



**Reclaiming the Autobiographical Expression of the Great Revolt of 1857
in British India: A Study of *Bidrohi Bangalee ba Amar Jivan Charit* by
Durgadas Bandyopadhyay**

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Abstract:

This paper tries to elucidate the autobiographical writing of Durgadas Bandyopadhyay on the Great Uprising of 1857 in Bareilly in North India. This kind of autobiographical writings are very few in number and not well known to researchers. So, this paper will review the autobiography as a first-hand source of the 1857 uprising in colonial India. The war literature and its histories are a new thing in current social science discourse. Issues, which were once marginal, now become central to the academic world. The Great Uprising of 1857 and the indigenous literature about it are many, yet it could not attract the minds of the historians. This article seeks to identify such native, especially one Bengali memoir whose subject matter is the 1857 Uprising in colonial India and subsequent causes and consequences.

By drawing the relation between memory and history, this paper tries to adopt the critical memory and literary studies and their relation with history following the analytical methodology and archival documents. This article also seeks to examine questions of loyalty, resistance, and the nature of the Revolt through an examination of loyalist narrative. Central to the argument is an attempt to question the teleological histories of 1857 that seek to establish a long and continuous history of discontent and resistance in the Bengal Army. This paper further argues for a reappraisal of sources and, especially, for a more deliberate engagement with first-hand autobiographical accounts and commentaries on 1857.

Keywords: Autobiography, 1857 Mutiny, East India Company, British Raj, Sepoy, Revolt.

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1. Introduction: Autobiography and 1857

Historians writing about the colonial world face a severe problem in acquiring sources representing the 'other side of the coin'. Most of the available sources as regards colonial period in India were written by the imperialist soldier-scholars and administrators for their own purpose, which would highlight the superior imperial notion. The Indian culture being predominantly oral did not generate adequate sources regarding the colonial confrontation. Naturally, it was the colonizers rather than the colonized that produced an overwhelming mass of historical data. It was due to the colonial encounter that produced one-sided evidence. This evidence generates the belief that the colonizers were inherently superior to their opponents, the colonized (Belice, 123). This problem is especially important when one focuses on the 1857 Uprising in India. Here, Durgadas Bandopadhyaya's autobiography titled *Bidrohi Bangalee ba Amar Jivancharit* comes to our aid (Bandyopadhyay, 123). Initially, the mass of the Bengali speaking people looked at the Revolt of 1857 from a standpoint that was in general one of non-acceptance. The Bengali literature which in the year 1856-1861 saw a tremendous creative activity and produced several stalwarts showed no interest in the great Revolt. In other words, the revolt failed to stimulate the literary interest of the people in its immediate aftermath (Sen, 32).

2. The Problem of Reading the Great Uprising of 1857

The problem of how to read the rebellion of 1857 has been a long-standing one in the historiography of India. Recent writing o 1857 has been from the perspectives opened out by 'histories from below' in the early 1980s. Following, Eric Stokes, the question of the soldier as peasant and as rebel could not be ignored (Stokes, 122). The early practitioners of the craft of 'subaltern history' made something of this question, as they did of local power dynamics and everyday cultural practices. Ranajit Guha described their elementary aspects (Guha, 32).

Gautam Bhadra wrote on four rebels of 1857 (Bhadra, 11). Rudranshu Mukherjee wrote on a local milieu (Mukherjee, 45) and later on an incident of imperial outrage. Tapti Roy wrote on another local context (Ray, 19). Military historians have used the revolt as the implicit or explicit *telos* of their narratives of the Company's army (Alavi, 11). Chris Bayly famously used 1857 as the crucial juncture of the crisis of the imperial information order and the revolt of the Native Informant (Bayly, 33). The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India was much more than a 'sepoy mutiny' (Pati, XIV). It was a major event in South Asian and British colonial history that significantly challenged imperialism in India. It has arguably and undoubtedly been a major landmark in colonial South Asian history. Besides, posing what was naturally the most serious military challenge to the might of British colonialism over the nineteenth century, its vibrations and memories lasted much longer than had been expected by those carrying out the colonial counter-insurgency operations. The many interpretations of the events of 1857 since its occurrence need to be seen in their historiographical context. This explains the narrow religious focus that contemporary observers bestowed on it, as well as the nationalist aspirations that were seen to characterise 1857, as historians in the years immediately following independence in 1947 sought to establish. The important presence of 1857 in the creation of an Indian history and identity explains the many 'myths' traced to it by various facets of that special event. Despite the Colonial, Nationalist, Marxist, or rather Subaltern historiography of the 1857 Rebellion, we come to know the recent trends to look into the events that led to the rise of the 1857 Rebellion in colonial India.

