CHAPTER 4
A Study of Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini from the colonial perspective: Resistance offered by the colonized

Before discussing Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini from the colonial and postcolonial angle, a brief study of the attitude of the Indians towards their foreign rulers has to be attempted. India was under the British rule which was indeed responsible for introducing quite a few reforms in the country. The Englishmen also did some development works in India. However, it must be admitted that not all the development projects were selfless ones. Most of the developments were done to make their stay in India comfortable. They came to India all the way from England for their business. It is therefore natural that their focus would be on their profit. They would work for India only that much as was needed to ensure their profit. However, as has been already seen in the previous chapter, all the Englishmen were not in India only to make profits. Some of them sincerely loved the country and worked hard for her development.

In the Mughal period, the emperor ‘owned’ all the land of the country. He distributed land to his subjects. They could hold this land only till their lifetime, or the former’s lifetime, after which the land returned to the throne. However, in most cases, these grants were renewed and given to the son of the holder. None of the subjects, irrespective of their religious faith, could hold any landed property in perpetuity. The Hindus, however, had additional woes. Beautiful girls were refused in marriage due to fear of abduction. Taxes were also discriminating. A Muslim paid half the amount of tax paid by a Hindu. The latter also paid festival, marriage and death taxes. Never was a Muslim penalized on the witness of a non-Muslim. Hindus naturally resented these.
The Hindus, therefore, felt rather relieved to see that the condition of the country with no law and order ended and the administration of the Government taken over by the British. In the Mughal court, ‘justice was dependent not on the rule of law but on the rule of men, who could be influenced by money, status and connection in the exercise of their office of judge’ (Cohn 65). The Hindus thus found a welcome respite in the change. As Cohn says, ‘The idea that India had been ruled by “despots” was revalorized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as one of the several ruling paradigms that formed the ideological infrastructure of British rule in India’ (65).

Raja Rammohun Roy was indeed thankful to the British for delivering the Hindus from Muslim tyranny. Some of his contemporaries like Dwarakanath Tagore and Prasannakumar Tagore also openly avowed their faith in the benevolence character of the British Government in India. The newly educated Bengali youths saw the Lord’s benevolence in the British rule. Prasannakumar Tagore proudly said, ‘If we were to be asked, what Government we would prefer, English or any other, we would one and all reply, English by all means, ay, even in preference to a Hindu Government’ (qtd. K. Mukhopadhyay 12). They were grateful to the British for having introduced liberal education which came as a deadly blow on the society permeated with superstitions.

The Hindus saw the hand of divine providence in the arrival of the British. Some saw them as selfish tyrants, but others like Rammohun Roy ignored the high-handedness of the British for the welfare they had done in India. He wrote:

Your dutiful subjects consequently have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors, but rather as deliverers and look up to your Majesty not only as ruler, but also as a father and protector. […] I conclude my Essay by offering up thanks to the Supreme Disposer of the events of this universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country from the long
continued tyranny of its former Rulers, and placed it under the government of the English
(qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 190).

Like Raja Rammohun Roy, the Young Bengal too welcomed the British rule: ‘If ever any
conquest proved a blessing to the conquered, it was the empire of Great Britain in India...The
kind and wise dispensation of God must be acknowledged by the improved Hindoo in timely
sending a civilized, and in every respect a clever people to give light where there was darkness,
to elevate what was low, to improve what was mean, to reform what was corrupt. (qtd. S. Basu
Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 190). Such a profusion of praise of the British is not simply for
delivering India from the clutches of the Muslim tyrants, but also for delivering the unfortunate
Hindu women from the clutches of the Orthodox Hindu tyrants. They were further grateful for the
introduction of western science and philosophy in India.

In an article published in the Sambad Bhaskar on January 10, 1854, Chandramadhab
Chakrabarti compared India under Hindu, Muslim and British rulers. He showed how the people
were happy under the British rule. The article used the contemporary Bengali style of writing
marked by the use of alliterative words of Sanskrit origin: ‘অবিলম্বিত বিদ্রীঢ়ক কৰ্ত্তব্য নরপতির সুখ সংখ্যে যে হলে রাজ্য সাম্রাজ্য মহান মহান অধীন রাজ্য
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The author here profusely praises the British rule and prays to the Almighty for the well-being of
the British empire. The benefits of the British rule lay in the introduction of the railways and
laying of roads. Under the new rule, theft was also reduced. Besides, there was deliverance from
the Muslim rule. The nineteenth-century nationalism centred on the notions of ‘Hindu’ and
‘Aryans’. The British were at least ‘Aryans’, but the Muslims were not even so. This also made the Hindus more tolerant towards the British.

Raja Rammohun Roy had profound faith in the British judiciary. He praised the indigo merchants for helping in the development of the country. He also supported the zamindari system. He praised the British for civilizing the Indians. He believed that association with the British would help in bringing about a new life for India. He was of the opinion that democracy coupled with modern education would remove the age-old superstitions of India. He thought that if the British ruled in India for 40-50 years and western science and democracy were seriously introduced, then foreign rule would no longer be required.

Gradually the British changed colours. They began extracting whatever profit they could. Besides they were racists. They metamorphosed from a compassionate ruler into a tyrant. Even the ‘dutiful’ subjects could not help noticing it. But they were so ‘dutiful’ that they would not attribute this change to the base nature and greed of the British. They now invented the binary of good Englishmen / bad Englishmen and hoped that the motherly Queen would chastise her ‘bad’ sons thereby ending the sufferings of the Indians. At a meeting convened to thank Gladstone and others for condemning the Vernacular Press Act, Surendranath Banerjea proclaimed with naivety to the tremendous cheering of an equally naive audience: ‘That there should be one law for the white and another for the black man, one for the rich and another for the poor, one for the high and one for the low, one for the English journalists and another for the native journalists, is a thing which no Englishman can endure or tolerate, unless or until he has ceased to be an Englishman’ (qtd. R. Ray 95). Another Bengali journal too echoed the same sentiment:

इंग्रजेन्द्र केवल राजा नहीं, आमदेव उद्धारकर्ता बनिए रहे छ... मुसलमान राजकिय़ा आमदेव कि मूर्खा हजारिन कै सिए मूर्खा बिहाँत कें उद्धार करिए प्रेम क्ये प्रेक्षु पेशक्षक सिधिया आमदेव के अपना पुर्खा परिप्रेक्वलिंग है। वे इंग्रजनद्र के एक लेखक ने इंग्रज आमदेव के अनुसार अपने पुर्खा परिप्रेक्वलिंग नहीं किया है।
British are not merely rulers, they are deliverers as well. From the little education we have now received, we can understand who rescued us from the miserable condition in which we were living during the Muslim rule. And who imparted that education? Which fool can hate Englishmen when they once think of these? The lowly Englishmen who hate Bengalis are not the ideals of the English race. Therefore one should not hate the entire race for their bad example.

There is no greater fool than those who try to show their patriotic sentiments by demeaning the Englishmen'.

