Kylas Chunder Dutt (1817-1857) and Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1824/5-86) both belong to the family of the Rambagan Dutt's who were descendants of Nilmoni Dutt, who had settled in Calcutta from his ancestral home in Burdwan in the eighteenth century. Once he settled in Calcutta, Nilmoni rapidly established himself as a leading citizen. His eldest son, Rasomoy (1779-1854), was a judge of the Small Cause Court in Calcutta and secretary of the management committees of both the Hindu College and the Sanskrit College. Rasomoy's eldest son was Kishen Chunder and his other sons, Govin Chunder (1828-1884), Hur Chunder (1831-1901) and Greece Chunder (1833-1892), were anglophone poets. Kylas was his second son, and was the first Indian to publish fiction in English (A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945, published in 1835). Nilmoni's youngest son was Pitamber, whose sons were Ishan Chunder (Romesh Chunder's father) and Shoshee Chunder.

There is an interesting story regarding the sudden conversion to Christianity of one branch of the family. When Kishen Chunder, the eldest son of Rasomoy Dutt, fell mortally ill, immediately after their father's death in 1862, he is said to have seen a vision of the next world on his deathbed and asked to be baptised. In “Introducing South-Asian Poetry in English: The Dutts of Rambagan”, Kaiser Huq recounts,

The cleric sent for evaded the request—lest, one assumes, Hindus accused him of stealing a dying man's soul. The youngest brother Greece, who
himself was unbaptized, then administered the baptismal rites. The dying Kishen adjured his brothers to embrace Christianity, which they presently did, en famille.¹

Pitambur's side of the Dutt family remained Hindu. Huq further says that, though the relationship between the Christian and the Hindu sides of the family remained genial, "...the conversion did result in a slight difference in outlook, which noticeably affected their literary productions". Most of the poems of the Dutt Family Album (1870), a book of poetry by Christian Dutts, are expressions of Christian piety. It also includes romanticised poems on Western subjects, Orientalist poems on Indian themes, and some translations from French and German. Huq says that "one could regard them as a conspicuous expression of the desire among a section of the Indian upper classes for complete assimilation into the culture of the coloniser." There is unabashed toadying in "To Lord Canning, During the Mutiny" and the celebration of British power in "Gibraltar".

The "unconverted Dutts" were set apart from their Christianised kin in their nationalist outlook. The term "nation" (and its allied terms such as "nationalist", "nationality") has acquired a lot of political and theoretical baggage in the last few decades after the Second World War, but we find the term "nation" used by Shoshee Dutt as early as 1845 in Republic of Orissa Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century.² Huq cites the "political difference" between the Christian and the Hindu Dutts by illustrating two sonnets with the same title, "India":

Both evince the self-conscious Indianness fostered by the Bengal Renaissance, but with different accents. The poem by the Christian Hur
Chunder, after declaring "boundless love" to the "Land of my birth" mourns her lost glory and looks towards the future: "But Time shall yet be mocked:—though these decay, I see broad streaks of a still brighter day." There can be no doubt that the Hur Chunder's "brighter day" is materialising under the aegis of British colonial rule. Shoshee Chunder's "India", on the other hand, is an exhortation to seek independence:

I dreamt a dream of strange and wild delight,

Freedom's pure shrine once more illumed did seem,

......

Science again aspired to the sky,

And patriot valour watch'd the smiling strand:

A dream! A dream! Why should a dream it be?

Land of my fathers! Canst thou never be free?^3

To the above example one may add excerpts such as these from Shoshee's poems:

My fallen country; on thy brow

The ruthless tyrants have engraved thy shame

And laid they haughty grandeur low

Yet even thus, and even so

I love to lisp thy name.

(From "My Native Land", quoted in Pallab Sengupta, 180)

Or,

At freedom's altar whimes [sic] the recreant slave
And servile huge the despot’s loathsome chain?

(Quoted in Pallab Sengupta 180)

In this chapter I take a look at the Kylas Dutt’s *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* (henceforth referred to as *Forty-Eight Hours*) and Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century*, (henceforth *Republic*) two texts which had an early vision of a free, united India.

At the time when *Forty-Eight Hours* (1835) and *Republic* (1845) were written, the concept of the Indian nation existed only as an imagined entity. In this context we may bear in mind Benedict Anderson’s interesting hypothesis about the nation and its communities in *Imagined Communities - Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community”. An imagined community is different from an actual community because it is not (and cannot be) based on quotidian face-to-face interaction between its members. Instead, members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity. As Anderson puts it, a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Italics mine) (5-7). Kylas Dutt and Shoshee Dutt are among the first of those intellectuals who were engaged in the task of imagining and consolidating the idea of the Indian nation.

