

# Forgotten Heroes: The Rebellion of 1857 and Narratives of Suppressed Dalit Voices

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## Abstract

The Rebellion of 1857 was a crucial event in India's freedom struggle against British colonial oppression. Talking about the overall contribution of different communities in this regard, while narratives of prominent upper caste figures have been widely documented, a significant portion of the population, particularly the Dalits, still remains unheard. The aim of the paper is to explore the Dalit narratives and their colossal sacrifices that contributed immensely in shaping the great rebellion. Moreover, the paper deals with Dalit erasure, distortion of facts, and marginalization of their voices from various important historical sources, thus denying a whole community of social pride and acceptance. Lastly, the paper also aims to bring a change by embracing and acknowledging the efforts of the less talked Dalit freedom fighters and integrating their voices into the collective memory of the nation's struggle for freedom.

**Keywords:** British; Caste; Dalits; History; Rebellion.

With the turn of the century, the world became a witness to the colonization of yet another nation. In pursuit of their imperialistic ideology, with an intent to trade majorly in spices, the Britishers established themselves by the name of the British East India Company in the year 1600, whose sole aim was to set up business ties with the local people of the country. This early half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was primarily the time of Mughal rule in most parts of India. During this century, the Mughals, who were the descendants of Taimur and Mongols of Genghis Khan (Fremont and Barnes 14) continued to expand their dominance over parts of India. However, they continuously faced threats from the European powers time and again, and by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Europeans successfully turned into a ruling authority from being mere spice traders. In the book *The Indian Mutiny 1857-58*, Fremont and Barnes write, "The power vac-

uum created by the existing rulers enabled the company to increase its power and influence over the country, converting it from purely business concern to an imperial agent of the Crown" (14). In the coming decades of the next century, the Europeans and the company ensured their hold on the country by defeating more and more rulers from other parts of the Indian subcontinent, and by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Britishers had turned themselves into a major ruling authority of the country.

A consensus is that, when colonization happens, the development or well-being of the colonized is never the purpose behind colonization. Instead, all such ventures are oriented towards achieving the sole interests of the colonizer. No matter how much the Britishers claimed to be civilizing the country, their unsaid aim was always in contradiction to what they preached - to exploit and reap as much as they could from a prosperous and flourishing country like India. The former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Benjamin Disraeli, famously said, "The East is a career." It can be very well inferred from the words of Disraeli, what the colonial mindset of Europe desired from the East. Over the next century, the company rose to become a complete powerful ruling authority for the Crown. To achieve this venture, the British company exercised different forms of policies, such as Divide and Rule, or the introduction of westernized education to create western minds in the native people which resulted in a complete overhauling of the country in terms of its political structure, socio-cultural setting, and technological advancements.

However, people have their own reservations about the British rule in India and whether or not it proved beneficial to the growth of the country. Those in favour of the argument, hold this constructive view that the British rule over India was indeed beneficial for the timely growth of the country, and their policies were reformative in nature. The elimination of various social evils such as *Sati Pratha*, and allowance of widow re-marriage were possible only because of the combined efforts of the Indian social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, etc., and the then sitting British officials. As argued by Fremont and Barnes, "The British brought in India with them a better political system, an early system of railways, the electronic telegraph system, the civil services, better roads and bridges and much more." (15), whereas, there are people who believe that rather than reformatory, their policies were exploitative and imperialistic in nature. Hence, more than a blessing, the British rule over India was a curse, a curse which strived to benefit only a small portion and exploit the rest.

