INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.
ABSTRACT

Marriage and Nation: Victorian Literature, The Anglo-Indian Tradition, and the 19th-century Indian Novel

by

Jaya Hariprasad

My project looks at the ways that the marriage plot in three literary contexts (Victorian fiction, 19th-century Anglo-Indian fiction, and 19th-century Indian fiction) allegorizes questions of independence and imperialism in both Victorian England and 19th-century India. I argue that in many instances marriage is liberating for Indian women and confining for Victorian women; the ramifications of this argument on idioms of freedom and choice are crucial to critical issues such as nationalism and imperialism. To this end, I have examined works such as *Jane Eyre*, *Dombey and Son*, *The Moonstone*, *Seeta*, *The Slaying of Meghanada*, and *Anandamath*. Looking at imperialism through an analysis of the marriage plot will allow a literary relationship to be plotted along the axes of marriage and nation in both 19th-century India and Victorian England.
Acknowledgments

The completion of this thesis has been dependent upon numerous people, but none more than Helena Michie, my advisor. From helping me frame my questions properly to helping me narrow my focus, Helena spent a great deal of time on this project, and I am truly grateful for her efforts. Her friendship and mentorship have been invaluable.

I am also grateful for the advice and direction of my thesis committee, Betty Joseph and Stephen Tyler. Both Betty and Steve provided me with wonderful suggestions and extensive feedback on my project.

I am indebted to the staff of Fondren Library at Rice University, as well as the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. Between both institutions, I had access to a wealth of primary and secondary sources.

On a personal level, I must acknowledge my family, particularly my father who helped me maintain my perspective and sanity. Even when I was close to giving up, he never let me. I also must thank my sisters Chitra and Tripti for being my sounding boards over the years, as well as enthusiastic proofreaders (who are not easy to come by). I also must thank my daughters Anya and Ishani for being so supportive of my work and for entertaining me along the way.

I also need to acknowledge and thank my husband Seenu. He has been with me every step of the way, and his support and never failing encouragement have made all the difference to me.

Finally, I need to thank all my friends and family. Your good wishes have made this work possible—this project is dedicated to you.
Contents

1. Introduction 1
   1.1 Critical Background 4
   1.2 Methodology 9
   1.3 Bibliography 15

2. Sati, Harem, and Missionaries in *Jane Eyre* 20
   2.1 Sati 25
   2.2 Harem 34
   2.3 Missionaries 43
   2.4 Bibliography 49

3. Reading Resistance and Freedom in the 19th-century Indian Novel Through the Lens of the Marriage Plot 52
   3.1 The Indian Epics 58
   3.2 *Anandamath* or *Dawn over India* 62
   3.3 *Kamala* 69
   3.4 *Umrao Jan Ada* 73
   3.5 *The Slaying of Meghanada* 76
   3.6 Bibliography 82

4. The 19th-century Anglo-Indian Marriage Plot and the 1857 Indian Uprising 84
   4.1 1857 84
   4.2 *On the Face of the Waters* 89
   4.3 *Seeta* 98
   4.4 Bibliography 110

5. The Babu in Britain—The Indian Figure in Victorian England and Victorian Fiction 112
   5.1 *Dombey and Son* 114
   5.2 *The Moonstone* 125
   5.3 Bibliography 138

6. Conclusion 139
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My dissertation will examine the marriage plot in three literary contexts: the Victorian marriage plot, the marriage plot in 19th-century Anglo-Indian novels, and the marriage plot in the 19th-century Indian novel. I find that the marriage plot allegorizes questions of independence and imperialism in both Victorian England and 19th-century India. My interest in the topic began after I considered the relationship in Victorian literature between marriage and colonization, where the latter often becomes a model for the former. Writing on George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, Katherine Bailey Linehan remarks on this connection and states:

The remarkable feminist twist attaching to Eliot’s analysis of the racism of empire results from narrative interpolation and imagery that implicitly call attention to the male *colonization of women*, whether through a commodification of women as objects for consumption or investment or a manipulation of women as subjects of command. In this light we come to see, in the full complexity of Eliot’s political vision, a double status for women of the Establishment class in that they *share a subjugation with the colonials from whose exploitation they profit* (332; my emphasis).

While she astutely comments upon a similarity between the oppressed figure of the Victorian woman and subjugated colonials, Linehan neglects to mention the Victorian woman’s self-perception that she was racially superior to her Indian counterpart—in other words, the Victorian woman did not believe herself to be as oppressed as the colonized women ruled over by the Empire (Grewal 66; Sharpe 10). Furthermore, the comparison between Indian and Victorian women as described by Grewal suggest that whether or not the Victorian woman was comfortable with her hemmed in status, she still
felt a sense of superiority to the Indian woman; it does seem to be the case that within various Victorian and Anglo-Indian novels such as On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny by Flora Annie Steel, the “oppressed” situation of the Indian woman is pitied yet separate from the situation faced by Victorian women. However, an examination of the marriage plots in Victorian novels, 19th-century Anglo-Indian novels, and 19th-century Indian novels reveal that not only was the married Victorian woman not as free as she believed (in comparison to the Indian woman), but that she was actually more restricted than the married Indian woman.

The Victorian marriage plot is driven by female choice—in many senses, the plot itself revolves around the actions of the female. The appropriate suitor for the heroine is made clear (to the reader even if not to the protagonists) through the events that arise during the courtship phase. This is similar as well to the narrative structure of the 19th-century Anglo-Indian novel. By contrast, the 19th-century Indian novel focuses on events that occur after marriage; there is no courtship plot. This is due mainly to the cultural traditions of arranged marriage in India. However, female choice is as much an element of the 19th-century Indian novel marriage plot as it is of the Victorian marriage plot, though this seems contrary to popular Victorian notions about Indian marriage and Indian women. Within Indian literature, the Indian woman’s freedom and ability to make choices often appear after her marriage has taken place.

Within Victorian and Anglo-Indian literary traditions, Indian women were perceived as weak and defenseless; moreover, the fetishized notions of suttee and the harem became the imagined contexts of Indian womanhood. Suttee refers to the self-immolation of widows, an infrequent practice of extremists in Hindu India, while the
harem was composed of numerous wives and concubines, a primarily Muslim Indian observance and also rather uncommon. Both suttee and the harem became symbols of the degeneracy of Indian men, while also simultaneously suggesting the helpless nature that seems inherent in the constructed Indian woman of the Victorian imagination.

In addition to the Indian female figure, I am interested also in the circulation of the Indian male—referred to as the “babu”—in England. The presence of this figure allows the site of imperialism not to be envisioned only off the British shore, but within the physical geography of Britain itself. Furthermore, the appearance of the Indian male in Victorian novels adds tension to the Victorian marriage plot by simultaneously suggesting the violence inherent to the colonial enterprise (and seen in images of the 1857 Uprising) and adding a discourse concerning the binaries of emasculation / empowerment.

Interestingly, the marital traditions of both 19th-century India and Victorian England are, in several instances, “exchanged.” By this, I refer to a trend among certain 19th-century Indian novels to incorporate aspects of the Victorian marriage plot (Rajmohan’s Wife, by Bankimchandra Chatterjee for instance or Indulekha by O. Chandu Menon), while features of the Indian marriage plot—including elements such as suttee and the harem are incorporated in Victorian literature, such as in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. I find that the 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot utilizes elements of both the 19th-century Indian marriage plot as well as the Victorian. The Anglo-Indian narrative encompasses a courtship plot as well as describing what happens to the couple after marriage, in a nod to both the Indian and Victorian literary traditions. Additionally, as seen in novels such as Seeta by Philip Meadows Taylor and On the Face of the Waters by
Flora Annie Steel, instances of violence in India (such as the Rebellion of 1857) add the threat of violence to the Anglo-Indian marriage plot, an element that does not underlie either Victorian or Indian narratives of marriage.

The novels I chose for discussion in my project are those that are reflective of the mores from the particular literary traditions they emerge from. In more specific terms, I feel that Jane Eyre, The Moonstone, and Dombey and Son are fairly canonical works of Victorian fiction. Taylor and Steel are both the most widely recognized authors within the genre of 19th-century Anglo-Indian fiction. On the Face of the Waters captures a historical moment of political and social transformation, using the Rebellion of 1857 as a backdrop. The events of 1857 are also discussed from another perspective in Taylor’s novel Seeta. On the other hand, the novels I examine from the 19th-century Indian literary tradition are those that attempt to highlight various regional traditions throughout India during that time. I explore the rationale behind my choices more deeply in the methodology section of this chapter.

I. Critical Background

Joseph Allen Boone describes the Victorian marriage plot as a search for “the most desirable end of existence,” stating further that one of the characteristics of the Victorian era was the “idealizing tendency to view the home as one’s private haven” (68). These statements have significant ramifications for the Victorian woman, turning her into what Boone terms “the untouchable angel presiding over her special temple” (68) or the oft-described “angel of the house.” There seems to be a very deliberate turning away from the turmoil abroad in Victorian fiction—marriage becomes the most stable institution in an uncertain, often traumatic, world. Furthermore, the references in both of
the above statements—"a desirable end of existence" and "private haven" seem to suggest that marriage creates a type of utopia. This locks Victorian women into a specific niche, assigning them a particular duty—to create, maintain and bequeath to future generations a ready-made Eden.

The Victorian marriage plot is also seen as a type of closure plot—what happens after marriage is not as significant as what comes before. The courtship plot and the seduction plot are both precursors to marriage; both plots end with either a reunion or a separation, which in turn ends in either marriage or tragedy (Boone 67). Rarely do these narratives extend into the actual institution of marriage. This lack of exploration lends itself to a preservation of the Victorian woman as an unblemished, angelic ideal, hemmed into the stereotypical roles demanded by an imperial enterprise. By this, I suggest that the "morality" of the British Empire relied in part on maintaining the myth that Victorian women were somehow purer, nobler, better, than native women—thus providing a paradigm of behavior for natives, particularly native women.

While the British Empire was reaching its peak, both Victorian and 19th-century Indian novels seemed more overtly concerned with domestic plots rather than political ones. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, British attitudes regarding India ranged from suspicion and distrust at worst, and paternalism at best. When the Indians revolted in 1857, to many British it seemed that their trusted children were showing violent ingratitude, as well as demonstrating their inherent heathen qualities. After all, one of the reforms British attempted to enact in India was the prevention of suttee. Though the Anglo-Indian novel does (in certain instances) engage with the issues surrounding the 1857 Rebellion, for the most part both the Victorian novel and the 19th-century Indian
novel do not. However, British interventions in the Indian marriage plot seem to reflect the Victorian novel’s preoccupation with issues surrounding real-life marriage in India, which in turn seems to be one way for the Victorian novel to comment upon the “degeneracy” of Indian marriage practices, and thus Indians—specifically the Indian women who allowed themselves to be contained by ideas such as suttee and harem.

However, I’d like to emphasize that it was not only Indian women who were required to fit into a particular role within the imaginations of Victorian and Anglo-Indian literature, but Victorian women as well. One example of this manipulation of the Victorian woman—forcing her to fit into a fantasized role—occurs in *Jane Eyre*, when St. John Rivers asks Jane to become his wife so that they may both travel as missionaries to India together. Even though he teaches her Hindi and talks to her of India, Jane’s true worth is not as a translator or preacher, but instead as a model, symbolically representing a piece of Britannia to the Indian woman. Within the novel, Jane makes numerous references to India prior to her proposal by St. John; for example, she indicates to her lover Rochester during several moments that she doesn’t want to be a part of his ‘harem.’ At the same time, she has also shown that she can acknowledge and battle against her own weaknesses as long as her sense of self and virtue are intact—she is a variety of moral soldier, so to speak.

Collectively, these references help position Jane as a type of Christian role model in St. John’s view—she is beyond concepts linked with India (therefore it can be argued that the text positions her as superior to Indians), and she tries to follow a somber, virtuous path. I’d like to reiterate here that the “otherness” of the Indian was a necessary component in an imperial project that sought to simultaneously establish British racial
superiority while also “civilizing” the heathen native. Therefore, the text’s propelling of Jane onto a moral high ground gives her an authority to travel to India as a type of ideal woman. Ironically, St. John constructs a portrait of Jane that places her within a limited, untrue scope—her virtue actually does not allow her to marry St. John (whom she does not love), but it does on the other hand permit her to go to India with him unwed; St. John’s failure to see Jane as she really is results in her eventual refusal of his proposal.

Within the Anglo-Indian novel, I hypothesize that the marriage plot is a combination of both Victorian and 19th-century Indian literary traditions. The British woman was upheld as an ideal within the Anglo-Indian novel; this can be seen upon an examination of Kate, a representative of Victorian England in On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny. Kate maintains her virtue and correctness even when undergoing a harrowing escape from Delhi—a trip that requires her to dye her skin brown and shave her hair in order to look like a “sati” or a Hindu widow about to commit self-immolation. Ironically, Kate has already been practicing a symbolic type of sati. Her husband has deserted her and following this Kate barricades herself in her home, trying to recreate English gardens in her backyard, immersing herself in domestic duties, and denying to everyone—including herself—that anything is wrong. This closely follows a statement by Jenny Sharpe who comments on the similarity between the “Victorian doctrine of self-immolation, which demanded from the domestic woman an absolute devotion to her family, and the Indian practice of sati” (14). Kate is eventually widowed, and remarries Jim Douglas. Her narrative in many ways mimics the courtship variant of the marriage plot described by Boone (67). Furthermore, by masking herself as a sati, Kate literally represents an intersection of the Indian and Victorian marriage plot—by dressing as a
sati, Kate make her way safely to the British army camp, which ultimately leads to her marriage with Douglas. On the other hand, the Indian widow Tara—though in love with Douglas herself—desperately tries to commit sati, though Douglas constantly blocks her efforts at self-immolation. As Sangeeta Ray notes, Douglas’s “decision to save Tara from a barbaric death reinforces the historical narrative of imperialism not only as necessary to the establishment of good society but also its particular espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind” (86).

Based on my readings of 19th-century Indian novels, I find that the marriage plot within this literary tradition functions as a master narrative that forms the contexts surrounding the literary construction of Indian women. In Rajmohan’s Wife, for instance, Matangi starts out as a “blank” figure—she is known only as Rajmohan’s attractive young wife. It is only as her marriage unravels that her literary formation takes on dimension. She shows her spirit and independence through her break with Rajmohan, while simultaneously upholding the philosophic and religious ideals that inform 19th-century Hindu society. In The Perishable Empire, Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts that Rajmohan’s Wife is “a potent site for discussing critical issues about language, culture, colonization and representation” (48). The text, with its announced interest in Matangi (particularly how her identity is shaped through her marriage) makes visible the notion that the discourses and critical issues which can be inscribed in the figurations of Indian women hinges upon recognizing that the marriage plot exposes the issues surrounding imperialism, nationalism, and gender.

My project will intervene in the critical discussions about imperialism and nationalism primarily through the lens of the marriage plot, the latter which helps to
construct the image of women in the Anglo-Indian, 19th-century Indian and Victorian literary tradition. I find that same arguments used to configure textual Indian women are useful as a means of elucidating the construction of the Victorian woman in literature. This is important because both British and Indian women are positioned in certain roles within the marriage plot, which impacts their ability to make choices. I argue that in many instances marriage is liberating for Indian women and confining for Victorian women; the ramifications of this argument on idioms of freedom and choice are crucial to critical issues such as nationalism and imperialism. Looking at imperialism through this type of analysis of the marriage plot will allow a literary relationship to be plotted along the axes of marriage and nation in both 19th-century India and Victorian England.

II. Methodology

I will be using both canonical and non-canonical texts from 19th-century Indian, Anglo-Indian, and Victorian literary traditions, as well as diaries, newspapers, and other archival materials to trace the relationship between the marriage plot and the imperial plot. One of the problems associated with this project is the lack of a unifying language or religious context within which to place the 19th-century Indian novels—most of these novels emerged between the 1860s and 1890s in various Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, and Tamil, to name the languages of the most prolific authors. Each language represents, to a certain extent, differences in culture and value. For instance, British influence was very heavy in Bengal, much more so than in other parts of India. Plot lines of novels from this region seem more overtly concerned with the political than novels written in South India, where the themes vary from marriage to religion. To control for these variable differences, all the works I use will be English translations
Religion is also a difficult issue to address, but one that must be focused on, particularly in relation to the tropes of sati (Hindu) and harem (Muslim). Unlike other nations, which had an official religion or a predominant religion that controlled the government, India is part of an imperial history that included rulers of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim faiths. In fact, prior to being annexed into the British Empire, India was largely under Muslim control, with the Moghuls in power in the North, Tipu Sultan (a Muslim) ruling in the South, and pockets of Hindu kingdoms scattered throughout Western and Central India. Furthermore, there are large populations of both Christians and Sikhs in modern-day India, whose roots span the 19th-century at the very least. This is one reason for the importance of maintaining a clear definition of “Indian” as not belonging to a particular religion, though numerous critics collapse the concept of “Indian” with “Hindu.” In my work, “Indian” will stand for anyone born in India; I will make appropriate designations about religious affiliations as specific instances arise.

Though this will not be an “influence” study examining what sources/texts were read and used by different authors of Victorian, Anglo-Indian, and 19th-century Indian novels, it is important to note that there was literary exchange across all three literary traditions. Priya Joshi’s work, In Another Country, examines and categorizes some of the British material that was read by 19th-century Indian authors. Material from projects such as Joshi’s will allow my dissertation to examine the impact of Indians reading texts that deal directly with the Victorian marriage plot. Furthermore, my research indicates that 19th-century Indian novels (such as Krupa Satthianadhan’s Saguna and Cornelia Sorabji’s Love and Life behind the Purdah) and other texts were being read in Victorian England (see the introductions to both novels by Chandani Lokuge and the Right Hon. Lord
Hobhouse respectively), though the mentioned novels were heavily pro-Christian and pro-English. The Anglo-Indian novel seems to have engaged directly with literary works of both India and England. By looking at this type of literary exchange, certain questions arise; perhaps the most important one is, “Did the authors of each literary tradition incorporate ideas about each other’s marriage plots not only through imagined perceptions and political currents, but also through direct contact with the texts of each other’s literary traditions?” If the answer is yes, then this makes the relationship between the marriage plot and imperial plot even more concrete, as the incorporations of each literary tradition’s marriage plots must have been deliberately manipulated and drawn to make specific imperial commentary on both the Indian and the British side. Furthermore, this uncovers an underlying tension in all three literary traditions that seems propelled by a political agenda. To this end, I will also be examining annotated bibliographies that discuss what was being read at particular moments critical to my project.

I chose novels from all three literary traditions based on certain criteria. As I briefly mentioned earlier, I wanted to examine Victorian novels that were canonical and somewhat mainstream, rather than obscure. I feel that works by Bronte, Dickens, and Collins demonstrate the connections between not only England and India, but also significant exchanges and impacts between both countries’ literary traditions. When looking at Anglo-Indian fiction, I also chose two authors who are considered to be prominent ones within the field. Again, choosing works from these authors suggests that the connections I am making among literary traditions are not haphazard or slight in nature, but rather they are certainly present and have been neglected until now. Choosing works to represent the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Indian literary tradition was more difficult. Currently
there is no existing compilation of 19th-century Indian literature; a quick venture into this field reveals how murky and unorganized it actually is. As a result, I decided to focus in on works that had been written in English and/or translated well into English.

Selecting texts that would adequately represent marriage in 19th-century India was more challenging, due mainly to the difficulties of navigating through colonial India’s murky political, social and legal quagmires. Marriage rules varied not only among the various castes, but also among different geographic areas. Thus a Brahman family of North India had different rules and norms for marriage than the same caste in South India. Very generally, marriage throughout colonial India shared the same chief objects: to promote religious duties, to procreate, and to share conjugal love (Basu 4). Unfortunately, a similar component of the marriages throughout India was the position of women—as Monmayee Basu states about the duty of the 19th-century Indian wife, “The woman’s sole aim in life ought to be to ensure the happiness and well-being of her husband’s family—her own happiness was of the least importance” (3). A central component to these ideas was the assumed matter of the wife’s pliability and obedience; both qualities were easy to come by, given that the brides were literally children—some betrothed before birth, some married in infancy, a majority before puberty. Besides the individual traumas that must accompany the marriage of a child bride, there were numerous difficulties posed when the child-bride was widowed. This was actually quite common; the girls were often given in marriage to men much older than they were (Sarkar 1872). According to Indian customs, a widow was considered to be a symbol of all that was inauspicious; needless to say, she had no rights to property or inheritance, she was separated from the rest of her family, and she could no longer participate in any
joyous family gatherings. She was also barred from ever remarrying. After the mid 19th-century, different reformist movements appeared in India, challenging traditional marriage, particularly focusing on the age of consent and the remarriage of widows. The Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856; this allowed widows to remarry and to be the heir's of their deceased husband's estate. However, there were numerous conditions that were to be met prior to claiming the inheritance; there also was a clause that forced the widow to give up her right to her inheritance if she remarried (Mitra 210-212). Perhaps more relevant to the case of child brides was the passing of the Age of Consent Act in 1860, which raised the age of child marriage to 10. While both laws were certainly steps in the right direction, the general population mostly disregarded them. While unable to impact the customs of many people in India, the acts did serve an important function—they highlighted the plight of children and women who were abused and suffering in the name of marriage. As debate grew surrounding the issues of both acts (with progressives—both Indian and Imperial—arguing for the acts and conservatives decrying them as derisive to tradition and culture), people were entering into dialogue about the condition of women in India, particularly in terms of education. Newspapers, such as the Bengali Somprakash, began to criticize child marriage:

> Early marriage...was the root of numerous evils and the main cause of the gradual decay of the human race. Just as strong trees could not grown from weak seeds, so a prosperous mankind could never grow from physically weak and mentally undeveloped boys and girls. (Basu 40)

With this complex historical tapestry, I realized the necessity of choosing literary works that were engaged with not just the ideals but also the politics of 19th-century Indian
marriage. I tried then to gather works that reflected these tensions from a variety of angles. *Dawn Over India* looks at the ways marriage and nation become entangled, and how the Indian woman needs to be revered in order for the nation to rise. *Kamala* tackles the issues of child marriage and widowhood within the context of the Hindu upper class. *Umrao Jan Ada* delves into the disrupted marriage plot, by focusing on the life of a Muslim courtesan, while *The Slaying of Meghanada* looks at nationalism and the ideal marriage. All these works were written at various moments in the 19th-century, representing different historical voices. While it would be impossible to represent every group and every movement of colonial India, I have chosen works that will resonate with the zeitgeist of 19th-century India, and authentically engage with the marriage plot.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Crane, Ralph J. *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction*. 