*A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945*

In 1835, Kylas Chunder Dutt, then an eighteen year old student of the Hindu College, wrote a prize winning prose fiction for his college competition about India of a
hundred years later. The piece was titled “A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945”, and here the young Kylas revolutionarily fantasized that the students of the Hindu College have risen in armed rebellion (though unsuccessfully) against the British. The text was published in *Calcutta Literary Gazette, or, Journal of Belles Lettres, Science, and the Arts*, Vol. III, new series, no. 75 (dated 6 June, 1835), a journal edited by D. L. Richardson, the well-known journalist, poet, and Principal of the Hindu College.

Short though the text is, it was a mission almost impossible to trace this text.

The text was first “discovered” by Pallab Sengupta in 1965, after more than a century of neglect by scholars. However, it was impossible to trace the text subsequently. Recently, it was traced by the Portsmouth based scholar Alex Tickell, who has the following interesting story to tell about its discovery:

Looking at the three volumes bound in dusty pink curtain material on the British Library desk, I was sure I’d found the missing story. I was almost certain that here, hidden for a hundred and seventy years, was the first piece of fiction written in English by an Indian author. If not, I’d have to go all the way to Calcutta to find it ... Disastrously, it wasn’t in the pink British Library volumes of the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, and it soon became clear, after frantic emails to India, that no-one had seen a copy for years. It seemed that I would have to get a flight to India, go to the National Library, and chase up the missing story myself... for a week I returned daily to search for Kylas’s lost short story, and sit through the heat of the steaming afternoons with the ruined books... However, in

97
spite of all the echoes of the Dutts' vibrant city I found in present-day Kolkata, after a week of searching the stacks in the Lieutenant Governor’s drawing room and visiting several of Kylas’s descendants, I still hadn’t found his elusive rebellion-narrative. Giving in to another colonial cliche’, I started to feel distinctly ill, and abandoning the search I boarded the train for the eighteen-hour journey back to Delhi, and a disappointed return to Britain. Like all good detective stories, my search for these lost Indian-English fictions ended with that circular logic which ensures that the hidden hinge of the plot is actually its most familiar component. I eventually found a June 1835 copy of the Calcutta Literary Gazette in a second-hand book shop in Leeds. The work of colonial acquisition had already been done for me by a Victorian missionary, E J Barton, who had survived the Indian climate in the mofussil or country town of Gaya long enough to bring his library home to a Northumbrian parish. Holding his copy of the Gazette I remembered the words of a Bengali academic I'd spoken to about the find, who said acerbically: “You should have known it was in the UK, after all, aren’t all our treasures over there?” Although only a minor literary treasure, Kylas’s story of anti-colonial civil rebellion was worth the search and, as one of the first Indian writers in English, I wasn’t sure exactly whose “treasure” his story was, anyway. Didn’t he represent the start of a long, complex literary dialogue between cultures? (Wasafiri Vol. 21, No. 3 November 2006, 10-14).
This long excerpt illustrates the neglect of our archival texts, and marks the gaps in Indian scholarship. But, more importantly, it raises a very pertinent question about trans-cultural negotiation and heritage. For Tickell, Kylas Chunder Dutt marks the beginning of “a long, complex literary dialogue between cultures”, the dialogue which is kept in motion by scholars like Tickell himself who took such pains to re-locate this “lost” text.

This text is not only the first work of prose fiction in Indian English literature, but also the first work of fiction of all modern Indian literatures that has an armed rebellion against the British as its theme. The story essays mistrust and revulsion against the British rule. This narrative is not only remarkable for its attitude to colonialism, but also for its negotiation with the English language and English education.

It records the earliest fictional militant patriotic outburst in India and was written twenty years earlier than what is called the “First War of Indian Independence” or the “Revolt of 1857”. However, nineteenth century India had already witnessed numerous peasant and tribal insurgencies. The first armed protests against British colonialism had come from “subaltern” quarters rather than from the Western-educated “civilised” members of the society. In Colonialism, Culture, and Resistance, K.N. Panikkar points out that though “early colonial historians and their disciples have drawn the picture of a docile and contented peasantry living under the shelter and comfort of Pax Britannica”, it is but a “misleading picture”, and that Kathleen Gough has recently identified seventy seven peasant revolts in various parts of India, “the smallest of which probably engaged several thousand peasants in active support of combat” (227). The Kol insurrection dates as far back as 1831 and in 1855 several thousand Santhals had rebelled.
In such context, it is worthwhile to examine Dutt’s negotiation with Western culture and Western education, his early interrogation of colonialism, and the nascent stirrings of militant nationalism embedded in this valuable text. Since intellectuals like Kylas Dutt could not take up arms literally against the British, perhaps the texts such as these were the site where they could imagine rebellion and satisfy their aspiration for liberty.

