CHAPTER V:

Fictional accounts of the Rising from the English point of view

Every conflict in the history of the human civilization has inspired literature in various forms since times immemorial, which may be regarded as unofficial histories of the period, complementing the factual documentation. While history portrays a collective record of a supposedly historical event in which the subjective comprehension of truth remains latent, literature brings to the surface those fears and apprehensions related to human loss and suffering which enables a historical event to permeate through the pages of archival records into the lives of the common people and imparts a sense of shared experience beyond the rigid borderlines of time and space.

The Uprising of 1857 has been no exception. It has been a continuous source of inspiration to the creative artists of both the countries for more than a century, and in tracing the pattern of these representations one may get to comprehend the multiplicity of the nature of the historical event, where each of these works holds up a certain truth – each true in its own way and yet projecting the parochialism of finite human perception. While the rebels of India had their own cause/s behind the slaughter of the English men and women, one cannot deny the insecurity and helplessness of the latter residing in an alien land, who were, in a sense, simply executing Imperialist orders. When these fictional representations of the Uprising from both the nations are placed beside each
other, they weave together the wonderful tapestry of the actual historical event, where multiple truths and points of view merge to create a grand universalist narrative of human agony and grief.

One of the first narratives of this kind was 'Perils of Certain English Prisoners' – a novella by Charles Dickens, published almost immediately in the *Household Words* in December 1857. As one of the earliest reactionary creative pieces towards the Uprising, 'Perils of Certain English Prisoners' stands out in its technique of voicing and contextualizing the violence related with this historical event in the mind of the 19th century English society. Dickens defies the constraints of time and space in relocating his response towards the Uprising in the island of Belize – an English colony in North America, where apparently the English men and women are trying to escape from the pirates. In one of his letters, however, Dickens states with reference to this novella “I wish to avoid India itself; but I want to shadow out in what I do, the bravery of our ladies in India.” Probably the fact that his son Walter had left for military service in India in July 1857 might have been one of the reasons behind his discretion. Nevertheless, Dickens is seen to do what he declares in his letter successfully through the 'Perils of Certain English Prisoners'.

In this novella, Dickens portrays life of the English men and women at Belize – their society and interactions with the colonized Other, through the arrival of Gill Davis and his fellow soldiers on the island. It begins as a recollection of an episode in the past,
based in around 1744, as Gill Davis recalls his arrival at the island of Belize, with
periodic interventions from a female counterpart, mentioned in the text as “my lady”
(Dickens 02). That Dickens intends to portray the silent heroism of the English women is
first hinted as Gill observes “…it’s always strange to me, noticing the quiet hand, and
noticing it (as I have done, you know, so many times) a-fondling children and
grandchildren asleep, to think that when blood and honour were up—there! I won’t! not
at present!—Scratch it out” (Dickens 02). One of the biggest shocks for the English
society to go through with the Uprising of 1857 was the violation of the English women
in an alien land at the hands of the colonized natives, which was in turn, the violation of
the basic Victorian values of sanctity of the hearth and home. Dickens is seen to represent
that thought in his novella as he compares the very loving and homely Victorian woman
beside Gill with the one who had stood up for the honour of her country in times of
immense national crisis in a distant land, thereby upholding contrasting aspects of the
same human individual.

Proceeding with the narrative, Gill records “in those climates, you don’t want to do
much”, thereby initiating the effect of alienation by verbally imposing the different
climate and through this difference, the larger dissimilarities of mindsets and cultures
(Dickens 02). He begins with the recollection of his dream of “the shepherd” who “used
to give me so little of his victuals and so much of his staff, that I ran away from him—
which was what he wanted all along, I expect”, quite distinctly threading in the concept
of Christianity and the white man’s burden to discover and civilize new terrains into the
discourse, and at the same time he mentions how the shepherd “seemed to move away
from the ship's side, far away over the blue water, and go right down into the sky" as his ship came into the vicinity of the island — which is perhaps an implication of the god-forsaken identity of the colony (ibid).

First introduced to Christian George King, “one of those Sambo fellows” who “was fonder of all hands than anybody else was”, Gill Davis recollects how he wanted to have “kicked Christian George King—who was no more a Christian than he was a King or a George—over the side, without exactly knowing why, except that it was the right thing to do” (Dickens 04). In this statement the Othering of the native is achieved through the identification of the very basic slippage in his identity, which though it may resemble the colonizer, can never make him their equal. The elaboration of the instinctive repulsion towards the native which follows in the later half of the statement portrays the ability of the protagonist as a colonizer almost blessed with a divine capacity to see through the intentions of the native, especially as his remark stands out to be justified in the course of the novella when Christian George King is discovered to be the traitor amongst the English. In this manner, Dickens portrays judgmentalism and absolutism of the colonizer as perceptions of intuitive wisdom, which establish them justly in their civilizing and ruling mission of the conquered territories.

The power equation operative between the colonizer and the colonized is concealed in the novella when Gill gets to learn from Miss Marion Maryon, the sister of the captain of the sloop, about their interaction with the natives — “we are all very kind to them, and they
are very grateful to us”, and further about Christian George King – he “would die for us” (Dickens 06). Two ideological ends are achieved in this process – the benevolence on the part of the colonizer is established and the natives are represented as benefitting from this civilizing mission, and at the same time, the innocence and kindness of the Victorian women is brought out in the affectionate approach of Miss Maryon, who as her name suggests, symbolizes all that is inclusive, accommodative and positive.

It would be significant to note Dickens’s pattern of characterization here. Christian George King is seen to be speaking in rough pidgin English, which makes him sound all the more alienated and automatically distances him from the sympathy or understanding of the readers, much in the technique of Caliban in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Similarly, the protagonist Gill Davis repeatedly reminds the readers that he is illiterate – the reason why his recollections are being written down by the lady beside him, and the political implication of an uneducated, unrefined, illiterate protagonist can be understood later as he declares regarding his attitude towards the natives – “I have stated myself to be a man of no learning, and, if I entertain prejudices, I hope allowance may be made. I will now confess to one. It may be a right one or it may be a wrong one; but, I never did like Natives, except in the form of oysters” (Dickens 07). Through this statement, matters of humanitarian tolerance of cultural difference are completely obliterated, for the readers soon get to realize that Gill Davis despite his educational drawbacks is the proper English man of commands and that his “prejudice” towards the “barabarous” natives, is essentially “a right one” – thereby promoting a judgmental approach towards the colonized.
Dickens also smoothens the economic inequality factor in the course of the novel as Gill Davis, a poor soldier of the Royal Marines, initially responds towards the English people on the island from an envy created by the class differences; for the people living away in the colonies during the Imperialist regime, though they were servants of the Crown, were perceived by the natives to represent the ruling class and therefore, led very luxurious lives. While describing a ball at the island organized by the English families, Gill Davis observes upon the behavior and mannerisms of the Commissioner and his wife that they “showed among the company on that occasion like the King and Queen of a much Greater Britain than Great Britain” (Dickens 10). This statement further exemplifies the independent nature of the settlement of the colonizers in these colonies. In projecting this point of view from the proletariat protagonist right at the beginning, the characteristic Dickens has already addressed the social inequality and as the narrative progresses, he goes on to portray the nationalist solidarity in unknown lands as they transcend the divisions which comprise the inner realities of England as a nation – thereby placing the issue of nation and race at a level much higher than the difference of class.