However, all Indians did not hold the British in the same regard as these people. Some like the young Rabindranath Tagore held views that were poles apart from the ones already mentioned. He openly declared his aversion towards British rule in his poem Dillir Darbar which was read at the Hindu Mela: ‘Whoever sings of the victory of the British, we won’t sing / We won’t sing the song of joy / Come, the few that we are, we shall sing another song’. This squarely brings one to the other camp where people were not happy with the British rule. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay also was not pleased with the British rule. About the ‘philanthropic’ aspect of his work as a government servant, he wrote to a friend:
I have been doing right royal service to the State by trying to fill its coffers, so that it may rebuild the Jagur barracks and indulge in other magnificent pastimes, to the edification of the tax-paying public. What the devil do niggers want their money for? They had better pay in their all at the Government Treasuries, and Government will do them immense deal of good by erecting uninhabitable barracks and abolishing slavery in Zenzibar. You see my work is genuine philanthropy (qtd. Chatterjee Nationalist Thought 83).

Political, economic, social and religious causes gradually created a profound discontent among the Indians. Social exclusiveness of the Englishmen and their haughty and arrogant attitude towards the Indians, both high and low, further added to the discontent. A police regulation was published that ordered 'Every native, whatever his pretended rank may be, ought to be compelled, under heavy penalties, to salaam all English gentlemen in the streets, and if the native is on horseback or in a carriage, to dismount and stand in a respectful attitude until the European has passed him' (qtd. Majumdar 417). This was indeed an unwritten law that was applicable to all Indians. Even Raja Rammohun Roy was insulted for not abiding by this regulation.

The Indians had to suffer indiscriminate assault at the hands of their British masters, who thought their subjects did not even deserve slightest civility. Their rude behavior towards Indians was also accompanied by physical assault, like striking servants or common men. Turning away respectable Indians out of Railway compartments was also quite common. Contempt of the Europeans for the Indians affected all sections of the society. Highly qualified Bengalis were being denied positions to which their merit entitled them. Again the lower classes too felt deeply resentful because 'their humanity was being denied by the barbarities such as slaps, kicks and whippings and the use of terms like “nigger” and “swine” practiced upon them by Europeans'
It was indeed true that racial arrogance of the British was one of the main reasons behind English rule being unpopular. In 1849, Kailaschandra Basu wrote: ‘[…] they are now regarded as a set of interlopers, dreaded for their power, but hated for pride’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 302). Indeed this could not have been better phrased. A large number of Indians, in general, hated the British from the depths of their hearts, but were afraid to express it. They hated the British even more because they had no scope of redressal for the wrongs they had to suffer in their hands. The scale of justice was always tilted in favour of the British. The assaults that the Indians suffered at the hands of the Englishmen were sometimes serious enough to cause bodily injury resulting in death. But ‘[…] the offenders escaped with light or no punishment, as they were tried by English jurors and backed up by practically the entire British community, with rare exceptions’ (Majumdar 417). Rabindranath Tagore could remember only one case, that too long ago, in which a European was hanged in Bengal for killing an Indian (Tagore ‘Prasanga Katha’ 733). Otherwise the courts let off Europeans with light punishment, attributing the death, in most cases, ‘due to general engorgement of spleens which had been accidentally ruptured in these numerous affrays’ (R. Ray 23).

According to Rabindranath, Indians, being subjects, were at the receiving end. Their retaliation would mean revolt against the king. He says that because of this major inequality in their social position; the offender is more cowardly than the offended. Even after the English offenders got respite from the court, Indians could have got some moral support if former’s compatriots rebuked them. Instead the Indians see that subscriptions are raised for them and there is no end to sympathizing by the English newspapers. Rabindranath says in a jocular vein that only the Victoria Cross is spared to be awarded for this show of cowardliness (‘Ghushaghushi’ 768).
The English newspapers cried hoarse whenever an Indian attacked an Englishman. But the Bengali journals were accused of fuelling racism. 'The European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association in Calcutta acted as pressure group to ensure that the judiciary inflicted weighted and deterrent punishment for assault on Europeans while tolerating the murders of Indians' (R. Ray 24). Punishing an Englishman for assaulting an Indian was shameful. On the other hand, exemplary punishments were awarded to Indians. A high-born young Muslim who accidentally whipped a European while riding his own horse was imprisoned. A rich banker of Allahabad was also jailed for having his servants prevent a European from taking away his flower-pots. Lord Curzon once wrote to the Governor-General of Bengal that to preserve the good name of the British in India, he did not make 'a statement of the real facts — as regards outrages, collisions, verdicts of juries, and the administration of justice between European and Native — as will make every Englishman in the country hang his head with shame' (qtd. R. Ray 23).

The British were in India for their own selfish ends. They justified their moves as being for the civilization of the peculiar species that only physically resembled human beings. Rabindranath Tagore says that some talented Englishmen like Rudyard Kipling had taken it upon themselves to introduce this new animal to England.

He [Kipling] is trying to get the Englishmen in England to understand that the Government of India is like a circus company. They are skillfully directing a dance of strange and wonderful animals of diverse species staged before the civilized world. A moment's turning away of the steady watchful eyes kept on them would inevitably result in all these animals springing at one's neck from behind. The nature of these animals has got to be observed with keen interest, a judicious manipulation of the fear of the whip and greed for the bone is necessary, and an understanding affection for animals is also required in some
measure. But to import principles, fraternity and civilization in this game would render the running / of the circus extremely difficult and would not be attended without grave risk for the manager (qtd. R. Ray 24-25).

In 1849, Bethune, as the Secretary of the Law Commission, drafted laws to remove the discriminations between British and Indians in the matter of law. These laws aimed at controlling the arrogance and high-handedness of the British. The British naturally got infuriated. They named it ‘Black Acts’ and agitated against their introduction. On behalf of the Indians, Ramgopal Ghosh said: ‘[...] will not the generous and the noble sons of Britain feel ashamed of their countrymen in India, who are anxious to perpetuate an invidious distinction, and preserve their exalted position at the expense of their native fellow subjects?’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara 281).

Rabindranath Tagore compares three different cases of physical assault, two by Englishmen and one by an Indian. He analyzes the circumstances in which these took place and points out the differences in the attitude. In one case, a rich Bengali was killed by three British soldiers. The killing was unprovoked. Tagore says even if the culprits are punished, the fact that remains is that the English newspapers did not even resent this incident. On the other hand, when an Englishman was killed in Howrah, all knew that the punishment would be exemplary. But as Tagore says, the circumstances leading to the killings were totally different. While the killing of the Indian that did not have any justification behind it, and showed the arrogance of the British soldiers, things were different when it came to the Howrah murder. Public was indeed angry over the high-handedness of the British. One or two unjustified murders may occur under such circumstances. In another barbaric incident, a British was firing for fun in Puna. Three Indians were injured, though not seriously. But such a game shows a cruel disregard for the Indians. The
culprit confessed of having ‘[...] fired at a coffee shop sweeper for a lark’ (qtd. Tagore ‘Prasanga Katha’ 734). Though the bullet did not penetrate deep into his body, it did into the hearts of the Indians in general.

