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**BETWEEN SELF AND SOLDIER: INDIAN *SIPAHIS* AND
THEIR TESTIMONY DURING THE TWO WORLD WARS**

By

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Abstract

This project started as an attempt to understand rank-and-file resistance within the colonial Indian army. My reasons for doing so were quite simple. Colonial Indian soldiers were situated in the divide between the colonizers and the colonized. As a result, they rarely entered colonialist narratives written by and of the British officer or nationalist accounts of the colonial military. The writers of contemporary post-colonial histories have been content to maintain this lacuna, partly because colonial soldiers are seen as not sufficiently 'subaltern' to be the subjects of their studies. The more I investigated the matter, the more I realized how important it was to move beyond ideas of resistance and collaboration. If *sipahis* (or sepoys) were between the two poles of colonizer and colonized, so their day-to-day existence fell between notions of resistance or collaboration.

The problem I still had was finding a means by which I could recover the voice of the colonial soldier. Locating the testimony of Indian *sipahis* was not as difficult as I first feared. Thousands of censored 'Indian Mails' from the two World Wars were stored by the India Office at Whitehall and are now within the archived records of the British Library. A similar number of interrogation reports of Indian military personnel who defected to the Indian National Army during the Second World War, and subsequently fought for the independence of India, have recently been declassified by the Indian Ministry of Defence and handed to the National Archives of India. Finally, depositions given by soldiers during courts martial in the early part of the twentieth century have survived in several archives. But none of these sources offered a holistic glimpse of what soldiers thought and felt. The presence of the censor, interrogator and the courtroom was literally written across the page and conditioned the voice of the *sipahi* contained therein.

The solution I have adopted in this thesis is to treat the heteroglot nature of these forms of testimony as reflective of Indian soldiers' own heteroglossia. Even though the spaces in which soldiers could speak were compromised, they could nonetheless provide opportunities for soldiers to push the boundaries of what was permissible and what was not. The form of the letter was used to further illicit activities and pass on news of discontent or trouble at home. The space of the colonial courtroom was reappropriated by *sipahis* in order to thwart the prosecution of their peers. The interrogation chamber was a forum for many soldiers to demonstrate that

they no longer considered themselves subject to the rigours of British military discipline. In each example, however, it was not only the boundaries of *sipahis'* testimony that were being distended, but the boundaries of their own identities. Thus the nature of my thesis is to demonstrate how soldiers could re-read and re-write their own roles within the colonial Indian Army.

Declaration

I affirm that this thesis is entirely my own composition, represents my own original research and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Signed:

Gajendra Singh

*To my parents, who raised me
and
In memory of the late Colonel Pritam Singh (INA)
Jai Hind!*

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Abbreviations

CIH	Central India Horse
CIM	<i>Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France</i>
CSDIC(I)	Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India)
DMI	Directorate of Military Intelligence
HKSRA	Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery
INA	Indian National Army
PM	Punjabi Musalman/Muslim
MEMC	<i>Middle East Military Censorship: Fortnightly Summaries Covering Indian Troops</i>
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
RIASC	Royal Indian Army Service Corp
SMR	<i>Report in Connection with the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore (1915)</i>
UP	United Provinces of Agra and Awadh (now Uttar Pradesh)

Glossary

<i>al-Dhajjal/al-Dajjal</i>	The Muslim False Messiah/Antichrist, whose appearance is to precede the Day of Judgement.
<i>anna</i>	One sixteenth of a rupee or 4 <i>paise</i> .
<i>ata</i>	Flour.
<i>Azad Hind Fauj</i>	Lit. 'The Army of Free India'. The official name of the INA after its reformation under Subhas Chandra Bose.
battalion	A body of soldiers, composed of 8 companies, and numbering 750 Indian officers and men.
<i>bhailawa</i>	(Reputedly) a plant, the seeds of which were used by washermen to mark clothes.
<i>Bharat Mata Ki Jai!</i>	Long Live Mother India!
<i>bidi/beedi</i>	Thin, often flavoured, Indian cigarette.
<i>bigha</i>	Unit used to measure an area of land. It varied in size throughout colonial India, but was generally less than an acre.
brigade	A body of soldiers, composed of regiments/battalions, and forming part of a division.
<i>bulbul</i>	A type of South Asian songbird.
<i>charas</i>	Hashish.
<i>chatak</i>	A small unit of weight measurement roughly equivalent to an ounce. There are 16 <i>chataks</i> in 1 <i>seer</i> .
company	A unit of infantry, composed of platoons, and forming one eighth of a battalion or regiment.
<i>crore</i>	Ten million.
<i>dafadar</i>	An Indian cavalry NCO, corresponding to a sergeant.
<i>dal</i>	Split pulses.
<i>Doaba</i>	Lit. 'Two Rivers' or 'Land of the Two Rivers'. Refers to the area of Punjab between the Ravi and Sutlej rivers.
<i>dhikr</i>	Islamic devotional recitation of the name of God.
<i>dhobi</i>	Washerman.
<i>dhoti</i>	Rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually around 7 yards long, wrapped around the waist and legs and knotted at the waist. Traditionally worn by Hindus in northern India.
division	A body of soldiers, composed of brigades, and forming part of a corps.
<i>darbar</i>	A state reception given by Indian princes for a British sovereign or by an Indian prince for his subjects; the court of an Indian prince.
<i>F Kikan</i>	Japanese military intelligence operation established during the Second World War. It was tasked to contact members of the Indian Independence Movement and played a pivotal role in the formation of the INA. Led, initially, by Fujiwara Iwaichi.
<i>Ghadar/Ghadr</i>	Lit. 'mutiny' or 'struggle'.
<i>ghee</i>	Clarified butter used in cooking.

<i>gol/gotra</i>	A lineage or sub-caste that divides broader South Asian castes or <i>varnas</i> .
<i>gora/gori</i>	Lit. 'White'. Term colloquially used to refer to Europeans.
<i>Granth/Guru Granth Sahib</i>	Sikh scriptures.
<i>hadith</i>	Islamic oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of Mohammed.
<i>hajji</i>	A Muslim individual who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca.
<i>havildar</i>	An Indian infantry NCO, corresponding to a sergeant.
<i>huzoor</i>	Equivalent to 'My Lord'. Used as a form of address by soldiers to refer to a (British) officer.
ICO	'Indian Commissioned Officer'. Refers to the 4411 Indian Officers educated at the IMA, Dehradun between 1934 and 1946. They were granted full authority over British troops but only within the geographical boundaries of the subcontinent.
<i>Jazirat-al-Arab</i>	Lit. 'The Island of the Arabs' (i.e. Arabia).
<i>jemadar</i>	A junior Indian VCO of infantry or cavalry. Equivalent to a Naib-Subedar in the contemporary armies of India and Pakistan.
<i>Jif</i>	'Japanese Influenced Forces'. British euphemism for members of the INA.
<i>kafir</i>	An 'unbeliever' (non-Muslim).
<i>Kala Pani</i>	Lit. 'Black Water'. Can refer to the taboo of the sea in Indian culture, or the Penal Colonies established in the Andaman Islands.
<i>kazi/qazi/qadi</i>	Islamic judge of <i>sharia</i> law.
KCIO	'King's Commissioned Indian Officer'. Refers to the 95 Indian Officers trained at RMC, Sandhurst between 1921 and 1933. They held full authority over British troops unlike VCOs or ICOs.
<i>khadim</i>	Custodian or caretaker (usually of a mosque or Islamic shrine).
<i>khalasi</i>	Labourer.
<i>Khalsa</i>	The community of Sikhs.
<i>khatib</i>	The person delivering the Friday prayers in a mosque.
<i>khel</i>	Kinship groups dividing a Pathan <i>ttabar</i> (tribe).
<i>kot/kote</i>	Various meanings depending on the context: village; fort/fortress; house; armoury.
<i>lakh</i>	One hundred thousand.
<i>lambadar</i>	Registered village headman, responsible for the collection of local tax revenue.
<i>lance-dafadar</i>	An Indian cavalry NCO, corresponding to a corporal.
<i>lance-naik</i>	An Indian infantry NCO, corresponding to a lance-corporal.
<i>madarchod</i>	Lit. 'Mother-fucker'.
<i>Makwa</i>	Area of Punjab (and parts of modern-day Haryana) lying between the Sutlej and Yamuna rivers.

<i>Majha</i>	Historical region of the Punjab comprising the modern Indian districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran, and the Pakistani districts of Lahore and Kasur.
<i>maulvi/moulvi</i>	Honorific used to refer to any Muslim religious cleric or teacher.
<i>maund</i>	Unit to measure weight, equivalent to 82.28 lbs.
<i>mem/memsahib</i>	Term of address used for a European woman.
<i>mihrab</i>	Niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca.
<i>mufti</i>	Islamic scholar and interpreter of <i>sharia</i> law.
<i>Musalman</i>	Muslim.
<i>naik</i>	An Indian infantry NCO, corresponding to a corporal.
<i>Netaji</i>	Lit. 'Revered Leader'. Term of respect given to Subhas Chandra Bose.
<i>Paltan</i>	Regiment.
<i>pagri</i>	Turban.
<i>paisa</i>	Smallest unit of denomination in South Asia, roughly equivalent to a penny.
<i>pir</i>	Title used by and to refer to a Sufi teacher.
<i>Pushkunwali/Pakhtunwali</i>	The honour or 'tribal' code of Pathans/Pushtuns.
<i>Ramzan/Ramadan</i>	Muslim month of fasting.
regiment	The basic unit of the Indian Army, composing of four squadrons of cavalry or eight companies (one battalion) of infantry. Each regiment would (usually) have several battalions.
<i>risala/risallah</i>	A troop or regiment of Indian horse.
<i>risaldar/ressaidar</i>	The senior Indian VCO of a cavalry squadron; the head of a risala.
<i>risaldar-major</i>	The senior Indian VCO of a cavalry regiment.
<i>roti</i>	Unleavened flatbread, slightly thicker than a <i>chapatti</i> .
<i>sahib</i>	Term used to address an Englishman or European; used in the Army to refer to an officer.
<i>Sat Sri Akal</i>	Lit. 'There is One Revered, Timeless Truth'. Sikh salutation.
<i>sardar</i>	Lit. 'Headholder' (Persian). Used to refer to the leaders of various Pathan tribes, and as a term of respect for any male follower of the Sikh faith; used in the army to refer to VCOs.
<i>sarkar</i>	Government or Presiding Authority; used as term of respect for someone in a position of authority.
<i>seer</i>	Unit of measure weight. 40 <i>seers</i> are in 1 <i>maund</i> .
<i>sipahi</i>	Soldier; infantrymen. Anglicized by the British into 'sepoy'.
<i>sowar</i>	Cavalry trooper. From Urdu <i>sawar</i> ('horseman')
squadron	A unit of cavalry, composed of troops, and forming one quarter of a regiment.
<i>subedar</i>	The chief Indian VCO of an infantry company, ranking immediately superior to a Jemadar.
<i>tahsil</i>	Sub-division of a district.
<i>thana</i>	Police station.

<i>ttabar</i>	Lit. 'Family' (Pushtu).
<i>ulama/ulema</i>	A scholar versed in Islam, who has (usually) completed at least seven years of study.
VCO	Viceroy Commissioned Officer. Refers to 'native' officers (Jemadar, Subedar, Subeda-Major, Risaldar and Risaldar-Major) who had a Viceregal rather than a King's Commission, and were thus of a lower rank than a full officer. Equivalent to a JCO in the contemporary armies of India and Pakistan.
<i>wakil</i>	Lawyer/trustee (Arabic).
<i>Zakat</i>	Obligatory Muslim tithe to charity.

INTRODUCTION

Within the archived film footage of colonial India held at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol¹ are reels filmed by and documenting the lives of Britons in India. In one film, attributed to the wife of the British Resident in Mysore State, amidst scenes of domestic bliss involving the planting of potted plants in a newly created colonial garden and children playing a game of tig, are scenes of the Parachinar Durbar held in the North West Frontier Province in 1929.² For the briefest moment before this scene is recorded in full, the viewer catches a glimpse of the Indian *sipahis*³ involved in the *darbar* before they were called to attention. The soldiers' *pagnis* are cast aside, their jackets opened to the waist, some smoke *bidis*, some play cards, and yet more enjoy a joke that neither we, nor the civil officer's wife shooting the film, are privy to. Then the film flickers, blacks out, and we are returned to what the film-maker intended for us to see: the same soldiers marching in column, with their uniforms neatly pressed and their bayonets sparkling in the sun.

The film footage described above does not appear to be a conscious attempt by the soldiers filmed to subvert the efforts of the officer's wife filming them. On no occasion do any of the soldiers look in the direction of the camera, and when they are later filmed marching in the *darbar* none of the soldiers appear to be unhappy or uneasy with what they have been asked to do. Instead the film reveals that a space existed when soldiers were not expected to fight or otherwise be on duty, in which *sipahis* could relax, laugh and discuss among themselves that which concerned them. The purpose of this thesis is, to put it simply, to investigate that space.

But it is not quite that simple. Before I can begin to discuss those conversations two questions and issues have to be resolved: how to define the colonial soldier and how to treat his narrative voice? The word 'soldier' evokes an image of the infantrymen or cavalry trooper, but, in the context of the Indian involvement in the two World Wars, it could refer to artillerymen, clerks, grooms, mule-drivers and even labourers placed under military articles. Moreover, even active soldiers had moments when they were not soldiering – when they could sit around, smoke and laugh. The

¹ Or rather it was held at Bristol. The Museum has since been closed in preparation for its relocation to London.

² *India: Parachinar Durbar, 1929, (Reel 57)*; Dalyell Collection, Film Archive, Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol, BECMV446/1998/005/028.

³ I will use the term 'sipahi' throughout this thesis to refer to Indian soldiers below the rank of a commissioned officer. The use of that word instead of the anglicized 'sepoy' or the current word 'jawan' is simply because it is the word that soldiers themselves at that time would have used.

narrative voice of the *sipahi* is as problematic. There is no shortage of voices for the historian to listen to, but none can be treated as a simple juridical retelling of facts (even when they claimed to be just that). Each narrative is situated between forms of censorship and the body of the *sipahi* and between testimony-proper and rumour. It is these two issues that will be addressed and reconciled in this introduction.

That 'Jungian Thing': Defining the Colonial Soldier

There is a vast literature on the subject of how one should speak to and conceive of the colonial or non-colonial soldier in the ranks. The overwhelming majority of it will not be touched on here. What will be discussed are two works: Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* and Leon Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution*. These volumes are remarkable for the different visions they have of the ordinary soldier, and aspects of each approach were present, in part, in the statements made by officers of the British Raj in India. I will be using both in outlining the direction I have taken in discussing the colonial *sipahis* of the Indian Army, albeit in a way that would have been alien to both Harvardian and dissident revolutionary alike.

Huntington pioneered a particular approach in studies of the soldier in developing countries. In *The Soldier and the State*, first published in 1957, he attempted to explain the then topical issue of why military coups had so often been attempted in the decolonized world. The result was a set of rules that explained the identity of the soldier in these exotic locales. For Huntington the very idea of soldiers or a military – '*l'idée militaire*' – was defined by its relation to 'a professional ethic'.⁴ This 'professionalization' entailed the training or 'expertness' of the soldier combined with a 'social responsibility' to the ideals of the state and a 'corporate loyalty' within the military institution.⁵ If each ingredient was applied in the right quantity, and presumably baked at the appropriate temperature, then one would arrive at the ideal soldier: 'politically sterile or neutral'.⁶ Slight changes to Huntington's thesis were applied in following years. Sam Finer in 1962 argued that it was precisely this professionalization or 'esprit de corps' that led to soldiers' involvement in politics

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p.61.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 84.

⁶ *Ibid*.

because it isolated soldiers from their ‘own nationals – the “civvies”, “les pekings”, “les bourgeois” – and so forth’.⁷ In the 1970s, the Israeli diplomat Amos Perlmutter merely substituted the term ‘praetorian spirit’ for ‘professionalization’ or ‘esprit de corps’ when discussing the ‘large mercenary armies’ of the colonial world.⁸ Despite the differences in language and emphases, Finer and Perlmutter echoed Huntington in stating that the colonial soldier is and was ordinarily distanced from civilian life. Resistance, dissent or coups only occurred as a result of either falling short or going beyond this ideal, whether it was an imperfect ‘professionalism’, a heightened ‘esprit de corps’ or a ‘praetorian spirit’.

Trotsky was, unsurprisingly, in complete disagreement with the idea that civilian and military lives were and are completely separate. During his time as People’s Commissar for War, between 1918 and 1925, Trotsky tried to answer the question of why the Russian peasantry had taken up arms to defend the Revolution:

Herein is the essence of the question. He who understands this will find the correct line for political work in the army. But allegories about a beleaguered fortress will avail little here. It is only a metaphor, an image for a leading editorial or a feuilleton. A Samara moujik on reading this, or hearing someone else read it aloud, will scratch the back of his head and say, “A clever writer is Comrade Kuzmin; he writes fine.” But for the sake of this metaphor, I assure you, he will not go to fight.⁹

The question of why he did fight was answered later in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, in which he stressed that the soldier did not have a separate identity but was merely the peasant or worker armed:

An army is always a copy of the society it serves – with this difference, that it gives social relations a concentrated character, carrying both their positive and negative characters to an extreme.¹⁰

And during the Revolution the soldier was simply reminded of this fact:

The worker looked thirstily and commandingly into the eyes of the soldier, and the soldier anxiously and diffidently looked away. This meant that, in a way, the soldier could not answer for himself. The worker approached the soldier more boldly. The

⁷ Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976 rpt.), p. 21.

⁸ Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times: On Professionals, Praetorians, and Revolutionary Soldiers*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1977), p. 92.

⁹ Leon Trotsky, *Military Writings*, (New York: Merit, 1969), pp. 96-97.

¹⁰ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution, Volume I*; translated by Max Eastman, (London: Sphere Books, 1967), p. 242.

soldier sullenly, but without hostility – guiltily rather – refused to answer. Or sometimes – now more and more often – he answered with pretended severity in order to conceal how anxiously his heart was beating in his breast. Thus the change was accomplished. The soldier was clearly throwing off his soldiery. In so doing he could not immediately recognise himself. The authorities said that the revolution intoxicated the soldier. To the soldier it seemed, on the contrary, that he was sobering up from the opium of the barracks.¹¹

By the eve of the First World War, the colonial Indian Army's understanding of its own *sipahis* operated somewhere between these two poles. On the one hand were attempts to treat *sipahis* as occidental soldiers with similar systems of military law, regulations and bureaucracy.¹² On the other were efforts to keep soldiers recognizably Indian. As Bernard Cohn wrote, the desire to rule in a more 'oriental manner' after the Uprisings of 1857, led to the understanding that,

[...] Indians should look more like Indians; those the British most depended on to provide the strength to keep India, the soldiers, should appear as the British idea of what Mughal troopers looked like, with their officers dressed as Mughal grandees. Another characteristic believed to be quintessentially Indian or oriental was a love of show, of pageantry, of occasions to dress up in beautiful or gaudy clothes. Indians, it was believed, were susceptible to show and drama, and hence more occasions were found where rulers and subjects could play their appointed parts and could act their "traditions" through costume.¹³

In other words the *sipahi* was defined by a double vision that was both synchronic and diachronic.¹⁴ There was a static and unchanging component to how colonial *sipahis* were perceived in the legal and bureaucratic processes of the Indian Army. And there was simultaneously a fluctuating and pseudo-historical part to this vision, not just with the introduction of exotic tunics and 'colourful turbans'¹⁵ but with ever-changing constructions of who was and who was not a 'martial race'.

It is this split perception of the soldier that I will discuss throughout this work, albeit with a difference. Every chapter looks, in part, at how colonial authorities tried to manage and condition Indian soldiers in the First and Second World Wars,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.122.

¹² The decade before the start of hostilities in the First World War saw the first publication of official *Army Regulations, India* and the updating of Indian military law in the Indian Army Act.

¹³ Bernard S. Cohn, 'Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century'; *idem*, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.129.

¹⁴ Or in other words a desire 'for a reformed recognizable Other; as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.' Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2004), p. 122.

¹⁵ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, pp. 106-151.

through policies that were implemented, half-implemented or forgotten. But the thesis' main purpose is to look at how soldiers lived through this double articulation of their own identity. *Sipahis* were at the periphery of British and Indian selves in India – literally so in the case of the 'native lines' in military cantonments, where Indian soldiers were housed between and apart from British barracks and South Asian towns. The present work will therefore explore the role of colonial soldiers as both colonizers and the colonized,¹⁶ or what Private Joker termed, in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, that 'Jungian thing':

Pogue Colonel: Marine, what is that button on your body armor?

Private Joker: A peace symbol, sir.

Pogue Colonel: Where'd you get it?

Private Joker: I don't remember, sir.

Pogue Colonel: What is that you've got written on your helmet?

Private Joker: "Born to Kill", sir.

Pogue Colonel: You write "Born to Kill" on your helmet and you wear a peace button.

What's that supposed to be, some kind of sick joke?

Private Joker: No, sir.

Pogue Colonel: You'd better get your head and your ass wired together, or I will take a giant shit on you.

Private Joker: Yes, sir.

Pogue Colonel: Now answer my question or you'll be standing tall before the man.

Private Joker: I think I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man, sir.

Pogue Colonel: The what?

Private Joker: The duality of man. The Jungian thing, sir.

Pogue Colonel: Whose side are you on, son?¹⁷

Reading Soldiers' Testimonies

The question remains of how to treat the testimony of colonial *sipahis*. There is certainly no shortage of soldiers' voices to read or listen to.¹⁸ This work alone contains a medley of narratives culled from collections of censored letters, courtroom depositions, interrogation reports and the odd interview. It is not especially new or

¹⁶ Or, to borrow a further phrase from Albert Memmi, 'those who are neither the colonizers nor colonized'. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized: A Destructive Relationship*, (Penang, Malaysia: Citizens International, 2005), p. 13.

¹⁷ Stanley Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket*, (1987).

¹⁸ Despite what some scholars have recently asserted: '...most Indian soldiers hailed from the poor peasantry and were largely illiterate. [...] As a result, Sikh and Gurkha soldiers seldom were able to keep written records of their thoughts and experiences and their voices were rarely directly preserved.' Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 199.

controversial, however, to state that each stage of hearing these voices is an exercise in admitting one's own limitations. No one working in the broad spectra that is 'history' can escape the archive being a place of 'commencement' and 'commandment',¹⁹ that we perform a constant violence against our 'sources' by deciding what is worthy of inclusion in a chapter and cropping even that,²⁰ and that the knowledge(s) we produce 'suppress difference as well as différance'.²¹ But there is a further complication that arises when reading and writing of *sipahis'* testimonies (even when reading and writing in a manner that is mindful of these issues). The voice of the *sipahi* is so deeply interwoven with that which conditioned it that I cannot read one without the other. And using these compromised sources becomes an exercise in writing a history of rumour as much as a history of events.

Jacques Derrida wrote, when referring to Heidegger, of the impossibility of effacing the difference between signifier and signified in language:

...he lets the word "being" be read only if it is crossed out (*kruezweise Durchstreichung*). That mark of deletion is not, however, a "merely negative symbol". That deletion is the final writing of an epoch. Under its strokes the presence of a transcendental signified is effaced while still remaining legible. Is effaced while still remaining legible, is destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign.²²

I face a similar dilemma in this thesis. Censoring voices and pauses are everywhere in the sources I have used. Soldiers' letters were cropped, *sipahis* were subject to constant interruption while making their depositions, accounts given during interrogations were often glossed over with ellipses, and the camera could be, and was, switched off. The fact that the sources exist only or largely in English complicates the situation further. It is impossible to know if there were mistranslations in the texts or whether surrogates were found for untranslatable or indecipherable concepts, except for those rare occasions when question marks were pencilled in or troublesome native words were written in full. Any attempt, therefore, to treat these sources as an 'autonomous domain'²³ in which soldiers alone spoke is doomed to failure. The *sipahis'* voice, such

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*; translated by Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Michel de Certeau, 'History is Never Sure', *The Possession at Loudon*; translated by Michael B. Smith, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

²¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 rpt.), p. 23.

²³ Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India'; *idem.*, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006 rpt.), pp. 1-7.

as it is, finds itself intertwined with that which conditioned and censored it and, even if the two are disentangled, the presence of the latter is made visible by its absence.

There is an additional problem even if the two could be separated. There are two facets to any retelling of a historical moment through testimony. One is a focus upon the particular and individual, ‘specifying sites and bodies that carry the marks of particular events, making real in everyday, physical, nameable terms’.²⁴ The other is rumour:

Rumour moves in a direction almost contrary to that of testimony: generalizing, exalting to extraordinary (even miraculous) status and employing the sweeping terms of deluge and just deserts (actual or impending). In rumour, language is transformed from a mode of (possible) communication to a particular kind of imperative condition – communicable, infectious, possible (and almost necessary) to pass on.²⁵

The testimonies of *sipahis* have elements of both. Specific events in letters were described through the medium of elaborate (or not so elaborate) ciphers, metaphors or verse. Depositions had an authorship and audience that was both within and outwith the colonial courtroom. And rigorous interrogations could result in soldiers citing works of fiction as much as they could words of fact. To put it simply, I cannot gain a cogent picture of what actually happened by using these sources.

Or can I?

The *sipahis*’ voice was conditioned and curtailed by the manner in which it was recorded, and the words that remain accessible to a historian are often ambiguous, but there is, nonetheless, a partial presence of the soldier in these sources. The very process of compiling a report of censored letters, courtroom depositions or interrogations mandated that there be some record of the soldier in them. That presence could be significant even if it amounted to a single sentence or was summarized in a pithy aside. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’, wrote at great length of heteroglossia – the presence in a single text of multiple meanings and realities. This is as true a description of the vernacular as of the cultured text: of the private as of the public utterance.

We have before us a typical double-accented, double-styled, *hybrid construction*.

²⁴ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2003 rpt.), p.67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

What we are calling a hybrid construction, is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical [syndactic] and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological belief systems. [...] the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence. It frequently happens that even the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction – and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents.²⁶

With Bakhtin in mind, these sources appear as contested rather than compromised. One can read them to find moments where *sipahis* pushed the boundaries of what was permissible by using those instances of ‘rumour’ in letters, depositions or interrogations.

It is possible to take it one step further. There was a material reality that informed and was informed by this linguistic double-play. If soldiers were able to manipulate their partial presence in the final texts of their testimonies in order to make their voices more pronounced, it could also work in reverse: soldiers could be manipulated by the testimonies they produced. The effort of trying to situate a word or phrase so that it would have an alternate meaning led to many *sipahis* re-situating themselves in an alternate space. The letter home metamorphosed into a medium through which soldiers queried their terms of service. The space of the colonial courtroom was reappropriated by *sipahis* in order to thwart the prosecution of their peers. And the interrogation chamber became a forum for many soldiers to demonstrate that they no longer considered themselves subject to the rigours of British military discipline. Hence, the importance of viewing ‘testimony’ as a process, praxis or act and not simply as a word referring to a static text.²⁷ The act of giving testimony involved an engagement and reappraisal of what it meant to be a soldier at specific moments. Or, to put it in other words, the heteroglot voice of *sipahis* reflected and created their own heteroglossia.

²⁶ M.M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’; *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*; edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin, Texas; Texas University Press, 1992), pp. 304-305.

²⁷ A methodology shared by Leonard Smith. Although his use of the French *témoignage* to refer to that quality that is absent from the word ‘testimony’, is not something I will adopt. Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers’ Testimony of the Great War*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 12-19.

Emplotting the Witness

There are two conventional methods of emplotment, the ordering of historical events, when writing a work of history: plotting by time (sequentially moving from one event to the other in the order that they happened) and plotting by space (juxtaposing events in accordance with a methodological or theoretical approach). This thesis does both. It starts with a broad overview of Imperial attitudes towards colonial *sipahis*, focuses in the middle chapters upon Indian soldiers in the First World War, and ends by discussing *sipahis* involved in the Second World War. At the same time the divisions between chapters broadly correlate with different types of *sipahis*' testimony: censored letters in the second and third, courtroom depositions in the fourth and interrogations in the fifth. There are, however, slippages in its writing. It is not quite chronological – the Second World War makes an appearance in Chapter 2 – nor is it quite divided by the different sources used – the same or similar colonialist voices appear in all the chapters.

There is a reason why these categories are blurred and the thesis is structured as it is. It is an attempt to reflect the different ways in which *sipahis* could re-shape fractured identities through testimony. Soldiering identities could be pushed in directions that alarmed the institutions that created them, non-soldiering modes of behaviour could be written into *sipahis*' own understanding of their codes of conduct, and there were, at certain moments, refusals to *be* soldiers. The thesis is shaped to take account of these forms of renegotiation. And if, at times, one chapter references or bleeds into another, it is because these moments were not absolute, and because soldiers could flit from one to the other or to none at all.

The chapters of this study are, broadly speaking, split into two parts. The first looks at how Indian soldiers were seen by the British Raj. Chapter 1 offers a glimpse of the diachronic part of this vision found in discussions of who was and who was not designated as a 'martial race' in India. Within military handbooks there was never one fixed answer but a series of inchoate and fluctuating narratives that operated on more than one exception. So-called martial races were not just exceptions to the majority of unmanly Indians but carefully situated against those that were previously fit for recruitment and those that may become so in the future. Chapter 2 discusses the other side of this vision, through the military regulations of the Indian Army that have remained largely unchanged from the beginning of the twentieth century to today.

The second and larger part of the thesis is focused on how *sipahis* lived through this split vision of them through the process of giving testimony. The hyperextension of otherwise anodyne words and concepts in soldiers' letters is discussed in Chapter 2. The re-appropriation of sanctioned spaces is the subjects of chapters 3 and 4, through the medium of chain letters and soldiers' depositions in a colonial courtroom in Singapore. Finally, Chapter 5 shows the negation of military identities in the interrogations of captured members of the Indian National Army during and after the Second World War. In a sense, therefore, this thesis is not an attempt to write a history by structuring it by either time or by space. It is an attempt to emplot the witness.

CHAPTER 1
IN SEARCH OF COLONIAL NEGATIVES: MARTIAL RACE THEORIES, RECRUITING HANDBOOKS, AND THE INDIAN ARMY, c.1890-1945

Between 1938 and 1939, a retired British Major, Donovan Jackson, penned a series of articles for *The Statesman*, the English-language newspaper published in colonial Calcutta and Delhi.¹ Its written content is not noteworthy. The articles are barely distinguishable from better known works published at the time that charted the ‘glorious’ history of Indian regiments and their part in ‘the protection and advancement of nations now known as the British Commonwealth’.² What make them worthy of comment are the pictures annotating Jackson’s words. Each article was accompanied by a ‘photograph’ detailing the perfect type of recruit to various Indian regiments and battalions. When that regiment happened to have several different ‘martial races’ in its ranks, a montage of several portraits was effortlessly drawn together:



‘Types of Men Enlisted into the Frontier Force Regiments – 1938’; Donovan Jackson, *India’s Army*, p. 319.

¹ The articles were subsequently compiled and published in 1940.

² Donovan Jackson, *India’s Army*, (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., c.1940), Author’s Foreward.

But the images were not photographs at all, or at least not photographs of actual soldiers. The portraits contained more than one perspective in them (especially in the case of the ‘Dogra Rajput’), and Jackson admitted that his pictures were painted when compiling his articles for publication into a single volume in 1940.³

Jackson’s sleight-of-hand was emblematic of others working and writing in his field. There were repeated efforts by colonial military theorists to close the gap between idealized images of colonial soldiers in India and the realities they lived. The creation of the Indian Army – from the unification of the three Presidency Armies in 1902 – was presaged by the secondment of British officers from their battalions in order for them to write ethnologies of the soldiers under their command. Various *Handbooks for the Indian Army* were produced and then revised, abandoned, reworked or forgotten in the last decades of the British Raj. The Handbooks were the pencilled drafts beneath the glossy print of India’s martial races, or they were, to borrow a phrase from Ann Laura Stoler, ‘colonial negatives’:

They were colonial negatives in more than one sense: they were cropped and re-cropped and redeveloped. They are absent from colonial histories because they were more often discarded in process and never occurred. As blueprints of distress they underscore what was deemed to have gone awry [...] what might be excised from that picture, and what could not be touched up.⁴

I will attempt in this chapter to shed some light on the negatives contained in the darkroom of the Indian Army. Doing so reveals a panoply of inchoate and half-formed images that related only in part to martial race theories circulated at the colonial metropole. The Handbooks and their associated literature did not just divide ‘martial’ Indians from the ‘non-martial’. They divided those currently fit for recruitment from those that were previously so and hinted at those that would become sufficiently ‘martial’ in the future. And over time those negatives could be discarded, re-found, or reproduced in subtly different ways. This chapter will first deconstruct the mass-produced image of the martial race in India and then analyse the colonial negatives that informed and were informed by it.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Developing Historical Negatives: Race and the (Modernist) Visions of a Colonial State’; Brian Keith Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 180-181.

Fulfilling Colonial Fantasies in Pursuit of the Martial Race

In the earliest history-cum-ethnographies of soldiers in India produced for the domestic market, Major George Fletcher MacMunn's *The Armies of India* of 1911, martial races were described simply as men that had 'the physical courage necessary for the warrior'.⁵ There was, however, more than one measure of that physical aptitude even in the polished prose of MacMunn's work. It was calculated in accordance with how bracing or enervating the climate was in various parts of the subcontinent: 'a thousand years of malaria, and hook-worm, and other ills of neglected sanitation in a hot climate, and the deteriorating effect of aeons of tropical sun on races that were once white and lived in uplands and cool steppes.'⁶ It was deduced later by how willing or not recruits were to adhere to 'unsavoury' Oriental practices of faith and custom; 'of early marriage, premature brides, and juvenile eroticism'.⁷ And martial classes were distinguished for their similarity to Europeans with their 'Grecian features', 'aquiline noses' and 'sonsy women'.⁸ Various historical works have dissolved the unitary picture of India's martial races invoked by MacMunn and other British Officers into its constituent parts. I will do the same. But only in part. Discussions of climate, Indian custom or how European certain Indians were, were linked by their common invocation of exotica and the bizarre. That element of fantasy, as will be shown below, framed the impulse to distinguish between who were and who were not martial races in India.

Stephen Cohen attributes Frederick Sleight Roberts as the architect of martial race theory in India.⁹ It is not without cause. Roberts, as Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army between 1880 and 1885 and then as Commander-in-Chief for all India [hereafter C-in-C], was noted for the frequency with which he disparaged his 'Madrassi' *sipahis*:

Each cold season I made long tours in order to acquaint myself with the needs and capabilities of the men in the Madras Army. I tried hard to discover in them those fighting qualities which had distinguished their forefathers during the wars of the last and the beginning of the present [the nineteenth] century. But long years of peace,

⁵ Major George Fletcher MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*; illustrations by Major A.C. Lovatt; with foreword by Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, (Somerton, Somerset: Crécy, 1988 rpt.), p. 129.

⁶ Lieutenant-General Sir George Fletcher MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1933), p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, throughout chapter 13.

⁹ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1971), especially Chapter 2.

and the security and prosperity attending it, had evidently had upon them, as they always seem to have on Asiatics, a softening and deteriorating effect; and I was forced to the conclusion that the ancient military spirit had died in them, as it died in the ordinary Hindustanis of Bengal and the Mahratta of Bombay, and that they could no longer be safely pitted against warlike races, or employed outside the limits of southern India.¹⁰

For Roberts this was of especial importance given his preoccupation with a Russian threat in Persia and Afghanistan and the supposed fact that no south Indian could match the martial aptitude of the Czar's soldiers:

It is no use our trying to persuade ourselves that the whole of the Indian Army is capable of meeting an enemy from Central Asia or Europe; they are not, and nothing will ever make them. It is not a question of efficiency, but of courage and physique; in these two essential qualities the sepoy of lower India are wanting. No amount of instruction will make up for these shortcomings, and it would be extremely dangerous for us to calculate upon possessing an army which would most assuredly fail us in the hour of danger.¹¹

Roberts' pronouncements had their effect with the abolition of the Presidency Armies in 1895, the creation of several 'class regiments' from northern Indian 'tribes', and the commissioning of official martial ethnologies by British Officers 'who understood Native character'.¹² Roberts also had his ideological protégés. Horatio Kitchener decreed, after wiping away the last vestiges of the Presidency Armies, that his reforms of November 1903, 'The Re-Organisation and Re-Distribution of the Army in India', and January 1904, 'The Preparation of the Army in India for War', would mark the 'complete elimination of units raised from unwarlike races'.¹³ And Garrett O'Moore Creagh, after assuming the mantle of C-in-C in 1909, synthesized the reforms of his predecessors into one governing maxim:

In the hot, flat regions, of which the greater part of India consists [...] are found races, timid both by religion and habit, servile to their superiors, but tyrannical to their

¹⁰ Frederick Sleight Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief, Vol. II*, (London; Richard Bentley & Son, 1897), p. 383; also quoted and paraphrased by S.P. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p. 46-48.