The Pirates attack the Island left alone by the English men who were misguided by Christian George King and sent down the river so that those left on the Island, including the ladies and the children, could easily be taken captives. The first description of the panic the word “Pirates” has on the women and children left ashore is justified thus by the first person eye narrator: “for, those villains had done such deeds in those seas as never can be told in writing, and can scarcely be so much as thought of” (Dickens 16). It is from this point in the text that one may clearly see the parallel being drawn between
the pirates and the 'mutineers'. The description of the battle at the fort resembles the siege of Lucknow, and the role of the women, especially Miss Maryon and Mrs Fisher is highlighted in a memorable manner to reflect the contribution of the second sex, otherwise perceived as delicate and fragile, in hours of immense crisis.

The alternative discourse on heroism begins with the description of Miss Maryon of whom the author recollects: “...Miss Maryon had been from the first with all the children, soothing them, and dressing them...and making them believe that it was a game of play, so that some of them were now even laughing” (Dickens 17). The resemblance between this fictional account and the factual account provided in A Lady’s Diary of the Siege of Lucknow which was published a year later in 1858, is astonishing, as it describes the women taking care of the children in the tyekhana and nursing the wounded soldiers during the Siege. This recognition obliterates the Victorian demarcations of the public and the private sphere, for the woman is portrayed doing as much service in preserving lives of the young ones as the men did in the battlefield fighting the enemy directly. Nevertheless, the Victorian concept of the sanctity of a woman is retained as Miss Maryon tells Gill Davis: “...if we are defeated, and you are absolutely sure of my being taken, you will kill me” (ibid). This idea of preservation of honour at the cost of one’s life is reiterated later in Christina Rossetti’s poem “In the Round Tower at Jhansi, 1857”.

At this hour of crisis, Gill Davis observes further “to my astonishment, little Mrs Fisher that I had taken for a doll and a baby, was not only very active in that service, but
volunteered to load the spare arms" and quotes the words of Miss Maryon who also volunteers for the same service "I am a soldier's daughter and a sailor's sister, and I understand it too" (Dickens 18). These statements uphold the legacy of English courage and valour as natural attributes, as they permeate the conventional concept of division of labour. It is in fact these two women who detect that the gun powder had been spoiled, and this introduces a new discourse into the social stream of projecting and perceiving a woman, as she transcends the constructed barriers of gender in her efforts to preserve life, through knowledge based on keen observation – thereby obliterating the domains of active and passive in being "steady and ready with the arms" (Dickens 20).

Another description worth mention is that of Mrs Venning, an aged English lady on the Island, as she is killed in her attempt to save her grandchild: "I...saw Mrs Venning – standing upright on the top of the steps of the trench, with her gray hair and her dark eyes – hide her daughter’s child behind her, among the folds of her dress, strike a pirate with her other hand, and fall, shot by his pistol" (Dickens 21). The child, it is later seen in the novella, is saved by this sacrifice of her grandmother and is returned to her mother by the Captain of the English ship and the story given is thus : "the child had kept quite still, where her brave grandmamma had put her...and had remained quiet until the fort was deserted; she had then crept out of the trench, and gone into her mother’s house; and there, alone on the solitary Island, in her mother’s room, and asleep on her mother’s bed, the Captain had found her" (Dickens 28). This episode celebrates the effectiveness of this form of alternative heroism based on resistance and self-defence in portraying the life of
an innocent child saved from the brutal Pirates by an ageing woman whose only weapon
was her outfit and her presence of mind.

In this manner, Dickens as a creative artist provides vivid pictures of silent defensive
heroism on the part of the English women in ‘The Perils of Certain English Prisoners’
recreating the terror and the pathos associated with it. Though the heroism of General
Havelock and the other English officers during the Uprising was celebrated in many
poems, Stephen Henry Sharman’s poem being one of them, this other side of heroism
which lay in resistance, was yet to be explored in the immediate context, and this is what
makes Dickens’s novella stand out as a literary piece of exceptional dimensions.

Although it comprises three chapters – the first one describing the siege, the second one
describing how the prisoners taken are first made ransom for the treasure left on the
Island and how they eventually escape from the pirates, and the third one relating the
relief of the prisoners in reuniting with the English officers who had returned to the
Island much after the siege and had set out looking for the survivors – only the first and
the third chapters of this novella are attributed to Dickens, while the second chapter is
believed to have been written by Wilkie Collins as a later addition to the existing text.

In the third chapter, Dickens provides a description of the prisoners of the siege escaping
down the river in a raft and the moment of ecstasy when they are relieved by the English
soldiers. Probably since Dickens wanted to focus upon and highlight the bravery of the English women, he does not provide a detailed account of the men at the battlefield with the pirates in the novella. The determination of the English soldiers and their valour is described thus as they stand on the English ship: “every man lying-to at his work, with a will that had all his heart and soul in it. Every man looking out for any trace of friend or enemy, and burning to be the first to do good or avenge evil” (Dickens 27). The allegorical cross reference to the basic tenets of Christianity in the repeated use of “every man” tends to generalize the heroic spirit and courage as a national and racial attribute and may be related to the illustration in the Punch magazine entitled ‘The British Lion’s Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger’ published in August 1857.²

The moment of re-union of the English officers with the prisoners finds a very graphic depiction in the novella: “there was a tumult of laughing and crying, and kissing and shaking hands, and catching up of children and setting up of them down again, and a wild hurry of thankfulness and joy that melted every one and softened all hearts” (ibid). The joy of rescuing the survivors, in its intensity of emotions and gladness, transcends the confines of space and time and merges with the basic humanitarian perception of being reunited with one’s own, as valid today as it was in 1744, or 1857. A very similar picture can be found in A Lady’s Diary of the Siege of Lucknow where the author writes upon the arrival of the English troops in Lucknow: “…our compound and verandah filled with our deliverers, and all of us shaking hands frantically, and exchanging fervent “God bless you’s” with the gallant men and officers of the 78th Highlanders” (Anon 68). It is here, in this merging and blending of fact and fiction across the constructed rigid boundaries, that
literature becomes a documentation of things past, present and future, and therefore, records those sheer moments of existence which do not find place in the archives of conventional historiography.

Another literary text describing in vivid details the siege and relief of Lucknow almost immediately is *The Relief of Lucknow* by Stephen Henry Sharman — a poem in three cantos written in heroic verse. It was first delivered in the hall of the Chelmsford Literary Institution in March 1858 and dedicated to "the memory of the Late Major-General Sir H. Havelock". In the Preface to his book entitled *The Relief of Lucknow and Other Poems*, Sharman writes: "...he does venture to hope that in the lines on Lucknow, the indulgent reader will overlook the shortcomings of the writer, in the interest which must ever attach to his theme, referring as it does to one of the most glorious and thrilling passages in the annals of our history" (Sharman Preface). The perspective of nationalist pride gains prominence here as Sharman through his vivid imagination brings to life the heroes who fought to preserve the honour of their country, almost naming each of them and ascribing dialogues to their thought process in this time of immense crisis.