Ray, Sangeeta. En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and


Sharpe, Jenny. Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text. Minneapolis: U of MN P, 1993.


Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita. Women Writing in India, 600 BC to the


CHAPTER II: SATI, HAREM, AND MISSIONARIES IN JANE EYRE

Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre is deeply invested in the marriage plot. What makes this novel different from the multitude of other Victorian novels dealing with marriage is the way in which India and Indian concepts are present in the developing romantic narratives. In Jane Eyre, two fetishized facets of the Indian marriage plot—“harem” and “sati”—are an underlying theme of the Victorian marriage plot. This has important implications for the relationship between the two nations and their ever-shifting struggles to figuratively position each other within their respective narrative and political frameworks.

Throughout Jane Eyre, the eponymous heroine is isolated, strange, foreign—an alien in traditional English surroundings such as Gateshead, the Reeds’ home. Jane’s early life situation is summed up by her cousin John Reed, who tells her, “You are a dependent . . . you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentleman’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense...[A]ll the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and windows” (JE 8). With such a proclamation almost opening the text of the novel, we are instantaneously bombarded with the magnitude of Jane’s otherness. Furthermore, the novel sets up rather early the paradigm that all relationships—whether or not blood relationships—are subject to the rules of power negotiations. Those individuals with money and privilege (or the potential to acquire wealth) are always in control; those without are always the other, the acted-upon, or the alien. Jane has yet to learn how to gain control. Without looks, family support, or charm, she does not fit the Reeds’ perception of one who will in the future be
worth anything. She is then pushed aside, as John Reed forces her to physically get out of the light (coming from the windows) and instead “stand by the door,” in an attempt to make her both physically and mentally invisible. By not allowing her to view her own reflection, John Reed attempts to take away her power of self-reflection, or her ability to consider herself as a subject. Furthermore, his statements make clear that Jane is an outsider in a home that is unequivocally not hers; in fact the collective behavior of the Reeds demonstrates that though they share a common family member, there are no ties between them. Though a young child, Jane recognizes this difference and separates herself from the Reeds, likening John to a dictator and herself as a slave—though importantly the context of this analogy is the ancient Roman oppression of Christians. By describing herself thus, Jane makes clear that hers is the group that will overcome the oppression, and that ultimately she will prevail. Another component of the metaphor however is that Jane sees herself as subordinate to the dominating rule of Gateshead. In this way, she takes the metaphoric role of the colonized, while the Reeds represent the colonizers. Extending the metaphor, it can be argued that India occupied a similarly complicated place within the British imperial family—an undisciplined and backwards colony that needed the guidance and sternness of her guardian Empire. It must be emphasized however that Jane’s insertion as a representation of “colony” in the colony and colonizer equation is only temporary—as the text progresses, she also “progresses,” moving from the position of colonized to colonizer.

Gateshead, with its luxuries, is not the only site where Jane’s initial alien status is visible. She is equally out of place at Lowood School, a bleak institution comprised of
underprivileged children, where she is singled out and marked as different by the headmaster Mr. Brocklehurst in his address to all the school children:

[T]his girl, who might be one of God’s own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example: if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul: if, indeed, such salvation be possible, for . . . this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen who says prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut—this girl is a liar! (JE 58)

Once again, a representative of the upper class asserts his authority over Jane. Though Brocklehurst is completely erroneous in his perception of Jane, it is seemingly irrelevant; he is an extension of the Reeds, pursuing her to Lowood to make certain she remains firmly down in her place. That Jane’s alleged misdoings follow her indicate that it is not location which defines Jane, but her own inherently poor character. Another reading of the passage suggests that what makes Jane so unpalatable to Brocklehurst is that she does not overtly belong to any nation. She is not British—rather, she is not the ideal “angel at the hearth” British woman who supposedly represents all that imperial Britannia stands for—and she is certainly not Indian, though she is more closely aligned with their poor morals and lack of dignity. Jane does not belong anywhere. Confounding this is her lack
of a specific class. Though born into an upper middle class, she has descended to a very “low” point. This slippage between nations and classes reveal not only textual anxiety about proper identification, but also later on provide the catalyst for Jane’s assertions of independence, and indeed her own developing subjectivity.

Besides attempting to mar Jane’s character, Brocklehurst’s speech also reveals an international hierarchy of status. Jane is an alien, thus the lowest rung on the social ladder. Therefore, she deserves to be treated as a pariah. However, only just above her are the heathen Hindus of India, or those who say “prayers to Brahma and kneel before Juggernaut.” Brocklehurst’s emphasis on the depravity of Indians is important, especially since Jane, as an alien, is more closely associated with India than with England. As Susan Meyer states:

Jane Eyre was written in an ideological context in which white women were frequently compared to people of nonwhite races, especially blacks, in order to emphasize the inferiority of both to white men. But as Brontë constructs the trope in Jane Eyre, the yoking between the two terms of the metaphor turns not on shared inferiority but on shared oppression. (66)

While I agree that there is a clear metaphor of shared oppression being played out in the novel, I feel there is also initially a sense of shared inferiority between Jane and the colonized/enslaved groups. For instance, it can be argued that what makes Jane so low is not that she is a liar, as Brocklehurst officially states, but that she is an interloper who has tried to take her station as an English child in the Reeds home. As long as Jane “knew her place” as a servant, she was acceptable. When she attempted to transcend the class status the Reeds had given her—fighting back against John Reed’s insults and physical
abuse at Gateshead—Jane commits an offense against the establishment cherished by Brocklehurst and the Reeds. She is then sent to Lowood School, where the establishment tries to make certain that Jane’s punishment continues; hence her public humiliation by being described as worse than an Indian. In other words, it is only by emphasizing Jane’s inferiority that her punishment is rendered effective.

However, I think it’s clear that Jane does not move through the entire narrative as an “inferior”; though she is positioned as such in the first half of the novel, Jane quickly sheds this label and by the end of the novel has taken her “proper” place in society. This metamorphosis is made possible by the appearance of Bertha Mason who takes over Jane’s “inferior” role. Indeed, it is only after Bertha’s first unseen foray into Jane’s narrative (she clandestinely sets Rochester’s bed on fire) that Jane overtly rethinks her own social position. Misattributing Rochester’s near-fatal incident to the servant Grace Pool (who is a signifier of Bertha), Jane is forced to reexamine both her own and Grace’s roles at Thornfield Hall. Jane states, “I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke the truth: I was a lady” (JE 137; my emphasis). Implicit in this statement is the notion that Jane is no longer the subordinate girl linked with heathens—she has moved up. Though she had once occupied a space lower than a servant’s, there are now legitimate servants filling their “correct” positions; the text has begun fitting pieces into their precise location—in other words, the text has taken its first steps towards a comfortable, appropriate Victorian-novel ending. Furthermore, it is at this moment, when Jane articulates her difference from Grace, that her narrative’s dissociation with India begins, and its alignment with the British Empire grows firmer.
The blurring between the adult Jane’s association with both India and England is due mainly to Brontë’s deliberate use of “Indian elements” (the tropes of sati and harem) during the major crisis points of Jane’s marriage plot. Sati and harem are integral parts of the Indian marriage plot, as imagined by Victorians. Another element that emerges in the text with connections to these tropes is missionary work, which seems to be a British response to sati and the harem, or a possible remedy for the evils propagated by heathen society.

I. Sati

Sati refers to the act of widow-burning. In her study of sati and its ramifications for colonial India, Lata Mani furthers this definition by adding the following:

Within the frames of a patriarchal ideology, ‘sati,’ a predominantly upper-caste Hindu practice, is comprehended as the duty of a virtuous wife. By immolating herself, the widow purportedly enables herself as well as her deceased husband to enjoy ‘heavenly pleasures’ and even, according to some scriptural texts, to escape thereafter the cycle of birth and death.

The scriptural sanction for widow burning . . . is dubious . . . (1)

This latter point is particularly important, as it questions the source of Victorian information about sati. Historically, sati was officially “abolished” in India by the British in 1829, but the debate over sati began sometime during the mid-1700s. The original East India Company policy about sati was to not interfere with the practice, for fear of unsettling the relationship between the British and the Indians. In fact, a British political
cartoon of the time shows a woman burning alive while British officials watch and engage in the following dialogue:

“This custom tho’ shocking to humanity we still allow in consequence of the revenue it brings in, which is of importance! I have also private reasons for not suppressing the burning system immediately.”

“Why my Lord with a view to Oeconomy under existing circumstances it might be imprudent to press the measure at present; besides I think I feel also the private motives which activate your Lordship.” (qtd. in Mani, Plate I “The Burning System”)

The conversation clearly indicts British officials for not taking steps to stop “the burning system,” particularly as the excuse for allowing sati to continue was both financial and political. Jenny Sharpe offers another reading of the British reluctance to stop sati. By stating they were defending the widow’s rights rather than furthering their own interests, Sharpe concludes that the British could “circumvent the label of interventionists. The early legislating of widow sacrifice was thus predicated on finding a precedent in ancient Sanskrit texts and on distinguishing ‘good’ (voluntary) from ‘bad’ (coerced) satis. In other words, the British effectively sanctioned widow-sacrifice so that they might abolish it” (50). I agree with Sharpe that the British did try to avoid the interventionist label, and though it is intriguing to consider that the British deliberately created a situation in order to appear as rescuers, I feel Sharpe neglects another important political angle of the East India Company regarding indigenous Indians. After all, sati was officially abolished in 1829, after East India Company officials felt they were finally a politically stable entity and thus able to enforce any abolition laws without fear of upsetting the established
balance between themselves and the Indians (Mani 24). This further supports the notion of abolishing sati as more of a British political maneuver rather than a morally driven action.

As the British Empire grew, it became increasingly important for the British to appear as just, moral rulers—hence the abolishment of sati fulfilled not only financial and political needs, but also psychological ones. By promoting the feeling that they were helping the helpless Indian woman, the imperial project took a self-righteous turn, where profit and exploitation became disguised under the premise of goodwill and charity. It is at this historical moment that British pamphlets began circulating in both England and India, decrying the practice of sati. Most of the pamphlets were authored by missionaries, whose presence in India would increase proportionately to the growth of the British Empire as a whole. I will return to missionary work in a moment, but for now would like to emphasize that sati became a sort of pet cause of missionaries, a way to inject Christian salvation as a cure for native ignorance and peril.

Though it is uncertain exactly where Charlotte Brontë’s knowledge of sati came from, it is clear that she knew of the practice—certainly well enough to engage with the topic both directly in her essays and as a narrative tool in *Jane Eyre*. Her 1842 essay entitled “Sacrifice of an Indian Widow,” written when she was a student in Belgium, employs the standard slanted Victorian view of sati. Interestingly, Brontë writes from the perspective of a male viewer, presumably British and possibly a missionary, who watches both the burning of a beautiful young widow and the “burners”—a group of Brahmins and the widow’s family members—who are also watching the widow burn alive. Immediately, Brontë sets up both a class hierarchy and intersecting narratives. First, by
removing the narrator from the drama and allowing him to see and report the action, Brontë infuses her narrator with the voice of textual authority—his are the words that matter. The other participants in the drama—the players on the stage, so to speak—are ironically silent. The narrator’s separateness may be reflective as well of Brontë’s own sense of separation. Remember that Brontë wrote the essay in Belgium, amidst the foreignness of French and Catholicism, both of which must have emphasized her own sense of identity, particularly her self-awareness as British, and a member of the largest Empire in the world. The narrator too makes clear his separateness, by remaining an outsider from the proceedings—watching but not intervening.

There are also two narratives which emerge from this episode—one concerning the passivity of Indian females, the other highlighting the depravity of Indian males. This is made clear through the intersecting juxtapositions of the Indian widow, the male Indian crowd and the British narrator. The widow is simultaneously the site where femininity is written and male nature made visible. In other words, it is only through a portrayal of Indian women as weak and submissive that the Indian man can be seen as an aggressor or a tyrant. Male violence is not seen against other males, but against women in the British view of India. The narrator condemns the act, thus positioning himself as the moral standard. Hence the British Empire, and by association its individual male subjects, become endowed with chivalry in their collective crusade to stop sati.

In *Jane Eyre*, the novel’s comments concerning sati are complicated by the way the text uses it as both a form of empowerment and a reason to denounce India and its culture. This is clear in one of Jane’s first crisis points within her marriage plot. When her “courtship” of Rochester is beginning (as her initial attraction to him is more obvious
to her dear readers), Bertha escapes from the attic and sets Rochester’s bed on fire. Jane douses the flames in time to save Rochester, but the act has been committed, and the bed curtains are destroyed. Though numerous interpretations are possible, I feel there is one particularly relevant reading which emerges. This reading relies on an understanding of the connection between Bertha and Jane. Several critics have discussed and vigorously debated the possible relationships between them; however, Gayatri Spivak’s readings of Bertha and Jane, later supplemented by critics such as Laura Donaldson, remain an important way for scholars to excavate the relationship. Spivak describes the process of Jane’s worlding, or the development of her awareness as a white Imperialist, as only possible by relegating Bertha to a position as an ethnic colonialist who embodies all the most feared qualities of the barbarian native. As such, Bertha becomes more than Jane’s dark double; the text presents her as an unformed version of the immoral colonial character. In essence, juxtaposing both figures reveals how deep Jane’s British imperial roots go. When she burns Rochester’s bed, Bertha has made the first symbolic move of ending her tenure as Mrs. Rochester. Brontë turns the process of sati here, in a move reflective of the complexities surrounding “the burning system.” Bertha, unlike the sati widow, is active, but her actions include attempting to burn Rochester’s sleeping body—her still, corpse-like husband. There is no indication that Bertha would have left Thornfield Hall; thus her sati would have been a near-perfect imitation of Indian sati. However, rather than ensuring that they would remain forever united, Bertha’s actions—punctuated by violence and destruction—suggest revenge. Sati has now become the woman’s weapon. However, the text makes clear that such combat is not thoroughly empowering. Bertha’s vengeance is ultimately all that comes to characterize her;
furthermore, mapping Jane’s marriage plot reveals that Bertha’s appearance here causes Jane’s and Rochester’s relationship to grow stronger—that in the narrative comparison of Jane and Bertha, Jane’s emerging no-nonsense Britishness becomes more desirable than the exotic savageness of the one time alluring Bertha. Interestingly, this episode also shows how a show of native women’s power can also be a clear indication of their depravity and lack of morals. Native use of sati reduces colonial women to uncontrollable creatures.

Jane’s next marriage proposal comes from St. John Rivers, who avoids all illusion of romance and tries to woo Jane by appealing to her spiritual salvation. He states:

God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must—shall be. (JE 356)

Rather than becoming completely put off by the dictatorial nature of Rivers’ proposal, Jane gives him serious consideration. The symbolic sati that emerges here is of the bad or coerced variety, as Sharpe has described. Whereas Bertha took action, Jane is being pushed into an unwilling sacrifice—Rivers employs the same arguments that Hindu widows presumably heard. A woman’s duty was to her husband and to ensure both of their spiritual rewards. According to very limited interpretations of oral tradition mythology, Hindu wives could ensure both their own and their spouses’ eternal happiness by giving up their lives. According to Rivers’ limited perception of marriage, Jane can be his helpmate, sacrificing her life to further his cause. That sati is an underlying theme of this episode is revealed both by Jane’s comment to Rivers “If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now” (JE 363) and in Diana Rivers’s not-so-subtle
comment that for Jane to accept the proposal would ensure she would be “grilled alive in Calcutta” (*JE* 366). Interesting also is that Jane, for all of her numerous assurances that she is nothing like the poor native wretches who suffer under male tyranny, is very tempted into such an alliance with Rivers. The rhetoric he deploys about duty and sacrifice speaks to the Victorian sensibility of idealized morality. In the Victorian eye, there is beauty in such total sacrifice. Though resisting such ideology, Jane is nonetheless impacted by it. It is this same ideology, transformed into a subtle underworking of the political, which added to the complications surrounding sati.

For instance, Mani notes numerous accounts of British men being moved by the sight of the Hindu widow (who was always young and beautiful), admiring her bravery and nobility. Though they outwardly tried to prevent sati, many British onlookers were impressed. In their perception, the Hindu widow would make the ultimate absolute sacrifice in order to maintain her husband’s honor. This type of romantic view is silently written into Rivers’ proposal, which Jane has great difficulty refusing. She does state that she scorns his idea of love; however this comes after a protracted inner debate where she states,

“[I]s not he occupation he now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign... I believe I must say, Yes—and yet I shudder. If I go to India, I go to premature death. And how will the interval between leaving England for India, and India for the grave be filled? Oh, I know well!... By straining to satisfy St. John till my sinews ache, I shall satisfy him—to the finest central point and farthest outward sacrifice he urges, I...
will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar—heart, vitals, the entire victim” (JE 356).

Though Jane articulates that she will be Rivers’ victim, she still esteems and respects his causes and his brand of morality—so much so that her narrative ends with an exhortation of him. In fact her refusal is of the actual marriage, not the sacrifice of her life for his work in India. It’s important to emphasize that Jane pleads to be Rivers’s missionary assistant in India, giving up her family and friends to further Rivers’ purpose—most emphatically, Rivers refuses. In other words, he will not be content unless Jane’s sacrifice to him and for him is complete. In terms of Jane’s potential sati, all of India will become Jane’s ‘grill’ or funeral pyre. Jane comes shockingly close to submitting to Rivers’ tyranny. Ironically, it is only after another sati is committed that Jane is able to fully complete her marriage plot.

Jane is compelled by forces (supernatural or otherwise) to seek out Rochester. On her journey to him, she learns of Bertha’s fate from an innkeeper. Bertha has jumped into a funeral pyre that she has created. Again, Brontë rewrites sati so that in Bertha’s hands, it becomes an empowering tool. Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall, but unlike the first fire, this one destroys the estate. Though Rochester attempts to save her, Bertha ignores him. As the innkeeper details, Bertha stood on the roof, “gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement . . . dead . . . afterwards the house was burnt to the ground . . .” (JE 377). The passage clearly illustrates Bertha’s final marital act as one of vengeance and closure. She does not burn with Rochester though, which is very appropriate as far as the sati paradigm goes. The narrative has indicated a clear divide between Rochester and Bertha for almost the length of the text; undoubtedly, neither
would wish to be eternally joined to the other, in Heaven or elsewhere. This final sati also has important implications for Jane’s marriage plot. Obviously, it legally severs the ties between Bertha and Rochester. Symbolically though, this burning has purified Rochester. In the sati mythology, the husband and wife are purged of all wrongdoing. This can be considered true of Rochester as well, particularly as it is only after Bertha’s sati that he can marry Jane. Furthermore, since he loses his sight in one of the most unselfish acts of his life—trying to save Bertha—it can be argued that Rochester has become a different man. After reuniting with Jane, Rochester declares

> You know how proud I was of my strength; but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness? Of late, Jane—only—only of late—I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere. (JE 393)

As such, Bertha’s death very closely follows a sati pattern, in that she and her husband are both destroyed. The Rochester who emerges is someone else. Ironically, Bertha’s sati has saved Jane from making any sacrifices whatsoever.

The use of sati in the text reveal not only perceptions of Indian women, it also operates as a tool of both empowerment and denouncement within the novel. When Bertha uses sati, it overtly emphasizes her savagery. When Jane is faced with the decision of becoming a sati for Rivers, her ability to sacrifice herself is highlighted. Both of these varying responses indicate these differences can be read as a function of race.

Furthermore, Rochester’s involvement with the final act of sati in the novel purges him of
his association with Bertha; by the end of the text, it is as if Bertha has never existed. Her act of sati however allows Jane’s marriage plot to begin anew.

The next section of this chapter will continue exploring the ways fetishized Indian marriage plot devices are used to underlie Jane Eyre. There are numerous references to harems which work in a similar manner to the way sati works in the text. Each mention of these devices coincides with some crisis within Jane’s marriage plot. Perhaps the use of sati and harems serve as comparisons that allow Jane’s narrative to build her into a superior entity; or perhaps they highlight the anxiety that subconsciously drives Jane’s choices. The appearance of sati and harem in the text may even indicate Jane’s illusions/delusions about how independent she truly is in a patriarchal class-driven society.

II. Harem

Ironically, there is an inherent misreading of texts about harem life, due to the misuse of the very word “harem”. The actual translation of the Turco-Persian word “harem” means sacred or forbidden, not any collection of women or their apartments as commonly thought; instead, the word “haremlik” denotes women’s physical spaces in the household. Greater consequences resulted from the early European error of mistakenly associating the Turco-Persian word “saray” which means “palace” with the Italian word “serrare” which means “to lock up or close.” From this grew the new word “seraglio,” which came to mean not only the apartments that women were kept in, but also the women themselves (Melman 2). This implies the Western imagination depicted harems to conform to the words that the West invented, rather than allowing the harem and its participants to describe themselves; thus the very voices of the East were silenced before
they could provide their own self-definitions. This left the figure of the Eastern woman—and by extension, in Victorian renderings, the Indian woman—open to misread as isolated, ignorant, and sexually degenerate.

One place that Victorians received images of harems from was the very popular *Thousand and One Nights*, also referred to as *Arabian Nights*. The Classified Catalogue of the Library of the Mechanics Institution in Keighley shows records of *Arabian Tales and Anecdotes* being available for circulation. Though bibliographic information for this title is not available, this text is almost certainly the one written by Edward William Lane, published in 1845. Lane's text is a "sanitized", highly edited version of earlier incarnations of *Arabian Nights*. The Brontës regularly patronized the library in Keighley; therefore it is highly probably that Charlotte Brontë was familiar with Lane's version of *Arabian Nights*, and its heroine Scheherazade.

