or Telang's treatment of Maratha polity will show, was not for them a necessary historical condition for the country's development along modern lines. Reflecting the loss of that awareness by the time the country awaited independence, Nehru was convinced that 1857, although a war of *Indian* independence, could not have ushered in freedom. Cognitive freedom, of which glimpses can be found in Chaudhuri's *Theories of the Indian Mutiny*, is required for rethinking 1857, and much else.

Notes

1. Edited by Harish Chandra Mookerji (1824-63), who came to be popularly known as 'Hindoo Patriot', the weekly's galaxy of contributors included Ram Gopal Ghosh (1815-68), Girish Chandra Ghosh (1829-69), Kissory Chand Mitra (1822-73), Dr Rajendralala Mitra, Dwarkanath Mitter (1833-74), and Joy Kishen Mukerji (1808-88).
2. *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857.
3. R. J. Mitter, ed. , *Speeches of Raja Rajendralala Mitra*, Calcutta, 1892, p. 7.
4. *Report of the Proceedings of a Public Meeting on the Vernacular Press Act*, Calcutta, 1878, col. i, p. 6.
5. *Yamalok ki Yatra*, Mirzapur, 1888, p. 15.
6. *The Discovery of India*, Calcutta : The Signet Press,, 1946, p. 279
7. *Friend of India*, 22 October 1857.
8. *Hindoo Patriot*, 11 June 1857. Never missing an opportunity to expose and ridicule the non-official Europeans, the *Patriot* wrote in its issue of 28 May 1857: 'Within the last fortnight, the gun-smiths have been deluged with custom, and their fortunes have been as effectually made as if the dreaded loot of Calcutta had been poured into their laps. ' As to what the Europeans would do with the weapons, it continued: 'Some have achieved the feat of offering for the militia, others have got themselves sworn in as special constables – a feint with many to throw off the responsibility of defending their wives and their daughters and run off on the smallest alarm to a place where numbers would at least lessen the chances of their being taken off like game. '
9. *Bombay Standard*, quoted in *Rast Goftar*, 28 February 1858.
10. *Hindoo Patriot*, 17 December 1857. The *Patriot* reports in this issue the arrest of the young Raja of Patchete in Burdwan on flimsy charges of treason. Earlier, in its issue of 4 June 1857, the *Patriot* had described how ground was prepared for what it called the charge of 'imaginary treason': 'A Benagallee gentleman, a most estimable member of the public service, is met by some alarmists in a railway carriage. The alarmists talked their nonsense, and submitted it for the opinion of the Baboo. An opinion was passed more discriminating than pleasing. Conversation was pressed with the purpose on one side of drawing from the other language that at the present time might be construed into treasonable language. '
11. *Rast Goftar*, 3 January 1858.
12. Prominent Parsi leaders and scholars, viz. , Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), S. S. Bengali (1831-93), K. N. Kabraji (1842-1904), Naoroji Fardunji (1817-85), A. F. Moos (1827-95), and K. R. Cama (1831-1909) – all except one of them grown up enough in 1857 to know what was going on – wrote for this weekly from Bombay. Naoroji, Bengali and Kabraji were, in fact, its first three editors. It may be noted that, oblivious to the *Rast Goftar*'s coverage of 1857, R. C. Majumdar used Naoroji in support of his temporally undifferentiated, blanket assertion that all prominent contemporary Indian statesmen dismissed 1857 as a mere mutiny. Equally significant is the rebuttal of this assertion by the otherwise brilliant and well-informed S. B. Chaudhuri. Equally oblivious of the *Rast Goftar*, Chaudhuri writes: 'Ö the eminent Indian statesman [Naoroji, who was 32 in 1857] was neither a contemporary observer nor a historian of repute. ' *Theories of the Indian Mutiny (1857-59): A Study of the Views of an Eminent Historian on the Subject*, Calcutta: The World Press Private Ltd. , 1965, pp. 19-20. In fact, Chaudhuri sees nothing happening in the post-1858 decades to warrant a swift shift in attitude – perceptible attitude. He writes, again in Naoroji's context: 'But nothing tangible possibly could have happened during the short period 1857-1882 which will account for this sudden fluctuation in Indian attitudeÖ. ' *Ibid.* , p. 21.
13. *Ibid.* , 31 January 1858.
14. *Hindoo Patriot*, 8 May, 19 August 1858.
15. Evidently inspired by 'When Paris sneezes, the whole of France catches cold', Gokhale is reputed to have said: 'What Bengal thinks today, the whole of India thinks tomorrow. ' Or was it a famous contemporary of Gokhale's who said it? Or is it, as it must be, apocryphal?
16. *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857.
17. *Ibid.*