Over the years, historians have also examined other facets of 1857. These relate to the organization, middle level leadership, activities in the areas where British authority had been subverted and if it was indeed a restorative Rebellion. More recently, since 1990s- historians have focused on the popular or rather marginal dimensions of 1857, including the specifics of the involvement of adivasis, (Singh, 120) low castes and outcastes, (Narayan, 19) popular

culture and questions related to the alternative order that emerged (Brodkin, 270). Moreover, scholars working within the paradigms of cultural studies sought to delineate the way racism emerged as a virtual fallout of the rebellion. In 2007, the dimension of the 1857 rebellion was emerged while the two specialist historians on south India (Rajendran, 180) witnessed the event in the colonial context of the south. Here, this section would argue, taking larger help out of their writings, the alternate meaning of the 1857 rebellion in south India since, my present thrust is the issue of south India in 1857 rebellion and the collective, albeit conflicting role played by the then colonial Madras army.

The 1857 Rebellion has been alternatively seen by Kaushik Roy in his recent article, which addresses the issues of technology and war, including the 'sepoy' component, during 1857. He examines the issues related to warfare. The European wars of the eighteenth century were of limited liability and fought without any moral or ideological issues. European warfare in the eighteenth century comprised conflicts between the armies raised, equipped and fed by bureaucratised monarchies. While, waging warfare, such armies made clear distinctions between the armed forces and the civilians. However, it argues that these were wiped away in the era of the people's war from the mid-nineteenth century. Conducted by the people's armies, citizens became soldiers, and the home front was also mobilised to support the war effort. Consequently, the watertight compartmentalisation between the home front and the battlefield 'vanished'. Public opinion was an important factor shaping the conduct of such wars. As Roy feels, the 1857 Rebellion contained in it the elements that can be characteristic of a 'people's war.' The English East India Company's wars with the indigenous powers between 1770 and 1849 were similar to the European eighteenth-century wars. This paper clearly addresses the issue of society and warfare from a colonial perspective (Roy, 1720).

3. Durgadas and his Memoir

Durgadas Bandopadhyay's account of his adventures during the mutiny of 1857 is full of dramatic passages and vivid imagery (Dasgupta, 77). His account of the rebellion at times both thrilling and compelling, captures the sheer dread supposedly felt by the mutineers at the coming British attack. Gore Aye Gore Aye suggests the anxiety of both mutinous soldiers and civilians in Bareilly at the prospect of English troops re-entering the city and wreaking their vengeance on its inhabitants. This anxiety is something that captures the minds of the contemporary people. Durgadas's narrative of the mutiny forms a major part of his autobiography *Amar Jivancharit*. After joining the army as a clerk with the 8th Irregular Cavalry regiment of the Bengal army in 1853 and following initial postings in Hansi and Burma, Durgadas's regiment moved to Bareilly in late 1856. It was here on 31 May 1857 that Durgadas was first caught up in the mutiny/revolt/war of independence. Bareilly and Rohilkhand provide the backdrop for his loyalist narrative of the 1857 rebellion.

Having arrived at Bareilly in late 1856, Durgadas settled down to a life of relative comfort. Though a Bengali, He had grown up in northern India and was familiar with the nuances and cultural milieu of the region. His house became centre for meeting place for the Bengali population, who used to drink, eat and debate at his home taking the topic of the contemporary socio-political situations (Banerjee, 31). Durgadas witnesses the perceptible changes in the behaviour of the sepoy in the town in March 1857. There were strong rumours that the Company had used cow and pork fat to supply the greasing paper for the new-issue cartridges. Durgadas says that these kinds of rumours led to great tension in the army among both Hindu and Muslim sepoys and it further prompts the speculation about imminent mutiny. Durgadas in his memoir mentions that dissatisfaction was mostly prevalent among the foot soldiers who openly proclaimed that they would refuse to turn out on parade with the new gun. He further says that they planned to set on fire the bungalows of the European officers. After receiving

this information, he immediately passes on the piece of information to his regiment's commanding officer. The commanding officer told him that he got the news and also explained the situation was grave in number of other stations as well. This has been explored from his memoir that under such situation, the commanding officer sought his own reading of the sepoy. Perhaps, the commanding officer had shown his faith in his opinion in this regard. While reading the autobiography of Durgadas, one understands that he shared a fair relationship with the colonial masters (Banerjee, 45).