Numerous critics have posited the instances of orientalism in British literature. Joyce Zonana explains this further:

That *Jane Eyre*, like so many nineteenth-century British texts, has a diffusely orientalist background has been recognized and for the most part attributed to the influence of the *Arabian Nights*, a book known to have been a staple of the Brontës' childhood reading. (595-6)

Beyond the moments in the novel which speak overtly to Islamic/Indian imagery (e.g., Lady Ingram's turban, young Jane's book selection of *Arabian Tales*), Brontë loosely structures the text's narrative on *Arabian Nights*, by modeling Jane in part as Scheherazade. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Arabian Nights* rely on acknowledging the sexual tensions underlying general discourse. Within both texts, both heroines attempt to put off
sexual aggression through forms of storytelling. Scheherazade famously tells a thousand and one stories to prevent her own potential rape and murder by the Sultan, King Shahryar—by keeping him distracted, he will not harm her. Furthermore, by keeping him entertained, Scheherazade gains power: the more nights she tells stories, the more enthralled the Sultan becomes, the more secure her position. Jane employs the same technique during her courtship phase with Rochester. She is determined to put off Rochester’s advances, and does so through conversation.

‘Very good,’ I thought; ‘you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I’ll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and, with this needle of repartee I’ll keep you from the edge of the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage.’ (JE 240)

This is reiterated again in the following passage:

The system thus entered on I pursued during the whole season of probation; and with the best success. He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty: but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained; and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste less. (JE 241)

The context surrounding these passages in the novel set the stage for another crisis in Jane’s marriage plot. Though engaged, Jane seems to doubt that Rochester will actually marry her; the vast difference in their social status, coupled with Rochester’s strong
romantic overtures emphasizes the concerns that possess Jane and, earlier, Mrs. Fairfax. Will Rochester actually marry Jane, or is he leading her on, hoping to take advantage of her? To prevent the latter scenario, Jane takes action. By deploying Scheherazade’s strategy, Jane anticipates the same successful results. Marriage, in both narratives, is the final goal; however, Brontë turns the structure of the novel to distortedly mirror that of *Arabian Nights*. While Scheherazade, a member of the harem world, is struggling to live as the only wife of King Shahryar, Jane is unwittingly actively working to become a part of Rochester’s harem. The poignancy of this is more remarkable as Jane makes numerous references to harems and her disdain of them. In one famous passage, Jane describes to Rochester how she would hypothetically destroy his harem:

“I’ll . . . go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved—your harem inmates amongst the rest. I’ll get admitted there, and I’ll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.” *(JE 237; my emphasis)*

One of the significant moments in the above passage occurs when Jane identifies herself with the harem girls. Nowhere else in the novel does Jane acknowledge any similarity between themselves; that Brontë allows Jane to do so now is telling. It is not simply a foreshadowing of Jane’s coming circumstances, but it also helps solidify a connection between Jane and the harem, or even more broadly, British and Colonial women, in a way that was not overtly acknowledged. Though there were certainly differences in their conduct within their respective marriage customs, there were also
similarities which were too uncomfortable for the Victorian man or woman to discuss. In the enterprise of marriage, women in both traditions were secondary and minor partners. However, importantly, harem women had more legal rights than their Victorian counterparts—a fact which was barely, if ever, acknowledged by the British. As Billie Melman states:

Economically, the married Muslim woman seemed to be superior to her middle-class British sister. For the “harim,” or wife, was a legal person and could, in theory, hold property, appear before the courts and enter contracts. (108)

Another issue inherent to harem life—polygamy—also gained importance among Victorians. Despite the perception of common polygamous unions, the actuality was far different. As Melman points out “plural marriage and seclusion were not regarded as necessarily subordinating practices. Within the domestic sphere, women exercised powers and enjoyed degrees of autonomies comparable to, if not actually greater than those of middle-class women in the West” (308). To further support this point, let’s examine the work of Emily Said-Ruete, who wrote on the topic of harem and polygamy in her 1881 autobiography Memoirs of a Princess. She stated that instances of polygamy and harems were rare, for both social and economic reasons. She also wrote that even where polygamy in the East did exist, Eastern marriages still compared favorably to Western ones:

I should say the only difference in the position of a married woman in the East and in Europe to be that the former knows the number as well as the
characters of her rivals, while the latter is kept in a state of considerable
ignorance about them (qtd. in Lewis 154)

During the 18th and 19th centuries, numerous printed descriptions of harem life
were available throughout England. Besides fictional accounts such as Arabian Nights,
travel journals and diaries existed as well. Since only women were allowed access to the
harem, their letters and impressions about their experiences were given special
importance. The “authenticity” of harem life relied on accounts by women (Lewis 130).
Brontë certainly had access to travel literature; a review of catalogues of both The
Mechanics Institution of Keighley and The Library at Ponden (another facility patronized
by the Brontës) reveal whole sections devoted to the topic. Among those works at the
Mechanics Institution is a three volume collection of letters by Sophia Poole, The
Englishwoman in Egypt. Published in 1844 and 1846, Englishwoman delves into the
private world of “purdah”; it also fits into the potential time frame during which Brontë
was composing Jane Eyre. Besides describing her life in Cairo, Poole’s letters describe
her journeys into various harems in the city and surrounding area. In the following
passage, she reveals both the fascination and anxiety accompanied by British thought on
the harem:

The ideas entertained by many in Europe of the immorality of the hareem
(sic) are, I believe, erroneous. True it is, that the chief ladies have much
power which they might abuse; but the slaves of these ladies are subject to
the strictest surveillance; and the discipline which is exercised over the
younger women in the Eastern harem can only be compared to that which
is established in the convent. A deviation from the strictest rules of
modesty is followed by severe punishment, and often by the death of the delinquent. The very framework of Eastern society is so opposed to the opinions of Europeans, that I will venture to prophecy it must be the work of several generations to root up prejudice before the mind of the Eastern can be prepared for the reception of our ideas of civilization. That Christianity is the only medium through which happiness may be attained by any people is most certain; therefore as the Easterns are very far from being Christians . . . so they are very far from being really happy. (137)

As Poole's passage makes clear, the harem is not a purely negative concept and yet, it is unfathomable to her that salvation is attainable to any who participate in it. More interesting though is the implication that it is not the idea of sexuality that leads to sin, but rather the refusal to acknowledge Christianity as the only path to God. In fact, the harem is refigured by many travel writers to exclude sexuality and instead convey an image similar to that of the British middle class home in its domesticity, femininity, and autonomy (Lewis 127; Melman 99).

The appearance of harems in Jane Eyre, both their mention and their rendering likeness in the text, is not merely a device to showcase Rochester's despotism and paint a seemingly negative view of Eastern women. While it is true that the superficial comparison between the Indian/harem woman and the British lady was one that was highlighted by the British to create an image of themselves as superior, Brontë takes a different approach. As with her treatment of sati discussed in the previous section, Brontë turns the images of harems and uses them to Jane's benefit in the novel.
Numerous women are, at various points in the text, gathered by Rochester. He starts off with Bertha Mason, and then goes on to include in his “collection” the French Céline Varens, the Italian Giacinta, and the German Clara. The European women are all paid off, so that the only constant harem member is the West Indian Bertha. This speaks to the notion that a woman as low as the nonwhite Bertha does not need to be compensated; the best life can give her is being chained to Rochester’s bed in an attic. Furthermore, though Rochester looks down upon “his women”, he respects them enough to set them free; to view this another way, we might say that the women’s common whiteness demands that he treat them accordingly. For instance, when discussing Clara with Jane, Rochester states that Clara was “not one whit to my taste,” and he “was glad to give . . . a sufficient sum to set her up in a good line of business and so get decently rid of her” (JE 274). Bertha, obviously, is not accorded such regard. She does, however, retain the dubious rank of “head wife.” Jane recognizes this, and it is what ultimately leads to her fleeing from Thornfield Hall. Interestingly, one of Bertha’s acts when she roams Thornfield Hall nocturnally is to tear Jane’s wedding veil apart. As Inderpal Grewal notes, the harem and the veil seemed to emphasize opaqueness, hiding the Indian woman away from everyone’s eyes; to eighteenth and nineteenth-century Westerners, negativity was attached to any idea, person, or thing that was not open or visible (50). By renting Jane’s veil—an accessory that could serve as a symbol for the harem woman—Bertha is preventing Jane’s membership in this dubious club. In other words, Bertha, in a sense, saves Jane from becoming a part of a harem. This is especially ironic as Jane had earlier described how she would save the “harem inmates”. 
Jane does derive a certain moral power from Rochester's insistence upon her figurative joining of the harem. Though she is tempted to do so, she refuses to participate, knowing in her heart that should she follow in the footsteps of his previous paramours, one day

"he would regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. I did not give utterance to this conviction: it was enough to feel it. I impressed it on my heart, that it might remain there to serve me as aid in the time of trial" (JE 274-5).

Resisting the temptation represented by Rochester is a powerful moment in Jane's development—her refusal to him unleashes her own self-belief and intuitive powers. If Bertha had committed sati while Jane stood idly by, then Jane breaks apart the harem while Bertha remains fettered to Rochester. Not only is the harem destroyed figuratively with Jane's departure, it is also physically ruined as the text reveals later when Jane realizes Thornfield Hall has been destroyed. Jane's intuition serves her in good stead; she hears a voice within her telling her that she must leave. It is not too speculative to assume that Rochester may not have let Jane willingly go; if she had waited until daybreak to leave Thornfield, it is not unlikely that Rochester might have forced her to remain with him. Relying on her new strength, Jane does not wait to find out. Bertha, on the other hand, marries Rochester before his harem is formed. She is imprisoned and isolated upon her arrival in England. Ironically, it is through British hands that women are forced into servitude; this could be a deliberate attempt on Brontë's part to implicate all men—not just Eastern ones—as oppressors. By not giving in to her temptations to run off with Rochester, Jane is leading Rochester to his salvation. She is his "last hope" of a
harem; if she refuses, then Bertha’s existence will be revealed—presumably no one will ally themselves with him anymore. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë is able to turn the harem against its despot; eventually he is the one left isolated (both in his society and in his blindness) and de-sexualized, with only a pair of elderly servants to wait upon him.

Like the notion of sati, the instances of harem in the novel serve multiple purposes in the text. Both serve a comparative function: through her conceptualization of sati and harem, Jane can identify herself as being from a different culture, one that is too sophisticated and refined to treat women so poorly. On the other hand, Jane does not acknowledge how she almost commits sati or joins a harem. Brontë, however, speaks to these events as I have described above. Her subtle presentations of harem in the text make it seem like a viable choice for Jane, a remarkable feat in a historical context that allowed imperialism to be built by wholeheartedly renouncing such heathen practices. Though Jane at one point likens herself to a missionary who will “preach liberty to them that are enslaved” in harems (*JE* 237), she does not realize that she actually would not be *freeing* anyone, but instead further justifying why the presence of the British in India was necessary to help the Indians be a better people.

III. Missionaries

Though the novel centers quite obviously on Jane Eyre, it also chronicles the development of Rochester and the text’s attempt to “save” him. Salvation is pervasive theme throughout the novel; nowhere is this personified more than in the figuring of St. John Rivers. His focus in the novel is his impending trip to India where he will devote himself to missionary work. Missionary work ties into the motifs of sati and harem in an important way—both ideas would be the focus of the missionary movement in India. By
emphasizing the heathen ways of Indian men and the inferiority of Indian women, missionaries hoped to show the natives that Christian lands, and Christian undertakings—such as building the Empire—were as infinitely superior to India as Christianity was to Hinduism and Islam. The spirit of the missionary movement may be best described by the words of Saleni Armstrong-Hopkins, a medical missionary in Colonial India:

“Hindus are inherently cruel and selfish and subject to such strong superstitious terrors that they govern their lives based on such notions” (17); “It is only through Christianity that Indian women will be saved; Hinduism does not respect women, leading all Hindu women to secretly wish for death” (79-80).

In *Jane Eyre*, Christian discourse is illustrated by four characters: Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, Rivers, and Jane (Franklin 462). Brocklehurst and Helen seem to represent opposite ends of the spectrum (with Helen representing a Christian ideal of love, sympathy and forgiveness and Brocklehurst personifying a very severe, dogmatic type of worship); Jane and Rivers seem to gravitate towards these two poles. Jane is more naturally aligned with Helen, while not having her “goodness”; Rivers seems to follow Brocklehurst, while not possessing the same degree of narrow-mindedness. What attracts Rivers to Jane is her ability to be sympathetic; this is also his greatest criticism of her—that she *feels* too much (Franklin 467).
The missionary motif appears to confound her marriage plot in the latter part of the novel, when Jane considers Rivers’s marriage proposal. Jane explains her refusal to Diana:

He has again and again explained that it is not himself, but his office he wishes to mate. He had told me I am formed for labour—not for love: which is true, no doubt. But, in my opinion, if I am not formed for love, it follows that I am not formed for marriage. Would it not be strange, Die, to be chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool? (JE 366)

Despite believing her own instincts about the error it would be to marry Rivers, Jane is tempted by him. She finds herself falling under the spell of his rhetoric. This is not surprising as culturally, women had a particularly important role to play in the imperial movement. They were to be missionaries or emissaries of domestic Christian values—as Susan Zlotnick quotes from Eliza Meteyard, the English gentlewoman would “go forth with brave and fearless hearts to teach, to sew, to cook, to be wives and mothers, and to be mighty examples to the less taught of their sex” (27).

Jane is very close to being swayed by this maternal imperialist propaganda, combined with Rivers’ words about the good she could do if she surrendered herself to God. It seems to follow God into India creates a missionary narrative which relies on the self-violence of renunciation. As Mary Ellis Gibson states:

Indian culture and especially Indian religions are represented as intrinsically violent; the noble sacrifice of the missionary thus becomes a
redemptive offering. Violence done to Indian culture is subsumed in a new ratio of heroic martyrdom overcoming heathen violence. (424).

Furthermore, the notion of “God” in Rivers’s sense goes hand and hand with the idea of benefiting the Nation. Should Jane choose to do her duty for her nation, then she will also be upholding God’s will. Thus it appears in the text that not only does imperialism justify missionary work, but that missionary work justifies imperialism.

What saves Jane from agreeing to marry Rivers is her long dormant power of self-belief, hidden away while she recovered from her protracted illness in the Rivers’ cottage. Just as she is about to say yes to Rivers’s proposal, she hears Rochester’s voice calling to her. She denies this is superstition; in fact, she acknowledges it as the power of Nature. Her strength and intuition allow her to understand what Nature tells her; it also gives her the impetus to escape.

When Brontë introduces Indian elements into the Victorian marriage plot, they serve a multiple purposes. Firstly, figuring sati and harem into the text allows the West to be viewed as the natural caretakers of the East. By discussing complicated, negative aspects of Indian culture and using those aspects as signifiers for all of India, Britain endows herself with the right to take over and teach civility to the ungodly Colony. Simultaneously, on a more textual scale, Brontë uses these tropes to lead to empowering moments. Bertha’s sati empowers Jane; it allows her to freely pursue Rochester. Jane’s brush with the harem forces her to rely on her own strength and leave the toxic Thornfield Hall. Interestingly, both Jane’s and Bertha’s moments of personal victory serve to not only help themselves, but also to help Rochester. He is the ultimate beneficiary of Bertha’s sati; as described earlier he has been both cleansed and set free by
it. Jane’s decision to leave Rochester’s “harem” forces him to give up the notion of harems altogether; Bertha remains his only wife for the short duration of her life. Even the movement in the text towards missionary rule works in Rochester’s favor. When Jane refuses to be a missionary to India, she realizes that she is already a missionary—soldiering on to save Rochester from his own vices. I believe it is this realization that causes her to hear Rochester’s voice at the pivotal moment in Rivers’s proposal.

As Jane Eyre progresses through the text, her Britishness is revealed more and more. At the moment of her liberation—an heiress, accountable to no one—she chooses to marry Rochester. While Jane celebrates her ability to choose her own partner, the text is more sly. “I hold myself supremely blest . . . because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am; ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” (JE 397), Jane notes. They seem to be equals, but the text does leave open the question: if Rochester had not been blinded and maimed, and thus completely dependent upon Jane, would she still be a part of him? Would he need her as much if she weren’t his “eyes”? While attempting to answer such queries could be rather complicated, another way to look at the resolution to Jane’s marriage plot is this: Jane chooses to marry and be dominant in a relationship with a man whom no one else wants. If her freedom to marry whomever she wants is not curtailed, it seems clear that her choice of suitors is deliberately limited to the one who physically cannot go against her wishes. Additionally, if Rivers’s attempts to marry Jane are akin to subduing “an Indian village that he will colonize” (Franklin 468), then Jane marrying Rochester is the successful completion of her goal to colonize him.
Perhaps this is one more consequence of using the sati and harem tropes; not only are they turned by the text to be moments of power, but ironically they help Jane in her endeavor to conquer Rochester. By the end of the novel, Jane is not only “successfully British”; she has become a conqueror in her own right. In a role reversal, Rochester has come to represent the weakened, darkened Colony. However, rather than the colony becoming engendered with masculinity, Rochester becomes feminized, relying on Jane’s caretaking ability. Under her care and, through her spiritual Christian guidance, Rochester begins to recover his sight. This is parallel to Rivers’s struggle in India, to fight so the natives can see through the Godly eyes of Christianity. Ultimately, Jane is a more successful colonizer and missionary: Rochester is redeemed, rewarded with a limited return of vision and a glimpse of the son. As for Rivers, he gives his life to a cause that fails to meet its expectations—the true Martyr.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Grewal, Inderpal. *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of*


Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text.* Minneapolis: U of MN Press, 1993.


CHAPTER III:  
READING RESISTANCE AND FREEDOM IN THE 19TH-CENTURY INDIAN NOVEL THROUGH  
THE LENS OF THE MARRIAGE PLOT

“Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor  
is it the simple negation of exclusion of the ‘content’ of an other culture,  
as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced  
within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate  
the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential  
relations of colonial power—hierarchy, normalization, marginalization,  
and so forth.” Homi Bhabha, 110-111.

A vast majority of the novels written in 19th-century India were produced in the  
latter half of the century—certainly after the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion. Yet very few of  
these works openly address the idea of political revolt or independence. Only one text in  
the 19th-century Indian canon, Dawn Over India, takes place against a backdrop of  
battles, but various versions of that novel exist, most of them replacing a British enemy  
with a Muslim one. In the original version, the battle is one fought between Hindus and  
Muslims. It is only in the English version published in 1941, in the midst of the  
Gandhian “Quit India” movement that the British are written as a common enemy against  
which Indians of all religious backgrounds must stand.

To return to Bhabha’s passage, a type of resistance was quietly coming about in  
India; it many ways it concerned not only what was written, but also how writing  
ocurred, and its final physical form, as a book. Resistance may be read into the actions  
of the colonized, as they used the form and, often, the language of the colonizer to
express their own narratives. As Bill Ashcroft notes in the introduction of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, for Bhabha

the ‘emblem of the English book’ is one of the most important of the ‘signs taken for wonders’ by which the coloniser controls the imagination and the aspirations of the colonised, because the book assumes a greater authority than the experience of the colonized peoples themselves. But, as Bhabha argues, such authority simultaneously renders the colonial presence ambivalent, since it only comes about by displacing those images of identity already held by the colonized society. The colonial space is therefore an agonistic space. Despite the ‘imitation’ and ‘mimicry’ with which colonised peoples cope with the imperial presence, the relationship becomes one of constant, if implicit, contestation and opposition. (9)

It is no coincidence, I think, that most—if not all—of the texts rely on Indian history and ancient Indian epics as frames for 19th-century literatures. In Bhabha’s terms, the colonized would necessarily emphasize a cultural history to take the place of an image thrust upon him or herself as an oppressed or marginalized figure.

The basis of any imperial relationship is an exchange of ideas, though this cross-fertilization may be unequal (Joshi *Reading* 285). The Indian reading public was comprised of individuals who avidly consumed British texts; in return certain ideas were gleaned from British texts, the novel specifically, which impacted several 19th-century Indian writers. According to Priya Joshi, an 1881 Census report in India revealed that full literacy among Indian males was 6.6%; for females it was .3% (*Reading* 287). Yet even with those numbers, it would be erroneous to believe that the book-consuming
public did not truly include females. The Indian literary tradition was primarily an oral one; women, often secluded in a *zenana*—a dedicated women’s space/apartment in the home—often gathered to hear a tale being told, or to hear episodes from epics being sung. British works were often translated into native languages; thus many canonical pieces of British literature were circulated throughout India. Interestingly, it is not only the British literary canon that is disseminated throughout British India, but also writers that were considered “second tier” in England, such as G.W.M. Reynolds. Joshi speculates that the reason for Reynolds’ popularity, along with writers such as Marie Corelli and F. Marion Crawford was their deployment of melodrama;

the melodramatic mold provided the pleasure and satisfaction of experiencing wholeness, victory, and retribution for all the wrongs that were, in reality or imagination, visited upon the community of readers. Melodrama both sent and received psychological signals to Indian readers, who eventually used its tropes to fashion a liberation struggle that ‘really’ took place, in the world and not just in their dreams . . . The excruciatingly complex plottedness of melodrama that was pervasive in Reynold’s, Corelli’s, and Crawford’s novels resonated fully with the circularity and intricacy of the epic plot in Indian letters, so familiar to Indian readers from performances, readings, and recitals or the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. (Reading 316-318)

Besides consuming the British novel, 19th-century Indians were also creating their own narratives. Though the Indian novel may have imitated the form of the British novel, such mimicry was in itself a type of resistance; “it is in-between the edict of
Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition that the colonial text emerges uncertainly” (Bhabha 107). In other words, the colonial novel is a destabilizing and uncertain space as these attributes must be inherent to any work by a displaced people, representing, in part, a psychological response to the rupture of their society by outside forces. “The edict of Englishness” which Bhabha mentions in the passage above not only refers to English rule, but also the very qualities that make a subject “English” instead of “Other”. These not only include a Christian religious choice, but also deployment of the English language.