In the Introduction, as Sharman begins his poem in a conventional style of a poet sitting solitary, he contextualizes the rebellion as the subject-matter of his poetry in the following manner:

...burning visions of the troubled East
My spirit stirred: — there, death and murd’rous strife
Malignant stalked; there, ruthless traitors poured
Red desolation on that golden land
And with defiant truculence, provoked
Britannia’s wrath; – there, wreaked a rebel host
Vindictive fury on her bravest sons;
Her daughters fell with foul indignity
Or hourly held their life on trembling thread;
And infant innocence no refuge found
From the wild tortures of barbarian hate (Sharman 02).

In these lines the process of nationalization of the Rising in the nationalist conscience of England can be seen distinctly. The atrocities of the East and the struggle of the English men and women suffering there – the picture which the poem proposes to explore, is thus seen to be based upon “burning vision”. Here, while “visions” refers to the creative imagination of the poet, the epithet “burning” probably implies the deep impact the Rising had left upon the English minds and the way it had come to form a part of the debates and discussions of the people through various newspapers and magazines in the 19th century England. In its reference to the “ruthless traitors” who brought misery to “that golden land”, the strange phenomenon of alienating the colony which is perceived to be rightfully belonging to the English and is therefore, in being their fortune, the “golden land” from the native/ the colonized Other is visible which, in effect, estranges the native even geographically from his/ her homeland by miniaturizing the independent identity of the colony to an extension of Great Britain. The description of the violence which follows in the next lines upon the “sons”, “daughters” and “infant innocence” thereby finds justification in the usage of the phrase “wild tortures of barbarian hate”. 

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In the next stanza the poet describes the appearance of the Muse with whose assistance he would embark upon this ambitious deed of portraying the rebellion at Lucknow in verse, in accordance with epic conventions:

As dreamy slumber crept, before me stood  
A being of proud step and lofty mien,  
Crowned with immortal amaranth, and borne  
On wings of radiant light; her girdle gleamed  
With carbuncles and emeralds, inscribed  
With names of mighty worth; and in her hand  
An ancient lyre; she touched the dulcet strings  
In soft harmonious prelude, — thus she sang  
Of Britons, who, by Indus as of old,  
Triumphant through all peril bore the Cross and Sword (Sharman 02).

The appearance of the Muse justifies the purpose of the grand narrative the poet wishes to offer as her girdle shines with the names of the heroes who fought for their nation, inscribed in precious stones, and through her song which celebrates the victory of the “Britons” who “through all peril bore the Cross and Sword”, the colonial policy of England finds justification in the amalgamation of aggression and violence with the Cross, symbolizing religiosity. This stanza therefore successfully establishes the purpose of the epic treatment given to the struggle of the English in India during the Rising.
In the first canto, the narrative voice is allotted to “the Spirit of Fame” who wanders through the “habitable sphere/ Unseen” and records “the good and ill” so that “the generations yet/ Unborn” may be able to comprehend “What things to emulate and what avoid” (Sharman 03). As the Spirit reaches the Lucknow fort, she describes the rebels surrounding it as “dusky forms, fiendish and fierce” who “Shot glances of unutterable hate” at the fort holding within itself: “A few brave souls, whom, in the open field./ They durst not combat, e’en on equal terms” (Sharman 04). It is here that the line of the power equation operative between the colonizer and the colonized is obliterated, perhaps intentionally, so as to highlight the spirit of endurance of the captive English men whose silence and inaction is justified as tragically heroic for they held within the fort women and children and therefore were compelled to endure “lest these should fall a prey” (Sharman 05). At the same time, this description enhances the inhuman and cowardly subject position of the rebel sepoys who are depicted as inconsiderate towards the women and children and taking advantage of the situation, therefore, by attacking their natural superiors under such circumstances.

The picture of England as an integrated nation in times of such dire crisis is presented as the Spirit of Fame enters the fort and describes “the fiery Celt” and “the cool (not braver) Saxon” in conversation amongst themselves, discussing their present situation and most anxiously anticipating the arrival of “the bold yet cautious Havelock”, who “though small his force,/ Taught them this lesson: – that they cannot cope/ With outraged manhood, and with British steel”; “they” referring to the rebels (Sharman 07). The historical descriptions of the fierce battles between General Havelock’s army and the rebel sepoys
portray and justify the English concept of ‘retribution’. In these lines without referring to 
this hackneyed word directly, Sharman interrogates the very validity of the rebellion 
which he has initially described as involving deeds “such as well might call/ A maiden’s 
blush, e’en upon manhood’s cheek” (Sharman 04), and now places in direct confrontation 
with “outraged manhood”. Culturally cultivated gender stereotypes are thus employed, in 
accordance with poetic license, to convey the supremacy of the colonizer as that of the 
“man”, and, therefore, in binaristic opposition with “these murderers”, or the colonized (Sharman 07).

At the same time, the few natives who had remained loyal to the English within the 
Residency find mention in the first canto as the poet writes: “What, though some traitors 
have betrayed their trust,/ Our native troops within are doubly true,/ And unsurpassed in 
honest loyalty” (Sharman 09). These lines, as the footnote suggests, were based on the 
reports of Brigadier Inglis, and in being included in a poem describing the English 
hardships during the Rising, portray in essence the nobility of the colonizers in being a 
race who know how to acknowledge, appreciate and honour the colonized Other, as a 
gesture of gratitude – which stands to hold within itself the meaning of civilization as 
opposed to the rebels, who were fighting not only the English but also their own brethren, 
their own countrymen. A contrasting picture of a fragmented nation is therefore provided 
in placing such an image of the colonized against that of the English – united across 
borders of rank and interests in such hours of national crisis.
A rather interesting side of action is brought in when while the soldiers are talking amongst themselves the arrival of “a being of a gentler sort” is mentioned who interrupts the ongoing conversation with the following words:

....full well to you
Is known the fate of woman at Cawnpore;
And that within, are many such as I:
Say, will ye yield to such a doom, the weak
Who trust in you for safety and defence? (Sharman 11)

In doing so, the poet elevates the level of pathos in the poetic composition with a reference to the atrocities met out by Nana Sahib on the English women and children at Kanpur, which was still a wound very fresh in the minds of the 19th century English citizens, and would therefore ensure the arousal of pity and fear, as also empathy towards those English officers left alone in alien land to deal with such an unbearable situation. The motive behind doing so is also quite clear as the soldiers respond to the lady’s query by referring to their heroic officers such as Banks, Lawrence and Inglis who had already sacrificed their lives in this endeavor, and assure her further that they too would have “cut a swift path to victory or the tomb” had not they been compelled to endure “for the hapless gentle ones we guard” (Sharman 13). This conversation therefore is seen to enable the motive of hero-worship and eulogization of the English soldiers.

The alternative discourse on heroism on the part of the English women in India during the Rising is threaded into the text, as the lady replies “...where the wounded lay, and sick,/ our part hath been to wait with patient care,/ and pour sweet balm of consolation in/
The Indian Mutiny Medal awarded for the Relief of Lucknow by the Government of England in 1858
their ears who bled for us; to watch and soothe the dying soldier in the closing scene/ and mitigate his pains...” (Sharman 14). She continues further “with weapons our frail hands can use, we’ll stand/ with our protectors, till hewn down, we fall;/ in night of dull oblivion, yet escape/ dishonor to our race and womanhood” (ibid). It is again through the recognized paradigms of gender and race that the concept of heroism is projected, and a new definition of the second sex is given — her bravery lying in her ability to stand the storm side by side with man and in doing so, transcend the socially defined role within the domesticity assigned to her.

