Chapter Five: Narrating the Nation: Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Shunker: A Tale of Indian Mutiny of 1857* 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*

*Shunker: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857*

The Rebellion of 1857-58 gave rise to an elaborate, divisive mythography/historiography on both British and Indian sides. It captured the popular imagination most powerfully. The divergence initiated right from the very names which this incident was given. The British, in the colonial official writings called it the “Sepoy Mutiny”. Indians called it their “First War of Independence”. 1

The 1857 uprising was in no way an ordinary event, nor could it be likened to the various sporadic armed rebellions by peasants and tribal groups that erupted in India in the decades preceding it. 1857 saw a pervasive, armed revolt against the powerful, prosperous yet oppressive East India Company.

In her editorial introduction to “Colonial Discourses: Series Three: Colonial Fiction, 1650-1914” Parama Ray points out that Patrick Brantlinger and Gautam Chakravarty have indicated the “unprecedented outpouring of writing, fictional and non-fictional” produced in the aftermath of the Mutiny. Ray quotes Chakravarty as remarking that “The literary yield of the rebellion...surpasses in volume the literary representation of the other conflicts during the long nineteenth century of expansion.” Chakravarty identifies seventy novels on the Mutiny from 1859 to the present day, while Brantlinger’s estimates are even higher. Moreover, there is a vast body of “journalistic
reportage, histories, eyewitness accounts, and diaries; practically every Anglo-Indian gentleman or lady who survived the Mutiny rushed into print, it seems.” Ray observes that “Members of the other ranks, and their families were exceptions to this mania for testimony—though George M. Fenn’s *Begumbagh* does assume the voice of a common soldier.” She notes that the British Library collection has a “significant number of both kinds of rendition of the Mutiny—the many novels that it inspired and the equally numerous first-person accounts of siege and survival.”

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth a host of Mutiny novels aided the strengthening of some of the enduring elements of Mutiny myth—“Christian heroism, providential protection, racial distinction, and Indian ingratitude…” Most of the contemporary accounts of the Mutiny were from the British point of view, and as may be expected, dramatized and sensationalized it. British representations and arbitrations carved the events of 1857 into a foundational myth and helped legitimize British rule in India. Aided by inflated newspaper reports, prejudiced historiography, and over a hundred vastly popular “Mutiny” romances, a grand-narrative of Indian treachery and atrocity vis-à-vis extreme British heroism was created. To colonial officials and writers, the “Sepoy Mutiny” was the exploit of a set of discontented sepoys who were not too happy with the introduction, in 1857, of the new Enfield rifle. Contemporary writings in the mid-nineteenth century create the image of the Indians as a barbaric race, thereby causing political hysteria and racism: central to the construction of the Mutiny as a mark of the “clash of civilizations” was the transmission of rumours about the “widespread rape of white women by lust-crazed Indian men, even though there was very little forensic evidence of rape.” Ray posits that
“the production of the sexually vulnerable English lady as the object of attack helped consolidate the moral authority of colonialism and to justify the ferocity of counter-insurgent campaigns.”

The message that came through in contemporary accounts as well as in the early histories of this event was legitimizing of the imperial mission. Constant reinforcements of ideas of racial superiority and the glory of English manhood provided the much needed justification for revenge against the “savage” Indian. The common reaction of the English people to the “mutiny” was one of fury and shock/repulsion. In a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, England’s orientalizing of her natives proved to be true. Britons felt taken in by a people who should have thanked them for their introducing to them “the best that has been known and thought in the world”. They reacted especially to the threat of the “Oriental,” that dark-skinned, overly-libidinous, unruly man who was a threat not just to innocent women and children but to everything civilized (i.e. English) man had sought to protect and serve. This image continued through the early part of the next century in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) and Paul Scott’s *The Raj Quartet* (written 1965-75).

Writing the Indian perception of 1857 was a perilous task, especially for those who worked under the British. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), is said to have given up his desire to write about the Rani of Jhansi: “I would wish once to portray this character, but since our bosses were offended by *Anandamath* (1882) that would be the end for me” (Quoted in Lipner 48). Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s *The Indian War of Independence*, the first detailed nationalistic narration of 1857, was published in 1909 and was immediately banned by the British. Speaking of the literary representations of
the events of “1857/58”, R. Veena observes in "The Literature of the Events of 1857: A Postcolonial Reading" that the British had "complete control not only over Indian territory but also over the literary “space” within which to write about it. It was only after Independence that the literary space was opened up to accommodate the Indian perspective(s) on the events of 1857" (1). Scholberg’s extensive bibliography lists a number of Indian texts about the revolt which were published before 1947. However, these have not been systematically preserved or canonized. It was however, a western scholar, none other than Karl Marx, who had first labelled the rebellion the “First Indian War of Independence” (as early as 1857-8). Marx emphasised the fact that for the first time in history Hindus and Muslims had fought side by side against foreign rule. Marx also saw the event as a kind of “retribution”:

However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England’s own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule. To characterize that rule, it suffices to say that torture formed an organic institution of its financial policy. There is something in human history like retribution: and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself. 4

In this context, Dutt’s Shunker: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, is distinctive not only because it engages with the narration of the “mutiny” of 1857 as early as 1887/8 (just thirty years after the event), but also because of its representation of the “Cawnpore massacre”, one of the most infamous episodes of the “mutiny”, and its
appropriation of the rape trope. The earliest Bengali novel on the Mutiny was *Chittabinodini* (1875). In *Harish Mukherjee: Jiban O Bhabna* (Bengali) (*Harish Mukherjee: Life and Thought*) Dilip Majumder provides a comprehensive list of Bengali novels on the Mutiny (132).

In Shoshee Dutt’s *Reminiscences of a Kerani’s Life* there is an interesting dialogue between the narrator and a British Colonel on the subject of “writing” the “story” of “the mutiny”. When the Colonel asks the narrator to give “your version of the mutinies in an epic ...” the narrator replies,

... the governors would not like anything of the sort coming from the governed. I should be set down as a mutineer myself if I attempted it. *We must leave it to the Englishmen to tell the story for us, and my confidence in Englishmen is so great that, sooner or later, the tale will be most faithfully told* (Italics mine) (Dutt, *Selections from Bengalina* 76).

The irony implicit in these lines is evident. Shoshee was only too aware that if he were to write about the mutiny he would risk being set down as a mutineer himself. And by saying so he also indicates the arbitrary nature of British suppression of the rebellion and the random, subjective character of British historiography. In fact in the biography of Romesh Chunder Dutt, Jnanendra Nath Gupta claims that on its publication, *Shunker* ‘startled’ Sir Erskine Perry and Sir Ashley Eden by its *strange discourses*, and there was some correspondence with the government on the subject” (Italics mine) (Gupta 7). Yet the subject of the “mutiny” was perhaps too impelling so that Shoshee could not resist too long from writing it. To maintain some kind of a balance in this tight rope walking, Shoshee scripts his story of the “mutiny” in a clever way: the narrative strategy being the
furtively smuggling in of an Indian tale while apparently adopting the British point of view.

Aware that he was treading on forbidden ground, Shoshee toes the line of contemporary British historians in sketching the character of Nana Saheb as the infamous hero of the Cawnpore massacre. The rebellion is represented as a Russian plot against the British, and the anti-colonial disposition of the rebels is explained as emanating from the colonial “abuse of power”. Shoshee's apparent allegiance to British historiography works as a mask to screen his radicalism, which lies in his negotiation with the rape metaphor. Rape is the master trope of colonial discourse, symbolising the power-relations between the coloniser and the colonised. It symbolised the Indians' transgressive assault against the British nation.

Victorian writers of the Mutiny, such as G. O. Trevelyan emphasize Nana Saheb's role as the deceitful conspirator, so much so that Brantlinger comments that “Nana Sahib’s treachery serves as a reductive synecdoche for the entire rebellion—one that is its own instant explanation, transforming politics into crime and widespread social forces into questions of race and personality” (Brantlinger 203). Brantlinger's comment is understandable when one looks at such descriptions as follows:

The great crime of Cawnpore blackens the page of history wit a far deeper stain than Sicilian Vespers, or September massacres; for this atrocious act was prompted, not by diseased and mistaken patriotism, nor by the madness of superstition... The motives of the deed were as mean as the execution was cowardly and treacherous. Among the subordinate villains there might be some who were possessed by bigotry and class-
hatred, but the chief of the gang was actuated by no higher impulse than ruffled pride and disappointed greed (Trevelyan 69-70).

Brantlinger observes that, by the end of the century Nana Sahib had become the “Satanic locus of all Oriental treachery, lust, and murder”, and had become a common villain in novels and melodramas: “His evil visage peers out of countless texts, the mirage like product of the projective mechanisms by which Victorians displaced their repressed sexual desire and guilt for imperial domination onto the dark places of the earth” (Brantlinger 204-5).

In Our Bones are Scattered, Andrew Ward says that “Anyone who tries to tell the story of Cawnpore must subsist on a sometimes sparse diet of questionable depositions, muddled accounts, dubious journals, and the narratives of shell-shocked survivors with axes to grind” (555). More than this, Ward acknowledges a “dearth of primary material from the Indian side of the equation”; the Indians at the time—at least those writing in English—told “the British only what they wanted to hear” (555). Representations of the “mutiny”, whether in paintings, cartoons, poetry, or prose, mirror the various agenda that underlie Britain’s presence in India and provide what might best be called a “theatre”, “a spectacle”, one that was used, even as it was being produced, to justify British action in India. After all the ultimate result of the Mutiny by the sepoys was a relinquishing of the control of India by the East India Company and an official setting of this jewel into the crown.