From the historical moment when the East India Company began to interact with India in an administrative capacity, there was always the impulse towards native education. The nature of this education was a contentious subject. Debates grew between two types of British groups: Anglicist and Orientalist, with an Orientalist method of rule initially succeeding to be the dominant tool of governance. In this era, roughly from 1760-1830 (before Said’s landmark study defining “Oriental” as an inferior “other” in relation to the West) an Orientalist was one who appreciated the culture of the “Orient” (Misra 3). During the Orientalist phase, the British attempted a respectful and appreciative approach to Indian laws and customs. Orientalists such as William Jones introduced Indian literature and culture to the West by translating classic works from Sanskrit to English. Conversely, the Anglicist phase of rule, which became more and more prominent as the British intent to rule India became more obvious, sought to “civilize” the ignorant Indians; English laws and culture were enforced in India (Low 104-105; Muir 277; Said 77-79).
In 1813, a charter was passed by the British parliament, renewing the contract of the East India Company for 20 years. Resolution 13 of that charter declares:

And whereas it is the duty of this country to promote the interest and happiness of the Native Inhabitants of the British dominions in India, and such measures ought to be adopted as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement, and in furtherance of the above objects, sufficient facilities ought to be afforded by law to persons desirous of going to and remaining in India, for the purpose of accomplishing those benevolent designs, so as the authority of the local governments, respecting the intercourse of Europeans with the interior of the country be preserved, and the principles of the British Government on which the Natives of India have hitherto relied for the free exercise of their religion, be inviolably maintained. (my emphasis; Papers Respecting the Negotiation (sp) with His Majesty's Ministers for a Renewal of the East-India Company's Exclusive Privileges; Resolution 13)

In her reading of this clause, Gauri Viswanathan emphasizes not only the support for missionary endeavor in India, but also the new responsibility of the British towards "native education" (23). It was also this clause which prompted Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay to present his famous "Minute on Indian Education" in 1835 to Parliament. Coinciding with the decline of Orientalism, Macaulay's speech concentrated on rereading Resolution 13's "useful knowledge" as useful knowledge of English. After enumerating reasons both demeaning and yet practical, Macaulay concluded that it was in the best
interest of the native to learn English, the language of global economy. He notes, "English is the language of the upper classes employed in the Indian government; the language will then likely become the language of trade so it will be more beneficial for natives to know it". I would pinpoint this moment as the beginning of formal Imperialism—the colonizing nation determined on its own specific policies that would suit best its wayward colony.

One important consequence of the emphasis on education was the opening of numerous colleges and universities throughout India, introducing young students to subjects such as English Literature (Viswanathan 44). This led to important developments for the Indian novel. As Raj Kanta Ray—a Bengali historian—states, Bengali writers (and, I would argue, Indian writers in general) "tapped the deep pathos of the Indian psyche and tinged it with the new Romanticism of the West" (46).

As mentioned earlier, there was—with very rare exception—no mention of British opposition in Indian texts. Yet perhaps the very silence on the subject can be read as the most subtle type of resistance—a lack of any type of acknowledgment. Rather than discuss the political, it seems the 19th-century Indian text is engaged, in one way or the other, with the marriage plot. In the previous chapter, we looked at the depiction of the marriage plot in Jane Eyre. As we have seen, the Victorian marriage plot is driven by female choice—the female protagonist is presented with multiple suitors and must decide whom to choose. The appropriate suitor for the heroine is made clear (to the reader if not the literary protagonist) through the events that arise during the courtship phase. By contrast, the 19th-century Indian novel focuses on events that occur after marriage; there is no courtship plot. This is due mainly to the cultural tradition of arranged marriage in
India. However, female choice is as much an element of the 19th-century Indian novel marriage plot as it is of the Victorian marriage plot, though this seems contrary to popular Victorian notions about Indian marriage and Indian women. Within Indian literature, the Indian woman’s freedom and ability to make choices often appear after her marriage has taken place.

I. The Indian Epics

Numerous critics have attempted to chart out the complicated psychological history of the Indian subject. The most exhaustive attempt seems to have been a study charting the emotional history of the 19th-century Bengali native by Rajat K. Ray. He finds that the Hindu Bengali mind is inherently sympathetic to the idea of all love as stemming from a longing for divine union. As he explains, in Hindu mythology, the incarnation of God, Krishna, inspired great love in the shepherdess Radha. Eventually though, Radha is parted from Krishna, destined to reunite after death in a spiritual embrace.

Her grief for Krishna slowly developed into union with Him in spirit, though in this world she was never able to see her Lord again. Radha bore a grievous loss for the deliverance of the world, a loss that she sublimated by merging herself with God. This greatest of love stories had an ineffably sad ending which still touches the innermost strings of Indian hearts . . . Radha let Krishna go because he was the saviour of the world, whose task was yet to be performed. The hero and heroine in modern Bengali works of fiction similarly resolve not to unite in the world out of a deep regard for each other as members of a collective social organism. In
spirit however, they become one by affirming their mutual love before parting” (90).

In Ray’s perspective, earthly sorrow is characteristic of true love, as sorrow manifests as the pain of separation from God that all human beings suffer through. However, Indians are more susceptible to such mentality because religion and mythology are closely entwined and a cultural given in daily Indian society, regardless of which faith one actually follows.

Before the written word appeared in India (the first printing press was established in 1556 in Goa, but it was not until 1716 that the first English text appeared and over a hundred years later until the British novel took off in India [Joshi IAC 38]), narratives were oral, and passed down as such over millennia. Furthermore, in a nation whose history was marked by, as Rabindranath Tagore put it “a household-dominated society”, the space outside the family orbit was very small (Ray, R. 34). For much of the early 19th-century, family entertainment was only to be found in the home—mostly from hearing songs and poetry recitals centered on the two main Indian epics: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Nearly every myth of Hinduism is encapsulated within these two works. Perhaps one reason for the synthesis of myth and philosophy in India is due to the fact that both concepts do not mutually exclude themselves in the Hindu narrative. As such, people are encouraged to follow the actions of heroes in the myths to achieve a spiritual goal. Joshi draws a connection between the epics and the appeal of melodramatic novels, noting that coincidences, which mark the melodrama, are integral parts of the epics and “underscore and affirm the existence of a divine hand involved in human affairs. The entire plot of...
the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* . . . revolves around coincidences and interconnections that serve to emphasize a sense of providence and to affirm the presence of a god” (*Reading* 319). This concept is integral to understanding the Indian novel.

In the *Ramayana*, the main narrative concerns the kidnapping of the Princess Sita by the demon king Ravan. After numerous interventions by the gods, Rama is able to rescue Sita. Throughout the ordeal, where Sita is constantly physically threatened and verbally abused, she still behaves with nobility and courage; therefore, she is considered to be an ideal woman. It is her faith and belief in her husband that ultimately appeals to the gods who then protect him. Throughout India, both Rama and Sita are considered to be incarnations of God. Furthermore, the *Ramayana* houses extensive portions of the mythology of the gods Shiva and Shakti.

The *Mahabharata*, on the other hand, tells the story of five brothers who are wrongfully sent out of their kingdom and wage war against their cousins to regain their rights. Krishna’s legends are recounted in the *Mahabharata*; the text also contains the doctrine *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Both narratives are very different, meant to reflect different ages of humankind. However, there are some important similarities, the primary one being the dedication to *dharma*, or dutiful right doing. Performing one’s *dharma* was an important step towards spiritual union with God. All the tales and histories contained within both epics reinforce this belief. Another similarity is the concern with marriage. In the *Mahabharata*, the character of Draupadi—the wife of all five brothers—is nearly sexually abused by her husbands’ cousins. The brothers, known collectively as the Pandavas, war with their cousins to avenge Draupadi’s insult. Because the characters who populate these epics are
so richly drawn, and their circumstances so dramatic, it was easy for the populace to remember the key points of the epics and, therefore, the main points of Hindu scripture. The stories are very pervasive; they still manage—for better and for worse—to guide daily life, just as they did in the 19th-century. Their impact on literature, both past and present, should not be underestimated.

Based on my readings of 19th-century Indian novels, I find that the marriage plot within this literary tradition functions as a master narrative that forms the contexts surrounding the literary construction of Indian women. In Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s novel *Rajmohan’s Wife*, for instance, Matangi starts out as a “blank” figure—she is known only as Rajmohan’s attractive young wife. It is only as her marriage unravels that her literary formation takes on dimension. She shows her spirit and independence through her break with Rajmohan, while simultaneously upholding the philosophic and religious ideals that inform 19th-century Hindu society. In *The Perishable Empire*, Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts that *Rajmohan’s Wife* is “a potent site for discussing critical issues about language, culture, colonization and representation” (48). The text, with its announced interest in Matangi (particularly how her identity is shaped through her marriage) makes visible the notion that the discourses and critical issues which can be inscribed in the figurations of Indian women hinges upon recognizing that the marriage plot exposes the issues surrounding imperialism, nationalism, and gender. There has not been much literary study on 19th-century Indian literature; as such, my analyses of the works *Dawn over India* by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Kamala* by Krupabai Satthianadhan, *Umrao Jan Ada* by Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa, and *The Slaying of
Meghanada by Michael Madhusudan Datta will rely greatly upon close reading and 19th-century cultural contexts.

II. Anandamath, or Dawn over India

As mentioned earlier, according to Priya Joshi, the original Bengali version of Anandamath, or in English, Dawn Over India, did not have a main British antagonist (167). The story is set in the past, where the main conflict is between Hindus and Muslims. It is only in the English version, published in 1941, that British enemies have displaced Muslim ones (Joshi 167). Not having access to the Bengali versions (which are difficult to locate), I have used the 1941 English translation in my arguments, and have therefore used the English translation title of Dawn Over India in this work. I would also like to note that without the benefit of reading the original, it is possible to view the novel as hinting at British enemies rather than Muslim ones. As Meenakshi Mukherjee states:

At a time when one of the indirect functions of the Indian language novel was the consolidation of the incipient nationalism of the pan-Indian as well as the regional variety, writers . . . were careful not to antagonize their imagined addressee through overtones of sedition . . . (15)

In Dawn Over India, marriages are upheld and communities find themselves closer to overthrowing foreign rule. According to Sangeeta Ray, Chatterjee’s novels “seem simultaneously to valorize man’s essential martial nature as that which distinguishes him from woman, even as they intimate that ‘woman’ is the eternal warrior” (24). Chatterjee’s perspective suggests not only the necessity of Indian women to the nationalist project, but also that women’s power is at the disposal of men, ready to be used for reclaiming the nation. The implications of this argument are foreground in
historical discourse, where the Indian Rebellion of 1857 serves as a starting point. In the British imagination, the “mutiny” of the Sepoys was an unpardonable offense, one that marked a drastic change in attitude towards the Indians. As Sangeeta Ray notes:

[T]he crisis marked by the Sepoy Rebellion changed the modus operandi of imperial government in India from that of a purported benevolent ruler to an unequivocal taskmaster. The English imagination was terrified by the exaggerated depictions of inhuman atrocities perpetrated by Indian men on innocent English women and children. The idea of protecting the image of the English nation threatened by rebellious indigenous mutineers could be upheld . . . by extending the boundaries of the imagined English nation to include the oppressed Indian woman . . . The Indian woman became a further contested site of appropriation when Indian nationalists sought to advance their agenda by fusing their desire for an independent nation with the independence of the Indian woman, who, they argued, could never achieve her “pure” status as an equal participant in the domestic or public spheres within the boundaries of a spurious imagined community. (8-9)

Chatterjee’s strong nationalist sentiments have been noted by numerous critics who describe him as everything from a “militant ideologue of Indian nationalism” (Chandra 52), to a writer who set out to “evoke a patriotic response” (Sethi 15) by “sympathetically and ironically interpreting the dilemmas of educated Bengalis under British rule” (Parry 195). Indeed much of Chatterjee’s work focuses on restoring India and Indian pride,
particularly through the medium of the historical novel. Chatterjee describes his own methodology of nationalistic revival in the following passage:

National pride comes mainly from creating and developing people’s history. Both social science and social idealism rely on history as a source. A nation without history is foredoomed. (qtd in Sethi 16)

Nowhere is this more evident than in *Dawn Over India*, which Meenakshi Mukherjee has described as a “deliberate attempt to mythicize history” (47). *Anandamath* follows the successful struggle of a group of Indian freedom fighters, the *Santan*, whose ranks include Shanti, a female warrior. With the assistance of Shanti’s physical and mental strength, the *Santan* are able to overcome the British at key battles. Published in the late 19th-Century, *Dawn Over India* was set during the Bengal famine of 1769-1770, during which an estimated third of the population died (Mukherjee 50). The exploits of the *Santan* are based loosely upon those of the militant nationalist Wamdeo Balwant Phadke, who attempted to raise his own army to fight the British; Phadke was arrested and convicted for treason by the British in the 1870s (Mukherjee 49-50).

The character of Shanti is Chatterjee’s own invention, based perhaps on the heroic exploits of the nationalist Rani of Jhansi who led battles against the British herself during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Unlike the Rani however, Shanti becomes associated with a religious movement, one that ties nation and religion to the figure of woman; “perhaps for the first time in Indian history, the concept of the mother goddess with its connotations of *shakti* became linked with the idea of motherland as a political unit” (Mukherjee 49). Hinduism is certainly privileged over both Islam and Christianity in Chatterjee’s original work. However, as evidenced by later versions of the novel,
Hinduism itself becomes a banner under which freedom fighters from all religions could align themselves. Even today, people of all religious backgrounds salute India using Chatterjee’s famous phrase “Vande Mataram” or “I worship the Mother.”

*Shakti* is an important notion in one philosophical branch of Hinduism. It is the idea of a universal power focused into the form of woman; this form then provides the actuating impulse for the male godhead potential. In other words, without *shakti*—or the female energy of the divine—the masculine form of divinity would be rendered impotent. Another important element of *shakti* may be expressed through the model of marriage. In Hindu mythology, each god has his own *shakti*, which takes the form of his wife, without whom, he is powerless. Chatterjee infuses Shanti’s character with this power. Shanti—whose name means “The Goddess who brings peace”—is married to the *Santan* warrior hero Jiban (whose name translates to the concept of “soul”). The union between the two survives tests of separation, poverty, and sacrifice. Their connection is cemented for the reader by the words of the Mahatma, a rebel leader, when he makes the following appeal to Shanti to safeguard the *Santan’s* cause by saving Jiban:

> Hitherto I have addressed only my Mother India as mother; for we recognize no other mother than our Motherland—with sweet springs flowing, fair fruits bestowing, cool with zephyrs blowing . . . today I address you as mother. So do honor your child’s request. Please do your very best to win victory—and—save Jiban’s life, and your own. *(Dawn Over India 170)*

The language used to entreat Shanti sounds much like a prayer; thus her image as a woman is imposed onto the imagery of the Goddess, and with this new representation of
Shanti comes the Mahatma’s—and by extension the reader’s—almost otherworldly faith in her abilities. Her strength is now revealed to be incomparable and her knowledge remarkable. Elevating her further out of the realm of the earthly to that of the spiritual, she sacrifices her sexuality for the chance to wield arms in battle. Upon their first meeting, the Mahatma unmasks Shanti’s male disguise and chastises her for trying to join her husband and the Santan. He also expresses his worries about her sensual nature, as the Santan have taken a vow of chastity. Shanti demonstrates her great knowledge to the Mahatma when she describes her perspective on marriage as a source of power for both husband and wife, as well as for the fledgling nation.

“Why are you bent on so sinful a deed here?” the Mahatma asked.

“A sinful deed! What do you mean?” Shanti spoke proudly, as she threw the braids on her back. “Is it a sin for a wife to join her husband in order to help him in his national duties? If the Children [Santan] call this a sin, then their concept of sin is defective indeed! I am his helpmate and I am here to aid him. This is my religion and my duty!”

Mahatma Satya was pleased with Shanti’s proud demeanor . . .

“You are certainly a saintly woman,” the Mahatma said. “But a wife is her husband’s helpmate only in household duties; and not in heroic deeds.”

“What hero ever became a hero without the cooperation of his wife?”

“Ordinary people are disturbed by a woman’s love and attention. And this harms the pursuit of their duties. Hence the rule for the Children [Santan] is never even to sit close to a woman. Jiban is my right arm! And you are here to cut off my right arm!”

“I am here to strengthen your right arm. I observe the strictest continence. And I mean to remain a brahmacharini [trans. chaste woman] though living near my husband. I am here to perform the duties of the Santan; and not to perform the duties of wifehood. I am not afflicted by separation from my husband. Then why should I not share his new duties with him?
Hence I am here, Master; and I am here to stay.” (Dawn Over India 132-3; my trans.)

Several things are apparent from the previous passages. First, they indicate Shanti has already begun actuating her shakti; as the Mahatma points out, she and Jiban are not “ordinary”. Second, perhaps building on her emerging divine status, Shanti rewrites the concept of “sin”. The idea of some type of earthly transgression becomes secondary to the active, “holy” pursuit of building the nation. Religion is employed in the novel to another purpose as well: “to portray love between men and women without being accused of violating social reality. In a society bound by extremely restrictive conventions of marriage, religion was a convincing means through which encounters between men and women could be raised above the level of ordinary exchanges” (Ray, R. 80-81).

It is not however only the warrior woman who becomes identified with the Goddess. In the text, another young couple, Mahendra and his wife Kalyani, also find their marriage severely tested. Their emergence from their trials, based mainly on Kalyani’s sacrifices as a mother and a wife, not only demonstrate the endurance of their bond, but also figuratively allows them to support their “true” mother, Mother India. This is best described by Kalyani’s dream early in the novel:

“I dreamt a strange dream. I felt as if for some unearned merit of my own I arrived at a really wonderful place. There was no earthly thing there. It was full of light—light both soothing and caressing. I found no other human there . . . On a blue mountain that was bathed in this supernatural light an illumined form was seated. There were other forms near it. The light was so bright that I could hardly see. But in front of that form I saw a female form most radiant too. A veil of dark cloud surrounded her, so her radiance was a little dimmed. She was sad and emaciated and in tears; and yet, her beauty was beyond words. She pointed towards me and spoke thus to the form above:
‘There, there she is! It is for her sake that Mahendra hesitates to take refuge unto me.’”

“Just then a flute struck a beautiful tune for a moment; and the supreme form of light said to me:
‘You had better leave your husband and come unto me. This woman veiled in darkness is the mother of you both. Your husband must serve her whole-heartedly. He cannot serve her properly as long as you stay with him. So come; —come unto me.’”

“How can I leave my husband?”

“Then the flute sang again and seemed to say:
‘I am your husband, I am your mother, I am your father, I am your son, and I am your daughter—so come, do come unto me.’”

“I forgot what I said in reply; and I woke from sleep.” (Dawn Over India 69-70)

The passages refer to Kalyani’s dream/vision of herself in heaven, receiving a command from God. Clearly, the beautiful female form is Mother India; she has accused Kalyani of selfishly holding on to Mahendra when he could be in service of the nation. Additionally, these passages crystallize the belief that not only is serving the country a religious duty, but that God is manifest in the very soil of India. This furthers the claim that no group—especially the foreign British—has the right to assert their dominion over the nation. The flute references are also a very subtle nod to Krishna, who is depicted in popular imagery as playing a flute, thus implying that ensuring India’s freedom is a morally correct action.

The mysticism prevalent throughout the novel lines up nicely with the notion that religion and epic are always present in the psychological undercurrents of the 19th-century Indian writer. This may be evidenced by the numerous battle scenes depicted in the novel, which echo back to the Great War of the Mahabharata. Just as in the Mahabharata, there is a “good side” and a “bad side”. Though there are “good” and
“bad” people mixed into both camps, the narrative of the *Mahabharata* sets up a clear division between the side that fights on the side of truth and the side that fights to further their own ego. This condemns the British in two ways—not only have they laid waste and looted India, they have done so only to show the world that they could. Setting the narrative up this way also slyly turns British rhetoric and ideology against them. One way that the British justified their imperial effort in India was to protect the degraded Indian woman (*Joshi LAC 173*). However, by alluding to the violent injustices perpetrated against India, Chatterjee is implying the ultimate violation of the female spirit, present in the form of Mother India. The message that is coded underneath the text then must ask “If they are not here to protect and promote women, as they say, why are they really here?” Thus are the first seeds of resistance germinated.

It is after her vision that Kalyani attempts suicide. Mahendra, thinking she is successful, renounces his life as a householder and joins the *Santan*. The Mahatma, with Kalyani’s agreement, hides her away for most of the action in the text. After winning many key battles against the British, Kalyani and Mahendra are reunited. Their union, like that of Shanti and Jiban, is one that represents the creative impulse. Through their understanding of each other and their common beliefs, each husband-wife pair is able to work together symbiotically to build an independent nation.

III. *Kamala*

*Krupabai Satthianadhan* represents an interesting perspective in the conversation about the role of the female Indian writer. Unlike Chatterjee, Satthianadhan was not a member of the privileged Bengali literati. Satthianadhan instead was training to be a physician in Madras, a field she would eventually have to leave because of poor health.
She came from a family who converted to Christianity before she was born; when she grew older, she was educated in English (a highly unusual accomplishment) and was accepted and entered Madras Medical College in 1878 at age 16. She was one of the first women admitted in medical school in India. Due to her poor health, she left three years later. Soon after, she met Samuel Satthianadhan, a fellow converted Christian intellectual, and the two married. In 1894, Krupabai Satthianadhan died at the age of 32. She had left behind two completed works: *Saguna*, which was an autobiography, and *Kamala*, which tackled the subject of child marriage. Though upon publication her works were very popular both critically and commercially, Satthianadhan is rarely mentioned in connection with Indian literary history (Joshi 188).

*Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child Wife* centers on its eponymous heroine, who grows up in the midst of nature and purity. Her only society is her absent-minded scholar father, old grandmother, and whichever village children wander through her little hamlet. When it dawns on her father that Kamala is now 12 and almost too old for marriage, she is quickly married off into a good family in a nearby town.

Just as in *Dawn Over India*, where the principle action takes place among the forests and jungles, nature plays a significant role in the *Kamala*. When the narrative begins, Kamala views the people around her, particularly her childhood friend Yeshi, as part of nature:

Yeshi and her whole family were (at the wedding), making themselves useful in various ways. She had known them from her childhood. They seemed to be part of the woods, the hills, and the glens around her. She used to hear their voices in the woods singing to themselves a loud hearty
melody while the sound of their axes echoed and re-echoed in the glens below. It was from their loud conversations as they went about doing their work that she gathered her knowledge of the wide world; and when the fields below, those long undulating stretches of green, were ripening in the sun, the girl used to watch with deepening interest the operations of reaping, thrashing, and gathering; and would try to recognize among the workers her own special friends . . . (Kamala 35)

The voices and sounds of human and nature have blended into one, a telling maneuver on the part of the text, revealing Kamala’s position as not merely an avid observer of nature, but also as someone who recognizes the interconnectedness of all things. An even earlier passage in the text reveals that when a child, Kamala found the wind to be her companion (22), and furthermore, the wind was so loud near her hut that “neither by night nor by day could one feel all alone” (23). Another implication of these passages collectively is their impulse towards the purity of childhood. It is only as a young girl that Kamala experiences such joy. As Joshi notes, Kamala “grows up in an isolated and idyllic pastoral world . . .” (IAC 183).