18. *Englishman*, 4 June 1857.
19. *Ibid.*, 20 June 1857.
20. *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27 May, 26 June 1857.
21. *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857.
22. 'The Sepoy Mutiny and its action upon the people of Bengal' ends thus: 'The security of honest men lies in the fact that the Government has proved unimpressionable alike by the terrors [the birth-rights men and the bureaucracy] they raise and the means they use.' *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 11 March 1858.
24. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1857.
25. *Ibid.*, 3 September 1857.
26. Summing up, in a later issue, the goings on in Bengal, the *Patriot* wrote: 'It would have been a miracle indeed if, in times like these, Bengal had been spared the horrors of political executions or the absurdities of state trials. The facility with which the rigors of but a slightly mitigated form of martial law were introduced in this peaceful province and the indifference with which that measure was viewed were the results alike of that crass ignorance of local politics which distinguishes the Indian press and the abject state in which a distant though great danger had thrown the minds of "the public". Conceive rebellion in Ireland, and a suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in England, and not an English politician or newspaper offering a remark on the proceeding, and you have the sort of thing that the Government, the politicians and the newspapers of Bengal did last year.' *Ibid.*, 10 June 1858.
27. *Ibid.*, 18 March 1858.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 4 March 1858.
30. *Ibid.*, 19 August 1858.
31. *Rast Goftar*, 31 January 1858.
32. Kantilal C. Pandya, Ramprasad P. Bakshi and Sanmukhlal J. Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Madshavram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894*, Bombay: M. N. Tripathi & Sons, 1959, p. 29. The *Scrap Book* for the years 1894-1904, edited by the same team, appeared in the same year. That for the last years, 1904-06, was edited by Kantilal C. Pandya alone, and it appeared a year earlier in 1958. Hereafter referred to as *Scrap Book*.
33. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 104; vol. II, pp. 9, 69-70, 190; vol. III, p. 1.
34. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 158-9.
35. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, *Sarasvatichandra*, Bombay, 1968, vol. I, Preface (in English), pp. 7-8.
36. See the English Preface to the concluding volume of *Sarasvatichandra* for statements such as this one: 'The writer of a novel may, however, be allowed to indulge in dreams of future days according to his own lights even where the forecast of any future at all must fall short of the exacting tests of scientific or philosophical criticsÖ. Some of the fictions here offered of what in part are only our hero's visions today, may indeed become facts in some practical fashion tomorrow.' Pp. 5-10.
37. Mallaraj, the young heir apparent of Ratnanagari, is the only character in *Sarasvatichandra* who, though not clearly knowing why, despairs of Indian freedom after the Subsidiary Alliance System. 'The State', he tells himself for he dare not tell his elders, 'has today been fettered and Rajputi has been widowedÖ. Just as we protect women, the English will now protect us.' The widowing of Rajputi here, however, does not carry the hopelessness it does following the defeat of 1857.
38. See *Sasrasvatichandra*, vol. II, pp. 176 ff.
39. Here is one of several similar entries in the *Scrap Book* to show how, caught in an impossible web, Govardhanram moved in circles as he groped for a possible way out: 'India is under foreign control and the foreigner is the kindliest of all foreigners available. To get rid of the foreigner by force or fraud is an idea associated with all the incidents that remind us of his rule being foreign. The idea naturally haunts our uneducated instincts; to the educated instincts the idea is both foolish and fallacious. It is foolish because it is not practicable, and because any experiments founded upon it would send the country from the frying pan into the fire. It is a fallacious idea because the distinction between a native and a foreigner is only transient, and the distinction is not a guarantee of the native being a better ruler than the foreigner in such a mass of heterogeneous people as make up my country. The proper problem is not the absolute eviction of the foreigner, but of his accommodation to the native elementÖ. In India the sovereign is enlightened, and yet has an interest in the country. Two things have to be done. This interest has to be made to cease to be foreign; and while it is foreign, we want natives who will guard against the civic temptations to which the foreigner is exposed by his position, people who will enable native interests to grow and develop without any hindrance from the adverse interests of the rulers, who will in fact watch over the real interests and develop the future welfare of the country. . . . And it is possible to do this both loyally and patriotically.' *Scrap Book*, vol. I, pp. 149-50.
40. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 158-9.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
42. I have discussed this in *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992.
43. I say 'virtually stopped' on purpose. We have, around the turn of the century, occasional balanced accounts of 1857, like in R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1903, vol. II, pp. 221 ff.
44. *Indian Spectator*, 24 March 1895.