In her article “Unspeakable Outrages and Unbearable Defilements: Rape Narratives in the Literature of Colonial India”, Pamela Lothspeich shows how British colonial fiction from about the middle of the nineteenth century to The First World War
abounds in tales of affronts to the European memsahib. Most of these tales are set against the backdrop of the 1857 rebellion. Lothspeich says that these fictional narratives often “replicate sensational first-person accounts of rape once disseminated in local media and in official government reports.” These rape narratives characteristically involve “savage brutes” assaulting delicate white victims, “reinscribing myths of racial superiority and validation for a civilizing mission in India. They also worked to justify Britain’s brutal suppression of the uprisings of 1857 and continued domination of India…”

These fictional narratives were so powerful and successful in creating and sustaining the image of “ungrateful”, “savage” Indians that Tennyson, (the then Poet Laureate of England), who had never visited India, could create the strong visual image of British heroism in the face of Indian treachery in “The Defence of Lucknow” thus:

Handful of men as we were, we were English in heart and limb,
Strong with the strength of the race to command, to obey, to endure,

... “Hold it for fifteen days!” we have held it for eighty-seven!
And ever aloft on the palace roof the old banner of England blew.

(Tennyson, in Sanyal (Ed.), Nineteenth Century 29-35)

In her article “Reading Ireland Writing India: The Postcolonial and Transnational Narratives in the Jugantar (1906-08)” Jharna Sanyal observes that,

...this ballad of the “deeds of [the] English”, celebrating the victory of the British defenders... is typically imperialistic... Tennyson may have been reading various sensational reports of atrocities published in Indian
newspapers and periodicals and eliciting information from survivors...

[The poem] is a dramatic reconstruction of the events of the siege and the
descriptions have an aural and visual immediacy (32-5).

In her feminist study of colonial writing, Allegories of Empire: the Figure of
Woman in the Colonial Text, Jenny Sharpe has argued that colonial accounts of the
"Cawnpore incident" fulfil a "complex discursive function". Sharpe brings the historical
memory of the 1857 Indian Mutiny to bear upon the theme of rape in British and Anglo-
Indian fiction. She argues that the idea of Indian men raping white women was not part
of the colonial landscape prior to the revolt that was remembered as the savage attack of
mutinous Indian soldiers on defenceless English women. By showing how contemporary
theories of female agency are implicated in an imperial past, Sharpe argues that such
models are inappropriate, not only for discussion of colonised women, but for European
women as well.

In her opinion, these rape-narratives efface the more disturbing prospect of the
loss of male political control: "A discourse of rape ... helped manage the crisis in
authority so crucial to colonial self-representation at the time" (67). Sharpe innovatively
genders a subject that Western writers have used historically to rationalize and affirm the
"civilizing mission"; chronicling the era when sexual violence became a discourse,
Sharpe demonstrates how rape "emerges in and is constructed by its enunciation," how
the crisis in British authority was managed through the sign of violated white female
bodies.

Shoshee experiments with a radical reversal in his appropriation of the abiding
rape metaphor in the dominant colonial discourse. Shunker's quest for personal
justice/revenge forms the plot of the narrative. Shunker is a peasant whose wife is raped by two European fugitives from Cawnpore, Bernard and Mackenzie, when she gives them shelter from their pursuers. When she is warned that she should not give shelter to the soldiers, she argues, “Mother, these men are in momentary danger of their lives. If we don’t screen them they are sure to be murdered. The risk to us is very great; but God, who sees everything, will protect us while we protect them” (Dutt, Selections from Bengali
da 99-100). In the chapter aptly titled “The Requital”, Shoshee shows the requital that Shunker’s wife receives in turn for saving the lives of Bernard and Mackenzie:

And so they remained, the incarnate fiends, in that home of innocence, to plot mischief against those poor creatures who were incurring so much peril for their sakes. A second night on their pallets of straw enabled them to ripen their scheme of baseness and ingratitude, and to develope [sic] it.

The night was dark. The traitors broke open the room in which the females slept. A woman’s shriek—an unavailing struggle! Oh merciful Heaven! Why is crime triumphant in the world? The old woman shrieked for aid. Help! Murder! Save us, neighbours, was the cry; but the neighbours were all fast asleep, and very few heard that cry of fear... The victim struggled hard but in vain; when the violence was completed she was insensible as a corpse (106-7).

Shoshee’s economy of expression is remarkable. He leaves out details that could have sensationalized his text. Moving on to the narrative, Shunker’s wife realizes her indiscretion in giving shelter to the undeserving rogues. She has to “unlearn” her
received Indian ethics/customs which regarded the guest as god. The traditional teachings about conduct and behaviour have to be re-scripted in the times of colonial violence. In desperation Shunker's wife consumes poison and dies:

I was indiscreet in sheltering them, and my indiscretion has been severely punished. Mother, let me die. Take this boy, mother, from me, and make him over to his father. Tell him that I was true to him to the last, and that he must be true to our hapless child... I have swallowed all the rat's bane that was in the house, and feel the effects of the poison in my veins already (107).

