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Mangal Pandey: Film and History

Debate over the film, Mangal Pandey, has raged on its putative lack of objectivity on the one hand, and on the other, on its depiction of an event that still has the power to “move” people. Ever since films emerged as a mass medium of significance, the notions of the “public sphere” in democracy have changed as well. This is especially so over remembering an event such as 1857, on which Indians continue to have very differing opinions. This paper argues that concerns over the film, as with 1857 itself, speak of an unresolved question of Indian democracy, i.e., whether the two domains of Indian democracy, comprising the “elite” and the “subaltern”, can ever combine to produce a “politics of the people”. Such a politics would give Indian democracy both a working sense of sovereignty and a lively sense of being truly a democracy.

ROCHONA MAJUMDAR, DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

We begin with an acknowledgement: that what happened in British India in 1857 cannot be comprehensively covered by any one particular name usually given to it – the Mutiny, the First War of Independence, a people’s war, a peasant uprising, and so on. There were no doubt particular elements in the events that partially justify such attempts at classification but we believe that, taken as a whole, what happened was no one thing. So after the fashion of calling the events of September 11, 2001, simply “9/11”, we will call the events of 1857, “1857”. Precisely because 1857 was no one specific event and had its impact on many different scales, it has been recalled on several different registers ever since its occurrence: as memoirs, as traveller’s experience, as history, as fiction, as photographs, paintings and sketches, and as films. Ketan Mehta’s film *Mangal Pandey* (2005, with Aamir Khan as Pandey) was one such recent filmic reconstruction of the early events of 1857: the rebellion of a lone soldier, Mangal Pandey, of the 34th regiment of the Native infantry of the East India Company’s army.

Our point of departure is the fact that the film *Mangal Pandey* (hereafter *MP*) gave rise to a lively debate in the Indian press about historical films and their relationship to actual histories (as historians might write them). This general point about filmic rendition of the past and its relation to the past itself – the past that historians try to recover – is something that interests us in this essay. But there is also a second point of interest. *MP* was something of an exception in stirring up such a controversy about history (for more details on the controversy, see below). *MP*, for instance, was not the first filmic representation of 1857. Two other films that readily come to mind, if we excluded Sohrab Merwanji Modi’s 1953 *Jhansi ki Rani*, are *Junoon* (1978, directed by Shyam Benegal) based on Ruskin Bond’s “A Flight of Pigeons” and *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (1977, directed by Satyajit Ray). Both these films were set against the stormy backdrop of the political turmoil of 1857. Yet, neither raised the hackles of intellectuals, politicians, film critics, and journalists in the way that *MP* did.

Indeed, as Priya Jaikumar has pointed out in her recent work on films in colonial India, historicals as a genre have had a long life in Indian cinema. From the colonial period on, Indian films in the historical genre depicted imaginary pasts, while mythologicals incorporated stories from the epics and puranas or constructed fables to narrate allegorical tales about Indian society. But the lack of realism that characterised either genre is read by Jaikumar as serving a direct political, i.e., nationalist or anti-colonial purpose during colonial rule. As she argues, “Almost in direct defiance (of the state) Indian historicals repeatedly

enacted a crisis of authority in governance. Historicals were different from socials in their placement of a film’s dramatic action in antiquity; they literally erased the presence of foreign colonisers by transposing visions of a future nation onto a fantasised past.”¹ Not that the colonial government was duped by this aesthetic sleight of hand. To cite Jaikumar once again, “The state gauged sedition based on assessment of intent; novels and films were of interest to the state for their submerged meanings and for their intentional as well as unintentional effects.”² Despite their departure from tropes of classical realism – which in the context of Indian cinema is the aesthetic counterpart of the political project of nation building – the colonial-Indian historical film can be interpreted as a text that locates the “harsh and strange spots of the past” in an even more distant or imaginary past if only to allow the viewer to “conceive good wishes for the future”.³

Jaikumar’s conclusion about the historical in the age of Empire has a direct bearing on what we argue in the forthcoming pages and is therefore worth dwelling upon at some length. Colonial cinema’s realisation of an ideal future society, she argues, “is contingent on an Antigone-like rejection of (the potentially authoritarian, unreliable, or corrupt) contemporary state/community. The colonial historical most closely fulfils a people’s romance with the notion of a future Indian nation, imagined as a predestined tryst with one’s unrealised but innate, antique potential for righteous self governance.”⁴

It seems to us, however, that with the attainment of independence, historical films lost this political function. They became the stuff of mythic lore, stories inserted into the past with no basis in either fact or politics. Hence Sharmistha Gooptu’s observation that the 1960 historical drama *Mughal-e-Azam* which was only “loosely” historical hardly ever attracted the kind of moral and political attention that got focused on *MP*.⁵ Films such as the more recent *Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002, directed by Rajkumar Santoshi), *The Making of the Mahatma* (1996, directed by Shyam Benegal), *Sardar* (1993, also directed by Ketan Mehta) have all modelled themselves on historical research. But few were roused about the historicity of these films, or their supposed impact on the audience. Yet, with *MP*, all kinds of anxieties, concerns, and strong sentiments were expressed in the press. Thus, to only give two examples, a commentator in *The Hindu* complained:

Bollywood continues to defile history. Now distorting, now disparaging, Bollywood’s arthritic treatment of the past goes on. Ketan Mehta’s much panned “Mangal Pandey” is only the latest ... In the garb of artistic licence truth is short-changed, and only

an honest cinemagoer with a heart for history duped.⁶

And a comment online read:

Aamir Khan is a rabble-rouser. It's a role he has mastered to perfection. His nostrils flare up, eye sockets pop and righteous indignation spills across the screen. It's no surprise, then, that it is this Angry Khan plastered on all posters for *Mangal Pandey: The Rising*. Luckily for him, as well as his audience, the rabble-rousing works. He did it in *Lagaan*. He does it again here. Only this time around, he's better dressed for the occasion.⁷

Among the many talking points against film were the following: the film was a travesty of "history", it was a melodramatic spectacle that cost a staggering 500 crores part of which came from the UK Film Council, but later vilified the British, that it peddled myths and jingoism as history. And perhaps most damning of all from the standpoint of the film industry was that there was no consensus on whether or not, like *Lagaan*, *MP* could be considered a box office success.

It was not that the criticism was always unfair or untrue. In any case, we do not seek to decide that question. We are attempting to put forward some speculative and tentative thoughts on why, unlike other historicals in the post-independence period, *MP* gave rise to such concern – and concerted – criticism. If we bracket for the moment the question of commercial gains – something that is at the heart of any Bollywood enterprise and something that can easily give rise to moral positions – we will proceed to suggest that the concerns about historical accuracy that were expressed about and around *MP* may be read as belonging to a tradition of debates what might constitute, properly, "a politics of the people" in democracies in the age of mass-media and mass-politics. Some aspects of this debate are global, as we shall see, but certain twists are specifically Indian.