Though written in 1835, the story is set in the year 1945. By locating the events of the story a hundred years later than the date of its composition, the author underlines the strong wish-fulfilment aspect of the theme. A militant uprising against the British was at that time a distant reality, something that could only be imagined to take place sometime in the future, not in the present. The author seems to be aware of his thinking being ahead of his times and thus sets the time frame a hundred and ten years in the future. The choice of his date of imagined rebellion, 1945, may be arbitrary, yet it is thrillingly near to the actual date of Indian independence, 1947.

The text opens with the description of India’s oppression under the tyrannical British rule:

The people of India and particularly those of the metropolis had been subject for the last fifty years to every species of sub-altern oppression. The dagger and the bowl were dealt out with a merciless hand, and neither age, sex nor condition could repress the rage of the British barbarians. These events, together with the recollection of the grievances suffered by their ancestors roused the dormant spirit of the generally considered timid Indian (Italics mine) (15).
It is of great interest to note the avant-garde use of the word “subaltern” in the text, much before post-modern theorists coined its current signification. It is commonly believed that the postcolonial use of the term emerged with Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1881–1937). Originally a term for subordinates in military hierarchies (literally meaning “subordinate”, the term “subaltern” is used to describe commissioned officers below the rank of captain and generally comprises the various grades of lieutenant), the term “subaltern” was adopted by Gramsci to refer to groups who are outside the established structures of political representation. The “Subaltern Studies Group” arose in the 1980s, influenced by the scholarship of Eric Stokes, and under the guidance of Ranajit Guha, who attempted to formulate a new narrative of the history of India and South Asia. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” one of the founding texts of postcolonialism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggested that the subaltern is denied access to both mimetic and political forms of representation (Spivak, in Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Ed.) 271-313). However, more than a century before Spivak and Guha, in the year 1835, Kylas Dutt in his Forty-Eight Hours had already endeavoured to represent the injustice of subaltern oppression, and, what is more crucial, more vital, had foresightedly used the word in its present post-modern signification.

The chief perpetrator of the oppression is Lord Fell Butcher who is tyrannical, autocratic, and immoral and a bad administrator. Unable to tolerate his mal-administration, a group of ex-students of the Anglo-Indian (Hindu) College decided to drive away the British from India. In this endeavour they are supported by “many of the most distinguished men of Calcutta—baboos, rajahs, nabobs”. Their leader Bhoobun Mohun"
(Bhoobun=world, Mohun=one of the names of Lord Krishna, who, according to Hindu belief is supposed to deliver the people from their persecutor)\(^7\) inspires them thus in one of their meetings:

Consider for a moment the cruelties which from generation to generation you have suffered. What improvements in our conditions could be expected from the enormities of Clive, despotism of Wellesley, the wanton cruelty of Warren Hastings and the inordinate rapacity of our present odious government? Let us unfurl the banner of freedom and plant it where Britannia now proudly stands (16).

This meeting is disrupted by the “red coats” which results in a skirmish, leaving many dead and wounded on both sides. Thus begins the rebellion. When the Governor hears about the incident, he writes a letter to Colonel Blood Thirsty (all the character names in the text are explicatory, like the names of the characters in the Morality Plays) stating that some natives are gearing up for an armed rebellion, in which circumstance all efforts should be made to secure Fort William against the natives. He sends a press note to the journal “The Calcutta Courier” alleging that a group of hooligans had been creating trouble in north-east Calcutta and when the soldiers tried to disperse them by firing blankly in the air, a few of the crowd jumped into the water and injured themselves.\(^8\)

On the other hand, Bhoobun Mohun returns from the disrupted meeting worried and anxious. The mutineers meet in his house, and they decide to take possession of Fort William one day later. The next day, one of the leaders withdraws himself from the rebellion on the pretext of personal safety. Bhoobun Mohan and Ganga Narayan
however remain determined about their goal of liberating their mother land. The next
day “nothing was to be seen but turbaned heads, pikes, muskets and halbets reflecting in
glittering colours the palm beams of the moon” (18). The young leader Ganga Narayan
is dragged into the fort when he challenges the British soldiers and asks them to
surrender the fort to the Indians. Ganga Narayan is killed and his dead body is
mockingly suspended in the air by the “civilized” British. A tough fight follows.
Bhoobun Mohan injures the commander of the British army. Ultimately however, the
Indians are defeated. Bhoobun Mohan and nine other rebel leaders are taken prisoners.
Perhaps the author’s own colonised circumstances were in some way responsible for
such an ending. Alex Tickell notes that,

In the second edition of the Pioneer [a short-lived monthly journal
devoted to literary matters that he edited with Bhuban Mohan Mittre], the
eighteen-year-old Kylas had warned his companions at the college not to
regard the journal as a political forum: “It may not be amiss if we venture
to advise our young fellow students... to refrain from entering at present
into the din of newspaper strife or of religious or political controversy, as
such a procedure will bring the paper into disrepute and frustrate the end
for which it has been established”. In the same year, however Kylas had
shown no such scruples in submitting his highly political short story...
(Wasafiri Vol. 21, No. 3 November 2006, 13)