Durgadas' memoir records the increasing nervousness of the English inhabitants since the tension continued over the following months due to rebellious situation done by the rebel soldiers in 1857 (Banerjee, 50-51). Finally, the regiment stationed at Bareilly witnessed revolt on Sunday 31 May. He immediately reached to Lieutenant Adjutant Beecher and found that the house appeared deserted and the lone native attendant was cowering in fear. The attendant explained that the troops in Bareilly had mutinied and Beecher had fled away once he came to know that the rebel troops were supposed to attack his bungalow. Under such circumstances, Durgadas has helpless and immediately called upon his brother and informed him that the fire of the rebellion of 1857 covered the whole of Bareilly and subsequently the troops become rebellious and showed their anger against the colonial officials. While, they were talking together for next step, they suddenly heard the sound of loud canon, immediately followed by gunfire. He kept on telling,

*“Abar Godum Godum shabde topdhani haite
lagilo. Prolay kaler jeno Maha-Kallol smukhito
hoilo”*

(Again, the air reverberated with loud sounds of cannon fire. It appeared as if the destruction of the world was approaching.) (Translation by the author.)

The scene, according to Durgadas, was one of absolute turmoil. The native servants were said to be running with their families without any definite sense of direction in the hope that they would somehow manage to escape from this situation. Random shooting was going on in parallel. In this atmosphere, both Durgadas and his brother were in dilemma and become confused since they could not understand what to do next. Their implicit loyalty to the company threatened their immediate personal safety. The rebels were started looting his house where their trusted attendant Bhabani was quiet. Ultimately, Durgadas found that his house was ransacked and his favourite horse had been taken away by the mutineers (Banerjee, 70-71).

The Bareilly rebels were led by General Bakht Khan. Nawab of Bahadur Khan, an old aristocrat of the Bareilly, around this time had established his Nawabi in the district. Bakht Khan induced Durgadas to join the rebels and to help them by becoming the paymaster of the rebel forces in Bareilly (Banerjee, 86). Being loyal to the British, he immediately stated that he had partaken of the salt of the English. He informed that the mutineers had no order and organisation, so he could not be expected to serve in such a force. Hearing this from Durgadas, the infuriated Bakht Khan ordered Durgadas to be imprisoned, alleging that the Bengali and the English were together to suppress the mutiny. Khan Bahadur used to refer to the Bengali people as the tutors of the English. "Trust not the Bengalees", so he said, "the Bengalees and the English share the same soul". The Bengali community according to Durgadas was being accused of collusion with the British. Many of them were imprisoned; some of them were whipped, while others had to suffer their property being looted. This has been pertinently described by Rudrangshu Mukherjee that the looting and eating were among the modalities of peasant insurgency and the he argues that the sepoy were merely peasants in uniform (Mukherjee, 187). At this juncture, Durgadas joined the English side and became part of the cavalry that campaigned against the mutineers at Kaladunga and Bareilly. Having apparently distinguished himself in these battles, Durgadas entered the city as the head of the colonial forces. His account reports

that all seemed deserted at first. Gradually, people came out of their homes to give a tumultuous welcome to the British. He narrates that the people of Bareilly were relieved only when they saw that the British troops oppressed the rebels.

Durgadas regretted the return of Muslim rule in Bareilly. He found out that the common people of the Muslim community also could not welcome the suppression of the British Raj. To them the change was not only a change of the rulers but also a change of the system of rules where they did not have anything to gain. The common people had a simple logic to follow. The British were their protectors for some time and with the end of the British rule the Muslim rulers would be their protectors. Whoever be the protectors the subjects would be satisfied with a good protection. The attitudes of the Hindus according to Durgadas, was somewhat different from that of the Muslim. Durgadas found them in a mood of depression. They wanted the coming back of the British rule. This was what Durgadas felt to be the logic of the common people. Many of the Hindu aristocrats lamented that by saying,

*“Babuji ar Sajyo hae na; Sighra Aungrez
agaman Karun-Punaraye sashan danda Laun,
Iayee Amra Chahi. Purbe Amra Ram Rajye Bash
Karitechilam.”* (Banerjee, 174)

(Sir it can no longer be borne with; may the English come soon and assume the sceptre. It is this we want. Before we were residing in the reign of Lord Rama) (Translation by the author).

Durgadas' account provides us with a significant native commentary on the rebellion and on the forces that could shape and inform adherence through 1857. His memoir would reveal the cultural superiority of the Bengali community. His notion of this superiority reflected when he dislikes the Purbaiya soldiers, who he claims lacked intelligence, method and organization. His sense of cultural and professional superiority is apparent throughout his memoir. For example,

during a discussion with English officials on the possibility of the mutineers advancing towards Kaladunga, Durgadas dismisses the prospect by emphatically declaring that these sattu-drinking soldiers are less than human and were incapable of launching an offensive.