When Shunker returns home he is shocked to hear the sad news and after overcoming his despair, vows to take revenge:

For three days, three long, unending days, did Shunker remain bereft of strength and reason. These were followed by a longer interval of fierce and burning fever, disturbed by incoherent ravings... At last his sickness left him, and health and intellect were regained—regained for one purpose only, the thought of which electrified his debilitated frame—Revenge! (111).

We see here how everyday domestic life of people who were not primarily engaged with the rebellion is also transformed in the engagement with violence. Shunker rightly speculates that the two soldiers, whom he had met on his way home and who had bought his cart, must be the culprits. To this end he joins the revolting sepoys. He takes the help of a havildar who had become a rebel after being insulted by his officers. The narrative does not lose much time in finding one of the culprits, Mackenzie, who is
hanged. By the end of the narrative Shoshee incorporates an element of drama as we see Nana Sahib being overtaken by Bernard and his associate. At this point Shunker enters the scene and while Nana Sahib leaves his wife behind, more concerned for his own safety, Shunker not only rescues her, but is also successful in his mission of taking his revenge:

"Is thy victim of Soorajpore forgotten? Behold her husband and avenger in me! The prince of Bithoor may be unmindful of his wife; but the poor clown of Soorajpore knows how to avenge the woman who had lain by his side." A wide gleam of satisfaction shot across the features of the avenger, his hold on Bernard’s necktie was tightened, and the next moment that villain was a corse [sic] (Italics mine) (130).

The narrative thus reworks the metaphor of the violated European woman. Jharna Sanyal notes that “The ideal Victorian image of woman at home was that of the ‘Angel in the house’. In a new location and on a new mission, as in the colonies, she needed to share with her male counterpart the ‘manly’ virtue of ‘valour’ that the English thought placed them before others. She came to represent the cultural identity of the race” (Nineteenth Century 38). Reminiscences rewrites allegory of the dishonoured/despoiled European woman.

It is a daring counter-narrative pitted against the political and historical truth-claims of “mutiny” colonial writings of the day. It inverts the popular discourse that the delicate white female was in threat from the savage Indian male. It also constructs a counter narrative of ingratitude against the dominant British discourse of Indian ingratitude towards their masters for civilizing them: the woman whom Bernard and
Mackenzie rape is the woman, who had saved their lives, fed them with care and gave them shelter. Indeed then, Shunker’s wife could be the symbol for India itself which had given shelter to an alien race and was now being violated by those very people.7

In Re-mediating “1857/58” in Fiction: Kim (1901) and Shunkur (1885) Astrid Erll compares the treatment of “1857/58” in the well-known colonial novel Kim by Rudyard Kipling (1901) with that in Shunkur.8 Erll says that it is Kipling’s “literary strategy” that in Kim the sole Indian eyewitness remembering the “Mutiny” “loyally re-narrates and re-sings the British myth”. Kipling uses this strategy to “hegemonise” the British myth. She says that a “cultural hegemony” is instituted and legitimised “at the very moment when other, rivalling groups accept the memories on which it is based.” Thus for Erll, Kipling’s novel “imaginatively transfers the British myth to Indian memory cultures... In short, Kipling's Kim stages oral memory as an indicator of the power, and also of the “truth”, of imperial cultural memory.”

Moving on to Shunker, Erll says that “Shunkur is a good example of re-mediation on various levels: The topoi which characterize Nana Sahib and the rape-revenge plot in connection with the revolt are striking re-mediations of British representations in Indian writing.” Erll compares Dutt’s description of the Cawnpore massacres with the account of a well-known British witness of the revolt, W.J. Shepherd, who reported in The Times of November 7, 1857 about what his experience in India:

The women and children, most of whom were wounded, some with three or four bullet shots in them, were spared and brought released from their...
to the Nana's camp, and placed in a pukka building called 'Subada Ke-Kothee' [...]. (Shepherd in *The Times*, 7 November 1857: 7)

One young lady, however, was seized upon (reported to be General Wheeler's daughter) and taken away by a trooper of the 2d Light Cavalry to his home, where she at night, finding a favourable opportunity, secured the trooper's sword, and with it, after killing him and three others, threw herself into a well and was killed. (Shepherd in *The Times*, 7 November 1857: 7)

Erll says that "Dutt has apparently copied Shepherd's account and integrated it into his literary text". Following the publication of *Shunker*, Shoshee had a dispute with the Government and he wrote the following letter to the Government officials:

One young lady only had been seized upon previously by a trooper of the 2nd Light Cavalry, and carried off to his own quarters, where she was violently treated; but, finding a favourable opportunity, she rose up at night, and securing her ravisher's sword, avenged herself by killing him and three others, after which she flung herself into a well, and was killed. (*Shunkur*: 107)
Shunker is a tale... partially founded on historical facts, as such tales usually are, while the best portion of the work is pure fiction only. All the names are fictitious; I put in whatever names occurred to me at the time I was writing the book... My facts are mainly taken from the Blue Book on the Mutiny published by the H. C. C., a great portion of which i.e. the Bengali Narratives were (with the exception of first 3 or 4 chapters, written by Dr. Mouat) prepared by himself... The English public have all along been habituated to look at one side of the Mutiny pictures only. I have ventured to give another side of it also, and I thought I owed it to my country to do so... I shall be able to cite... almost every statement I have made, provided the Blue Book I have referred to, are made available to me (Italics mine) (Quoted in Pallab Sengupta, Ingreji Sahitye Bangali Lekhak, 207).

However, Erll’s suggestion that “Almost identical passages can be found in Ball’s History of the Indian Mutiny and in Henty’s “Mutiny” novels In Times of Peril (1881) and Rujub the Juggler (1893) – and it is likely that they made their way from there into Dutt’s novel” cannot be accepted because Shunker was written earlier than these texts. 9

Erll also reads Shunker as a “re-mediation” of the Draupadi episodes in the Mahabharata: “...its rape-revenge plot ... has a mythological dimension, which carries a proto-nationalist subtext – a subtext which the British reader would not necessarily expect judging from the medial mimicry on the text’s surface.” Erll refers to the Kichaka and Dushasana episodes from the Mahabharata. This is certainly an interesting reading of the text. But rather than the Draupadi episode from the Mahabharata (Draupadi’s
husbands were largely responsible for her ordeal), I would suggest that Shunker's story alludes to the tale revolving around the Hindu god *Shunker Mahadeva* and his wife *Sati*, at whose death Shunker Mahadeva, mad with grief and rage had performed *tandav* (mayhem/destruction).

While apparently re-producing the British version of the mutiny, Shoshee actually engages with the telling of tales untold. He uses the strategies of irony and satire to subtly script/insert the story of Shunker's revenge in the pages of history. Shunker may not be a historical figure, but he represents a section of those people who went unrepresented in the British versions of the mutiny. That Shoshee was only too aware of the "points of view" in the re-telling of the events of 1857 is amply clear when we look at the titles of two consecutive chapters of *Shunker*: Chapter XVI is titled "One side of the Picture" and here a British civilian named Bill speaks in support of the "natives", while the next chapter, titled "The Other Side of the Story", speaks of British benevolence and "native atrocities". In "The Beginnings of the Indian Novel" (in Mehrotra (ed.) *Illustrated History*), Meenakshi Mukherjee explains the "twin perspectives" in *Shunker* in the following way:

Dutt takes special care to distribute sympathy evenly between the British and the Indians. If officers like Bernard and Mackenzie are despicable enough to rape the woman who has given them shelter, Nana Saheb's treachery and promiscuity are fore-grounded as if to provide a balance in villainy (95).

However, we cannot agree with Mukherjee that "Shunker's vendetta against those who raped his wife is made out to be a purely personal matter with no political
It is true that Shunker does not join the mutineers for any overtly political purposes, however, it must be remembered that he joins the rebel because the political situation enters his threshold, because it affects his private domain. The political issue entangles with ethical and domestic concerns. Thus, as has been now theorized, the personal becomes political, and personal lives are in considerable part delimited and determined by political relationships and structures.

Moreover, as Subalternists stress, the foundational texts of history look at the “grand narratives”, overlooking the details of the common lives and how they are affected by and how in turn they negotiate with the great events. Shoshee’s focus is on the lower strata of society and its engagement with the event of the “mutiny”. Shunker’s quest for justice is thus no specific act of personal revenge. There is doubtlessly an allegorical quotient in *Shunker*. Shunker’s wife may be read as signifying India’s violation by the British whom she had sheltered. It is also a very daring take on the elaborate mutiny myths that were being created and circulated by “mutiny writers” of the day. As was expressed by Malavika Karlekar very recently, the value of this text lies in “the fact that an Indian in the service of the raj published such a tale at a time when the wounds of 1857 were nowhere near healed.” She rightly points out that “Britannia may have been ruling the waters of India—but *exposing its seamier undercurrents that has gathered credence in post-colonial times, had early beginnings*” (Italics mine). This is one of the main arguments of my thesis. The next text taken up for study too points in the same direction.
Shoshee Dutt's *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) (henceforth *TYZ*) is a long episodic political novel that seems to be motivated to make the people realize the magnitude and grandeur of India's cultural heritage and press the need for national/religious integration and political freedom. Dutt uses the device of making the protagonist go on a long pilgrimage in order to showcase to the reader the religious, spiritual tradition of India. This kind of an ethnographic, anthropological approach is also to be found in Lal Behari Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta* (which I discuss in detail in the next chapter).