¹¹ Frederick Sleight Roberts, *Correspondence with England while Commander-in-Chief in Madras, 1881-1885*, Vol. 2, (Simla: Govt. Central Printing Office, 1890), pp. 25-6.

¹² Roberts, *Forty-One Years*, p. 493.

¹³ Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj, From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence: 1858-1947*, (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989), p.217.

inferiors [...]. In other parts [...] where the winter is cold, the warlike minority is to be found.¹⁴

But climactic theories of race were only part of the picture. As early as 1812, Sir John Malcolm, at the time a Lieutenant-Colonel, compiled a series of sketches of Sikhs in Punjab that made mention of their virtuous ‘racial’ qualities.¹⁵ Similar material decorated the pages of *The United Service Journal* in the early nineteenth century, with its description of Rajputs as a ‘high-minded and brave race’, Sikhs as ‘slow-witted’ but formidable, and Muslims as brave but blinded by ‘fanaticism’.¹⁶ There were, therefore, ascriptions of martial characteristics that preceded environmental narratives of race. Douglas Peers and Channa Wickremesekera have characterized it with reference to the first flush of post-colonial histories inspired by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. The martialization of soldiers becomes contiguous to the wholesale objectification and dehumanization of all Indians under colonialism. The only contention is precisely when this occurred. For Peers, the 1830s served as the origin of ‘several foundational stereotypes’ of who was and who was not fit for recruitment,¹⁷ and for Channa Wickremesekera it ought to be traced back further into the eighteenth century:

The essential ingredient for the development of a racist perception about Indian soldiers in the following century [...] was well and truly alive in the eighteenth century, and [...] the sepoy army was founded partly on that perception. In other words, the racist ideology of the nineteenth century provided a new interpretation for

¹⁴ Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p. 48.

¹⁵ ‘The character of the Sikhs, or rather Singhs, which is the name by which the followers of Gúrú Góvind, who are all devoted to arms, are distinguished, is very marked. They have, in general, the Hindú cast of countenance, somewhat altered by their long beards, and are to the full as active as the Mahrátas; and much more robust, from their living fuller, and enjoying a better and colder climate. Their courage is equal, at all times, to that of any natives of India; and when wrought upon by prejudice or religion, is quite desperate. They are all horsemen, and have no infantry in their own country, except for the defence of their forts and villages, though they generally serve as infantry in foreign armies. They are bold, and rather rough, in their address; which appears more to a stranger from their invariably speaking in a loud tone of voice; but this is quite a habit, and is alike used by them to express the sentiments of regard and hatred. The Sikhs have been reputed deceitful and cruel; but I know no grounds upon which they can be considered more so than the other tribes of India. They seemed to me, from all the intercourse I had with them, to be more open and sincere than the Mahrátas, and less ruse and savage than the Afgháns. They have, indeed, become, from national success, too proud of their own strength, and too irritable in their tempers, to have patience for the wiles of the former; and they retain, in spite of their change of manners and religion, too much of the original character of their Hindú ancestors, (for the great majority are of the Hindú race,) to have the constitutional ferocity of the latter. The Sikh soldier, is, generally speaking, brave, active, and cheerful, without polish, but neither destitute of sincerity nor attachment; and if he often appears wanting of humanity, it is not so much to be attributed to his national character, as to the habits of a life, which, from the condition of the society in which he is born, is generally passed in scenes of violence and rapine.’ John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs; A Singular Nation, Who Inhabit the Provinces of Penjab, Situated Between the Rivers Jumna and Indus*, (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1812), pp. 129-131.

¹⁶ Anon., ‘The Indian Army. No. 3, *United Service Journal* (1836); Douglas M. Peers, “‘Those Noble Exemplars of the True Military Tradition’: Constructions of the Indian Army in the Mid-Victorian Press”; *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (February 1997), p. 132.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

an old perception, giving it a more sinister twist. In the heady atmosphere of empire and scientific progress the inferiority of the Indian soldier came to be treated as a product of an innate weakness and the Indian cultural environment itself came to be seen as the manifestation of that inner weakness, turning simple prejudice into downright contempt and men into specimens.¹⁸

It is an argument that has some merit. There was a part-ascription of negative feminine characteristics to some Indian *sipahis* and positive childlike qualities to others in the Armies of the East India Company, and it became a term of reference that was harked back to at a later date. In 1918, for instance, in a parable written for military recruiters to relay to potential recruits in Punjab,¹⁹ a Punjabi Mussalman, Sher Jang, is bedevilled by a salacious *babu* and rescued by a British officer:

[...] an Englishman came up and asked the Babu what was the matter. I explained that I had come to enlist in the Army, but that the Babu did not want to let me go. The Englishman laughed and said to the Babu, “Fikr na kar, Babuji, I’ll pay the amount.” [...] I then asked him, “What dalali do I have to give you?” He laughed more than the last time (he always seemed to be laughing) and said, “There is no dalali or dusturi.”

[...] “I have always heard that all Faujdar officers are kind,” says old Gulab Khan. “More like brothers and fathers to the sepoy.”²⁰

There was one other theme to the depiction of India’s martial races: the contention that some soldiers were proto-Britons. *Sipahis* were described as either living as Englishmen lived ‘in the tenth century’,²¹ or as being racial off-shoots of Anglo-Saxon ‘tribes’:

[Maharajah] Dhulip Singh was a Jat. When, after his death, his army insisted a year or so later on rushing onto the bayonets of Lord Gough and the Indo-British Army, and were destroyed for their pains, the British Government endeavoured to restore and maintain the Sikh kingdom. It will be remembered how the Sikh chiefs and the old Sikh Army that survived insisted on trying their fate once more, only to be destroyed in the ‘crowning mercy’ of Goojerat. Then was the Punjab annexed and the boy, Dhulip Singh, eventually sent to be brought up in England with ample revenues.

¹⁸ Channa Wickremesekera, “*Best Black Troops in the World*”: *British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy*, 1746 1805, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), p. 183.

¹⁹ There are two pamphlets that I have come across, each of which relays the same story and dates from 1918: *How Gul Mohamed Joined the King’s Army* (for Punjabi Mussalmans) and *Teja Singh Khalsa Joins the Army* (for Sikh Jats). It is quite possible that other pamphlets were written for the edification of other ‘martial classes’.

²⁰ *How Gul Mohamed Joined the King’s Army*, (Simla: G.M. Press, 1918), pp. 2-5.

²¹ C.M. Enriques, 21st Punjabis, *The Pathan Borderland: A Consecutive Account of the Country and People on and Beyond the Indian Frontier from Chitral to Dera Ismail Khan*, (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1910), pp. 52-53.

To him his friend, Colonel Sleeman, the famous Indian political officer, wrote, "I see you are going to live in Kent. You will be among your own people there, for you are a Jat and the men of Kent are Jats from Jutland," and no doubt he was speaking ethnological truth.²²

With the emergence of Indian Commissioned Officers before and during the Second World War, the language reached its apotheosis. Indian Officers became indistinguishable from the old *Gora Sahibs* in the officers' mess:

6. Would I have to serve under Indian Commissioned Officers?

As Indian Commissioned Officers now serve in all Indian Regiments, it is quite likely that you may find yourself serving under an Indian Commissioned Officer, but this should be no deterrent to service with the Indian Army. Indian Commissioned Officers have proved their worth in the field, both in bravery and powers of leadership. They are trained by the same methods as British Officers and live in the same way in the same Mess. They are finally accepted or rejected by precisely the same standards, so there is no need to fear any loss of prestige in being posted to an Indian Regiment in which Indian Commissioned Officers are already serving.²³

It also had an effect on the type of patronage given to former soldiers. Pensioned soldiers were sites of social engineering in the canal colonies of Punjab, by being favoured with land allotments, grouped together, and encouraged to build houses on European patterns.²⁴ In the Chenab Colony the policy was taken to its extreme. Whole villages were named after 'regimental eponymous heroes': 'Fanepur (19th Lancers, Fane's Horse), Rattrayabad (45th Rattray's Sikhs), Probynabad (11th Prince of Wales' Own Lancers), Hodsonabad (9th Hodson's Horse) and Kot Brosyer (14th Sikhs).'²⁵

Thus, there were at least three aspects to martial race discourses propounded by the Indian Army: climactic, the division of Indian on a martial-unmartial axis, and the granting of pseudo-British qualities to *sipahis*. What links them is the common element of colonial fantasy. Climactic theories of race were not new when Roberts

²² MacMunn, *The Martial Races*, pp. 13-14.

²³ *Notes for Officers Wishing to Join the Indian Army*, (London: Military Department, India Office, 1942).

²⁴ The principles upon which land in the canal colonies was to be apportioned was made clear by the Revenue Secretary of the Punjab Government, on 22 July 1891: 'It seemed essential to preserve the tradition of the Punjab as a country of peasant farmers. No other general frame of society is at present possible or desirable in the Province. The bulk of the available lands has therefore been appropriated to peasant settlers while the size of the individual grants has been fixed on a scale which will, it is hoped, attract the sturdy, the well-to-do, and the enterprising classes.'

Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony, Vol. 31A, 1904, (Lahore: Civil and Military Press, 1907), p. 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

chanced upon them, having formed the basis of fictional and then medical works about India in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁶ Robert Young shows that there was a fantasmatic desire implicit in the characterisation of martial or caste communities in India as a *race* apart; their perceived ‘chaste abstention from racial sexual transgression, from hybridization and mongrelization’²⁷ set in stark relief to the majority of Indians:

It contributes much to these feelings, that Southern Asia is, and has been for thousands of years, the part of the earth most swarming with human life; the great *officina gentium*. Man is a weed in those regions.²⁸

And sexual desire was always implicit in comparisons of ‘martial’ classes to Europeans. It was there in demands that well-muscled soldiers ought to wear no or tight clothing and hold ‘the “erect position”’ in the *Manual of Physical Training for the Indian Army*,²⁹ or in the language used to describe the characteristics and appearances of manly soldiers:

Dogras are by nature tractable and obedient. They have no aspiration after independence, and seem to prefer being under authority. They yield implicit obedience to a ruler whom they admire and respect. [...] In general physiognomy the Dogra are decidedly a good-looking race. Their complexions are generally fair owing to the temperate climate in which they live, and among the higher castes, owing to the purity of their descent. Caste gradations are strongly marked in their aspect, the higher the caste, the purer and more elevated the features.³⁰

These elements of fantasy were integral to the reasons why the Handbooks were commissioned. The ethnographies attempted to close the gap between flights of imagination and reality. Officers sought to prove the veracity of colonial fantasies by officially recording the ‘characteristics, customs, prejudices, history and religion’ of

²⁶ It was present in Alexander Dow’s *History of Hindostan* and early nineteenth century medical opinion. See Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan; Translated from the Persian. To which are prefixed two dissertations; the first concerning the Hindoos and the second on the Origin and Nature of Despotism in India*. (London: J. Walker; White and Cochrane; Lackington, Allen and Co.; Black, Parry and Kingsbury; J. Nunn; J. Cuthell; R. Lea; Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown; and J. Faulder, 1812 rpt.); and E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experiences of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, (Molden, Massachusetts: Polity, 2002), Chapter 2.

²⁷ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 98.

²⁸ Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and Other Writings*; in Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 98.

²⁹ *Manual of Physical Training for the Indian Army, 1911*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1911), pp. 2-5.

³⁰ A.H. Bingley; revised by A.B. Longden, *Class Handbooks for the Indian Army: Dogras*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing, India; 1910), pp. 71-72.

martial classes.³¹ And as fantasies changed, and old negatives were found to be inconstant with how groups of soldiers were now perceived, new Handbooks were commissioned and the old quietly discarded. That is what occurred in the case-studies I will now turn to: of Sikhs, Pathans, and Brahmins.

The Dangers of Being Both 'Black' and a 'Lion': Sikhs

Perhaps no martial identity has had a longer half-life since Independence than that applied to the Sikhs of Punjab. Half-remembered words and deeds daily creep into the language of Sikhs themselves,³² and even permeated the filming of Star Trek in the guise of the genetically engineered super-villain Khan Noonien Singh:

Lt. Marla McGivers: [He's] From the northern India area, I'd guess. Probably a Sikh. They were the most fantastic warriors.³³

(Un)Fortunately the crew of the Enterprise did not always get it right. The martial characteristics ascribed to Sikhs proved mutable even after the advent of the Handbook programme. I will chart below quite how far and for how long it fluctuated.

Following the annexation of Punjab by the East India Company in 1849, the Board of Administration, established to govern the new province immediately raised five regiments of infantry and cavalry from the former Khalsa Army consisting of 'men, habituated from childhood to war and the chase'.³⁴ The majority of Sikhs were viewed as being hostile to Company rule and were largely excluded from this category. Their numbers were restricted to no more than two hundred in infantry and one hundred in cavalry regiments.³⁵ To some extent this changed with the outbreak of

³¹ *Our Sowars and Sepoys: Official Text-Book for the Lower Standard Examination in Urdu (English)*, (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1941), Preface.

³² Take, for instance, the Memorandum issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to the French Government over the issue of religious accoutrements being prohibited in the French education system: 'Your Excellency, it may also be not out of place to mention that the Sikhs have age old ties with the French people. The sovereign Khalsa State of Punjab had senior French officers. The Sikhs fought against the dictatorial and despotic regimes and for the forces of liberty, freedom and democracy along with the French people & State. Thousands of Sikhs were killed in action & your esteemed country has graves of such brave Sikh soldiers who sacrificed their lives to protect the dignity and freedom of every human being. They were all Sikhs having unshorn hair and wearing turban in accordance with the Sikh religious discipline. Your Excellency, we seek your personal intervention to undo this injustice and allow the Sikhs to practice and manifest their religion by restoring their right to wear turban.' Shiromani Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, to Dominique de Villepin, 13th February, 2004. <http://www.sgpc.net/dastar/index.asp>.

³³ 'Space Seed'; *Star Trek, The Original Series*, Series 1, Episode 2, (1967).

³⁴ Punjab Administration Report, 1849-1851; Rajit K. Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 9.

³⁵ Mazumdar, *Making of Punjab*, p. 8.

the Uprisings of 1857 and with the recruitment of 23,000 Sikhs to quash it. The language describing Sikhs as a soldierly class came to be used in reports drafted by colonial officials in India, and even in the weekly *reportage* of Friedrich Engels. But in the hysteria that followed the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’, the picture engendered of the Sikh – and quite what Sikhs *were* – was still confused and uncertain. Engels concluded his article by asking how long it would be before the ‘saucy’ Sikh would turn on his colonial master:

There are now nearly 100,000 Sikhs in the British service, and we have heard how saucy they are; they fight, they say, to-day for the British, but may fight tomorrow against them, as it may please God. Brave, passionate, fickle, they are even more subject to sudden and unexpected impulses than other Orientals. If mutiny should break out in earnest among them, then would the British indeed have hard work to keep their own. The Sikhs were always the most formidable opponents of the British among the natives of India; they have formed a comparatively powerful empire; they are of a peculiar sect of Brahminism, and hate both Hindus and Mussulmans. They have seen the British “raj” in the utmost peril; they have contributed a great deal to restore it, and they are even convinced that their own share of the work was a decisive one. What is more natural than that they should harbour the idea that the time has come when the British raj should be replaced by a Sikh raj, that a Sikh emperor is to rule India from Delhi³⁶ or Calcutta?³⁷

The systematic ascription of martial qualities to Sikhs by the Army had to wait until Frederick Roberts became C-in-C in 1885. The publication of the first census of Punjab in 1883, and its enumeration and description of various castes and ‘tribes’, gave a common means of reference and an ethnographic framework to military officers in India. It allowed the *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs* published in 1899, and written by Captain A.H. Bingley, to ascribe martial qualities to the ‘right type of Sikh’. Sikh Brahmans were condemned for their caste prejudice,³⁸ urban Sikh Khatri

³⁶ Engels did stumble upon some truth in making this comment. Older versions of *Raj karega Khalsa*, the popular *ardas* (prayer) among Sikhs, did make specific mention of sitting upon the throne of Delhi:

*‘Dilli takht par bahegi aap Guru ki fauj
Chatter phirega sis paar barhi karegi mauj
Raj karega Khalsa aaki rahe na koe
Khwar hoe sab milenge bache saran jo hoye’.*

Or:

‘The Guru’s army will sit upon the throne of Delhi
Over their heads will revolve a *chatter* (a parasol that is a sign of royalty) and they will enjoy themselves immensely
The Khalsa will rule unchallenged
They will unite after overcoming evil and will be saved after entering the refuge of the Guru’.

³⁷ Friedrich Engels, ‘The Revolt in India’, *New York Daily Tribune*, 17 September 1858; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence, 1857-1859*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), pp. 152-153.

³⁸ A.H. Bingley, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs*, (Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1899), p. 37.

for their reluctance to take to the plough,³⁹ and low caste Sikh Mazbhis for their supposed criminality.⁴⁰ It was rural Sikh Jats who were singled out for praise for being devoid of all these sins and blessed with an impressive stolidity and obedience:

Hardy, brave and of intelligence too slow to understand when he is beaten, obedient to discipline, devotedly attached to his officers, and careless of the caste prohibitions which render so many Hindu races difficult to control and feed in the field, he is unsurpassed as a soldier [...].⁴¹

Consequently it was Sikh Jats who were favoured for recruitment. During the First World War they formed the majority of the twelve to twenty percent⁴² of all Indian ‘fighting men’ that were Sikh.⁴³

That was not the end of the matter. While the Sikh Jat was broadly understood to have a soldierly bearing, different and often contradictory soldierly qualities were applied to him from particular locales in Punjab, and from different *gols/gotras* or sub-castes. The first of these was the distinction made between Sikh cultivators from the *Majha* and *Malwa* areas of Punjab – the former being roughly contiguous to the districts of Amritsar, Lahore, Sialkot and Gujranwala that was annexed in 1849, and the latter being the area east of the Rivers Sutlej and Beas that the East India Company came to control from 1809 and 1846. Years of having their own Raj had created, for Bingley, a different cultural and physical specimen of Jat in the *Majha* to what the British had grown accustomed to in the *Malwa*:

The Manjha [or Majha] Sikh is a rule brighter, smarter, quicker, and more refined than the Malwai, while the latter on the other hand is more stubborn, works quite as conscientiously but less cheerfully, and from his very stolidity and obtuseness is equally staunch, while nowise inferior in either courage or discipline.⁴⁴

Even Sikh Jats within these areas were not all suitable for military service. Innumerable distinctions were made between *gols* of Jats of ‘not very good quality’⁴⁵ and those sub-castes within both the *Majha* and *Malwa* areas that were seen as being

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁴¹ Lepel Griffin; *ibid*, p. 93.

⁴² 88,925 out of a total of 739,938 combatants recruited. That ignores of course the Sikhs in the ‘regular’ Indian Army, as well as those in the State Forces. It also does not count the numbers of Sikhs in other colonial regiments, such as the Malay States Guides or Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery. The total proportion may have been as high as 20%. *India’s Contribution to the Great War, published by Authority of the Government of India*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1923), Appendix C.

⁴³ The total Sikh population in Punjab was some 3,238,803 according to the Census of 1921.

⁴⁴ Bingley, *Handbooks: Sikhs*, p. 29-30.

⁴⁵ Such as between Doaba Sikhs nearer the Majha area, areas bordering the Himalayas, etc., *ibid*, Chapter 5.

especially suited to the military life. Particular praise was found, for instance, for the Sindhus or Sandhus found in 32 villages of Tarn Taran *tahsil* in Amritsar district:⁴⁶

[...The Sindhus] are the finest of the Amritsar peasantry. In physique they are inferior to no race of peasants in the province, and among them are men who in any country of the world would be deemed fine specimens of the human race. [...] They make admirable soldiers, when well led, inferior to no native troops in India, with more dogged courage than dash, steady in the field, and trustworthy in difficult circumstances, and without the fanaticism which makes the Pathan always dangerous.⁴⁷

Lastly, although ‘Sindhu Jats’ were ‘fine specimens of the human race’⁴⁸ when recruited from Tarn Taran *tahsil*, the sons of military pensioners that were settled in the canal colonies of western Punjab evidently were not. Or at least they were not according to settlement officers pressed to explain why so few Sikhs from this area were willing to take up the King’s shilling.⁴⁹ Bingley’s Handbook, therefore, attempted to rank Sikhs in accordance with a racial rather than religious understanding of Sikhism.

However it did not prove as authoritative as either he or his superiors would have liked. Praise for Sikh Jats was tempered in the aftermath of the First World War. Official histories still praised the ‘Black Lions’ of the Khalsa who died nobly defending the honour of the King-Emperor,⁵⁰ but the landscapes in which those lions pranced was decidedly murkier. Following the revolutionary Ghadr movement, and the civil disorder that preceded and followed the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, district gazetteers complained of how poorly Sikhs, and Sikh Jats, were living up to their reputation:

It is all the more regrettable that the excellent record of the district should have been spoilt to some extent in the aftermath of the war. On 14th and 15th April, 1919, immediately following the outbreak of serious political disorders at Amritsar, there were also disorders in Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Hafizabad and Akalgarh.... Communication wires were cut, certain British Officers were interfered with...and even the house of Revd. Grahame [sic.] Bailey of the Scotch Mission at Wazirabad

⁴⁶ *Punjab District Gazetteers: Vol. XXA, Amritsar District, 1914*, (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1914), p. 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony, Vol. 31A, 1904*, (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904), p. 158.

⁵⁰ Frederick Yeats-Brown, *Martial India*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1945), p. 31.

was burnt. Also at Gujranwala, the Tahsil, District Court, Post Office, Church, Railway Station and Dâk Bungalow were burnt.⁵¹

Reports made of areas of Punjab that were largely untouched by violence, or the later Akali movement for the reform of Gurdwaras, nonetheless contained warnings for individual military recruiters that the ‘fine qualities’ of Jats ‘are often marred by grosser traits, as when their martial spirit and dogged courage exhibit themselves in crimes of violence’.⁵² And the figure of the Sikh even began to intrude upon reports previously restricted to the troublesome Bengali:

With the high-spirited and adventurous Sikhs the interval between thought and action is short. If captured by inflammatory appeals, they are prone to act with all possible celerity and in a fashion dangerous to the whole fabric of order and constitutional rule.⁵³

The language used by civil departments of the colonial establishment in India forced a revision of the official military ethnology. Major A.E. Barstow of the 11th Sikhs was chosen for the task, and the tone he adopted was one of alarm. The initial section of *The Sikhs*, published in 1928, replicated the style of Bingley’s Handbook and unashamedly plagiarized the early ethnography when charting the ‘origin of Sikhism’. But that changed when it came to recount the history of Sikhs under the British Raj. The Sikh community was suddenly split into two: the pure Sikhs in the Army and those who had ‘relapsed into Hinduism’:

Throughout the era under review, as is the case at the present time, one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion has been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh Regiments, to send Sikh recruits to receive the “pahul” of baptism, according to the rites prescribed by Guru Govind Singh [sic.]. Sikh soldiers, too, are required to adhere rigidly to Sikh customs and ceremonial [customs] and every effort has been made to preserve them from the contagion of Hinduism. Sikhs in the Indian Army have been studiously “nationalised”, or encouraged to regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation; their national pride has been fostered by every available means, and the “Granth Sahib”, or Sikh Scriptures are saluted by British Officers of Indian Regiments. The reason for

⁵¹ It is also interesting that an attack on a minister’s house is deemed more important than the arson of Government buildings; *Punjab District Gazetteers: Vol. XXXIVA, Gujranwala District, 1935*, (Lahore: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1936), p. 36.

⁵² B.H. Dobson, *Final Report on the Chenab Colony Settlement*, (Lahore: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1915), p. 37.

⁵³ East India (Sedition Committee, 1918), *Report of Committee appointed to investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India*, (London: HM Stationary Office, 1918), p. 68.

this policy is not far to seek. With his relapse into Hinduism, and re-adoption of its superstitions and vicious social customs, it is notorious [sic.] that the Sikh loses much of his martial instincts, and greatly deteriorates as a fighting machine.⁵⁴

The Indian Army became the one means to inoculate the Sikh from this pernicious disease. And where the Army failed, so the Sikh was found to act in a seditious manner. Summaries were given by Barstow of rural agitation in Punjab in 1907, the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the ‘Tat Khalsa Party’, the Ghadr Movement, the ‘Disorders of 1919’, and, finally, the ‘Gurdwara Reform Movement’ of the 1920s. The ‘finger of blame’ in each case was firmly pointed towards ‘the “advanced Sikh reforming party”, which is not merely not orthodox in its religion, but would seem to have been in some danger of falling away from Sikhism altogether’.⁵⁵ And in case the reader was not concerned enough by the dangerous activities of these ‘Hindu-Sikhs’, Barstow concluded, without irony, that they were also secretly Bolsheviks:

Bolshevism may, rightly or wrongly, be considered to be the coming world peril. Its promoters at Moscow are said to have as their ultimate objective the peoples of the Far East and other Asiatic countries. Be this as it may – but, if India is there objective, then it is well to note that the agricultural conditions of the Punjab much resemble those of the interior of Russia, and as such must attract the attention of their agents.

There is a further point and it is that of religion. In the Punjab if anybody’s religion has got anything in common with the basic principles of Bolshevism it is that of the Sikh. To begin with his religion is democratic and preaches equality and nobleness of labour. The dictum of Guru Govind Singh [sic.] was to the effect that everything possessed by an individual Sikh belonged to the whole Panth and that the belongings of the whole Panth were to be equally shared by every individual Sikh. It has seldom been translated into practice. The authority of religion is however thin and the Sikh soil is likely to prove somewhat suitable for the growth of Bolshevism.

The symptoms of the disease are already visible to some extent amongst certain Sikhs although in most cases the would-be victims do not know themselves what disease they are suffering from.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ A.E. Barstow, 11th Sikhs, *The Sikhs: Revised at the Request of the Government of India* (re-titled *The Sikhs: An Ethnology*), (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2004 rpt.), pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.54-55.

Thus for Barstow the manly qualities of Sikhs came to be seen as a double-edged sword. The Sikh was naturally given to sedition unless properly channelled in military service.

During the Second World War what was seen as an extra-military problem began to be perceived in the ranks. In January 1941, there were mutinies in the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery (HKSRA) over refusals to wear steel helmets over or instead of their *pagris*. Large numbers of Sikh soldiers joined, and initially commanded, the profoundly anti-British Indian National Army in south-east Asia. And there was difficulty in dissuading young Sikh men from joining technical units, in which they could avoid battle and gain vocational training, over combat. The initial reaction of analysts at the India Office at Whitehall to this problem was to blame recruiters, who were seen as enlisting Sikh Jats that did not possess the 'traditional military qualities' of old.⁵⁷ It also led to suggestions by Winston Churchill that the Indian Army ought to be reduced in number 'by some 400,000 or 500,000 men' so that it could be staffed once more by those soldiers that had a 'long tradition of military service and loyalty to the crown'.⁵⁸ Those within the Indian Army, however, perceived the problem to be more substantive. Whilst the authors of secret memoranda were confident enough to declare in 1941 that 'nationalism' as a creed had no following in the armed forces⁵⁹ and that the educated Congressman 'was an object of contempt'⁶⁰ for most of those in arms, the attitude of Sikh Jat soldiers was described in drastically different language:

The Sikhs present a somewhat different problem from other classes. They are a separate, warlike, and politically minded community.⁶¹

Thus, not only did the proportion of Sikhs in the Indian Army fall, from the twelve percent it stood at in 1925 to ten percent in 1942 and even lower in 1946,⁶² but the naturally seditious Sikh Jat was no longer seen as a fully 'martial' figure in the last days of the British Raj. Even the use of the Sikh salutation, *Sat Sri Akal*,⁶³ came to be viewed

⁵⁷ 'Subversive Attempts on the Loyalty of the Indian Army', 3 April 1943; *Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945*, War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library L/WS/1/707, p. 378.

⁵⁸ Winston Churchill; *ibid*, p. 408.

⁵⁹ *Class Composition of the Army in India*, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, (L/WS/1/456), p. 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁶³ Lit. 'There is One Revered, Timeless Truth'.

as seditious, at least according to the commanding officer of the 12th Heavy Regiment, HKSRA, pressed to explain how he had allowed his men to mutiny:

Presiding Officer: [I wonder] whether the cry of “Sat Sri Akal” has any insubordinate significance?

Lt. Col. J.D. Wray: It has in fact no insubordinate significance but the way the words were shouted appeared to me to give it that significance.⁶⁴

From Noble Frontiersman to Debauched Tribal: the Pathan

It became fashionable in the early nineteenth century to write of peoples at the margins (or beyond) of colonial societies. Walter Scott, in his Highland romances, and James Fenimore Cooper, in his ‘Hawkeye’ novels, fenced out whole careers writing of the air of nobility, chivalry and ‘wildness’ that infused frontiersmen:

Although in a state of perfect repose, and apparently disregarding, with characteristic stoicism, the excitement and bustle around him, there was a sullen fierceness mingled with the quiet of the savage...and yet his appearance was not altogether that of a warrior. [...] His eye alone, which glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds, was to be seen in its state of native wildness. For a single instant his searching and yet wary glance met the wondering look of the other, and then changing its direction, partly in cunning, and partly in disdain, it remained fixed, as if penetrating the distant air.⁶⁵

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, to find that the Pathans (or Pushtuns) of the Hindu Kush were described in the same language in military handbooks as the ‘Indians’ of North America or the inhabitants of Highland Scotland. They became a people naturally given to martial endeavour because they hailed from the frontier. After the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) was demarcated, settled and placed under stringent military supervision, however, the same frontier spirit began to be viewed in reverse. Where they were once martial, now Pathans came to embody vices and degenerate practices that were antithetical to military life.

Pathans were first recruited after the annexation of Punjab and the frontier territories in 1849, but they were not initially distinguished as a separate ‘military

⁶⁴ Interrogation of Lt. Col. J.D. Wray; *General Court Martial, Royal Artillery, Hong Kong, 20 January 1941*: War Office Records, National Archives, Kew, Surrey, WO 71/1057.

⁶⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*; Introduction and Notes by David Blair, (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2002 rpt.), p. 8.

class' from other 'Muhammedans of Punjab' in military and civil reports.⁶⁶ On the rare occasions that they were, only fragmentary, and unflattering, descriptions were made of them:

The true Pathán is perhaps the most barbaric of all the races with which we are brought into contact in the Panjáb [sic]. His life is not so primitive as that of the gipsy tribes. But he is bloodthirsty, cruel, and vindictive in the highest degree [...].⁶⁷

A distinct and more positive image of Pathans only began to emerge when necessity demanded a closer understanding of them following the creation of the North West Frontier Province as an administrative area separate from Punjab in 1900. *A Dictionary to the Pathan Tribes* was compiled under orders from the Quarter Master General in India in 1899 and was,

[...] compiled with a view to providing an index to the numerous ramifications of the Pathan tribes of the North-West Frontier, in such a form that any obscure sub-division may be easily referred to [in] its proper tribal position.⁶⁸

C.M. Enriquez, the 'Assistant Recruiting Staff Officer for Pathans', added his own *The Pathan Borderland* in 1910. And finally Major R.T.I. Ridgway of the 40th Pathans authored the official Handbook in the same year.

The ethnologies all started with the same goal, regardless of the volume or the author: to find a way to distinguish Pathans from Afghans.

In its streets [Peshawar] India meets Central Asia, and of the crowds which throng its bazaars fully thirty percent are travellers on their way to and from Hindustan, or are stragglers from the neighbouring Pathan mountains. Not the least picturesque [sic.] are the sulky Afghans, who, to judge from their truculent manners, have forgotten that they no longer walk the streets of Cabul. It is the peculiarity of the Afghans that they are always thoroughly at home everywhere, and never seem to realise the necessity of dropping any of their swagger when in foreign lands. In pleasing contrast are the cheery, laughing Pathans, many of whom are 'in town' for a holiday, and who, like tripper [sic.] all the world over, are determined to enjoy themselves.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ As, for instance, in the *Annual Caste Return of the Native Army in India, on the 1 January 1893*, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, (L/MIL/7/7081).

⁶⁷ Denzil Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes: Being a reprint of the chapter on 'The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People' in the Report on the Census of the Punjab published in 1883 by the late Sir Denzil Ibbetson, K.C.S.I.*, (Lahore: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1916), p. 58.

⁶⁸ *A Dictionary of the Pathan Tribes on the North-West Frontier in India, compiled Under the Orders of the Quartermaster General in India, in the Intelligence Branch*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1899), Preface.

⁶⁹ Enriquez, *Pathan Borderland*, pp. 52-53.

After being distinguished from Afghans, Pathans were compared favourably with their colonial overlords. Their ‘tribal code’ – the words *Pushtunwali* or *Pakhtunwali* were not used – led to a pseudo-British understanding of ‘democracy’ and resulted in chivalrous behaviour that no other ‘race’ in India displayed; apart, of course, from the Briton:

[...] it is beyond question that he appeals strongly to and enlists the sympathies of British officers who have had dealings with him politically or when associated with him in regiments. His manliness is at once apparent, and his proverbial hospitality, courtesy, courage, cheerfulness and loyalty make him an excellent companion, and a valuable soldier, and entitle him to respect and admiration. It is true that he possesses a large amount of pride, and considers himself superior to other races, but this pride has often been of great use, and frequently enabled him to face difficulties which could not have been overcome without the necessary *morale* engendered by it.⁷⁰

At times those ‘debts of honour’ compelled Pathans to commit ‘crimes of passion’ and indulge in banditry. Even that, however, could be excused as demonstrative of an innate British sense of justice and playfulness:

Nature, too, has cursed him with the countenance, figure and physique of a brigand and *noblesse oblige*. Does not his bold dare-devil, cut-throat appearance saddle him with a terrible responsibility? There is nothing degrading in a barn fowl living the life of poultry, but what would the bird say if the hawk did the same? Why, the very sparrows would point the beak of scorn at him! But what is the Pathan to do? If, being born with a beak and talons of a hawk, he fulfils nature’s mandate and goes a-hawking, an unromantic British soldier promptly hangs him; if, on the other hand, he seeks peaceful occupation, say on the railway, he is either scorned as degenerate or mistrusted as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. But even here one is more or less dealing with the Pathan of fiction. Yet there does exist the Pathan of sober fact, who, in spite of his clothing, is neither wolf or sheep – the Pathan with whom we rub shoulders daily in our frontier stations – whom we like and to a very great extent admire. It is he who really represents his race. But being the plain matter-of-fact Pathan of every-day life, literature knows him not, and only those are acquainted with him whom duty casts in his midst. To such he is full of interest, and his real picturesqueness lies in the fact that, in spite of his surroundings, he is more like the Briton than any native in India.⁷¹

In other words, the very primitiveness of Pathans became their redeeming feature. In the years preceding the First World War 12,348 Pathans from both British India and

⁷⁰ R.T.I. Ridgway, 40th Pathans, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Pathans*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1910), p. 19.

⁷¹ Enriquez, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 89.

Afghanistan were present in the ranks of the Indian Army,⁷² and thousands more were recruited for para-military frontier militias.

