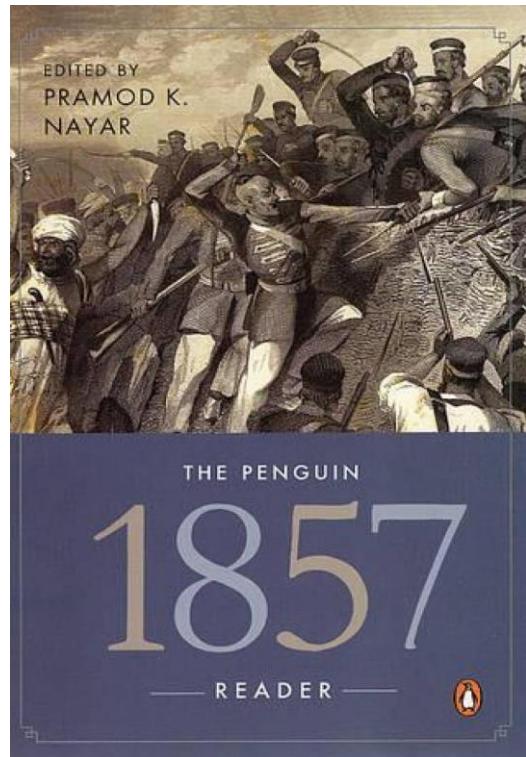


***The Penguin 1857 Reader*, Editor: P.K. Nayar, ISBN: 0143101994, 9780143101994, Year of publication: 2007, Publisher's details: Penguin Books India, Price: Rs 350, Page no: 339.**

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For both the British and Indians, 1857 marked a watershed year. It was the first resistance of the Indians against their colonial masters. The events of the Uprising of 1857 have left an indelible imprint both on history and literature. The Uprising of 1857 was a turning point in the history of colonial India. *The Penguin 1857 Reader*, edited by Pramod K. Nayar, is a carefully curated anthology that revisits the Uprising through a wide range of narratives and their responses.

The anthology does not offer a singular interpretation; in fact, it brings multiple voices, ideologies, and historical positions onto a single plane. The event of 1857 left an indelible mark on the minds of Indians and Europeans, and as a result, it led to a variety of names that were associated with it. To the British, it was the Sepoy Mutiny, and to the Indian thinkers, it was the 'First War of Independence'. Nayar's editorial project sits well within the postcolonial historiography and cultural studies, and therefore qualifies as an important text to understand India under colonial rule in the nineteenth century. The introduction of the anthology offers a detailed context of British colonial expansion and the ill effects of economic, religious, and military policies of the British, which led to the Uprising. The writer does not try to resolve the debate over whether the event was a mutiny or an uprising, and for this reason, he has titled the anthology as *The Penguin 1857 Reader*. He tries to leave the event open-ended for the readers who might view the event from different ideological and nationalistic viewpoints. The striking feature of this volume is its structure. It is broadly divided into two sections, Narratives and Responses and records viewpoints from across the globe. The first section documents the build-up to the uprising and the lived experiences during the violence, while the second section traces the afterlives of 1857 in



Britain, India, America and Europe. The subsections of the anthology are titled British Responses, Euro-American Responses, and Indian Responses. The responses are official orders, farmans, newspaper and magazine articles and ballads. Before these Responses, the writer has provided his own commentary, which familiarises the readers with the content of the Responses. The anthology juxtaposes the views of the coloniser, the British and the colonised, the Indians, in the same breath. By including the American responses, he tries to leave the event open-ended to the readers who might view the event from different ideological and nationalistic viewpoints. Nayar makes an effort to include the voices of the marginalised sections: Indian Sepoys, native Christians, and rural men and women. The testimony of Mrs Aldwell, the diary of Ghalib, gives us a deeper insight into the social context of the rebellion.

However, the text is dominated by Anglophone narratives. The native narratives are included, but are fewer in number, which gives an edge to the Anglophone narratives and their ideologies. The anthology only offers a fragment of the documents, which offers only a cursory view and lacks any kind of critical commentary.

The anthology facilitates certain discussions, such as :

- a. The construction of historical narratives through selection and framing.
- b. Role of media and propaganda in shaping both imperial and nationalist ideologies.
- c. Gender and violence in times of rebellion.

To sum up, this anthology is a foundational text for understanding a much-contested event. However, the book is largely comprised of Anglophone sources and has limited representation of subaltern perspectives, yet it serves as a critical source for those who are interested in the Uprising of 1857. It is to be noted that Nayar has reflected on the past, but his job has been that of a mediator, not of a commentator.