Tickell further notes that,

It is difficult to account for this inconsistency in Kylas’ views on politics
and publication. Perhaps he thought that the stature of the Literary
Gazette would protect him from possible reproach, or may be he was just worried that his fledgling journal would lose its literary focus amidst the impassioned political debates... Whatever conclusion we come to about Kylas' wider literary-political aims, it is telling that the publication of his provocative "Journal of Forty-Eight Hours..." coincides with Charles Metcalfe's Press Act XI of 1835, in which the Governor General abolished restrictions on the press, thus ensuring greater freedom of expression throughout colonial India. (Wasafiri Vol. 21, No. 3 November 2006, 13).

Alternately, the failure of the mutineers may have to do with the fact that the mutineers belong to the educated middle and upper middle class elite, and they did not enlist the support of the masses. Kylas was prudent enough to realize the difference between the desire for freedom and its execution. Kylas by means of his western education had imbibed Western ideas of freedom, but, was also aware that those ideas could not be realized practically so easily. Thus, though the desire for "freedom" is intense, his psyche could not accommodate a successful rebellion for acquiring that "freedom". But it is significant that the vision of freedom had already taken root, and Indians had already begun to imagine freedom.

Though the rebellion is "unsuccessful", the leader of the rebels, Bhoobun Mohun, standing in the face of death, continues to inspire his countrymen:

My friends and countrymen! I have the consolation to die in my native land, and though heaven has doomed that I should expire on the scaffold yet are my last moments cheered by the presence of my friends. I have
shed my last blood in defence of my country and though feeble the spark within my frail frame, I hope, you will continue to persevere in the course we have so gloriously commenced. (20)

Sisir Kumar Das has observed that,

The passionate speech of the leader of the rebels before his execution reminds one of the freedom fighters yet unborn. When one remembers the series of uprisings in India- Garo movement in Mymensingh, Nayeks insurrection, Paik insurrection, to mention a few and also the attitudes of the Muslims towards British rule-- the story appears as a formidable document of distrust and hatred against the British rule. It is ironical that this first expression of patriotism as well as hatred for the British rule in Indian literature was recorded in the English language. (80)

Bhoobun Mohan’s speech might have been inspired by Robert Emmet’s (1778-1803) “The Speech from the Dock”, which was widely quoted and remembered not only by Irish nationalists, but also by Indian nationalist periodicals during the nationalist movement for freedom. Of course there is no definitive proof that Emmet’s speech was read by Kylas, but there is reason for us to conjecture so because under the guidance of his teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Kylas and all other students of the Hindu College were made to read revolutionary texts such as those by Tom Paine and Voltaire.

Kylas Dutt’s Forty-Eight Hours is not only remarkable for its bold attitude to colonialism, but also for its negotiation with the English language and English education. Kylas Dutt was a student of the Hindu College, the first institution set up by
Indians themselves in 1817 for imparting Western education. Not only Dutt himself, but his rebel leaders are also students of the Hindoo College. The students of the Hindoo College not only studied Western philosophy, history and literature immensely, but also drew their inspiration from it. I have already referred to the autobiographical account of Rabindranath Tagore in *Jiban Smriti* (1912) where he speaks retrospectively of the 1880s and gives us a hint about the reception and assimilation of Western literature in nineteenth century India.  

The inspirational ability of which Tagore speaks helps us to understand Dutt’s use of the following passage from *Junius Brutus* as an epigraph to his text:

> And shall we, shall men, after five and twenty years of ignominious servitude, shall we, through a fear of dying defer one single instant to assert our liberty? No, Romans, now is the time; the favourable moment we have been waiting for is come.  

Kylas’ use of this passage from *Junius Brutus* marks multiple transcultural and translinguistic negotiations. Kylas re-contextualizes this passage from Duncombe, who was himself using the Roman situation as an inspiration for his own times.

Four months after the publication of *Forty-Eight Hours*, Kylas made the following remark in an article titled “India under Foreigners”, published in *The Hindu Pioneer*, a periodical edited by himself,

> The violent means by which Foreign Supremacy has been established and the *entire alienation of the people of the soil from any share in the government*... are circumstances which... no commercial, no political
benefits can ever authorize or justify (Italics mine) (*The Hindu Pioneer*, October 1835).

Kylas here completely rejects the civilizing mission theory used by the colonisers to justify their imperial ambitions. He points out that the British are alienated from the people of the soil, and that they have denied the Indians any share in the government. And that is why any civilizing or moralizing mission is but a poor apology, a mere excuse to carry on with the colonial project.