Bidrohegan Jodi manush hoito, tahule ekdino

amra

Kaladungite tikite paritam na

Chattukhor Dakatgulo Kapurusher ek shesh.

Taharai aj Bhoye Sa Hoiya ache.

Taharai etokhon Hoyto Bhabiteche jadi

Kaladungite

Engrez-Sena amderkai akraman kore ta hole

amra ki korbo.

(If the mutineers were human, we would not have been able to last in Kaladunga. These Sattu-drinking dacoits are big cowards. They are the ones who must be lying motionless through fear. They must be thinking, what are we to do in the event of the English army attacking us? (Translation by the author).

So, the Bengali notion of cultural superiority is in the mind of Durgadas, and it is prevalent in his opinion as well. His account makes clear, a sense of cultural arrogance could play an important role in shaping Bengali attitudes towards the mutiny, as it did for Durgadas, whose own sense of identity disbarred him from allying himself with the Purbiya rebels, whom he regarded as subhuman. The memoir does not represent a general Bengali attitude, rather it shows some interesting ways in which Bengali identity could inform the meanings of ‘loyalty’

during 1857 (Joshi, 80). His autobiography provides an impressionistic but potentially useful account of the personal circumstances of one of the many soldiers involved in the Uprising. All through his book he drew the picture of the oppression of the rebel soldiers. He tried to find out the causes of such an event. Why did they suddenly all rise to destroy the British Raj? This was the question he faced.

4. Durgadas and the Rebellion of 1857

Amar Jivancharit is the only Bengali memoir written by a Bengali Sepoy associated with military life in the colonial army. His account is a straightforward autobiographical narrative. He vividly described the regiments, which were there around the time of 1857. Michael H. Fisher asserted that the strong bond was prevailed between the British officers and their Bengali counterparts. Such personalised loyalty bonds lasted till the first decade of the nineteenth century. Durgadas highlighted this notion in his memoir. Perhaps, he understood the increasing bureaucratization of the colonial military establishment, which started in the 1850s and continued even in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when he started penning his memoir. Durgadas's account is pro-British in nature. He did not show any concern about displeasing the government by writing critically about the British and wrote on his own spontaneous initiative. He uses quotations in his memoir extensively. Probably, however, he kept notes, or he just made up the quotations. Durgadas, however, informs us that there is no empirical falsification in his memoir. One could question how Durgadas remembered the exact quotations of so many persons whom he cites in his memoir. So, one might question the authenticity of his memoir. It seems that he is well-read person and has been well versed in European history. In his memoir, Durgadas mentions Napoleon's greatest victory called Austerlitz. Though, we come to know that he comes from a literary urban background.

Durgadas' accounts focus on the origins of what they called the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. Durgadas gives no importance to the long-term structural causes behind the 1857 Uprising but focuses on the immediate factors behind the Uprising. He describes the deteriorating relationship between the sowars, sepoys and the sahibs during the 1857 and the role of rumour as regard the threat to religion and caste in instigating the sepoys and the sowars against their white masters. He also accepts the thesis that the Uprising of 1857 was a Muslim conspiracy. He did not even pay much heed to such a conspiracy by the dispossessed Indian rulers. Durgadas does not accept that the 1857 Uprising was a popular upsurge. He agrees that the rebel sepoys' combat motivation was due to intoxicating drugs and the hunger for plunder and overconfidence of the rebels in their ability to drive out the British from India.

Durgadas autobiography though, represents an indigenous strand, it is a sort of 'loyalist' literature regarding the Uprising of the 1857. He accepts the dominant assumption of the authors of colonial literature that British domination was beneficial for the Indians. The colonial authors accepted the theory of eastern misgovernment by the 'oriental despots', which made the East India Company's rule not only inevitable but also desirable. Durgadas succumbs to this notion. He finds nothing except rape, pillage, plunder and abduction in Khan Bahadur Khan's *nawabi* at Bareilly. In his memoir, he portrays the rebel leader of Bareilly Khan Bahadur Khan as a product of effeminate Muslim aristocracy and Bakht Khan as hot-tempered rustic fool. Durgadas repeatedly emphasises the cruelty and high-handedness of Bakht Khan. Bakht Khan was anti-Bengali because the literate Bengali babus were hand in glove with the British. It was Bakht Khan, who arrested 50 Bengali on 21st July, 1857 in Delhi, for their correspondence with the British. Further, he issued an order that every Bengali who could read and write should be imprisoned. Even, in Jhansi Bengalis were targets of violence by the rebels. In general, Durgadas' overall opinion was that the Muslim administration of Khan Bahadur Khan at Bareilly was anti-Hindu in orientation. Here, Durgadas aligns with colonial historians.