The first canto comes to an end with a description of the heroic deeds of Brigadier Inglis which the English soldiers recollect in their response to the earnest pleas of the lady and a reference to the “British Lion” which “never hath been wont/ to humble” and “if slain, he dies/ untamed, and hurls destruction on his foes” — a much used symbol for the British courage and valour in the context of the Rising in the 19th century England (Sharman 14-15). It would be worthwhile in this context to remember that the medals awarded by the government of England to the officers and soldiers who fought and suppressed the Rising of 1857 in India also had as its emblem the figure of Queen Victoria bearing a wreath in her right hand, a union shield in her left hand, and standing in front of a huge lion.³

The second canto dwells in detail upon the infamous Kanpur massacre where women and children were brutally executed by Nana Sahib’s men and cites instances of stoic heroism in those silent sufferers who trusted the words of the “archtraitor” and were slaughtered
in the name of security (Sharman 32). Recollecting a few names and the sacrifice of a large number of anonymous ladies who underwent this fatal end, Sharman writes: “Oblation on a Christian altar, pure,/ And sanctified through their Redeemer’s blood,/ Though offered up by Pagans…” (Sharman 24). He narrates the faith of General Wheeler who falls a victim to native deceit and the misfortunes of Miss Wheeler whom he describes to have been abducted and molested by a native sepoy – an episode which “none can tell, for none/ Were there to witness” (Sharman 28). It is significant to note here as later historical documents reveal that though there was bloodshed and violence in the Rising, no instances of sexual violation were recorded. This episode, therefore, seems to have been based on the creative imagination of the poet in line with mainstream conceptualization of violence, where violating the sanctity of the woman is perceived to be the most heinous offence. Especially, for a Victorian readership this would enhance the horror of the experience and thereby enable the narrative to arouse the strongest nationalist passions and attain the loftiest heights of the historical epic it claims to be.

The episode related to Judith Wheeler, however, remains shrouded in ambiguity, and during the 19th century she was reported to be a woman who after being abducted by a sowar killed five sepoys before killing herself. This is the image celebrated by the poet as he writes in her remembrance:

...Oh! there are times
When the weak nerves of womanhood are armed
With superhuman strength, and the soft veins
Swell forth indignantly with deep insult;
The tiny muscle and the fragile arm,
Outraged, become a giant’s; -- thus, she struck,
And was her own avenger. (Sharman 29),

followed by the exclamation "spotless, heroic maid" who chose "self-immolation, than dishonored life" (ibid). She is compared to Lucretia, the Roman legendary woman whose violation caused the transformation of rule in the history of Rome from monarchy to the Roman Republic, and her act of committing suicide is hailed as "she died (because she durst not live)/ A martyr to her country" (Sharman 30). It is in this manner than literature through its unofficial documentation of history raises canons of myths and legends around a historically specific event which enables the spirit of the time to transcend the boundaries of facts in based on a subjective perception of truth -- that which permeates the nationalist consciousness of a nation far beyond socio-political categorizations.

In the context of the violence at Kanpur, General Havelock is brought in as an "Instrument of Heaven!/ Especial servant of the Omniscient", and in response to his charge of Kanpur, the terrible violence of Bibighar massacre is enumerated (Sharman 33). A linear logic is thus imparted to the context of the Rising, as the European soldiers pledge to "execute retributory vengeance" surrounded by the corpses of the women and children mercilessly butchered at Bibighar by the men of Nana Sahib (Sharman 38).

The third canto begins with a plea to the poets, painters, historians, orators and the members of the senate to "combine/ with all the good and great of every clime/ to yield
due honor to the men, that saved an empire” (Sharman 45-46). A description of the English army advancing towards the Lucknow Residency follows, led by Havelock and Outram. Perceived from the point of view of an English woman imprisoned within, the magic of that moment when the bugles and cries of the English army are heard for the first time, is recreated with reference to a letter of Jessie Brown published in Jersey Times on 10 December 1857, as she shouts out: “Hark! they come, they come!../'tis the Slogan of the Highlander” (Sharman 49). It is interesting to note how Sharman blends into his long narrative the popular contemporary records of the 1857 Rising available in England, ranging from newspapers to reports of the English officers, in order to heighten the effect of his poetry as derived from the factual accounts.

Surrounded by the rebels, the war cry of the English is dramatized thus:

The Northern battle-cry: “Britons, strike home!
Strike for old England! Charge with all your might!
Ye dauntless mountaineers, on, for your friends!
Strike for your leaguered daughters, for your babes!
Avenge Cawnpore! ye stalwart Highlanders,
Perform your oath! On, Gael and Saxon, on!
Britannia, to the rescue!” (Sharman 52).

In the context of the present postcolonial diasporic existence, though the entire concept of the empire and colonial rule stand invalid, one cannot perhaps deny the truth of the emotions expressed in these lines, irrespective of the violence it seeks to justify and celebrate. Bloodshed ought to be condemned; nevertheless, when a historical event like
the Rising of 1857 is read through the literary representations from the English as well as
the Indian point of view, it enables one to accommodate the plurality embedded in the
actual event and therefore, encourages the humanitarian tolerance of hybridity through
acceptance of the difference of perceptions. Hence when Sharman writes of the rescue
army arriving finally at the Lucknow Residency through lines such as “triumphant over
heaps of slain, they reach/ The Residency”, the reader learns to appreciate the intensity of
utterance having gone through the detailed catalogue of intense suffering (Sharman 53).

Similarly, as Sharman sings in praise of “the noble, fiery Niell”, the man responsible for
the brutal massacre of the Indians at Allahabad, as the martyr leaving behind a legacy of
“enthusiastic, self-denying love/ of honor, country and humanity”, one cannot deny the
subjective perspective of truth in iconizing Niell as a man who sacrificed his life in
suppressing a bloody rebellion in an alien land, thereby setting new heights of patriotism
(Sharman 54). It is here that the concept of relative understanding of terms gains
prominence, for that which is celebrated as “humanity” by Sharman, is but an episode of
most inhuman man slaughter in the nationalist historiography from the Indian
perspective.

This celebration of nationalist sentiments attains its climax in the next stanza where the
Spirit of Fame visualizes amidst the blood-stained battlefield the rise of the “Spirit of
Britannia...blessing her children with benignant smile” and showering “parental
benediction” (Sharman 55). Having expressed her gratitude towards the best of her
children who “shall shine resplendent to all nations”, the Spirit of Britannina then addresses the colonized land in the following words:

Oh! Land of desolation and of blood,
Of idol worship, dark fanaticism,
Land of the red unpitying Suttee
Of heinous crimes, of Pagan ignorance,
And wilder superstitions, – o’er thy glades,
Thy cloud-capt mountains, from the Himmalehs,
To the tall Ghauts that skirt thy southern shores,
Shall equal rule extend; unfettered, now,
A milder faith o’erspread thy wide domain (Sharman 56).

These lines while critiquing the uncivilized customs and beliefs of the colonized, also anticipate the changing administrative policy of the colonizer, for soon after the Rising, the Company rule came to be replaced by the British Raj. In placing “a milder faith” as opposed to “idol worship”, “dark fanaticism”, “heinous crimes” and “Pagan ignorance”, the superiority of Christianity as a religion of tolerance and the colonizers as the representatives of these virtues, is made explicit and in ascribing these words to the “Spirit of Britannia”, the soul of a benevolent nation is brought to life, thereby imparting a touch of the supernatural to the historical subject matter.