The Narrative of the Film

MP opens with a song sequence. The picturisation is as follows. There is first a dissolving shot of a painting that gives way to the sun rising against the horizon of a river, presumably the Ganges. As titles roll we witness a group of men on an elephant addressing themselves to entire villages, early bathers on the river ghats, people congregated at bazaars and under trees, munshis, sepoys, traders, urging them all to rise. Their journey ends outside what appears to be a jail or barrack and we are introduced to one of the main players of the film – the English East India Company. The "rising" invoked in the song is also brought into perspective as we witness red coated British soldiers marching in an orderly file into the barracks escorting with them a person who is shown from the ground up. His feet are heavily shackled, he is chained and handcuffed. As the camera moves up his body we see his thickly bandaged torso under which his sacred thread is displayed quite prominently. We know at this point that the long haired, light skinned prisoner is one of the twice-born.

As we wait for a frontal shot of the prisoner we are told more about the Company. That it was one of the most powerful political and commercial enterprises of the 19th century and by 1857 it controlled 20 per cent of the world's population. The Company, the voiceover tells us, had its own laws, government, and army. Once the opposition is clearly identified, the camera rolls back to the prisoner who is now being mounted on the gallows. Standing on one side is an orderly group of British soldiers, one of whom has discomfiture and pathos written on his face. As viewers we do not know at this point that the narrative of the film will be based on the remembrance of this lone Indophilic Englishman who is later introduced as Captain Gordon. But the bruise on his cheek and his overt embarrassment at the sight of the prisoner tells us that within the East India Company are whites who feel ill-fitted to the Company's outfit. Finally we get a frontal

shot of Mangal Pandey. But our first glimpse of him happens through a noose that is about to go around his neck. This shot of Pandey's face framed by the noose returns us again to the theme of the opening song whose refrain 'mangala mangala' foretells an event that will be auspicious for all. It is almost as if the noose in this case is a garland that is put around the neck of a deity that brings all round 'kushal mangal' (good luck) – an expression occurring in the song – to worshippers and those beholding the deity. The tightening of the noose around Mangal Pandey's neck will bring a similar auspiciousness to the country where he was born. When asked by the presiding British officer whether he has a last wish, Mangal Pandey declares that it is beyond the officer's powers to grant him his last wishes. But that he is certain that those wishes would one day be fulfilled.

The hanging cannot be carried out on that day, April 7, 1857, as the hangman who was supposed to carry out the task had deserted his duty. As the Company sends out for a new hangman we enter the film's narrative through a flashback by Captain Gordon. The central axis around which the film revolves is the friendship between Mangal Pandey and Gordon. The latter is constantly separated out from the rest of his fellow officers. While he is superior in rank to Pandey, he is a man of humble origins from Glasgow, a papist among his protestant brethren. He is also more avowedly Indian than he is English having lived and worked in India and eventually is shown having a relationship with a Hindu widow, Jwala. It is Gordon who in response to a query from Mangal Pandey tells us about the Company. Answering Pandey's repeated questions about "who is the Company?", "what is this object called the Company?" Gordon states that the Company is a strange creature ('ajeeb hasti'). It has a single motto, profit. This it manages through trade – trade in indigo, opium, spices, love, honour, anything and everything in the world. He likens the company to the "villain" in the Indian epic Ramayana. But if Ravana had ten heads, the Company has a thousand which are glued together by one overriding drive – "greed." On a previous occasion, at a party in the house of his senior officer Gordon tells Emily Kent, the host's daughter that the Company forces Indian peasants to cultivate poppy from which opium is produced. This is then exported to China in exchange for silks and tea thereby producing an entire nation of opium eaters. When the Chinese emperor resists the Company, the latter dispatches its Indian sepoys to fight and die for the Company's cause. "The circle is complete" declares Gordon and "we call it the free market". Not only Gordon, throughout the first half of the film there are repeated critiques of Company rule. For example, a villager declares to his cronies 'Jab saudagar ho raja, tab praja ke baaje baaja' (When the trader becomes ruler, the subjects face the music). Crown rule however is held up as more just, benign, and fair. Lord Canning is shown as holding up a toast to the queen and to British rule which he states majestically is epitomised by modern governance, scientific rationality, and the rule of law. The Company however is a mockery of each of these ideals. So much so, that one Lockwood has been sent over from Britain to investigate the misdemeanors of the Company's financial affairs.

All this is reminiscent of what Nicholas Dirks has felicitously phrased "the scandal of Empire". For Dirks, the empire was scandalous not only in terms of the private loot carried on by Company officials, but also in its misuse and abuse "of other grants, treaties, agreements, and understandings, each of which ... became the pretext for the assumption of sovereign rights over trade, revenue, law and land on the part of a monopoly joint stock company that was at the same time systematically violating the terms of its own relationship to the Crown and Parliament of England."⁸ Yet, within the narrative structure of the film Mangal Pandey's anti-Company actions are not fuelled by any of these

miscarriages of justice. In fact he is amenable, albeit with great mental agony and anxiety, to countenance a fellow Indian servant being abused by one Captain Hewson as a “black dog” and beaten up mercilessly. He even shoots upon hapless villagers who produced opium at the Company’s behest. He shares his frustrations with Gordon, his friend and trusted superior. Perhaps the strength of the friendship gives him the wherewithal to carry on in the employment of the Company. It is not until he is convinced of the truth in the rumours about the use of cow and pig fat in the cartridges meant for use in the newly introduced Enfield rifles that Pandey turns rebellious.

If the first half of the film revolves around the friendship between Pandey and Gordon, the second half depicts its unravelling. It was Gordon’s assurance that the Company was cognisant of the sepoy’s religious beliefs that persuaded Pandey to bite off the greased cartridge. But, gradually the rumours that the cartridges were greased with substances considered profane by both Hindus and Muslims gather steam until Pandey and his other sepoy cohort pay a visit to the cartridge factory run by a Parsi businessman. In a scene bordering on the absurd we see bubbles of cow and pig fat bubbling in large cauldrons and animal carcasses strewn and hung all around the inside of the factory. Pandey stumbles out disgusted and disillusioned. His greatest concern at this point however is that he has lost his high caste status and has become an untouchable like Nainsukh. The first half of the film had several sequences where Pandey is shown spurning Nainsukh for defiling him with his touch following Pandey’s purificatory early morning bathing ritual in the Ganges. But once he is assured by the other sepoys that an act committed in ignorance is not debilitating to one’s caste status Pandey galvanises into action.