Wells, who presided as the judge in the case over Nildarpan, was a staunch supporter of the indigo merchants. He was so prejudiced against the Indians that he called them ‘a nation of forgers and perjurers’ (qtd. De 25). He severely punished Indians for the slightest offence. In the course of this case, his hatred for Indians grew even stronger. On September 23, 1861, an appeal signed by over 20,000 Indians reached the State Secretary, who in turn warned Wells. Though the High Court was established in many provinces, the British subjects did not lose the privileged position that they had been enjoying in Indian law-courts. Thus the Englishmen could ill-treat with impunity even the most highly placed Indians. Though in 1872 they were subjected to the jurisdiction of moffusil courts, they were to be tried by first-class magistrate or judges of their own race and penalties inflicted on them were considerably less than in the case of Indians.

These discriminations hurt the sentiments of the Indians. Gradually the rhetoric of loyalty gave way to censorship. The educated Indians could soon see the British in their true colours. Dwarakanath Tagore, who was loyal to the British said: ‘They have taken all which the Natives possessed; their lives, liberty, property and all were held at the mercy of the Government’ (qtd. K. Mukhopadhyay 12). All Indians, whether rich or poor, had the experience of being ill-treated due to the colour of their skin. ‘As late as 1930 British officers advised in a secret army memorandum that they should not kick Indians [...] The perception of shared bondage gave credibility to the notion of shared nationhood’ (Raychaudhuri 165).

English education helped people develop individualism. As the Somprakas writes, the British could not achieve what they had hoped while introducing western education. While introducing
English education Macaulay had hoped to create a class that would further their cause in India. But the result was just the opposite of what was anticipated. These educated youths could see the faults of the British and began to criticize them. They treated the rulers as their equals and criticized them whenever they saw something wrong. As Rabindranath Tagore says in ‘Raja o Praja’, ‘Whenever they see some fault of the British, Indians, in their feeble voice, keep on making pleas in the name of civilization and justice. This indeed irks the British but they have to be on their guard as well’.

The educated youths began to perceive that alien rule was the root cause of all evil in India. In an article published in the Sarbasubhakari Patrika it was argued that the subjects of a ruler who is a foreigner can never be happy. It stated quite unambiguously that ruler will first attend to his own selfish needs before turning to his subjects. The writer lamented: ‘The white master’s disregard for his servant was even more than that for foxes and dogs. He would never give them their salary once unless they overworked twice or thrice’.

There was a new phase in Indian politics after 1857. The spirit of violence was almost replaced by an intellectual movement of a non-violent nature. The political scenario of the country was dominated by a class of educated youths who were aware of the principles of teachings of political agitation that were prevalent in England. There was a steady growing discontent of the intelligentsia against the British rule. The Indians faced the racial abasement as well as economic ruin of the country due to the various policies of the British. Consequently there were repeated occurrences of famines. R. Palme Dutt says: ‘While in the first half of the
nineteenth century there were 7 famines, with an estimated total of 1.5 million deaths, in the second half of the nineteenth century there were 24 famines with an estimated total of 28.5 million deaths, and 18 of these 24 fall in the last quarter of the nineteenth century’ (qtd. Majumdar 664).

Social humiliation coupled with economic exploitation stimulated the spirit of opposition to British rule. The educated youths were aware of the reactionary features of the British imperialism. Thus their barbs of criticism of the various aspects of British misrule were targeted at the rulers. Now the Indians strongly retaliated. Sasichandra Datta wrote:

The day is now gone by when a Hindu could be struck even by an Englishman with impunity. We have ourselves more than once seen the blow instantly returned...Societies and associations have been formed in which indignant members have spoken menace and defiance while alluding to the British name and portray in lurid colours the treachery, perfidy and aggression, the oppression, extortion and injustice of the British power (qtd. G. Chattopadhyay xlvi).

Even the poor Indians treated the British with insolence. The signs of resistance so alarmed the Englishman that they wrote in 1893: ‘The time has arrived to look into this question a little more closely. The unprovoked assaults on Europeans, especially soldiers, are becoming increasingly frequent. Europeans are insulted, abused and jeered at by the lowest type of natives and if they retaliate, they are set upon by a mob’ (qtd. Tagore ‘Ghushaghushi’ 769). The inability of the British to administer impartial justice, proved their cowardice to the Indians. This has led, as Tagore says in ‘Ghushaghushi’, to the Indians slighting the British everywhere. They have ceased to respect them.
The educated community, which showed the union of learning with feeling, aggrieved at the treatment meted out to the Indians and used the journals and various societies to voice their antipathy to the rulers. The journals mention the atrocities of the police, arrogance of the civilians and the inequality in legal matters. These became the means of awakening the resentment of the Indians in general. Iswarchandra Gupta wrote about the British in the Sambad Prabhat in June 1, 1848: ‘তাহারা এই অর্থের আর্থিক উম্মতি এবং ওই অর্থ বাজারের বাজারচিত্রের নীতিমালা নিগূণ করিতেছেন’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetan Itihas 301) ‘They have turned into wealth-suckers of the country and are therefore stuffing the big bellies of their countrymen’. This was actually what the British were doing. They were siphoning the wealth of India to England. As a result India was gradually being impoverished. They imported products that were being manufactured in India and sold these at low prices. This almost killed the Indian industry. It so happened that the weavers of muslin, a very fine and costly fabric, were engaged in weaving coarse jute gunny bags. In 1856, a student of the Oriental Seminary wrote an article in the Samachar Sudhabarshon urging the brave Hindus to protect their country from the clutches of the demon that caused famines and hunger in the fertile Bengal. The Hindus were so unhappy that some like the author of the long essay in the Samad Sadhuranjan began feeling the Muslim rulers to be more tolerant than the British. This so annoyed the Morning Chronicle that they questioned whether the former had ever heard the name of Aurangzeb.

On February 8, 1843 Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay presented a paper entitled ‘The Present State of the East India Company’s Criminal Judicature, and Police under the Bengal Presidency’ at a session of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge held at the hall of the Sanskrit College. He spoke sharply against the misuse of power by the officials of the Company and the police as well, and also as to why the British came to India. He said: ‘The courts in the
interiors were notoriously and shamelessly corrupt...it would be flattery and an untruth to say that the present system of police was one in which the natives could repose the least confidence' (qtd. G. Chattopadhyay xlv).

Captain Richardson was present at the hall with a few Englishmen. He got exited and interrupted the speech: ‘To stand up in a hall which the Government had erected [...] and there to denounce, as oppressors and robbers, the men who governed the country, did in his opinion, amount to treason. He could not permit it, therefore, to be converted into a den of treason and must close the doors against all such meetings’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 144-145). Captain Richardson’s behavior overstepped the bounds of civility and the members of the Society walked out of the hall in protest. Tarachand Chakrabarti, who was chairing the meeting, stood up and said:

Captain Richardson, with due respect I beg to say, that I cannot allow you to proceed any longer in this course of conduct towards our Society, and on behalf of my friend Baboo Dukhin [sic], I must say that your remarks are anything but becoming. I am bound also to add that I consider your conduct as an insult to the Society and that if you do not retract what you have said and make due apology, we shall represent the matter to the Committee of Hindu College, and if necessary to the Government itself (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 145).