The epic narrative of the Rising comes to an end with a detailed description of the death of Havelock – “Sublime in death, as he had been in life!” (Sharman 59). Grieving the
death of the brave general, describing the sorrow of his men and dwelling upon the woes of his family and countrymen, the poem concludes with a wonderful simile thus:

As falls the oak, that lifts its lofty boughs
In forest pride, amid the canopy
Of the broad firmament; arrived at full
Maturity of growth, stately and grand;
Unhurt by wintry snows; unbent, unharmed
By hundred summer storms and lightning’s gleam;
But yielding to the axe in ripe old age –
So thou didst fall... (Sharman 61-62).

In comparing Havelock with the huge oak which symbolizes strength, grandeur and tolerance, withstanding all the blows of nature but falls a victim to the unnatural brutal force of the axe, a tragic splendor is lent to the mainstream discourse of warfare and heroism. Stephen Henry Sharman thus achieves through his epic an elevation of the socio-cultural and historical context of the Rising in creating martyrs through a beautifully constructed grand narrative.

Christina Rossetti’s take on the Uprising in India was, however, different as she wrote ‘In the Round Tower at Jhansi, 1857’, first published in 1862 with *The Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Depicting the moment of immense agony as having lost all hope against the rebels, Captain Skene decides to kill his wife and himself instead of falling victims to their wrath, Rossetti dwells upon the emotional intensity of the hour of such a decision-making where people must kill their own loved ones in order to retain their sanctity of
being. In the second edition of the poem published in 1875, Rossetti added a footnote the retention of the poem “not as historically accurate” but based upon the “supposed facts” received from India during the revolt.

The poem begins with the helplessness and despair of a battle lost to violent aggressive strangers who are described as “the swarming, howling wretches”, thereby attaining sympathy on the side of those defeated by complete dehumanization of the colonized Other. The four short stanzas which follow provide an imaginary dialogue between Captain Skene and his wife just before arriving at the fatality of the final moment. With lines such as “Young, strong, and so full of life/ The agony struck them dumb”, the tragedy of futile lives across the seas dying of compulsion before age is ushered in, which in turn, heightens the emotional aspect of the piece.

Nowhere does Rossetti hint at the nature of the finality being discussed by the Captain and his wife, and this tension reaches its peak in the third stanza as she writes: “Close his arm about her now/ Close her cheek to his/ Close the pistol to her brow —/ God forgive them this!” This intimacy elevates the fear further, in anticipating the horror of the future which awaits the young couple. A subtle hint of suicide is provided in the last line for it is deemed to be one of the greatest sins in Christianity, and in using such a line while describing the prevailing circumstances, Rossetti simultaneously justifies the logic behind the action taken as the only option available to retain one’s own honour as in life, so in death, in being slain by one’s own than being devastated by the Other.
The next two stanzas continue in the dialogic form depicting the agony of the forced and yet self-willed act of separation, as the poem finally concludes with “Kiss and kiss: ‘It is not pain/ Thus to kiss and die./ One kiss more.’ – ‘And yet one again’ –/ ‘Good by’ – ‘Good by’.” In employing dialogic mode to this sensitive theme and thus creating an objective distance between the poet and the poem, Rossetti ascertains that the readers get carried away by the content of the poem, without questioning the authenticity of the narrative voice.

Unlike Sharman or later, Tennyson, Rossetti’s poem does not deal with celebration of nationalist sentiments or racial pride, but dwells upon the inhuman pain of personal loss, under a given situation, though based upon factual history. It is here that one may notice the difference in perceiving and representing the same history in being recorded by two members of the same nation, but different biological sexes. While the male poets emphasize upon heroism, aggression and valour, Rossetti represents that delicate side of the picture, that moment of intense agony which no nationalist historiography will perhaps ever take into consideration, and perhaps, that is the reason why in a poem of twenty lines, nowhere is England, the flag of England or even the word ‘country’ mentioned in Rossetti’s account.

The authenticity of Captain Skene’s death historically, however, remains uncertain. While some records state that Captain Skene was killed with the other English officers taken out of the Rani’s refuge in Jhansi by the rebels against fake promises of safe
passage, some other accounts state that he and his wife along with another English officer
Captain Gordon managed to elope from the band of rebels and took shelter in a small
round tower at Jhansi from where they fought the rebels as the wife of Captain Skene
assisted the men by loading their revolvers and successfully killed many rebels before
finally killing themselves. Captain Skene was posthumously awarded the Indian Mutiny
medal for his service in Central India.

In his poem entitled ‘The Defence of Lucknow’ written in 1879, Alfred Tennyson also
provides a description of the siege and relief of Lucknow, in seven stanzas, during the
Uprising in India in 1857. The Poet Laureate of England in 1850 and a member to the
House of the Lords in 1884, Tennyson’s poem resonates with racial pride and lofty
nationalism. It employs a quick rhythm with a series of images in succession which
impart a sense of action to the poem. The first stanza consists of six lines and is the
shortest stanza in the poem forming a kind of introduction to the detailed account which
follows. With an apostrophe addressed to the “banner of England”, the poet continues
with a hyperbole thus: “Never with mightier glory than we had rear’d thee on high/
Flying at top of the roofs in the ghastly siege of Lucknow” (Tennyson 01). Unlike
Sharman, Tennyson does not dwell upon the Rising or refer to the other instances of
violence; his subject matter relates to the siege of Lucknow and he foregrounds in
immediately in the very opening stanza. The epithet “ghastly” ascribes a subject-position
to the poetic voice and ushers in the parochial stand it would thus presume.
The second stanza provides a description of the precarious condition of the English soldiers within the Lucknow fort — the hardships through which they held onto their country’s honour, with women and children amongst them. It is interesting to note here that Tennyson uses “we” and “our” to describe the siege, unlike Sharman who employs poetic license in ascribing a narrative voice to the omniscient Spirit of Fame and later, the Spirit of Britannia. In making use of this collective pronoun, which at once distances and includes the readers as a part of the entire episode, he develops upon the nationalistic theme subtly by integrating the reader with the direct experience perhaps even without his/her notice. Even now, when read aloud, the words “we” and “our” phonetically integrate the experience of the English officers with all who read the piece, irrespective of nationality, thereby enhancing the intensity of spontaneous human response towards unexpected violence. Only when located in its historical context, can one derive an understanding of the motivated use of the binaries employed.

Tennyson uses anaphora to emphasize the horror of death in this stanza as he writes:

“Death from their rifle-bullets, and death from their cannon-balls/ Death in our innermost chamber, and death at our slight barricade,/ Death while we stood with the musket, and death while we stoop to the spade,/ Death to the dying, and wounds to the wounded.../ Death — for their spies were among us.” (Tennyson 01). This repeated use of the word “death” creates a vivid picture of the dangerous reality faced by the English prisoners within the Lucknow fort and thereby arouses empathy in the readers, and at the same time
it reflects the master craftsmanship of Tennyson as a poet who exercises as he writes, complete control upon the response of the readers as well in his carefully planned usage of words and phrases.