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## The Rebellion of 1857

The episode of 1857, known as the 'The Indian Mutiny' or 'The Sepoy Mutiny' by the British, was a brutal and bloody event in the history of pre-Independence India. The Indians prefer calling it 'The First War of Independence' or 'The First Struggle for India's Liberation' instead. There might be a symbolic meaning to this. When the British call it as the Indian Mutiny, they actually mean to signify a revolt, an event that occurred when the sepoys turned into rebels. But for Indians, it was way more than just a rebellion. It was the fight for a better future, it was the fight to break free from the clutches of servitude of more than two centuries, it was a fight for their Independence. Although an unsuccessful revolt, it is because of the intensity, and the feeling of patriotism that led the rebellion to become an inspiration for India's political freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are multiple causes as to why the rebellion started, and what went wrong for the British East India Company which led to their sepoys revolt against them, leading to a fierce, bloody battle of power struggle between both the company and the people. The main issues were political, social, religious, and economic causes. The political cause followed because of a policy known as the "Doctrine of Lapse". The social and cultural causes were the introduction of reformative actions such as the abolishment of *Sati Pratha* and legalization of the widow remarriage. The economic reasons followed the problem of heavy taxation on land. One of the principal reasons generally considered by all is the rise of religious tensions where the sepoys and the people started believing that the British were attacking their religious beliefs and wanted to superimpose Christianity upon them (Fremont and Barnes 17). With more Christian missionaries around, and with more focus on improvising the existing native culture, the tension among the people grew. The natives felt unsafe and deemed Britishers to be a threat to their religion.

In addition to the religious beliefs, 'caste' has always played a key role in the Indian society. In order to understand the dynamics better, it is important to look at the social system of 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. In the company's army units, the social composition of the battalions was composed of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikh troops. Fremont and Barnes mention, "80 percent of the soldiers in the units were from the warrior caste (Kshatriyas) along with the Brahmins, and being the top two castes of the social strata, they did everything possible to avoid close contact with the other lower caste sepoys, in order to avoid defiling their caste" (20). Moreover, "The high caste Hindus - Brahmins and Rajputs in particular felt that it

was a deliberate attempt from the Britons to usurp the caste system which was integral to their culture” (19). Thus, the fear of the abolishment of the well-established caste structure, by homogenizing and uniting the whole of the society under an army would prove to be catastrophic to the existing entitlements and hegemony that the upper castes have been enjoying for ages.

In this paper, the focus will be more on the religious and caste-based aspects which resulted in the outbreak of the revolt. As per Drishti, an educational institute, it is believed that the immediate cause of the outbreak of the rebellion was the introduction of Enfield rifles which were greased in cow and pig fat and had to be bitten by mouth to be used. This ignited tension among the Hindu and Muslim sepoys who refused to use them. What followed was unrest at various places. Mangal Pandey, an upper caste Brahmin sepoy in the Barrackpore unit of the company’s army, after refusing the use of the greased rifles, attacked his senior British officials. Following which he was hanged till death. The rebellion officially started on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1857, when enraged by the circumstances, various other sepoys shot their British officials and marched to Delhi. The rebellion was widespread with its effect seen from Bihar to the borders of Rajasthan and had Bareilly, Kanpur, Lucknow, Gwalior, etc. as the main centers. The revolt of 1857 continued for more than a year which finally ended in July of the following year. Although the revolt is often regarded as a failed attempt to overthrow British rule, it brought some very important political changes thereafter. Of which, the principal change was that the Company rule finally came to an end, and was replaced by the British Crown. There were also some administrative changes that the country witnessed which included the change from Governor General’s office to the Viceroy’s office. The “Doctrine of Lapse” was abolished following which the rights of the rulers were recognized and the right to adopt an heir was allowed. The religious tolerance from the British also increased, although they never considered Indian culture superior to their own culture (Fremont and Barnes 16). Hence, the whole episode of the revolt of 1857, established the roots of nationalism in the minds and souls of the people which further went on to influence and inspire the Indian freedom struggle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Erasure of Dalit Contributions**

In present times, whenever a discussion is put up regarding the contributions of people in the rebellion, a popular opinion arises that people from all sections of society played a significant role in fighting for their

motherland. But it becomes quite contradictory, when going through the historical documents or mainstream literature, only a few upper caste names are glorified and celebrated. Mangal Pandey, in many narratives, is considered by many, and especially the *savarns* to be the one igniting the fire of rebellion by his act of revolt. Along with Pandey, there are many examples from upper caste/class communities such as Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Maratha Brahmin Tantia Tope, Nawab and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh, etc. who mostly dominate the narratives. There must be others as well, but mostly only the above discussed characters are found in most of the mainstream narratives pertaining to the Revolt of 1857. These important figures have played a crucial part in the revolt and they do deserve all the glorification and appreciation but the problem lies here. While the upper caste personalities are glorified and celebrated with a special focus on their whole life stories and anecdotes, Dalits rarely find a place in most of the mainstream narratives. This brings us to an obvious question that in such a diverse and culturally rich country, why are only a handful of great personalities popularly glorified and celebrated?