The above incident shows how in the colonial Bengal one had to fight for one’s dignity. It did not come automatically. The British high-handedness would come to an end only when the Indians retaliated. Rabindranth Tagore says in ‘Raja o Praja’ that if Indians could make the rulers understand that they do not see any credit in transgressing the path of law, that they abhor evil however strong it might be and that they see cowardice in the inability to administer impartial
justice, then the British will be bound to respect them because they shall find their subjects' ideal similar to their own. Had not Tarachand Chakrabarti retaliated, it would have been Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, and not Captain Richardson who would have to apologize. Dakshinaranjan too says in his February 8 speech that the system of corruption and bribery would remain so until the Indians themselves would expose it and bring about reformation.

Only a few days after Dakshinaranjan's speech, an essay entitled 'Grievances of India' was serially published in the Bengal Hurkara. It was written by 'An Old Hindoo' and argued that the condition of the people under the British was worse than what it had been under the Muslims. It said that the British were formulating tyrannical laws for their own selfish needs. These essays and Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay's speech disturbed the editor of the Friend of India. He wrote about the speech:

It was filled with the most unqualified abuse of the Government of India and its institutions and was calculated, though it may have been / designed, to sow the seeds of dissatisfaction towards the British administration in the minds of the youths who surrounded him. It was loudly and repeatedly applauded by the auditory, more specifically in those passages which denounced the public authorities with, particular acrimony (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 191-192).

Indeed people began retaliating, irrespective of their social positions. They learnt to maintain their self-esteem. The educated retaliated with their newly acquired weapon. Vidyasagar had a high sense of self-respect and would not tolerate anyone slighting him. Carr, the Principal of the Hindu College, once talked to him with a pipe in his mouth and his legs with the shoes on the table. When the latter did the same with Carr, the Secretary of the Education Council demanded an explanation. Vidyasagar wrote:
Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 377) ‘I thought, we, being natives of this country, do not know manners. I learnt this manner from Mr. Carr the other day when I met him. I did not have the idea that the manners of a very well-bred European can be ill-manners. I thought this was your way of greeting people. Therefore instead of greeting him in our own indigenous way, I did what he taught me. If I was wrong, I am not to be blamed’.

In another incident, Vidyasagar was not allowed inside the Asiatic Society because he was wearing slippers, which were a prominent mark of his individuality. This led to the ‘great shoe question’ being discussed in the society. On his way back, Vidyasagar parodied a Chanakya sloka: ‘বিষয়ক নৃত্যঃ চ নৃত্য তুল্যঃ ক্ষমাতে / ব্যাকরণ পুনর্ব্যাখ্যায় রমণ, বিযাচার সর্বত্র পৃষ্ঠিক্ষেত্র’ ‘It is not possible to compare knowledge and kingship. While the king is respected in the country, the learned is respected all over the world’ and recited ‘বিষয়ক নৃত্যঃ চ নৃত্য তুল্যঃ ক্ষমাতে / ব্যাকরণ পুনর্ব্যাখ্যায় বিযাচার, বিযাচার সর্বত্র পৃষ্ঠিক্ষেত্র’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 355) ‘It is not possible to compare knowledge and shoe-ship. While the learned is respected in the country, the shoe is respected all over the world’. About this incident, Vidyasagar wrote an article entitled ‘তালতলার চাট’ ‘A Pair of Slippers’ in Sadharani Patrika on July 12, 1874:

রে তালতলার চাট ইংরেজের আনন্দ কেবল ভোরই অনুষ্ঠিত হইল না […] ইংরেজ, বিচারকার্যের সাধারণ অন্য সাধী ভারতির আধে, আমি হিনু দেবার হয়ে প্রথম সার্কারের কার্যকারিতা পাঁচ করান, আসার সার্কারের হয়ে পুনর্ব্যাখ্যায় মায়েরক উঠিয়া এনে, ইংরেজের চাট উচ্ছাস্ব নাই, কেবল রে চাটহাটি। ভারে পৃথি ভারতের সময় ইংরেজ না […] ইংরেজ ভালতলার চাট, এতে উত্তরিতে ভারার কিছুতে উত্তর ইংরেজ না।
‘O pair of slippers of Taltala, only your fortune didn’t shine in this British age! [...] The British bring witnesses in the courts of trials. They replace the mad Tinu by Sridhar Sarbabhauma who is again replaced by Gulzar Mandal. All are equal in the eyes of the British. But o poor leather-slippers! Only you couldn’t taste their impartiality [...] Unfortunate Taltala slippers, in the face of so much development, your condition didn’t slightly improve.

Slipper, you are suffering for your own evil deeds! You couldn’t improve your status even in this social deluge’.

However, it must be admitted that all were not as bold as Vidyasagar or Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay. The Indians in general lacked a strong personality. At different moments of the colonial rule, Bengalis were portrayed as ‘effeminate’. Macaulay described Bengalis as physically ‘feeble even to effeminacy’ and mentally ‘weak even to helplessness’ (qtd. Choudhury 4). Bengalis were physically as well as morally identified with weakness and the helplessness of a submissive slave. It was commonly held that Bengalis were a bunch of cowards, unable to protect themselves and afraid of even slightly annoying the ruling class.

In an article published in 1867, the National Paper argued against the generalization that Bengalis as a race have weak mind and body and have a speculative disposition. They are also said to be lacking in enterprise. But the paper found the degree of physical weakness to be inversely proportional to class hierarchy. It said that though this was true for the educated elite, it was not so in the case of the lower classes of Bengal from where the lathiwals³ of the zamindars or the terrorizing dacoits came. The article wondered as to why the Bengalis then could not be trained to be soldiers.
What is said about the Bengalis is also true of the Indians in general. Leaving apart the Sikhs, Rajputs and Marathas, Indians did not constitute what is known as a martial race. About the degeneracy of the Indians, Alexander Dow writes in the Preface of his translation of Ferishta’s History of Hindostan, a history of the Mughal conquerors of India: ‘[...] In a government like that of India, public spirit is never seen, and loyalty a thing unknown. The people permit themselves to be transferred from one tyrant to another, without murmuring; and individuals look with unconcern upon the miseries of others, if they are capable to screen themselves from the general misfortune’ (qtd. Cohn 63).

The degeneracy of the Bengalis is best found in the abhorring babu culture of Calcutta. Dow’s comment targets this particular group of men. These babus were people with ample leisure and money at their disposal. They were usually acquainted with Persian and also had some knowledge of English. These people led their lives in luxury. About these people Sibnath Sastri says: ‘এই বাবুরা বিনে মুমাইয়া, মুতি উড়াইয়া, বুবুলীর লড়াই ছেলেয়া, সেঙ্গার, এসরাজ, লেংগা বাংলা বাঙালি করি, লেংলাই, পাচারি প্রকৃতি মুমাইয়া রাত সারাসারিতে ব্যাড়ে আপাত গীতিকাত্মক ও আমাদ করিয়া কল চাটাইত’ (Ramtanu Lahiri 124)

‘These babus slept in the day, spent time in flying kites, seeing fights of bulbuls, playing sitar, esraj, vina, etc. and listening to kabi, akhrai, panchali, etc. During the nights they would visit the houses of prostitutes where they listened to songs and music and spent their time in amusements’. It had become a fashion with some rich men to keep a prostitute, usually a singer or a dancer, in a garden-house. They used to spend a lot on her maintenance, the amount of money spent showing off the wealth of the babu. Thus they made the expenses in competition.