In spite of its strong documentary element, the theme of realization of one's duty to one's motherland works successfully in the novel. The novel offers a vivid panoramic picture of the several armed rebellions in India in the first half of the nineteenth century. The central character of the novel is the young *zemindar*, Monohur, who binds this otherwise episodic novel. A mysterious *sannyasi*, Babajee Bissonath, is Monohur's guide. Through their patriotic pilgrimage the novel moves in a slow pace towards a total vision of the awakening of a *desh/nation*.

*TYZ* is a detailed record of the various religious texts, places of pilgrimage and Hindu and Muslim rituals and festivals. Its detailed discussion and analysis of the Muslim society and religion is something that sets it apart from its contemporary texts. *TYZ* not only identifies the Muslim element as an important part of Indian society, but also
recognizes and urges the need for the unity between Hindus and Muslims. Though the detailed descriptions make the text digressive in nature, yet it is these very digressions that make TYZ such a rich text.

Dutt locates TYZ about sixty years after the Battle of Plassey. The protagonist is Monohur, the eighteen year old young zemindar of Bona Ghat. Monohur is more interested in pursuing the pleasures of youth rather than be burdened by the responsibilities of his zamindari.

He was a fine specimen of a high-bred Bengali youth, of slim but wiry build, with an expressive and handsome face scarcely disfigured by a pair of small and deep-set eyes, and having many good qualities of the heart, mixed unfortunately with an intense, or immoderate, love for frolics and adventures (Dutt, TYZ 13).12

His mother seems to be very worried about the young Monohur, who is taken up with the Dewan’s Mela, an annual fair that he wants to celebrate with special grandeur:

But I am sure it would please me better to see you applying to your work as diligently as your ancestors did, than that you should be going about gathering praises from the mob at a meld. Empty praises from the mass must not turn your young head, my son. You run so frequently after frolics and adventures that you really do alarm me at times (14).

However, very soon Monohur finds himself in the midst of responsibilities when he has to resolve the dispute between two Muslim students in his zemindari. It is here that meets a mysterious fakir, who asks him to place his dilemma before the deity of Naggesur Mahadeva. Monohur’s dilemma is this: “What I want to know of Naggesur
Mahadeva is this only should I remain at home to get wived, as my mother wishes? Or go out to fight the battles of my country, if my services are asked for?” Monohur is advised to go on a tour of the country before getting married: “You... may well give an additional year or two to your country before you get bound by your domestic duties and sit down to beget and rear children” (33).

It is this fakir who fans Monohur’s anti-British feelings, and this becomes a cause of worry for his mother:

"How foolishly you speak, indeed," observed his mother, expostulatingly. "The English Government is a paternal one, and all that we have we owe to it. The terms of the engagements referred to are binding on us by those of the Perpetual Settlement. Don't you know what that is?" "But the land, mother, the land is the free gift of the gods! The English did not bring it out with them in their ships; did they? The country belongs to its inhabitants, who were placed in it by the gods. The English understand this well enough in their own country. Why have the Hindu and Mahomedan laws then been interfered with and overturned? Why have not all the privileges we enjoyed before under the Mahomedans been continued to us? O, mother! if all Zemindars were of my mind they would throw up their zemindaries rather than hold them under such conditions as have been shown to me" (45).

His mother’s repeated pleas concerning his safety fall on deaf ears as Monohur muses: “The whole country is now ripe for a revolt," muttered the Zemindar to himself. Why should I not take advantage of the circumstance ...?” (47) Following the advice of
the fakir Monohur joins the Ferazee Movement under the name of Kharga Bahadoor. When he expresses his doubt about the Ferazees being against the Hindus, the fakir explains his position thus:

The Ferazees are said to be fanatics, and they have been fighting from the commencement with all the Hindu Zemindars in their neighbourhood.”

“Yes, that was, indeed, the first phase of our development, but that phase has since gone by. The Ferazee doctrines were originally enunciated at Dowlutpore, in the Furreedpore district, whence I come. Their objects are two-fold; first, to purify Mahomedanism, and next, to liberate the country from foreign thraldom. It was Teetoo and his party who commenced to fight with the Hindus, but he has now been overruled in council by us. The country belongs to the Hindus and the Mahomedans, and the two religionists could not act in opposition without weakening each other. We have a common object now to attain namely the expulsion of the Ferangees from Bengal, and are as assiduously seeking for the aid of the Hindus at this moment as we had opposed them before” (62-3).

The novel is a pioneering piece of work in many respects, particularly for its theme of national integration. It speaks of the union of the Hindus and the Muslims as a common force against the “ferangees”. The fakir motivates the Muslims involved with the Ferazee Movement to fight against the common enemy, i.e. the British. He urges them not to waste their vigour in fighting against the Hindus or against other Muslim sects.
In this context it must be remembered that the call for Hindu Muslim unity by the nationalists was a socio-historical reality in the late nineteenth century. However, as early as the 1857 rebellion, Hindus and Muslims were seen to come together for a common cause. The Bengal Army was composed of both Hindus and Muslims drawn from different castes, and provided the basis for a new level of Hindu-Muslim unity. While the Hindu and Muslim sepoys fought together, so also did the Hindu and Muslim *talukdars* and *rajas* come together.