According to Badri Narayan, the role of different communities in the revolt is a matter of debate by historians and intellectuals. While a group claims that the revolt was only confined to local Kings and feudal landlords such as Rani Lakshmi Bai, Nana Sahib Peshwa, Tantia Tope, etc. and the lower caste only functioned as their soldiers or guards, another section feels that such a revolt would not have been possible without the active cooperation of Dalits since they consisted of a huge portion of the population. If that is deemed true, Dalits long await their due share of credit for the rebellion. As discussed earlier, Indian society has never stayed free from the caste divide. Since the mainstream literature, documents, and the media have completely denied Dalits a voice, the uprising of Dalit Literature as a counter-literature, managed to dig deep into and bring out the lost voices and narratives which include Dalit freedom fighters of the 1857 rebellion. Their very own literature sought to provide social pride and acceptance which their community had been deprived of since ages. Charu Gupta, in her paper, "Dalit 'Viranganas' and Reinvention of 1857", says, "This popular Dalit literature can be seen to represent alternative and dissident voices, coexisting with and simultaneously challenging hegemonic ideologies" (Gupta 1739). Thus, writings by Dalit writers not only brought some representation of Dalits on the pages but also had academicians talking about them. However, the aim of a complete and fair representation is still far away for Dalits.

In contradiction to the beliefs of the mainstream academicians, in her pa-

per, Charu Gupta emphasizes that the revolt of 1857 contains the narratives of popular Dalit histories with a complete alternative account of the emergence of the revolt which is a mix of histories, myths, realities and retelling of the past (1739). Similarly, Badri Narayan, in his paper, "Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857," tells us the account of real happenings in Majhauwa village of Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh where Dalit communities like Chamar, Pasi, Dhobi, Mali, etc. worship the shrine of Shahid Baba. On further inquiry, it was known that four chamars of the village had sacrificed their lives in the 1857 rebellion and were worshipped by Dalits (Narayan 1734). The Dalit narratives regarding the rebellion of 1857 lay emphasis on the very fact that there was a huge participation of Dalits in the rebellion which was not documented by the historians and hence only remain in the oral narratives of the local regions where the participation in the rebellion took place. Some of the Dalit male freedom fighters were Matadin Valmiki, Udaiya Chamar, Banke Chamar, Chetram Jatav, Balluram Mehtar, and several others who lost their voices in the upper caste mainstream historical pages. Regarding the little representation that these figures have got, Charu Gupta holds this view that these Dalits are very popular and a source of inspiration to many in the local areas. They feature in oral narratives as well as local literature produced in thin pamphlets. These are sold in large quantities in small stalls in *melas* or in public rallies, thus reaching a large number of Dalit households. Most of the authors of these pamphlets are unknown. These pamphlets lack quality and are usually very thin and are priced very cheaply, anywhere between Rs. 2 to Rs. 50 and are published through private Dalit presses (Gupta 1739). The credibility of these pamphlets is nullified by the mainstream but Charu Gupta considers these pamphlet-based literature as "Unofficial histories of Dalits in colonial India" (1740). These works have not been able to ensure upward mobility and thus remain strictly confined to local regions. From these pamphlet-based literature, many narratives can be looked up to, which tell about the heroism and activism that Dalits portrayed in the rebellion. Some of the popular narratives go as follows:

### **Dalit Heroes/Activists**

Matadin Valmiki, also known as Matadin Bhangi, a Dalit freedom fighter, worked in a cartridge manufacturing unit of the British East India Company in Barrackpore. He is considered to be the first person to ignite the fire of the rebellion by instigating Mangal Pandey about losing his *dharm*a by using the cartridge of the Enfield rifles made up of cow and pig fat. This led to Mangal Pandey's revolt against the company and was hanged till

death. It is said that one day while crossing paths with Mangal Pandey, Matadin asked him for some water to drink which was denied by Pandey citing his high caste Brahmin birth and inability to engage with a lower caste Dalit, failing which his *dharma* would get polluted. Hearing this, Matadin countered Pandey by questioning his purity and by accusing him of being a hypocrite as he no longer remained a Brahmin because he had already used the Enfield rifles greased in cow and pig fat provided by the British East India Company. Dalits hold this view that, had Matadin not instigated Mangal Pandey about losing his high caste Brahmanical stature, he would not have revolted against the company. Thus, Matadin is considered to be the first person to sow the seeds of the rebellion. While other upper caste figures received their share of recognition, Matadin Valmiki remained lost and unknown, as reported by Bharat Voice, a digital media platform. Most mainstream narratives only speak or talk about a lower caste man instigating Mangal Pandey about cow and pig fat-greased rifles, but they do not elaborate this narrative any further nor do they care about bringing Matadin's identity to light. On the other hand, denying basic human necessities like water on the pretext of losing one's *dharma* also questions the inhuman social stratification and caste structure that forbids access to basic necessities like water. Fremont and Barnes also talk about Matadin Valmiki, in the book, *The Indian Mutiny 1857-58*:

It is thought that in January 1857, a low caste ammunition labourer at the small arms arsenal at Dum Dum, near Calcutta, informed a Brahmin sepoy that the grease used in the manufacture of cartridges contained a mixture of cow and pig fat, and was, therefore, an abomination both to Muslims, who regarded pigs as unclean and to Hindus, who venerated the cow. (28)

Badri Narayan also highlights the narrative of Matadin Valmiki in his paper, "Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857," he writes,

There was a factory in Barrackpore where cartridges were manufactured. Many of the workers of this factory belonged to the untouchable communities. One day one of the workers felt thirsty. He asked a soldier for a mug of water. That soldier was Mangal Pandey. Mangal Pandey, a Brahmin, refused him water because the worker was untouchable. This was very humiliating for the worker. He retaliated to the Brahmin soldier saying, *Bara awa hai brahman ka beta. Jin kartuson ka tum upayog karat ho, unpar gaaye or suar ki charbi lagawa jaat hai, jinhe tur apan daatun se torkar banduk mein bharat ho. O samay tomhar jati aur dharam kahan jawat. Dhikkar*

*tumhare is brahmanatwa ka* [You claim to be a highly respectable brahmin, but the cartridges which you bite with your teeth and insert in your guns, are all rubbed with the fat of cows and pigs. What happens to your caste and religion then? Curse on your Brahminism.]

Hearing this soldier was taken by surprise. That untouchable was none other than Matadin Bhangi, who opened the eyes of the Indian soldier and ignited the first spark of India's independence in the cantonment. The words of Matadin Bhangi spread like wildfire through the cantonment. Very soon the torch of Independence was lighted (1735).

Similarly, the movie *Mangal Pandey: The Rising*, directed by Ketan Mehta, also features this narrative of Matadin engaging with Pandey. However, the name and identity of the lower caste character is shamelessly changed to Nainsukh, a sweeper, while the upper caste identity is kept original. In the scene of Matadin's character Nainsukh encountering Pandey, Pandey uses the dialogues such as *Jaban sambhaal kar baat kar kutte* (watch your tongue, dog!) and *Choo liya toh bhrasht ho jaunga* (will get polluted if I come in contact) (0:27:09 - 0:28:18). Soon Pandey starts thrashing the lower caste sweeper with a stick. The lower caste sweeper replies by talking about the greased Enfield rifles. He says, "*Kartoos uthao, muh se chabao, or fir jaat paat deen dharam sab dhuan ho jaye*" (use cartridge, bite it with your teeth, and yet everything is forgiven) (0:27:09 - 0:28:18). Subsequently, the sepoy's gather to complain about the greased rifles to General Hearsey, where Mangal Pandey rises and complains about the greased rifles (0:28:44 - 0:29:01). When being asked who told them about this, Pandey replies by saying, "*har taraf yahi khabar faili hai*" (it's the talk of the town) (0:29:02 - 0:29:14). Thus, Mangal Pandey's hesitation to not even acknowledge a lower caste Dalit, who informed him about his sanctity shows how brave efforts of Dalits have always been ruled out. Also, the change of name and identity in the movie from Matadin to Nainsukh and from working in a cartridge manufacturing unit to being a sweeper looks like a deliberate attempt from the maker's side because for them of what great importance would a lower caste Dalit character would be. This is a classic example of how Dalits have suffered from manipulation of narratives/facts, denying them the social pride and acceptance they deserve.