The babus spent their days in indolence. They never strayed into the sphere of useful, constructive work. A diary published in 1842 by one such babu throws light on the lifestyle of this rich and leisured class:
This ‘other place’ is nothing but the house of the prostitute. It is needless to say that a person with such a lifestyle lives like a parasite. Such a person is not capable of making the slightest contribution to the social welfare.

Bengalis in general are not a martial race. Their geographical position ensures them food without much trouble. Bengal is a fertile land with ample rainfall and lots of ponds and rivers. So agriculture is not as difficult as it is in some other parts of the country. Moreover the Permanent Settlement further ensured a perennial flow of money into the pockets of non-resident zamindars from their estates in the rural Bengal. This made them indulge in a lazy lifestyle and further destroy the ability to exert themselves. They were afraid of disturbing the existing social order even slightly. The Sepoy Mutiny thus frightened them, and they were eager to make their stance clear to the British. Kaliprasanna Sinha could hardly resist burlesquing the loyalist attitude of the
Bengalis who gathered at the Hindu Metropolitan College to condemn the Mutiny in the persona of Hutom:

Finding them in a spot, the Bengalis convened a meeting at Gopal Mullick’s house and sent out a message to the English:

Though a hundred years have rolled by after the coming of British, Bengalis are still the same wretched imbeciles that they were. Despite hobnobbing with the British for so long and imbibing their education and manners, they have not become like the Americans. (It’s doubtful if they even can.) Some of their bigwigs are so scared of high waves that they don’t take a boat ride on the Ganga. They clasp the hands of their wives or housemaids when they go out to pee in the night! The only weapons they can handle are table knives and penknives. It’s impossible to imagine that people who were afraid of their own shadows will go out and fight (Roy 82).

The show of devotion towards the British and the reluctance to express the urge for freedom is the fear of incurring the wrath of the British rulers. Nabinchandra Basu had to change many portions of his Palasir Yuddha in its second edition. For example, “I don’t desire the heavenly bliss of Nandan Kanan / If I can momentarily enjoy freedom” gave way to “I don’t desire the heavenly bliss of Nandan Kanan — but alas! The dream is over” (qtd. Basu and Chaudhuri 256). The poet deliberately avoids the mention of freedom, to save himself from the British ire.

In Dillir Darbar, Rabindranath Tagore was annoyed at the loyalist attitude of the Indians who dearly held the very symbol of their slavery by participating in Lord Lytton’s Imperial Assembly at Delhi. The poem asks: ‘In this deep darkness, in this unfortunate time, India quivers with
joyous sounds! / I hear that millions of slaves, wiping their tears and holding their sighs, / Are 
delirious with joy for the golden chains. / I ask, so answer O Himalaya: can this portend a happy 
day?' (qtd. Choudhury 37). Indians became so servile that that they could not even see that they 
were being subjugated and ill-treated by the British. They regarded these to be the chastisement 
of the big brother for the well-being of the immature folk. These loyalists therefore did not resent 
the arrogance of the British. Mere presence of the latter was for them a proof of the benevolence 
of God. They could never imagine, not even in their wildest dreams, of opposing the British.

On his visit to India, Blunt was told by a young tea-planter that ‘a rebellion is brewing in 
India’ (qtd. Majumdar 882). Blunt, in turn discussed the chances of rebellion with the Lieutenant 
Governor Sir Alfred Lyall who would not believe that there was any chance of one in the near 
future. They thought that Indians were weak as a race and would always need someone to 
support them. This ensured British a comfortable rule over the country. However the last quarter 
of the nineteenth century was marked by a new period in the development of modern politics. 
Though the earlier rhetoric of loyalty was not altogether abandoned, this period saw a more 
sustained spirit of opposition. The professional politicians belonging to the educated middle class 
contributed towards the growth of a nationalist movement. The dawn of nationalist 
consciousness among the radicalized youth of Bengal was seen in their sharp protests against all 
forms of racial discrimination practiced by the Europeans.

The need of the day was to make every Indian aware of the yoke of imperialism. But the 
problem was that all did not hold similar views. Some were impatient to break free. Others, 
while admitting the bondage and the consequent restrictions, felt themselves unequal to it in 
might and thus unable to come out of it. There was yet another group who was basking in the 
warmth of British glory and prayed for its continuance. Tagore once commented that when a
country is persecuted by outsiders, its people are expected to create a united front to defend themselves. But this was not the case in India, where people continued to be separated due to narrow selfishness.

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini do not basically portray a subaltern trying to assert his rights in the face of the oppressive colonizer. These are primarily domestic dramas depicting the lives and problems faced by the educated middle-class Bengali. While presenting the lives of these people, both the plays throw light on the problems faced by this class against the backdrop of the late nineteenth-century colonial Bengal. While presenting their frustrations and aspirations, the dramatist means to stir his countrymen out of stupor. The dramatist employs the leading characters of his plays as his mouthpieces. He also uses the stage as a platform to reach out to the masses. He actually wants the Indians to understand that they are being denied freedom in their own country. He also shows them how they may prepare themselves for the fight against the British high-handedness.

The inertia of their countrymen frustrates Surendra and Sarat in Upendranath Das's dramas. They see that there remains much to be done to improve the condition of the country. But the people are hopelessly lacking in enterprise. The former is tired of the patience of his countrymen towards the injustice of the foreign rulers. When his sister Birajmohini tells him to exercise more patience because no injustice can remain forever, he angrily replies: 'Can you see the prosperity of India by practicing patience? (11.4) He tells her that in a civilized society the dispensation of law is entrusted in the hands of a selected few who take the oath of working impartially. But when this judiciary becomes corrupted, the primary duty of self-defence returns to the hands of the countrymen. Thus, according to Surendra, the British magistrates being corrupt, Indians should look after themselves and are not to depend on these people to bring justice.
Sarat also feels that Indians are too selfish and sensual to even slightly bother about the state of the country. He says that the number of people who worry about the miserable condition of the country even once in a week can be counted on one's fingers. He traces this to the lack of education and the prevalence of prejudices. He wonders when this 'disease' will be cured. What further annoys Sarat is the overindulgence in the emotion of love. He says: ‘[...] is this the time to indulge in love? Don’t we have any abhorrence? Don’t we remember that day and night we are being ruled like cattle? Doesn’t the racial prejudice of the British in every sphere make the blood flow through veins like lightning? Doesn’t it make the body feel hot? Doesn’t a cry of fie rise within the heart? Still cherishing other wishes, other desires?’ (I.1).