Similar ideas may be found in the writings of Marx about India some years later. Marx remarked that,

All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid, and destructive as the successive action in Hindostan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history.¹⁵

In Bengal itself Kylas was not the only one to realize the exploitative nature of the British Rule. Harish Mookherjee for instance writes that “There is not a single native of India who does not feel the full weight of the grievances imposed upon him by the very existence of the British Rule in India - grievances inseparable from subjection to a foreign rule. There is not among the educated classes [one] who does not feel his prospects circumscribed and his ambition restricted by the supremacy of that power.
Tickell’s comment that “Kylas’ short story is an unusual literary hybrid, and could be dismissed as a hasty pastiche of some of the more radical poetic and philosophical additions to the Hindu College curriculum” (Tickell’s “Introduction” in Dutt, Bengaliana 13), shows poor perception of the text. *Forty-Eight Hours* is anything but a “pastiche”. Rather, it is a document that records the earliest response of the Western educated Indian to the British Rule. Its value need not be diminished because it has at its centre “imported principles of liberty and constitutional freedom” (14). The empire, its time we realize, had started writing back much earlier than it is commonly believed.

*The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century*

Kylas’ cousin, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, also wrote a number of fictional texts on the theme of rebellion against the colonial power. Shoshee was the most prolific writer of his family, and wrote on varied subjects and in varied genres. His poetry and prose featured regularly in journals and periodicals in Calcutta. His first published work was *Miscellaneous Verses* (1848), which was later expanded and reprinted as *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems* (1878). In 1854 was published *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*, the essays of which reappeared in a later work *Stray Leaves; or Essays, Poems and Tables* (1864).

From the 1870s Shoshee’s works were mostly simultaneously published from London and Calcutta. Significantly, Shoshee starts using English pseudonyms (for the London editions) at this stage. In *Historical Studies and Recreations* (1879), Bengal, An
Account of the Country from the Earliest Time (1884), and The Great Wars of India (1884) Shoshee uses the pseudonym J. A. G. Barton. The Wild Tribes of India (1882) and The Young Zemindar: His Erratic Wanderings and Eventual Return: Being a Record of Life, Manners, and Events in Bengal from Forty to Fifty Years ago (1885) were written under the preposterous pseudonym Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney. Since he uses the English pseudonyms only for the London editions, it is quite clear that he does for the purpose of wider acceptance by the English readers. Pallab Sengupta has noted that in the journal The West Minister Review the same book of Shoshee was reviewed differently depending on its author’s name being European or Indian (Ingreji Sahitye 220). In 1885 was published Realities of Indian Life: Stories Collated from the Criminal Reports of India to Illustrate the Life, Manners, and Customs of its Inhabitants. In 1877/8 was posthumously published Bengaliana: A Dish of Rice and Curry, and Other Indigestible Ingredients, an amalgam of Shoshee’s prose works. The varied contents of this text are as interesting as its peculiar title. “Bengaliana” is a pun linguistically cutting across both English and Bengali: “-ana” is a Bengali suffix and the word “Bengaliana” roughly translates as “Bengali-ness”. The culinary subtitle with its humorous allusion to the “indigestible” aspects of Bengali cuisine is almost a kind of warning to the reader of the stodgy/tough contents of the volume. Of the four texts of Shoshee dealt with in this thesis, three (The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century, Reminiscences of a Kerani’s Life and Shunker: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857) were published in Bengaliana: A Dish of Rice and Curry, and Other Indigestible Ingredients.
In the vein of Kylas Dutt's *Forty-Eight Hours*, Shoshee's *The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century* (henceforth *Republic*) (first published in *Saturday Evening Hurkura*, 25 June, 1845), is a fantasy of rebellion against the colonial rule in the twentieth century, and advances a step further to actually imagine liberation from the colonial rule. It tells the story of an *adivasi* uprising against the British, but unlike the failed attempt of Kylas's rebellious youth, Shoshee's army of tribal *Kingarees* is victorious, making *Republic* the first text in Indian literature to imagine independence. The rebellion is sparked by the introduction of slavery:

On the 25th June, of the year 1916, was passed, in the Council Chamber at Pillibheet (the capital of British India), an Act, permitting a system of oppression revolting to the refined ideas of the Indian public. The purport of it was, that, it being found cheaper to support Indian labourers as slaves than to employ them at fixed wages, slavery was from that time forward to be re-established in British India, against all provisions to the contrary.... An enactment so harsh and oppressive necessarily irritated the feelings of the native community (Dutt, *Selections from Bengaliana* ed. Alex Tickell 141-2).19

In the “Introduction” Alex Tickell points out that:

The rebellion narrative allows Shoshee to interrogate colonial moral certainties, and includes an elaborate parody of benevolent utilitarian rhetoric in which an English journalist protests that in India “slavery, now constituted, hardly approaches the “durance vile” of a common every-day labourer” (“Introduction”, Dutt, *Selections from Bengaliana* 20).
Shoshee underlines the “despotism” of the British on more than one count:

The despotism of the British Government had for some time been regarded with the greatest hatred and dissatisfaction. But nothing—not the dishonest and inefficient administration of justice, not the gross corruption that prevailed in the highest functionaries of the Government, not even the total exclusion of the whole native population from every legitimate object of ambition, and every honourable species of employment—had spread such dissatisfaction, as this injudicious and disgraceful enactment (Dutt, Selections from Bengaliana142).