Because of the equation made between ‘tribalness’ and martial bearing, different types of Pathans were seen as more ‘tribal’, and thus more martial, than others. The most pronounced of the distinctions made by military recruiters was between the ‘true’ Pathan of the hills and the more dubious Pathan of the plains. The latter was seen as the ‘possessor of all sort of vices’ for dwelling in towns⁷³ and was accused, more specifically, of diluting his frontier blood by cavorting with ‘untouchable’ ‘Chamar women’.⁷⁴ Even those reared in the hills and mothered by Pathan women, however, were not seen in quite the same light. Some groups of frontiersmen were perceived as having ‘retained their tribal identity’ better than others:

Those which have retained their tribal identity and been the most powerful...are esteemed most highly [by us], while those who have been buffeted about and have a mixed origin...are those least popular and lacking in martial qualities.⁷⁵

The Afridis, hailing from the country south and west of Peshawar, were identified as ‘wiry and strong’ with ‘excellent discipline’ largely because they all recognized their common kinship from one ‘common ancestor’.⁷⁶ Khattaks were praised for being ‘more civilized and respected than other Pathans’ because of their tendency to reside in tight democratic communities that suited them to a soldiering life.⁷⁷ While those who weren’t identified as sufficiently ‘tribal’ in nature, such as the quarrelsome Zakha Khel Afridis, were to be condemned as the ‘wildest and most turbulent’ of all Pathans and so not fit for enlistment under any circumstance.⁷⁸

Just as the very ‘tribalness’ of Pathans made them useful soldiers before the First World War, so it was that very quality that made them objects of suspicion after the start of hostilities. High rates of desertion among Pathan *sipahis* between 1914 and 1918 were part of the reason. Accusations were made that the frontier Pathan was racially incapable of fully realizing that military discipline superseded ‘tribal

⁷² *Annual Return Showing the Class Composition of the Armed Forces of India, on the 1 January 1908*, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, (L/MIL/7/7084).

⁷³ W. Fitz and G. Bourne, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Hindustani Musalmans and Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1914), pp. 47 and 83.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁵ Ridgway, *Handbooks: Pathans*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

loyalties'.⁷⁹ But the language hardened after the First World War. The Third Afghan War in 1919 and rebellion in Waziristan between 1919 and 1920 led to Pathan militias being accused of succumbing totally to 'the call of Islam' and defecting to the side of the pan-Islamist 'Mullah' Fazl Din.⁸⁰ The main cause, according to the report of the operations, was the racial characteristics of the Pathan that left him open to 'dangerous' religious fervour:

Their character, organization and instincts have made them independent and strongly democratic, so much so that even their own *maliks* (or elders) have little real control over their unruly spirits. ...[The] tribesmen carry their lives in their hands and finding that the natural resources of their country do not favour them enough, they eke out their existence by plundering their more peaceful neighbours.⁸¹

Reports of desertion and perceived fanaticism had its effect on recruitment. New Pathan infantry companies raised during the First World War only amounted to 5% of the total,⁸² despite the fact that 15% of the Indian infantry companies sent to France in 1914 had once been exclusively Pathan.⁸³ In other words, there was a transformation of the frontier stereotype into a series of negative qualities made during and immediately after the First World War.

In the decades following the First World War, the Pathan's tribal peculiarities came to be the subject of an even greater moral condemnation than their predilection for desertion and religious radicalism had previously resulted in; particularly over the issue of homosexuality. The possibility of sexual relations between two soldiers was recognized and legislated against in British Naval and Military law from 1866, when 'Sodomy with Man or Beast' was declared a military offence.⁸⁴ Up to and during the First World War, it was not a 'crime' that was actually prosecuted in the Indian Army, and that is in spite of quite frank admissions of same-sex relationships by Pathan

⁷⁹ 'Their defects as soldiers are that their tribal customs are so democratic that they can be disciplined only by a leader they know; they tend to lose cohesion if their officers become casualties [...].' Yeats-Brown, *Martial India*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ 'The border tribes were naturally excited by the entry of Turkey into the war; they were encouraged by the preaching of a few prominent mullahs to look towards Kabul and prepare for Jihad; [and] they heard the wildest rumours about the military situation in India and abroad. [...] [This fomented] a general rising.' The General Staff, Army Headquarters, *Operations in Waziristan, 1919-1920*, (Delhi; Government Central Press, 1923 2nd edn.), pp. 11 and 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸² 8 from a total of 152; 'Statements Showing "Class Composition" of Newly Raised Indian Infantry Battalions, on 1 January 1917'; *Class Composition*.

⁸³ 18 from a total of 120; 'Appendix II: Composition of Indian Regiments Serving in France, 1914-1915'; *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldier's Letters, 1914-1918*; selected and introduced by David Omissi, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 363-364.

⁸⁴ Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), p. 79-80.

soldiers as late as 1917.⁸⁵ It was only in the climate of the 1920s and 1930s when frontiersmen were no longer to be as valorized as they had been before, that homosexuality, which had once been quietly permitted, now came to be openly discussed as the progenitor of all the other unsoldierly vices that afflicted the Pathan. Thus, for instance, in the memoirs of Maurice Willoughby, a British junior officer in India in the 1930s, the soldiering Pathan is first introduced to the reader in a narrative voice mixed with disgust and incredulity:

On cold nights he would bring along a small boy or even two, sons of nephews, cousins or friends, to share his bed and keep him warm. Nobody even considered it strange.⁸⁶

Later references to Pathans confirm that the only thing worth knowing about ‘the fierce tribes along the North-West Frontier’ is their ‘propensity for boys’, and ensuing incest and bestiality:

When the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, whose Regimental Mascot is a large white goat, arrived at Landi Kotal in the heart of Pathan Afridi country, the locals were puzzled. ‘What! Only one goat among so many?’ Later the Goat-Corporal was the subject of one of the most celebrated court martials in the British Army; that of being charged ‘Contrary to Good Order and Military Discipline, he did upon certain dates, Prostitute the King’s Goat’. Apparently he had found himself a nice little earner hiring the animal out to local tribesmen. His defence was that he had only done so for the animal’s delectation and pleasure, being sorry for it in its celibate state.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Examples include a poem to a male sweetheart;

‘Since the day you went to the field, Oh heart
of my heart,

From that day I know no ease,

[...]

My soul languishes for communion with you

And my body is like water...’

Kot Dafadar Kutubuddin Khan, 3rd Corps Remount, Lahore, to Gulab Khan, 11 Lancers attached 19 Lancers, France, 7 March 1917; *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1917-1918*, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, L/MIL/5/827, Part 2.

And a letter recounting the ‘hospitality’ of two French gentlemen;

‘Since the 21st March I have been separated from the [French] gentlemen in whose house I lived; but I have exchanged letters with them and have written and told them what you say. I have also given them that if they want anything from India and I am not present, they should without fail write to you. ...They are kind and hospitable people and as long as I live I will serve them in whatever way I can [...].’

Risaldar Nadir Ali, 11 Lancers attached 9 Hodson’s Horse, France, to Mahomed Amir, Peshawar, NWFP; *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Maurice Willoughby, *Echo of a Distant Drum: The Last Generation of Empire*, (Lewes, East Sussex: Book Guild, 2001), p. 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The willingness for the tribal Pathan to contravene the perceived natural order became a symptom of a wider illness: the propensity of the frontiersman to rebel against military authority:

The levy-man jogs jauntily by, conscious to-day that with his coat turned outside-in he is an irregular trooper of King George, but that with it turned inside-out, why he is [...] as good a raider as those he is out to stop, nay better.⁸⁸

In the early years of the Second World War the total number of troops from the North West Frontier Province rarely surpassed six percent and little effort was made later to recruit more Pathan *sipahis*.⁸⁹ The new image of the Pathan was not the noble frontiersman but the deviant tribal.

Rediscovering the ‘Oldest of the Martial Classes’: the Rural Brahmin

The fidelity that the ‘Oudh Brahman’ soldier of the East India Company was seen to possess in the early nineteenth century is evident from the fictional narrative of Subedar Sita Ram published in 1873,⁹⁰ a figure who neither appears in military pay-books nor regimental lists but whose life-story was conveniently related in full to a British officer, Lieutenant Colonel James Norgate, just before he died:

Defender of the poor! – obedience, etc., etc., - I have, by the fatherly kindness of the Government, been granted my pension, and according to your desire, I now send your Lordship, by the hands of my son, the papers containing all I can remember of my life during the forty-eight years I have been in the service of the English Nation in which I have suffered seven severe wounds, and received six medals, which I am proud to wear. I trust what I have now written, and what I have before at different times related to your Honour, may prove that there were some who remained faithful, and were not affected by the Wind of Madness [the mutinies of 1857] which lately blew over Hindustan [...].⁹¹

Norgate’s caricature of the Brahmin soldier, Sita Ram, not only maintains a ‘native’ deference that is due to all British officers long after his military service is at an end,

⁸⁸ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, p. 244.

⁸⁹ Extrapolated from figures on the Indian Army, 1/1/41, and later. *Class Composition*.

⁹⁰ There are those who have argued that the narrative is genuine, but I severely doubt it. No original manuscript, in Avadhi, has ever been found, and Sita Ram must have served in several regiments at the same time in order to have been present at all the events recounted in the tale. For a fuller analysis of the narrative’s authenticity see James Lunt’s Editorial Note; *From Sepoy to Subedar: being the Life and Adventures of Subedar Sita Ram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army written and related by himself*; edited by James Lunt, translated and first published by Lieutenant-Colonel James Norgate, Bengal Staff Corps at Lahore, 1873, (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. xv.

⁹¹ Foreword by ‘Sita Ram’; *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p. xxix.

but this constructed Brahmin is willing to sacrifice both his caste and his first-born son to ‘uphold the English rule under which I had served and eaten salt for so many years’.⁹² Although the mutinies of 1857 did not affect Norgate’s appreciation of the twice-born Hindu soldier, it has become something of a historical orthodoxy to comment on how a later generation of British officers condemned Brahmin *sipahis* for their adherence to caste prejudice, their poor physique and their lax morals.⁹³ I will show that, while the recruitment of Brahmins from the United Provinces [hereafter UP] was curtailed for a time in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the recruitment of soldiers from these communities never ceased entirely, and an understanding that the Brahmin could be the ideal soldier came to be revived as British Imperial power in India began to wane.

In his novel ‘Kim’, first serialized in 1900 and 1901, Rudyard Kipling makes clear his disgust for the Brahmins of northern India. Even those such as ‘Hurree Chunder Mookerjee’ that were to be found in the service of the Crown were to be condemned:

His companion was the whale-like Babu, who, with a fringed shawl wrapped around his head, and his fat open-work-stockinged left leg tucked under him, shivered and grunted in the morning chill.

‘How comes it that this man is one of us?’ thought Kim, considering the jelly-back as they jolted down the road [...].⁹⁴

Much like Kipling, A.H. Bingley and A. Nicholls’ *Caste Handbooks for the Indian Army: Brahmans*, published in 1897, also derided the unmanly physiques of Brahmins. Where they were not bloated like Hurree, they were emaciated because of the propensity of the Brahmin ‘to fill his pocket at the expense of his stomach’ and due to the ‘wearisome formalities’ that high caste Hindus indulged in when preparing and consuming food.⁹⁵ As it was for Kipling,⁹⁶ the caste ‘exclusiveness’ and intricate purification ceremonies practised by Brahmins from northern India were seen ‘as inimical to military efficiency’⁹⁷ especially when it led to overt ‘bigotry’ against

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁹³ As it is for Douglas M. Peers, “‘The Habitual Nobility of Being’: British Officers and the Social Construction of the Bengal Army in the Early Nineteenth Century”; *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (1991); and Wickremesekera, “*Best Black Troops*”.

⁹⁴ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 161.

⁹⁵ A.H. Bingley, and A. Nicholls, *Caste Handbooks for the Indian Army: Brahmans*, (Simla, Government Central Printing Office, 1897), p. 42.

⁹⁶ As with the village Brahmin encountered in Chapter 3. Kipling, *Kim*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

others.⁹⁸ Finally, the famed Brahmin ‘love of thrift’ was not only seen as leading to cases of Brahmin NCOs embezzling funds⁹⁹ but indirectly leading to the ‘deep and tricky character’¹⁰⁰ of Brahmins that made regimental discontent more likely.¹⁰¹ As a result there was only one regiment bearing the name ‘Brahmans’ by the time of the First World War, and even a portion of that regiment was disbanded in 1917. Its soldiers were accused of objecting to the ‘group system of messing’, enforced by its commanding officer, that would have led to ritually impure non-Brahmins preparing their food.¹⁰²

Yet, for Bingley and Nicholls, Brahmins were not to be excluded wholesale. The opening pages of the military manual made clear the authors’ intent to show that some Brahmins could once again be placed ‘on an equality with the most warlike races of India’.¹⁰³ In so doing they divined two different types of Brahmins in India. One was physically unfit, untrustworthy and bedevilled by arcane caste prejudice and the other was free of those vices:

There [...] arose [in India] a class of Brahmins who, while retaining the privilege of a Levite class, were in all essentials an agricultural people, of naturally pacific tendencies, but ready and able to defend themselves whenever occasion required [...]. They were more docile and easily disciplined; they were quicker to learn their drill; and their natural cleanliness, fine physique and soldierly bearing made them more popular with their European officers than the truculent Muhammadans from the north, to whom pipeclay and discipline were abhorrent.¹⁰⁴

To this end, a distinction was drawn between Brahmins in the rural areas of the United Provinces that exercised a sacerdotal function of being part-time ‘priests’, who under no circumstance were suited for military life,¹⁰⁵ and ‘secular’ Brahmins that occupied no religious role in their villages and from whom recruits ought to be obtained.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, as these ‘secular Brahmins’ were ranked in order of which ‘tribe’ or ‘sub-tribe’ of U.P. Brahmin would furnish the most soldierly of recruits, it

⁹⁸ As apparently among the Kanoujiya Gaur Brahmins of U.P. *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ In Kipling’s work, the same village Brahmin referred to above tries to steal the purse of a Tibetan lama after slipping an opiate into his drink. Kipling, *Kim*, p. 50.

¹⁰² When apparently they refused to adhere to a ‘group system of messing.’ At least that is the conclusion drawn by the presiding officers at the courts martial. The testimony of the soldiers had more prosaic concerns over pay and leave. *Native Regiments – Insubordination, Misconduct etc.: Conduct of the 3rd Brahman Regiment in Mesopotamia*, Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/7/7277.

¹⁰³ Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7-9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

was those communities that would eat animal flesh and who tilled the soil as labourers or landed agriculturalists that were the most highly prized. The reason for this was because they had surpassed their Brahminical heritage by being ‘cultivators pure and simple’.¹⁰⁷ Particular praise was reserved for men among the ‘Kanoujiya’ Brahmins found in the area south-west of Mathura and along the Nepal border. Such was the regard with which the Brahmin agriculturalist was held in by the Second World War that 37,000 ‘Brahmans’ were recruited in the Artillery, Engineers, Infantry and Royal Indian Army Service Corps; and three-fourths of them were rural *Kanoujiyas*.¹⁰⁸

Other Brahmins recruited into the Indian Army, as Punjabi Dogras, were so shorn of their Brahmin-ness that they were not described as Brahmins at all by military handbooks. In the ‘isolated’ pockets of colonial Punjab in which Dogras were to found, primarily in Kangra, Sialkot, Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur districts and in the princely states nearby, the populace was seen to mirror the practices of pre-Brahminical ancient India rather than the ‘priest-ridden’ India of the plains. Bingley reasoned that it was because there had been historically no ‘Musalman domination’ nor loss of Rajput royalty that would have thrown the Hindu population ‘wholly into the hands of the Brahmans’.¹⁰⁹ As such, although Brahmins of the region were once again divided by recruiters into the ‘ploughman’ or the ‘priest’, ‘the former being eligible while the latter is not’,¹¹⁰ care was taken to show that all Dogra Brahmins had benefited from a mixing of their blood ‘with the surrounding population, or remnants of the aboriginal aristocracy of the hills’.¹¹¹ Further still, the Dogra Brahmin was perceived approvingly as being culturally distinct from the other Brahmins of India, to the extent that they would avoid contact with one another:

The Dogra Brahmans will not associate with those of the same caste from the plains. Both profess mutual distrust, and neither will eat *roti* cooked by the other; the hill Brahman, moreover, will nearly always eat flesh, which is eschewed by the majority of his down country brethren.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13-20.

¹⁰⁸ *Typewritten minute marked “Strictly Personal and Secret” from General Auchinleck*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ ‘It is in Kangra, and perhaps in Kangra alone, that we find caste existing nearly in the same state as that which the Musulman invaders found it when they entered the Punjab. It is certainly here that the Brahman and the Kshatriya occupy positions most nearly resembling those originally assigned them by Manu.’ A.H. Bingley; revised by A.B. Longden, *Class Handbooks for the Indian Army: Dogras*, (Calcutta; Superintendent Government Printing, India; 1910), pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 26.

It was another caste entirely, the 'Bhojkis', that were described as occupying the role of Brahmins in the hills by being 'quarrelsome, litigious, and profligate', whereas the Dogra Brahmin was seen to possess the same characteristics as the Rajput. Indeed so un-Brahmin-like was the Dogra Brahmin seen to be that all of the 28,071 Dogras in the Indian Army by the end of 1940 were grouped together in the same companies and sections regardless of caste:¹¹³

[...] it is among the Dogra [...] of our Punjab regiments that we find the best specimens of Hindu character, retaining its individuality while divested of many of its faults. Here we acquire a clearer conception than elsewhere of their high spirit when roused, their enthusiastic courage and generous self-devotion, so singularly combined with gentleness, and an almost boyish simplicity of character.¹¹⁴

Thus, the image of Norgate's faithful Brahmin was revived albeit in a different form. Narratives of Brahman martialness in India changed, which both helped to fill the material gap in the numbers of the Indian Army in the Second World War and helped to fill the gap in the psyche of the colonial military establishment that was searching for new soldiering classes to replace those that had been lost:

Brahmans of course are the oldest of the classes to be enlisted in the Indian Army [...]. For many years past, however, the enlistment of Madrassis and Brahmans has been very limited, so it may be said that the great increase [in recruitment] which has taken place in the last three years constitutes a welcome innovation.¹¹⁵

Conclusion: Following the Negative

A history of the Handbooks is one of recurring inadequacy: they were never quite good enough for the Indian Army. The Handbooks did succeed in merging fantasy with perceived truth. The Sikh was the archetype of Roberts' perfect soldier: not a religion but a race; not weakened by climate but strengthened by the cool airs of Central Asia. Pathans were how British wished to see themselves: 'chivalric', 'hawk-like' and imbued with an innate sense of 'democracy' and 'fair-play'. The Brahmin was symptomatic of all Indians: inscrutable in their fidelity and their treachery. But the negatives never or rarely outlasted their production. Bingley produced his

¹¹³ 'Annual Return Showing the Class Composition of the Indian Army etc., on 1st January 1941'; *Class Composition*.

¹¹⁴ Bingley; revised by Longden, *Handbooks: Dogras*, p. 71.

¹¹⁵ Claude J. Auchinleck, 'A Note on the Size and Composition of the Indian Army, August 1943'; *Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945*, War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library L/WS/1/707, p. 416.

Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs in 1899, but by the First World War it was already outdated. Pathans' frontier nobility was replaced by frontier degeneracy within a matter of years from 1910. Reality always moved too fast, or otherwise eluded, the artfulness of the martial race ethnologists. Brahmins were, therefore, recruited by the Indian Army in a different guise long before their sudden re-discovery by Claude Auchinleck as 'the oldest of the [martial] classes'.¹¹⁶

So what use are the Handbooks for the historian if they were so easily discarded and so poorly representative of soldiers? It is because they were intellectual justifications of colonialism and the colonial military that at once articulated supreme confidence and unseen fears. Martial Indians were fixed absolutely, down to castes within castes and affiliations within tribes. They were known better than they knew themselves. Even the 'official text-book' for the teaching of Urdu to British Officers warned against actually talking to *sipahis* or Indians and instead drew up a series of fictional dialogues about the 'fighting qualities', 'early history', 'general physique', 'customs' and the nature of Indian 'battalions'.¹¹⁷ It meant that the Handbooks were never fully forgotten. When new martial classes had to be found, the vacuum was filled by those who were a close approximation for the old: Mazhbi Sikhs or Ramgarias for Sikh Jats. Handbooks could be resurrected in order to prove that new recruits were in no way a deviation from previous policy, as in the case of Brahmins. And the mothballed negatives relating to Pathans, of innate '*noblesse oblige*' and 'wildness', have had a new airing today in order to excuse/justify wars of occupation/liberation in Afghanistan.¹¹⁸

But if the Handbooks are recurring colonial fantasy so were they recurring colonial nightmare. The soldier only existed in an abstracted form in the Handbooks

¹¹⁶ Auchinleck, 'Note on the Size and Composition of the Indian Army'.

¹¹⁷ *Our Sowars and Sepoys: Official Text-Book for the Lower Standard Examination in Urdu (English)*, (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1941), Preface.

¹¹⁸ Substitute the word 'Taliban' with 'Pathan' and the language of New York Times editorials is remarkably similar:

'Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, President Obama's choice to be the next military commander in Afghanistan, has defined America's essential goals there in a way that represents an overdue change in military strategy. He told senators last week that "the measure of effectiveness will not be the number of enemy killed. It will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence."

If General McChrystal can carry it off, he will have a far better chance of turning around a war America has not been winning — but must.

[...]Afghanistan's people have few illusions about the Taliban. They have felt the lash of its medieval punishments, witnessed its brutal attacks on women's rights and girls' education and noted its cynical and sinister ties with major drug traffickers. But they have little enthusiasm for a war in which foreign troops and Taliban fanatics shoot at each other with seeming indifference to the civilians caught in the cross-fire. Last year, some 2,000 Afghan civilians were killed, according to the United Nations and private aid agencies.'
Editorial, *The New York Times*, (7th June 2009).

and its associated literature. Mention was made of him only in parables, jokes, stories, but never summations of what he actually said. Yet the agency of the soldier permeates through the double exposure of that colonial lens. He appears as a ghostly presence whenever bungalows are set alight, explanations have to be sought for high rates of desertion, and when a military class suddenly proves itself worthy of recruitment. The (re)production or (re)abandonment of Handbooks are a blueprint to where things went awry: where *sipahis* acted in unforeseen ways. The rest of the thesis will follow that agency through testimony.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERILS OF ‘ORIENTAL CORRESPONDENCE’: WRITING AT THE MARGINS OF THE SOLDIER’S LETTER

In November 1914 a special military censor was imposed upon the letters of *sipahis* serving in France. Its purpose was to subject correspondence written to soldiers to ‘systematic examination’ and so preserve the integrity of Indian battalions from the wiles of ‘Indian agitators’.¹ But within a matter of weeks the aims of the censor changed. The letters written *by sipahis* were far more dangerous:

The mail to India [from soldiers] which at first was regarded as negligible has now become the most important part of our work. A number of letters from men with their units at the front have been examined. They betray undeniable evidence of depression. [...] The tendency during the month has been for these letters to increase in numbers and in length. At the same time there has been a marked change in tone. Grumbling is still almost entirely absent and there is never a hint of resentment or anti-British feeling. [...] But adverse signs are growing more conspicuous. Many of the men show a tendency to break into poetry which I am inclined to regard as a rather ominous sign of mental disquietude. The number of letters written by men who have obviously given way to despair has also increased both absolutely and relatively. [...] What is more significant still is the proportion of letters which though they show no sign of giving way to despair or of any faltering devotion to duty yet give a melancholy impression of fatalistic resignation to a fate that is regarded as speedy and inevitable. This feeling too appears to be spreading.²

The censor, E.B. Howell of the ‘Political Department of the Indian Civil Service’, tailored his operations in an attempt to cope with the new threat. He brokered extra funds, tried to find trustworthy translators for any scripts in which *sipahis* were

¹ ‘Towards the end of September 1914 the Lahore and Meerut Divisions of the Indian Army, with the normal complement of British troops included, began to arrive in France. The Force was disembarked at Marseilles and after a few days’ rest there was conveyed by train to Orleans. The route chosen for the troop trains was a circuitous one leading through Toulouse and other places in south-western France. While the force was in transit a member of the Indian Revolutionary Party [Ghadr Party], if it may be so called, was arrested in Toulouse, and upon examination his pockets were found to be stuffed with seditious literature intended for dissemination among Indian soldiery.

The authorities, thus set upon their guard, decided that, at least during the stay of the Indian troops in Europe, their correspondence must be subjected to systematic examination, and cast about as [sic.] a suitable person to appoint as Indian Mail Censor. It was not easy to find anyone possessing anything like the requisite qualifications, but eventually Second Lieutenant E.B. Howell, a member of the Political Department of the Indian Civil Service, who chanced to be serving in France as an interpreter attached to a regiment of Indian cavalry, was chosen and directed to undertake this duty.’

Captain E.B. Howell, ‘Report on Twelve Months’ Writing of the Indian Mail Censorship, 7th November 1915; *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1914-1918*, [hereafter *CIM 1914-1918*]; Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/5/828, Part 1.

² Howell, 23rd January 1915; *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1914-1915*, [hereafter *CIM 1914-1915*]; Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/5/825, Part 1.

literate,³ and strived to convince *La Poste* – the French Postal Service – of the importance of his work.⁴

It proved a futile task. Howell constantly complained that it was ‘far beyond’ his ‘powers’ to examine even a small portion of the total letters written, let alone analyze them ‘in detail’.⁵ Most letters were passed without any censorship because of Howell’s reluctance to excise letters that may be ‘the last will and testament’ of the writer,⁶ and his frustration with the inscrutable nature of Oriental turns of phrase:

The first extract illustrates how almost impossible it is for any censorship of Oriental correspondence to be effective as a barrier. Orientals excel in the art of conveying information without saying anything definite. When they have a meaning to convey in this way, they are apt to use the phrase “Think this over till you understand it”, or some equivalent, to the reader. [...] It naturally follows that the news conveyed is extremely vague, and gives rise to wild rumours.⁷

For Howell it would (somewhat ironically) have required a work of history or ‘some other book’ to make sense of the letters.⁸ But his advice was disregarded. By the Second World War attempts to explain the letters soldiers wrote were kept to a minimum. Summaries and extracts of letters were to be recorded but kept ‘under lock and key’ and ‘destroyed by fire’ when no longer of use.⁹

This chapter will try to make sense of the letters censored during the First World War and (those that still survive) from the Second. And it will do so by stressing the polysemous nature of the soldier’s missive. The length of letters were regulated by the thick blue borders of ‘letter cards’ or pieces of paper upon which *sipahis*’ letters had to be scribbled.¹⁰ Due to the shortages of letter-writers on the Front, language primers

³ Some of the original staff assigned to the Chief Censor’s office at Boulogne never appeared, and Howell had particular difficulty translating Gurumukhi.

⁴ It was 14th November 1917 before absolutely every letter was redirected to the Censor’s office. *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1917-1918*, [hereafter *CIM 1917-1918*]; Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/5/828, Part 5.

⁵ Howell, 4th February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁶ ‘It was felt that it would be quite unfair to withhold the whole of a long letter containing as often as not what the writer believed to be his last will and testament, simply because here and there through the letter advice was given to younger relatives to stay at home or not to leave the village, or to be guided by the direction of so and so, or not to join the army.’ Howell, 28th August 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 5.

⁷ Howell, 15th February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁸ Howell, ‘Report on Twelve Months’ Writing’.

⁹ The surviving reports are incomplete, and not ordered, but each began with instructions on how it ought to be properly destroyed: ‘This Summary should be kept under lock and key in suitable custody or destroyed by fire if not required for record’. *Middle East Military Censorship: Fortnightly Summaries Covering Indian Troops, September 1942 – April 1943* [hereafter *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*]; Public and Judicial Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/PJ/12/655, File 2336/42.

¹⁰ See Appendix III for an example.

were consulted so that *sipahis* could fill out their letters with certain stock phrases.¹¹ Letters were read out and translated by a NCO to an officer, often in front of other men or the letter-writer as a form of regimental censorship. After that, any letters would have to pass through the office of the 'Chief Censor'. At each stage the language of *sipahis*' letters was deeply conditioned, but it was precisely those conditions in which letters were written that fostered polysemy. Regimental and supra-regimental censorship forbade anything but the most anodyne of letters. If soldiers were to relay personal or sensitive information, they had to first mask the information from any interlocutors. And on many occasions, that is exactly what they did.

Yet there was nothing 'hidden' about these transcripts.¹² A single letter could profess love for the King-Emperor and veneration for all officers, while containing expectations and demands that the Indian Army was unable or unwilling to fulfil. Both could occur, as it were, in the same breath. And when those expectations were not met, the letter became the means of taking action to realize those demands, or transmit its failure to other *sipahis*. The censored letter was involved in the disciplining of *sipahis*' bodies, and, at the same time, *sipahis*' efforts to adjust the boundaries of that delimiting framework.

There are two parts to this chapter. The first will discuss the engagements in letter writing between what the officers and the legal institution of the Indian Army expected of its *sipahis* and what *sipahis* expected from military service. The second will focus upon attempts to realize the privileges soldiers believed they were due.

'It Is Good to Be Loyal ... Sometimes': Mirroring Military Regulations (Im)Perfectly

By the start of the First World War, the task of summarizing the regulations and orders of the Indian Army was finally complete. Inside the final volumes of the *Army Regulations, India* were exhaustive lists of how an officer ought to conduct himself and what was expected of Indian *sipahis*. But there was something missing. Elements of those prescribed codes of behaviour littered *sipahis*' letters but were interpreted in different ways or had extra injunctions attached to them. They ranged from how

¹¹ 'Under stress of necessity many Indian soldiers during their stay in Europe have learned to read and write their own languages, and primers and spelling books come in large quantities from India to [soldiers in] the Army.' Howell, 11th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

¹² Or rather this "hidden transcript" did not exist independently of the public, in contrast to what James C. Scott has theorized. See Conclusion and of course: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

soldiers employed the standard genuflection of ‘God Save the King’ to how soldiers justified their enlistment and continued service as military personnel, to what *sipahis* expected of the officers commanding them. Soldier’s letters in both the World Wars operated in parallel to the official regulations, mirroring its form but not all its content.

In an effort to anticipate what his superiors wished to read, Howell tried to record and highlight letters that ‘either express sentiments of loyalty’ or were written in such a manner that ‘these sentiments may fairly be inferred’.¹³ He had a surfeit of letters to choose from.¹⁴ But many had a double (or even more) meaning(s). This was particularly so when stock phrases such as ‘God Bless the King’ were used or acts of deference or comradeship towards British soldiers were described. An example is contained in a letter written in September 1916 by Jemadar Hasan Shah that recounted a fictional meeting with a dying British soldier in a battlefield in France. The censor concluded that the story Hasan Shah told was indicative of the affection for ‘Tommys’ that all *sipahis* possessed. The main purpose of the letter, however, seems to have been to use the voice of the British Private to express the fatigue and homesickness that the *sipahi* felt but could not openly admit:

I was on the battlefield accompanied by a sowar, and came upon a wounded British soldier. “Well friend,” I said to him. “How are things with you?” “Quite all right,” he replied. “I am proud I was of service in the fight, but I am thirsty.” I gave him water to drink and asked if he wanted anything else. “I regret nothing,” he said, “except that I shall not meet my sweetheart. She would have nothing to say to me at first but 4 months ago she wrote and said that in the whole world she loved only me and begged me to come to her soon.” “My friend,” I said to him. “May the All Merciful God satisfy the desire of your heart, and unite you with your beloved.” “I am finished,” he said. “And when my end comes, my one regret will be that when my love called to me I was unable to go to her.” “My friend,” I said, weeping with pity. “My own condition is the same as yours.”¹⁵

On another occasion Sepoy Gurdit Singh transcribed a song in Gurumukhi that he claimed to be a popular soldiers’ ditty sung at the time. But the boastful veneration for

¹³ Howell, 26th December 1914; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

¹⁴ For instance: ‘If I am to die for the sake of the great Emperor, then what could be more glorious?’ Garhwali Subedar, Hospital, England, to friend, India, 21st February 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 1.

¹⁵ Jemadar Hasan Shah, (Punjabi Musalman), 9th Hodson’s Horse, France, to a lady addressed as “Dearer than life”, c/o Bheja Mul, Shopkeeper, Adowal, Jhelum dist., Punjab, India, 19th September 1916; *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1915-1916*, [hereafter *CIM, 1915-1916*]; Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/5/826, Part 7.

the King-Emperor articulated at the beginning of the piece became the means to excuse the hint that all is not well with the Indian soldiery at the end:

The King of England wired to us "You must go tonight
Valiant men of India, you must know how to fight
Take the Eepree [Ypres] trenches, take Hill Sixty-two,
Let Lahore Division show what it can do!"
Off we march as quickly as our feet can go!
See us in the morning opposite the foe!
Fix up our machine gun! But we may run away!
[Because] All alone it can eat up a regiment a day!¹⁶

Finally, in a letter intercepted from Amir Khan, a *sipahi* of the 129 Baluchis on 15 March 1915, two pieces of paper were found. One contained the words: 'I am not wounded and hope that all will be well. There is no other hardship. ...I speak with certainty, our King – God Bless Him – is going to win and will win soon'.¹⁷ Another piece of paper that was concealed in the folds of the one on top contained a dramatically different narrative:

God knows whether the land of France is stained with sin or whether the Day of Judgement has begun in France. For guns and of rifles there is now a deluge, bodies upon bodies, and blood flowing. God preserve us, [from] what has come to pass. From dawn to dark and from dark to dawn it goes on like the hail that fell at Swarra Camp. [...] God grant us grace, for grace is needed. Oh God, we repent, oh God, we repent.¹⁸

The reason why new recruits enlisted in the military was understood in the *Army Regulations, India* in a manner completely different from romanticized martial race narratives. Officers were instructed to regard new recruits as wage-labourers trying to supplement their agricultural income.¹⁹ But it appeared to have little understanding of additional perceptions of the military as a conduit for social advancement and governmental patronage. The prospect of promotion was, unsurprisingly, the subject

¹⁶ Gurdit Singh, (Sikh), France, to India, 19th November 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 8.

¹⁷ Amir Khan, (Punjabi Musalman), 129th Baluchis, France, to brother, Lance Naik Zaman Khan, 34th Regiment, Rawalpindi, Punjab, India, 18th March 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Between 15th March and 15th October of any given year when there was 'work to be done in the fields' up to forty percent of a strength of a battalion were to be allowed to head home on furlough or military leave. *Army Regulations, India, Volume II*, p.25.

of numerous missives. When promotion was not to be had, complaints were issued²⁰ and soldiers advised each other to leave the Army:

If for any reason you are passed over [for promotion], first make a representation and then make endeavours to return.²¹

Promotion, however, was not attractive just because of the immediate rewards of higher pay or prestige. *Sipahis* viewed promotion as having advantages for social networks beyond the Army. In the cases of Atta Mohamed of Patiala State and Fakir Mohamed of Shankargarh in NWFP, it would result in higher status brides, and presumably bigger dowries for themselves and their families.²² For others, promotion was a vehicle for securing a Government pension and a land grant from the military. This applied even if they did not hail from a region where such grants were on offer, such as in the case of Rahman, a Pathan of 57th Wilde's Rifles:

You should tell the Doctor you got ill through carrying ammunition boxes from the support trenches to the firing line. That will probably get you a [higher] pension, and if so it will be an excellent thing. [...] Say that it was lifting the support boxes to the firing line that made you ill – that should certainly get you a higher pension [...].²³

It was also a means of ensuring that the apparatus of the Indian Army would care for their families. Obtaining a promotion allowed for a higher amount of a soldier's wage to be transferred in family remittances and was perceived as offering a guarantee that extra provisions over and above this would be made in emergencies:

You have written to state that [my] brother's family allotment has been stopped. I will approach the higher authorities to try to find out if the family allotments of all the prisoners of war have been stopped, and if so why. Is this the reward for services rendered to the Government by men who have joined the Army to sacrifice their lives? Is this the way to recognize their services, that, if at some time they unfortunately fall into the hands of the enemy, they are deprived of the little support their relatives have in the shape of family allotments? What will happen to their families? How will their wives and children feed themselves if in utter disregard of

²⁰ Subedar Major Sundar Singh, (Sikh), 89th Punjabis, France, to Havildar Major Jivan Singh, 89th Punjabis, Depot, Punjab, India, 17th November 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 8. And Ali Gaur Khan, (Punjabi Musalman), Jhelum dist., Punjab, to Hussain Baksh Khan, 34th Poona Horse, France, 12th May 1917; *CIM, 1917-1918*, Part 4.

²¹ Taj Mohamed Khan, (Muslim Rajput), Bareilly Cant., UP, India, to Nur Mohamed Khan, 3 Skinner's Horse, France, 9th June 1916; *CIM, 1915-1916*, Part 5.

²² Atta Mohamed, (Punjabi Musalman), Patiala State, Punjab, to Abdul Majid Khan, 34th Poona Horse, France, 23rd May 1917; *CIM, 1917-1918*, Part 4. And Fakir Mohamed, (Pathan), Shankargarh, Peshawar dist., NWFP, India, to his son, Mahsud, 38th Central India Horse, France, 14th July 1916; *CIM, 1915-1916*, Part 6.