He pays a late night visit to Gordon returning to him a pistol that had been a gift from the Englishman to Pandey when he saved his life in the Afghan war. Having severed the knot with Gordon, Pandey begins to plan rebellion and the overthrow of the Company raj. In this his close collaborator is one subahdar Zafar Khan, a Muslim official in the Company’s army. The film explicitly invokes Hindu-Muslim solidarity in the rising against the British. The use of a Sufi song, Hindus showing respect for Muslim religious practices and visiting Sufi shrines creates images of a syncretic and secular culture. It is also at this point that the film raises the most interesting questions about the nature of sovereignty under colonialism. As Pandey and his colleagues meet up with Afzal Khan (modelled on Azimullah Khan?), a representative of Nana Sahib and Tantia Tope, the latter solicit the sepoys’ support in their crusade against the East India Company. Pandey’s retort to them is significant. He accuses the maharajas and other princely scions of having relinquished their kingdoms to the Company without any significant resistance. He charges them of being slothful and wedded to a life of luxury and splendour. As a member of the Company’s army, he has witnessed the infighting and lack of initiative among the maharajas. Thus there was no way that he would exchange one set of corrupt rulers, the East India company for another, the kings and princes of Hindustan. When asked who would replace the Company’s rule his one word response is “the people”. He elaborates his point with words and sentiments that would have been anachronistic in the context of the mid-19th century. “We are Hindustan”, says Pandey. “The Company rules on our strength”. Just as iron alone can “cut iron”, it is only the Company’s army that can effectively challenge the Company. Returning once again to the theme of popular sovereignty he asserts that “In England too only the coins bear the queen’s insignia. It is the people who rule”. The battle to come was a battle for freedom. It was to be a battle that would ensure “the freedom of the past for the freedom of the future”. In this war of freedom the one symbol that would hold together

the rebel army, the princes, and all would be the Red Fort in Delhi and its elderly occupant Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor.

From here on the film proceeds rapidly to its climax. The sepoys’ plot of declaring war on May 31 is foiled as the Company sends out for the queen’s regiment from Rangoon to combat the rebels before that date. Caught unawares and unprepared a few days before their planned uprising, Pandey nonetheless fights almost single-handed with the English. But here too the focal point of the dramatic action is a duel between him and Captain Gordon where Pandey clearly emerges as the victor but spares Gordon his life. Seeing that he is about to be captured by the British he puts his chest on gun point and pulls the trigger. The British however want him alive so as to mete out exemplary punishment that would deter future rebellion. When Gordon tries to persuade a hospitalised Pandey that a guilty plea and apology might save his life Pandey refuses. Once again we hear sentiments whose intellectual provenance would belong somewhere in the early 20th century but in the film are put in the mouth of an illiterate subaltern in the East India Company’s army. He tells Gordon that for the longest time, he (Pandey) had treated Nainsukh as an untouchable. Now however it is clear to him that they (implying the colonised) were all untouchables without the right to raise their heads in their own land. His fight was no longer against the “grease” or against the cartridges. He was prepared to bite off a thousand cartridges if only that would win him his freedom. His last lines quite literally (for he does not speak to his lady love Heera who comes to meet him before the hanging) are spoken to his friend Gordon. “Hindustan is rising and no one can stop it – not you, not me, not my life.”

The flashback ends here. We are returned to the opening song of the film ‘mangala mangala’ and to the re-scheduled hanging. Except this time around the punishment will take place in the open with a surging crowd of spectators who have to be reigned in by Company soldiers. Mangal Pandey escorted by the English soldiers appears on screen. Unlike in the opening scene this time he emerges head first, almost as if he is rising from the ashes. Indeed he is a new man. Gone are his allegiances as a paid Company sepoy, his pride as a brahmin, as a man who used to loathe prostitutes. He emerges as the first future citizen who is martyring himself for his country. The slow emergence of this figure – head first with a prominent red tilak on his forehead, followed by his muscular arms bound to a bamboo pole, his legs in chains all seem to signal the emergence of an unmarked citizen subject who is martyring himself for his country. The significance of his still wearing the sacred thread seems to have been negated by his earlier statements about untouchability. As he is marched to the gallows his eyes stare straight ahead. The only person he casts a sidelong glance at is Gordon. The next few scenes unfold swiftly. Pandey shouts his last words “Halla Bol” exhorting the massive crowd to rise in rebellion. His body, shown from a distance whooshes up, and a deathly silence descends upon the crowd. After this momentary lull, it is Nainsukh the untouchable who follows Pandey’s cry, yells “Halla Bol” and breaks through the barricade of British soldiers. The mutiny has begun. The crowd that had gathered to view the spectacle of Pandey’s death rushes forth on the field in a manner reminiscent of the exultant crowd of villagers after the cricket victory in *Lagaan*. The voiceover is resumed one last time as we are informed that this was one of the “bloodiest battles in human history”. It put an end to the Company’s Raj in India and led to the Queen’s proclamation in 1858.

Historical records have apparently noted that an English officer named Gordon fought on the side of the sepoys. While the British termed this event the “mutiny”, Om Puri’s baritone tells us for Indians it has remained the “first war of independence” and

Mangal Pandey is one of the first martyrs of that war. There is a rapid succession of portraits. First it is Queen Victoria, whose face dissolves into Mangal Pandey's whose face in turn dissolves into found footage showing Gandhi and familiar scenes reminiscent of Gandhian civil disobedience. Pandey's dream we are informed was realised in 1947 when Nehru is shown hoisting the Indian national flag.

Travesty of History?

Very little indeed is known about the historical person Mangal Pandey, a member of No 5 Company of the 34th Native Infantry at Barrackpore, who "mutinied" some time late in the afternoon of March 29, 1857.⁹ His presence in the actual history of 1857 seems to have been shadowy. On the one hand, there is the claim that "his actions precipitated the mutiny/rebellion of 1857".¹⁰ But it is at the very least uncertain whether Pandey's individual act of mutiny can be said to have precipitated 1857, for the grievances over greased cartridges had been festering for some time.¹¹ Some of the histories of 1857 published in the years immediately following the events do not – even when they mention the Mangal Pandey episode – cast him in the role of a catalyst. William Howard Russell, "the first war correspondent" who wrote on the Crimean War and who came to India in 1858 to report on "the rumours on atrocities against British men, women and children ... and to inquire into the circumstances of the failure of the British rule in India which had been brought to light by the Mutiny", did not even mention Mangal Pandey in his published diaries.¹²