Such isolation does not serve Kamala well. Her sister-in-laws quickly begin to antagonize Kamala, while her parents-in-law, easily influenced by their daughters, soon follow suit. Ganesh, Kamala’s young husband, has left back for the city to complete his English education, leaving his new bride alone. Though Satthianadhan studied and wrote her major works in English, she makes an interesting commentary through the voice of Ganesh’s father, himself a learned man in Sanskrit:
Ganesh was come of a learned family. His father and his grandfather were *shastris*, noted for their learning. But in these days Sanskrit learning is not appreciated, and those old days have gone. Sanskrit learning is despised, and English learning is all in all, for it pays best. So much against his will the old *shastrī* sent his only son Ganesh to an English school. The old man in his inmost heart had the greatest contempt for English learning, which he regarded as not only superficial but also as antagonistic to the Hindu religion. But he was forced to yield to the influences of the times. (Kamala 53)

English learning is very important to the novel; Ganesh moves away from his conservative roots in an attempt to free himself from the old-fashioned culture of his family. However, his mind is not enlightened and so his attempts are destined to fail. On the other hand, Kamala, while not being educated, has a mind that is always open; the text rewards her in a sense by allowing her to fulfill her desire as a contributing member of society and perform acts of service and charity. Ganesh never views anything outside of his own needs.

Interestingly, Kamala’s penchant for martyrdom in her marriage and duty towards others finds its roots in the *Ramayana*. At one point in the text, after Ganesh displays how little he regards her, Kamala invokes ancient heroines:

> She wished to be exemplary like Savitri, Seeta, and other noble women; but even they had to submit to fate and did not get their due in this world. So Kamala reasoned while she bore meekly all the taunts and hard words of her sisters-in-law and wondered... why she felt such longing to be lost
in a great wild wilderness, where she might dream in silence and enjoy to
her heart’s content the glory and the magnificence of earth and sky.

(Kamala 59)

In addition to the mythological reference, the text also points to the importance of nature. The earth and sky are sources of comfort to Kamala, representing not only an escape from her reality, but also a return to her pastoral childhood.

The tying together of mythology and nature seem to frame Kamala’s story as an epic itself. I would argue that Kamala could be a retold Ramayana. Kamala may be read then as the Sita character, though instead of being kidnapped she is taken with her father’s knowledge. She is separated from her husband; just like Sita, it is a separation that is not of her will. Furthermore, when imprisoned at Lanka, Sita receives a visit from Hanuman, the son of the Wind God. He reassures her of her salvation and leaves. In Kamala, the wind appears at pivotal moments. Most striking though is the windstorm that arises when Kamala, after being humiliated when Ganesh brings his mistress into their home, finally leaves him. She grabs their child and rushes out into the night while “the winds were howling on all sides” (140). Where the two diverge however, is in their endings. Sita has undergone trial and anguish for the sake of being reunited with Rama, her husband. Kamala is widowed. Interestingly, she receives a proposal from a lifelong friend, Ramchunder (whose name also means “Rama”). Instead of accepting her Rama, Kamala refuses him, deciding instead to devote her life to helping others.

IV. Umrao Jan Ada

When Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa was 48 in 1905, he published Umrao Jan Ada, a novel in Urdu, which was a hybridization of biography and autobiography. In the
later years of the 19th-century in Lucknow, India, Ruswa had met the famed courtesan Umrao Jan Ada (referred to as Umrao or Umrao Jan). Ruswa’s recollection of Umrao Jan, as well as his transcribed interviews with her makes up the narrative; however, Ruswa allows Umrao Jan to tell her own story in her own voice. There are several moments where Ruswa interrupts the narrative to ask Umrao Jan a question or a point of clarification, at which point the conversation between Ruswa and Umrao Jan is then reported.

Umrao Jan’s story begins when she is a child named Ameeran. She is kidnapped from her family and sold into a brothel, where her name is changed to Umrao. When reflecting on these events, Umrao feels the need to explain the plight of women who normally become prostitutes:

In my lifetime I have seen and heard of many a respectable wife or daughter going astray and I know the circumstances which lead to their downfall. First is the parents’ inability to marry off their daughters in good time after they have obtained puberty. Second is the marrying off of girls to someone without their consent; parents do not give thought to matters like the disparity of age, looks or temperament and throw their daughters into the arms of any man they can find. As soon as the girl finds that she cannot get on with her husband, she leaves him. Yet other instances of girls who have the misfortune to be widowed in their youth and who find a widow’s lot unbearable; if they are lucky they take on another husband; if they are not and get into bad company, they go on the
streets. But none of these things happened to me. I was just born unlucky.

(UJA 5-6)

Within this passage, it is interesting that Umrao unravels the marriage plot. She refuses to look at marriage in a romantic way; instead it is a practical matter that needs to be approached with intelligence. In this sense, it seems the novel has very modern impulses; it may perhaps be best viewed as straddling both the late 19\textsuperscript{th}-century and the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century.

As Umrao grows up in the brothel, she becomes quite skilled in poetry, singing, and dance. She gains acknowledgement as the most famous courtesan of Lucknow. Her popularity is attested to in current times by the release of two Indian films based on her life; one in the mid 1980s, the other in 2006 with the famous actor Aishwarya Rai in the title role. Perhaps one reason that Umrao's story resonates with so many is that her character is a survivor. By the time she reaches adulthood, Umrao is very sought after and has begun to amass her own wealth. However, the Rebellion of 1857 occurs and Umrao flees Lucknow with one of her patrons who had been involved in the looting of various places during all the chaos. Eventually, Umrao returns to Lucknow, where she lives out the remainder of her life.

Umrao Jan represents a disruption in the narrative of marriage. Before being kidnapped, her marriage had actually been arranged; plans were being laid for the ceremony. Her absence is an obvious obstacle to her marriage. Yet even though there would be no marriage in her future, initially Umrao used marital imagery to describe her circumstances:
Mirza Ruswa! You will probably think that I was a very callous child to have forgotten my parents so soon and taken to games and frolic. Although I was of a very tender age, as soon as I entered (the brothel) I knew that I would have to spend the rest of my years there. *I was like a bride who, when she goes to her husband's home, knows that her sojourn is not for a day or two but she has to live there for better or worse till the end of her time, till the day of reckoning.* (UJA 15; my emphasis)

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from Umrao Jan's narrative is her ability to fashion herself. For all the lack of control that marked much of her life, she is completely in charge of her story and her voice, and is thus able to articulate what her hopes really are. For Umrao, her education saved her life. She herself remarks on this when she says “If I had not acquired this taste for reading, I would not have been able to live very long . . .” (UJA 150). In a larger sense, this is the story of the colonist. Unable to take charge of their own destiny, colonists could still use their power of articulation to change the course of their lives. Words, not weapons, could save people, as evidenced by Gandhi’s nonviolent campaigns for national freedom. While most 19th-century Indian novels looked to the past to reconstruct their history, *Umrao Jan* commented openly on the present while offering hope for the future.

V. The Slaying of Meghanada

In 1833, Madhusudan Datta entered the prestigious Hindu College in Calcutta at age 9 (Mukherji 49). He was from a professional family, rather than an agricultural or landowner based one (his father was a lawyer). Datta became fluent not only in his native Bengali, but also English, Urdu, Italian, French, Latin, Greek, Tamil, and Telegu.
At age 18, his father arranged for Datta to marry. Datta was furious—his dream was to go to England. To retaliate, and hopefully make his path to England smoother, he decided to convert to Christianity. To that end, he met with Rev. K.M. Banerjee, a Bengali convert. Rev. Banerjee felt that Datta was more interested in journeying to England than becoming a Christian (Seely 18). Datta, however, did convert, and as a result, did not marry his negotiated match. Furthermore, he was forced to leave Hindu College, as the school did not accept converts at that time. It was sometime later that Datta informally adopted the first name “Michael”. Though he wrote in English, *The Slaying of Meghanada* was composed in Bengali in 1861. It is considered one of the most important works of the 19th-century, the only celebrated epic poem of its kind, yet there are very few academic/scholarly articles concerning it. Outside of works by Bankimchandra Chatterjee (the most celebrated Bengali writer of the 19th-century) and Rabindranath Tagore, India’s first Nobel Laureate, there has not been much critical attention paid to authors of 19th-century work. It was only in 2004 that an English version of “*The Slaying of Meghanada*” was made available to readers.

As Clinton Seely notes Datta’s work is an epic, remaining throughout “a partial embodiment of the *Ramayana* . . . *Meghanada* is a text wherein East meets West, where literary traditions blend in Datta’s adept hands to become the epitome of cultural assimilation, selective as it was, taking place in the elite Bengali population of nineteenth-century Calcutta” (33). The poets and epics of the West fascinated Datta. To that end, he used elements of *Paradise Lost* in this work; just as Milton makes Satan a sympathetic character, Datta attempts the same for the demon Ravan.
As noted earlier, the presence of myths and epics could be felt subtly threading the 19th-century Indian text together. In *The Slaying of Meghanada*, it is not a restrained undercurrent at all. Instead, Datta’s work is a retelling of the *Ramayana*. However, there are some startling differences. The main divergence is within the characterization. Rama, in the *Ramayana*, is indisputably a hero. Ravan, on the other hand, is an anti-hero. Though there are moments in the *Ramayana* where Ravan is praised for his high intellect, bravery in war, love for his children, and admirable administrative skill, he is still condemned and vilified for his kidnapping of Sita, his terrorizing of innocent people, and his unrestrained ego. Another important character of the *Ramayana* is Lakshman, Rama’s younger brother, who is considered a noble hero and fearless warrior. In *The Slaying of Meghanada*, these character portrayals are somewhat reversed. Rama, while not a villain, is not an ideal man or hero; instead, he is not as aggressive and loses faith quickly. Lakshman is a warrior who needs to rely on treachery rather than arms. Meanwhile, Ravan becomes a hero defending his country from Rama and his insurgents.

In Datta’s tale, the main action concerns Meghanada, Ravan’s oldest son. He is a hero both in Datta’s work and in the *Ramayana*, but in the latter he, not Lakshman, is shown as using deceptive arts in warfare. An inclusion is Datta’s work, which is not in the original, is that of Pramila, Meghanada’s wife. Pramila is depicted as a warrior woman, a spouse worthy of a hero. She is modeled on a female warrior of the same name from the *Mahabharata* (Seely 50). In a text teeming with ideal wives, (including Sita and Ravan’s wife), Pramila stands out. She too elevates her husband to the position of a god, but she also performs valorous actions herself.
The Slaying of Meghanada recounts an episode from the Ramayana. The text opens with Rama laying siege to Lanka, having learned that Ravan kidnapped Sita and brought her to his island kingdom. His brother Lakshman, as well as a multitude of warriors accompany Rama. The fighting between both sides has gone on for a few weeks; many of Ravan's sons have been killed in the battle. Sita is being held captive in a garden on Lanka's palace grounds. Meghanada and Pramila are not in Lanka proper; they are in Meghanada's Palace elsewhere. Meghanada has just received notice that he is needed to lead the Lankan army, so he leaves Pramila to see his father.

Pramila's first active entry in the text comes in the beginning of Canto 3. She is pacing in her apartments, planning ways to reunite with Meghanada. She confides her plans to march into Lanka to one of her attendants. The attendant remarks:

"How will you enter on this day Lanka? The troops of Raghava, like an ocean impossible to cross surround her. There thousands upon thousands of the Raksasa's foes tromp about with weapons in their grasp . . ." (SoM 62-65)

Pramila responds angrily:

"I, the Daughter of a Danava, a bride within the clan of Raksasas—Ravan is my father-in-law, and Meghanada is my spouse—am I to fear, my friend, that beggar Raghava [Rama]? We go this day to Lanka proper by the strength of our own arms." (SoM 70-74)

After this conversation, Pramila outfits her attendants with warriors garbs, and they together march to Lanka. Rama's soldiers, who bring Pramila's messenger to him, stop them. The messenger tells Rama that Pramila requests passage into Lanka; if she is
stopped then she will battle with him herself. Rama promises them safe passage and then asks his soldiers about Pramila’s history. She is like power in its purest form, leashed only because she restrains herself for Meghanada’s sake. Rama is worried by this, and asks “When the mighty lioness joins her mate within the forest, who can protect my herd of deer?” (SoM 423-424)

To combat the power that Pramila brings with her, the gods devise a stratagem to defeat Meghanada. Meghanada will be performing a secret religious rite; Lakshman must disrupt that rite and kill Meghanada while he is unarmed. Lakshman agrees and the next day, proceeds with the plan. Meghanada is defeated.

Pramila enters the text again, this time filled with grief. As preparations are made for Meghanadha’s funeral, Pramila’s attendants once again don warriors’ garbs. Pramila is carried on a palanquin to Meghanadha’s funeral site.

Having bathed her body
In that sacred place of pilgrimage, the ocean, the most
Chaste of faithful wives, that pretty Pramila, divested
Herself of ornaments and jewels, bestowing them on
All those present. With obeisance to her revered elders,
That one of honeyed speech addressed the group of Daitya maids
Saying sweetly, “O companions, after all this time my
Life today comes to an end in this arena of the
Living. Return, all of you, to our Daitya homeland. Speak
Politely at my father’s feet . . . all the news.
And to my mother . . .
Tell my mother, that which Fortune wrote upon
The forehead of this humble servant today
Has come to pass. To whose hands my parents gave this humble
Slave, it is with him, my dear, I go this day—within our
World what refuge is there for a wife without her husband? (SoM 349-366)

Pramila is applauded for her “noble thoughts” by the gods; before the pyre is lit, both Meghanada’s and Pramila’s souls are carried to Heaven to exist in eternal happiness.

The marriage between Pramila and Meghanada is demonstrably unbreakable. Though Sita is the ideal wife of the Ramayana, she suffers for years due to separation from Rama. In Datta’s tale, the ideal wife does not suffer for more than few moments. Datta however, may not be trying to rewrite the epic as much as he is making a subtle commentary on the politics of colonial India. The center of the action is Lanka; our perspectives on the text begin there. We have to gaze outward from Lanka to see Rama. This makes him an outsider, and makes us citizens of Lanka. Seely supports this notion when he states “The ‘us’ here corresponds to Hindu India whose surrogate becomes Meghanada, slain while performing a very Hindu sort of worship” (56). This type of reading also then allows the British to correspond to Rama, a notion not likely to incite a British reader. Furthermore, the indestructibility of Pramila and Meghanada’s union indicates that India too is equally unable to be broken.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


East India Company. Papers respecting the negociation with His Majesty's ministers for a renewal of the East-India company's exclusive privileges, for a further term after the 1st March 1814. London, 1813. Goldsmith's Library, University of London, 454s.


CHAPTER IV:
19th-CENTURY ANGLO-INDIAN MARRIAGE PLOT AND THE 1857 INDIAN UPRISING

I. 1857

The events of May 1857 changed the relationship between the Indian colony and the British Raj forever. While in England the “betrayal” of the sepoys was viewed as “mutiny”, in India the events were termed as a “Rebellion”, part of the first few steps the colony took toward independent nationhood. In England, there was great dismay and shock, as numerous reports circulated of the savagery and brutality of the natives. Though these reports were for the most part unfounded, they gripped the British imagination. More than ever, Imperialists believed that control over India needed to be tightened, and that British influence was direly needed to prevent savage native impulses from rising ever again. Though the events of 1857 have been detailed numerous times, they are relevant enough to this study to deserve a brief recap; this was the historical moment when India began the process to forcibly reclaim its national identity.

Any history of the 1857 uprising needs to look back to the East India Company. The East India Company was actually founded in 1600, but gained its considerable power in India after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Col. Robert Clive, in collusion with the native army chief Mir Jafar, fought against the Nawab of Bengal. Mir Jafar secretly agreed to not take up arms in exchange for the British putting him on the throne. In return for this favor, Mir Jafar agreed to “assist” the East India Company make inroads into the subcontinent. Dependent upon Mir Jafar’s help, which never came, The Nawab of Bengal was badly defeated by the British. As a result, Mir Jafar was installed as the new Nawab of Bengal. In turn, he paid out almost 30 million rupees to the East India
Company. In addition, he gave the East India Company the right to collect taxes from several districts; furthermore, Mir Jafar also granted the East India Company the right to unimpeded trading access throughout the countryside (Metcalf 51). Mir Jafar did not realize how much he would give up by agreeing to help the British. In essence, Mir Jafar gave the East India Company the right to control the Indian economy in exchange for becoming a puppet of the East India Company, a figurehead they used to reassure the people with an imperial sleight of hand that a native still was in charge.

In addition to such direct assistance as Mir Jafar’s, the East India Company was quickly able to gain a formidable foothold in India because it was a “country whose people were not yet united by nationalism, faced an agency which as a corporation could pursue longer aims than individual princes, and which knew how to exploit the absence of nationalism” (Wint 17). Part of the Company’s ruling strategy for India involved pursuing a program of Orientalism which, as described in the previous chapter, was an “appreciative” movement, designed to better understand native culture and psychology. To this end, under Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of the East India Company’s Indian territories, the Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784 (Metcalf 61). As time went on however, and the East India Company gained more power both financially and territorially, the appreciative Orientalist perspective was gradually replaced by the more Conservative, pro-British, approach. As a result of this paradigm shift, by 1857 numerous grievances were in circulation among the natives. Perhaps the best illustration of these issues concerned the British treatment of the sepoys.

The sepoys were Indian soldiers of all religious faiths, typically from higher classes and castes. Though they, for the most part, served loyally within the British
army, they were not rewarded for their service. Instead, most were unhappy with their small salaries and their very limited opportunity for advancement. As Barbara Metcalf notes, promotion was a privilege reserved exclusively for whites (100). Sepoys in the Bengal Army division were also upset by the East India Company annex of Oudh, a prosperous part of the country's Bengal region. Adding to the unrest of the sepoys were the rumors circulating about the various materials with which they were in regular contact. The flour used to make their daily bread was rumored to contain ground bone dust—understandably repugnant to the sepoys. Furthermore, the sepoys were concerned with the Enfield rifles they were forced to use. The cartridges of these new rifles required both ends to be bitten off before being inserted into the rifle; however, the cartridges were supposedly greased with beef and pig fat. Beef is prohibited to Hindus, while pork is forbidden to Muslims. Thus, with one insensitive blow, the British managed to deeply insult the major religions of India. On May 10, 1857, the sepoys began revolting in the North Eastern town of Meerut. It would be almost a year until the rebellion was totally stamped out. The end of the rebellion also meant the end of the British East India Company—the British crown took over the governance of India. There would be no more Governor-Generals; instead they were replaced with Viceroy's who completely controlled India, eventually under the aegis of the “Empress of India”, Queen Victoria.

Numerous British authors took note of these events. Indrani Sen (pd.cpim.org/06102007_1857.htm.html) provides a list of such writers under the title “Racist Mutiny Literature”; figures on that list include authors such as Edward Money, James Grant, and J. Fanthorne. Sen describes their writings on the “Mutiny” as
extremely racist (pd.cpim.org/06102007_1857.htm.html). It is almost a foregone conclusion that after an episode of widespread violence, the “perpetrators” will be forever cast as villains; the figure of the native becomes a space upon which the British writ their fears of the natives’ darkness—both physically and emotionally—and also the proof of their beliefs—the natives really were as mentally dwarfed as they believed. Degrees of disdain for the colonists ranged however, from the vitriolic to the saddened.

Both Flora Annie Steel and Philip Meadows Taylor wrote novels responding to and incorporating the Rebellion of 1857 into the plots. Both novelists also fell more on the “saddened” end of the British response spectrum, though this may be due to the greater amount of time they spent in India compared to many of their compatriots. Both Steel and Meadows are considered “Anglo-Indians” a term invented to describe “white” British citizens who lived in India. The term is now used interchangeably with “Eurasian”, but I feel there is an important racial distinction between the two. An Anglo-Indian was born in the UK proper, came from two “white” parents, and then settled in India. A Eurasian was actually born from someone of Indian descent and someone of “white” British descent. Within the colonial context, the term “black” referred to anyone not white, including Indians.

The novels of Steel and Taylor depict Anglo-Indian presence in India during the time of the Uprising. Both novels look at the way Anglo-Indian society was structured, emphasizing marriage and romantic relationships. Though the narratives reflect Victorian mores, they also mimic the pattern of the 19th-century Indian marriage plot. The 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot seems to be a hybrid of both Victorian and Indian marital narratives. Following the formula of the Victorian marriage plot, the
Anglo-Indian marriage plot graphs courtship and explores the history of the marrying pair up until their marriage. The 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot then follows the course of the 19th-century Indian marriage plot, by detailing what goes on after the marriage has taken place. It would be a disservice however to locate the 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot as simply between the Victorian and 19th-century Indian literary traditions. As Anindyo Roy describes:

The Anglo-Indian romances continued on the track that had already been laid out by the sensation novels of the 1860s. By establishing British India as the new site for dramatizing the fantasies of a colonial culture, they articulated questions of power, racial identity, and sexuality that had been taboo for mainstream metropolitan Victorian culture. (93)

Examining the passage above yields numerous important implications. First of all, it seems the history of the 19th-century Anglo-Indian novel is rooted in the tradition of the “sensational” novel; this is a natural mode for a literary tradition that would build itself in a colony. India, both in its status as a colony and a land of dark people (both aspects pointing to an uncivilized, “unfinished” land) provided an empty canvas on which Britons could project their desires, fears, and fantasies. Secondly, the passage implies that those ideas and notions which would be too shocking for delicate Victorian sensibilities to bear are able to be expressed in a land where delicate sensibilities were not characteristic of the natives; furthermore, by being exposed to such ‘heathens’, Anglo-Indians were more hardened to the “dark side” of life than those countrymen who stayed in England. Hence the drama that is apparent in the 19th-century Anglo-Indian novel is suggestive of great violence and trauma, particularly in the literature that orbits around
the 1857 revolt. While both Steel and Taylor are more sympathetic to Indians than many of their colleagues, they still employ the tropes of native violence to signify pivotal moments of marital tension.