²³ Rahman, (Pathan), 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), Hospital, England, to an unknown soldier, 8th April 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 2.

their services their family allotments are stopped? When a prisoner who is in the hands of the enemy comes to know that whatever little his wife and children are getting has been stopped, hatred and dislike will naturally arise in his heart against his Government. I am at a loss to understand how the families of soldiers manage to feed themselves when the rate of wheat in India is Rs.15/- per maund and especially when these few rupees of a/c [sic] of family allotment are also stopped. [...] Must they fill their stomachs with bricks and stones? May God spare even the enemy from experiencing such a state! [...] By such deeds neither the Government nor the country or Nation are benefited!²⁴

A further addition to the expectations soldiers had was the desire for their 'work' to be honourable and should not require a soldier to take unnecessary risks. New recruits viewed the prospect of combat through the prism of an adolescent military adventurism:

I have heard that the 10th Lancers have had their opportunity in Basrah [Basra], but our regiment does not get an opportunity anywhere. What, is our regiment the refuse of all other regiments? What is the reason for it?²⁵

This desire for battle during the First and Second World Wars, however, swiftly turned to disillusionment. The reality of modern warfare, consisting of the trenches in France or the British reverses in North Africa, differed dramatically from how most soldiers had envisaged the Front. An Indian soldier in Egypt in October 1942 expressed his surprise that a war could last for over two years and that every day he had to 'work, work, and [do] more work',²⁶ and a Sikh soldier writing from Flanders in October 1915 lamented his fate for being in a war where he could die without even seeing his enemy:

What you say in your letter about not being disloyal to the Emperor, and it being the religion of Sikhs to die facing the foe – all that you say is true. But if only you yourself could be here and see for yourself! Any shrivelled *charas*-sodden fellow can fire at us and kill a score of us at our food in our kitchen. [...] There is no fighting face to face. Guns massacre regiments sitting ten miles off. Put swords or pikes or staves in our hands, and the enemy against us with like arms, then indeed we shall show you how to fight! But if no one faces us what can we do? No one stands up to fight us. Everyone sits in a burrow underground. They fight in the sky, on the sea in battleships, under

²⁴ Draughtsman, Forward Survey Company, Egypt, to India, June 1943; *MEMC April 1943 – Sept. 1943*.

²⁵ Dafadar Bhagwan Singh, (Sikh), Machine Gun Squadron, France, to Bisawa Singh, 11th Lancers (Probyn's Horse), Dera Ismail Khan, NWFP, India, 18th October 1916; *CLM 1915-1916*, Part 8.

²⁶ Indian soldier, Back Areas, Egypt, to India, October 1942; *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

the earth in mines. My friend, a man who fights upon the ground can barely escape. You tell us to fight face to face to the foe. Die we must – but alas not facing the foe!²⁷

The fact that *sipahis* were never safe from harm, in spite of the precautions they took or how bravely they fought, led to many soldiers questioning their continued service in the army, as in the case of Khilullah, a *sowar* attached to the 2nd Lancers:

I am sick to death of this Military life, and I wish to ask your advice. If I return alive from this war I shall certainly take my discharge and I want your advice as to what sort of work I should take up. My wish is to enter the Forest Department. Do not speak of the matter to my father or to any one amongst my relatives. My father is not conversant with the times. He thinks service in the Army to be the best and most honourable; but those times are gone when honour was shown in the Army. Nowadays the Army is without honour. Perhaps in 40 or 50 years such a time will return when the Army will enjoy honour; now it has none.²⁸

Thus, alongside a demand for gainful employment by soldiers, that the colonial military establishment recognized, were expectations for social advancement and honourable work that official regulations did not take into account.

The role of an officer, as perceived by *sipahis*, was another area in which soldierly adjuncts were made that went over and above army regulations. In *Army Regulations, India* the duties of a British ‘unit commander’ of the rank of Second Lieutenant or above was defined as,

the training, administration, health, maintenance of discipline, efficiency, and the state of the accounts in the unit under his command. [...] he will supervise and control all duties performed by those under his command. He is responsible for the security of buildings, armaments, equipment or other stores in the[ir] charge, and that they are complete, serviceable, and in accordance with the latest pattern[...]. It is the duty of every unit commander to see that no officer, soldier, follower or civilian employee who is unfit to perform his duties is retained in the service. He is responsible that all orders published by superior authority are communicated to those under his command whom they may concern. He is responsible that the rules for the handling of explosives [...] are strictly adhered to.²⁹

²⁷ [Name withheld], (Sikh), French Post Office 13, France, to Mahant Partab Das, Patiala, Patiala State, Punjab, India, 18th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 7.

²⁸ Khilullah, (Hindustani Mussalman), 8 Cavalry attached 2nd Lancers, France, to Dilawar Ali, Head Clerk, Forest Office, Dharamsala, Punjab, India, 4th July 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

²⁹ *Army Regulations, India, Volume II: Regulations and Orders for the Army*, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1923), p. 4.

Little emphasis was placed on ensuring that officers behaved in a fair and impartial manner to their men. But this was exactly what *sipahis* came to expect of their British officers. In the 98th Goods and Provisions Transport Company of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (RIASC), both a Major and a Captain were condemned by the men under their command. They were criticized for bringing up men on charges 'without sufficient cause' after demanding they show 'undue servility';³⁰ for repeatedly placing the same men on charges even after they had been cleared by a military tribunal;³¹ and for promoting others without regard for their seniority in the Company.³² In addition, soldiers viewed their British officers as more than just military personnel but as physical embodiments of the colonial government of India. They were expected to hear and offer redress to soldiers' petitions and pass on to higher authorities those to which they could not directly respond. These petitions ranged from simple demands for higher pay and extra food allowances for wounded men,³³ to simple requests for leave:

We have all of us given a Memorial, that is a petition to the honoured and exalted Viceroy of India, that, "Whereas we have been separated so long from our homes and children and our relatives and have been compelled to adapt ourselves to new methods of life, to which we were altogether unaccustomed, to save the exalted government in a cold country without any leave etc., and whereas we Indians are so circumstanced and conditioned that we cannot remain abroad for very long, etc., etc., therefore, as an act of grace, let other men be quickly brought in our place, so that we

³⁰ VCO, 98th GPT Company, RIASC, Italy, to India, January 1944; *Middle East Military Censorship: Fortnightly Summaries Covering Indian Troops, November 1943 – March 1944* [hereafter *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*]; Public and Judicial Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, [misfiled as 'Indian Chief Censor's Fortnightly Reports, 1943-1944'], L/PJ/12/578, File 471 (XN/37).

³¹ Havildar Clerk, 98th GPT Company, RIASC, Italy, to India, January 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

³² Lance Naik, 98th GPT Company, RIASC, Italy, to India, January 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

³³ 'Sir,

When we were summoned as reservists from 35th Scinde Horse at Dera Ismail Khan and sent to join 36th Jacob's Horse, your honour informed us that all reservists on joining would be paid as sowars. But we have been paid at the same rate as syces [grooms], and we respectfully claim to receive pay as sowars from the date that we were ordered to the 36th Jacob's Horse.' Natha Singh, Mal Singh, Hari Singh, and Fauju Khan, Reservists, 35th Scinde Horse attached 36th Jacob's Horse, France, to Officer Commanding, 35th Scinde Horse, Jabalpur, India, (not dated, 1916); *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

'I tell you frankly without fear of opposition that the military authorities in charge of our hospital are not treating us as they ought to have done. The public of England is quite ignorant about it and so the matter is not brought to light. We have drawn up an application [sic., petition] and we intend submitting it in a day or two laying out our chief troubles and wait for the result patiently [...].'

Ram Jawan Singh, (Hindustani Hindu), Storekeeper, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to his father, Lucknow, UP, India, 30th September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

may be able to remove those misfortunes which have sprung up in our absence and may be expected to increase so long as we remain away.”³⁴

‘Native’ Indian officers holding a Viceroy’s Commission (VCOs) and those Indians who were permitted to serve as fully commissioned officers after 1920 (KCIOs or ICOs)³⁵ had demands made of them that differed in type from those made of their British counterparts. The regulations of the Indian Army viewed the task of the Indian officer as the confidant of the (British) commander: ‘responsible for keeping him acquainted with every occurrence, circumstance, or condition among the native ranks’.³⁶ *Sipahis*, on the other hand, expected the ideal Indian superior to be the confidant of the men, and to be in full sympathy with all their hardships. Soldiers would write long eulogies of Indian officers that had been killed if, as in the case of Subedar Gul Mohamed Khan of the 69th Punjabis, they had become renowned for the kindness they had shown towards young soldiers:

The Subedar has been killed. We are all very sorry, but his day had come. [...] He had been known in the regiment as “Khan Bahadur” and the Subedar Gul Mohamed Khan showed himself [to be] a pattern of valour. [...] He was ever on the look-out for the fainthearted, and if he heard anywhere of a young man who was troubled in mind he went to him and talked to him in such a way that all his discomforts of exile and homesickness faded away.³⁷

On occasions where Indian officers were found to have sided with the British *Sahibs* against their men, the language used to describe them transformed dramatically. Behari Lal wrote of the ‘Indian Lieutenants’ that were in his section as being akin to the *‘dhobi’s* dog “belonging neither to the home nor the washing place” for deigning it

³⁴ Wazir Chand Chopra, (Punjabi Hindu), Office of the Field Controller of Military Accounts, Indian Cavalry Corps, Rouen, France, to Lal Har Kishan Das, Branch Postmaster, Ghotla, Fatehgarh, Sialkot dist., Punjab, India, 8th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

³⁵ KCIO and ICO are abbreviated forms of King’s Commissioned Indian Officer and Indian Commissioned Officer respectively. The history of Indians with a full commission and with a full officer’s rank, outwith favours bestowed on Indian royalty, begins as early as 1905, but the history of Indians permitted to actually command soldiers only begins in July 1920. For this purpose Indians were selected as ‘gentleman cadets’, trained at Sandhurst, and given the same type of King’s Commission as any of their British counterparts (hence the abbreviation KCIO). In July 1932, however, with the creation of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) at Dehra Dun, and the closure of Sandhurst to Indians, one had the creation of a new type of fully commissioned officer. Much like the KCIOs that had preceded them, these ICOs would serve a probationary year in a British regiment before being drafted to an Indian one, but unlike KCIOs who had a King’s Commission, ICOs were commissioned by the Viceroy into ‘His Majesty’s Indian Land Forces’ giving them complete authority over Indian sipahis anywhere in the world but only over British troops in India. See Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus*, (London; Taurus Academic Studies, 1998), for a more detailed exposition of the changing status of the Indian Officer.

³⁶ *Army Regulations, India, Volume II*, (1904), p. 73.

³⁷ Naik Buland Khan, (Punjabi Musalman), 69th Punjabis, to Mohamed Ashraf Khan, son of Subedar Gul Mohamed Khan, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 5th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 7.

beneath themselves to eat alongside their fellow Indians.³⁸ And Signaller Sher Khan wrote with undisguised glee of the social ostracization to which he had subjected a Risaldar:

He [the Risaldar] is such an evilly disposed man that even here in the place of death, he practices his evil designs. I expect to return soon, and I expect too that the Risaldar Sahib will remember me till his dying day. The rest of the regiment are with me and he wanders alone like a mad dog. Lal Khan tells me that the Risaldar Sahib now asks for pardon saying "it is a mistake, it is proper that you excuse [me]" but I will never utter words of pardon [...]. Everything from A to Z has been reported to the [British] Sahibs and everything has been proved. [...] I showed him up properly.³⁹

What was common to both Indian and British officers was that they were expected to lead by example and be as efficient or brave as the men they commanded. It was with undisguised disdain that men such as Rifleman Gokul Singh Rawat wrote of his VCOs who had 'defecated in their *dhotis* through sheer fright', 'melted' their 'livers' through drink, and had consequently given 'their men a bad name'.⁴⁰ Nur Mohamed Khan, of a Signal Company in France in October 1916, not only wrote disparagingly of his Jemadar but wrote approvingly of the efforts his comrades had taken to remove him from command:

The next day there was a march and three or four horses dropped their shoes. [Jemadar] Lal Khan then thought it was all over with him and got fever through fright and was taken to hospital. He was screaming and crying and the patients were astonished at the sight of this new arrival with his pale face and hair turned white. He said he was dying. The next day the patients all said to the doctor sahib "Either take this man away or remove us from the hospital." He was eventually sent back to India as unfit for service.⁴¹

Finally, not only could British officers be condemned for refusing to put themselves in harm's way in a battlefield,⁴² or for 'running away' to England whenever their

³⁸ Bihari Lal, (Punjabi Hindu), Supply and Transport Corps, Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade, France, to Pandit Mathura Prasad Bhargava, Quetta, Baluchistan, India, November 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

³⁹ Sher Khan, (Pathan), Signalling Troop, 19th Lancers, Sialkot Cavalry Brigade, France, to Fateh Khan, Pensioned Dafadar, Mianwali, Punjab, India, 5th July 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 6.

⁴⁰ Rifleman Gokul Singh Rawat, (Garhwali), 1/39th or 2/39th Garhwali Rifles, France, to Subedar Ram Kishan Rawat, Nadar Syang, Upper Burma, India, 17th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 7.

⁴¹ Nur Mohamed Khan, (Punjabi Musalman), Signal Troop, Secunderabad Brigade, France, to Armourer Sher Mohamed Khan, Jhelum, Punjab, India, 25th October 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 8.

⁴² 'The brave English have evolved such a rule as is advantageous to them. The red pepper is little used while the black pepper is used daily to the extent of at least a thousand maunds. From this there is a great advantage to the [English] troops. I can't write any more.' Gunga Ram, (Hindu Jat), 3rd Company, [regiment censored], Kitchener General Hospital, Brighton, England, to Lance Naik Suji Ram, 5th Company, 113th Infantry, Dabarugad, Assam, India, May 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

‘attraction to home’ grew ‘too great’,⁴³ but ‘whites’ in general were criticized for displaying a reluctance to fight if, as in the case of Yusuf Khan in October 1915, soldiers had an opportunity to visit the colonial metropole:

The news is that the white men here have refused to enlist, declaring that the German Emperor is their King no less than is the King of England. An Indian black man went off to preach to them. He asked them if they were not ashamed to see us come from India to help the King while they, who were of the same race, were refusing to fight for him. But really the way these whites are behaving is a scandal. Those who have already enlisted have mutinied.⁴⁴

There was a difference between the roles delineated for soldiers and how soldiers reasoned their own service through their letters. This is evident from the language *sipahis* used, the perceived benefits they expected to accrue as enlisted men, and the expectations they had of the officers commanding them. Yet soldierly views of service did not amount to *disjunctions* of the views put forth by officials in the Indian Army, but rather as *adjunctions* or *hyperextensions* of them – taking them outwith their initial context and applying them in ways in which they were not supposed to be applied. This was true of the use of loyal phrases in letters by soldiers to mask that which postal censors would disapprove of, as it was with the demands for state patronage for soldiers’ families, and was once more apparent in the roles *sipahis*’ cast for the different types of officers in command. But letters could do more than just communicate these adjuncts. When soldiers’ expectations were not realized, the letter became an agent of discord and protest within the military. It is to those instances that I will now turn.

‘Eating Sweetmeats’ in Brighton: Traversing Sexual Frontiers and the Kitchener Indian Hospital

A month after a military hospital was established in the former Workhouse in Brighton, in February 1915, Colonel Sir Bruce Seton was appointed as its commander. Seton immediately set about rectifying what he deemed to be vices prevalent among the Indian soldiers under his care:

⁴³ Name Censored, (Sikh), 47th Sikhs, France, to a Clerk, 47th Sikhs, Regimental Depot, Punjab, India, 9th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

⁴⁴ Yusuf Khan, (Pathan), Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Abdull Jan, 40th Pathans, France, 6th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

It was evident from the very first that drink and the sex problem were factors which would have to be reckoned with. A large proportion of the followers, the sweepings of Bombay City, were to be found to be habitual drunkards; and the ill-advised conduct of the women in the town, though partly innocent in intention, was bound to result in the gravest scandals. To deal with these problems it was necessary to draw up absolutely inflexible rules governing the granting of permission for passes outside the precincts.⁴⁵

Seton prefigured the fear that Ann Laura Stoler has characterized as '*métissage*': the 'threat to white prestige', 'European degeneracy and moral decay' implicit in the sexual mixing of the colonizer's body with that of the colonized.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, the measures Seton took to prevent sexual liaisons between Indian men and British women at the Kitchener Indian Hospital, as the establishment came to be known, was met with disapproval. In the letters written by Indian wounded and hospital staff, concerns were expressed that their officers were over-stepping the bounds of legitimate authority; parallels were drawn with maltreatment of Indian soldiers elsewhere; and forms of protest were enacted to force Seton into a rethink.

In spite of policies imposed to segregate Indian wounded from white female nurses, encounters with European women were common. A large number of soldiers' letters referred to European women or *mems* of all backgrounds. Wealthy spinsters or widowers were depicted as desperate to secure the 'carnal pleasure' of *sipahis* – Sikhs and men of the Service Corps apparently earned as much as '6, 7 or 8 francs' a time⁴⁷ – or as matronly figures showing platonic concern:

My mother, like you this French mother does all she can for my comfort and thinks much of me. I cannot write sufficiently in praise of what she does for me. If on any day, by reason of the press of work, I do not return till evening, the people of the house come in search of me and complain about me being absent for so long. At the time when I was away and could not find time to write either to you or her she came close to the place where I was and where no one is permitted to come, and asked to

⁴⁵ *Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton*, Colonel Sir Bruce Seton Papers, European Manuscripts, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, MSS Eur/F143/66.

⁴⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonialist Southeast Asia'; *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 34, (1992), p. 515.

⁴⁷ 'The state of affairs here is this. Ten annas are equal to one franc. So by paying 6, 7 or 8 francs the [French] women get men to have carnal intercourse with them. So that for little money sexual pleasure is sold, especially by Drabis [men of the Transport Corps] and Sikhs [who] have got a lot of money from this.' V.S. Pranje, (Maratha), I.S.M.D., Lahore Indian General Hospital, France, to Pirdan Singh, Ward Orderly, Depot, 54th Poona Horse, Ambala, Punjab, India, April 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

see her boy, and brought with her a hamper of things to eat. What more can I say about the concern she has for my welfare?⁴⁸

Sex-workers were written about voluminously. Jai Singh relayed at length about his intention to journey into the ‘fairylands’ of Paris and his plan to spend ‘Rs.250 in four days’,⁴⁹ and others commented on the easy sexual gratification available outside their hospital grounds or on the streets of Brighton:

English girls are very free in their nature and they love Indians very much. [...] Love-making and breathing in Europe is nothing but a matter of choice, friends are plenty when purse is full.⁵⁰

And more ‘virtuous’ girls of marriageable age made their way into soldiers’ narratives. Many *sipahis* indicated that they were in consensual relationships with one or, in the case of Abdul Jaffar Khan, two Frenchwomen by 1915,⁵¹ and others commented on their desire to wed English ‘*mems*’ that they had met:

I am sick, but there is nothing the matter with me, nor am I wounded. [...] Tell [censored] not to be anxious about me, for when I come back I will bring him a lovely girl to marry such as he could not find among all the Mahsuds. If the war comes to an end I will bring you a ‘mem’ from England. So do not be distressed, but pray always, for safety is difficult.⁵²

Thus not only did soldiers partake in sexual relationships with European women but the issue of these trans-colonial liaisons formed a large part of their correspondence.

For some *sipahis* sex was only of secondary importance to encounters with European women. It became a conduit through which they could question what it

⁴⁸ Kot Dafadar Wazir Khan, (Punjabi Musalman), Meerut Cavalry Brigade, France, to Mother, Shahpur dist., Punjab, India, 23rd May 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 5.

⁴⁹ ‘I am off to Paris which has been hitherto “out of bounds” to everyone but officers. Now we (up to Dafadars) can go. Paris is a city of fairyland and God will give us an opportunity of seeing it. I will write [to] you all about it. Whatever happens do not let anyone know about this. I intend to enjoy whatever pleasures there are. Don’t let anyone know that Jai Singh is spending Rs.250 in four days. If father heard of it he would be very angry. I should like to marry in France but I am afraid the family would be ashamed. You can marry very fine girls if you like.’ Jai Singh, (Hindu Jat), 6th Cavalry or 19th Lancers, France, to Sirdar Singh, Lahore, Punjab, India, 6th November 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

⁵⁰ Nabi Buksh, (HM), [unknown regiment], Kitchener Indian General Hospital, Brighton, England, to Frarijje Esq., Head Clerk, Cantonment Magistrate’s Office, Neemuch, NWFP, India, 12th June 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁵¹ ‘Just tell me, if I were to bring them out what would be the difficulties in the way? Do you think that I should bring them with me? Would there be any harm? Of course people would laugh, but “can en fait rien”. Your mouth will water when you see them but you won’t be able to see. You will do your best no doubt to peep around the corner. Well write me at length what the drawbacks may be, as compared with the advantages. Both of them are quite willing to come.’ Abdul Jaffar Khan, (Hindustani Muslim), Signal Troop, Sialkot Cavalry Brigade, France, to Dafadar Inayat Khan, Rohtak, Punjab, India, 20th August 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 7.

⁵² Dad Gul Khan, (Pathan – Mahsud), 129th Baluchis, Hospital, England, to friend, Waziristan, NWFP, India, 18th March 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 2.

was that made them, as Indians, different from their white counterparts. One hospital worker began his letter in wonder of sexual liberation in Europe and the joys of extra-martial affairs – '[she said] it does not matter how poor you may be I am quite ready to lie openly with you'.⁵³ But this led him to question why it was that these consensual relationships involving Indian *sipahis* were condemned and frowned upon by their officers when similar liaisons involving British soldiers did not receive the same treatment.⁵⁴ Mithan Lal, a storekeeper at the Kitchener Indian Hospital, wrote of the contrast between the freedoms given to the English populace of Brighton to the freedoms denied Indians at the hospital, and asked the respondent if *sipahis* were being treated in a similar manner to the political prisoners of the Andaman Islands.⁵⁵ Finally, Ram Jawan Singh, a wounded soldier at Brighton, compared unfavourably the treatment of Indian soldiers in Britain to how the French treated their 'Algerian subjects':

I believe that you must have got my previous letter to this. When you send a reply to that, please note that you should inform me about the treatment of the French Republic towards its Algerian subjects or fellow-citizens [or] whatever you like to call them [...]. First, how are they kept? Whether they are allowed to go out to the town when off duty without any guard to look after them, which means a sort of generous trust placed in their characters and good conduct [...and] which also means a liberal treatment of the matter and not snatching away the rights and privileges of good ones for the faults of the bad [and] where a cool judgement is needed to draw a wise line [sic]. Second, what pay do they get under the French Republic? Is it what the French soldiers receive or with some differences and why? What uniform are they given? I think that in the matter of uniform there will be some distinction [...] which too in my humble opinion [there] should not be when fighting under the same French flag.⁵⁶

⁵³ J.H. Godbole, (Maratha Brahmin), Sub Assistant Surgeon, Indian General Hospital (Kitchener), Brighton, England, to H. Godbole, Dapoli, Rutnagari dist., Bombay Presidency, 16th November 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ 'Alas, we are not free to go about at will. In fact we Indians are treated as prisoners. On all sides there is barbed wire and a sentry stands at each door, who prevents us from going out. In cases of urgent necessity, when the C.O. is satisfied that urgency exists, leave of absence for three hours is obtained with great difficulty. [...] If I had known that such a state of affairs would exist, I would never have come. In India we were assured that once our work for the day was finished, we would be free to go where we pleased. [...] If you ask me the truth, I can say that I have never experienced such hardship in all my life. True, we are well fed, and are given plenty of clothing; but the essential thing – freedom – is denied. Convicts in India are sent to the Andaman Islands; but we have found our convict station here in England. Tell me, how are they treated?' Mithan Lal, (Hindustani Hindu), Storekeeper, Indian Convalescent Home, New Milton, England, to Maulvi Abdul Jabar Sahib, Ballygunj, Calcutta, Bengal, India, 2nd December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

⁵⁶ Ram Jawan Singh, (Hindustani Hindu), Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Mr Jacques Derel, 5th Avenue Victor Hugo, Vernon, France, 26th September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

In addition to a simple physical *métissage* at Brighton was a tentative intellectual mixing that led, at least some, *sipahis* to question what it was that led them to being treated differently from British soldiers.

It was the ideas and assumptions engendered by trans-colonial liaisons that were seen to be the most dangerous aspects of *métissage*: ‘detrimental to the prestige and spirit of European rule’.⁵⁷ Seton did not just stop at barring Indian personnel from leaving the hospital grounds⁵⁸ – with the exception of VCOs and hospital staff who could leave if granted a pass. He ordered ‘barbed wire palings’ to be erected on the walls surrounding the hospital. (British) Military Police guards were stationed around the perimeter of the hospital in order to prevent ‘cases of “breaking out”’⁵⁹ and ordered to punish soldiers breaking the rules with a ‘dozen lashes’.⁶⁰ Measures were introduced to prevent visits to and from neighbouring military hospitals,⁶¹ and rations for patients were cut, to the extent that one soldier claimed that he only received ‘2 *chataks* of *ata* [flour]’ per day and ‘those who eat sugar do not get milk, or ghee’.⁶² Finally, limits were imposed on how many of the seriously wounded at the hospital could be invalided back to India or transfer to other hospitals in order to escape Seton’s measures.⁶³ *Métissage* in all its forms – from sexual encounters to the exchanging of ideas – had to be prevented at the Kitchener Indian Hospital, and stringent measures were taken in order to suppress it.

⁵⁷ Howell, 19th June 1915; *CIM, 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁵⁸ *Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Both the *Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital*, and soldiers’ correspondence made mention of this. For example: ‘Formerly we used to go into town, but the men began to misbehave badly and we were stopped from going. Now only the sick go to the town. If anyone climbs the wall and stays out he gets a dozen lashes. We are let out into the town once a month – and then only two or three men with two or three white soldiers. For this we have only ourselves to thank, for had those rascals not misbehaved we should still be allowed to go out every day. In the days when there was no restriction two or three men used to spend a couple of nights or more in this town. They were given a dozen lashes, but this did not prevent them from behaving as before.’ Assistant Shopkeeper Tulsi Ram, (Punjabi Hindu), Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to a friend, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 12th August 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁶¹ ‘The Pavilion Hospital is in the middle of town and to go too and fro is forbidden, for the patients are not allowed to go between hospitals which are in the town.’ Muhabbat Khan, (Pathan), [unknown regiment], Hospital in Brighton, England, to Abdullah Khan, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 2nd July 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁶² Sepoy Hoshanki [sic], (Dogra), 37th Dogras, attached 41st Dogras, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Lance Naik Hira Singh, 74th Infantry, attached 59th FFR, France, c. September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 5.

⁶³ ‘England is a dog’s country. India is a very fine country. Our people are very angry. They do not allow us out to the bazaars etc. They do not let the French or English talk to us nor do they let us talk to them. The English [Officers] have now become very bad. They have become dogs. Our Indian soldiers are very much oppressed, but they can do nothing. Now they have sent us across the river [English Channel]. There is an abundance of everything but there is not honour. No black man has any ‘izzat’. Men wounded 4 or 5 times are sent back to the trenches. Men who have lost their arms or legs are sent back to India.’ Sepoy Pirzada, (Pathan), [unknown regiment] Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Zaman Khan and Hasan Shah, 40th Pathans, Depot, Fategarh, UP?, India, 3rd June 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

It resulted in an almost immediate response from soldiers unwilling to accept this new draconian regime. These ranged from attempts to sneak past the guards posted at the hospital grounds in the dead of night to *sipahis* endeavouring to arrange their transfer to other hospitals.⁶⁴ One particular instance of dissent is noteworthy, involving Sub-Assistant Surgeon Jagu Godbole, both because it is referred to in several soldiers' letters⁶⁵ and because, after his arrest and conviction, the man in question was unafraid to outline his reasons for committing the crime. Jagu wrote a series of letters to his father on 14, 16 and 19 December 1915. They all began with the hospital worker questioning the view aired by his parents and teachers in Bombay that 'our morality is higher than the morality of the English'⁶⁶ because, for Jagu, it led to the denial of natural carnal desires:

It is natural that our minds should lean towards those we love, and the English song ['It's a long way to Tipperary'] brings out this feeling. Among us we would immediately say, 'What a fool you are, to thus take the name of women when going to war, instead of naming God. Owing to this fear, in place of saying the words 'sweetest girl' we should say the name of Pandurang or some other god. Thus, while actually thinking of our women we will make pretence and put into our song the name of a god. How can this be looked on as moral?'⁶⁷

While Jagu expressed his admiration for the greater sexual freedoms found in England in his letters, however, he went on to describe how the permissive atmosphere of Brighton had changed for the worse:

The same forces are, however, in operation, notwithstanding what I have said, in England, which is following in the footsteps of India. I meet many people here, and old men and women say to me "Do whatever you like, but do not approach any girls". They must be doing the same thing to their own people [...].⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Or even back to the Front on rare occasions: 'I am very much annoyed because the officers here are very bad. The work which they give us here to do, if I were to do it, could not be accomplished [if I worked] day and night. I came here to serve as a soldier, but they threaten me with severe punishment. I have written to the officer commanding the 47th Sikhs to say that I want to come away from my present task. I do not care for death. [...] But I will not be spoken to by Babus in a way that pierces a soldier's heart. It is worse than bullets.' Ward Orderly Diwan Singh, (Sikh), 'at one of the hospitals in England', to Bir Singh, 47th Sikhs, France, 24th July 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁶⁵ For example: 'I am left here still, as there was a case in which I was concerned. A sub assistant surgeon threatened the surgeon of my hospital (who is a Colonel but who expects to be promoted to General) with a revolver. By the Grace of God the revolver missed fire [sic. misfired], and I immediately caught hold of the man.' Nahar Singh, (Hindu Jat), Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Lance Dafadar M. Bashir Khan, 30th Lancers, France, 27th November 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

⁶⁶ Jagu Godbole, (Maratha Brahmin), Sub Assistant Surgeon, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to India, 14th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1918*, Part 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

It is this perceived change that Jagu used to justify his crime – the attempted murder of Colonel Seton – for which he received ‘seven years’ rigorous imprisonment’:⁶⁹

Now, please listen to what I have to say carefully. I have committed a great crime. Notwithstanding the fact that *lakhs* of Hindus are dying for the sake of England, they have not been allowed to go about here freely. This very ungratefulness I have been unable to bear. So one day taking a pistol I went to kill the Colonel and was caught, and have been in imprisonment for the last month. [...] If I get off well and good; if not, I will live the life of an ascetic. Do not be anxious and do not look for any letters, and do not write to me.⁷⁰

Jagu’s example inspired others. Although the majority of those at the Kitchener hospital did not attempt anything as dramatic as the assassination of Seton, a series of collective but anonymous petitions appeared to the King-Emperor and the Viceroy of India. They were embedded in *sipahis* correspondence and written in order to inform ‘the public of England’ that ‘the military authorities in charge of our hospital are not treating us as they ought to have done’.⁷¹ As time went on, these petitions appeared to grow in size and number as they captured the mood of wounded soldiers treated elsewhere and motivated them to create joint petitions with their fellow *sipahis* in Brighton, such as that of April 1915:

From [the] Indian Sick in Hospital “Barton” [in Milford-on-Sea]

To the Emperor of India, England, from the sick of whose Petition this is that no British Officer nor Indian Doctor cares for us. They deal hardly with the sick. The British Doctor beats the sick. [...] Let the King, God bless him, understand more than a little of what is written. Your Majesty’s order was that a man who had been wounded once should be allowed to return to India or that if he is recovered he should not be made to serve again. The heart of India is broken because they inflict suffering on the sick. Blessed King what can I say? There is nothing worth describing. We do not get new clothes. In the morning only [...] tea, at ten o’clock a *chapatti* and a spoonful of *dal*. In 24 hours 5 cigarettes. In the evening the *chapattis* are half-baked and there is no meat. No sick man gets well fed. The Indians have given their lives for 11 rupees. Any man who comes here wounded is returned thrice and four times to the trenches. Only that man goes to India who has lost an arm or a leg or an eye.

⁶⁹ Jagu Godbole, (Maratha Brahmin), Sub Assistant Surgeon, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to India, 19th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1918*, Part 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Ram Jawan Singh, (Hindustani Hindu), Storekeeper, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to his father, Lucknow, UP, India, 30th September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

Indian School Hospital. Sections A, B, C, D, E.⁷²

Some of the men who admitted to drafting 'applications' or 'memorials', such as Ram Jawan Singh, regarded this activity as only the first stage in their protests. They were prepared to 'move on further if we do not find any satisfactory reply.'⁷³ Whilst there is no evidence that the *sipahis* at Brighton did 'move on further' before the hospital was closed some months later in December 1915, what did occur at the Kitchener does nonetheless show how differing attitudes towards *métissage* in the military created discontent both for individuals such as Jagu Godbole and for Indian patients as a whole.

"What We've All Got to Go Through for the Emperor": 'Contracts', Self-Mutilation and Malingering during the First World War

Jaroslav Hašek recounted his own experiences as a Czech soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War through the prism of the 'good soldier' Švejk. He devoted a lengthy passage in his work to Švejk's experiences in a military prison after he was accused of malingering:

On reaching the military prison, Schweik was placed in the hut used as an infirmary which contained several of the faint-hearted malingerers.

On the bed by the door a consumptive was dying, wrapped up in a sheet soaked with cold water.

"That's the third this week," remarked Schweik's right-hand neighbour. "And what's wrong with you?"

"I've got rheumatism," replied Schweik, whereupon there was hearty laughter from all those around about him. Even the dying consumptive, who was pretending to have tuberculosis laughed.

"It's no good coming here with rheumatism," said a stout man to Schweik in solemn tones, "rheumatism here stands about as much chance as corns."

"The best thing to do," said one of the malingerers, "is to sham madness."

[...] "That's nothing," said another man. "Down our way there's a midwife who for twenty crowns can dislocate your foot so nicely that you're crippled for the rest of your life."

[...] "My illness has run me into more than two hundred crowns already," announced his neighbour, a man as thin as a rake. "I bet there's no poison you can

⁷² Letter addressed to the King-Emperor, from Milford-on-Sea, 24th April 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

⁷³ Ram Jawan Singh, (Hindustani Hindu), Storekeeper, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to his father, Lucknow, UP, India, 30th September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

mention that I haven't taken. I'm simply full of poison. I've choked arsenic, I've smoked opium, I've swallowed strychnine, I've drunk vitriol mixed with phosphorous. I've ruined my liver, my lungs, my kidneys, my heart – in fact all my inside outfit. Nobody knows what disease I've got.

[...] "Well," said Schweik, "you see what you've all got to go through for the Emperor."⁷⁴

In writing of acts of self-mutilation and malingering in the Austro-Hungarian military Hašek avoided asking the question of why his soldiers were acting in the way they were. Perhaps it was to avoid censorship or maybe it was because the answer was self-evident. It is, however, worth asking that question about Indian soldiers in the First World War. In their letters many *sipahis* admitted that they were malingering or intended to do so. They also, simultaneously, justified their actions. The widespread belief that by 1917 soldiers had already exceeded the maximum length of their 'contracts' led to the conclusion that they were entitled to feign illness to avoid duty.

Of the Indians serving under military articles in France during the First World War, it was only those employed in labour companies from February 1917 that officially had the length of their service prescribed in a contract. They became the first in the Indian military to protest when the terms of their contract were breached. The censored mails of 1917 were replete with labourers discussing excitedly what they would do after their current employ of lifting shells or driving mules was over. A.M. Anwari, of 79th Labour Company, imagined that he would get work as a clerk 'with the boys of Aligarh college';⁷⁵ and Ram Datt Singh imagined that he would be able to live in the splendour of England:

I am satisfied at being able to serve our illustrious Government body and soul and to see the countries which my ancestors never even dreamed of seeing. Now our Government has issued an order that whoever will agree to serve [...] will be sent over to see London. This is my good fortune that I will be able to see England and to write to my friends all about it. I shall not be surprised if we have to stay there. For this we have to congratulate [the] Government and thank them for what they have done for us.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Schweik*; illustrated by Joseph Lada, translated by Paul Sewer, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1941), pp. 42-43.

⁷⁵ A.M. Anwari, (Hindustani Mohamedan), 79th Labour Company, France, to Mohamed Hakim Anwari, India, 9th May 1918; *CIM 1914-1918*, Part 2.