Kaye and Malleson agree that, whatever the Muslim elites were able to set up an administrative fabric in the turbulent days of 1857, they oppressed the Hindus.

Here, we could see the loyalist attitudes of Durgadas, and it was aptly reflected in his memoir (Banerjee, 89). Even, the official documents state that the Bengali remained loyal and hence the rebels turned against this community. We should keep in mind that Durgadas technically belonged to the non-combatant branch, in time of crisis he participated actively in warfare. Some of his characters has revealed through his memoir. After the suppression of the 1857 Uprising, the British government decided to grant Durgadas a jagir. However, he refused this reward. Durgadas records in his memoir: 'In the aftermath of the Sepoy War, the Collector of Bareilly Mr. English asked me: "Durgadas babu! If you agree then I could recommend your name to the government for issuing a jagir". I replied: "I am not in need of a jagir. I have done my duty by serving the salt giver."' Amar Jivancharit's intended audience was the literate Hindu Bengali middle-class, as it was initially published in Bengali from Calcutta. His memoir tells the stories of their families and their societies of origin. The account shed light on the British life in the cantonments which spotted the landscape of the Raj. Though, he participated in the British dominated cantonment's social milieu but could not become an integral part of the British western culture (Roy, 23).

5. The Notion of Masculinity and the Uprising of 1857

Durgadas presents the instance of loyalty. The Purbaiyas remained loyal during the 1857 Uprising, and even Durgadas possibly represented those middle-class Bengalis who were firmly allied with the British. Unlike most of this group, however, Durgadas played an active role in support of the company. In his account of the pre-mutiny period, Durgadas' memoir reveals how some of the differences may have been manifest and suggests some of the means by which they could be alienated. He impressed his fellows by showing his physical prowess

and wrestling skills. According to him, the latter quality amazed the sepoy since it was widely believed that Bengalis were physically incompetent. It was wondering for the sepoy that being a Bengali how he could be so strong. Under such circumstance, Durgadas reply was- 'Who said that a Bengali could not be strong? I know Bengalis who have the strength (of) ten of you'- contested representations of the physical weakness of Bengalis (Banerjee, 10).

It is difficult to pinpoint the origins of Indian notion of regional physical differences at this juncture since. The recruitment policy-based o selective enlistment within communities with a long tradition of military service and the exclusion of other communities who were lacking in the appropriate tradition was somewhat analogous to the martial race theory that took place in post-1857 period in the colonial army. It was believed that the upper-caste sepoy from Awadh and Bhojpur who were termed as 'Purbaiya' provided ideal recruits. They were brave, honourable and obedient and masculine looking to boot and often had a long family history of military service (Kolff, 34). They were regarded as manly. So, they were mostly preferred by the recruiting officials when enlisting in the colonial army. Hence, they formed the basis of the Bengal regiment under the Company rule.

Communities like the Bengali were in contrast, effectively disbarred from any service. Though, there was no official injunction, it was a tradition that Bengalis would not be taken in the army (Roy, 321). General C. Troup, the commanding officer at Nainital in 1857, mentioned in the certificate awarded to Durgadas for his service during the mutiny that he had never heard of a Bengali exhibiting such bravery. The implication, of course, was that Bengalis as a whole were not known for their courage in combat. To some extent, the British stereotypes were instrumental in this case. Even, this imagery was frequently appeared in Durgadas' memoir. He always kept himself aloof from cowardly Bengalis so that he could prove his effeminate attitudes. This may suggest a defence mechanism, a means of reaffirming his masculinity in

the context of his interactions with communities who were considered martial and conjured to be so (Nandy, 132 and Sinha 34).