Banke Chamar was a freedom fighter from the Jaunpur area of Uttar Pradesh and along with his 18 associates, was so active as a rebel in the revolt that the British declared a huge reward for whoever got Banke, along



with his 18 associates caught. Later, an informer, a retired British army soldier, informed the British about their whereabouts following which Banke and his associates killed several other British soldiers in a battle but were ultimately caught and hanged till death (Narayan 1736). Amit Agrawal, in his article on [Bharatvoice.in](http://Bharatvoice.in), also mentions this narrative of Banke Chamar and goes on to claim that the British even placed a huge reward of Rs. 50,000 on him, at a time when two cows cost mere 6 *paisas*.

Chetram Jatav and Balluram Mehtar – Several legends, as documented by Badri Narayan, mention that Chetram Jatav and Balluram Mehtar along with several other revolutionaries took to the streets of Etah of Uttar Pradesh, and killed a number of British soldiers. However, due to a lack of proper planning, they were caught, hanged from a tree, and shot dead (1736).

Vira Pasi was another lower caste freedom fighter who worked as a security guard to the King of Rai Bareilly, Raja Beni Madhav Singh. According to legends, the King was captured by the British, and Vira Pasi broke into the prison to help the King escape. The Britishers announced a reward of Rs.50,000 but were never able to capture Vira Pasi (1736).

There were thousands of other Dalits without whom the revolt would not have achieved the intensity of an outrageous rebellion. A rebellion, that shook the roots of the British East India Company in India to such an extent that even though the rebellion was unsuccessful, it ended the company's rule in India forever.

### **Dalit Women Voices of 1857**

According to Charu Gupta, when it comes to the Dalit narratives of the revolt, a chief feature of these popular Dalit histories consists of the way Dalit women get represented in them (Gupta 1740). They are termed 'Viranganas' which means heroic women and are important symbols for identity formation. Their narratives are also mostly written by their male counterparts. So, it is a matter of great discussion time and again, about how the narratives concerning women are always governed by male writers. Gupta further emphasizes how the narratives of Dalit *viranganas* outnumbered Dalit men when it came to 1857 (1740). These women are given the utmost respect and are worshipped by all Dalits religiously. It is also a matter of fact that the people from the Dalit community through celebrating and glorifying these superwomen aim to reclaim their lost glory. In the narratives featuring Dalit *viranganas*, these women are depicted to

be very brave and powerful right from their childhood. The 1857 revolt serves as a turning point, leading them to achieve great deeds in the face of high odds. They are also projected as highly moral figures, very noble, super brave, and super nationalist Dalit women, and are considered as the emblems of Shakti (1742). This also brings in the very notion of challenging Dalit female sexuality. While Dalit women have been deemed to be a subject of sexploitation since ages, these imageries of warrior and brave women also turn up to be a reaction to the images of sexually immoral Dalit women (1742). There are plenty of narratives featuring women freedom fighters who are looked up to by the whole community. Jhalkari Bai, Uda Devi Pasi, Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi, Mahabiri Devi, and Asha Devi are some examples along with several others. Researchers such as Badri Narayan have also attempted to bring to light the narratives of some of these Dalit *viranganas* of 1857. These narratives go as follows -