Yet it is clear at the same time that the British had some perception of a general discontent over questions of religion and greased cartridges that was growing among the sepoys and that Mangal Pandey typified for them. Some sense of the British feelings is conveyed by Martin Richard Gubbins, a member of the Bengal Civil Service and the financial commissioner for Awadh in what he wrote in his contemporary account of the "mutinies in Oudh". It was in April 1857 that Gubbins said, "uneasiness first begun to be felt by the authorities at Lucknow respecting the allegiance of the native soldiers quartered at that capital. During the two preceding months, the newspapers had made known the general repugnance felt by the sepoys to the use of the new cartridges. We had heard of the mutiny of the 19th Regiment of Native Infantry at Berhampore, and its disbandment at Barrackpore. The feelings of the disbanded soldiers was known to be anything but friendly".¹³ George Treveleyan's book on the events in Kanpur, first published in 1865, dates British "uneasiness" from even earlier: "from about the middle of January 1857 onward".¹⁴ It is the emergence of Mangal Pandey as a type (to the British) in this context that is signalled by the fact that Pandey's name "gave rise to the description of all (rebellious sepoys) ... as 'Pandies'".¹⁵ Or as Treveleyan put it, with all the force of contemporary British prejudice: "Mungul Pandey was condemned by court-martial and duly hanged on the 8th of April ... Public opinion had become less squeamish before the year was out. From this miserable fanatic was taken the name of 'Pandy', which in Anglo-Indian slang signified a mutineer."¹⁶

There is very little in contemporary descriptions of Pandey's mutiny that suggests the figure of a nationalist hero. In most accounts of Pandey in his state of rebellion – when he came out wearing his "regimental dress" on top of his dhoti and carrying a loaded musket – is described as calling out to his comrades exhorting them to come out and defend their religion. There is nothing about the freedom of the country in the early reports of his statements. There is, of course, some debate about whether he was under the influence of "bhang or opium, or both"; it was

also suggested at the time that he "suffered from epilepsy" – but that by itself is neither here nor there.¹⁷ Local histories that preserve the memories of Mangal Pandey and his ancestors – such as Ram Vichar Pande's *Shaheed Mangal Pandey* (incidentally, a title first conferred on Pandey by Savarkar – see below) or Durga Prasad Gupta's *Ballia aur uske Niwasi* – reportedly focus on the piety of the Pandey family.¹⁸ Local memories of Mangal Pandey are quite clearly tied up more with the local honour and ritual status of this brahmin family – his grandfather Shivrinarain, we are told, for example, was versed in astrology, or that sweetmeats worth rupees seventeen were distributed when Pandey was born in 1828 (or alternatively in 1831), that his father Jagannath Pandey used to worship in the Shiva temple "just behind their house" in the village of Nagwa of the Ballia district (Uttar Pradesh) and so on.¹⁹ M L Bhargava who summarises these local fables in a collection of documents on 1857 and who once acted as a member of the History of Freedom Movement Committee of Uttar Pradesh adds a nationalist icing on top of this cake of local sentiments with his assertion that "Mangal Pandey...shall remain memorable in Free India as a martyr for the freedom of motherland".²⁰

In fact, we know so little about the real Mangal Pandey that the only way to make him into a hero is to create a composite character – stick into the sketchy outlines we have of his life details from other places, other lives and other times. Anachronism has to be the name of the game. William Dalrymple is probably right in his observation in his recent book, *The Last Mughal*, that it was the young Savarkar who first raised Pandey to the status of being an icon of Indian nationalism.²¹ Savarkar devoted a chapter to him in his nationalist classic, *The Indian War of Independence*. The chapter is significantly titled 'Shahid Mangal Pandey'.²² Savarkar portrays Pandey as a hero of 1857 by describing him as a "valiant young man" and "a brahmin (who) took up the duties of a kshatriya," whose love of "his religion" was more than that of "his life". "Pure in his private life and undaunted in battle, the idea of the freedom of his country had entered and electrified his blood."²³ Savarkar's Mangal Pandey says and experiences things not supported by historical evidence:

The idea that his brethren were going to be insulted before him fired Mangal Pandey's heart, and he began to insist that his own regiment should rise on the same very day. When he heard that the leaders of the Organisation would not consent to his plan, the young man's spirit became uncontrollable, and he at once snatched and loaded his gun, and jumped on the parade ground, shouting "Rise! Ye brethren rise! I bind you by the oaths of your religion! Come, let us rise and attack the treacherous enemies for the sake of our freedom."²⁴

The "organisation" that Savarkar assumed into existence has never been proven to have really existed. Pandey walked up and down in front of the quarter-guard rather than "jump on to the parade ground" and, by all accounts, the historical Pandey did not utter a single word about "our freedom". He did speak about religion though.

Aamir Khan does something similar to Savarkar. Savarkar created a Mangal Pandey whom the reader could imagine as a hero of the nation's epic struggle for freedom. As he once said in an issue of the *Tulwar*, the organ of the Abhinava Bharat Revolutionary Society, his objective was – "subject to historical accuracy" (a rule he did not always observe) – "to inspire his people with a burning desire to rise again and wage a second successful war to liberate the motherland".²⁵ The chapter on Mangal Pandey ended with the call: "Let every mother teach her son the story of this hero with pride."²⁶

Aamir Khan also wants to make Mangal Pandey seem like the hero of "the rising". The film therefore deliberately takes many liberties with history. Thus, one would not know, watching the

film, that the incident of a low-caste (not necessarily “untouchable”) ‘lascar’ (or ‘khalasee’ in some accounts) taunting a brahmin sepoy about his caste-consciousness while informing him of the greased cartridges was an incident that reportedly took place in Dum Dum in January 1857 and was not a part of the historical Mangal Pandey’s life.²⁷ Nor would they know that it was around Meerut and about May in 1857 that “courtesans of the bazaar brothels” began to taunt the troopers, “egging on the men to rescue their 85 comrades from the gaol”.²⁸ Nor would the delightfully creative anachronism of a character like Captain Gordon be obvious to the viewer. As several scholars have pointed out, the sepoy-officer relationship was actually undergoing a change between c 1820 and 1850 as the older type of officers who “wrestled” with their sepoys and “gave *nautes* for the regiment” were being replaced by a new type – men who knew less of the sepoys and of their languages and practices, men who readily address the latter as “nigger” or ‘suwar’ (pig). Sir Charles Napier had, in fact, lamented this development some years before 1857.²⁹

Besides, the film operates with an image of the brahmin that is fundamentally ahistorical and orientalist. This is the brahmin who is always – and under any circumstances – hyper-sensitive about his caste-status and the rituals of purity, an image that also was peddled by popular British histories of 1857 both in the 19th and the 20th centuries. British historians of 1857 writing for a general readership went to some length to explain to their readers why a brahmin soldier may have been really upset to be told by a low-caste person of the danger posed by greased cartridges to their standing in the caste-system. This was the gloss supplied by T R E Holmes for the English reader of the 19th century:

It is hard to convey to the mind of an English reader as adequate idea of the force of the shock beneath which the imagination of that brahmin must have reeled when he heard these words... It must be remembered that not faith, not righteousness, but ritual was the essence of his religion. For him to be told that he was to touch with his lips the fat of the cow was as appalling as it would have been to a mediaeval Catholic to listen to the sentence of excommunication.³⁰

Richard Hilton, once a major-general in the British-Indian army, who wrote a “centenary history” of 1857, sought to assist his mid-20th-century reader with another parallel, stereotyping the brahmin and “a cultured European” with equal force. He wrote: “To appreciate fully the shocked surprise of the brahmin, one must try to imagine a cultured European, of particular personal habits, being asked by some filthy tramp [the place of the low-caste person] for the loan of his toothbrush.”³¹

What such stereotypes – and the film *MP* – overlook is the strong possibility, or perhaps even the fact, that the heightened consciousness, on the part of the brahmin sepoys of the Bengal army, of being brahmins may have been a product, not of any eternal brahminism, but of the very employment policies of the East India Company. As Dalrymple writes, perceptively: “Encouraged to regard themselves as an elite by the British, the northern Indian peasant farmers [many of them brahmins] who became sepoys had grown to become very particular about the preparation and eating of their food, and notions of caste, which in India had traditionally been relatively fluid, underwent a process of “Sanskritisation”, as the sepoys came to understand such issues being central to their notions of self respect.”³² This point was not unfamiliar to the British in the 19th century. Sir Charles Napier had issued a warning long before 1857. He said: “The most important thing which I reckon injurious to the Indian army is the immense influence given to caste; instead of being discouraged, it has been encouraged in the Bengal army; in the Bombay army it is discouraged; and that army is in better order than the army of Bengal, in which the brahmins have been leaders in every mutiny.”³³

There is no such historical perspective in *MP*. Much ink has, therefore, been understandably dispensed in both India and the UK on the factual errors that are strewn throughout *MP*. Saul David noted that while he was no “apologist of the East India Company”, there is no “evidence” that supports the film’s assertions pertaining to prostitution and slavery.³⁴ He also questioned the idea, so central to the film, that the events of 1857 were sparked off by the East India Company using cartridges greased with cow and pig fat. Interestingly, two books (although from different vantage points) on Mangal Pandey were published in India the same year that the film was released. One of them *Mangal Pandey: the true story of an Indian Revolutionary* by Amaresh Misra celebrated Pandey’s valour as is suggested by his title. The other by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Mangal Pandey: Brave Martyr or Accidental Hero?* adopts a more complex understanding of Pandey.³⁵ Mukherjee (basing his observations upon works by authors like Kaye, Malleson and others) draws attention to the fact that Mangal Pandey was a name that continued to haunt the British. The myth that surrounds the name of Mangal Pandey writes Mukherjee, “is a British creation”. Briefly, Mukherjee’s arguments can be summarised as follows: Pandey had acted in a fit of intoxication. The revolt of 1857 was a collective endeavour without a single author. To ascribe its origins to the acts of a lone, inebriated sepoy would therefore be historically fallacious.

Yet historians’ objections to *MP*, while they may have been based on facts, are surprising as the film begins with a disclaimer that should have disarmed the historically-minded. The disclaimer appears before the title sequence and says in no uncertain terms that:

This story is based on actual events. In certain cases incidents, characters and timelines have been changed or fictionalised for dramatic purposes. Certain characters may be dramatic composites or entirely fictitious. Some names and locations have been changed. The scenes depicted may be a hybrid of fact and fiction which fairly represent the source materials for the film believed to be true by the filmmakers.

There is no denying that *MP* creates Mangal Pandey into a composite character. He is not entirely fictitious but he is not entirely historical either. There is little doubt from the start that this is not a “historical” that is about history alone. To criticise the film in terms of its historical shortcomings is to make a confusion of categories or genres. This point is simple enough and would not be unknown to our historians. Why then the confusion and the subsequent criticisms?

Media, Memory, and the Politics of the People

This is where we enter the more speculative and the concluding part of our argument.

There were certain responses to *MP* within India that raised questions about how the past – and 1857 in particular – circulates in popular memory and in popular rituals of memorialisation that are not, as we shall see, unconnected to questions of how democracy and mass media influence each other. It was reported that people in Ballia, reportedly Mangal Pandey’s native district, held demonstrations demanding the deletion of what they deemed were the “offending” portions in film. Clearly they were referring to scenes that showed Pandey getting intimate with the prostitute Heera.³⁶ The same newspaper reported that the villagers took out a mock funeral procession under the banner of Swaraj Darshan, a local theatre group, and burnt an effigy of filmmaker Ketan Mehta at the district headquarters. *The Indian Express* reported that the film was considered offensive by the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh Mulayam Singh Yadav who issued a statement saying that “his government was examining the film

after charges that the script had showed the freedom war hero visiting a brothel". The fact that the film did not mention Pandey's native village Nagwa was also found highly objectionable. "These are issues related to the legendary hero and cannot be taken lightly, since it hurts public sentiments and will be banned if the allegations are found to be true", declared Yadav.³⁷ A kind of mass hysteria accompanied the release of the film in certain pockets of the country. Since Pandey belonged to the infantry regiment in Barrackpore, the local townspeople inaugurated a statue of Mangal Pandey coinciding with the national release of the film, while a senior official of the Indian army released it.³⁸

We suggest that the criticisms and concerns expressed about this film in the print media had something to do with the unavoidable recognition of the power of a mass-medium like film to shape popular memories or perceptions of the past. Semanti Ghosh's Bengali article 'Kalpanar Hysteria' or "the hysteria of imagination" best captures some of these concerns. Briefly put, the concerns expressed about films such as *MP* have to do with the impact that falsification of historical fact would have on the minds of the young (Indian) cine-goer.³⁹ Implicit in these fears is an acknowledgement that film today is much more pervasive and powerful than print at captivating and kindling popular imagination. To expose young or "ignorant" minds to the fabrication of history, something that allegedly saturates the text of *MP*, could potentially have a deleterious impact on the received pedagogy of thousands of viewers.