⁷⁶ Ram Datt Singh, (Hindustani Hindu), 29th Bihar Labour Company, France, to Babu Jandhar Bajpai, Sarsinghbhai, Bihar, India, 5th April 1918; *CIM 1914-1918*, Part 2.

The tone of their letters soured when labourers were still not released from their service at the end of February 1918. They were informed that due to a dearth of shipping the men would have to sign a new 'contract' that would be renewed every month for an indefinite period.⁷⁷ The Pathans employed in the 50th North West Frontier Labour Company immediately lay down their tools and refused to do any work for several days.⁷⁸ Nagas threatened to 'burn their camp down or do anything that occurs to them as suitable to the occasion'.⁷⁹ And recent Christian converts threatened to de-baptize themselves unless they were swiftly repatriated:

It has become very difficult for me to get back because it is written that I will have to stay till the end of hostilities. Go to the Padre Sahib and ask him to use his influence to get us back and tell all the women folk if our prayer is not heard [then] none of the women ought to marry any more Christians. It seems to me that the war will go on for another 20 years and we shall have to stay all that time. Unless you put pressure on the Padre Sahib you will find it very difficult to see our faces again.⁸⁰

Even the Commander of the Indian Labour Corps, the renowned Victorian oarsman Oliver Russell, the 2nd Baron Amphyll, expressed open sympathy with the dissenting labourers and condemned the way that the Indian Army had treated his men:

In this way a dirty trick, I cannot call it anything else, is going to be played on men who have risked much to serve us well and nobody is going to be held responsible for this stain on British honour. [...] Honesty is always the best policy in the long run and in this manner the Government of India will surely reap as they have sown. Faith in British honour, our main safeguard, will be destroyed forever [...].⁸¹

⁷⁷ 'On March 1st the Military Secretary came from England to see us. He is Genl. Cox [...]. He said we had done excellent work in spite of the cold and [had] helped the British Raj very much. Now our contract had expired and we wanted to go home but the war was fiercer than ever and the Government wanted all their ships to carry the troops so it was impossible to send us all at once but we would be sent back gradually as occasion offered. We would [therefore] be obliged to make another contract and should get an increase in pay. For the first new contract there would be an increase of Rs.5 a month and for the second another Rs.5 and for the third another Rs.5. We should all be sent back gradually within 4 or 5 months and there would be fresh arrangements each month. We are all very depressed indeed and do not want to stay but what can we do? We are forced to stay.' Kachshaf [sic], (Indian Christian), Ranchi Labour Company, France, to Dr Lacchaf, Mission Hospital, Ranchi, Bihar, India, 9th March 1918; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 6.

⁷⁸ Lieutenant General H.V. Cox, 'Diary of Tour in France, 27th February to 8th March 1918'; *Correspondence and Memorandum on the Indian Labour Corps in France and Flanders, July 1917 – June 1919*, Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/5/738.

⁷⁹ Lt. Williams, Indian Labour Corps, France, to Mrs Williams, Ranchi, Bihar, India, (not dated); *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 6.

⁸⁰ Ramis Ekka, (Christian), Ranchi Labour Corps, France, to B. Manwar Ekka, Roman Catholic Mission, Ranchi, Bihar, India, 24th May 1918; *CIM 1914-1918*, Part 2.

⁸¹ Lieutenant Colonel Lord Amphyll, France, to Lieutenant General H.V. Cox, India Office, Whitehall, London, 25th April 1918; *Indian Labour Corps*.

Soon combatants in the Indian Army began to assume that they too were subject to similar contracts and were being forced to fight illegally. From February 1917, after the first detachments of Indian labourers arrived in France, *sipahis* began to echo the view of labourers that their ‘contracts’ would soon be at an end. Senchi Khan recounted on 4th May 1917 that an officer had personally told him to,

“Cheer up! [...] the men can’t be long now as the three years agreement is nearly up. There is every hope that at the end of the three years the Force in France will go back.”⁸²

By 29th June this rumour had become a fact, at least for Azizuddin of the 6th Cavalry, who instructed his family to thank Allah that ‘the three years are nearly up’.⁸³ And a month later, on the 30th July 1917, Kaka Singh of the 38th Central India Horse was confident enough to add more details still:

We have very strong hopes of one of three things happening. The first hope is that we shall all be sent back this winter. The second is that if we don’t all return, those who have been here for three years will be sent back. The third is that failing all else, leave to India will be opened.⁸⁴

Any sense of hope turned to bitter disillusionment when neither leave to India nor repatriation was permitted. For Kallu Khan of the Jodhpur Lancers, it clearly meant that the *Sarkar* could no longer be trusted. Soon, he anticipated, even the sick and wounded would be forced back into the trenches unless they were ‘likely to die on the voyage out [to India], or a few days after their arrival.’⁸⁵ Abdul Wahab Khan penned furious letters that *sipahis* were being kept in France in contravention of their terms of service:

Put away from you every thought about my coming on leave. In this matter our Master’s made sport of us [...] but we in our stupidity thought that they were in earnest, and communicated the prospect of coming to you, thus bringing on you our subsequent disappointment.⁸⁶

⁸² Senchi Khan, (Pathan), Peshawar, NWFP, India, to Dafadar Yakub Khan, 38th CIH, France, 4th May 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁸³ Azizuddin, (Hindustani Musalman), 6th Cavalry, France, to Mohamed Nazirul Zaman, Farrukhabad, UP, 29th June 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁸⁴ Kaka Singh, (Sikh), 38th CIH, France, to Narinjan Singh, Ludhiana dist., Punjab, India, 30th July 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

⁸⁵ Kallu Khan, (Muslim Rajput), Jodhpur Lancers, France, to Kasim Khan, Jaipur, Rajputana, 3rd March 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 2.

⁸⁶ Abdul Wahab Khan, (Hindustani Muslim), 6th Prince of Wales’ Cavalry, France, to Atta Khan, Pertabgarh, UP, India, 27th March 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 2.

Thus, soldiers began to echo military labourers. Combatants in the Indian Army believed that the regulations governing their service also proscribed an indefinite stay in France, and expressed great unease when this stipulation was breached.

The response by soldiers in the fighting units of the Indian Army differed from their compatriots in the Indian Labour Corps. No strikes or work stoppages were attempted. The punishments meted out to *sipahis* were far more severe to risk such a move. Soldiers relayed apocryphal warnings to one another of the severity of punishments in France. Sowar Man Singh of the 6th Cavalry, for instance, wrote of the despondency that had swept across his troop upon learning that two of his compatriots were to be shot for the 'minor crime' of 'not relieving each other on sentry duty and leaving the place without any sentry'.⁸⁷ Another Afridi *sipahi* relayed how close a friend of his had come to being accused of malingering by officers watchful for the slightest indiscretion:

Sikander Shah has come here too. I have made thorough enquiry from him. He told me that a man of the 57th came and our people asked how Inzar Gul was. He replied that Inzar Gul himself had hit his own hand. Then the Doctor caused him to be arrested, saying "You have caused your own injury." [But] There was another sepoy with him who said "I saw him hit," ie. he gave evidence in his favour. Then the Doctor let him go. The man is not known to me who said this but [by] God will be known to you. If you know his name send it to me. When I rejoin I will make enquiry before the Colonel to find out about that sepoy and discover who it was that delivered him from the Doctor.⁸⁸

The lack of overt action did not preclude more covert activity. Towards the end of 1916 and in the early months of 1917 soldiers began to write home and enquire whether contacts of India knew of anything that would 'produce sores on the legs or on the neck or on the chest' that would not 'be found out as being self-inflicted'.⁸⁹ These enquiries were stated frankly in some letters and far more obliquely in others. Talib Mohamed Khan penned a short note congratulating a *sipahi* for successfully returning to India – 'I am very glad to hear that you have arrived safely in your native country. May God grant us all to get there soon!' – before writing in brackets at the margins of the letter:

⁸⁷ Man Singh, (Sikh), 6th Prince of Wales' Cavalry, France, to Sirdar Gurdatt Singh, Risaldar Major, 6th Prince of Wales' Cavalry, Depot, Sialkot, Punjab, India, 9th June 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁸⁸ [Name Censored], (Afridi Pathan), 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force), hospital, England, to friend, 58th Vaughan's Rifles, France, February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁸⁹ Abdul Karim, (Hindustani Muslim), 3rd Company, 1st Sappers and Miners, Meerut Division, France, to Risaldar Shahzad Khan, Saharanpur dist., UP, India, 19th December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

(I wish you would be good enough to send me something which will make the doctors declare me unfit for Service and at the same time will not be dangerous to life).⁹⁰

Replies were sent detailing a whole list of grisly ways in which military medics could be deceived, usually involving the application of toxic substances to the groin and testes. But by far the most common ‘remedy’ that was prescribed involved the use of seeds of the *bhailawa* plant.⁹¹ They were ordinarily used by *dhobis* or washermen to mark the clothes that they had washed, and so no one could question their presence in a *sipahis*’ kit. They had the added advantage of causing an impermanent inflammation of the skin that would last ‘three days’⁹² and could be applied by *sipahis* in more than one way depending on the resources available to them.⁹³ Soldiers from the 40th Pathans,⁹⁴ 20th Deccan Horse, and 9th Hodson’s Horse,⁹⁵ all somehow circumvented the postal censor, secured the seeds and used them to good effect:

To the Punjab will come having saved their lives those men who have been wounded and are not fit for the service of Government, and those who have bodily sickness which is not likely to get better soon. But here, at present, this is the state of affairs. Men feigning and pretending all kinds of sickness, and being brought before all sorts of committees, get sent [back] to the Punjab. Since [the fighting grew fierce] many men who can hear, pretend to be deaf and those who can speak to be dumb, some complain of pains in the loins, knees, or body, others say they have giddiness in the head, or something the matter with their lungs. Each one gets before some committee and is sent back to the Punjab, thus saving his life by some way or another. Because the Doctors are a set of blind people, there are many diseases they cannot diagnose, [so] some men, feigning all kinds of illness, save their lives and get back to India.

⁹⁰ Kot Dafadar Talib Mohamed Khan, (Punjabi Muslim), 34th Poona Horse, France, to Kharim Khan, Reservist, 1st Lancers (Skinner’s Horse), Risalpur, NWFP, India, 9th November 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 8.

⁹¹ *Bhailawa* is also referred to as ‘teilya’ by one Garhwali *sipahi*.

⁹² Mohamed Qaki Khan, (Hindustani Muslim), Shahjehanpur, UP, Sowar Mohamed Rafiq Khan, 30th Lancers (Gordon’s Horse), France, 6th June 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁹³ ‘[...] the smoke of the Bhulawan plant is used for this purpose. The plant is ground down and then thrown on burning coals. The smoke is allowed to play upon that part of the body on which is desired to cause an inflammation.’ *Ibid.*

And: ‘And what I wrote to you about Bhilawan, if you have got them, you should mash them up, and then smear them on the body, afterwards heat the places on the body where you have out the Bhilawan. Then put some of the smearing mixture on the lower part of your stomach and in your mouth, and fumigate yourself also with it.’ Sepoy Diwana, (Dogra), 37th Dogras, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, England, to Sepoy Ramdatta, 37th Dogras, attached 41st Dogras, Marseilles, France, 17th July 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

⁹⁴ ‘Dhobi Ram Lal’, 40th Pathans, France, to Dhobi Siraj-ud-Din, Depot, 40th Pathans, Fatehgarh, Punjab, India, 19th September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

⁹⁵ Niamat Ullah, (Pathan), 9th Hodson’s Horse, France, to Ali Mohamed Khan, Farrier, 10th Lancers, Loralai, Baluchistan, India, 4th July 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 6.

Otherwise it would be difficult, for there is no sign of the war stopping, or of peace being made, and the whole world is being destroyed.⁹⁶

Thus, the *bhailawa* seed restored what *sipahis* in France believed was their due: the right to return.

Famine, Falling Houses and Fabricating Means to Return Home during the Second World War

On 28th December 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel M.G.M. Mair, censoring Indian correspondence in the Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean, penned a warning to his superiors that,

There remains no length to which writers will not go to obtain a return [...back to India]. Commanding Officers, Deputy Commissioners of every degree, even the Commander-in-Chief himself, continue to regularly receive a large number of complaints. [In addition] Parents and wives continue to write on their 'death-beds' apparently without respite, since their number is now swollen beyond all reasonable proportions. Another amazing aspect is the speed with which so called 'critical' conditions transpire after the posting overseas of the soldiers.⁹⁷

Nothing more was said on the matter. It appears that neither Mair nor the men he was reporting to wanted an explanation. Soldiers relayed graphic accounts of famine and starvation in India between 1943 and 1944 that contrasted absolutely with the newspapers and broadcasts the Indian Army prepared. Fear that such horrors were about to afflict their own homes compelled *sipahis* to explore illicit means through which they could travel back to their families. While, throughout, Mair's reports remained steadfast in asserting that there was no famine, and soldiers were (largely) unperturbed by news from home.

Throughout the Second World War the Indian Army provided publications to its soldiers serving overseas that would 'remove the men's apprehensions' about the state of affairs in India. The weekly newspaper *Fauji Akhbar* acted as a running commentary on the rural economy of India⁹⁸ and the *Digest of Indian News* was filled

⁹⁶ Sadar Singh, (Dogra), Lady Harding Hospital, Brockenhurst, England, to Katoch Ragbir Singh, Palompra tahsil, Kangra dist., Thural P.O., Punjab, May 1915; *CLM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

⁹⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel M.G.M. Mair, Chief Field Censor, Summary No.163, 15th December to 28th December 1943; *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

⁹⁸ Or at least it did according to *sipahis'* correspondence: 'Nowadays it is very hard to make both ends meet with your Rs.65/- per month. Everything has become dearer. Perhaps you see the rates in *Fauji Akhbar*, but there is a great difference between them and the actual rates.' Father of a soldier, India, to a Naik, IBT Company, Middle

with a series of lurid headlines carefully designed to avoid reporting on anything of substance: “A Freak Child”, “Punjab War Songs Competition”, “Ex-Convict Arrested”, “Man Burnt to Death in Saving Child”.⁹⁹ *Sipahis*’ letters were, however, a parallel means of exchanging news. Between 1943 and 1944, there was only one story of note in those letters: famine in Bengal. Snatches of radio broadcasts or newspaper articles would be heard or found and *sipahis* would ask what was ‘really’ going on. It was by radio that a Bengali *sipahi* in January 1943 came ‘to know of the condition of Calcutta and Chittagong’,¹⁰⁰ and led to another requesting more information:

The radio programme relayed from home gives us a vivid idea of the miserable state of affairs prevailing there as we listen to it regularly, and how the poor are hard up [...and] depressing and overwhelming feelings are growing in my mind.¹⁰¹

The letters that trickled through did not present a positive picture. The huge increases in the price of rice in Bengal were charted from the already inflated ‘Rs.7 or 8 per *maund*’ in December 1942,¹⁰² to ‘Rs.35/36 per *maund*’ in June 1943,¹⁰³ to Rs.40 per *maund* by August 1943:¹⁰⁴

The food situation is tragic in this country. Do not be startled to learn that rice is selling at Rs.40/- a md. [It is] Strange to say, [but] sometimes [even] money can’t purchase it. Death caused through starvation seems to be the order of the day. Famine and epidemics are prevailing everywhere and as a result of it a large number of people are dying daily. [...] If no immediate help is possible from your end in this dire crisis, I am sure that we are doomed and the end is lurking outside our door. [...] Many people are dying of starvation daily. The prices are as follows:-

Rice...Rs.40 a *maund*.

Atta...Rs.35 to 38 a *maund*.

Coal...Rs.2½ a *maund*.¹⁰⁵

More graphic descriptions of what life was like in eastern parts of India were provided by *sipahis* passing through famine-struck areas:

East, August 1943; *Middle East Military Censorship: Fortnightly Summaries Covering Indian Troops, April 1943 – September 1943* [hereafter *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*], Public and Judicial Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/PJ/12/655, File 2336/42.

⁹⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel M.G.M. Mair, Chief Field Censor, Summary No.133, 21st October to 4th November 1942; *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

¹⁰⁰ Sepoy, Egypt, to India, January 1943; *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

¹⁰¹ Draughtsman, Indian Draughtsman Unit, Egypt, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, to India, February 1944; *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹⁰² From Dacca, Bengal, India, to Soldier, Middle East, December 1942; *MEMC Sept. 1942 – April 1943*.

¹⁰³ From Bengal, India, to Subedar, IMD, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, June 1943; *MEMC April 1943 – Sept. 1943*.

¹⁰⁴ From Bengal, India, to Havildar Clerk, Middle East, August 1943; *MEMC April 1943 – Sept. 1943*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

I see many people returning with great disappointment from Government Ration Stalls, because there is no rice left to ration. [...] Anyone can live without food for one or two weeks if there is hope of getting it in the end, but when there is no hope, then on what ground will he live? Moreover, wealthy people have the hope that they can get food at any cost; but what about the middle and poor classes who have no money and who are depending on daily or monthly wages? India has never suffered so much before [...]. The same India which was not in need of anything and was helping other countries in their distress, has now become a beggar and is begging others for food, and can't get it. [...] All its beauty has vanished and those young boys and girls, men and women who were full of fresh and vigorous blood, the signs of which could be seen on their cheeks, are now as withered trees. There is no flesh on their bones, no sign of their youth, but only signs of worries and miseries, and people of all ages, youths, or young ones can be seen lying as dead on the foot paths or on the pavements in the burning sun without food. [...] Who is going to feed them or satisfy them, and who is responsible for it? [...] India was a golden bird in olden times but now this war and its selfish powers has made it a beggar country.¹⁰⁶

The effects of this commentary on the Bengal famine were just as significant, if not more so, for the majority of *sipahis* that were not Bengali. Reports of high prices for basic necessities outside Bengal stoked fears that mass-starvation would soon occur throughout India. A Garhwali *havildar* wrote a letter about the 'Indian food problem' in June 1943 in which he imagined that the conditions in Bengal were being replicated in his own village:

From my personal experience I can tell you that the food we get here is much better than that we soldiers get in India. But whenever I sit for my meals, a dreadful picture of the appalling Indian food problem passes through my mind leaving a cloudy sediment on the walls of my heart which makes me nauseous, and often I leave my food untouched.¹⁰⁷

A Tamil *sipahi* in Italy wrote to a friend in India in November 1943 and warned of the calamities that were to come:

All the letters from home are pathetic and touching and I am now in an ocean of sorrow. What is the use of such a life? I do not know when I am going to start a happy life. I received a letter from my wife that my house is washed away by floods in the Adyar Cooum River and they are now sheltering in a *choultry* in Madras. It often

¹⁰⁶ From a Soldier, India, to a Soldier, Middle East, September 1943; *MEMC April 1943 – Sept. 1943*.

¹⁰⁷ Havildar, Tunisia, Tripolitania, and Cyrenacia, to Garhwal, India, June 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

drives me mad. What is to be done? In such a condition how can man be happy when his family is in such a dangerous plight?¹⁰⁸

Finally, a Punjabi soldier from Sargodha district wrote unequivocally of what he foresaw for his friends and family in Punjab in February 1944:

Everyone in India knows well how people suffered in Bengal and millions died of starvation and now they want that you should die in the same way. [...] How funny the army and its rules and orders are, and how miserable those poor dependents are, whose supporters are in the army. How happily you were living before, but now you are the worst sufferers in all respects. May God end this war soon and make us free from the blessed army life, and its rules, regulations and orders.¹⁰⁹

It became commonplace, therefore, to transplant the images evoked by the news from Bengal to the villages and provinces from which non-Bengali soldiers hailed.

It did not lead to a universal response. For some *sipahis* – their names excised by Mair – it was enough to seek reassurances that their monthly remittances were reaching their families¹¹⁰ and hope for this amount to be increased:

Dear mother, I am fed up reading all your letters which often drive me mad. You should know very well by now that I am here in the rank of a *sepoy*. My total pay, plus overseas allowance, is Rs.30/- only, and out of it I have allotted Rs.15/- to you. A *sepoy* in the army is allowed to allot that much only, that is why I am sending Rs.6/- to 7/- to you in addition to the F.A. [Family Allowance]. [...] Pray to God for [a] general increase in the pay of other ranks of the Indian Army.¹¹¹

Others petitioned local District Soldiers' Boards¹¹² to make domestic necessities available to their families at a subsidized rate (if they were from Punjab),¹¹³ or to appeal to their Officers and District Commissioners that such institutions should be

¹⁰⁸ Madrasi Sepoy, 9th Army Area, Italy, to India, November 1943, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹⁰⁹ Soldier, Middle East, to Sialkot, Punjab, India, February 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹¹⁰ 'Please let me know if you are receiving my allotment of Rs.22/- monthly. It is to feed the family that I joined the service in distant foreign lands. If what I earn can't feed them properly, what will be the use of such service?' Sepoy, Indian Division Headquarters, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, to India, June 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹¹¹ Sipahi, Indian Infantry Brigade, Transport Company, 10th Indian Division, Italy, to India, November 1943, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹¹² These were established under the aegis of the Indian Soldiers' Board in 1919 throughout Punjab, and more haphazardly elsewhere, to provide a level of support to the large number of returning soldiers following the end of the First World War. See Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, pp. 135-137, 249.

¹¹³ 'I asked my officer commanding to write to the authorities in India to give you a permit so that you may buy sugar and kerosene oil. Have you received the permit? If not go to the officer and ask about it, and write to me about your position. It seems that in India no one listens to our grievances.' VCO, North Africa, to India, January 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

established outside Punjab.¹¹⁴ Yet more *sipahis* made a number of petitions to their Officers in which soldiers laid forth 'genuine requests' 'under very pressing circumstances' for compassionate leave.¹¹⁵ What united all these demands and requests made by the rank-and-file was that they proved unsuccessful, because monthly allotments were not increased, Soldiers' Boards did not operate with any degree of cohesion outwith Punjab, and leave proved extremely difficult to obtain:

I dreamed and dreamed of getting back to India and also believed it would come true.
But the dream ended in nothing more than a dream. My hopes are shattered to pieces
and I feel extremely disappointed.¹¹⁶

When legitimate means had been frustrated, soldiers turned to the surreptitious. In August 1942, several soldiers of the 4th Battalion, 11th Sikhs were able to obtain extraordinary dispensation to return home from Egypt because 'our house has fallen in', 'one of my [father's] legs is fractured' and 'mother has turned blind'.¹¹⁷ What seemed to be remarkable coincidence revealed itself to be the work of soldiers' ingenuity, when the same formula for securing leave came to be used by other *sipahis* throughout 1943. At the beginning of the year, one soldier recounted how he had been told of 'a really good excuse' that originated 'from one of my friends' in another regiment.¹¹⁸ Quite what that 'excuse' was remained unclear until April, when another *sipahi* sheepishly informed his father that he had been portrayed in an 'excuse' as 'a blind old man' who was 'unable to pay his land revenue of fifty *bighas*'.¹¹⁹ At the end of 1943, so common had this deception become, that men of 5th Battalion, 5th Maratha Light Infantry had each submitted '10/12 applications' of this type.¹²⁰ And with its

¹¹⁴ 'It simply tortures me to learn that my children undergo such hardships and waste so much time in buying a small quantity of sugar and kerosene oil. It is really shocking that the Government do[es] nothing to help the families of soldiers serving overseas although they claim a lot is being done for them. I have written to the Deputy Commissioner but doubt if he will do anything. We can bear any hardship on our person, but cannot tolerate the sufferings of our families.' Sikh Subedar-Major, IAMC, Middle East, to India, 28th August 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹¹⁵ 'My heart burns when I hear about the conditions at home, but I am helpless, because I cannot get leave. I [have] approached the OC many times for leave, but I was not successful in get[ting] it. These people are so stony-hearted that in spite of my genuine requests for leave, made under very pressing circumstances, I get a heart-breaking response from them. I am feeling so much dejected over home affairs that I often pray God to take me away from this cruel, tyrannical and unjust world, and if the circumstances remain as they are, [it will be] no wonder if I may succeed in leaving this world. I am so much worried that my brain does not work and I feel as if I am becoming mad.' Draughtsman, Forward Survey Company, Tunisia, Tripolitania, and Cyrenaica, to India, June 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹¹⁶ Havildar Clerk, HQ, 10th Indian Division, Italy, to India, November 1943, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹¹⁷ Havildar, 4/11th Sikhs, Egypt, to father, Kaim Karan Dist., Punjab, 1st August 1942, *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

¹¹⁸ Sipahi, Back Areas, Egypt, to India, November 1942, *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

¹¹⁹ Lance-Naik, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, to father, India, April 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹²⁰ Naik, 5/5th Royal Maratha Light Infantry, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan, to India, 5th September 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

popularity came subtle amendments and alterations to the formula. Some soldiers adding that they were also recently married¹²¹ or that their brother was a prisoner of war,¹²² others that they had documentary proof of their parents' illness,¹²³ and some combined all these elements as they enjoined their supposedly ill relatives to petition on their behalf:

I reported the illness of my father to my Coy. Commander. I also added that I was poor, while all my older brothers were well-off and wanted to confiscate all my heritage after my father's death and that I had a wife [...] You will please get an application sent by father to our C.O. saying that he is an old man, dead nearly and requests the C.O. to send me back very soon.¹²⁴

Such activity proved difficult for British military subalterns or more senior officers to turn down, because of the fear of what may occur if all these applications were summarily dismissed:

I have sent off a bunch of lads on leave again lately [but] none of the former lot I sent off have come back. [...] Yet if I refuse] it breeds discontent, [and] one gets very tired of making excuses and holding out false promises.¹²⁵

Thus, incidents of falling houses increased as news of calamity in India reached soldiers. And they were informed by the belief that the Indian Army had failed in its duty to protect their families.

Conclusion: Casting a Shadow (Imperfectly) over Lulu

Some two decades after the Armistice, Mulk Raj Anand wrote his novel *Across the Black Waters*. The novel was the second part of a trilogy narrating the experiences of Lal Singh from adolescent rebellion, to military service in the First World War, to

¹²¹ 'The official letter about my marriage, sent by you has not arrived here so far, and I will know about it as soon as it reaches here ...this is the only means of getting leave from here.' Sipahi, Pioneer Regiment, Egypt, to India, 9th September 1943, *MEMC April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹²² 'I have submitted a petition for leave. I have stated in it the deplorable condition of my family affairs. As, for instance, my parents are old and my brother is POW. They [my parents] have lost heart and keep wailing for him. Therefore I want to go home to console my old parents and to make some proper arrangements for them and the property. This application has been sent to India for verification. [Make sure] You explain these difficulties to the man who comes to you for verification.' Sepoy, Indian Field Ambulance, 8 Indian Division, Central Mediterranean Force, Italy, to India, January 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

¹²³ 'In my opinion you should apply to my C.O. for my leave through the C.O., I.G.S.C. Depot Aurangabad, attaching a certificate of your illness. [...] Get this petition recommended by the Magistrate of the High Court.' Sipahi, Egypt, to India, [not dated], *MEMC, April 1943 – September 1943*.

¹²⁴ Sapper, Madras Sappers and Miners, Palestine, Syria, Transjordan or Lebanon, to India, [not dated], *MEMC September 1942 – April 1943*.

¹²⁵ British Commanding Officer, Indian Pioneer Company, 8th Indian Division, Central Mediterranean Force, Italy, to Britain, February 1944, *MEMC November 1943 – March 1944*.

his return home and involvement in revolutionary activity.¹²⁶ For Anand, it was at once a memorial to a soldiering father from whom he was estranged, and frustration at his father's social conservatism. Anand's *sipahis* were sexually liberal,¹²⁷ horrified by the brutality of battlefield justice,¹²⁸ and constantly questioned their officers' worth:

'Listen, boys, listen: First Battalion Connaught Rangers, Ferozepur Brigade, will go by military transport at once to Wulvergham to join Cavalry Corps under General Allenby. On the return of the motors, the 69th Rifles under the command of Karnel Green Sahib will move up to Wulvergham and join the 2nd Cavalry Division under General Gough Sahib Bahadur.

'But what about the rest of the Brigade?' asked tubby Dhayan Singh.

'Aren't we all going into action together since we have come together?' queries Rikhi Ram.

'Shall we be separated even from our own Brigade?' asked Kharku.

The sepoys seemed to be panic-stricken at the announcement.

'Our regiment will be together,' said Havildar Lachman Singh to console them. 'So we will be all right.'

But the sepoys edged away, their faces tinged with the regret that from now on there would be partings after which each man will probably have to go by himself. From the congregational life of their past and, more particularly, through the long journeys with thousands of sepoys, they had come to accept their togetherness as a law of nature and they had naively expected that they would all be put to fight side by side with each other.

'Where is Wulvaga?' a sepoy was asking.

'Where is the place, *Holdara?*' another repeated the inquiry. 'When are we going?'

'Why is it that only the *Gora* regiment and our regiment are going, Uncle?' Kharku turned to Kirpu. 'What is the meaning of all this?'

'The Sarkar is like a bitch, son,' said Kirpu. 'It barks its orders and does not explain. What I am concerned about is where are we going to stay. Can't stay in the cold out here ... I hardly slept a wink last night: These Sahibs are ...'

'Illegally begotten!' added Kharku.¹²⁹

The fragmentary and episodic picture of *sipahis* gleaned from their letters lived up to Anand's vision, and, in parts, surpassed it. Details of sexual encounters were exchanged that recounted brief sojourns in brothels and more consensual

¹²⁶ The other two parts of the trilogy are: *The Village* and *The Sword and the Sickle*.

¹²⁷ Upon reaching Orleans, Anand's soldiers head for the comforts of the brothel. Their fun is frustrated only by a lack of money. Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters*, (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2000 rpt.), pp. 42-49.

¹²⁸ As when Hanumant Singh is shot for malingering. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

relationships. Acts of malingering were described and enacted that deftly avoided firing squads or summary executions. Sipahis offered more substantive critiques and expectations of their officers than mumbling *madarchod* or ‘mother fucker’ under their breaths.¹³⁰ At the same time, the letter could be used strategically to spur illicit activity. Petitions, *bhailawa* seeds, and news of falling houses were all relayed through oblique metaphors, using stock phrases in new contexts, or by (literally) writing at the margins.

There was one aspect, however, in which letters were not in accord with Anand’s novel. The activity described did not automatically lead to disenchantment with the Army and British colonial rule. Anand’s *Lalu* returns to India with the words of *Ghadari* agents¹³¹ circulating as a mantra in his mind: “‘Brothers-in-law, you like your fathers, the English! ... You like to lick their testicles! ... You ...’”.¹³² There were a handful of letters that were sent to soldiers from the *Ghadar* Party, but the only response by *sipahis* was to distance themselves from their revolutionary programme.¹³³ Soldiers, even those malingering, did not describe themselves as fundamentally disloyal or their actions as challenging the legitimacy of military authority. Instead, letters were the flip-side of military regulations: adding adjuncts to the roles delineated for sipahis, and working to obtain lost privileges or means of escape. As one *sipahi* wrote, when commenting on the high rates of malingering and self-harm, *sipahis* were merely ‘showing loyalty’ for the amount of ‘salt that they had eaten’.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Anand, somewhat unimaginatively, chose to translate *madarchod* as ‘rape-mother’.

¹³¹ Or more accurately the words of the Berlin Committee, viz. Maulvi Barkatullah, Champakaraman Pillai, and Virendranath Chattopdhyaya.

¹³² Mulk Raj Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle*, (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1986 rpt.), pp. 25-26.

¹³³ ‘On the 3/3/16 five men of the police were killed and 4 were wounded. Robbery is very prevalent, and unprincipled men have spoilt the country. Especially the “American Ones” have done much mischief [sic], and many men are under observation as suspicious characters.’ Ganga Singh, (Sikh), 45th Sikhs attached 15th Sikhs, Peshawar, NWFP, India, to Jemadar Sahib Singh, 30th Lancers, France, 6th March 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 4.

¹³⁴ Pay Havildar Mir Dast, (Pathan), 28th Punjabis, Bannu, NWFP, India, to Subedar Arala Khan, 57th Wilde’s Rifles (Frontier Force), France, 11th June 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 4.

CHAPTER 3
THROWING SNOWBALLS IN FRANCE:
(RE-)WRITING A LETTER AND (RE-)APPRAISING ISLAM, 1915-1918

On the 11 July 1916, Captain G. Tweedy, the newly appointed Chief Censor of Indian military correspondence in France, alerted his superiors to a slip of paper he had found hidden in an otherwise anodyne letter by a Punjabi Musalman *sipahi*. It was the nature of the concealed missive, as much as the fact that it was hidden, that alarmed Tweedy. It took the form of a message that had been relayed from the Prophet Mohamed, and the injunctions contained therein directed the Muslim soldiery of British India to put their loyalty to their faith before any loyalty to their *Sahibs*:

786. Order of Mustapha

Order of the Highness the Prophet Mahomet to Sheikh Ahmad, Khadin [sic. 'Khadim' or Custodian] of the auspicious Mauseleum at Medina.

I Sheikh Ahmad of Medina saw in a dream the Prophet reading the Koran. He said to me "Sheikh Ahmad I am weary beyond all measure of their sins. Between two Fridays 9 lakhs of people died, of whom only 70,000 were in the true faith and all the rest were Kafirs. God Almighty sent the angels to me with the following message "Mahomet, look at the condition of your followers. I can bear it no longer and I shall have to change the state of things because your devotees are full of sin. They have given up their prayers and do not give the Zakat to the poor. They devote themselves to theft and backbiting, fornication, false evidence, eating swine's flesh, and misappropriation of others property. They do not keep their caste and do not give alms to the poor and disobey my orders. They are too much devoted to the world and in fact all Mahomedans are guilty of these sins. Therefore I think it necessary to change them into the original type of Mahomedans." His Highness the Prophet prayed God to bear with His people and promised to issue further instructions to Islam and said "If they do not hear this last injunction then Thou are the Master do as Thou pleasest." Then the Prophet said to me "Instruct all the followers of Islam that the Day of Judgement is at hand and the sun will soon rise in the West and the mountains will begin to burn. These are the signs of the end of the world." Once more [in the past] I gave this warning to the faithful but no one attended to it and [they] grew even more absorbed in sinful pleasures. Now I issue clear orders to the faithful to avoid the sins I have mentioned and that they should call to mind the manifold pains and anxieties the Prophet has undergone for their salvation. Do Musalmans want the Prophet to spend all his time in begging God's forgiveness for their sins? The Prophet has clearly said that if you do not obey this last call he will have nothing more to do with you and will implore the Almighty no more for you. Whoever will copy this

message and circulate it from city to city and read it out to others the Prophet will stand by him in the Last Day, and who does not do this will be his enemy and he will do nothing to save him however regular and abstinent his life may be. Sheikh Ahmad takes a solemn oath that this dream is true, and that if it is not true he prays God to smite him dead as an unbeliever. This news has come from Medina the Holy. Impress on every Mahomedan to obey the instruction if he wishes to escape from Hell fire.¹

The missive from Medina came to be termed the ‘Snowball’ letter² because it helped to frame a debate that Muslim soldiers conducted over their religion, and the frequency with which it was referred to increased as the War raged on. At the time, Tweedy busied himself with trying to find where the letter had originated from in (what proved to be a vain) hope that it could be stopped at the source. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the precise origins of the missive are unimportant. As it was read, received and transmitted by soldiers it was internalized and altered to reflect their own reality. Vernacular words and concepts such as *laks* and caste infiltrated the religious prose; the words and metaphors of the missive changed each time a soldier transcribed or quoted from it; and the actions it inspired resulted in everything from increased numbers fasting during Ramzan to outright mutiny. Furthermore, the letter came to be used as a response to, and operated in a space created by, earlier attempts to interfere with the religious practices of Muslim *sipahis* that were sanctioned by British and German military authorities. So rather than seeking to locate who first threw the ‘Snowball’, I will attempt to follow the path it took as it journeyed and grew in size.

The chapter will begin with a brief account of German propaganda and the *Ahmadiyya* Movement before and during the First World War. It will recount their attempts to influence religious discourses among Muslim soldiers and the unintended consequences this activity had of spurring Muslim *sipahis* into questioning the compatibility of faith and military service. This will be followed by an analysis of the part the Snowball letter played in this re-appraisal of how soldiers understood their religion. Finally, the chapter will conclude by showing how this occurred with reference to two particular issues: inter-racial sex and the Turkish entry into the First World War.

¹ As transcribed by *Sipahi* Gasthip Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), France, to Pir Sahib Akhbar Khan Badshah, Jhelum, Punjab, India, 4 July 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, part 6

² The term is used as early as August 1915, when the Censor at the time (E.B. Howell) makes mention of a chain letter from Medina circulating among the troops. Howell does not see fit, however, to include the text of the letter in his fortnightly reports.