It is here that Monohur meets a young girl, who, we learn, the fakir wants Monohur to marry. Monohur himself is quite attracted to this girl. However, the Ferazee Movement is not successful, and it is then that Monohur is taken on a tour of the country by the fakir, who now reveals his true identity as a convert from Hinduism. He says that he has become a Muslim in protest against the caste system of Hinduism:

> Listen then, and I will tell you my story. You must have heard of the Karta-Bhajas of Ghosepara, in the district of Nuddea, a peculiar sect of Vysnubs who do not adhere strictly to caste rules and restrictions... Love is the foundation of the Karta faith, and caste is necessarily unrecognised by it, for caste presumes a distinction between man and man, which love will not allow (82-3).

From this point onwards the *fakir* assumes the name Babajee Bissonath. During their expedition they engage themselves in the various sporadic rebellions that they come across. The first of these is when they come to Dhulbhoom where the native people are up in arms against the British Government in protest against the Government’s interference with their inheritance laws. They band with the *Kols* but are unsuccessful in
their rebellion. They then decide to go to Puri and Shoshee describes the “Car Festival” or *Ratha Yatra* in detail, pointing out its grandeur. From here a mysterious man invites them to go to Banpore for leading a rebellion against the British. They decide to go and though at first they are successful, the battle at Puri devastates them and they somehow escape with their lives. Monohur begins his homeward journey. When he reaches home he finds that everything has changed. He comes to know that during his absence of seven years his mother and all other relations have died. Despondent, he leaves his home and spends the night with a *byragi*.

After that he begins his wanderings again and on coming to Satgaon in Hooghly he meets a *Paramhangsa* from whom he learns much about the *Vedas, Purans* and the duties of a *Brahman*. Here he once more meets the Babajee, and visit various places of pilgrimage like Gaya, Deoghar, Baidyanath etc. They also visit the Bodh-Gaya, Kashi and Ayodhya. Finally, Monohur reaches Echapur, the zemindari estate of his maternal grandfather, and his marriage being solemnized with the girl of his choice, expresses his desire to stay there for the rest of his life. However his wife sees a dream that beckons them to Bona Ghat and the errant zemindar finally returns to stay in Bona Ghat with his young wife. The novel is a kind of nationalist *bildungsroman*, where Monohur is taken on a kind of *Bharatdarshan* (*Bharat=India, darshan= view, perception, darshan also means philosophy*) by his guide, Babajee.

Towards the end of the novel, we see that Monohur becomes disillusioned when he realizes that freedom is hard to achieve. He is forced to rethink his earlier view that “the whole country is now ripe for a revolt”. Chapter LIV, “The English Versus the Mahomedans” is an express debate about the state of the country under the two races.
The debate is initiated by Babajee and Monohur opines that “we must not judge ill of an entire people, you know, from one particular case of this kind, the chief actors in which, moreover, can hardly be regarded as patterns of their race” (413). Monohur says he has revised his hatred of the English: “To say the truth, I bitterly hated the English to begin with” (414), and he is supported to some extent by Babajee’s brother, the priest of the temple of Naggesur Mahadeva, who had earlier urged Monohur to join the Ferazees: “I do not think so ill of the latter now as I did before, and as you do to this day; though of course I abominate them as a godless people quite as much as you can” (414). He further says that,

I did wish for the subversion of the English power at the time you speak of; but only because I regarded the English as being indifferent to their religion, contemptuous towards the world generally, and spiteful towards their equals. I wanted their self-conceit and presumption to be punished; but I have since got much reconciled to their rule, which seems to me to be in every respect better suited to our present condition than the Mahomedan Government ever was, and to have already bettered that condition to a greater extent than the Mahomedan Government ever attempted to accomplish (414-5).

The priest speaks much in favour of the English Government as opposed to the Mahomedans, but Babajee is firm in his belief:

My charges against the English are very heavy, and nothing that my brother has yet stated has shaken my convictions in the least. Throughout the land the Englishman is criminally truant in all his acts, heedless of the
lives he destroys. The world is instinct with life, but he carries death with him in every place. He shoots at birds and animals which never dreamt of molesting or annoying him, merely to derive a transient pleasure. He shoots even at men, almost as heedlessly, and the courts which administer justice so equitably, as Dada Mohasoy maintains, never punish him when the victim is a native... (416-7).