The third stanza provides a graphic description of the huge rebel army attacking the Lucknow fort and the dauntless spirit of the English officers within the fort whom he voices thus: "Kill or be kill'd, live or die, they shall know we are soldiers and men" and further depicting the defeat of the rebels, he writes: "Backward they reel like the wave, like the wave flinging forward again,/ Flying and foiled at the last by the handful they could not subdue" (Tennyson 02). In employing the image of the wave for the rebels, Tennyson sets in a sharp contrast of the numbers with the "handful" of English officers. The fourth stanza carries this sense of pride further as he writes: "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", thereby establishing with excellent brevity of expression, the supremacy of the nation, the race and the religion – for while command justifies the superiority of England as a nation, "obey" stands for discipline and loyalty as racial traits and "endure" ushers in the Christian concept of endurance (Tennyson 03). The racial instinct of the poet finds further expression in the fifth stanza where while describing the stealthy moves of the rebels and the English victory with the help of the Indian soldiers who had still held on to the British officers, he writes: "Praise to our Indian brothers, and let the dark face have his due" (ibid).
The sixth stanza interiorizes the suffering of the English prisoners within the fort especially in providing the details of the horrors faced by them in life and death and comparing it to the clime of their homeland through “thoughts of the breezes of May blowing over an English field” as against the alien land with “heat like the mouth of a hell, or a deluge of cataract skies” and expressing it as “the wound that would not be heal’d” (Tennyson 04). The elegiac mood of the poem as it moves towards a conclusion enhances the effect of pity and fear in thus describing the psychological reality of helplessness, especially in the italicized use of the word “would”. The stanza attains the climax of pathos in lines such as “Grief for our perishing children, and never a moment for grief”, which places emotional and factual reality side by side and heightens the shock of the experience even further.

The last stanza celebrates the arrival of Havelock and his men at the Lucknow fort having defeated the rebels. The intensity of the moment is depicted thus by the poet in visualizing the reaction of the prisoners on meeting their saviours: “Blessing the wholesome white faces of Havelock’s good fusileers, Kissing the war-harden’d hand of the Highlander wet with their tears!” (Tennyson 05). Here again Tennyson merges the physical and psychological reality of the situation which enables him to achieve an integrated sense of nationality at the end of the poem which celebrates the prisoners and the saviours alike as pearls of the same string of English history.
It would be significant to note that all the seven stanzas of the poem conclude in one refrain: "...ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England blew", except the fifth stanza where gratitude is expressed towards "the dark face" and the last stanza where the prisoners are finally rescued by "the wholesome white faces". These two stanzas end in "ever upon the topmost roof our banner in India blew" and "ever aloft the palace roof the old banner of England blew", respectively. This technique highlights the poetic craft employed by Tennyson, further. While his theme throughout the poem is to celebrate a sense of national and racial pride in the context of the Indian Uprising, the refrain enables him to show how the pride of the country is kept intact by the English soldiers all through, despite the unimaginable horrors and dangers faced by them. Even the slight changes made in the fifth and the last stanza assist him in consolidating the impact of the poem – in the fifth, the alteration, in a way, signifies the acknowledgement of being able to retain a hold upon India due to the support of the natives, even if a handful, and in the seventh, the change establishes through the beautiful uniting of the prisoners and the rescuers, a miniature England where the spirit of fraternity and solidarity remains intact as the English nationalist legacy despite all odds in an alien land.

The Uprising in India in 1857 inspired a huge corpus of literature written in English, both prose as well as poetry, throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries. Reading through these subjective analyses and interpretations of the historical fact reveals the changing English perspective. The turn of the century ushered in a somewhat more tolerant
understanding of the Rising, since this was already the time when colonialism was not an unquestioned proposition amongst even the ruling race any longer. Further, with the passage of time, the Rising now ceased to be felt as contemporary violence and therefore, in dealing with it, subjectivity now came to be assigned in retrospect, thereby giving rise to an objective distance. Thus, unlike the 19th century representations, the tone was now reflective and thoughtful – the Other could be given some space within the narrative now and the focus shifted from a propagandist and judgmental stand to a comparatively inclusionary approach.

John Master’s *Nightrunners of Bengal* is perhaps one of the most interesting novels during this era, more so for it came to be written by an Englishman serving in India based on his Indian experience, and was first published in 1951, i.e. after the political independence of India. His novels stand unique in the manner in which he fictionalizes the history of India in his historical fiction. He attempts an exploration and understanding of India through the Savage family, as through generations they experience various events in India from Thuggee to the Partition through the Indian Rising, in works such as *The Deceivers*, *Nightrunners of Bengal* and *Bhowani Junction*.

Masters’ *Nightrunners of Bengal* is dedicated “To The Sepoy of India 1695-1947”, and this declares right at the beginning that in being based upon the Rising of 1857, the novel shall attempt a contextualization of that specific phase of history viewed in totality against the larger backdrop of the entire duration of the British Empire in India. In the
Foreword, Masters writes how the “Indian soldiers, who were and are called sepoys, turned on British officers and murdered them, their women and their children” and how in response to this the English soldiers “sprang up in an ecstasy of outrage, to answer murder with mass murder, and hate with a demoniacal fury of hate” (Masters vii). He observes thus “twelve centuries of English history show nothing remotely like it. This was at once the noon of courage and the midnight of barbarism”, and further, “the Great Bengal Mutiny lives as history’s cruelest example of the inherent melancholy of power” (ibid). This is the point of view which enables Masters to examine and portray the Uprising both as an insider, who understands the cultural context of the colony, as well as a distant onlooker who recollects the Uprising based on his understanding of India and assigns subjectivity to his English protagonist placed in this context, in retrospect.

In this novel, structurally, apart from stringing in the social history of India during the 19th century Masters examines and evaluates the historical context and his novel progresses mainly through the points of view of three characters – Rodney Savage, Caroline Langford and the Rani of Kishanpur. Beginning with a leisured life at the English quarters, the narrative moves through death and destruction during the Rising and the gradual dehumanization of Rodney Savage, who is restored to humanity by Miss Langford. Savage meets the Rani of Kishanpur on one of his official trips to the territory and the Rani later becomes an accomplice to the rebels. The character of the Rani becomes particularly interesting as later it came to be read as loosely based upon Rani Lakshmibai – the warrior queen of the East. The novel ends with a last meeting of the
Ram and Savage and it is here that Masters accomplishes the final humanitarian touch to the historical tale.

The novel begins with the protagonist Rodney Savage riding back home from the parade ground where he discovers Caroline Langford standing amidst the natives under a peepul tree to listen to the Silver Guru of Bhowani. Savage observes “she was so cold, so English, against the warm colors” (Masters 13). He rides off from the spot with Miss Langford as crows gather around the Silver Guru who was believed to have control over all the birds and animals. He recollects of having been told that “the crows only gathered when catastrophe was in the air” (Masters 14). In this manner, without elaborating upon any specific incident in the barracks, Masters draws upon the local premonitions to create suspense and foreboding right from the beginning of the novel.