This is a long-standing concern with its own transnational history but it has some specifically Indian inflections as well.⁴⁰ Let us briefly recapitulate the transnational aspect of the problem first. Historians (with individual exceptions) have often expressed a degree of concern about filmic rendition of the past. An eminent historian of our times, for instance, reports a certain feeling of unease with the way film-makers market "experience" as a way of getting access to the past. We refer here to Natalie Davis' discussion of two films, Stephen Spielberg's *Amistad* and Oprah Winfrey's *Beloved*, both depicting slavery on screen. Winfrey thus explained her own objectives in creating this filmic rendition of Toni Morrison's novel: "I wanted people to be able to feel deeply on a very personal level what it meant to be a slave, what slavery did to people, and also be liberated by that knowledge". She is reported to have said to her scriptwriter and fellow-producer, "This is my *Schindler's List*".⁴¹ Spielberg similarly used "considerable dramatic licence", reports Davis, in *Amistad* so as to make it "symbolic of a struggle that continues to this day" in the form of "immigrants brought in illegally to work in sweatshops".⁴² Davis, as a historian, is clearly unhappy about this collapsing of the distance between the past and the present. She does not go as far as Louis Gottschalk of the University of Chicago did when, in 1935, he wrote the following to the President of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer:

If the cinema art is going to draw its subjects so generously from history, it owes it to its patrons and its own higher ideals to achieve greater accuracy. No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticise and revise it.⁴³

But, clearly, it has been a losing battle in the last 70 odd years for those on Gottschalk's side. Davis presents a weaker version of the Gottschalk argument but, for her, the presentism that is often endemic to filmic representation is an issue. She writes: "The play of imagination in picturing resistance to slavery can follow the rules of evidence when possible, and the spirit of evidence when details are lacking."⁴⁴ At the very least, film-makers should follow the principle of separating the past from the present and not collapse that distinction into one single experience. "Strangeness in history", she writes, should be sustained "along with familiar". Or, as she puts it in another place

in the book: historical films should "let the past be the past".⁴⁵

The film-studies critic Tom Gunning has clarified what threatens the enterprise of the historian here. He emphasises how films make the past available by making it vivid thereby converting it directly into an object of embodied "experience". This is very different from the ideal of re-enacting the past in the historian's mind. In Gunning's words:

...film provides indelible images of some of the 20th century's great events. Our horrified consciousness of the Holocaust relies partly on the filmed images from the liberation of the camps, and our knowledge of the devastation of the Atomic bomb comes partly from motion pictures of Hiroshima or of A-bomb test explosions. Conversely, twentieth-century disasters or traumas that went unrecorded by motion pictures – such as the genocide of the Armenians or mass starvation in Asia – are less present in public consciousness because of the lack of vivid images... Fictional films serve as historical evidence in the same way that other representational art forms do – by making events vivid... [A]s a form of mass visual entertainment, films reflect social attitudes in a specific and vivid manner.⁴⁶

Such vividness that is not mediated and controlled by the abstract form of historical reasoning that academic historians employ could, it is feared, destroy the principle of historical objectivity.

At issue here is not just the aesthetic or academic question of historical objectivity. This objectivity, one may argue, is a critical tool of a certain conception of democracy as well. The question can therefore easily become political. The coming of mass-media emphasising audio-visual forms of reception and judgment has globally changed the nature of the public sphere in democracies. Instead of the 18th century model described by Habermas – a public sphere based, ultimately, on the individual's capacity for disembodied reasoning, a "brains in vats" model, really – we have public spheres animated by the direct appeal to the senses (as well as reasoning) that a medium like films can make. (Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is an excellent case in point.)

One can read what was said for and against *MP* in the Indian press as a version of this transnational or global debate about democracy. But the debate takes on a particular form in India, and especially so when it comes to remembering 1857. The business of remembering 1857 has always split Indians, one could say. On the one hand, there is the tradition that Savarkar inaugurated – of calling 1857 the first war of independence. This tradition has never quite died. Leaving aside the question of use of Savarkar by nationalists such as Subhas Chandra Bose and confining our remarks to academics alone, it is interesting to see that even R C Majumdar, who otherwise disagreed with S B Chaudhuri's characterisation of 1857 as a "civil disturbance", judged that Mangal Pandey "fully deserves the honour of the first martyr which posterity has given him".⁴⁷ Rudrangshu Mukherjee saw 1857 as a "popular" rebellion – which S N Sen, C A Bayly, and others have granted in the case of Awadh.⁴⁸ And, indeed, as we have stated before, Om Puri's voice-over in *MP* clearly calls 1857 "the first war of independence".

Some very eminent nationalists, on the other hand, opposed the Savarkar line of thinking soon after independence. Consider the then education minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Foreword to S N Sen's official centenary history of 1857. Azad asked for an "objective" piece of history in order to oppose the way of thinking associated with Savarkar. He wrote, referring indirectly to Savarkar: "Some Indians have written on the struggle in the early years of this century. If the truth is to be told, ... the books they have written are not history but mere propaganda. These authors wanted to represent the uprising as a planned war of independence organised by the nobility of India against the British government." This, Azad thought, was baseless. It was

“ridiculous”, for instance, to consider Ali Naqi Khan “one of the chief conspirators” when he was “completely a henchman of the East India Company” and whom the people of Lucknow “looked upon ... as a traitor”.⁴⁹

Yet 1857 has always cast a long shadow across the terrain of Indian politics ever since it happened. The Quit India movement in Bihar often brought back – both to the nationalists and British officials – memories of it.⁵⁰ The mobilisation against vasectomy in northern India during the Emergency reminded many of the events of the 19th century, and with the advent of *Subaltern Studies* in the 1980s, Ranajit Guha famously saw in 1857 a paradigmatic form of peasant insurgency that was central to his conceptualisation of Indian politics having two necessary domains and idioms: an elite one represented by leaders such as Nehru and a “popular” or subaltern one that classically followed and expressed the logic of insurgency that Guha discerned in 1857 and other similar events.⁵¹

We submit that the concerns expressed around Aamir Khan’s and Ketan Mehta’s portrayal of Mangal Pandey speak to an unresolved question of Indian democracy, a question that acquires urgency the more mass forms of democracy take root in India. This is the question of the two domains – to stay for the moment with Guha’s formulation – could be combined into a “politics of the people” that would give Indian democracy both a working sense of sovereignty (an effective rule of law, that is) and a lively sense of being truly a democracy (a rule of the demos). The Constitution was written in the name of a category called “the people of India”. That was an example of performative speech. But in everyday we have had several and very different – and one might even say, competing – ways of imagining what a “politics of the people” might look like and how the category “people” might be represented in politics. There, firstly, was the Nehruvian imagination of “the people” after independence – a “people” as committed to the nation as the nation was committed to its people(s). In the world of Bombay films, this equation of a romanticised category called “the people” with the nation shifted from the historical to the social in the period immediately after independence. This imaginary was most vividly brought to life in song sequences from films of the 1950s where the slum, the street, the city became the ground of play for “the people”. These were sites where the ordinary, the average work-a-day person, the socially under-privileged, and poor were portrayed as “subjects” whose playfulness, heroism, joys and sorrows could be properly realised in some vision of national unity. Songs like ‘Dil Ka Haal Sune Dil Wala’, ‘Ramaiyah Wasta Vaiah’, ‘Mera Joota Hai Japani’, ‘Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan’ were all redolent with image of “the people” as sovereign despite their financial impoverishment and other social handicaps.

