

## A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945

by Kylas Chunder Dutt (A student at the Hindoo College.)

[from *The Calcutta Literary Gazette, or, Journal of Belles Lettres, Science, and the Arts*, Vol. III, new series, no. 75 (6th June 1835)]

And shall we, shall men, after five and twenty years of ignominious servitude, shall we, through a fear of dying, defer one single instant to assert our liberty? No, Romans; now is the time; the favourable moment we have so long waited for is come.

JUNIUS BRUTUS<sup>55</sup>

The people of India and particularly those of the metropolis had been the subject for the last fifty years to every species of subaltern oppression. The dagger and the bowl were dealt out with a merciless hand, and neither age, sex, nor condition could repress the rage of the British barbarians. These events, together with the recollection of the grievances suffered by their ancestors, roused the dormant spirit of the generally considered timid Indian. Finding that every day the offences instead of being extenuated were aggravated, that no redress could be obtained by appeals to either Lords or Commons, he formed the bold but desperate resolution of hurling Lord Fell Butcher, viceroy of India, from his seat and establishing a government composed of the most patriotic men in the kingdom. It is neither a matter of surprise nor for indignation, that the born subjects of 'the lord's anointed' of merry England should take up arms against their sovereign, when we consider the deep and dreadful provocations which the Indians received. It was the only method calculated to repress the brutal atrocities of the merciless conquerors. Men accustomed to scenes of dangerous intrigue and infamous cruelty soon become callous to the generous feelings of human nature. With the rapidity of lightning the spirit of Rebellion spread through this once pacific people. It is easy for the historian and the bard to depict in the most lively colours the excesses committed by revolutionary parties, but he only can truly judge of their situation who has been a fellow sufferer with those whose families, friends and companions have been butchered in cold blood—who has seen villages and towns laid waste by fire for illumination—who has beheld thousands of human beings compelled to desert their home and country and seek refuge in dens of the earth, in clefts of rocks or in the hollows of trees.

In this conspiracy were engaged many of the most distinguished men in Calcutta—Bábús, Rájás and Nabábs increased its consequence. It was conducted for some time with the greatest imaginable secrecy, and the contagion of Rebellion would probably have infested every city in the kingdom, had it only had time to perfect its machinations.

It was a beautiful evening; the hues of the setting sun, the whisper of breezes and the singing of birds made the whole scene delightful. Instead of lounging about the streets, as is generally the case, the rich and poor all huddled in the same direction. At about six a vast number of men assembled on the North Eastern suburbs of the 'City of Palaces.'<sup>56</sup> On the left of this spacious plain gurgles a rill, on the right it is fenced by avenues of bamboos. The front view is bounded by a beautiful Pagoda, the work of some Moslem hand, whose spiral tops reflected in a thousand fantastic colours the bright rays of the sinking sun. Within this inclosure, all was lovely—the tumultuous dashing of the waters, the hollow murmurs of the winds, and the confused melody of singing birds and human voices, made it inexpressibly enchanting. The people all sat down on the turf and the proceedings of the meeting commenced. From one extremity rose a venerable figure not above fifty or sixty. The contracted brow and the deep furrows on his cheeks marked the predominance of passion and of corroding care over age. 'Gentlemen,' said he, 'I have the pleasure once more of witnessing my fellow countrymen, assembled to assert their native rights and vindicate their wrongs. But before we enter upon this day's topic, allow me to ask whether the proposition of each man wearing a carabine and a sword, carried at our last meeting, has been universally complied with?' A loud and lengthened peal of applause proved that it was. Bhoobun Mohun, a youth of twenty-five splendidly attired in kincaub and gold, rose at the instant his venerable predecessor extended himself on the turf. He gracefully flung a richly embroidered scarf over his left shoulder and addressed the meeting with all the learning and eloquence which the Anglo-Indian College could furnish. He expatiated with a deep