The exposition of Rodney Savage’s character takes place slowly through his conversation with others and his lonely musings. For instance, as Rodney’s wife Joannna refers to the Indians as “blacks”, he retorts sharply saying “we do our work and enjoy ourselves and lord it over the country entirely by the goodwill of the average native – especially the native soldier, the sepoy. If you even think of them insultingly, of course they know it and resent it” (Masters 19). This reveals that Rodney Savage is not governed by common prejudices against the colonized. Further, his feelings towards the Company he serves are not entirely loyal and devoted; it is a blend of love and hatred. This is brought out as the omniscient narrative voice states “Rodney had been born in and of that empire, but still it
took his breath away when he considered the power created by those English merchants 
who had striven here and made themselves the masters of princes”, and further, “the map 
of India was a daub of British red, patched by yellow islands to mark the states of the 
remaining rajas. On British sufferance, these states ruled themselves, but were forbidden 
to treat with each other or with any foreign power” (Masters 22-23). In this manner, the 
socio-political scenario of the 19th century India is re-created to authenticate and 
contextualize the narrative.

A rather strong statement regarding the Company is made when Savage observes “the 
Company had become a weird blend of trading corporation and administrative engine, 
and the English government in London controlled it...It minted money, made laws, 
collected taxes, and executed criminal and civil justice. It kept the peace – and made war 
from Persia to China” (ibid). This highlights the nature of transgression of the East India 
Company in 19th century India and upholds many social questions in doing so, 
interrogating the very basis of colonialism thereby.

Caroline Langford, on the other hand, puts forth a foil to Rodney Savage, in 
complementing and interrogating his military and political observations from a basic 
humanitarian angle. This is first shown as she stands amidst the crowd of the natives to 
hear the Silver Guru speak and later at an English get together when she brings up the 
issue of the crows saying: “Rajahs are so rich and autocratic that I’d expect them to be 
even more cut off from the common people than we are. It is not so. If something worried
his people, the Rajah felt it. I think the crows, and what the Silver Guru said, worried all the Indians who were by the tree – so it ought to worry us, because we’re supposed to be their friends as well as their rulers” (Masters 27). This statement shows her keen observation and understanding of the Indian society and also her eagerness to care for the colonized Other – angles later elaborated in the course of the novel, as she restores Savage to humanity from the revengeful bend of his mind, after having survived the Rising at Bhowani.

Rani Sumitra Lakshmi of Kishanpur is introduced into the plot through Captain Savage’s official visits to the place. She inspires wonder in him as a “kind of human being...who could tear apart the chains of her sex and widowhood” (Masters 48). In fact, it is this subversion of the female stereotype which makes both the female characters important – Caroline Langford and the Rani – the former in taking the lead role in guiding Rodney Savage after the Rising and the latter in her attempts to save her kingdom for her child by arranging and supporting the Uprising and deceiving the English by using her femininity as a weapon. One such instance is seen as she tries to seduce Savage into a physical intimacy to achieve his commitment to defend her son and her state. Savage, free from the racial prejudices is shown to nurture a soft corner for her all through the novel and his feelings are expressed thus: “In a sudden realization he saw that they had flown down from planets far apart in space, met, and for an instant joined on the scarlet cushions” (Masters 89). “Scarlet” later gains significance as the relationship between Savage and the Rani is seen to be based on blood, claiming innocent lives, and the Rani reveals that it was she who had murdered the king.
Rodney Savage is portrayed as an English officer conscious about the perspectives and feelings of the sepoys and the natives, especially as he tries to explain to his superiors the difference between the understandings of the two different civilizations with respect to social reforms such as Suttee, female infanticide and subjection of Brahmins to criminal laws that “we think those are good and just ideas, but the sepoys don’t” (Masters 119). The difference between his and Caroline Langford’s sensibilities is one in degree, not in kind, as the latter away from the political and military practicalities can maintain her clear sightedness and humanitarian approach towards people and issues, for instance, when she tells him on discovering a hint of a conspiracy at Kishanpur: “I’m not crusading against people, or human enemies, but against falsehood, and there is no need to hate anyone” or when she asserts “it is not that India is wicked; she has her own ways. If we rule here we must rule as Indians” (Masters 131, 166). While Savage loses his sympathy towards the natives after the Rising, Caroline can retain her understanding of them, as this concern is based on human empathy.

Masters accommodates into the course of his narrative the social history of passing of chupattis from one village to another. On his way back from Kishanpur, Savage catches a man running through the forest with a thick bunch of chupattis and on being asked he says how these chupattis have been arriving at different villages from the east and that people who break this chain will be destroyed by Shiva. He elaborates on how he is supposed to hand over these chupattis to the watchman of the next village: “I give him
two chupattis, first breaking one into five equal parts and the other into ten equal parts”,
which he then must pass on “two each to north, west and south” (Masters 96). Savage
later learns from Caroline how the chupattis came to be replaced by “handfuls of raw
meat...shining white on one side and raw red flesh on the other. One piece is always
large, one a little smaller, and the other very small” (Masters 134).

The mystery is explained in the 16th chapter which describes the outbreak of the
rebellion: “A chupatti in five parts, signifying the fifth month. A chupatti in ten parts for
the tenth day. Flesh, white-skinned on one side, raw on the other – a big piece for a
sahib, a smaller piece for a memsahib, and a little piece for a child. On May tenth kill all
the white skins – or they kill us”, followed by the battle cry “Remember Mangal Pande!”
(Masters 189). The mysterious process of communication, acknowledged by the social
historians of both the nations, lends authenticity to the narrative by contextualizing it in
the midst of the social upheavals and mechanisms of India during the mid 19th century.

In the Foreword, Masters cites the official reports and letters as his source of incidents
and writes “my object has been to make the fictional whole present a true perspective of
fact – the facts of environment, circumstance and emotion” (Masters viii). This blending
of fact and fiction further establishes his novel as an unofficial documentation of the
reality of the Rising; a discursive analysis of the 1857 Uprising from an alternative point
of view. The mention of Mangal Pande is of primary significance, because drawing upon
the archival reports of the period, Masters must have come across Mangal Pande, who is
also given a huge space in John Kaye’s historical account of the Rising. *Nightrunners of Bengal* is perhaps one of the earliest works of fiction to acknowledge the presence of Mangal Pande as the motivating spirit behind the Uprising, which is not found even in the Indian literary accounts of the same historical event during the first half of the 20th century.

As Savage escapes the Rising with his wounded two-year old son Robin, the terrible violence and bloodshed gradually bring about a transformation in him. This finds expression for the first time as he plans a murder to meet his basic necessities: “He’d creep down into the village when the men were out, kill a woman alone by her hearth, and steal food and perhaps a bullock cart” (Masters 215). He meets Caroline Langford on his way who had also managed to escape with the help of a trusted servant Piroo, and together they reach the Rani of Kishanpur where some more English refugees sought shelter in the fort. By this time, Savage has already lost his human faith and the state of the English prisoners is described by Masters thus: “They were naked in their minds, stripped off faith and trust by the same blast that had destroyed wealth, family and position. Naked, they did not want to see or be seen” (Masters 228).