Circulating the Words of the Prophet(s): Chain Letters, German Propaganda and Ahmadi Missionaries

The 'Snowball' letter was not the first of its type. In the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Jonathan G. Katz has discovered a series of eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts written in different scripts and locales, all of which invoked Sheikh Ahmad's dream:

Praise be to God, He alone. In the name of God the Merciful the Munificent, May God bless our lord and prophet and master Muhammad and his family and companions, and may He grant continued peace unto the Day of Judgment. It is told of Shaykh Ahmad, trustee (*wakil*) of the precinct of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation!) that he said, "I was stationed in the Prophet's *mihrab* on the right side of his noble tomb Friday night reciting the word of God (May He be honored and glorified) when a man approached me. Light issued from his eyes in the middle of the night. I did not know what to think. Then I understood that this beauty belonged to our intercessor, our lord Muhammad (God bless him and grant him salvation!).

He said to me, "O Shaykh Ahmad, you know the condition of my community as to its good and its bad and what issues forth from my community."

And when I saw this beauty I stopped and clasped my hands.

Then he said (God bless him and grant him salvation!), "You are sinners. Indeed, I have seen at this time 70,000 of whom 700 are in accordance with the faith and the remainder not in accordance with the faith. We take refuge in God from this evil, O Shaykh Ahmad."

Then he said (God bless him and grant him salvation!), "I am ashamed before God Almighty and the angels because the people of my community disobey their mothers and fathers, and they do not recognize the condition of the poor and the unfortunate. Indeed, they study worldly desire. Do not the '*ulama*' have good-ness that no one listens to their speech or honors them? [sic.] The wine session and the distraction of slander is preferable in their opinion to the session devoted to knowledge, *hadith* and *dhikr*. We have already sent to them prior to this two messages, and they did not pay attention to the matter, and not one among them saw it. I, God's servant, am ashamed before God Almighty and before the angels, while they neither have shame before God nor before us nor before the angels. While their faces bear the marks of faith, they have reviled the faithful."

He said, "The *khatib* approached me and said to me, 'Your community fears neither sins nor disobedience. They recite the book of God the Great. O Muhammad, your community commits these sins and they turn their faces. It is your nature, O my beloved, O Muhammad, (to show) mercy upon the believers.'"

Then the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation!) said to me: "Supply them this paper, O Shaykh Ahmad, God's deposition with you. Propagate this

message to my people lest they abandon the faith: Obey God and the Prophet. Perhaps you will be granted mercy. Only (note that) the thing is near. Remorse has no benefit after death. Only (note that) the Resurrection is near. On account of the door of repentance being open, repent unto God of (your) sins. You and your faces are the faces of believers but your actions are the actions of Christians and Jews, and you will die not according to the faith. We seek God's protection from this evil. Only (note that) the accounting is near. The deed came to pass upon your heads before (the years) 1220 and 1230 [1805-1824 C.E.]. In the year forty the corruption will be great and death will be great in the year fifty. Cities will be destroyed in their entirety and signs will appear. In the year sixty stones will be hurled from the sky on the heads of sinners. In the year seventy the sun will rise in the west, and in the year eighty the word of God the Great will ring out and afterwards the Antichrist [*al-Dajjal*] will set forth."³

The letters, posters and telegrams are, for Katz, proof that 'a pious Muslim of the eighteenth or nineteenth century' could 'express concern over the moral and spiritual health of the Islamic community for its own sake and without any explicit reference to the existence of the "Other"' or the 'West'.⁴ What may be true of the eighteenth or nineteenth century was not true of the twentieth. The later version of the missive was conditioned by the site of its production, and shaped by the circulation of German and Ahmadiyya propaganda among Muslim *sipahis*.

Shortly after the start of hostilities and the appearance of Indian soldiers in France, the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (Information Centre for the Orient) was established in Germany. Its goals, as outlined by Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, was to sow propaganda among colonial soldiers of the French, Russian and British armies. Special newspapers were produced, provisions for religious worship were met, and leaflets written in 'Oriental' languages were prepared:⁵

[...] You have been deceived. You are meant to fight here, on foreign soil for the British who hold your home country in bondage. But you do not know that at this moment the people of your country have risen against the English to win their freedom. This is confirmed by reliable news and telegrams from your native country. The English hide this information from you. [...] But, men of India! The Germans do not want to kill you with their terrible weapons. They love your country and are well-disposed towards you. [...] Although you cannot participate in the freedom fight of

³ An excerpt from the third of the letters Katz studies. It was written in Maghribi script (so presumably originated from North Africa) in 1779. Jonathan G. Katz, 'Shaykh Ahmad's Dream: A 19th-Century Eschatological Vision', *Studia Islamica*, No. 79 (1994), pp. 163, 167-168.

⁴ Katz, 'Shaykh Ahmad's Dream', pp. 157-158.

⁵ With thanks to Heike Leibau, and her paper: 'Histories of Historical Sources: The Representation of South Asian Prisoners of First World War in German Archives and Museums', presented at 'South Asian Experiences of the Two World Wars', German Historical Institute, London, 26th May 2009.

your brothers being as you are in a foreign country, you can help them by not fighting for their enemies here. Throw down your weapons and give yourselves up to the Germans!⁶

It is difficult to assess how successful the activities of the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* were among soldiers at the Front. No soldiers wrote of having seen such leaflets, and nor would they since it was a crime to secret away and read enemy propaganda. It was also extremely difficult for British censors to intercept material thrown from one trench to another or dropped by aircraft. One letter from an Indian POW held in Germany in August 1915 was found and censored, but it was only discovered because it was posted to India by mistake.⁷

Although it is hard to discern quite how much German propaganda made its way through to *sipahis*, its effect is not. It could spark off rumours, speculation, flights of fancy that had an effect greater than the number of soldiers reading it. The case of Jemadar Mir Dast of 58th Vaughan's Rifles is a prime example. Mir Dast defected to the Germans in February 1915 with 12 other *sipahis*. The fact that his brother had won the Victoria Cross⁸ led some *sipahis*, particularly fellow Afridi Pathans, to speculate that Dast had been awarded the Iron Cross by Kaiser Wilhelm II.⁹ That in turn led to the belief that the German Kaiser had subsequently converted to Islam:

A letter has come from those of our men whom the Germans took prisoner, from the men of our regiment, saying, "We are now under the German king. You can please yourselves. We are well and happy, because here there is a Muslim King." About 200 of our regiment were taken prisoner.¹⁰

And it led to suggestions, by October 1915, that the Germans were preparing to liberate Muslims in India by invading through Afghanistan:

⁶ Professor Salenka, '*Ihr tapferen Krieger von Indien!*' (Ye Brave warriors of India!), 16th October 1914; *ibid.*

⁷ 'A letter came from you once before, which I answered. So now I am writing to you a second time. I am now all well by the Grace of God. I am a German prisoner. I hope you will send me an answer quickly on receipt of this, though I know that you have not much leisure.' Jemadar Id Mohamed Khan, Zossen, Germany, to Jemadar Adjutant Abdulla Khan, 129th Baluchis, France, 17th August 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 6.

⁸ Also called Mir Dast and also a Jemadar. Mir Dast VC, however, served in 55th Coke's Rifles.

⁹ It is possible that he may have received the Iron Cross. E.B. Howell was unsure whether he had or not, and the records were destroyed during the Second World War so it's impossible to know for certain.

¹⁰ Afridi Pathan Havildar, 40th Pathans, France, to father in Peshawar, 26th February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

I have heard that an army of the Sultan Badshah and of the Germans has come to Kabul and I have heard that it numbers 11 *lakhs* of men and with it Jemadar Mir Dast too has come [...].¹¹

It was while these conversations were ongoing that the first *Ahmadi* literature appeared and was passed on to soldiers without censure or comment. The *Ahmadiyya* Movement and its adherents were a small minority among South Asian Muslims but had an influence greater than their size. It was founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, after he claimed to be both the reincarnation of Christ and the *Mahdi* (the prophesized redeemer of Islam). A synergy with British colonialism came about some time after 1901 when *Ahmadis* began to actively promulgate Ahmad's message in Punjab and the rest of India.¹² By 1916, the main group within the *Ahmadis*, the *Qadiyanis*, were running missions in Britain – at Woking, Surrey, and at Great Russell Street in London – with the help of large, undeclared donations.¹³ At the same time, they were celebrated in the press as ‘a sort of Protestant Muhammadanism,’¹⁴ and in print for their ‘absence of political controversy’.¹⁵ In return for this support, the *Ahmadis* took upon themselves to make it clear to as many Muslim soldiers as they could that it was their religious duty to fight for their British *Badshah*.

Ahmadi letters to soldiers were rebuttals of German propaganda and the speculation engendered by it. They were tailored to reflect the major happenings of the First World War, and were conveyed in ways that would simultaneously prove the veracity of their prophecies and inculcate loyalty to the Crown. After the February Revolution in Russia in 1917, for instance, a pamphlet was sent to Sub-Assistant Surgeon Raffi-ud-din Khan that contained ‘proof’ that Ahmad had predicted the event, before using the sudden fall in grace of the Czar as a sign that British rule over India had been ordained by God:

He [Maulvi Mahomed Ali Khan – a prominent Ahmadi] remarks that before the war the Tzar of Russia was the most powerful King on Earth, since his word was law over 16 million people, and yet today, he asks what is the position of the Tzar? And he

¹¹ Ajrud Din, (Pathan – Afridi), Tirah, NWFP, India, to Havildar Gul Badshah, 58th Rifles, France, 19th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 8.

¹² When the missionary party *Jamaat-i-Ahmadiya* was formed.

¹³ The finances of the Woking Mosque and Mission in 1917 contained large discrepancies. Its annual receipts amounted to Rs.26,785 – 8 – 3 while its expenditure was Rs.31,963 – 6 – 0. This shortfall was made up by an undeclared donation totalling Rs.5,168.

¹⁴ ‘Bombay Advocate,’ 31st August 1915; H.A. Walter, *The Religious Life of India: The Ahmadiyya Movement*, (Calcutta; Association Press, 1918), p. 120.

¹⁵ H.A. Walter, the Literary Secretary of the National Council of the YMCA of India and Ceylon, investigated the matter on behalf of the YMCA. The work was only published in 1918, however, after Walter died whilst writing the last chapter of the volume. Walter, *Ahmadiyya Movement*, p. 136.

answers his question by saying that he has not only lost his crown and is a prisoner in the hands of people who before were as nothing in his estimation, but he is separated from his wife and family and his last state is one of utter ruin.

He observes that it is due to the blessing of God, that though the Tzar has been deprived of his "Crown" no harm has come to our Government, which [is] prosecuting the war successfully.¹⁶

This desire to demonstrate to *sipahis* that it was their religious duty to show fealty to the British Crown was put in more frank language to the few soldiers who were *Ahmadis* and who had been spreading the word to their peers:

Subscriptions are being sent regularly to Kadiani Sharif. Mufta Mohamed Sadiq and Kazi Abdulla and Abdul Hali, Arab [sic.], are having a good propaganda in London and English people, men and women, are becoming their disciples. We are being very successful. The prophecies of the Messiah are being fulfilled daily. The Mohamedans who are ignorant of our religion remain unsatisfied and suffer in pain. His Highness and the Prophet laid down that non-Musalmans who were our friends should be helped and supported and...[we should fight] against their enemies. The English Government is our supporter and protector and this Government is for us Indian Mohamedans, a blessing and a benefit. This is the Government under which we can follow our religion, and this Kingdom of England, especially London the capital, has a favourable atmosphere for Islam. There is no hindrance to our propaganda. It is our duty to fight for such a power and combat its enemies.¹⁷

The reception the *Ahmadi* message received among soldiers, however, was decidedly lukewarm. In the 18th Lancers, open scorn was shown for the *Ahmadiyya* Movement and the specific pamphlets and letters that were circulated within the regiment. Abusive correspondence was directed to *Ahmadi* missionaries from regimental lines which accused them of being 'false Musalmans' for eating meat killed by non-Muslim butchers.¹⁸ On other occasions *Ahmadis* were accused of secretly being

¹⁶ Nur Ahmed, (Punjabi Mussalman), Abbotabad, NWFP, India, to Raffi-ud-din Khan, Assistant Surgeon, Sialkot Field Ambulance, France, 28th May 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

¹⁷ Ghulam Haidar Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), Police Pensioner, Shahpur, Punjab, India, to Haqq Nawaz Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 21st September 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

¹⁸ 'I am going to repeat the orders that His Highness the Khalifa gave me when I left for Europe. He was emphatic that nothing could be eaten which had been strangled or which had been killed by a blow to the back of the neck. He added that we could eat meat killed by Christians or Jews provided that they cut the throat in front. It does not matter whether the Bismillah is said or not. The Jews are most careful and certainly we can eat meet killed by them in confidence but we have to be very careful about the Christians as they generally knock down or strangle their cattle. [...] I am a real Mohamedan and act up to my faith. The Sirdar when he spoke to you must have been thinking of the Mohamedans who do not trouble themselves about these things and think all meat is lawful. They have not had proper light vouchsafed to them by which to regard God [sic]. I feel confident about my enlightenment and that it is impossible for me to do anything against His commands. He who breaks God's obediences never thinks of Him.'

Christians¹⁹ and gleeful tales were relayed of *Ahmadi* literature being burnt in the trenches.²⁰ Such was the vituperative response within the 18th Lancers that the one *Ahmadi* within the troop, Dafadar Haq Nawaz, who had been the conduit through which *Ahmadi* propaganda was passed to others, suffered a change of heart. The reason, as he explained, was because he had been influenced by men within the regiment who were issuing counter-arguments to those put forward by the *Ahmadis*;

[...] I have seen, that the condition of all the Mohamedans is precisely what you have described on reference to this text. I do not contend with them; but when I listen to their talk, I am moved to utter a prayer “May God put them on the right way.” On the surface they are faithful but in their hearts there is emptiness. ...I get full of burning wrath when I hear the complaint of my companions that our death has become unlawful.

PS. There is a matter on which I desire to consult you. Kindly give me your advice. The meaning of the text is “To obey God, to obey His Prophet and to obey the Authority placed over you.” Now God is holy and the Prophet also is holy, should not the Authority placed over us also be holy? That is to say, one must follow in the footsteps of the Prophet, and act in accordance with the example he has set, [but] must one also walk in the footsteps and act in accordance with the example placed over us? Must one in fact conform to the religion of our present King? These are the questions which a Shiah Moulvi in the regiment has raised after reading your tract, saying “We cannot accept [it] as the Authority mentioned in the text, [is] an Authority which eats swine’s flesh, drinks spirits and commits fornication.” They [Muslim soldiers] admit that they are greatly in error saying “We do not serve the Authority from our hearts; but on the surface we show more than obedience. So without doubt we greatly err.” For myself, since this discussion was started, I find myself unable literally to follow in the footsteps of the Authority [...] If the precepts of the Prophet are the precepts of God and the precepts of the Authority are to be regarded in the same way as the precepts of the Prophet, then they say the precepts of the Authority should be pure.²¹

For other soldiers it was not enough to merely counter the *Ahmadiyya* message, but necessary to find genuine alternatives to what the *Ahmadis* preached. This took the form of personal letters to *pirs* or *maulvis* in India asking their advice or religious instruction – ‘is it lawful for Mohamedans to take milk from the cow by the hands of

Kazi Abdullah Quadiyani, (Punjabi Mussalman), Honourary Secretary of the Muslim Mission Society, 41 Great Russell Street, London, to Dafadar Haq Nawas, 18th Lancers, France, 21st November 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 9.

¹⁹ Kazi Abdullah Quadiyani, (Punjabi Mussalman), Honourary Secretary of the Muslim Mission Society, 41 Great Russell Street, London, to Dafadar Haq Nawas, 18th Lancers, France, 21st November 1916; *ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Dafadar Haq Nawaz, (Punjabi Mussalman), 18th Lancers, France, to Moulvi Mohamed Sadiq, Sadar Bazaar, Meerut, UP, India, 13th August 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

Christians?';²² have 'we sinned for not keeping the Ramzan fast?';²³ 'has God abandoned us for fighting in this War?'²⁴ Another approach was to take an interest in prominent Muslims involved in the nascent nationalist movement in India. Lance Dafadar Sher Mohamed of 38th Central India Horse wrote to the Editor of *Khabit* – a Muslim newspaper published in Delhi at the time – demanding that he send his regiment all the news he had on Moulana Abul Kalam Azad because 'I know his writing and as I am a devout Mohamedan I have a great affection for him.'²⁵ *Sipahi* Mohamed Yousuf wished to see the proceedings of the All-India Muslim League after they agreed to share a joint platform with Congress in 1916,²⁶ and his peers discussed avidly Edwin Montague's tour of India in the following year.²⁷ Thus, while German propaganda had some effect, the unintended consequence of *Ahmadiyya* missionary activity among Muslim soldiers in the First World War was to encourage those soldiers to discuss non-*Ahmadi* Islam and what it was to be a non-*Ahmadi* Muslim.

Shaping Snowballs in France: (Re)Reading and (Re)Writing the Snowball Letter

The Snowball letter emerged as part of the conversation that Muslim *sipahis* were engaged in over their religion. What differentiated it from other means of

²² Abdul Sultan Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), 36th Jacob's Horse, France, to Abdurrazaq Khan, Deolali, Punjab, India, 15th March 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 2.

²³ Jemadar Hussein Shah, (Pathan), 9th Hodson's Horse, France, to Pir Badshah, Kohat, NWFP, India, 26th June 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

²⁴ Jemadar Abdul Rahim Khan, (DM), 36th Jacob's Horse, France, to Mir Hussein Khan, Hyderabad, India, 7th February 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 1.

²⁵ Lance Dafadar Sher Mohamed, (Punjabi Mussalman), 38th CIH, France, to Editor of the "Khabit", Delhi, 26th October 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

²⁶ 'Please send me the weekly edition of your paper. I want to see all the proceedings of the All-India Muslim League which no doubt will be recorded in your paper. I am particularly interested in this matter.' Clerk Mohamed Yusuf, (Punjabi Mussalman), Deputy Adjutant General's office, 3rd Echelon, France, to the Manager of *Paisa Akhbar*, Lahore, Punjab, India, 3rd December 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

²⁷ 'The Secretary of State for India has come to India and is taking the views of everyone about Self-Government and will make his decision after hearing these opinions. Hindus will get the best of this because, through their education, they have a larger representation. Mohamedans are poorly represented because of their lack of education. Differences of opinion therefore seem likely. The Hindus and about half [of] the Mohamedans want Self-Government while the other half of the Mohamedans don't want it. I believe that Montague Sahib will give a just decision.' Ali Alam Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), War Hospital, Khendwa, (India?), to Malik Khan Mohamed Khan, 36th Jacob's Horse, France, 15th December 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 6. And: 'The Secretary of State for India, Montague Sahib, has come to India and is staying at Delhi. Formerly he had declared his intention of visiting the principal towns in India so as to meet the people; but when the Hindus started rioting he said he would not leave Delhi. He gave a whole day to the Mussalmans, conversing with them, and made a favourable impression on them. They feel honoured. The Hindus are agitating for Home Rule, but the Mussalmans are against it and wish the Government to remain as at present as they do not wish for Home Rule. This is the reason for the trouble between the Hindus and Mussalmans. The Hindus have rebelled in various places and in Bengal seditious letters have been found in which it is urged that the unclean races should be driven out of the country or slain. This is what they did in Arrah. Many disturbances are taking place.' Mohamed Yusuf Ali Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), Amethi, UP, India, to Sowar Ali Khan, Acting Lance Dafadar, 2nd Lancers, France, 28th November 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 6.

discussing one's faith, however, was that it simultaneously countered the *Ahmadi* message and provided an alternative to it. Its language and form were tailored to offer a retort to the *Ahmadiyya* movement. At the same time and in the same space, the means by which the letter was distributed and re-written by soldiers allowed for it to become a wider vehicle for discussing an individual's faith. It was this very pliability of the letter that allowed for it to exist in several geographic spaces, dozens of regiments, and still be referred to as the First World War came to a close.

There were elements within the Snowball letter that acted as straightforward rejoinders to the *Ahmadi* message. The Snowball letter took on a similar form to the preachings of Ghulam Ahmad – that of a dream sequence through which the message of an angel, the Prophet or Allah was transmitted. It also shared the belief that the 'Day of Judgement is at hand', and that most Muslims would be found wanting by God.²⁸ The point at which it departed from the propaganda of the *Ahmadiyya* Movement was in the explanations it gave as to why Muslims had fallen out of God's favour. According to Snowball, Muslims had angered Allah and the Prophet by deviating from the 'original type of Mahomedans' and by daring to listen to supposed heretical beliefs.²⁹ The warning at the beginning of the letter was that the 'followers of Mohamet' have become 'Kafirs', and the kind of apostates they had turned into was made clear when the vices of these 'false Muslims' were listed.³⁰ The sins of eating 'swine's flesh', 'backbiting' by attacking fellow Muslims, and misappropriating 'other's property' were precisely those vices that soldiers had already levelled at *Ahmadis*.³¹

But the Snowball letter was not just a simple point-by-point critique of the *Ahmadiyya* Movement. The letter of July 1916, which is the version that the Censor first transcribed, was not the first time or the only form in which the Snowball letter was circulated. References to 'the letter from Medina' were made in *sipahis*' correspondence and in the reports of Tweedy's predecessor as Chief Censor throughout 1915. It was also presented in different forms and contexts throughout the Islamic world for a century and a half before the First World War. But while parts of the letter harked back to a time and geographic space beyond the experience of most *sipahis* in France, the form and meaning of the letter changed each time it was read, written and passed on to others. Its significance came from its existence as a chain

²⁸ Snowball letter; *Sipahi* Gasthip Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), France, to Pir Sahib Akhbar Khan

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

letter, and the myriads of interlocutors it passed through. The demand made at the end of the letter that it was mandatory for any literate Muslim to ‘copy the message’, ‘circulate it from city to city’ and ‘read it out to others’ led to it being shaped to accord with the beliefs and understanding of the individual receiving and sharing the message.³²

One can gain a sense of precisely how the reading and re-writing of Snowball altered its form and message by looking at the first cases in which it was received and passed on by soldiers. When soldiers first wrote of the ‘missive from Medina’ in 1915 or 1916 they wrote of how it had passed through several hands before theirs and how they were keen to continue that chain. Havildar Umr-al-Din Khan first heard about the letter from a friend in another regiment in France, and mentioned on 23rd August 1915 that it had gone from Medina to Delhi ‘moving from strength to strength among the people’ before finally being sent by telegraph to his battalion.³³ Sowar Rahmat Khan, in December 1915, confessed that he had come across the letter lying on the floor of his hospital and was immediately going to send ‘three copies to Jandiala, one for the mosque and two for the brotherhood’.³⁴ When the same soldiers came to disseminate the message to others, however, the language of the letter began to appear in contexts that were unrelated to the *Ahmadis*, and in language that was different from the Snowball of July 1916. Dil Khan of the 129th Baluchis labeled himself a *pir* upon hearing of one version of the letter and merged half-correct quotes from the Snowball into the sermons that he gave to friends and family in France and in India. He was unsure precisely where the letter had originated from and misquoted the figures of those who had been saved and those who had been condemned, but the basic message of Snowball remained:

Perhaps this world is not for our people and the end is not for our people. You are a religious and prayerful man...so know that a letter has come from Mecca or Medina in which it says that all Musalmans have turned infidels through lust of this world, and the times are evil. They eat through the fast and do not pray and in two weeks 70000 thousand, you know, received forgiveness and 19 lakhs went to Hell. The moon rises in the West. [At] First it rose from the East. ...It is the beginning of death. The end is

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Havildar Umr-al-Din Khan, (Pathan – Orakzai), [regiment unclear], France, to Subedar Niamat Ullah Khan, Co. No. 4, 1 Sappers and Miners, France, 23 August 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, part 5.

³⁴ Sowar Rahmat Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), 15 Lancers, Pavilion Hospital, Brighton, England, to Hazrat Sahib Pir Faqir Shah, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 6 December 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, part 8.

at hand. Since I was born I never heard the like of this letter that comes from Holy Mecca.³⁵

Abdul Ghani, a *sipahi* who had been wounded and had returned to Punjab, wrote to a soldier in France and quoted a fragment of the Snowball missive, in proto-Rushdean vein. He claimed that the words had not come from a letter at all but from the mouth of a woman in a nearby village who had been born from the womb of a cow and had been found sucking at its teat:

I have also heard that at Nambal a man's cow brought forth and gave birth to a woman. [...] he gave her clothing and in fear went to Maulvi Faqir-Ullah, and asked him what was this miracle. The Maulvi replied "If the woman can speak, go and ask her." So he came back and asked her and found her drinking the cow's milk. She said "I am born to make trial of you, for the Day of Judgement is at hand. The people do not say their prayers, nor [do they] keep the fast. They eat that which is unlawful and drink wine. They do evil deeds. Refrain from these things."³⁶

Even when the Snowball letters were not being directly quoted from at all, the sentiments contained therein informed the everyday correspondence of *sipahis*. It was referenced when soldiers wrote to their homes and asked their families to distribute *zakat* or alms on their behalf 'for this is the last time'.³⁷ It was hinted at in letters written in the latter parts of the War in which *sipahis* discussed how and why they had been keeping the *Ramzan* fast in the trenches:

We are keeping a fast since 2nd July, and we have now completed 25 days. May God look kindly on our effort, Amen. I have had much discussion with Abdul Khalik Khan about the keeping of the fast. He said "Your people gain no credit by keeping the fast, since God has dispensed with us all, whereas you continue to fast." I replied "The life which we are now leading is one which God would not inflict even on a dog, as it is a time of unspeakable hardship with death always at hand, and perhaps by the grace of God we may gain heaven by reason of our self-denial in having kept the fast. Amen! If God in his mercy takes us safely home again, it will be time for us to enjoy ourselves

³⁵ 'Pir' Dil Khan, (Pathan – Mahsud), 129 Baluchis, France, to Naik Mir Gul Khan, Secunderabad Brigade Hospital, France, 2 September 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, part 5.

³⁶ Abdul Ghani, (Punjabi Mussalman), Murree Hills, Punjab, India, to Mohamed Ismail Khan, private servant to the Officer of Lahore Indian Stationary Hospital, Marseilles, France, 16 November 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, part 8.

³⁷ Mohamed Ghans, (Dekhani Muslim), Signal Troop, Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade, to Abdul Ghafur, 26 Light Cavalry, Bangalore, India, 3 July 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, part 6.

[...].” Tell me when you write whether our self-denial has obtained us credit with God or not.³⁸

Finally, the Snowball letters intruded upon pieces of prose lamenting the fallen state of the contemporary Muslim, whether in India or in France:

Khan Sahib the fact of the matter is that we have given up God’s law which he gave to us and we have thus been disgraced. The people of Europe have not followed this law in its entirety but have gone some way in that direction and hence the blessings which have been bestowed on them. How true is the saying of Syed Ahmad

“The table of laws which we broke
The people of the west have joined.”

I have now seen this with my own eyes in Europe and understand why God is pleased with the Europeans. There are no doubt shameful things here among individuals, but if there were no blemishes of any kind they would all be angels, and they would have escaped the punishment which has fallen upon Europe. What can I say more, Khan Sahib? If God takes pity on us we may pull through but without his help I see no prospect of our becoming men at all! God has given us many things which Europe does not possess and if we only follow God’s law, Europe will be as nothing beside us.³⁹

Thus the process of transliteration and interlocution of the Snowball letters allowed for parts to be emphasized over others, parts to be re-written, and others to be ignored. But the Snowball letters did not just shape the language and sentiments of the correspondence that followed. As will be shown in the rest of the chapter, they helped to alter existing attitudes towards sex and the legitimacy of the War.

‘Could a Man Be So Perverted to Lose His Religion for the Sake of a Woman?’: Sex, Intercourse and Religion in France

In the winter of 1916 and 1917, the Indian Army in France decided to sanction marriages between Muslim *sipahis* and French women. It was partly to appease the supposedly lascivious tendencies of young Indian men that had already been witnessed in Brighton,⁴⁰ and partly in response to a request from the French

³⁸ Nur Mohamed, (Pathan), 38 Central India Horse, France, to Sultan Mohamed Khan, Turangazai, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 26 July 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, part 6.

³⁹ [Honorary?] Captain Malik Muhammad Mumtaz, (Pathan), Staff, Secunderabad Brigade, France, to Khan Niaz-ud-din Khan Sahib, Jalandhar, Punjab, India, 10 September 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, part 7.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2.

Government that bars on inter-racial marriages be relaxed.⁴¹ French women became acceptable repositories for Indian sexual desire for the Army, but the reaction from Muslim *sipahis* was mixed. Those men who did marry their ‘French sweethearts’, such as Mohamed Khan of the 6th Cavalry, journeyed, in the letters they wrote, from joy to embarrassment and, finally, to regret. The reason for this dramatic change in professed attitudes was due to the Snowball letter and how it came to be received and re-transmitted in 1917 in Cavalry squadrons containing Muslim *sowars*.

Much like the soldiers of any other army at any other time, and as described in Chapter 1, both Muslim and non-Muslim Indian soldiers wrote of their sexual adventures in France in quite graphic and earthy language. Novel European sexual positions were discussed – ‘contrary to the custom in our country they do not put their legs over the shoulders when they go with a man!’⁴² Soldiers exchanged boasts that they had bedded more than one woman at a time or that they were so popular with French women that they themselves were being paid to have intercourse with them:

The state of affairs here is this. Ten annas are equal to one franc. So by paying 6, 7 or 8 francs the [French] women get men to have carnal intercourse with them. So that for little money sexual pleasure is sold, especially by Drabis [men of the Transport Corps] and Sikhs [who] have got a lot of money from this.⁴³

And more than one *sipahi* talked of settling down with a French partner or two:

Just tell me, if I were to bring them out what would be the difficulties in the way? Do you think that I should bring them with me? Would there be any harm? Of course people would laugh, but “can en fait rien” [sic. “ca ne fait rien” or “that doesn’t change anything”]. Your mouth will water when you see them but you won’t be able to see. You will do your best no doubt to peep around the corner! Well write me at length what the drawbacks may be, as compared with the advantages. Both of them are quite willing to come!⁴⁴

There was of course the odd letter, or two, at this time in which the writer asserted that he was appalled or disgusted at the prospect of sleeping with European women,

⁴¹ According to several letters, it was the appeals of French women and the French government that finally caused the Indian Army to relax its stance on inter-racial sex and marriage.

⁴² Balwant Singh, (Sikh), French Post Office 39, France, to Pandit Chet Ram, Kang, Amritsar dist., Punjab, India, 29th October 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 7.

⁴³ V.S. Pranje, (Maratha), I.S.M.D., Lahore Indian General Hospital, France, to Pirdan Singh, Ward Orderly, Depot, 54th Poona Horse, Ambala, Punjab, India, April 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

⁴⁴ Abdul Jaffar Khan, (Hindustani Muslim), Signal Troop, Sialkot Cavalry Brigade, France, to Dafadar Inayat Khan, Rohtak, Punjab, India, 20th August 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 7.

but they were more to appease concerned parents or loved ones in India than any indication of genuine sentiments.⁴⁵

When the first marriages were sanctioned between Muslim Indian sipahis and French women in October 1916, the initial reaction was also largely positive. Men such as Nazir Ullah were motivated enough to leave the army and go in search for work that would offer better remuneration because of the feelings that he had towards his ‘Mademoiselle’:

I have arrived in India. I have given up the idea I had of going to Mesopotamia. I am in search of some means of livelihood which will enable me to satisfy my longing to marry my “Mademoiselle”. At present she remains in Marseilles.⁴⁶

Those that were engaged to marry, such as Inayat Ali Khan, wrote long letters that unequivocally defended the women who had captured their hearts from claims that they were sex-workers or were otherwise ‘morally impure’:

Whatever you have written about Bernadette is entirely false. She is an unmarried girl and surrounded by modesty and moreover, I rely on her, and she has given me her youthful promise that she will never look at another man. Further my actual seal remains imprinted upon her.⁴⁷

Finally, some non-Muslim *sipahis* appeared to have actively considered converting to Islam or Christianity so that they could marry in France, in spite of the unease it provoked among their parents:

Consider, how could I possibly consent to your becoming a Musalman and marrying a Moslem wife, or embracing Christianity and marrying a Christian wife? Have you no shame? Do you think I brought you up so that you might marry a Christian wife? Could a man be so perverted to lose his religion for the sake of a woman? You were one who had a promising future before you in the world, and yet you proceed to wreck your life by being a traitor to your faith! [...] It is the greatest disgrace for a Hindu to become a Mohamedan or a Christian, do not therefore blacken your face

⁴⁵ Jai Singh was one of those who had sworn that he would not indulge in ‘carnal pleasures’ to his family. A letter to a fellow soldier reveals how insincere this promise was: ‘I am off to Paris which has been hitherto “out of bounds” to everyone but officers. Now we (up to Dafadars) can go. Paris is a city of fairyland and God will give us an opportunity of seeing it. I will write [to] you all about it. Whatever happens do not let anyone know about this. I intend to enjoy whatever pleasures there are. Don’t let anyone know that Jai Singh is spending Rs.250 in four days. If father heard of it he would be very angry. I should like to marry in France but I am afraid the family would be ashamed. You can marry very fine girls if you like.’ Jai Singh, (Hindu Jat), 6th Cavalry or 19th Lancers, France, to Sirdar Singh, Lahore, 6th November 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

⁴⁶ Nazir Ullah, (Hindustani Muslim), c/o Rev. N.G. Leather, St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, to Risaldar Satter Shah, 34th Poona Horse, France, 11th April 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁴⁷ Inayat Ali Khan, (Hindustani Muslim), Depot, 6 Cavalry, Sialkot, Punjab, to Abdul Jabbar Khan, 6th Cavalry, France, 2nd February 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 2.

before the whole world. [...] Now I give you my last advice, viz. to put away this unprofitable idea from your mind, and never to allude to it in future. And if you reject my advice, take care how you bring such a woman to my house, for she will be beaten on the head with a shovel a thousand times [...].⁴⁸

Thus both Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers were fairly open to inter-racial sex, sexual experimentation, and even marriage – at least in the first few years of their time in France.

All this changed as the Snowball letter passed through squadrons and regiments containing Muslim *sipahis*. Suddenly and unexpectedly the issue of inter-racial sex leading to inter-racial marriage became an issue of faith. In August 1916, the supposedly lax sexual mores of Muslims began to be seen as a reason for God turning his back on the followers of Islam:

The holy festival of Ed was celebrated here by the Egyptians in a very strange way. [...] The festival lasted from 1st to 3rd August [sic]. [...] During these 3 days we did not meet a single Egyptian who was not the reverse of virtuous and well conducted. Each man encountered was more or less the worse for drink, and having at least one “nightingale” sitting beside him in his carriage indulged in all kinds of lewd and obscure songs. It was all very wrong. [...] The part of the town occupied by Courtesans was worth seeing. On one side a “nightingale” in the possession of an Arab sang loudly. On the other a “nightingale” embraced an Egyptian, while some poor Hindustani looked on and wondered when his turn would come. [...] Great Kazis [Judges] and Muftis [Law-givers] and Devotees, who had rigorously kept the fast for a month, merely awaited their opportunity at the approach of evening to carry away their “nightingales” and despoil them in the dark. It was a strange sight watching the flittings in and out, here and there, of the “rose-faced” ones. Shame! Shame! The very ground cried out for protection, and praying to God said “for a day like this make a new earth for I am no longer able to endure the suggestive gait and the thrust of the painted heels of these creatures.”⁴⁹

In November 1916, coded letters emerged that were sent to individuals who were known to have had relationships with French women and which accused them of

⁴⁸ Naubet Rai (father), (Punjabi Hindu), Rawalpindi, Punjab, India, to Mehta Deoki Nandan, Supply and Transport Agent, Marseilles, France, 18th June 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

⁴⁹ Anwar Shah, (Punjabi Mussalman), Camel Corps, Suez, Egypt, to Aurangzeb Shah, Signal Troop, Lucknow Cavalry Brigade, France, 18th August 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 7.

adopting the garb and customs of European men in an attempt to become ‘Misters’ or ‘Gentlemen’.⁵⁰

Alongside me a Bulbul is lying. I had intended putting her in this envelope and sending her to you. But I realise that you have no desire for an Indian Bulbul. Tell me, have you a Bulbul [in France] or not? You surely must have one “Mister”! Do you understand what I mean?⁵¹

In case these warnings were too oblique, in 1917 these letters metamorphosed into threats of harsh repercussions for any individuals found to be taking ‘cups of tea in hotels’ (visiting brothels) or who were engaged to French women; both were seen as the first steps to an individual abandoning his faith and ‘becoming a Christian’.⁵² The nature of these repercussions became apparent in the 38th Central India Horse where Ajab Khan wrote in October 1917 of the social ostracization that met soldiers who were found to have venereal disease:

If I had not done my best to advise and restrain Wazir Zada Khan his condition would have been disastrous. As soon as he reached Marseilles he contracted venereal disease. The same thing happened when he went to Rouen. In the Sircar’s house if anyone commits murder he gets punished and the matter is finished; but if a man gets venereal disease each and everyone perpetually looks askance at him.⁵³

The result of Muslim soldiers ‘looking askance’ at other *sipahis* who had pursued relationships with French women can be seen in the 6th Cavalry. Several *sowars* in that squadron appeared to have married Frenchwomen, and a significant number of those had had children with their partners. By the end of 1917, however, not one of those *sowars* claimed to be content with married life. Lance Dafadar Mohamed Khan began his first letters after his wedding by defending his decision to marry a Frenchwomen and refuting allegations that he intended to stay on in Europe and convert to Christianity:

⁵⁰ ‘Is this the effect of the climate of France, that it washes all love out of the heart and makes it hard like a stone? Have you become a perfect “gentleman”?’ Turn aside any thought of becoming a “Gentleman”!’ Anon. wife, (Punjabi Mussalman), Ludhiana, Punjab, India, to Jemadar Khan Shirin Khan, No. 1 Base Remount, Rouen, France, 4th April 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁵¹ Ahmed Ali, (Punjabi Mussalman), 5th Cavalry, Risalpur, NWFP, India, to Yakub Khan, Mhow Cavalry Brigade, France, 28th September 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 8.