manly tone on the hardships and dangers to which the natives of Indostan had been subject since their subjugation by the Britons; and concluded by saying, 'My friends and countrymen, I speak not to you with a wish to display my powers of rhetoric (of which I possess but little), I am not speaking from a heated imagination or blind enthusiasm, I speak only the plain and simple dictates of my heart, which I firmly believe meet with a response in all your bosoms. Consider for a moment the cruelties which from generation to generation you have suffered. What improvements in our condition could be expected from the enormities of Clive, the despotism of Wellesley, the wanton cruelty of Warren Hastings<sup>57</sup> and the inordinate rapacity of our present odious Government? While the other nations of the earth are rising high in the scale of civilization, the people of Indostan are daily sinking to the level of beasts. Consider for a moment, my friends and countrymen! of what you have been forcibly bereft by these rough islanders. If you are still willing to submit to the wicked impositions of the British nation, if you are still willing to bear patiently all the refined cruelties of our present ruler Lord Fell Butcher, if your hearts sicken not at the idea of degradation, if your feelings revolt not at the thought of shackles and dungeons, I shall set you down for the most abject and degraded of human beings. But banish that thought. Let us unanimously engage to emancipate the natives from the thralldom of oppression. Let us all unite in a body, and it shall be the most glorious scene that India has beheld, when we effect the overthrow by one powerful and deadly blow of this system of injustice and rapacity.'

'Friends! countrymen and chieftains! let us no more be called the weak, the deluded portion of mankind, let us no more be branded with cowardice and degeneration, let us unfurl the banner of Freedom and plant it where Britannia\* now proudly stands. If the consideration of rising in the estimation of the world move you not, Oh! I beseech you to look for the safety of the dear companions of your souls, the little ones, the darling of your eyes, and above all attend to the wants of our much neglected mother, the land that gave us birth.'

There was a murmur of approbation and a burst of applause as soon as the young man concluded his harangue and sat amongst a group of acquaintances. In the mean time many of the audience at once exclaimed 'Red coats! Red coats!' On looking forward it was perceived that about 16 troopers and 150 dismounted dragoons were approaching the spot where they were assembled. They all jumped up and Bhoobun Mohun whistled shrilly, which was answered from some distance by the report of a gun. The little body of soldiery immediately appeared on the skirts of the plain. Two officers dressed in scarlet and gold led or rather hauled a stout looking civilian between them. The man in black, evidently terrified on seeing so vast a concourse before him, could neither walk nor speak. Being reminded by the officers to do his duty, he with no little hesitation and change of countenance read the proclamation for dispersion. The bold patriotic youth retorted nearly in the following words. 'Worthy Magistrate, I am sorry we are not able to comply with your proposition; we defy you to do your worst. You see before you men who will neither be terrified by the neighing of a steed, the waving of a sword nor the flashing of a gun. We are determined to assert our liberties, when every other resource has failed, by the strength of our arms. Go tell them that sent thee that we have resolved to hurl Fell Butcher from his seat, we have renounced the allegiance of the feeble and false Harry of England, and that we mean to abide by our own laws and parliaments!' Confounded at this bold declaration, the good magistrate staggered back a few paces and was supported by a serjeant from sinking to the ground. The officers looked at each other, whispered a few words and the trumpets sounded a charge with bayonets. The youthful hero blew a shrill blast, and about two hundred turbaned figures with guns in their hands, and fifty horsemen with scimitars and lances, appeared from the side which was covered by bamboos. The unarmed retired to the borders of the plain, while a general engagement took place between the patriots and the royalists, both charged with levelled bayonets alternately retiring and advancing. The clashing of swords, the discharge of guns, the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying made a fearful noise. During this bloody transaction our hero was not a silent spectator of the scene. He ordered his attendant to bring his proud war horse, and having adjusted his clothes with military nicety, he buckled his pistols round his waist, waved his sword and mounted his charger. Receiving the benediction of the venerable priest who stood trembling a few paces distant, and whispering a prayer to Heaven to strengthen his arm, he darted himself into the midst of the fray. Lieutenant Martin, mad with rage, confronted him and aimed a furious blow at him which he eluded with great dexterity. Escaping the blow, he in his turn gave a smart rap on the head of his antagonist, which made him reel in his saddle for a minute or two. 'Curse