This sort of masculinity was deeply inscribed to certain communities and this was addressed by the colonial British officers and further formulated the martial race ideology, which again might face challenged from the indigenous society. Colonial bias towards the high-caste, masculine Purbaiya recruits resulted in their dominance in the Bengal army, a dominance which they retained till 1857 in spite of increasing competition from communities like the Gurkhas and the Sikhs. The common ties of caste, clan and residence shared amongst a vast section of the Bengal army no doubt facilitated the outbreak and spread of the revolt. However, omnipresent notions of masculinity could also generate cultural disagreement amongst native troops, and these notions may have contributed to shaping distinct communities of rebels and loyalists during 1857. There was growing disagreement between the Bengali and Purbaiya. The Bengali probably regarded the Purbaiya as lowly, subhuman, traditional, ignorant and driven by superstition. While, the Purbaiya regarded the Bengalis short tempered, alienated from the society, and not fit for the martial quality. Hence, they should be kept out of the Indian army. This situation resulted in a gulf that possibly made cooperation and collaboration problematic. While, the narrative explored here, has served thus far as entry point to analyse the mindset of Durgadas, hailing from diverse and antagonistic background. He derived his loyalty from his family. The accounts are also valuable as a means of exploring some of the long-term issues, which have been identified as contributory factors in the rebellion. The memoir may thus suggest some of the reasons for the military failure of the rebels.

6. *Amar Jivancharit* and the Portrayal of War

Durgadas' military memoir shares a lot of similar and dissimilar strands with military autobiographies written by persons across the world in the last two centuries. Joanna Bourke

says that most of the military memoirs share some common tropes. These are victory under great odds, moral weakness of the enemy, mass slaughter, pride in superiority, battlefield with atrocities (Bourke, 35). All these features are present in *Amar Jivancharit*. He informs about the Rohilkhand Horse that participated in numerous small actions. His account vividly describes the atrocities happened around the times of 1857. He writes that the battlefield was filled with corpses. Some of the dead bodies were without heads, and the severed heads were scattered here and there. He keeps on saying that many of the injured soldiers were without arms and blood was gushing out from their mouth. John Keegan writes that most of the military memoirs describing military actions are full of information, which in way imagery in nature. The emotional quotient is prevalent in the description. The kinds of thunderous rhythm also make them powerful (Keegan, 36). Durgadas has never shown any mercy towards the rebels. He describes in detail how he personally killed and wounded many rebels in several encounters. He, according to Kaushik Roy, exaggerates the rebel losses in the encounters in which he participated (Roy, 19). This is common in military memoirs written by other British officers in the colonial era. George Blake who as a young man participated during the 1857 Uprising as a grenadier in the flank company of the 84th Foot Regiment, maintained a diary in which he noted the various extraordinary adventures against large number of rebels. He pointed out the number of rebels who had opposed him at every stage (Dowson, 38). This is done with deliberate aim to highlight the glory and bravery which the British gained by fighting against numerically superior enemies. It has been argued that ordinary men enjoy slaughtering other males in combat and the narrative of personalised killing remains central to men's experience of war (Burke, 11). It is argued that Durgadas was also motivated by this premise.

Durgadas always wanted to show his bravery, and this has been reflected in his memoir while penning the various events of 1857. He did not forget to mention the technical advancement of the British vis-a-vis the poor understanding of techniques of the rebels. As we know,

technology is certainly one of the principal drivers of history. The rebels used low range matchlocks and indigenous bows and arrows while the British soldier's hands were full of Enfield. In the history of warfare, non-tangible factors also played an important role. Durgadas mentions these kinds of technical difficulties, organisational deficiencies, managerial inadequacies, lack of discipline and inefficient military leadership of the rebels. This ultimately, resulted in the collapse of the mutineers. Durgadas occasionally refers that the rebel soldiers took part in looting. Here one must understand that the debate whether the rebels were all peasants in uniform or a sort of semi automatons conditioned by the rituals of military service into professional soldiers with a sense of corporate identity. The undisciplined attitudes of the rebel soldiers have been highlighted by the colonial authors while they wrote about the fate of the Uprising. These attitudes make the difference, and this has not been prevalent among the Indians at large. The colonial authors think that it was only the British leadership that made the colonized disciplined and the taught them the art of drill in army cantonment. Without the British officers, the rebel troops proved to be disloyal, undisciplined and a rabble (MacMunn, 201). Durgadas has summarily accepted all these notions while starting to write his autobiography. Probably, he forgets that India does not have any military training institutes around this time and hence the sepoys could not learn properly the art of modern day fighting at the battlefield. This also could not help to make any all-India military leadership that could make a difference in the combat against the British.