But this 1950s’ imagination of the people as the subaltern equivalent of the nation withered as the decades wore on and the older nationalist or socialist imagination of the “masses” as a united agency ceased to be viable. Politics of caste, of dalit self-assertion, of reservations, of the rise of the criminal-politicians and of the mafia, of widespread corruption have fragmented the category of the “people” into many other forms of representation some of which have been portrayed, for instance, by Sanjay Dutt, notably in his Munnabhai films. As has been so aptly demonstrated by scholars like Ravi Vasudevan, Ranjini Mazumdar and others, cinema’s investment in this category of the “people” is now performed via repeated engagements with notions of criminality, the fracturing of the urban space, the corrosion of a moral economy – in short with an attempt to demonstrate how and under what social pressures the category has been splintered and robbed of all buoyancy.⁵²

MP, then, becomes an interesting and intriguing film when we see it as a part of a cluster of films – *Lagaan*, *Rang de Basanti*

– that have sought to rescue this category called “the people” and that centre around the depiction of its main actor, Aamir Khan, as a citizen hero. This presentation of the hero – preserving intact his heroic qualities but cathecting his entire existence on to an imagined, romantic category called “the people” – is accomplished through a wilful manipulation of Indian history. Khan as Mangal Pandey or Bhuvan (in *Lagaan*) or Daljeet (in *Rang de Basanti*) would have no existence as a character without the films also simultaneously hypostatizing a greater category – the people. *MP*, like some other films that Khan appeared in, resonates with an effort to grapple with the present, to find succour for the problems of the contemporary by recasting the past. Interestingly, all these films bypass the immediate post-independence decades, a close engagement with which might offer a more linear account of the present. Instead all of these films undertake a temporal loop into the colonial period in which they embed the category of the people. The films appear to pose viewers with the question of whether or not we would have a different “now”, and certainly a different future, if the past were to be altered by these instances of popular agency. In other words, the process by which the films accomplish or provoke in the viewer the capacity to imagine a new “now” is by energising and dramatising with the aid of melodrama and spectacle – the two most favoured and assured tropes of Hindi cinema – the entity of the people. It is the people that emerge as the protagonist in the trio, *Lagaan*, *MP*, and *Rang de Basanti*. Much like *Lagaan* (2001) and *Rang de Basanti* (2006) – two films that preceded and followed *MP* – the latter too can be read as recuperating this imaginative category of the people that has died in Bollywood cinema.

What may appear disturbing about the use of the past in this rendition of “the people” in *MP* is precisely what remains unresolved in Indian democracy, and that is the relationship between the “popular” and the “democratic”. The Nehruvian dream of an orderly, disciplined (we use this word advisedly) democracy comes up everyday against the resistance of “popular” politics of various kinds. At the centre of these clashes internal to the cultures of Indian democracy are questions of pedagogy. How will we learn to make our society ever more democratic? Can we have a democracy that abandons the ideals of a Habermasian public sphere and the rule of law? But *who* will instil these ideas and in *whom*? Who will be the teachers and who will be the taught? It is on these kinds of questions that elitist answers founder. Will the “people” be merely an object of representation or will they, in some ways, speak directly for themselves? Can they be their own teachers? The anxiety expressed by some on this score seems legitimate, for – as 1857 and numerous other instances of subaltern politics make clear – while there is something inherently democratic about the popular, the popular by itself does not ever guarantee the achievement of a democratic culture that, say, treasures the individual or the right of dissent. Aamir Khan’s *Mungal Pandey* speaks to this dilemma that is quite central to the evolving politics of Indian democracy.⁵³ [27]

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Notes

1 Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema At the End Of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006, pp 205-06. Words in parenthesis ours.

2 Ibid, p 206.

3 On questions of realism in Hindi films, see Ashish Rajyadhaksha, ‘Realism, Modernism and Post-colonial Theory’ in John Hill and Pamela Church-Gibson eds, *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, pp 415- 25; Sumita Chakravarty, *National Identity*