II. *On the Face of the Waters*

Flora Annie Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters* was published in 1896, almost 40 years after the 1857 Revolt that comprises the major action of the text. At the narrative’s opening, the reader is symbolically placed in the center of a public auction. The items being sold off are items from the deposed Nawab of Oudh—a relative of the Mir Jafar described above. Among the items is a parrot trained to speak Muslim mantras. Though a bidding war between a British woman and a Muslim cleric ensues, the British agent wins and takes the bird. She then casually gives the bird away to another British woman. In this scene of adamant bidding, we are given our first glimpse of Alice Gissing, the novel’s anti-heroine. It would be very easy to read her actions as symbolic of the white Imperialist coming in, devaluing culture and trying to keep natives from accessing their culture. In truth, this type of reading offers much validity. However, it is erroneous to view Alice as any type of representative of an idealized England. Alice herself falls outside the pale of English society; the narrative itself resists this as seen in the following passage describing Alice’s home:

> The Gissings’ house stood in a large garden; but though it was wreathed with creepers, and set with flowers after the manner of flowerful Lucknow, there was no cult of pansies or such like English treasures here. It was gay with that acclimatized tangle of poppies and larkspur, marigold, mignonette, and corn cockles which Indian gardeners love to sow . . .
In the big dark dining-room also . . . there was no cult of England. Everything was frankly, staunchly of the nabob-and-pagoda-tree style; for the Gissings preferred India, where they were received in society, to England, where they would have been out of it. *(OFW* 52)

The Gissings, by dint of their trade background, would not be a part of the upper classes in England. Rather than represent the white British subject, the Gissings are a representation of the Anglo-Indian, a different psychology than the mainland English altogether. As Sen notes,

Anglo-Indians defined themselves as “white Brahmins” or “the ruling caste.” In fact, this generation of colonisers, in effect, acquired an ‘Anglo-Indian’ identity which was distinct from, although impacted upon by both their ‘English’ duality and the ‘native’ culture surrounding them. (10)

On the other hand, Kate Erlton is far more “Anglo” than “Indian”. She worships at the cult of domesticity and England, keeping any “Indian” elements out of her home (other than servants). She prefers the delicate pansy to any wild bloom of Indian foliage. Kate also refuses to learn any native language, though she has lived in India for numerous years. Prior to the narrative’s beginning, she sent her son back to England to be schooled, away from the bad native influence. Her dislike of India though is also tied to her participation in Anglo-Indian society. Her acquaintance Alice Gissing is also the mistress of Kate’s husband Maj. Erlton. By allowing this affair to occur, the text also implicates India as a destabilizing marital force. In India, where all white people are lumped together and forced to socialize exclusively with one another, there is no safe separation between the classes. Ironically, considering the history and contexts of Indian
“enslavement”, India acts as the great equalizer of English society.

Kate is positioned in a very unique way within the novel. On the one hand, she is the suffering partner of an unsuccessful union; on the other, she is—in a very subtle way—being courted by the outsider James Greyman, whose real name is Jim Douglas. Douglas acts towards her with chivalry and understanding; living with a husband who treats her with neither makes Douglas that much more appealing. Douglas seems to have fallen in love with Kate upon first meeting her; he admires her English home and can’t erase the image of her “blue Northern eyes with the glint of steel” from his mind (OFW 39). He makes note of her eyes throughout the text; their blue steel color is a reminder of England, compared to the dark color that signified the natives and their eyes.

Douglas’s “fake” name elucidates his character; at the onset of the novel, Greyman is a “gray” character. He has been dishonorably discharged from military service for seducing an officer’s wife and consequently buries himself in native culture. He has a Muslim mistress whom he rescues from child prostitution. The text seems to applaud him for saving a young girl; the girl, Zora, is grateful for her rescue and is in awe of being treated so kindly (an obvious implication that a native lover would have been incapable of treating her well). The text is silent however on his keeping the same young girl to be his own mistress until her untimely death. It is not just sorrow which marks Zora’s demise; it is also Douglas’s relief that he is so easily disentangled from this native embrace.

“He hated himself for . . . bracketing death and freedom together, but for all that he would not blind himself to its truth . . . Zora was, indeed, the only tie to a life which had grown distasteful to him . . .” (OFW 39).
In many ways, Jim Douglas is at the center of the novel, figured ostensibly as a rescuer of women. This rendering of Douglas is as important to the narrative as the Revolt of 1857. Douglas is both British and Anglo-Indian, but he is a white male who answers the call of England to defend British interests in India; the text thus raises him above the women he rescues. Interestingly though, it is hard to find a moment when he ultimately succeeds in his rescues. For instance, though he “rescues” Zora, she is completely his private captive. The text justifies this however, because she was happy in her captivity—similar to the beautiful bird in its cage, auctioned off at the beginning of the novel. Zora’s similarity to a pet is not lost on the narrative; she is described at various points as “a tired squirrel” (OFW 41), and a pet “horse” (OFW 33) it is merely accepted as the best circumstance Zora could ever hope for. Zora’s rescue itself is also not a thing of great heroism; instead, Douglas purchases her from a brothel because he is moved by her predicament:

He had paid a long price for her, not only because she was beautiful, but because he pitied the delicate looking child—for she was little more—just about to enter a profession to which she was evidently a recruit kidnapped in early infancy; as so many are in India (OFW 34)

The passage claims that Zora’s prostitution is a problem that has its roots in native society; India is thus to be held accountable for Zora’s situation. However, Douglas actually buys Zora—an overt example of human trafficking. Slavery had been abolished in the British Empire in 1807 by the passing of the Slave Trade Act. In 1811, slave trading was considered a felony. On the Face of the Waters was written in 1896, with the actions of the novel occurring between 1856-1858. India was not officially a part of the
British Empire yet, but it was administered and governed by British agents (the East India Company). Furthermore, there have been numerous accounts (academic and firsthand) of the British stepping in to abolish practices they deemed dangerous, such as sati, though the reasons are varied. It is remarkable that the British would have no objection to slavery in India. Rather than actually rescuing her, Douglas actively participates in the keeping Zora captive.

Douglas is also a hero for Alice Gissing, saving her from a snake:

“Keep still!” interrupted a peremptory voice behind her, as a pair of swift unceremonious arms seized her round the waist, and by sheer force dragged her back a step, then held her tight-clasped to something that beat fast despite the calm tone. “Kill that snake, some one! There, right at her feet! It isn’t a branch. I saw it move. Don’t stir, Mrs. Gissing, it’s all right.”

There was a faint scent of lavender about the dress, about her curly hair, which Jim Douglas never forgot; just as he never forgot the passionate admiration which made his hands relax to an infinite tenderness, when she uttered no cry, no sound . . . (OFW 123-4)

Again the passage implies sexual conquest. The scene is charged with eroticism, where the phallic symbol of the wild snake becomes visible at the same moment that Alice appears. The passage is ostensibly “romantic”, with its use of words like “passionate admiration,” “tenderness”, as well as Alice’s natural lavender scent. However, I feel the actions seem to recall a more troubling erotic energy, reading more like a prelude to rape than romance.
Numerous critics have pointed to the rape narrative as one that circulated with accounts of the 1857 revolt and its atrocities (Paxton 249; Sharpe 3). The Indian man, victimizing the British woman, always perpetrates this rape within the Revolt discourse. As Nancy L. Paxton states, “As early as 1865, the distinguished historian George Trevelyan argued . . . that there was no evidence that English women were actually raped during the Uprising of 1857” (251). Paxton does remark though that the one instance where a rape was reported led to such scrutiny and blame of the victim that many women who were raped may have chosen to remain silent. This supports Sharpe’s work, in which she notes,

I do not wish to suggest that no English woman was raped—that is to perform the reverse of colonial accounts that denounce the rumors of British soldiers raping Indian women. Even one instance of a rape is a sobering reminder of the sexual violence directed against all women during times of war. What I am suggesting is that there is no evidence pointing to a systematic rape and mutilation of English women, and that the Mutiny reports reenact that absent violence in its place (67).

The passage depicting Douglas forcefully holding a terrified, silent Alice from behind alludes to the rape narrative; however, in this circumstance, it is not the native raping the white woman. It is the British man simultaneously acting aggressively towards the silent Anglo-Indian woman and becoming aroused by her “when she uttered no cry, no sound” (OFW 124). Clearly, it is the confirmation of his dominant masculinity—revealed in Alice’s uncharacteristic silence—that makes Douglas feel so stirred. This is only episode where Douglas and Alice interact. Their next meeting occurs once the Revolt has
occurred. Douglas is rushing to save the women from the roaming mutineers. He reaches Kate’s home, only to find that he is too late to save Alice. She has been shot and killed while saving a little boy. Earlier I had mentioned that India was the great equalizer of British society; in this same vein, perhaps the greatest preserver of British nobility is death. Death touches everyone and in the case of the British serving in India, dying for the sake of the homeland washes away earthly transgressions. Because Alice died an “honorable death”, she is absolved of her sins. Prior to Alice’s death, she had arrived on Kate Erlton’s doorstep to inform her that Alice and Kate’s husband were going to elope, as they were going to have a child together. This also sheds light on Alice’s potential rape. As mentioned earlier by Paxton, the one woman who’s rape was uncovered, led to allegations against her. Rape then becomes entwined with ideas of racial purity; a true English woman “would have died to protect her honor or committed suicide afterward” (251). Alice was not considered a “pure” woman; she, a married lady, was the mistress of a married man. Perhaps, the text was trying to dispense justice to Kate, the English victim of these deceits, by having Alice almost victimized. Alice, though, is seemingly forgiven for her transgressions, by being allowed to die in a heroic manner.

One woman not allowed to die heroically is the third woman that Douglas “rescues,” the Hindu widow Tara. Douglas rescues Tara from the funeral pyre, after Tara’s brother Soma tips Douglas about the impending sati. In exchange for her life, Tara becomes Douglas’s servant, hired to care for Zora. As an aborted sati, her Rajput community rejects Tara; she lives in isolation in Douglas’s household. After Zora’s death, Tara revisits the idea of sati, this time by trying to drown herself rather than
burning alive. Douglas prevents this from happening again, by interfering with Tara’s purification rituals. She is saved, but becomes an empty space existing between two cultures, equally rejected by both her Rajput community and invisible to Anglo-Indian society. Her life in widowhood is like a living sati—isolated, silent, and devoid of life. In an attempt to live, she tries to mimic Kate. Kate realizes that Tara is in love with Douglas when Tara calls upon her to nurse him back to health. Kate enters the sickroom that Tara has fashioned and sees things done up in a very “English” way:

... her eye fell on a familiar earthenware basin, kept warm in a pan of water over the ashes. It was full of ‘chikken-brat’ (corr.), and excellent of its kind too. Then in a niche stood milk and eggs—a bottle of brandy, arrowroot—everything a nurse could wish for. And in another, evidently in case the brew should be condemned, was a fresh chicken ready for use.

... (OFW 378)

Kate reads Tara’s devotion for Jim in the catalogue of items that Tara has prepared. In attempting to imitate Kate—whom Douglas loves—Tara has also made an effort to move outside the scope of her limited existence and become a part of Douglas’s life. Unfortunately, Douglas rejects Tara as his nurse; in a larger sense, he rejects Tara’s wish to live vicariously through either himself or Kate. After she sees the comfort with which he accepts Kate’s assistance, Tara jumps into a fire—in a sense, widowed and bereft a second time.

With every other woman in the text disposed of (all of whom were demonstrably unworthy of a fairy-tale ending), we must look at the final woman Jim Douglas rescues; indeed, the only one who actually does not die is Kate Erlton. She notes this herself
when she tells Douglas, with no hint of irony:

And you had your chance of saving a woman . . . and you saved her. It
isn’t much, I suppose. It counts as nothing to you. Why should it? But to
me—

Why didn’t you let them kill me and then go away? (OFW 380)

Kate seems unaware of Douglas’s other rescue attempts, though they would hardly
matter. In this moment, Kate is the victor. Alice was killed before she could elope with
Maj. Erlton, thus preserving the respectability of Kate’s marriage. Had Erlton and Kate
maintained their union, it would certainly be a loveless one. The narrative tidies this
problem up as well by letting Erlton die in battle. As echoed in the death of his lover,
death in an honorable cause eradicates the sins of living. This is particularly important
for Kate. In one of the opening scenes of the novel, Kate is trying to pay off Erlton’s
gambling debt to Douglas by offering him a cache of diamonds. When Douglas refuses,
telling her that the truth will be more beneficial to everyone in the long run, Kate in
essence responds that she would rather be respectable than right (OFW 27-28). After the
Revolt has begun, Douglas helps spirit Kate away. Though he is too late to save Alice,
he makes up for it by rescuing Kate. He takes her to the secret rooftop apartments where
he had kept Zora. In order to avoid detection by the sepoys, Kate is instructed to dye her
skin and hair brown and don the apparel of the native woman. By camouflaging her thus,
with Tara’s help, Kate survives the sepoy attack on the English at Delhi. She is also able
to sneak out of Delhi to the British cantonments just outside the city. Among her fellow
British, she is finally free. Her marital bond too is dissolved, freeing her emotionally.
Erlton dies defending the Empire; thus he dies a good death. As seen earlier with Alice
Gissing’s demise, death in the defense of the English and the Empire wipes away one’s sins, taking away the human chaff and leaving behind the celebrated hero. Erlton’s newfound heroism positively impacts Kate; the bond that had initially caused her so much grief and embarrassment is henceforth to be seen as a union of honor and tribute. Furthermore, Douglas, though committing numerous transgressions, is shown as fighting valiantly for the rights of England. When he is felled in battle, Kate rescues him through her nursing skill. The narrative portrays Kate and Douglas enacting equal exchanges by dint of their “saving” of each other; this makes them suitable life partners. The marriage plot within the text focuses primarily on Kate. Unlike the Victorian marriage plot, we negotiate the turns of Kate’s marriage within the text, all the way to her widowhood; simultaneously, we are able to view the foundation being laid for Kate’s second marriage, following the courtship phase of Douglas and Kate. This of course differs from the 19th-century Indian marriage plot, which begins after marriage. The 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot seems to be a hybrid of these two traditions, located somewhere between both, but with the threat of native violence always under the surface.

III. Seeta

Philip Meadows Taylor had a different perspective on India than Steel, based not only on his gender, but also the amount of time he stayed in India and the cultural impact it had on him. At age 16, Taylor left England for India. After working in civil administration for some time, he eventually became the financial administrator for the Nizam of Hyderabad. He spent the remainder of his career working with the Nizam; Taylor became very popular with the native people, partially because he was very sympathetic to natives, and partially because he attempted to administer the Nizam’s
districts with compassion and fairness. He participated in an interracial marriage; in 1832, at age 24, Taylor married Mary Palmer, a Eurasian descendent of a Delhi princess (Khulpateea 130; Taylor Story 76).

In 1839, Taylor published his first novel on the practice of ‘thuggee’, a text which dealt with English concerns about the rituals dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali, involving stealing and murdering in her name. Demonstrating his interest in Indian society, Taylor penned a trilogy of historical romances. The novel Tara, (1863) describes the rise of native Indian power in 1657. Set against the backdrop of the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the novel Ralph Darnell (1865) follows next. Finally, Seeta, (1872) rounds out the trilogy, focusing on the events of the 1857 Uprising. Each novel of the trilogy has a one hundred year space between its action and that of its sequel; in many ways, the trilogy, when looked at together, tells the narrative of the East India Company in India. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be focusing on Seeta, the final novel of Taylor’s historical romance trilogy, which deals not only with the Anglo-Indian response to the 1857 Revolt, but also provides alternative readings of the marriage plot.

The action of the text opens with a nod to Taylor’s history with thuggee by introducing the character of Azrael Pande. He is a Brahmin by day, a thug by night. He is commissioned to break into the house of wealthy Hari Das and murder both him and his infant son, thereby changing the inheritance structure of the family. In exchange for some of the loot, Pande agrees and sets of to do this task. He successfully kills Hari, but manages only to inflict serious wounds upon the child. The child’s mother—and new widow—is Seeta, a beautiful, intelligent woman who manages to escape death at Pande’s hands. Seeta and her child go to live with her grandfather Narendra and his spinster sister
Aunt Ella in the town Shah Gunj. From the first moment they arrive back in her childhood home, it is clear that Seeta is not a “typical” Indian woman.

Her growing beauty distressed her aunt and grandfather. Why had it been given to her? Why should such charms be vouchsafed to a widow? They watched anxiously whether, when the anniversary of her husband’s death came round, she would desire to perform the duties and ceremonies of a widow in full—have her beautiful hair shorn off, and break her ornaments on the place where his body had been burned—but there was no sign of this. Once, when Aunt Ella hinted at the propriety of such a ceremony, she drew herself up, and said, proudly—

“It is not a shaven head or a coarse garment that makes a virtuous widow, Aunt Ella! What I am, I will remain. Am I to disfigure myself to shock my boy when he grows up? No!” (Seeta 49)

Seeta had been highly educated as a child, participating in numerous educational sessions with the Brahmin priest Wamun Bhut. Her unique upbringing serves her well when she is called before the magistrate to testify against the gang of thugs who have been caught by the local constables. It is at this trial, where Seeta impresses everyone in attendance with her composure and clear speaking, that she first meets the handsome young magistrate, Cyril Brandon.

For a native woman Cyril Brandon had never seen any one so fair or of so tender a tone of colour. Such, he remembered, were many of the lovely women of Titian’s pictures—a rich, golden olive, with a bright carnation
tint rising under the skin—and Seeta’s was like them . . . He could not see much of Seeta’s figure; but the small, graceful head, the rounded arm, the tiny foot, the graceful movement of the neck, and her springy little step as she had entered the tent, assured him that it could not be less beautiful than the face (Seeta 61).

What fascinates Brandon is not just her beauty, but the fact that this beauty can be read within European terms; Seeta’s looks make her able to pass as Western, able to mimic the Anglo woman.

After her testimony results in the arrest of the whole band, Cyril learns that Azrael Pande has escaped and is planning to retaliate against Seeta and her family. Cyril decides to stay in the vicinity to protect them; during the course of a violent confrontation between members of Pande’s gang and Cyril’s police, Cyril is seriously injured, and is taken into Seeta’s home to be nursed back to health. In this way, the text allows friendship to blossom between Seeta and Cyril.

Their interactions are first marked by literary exchange. Cyril, bored during his convalescence, entreats Seeta to read to him. Since she does not speak English, she reads him portions of her favorite poetry in Sanskrit—an interesting narrative choice as it is a vernacular that was not commonly taught to women while simultaneously it is a language privileged over the more “common” Hindi and Urdu. One of the main pieces that she recites is the story of Savitri, from the Mahabharata:

She read slowly; but in her sweet musical voice the beautiful couplets of the old Hindoo poet sounded as he had never heard them before . . . Seeta grew more and more excited with her subject, and the intonations of her
voice followed the variations of the exquisite story. It has been foretold that Savitri’s husband is to die; and while they are in the forest his death-trance comes upon him and he cries, “Dearest, I can stand no longer!”

Then

Down upon the ground she sate her, laid his head upon her breast
And the loving, gracious lady, lulled her Satyavan to rest.

Cyril then takes the text to read it aloud to Seeta.

The passage had been a favourite college exercise and he knew it by heart: and in India he had acquired much of the proper cadence and pronunciation of the poem. Yama, the Lord of Death, come, a dread presence, and takes away the spirit of Savitri’s husband; but she fears nothing:—

Wheresoe’er my husband goeth, in the way where he is led,

There Savitri, faithful ever, still unalteringly will tread (Seeta 110)

The narrative of Seeta is framed within the boundaries of the Hindu epic heroine. The text has taken great pains to identify Seeta with the heroines of India, such as Savitri, and an obvious nod to her namesake, Sita from the Ramayana. Both are heroines noted for their religious devotion to their husbands; this piety gives them both almost supernatural powers. The differences between the two characters are important: Savitri rescues her husband, while Sita’s rescue is her husband’s goal. Seeta in this novel is actually an amalgam of both the epic heroines.

Cyril falls in love with Seeta. Though he tries to resist this, he is confronted with
the memory of his conversation with his best friend Philip Mostyn on the subject of interracial marriage. As Philip notes,

"...for all that there is many a Hindoo girl, like Seeta, who would be an ornament and a blessing to any man, and to his family also; though, perhaps, it is best, after all, that it is not attainable."

"Why, Philip?"

"Because of our social prejudices, which you and I can't overcome. Because of old Mrs. Grundy, who is as powerful here as elsewhere in the world—more so perhaps. Because our perceptions are narrowed with our isolated positions, and become incapable of extension; and because, if a man, one of us, married a native lady—married, I say—he must exclude himself from society, which would require a strong mind; and must undergo temptation if he entered it, which would require even a stronger mind to resist."

"Then the thing is impossible, Philip?"

"I did not say it was," he replied laughing. "I have stated the arguments for and against, as well as I could, and leave them to you." (Seeta 87-8)

As the above passage shows, romancing Seeta has been on Cyril's mind for sometime, even before he spends a prolonged amount of time getting to know her. After hearing Seeta read and discuss the passages from Savitri's story, Cyril is charmed and
begins more concretely thinking about marrying her. He writes her a letter, but is then embarrassed of it and tears it up. He promises her Aunt Ella that he will leave Seeta alone, but is unable to. These moments indicate that he is drawn to Seeta on levels both intellectual and emotional. He finally asks Aunt Ella for Seeta's hand in marriage. She agrees and Seeta is married according to Hindu rites. It is impossible to be married according to Christian rites; the Church will not recognize any union if both partners are not Christian. This is not initially a concern for either Seeta or Cyril; it develops into an issue later in the text.

After their wedding, Seeta and Cyril move into a cottage near the British fort at Noorpoor. They spend their time blissfully, keeping as much to themselves as possible. In this manner they avoid all outside society, particularly the “Mrs. Grundys” of the Anglo-Indian community. As Paxton puts it, “In representing the mutual love that Seeta and Brandon share, Taylor reasserts a more Romantic perspective on the power of sympathy and sexual passion to overcome racial prejudice and accommodate cultural difference” (260). While I agree with Paxton’s reading, I feel this must be amended to factor in the isolation necessary for this ‘the power of sympathy’ to occur. Mostyn has warned Cyril about the degree of prejudice anyone who married outside of his or her race would encounter; Cyril himself is cognizant of this and so keeps Seeta sequestered in their cottage. While both Cyril and Seeta are left together, their romance continues. As soon as Cyril begins to slowly join the British community again, fault lines begin to appear in his union with Seeta.

By herself, Seeta literally has no peer. When Mostyn’s sister Grace arrives from England, she quickly becomes Seeta’s equal in Cyril’s eyes. Though Cyril is an
ostensibly faithful married man, he leaves Seeta at home by herself in their little cottage, while he begins circulating throughout society. He is perhaps, trying to protect her from a critical—and likely hurtful—British gaze, but it seems that he also separates himself from the husband of a native to a British gentleman. The daily separations in the evenings—when Cyril goes off to various parties and admires Grace—begin to take a toll on Seeta.