on the barbarian,' said he, and renewed the combat with redoubled ardour. The contest was long and furious, the coolness and agile movements of the Hindoo being a counterpoise to the great strength of the Briton. They exchanged many smart cuts, their rich and splendid dresses were hacked and hewn in a thousand places, and the nodding plume of the one and the flowing scarf of the other were mangled and torn to atoms in the fray. At length the Briton foaming with ire and exhausted with loss of blood, muttering the direst of oaths of vengeance, recoiled from his saddle and fell headlong on the ground. Victory declared in favor of the patriots. About twenty-five royalists lay dead on the plain and as many wounded; while of the patriots six had expired and thirteen were severely bruised. The remaining officers of the royalists, consulting for a minute or two together, ordered the trumpets to sound a retreat. Forming themselves into three bodies they retired, one by one, keeping their front towards the enemy, who continued a brisk fire. The night having advanced pretty far the patriots betook themselves to their houses to dream of their glorious exploits and to rise in the morning to consult new plans for the furtherance of their object.

We must now conduct the reader to the magnificent apartments of the Government House, the residence of the noble and humane Lord Fell Butcher. The door of the bed chamber being slowly opened by the surdar bearer a damsel apparently of 14 with luxuriant tresses and deep black eyes, having about her a short robe of fine white linen with long white sleeves, was discovered arranging her dress. The skirts of her robe hung down as far as the knee, displaying the calf of her leg and the delicate symmetry of her ancles and feet. Her shoes were of the most curious workmanship and a chequered silk handkerchief carelessly thrown about her neck, vied in splendour with the hues of the rainbow. An image of some Deity set with diamonds and pearls was suspended round her neck to protect her from evil. As soon as she placed her light foot upon the threshold, the Viceroy waked and jumped out of his bed and asked the bearer whether 'Beeby sahib' was stirring. Being answered in the negative, he conducted the damsel along the marble pavements, and placing her in the palanquin, took a hearty farewell. The morning ablutions being over, he entered the Council Hall with the morning gazette in his hand. It was splendidly furnished—chandeliers, mirrors, pictures, arras and carpets made a gorgeous display. In the middle was placed a small table with heaps of folded letters, rolled up parchments and writing materials. After perusing the gazette for a minute or two he laid it aside and exclaimed who waits? A young officer, his hat under his arm and his sword dangling by his side, appeared, made a low respectful bow and approached his lordship. 'Ho! What is d'ye call him, here?' 'Yes, my lord, ensign Valancourt stays without.' 'Bid him come hither.' The officer retired and in a minute or two the ensign entered the hall. His face was patched in five or six different places and his left hand was tied in a sling. 'Well sir, I hope the business of yesterday has been gloriously terminated?' The officer hung down his head and the blood gushed into his features. 'Ah! ha! is that the case? Did the royalists retreat before a parcel of Bengalees? We must take severer measures now I should think. Well how many wounded and killed?' 'Fifty, my lord.' 'Zounds! that's terrible. How did the riotous mob contrive to send so many to Pluto's gloomy region?' 'There was a body of two or three hundred men in ambush armed at all points, who seeing us attack the rebellious mob with our bayonets, rushed into the conflict and—' 'Made you turn your heels?' The ensign again blushed and hung down his head. 'I shall see. You may go; but remain within hearing.' Making a profound bow, the young man retired. After taking two or three turns about the room in deep meditation, his Lordship resumed his chair and penned the following letter.

TO COL. JOHN BLOOD-THIRSTY.

*The town and fort Major of the Fort William in Bengal.*

My Dear Col. —It appears from the information of many confidential persons that great dissatisfaction towards Government is prevalent amongst the native population. I authorize you therefore to take such measures as will be requisite for the safety of the Fort in case of a surprise or sudden attack. The publicity attending the transmission of letters through Secretaries and Boards has obliged me to have recourse to this method.

I am, my dear Col.

Your's sincerely,

*Govt. House, April, 1945.*

BUTCHER

Dispatching this letter, he took a turn or two and wrote the following paragraph, which he sent to the press.