Dutt pinpoints several areas of misrule on the part of the British, and says that though none of these prompted the native population to rebel, it was the re-establishment of slavery that “kindled” “the spirit of the populace”:

At first from all quarters poured in entreaties and appeals to good feeling. The Morning Star, the Bengal Hurkaru, and the Agra Gazette took up the cause of “poor oppressed India.” but entreaties, appeals to good feeling, and editorial declamations were of no avail. Then came Indian Patriot, denouncing the British Government, predicting its coming overthrow, philosophizing on the future, and calling on the slumbering genii of India to extirpate the foreigners²⁰ (142).

But what really caused the crisis was “a very declamatory article in the Government Advocate”, where the following remarks were made:

… Does it not strike the mind of every sensible man, that India, for centuries to come, will not be able to wrest the supremacy from the grasp
of her conquerors? ... The Hindus are like children. They want what they cannot understand, fret because with parental care we refuse to indulge them, and cry because we are deaf to their entreaties... But “why does the enactment exclude Europeans from slavery” they ask. Why dear patriots? *Because ye are the conquered, we the conquerors.* Are you answered?

(Italics mine) (143-4).

Shoshee here highlights two important elements in the British attitude towards Hindus/Indians. First that they regarded the Hindus/Indians as “children”, and second that they did not regard themselves as one with the Indians, always being greatly conscious of the conqueror-conquered divide. By transmuting them metaphorically to women and children, the British gained a strong psychological control over the Indians. The paternalistic metaphor was used to add a benign nuance to colonial guardianship. In his book *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990), postcolonial theorist, cultural critic, and historian, Robert JC Young has forwarded his argument about the politics of metaphorisation. He argues that the West has manufactured the myth that the colonised are like children in need of guidance in order to gain and maintain their hegemonic control over them (32-51).

Shoshee too identifies these stereotypes as being the main reasons for the Indians being incensed against the British, the introduction of slavery being the catalytic force in fuelling the rebellion. This of course has its historical basis. In *On the Bengal Renaissance*, Susobhan Sarkar remarks that:

Early in 1843, George Thompson of the anti-slavery agitation reputation addressed several public meetings which were organized by the
Derozians who were roused to enthusiasm by his gifts as an orator. Out of this excitement arose a political association inspired by Thompson and conducted by Young Bengal. This was the Bengal British India Society founded on 20 April 1843, with the object of concerted activity for the protection of the legitimate rights of the subjects, and was open to all (26).

But Shoshee’s protagonists are not the Western-educated members of the so-called civil society. He chooses as his protagonists the adivasis of Orissa. Shoshee’s engagement with tribal characters is interesting and suggests some kind of a political frustration with the so-called “civilized”, “educated”, community. This is attested by comments such as these that he makes in The Wild Tribes of India, the ethnographic study published under the pseudonym H. B. Rowney: “... one redeeming feature ... of subaltern adivasi groups... is their utter abhorrence of thraldom and despotism” (xv). In this context, it is to be remembered that like his cousin Kylas, Shoshee too uses the word “subaltern” in the sense of marginalized groups of people. But the subaltern for Shoshee Dutt is not dumb/mute, but rather more vocal than the educated, “civilised” sections of the society. Indeed, he says that the subalterm are redeemed by their intolerance of injustice. It is imperative to remember that contemporary accounts of tribal rebellions form the basis of important nationalist fictions in Bangla such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Anandamath (1882). Shoshee’s tribal studies, though veiled as ethnography, cannot avoid political implications.
As already mentioned earlier, nineteenth century India had actually witnessed numerous peasant and tribal insurgencies. In Orissa itself, a long unrest prevailed from 1837 to 1856 and again from 1882 to 1894 which is known as the Kondh Rising.

Central to Shoshee's narrative is the romance plot involving Nuleeny and Jugoo Das. Jugoo falls a prisoner in the hands of Subadar Bahadoor Gopee Das, "a rejected admirer of Nuleeny, who had enlisted in the service of the enemies of his country on account of domestic differences". Every other means of securing Jugoo's release having failed, the brave Nuleeny decides to free her lover herself:

With a spirit of chivalry which, in this age, is common amongst the women of no other country but Orissa, she left her father's house alone, disguised in the mean habiliments of a fakir, to seek her beloved Jugoo among the hated Ferangees. What miseries and privations she suffered on the way and how, when she did reach the place of her destination, she managed to ingratiate herself with her lover's captor, our deponent saith not... (146).