In this situation, it is only Caroline who can think clearly, manage crises, look after the ailing and explain the course of action to Savage. It is she who can perceive that they are not guests but prisoners at the fort and thus outraged, seeks an interview with the Rani. The character of the Rani emerges in a completely different light as she responds to the
rebukes of Caroline: “You have not the courage to fight for what you want. I have. I killed my husband for India; I pretended to be a whore for India; I lied, for India. I am an Indian first and woman afterward. Poor little thing, just discovering you are woman first – and nothing else” (Masters 235). The contradiction between patriotism and gender stereotype is brought into light here for the first time in the course of the novel, and the Rani’s transgressing of the latter introduces a contrapuntal discourse regarding the concept of heroism, as the existence of a human being as an individual gains prominence over the expected social codes of conduct. It would be significant to note here that the Rani and Caroline are both in a way, subverting the gender stereotypes but they are contrasted in their motives and routes – while the Rani deceives and kills to protect her state, Caroline preserves and nurtures, not only her own race but even the cholera affected natives at Chalisgaon.

Rodney gradually is portrayed as being transformed into the symbolic head of the English concept of retribution. The omniscient narrator observes: “The next few months would lay the new foundations, granite and rough and cold. There’d be British soldiers pouring in from overseas. They’d hear what had happened at Bhowani and Kishanpur, and they’d pay it back a thousand fold. Rodney would lead them” (Masters 248). That this is a transformation for the worse is implied through the response of Robin towards Rodney, who had gradually come to lose all human warmth: “...he whimpered when Rodney came near him. If Rodney picked him up to caress him, he hung stiff in his arms, with panic-stricken eyes” (Masters 251).
Caroline restores him to humanity during their stay at a village called Chalisgaon where she confronts him saying: "Rodney, do you realize that you are insane?...You see murder and plots where there is only friendship", and further, "...you are so strong; but nothing's worth the loss of your humanity. Be stronger still, understand that there is love and charity left in the world..." (Masters 263,264). Located almost a century away from the actuality of the Uprising, the character of Caroline emerges to be an introspective creation of the novelist, who could possibly be brought to life only now and not the earlier immediate responses towards the event, since the novel is placed at a distance sufficient in the axis of time to understand how further violence could have been avoided only by restoration of human faith and trust.

It is this realization which enables Rodney to understand India as he observes: "...India, had just been betrayed, by men who had power but no love. White or brown, it made no difference here; nothing was "foreign" to India, for India was illimitably varied. A foreigner was a man who did not guard the past and foster the future; above all, a man who did not love" (Masters 271). This relocates Rodney from the English camps to the Indian tradition of inclusion and accommodation. Helping the villagers in the time of cholera at Chalisgaon, instead of leaving the place with his own people, he comes to incorporate once again, the humanitarian concepts of love and care, and breaks free from the hegemonic pattern of understanding India from the colonizer's perspective.
This acceptance of relativity in place of absolutist judgments attains its climax as the novel comes to an end with Rani Sumitra Lakshmi and Rodney meeting each other for the last time during the English attack on the rebels. He sends away his troops knowing well that Sumitra was hiding nearby with her three-year old son, and tells her as she reveals her plan to continue with the rebellion: “I don’t know what’s right for India – I thought I did once. I don’t know who should decide – there are too many different voices. The poor people speak from ignorance and poverty; you speak from jealousy; we – I don’t know” (Masters 329). He promises Sumitra to take care of her child and raise him with Robin, and adds: “You and I will never understand each other, but perhaps they will. It’s going to be important” (Masters 330). The dream of a tolerant, accommodative and forgiving future emerges clear in these lines as the novel ends on a note of hope – acknowledging heterogeneity and looking forward to a generation which will be able to transcend the memories of this violent past in an era of postcolonial existence.

It would be significant to note that a very different discourse on nationalism is woven into the text through the character of the Silver Guru, who is later revealed to have been an Irishman employed in the service of the East India Company who later realized the futility of it all and roamed around in India trying to decipher its true meaning. In the course of the novel, it is seen that he joins the rebels as a major support and organizer of the rebellion and comes to exercise an immense control over the masses who revere him almost as a local deity. No one is aware of his original identity and when Rodney discovers the truth about him towards the end of the novel, he says to the latter: “In my country the children will learn my name, and remember me as a man who fought their
battle in a far place – for them” (Masters 289). This statement holds within itself a serious critique of Colonialism where the colonized are conceived to unite across time and space against their common oppressor.

In one of their earlier meetings, Rodney observes about the Silver Guru “…India had touched him and turned his white to silver”, contemplating upon the treatment this man received from the natives, having been able to transcend the barriers of race, nationality and religion in the larger interests of humanity. Though the Silver Guru’s aforementioned confession reveals a motive behind his stand which so long came to be projected as selfless and therefore reverential, the fact that his journey through the realms of diverse human experiences has actually enabled to him to conceive truths larger than the apparent realities is reflected as he finally tells Rodney that he was driven into this violent conspiracy by the “hatred of England which is not the same as love of Ireland” (Masters 290). In admitting this, he rises above the narrow lines of demarcation which govern human thoughts and action, and thereby attains the divinity which he had been faking until now, probably unaware of how it had gradually crept within him as an integrated part of the multiplicity of his own being.

Masters achieves in his novel what neither of Dickens, Sharman, Tennyson or Rossetti could in their respective works. The reason behind this perhaps lies in the passage of time. When Masters writes about the Rising after a long phase of experiencing the country, he is placed at a more advantageous position than the others in having seen the
after-effects of the Rising upon the British rule in India, and understanding the view of the Other in the first half of the 20th century, when India as a country had already risen to recognize itself as a single unified nation. The book was first published after the Second World War, and the end of the British colonial rule and thus in his representation, he could weave in colonialism in its entirety, instead of limiting it within India. His creation thus becomes not just a literary piece but a postcolonial discourse upon the Indian Uprising from the English point of view, visualized through a veil of fictitious characters and lives.

In this journey from the 19th to the 20th century English literary representations, the shifts in perspective from national pride to humanitarian regret, reciprocation of violence to tolerant afterthought, and glorification of colonialism to interrogation of the very subject of subjugation of the colonized Other is discernible. While the factual records reflect the struggles for survival, and historical accounts glorify or critique the socio-political contexts, it is in these literary representations that the human suffering finds expression. Whether they celebrate heroism or offer a contrapuntal understanding of the concept, the literary representations can be read as an alternative archive of human history in their vivid portrayal of the anonymous men and women who perished though the cracks of history in the making of mainstream historiographic records.
Notes:

1. The Imperial Context of "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" (1857) by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins -
   http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/pva/pva354.html

2. Illustration included in Chapter 1.

3. The Indian Mutiny Medal was a campaign medal approved in 1858, for issue to officers and men of British and Indian units who served in operations in suppression of the Indian Mutiny. The medal was initially sanctioned for award to those troops who had been engaged in action against the mutineers. However in 1868 the award was extended to all those who had borne arms or who had been under fire, including such people as members of the Indian judiciary and the Indian civil service, who were caught up in the fighting. Some 290,000 medals were awarded – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Mutiny_Medal

4. Following the suppression of the 'mutiny', an investigation into events at Cawnpore considered the veracity of widespread claims that British women had been raped before they were killed. Colonel Williams, Commissioner of Police in the North Western Provinces, interviewed 63 witnesses and concluded that "the most searching and earnest inquiries totally disprove the unfounded assumption that at first was so frequently made and so currently believed, that personal indignity and dishonour were offered to our poor suffering countrywomen" – 'Embodying war: British women and domestic defilement in the Indian 'Mutiny', 1857-58' by Alison Blunt in Journal of Historical Geography, 26, 3 (2000) 403–428.