THE CALCUTTA COURIER EXTRAORDINARY,  
*April 1945*

We understand from a military person, that last evening a party consisting of two troopers and sixteen foot soldiers were sent by Government to quell the disturbances of two thousand men in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. The Magistrate tried his utmost efforts to persuade the people to return to their houses, but all in vain: they persisted in keeping their ground. The military, according to the orders of the Lieut. in command, made a mock fire, which so terrified the vast multitude that they fled in every direction. Some persons were crushed to death in the dense crowd and some were drowned in attempting to cross the stream. Be that as it may, the affair of yesterday has been, without the effusion of blood, a terrible example to the disturbers of the peace. ———

When Boohun Mohun returned home from the dreadful rencontre, various thoughts crossed his mind. Sleep fled from his troubled pillow, and he lay motionless on his bed in deep reverie, and at last starting up he exclaimed, 'I must chase these idle fears and dire forebodings.' He sent for some of the principal conspirators, who arrived soon after; and consulted with them on the requisite manœuvres and the probable result of their intended attack on the Fort. 'If we do not,' said he, 'take advantage of this favorable moment, will not search warrants be issued to-morrow for the bodies of Bhoobun Mohun, Parbutty Churn and Gunganarain, or a price set on their rebellious heads. Information will be communicated to night to all the stations near Calcutta, and ere tomorrow noon thousands of horse all in complete array, and hundreds of twenty-four pounders, glancing against the sun, will occupy the Esplanade and even the streets of Calcutta. But then where is the remedy? The expected succours have not yet arrived, and the flower of our countrymen have been too much fatigued by the bloody and obstinate engagement of this evening to hazard the surprise of the fort or the blowing up of the government house tonight.' The consultation proceeded till 2 A.M. when convinced of their own importance and flushed with their trifling victory, they determined on attacking the fort the next day at nightfall. The parties separated with the full expectation that ere day-break the promised supplies of men and money would reach them and that the next day's sun would be as propitious as the preceding day's.

The dawn of morning roused Bhoobun Mohun, and its light was scarcely abroad in the azure heavens, when a gentle tap at the door of his dwelling announced some friendly visitor. It was slowly opened, and a man delivered a scroll into the hands of our hero. He read it attentively more than once, and then as if unconscious of the presence of any one, said, 'why say "dear Bhoohun and your's affectionately" when you do not mean it? Why not tell me at once that you were afraid of your family, your head, and above all your purse. Silly fool, that I was, to have trusted so much in your "utmost efforts to further our cause, your not caring to be made a beggar or what is worse your indifference as to the possibility of your loosing your head." Ah! ha! I see through all. Now that the thing becomes more and more dangerous you wish to'—Perceiving that the servant who brought the letter was listening patiently to all his unconscious remarks, he looked at him full in the face, with a keenly scrutinizing eye and then imperatively bade him depart. Returning to his closet, he re-perused the letter with a deep emotion and then muttered to himself. 'I must do, I see, without these cowardly hinds. The work must not be delayed any longer.' During the day he employed himself in writing to all his faithful comrades, informing them of the propriety of the speedy termination of this affair. Night came on, and the assembled force of the insurgents seemed to be considerable; the whole of the Chitpore road and part of the Esplanade was densely occupied. Nothing was to be seen but turbaned heads, pikes, muskets and halberts—reflecting in glittering colors the pale beams of the moon.

While the artillery-men on the ramparts were preparing some guns to give the insurgents an idea of the warm reception which they were to receive in a closer engagement, a rebel horseman displayed a large white pennon. Gunganarain, for such was the equestrian's name, a robust looking youth, spurred his horse, which danced and galloped to the sound of martial music and was in a short time within pistol shot from the fort. On seeing him approach thus far, the draw-bridge was lowered and some men dressed like officers, advancing to receive his message, fairly surrounded him. Without being in the least daunted, the youth told them in a loud, strong voice, that he had been commissioned by the only supreme power in this country, the leaders of the national convention, to summon them in the name of the convention, to surrender the castle, to lay down their arms and dismiss the native troops in their employ upon fair conditions of quarter and licence to depart with their families and property. 'In case of a refusal,' he continued, 'mark the consequence! Fire and sword shall soon