The plays also refer to the faint-hearted Bengalis. When the dacoits attack Sarat’s house, he teaches shooting a pistol to one of his servants. But the latter is too nervous to learn. Again, when Sarat shoots Gopinath dead, the latter’s team-mates are about to flee because Sarat has some 10 – 12 rifles in his house. This makes the British admonish them as ‘cowards’. However, when Sarat is about to be killed by an Englishman, it is Sarojini who picks the pistol that the servant could not use and kills him. This proves that all the Bengalis are not cowards. Even a Bengali girl does not hesitate to shoot a dacoit. However all Bengalis were not like Sarat or Sarojini. Most of them were indeed chicken-hearted and effeminate.

This makes Sarat believe that independence is still a far cry for India: ‘We are a race of such wretched cowards that I can’t even think of such a thing happening before two hundred or three hundred years’ (I.1). He can see that the mental framework of the Bengalis is far from being ready for the fight against the colonialists. When the sc-geant unlawfully attacks Binay, Sarat rushes to defend the Bengali. The shop owner, on the other hand, downs the shutter of his shop, but cannot resist the curiosity of watching the goings-on. He does not have the courage to come
out and help Binay; nevertheless he cannot deprive himself of the sight of violence. With such people around him, Sarat feels that the British will have a long period of rule in India. What Sarat ‘prescribes’ to ignite a fighting spirit amongst the Bengalis is akin to the programme of the Hindu Mela. He wants people to ‘get united and remove the darkness of the ignorance of the country, try to improve the country’s agriculture, trade and industry – and vow to establish amity within the country’ (I.1).

According to Sarat, the condition of India is so miserable that the British rule itself has become the only means of deliverance. The person who suggests a revolution at this stage is himself a traitor. One is reminded Indranath Bandyopadhyay’s Bharat-Uddhar Kabya, where Sures says that in the face of lack of unity and courage amongst the Indians, British rule is the only solution, however painful it might be. Sarat says:

So intense and all-devouring is the downfall of India that the permanence of this abhorring slavery has begun to be counted as the only means of our future development. Even the core of the society is afflicted with this severe disease. Under these circumstances the one who advises to rise in arms against the British, or express such a desire, is not only a great fool and indiscreet, but the country’s enemy (I.2).

When Sarat has been abducted by Aamir Khan and his men, his courage and presence of mind makes the latter comment that such a behavior indeed cannot be expected from the Bengalis.

Upendranath Das tries to rouse the readers’ indignation by showing the discrimination Indians are subjected to. The British may deny access to a public place at their sweet will. Indians are subjected to racist comments. In Surendra-Binodini, the magistrate McCrindle calls them half-civilized, while the sergeant in Sarat-Sarojini calls Sarat a swine. In both the plays, the British badly insult the Indians. After depicting the British as racists, the dramatist goes on to add more
shades to the portrait. While sending a gang of dacoits to Sarat's house, Matilal, the villain in Sarat-Sarojini, tells the gang leader Gopinath that he has recruited four Britishers, because their white face itself frightens Bengalis. He goes on to say that: 'The British are such a race that you can buy the whole lot if you give money. It is only for money that they have sailed across the ocean and come to our country' (IV.3). However he does not forget to add a note of caution about arming the British dacoits: 'If necessary, give them swords. But don't give, unless it is urgent. They may attack. They are such a mean race' (IV.3).

Songs are also so used in Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini as to kindle nationalistic feelings. Some songs of the drama portray the miserable condition of India and try to stir the countrymen into action. The opening song of Surendra-Binodini may be cited as an example:

Alas what a dark night has covered the face of India
Alas the prosperous India is now merged in awful grief
Floating in the sea of grief
Mother India day and night
Recollecting her earlier prosperity
Is weeping incessantly.
Who will now wipe
Mother's tears? (I.1)

The song closely resembles those sung at the Hindu Mela. These songs portrayed a miserable Bharat-Mata shorn of her previous glory. Bharat-Matar Bilap 'The Lamentations of Mother India' was staged at the Hindu Mela on February 15, 1873 under the auspices of the National Theatre. 'It represented Mother India, pale and morose at the miseries, poverty and degradation of her sons - dull, pathetic and quite reluctant to make any effort whatsoever. The famous song
of Satyendranath Tagore “Malina Mukhachandrama Bharata Tomari” (‘O India, thy moonlike face is dark with sorrow’), used to move the audience to tears’ (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 256).

The same sort of songs can also be seen in Sarat-Sarojini. For example, the first song is about the beauty of the evening at the Eden Gardens. Even in that pleasant atmosphere, the singer can acutely feel the pain inflicted by the chains of slavery. The same sentiment also pervades the last song of this drama: ‘You are enslaved for your own fault / Disgrace and feebleness has overcome the three worlds’ (VI.6).

When Sarojini turns down the marriage proposal of Matilal for Sukumari, the ghataki ‘female match-maker’ threatens them with dire consequences. This frightens Sukumari. But Sarojini assures her: ‘Is this a lawless country? What do we care if he has fighters with sticks and white servants? We live in a country ruled by the British’ (IV.1). What Sarojini says is true. The British had a code of law, while during the Muslim rule, the will of the emperor was the law of the land. In the eyes of the British law, all Indians were equal. It would not make any distinction between the rich and the poor, the Hindu or the Muslim, as long as one not a favourite. But the picture changed when the legal suit involved a Britisher. Such a judicial system is far from being perfect.

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini portray the corrupt judiciary. Sarat mentions the magistrate of Anantapur assaulting a young woman. When her husband sues him, he is convicted of slander and sentenced to three months’ rigorous imprisonment. In Surendra-Binodini, McCrindle too does the same with the women in custody. He confides in Krishnadas that he cannot resist himself in presence of pretty women, thereby compelling the latter to say in an aside: ‘That’s in their blood’ (I.2).

McCrindle destroys the deed of the debt that he took from Surendra. When the former says that he will have his due back because he can produce witnesses, the magistrate blatantly replies:
'You fool, the signatures of two hundred Bengalis like you won’t hold good against what I say taking oath by kissing the Bible. Haven’t you been able to learn this bit after staying so long under the British rule? Your lack of knowledge has sincerely hurt me’ (I.4). He thus shows his irreverence to the holy book. He goes so far as to shoot Surendra so that he cannot create any more trouble. However the latter is saved by a milkman who happens to be the sole witness of the gruesome crime. The latter is falsely implicated and sentenced to two months’ imprisonment. When Surendra canes McCrindle at a park, Birajmohini, Surendra’s sister is dragged to court and falsely implicated. The trial is deliberately adjourned until the next day and McCrindle tries to assault her at night. He thanks Sir James Stephen, the then Law Member of the Government for preparing the new regulations of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1872, thereby giving more power to the magistrates.

McCrindle blackmauls Krishnadas, whom he saved from death sentence and forces him to bring women for his enjoyment. He does the same with another Muslim who once committed forgery out of greed. McCrindle threatens this man to do what he orders, failing which, he shall be deported. The former brings women to an isolated house, somewhat removed from the other ones. The man is entrusted to make the house appear haunted so that the relatives of the women would not venture to come so far to try to rescuing them. He follows the instruction of McCrindle out of fear.