The author here leaves out the details that could have proven Nuleeny's heroic ability. This may have to do with the author's sense of urgency in moving ahead with the narrative. Nuleeny's presentation as the woman with a "spirit of chivalry" may have to do with Shoshee's memory of the famous Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, one of the heroes of 1857. While the British were busy establishing that Indians were like children or women, Shoshee counters with his image of the chivalrous Nuleeny ready to fight for her lover. Shoshee continues:
...in the course of a short time... she was enlisted among his keepers... she managed to secure his liberty... Furious and foaming Gopee Das gave chase, with half a dozen sowars at his back; but Jugoo and his fair deliverer, being mounted on the fleetest horse ever transported from the happy shores of Arabia, were far out of harm's way (146).

They are soon overtaken and their horse gives way, and after a brave and desperate fight "warding off the blows which were dealt at him from all sides, Jugoo kept retreating, until, gaining the brow of a steep declivity, he flung himself over to the opposite side, and was instantly lost to view" (146). The brave Nuleeny is forsaken by her lover in her moment of distress and is left to fend for herself. Shoshee attempts to explain Jugoo's act thus: "not that he valued his life more than hers, but because he felt persuaded that she could meet no wrong from one who had long professed to be her lover" (146). This could be an ironic comment from the author through which he snidely underlines the comparative nobility and courage of Nuleeny vis-à-vis that of her lover. As may be guessed, Nuleeny meets a sad fate (what exactly we are not told), "but that fate was quickly avenged":

Lukhun Das Khundati was no sooner informed of his daughter's death, than he repaired to the Kingaries, or hill-tribes. He raked up the fire that was slumbering beneath the ashes, urged home the despotism of the British Government, and at the head of eighty thousand men, began his terrible march towards the English seat of empire... On the 15th of October, 1921, took place the memorable engagement of the Jumna... The English generals were totally defeated... Jugoo Das and Gopee Das
were found dead on the field of battle, locked fiercely in each other’s arms! On the 13th January of the following year Orissa proclaimed her independence, and though the Government of Pillibheet refused to recognize it, their armies completely evacuated that province, after a few vain efforts to disturb its independence (147).

Shoshee’s grand proclamation of Orissa’s independence in such eloquent terms surely raises the suspicion that Shoshee was perhaps symbolizing the whole of India through Orissa. This suspicion gains strength as we see how the narrative ends with a futuristic vision of the decline of the British Empire and the dawn of “a nation emerging from the chaos of ignorance and slavery”: “The British Empire is sinking fast into that state of weakness and internal division which is the sure forerunner of the fall of kingdoms” (147). Yet the author also expresses regret for the fallen Empire: “we regret for its fallen grandeur; we regret to see an imperial bird, shorn of its wings and plumage of pride, coming down precipitately from its aery [sic] height” (147). Is this a real regret or is it mere rhetoric/ironic? Perhaps it is both. Shoshee’s ambivalence is representative of the educated consciousness in colonial India: the consciousness which constantly oscillated between the merits-demerits of the British Rule in India. While regretting the fall of the “imperial bird”, the author admits that his attention is caught by the newly emergent,

... morning splendour of a brilliant luminary. A splendid spectacle is presented to the eyes of wondering millions, of a nation emerging from the chaos of ignorance and slavery, and hastening to occupy its orbit on
the grand system of civilization. The Republic of Orissa has become the predominant star in Hindustan (Italics mine) (147).

Shoshee here talks of the emergence of the “nation” decades before it was to be conceptualized by Indian nationalists, and more than a century before the Indian nation was to be actually formed. His vision of his nation “hastening to occupy its orbit on the grand system of civilization” confirms his confidence in the indigenous culture which, he feels, has its rightful place in the majestic scheme of global evolution. The narrative mode employed by Shoshee is a blend of romance and realism. The romance plot is intricately braided with the realist elements of British subjugation and the rebellion against it.

Shoshee’s work preludes the later, more pronounced anti-colonial writing by Indians. It rightly situates the date of independence in the twentieth century. Though India’s independence would finally come from the organised freedom struggle of the middle class educated Indians, people like Shoshee himself, rather than from sporadic armed rebellions, at this point of time Western educated people like Shoshee could only imagine freedom, not yet execute it. Thus his agents of liberation are the tribals who are outside the purview of colonial education. The significance of Shoshee’s work lies in the fact that it brilliantly augurs the profound aspirations of a whole people. He recognizes the substrata of Indian desire for independence and pens its story a hundred years before it was to become a reality.