*Virangana* Jhalkari Bai, one of the most celebrated and worshipped freedom fighters in the Dalit community was born in the Bundelkhand region which comprises parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh today. She was born in the Koli caste and was a trustworthy companion of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. Since childhood Jhalkari Bai is said to be fearless, and active in extreme physical tasks. She was a skilled horse rider too. There are several legends praising her fearlessness as a warrior, of which a legend says, that in the process of self-defense, she once killed a tiger single-handedly. She was married to Puran Koli who was a soldier in the army of Jhansi and it was through him that Jhalkari Bai got associated with Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. Seeing her bravery, the Rani elected Jhalkari Bai as the chief of her all-women defense force known as the Durga Dal. Jhalkari Bai had an uncanny resemblance to Rani Lakshmi Bai and it is because of this resemblance that she fought in place of Rani Lakshmi Bai when the British stormed the fort of Jhansi, thus providing an escape route for Rani Lakshmi Bai and gathering more support. She killed several British soldiers and it is only after capturing her that the Britishers found out her real identity. It is because of her sacrifice that Jhalkari Bai has attained an everlasting status of a Dalit *virangana* and is highly regarded in the Dalit community.

*Virangana* Uda Devi Pasi, another Dalit women freedom fighter of the revolt who, like others was neglected in mainstream history. According to anecdotes about her, she was a brave woman from the Pasi caste who along with her sisters called *Viranginis* and several other women launched an all-out assault on the British soldiers in Sikandar bagh of Lucknow and in the process killed many. Her husband, Makka Pasi, was a soldier

in the Nawab of Awadh's army and it is to avenge her husband's death that Uda Devi herself picked up the weapons. She joined Begum Hazrat Mahal, the Begum of Awadh with whose help she formed a battalion to fight against the British. It is said that Uda Devi along with other *viranganas* caused heavy casualties to the British army by killing around 36 British soldiers. Horrified by her fearlessness, the Britishers were forced to step back but soon enough they figured a sniper hiding on a branch of a *peepal* tree. They shot the sniper down only to realize it was a woman who killed their well-trained soldiers. This is the legend of Uda Devi as narrated by the Pasi community and every year on 16<sup>th</sup> November, they celebrate the great sacrifice of their unsung warrior who never made it to the mainstream. Dr Abhinandan Swaroop, in his paper titled, "The contribution of Uda Devi Pasi in the first revolution of Awadh: A Historical study," mentions, how the city of Lucknow considers her as 'a heroine of the mutiny of 1857' (8152).

*Virangana* Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi, the queen of Ramgarh, according to most narratives was born in an upper caste zamindar family of Lodhi-Rajputs but is considered a popular Dalit icon who fought fiercely in the revolt of 1857. Not much has been documented about her life but as per the oral narratives, it is said that her empire fell prey to the annexation by the East India Company following the policy of Doctrine of Lapse.

*Virangana* Mahabiri Devi was another freedom fighter of humble origins. Born in a family of Bhangi community, Mahabiri Devi was subjected to untouchability throughout her life. As mentioned on the website of Indian Culture, Govt. of India, Mahabiri Devi at a young age founded an association of women whose objective was to protect women and children of her community from doing any sort of dirty work and to ensure them a dignified life. In the Revolt of 1857, she assembled 22 other women, armed them with weapons, and attacked the unaware British soldiers in Muzafarnagar. The group managed to kill a number of British soldiers but were finally killed ruthlessly by the British soldiers. Mahabiri Devi, thus laid down her life for the nation playing an important role in fighting the soldiers of the East India Company.

Since the advent of a separate Dalit literature, Dalit writers have been trying hard and are attempting to bring to light their narratives and through them attempt to reclaim a strong and respectable position in the society. It is, hence, clear that the revolt of 1857 was not just a one-sided narrative of the upper caste figures and had an active participation of all segments of the society. It is evident from the narratives discussed above that the

mainstream sources of information have always denied the lower castes their due share of space and dignity. When the representation of an entire community is eliminated, there arises a strong need for assertion in order to save their narratives from extinction. The legends, anecdotes, and narratives discussed above are examples of how both Dalit men and women played a key role in the revolt of 1857.