- in *Indian Popular Cinema, 1847-1987*, Austin, University of Texas Press, Texas, 1993; and Madhav Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Reconstruction*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998. The words within quotes are quoted somewhat out of context from Natalie Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2000, p 136.
- 4 Jaikumar, *Cinema*, p 216.
 - 5 Sharmistha Gooptu, 'Mangal Pandey: Is History Important?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 27, 2005.
 - 6 Ziya Us Salam, 'Wreaking Havoc with History', *The Hindu*, August 26, 2005.
 - 7 Lindsay Pereira, 'The Rising: History Comes Alive', August 12, 2005, <http://in.rediff.com/movies/2005/aug/12aamir.htm>
 - 8 Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p xiii.
 - 9 Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny 1857*, Penguin, London, 2003, Chapter 7 entitled 'Mungul Pandey', pp 67-77, has much of the historical detail about Pandey's mutiny that is currently available.
 - 10 P J O Taylor ed, *A Companion to the "Indian Mutiny" of 1857*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, p 209, entry on 'Mangal Pande'.
 - 11 Greased cartridges had been first imported in 1853. For some details of early disaffection about the cartridges, see Surendra Nath Sen, *Eighteen Fifty Seven*, Publications Division, Delhi, Government of India, 1995 (first published 1957), pp 40-45.
 - 12 See William Howard Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, ed, Michael Edwardes, Cassell and Co, London, 1957 (first pub 1860).
 - 13 Martin Richard Gubbins, *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh, and of the Siege of the Lucknow Residency; with Some Observations on the Conditions of the Province of Oudh, and on the Causes of the Mutiny in the Bengal Army*, Richard Bentley, London, 1858, pp 1-2.
 - 14 Sir George Treveleyan, *Cawnpore*, Macmillan, London, 1907 (first pub 1865), pp 24-25.
 - 15 Taylor, *Companion*, p 209.
 - 16 Treveleyan, *Cawnpore*, p 29.
 - 17 Taylor, *Companion*, p 209. Scholars pointing to the effect of 'bhang' on Pandey's decision to rebel often seem to overlook the point that an intoxicant may, under certain circumstances, very well work to facilitate "agency" for human beings. It is also interesting to note that the point about Pandey's being under the influence of bhang was perhaps first made by his co-sepoys who may have said it to exonerate both him and themselves in the hope of a lighter punishment. We are told that it was on being admonished by General Hearsey that that the sepoys of the 34th Regiment said "with one voice" of Pandey – "He is mad – had taken *bhung*... to excess". See M L Bhargava, *Saga of 1857: Success and Failures*, Reliance Publishing House, Delhi, 1992, p 37.
 - 18 Bhargava, *Saga*, pp 49-51.
 - 19 Bhargava, *Saga*, pp 49-50.
 - 20 Bhargava, *Saga*, p 53.
 - 21 William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty*, Delhi, 1857, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2006, p 20.
 - 22 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, Phoenix, Bombay, 1947, first published 1909, Part II, Chapter 1, pp 101-06.
 - 23 Savarkar, *War*, p 103.
 - 24 Savarkar, *War*, p 103.
 - 25 Cited by G M Joshi in his Foreword 'The Story of this History' to Savarkar, *War*, p x.
 - 26 Savarkar, *War*, p 105.
 - 27 Even as a historical incident, this has many versions. For example, R C Majumdar, basing himself on a letter by General Hearsey, dates the incident to "early January 1857" and describes the "low-caste" person as a 'khalasi'. R C Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, Firma K L, Calcutta (1957), 1963, Book 2, Chapter 1, p 69. T R E Holmes in his then-popular book, *A History of the Indian Mutiny and the Disturbances Which Accompanied it Among the Civil Population*, W H Allen and Co, London, 1891 (4th edn, first pub 1883, reprinted 1885, 1888), p 78 gives simply "one day in January, 1857" as the date of the incident and reports the low-caste person to have been a 'lascar'. Major-General Richard Hilton's *The Indian Mutiny: A Centenary History*, Hollis and Carter, London, 1957, p 25, on the other hand – and after making much heavy weather of how "perversion of history can be a powerful weapon of propaganda (p 1) – surprisingly homes in on "the middle of January" as the precise date for this "strange incident" without telling us what his authority may have been for such a date.
 - 28 P O J Taylor, *What Really Happened During the Mutiny: A Day-by-Day Account of the Major Events of 1857-1859 in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999, p 45.
 - 29 See the discussion in Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny*, pp 34-44 and Michael Edwardes, *Red Year: The Rebellion of 1857*, Cardinal, London, 1975, pp 21-22. Treveleyan, *Cawnpore*, p 36, writes: "And so it came to pass that [for the European army officers in India] to be sent back to head-quarters was 'a shame', regimental duty was 'a bore', and the sepoys were 'niggers'. That hateful word ... made its first appearance in decent society during the years which immediately preceded the mutiny."
 - 30 Holmes, *A History*, p 78.
 - 31 Hilton, *The Indian Mutiny*, p 25.
 - 32 Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*, p 135. Words in parenthesis ours. See also the footnote in Dalrymple on this page.
 - 33 Napier cited in Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny giving a detailed account of the Sepoy insurrection in India; and a concise history of the great military events which have tended to consolidate British Empire in Hindostan*, Vol I, Master Publishers, New Delhi, nd (1859), p 36.
 - 34 Saul David cited in Khalid Ansari, 'Brits Rising against Mangal', *Midday*, August 18, 2005. He is also cited in a story on Mangal Pandey by the BBC. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/1/hi/entertainment/film/4151152.stm> Published: 2005/08/14 16:39:14 GMT.
 - 35 Amaresh Misra, *Mangal Pandey: The True Story of an Indian Revolutionary*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2005; Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Mangal Pandey: Brave Martyr or Accidental Hero?*, Penguin, Delhi, 2005.
 - 36 'Mangal Pandey Irks Native Villagers', *The Statesman*, July 29, 2005.
 - 37 'UP Government Considering Banning Aamir Khan Starrer', *The Indian Express*, August 15, 2005.
 - 38 Semanti Ghosh, 'Kalpanar Hysteria' 'The Hysteria of Imagination', *Anandabazar Patrika*, August 14, 2005.
 - 39 Ghosh, 'Kalpanar Hysteria'.
 - 40 In this part of the argument, we draw on Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'History and the Politics of Recognition' in Alan Jenkins and Keith Munslow eds, *Manifestos for Historians*, Routledge, London and New York, forthcoming. See also the discussion in Chakrabarty, 'Itihasheer janajibon' [The Public Life of History], in Bengali, *Anustup*, Annual/Puja number, October 2005.
 - 41 Winfrey cited in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on the Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2000), p 99.
 - 42 Davis, *Slaves*, p 131.
 - 43 Gottschalk cited in Robert A Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age' in Marcia Landy ed, *The Historical Film: History and Memory in the Media*, Rutgers University Press (Rutgers, N.J, 2001), p 50. The quote originally occurs in Peter Novick's, *A Noble Dream*.
 - 44 Davis, *Slavery*, p 136.
 - 45 Ibid, pp 131, 136.
 - 46 Tom Gunning, *Making Sense of Films* on <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/>. Indeed, even some British schools appear to be teaching their students the history of British imperialism in India today through Bollywood films. As Amit Roy recently reported in the *Kolkata Telegraph*: "Andrew Robinson, history master at Eton College, keeps a copy of Lagaan handy to acquaint his boys with the scholarship of India's best-known historians, Aamir Khan and Ashutosh Gowariker. Most Britons also take their knowledge of Gandhi from Richard Attenborough's Oscar-winning movie." Amit Roy, 'India Divides Britain', *The Telegraph* (Kolkata), December 28, 2006.
 - 47 Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p 74.
 - 48 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt: A Study of Popular Resistance*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984; see Bayly's comments in Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, ed, C A Bayly, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p 236.
 - 49 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 'Foreword' to S N Sen, *Eighteen Fifty Seven*, pp xvi-xvii.
 - 50 This is discussed in Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'In the Name of Politics: Sovereignty and the Multitude in Indian Democracy', first published in *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006) and forthcoming in a revised form in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori eds, *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: The Transition in India and Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2007.
 - 51 See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, and his contribution to the first volume of *Subaltern Studies* (1982).
 - 52 See Ravi Vasudevan, 'Disreputable and Illegal Publics: Cinematic Allegories in Times of Crisis' in *Sarai Reader, Crisis/Media*, 2004, pp 71-79; 'An Imperfect Public: Cinema and Citizenship in the "Third World"' in *Old Media/New Media: Ongoing Histories*, *Sarai Reader*, 2001, pp 57-70; Ranjini Mazumdar, 'Ruin and the Uncanny City: Memory, Despair, and Death in Parinda', *Sarai Reader: The Cities of Everyday Life*, 2002, pp 68-77.
 - 53 Some of these questions are taken up in Chakrabarty, 'In the Name of Politics', *EPW*, 2006.