But what had already begun to take shape was a critical opinion, albeit marked by certain ambivalences, about the colonial rule in the minds of Western educated
people like Shoshee. In the next chapter I take a look at Shoshee's pointed, mordant critique of colonial culture, *Reminiscences of a Kerani's Life*. 
Notes and References


2 See p. 114.


4 Having located it in the catalogues of the National Library, I realized soon enough that the text was not to be found there nor in any of the archives in Bengal. After having repeatedly searched for four years I finally found the text on the internet on http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals (Wasafiri Vol. 21, No. 3 November 2006) 15-20.

5 As recorded above, Kylas Dutt's lost text was "found" by Alex Tickell who re-printed it in the Journal Wasafiri (vol. 21, No. 3 November 2006) 15-20. All references to the text are from here.

6 According to Alex Tickell, 'One of Kylas's closest student friends, Bhuban Mohan Mittre may have provided a model for his protagonist' (Midnight's Ancestors).

7 Mohan means charming/fascinating, and it is a part of three of Krishna's hundred and eight names.

8 Kylas' mention of The Calcutta Courier was not taken too kindly by the journal authorities. Calling Kylas a 'traitor', the following remarks were made in the paper: 'When the British Parliament ordered a sum to be set apart out of the revenues of India, for instructing a native population it never could have been intended to teach them sedition. (The Calcutta Courier, 19th June, 1835) Pallab Sengupta notes that the controversy about the use of the name of The Calcutta Courier was resolved by Kylas' teacher and editor of The Literary Gazette where Kylas' story was published), the famous D. L. Richardson, in its next issue (Ingreji Sahitye 130).

9 Tickell overlooks the fact that for people like Kylas, such ambivalence was inevitably conditioned by the very nature of their education and location. It is not lack of scruples, nor inconsistency, but ambivalence that characterizes Kylas' and also Shoshee Dutt's attitude.

10 Das' remark that Kylas' use of the English language to write about rebellion is 'ironical' represents the earlier school of thought that believed language is a racial property. However, as I have already discussed,
the very fact that in the nineteenth century Indians chose to write in English, and particularly the subjects chosen by them, sufficiently underline the fallacy of such thinking.


12 I have already discussed this in detail in Chapter one. Thomas Paine was an English pamphleteer, revolutionary, radical, classical liberal and intellectual. He lived and worked in Britain until the age of 37, when he migrated to the American colonies just in time to take part in the American Revolution. His main contribution was as the author of the powerful, widely read pamphlet, Common Sense (1776), advocating independence for the American Colonies from the Kingdom of Great Britain, and of The American Crisis, supporting the Revolution. Later, Paine was a great influence on the French Revolution. He wrote the Rights of Man (1791) as a guide to the ideas of the Enlightenment. He became notorious with his book, The Age of Reason (1793-94), which advocated deism and took issue with Christian doctrines.

François-Marie Arouet (21 November 1694 – 30 May 1778), better known by the pen name Voltaire, was a French Enlightenment writer, essayist, deist and philosopher known for his wit, philosophical sport, and defense of civil liberties, including freedom of religion. He was an outspoken supporter of social reform despite strict censorship laws and harsh penalties for those who broke them. A satirical polemicist, he frequently made use of his works to criticize Catholic Church dogma and the French institutions of his day. Voltaire was one of several Enlightenment figures (along with John Locke and Thomas Hobbes) whose works and ideas influenced important thinkers of both the American and French Revolutions.

13 See page 67 above.

14 Junius Brutus (1735) is a verse drama by William Duncombe (1690-1769). The play makes frequent appeals to "liberty," in keeping with the ‘Patriot’ plays of disaffected Whigs. The Patriot Whigs and, later Patriot Party, was a group within the Whig party in the United Kingdom from 1725 to 1803. The group was formed in opposition to the ministry of Robert Walpole in the House of Commons in 1725.

15 (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm)

16 The British themselves learnt the principle of liberty from the French. Moreover, it has to be remembered that in matters of “culture” “import/export” is a difficult term as far as such fundamental concerns/concepts are involved.
The institution of "Literature" in the colony is under the direct control of the imperial ruling class... So, texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective. (Ashcroft et al. 6)

Interestingly, Lal Behari Day also uses the culinary metaphor to discuss the character of his novel, Govinda Samanta. I have taken up this text in Chapter Six.

All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.

While the Morning Star, the Bengal Hurkaru, and the Agra Gazette were periodicals of Shoshee's day, Indian Patriot is fictional. However it closely echoes The Hindoo Patriot, the journal founded by Harish Mookherjee. In his Bengaliana (1874), a collection of some of his works including The Republic, Dutt mentions that The Patriot has no links whatsoever with The Hindoo Patriot.

Tickell notes that this plot is 'reminiscent of the legend of Prithviraj and Sanjogita [sic]', but the situation is reversed here with the woman taking the role of the saviour (Dutt, Selections 20).