Babajee also attacks the guise of the civilizing mission of the English:

Every one vindicates his motives when he is not able to vindicate his acts. Well, even the motives of the English, Dada Mohasoy, are, I fear, not always as disinterested as you have understood them to be. They affect, for instance, that the conquest of the country was dictated by the most benevolent motives, that they hold us in subjection simply for our own good only... but the greater advantages remain still, arid wholly, with our conquerors; there is no disinterestedness, no indubitable purity of motives, in the case, as they are so eager to assert. First of all, they derive all the benefits of an unlimited commerce with our country by the conquest. Had India belonged to any other nation it would not have been English products that would have inundated all our markets (418-9).

We see here the early enunciation of ideas that were to form an important component of later anti-colonial discourses of Indian nationalists. In his essay “Englishmen and the Indians” (translated by Jharna Sanyal), Tagore makes the following analogy:
Increasingly, England is treating India as the long-tended cow in its royal herd. The English are not lazy in keeping her shed clean or supplying her with fodder; they take good care to retain this movable property but they never forget to blunt the edge of her horns lest she is ever upto some mischief. And, while milking her twice a day they do not totally deprive the emaciated calves\textsuperscript{15} (115).

He further says that:

The English products are imported from some distant island with which this country has no concern. Then again, they enjoy the immense advantage of finding lucrative employments for the mass of their countrymen here, who, but for the Indian field, would have been all but beggars in their native land. Have you any idea, Monohur, of what shoals of Government officials come out to this country, year by year, to suck it dry? What shoals of military officers, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, merchants, and tradesmen also? Could these have earned anything like the princely fortunes they go home with in any other part of the world? (419)

When Monohur says that during their travels they have seen that the British Rule is at least better than the Muslim one, Babajee remains firm British Rule cannot be accepted:

No, Monohur; you won't extract a single word from me in favour of the English Raj. What was verified in the course of our travels was this only, that Oude is worse governed than Bengal; that the Nawab is a greater rascal than the Company Bahadoor. But the Mahomedan Government, as a
rule, was not so bad as that of the Nawab; and I won't concede that the English Government is better than the Mahomedan Government was, though you, as a Zemindar under the English Government, need not accept my views on that point (420).

Babajee Bissonath represents the author's voice in the text. It is the voice which, till the end, remains un-reconciled to the idea of the British Rule, and cites social, religious, and economic reasons for it. But by incorporating the voices who speak in favour of the English rule, Shoshee allows the scope for a debate in his text. It is quite clear that the story element in the text is of marginal importance. The chapter "The Englishmen and the Mahomedans" corroborates that the text is a site of debate and deliberation about the British Rule.

S. K. Mund suggests that the Babajee-Monohur relationship is rooted in the Indian tradition of the Gita—the Krishna-Arjuna (spiritual guide/disciple) relationship. Babajee Bissonath is perhaps the only holy-man in the nineteenth century Indian English novels to have intense patriotic motivation (47). Babajee is a well-sketched real character, but he is also a symbolic figure. He is a symbol of the desh-bodh / national consciousness—an embodiment of the aspirations of the progressive Indian. The next chapter takes a look at another aspect of desh-bodh / national consciousness, one that finds expression through the representation of peasant life.
Notes and References

1 The term “first war of independence” was first used by Karl Marx and Engels in their articles on the events in India in 1857 in The New York Daily Tribune 1857-59. This correspondence was later published as a book, The First Indian War of Independence (1859).


6 In 2005 Alex Tickell published A Selection of Bengaliana, where Shunker was included as one of the texts. All references to Shunker are from this text.

7 Frederic Jameson’s proposal that all third-world texts should be read as national allegories is no doubt questionable, because of its homogenizing reductionist attitude, because national allegories are common to literatures of all nations, all countries. See Frederic Jameson’s “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital”, in Social Text, Fall 1986, pages 65-88.


9 The last claim cannot, however, hold true, because Dutt’s novel was published in 1877/8. Nevertheless, it is a fact that descriptions of the ‘atrocities’ of the ‘mutiny’ were mostly stereotyped, as I have also pointed out above. It is a high probability that all the texts mentioned by Erll were drawing on the same Blue Books that are referred to by Dutt.

10 See Dutt’s letter to the Government above.


(http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080518/jsp/opinion/story_9279784.jsp)

12 All subsequent references to this novel are from this edition.
For details on the Permanent Settlement, see page 30 above.

The Ferazee Sect was founded in 1804 by a Muslim man of humble origins, Shariat-ullah. The word *Ferazi* in Arabic means 'the commandments of God', and thus a Ferazee is one who acts in strict conformation with the commandments of God and the teachings of the Prophet. The Ferazees were non-conformists who interpreted the *Koran* in their own way, moving away from tradition and learned opinion. Their mission was the revival of the Muslims. Soon, the activities of the Ferazees assumed organizational forms. One of their drives was against oppressive zamindars and indigo planters. One of the most important leaders of the Movement was Titumir. *Tyz* gives a good deal of space to the Ferazee Movement.