If Seeta missed her husband, as she truly did, it was no more than he had told her to expect at this “festival time,” when he should be from home perhaps every evening; and she tried to make the best of it bravely enough. But the girl was not used to being alone, and had never been [so] lonely in her life” (Seeta 190)

Cyril’s justification for leaving her behind has changed also from protecting her to not expecting her participation in the Christian holiday season. As the narrator points out, “Cyril always paid Seeta a visit after he had dressed for the day; and before he left her . . . said he would get back as soon as he could and take her out for a sail on the lake. But I am sadly afraid he did not get back as soon as he could on all occasions . . . I am afraid too, that even Seeta’s English lessons were but slightly attended to, and the sail on the lake often altogether missed” (190). At this point of marital crisis, the “memsahibs” enter the text.

As Jennifer Otsuki notes, “The ‘memsahib’ is invariably identified as the figure who most actively enforces the terms of . . . social divisiveness of colonial society” (1). In it’s most literal term, ‘memsahib’ referred to the wife of master, or sahib. Memsahibs
played an important role in Anglo-Indian culture, particularly to reinforce the notions of Britishness and recreate as much of British society as possible within India. There were always the fears that there was not the same amount of social policing in Anglo-Indian circles; too much laxity in social rules could lead to an undermining of the Empire. Rebecca Saunders elaborates further:

The unconscious worry over unlimited freedom was focused on the memsahib and her reaction to India. This pressure resulted in the precarious position of the memsahib; she was expected to maintain strict standards, but was resented for doing so; if she failed to maintain standards, she was harshly judged. Thus the freedom and sense of adventure of the frontier could lure Westerners because the memsahib’s presence there assured that control would be maintained (306).

The ladies of the Noorpoor Anglo-Indian circle fit the description of memsahibs perfectly. They pounce on the idea that Cyril has “gone native” and do their best to undermine Seeta. It is only if this marriage is broken up that social order can be maintained; as Saunders alludes to, the upkeep of British society in India was the occupation of the Memsahib. To this end, the novel takes up another point of tension in Seeta and Cyril’s marriage: Seeta’s exclusion from Christianity.

The memsahibs, primarily Mrs. Home (whose name indicates that her great interest is in promoting the superior values of her home England), send native servants to Seeta in order to taunt her about Cyril’s growing closeness to Grace. Because they were never married in Church, Seeta is not considered to be Cyril’s wife, but rather his
mistress; this is what the servants tell Seeta. They tell her also that Cyril is rumored to be marrying a Christian so that his children will all be legitimate. Seeta is understandably disturbed by this, but ultimately does not let it bother her. When she and Grace do finally meet, they are both taken with each other; Seeta has complete faith in her friend. In return, Grace tries to help Seeta become as English as possible, teaching her “skills” such as watercolors and needlepoint.

Though Taylor seems to believe that “a proper cultural liaison between the West and the East could take place only if the West tried to view the East with sympathy, understanding, and respect” (Misra 96), the text also implies that the East needs to become more Western to ensure a favorable place within the British imagination. Within these contexts, the villainy of Azrael Pande, the thuggee murderer, becomes more sharply defined. While Seeta and Cyril are negotiating the course of their married lives, Azrael is hiding amongst the sepoys, instigating them against the British. In this novel, the 1857 Uprising becomes less about political issues and more about personal vendettas. Joy Wang has even noted that for a ‘mutiny’ novel, “Seeta focuses on an . . . Indian woman involved in a consensual, affective marriage” rather than “the prototypical . . . plot dwelling on the sexual defense of the memsahib” (116).

The text nears its end as the Uprising reaches its climax. Seeta, who has loyally stayed by Cyril’s side even when he wants her to leave for her own safety, saves Cyril’s life. Azrael, who has become obsessed with Seeta takes advantage of the chaos surrounding the Revolt and attempts to attack Cyril in their cottage.

Azrael Pande . . . sprang suddenly on him from a corner of the verandah, with his spear. Cyril parried the thrust, and made a cut with his sword in
return, which was caught on his spear by the Dacoit [trans = criminal],
when at the moment a chance shot struck Cyril in the right arm, and his
sword dropped. He was entirely at his enemy’s mercy. “Jey Kalee Mata!”
shouted Arael. “Dog of a Feringee! No escape now for thee,” and as he
drew back his deadly weapon to strike, Cyril heard a cry—it was not a
scream—and Seeta had rushed before him, receiving the blow in her
breast. (Seeta 377)

Azrael is killed in the ensuing chaos. However, as his name suggests, he brings
death with him. “Azrael” is not a Hindu name; certainly not one that a Brahmin family
would choose. The text seems to indicate that his name—the name of an Islamic angel of
death—was in preparedness for these final moments in the text. Seeta’s wounds prove
fatal. Before she dies, Seeta immerses herself in Christian rhetoric, mixing it in with her
childhood Sanskrit prayers. She then passes away, after invoking Heaven. Her death, as
well as the scenes just prior to her death when she speaks with Mrs. Pratt the missionary,
suggests that she is close to conversion. The text confirms this in passages near the end
of the novel: “Yet towards becoming a Christian, the advantages, in a worldly point of
view, appeared by far more decided than in continuing as she was” (389). However, her
death is still imbued with Hindu ideals; she dies saving Cyril like “Savitri,” and is
grateful that he rescued her from a life of isolation, as Rama rescued Sita from the
secluded gardens at Lanka.

The novel’s ending seems to be from another narrative altogether. Cyril returns to
England, inheriting his older brother’s title. He marries Grace and has beautiful children
with an abundance of “curly, golden hair”. The only remembrance of Seeta is a portrait
hanging in a private room of the house. This mimics the way Cyril secluded her when she was alive; even in death, she will only be visible away from "public" eyes. It is only in her native India that a school has been founded in her name, and a monument has been erected in Seeta's honor, where the public may drop flowers on her altar.

Both *On the Face of the Waters* and *Seeta* depict marriage among the Anglo-Indian community. While both are sympathetic—to varying degrees—to the native Indian's sensibilities, neither text is able to truly participate in a discourse on equality. Even with the Revolt of 1857 looming over the events in both, neither narrative takes the natives' concerns seriously. Instead, any anxiety about the Uprising becomes sublimated into the respective marriage plots, indicating that the 19th-century Anglo-Indian marriage plot was partially based on the need to create a secure space in response to suggestions of suddenly erupting violence.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Otsuki, Jennifer L. "The Memsahib and the Ends of Empire: Feminine Desire in


Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text.* Minneapolis: U of MN Press, 1993.


CHAPTER V:
THE BABU IN BRITAIN- THE INDIAN FIGURE IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND VICTORIAN FICTION

The history of Indians in England stretches back almost as far as the history of the British in India. The groups that migrated to England however, were very small. Numerous reasons exist for this. One was the superstition, as seen in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, that for many devout Hindus, crossing the sea meant losing one's caste. Furthermore, there were practical concerns: the cost of undertaking such an expedition, the chances of surviving a long, treacherous voyage, and the uncertain reception at journey's end. For all this though, Indians did make the voyage; while the majority were visitors, many ultimately settled in Britain. This allows Britain itself to become a site of imperialism, not just the isolated and removed "mother country". The interaction
between Indian and Briton was a complicated one; initially, Indians who landed in Britain often evoked wonderment and were viewed more as exotic objects of interest than people. Most of these early “prominent” Indians were from the province of Bengal; hence they were termed “Babu”, a Bengali term for “sir”. The term would become more derogatory as time passed (Visram). One such example of a traveling Babu to England comes in the persona of Rajah Rammohan Roy. Roy arrived in Liverpool on April 8, 1831. Roy was a tireless advocate of women’s rights in India, as well as deeply interested in reforming Hinduism. To this end, he worked towards developing the Brahma Sabha, a view that promoted monotheism within the Hindu faith. These views allowed the monotheistic Britons to find Roy acceptable and relatively easy to relate to; however, for the most part, Roy’s viewpoints did little to humanize him for the great majority of people he encountered. This is seen in accounts of Rajah Rammohan Roy visiting a factory in Manchester:

Men, women and children rushed in crowds to see ‘the King of Ingee’! Many of the great unwashed insisted upon shaking hands with him; some of the ladies who had not stayed to make their toilets very carefully wished to embrace him, and he with great difficulty escaped . . . The aid of the police was required to make way for him to the manufactories, and when he entered, it was necessary to close and bolt the gate to keep out the mob . . . After shaking hands with hundreds of them he turned round and addressed them, hoping they would all support the King and his Ministers in obtaining Reform; so happily had he caught the spirit of the people. He
was answered with loud shouts, ‘The King and Reform for ever!’ (Visram 170-171)

In certain aspects, Roy was the equivalent of a celebrity; his differences from mainstream Britons were striking and isolating. This is almost certainly the product of his visible racial difference. His intellect and charisma, upon which he built his journey, did not banish his race. Michael Fischer describes a dinner party that Roy attended, where a British colonel serving in India angrily asked, “What is that black fellow doing here?” (255). Fischer further notes that “William Thackeray . . . later in his fiction ridiculed both Roy (as the character ‘Rommun Loll’, a petty merchant claiming royalty) and the British hostesses who fawned on him” (255).

The Indian figure—typically male—circulates throughout 19th-century British fiction. Within Victorian novels, as demonstrated in an earlier chapter on *Jane Eyre*, “Indian” elements arise simultaneously with the appearance of Jane’s marital tensions. This chapter however, looks at the most visible signifier of India—the figure of the Indian—and charts his course through Victorian fiction. The Indian male in these works not only catalyzes the marriage plot, he serves as a concrete reminder of the Imperial project.

*Dombey and Son*

The visible marker of race separated Indians in Britain, as it reciprocally kept apart Indians and British in India. However, in Britain, British superiority was a given, as it was amongst the Anglo-Indians in the colony. Some Indians tried to work within these parameters, deciding that business dealings could be maintained on Indian terms. To this end, Dwarkanath Tagore traveled to England in 1842 as a partner with two British
Tagore was the grandfather of the future literary genius Rabindranath Tagore. Dwarkanath met with numerous English glitterati; he was particularly interested in meeting Charles Dickens, describing him in a letter as being the most well known of English authors. Dickens, however, was less than complimentary in his turn. In a letter to the Count D’Orsay, Dickens writes:

“A tiger with such a name as Dwarkanaught [sic] Tagore, is not an everyday animal. Can a pinch of salt be dropped upon its tail?

“I seem to think that I have seen puppet-shows in the Streets, placarding the Drama of Dwarkanaught [sic] Tagore—I half remember having seen him at Astleys, clad in a Leopard Skin with Salmon-colored arms and legs, throwing summersets in the Ring, and performing such fears of strength as amazed everybody but that misbelieving clown. I in part believe that I have seen him made up in a very small parcel with his heels very close together, and his card on his breast, at the Egyptian Room in the British Museum. And again my treacherous memory conjures up his portrait in colours, cut from a sheet of Theatrical Characters and pasted on the lamp of a baked potatoe stand, in the public street at night.

“Dwarkanaught [sic] Tagore! What does the postman think of him—what does a long-stage coachman say, when he has him on the Waybill—what does his washerwoman call him, when she mentions him to her friends—who gave him that name—had he godfathers and godmothers—or did some old Maniac of a Brahmin, drunk with the spirit of Rice, invent it? Sometimes I think he is that grizzly bear you spoke of—but then I remember that he came from America—not
India. I have spelt it backwards, but it makes no less tremendous nonsense that way. He is a live hieroglyphic. I give him up.” (Dickens Letters 304-305).

Though Dickens and Tagore would eventually meet three years later, it is quite clear from Dickens’s missive that he did not respect Tagore; instead, Dickens figures him as an animal, a clown, and perhaps a mummy. The vicious rhetoric concerning Tagore’s name—a legacy of drunk Brahmins and cartoonish impulses—is even more disturbing considering that Dickens is renown for his intellect and charity. Notable too is Dickens’s amalgamation of every “Oriental” stereotype—African, Egyptian and Indian—into Tagore’s characterization, which Dickens then holds up for D’Orsay’s view. The next time Dickens mentions Tagore in his letters, it is not by name, but by the term “baboo.” When Tagore made his next visit to England in 1845, he donated a large amount to a sanatorium that Dickens was also interested in assisting; Dickens thus may have been “bought” into superficial socializing with Tagore. Dickens’s respect for the latter however did not seem to grow.

The B (I am afraid to write Baboo again for I am always going to put an N after it) wants to hear all about the Paper . . . (Dickens Letters...)

Even after Tagore’s demonstrable generosity—he was famous for his philanthropy and interest in furthering education as well as helping fund medical schools—Dickens still likens him to a “baboon”. One has to wonder then, if there were anything Dwarkanath Tagore could have done to gain Dickens’s esteem; most likely, the answer is no. This then leads to inferences about the Indian experience in Britain overall. If an intelligent, articulate man like Dickens, sensitive to the plight of the lower classes, could react in so base and crass a manner when confronted with a sophisticated Indian, then what hope
was there for the relationship between “everyday” Britons and “regular” Indians? Though there is evidence (Fischer, Visram) that Britons were generally a little more compassionate towards Indians than Dickens was, public sentiment eroded after militant events in India threatened to break the relationship between them.

After the Rebellion of 1857, distrust and suspicion against Indians was very high. Dickens, already predisposed to think the worst of the natives, commented that

I wish I were Commander in Chief in India . . . The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement . . . should be to proclaim to them, in their language, that I considered my holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested. (Nayder Dickens Studies Annual 216-217; my emphasis)

Dickens final words about genocide are embedded within images of violence and faith. One can’t help but feel that perhaps Dickens had been waiting for native violence to justify his position as morally, physically, and mentally superior; after 1857, he sees no reason why Indians should even exist. Ironically, Dickens seems to have no issue using violence to protect and further the word of his God; the sepoys too used violence to protect the sanctity of their faith.

In Dombey and Son, which deals with global trade and merchant voyages, India is a silent specter in the background. India was the source for much of the goods that the British exported. In fact, the East India Company is referenced directly, almost in the beginning of the text:
Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. (DS 34)

Wealth and exoticism are implied and intertwined in Dickens description of the East India Company—characteristics that easily apply to the image of India itself. The relationship between the Dombey and Son firm and the East India Company is further acknowledged with the inclusion of the East India Director at a dinner party with Dombey and Edith (DS 487). However, the text seems to be arguing that wealth from India is somehow tainted. The first example of this is in the mocking tone describing the East India director’s arrival at the party:

[An] East India Director, of immense wealth, in a waistcoat apparently constructed in serviceable deal by some plain carpenter, but really engendered in the tailor’s art, and composed of the material called nankeen, arrived and was received by Mr. Dombey alone. The next step was . . . Mr. Dombey’s sending his compliments to Mrs. Dombey . . . and the next, the East India Director’s falling prostrate, in a conversational point of view, and as Mr. Dombey was not the man to pick him up, staring at the fire until rescue appeared in the person of Mrs. Skewton; whom the director, as a pleasant start in life for the evening, mistook for Mrs. Dombey, and greeted with enthusiasm (DS 487)
The Director wears a garment made from Chinese cloth, which is then unflatteringly compared to wearing a wooden suit; after this, he remains mentally locked in a move of Indian obeisance; both his lack of polished clothing and his inability to speak until he is “rescued” imbue the director with femininity. Both the Director and Dombey are silent, but their respective silences are coded differently. The Director’s indicates femininity, while Dombey’s is more serious and therefore masculine. Even in his silence, the Director needs to rely on an agent of British society (a symbol of the ideals of British imperialism) to release him from his enforced silence. Dombey, on the other hand, looks broodingly into the fire. Emasculating the East India Director thus weakens what he stands for—the wealth to be found in India. This becomes most obvious when Dombey loses his fortune; though Carker’s deliberate mismanagement is the ostensible reason for the loss, I feel that the disappearance of Dombey’s wealth is a foregone conclusion as it is written into the narrative of moral imperialism. The money gained through buffoonish characters, such as the Director, is not “good enough” to sustain a respectable British family. On the other hand, money that is filtered through a morally responsible source, such as Harriet Carker, is “clean” and therefore acceptable.

In addition to the Director, the figure of the Native in the text provides a more concrete link to India. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, in her important work on the Native in Dombey and Son, has noted that

The designation of the Major’s Indian servant by the generic and capitalised title of the “Native,” and other frequent apellations like “exile,” “expatriate” and “Prince”—the scrupulous avoidance of the proper name—has, obviously, its commonsense reasons. The Native’s name, like
the Islamic God's and the prophet Mohammed's in Mrs. Skewton's invocation, remains unspoken because the speaker does not know it, or it is not worth knowing, or everyone knows it, or it cannot be pronounced. But we might also speculate whether naming the proper name of the other is not also, as in some superstitions, the forbidden, transgressive act that would confer recognition upon a disputed reality. (92-93)

While it is extremely unlikely that the Native is an actual Prince, it is interesting that the narrative terms him so and then makes him a servant. The Native does not distinguish himself in any way. He obeys the Major like any servant would. He is also never given a voice. Though the Major gives the Native various orders, these moments are presented to the reader in summary form only. The Major never directly addresses him and in turn, the Native never speaks. This furthers Rajan's point, as the act of speaking necessarily assumes thinking, which in turn demands a sense of self (cogito, ergo sum).

There are two instances in the text where the Native is prominently displayed—these are also the only two instances where he acts on his own accord, rather than on the Major's directive. The first occurs after Miss Tox receives notice from Mrs. Chick that Dombey is to marry Edith. The news is too much for Miss Tox, who subsequently faints, holding her ubiquitous watering can, into the Native's arms. Her watering can tilts as she falls, so that she waters the Native, as if he were a "delicate exotic" species of flora (DS 397). Under Mrs. Chick's direction, he places her on a sofa and then quickly leaves. The next instance occurs at Dombey's wedding. The Native is said to acquiesce in a planned outing with the other servants, even though he "is tigerish in his drink, and . . . alarms the ladies (Mrs. Perch particularly) by the rolling of his eyes" (DS 429). Both of
these moments again point to the Native’s lack of human quality. Strikingly, these scenes are incorporated within the larger portrait of Dombey’s wedding.

As noted in earlier chapters of this project, the Victorian marriage plot is about closure. This is certainly reflected in the marriage of Florence and Walter, which the text leads up to and then, after celebrating their union, finishes. In fact, the last chapters of the novel seem to tie up all the available couples into marriage. The only union that does not end this way is that of Dombey and Edith, whose lives after their marriage are detailed. The figure of the Native, appearing as Dombey and Edith’s marriage begins, prompts the transformation of the Victorian marriage plot into the Anglo-Indian marriage plot. It can certainly be suggested that the text is built on the colonial enterprise—there would be no Dombey and Son business if there were no source of goods. Carrying this argument further, Dombey is very easily implicated in the Imperial Movement. His desperation for a son to carry on his name is not so much a gesture of love as it as a reflection of the extreme arrogance that has marked him from the narrative’s start.

The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and the moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them: A. D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei—and Son. (DS4)
This passage also very clearly states Dombey’s self-identification with Imperialists. The novel strengthens his role as “Master” as it continues. This then, places Edith in the role of subjugated femininity—epitaphs which described the British view of India as well. In a nod to the 1857 Uprising, silently underlying British values, the narrative portrays Edith as rebelling against her “master” for his transgressions. I find too that there is another element of “India” at work in the Dombeys’ marriage: the trope of sati.

Florence’s maid Susan mentions sati directly in the text:

I may not be an Indian widow Sir and I am not, and I would not so become but if I once made up my mind to burn myself alive, I’d do it! And I’ve made my mind up to go on. (DS 584-585)

In the passage above, Susan makes an impassioned plea to Dombey on Florence’s behalf, demonstrating her loyalty. Susan invokes sati after Dombey has ordered her to stop speaking. By bringing the concept up, Susan is not so much discussing widowhood as she instead speaks to the characteristics of a voluntary self-immolation: she is determined to follow through with her plan at any cost because of her sense of justice and nobility. These, of course, are some of the reasons given for sati. As discussed in the first chapter, there is a simultaneous British horror and admiration for the practice: horror that a defenseless woman would be forced by heathen Indians to kill herself, admiration that a woman would preserve her chastity (and thereby her husband’s inviolate right to be the only one to ever touch her) through choosing a noble death. After Susan’s use of sati imagery, Rajan is right to note that
We cannot be blind to the other uses of the sati allusion occurring at this juncture in the narrative, at the point where Susan’s departure from Dombey’s house is the cue for the elopement of Edith with Carker, in its turn followed by the flight of Florence. (98)

I’d like to go a step further though and suggest that Edith is performing a type of figurative sati. Similar to Kate in On the Face of the Waters, Edith too isolates herself from society, choosing to live as a recluse rather than the wife of an unsatisfactory husband. Though Dombey is still alive, the life of Mrs. Dombey has passed on; she forcefully states that she is dead to her husband (DS 826). Furthermore, it can be argued that Edith has committed social suicide by running away with Carker (though the text goes to great, almost ridiculous, lengths to emphasize that Edith’s chastity is unscathed). In the mythology of sati, there was an element of prosperity and purification that came with self-immolation (Chatterjee, Amal 112). In other words, it was to the benefit of the dead husband’s soul, as well as to his left-behind family members that the widow sacrificed her life. She died a “good” death, in her husband’s name, was spiritually elevated by the Gods—and the rewards of heaven rained down on the husband’s family. In an interesting parallel, by running away, Edith catalyzes the Dombey family’s renewal. Moreover, Edith is cognizant of her impact, as is revealed in the following discussion between her and Florence, towards the end of the novel:

“May I say,” said Florence, “that you grieved to hear of the afflictions he has suffered?”
“Not,” she replied, “if they have taught him that his daughter is very dear to him. He will not grieve for them himself one day, if they have brought him that lesson Florence.” (DS 826)

At the end of their exchange, Edith hugs Florence and bids her farewell, saying “When you leave me in this dark room, think that you have left me in the grave. Remember only that I was once, and that I loved you!” (DS 827). It is through Edith’s sacrifices and figurative sati that Dombey’s redemption and “happy ending” are possible.