destroy you.' No sooner was this pronounced, than as if by one impulse, three or four of the officers laid strong hold of his arm, while two caught hold of the bridle and dragged him violently into the fort. Wondering at this circumstance, the insurgent army waited in anxious suspense for the conclusion of such extraordinary behaviour. After a few minutes, as if every thing was ready for the purpose, the poor man was seen swinging, like a pendulum, on a gibbet upon one of the ramparts, shorn of his splendid robes and having a paper crown on his head, in derision of the assumed title of his rebellious party. This became the signal for a general onset, and several hundred cavaliers putting their horses into motion, rode furiously up, followed by a strong and disciplined band of foot soldiers, to avenge the cruel death of their young officer. The whole army would have fallen into confusion, but for the timely aid of its experienced officers, who flew from rank to rank, entreating, commanding and menacing the men to keep their ground. As they discharged their fire-arms against the defenders upon the battlements, they were hailed by a shower of cannon balls, which emptied at least two score of saddles. Continuing with determined courage to ascend the walls, and being vigorously supported by a strong body of men-at-arms, which was brought up with admirable skill, they sustained with firmness another heavy but much more destructive fire. Possessing no means to protect themselves from this galling fire or of answering it even with their guns, the royalists being under cover of their barricades and other defences, the insurgents were in the most dreadful situation. To their great alarm, also they beheld a body of horsemen, the body guards of the viceroy stationed at Ballygunge, amounting to about six hundred men approaching to relieve the garrison. The horsemen charged furiously and another terrible fire was opened from the government house, in which were placed a body of infantry. In the mean time Bhoobun Mohun, perceiving to his great mortification the inevitable consequence of this rash engagement, fought with desperation. Most of his followers were killed and he himself would have met with the same fate but for the successful exertions of a cool and resolute company of soldiers, who poured a heavy fire of carabines wherever they advanced. Extricating himself from his present difficult, he began to rally his forces, that were scattered in every direction. An officer hastily rode up to him and met him face to face. Without any other introduction than that of *the friend of Lieutenant Martin*, he attacked Bhoobun Mohun with the greatest fury, but light of foot and quick of eye, the latter leaped aside and eluded a blow which would have proved fatal had it taken effect. Exchanging many smart cuts and desperate blows, they rushed towards each other and grasping one another's clothes they furiously grappled together like two desperate gladiators. The contest continued for several minutes, during which time their deadly clasp was not loosened; and at last, as if actuated by a demon, they both let go their hold, and foaming with ire, flourished their weapons and made a terrible pass. The sword of the officer grazed the ribs of Bhoobun Mohun, while that of our redoubted hero passed right through his opponent's heart. The gigantic Englishman fell prostrate on the ground with a groan that marked his instant dissolution. Taking a minute's rest, after so warm a contest, Bhoobun Mohun began to rally round him his scattered troops and signified his intention of consulting with his officers, some of whom formed a circle round him. While he was in this situation, the draw-bridges were unexpectedly lowered, the garrison sallied out, and a severe action commenced in which the patriot and his men displayed the most determined valour. The scene became still more horrible. On one side the patriots were charged by bayonets, on another they were attacked by the bodyguard, while from a third, the artillery made a lamentable havoc. The youthful hero toiled in the front excessively, encouraging, by his resolute, brave and cool behaviour, the rest of his countrymen who harassed on all sides were unable to keep the field any longer; the better part of the troops rushed desperately into the conflict, unawed either by the number or the success of the enemy, while the less brave or more wearied hastened to hide themselves in streets and houses from the excesses of an enraged and victorious soldiery. Every moment reinforcements poured out from the fort and the strife continued, even then, with great fury between thousands on one side and a handful of men on the other. Sure of the dreadful result, the patriots were still reluctant to quit the field. Fifty men out of many thousands alone remained on the spot to contend for the liberties of their country. Had there been light sufficient to distinguish friend from foe, they too would inevitably have been crushed to death, but the disappearance of the moon and the smoke of the fire arms tended greatly to their safety. While they were in this precarious situation, the dawn of morning was visible, which increasing made known to the English, the smallness of the enemy's troops. There was a furious charge from every direction and the handful of men, after maintaining the contest, so long undecided, was nearly annihilated—twenty-five were