⁵² ‘I swear to you that although I have been in France for two and a half years, I have not even taken so much as a cup of tea in a “hotel”. I swear also that up till this moment I have committed no evil deed in France and nor am I a Christian. I am your true son, and your advice is plainly written on my heart.’ Mohamed Feroz Khan, Ward Orderly, (Punjabi Mussalman), Ambala Cavalry Field Ambulance, France, to father, Chaudhuri Ghulam Ahmad, Sialkot dist., Punjab, India, 7th December 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

⁵³ Ajab Khan, (Pathan), 38th CIH, France, to Amir-ud-Din, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 14th October 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

You seem to have made up your mind that Mohamed Khan will never return to India. This is an absolute error. Do you suppose that because a man has married he cannot come back? [...] I made the girl a Mohamedan before I married her. Why are you so displeased? If my wife likes to go to India well and good. If not she can stay in France. I will not stay here and nor did I ever promise to do so. [...] Do not imagine that because I married a European I have become a Christian, never!⁵⁴

After he was stripped of his 'stripe' due to the insistence of the men under his command in June 1917, he wrote letters claiming that he had been forced into the wedding through no fault of his own:

I want to tell you of my misfortunes. I was stationed in a village and was in a house where they were very kind to me. There was a young woman in the house and the parents were very pleased with me. She wrote to the King in London and asked permission for me to marry her and the petition came back with the King's signature on it granting leave. But she did all this without my knowledge. The Colonel sent for me and asked whether it was true. I said it was and asked his leave to marry but said I must make the girl a Mohamedan. The Colonel and the men then got very angry and took away my rank of Lance Dafadar and said they would not give me leave to get married. When this came to the girl's ears she sent another petition to the King and the Colonel gave leave and said that directly [after] the marriage was celebrated he should be informed. According to His Majesty's order the wedding came off on the 2nd April. [...] But I swear to God I did not want to marry but after the King's order I should have got into grave trouble if I had refused.⁵⁵

Finally, after being flooded with letters from as far afield as Calcutta that accused him of being an apostate, Sowar Mohamed Khan begged forgiveness for the 'sin' he had committed and cursed his own child for being the daughter of a 'Kafir':

I have wept much since Kariz Fatima's illness. What you have written that Margaret is my daughter now and that I don't care about Kariz Fatima at all, is wholly false. Kariz is part of my heart and Margaret is the daughter of a Kafir from whose hands it is unlawful even to drink water.⁵⁶

Thus while other sipahis continued to enjoy the 'fruits' in the 'gardens of France', many Muslim soldiers began to refrain from doing so because inter-racial and inter-

⁵⁴ Mohamed Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), 6th Cavalry, France, to Ahmed Khan, 12th Infantry, Calcutta, India, 28th May 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁵⁵ Mohamed Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), 6th Cavalry, France, to Dafadar Ghans Mohamed Khan, Rohtak, Punjab, India, 18th June 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 3.

⁵⁶ Mohamed Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), 6th Cavalry, France, to Dafadar Manvah Khan, 5th Cavalry, Risalpur, NWFP, India, 20th August 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

religious sex came to be seen as a breach of their faith. The reason was due, at least in part, to the reception of the Snowball letter.

‘Show the Frenzy of Islam in the Fight, Oh Musalmans!’: Jazirat-al-Arab, 15th Lancers and Mutiny in Mesopotamia

On the 29th October 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered into hostilities against the Allied powers by shelling the Imperial Russian fleet at Odessa.⁵⁷ The timing of the act could not have been worse for the commanders of Indian divisions overseas and the India Office in Whitehall. Fears were raised that Indian Muslim *sipahis* would sympathize with their co-religionists, and instructions were given to the Chief Censor of Indian military correspondence in France to report any such instances that he came across. Remarkably little was found. Muslim *sipahis* began to discuss the Turkish⁵⁸ entry into the war in the early months of 1915, but the Censor discovered only a handful of letters that appeared to display any dismay. Yet, when units containing Muslim *sipahis* were sent from France to fight against the Ottomans in Mesopotamia (Iraq), the 15th Lancers (or Cureton’s Multanis) mutinied as soon as they disembarked. The mutiny, and the wider change in attitudes displayed by Muslim *sipahis* towards Turkey, was due to the Snowball letter.

Whilst in France as part of the 3rd Lahore Division,⁵⁹ and before the advent of the First World War, the 15th Lancers had an exemplary service record. The regiment was formed during the Uprisings of 1857 from six *risallahs* of ‘Multani Pathans’ by a Captain Cureton and continued to be an exclusively Punjabi Muslim cavalry unit recruited from the Multan area. After being sent to France, the regiment fought at the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Aubers, Festubert, Loos, La Bassee, Messines, Givenchy and St. Julien in 1914 and 1915, and did so, by all accounts, with some distinction. More importantly, the men in the regiment appeared to show scant regard for Turkey or its entry into the War:

⁵⁷ The Turkish ships were actually led by German battleships operating under a Turkish flag, but it was intended to be a declaration of war from the Ottoman Empire.

⁵⁸ Few *sipahis* distinguished between ‘Turkey’ and the wider ‘Ottoman Empire’. I will use the two terms interchangeably for that reason.

⁵⁹ Although it was an infantry division, 15th Lancers were attached to it as ‘Divisional Reconnaissance’.

What better occasion can I find than this to prove the loyalty of my family to the British Government? Turkey, it is true, is a Muhammedan power, but what has that got to do with us? Turkey is nothing at all to us.⁶⁰

In other words, the 15th Lancers had little history of dissent even when hunkered within the trenches of the Western Front.

Despite these expressions and signs of loyal service, there was a simmering in attitudes towards the *Sarkar*. By the summer of 1915, soldiers had begun to discuss the progress of Turkey in the War by using language that the Censor only partially deciphered.⁶¹ One means of doing so, identified by the Censor, was to cast belligerents as fictional villagers or as animals and place them within poetic parables. Risaldar Zabida Khan used this method in 1915 to convey his dismay that the Sultan and Khalifa of Turkey had become involved in the conflict, before taking some small comfort at the fact that no confrontation had yet happened with Britain:

I am sorry about Talmad Khan [Turkey] but it is the will of God. God is gracious and you are praying. We will see what happen[s]. He has staked his head and his body but life is the thing most precious to everyone and he is sitting down and biding his time.⁶²

When the forces of the British Empire were cast into battle against the Turks at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, Abbas Ali Khan of the 38th Central India Horse used the same metaphor to express his secret desire that ‘Sultan Khan’ would emerge victorious:

You are continually writing and saying that there is a conflict between Fateh Khan [Britain] and Sultan Khan [Turkey], and you ask me to pray that Fateh Khan may obtain the victory. I however am very concerned about Sultan Khan because he is an honest person whereas Fateh Khan is a great rascal, and dishonest. I pray for Sultan Khan, that he may obtain his rights.⁶³

⁶⁰ X.Y. [name censored], a Mohammedan Native Officer in France, to brother in India, 1914; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁶¹ The earliest instance was from February 1915, but it was from a soldier in India rather than France. ‘Remember this one thing, that the Sultan Badshah is one of us. We hear that the German Badshah has become a Mussulman. You are a wise man, understand and think over this. Then draw your own conclusion. Islam is a good thing. You are out of our reach nor can we help you. But we pray much.’ Pathan Sepoy, 55th Rifles, Kohat, NWFP, India, to a friend, 58th Rifles, France, 15th February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁶² Risaldar Zabida Khan, (Pathan), 1st Lancers, attached 19th Lancers, France, to Risaldar Major Munshi Akram Khan, 1st Lancers, Risalpur, India, 17th April 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 3.

⁶³ Abbas Ali Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), 38 CIH, France, to Karam Ali Khan, Abdullapur, Sultanpur PO, Mirpur dist., Kashmir State, 8th January 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 1.

And when in March 1917 the British captured Baghdad and routed the Turkish army, Sowar Gul Mohamed Khan used another parable to express his state of mind;

You asked me how the groves of the pomegranates and medlars [Arabia] are getting on. My reply is that the nightingales have looted the fruits of both groves and when they were plundered you were not there. It is a great pity.⁶⁴

Amidst these letters that conveyed specific information about the progress of Turkey in the War were others that sought to link the decline of the Ottoman Empire with the perceived decline of Islam. Each took the form of dream sequences or poems that mirrored elements of the Snowball letter, and each came back time and time again to the threats facing the *Jazirat-al-Arab* – the ‘island of the Arabs’ and the cradle of Islam. In one letter, the author of which is uncertain, the dream took the form of a *Hajji* entering a Hindu temple for ‘a sweet offering’, but when ‘he had received [it] once, he drew his hand back and put forward the other. A dog carried off the sweetmeats which were in his hand and from the other the vessel was turned aside’.⁶⁵ In another, Sowar Ajab Gul wrote of a Kafkaesque vision he had had of his father being killed by his brother after he had taken the form of a harmless insect:

I have had a dream and must tell you about [it]. My father appeared in the shape of a dried up insect and brother Hazara Gul drove him away and he fell on the ground. My mother said “you tyrant that was your father and you have killed him”. ...I then prayed that God would give me a glimpse of my father and I went to sleep again and had another dream and saw my father washing his teeth seated on a charpoy. I then woke up and prayed to God that if he were dead I might see him as he was and then fell asleep and saw my father in his grave in our own house. Then his hands and feet appeared and he came out of his tomb. I was delighted and said “Father are you all right?”. He replied, “No I am not”. Then I saw a Mullah appear and my father and he began to read the Koran together. Then I put my father back in his tomb and directly afterwards the grave was illuminated and I woke up. I am disturbed in mind. What does it all mean?⁶⁶

Finally constant inferences were made to the plight of Muslims across the world in poetic verse;⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Sowar Gul Mohamed Khan, (Pathan), Baghdad, Mesopotamia, to Mohamed Nur Khan, 38th CIH, France, 18th October 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

⁶⁵ ‘Muhamedan of Punjab’ serving in France to his brother in India, 6th February 1915; *CIM 1914-1915*, Part 1.

⁶⁶ Sowar Ajab Gul, (Pathan), 38th CIH, France, to Bhai Ahmed Pul, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 22nd December 1916; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 1.

⁶⁷ There was another letter written by the same author which was not quite as ambiguous. Although it began with a standard pledge of loyalty towards the King-Emperor – ‘It is necessary to point out also that our religion does not

The ship of our country is in distress far from home
 The day of resurrection has commenced behind the curtain of tyranny.
 Confidants and sympathizers of your country
 The wind that reaches you is laden with grief.
 It says to you "We are far from home – keep us in remembrance."
 Those who are dying for their country, this is their cry,
 "Our blood proclaims our fidelity."
 The civilized world acknowledges their worth,
 If their necks be bent at all it is a passing stage.
 Alas, that in our hearts the flame of love has not been kindled!
 The caravan of our country is grieving in a foreign land,
 Tyrants are not shamed by their tyranny,
 They ravage the plot, which one time bloomed with flowers.
 Where formerly sweet melody reigned supreme
 Is now heard the clinking of handcuffs.
 To them, as travellers, all roads have been closed,
 Fetters are bound on the innocent ones.
 If in your heart there is not yet the spirit of modesty,
 Read the funeral service of the honour of your race and faith.
 [...]

Consider the love of Islam,
 It gave to its deadly enemy the cup of death.
 Now is the opportunity of your brother's honour!
 The duty is a real one, not the price of generosity.
 If now the heart of Islam turns to water,
 A thousand pagan jeers will fall on Mohammedanism.
 Show the frenzy of Islam in the fight, Oh Musalmans!
 Otherwise the honour of your race will depart, Oh guardians of that honour!
 Remember the race from which you sprang, show the might of your country!
 Your country is oppressed with troubles, [so] recollect the obligations of your duty.
 The Prophet has bequeathed to you his humanity and generosity

permit us to perform any bad habits. Further our religion teaches us to be in accord with our King.' – the verses within the letter conveyed a different message:

"In the garden of this world what grievances can be urged against the hunter
 When the flowers themselves place thorns on my resting place?"

This is my condition. What more can I say? The evils of this world have entered into my soul. I ask why this should be and tell you the simple truth:-

"Those on whom I relied have turned their face away from me.
 What grievances can I urge against an enemy when friendship is such!
 None whatever! It is the fashion of the times!"

Hamidullah Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), Contractor, Inderkot, Meerut City, UP, India, to Kot Dafadar Mohamed Wazir Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 5th May 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 5.

You are the living monuments of the sense of honour of the Arabs.⁶⁸

Thus the impact of Turkey's entry into the First World War can be measured through *sipahis'* correspondence, but not in the manner that the Censor thought. There was little direct reference to the Ottoman Empire or its military defeats. But the 'dogs' that troubled pious Muslims in the dreams that soldiers relayed, the 'fathers' that were accidentally killed by fellow soldiers, and the 'tyranny' that was troubling 'our country' are constant reminders of the sentiments engendered within many Muslim *sipahis* at the prospect of fighting their co-religionists.

In the 15th Lancers, these feelings reached their acme. The 3rd Indian Division, of which the 15th Lancers were part, was ordered to Mesopotamia in December 1915 after the first British campaign against Turkish forces in Arabia ended in failure. 'Maulvi' Ghulam Sarvar, a trooper within the 15th Lancers, wrote of what happened during their sea voyage and as soon as their ship landed in Basra in January 1916. Every man within the regiment took an oath with 'the Koran in his hand'⁶⁹ to make 'some representation' as they disembarked because Basra and Arabia were 'held most sacred by Mussalmans.'⁷⁰ But the Indian officers betrayed their oaths and co-religionists by informing their British superiors:

The account of my misfortunes is a long one and I now proceed to relate it. We left France and voyaged for one month to Basrah. [sic.] As soon as we arrived at Basrah the Sirdars held a meeting, and after a discussion came to the conclusion that some representation should be made because the place is held most sacred by Mussalmans. Each one took the Koran in his hand. But a few of the Sirdars commenced to act treacherously in spite of having taken up the Koran, and reported the most trifling matter to the Colonel Sahib from time to time, notwithstanding the fact that they themselves were the very ones who started the plea that it was not proper for us to fight in this area of the war. [...]The Colonel Sahib reported the matter to the General Sahib, and immediately a battery of artillery and 3 or 4 British Regiments surrounded our camp. None of our men realised what was being done, and when they were told to parade without arms they forthwith did so. [...] But] the Sirdars sitting in their tents had written out nominal rolls of the men who had refused service. The British troops collected our arms, and looted our private property, taking the money of

⁶⁸ Hamidullah Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), Contractor, Inderkot, Meerut City, UP, India, to Kot Dafadar Mohamed Wazir Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 18 May 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 5.

⁶⁹ Another account records that the Korans were placed 'upon the heads' of the *sipahis* taking the oath, but that, while possibly true, is written by a soldier from another regiment reporting on hearsay.

⁷⁰ Maulvi Ghulam Sarvar, (Punjabi Mussalman), 15th Lancers, attached 27 Lancers, Remount Depot, Sagar, UP, India, to Talib Hussain Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 26 September 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

some, the shaving implements and watches of others. In the evening we were placed on board ship again, and for 3 days a Court Martial was held.⁷¹

During the Courts Martial, Ghulam was one of 429 who were punished for their role in planning to mutiny. Three 'Kot-Dafadars' were sentenced to 'penal servitude for life', the other NCOs were to be transported 'for 15 years', the 'senior privates' received '7 years transportation', and the eighty draftees to the regiment were dispatched to Bombay for three years imprisonment:⁷²

Our ship then left for sea and reached Bombay after a voyage of 5 or 6 days. There the recruits were disembarked, and our ship continued the voyage to the Andamans. When we arrived there, we were placed on a separate island, [and] a Colonel of the 4th British Infantry Regiment and 2 doctors were sent with us. Our uniforms were collected and sold for auction and the proceeds sent to our homes, and we were given convicts' dress. Four Sirdars had been sent with us to the Andamans, three of whom were from our district, and they returned as soon as we had landed. [...] The work we did was this. We built houses. We made a road, we felled trees and we made bridges of stones and the officials who came to inspect our work were astonished at what we had done, and left excellent written reports about us. [...] The Commissioner of the Andamans wrote to the Viceroy on our behalf saying "These men are entirely blameless." The doctor sahib also used much influence on our behalf, and after 12 or 14 months the Viceroy, having pity on our lot, set us free.⁷³

Perhaps because of the experiences that he had been through, Ghulam styled himself as a 'Maulvi' even while offering to serve as a soldier again. Yet there was no contrition on his part, for as he and other *sipahis* in the 15th Lancers stated: 'We were blameless.'⁷⁴

Muslim soldiers in France and India seemed to agree. Within months of the mutiny dozens of letters were exchanged recounting the 'story' of the 15th Lancers and expressing their outrage over the punishments they had received. On the 24th March 1916, Ashrafali Khan, a regimental instructor in the 6th Cavalry in India, wrote of how he had overheard the former Colonel of the 15th Lancers talk to 'his Sahib' and proceeded to give an exhaustive account of all that he had learnt before concluding

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Ashrafali Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), 6th Cavalry, Sialkot, Punjab, India, to Dafadar Fateh Mohamed Khan, Signalling Instructor, 6th Cavalry, France, 24th March 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 4.

⁷³ Ghulam Sarvar to Talib Hussain Khan, 26th September 1917.

⁷⁴ Safdar Ali Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), 15th Lancers, attached 27th Lancers, Sagar, UP, India, to Signaller Jalib Hussain Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 17th July 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 4.

that ‘the deeds of the regiment’ were now ‘written in letters of gold’.⁷⁵ Fateh Khan some months later wrote in awe of how the men had ‘declined to take up arms against their brother Musalmans’ and asserted that this in no way constituted a crime:

[...] it has been reported in the newspapers that the new Viceroy [Viscount Chelmsford] has ordered that these men should be sent to some other theatre of war, since they did not in reality decline to fight for the Sircar, and should not be called upon to fight against the Turks against their wish. I do not know why action has not been taken on this order. It is very sad that fate should have dealt thus [and so] cruelly with the regiment in the end, after they have done such good service and gained so much renown elsewhere.⁷⁶

For others, their letters took the form of prayers pleading for the release of those *sipahis* who had been to the penal camps of the Andaman Islands:

Please God, those men who were sent across the Kala Pani will soon be liberated. Do you also pray Government to deliver them from the misfortune into which they have fallen? I am troubled only at the long separation from you, and because of the calamity which has befallen those of my beloved ones who have been sent to the Kala Pani.⁷⁷

The soldiers involved began to petition for their release,⁷⁸ and, in at least one district in Punjab, *lambadars* from Niazi villages⁷⁹ refused to allow access to recruiters from the 15th Lancers.⁸⁰ It is this enduring legacy of the mutiny in January 1916 that explains

⁷⁵ Ashrafali Khan, (Hindustani Mussalman), 6th Cavalry, Sialkot, Punjab, India, to Dafadar Fateh Mohamed Khan, Signalling Instructor, 6th Cavalry, France, 24th March 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 4.

⁷⁶ Fateh Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), Lyallpur, Punjab, India, to Fateh Ahmed, Supply and Transport No.5 Base Supply Depot, France, 30th June 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 6.

⁷⁷ Lance Dafadar Mahmud Khan, (Punjabi Mussalman), Banadar Abbas, Persia, to Dafadar Mohamed Khan, 18th Lancers, France, 11th May 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 5.

⁷⁸ ‘I asked concerning Haq Ghulam because I had sent 3 or 4 petitions about the 15th Lancers and had received no reply. I knew all about the matter from the first, but I did not wish to distress you with it. I hear now that they will all be released, please God, before I return. If not, then, as soon as I return to India, I will again agitate about their release. Nothing can be done from here at the present time, but do not be anxious everything possible is being done on their behalf. A certain man here has received a letter in which it is stated that Sultan Hussein of Hangu and his fellows have been released as the result of an appeal made on their behalf by Risaldar Sahib Dost Mohamed Khan of the 37th Lancers. Don’t be anxious God will certainly be merciful. It is not as though only one man was involved. There are many men involved and some of them are important personages.’ Lance Dafadar Sabaz Ali Khan, (Pathan), Signal Troop, Lucknow Cavalry Brigade, France, to Alim Hussein, Ustarzai, Kohat, NWFP, India, 3rd October 1916; *CIM 1915-1916*, Part 8.

⁷⁹ Niazi being one of the largest Muslim castes in Mianwali district.

⁸⁰ ‘I am in the Remount Depot here and you must have heard how our regiment was imprisoned and I was among the prisoners. Now Government has released us and broken up our regiments into parts. Some of us have been sent to Hissar, Sagar and Sihore and the men who were not imprisoned were made into a separate wing and another wing has been made of Sikhs and Jats. There is great excitement there about recruiting. The Deputy Commissioner of Mianwali had a meeting to which all the lumberdars of the district came. The Deputy Commissioner told them to supply recruits and the lumberdars of the Nayazi refused. The Deputy Commissioner then dismissed 3 of them, the lumberdars of Datke, Ukri, and Shahbag Khel. 107 recruits were collected at the meeting.’ Sowar Kunda Buksh Khan, (Pathan), 15th Lancers, Sihore, UP, India, to Ghulam Hasan Khan, 36th Jacob’s Horse, France, 14th September 1917; *CIM 1917-1918*, Part 5.

the decision taken at the end of the First World War to disband the regiment. Ordinary Muslim *sipahis* had demonstrated the depth of their feelings towards their 'brother Musalmans' and presaged the programme of the nascent nationalist movement in India.

Conclusion: (Re-)Writing a Letter and (Re-)Appraising Islam

The First World War was not the last time Sheikh Ahmad had a dream or Snowballs were thrown. An email was sent in January 2009 bearing a similar message:

GIVE FIVE MINUTES OF TIME TO ATLEST [sic.] READ IT TO THE END
INSHAALLAH

Subject: DONT DELETE! IF YOUR [sic.] A MUSLIM! PLEASE READ THIS!

This is true. From Madina Sheikh Ahmed has sent this news. On a Friday Sheikh Ahmed fell asleep reading the Quraan. Then he dreamt the Prophet Muhammed (saw) standing in front of him and saying that in one week seven thousand people died but not even one was a true Muslim. None did what ALLAH wanted. He also said now is a bad time. These days Wives dont [sic.] look after their Husbands, Girls go round without being covered they do not respect parents or others, Rich do not look after the poor, they do not give gifts or money or do not give fulfil zakaat.he also said to Sheikh Ahmed make people understand to give zakaat,To do prayer and to keep fast [sic.]. The day of judgement is near. When There is a single star in the sky, straight away the path of forgiveness will close. The writing in The Quraan will disappear (vanish). The Sun will lower itself with Earth. The Prophet said whoever reads this news to someone else,

'I WILL ON THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT MAKE HIM A PLACE IN PARADISE, AND IF SOMEONE DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS NEWS TO BE TRUE THEY WILL BE BANISHED FROM PARADISE '

If a poor person gives out this news to other people his/her good wish will come true. Sheikh Ahmed said if this is not true then my death will be off a Non-Muslim. The Prophet said

'KEEP FAST, DO PRAYERS, GIVE ZAKAAT AND GIVE KINDNESS TO THE POOR'

Whoever Forwards this will get his/her reward in three days. One Person forward[ed] it to 40 people he had 8,000 thousand, take prophet in his Business. [sic.] One Person did not believe this news and his son died. One kept Saying he will forward it today, tomorrow but never forward[ed] this News he died as well.

PLEASE DO NOT THINK THIS IS NOT TRUE.

PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE!⁸¹

The email was subsequently forwarded (at least) nineteen times. Pictures displaying the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina were added, and then, just as easily, omitted. Parts of the message were written in bold or red type or inflated to such a size that the recipient has to scroll down with his or her mouse in order to read his or her sentence. And preambles were added drawing attention to particular parts, or just songs from Bollywood movies: '*Mohabbat To Ik Javeda Zindagi He Mohabbat Jisse Bakhsh De Zindgaani Nahin Maut Par Khatam Uski Kahaani*'.⁸² Sheikh Ahmad's dream was repackaged, transmitted through a new medium and then reworked as it was cut, pasted and forwarded on.

It was ever thus. During the First World War the Snowball letter was read, re-written and passed on. The frequency with which it was transcribed and sent changed, and it gained prominence as a rejoinder to Ahmadi propaganda. But each time it was transcribed it became different to what it had been before. Its language slipped into the everyday prose of soldiers' letters. It was internalized as a call for soldiers to purify their own bodies and oppose inter-racial sexual relationships. And it was used to urge others to try and preserve the wider body of Islam across the world.

In other words, the Snowball letter appropriated spaces created by official attempts to inculcate loyalty among Muslim *sipahis*, and it was itself constantly appropriated by individual soldiers. It linked impassioned arguments against Ahmadi missionaries with mutiny (or attempted mutiny) in Basra, but not directly. The soldiers of the 15th Lancers did not retrospectively justify their actions by citing Sheikh Ahmad's dream. Soldiers had begun to receive their own dreams and recite their own prophetic verse.

⁸¹ With thanks to Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi for forwarding the email to me.

⁸² From the song 'Javeda Zindagi' and the (Bollywood) film 'Anwar'.

CHAPTER 4

MUTINY, FABRICATING COURT TESTIMONY AND HIDING IN THE LATRINE: THE 5TH LIGHT INFANTRY IN SINGAPORE

In 1915 in the early summer heat of colonial Singapore, a mutiny occurred. For several days in February the Muslim Rajput soldiers¹ of the 5th Light Infantry killed their officers and other Europeans in positions of authority,² took control of large swathes of the city, and co-opted other Indian *sipahis* stationed nearby into their revolt. The reaction of the colonial government was just as dramatic. 47 *sipahis* and NCOs were executed³ and 64 were given the sentence of ‘transportation for life’ (often no better than a death sentence).⁴ In spite of the severity of the revolt and the reaction to it, however, the only published account has no space for the mutineers as the subjects of the revolt. R.W.E. Harper and H. Miller’s ‘Singapore Mutiny’ begins with an exhaustive ‘Dramatis Personae’ of eighty names, mentioning everyone from the Governor of the Straits Settlement to Mrs Marjorie Binnie and her aunt. But only one Indian *sipahi* is included, and even he only makes the list with the soothing parenthesis next to his name: ‘killed by defence forces’.⁵

Despite what Harper and Miller may have concluded there was more than one soldier who was an actor in the mutiny and more than one who survived. Before and during the courts martial of the men of the 5th Light Infantry, a parallel Court of Inquiry was established in Singapore in order to collect ‘evidence for presentation to Summary General Court Martial for the trial of mutineers and to ‘report upon the causes (direct and indirect) of the Mutiny’.⁶ Few *sipahis*, however, gave evidence in the manner that their *sahibs* wished they would after they were herded into the dock. Lance Naik Feroze Khan answered the summons by maintaining that he had been

¹ The right wing of the 5th Light Infantry was officially described as being filled with Ranghars, a Muslim Rajput ‘clan’ found primarily in Punjab. As with a lot of regiments that recruited Muslims, however, many of the soldiers were not Ranghars and some in their testimony even admitted to being Jats or Lohias (blacksmiths). I will use the phrase Muslim Rajput rather than Ranghar when referring to the men of the right half of the 5th Light. The left half of the battalion was staffed by Hindustani Pathans, a term that is even more troubling than that of Ranghar. So I will avoid the term altogether except in those (rare) cases that soldiers expressly stated they were Pathan.

² 12 British Officers and 14 European civilians were killed.

³ A further 2 Indian Officers were also executed. All of the men were shot, except for one *sipahi* who was hung. It is possible that this was an extra-judicial punishment that the Court of Inquiry was keen to gloss over, since all military executions at the time ought to have used firing squads as a matter of law.

⁴ *Report in Connection with the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore (1915)*, [hereafter *Singapore Mutiny Report* or *SMR*] Military Department Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/MIL/17/19/48. Also reproduced in T.R. Sareen (ed.), *Secret Documents on Singapore Mutiny, Volumes 1 and 2*, (New Delhi; Mouton Publishing, 1995).

⁵ R.W.E. Harper and H. Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), ‘Dramatis Personae’, p.xi-xiii.

⁶ ‘Forwarding Letter by Brigadier-General F.A. Hoghton, President of the Court of Inquiry, to Chief of the General Staff, Army Headquarters, India, 20th May 1915’; *SMR*.

buying a tin of milk when the mutiny had occurred and then, when confronted with evidence to the contrary, began to justify his role in the revolt.⁷ Fazal Azim surprised the Court by voluntarily appearing before it and promising to identify ‘all the thieves’.⁸ Sazawar Khan was able to convince the Court that he had been a target of the mutineers and should be treated as a victim and not as one of the accused.⁹ And Dost Mohamed effectively asserted that he knew nothing of the mutineers because he had been an officer orderly and was not known or trusted by most of the men of his company.¹⁰ Each of the roles that the four *sipahis* occupied in the courtroom – of the unrepentant mutineer, the turncoat, the victim and the outsider – were all, to varying degrees, constructs. The slippages in their own testimony and that of their peers reveal that all four men were involved in taking up arms against their officers. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the purpose behind the testimony which these *sipahis* gave was to defend their friends, relatives and messmates from prosecution and to implicate the dead, the unpopular and those of a different caste.

This chapter will try to rehabilitate the soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry who have either been ignored or scantily treated by historians. Four soldiers – Feroze Khan, Fazal Azim, Sazawar Khan, and Dost Mohamed – will be the subjects of this work, and what will be analyzed in particular is how they re-appropriated the physical and linguistic space of the colonial courtroom. The suggestion will also be made that the testimonies given by these *sipahis* were dependent upon a further re-appropriation of ethnic, geographic and operational military identities. In so doing, there is no intention to imply that these depositions are of greater worth than the dozens of others that are not analyzed in detail. The reason for focusing upon four rather than all of the narratives that soldiers gave in 1915 is, to echo Certeau, to ‘refer to a reality which once had a living unity, and which *no longer is*’¹¹ instead of distilling that unity in a fragmented analysis. Before embarking on a study of the four soldiers’ testimony, however, I will begin with a summary of what the members of the Court of Inquiry

⁷ Testimony of No.2637, Lance Naik Feroze, ‘C’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section 3A: Evidence on Events at Alexandria.

⁸ Testimony of No.2523, Lance Naik Fazal Azim, ‘D’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*.

⁹ Testimony of No.1878, Naik Sazawar Khan, ‘C’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*; Section 3: Evidence on Events at Alexandria.

¹⁰ Testimony of No.3179, Sipahi Dost Mohamed, ‘B’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*; Section 3A: Evidence on Events at Alexandria.

¹¹ Michel de Certeau, ‘History is Never Sure’, *The Possession at Loudon*; translated by Michael B. Smith, (Chicago; Chicago University Press, 2000), p.8.

wished to hear from the *sipahis* who gave evidence and how their own priorities conditioned that which Indian soldiers relayed to them.

‘L’Audace Toujours L’Audace’: the Objectives of the Court of Inquiry

Brigadier-General Frederick Aubrey Hoghton, the man who came to preside over the Court of Inquiry, and who later wrote a report summarising his findings, concluded that the mutiny by the men of the 5th Light Infantry could have been prevented were it not for the fact that;

The time honoured maxim of *L’audace toujours L’audace* when dealing with Orientals was apparently lost sight of. We believe that resolute action by a formed body of Europeans would [...] have exercised a marked effect upon the course of the mutiny.¹²

This statement by Hoghton was partly the product of a specific Singaporean colonialist mentality that ‘raised more racial barriers’ than elsewhere in the British Empire,¹³ but it also reflected the type of evidence that Hoghton and his peers wished to gather. This is because the proceedings of the Court came to highlight the failure of officers, both British and Indian, to exert a proper influence over the men under their command. Furthermore, the view was expressed that the mutiny was caused by a handful of malcontents who preyed upon ‘the gullibility and credulity’ of the ordinary Indian *sipahi*,¹⁴ and whose influence could, therefore, have been diluted given a strong officerial hand. It is this preoccupation of the Court of Inquiry to find poor officers and insidious ringleaders, and the ways it may have affected the evidence *sipahis* gave, that will be the initial focus of this study.

The Court of Inquiry began by seeking to find the single ‘opening event’ of the mutiny, and this was quickly located in a parade address given by Brigadier-General Dudley Ridout, the General Officer Commanding, Singapore, to the assembled men of the 5th Light Infantry at Alexandra Barracks on 15th February 1915. The reason was that the content of the speech, the manner in which it was given and even the time it was delivered was disputed by the officers that were called upon to give

¹² *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

¹³ That was the experience of Laxmi Sahgal, née Swaminathan, and many others that later came to join the INA. Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India’s Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*, (Ann Arbor; Michigan University Press, 1993), p. 47.

¹⁴ *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

evidence. For Ridout, the speech was a simple message to congratulate the *sipahis* for their smart attire and to inform them that they would soon depart Singapore for Hong Kong.¹⁵ Statements by junior officers of the 5th Light Infantry, in contrast, asserted that the speech was so lengthy that it necessitated a translation into Hindustani by the commanding officer of the battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Martin, whose own lack of preparation and faltering grasp of the language resulted in a garbled address.¹⁶ Finally, Subedar-Major Khan Mohamed Khan, when asked about this, stated matter-of-factly that neither he nor his fellow VCOs had any idea of what had been said and that after the parade had been dismissed:

I heard the men saying “We are going on service [to Europe],” but I said, “As we are going to Hong Kong, nothing is yet certain about service.” They all said, “No, we are going on service; the general has said it.” I said, “No, you don’t understand.” After breakfast I went to the office and my double company writer (Allah Baksh) said, “Is the regiment going on service?” I said “No, why?” He said, “Well, all the regiment says we are going on service.”¹⁷

The Court’s conclusion was that the lack of ‘dash’ and daring among officers cultivated a detrimental ‘impression in the minds of some of the men’¹⁸ and a reduction in the deference due a British *Sahib*.

According to Hoghton, the creation of a detrimental ‘impression’ in the minds of *sipahis* in the 5th Light continued apace after ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies attacked and looted the regimental armoury at, or shortly after, 2 pm on 15th February. When Lieutenant-Colonel Martin had been awoken from his mid-afternoon nap with the news that men of the right wing of the battalion had ‘run amok’, he promptly barred the doors and windows of his bungalow and returned to his study deciding (wisely) that discretion was the better part of valour.¹⁹ The more junior British officers of the battalion – Major Cotton, Captain Bell and Captain Boyce – did attempt to rush to their Double Companies so that they could be mobilized to quell any disorder, but, as Hoghton recounts, they were accosted by the Indian officers and prevented from continuing further ‘on the grounds that their lives would be endangered’ and that they

¹⁵ ‘Report from Brigadier-General Dudley Ridout, General Officer Commanding, Singapore, with remarks on proceedings of the Court of Inquiry’; *SMR*.