Durgadas, while portraying the glorious events of the Great Uprising of 1857, mentions the chivalrous service of himself, some of the sahibs and Indian officers like Dhokal Singh, Hira Singh etc. he never mentions the sepoys and sowars by their individual names. He represented himself parallel to the colonial rule albeit in inferior manner. This trend, according to Kaushik Roy, is common in military autobiographies written by officers all around the world (Roy, 20). John Keegan points out those military memoirs were written for an audience unaccustomed to

think of private soldiers as individuals worthy of mention by names (Keegan, 116). The Bengali middle-class during the first half of the twentieth century, the target audience for Durgadas' memoir, was of course the sahibs and the officers in the Indian army but not the sepoy and sowars in particular. *Amar Jivancharit* represents a sort of 'history from top' since he was an elite in the colonial society and collaborated himself with the imperial ideologies. The rebel world has not been fully explored in the memoir written by Durgadas. He followed the colonial notion of representing the events of 1857 but overlooked the 'history from below' model while dealing with 1857.

Like all military autobiographies while depicting actions, the narrative of the *Amar Jivancharit* imposes a structure, which was absent in the chaotic reality of the battlefield. The rebel soldiers could only be remembered for their sporadic and unorganised actions around this time. Durgadas tends to showcase the events that capture the rebel attitudes of the sepoy who took up arms against the colonial masters. It is under consideration how his memoir retrieves the past in terms of present-day context. It is interesting to note that his memoir represents the subaltern historiography since it emphasises the fragmentary episodes in the lives of common people (Chaturvadi, 3).

7. *Amar Jivancharit*: Source of Information, Myth, Fiction and History

Now, it needs to find out whether *Amar Jivancharit* reflects any history, myth or fictitious events around this time. Definitely, this provides us source of information, which help to find out 'how it really was' in and around 1857. The historian's job, according to Lepold von Ranke is to find out the event of the past in accurate way. In other words, the objective of the historian is to retrieve the evidence and reconstruct the past irrespective of any moral judgements (Fulbrook, 13). Bourke writes that texts are not simple sources of information on the level of content analysis but important events in their own right. Historians might not only depend on

the event of the past rather one should also take care how it really happened. Though, one might question the authenticity of such texts, which depicts day to day events of 1857. While, someone like Durgadas Banerjee started writing his memoir, he might have been influenced by his own thinking, which may not be accepted or ignored in true sense. Sometimes, the authors rely on inherited myths, generate new myths and which later become part of our lives. Most of the authors get entangled when they start writing their memoirs. They later on become confused since they could not remember everything while penning the events. Moreover, different individuals and different communities or nations remember warfare in different ways (Bourke, 267).

Recently, it has been argued that the distinction between histories, autobiographies and novels is not substantial. Rather, their intention remains the same while presenting any particular event. Gautam Chakravarty in his study of the 'Mutiny' novels asserts that there is not much difference between the novels of the 1857 Mutiny generated by the British and the histories of 1857 written by the British officials. He also asserts that most of the British authored Mutiny novels end with the defeat of the rebels and the return of the British rule (Chakravarty, 113). Durgadas' memoir also points to a similar event. He had desired that that the British rule is bound to return. He was somehow influenced by the colonial authors while he said that the British soldiers were motivated by the ideas of patriotism and nationalism, the rebels were merely mercenaries. Gautam Chakravarty says that the British heroes of the Mutiny novels, being motivated by muscular Christianity, displayed gallantry and a martial spirit (Chakravarty, 13). Most of the autobiographies of the British soldiers emphasize that rebel soldiers lacked the quality of fighting spirit, courage and determinism. Naturally, they could not confront the British troops face to face in close-quarter combat. Durgadas as well as the British military officers, who wrote about the 1857 Uprising during the nineteenth century point out the picture of the rebel sepoys' belief in the superhuman capabilities of the white

soldiers. Durgadas mentions that very often panic broke out among the rebel camp, and the rebel soldiers shouted.

‘Gora aye, Gora aye’ shabda jeno akash, patal,
prithibipurna haiya uthilo (Banerjee, 90).

(White soldiers are coming. The sounds of ‘Gore Aye’ reverberated through the sky, underworld and throughout the earth.) (Translation by the author) For Durgadas, the British were heroes, and the rebels were cowards. He depicts this throughout his memoir. He cried against the rebel soldiers and defended the British officials. Kate Teltscher rightly asserts that the British image of benevolent rule as portrayed in colonial literature was largely constructed around the exploits of British individuals. The British heroes’ integrity, humanity and generosity are emphasised. The British heroes in the Mutiny novels displayed true English character by providing beneficial administration to the native subjects. Mutiny novels and the autobiographies of the British officers paint the East India Company’s rule as a sort of benevolent despotism. Stephen Peter Rosen claims that the paternalist idiom dominates the relationship between the British masters and their Indian subjects. This patron-client relation has been aptly reflected in the writings of colonial historians at large (Rosen, 13). Again, the colonial subject is portrayed as childlike, who always entrusted his fate to the kindly British adults. It is to be noted that the British military officers of the nineteenth century also portrayed the image of enlightened and courageous British officers as father figures to the childlike Indian soldiers.