instantly slain, fifteen severely wounded and ten taken prisoners. The trampling of horses, the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying made the scene extremely fearful. It was found on the closer examination that the leader of the patriotic party was not amongst those who made the grass their bed, but was a prisoner in the fort, along with nine other men. There was a shrill cry of savage joy and wild exultation as this was signified to the whole body of the soldiery. The military formed themselves into lines and entered the fort, the musicians playing the triumphant airs of victory. Spurring the horses and making them leap twelve feet at a bound, the officers—their swords dyed in blood and their uniforms besmeared with dirt—joined the dreadful shouts of revelry.

---

Hope for a season bade the world farewell  
And freedom shrieked as *India's patriot* fell.

There was a general silence when the Cathedral bell tolled six. People from the different quarters of the city began to assemble on the esplanade at the front of the government house. The countenances of the European spectators exhibited a brutal triumph while those of the natives betrayed despair. A quarter after six, it was announced that the prisoner's car was approaching its destination. Every eye was directed to the place whence the carriage issued. A band of musicians playing the dead march formed the van, their measured steps and stately appearance tending to increase the general melancholy. Behind them came a little square consisting of a hundred men with halberts, followed by the expected car which was surrounded by two circles of dismounted dragoons. Their nodding plumage, glittering bayonets and scarlet coats made a terrific display. The rear was closed by one regiment of foot, the 13<sup>th</sup> I believe, and about two hundred well built troopers. With solemn steps and slow they entered the government house by the large archway opposite Esplanade row. The cavalcade made a halt and arranged themselves according to directions. The regiment of foot was stationed in two opposite rows east to west, and the battalion of horse stood parallel to the house; that the view might not be obstructed; nothing else was placed between it and a *scaffold*, save one or two solitary sentinels, who viewed the whole scene with intense anxiety. As the gentlemen, the friends of *our* noble lord arrived, their steeds were taken to the stables, where the attendants employed themselves in freeing the animals of their gorgeous trappings and decorations; which were as various as the taste, caprice or the means of the owners. The guests were ushered into the great hall where was a table groaning under the weight of Asiatic luxuries. As the upper end of the table sat the humane viceroy, who welcomed his friends and invited them with politeness to partake of his *simple* cheer. Before their hungry appetites the board was soon cleared and the most merciful ruler of India with all his friends and retinue arranged themselves on benches opposite the windows, to feast their eyes with the approaching glorious sight. A signal being made by the firing of a gun to prepare the prisoner, the door of the huge vehicle was slowly opened by a serjeant, with three files of soldiers standing by him. He was brought out and exposed to the public gaze. The same bold spirit which had distinguished him in the heat of contest, still shone in his features. His hair was dishevelled, his clothes out of order and his hands and legs closely fettered—every thing marked his sad destiny save that sternness of demeanour, which struck terror into the minds of those who beheld him. A smith who stood at a respectful distance was now beckoned to do his duty. The 'cold bonds' were struck off and he was conducted to the scaffold. A tall, well-built man stood at one extremity of it with a heavy axe in his hand. With a determined step the prisoner strode upon the stage and eyed the whole scene with perfect self-possession. He knelt down for a moment, placed his hands over his eyes, uttered a few indistinct words towards Heaven—a momentary hectic flushed his countenance and then he rose with his usual activity. Intending to address the people, he walked manfully up to the front of the stage, and the following words burst forth from his lips. 'My friends and countrymen! I have the consolation to die in my native land, and tho' Heaven has doomed that I should expire on the scaffold, yet are my last moments cheered by the presence of my friends. I have shed my last blood in defence of my country and though the feeble spark within me is about to leave its frail frame, I hope you will continue to persevere in the course you have so gloriously commenced.'

While he was going on in this strain, the viceroy struck with awe at the energy of the young patriot, dispatched an officer to conclude the scene immediately. His hands were powerfully arrested, his head forcibly thrust between two wooden pillars and severed from his body at a single blow.<sup>58</sup>

\*The top of the Government House.