Though the narrative indicates at its close that Dombey is a changed figure, especially noted in his secret affection for his granddaughter, there are subtle markers implying a course that has not shifted very much from its origin. Dombey is given a second chance with his children in their new incarnations.

As seen in the novel’s close, Dombey loves the little girl very much; however, his love is suspect as the narrative withholds certain key pieces of information. We never learn her name. Dombey hugs her and cries “Little Florence” once in the last line of the text, but that could mean that she reminds him of his daughter Florence, particularly in her childhood, which he deliberately missed in its entirety. The other problem with his affection is that it is invisible to others, just as no one saw him give any affection to Florence. In Florence’s case, there was an absence of emotion, while in the little girl’s case his adoration is hidden from everyone but Florence. Either way, the public perception is of an empty space, unfilled with attachments. This suggests that Dombey, though he has privately learned to open his heart, has not changed his ideology that much. Earlier in the text, Miss Tox, upon learning of Dombey’s change of heart with Florence, tells Polly “And so Dombey and Son as I observed upon a certain sad occasion
... is indeed a daughter, Polly, after all" (DS 801). The ending belies this sentiment; with his love for the little girl a secret and his affection for little Paul (who, incidentally, is properly named) apparent for all to witness, Dombey essentially reaffirms that he is still the eponymous patriarch of Dombey and Son.

Little Paul ends up being the hope of the narrative—the next generation upon which the burden of trade and empire will fall. Paul has no fear of this, remarking only that he is very strong (DS 833). Dombey “walks with the little boy, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him, as if her were the object of his life. If he be thoughtful, the white-haired gentleman is thoughtful too; and sometimes when the child is sitting by his side, and looks up in his face, asking him questions, he takes the tiny hand in his, and holding it, forgets to answer . . . and as they go about together, the story of the bond between them goes about, and follows them” (DS 833). The narrative further reinforces the superiority of little Paul from the moment of his birth. By dint of his birth at sea, little Paul belongs to no one single nation; though he is English by his parents, he is also representative of the new breed of the global British. It is fitting too that little Paul is born at sea, recalling a discussion that Florence and her brother Paul had much earlier in the text, about the sea. “I want to know what it says . . . The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?” (DS 107), Paul asks. By the end of the narrative, the answer is clear: the seas speak of British domination that extends far beyond British soil.

II. The Moonstone

While Dickens viewed Indians with great distrust, it seems the opposite is true for Wilkie Collins. Collins, Dickens’s close friend and collaborator, appears to have had a
very different approach to the 1857 Uprising and Indians in general. This is particularly apparent in Collins’s work, *The Moonstone*. Lillian Nayder notes:

Although critics often identify sentimentality as politically evasive, the sympathy that Collins evokes for the Hindus here is politically charged. In a novel published on the tenth anniversary of the rebellion that Victorians termed the ‘Indian Mutiny’—an uprising that generated racial hatred towards South Asians among the British—Collins humanizes figures commonly presented as bestial by his contemporaries . . . (139)

Collins’s work is unique in that it is a site in which natives circulate and interact with the English. This reflects the real-life circulation of Indians in England. By the mid-19th-century, there were enough Indians living in Britain that lodgings were open specifically for “Orientals”. Known as the “Strangers’ Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders, the Home, in West India Dock Road, Limehouse, opened in June 1857. It was the first institution of its kind” (Visram 400 Years 59). Also in England at this time were numerous Indian Princes.

Every year rulers of some of these ‘Native states’ [in India] came to Britain—to pay respects to the sovereign, or simply for pleasure, or on invitation to attend a formal state occasion, since no royal state function was complete without these elegant maharajahs and rajas. Many
acquired a taste for foreign travel some sent their children to be educated in Britain. (Visram Ayahs 172)

These descriptions illustrate that England was not barren of any color; instead, Indians—while maybe not yet a sizeable minority—were certainly becoming more visible. They were also less like Dickens’s portrayal; Collins’s descriptions of Indians in The Moonstone were closer (though still far off from reality). To his credit however, in a time of uncensored prejudice, Collins imbues his wandering Brahmins with intelligence, faith, duty, and humanity.

The novel is framed by discourse about India. It begins with a history of the battle at Seringapatam in 1799; this was the final battle between the British and Tipu Sultan, which, due to a betrayal within his own camp, led to British rule in Mysore and the death of Tipu Sultan. As the novel portrays, upon Sultan’s death, the British looted his storehouses and shipped numerous articles, including objects d’art and valuable jewels, back to England.

The first instance of native appearance in the novel occurs in the history of Moonstone, a large and extremely rare yellow diamond residing in the forehead of the Moon God idol. The idol is nearly desecrated by Muslims, at which point three Brahmins secretly carry it off and install it in a sacred temple in the holy city Benares. Once there, the God Vishnu appears before the three Brahmins and speaks to them.

The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard and bowed before his will.
The deity predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him.” (MS 12).

The passage shows that the first native voice in the text belongs to Vishnu, the Moon God. Furthermore, the language of Vishnu’s commands—though not explicitly detailed—implies a sense of grandeur and majesty. The Brahmins immediately obey; they also completely believe his prophecy. As the passage indicates, their faith in their God allows them to pass down the duty of guarding the Moonstone through generations. This enterprise lends itself nicely to a comparison with the desire for male progeny evidenced in Dombey and Son. In The Moonstone, the Brahmins need to have male heirs; but this desire rises from the need to protect humanity. According to Vishnu’s warning, any person who takes the Moonstone—regardless of that individual’s race or class—will be doomed; furthermore, that curse will travel down through that mortal’s descendents. Thus, protecting humanity becomes the “family business” of the Indians, a duty that they must pass on to subsequent generations. On the other hand, Dombey’s frantic need to have a son has to do with a self-interested preservation in his own name and wealth. There is also the indication at the end of the novel, as described previously in this work, that Dombey wants to raise mirror images of himself to go forth and conquer the land and seas in the name of Britain.

The Battle of Seringapatam is a clever choice with which to begin the narrative. Though the 1857 Uprising was much more recent to Collins’s work, the deliberate use of a “historical” event for Victorians allows them to remove themselves from the tensions and anger surrounding the current situation in India. Furthermore, Collins presents the
events at Seringapatam with a sympathetic and moral perspective. The history of the Moonstone reveals Muslims stole it during the terror reign of the Mughal Aurangzeb. The Moonstone travels to Mysore, where it is next seen in the palace of Tipu Sultan. The narrative does not allow native degradation, even though it is a common element of mid-century British discourse on India. By stating that John Herncastle may have murdered three Indians in order to steal the Moonstone, Herncastle is instead condemned himself, an image that is elucidated by such statements as “It is my conviction . . . that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle’s guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it” (MS 15-16).

The bulk of the novel is placed within the timeframe of 1848-1849. This coincides with time of the Second Anglo-Sikh War, which began in 1848 and was over in 1849. The end of this war gave Britain control of the wealthy border region, Punjab. In addition to this, Jaya Mehta has noted, “The years 1848-49 were significant in ways that resonated with the Indian rebellion. On the European continent, it was a period of democratic revolutions, especially in the Austrian Empire, Italy, France, and Germany . . . In response to the continental revolutions, there was a resurgence of Chartism in England which was also crushed” (621-2). Revolution and rebellion thus form the backdrop of The Moonstone, making it a fitting start of a new genre, detective fiction, with its emphasis on questioning the seemingly factual and seeking sensible answers.

The appearance of three Brahmins at Lady Julia Verinder’s estate brings the native body to the British manor. Gabriel Betteredge, the estate steward, describes the Indians as possessing superior manners, even though they are traveling jugglers (MS 30). The text employs the prevailing stereotype of Indians as being buffoons and objects of
exotic inquiry, but it does so in a reverse-manner; the Indians are aware of these stereotypes and appropriate them to cover their real selves. Thus the British themselves hand the Brahmins the perfect, impenetrable, disguise. It is only the Orientalist traveler Murthwaite—with his sympathy and knowledge of India, its people and its languages—who is able to confidently declare that the jugglers are not what they appear.

“Mr. Betteredge,” he began, “those three Indians are no more jugglers than you and I are...”

“...I know what Indian juggling really is. All you have seen tonight is a very bad and clumsy imitation of it. Unless, after long experience, I am utterly mistaken, those men are high-caste Brahmins. I charged them with being disguised, and you saw how it told on them, clever as the Hindoo people are in concealing their feelings. There is a mystery about their conduct that I can’t explain. They have doubly sacrificed their caste—first, in crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers. In the land they live in, that is a tremendous sacrifice to make...” (MS 84)

Betteredge then expresses his feeling that Indians were all “a set of murdering thieves. Mr. Murthwaite expressed his opinion that they were a wonderful people.” (MS 85) With these lines, the narrative confirms that the Indians circulating through the novel will be intelligent and determined; the text also presents an alternative to the usual prejudicial standpoint concerning Indians—in an immediate counterpoint to Betteredge’s conventions, Murthwaite declares Indians are “wonderful.”
In the midst of the Indians' appearance, the narrative begins to suggest the possible pairing of Rachel Verinder and Franklin Blake. Though both have known each other since childhood, they have not met for numerous years. Franklin returns to the estate with the Moonstone, a legacy that he is entrusted to give to Rachel on her birthday from her dead Uncle John Herncastle. This exchange seems sets off the beginning of their courtship plot.

Betteredge describes Rachel (whom he has known since she was a child and is the same age as his daughter Penelope) in ways that emphasize her exotic appearance:

I answer for Miss Rachel as one of the prettiest girls your eyes ever looked on . . . Her hair was the blackest I ever saw. Her eyes matched her hair. Her nose was not quite large enough, I admit. Her mouth and chin were (to quote Mr. Franklin) morsels for the gods; and her complexion (on the same undeniable authority) was as warm as the sun itself . . . With all her secrecy and self-will, there was not so much as the shadow of anything false in her. I never remember her breaking her word (MS 64-5; my emphasis)

Rachel is not a typical English girl—instead, she is described in terms similar to the description of Meadows Taylor's Seeta. Warm skin, dark eyes, dark hair—with these characteristics, the text allows Rachel to be associated with India. This alignment is strengthened when Franklin gives her the Moonstone, which she fashions into a brooch and wears over her heart. The Moonstone diamond "ambivalently 'figures' India" (Mehta 613), but it also represents organs in the body. On the idol, the Moonstone is a
third eye, which traditional Hindu mythology reads as symbolic of wisdom and inner truth. The Moonstone adds another meaning when Rachel possesses it. She wears it on her chest, over her heart; the diamond then becomes a representation of Rachel Verinder's heart, which in turn becomes a symbol of her love. Within this context, the Moonstone makes its first appearance in Rachel's marriage plot.

The disruption of Rachel's courtship is signaled by the appearance of Godfrey Ablewhite, another potential suitor, and Rosanna Spearman, the second housemaid. She is a rehabilitated thief, whom Lady Verinder hires as a charitable endeavor. After Rosanna meets Franklin, she (as put by Penelope) falls in love with him at first sight (MS 58). Interestingly, the first instance of their meeting occurs at the Shivering Sands, a local area of treacherous quicksand. Rosanna reveals numerous details of the Shivering Sands in her conversation with Betteredge on the banks of the bay, which borders the Shivering Sands. Gabriel asks her:

“What is it that brings you everlastingly to this miserable place?”

“Something draws me to it . . . sometimes, Mr. Betteredge, I think that my grave is waiting for me here . . . Look!” she said. “Isn’t it wonderful? Isn’t it terrible? I have seen it dozens of times, and it’s always as new to me as if I had never seen it before!”

I looked where she pointed. The tide was on the turn, and the horrid sand began to shiver. The broad brown face of it heaved slowly, and then dimpled and quivered all over. “Do you know what it looks like to me?” says Rosanna, catching me by the shoulder again. “It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and
lower in the dreadful deeps! Throw a stone in, and let’s see the sand suck it down!” (MS 38-9)

This passage has been read by Mehta as a retelling of the 1857 rebellion, where Rosanna’s description of the Shivering Sand “simultaneously recalls and revises the two most infamous images of the Raj: the ‘Black Hole of Calcutta’ of 1756 and its almost uncanny double just over a century later, the notorious well at Cawnpore [Kanpur]” (623). The “Cawnpore [sic] Well” refers to an incident during the rebellion when British women and children—both living and dead—were stuffed into a well and left there to die by their captor Nana Sahib (Mehta 623; Wolpert 55). Needless to say, this event is horrific. In the novel’s context, the references to Kanpur invoke images of injustice and sorrow; the Shivering Sand acts as the text’s own prophecy about promised doom to those who disrupt the natural order. In a larger sense, it works as an anti-imperial rhetoric. It is immediately after this that Franklin, searching for Betteredge, meets Rosanna, who in turn flees back to the house. After she is gone, Franklin sits in her stead, overlooking the Shivering Sands, and tells Betteredge the tale of the Moonstone, including its being left as a legacy to Rachel. The juxtaposition of these two scenes (Rosanna/Betteredge and then Franklin/Betteredge) is carefully placed in order to continue building a discourse about anti-imperialism. The last line of the passage above—“throw a stone in”—moves within anti-imperialist parameters. The ‘stone’ may be viewed as a reference to the Moonstone, which the narrative urges to be returned to where it came from—the “broad brown face” of India.

It is after the theft of the Moonstone on Rachel’s birthday that the cracks in her relationship with Franklin are revealed. Her strange outbursts against him, which
comprise much of the mystery in the novel, lead her to leave both Franklin and her country home for London. This also puts her under the suspicion of Sergeant Cuff, a decorated police officer. Initially, the three Indians were suspected; however, inquiry led to belief in their innocence and they were let go. The novel is tempered by its drive towards justice and equity; admirably, the Indians are not made into scapegoats for the theft. There is every indication however that they will follow Rachel to London—even they, like Cuff, believe that Rachel is involved in the disappearance of the diamond. As Cuff tells Betteredge, “You will hear of those Indians again. You will hear of them in the neighborhood, if Miss Rachel remains in the neighborhood. You will hear of them in London, if Miss Rachel goes to London” (MS 185-6).

Through the assistance of the diaries of Mr. Bruff and Miss Clack, it is established that the Moonstone has traveled to London and it is locked in a safety deposit box in the bank of Mr. Luker (though he will only say he is keeping a gem safe). Furthermore, confirming Cuff’s words, the three Indians are briefly seen there as well. These events emerge from the shadows of the other proceedings that occur in London. Rachel receives a marriage proposal from Godfrey Ablewhite. After resisting his efforts, Rachel tells him that she will never love him but can settle for a companionate union. Godfrey assures her that she will love him in time, at which point she accepts.

“You won’t ask me for more than I can give?”

“My angel! I only ask you to give me yourself.”

“Take me!”

In those two words she accepted him! (MS 245)
Reading this passage symbolically, Rachel has no love to give for she has lost her heart, represented by the Moonstone. By accepting Godfrey for less than love, she is violating nature—her "heart" is lost so she should not be engaging in enterprises based on love. This also recalls the prophecy mapped out earlier originating from the Shivering Sands: in this text, violating nature will lead to certain destruction. This is confirmed when moments after Rachel accepts, she is called away by a servant and finds that Lady Verinder has died, perhaps the instance Rachel and Godfrey agree to marry. After a further series of events, revealing Godfrey's mercenary motives, Rachel breaks the engagement; in this manner the narrative reverts back to a course that is in keeping with nature/natural order.

In a somewhat parallel track, Rachel's inferior "Other" self, Rosanna, also breaks with nature and order. Rosanna, who has been in love with Franklin—not of her class, background, or stature, also begins, like Rachel upon the Moonstone's disappearance, acting strangely. She too suddenly leaves the estate, but instead of emerging in London kills herself by walking into the Shivering Sand. In a posthumous letter to Franklin (delivered by the caustic and saddened Limping Lucy), Rosanna reveals that she wanted him to love her; for that reason she hid evidence that he might have been involved in the Moonstone's theft. When she realized her love would never be returned, she leapt to her death through quicksand. Rosanna's letter also puts Franklin on the track to uncovering one of the mysteries of the novel: why Rachel treated him with such sudden scorn—Rachel believes he stole the Moonstone. This is confirmed when he confronts her in London and tells her that she saw him steal the Moonstone from her room. It is her love
that does not allow her to turn him in; simultaneously, it is her dignity that keeps her away from him. Franklin is incredulous and leaves her.

The marriage plot is saved by the appearance of Ezra Jennings in the novel. Jennings, as indicated by the novel is half English and half Indian. His description in the text supports this, as well as his own partial admission. “I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother—It doesn’t matter . . .” (MS 371). As Mehta describes, Jennings is a link between the Indian and British figure (628). Earlier Franklin meets Ezra and describes him thus:

His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a pent-house. His nose presented the fine shape and modeling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West . . .” (MS 326)

Relying on Jennings’s discretion (‘The little he had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman’ MS 370) Franklin recounts the events leading up to this seemingly final break with Rachel and the loss of the Moonstone. Based on his research, Jennings postulates that Franklin stole the gem while he was unknowingly drugged with opium. Jennings theory is then proven by an experiment involving a recreation of the crime, which Rachel attends as well. Furthermore, it is eventually revealed that Godfrey had access to the Moonstone, and that he is the one who took it away, hoping to clear all his debts with its pledge.

Franklin and Rachel are reunited by the end of the experiment, both of them repeatedly exclaiming that Ezra is their dearest friend. His death soon after is a solemn
event, but it reflects the esteem that he is eventually held in. Though the Moonstone is not back in Rachel’s position, knowing the truth about its loss sets her free from its spell. Now that her heart is truly awakened and alive, she no longer needs a representation of it. Franklin and Rachel marry, with every indication of future happiness.

The end of the novel finds Godfrey murdered by the Indians and the Moonstone restored to its rightful position. The ending also reveals the ease of British passing for Indian. When Godfrey’s body is discovered, he is disguised as a sailor and his skin has been darkened. The implication is that Godfrey wanted to steal the Moonstone from Mr. Luker, who had agreed to lend Godfrey money based on the diamond’s worth. Godfrey had made it to an inn, where his altered appearance made him appear Indian. If he had been able to get away with his plan, suspicion would have been diverted to the Indians. Another “passer”, Murthwaite, finds his way into India’s interiors, where he reveals the final fate of the three Indians:

The god had commanded that their purification should be the purification by pilgrimage. On that night, the three men were to part. In three separate directions, they were to set forth as pilgrims to the shrines of India. Never more were they to rest on their wanderings, from the day which witnessed their separation, to the day which witnessed their death (MS 471).

The novel makes it clear that though the Indians are implicated in Godfrey’s death, they will not be punished by British law. It is apparent that Indian actions are triggered responses to British injustice (Nayder 139). They have been punished by their god; his
ruling to them is inviolate. Murthwaite also sees the new temple in which the Moon God's statue has been unveiled:

And there, in the forehead of the deity, gleamed the yellow Diamond, whose splendour had last shone on me in England . . .

Yes! after the lapse of eight centuries, the Moonstone looks forth once more, over the walls of the sacred city in which its story first began. How it has found its ways back to its wild native land—by what accident, or by what crime, the Indians regained possession of their sacred gem, may be in your knowledge, but is not in mine. You have lost sight of it in England, and (if I know anything of this people) you have lost sight of it for ever (MS 472).

After its circulation throughout the Empire, the Moonstone has made its way back to its home, celebrated in both India and England. Overall though, as Ian Duncan notes, "The English failure to recover the Moonstone mirrors an Indian success" (301). Though at the time of the novel's publication British domination was nearing its height, there were still impulses to respect India's culture and people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

"It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The role of
literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored. These two obvious 'facts' continue to be disregarded in the reading of nineteenth-century British literature. This itself attests to the continuing success of the imperialist project, displaced and dispersed into more modern forms.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Three Women's Texts* 269

This dissertation has examined the marriage plot in three literary contexts: the Victorian marriage plot, the marriage plot in 19th-century Anglo-Indian novels, and the marriage plot in the 19th-century Indian novel. Reading literature of the 19th-century in the context of imperialism is imperative in order to fully realize cultural construction in all the geographical spaces that were involved in producing the British Empire.

One goal of my project was to construct the image of women through the lens of the marriage plot. As discussed previously, imperialism is one model for the Victorian marriage—the husband is the “colonizer” and his wife is the “colonized.” It is this dynamic which often drives the Victorian woman to demonstrate her superiority to her Indian counterpart. The need of British women to demonstrate their great advantage over the predicament of Indian women necessarily leads to a breakdown in the depiction of the Indian male. The Indian male was presumed to be savage and cruel to his wife. He was at once threatening and impotent. The numerous examples of British writers comparing Indian men to animals reflect this tension. The urge to prove Indian inferiority is even greater in Anglo-Indian females. Their physical proximity to the natives actually makes them reinforce their separateness, in an effort to clearly demarcate their difference from Indian women.
Furthermore, through the depiction of Indian women in 19th-century Indian novels, I argue that marriage is ultimately liberating for Indian women; my research on the Victorian marriage plot, however, finds that marriage is confining for Victorian women, which is perhaps one reason that the marriage plot rarely depicts life beyond the courtship phase. This is juxtaposed to the Indian marriage plot, which almost exclusively deals with life after marriage. In 19th-century Indian novels Indian females—working within the parameters of their marriages—were able to utilize their strengths and move towards their own destinies, made by their own choices. On the other hand, in the Victorian novel, married females who stand up for their own choices typically sacrifice marital satisfaction to do so, such as Edith Dombey. Indian women would not be able to follow their choices if their partners were as brutal as the British imagination made them out to be.

Colonization was often a violent, bloodied experience. The numerous battles and skirmishes fought across India during the time of the East India Company and then the Raj attest to this. However, this violence is sublimated in British writing at the time, where many preferred to not deal with such issues directly, but rather through subtle cues and markers embedded in the text. One reason for this might be to maintain the idea that the Empire was built on moral imperative, not financial gain for a select few. Anglo-Indian fiction is built on an entirely different premise, engaging directly with India and Indian ideals.

Perhaps the best way to end my dissertation is by returning to one of its key texts, *The Moonstone*. The marriage of Rachel and Franklin, which comes about through the efforts of the half-Indian Ezra Jennings, suggests that an alternative to brutal imperial
policies could be cooperative, respectful exchange. *The Moonstone* is a novel that abounds in prophecies. It seems to foreshadow the exit of British rule from India almost 80 years later, as it depicts the Indian people responding to the laws that *they* have created themselves, and publicly celebrating their successful retrieval of a culturally invaluable Indian artifact lost in England.