Durgadas’s memoir narrates the benevolent characters of the British officers. The civilizing nature of the British rule is a common feature in writings of his narrative. His memoir could be contextualised against the background of dominant ideological trends. The ethnocentric racial overtones that characterise the writings of the Victorian age are present in his memoir.

Durgadas in *Amar Jivancharit* occasionally functions as a sort of colonial ethnographer nothing the dress, food habits and culture of the exotic races like the Burmese whom he considers inferior compared to the high caste Bengalis. The freedom enjoyed by the Burmese women was especially distasteful to the conservative upper caste Hindu Durgadas. Whether this racial or cultural superiority is prevalent in his nature is not known to us. Possibly, this has been shaped since he was very much fond of the colonial government and its applications. Durgadas himself carried the imperial stereotypes in his writing consciously or unconsciously. He accepts the colonial theory of making the Indian civilisation inferior compared the British. The British looked down upon the Indians as savages and believed that they represented a lower type of civilisation. Durgadas somehow accepted the civilized-savage dichotomy. In his hypothesis, the Maugh were savages while the high caste Hindus of north India represented a superior civilisation.

Despite all the conflicting notions of his writing, to an extent Durgadas's memoir could be used to reconstruct 'how it really was' during the troubled days of 1857. The British officials in their accounts mostly concentrate on the *sahibs* and the *memsahibs*. In contrast, Durgadas widens our historical knowledge of mid nineteenth century colonial Asia as it focuses on the activities of the colonized. Durgadas mentions that his regiment was stationed in the early 1850s in Burma. During this time, some of the sepoys despite having wives back in India, married Burmese women and became father. When the regiment left Burma for India, the sowars left the Burmese ladies in a lurch. Official documents lacks this informaion. Herein, lies the importance of Durgadas' memoir. Durgadas' autobiography also throws up rich historical data. He described in detail the lives of the common soldiers and their regiment life under the colonial period. The sepoys and sowars' food habits, recreation pattern like singing together, kusti matches, their relation with women are portrayed in the memoir. This also throws light on the activities of the rebels, information about their leaders, the rebels' troubled

relationship with the *seths* and especially the intricate relation between the rebels and the prostitutes in the regiment. The rebels got to know the next moves of the regiment as well as their forthcoming campaign from them. It helps the rebels to reorganise their movement. Durgadas informs in great detail about the face of rebel leadership. He vividly narrates the internal organisation of the rebel armies. Such information is missing in the from British-authored documents. Being a literate person, he used to maintain accounts of such incidents, which have great historical importance. One thing is noticeable here is that he kept on silent about his personal lives, especially he kept tight-lipped about his wife. Though, he elaborates his relationship with a Panna girl of 'sweet sixteen.' He probably understood the division of public and private space and also his orthodox middle-class Bengali culture stopped him to disclose such relation in great detail. Somehow, his sense of moral ethics inhibited him from providing light on these issues.

8. Conclusion:

The native accounts explored the phenomenon of 1857. A fresh perspective on 1857 certainly requires the creative use of existing sources, as well as a more comprehensive use of those that have been little used so far (Ray, 21). Such an examination may usually contribute to the wider debates on 1857. While many mutiny historians continue to emphasise that religious unity was a key feature in the rebellion, Durgadas' account of life in Bareilly provides us with various instances of Hindu-Muslim conflict. This type of environment helped the Company to continue its dominance in the subcontinent. The memoir of Durgadas acted as an entry point to probe the complex nature of loyalty and resistance during 1857. In the absence of a larger corpus of source material, historians must probe those that are available and, based on these, endeavour to address and interpret, rather than simply ignoring, the interrelations of loyalty and rebellion during the great Uprising of 1857. From all that has been said of Durgadas in the preceding observations it is clear that he desired that coming back of the British rule. He records his actual

experiences and in his expressions the loyalty toward the British officers were reflected. He made some candid confessions. What Durgadas was trying to represent was not surveillance but a kind of loyalty to a rule that had allowed a vast mass of people to rise into prominence within a framework of broad collaboration between the ruler and the ruled. Durgadas was simple and free of pretension. He never shunned the idea of speaking from his own personal bias but what he thought to be right he did. If he was pro-British, he was so from a sentiment that was current among the Hindus and rampant in a society that had learned to appreciate the benefits of the British rule vis-a-vis the degradations that had crippled the Mughal rule during the last century.

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