The plays show how Indians should muster courage to resist the colonialists. Surendra kicks McCrindle when the latter insults his sister. Later in the play McCrindle is annoyed at finding an Indian who, seeing a British does not salute or even stand up. The former therefore kicks him and finding him to be Surendra, canes him. The latter retaliates by kicking McCrindle and caning
him for his treachery and arrogance. Sarat also retaliates at the sergeant’s high-handedness. He is sued and fined; still he will appeal because he was not the first to strike.

Sarat also publishes four articles on the British governance and is implicated by the exposed magistrate of Anantapur for slander and sedition. This reminds one of the essays written by the ‘Old Hindoo’ in the Bengal Hurkara. Rabindranath Tagore also says that whenever British insults an Indian, the latter should immediately retaliate. He may not get justice; he may be falsely implicated and may also have to die. He writes in ‘Ghushaghushi’:

[...] জনায় সম্ম করিয়ার জন্য গ্রামক মানুষকে বে জনীয় অধিকার আছে বসাসানে নাম পাথি না গাঠিতে তারি, তবে মানুষের নিকট রেন এবং মধ্যে নিকট পড়িত হইবে। নিজের যুক্ত ও মর্ম আমার পালা না করিতে পারিও, নিকু বা জনায় নাম সম্ভ কাহার প্রতি এবং সম্ভ মানুষের প্রতি জনায় [...] বিধে ঘাড়ে, বাণিজ্য ঘাড়ে স্থায়ি ঘাড়ে নিজেকে সর্কে বাৰ্তাহারা, নানা মীমাংসিতে মীমাংসে করিয়া করিব নাম নিজেকে সংবলন করিয়া দুই শান্তনর কর্তার আমায়িকে গ্রাম করিতেই হইবে

(772) ‘If one does not apply the divine right of fighting injustice, one degrades oneself in the eyes of the other people as well as in the eyes of religion. One may ignore one’s own misery and loss. But what is wrong, is wrong against the whole race, against the humanity. One has to commit oneself to the duty of subduing any injustice arising out of jealousy, bravado or arrogance, without overstepping the path of righteousness’.

Other literary works also urged Indians to fight for their self-esteem. They came up with novels, plays and poems where the Indians stand up boldly against the British colonizer. For example, Pramathanath Ray Chaudhuri’s Parisodh presents a situation where the Bengali fights back. He falls in front of an Englishman’s carriage and unintentionally stops his way. He is abused, both verbally and physically. The poem goes ‘[...] আম, তোরনকঃ – কর যে হঠাতে আমা দুটি চড়’ (qtd. Basu and Chaudhuri 268) ‘Ah, then two nice slaps on the English cheek by the Bengali’.

The poem concludes: ‘দুই গলা সকলিন দুই না উঠিবে/ কিন্তু শান্তনু বাংলা-এ বাংলিয়া চলিবে’ (qtd. Basu and
Chaudhuri 268) ‘As long as the punch won’t be returned with a punch / The merciless debt to the
British will be ever increasing’.

In Sarat-Sarojini one gets the picture of colonial prison. These prisoners are serving the
sentence of rigorous imprisonment. McCrindle engages them in renovating his house, a project
that is never complete. This is so because everyday he comes up with new orders of renovation.
His overworked prisoners are brutally treated and not given their allotted food. Krishnadas steals
the food meant for the inmates. Neither are the women of their household spared. McCrindle
exploits them under the pretence of interrogation. The prisoners remain helpless spectators. They
cannot provide any protection to their womenfolk. They take the cue from various incidents of
jail-breaking and specially the Hazaribagh jail-breaking that came close on the heels of the
Sepoy Mutiny and plan one. One night they try to break free. They kill two native guards who
came to control the situation. McCrindle comes and kil.s few prisoners with his revolver. When
he runs out of ammunition, the prisoners kill him and escape.

There is a reference to Wahabism in Sarat-Sarojini. This religio-political creed was founded
by Saiyid Ahmad, who cherished the ambition of restoring Muslim power in India by
overthrowing the Sikh in Punjab and the British. Its members were urged to unite as one body
and fight the infidels to conquer India. They were giver. military training. They also sought the
help of the native Hindu states. They had branches at Rajmahal and other places. These camps
gathered volunteers and money. The British tried hard to crush the rebels. They used diplomatic
tactics as well. They got certain correspondences and this led to various State trials in 1864 and
1865, which in turn led to the Rajmahal trial of 1870. Ibrahim Mandal, on whom the Aamir Khan
of Sarat-Sarojini is modelled, was sentenced to transportation for life. He was the leader of the
movement in the adjoining areas and collected large sums of money for jihad. He was so
respected by his own people that the British found it hard to procure witnesses to testify his seditious acts. He was released in 1878.7

Sarat’s encounter with Aamir Khan throws light on the contemporary Hindu – Muslim relationship. There was one discordant note in the glowing account of nationalism. A growing cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims was gradually gaining prominence. Though there was some fellow-feeling and they occasionally came together during some political crisis, they remained as two distinctly separate groups. Such was the hatred towards the Muslim that someone as decent as Sarat could tell Aamir on his face: ‘[...] there was no limit to the Muslims’ autocracy. The autocracy of the English is somewhat – though only slightly – bound by civilization’ (V.4). The Hindus did not want the Muslim even in place of British rule. They felt that restoration of Muslim power would be like returning to the past from the modern age and was not at all desirable.8

The colonizer is also made an object of ridicule. When Haridas tries to convince Sarat of Darwin’s theory of evolution, the latter is in no mood to give him ear. On the former’s insistence, Sarat tells him to prove that the British are actually monkeys. He is not happy with the proof by the first syllogistic pattern of the British belonging to the monkey-family. His friends too wonder if Haridas’s science could transform few female monkeys, imported from England, into good women.

In Surendra-Binodini the hymn-singing of the Christians is made fun of. It is said that they pray so that Jesus may lead them from light to darkness. The Hindus were critical of the ways of the Christians. Even the broad-minded Raja Rammohun Roy felt that Hinduism was better than Trinitarianism because the stories that the former mentions are explicitly stated to be nothing but myths to help the layman grasp the spiritual truth sooner. But Trinitarianism will not admit such
a thing. They firmly believe these to be true. Thus when a missionary tries to convert a Hindu, the latter actually moves from light to darkness, just the opposite of the famous Upanishadic phrase ‘Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya’9 ‘Lead us from darkness to light’.