### **Marginalization of Dalit Voice**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century American-British-Indian novelist, Salman Rushdie once tried to establish a relation between 'Memory' and 'Power'. In his book, *The Midnight's Children*, Rushdie said, "Memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end, it creates its own reality, its heterogenous but usually coherent versions of events and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (211). This statement by Rushdie fits in perfectly with what exactly is the case in excluding Dalits from the mainstream history. This power struggle has 'history' and 'memory' as important elements that work together in order to ensure everlasting hegemony and dominance for a particular group. While it is very important to write/create history, in this case, it is more important to erase other's history too and perhaps that is what the mainstream upper caste writers and historians did. They wrote their histories very well but denied the same space to others, especially the Dalits. Charu Gupta argues that the revolt of 1857 figures in a way the powerful Dalit historical accounts, where the complete alternative account of the revolt emerges, converging histories, myths, realities, and retelling of the past (Gupta 1739).

This denial of space for new and alternative narratives to emerge has caused a damage to Dalit communities where their contributions to the revolt are always questioned. This is where Dalit narratives such as anecdotes and legends from Dalit Literature come to help. In these accounts, it is argued that the armies of the British largely consisted of Dalits as soldiers. Narayan also agrees and mentions, "The Dalits have an emotional link with the 1857 war of independence for they believe it was initiated by them" (Narayan 1735). New Dalit histories also argue that while the upper caste kings and feudal landlords fought in the revolt for their own selfish reasons, the Dalits were true to their motherland and fought for the liberation of their motherland. The Dalits who fought and rebelled did so for the love of their country while the upper caste people fought because they had everything to lose. Every luxury that they owned, the entitlements that they had, were at stake. So, the upper caste fought for saving their

powerful ruling status while Dalits didn't really have anything to lose as such and fought for nothing but their motherland. However, it was a dual war for the Dalits as they had to fight against both the oppressors - firstly, the upper caste Hindus for their caste-based oppressions and secondly, the British colonial power. There are many examples that can be referred to, to better understand how Dalit narratives are excluded by biased production of history and misinterpretation of sources. One such example is of cinema, as already discussed before, how cinema and movies work in order to promote and narrate only a partial side of the story either by manipulating facts or by mis-portraying and stereotyping a certain group of people. As discussed about the movie *Mangal Pandey: The Rising*, a question surely arises in the mind as to why was the name of Matadin Valmiki's character changed to Nainsukh while the character of Mangal Pandey was kept the same. Is it not an attempt to erase identities by manipulating the actual narratives of a community? Another very significant example is of the textbooks that school-going students read. These textbooks are not just ordinary textbooks but are prescribed in the syllabi of Indian schools. In the history book of class XII NCERT, namely, *Themes in Indian History Part III*, there is a chapter dedicated to the revolt of 1857 entirely, that is, "Rebels and the Raj: The revolt of 1857 and its representations."

The chapter advocates the very fact that all sections of the people of India came together to fight against imperial rule (Sankaranarayanan 313). It is worth noticing that, although the chapter talks about the participation of all sections of the society in the rebellion, but what is disappointing again is a dearth of information regarding the role and representation of Dalits in the chapter. What is more unfortunate is that where freedom fighters like Rani Lakshmi Bai and Tantia Tope are glorified and celebrated in greater amount, the names of Dalit freedom fighters like Matadin Valmiki, Jhalkari Bai, Uda Devi Pasi, etc. are not even acknowledged and mentioned in the whole chapter. Naturally, the question again arises, where are the Dalit freedom fighters and why are they not mentioned in the textbooks? If only a particular section of the society's contributions is appreciated, and on the other hand, an entire community is getting blindsided, then how far can it be said that the question of representation is fair for the Dalits? Equality cannot be achieved if the collective narrative of a whole community is ignored. Since there is a dearth of information about these unsung voices in the very school textbooks and the school curriculum, there will always be a possibility that the young learners grow up to only learn about the mainstream narrative of the revolt of 1857. Attempts like these are a clear indicator of caste bias in writing/creating/manipulating and neglecting history which undoubtedly leads to the marginalization of Dalits and their voices.

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