During the tenure of Sir George Campbell as the Lieutenant Governor, there were schools to train men to become sub-deputy magistrates. They were required to master a wide range of subjects like botany, chemistry, land measurement, law, swimming, gymnastics, etc. Soon after the Government circular declared this, the Amrita Bazar Patrika published a cartoon on May 2, 1872 lampooning the Lieutenant Governor. It showed a few Bengali youths, in the dress worn while performing gymnastics, standing in a queue. They had compass in their ears and iron chains round their waist. Below the cartoon, it was written: ‘ফেলাম সংস্কৃত অবস্থানেরে / সাধু শান ঘর কম্পাস ক্রান্ত / দেহ সাঁত হতি দুই জেল চাঁদার দুইটি / অমাদের হাতার মন মত চেয়ে চেয়েগুড়ি’ (qtd. Bandyopadhyay 118) ‘Mr. Campbell’s Model Deputy Magistrate / Can show obeisance as well as ride the horse / Plough at the waist is replaced by chain, a compass is over the ear / Legs that are one yard seven inches two fingers long / Such is the deputy liked by our lord’. The guard in Sarat-Sarojini ridicules the magistrates in the same vein. They shall dance on bamboo pole, while their movements shall be regulated by the Lieutenant Governor who would pull at the ropes tied round their waists. This metaphorically states that the sub-deputy magistrates shall not have any power and shall act as the puppet of his British masters.

As Blunt had noticed, the town population was gradually becoming more enlightened. It is therefore but natural that they shall be more enraged at the servitude that the British demanded. It is true that the dramatis personae are not always seen fighting the British rulers like the Wahabis. Since they are educated, their way of protest is totally different from others. They use the journals and societies to present their views. Poems, novels and dramas were also composed. In
Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini the dialogues and incidents point towards the urgency of the situation. In other words, the plays breathe patriotic sentiments. They show people how they are to change their lifestyle to become the worthy sons of Bharat Mata. It is therefore no wonder that the government would come down heavily upon these plays.
NOTES

1 About this peculiar style of writing Manomohan Gangopadhyay says that in the clattering of the alliterations, the meaning is lost. One has to try hard to somehow extract the sense, leave apart the meaning of the particular passage. The author deliberately uses this artificial style to display his vocabulary and grasp over the language. Two examples of this type of writings may be cited: ‘কাহিনীকুলকলালাপাচারে উদ্বিজ্ঞানিকারীরা শিনপূর্ণ কামান্ন হইয়া আসিবেন’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar, O Bangali Samaj 321) and ‘আমী আসিয়া রহিত ব্যবহারিত সদৃশ পরিপূর্ণ উদ্ভাসারস হীনত আত্মত পরামর্শ বিক্ষিপ্ত স্রোতে পুঁজির পরগুলি কৃতান্তার মহাপার্থ মহামায় মহাময় মৃত্ত হইয়া নিবেদন...’ (qtd. M. Gangopadhyay 99).

2 Swami Vivekananda was once travelling with two Englishmen in the same railway compartment. They took him to be an ignorant monk and made fun of him in English. When Swami Vivekananda talked to the Station Master in English, these Englishmen felt greatly embarrassed and wanted to know why the Swami had not protested. He replied that this was not the first time that he saw fools. At this the men wanted to fight. But seeing the strongly built Swami with his undaunted spirit, they considered apologizing a better option. (The Life of Swami Vivekananda 349-350).

3 These people were trained to fight with staves and thus formed part of the indigenous army of the landlords.

4 The diary continues:

[...] যুদ্ধের - ৭ ডিসেম্বর সময় বাটী আলিয়া একবার নিয়া গেলাম, ১০টার সময় নিয়া তুল হইল, যে দিন আর চা পান করিতে ইচ্ছা হইল না, মানুষের করিতে দুই প্রহর অতিহীন হইল, পর নিয়া গিয়া বেলা সময় ৩টা তখন একবার নীলাম ভিজিতে গিয়া করিলাম, সেই নৌকায় একটা মুড়ি ধর করিতে সাড়া হইল, কিন্তু সাড়া নাম্বার পাল হইল না, মুড়ির নীলাম পরিজ্ঞামূর্তক একবার স্নায়ুর কোটা করিয়া রাখে মণিমের / হুমায়ূন আহমেদ, বন্ধ ভাগ করিয়া তলা পান করিলে
['[...] Friday: I returned home at 7:00 am and went to sleep. I woke up at 10:00 am. That
day I didn’t feel like taking tea. The second prahar slipped away by the time I took bath
and had meal. Then I went to sleep. At 3:00 pm I went to see auction. I wanted to buy a
pair of horses for my chariot. Since I didn’t find one to my liking, I left the place of
auction and went to the Supreme Court and the House of Carr and Tagore. After returning
home, I changed, had some refreshments and left for the garden-house with Hari Babu and
Syam Babu. That day I didn’t return home. At 10:00 pm I straight away went to the other
place.

Saturday: Since I had a late night for some reason, I slept till late in the morning. Later
two of my friends came to that place and woke me up at 10:00 am. After much fun and
talk, we decided to go to Khardah to see ras-jatra. Then I came home and after bath and
meal, left for Khardah. Two more persons accompanied me and we had such merriment
that I can’t express it.
Sunday: Today I returned home at the second prahar. There’s an invitation at –babu’s garden-house. I’ll go there in the evening. There also we shall have much fun tonight.

Calcutta

A rich man

Agrahayan 6, Sunday

The editor, Akshaykumar Datta, could not help commenting that had this ‘rich man’ published the journal covering his entire life he would indeed become a butt of ridicule.

There were two meetings at the house of Ramgopal Mallik (the Hindu Metropolitan College) to condemn the Sepoy Mutiny and express loyalty of the Bengali subjects to their British masters. The dates of the first of the two meetings are not known. The Sambad Bhaskar reported on May 26, 1857: ‘[...] কলিকাতার সমস্ত জা‌লালেরা নিপুন মেট্রোপলিটন কলেজে ব্রিটিশ সরকারের প্রতি অনুগ্রহপ্রকাশের কন্যা এক সভা করেন [...] সমস্ত লিপ্তদের নিয়ে নিয়ে করিতে এবং নিয়ে দ্বারে সরকারকে ব্রিটিশ সাধারণের প্রতি স্নাতি নিয়া একটি প্রতিশোধ প্রকাশ করা হয়’ (qtd. Nag 243) ‘The prominent bhadralok of Calcutta assembled at the Hindu Metropolitan College to show their loyalty to the British. The Sepoy Mutiny was condemned and it was agreed that a proposal would be given to the Government assuring them all sort of help in curbing the Mutiny’. About the other meeting held on May 25, 1857, the Bengal Hurkara wrote on May 26: ‘Several gentlemen [...] demanded that the Government should be solicited to arm their retainers [...] / and declared that peasants and the inhabitants of the country were so loyal and faithful as themselves, and were waiting anxiously to hear that the Government had with a strong hand put down its enemies’ (qtd. Nag 243-244).

Nandan Kanan is the Hindu counterpart of the Garčen of Eden.

For more information on Wahabism, see Amalendu De’s Bangali Buddhijibi o Bichchinnatabad and Roots of Separatism in the Nineteenth Century Bengal.
The educated Hindus regarded the earlier Muslim rule as the backward movement of the history. The newly educated Hindu middle class did not desire this retrogression at any cost, not even at the cost of driving away the British (B. Ghosh *Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara* 293).

'Lead me from untruth to truth, lead me from darkness to light / Lead me from death to immortality' (*Brihad-aryaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28).