¹⁶ *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

¹⁷ Testimony of Subedar-Major Khan Mohamed Khan, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section VII: Evidence of the Indian Officers.

¹⁸ *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

¹⁹ Martin explained his actions away by stating, ‘I decided to remain at the house as I thought if there were any loyal men they would come [to me]’. The court remained unconvinced. Testimony of Lieutenant-Colonel E.V. Martin, Commanding Officer, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section VIII: Evidence of the British Officers.

would be ‘helpless to restrain the men’.²⁰ Those VCOs and senior NCOs that were in the ‘sepoys’ lines’ when the first shots were fired were either accused of assisting the mutineers or, in the case of Colour Havildar Jamaluddin, found that they had pressing business to attend to on the lavatory.²¹ As a consequence, over half of the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry were devoted solely to collecting the testimony of officers and analyzing their perceived failures.

The other priority of the President and Members of the Court was to identify the supposed ringleaders of the mutiny. For, as the Court of Inquiry articulated, the inadequate performance of the ‘leaders’ of the ‘[military] community’ allowed certain ‘native’ soldiers to gain undue prominence among the rank and file and create ‘states of unrest’ within the regiment.²² Of the *sipahis* in question, it was certain VCOs that were accused of being particularly troublesome, with the Muslim Rajput Indian officers of the right wing of the battalion accused of bickering endlessly with those that were not of the same caste or religion:

We have indisputable evidence of the existence of serious dissension amongst the Mussulman Rajput Indian Officers of the right wing. We know that for reasons going back for some years, of which we can obtain no clear definition, there had been disagreements between the Subedar-Major Khan Mohamed Khan and Subedar Wahid Ali on the one hand, and Subedar Dunde Khan, Jemadar Chiste Khan and Abdul Ali on the other. As is the invariable custom amongst Indians, each of the separable cliques had its own particular followers among the rank and file. [...] We are told how the fact of these officers being at variance frequently militated against the maintenance of discipline, and how the fact of one side favouring any particular policy or measure in the regiment was at once the signal for its rejection by the others.²³

Subedar Dunde Khan and Jemadar Chiste Khan in particular came to be apportioned much of the blame for the mutiny, and the two VCOs were shot in a botched public execution even before the Court of Inquiry had been convened.²⁴ The

²⁰ *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

²¹ Testimony of No.1811, ½ Colour Havildar Jamaluddin Khan, ‘F’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*, Section 3: Evidence on Events at Alexandra Barracks.

²² *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Subedar Dunde Khan and Jemadar Chiste Khan were shot on 21st February 1915. The firing party was commanded by a Lieutenant Malcolm Bond Shelley, who was an officer in the Malay States Volunteers – a hastily drawn up and primarily European militia. During the account he gives of the execution he mentions that he was unsure of what was required of a firing party, that two of the ten men on the firing party were unable to load their clips into their rifles, and when they did fire many of them missed their targets. Malcolm Bond Shelley, ‘Brief Account of the Happenings in Singapore’, (1927); Sareen (ed.), *Secret Documents*.

Court endeavoured to find *post facto* justifications for the executions that ranged from the suspicious manner in which they smoked cigarettes to claiming the two Indian Officers were present at certain events during the mutiny even when they were not so.²⁵ A significant portion of the Court's efforts, therefore, was spent proving that supposed malcontents among the 5th Light Infantry did indeed have a malefic influence.

The search for ringleaders also encompassed Indian civilians that had contact with *sipahis* and 'Germans'²⁶ that had been interned in Singapore shortly after the commencement of hostilities in the First World War. Hoghton admitted that he had 'no direct proof' that any Indian residents of Singapore had 'promoted fanatical unrest and general disaffection' among Indian *sipahis* of the 5th Light Infantry,²⁷ but, nevertheless, two men, Kasim Ismail Mansur and Pir Nur Alam Shah, were arrested and hung. The reason for this was the public reporting of *Ghadar* activity in India, and the clear desire by Hoghton, Ridout and others to gain some credit by linking what had occurred in Singapore with a pan-national conspiracy.²⁸ Further accounts of the mutiny in the 1930s by British personnel involved in the Court of Inquiry accused Mansur and Shah of being 'Bolshevist subversive intriguers',²⁹ which was even more unlikely given that the Bolsheviks were barely a coherent party in Czarist Russia at the time. This does, however, indicate how quickly the narrative of 1915 changed to accord with later colonialist bugbears. The Court of Inquiry also tried to find and accuse German agitators. This was largely due to the fact that men from the 5th Light Infantry had acted as guards for a camp at Pasir Panjang in Singapore at which German sailors,³⁰ and any civilians in the city that seemed as if they could be German, were imprisoned. Furthermore, during the mutiny some Muslim Rajput soldiers did

²⁵ 'We have evidence of his [Jemadar Chiste Khan] at Pulo Brani in a strain deprecatory of British prestige, and calculated to foster ideas of German ascendancy. We are also told of his enlarging upon the benefits eventually to be derived from supporting the German cause against the British. From another quarter we hear of meetings of non-commissioned officers and others of the right wing Companies under Jemadar Chiste Khan at which soldiers would smoke and at which subjects of a doubtful nature appear to have been discussed [...].'

And: 'What is more likely than these disaffected officers, having played on the feelings of Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali, now probably thoroughly discontented and ready to give trouble, utilized him as the instrument to bring about the outbreak that ensued?' *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

²⁶ Or rather people that were accused of being German.

²⁷ *SMR*; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

²⁸ For instance Ridout wrote to the C-in-C, India, in an addendum to the report submitted by the Court of Inquiry, that he had had the foresight to supervise an active spy network among the *sipahis* in Singapore in the anticipation that subversive activities may be undertaken among the troops. He didn't make so much of the fact that his agent had been prohibited from working among the 5th Light Infantry. Ridout Report; *SMR*.

²⁹ R.C.D. Bradley, British Advisor, Johore State, Malaya, 'An Eye-witness account of the Mutiny', (1933); Sareen (ed.), *Secret Documents*.

³⁰ The German sailors were from the SMS Emden, a light cruiser that was sunk at the Cocos Islands on 9 November 1914 by HMAS Sydney.

break open the gate of the camp and were seen throwing rifles and ammunition at the men and women who were interned there in the expectation that they would join them. The fact that they never did and many assisted their British captors in the days after the mutiny only afforded them a limited amount of goodwill,³¹ as, along with queries of suspected *Ghadar* agents and seditious VCOs, the Court of Inquiry spent an inordinate amount of time questioning *sipahis* about the role German prisoners played during the mutiny.

The result of the Court of Inquiry having preconceived ideas as to what caused the mutiny in Singapore is evident by merely glancing at the transcribed narratives of the *sipahis* who gave evidence. Amidst long passages in which *sipahis* described their caste, when they had enlisted and their experiences in the 5th Light Infantry, the voice of ‘The President’ intruded to force the witnesses to adhere to his own priorities. Men giving evidence would be interrupted with sudden questions that indicated the impatience of the governing voice: ‘But what is the cause of this outbreak?’³²; ‘Who were the blackguards in the regiment?’³³; ‘Have you ever been to a mosque outside the lines?’³⁴ Yet the intrusion of the President into the testimony of soldiers both restricted and enhanced the agency of *sipahis* speaking before the Court, because, by offering the Court of Inquiry the half-truths that they wished to hear, the soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry could conceal other, more substantial information. This will be demonstrated below with detailed analyses of the testimony given by Feroze Khan, Fazal Azim, Sazawar Khan and Dost Mohamed.

Silences, Ciphers and Buying Tins of Milk: the Testimony of Feroze Khan

In the public testimony given by Vietnam War Veterans in February 1971 – in what was known as the Winter Soldier Investigation – one of the GIs, when asked about ‘shamming’ in the military and his whole experience in the ‘Nam’, simply replied ‘Man I can’t talk, I can’t tell you people the instances or whatever you want to

³¹ Some German prisoners were praised for their ‘correct behaviour’ in assisting the officers and soldiers of the guard posted at the internment camp and at a hospital nearby in combating the mutineers.

SMR; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

³² Testimony of No.1795, Havildar Major Ghafur Khan, ‘E’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section 3: Evidence on Events at Alexandra.

³³ Testimony of Colour Havildar Mahboob, ‘C’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section 3: Evidence on Events at Alexandra.

³⁴ Testimony of No.2612, Lance Naik Maksud, ‘D’ Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section 3: Evidence on Events at Alexandra.

hear'.³⁵ The words of the American soldier could just as easily have come from the mouth of Lance Naik Feroze Khan of "C" Company of the 5th Light Infantry. The only difference is that, when Feroze was called upon to give evidence before the Court of Inquiry, he knew that he had been identified as a mutineer in the preliminary evidence given by British Officers and some *sipahis*, and he chose to convey a fabricated account of what he did during the mutiny rather than remain silent. This section will be focused on answering the question of why Feroze made this choice, but not before it summarizes what the *sipahi* had to say for himself and what others had to say of him.

In the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, it was accepted practice for *sipahis* to begin their evidence by declaring their caste, from where they had been enlisted and how long they had served in the 5th Light Infantry. Feroze Khan, however, did away with this convention and began his evidence in a more confrontational manner by declaring forthrightly that he was not present when the first shots of the mutiny were fired:

About 2.30 or 3 P.M. on the 15th February, I went down to Pasir Panjang to buy a tin of milk. It is more expensive at Pasir Panjang but better quality. Before I got to Alexandra Road I heard the "Alarm" sounded so I returned.³⁶

He further talked of the confusion that reigned in his own mind after he had made his way back to the cantonment, and that this was the reason why he subsequently dispensed with his uniform, picked up some discarded ammunition and hid his rifle:

When I got back I saw everybody rushing about. I went into the lines and put on my uniform and went towards the *Kote* [Armoury] to get my rifle. There was nobody there. I looked towards the quarterguard and thought what I should do. I had my rifle, and I heard firing from behind me. A shot struck near me and I fled. As I passed between the barracks I saw a broken ammunition box with one unbroken and one broken package of ammunition in it, which I took and went into the jungle. I sat there alone for some time hearing firing. At dark I rose and moved towards the town. I was afraid and charged the magazine and chamber of my rifle. I remained till morning near Alexandra Road when I thought the best thing for me to do would be to give myself up. I was going along the road when I heard firing on my right so I again went into the jungle towards Mount Faber. I was afraid I might be shot by either mutineers

³⁵ Milliarium Zero and Winterfilm, in association with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *Winter Soldier*, (1971).

³⁶ Testimony of Feroze Khan.

or [British] soldiers so I hid my rifle near a Chinese Temple so that I might find it again. I found other rifles there. I took off my uniform.³⁷

Feroze also criticized the extra-judicial punishments that were meted out to Indians in uniform after the mutiny for preventing him, a *sipahi* who wished to aid the British, from surrendering to the police or European soldiers:

I met a Malay policeman. I asked him where the police *thana* was and he said "Pergi". I next met a Sikh who said that if any of us went near a *thana* we would be killed. I went to a mosque near Kampong Jawa where I bought some food and prayed. There were two more of our men, one Sepoy Jaher Mohamed and Sepoy Mohamed Hussain. I slept in the mosque. In the morning Sepoy Abdul Ghanni joined us. He said he had come in the day before (16th). While there the police came at 11 A.M. [on the] 17th, and they arrested all of us.³⁸

As such, his initial account conformed to that which he thought the Court would wish to hear. For Feroze Khan claimed that the lack of strong leadership and good officerial conduct during the mutiny left him confused when he did reach the *sipahis'* lines and so fearful of what would happen if he did surrender that he was unable to do so.

The terms and tone of Feroze's narrative changed when the governing voice of the President intruded upon it. Rather than denying any knowledge of events that were seen to have led to the mutiny or absenting himself from them, the Lance Naik began to admit certain realities that the Court knew of and even offered a tentative justification for the actions of the mutineers. When asked by the President how he came by a cap of the Malay States Volunteers – a primarily European force used to quell the mutiny – that he was brazenly wearing in the presence of the Court of Inquiry, he quickly quipped, 'I found the Malay cap I am wearing in the mosque'.³⁹ After Feroze was confronted by evidence that he had asked for his discharge from the 5th Light Infantry on the morning before the mutiny, he excused his actions by stating:

I had some time before this, for family reasons, asked to be sent to the depot and just before the General's parade, I heard the men saying that there was a number of men

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

asking for their discharge or for transfer to the Depot. I left the hospital and saw the Colonel who said, "Wait till we get to Hong Kong, I will make it right."⁴⁰

Finally, when Feroze was questioned over why he had been accused of malingering by officers in command of the 5th Light Infantry, he abandoned his earlier evasiveness and accused his officers of being in breach of military regulations because of their practice of imposing irregular fatigues on men who should have been in hospital:

On the morning of the General's parade I was one of those who fell out. I was taken to the doctor. I was given medicine. The doctor did not say that there was nothing the matter with me. The doctor said that those not fit for duty would remain in hospital. I did not remain [i.e. he was forced into a fatigue]. I was taken before the Colonel in connection with this and in connection with the matter of a fatigue party of which I was in charge on the same day [which refused to do the work asked of it].⁴¹

Feroze admitted, therefore, in the adjuncts to his initial narrative a far more detailed knowledge of what had caused the mutiny among the 5th Light Infantry.

Even the admissions that Feroze did make, however, did not broach what he actually did before and during the mutiny. In the days and weeks preceding the revolt on the 15th February, he had come under the notice of some of the British officers of the battalion for his 'insubordinate' tendency to make complaints against his immediate superiors.⁴² One *sipahi* recounted that, after Sepoy Ismail of 'C' Company had fired the first shot of the mutiny, Feroze had applauded and appreciated the act: 'Lance Naik Feroze Khan came into the guard room and asked where this lion Ismail was ... "Where is the lion? He has done very well."⁴³ According to the testimony of two other soldiers who were patients in the isolation ward of the cantonment hospital, at 'about 2.30 P.M.' Feroze led or was part of (there is some confusion over the issue) a large group of *sipahis* that had fired upon the hospital staff.⁴⁴ Finally, after the mutiny had been underway for several hours, Sepoy Fateh Mohamed Khan witnessed him 'firing at least two shots' at 'two or three white men' at Tanglin barracks, although he did not know 'whether he hit them or not.'⁴⁵ It is true of course that there were very many other *sipahis* who sought to defend Feroze Khan from any suggestion

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Testimony of Captain L.P. Ball, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section VIII: Evidence of the British Officers.

⁴³ Testimony of Fazal Azim.

⁴⁴ Testimony of No.1840, Gulam Mohamed, "H" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*; Testimony of No.2716, Sepoy Maksud, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Testimony of No.3067, Sepoy Fateh Mohamed Khan, "C" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid.*

that he had been involved in the mutiny,⁴⁶ and some of those that gave evidence against him did so to satiate personal vendettas,⁴⁷ but if only a handful of the complaints made against Feroze Khan were genuine then the testimony he gave before the Court was false.

So the question remains: why did Feroze give a fabricated testimony?

Certainly part of the motivation was a personal desire to avoid the executions that he would have been able to hear from the gaol in which he was kept,⁴⁸ but the manner in which Feroze amended his testimony in response to the questions of the Court and the fact that he was unafraid to admit a more detailed knowledge of the mutiny reveals that this cannot have been the sole reason.

It is by analyzing the choice of words and what Feroze chooses to omit from his account that enables one to understand the other motive. Throughout Feroze Khan's testimony, the *sipahi* studiously avoided naming any of his fellow soldiers. The names of the soldiers he was arrested with made a brief appearance, but aside from that every other Indian protagonist in his narrative was hidden behind a cipher, be it the 'Sikh who said that if any of us went near a [police] than we would be killed'⁴⁹ or the 'the Orderly Havildar – I don't know who it was – [who] gave out [the order] that nobody was to talk about service' in France.⁵⁰ Other *sipahis* appeared at the edges of Feroze's account, but their numbers, names or precise activities were never disclosed. Thus the Court was informed that 'When I got back I saw everybody rushing about'⁵¹ but, as Feroze quickly returned to where *he* went and what *he* did, no indication is given of who was in that crowd nor where they were rushing to and from. Similarly, when Feroze Khan admitted that 'I hid my rifle near a Chinese Temple' and also added that 'I found other rifles there',⁵² the precise number of rifles that were present

⁴⁶ For instance, Sepoy Udmi of "E" Company was also in the hospital and was adamant that he could not tell if Feroze Khan was among the party that attacked it, and Naik Khuda Baksh stated that he ran into the jungle with Feroze Khan after they had been attacked by the mutineers. Testimony of No.2512, Sepoy Udmi, "E" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *Ibid*; Testimony of No.1809, Naik Khuda Baksh, "C" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Captain Ball, for instance, appears to have singled out Feroze Khan for condemnation because of the reprimand he had been given after the aforementioned incident in which sick and feverish *sipahis* were given irregular fatigues.

⁴⁸ The whole of the 5th Light Infantry was interned in the months after the mutiny, many aboard a 'prison ship'. At the time *sipahis* were giving evidence, however, there were moved to within earshot of the firing squads that executed 47 *sipahis* and VCOs. According to one account, as the shots were fired: '[the crowd seemed] to utter some kind of gasp. From within the prison, however, came an anguished wail, the voices of comrades of the dead men. [...] Such, with one exception, was the pattern of each group of executions that I witnessed.' Cadet Dickinson, Straits Settlements Police; R.W.E. Harper and H. Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, (Singapore; Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁴⁹ Testimony of Feroze Khan.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² *Ibid*.

and whom those rifles belonged to was quickly glossed over. What is revealed, therefore, by analyzing the words and silences within Feroze's testimony was his desire not to mention any *sipahi* other than those the Court of Inquiry knew he had been with. Consequently, one can conclude that the reason that Feroze constructed a fabricated account of his actions during the mutiny rather than remain silent was to ensure that no other soldier would be impugned for their association with him.

Naming 'All the Thieves' as the Court's Approver: Fazal Azim's Testimony

After Lance Naik Fazal Azim, of "D" Company, approached the dock in March 1915 to give his account of the mutiny, the soldier was informed in no uncertain terms by the President of the Court of Inquiry 'that they had evidence that he went to Tanglin' barracks in the company of mutineers 'and wanted to give him the opportunity of telling us anything he may know with regard to anything that happened'.⁵³ The response by Fazal Azim appeared to be one of complete compliance. In his testimony, he gave a full account of the moment he learnt of the mutiny and recounted at length what he and those around him subsequently did, all under the rubric of being the Court's approver:

I knew all about it and can put you on[to] all the thieves and I am prepared to prove it.⁵⁴

In spite of what the Court came to believe, however, Fazal did not completely disclose everything he witnessed and there was an ambivalence to each revelation that he did make. An explanation will be given below of why there were so many silences and ambivalences in the statement he gave, but only after a transcript is provided of his testimony.

The Members of the Court of Inquiry came to apportion a greater value to Fazal Azim's deposition than those of other approvers.⁵⁵ The reason that was so was because the *sipahi* was careful to extricate himself from what the Court of Inquiry deemed to be the worst offences of the mutineers and because he was willing to name

⁵³ Testimony of Fazal Azim.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Fazal Azim's testimony was used to incriminate *sipahis* far more often than the testimonies of his fellow approvers. For instance, it was largely Fazal Azim's testimony that resulted in Feroze Khan being implicated in the mutiny, even though there were others who cast aspersions at the Lance Naik.

those who took part in the mutiny. A cursory glance at his testimony demonstrates how often Fazal expressed his shock and alarm at the actions of men who were willing to take up arms against their officers; such as when the *sipahi* first learnt that a mutiny was underway:

I was sitting in my section “D” Company, No.26, playing cards with three or four men. [...] A shot was fired from the quarterguard. Immediately afterwards or very shortly afterwards, Abdul Ghani, my section commander came out of the barrack[s] room towards me with his apron full of ammunition and his rifle in his hand. Then I saw Sepoy Ismail and Sepoy Hoshiar Ali of “D” Company carrying an ammunition box between them. Sepoy Hoshiar Ali on the right, and Sepoy Ismail on the left. Then Subedar Wahid Ali, the Company Commander, and Naik Nur Mohamed came towards the right half company from the left half company.

I went up to Subedar Wahid Ali, who was a relation of mine by marriage – he has twice been married into my family – and thinking he might be in danger, I followed him. When he got close to the centre of “L” block, which is to the right company of “D” [sic], I saw that ammunition box had been put down on the ground by the west end of the block, and that Naik Ruk Nurdin was standing on the ground immediately below the block to the south. He slapped his hands on his thigh, and said to Subedar Wahid Ali “Go away, Subedar Sahib, or you will be shot”. Then Havildar Murad Ali Khan said the same thing.⁵⁶

To emphasize how unwilling a mutineer he was, the Lance Naik maintained that it was only his desire to protect his commanding officer from harm that led to him unwittingly being thrust into the midst of the conspiracy:

Subedar Wahid Ali then went through “L” block northwards towards the native officers’ lines. He came between the two blocks of “D” and “E”, and moved south. While he was passing through the blocks two sepoy, namely, Maizar and Fulkhan of “D” Company, clicked their bolts [i.e. prepared to fire]. They were inside the barrack room. I was very much afraid for the safety of Subedar Wahid Ali, and took ten rounds of ammunition from the box I have mentioned. I charged the magazine with five rounds; I don’t know what I did with the other five. I put them down somewhere. I remained near “L” block with the intention of protecting Subedar Wahid Ali if I could. Meanwhile he had gone away, but I don’t know where. I remained there for a long time. I then went to a little rising ground close to the cookhouse of “N” and “O” blocks. The Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali, with four or five other men, were standing

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

between the blocks “A” and “B” and with Imtiaz Ali were Sepoy Nur Mohamed of “A” Company, and Sepoy Raffi Mohamed of “A” Company. I had my rifle with me. Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali said to me “Where are you wandering about [to]?” I said “I have come from my Company.” Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali then said “I have sent Havildar Ibrahim, Naik Munshi, and Naik Zafir Ali and a lot of men to Tanglin.” He said “Why are you not doing something?” I gave no reply as I was afraid. The motor lorry was then standing in the front of the Quartermaster’s stores, and I went round by the motor lorry, past the mosque, back to the cookhouse of my Company blocks “L” and “M”. By the cookhouse came Lance [Naik] Feroze Khan of “C” Company, who was identified at the same time as myself. He came from the direction of “E” Company, blocks “D” and “E”. He said to me “Come with me; we will go and see something.”⁵⁷

Finally, after being compelled to join the mutiny, Fazal claimed that he managed to slip away before he committed a serious offence and fired his rifle:

I went with him [Feroze Khan] and in front of us were walking five or six Sepoys. They were going towards Alexandra Road in the direction of the cross roads between Alexandra Road and the path to the Indian officer’s quarters. I recognized Basharat of “A” Company, Inayat of “A” Company, Sepoy Bahar Ali of “B” Company, and Sepoy Rahimdad of “B” Company. I cannot remember the rest. They had rifles and ammunition. When we came to these five or six sepoy, Lance Naik Feroze spoke to them and said “Where are you going?” They replied “We are going along.” [sic] He said “Is it for you to give me orders or for me to give you orders?” and he began to talk to one of the sepoy, but I don’t know what he said. We then all joined up together. We went along in a northerly direction towards the hospital. I went with this party as far as the little hill beyond the Isolation ward of the hospital and got into the jungle and there I got frightened as to what they were going to do and separated from them and went towards the Green Hill. I sat close to a Chinese hut at the foot of Green Hill. About dusk, Dost Mohamed of “B” Company came to me. He had a rifle and his haversack was full of rounds, I asked him if he had turned against the Government and he replied “No.” I took his rifle and examined it. It had been fired. I then removed the magazine of his rifle and my own and I hid them at a spot I can point out. He [sic, We] then went over Green Hill. It was then getting dark and we placed both rifles in a spot I can point out and we slept close to a Chinese hut. The reason I hid our rifles was that I was afraid of being shot on sight for having a rifle on me, and I took particular note of the places where we hid them and the magazines to prove that we did not hide them for any ulterior purpose. About 6 or 6.30 next

⁵⁷ Testimony of Fazal Azim.

morning we came to a police station somewhere close to town [...] and we were brought to the Central Police Office.⁵⁸

As one can see throughout the narrative, however, Fazal Azim combined his attempts to exonerate himself from blame with what seems to be a full and frank list of names. The soldier mentioned those whom the Court had already identified as prominent mutineers – Lance Naik Feroze Khan, Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali and Sepoy Ismail – a list of their cohorts with whom the Court was less familiar – Naik Ruk Nurdin, Havildar Murad Ali Khan and Sepoys Maizar and Fulkhan – and a handful of others who, Fazal claimed, were compelled or coerced to join the revolt – Basharat, Inayat, Sepoy Bahar Ali and Sepoy Rahimdad.

Fazal Azim embellished his narrative further in response to the questions the Court posed to him. When the Lance Naik was asked what he thought were the causes of the mutiny he initially replied that he did not know before coyly, and then not-so-coyly, defaming Jemadar Chiste Khan and men associated with him:

God knows [what was the cause]. A shot was fired and everybody seemed to go mad. The firing was at the instigation of Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali.

All I can tell you is this: that Chiste Khan used to talk to my section in “D” Company and tell them all the news regarding the war that was unfavourable to the Sirkar. We used to hear news of the successes of the British, at which we were very pleased. Chiste Khan used to say exactly the opposite; that the British had been defeated, etc. I heard him say these things with my own ears. I have no doubt that he used to tell the sepoy's other news, but he was very suspicious of me, being a relative of Subedar Wahid Ali, who was his enemy and he never would talk much when I was there. In fact, he would not let me sit in his Mess. He used to talk to the men in the afternoons and very frequently at night, and sometimes used to sit till 11 or 12 o'clock at night talking to the men. With him used to be Abdul Ghani, Abdul Rahmat, Havildar Murad Ali, Naik Ruknuddin and Nur Mohamed. Sepoys both of my Company and of other Companies used to sit there listening. At night, sepoy's of other Companies did not come as a rule, but by day they used to, lots of them. The day that the General Officer Commanding made his speech saying what fine fellows we were, after parade Chiste Khan, Havildar Murad Ali, Naik Nur Mohamed and Naik Karim Khan told the section that we were not going to Hong Kong and that we were going to the war, and that we were being deceived about this...when the officers and non-commissioned officers began to spread these stories, who was to believe anything? When Subedar Wahid Ali came into the lines as I have described on the 15th, after

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the “Alarm”, if these non-commissioned officers whom I have mentioned – Murad Ali, Abdul Ghani, Nur Mohamed, and Ruknuddin – if they had lifted a finger to help them and had given a single order to the men to remain loyal to him (Subedar Wahid Ali) no one would have done anything. They were the real authors of the mischief led by Chiste Khan.⁵⁹

After he was asked if he had anything to add to his statement, Fazal claimed that he had recently overheard conversations between *sipahis* in which the soldiers had incriminated themselves.⁶⁰ This precipitated the apparently spontaneous declaration that he would hereafter act as an agent for the Court within the gaols and prison-ships in which the soldiers of the regiment were interned:

If I am sent to the prison ship and allowed to live there I will get any amount of information.⁶¹

Thus, Fazal differentiated himself from other *sipahis* who turned Court’s approver both by offering a more complete account of the mutiny and a list of those involved, and by making the open-ended promise to supply ‘any amount of information’ in the future. It is clear then from both the content and the sentiments of Fazal Azim’s deposition that he not only gave king’s evidence but that he desired to be seen and remembered as an individual who gave king’s evidence.

Part of the reason that Fazal was so eager to adopt the guise of the perfect collaborator was to deflect attention away from what he actually did on 15th and 16th February 1915. Two *sipahis* who were malaria patients in the isolation ward of the cantonment hospital both disputed Fazal Azim’s claim that he played a minor role in the mutiny. *Sipahi* Maksud, a ‘Pathan of the Rohtak District’, stipulated that after the hospital came under fire from mutineers and he fled from it, he ran into another group of rebellious soldiers that were led by Fazal Azim.⁶² The other patient, Gulam Mohamed, elaborated further by claiming that there were twenty or thirty *sipahis* with Fazal, that they were being led in a double or quick march, and that they all had their ‘accoutrements’ with them:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Fazal Azim claimed that Sepoy Shamsuddin Khan admitted to shooting Lieutenant Elliot – an officer from the 5th Light Infantry – and that Sepoy Basharat saw the man that shot Captain Maclean – an officer from the Malay States Volunteers; *ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Testimony of Sepoy Maksud.

I saw Lance Naik Fazal Azim. I don't know his number or Company, but I know him well. He was in the signallers. He had 20 or 30 men with him. He was conducting this party along the road. They were all armed with rifles. I cannot say if they had bayonets. If they had [bayonets] they were not fixed. They had all their accoutrements. They were going towards Tanglin in extended order. I could not say if they had ammunition. They passed me at 30 yards distance. They were in no formation, but going in a clump along the road. They were going at the "quick, stepping out [pace]." The party had gone on ahead of me, but Lance Naik Fazal Azim passed me when I was near and I could recognize him.⁶³

Even Subedar Wahid Ali, who one would expect to have supported Fazal given that the Lance Naik claimed he had followed and protected the man from harm, stated;

On the 15th of February when the outbreak occurred and I went to my company, I did not see Lance Naik Fazil Azim [No.] 2523. He belongs to the right wing. He is a relative of mine, and [I] know him well. He may have been there. There was a crowd of people [there], but I did not see him.⁶⁴

It is clear then that part of Fazal Azim's enthusiasm for becoming an approver was to avoid his own court martial, especially given the fact that, before and after Fazal's testimony, witnesses inferred that he led a party to Tanglin barracks, at which 11 Europeans were killed.

To that end the Court of Inquiry was happy to oblige Fazal Azim, because it was unwilling to believe the testimonies that contradicted the Lance Naik's account. The testimonies of both Maksud and Gulam Mohamed were treated as the product of a grudge the men held against Fazal for some wrong he had committed against them in the past. Consequently, both sipahis were re-examined, forced to pick out Fazal from an identification parade, and, after one of them failed in identifying him, their testimony was ignored.⁶⁵ Subedar Wahid Ali was not accused of bearing the Lance Naik any ill will. The Court was, however, disposed to viewing all Indian Officers as incompetent and Wahid Ali's failure to notice a man, who was after all his relative, was seen in that light.⁶⁶ If there were other soldiers who could have highlighted the

⁶³ Testimony of Gulam Mohamed.

⁶⁴ Testimony of Subedar Wahid Ali, Commander of "D" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section VII: Evidence of the Indian Officers.

⁶⁵ *Sipahi* Maksud was asked to pick out any mutineers he recognized from a line-up, and he identified both Fazal Azim and Feroze Khan. Only his identification of Feroze, however, received any attention. My best guess is that this was because Gulam Mohamed was asked to undertake the same task at (roughly) the same time and because he failed to successfully identify Fazal. Testimony of Sepoy Maksud; Testimony of Gulam Mohamed.

⁶⁶ Subedar Wahid Ali was one of the VCOs for whom the President of the Court of Inquiry reserved special condemnation.

inconsistencies within Fazal Azim's deposition, such as the man with whom he surrendered, they were either never called to give evidence or the Court failed to ask them about the matter.⁶⁷

Ultimately, the Members of the Court of Inquiry were unable to come to the conclusion that Lance Naik Fazal Azim was a mutineer. The reason for this was due to the nature of the disclosures that the *sipahi* made since, throughout his account, Fazal only impugned the dead or soon-to-be dead. Fazal Azim identified several prominent mutineers or ringleaders in his evidence, but, of these Jemadar Chiste Khan had already been executed, Lance Naik Feroze Khan was in the process of being court-martialled and Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali had died during the revolt. All of the other men the *sipahi* had accused of acting in a seditious manner were already lying in their graves. These included those whom he had witnessed 'clicking the bolts' of their 'rifles' and hoarding ammunition⁶⁸ and those non-commissioned officers he had accused of failing to give a 'single order to the men to remain loyal'.⁶⁹ There were other soldiers that Fazal Azim mentioned in his narrative, but each of them were defended in his testimony.⁷⁰ It was claimed that *Sipahis* Basharat, Inayat, Bahar Ali and Rahimdad had all been forced to join the group of mutineers that headed towards Tanglin, and that Fazal could not 'remember the rest' of those that accompanied them.⁷¹ It is difficult to ascertain whether military authorities ever charged the soldiers that Fazal Azim defended, but since they were never called upon to give evidence one can assume that Fazal succeeded in convincing the Court of their innocence. Thus what is significant about Fazal Azim's testimony is the ambivalent nature of each revelation he made. Those soldiers who featured as mutineers in his narrative were already dead, and those who may have been mutineers and who were alive were barely mentioned at all.

⁶⁷ The Court did call Dost Mohamed to give evidence but not, as I show later, to cast aspersions on Fazal Azim's testimony.

⁶⁸ *Viz.*, Naik Ruk Nurdin, Havildar Murad Ali Khan and *Sipahis* Maizar, Fulkhan and Ismail. Testimony of Fazal Azim

⁶⁹ *Viz.*, Abdul Ghani and Nur Mohamed. *Ibid*

⁷⁰ The exception to this is Dost Mohamed. The reason for this will be examined later.

⁷¹ Testimony of Fazal Azim.

“If You Wish to Save Your Life, Run!”: the Deposition of Sazawar Khan and Embracing Victimhood

Naik Sazawar Khan, of “C” Company, was among the first Indian soldiers that the Court summoned to give evidence. This was because Sazawar claimed he was (and was treated as) a victim of the mutiny. The Naik was detailed in a fatigue that was fired upon in the initial stages of the revolt, and the colonial authorities did not possess any preliminary evidence to suggest he had supported the mutineers. It was believed that the *sipahi* would reveal and disclose more than other *sipahis*, and at first it appeared as if he might well do so when Sazawar promised that ‘I have no reason for concealing the truth. I have no fear of being punished’.⁷² The Members of the Court of Inquiry proved to be mistaken, however, in their belief that Sazawar Khan’s evidence would provide fertile ground from which later prosecutions would emerge. They were also mistaken to think that the *sipahi* was completely disassociated from those that took part in the revolt.

Naik Sazawar Khan was present in a group of *sipahis* and *khalasis* (labourers)⁷³ that were detailed to load ammunition and ‘drums of oil’ from the regimental armoury and onto a lorry on the afternoon of 15th February 1915. Due to the fact that the half-loaded vehicle and the cantonment armoury were the first targets of the mutineers, he was well placed to describe the first stages of the revolt:

Naik Sadiq was standing on the lorry and Mahbub, the Khallassi was handing him empty drums of oil. There were about three or four drums still to load. I am unable to say whether Ismail was sentry on the quarterguard,⁷⁴ [but] Ismail, who fired on the motor lorry, did so from the position of the quarterguard sentry. He shouted something, but I am unable to say what, but after firing he came on towards the lorry with his bayonet fixed at the “charge”. All the whole fatigue ran away, including myself. I stopped on the road opposite the quarterguard. Ismail then reloaded and said to me, “If you wish to save your life, run”, presenting his rifle at me I backed

⁷² Testimony of Sazawar Khan.

⁷³ The term *khalasi* was used by the British in colonial India to specifically refer to servants or labourers serving as seamen. Among many north Indians, however, it was a colloquial term applied to any unskilled labourer. Thus, for instance a stoker aboard a railway engine was commonly referred to as a *khalasi*. In the case of Mahbub Khan, the term was used to describe his employment as a man who would carry heavy loads to and fro in the cantonment.

⁷⁴ A Quarter Guard was ostensibly a selection of men from a battalion who were given live rounds in order to protect a camp or cantonment from external threats. In practice, however, they acted as a form of security against any internal problems. Only the handful of men selected for Quarter Guard duty would have live rounds, and any man found to have committed a minor offence could expect to be imprisoned within the building housing the Quarter Guard.

across the road towards a small footpath near the Chinese shop. I got under cover and distinctly heard Imtiaz Ali shout to the men “Fall in”.⁷⁵

The Naik did not dwell over what occurred in those initial moments, however, and spent the rest of his time in the dock describing how his fear of the mutineers and his subsequent flight from then did not leave him in a position to add anything more:

There was a tremendous noise going on, but I saw very little of what was the cause as I was hiding under cover. While I was standing on the road just previously described I looked towards the quarterguard, but I could see no one except Ismail who fired the shot and was standing by the lorry in the road. I ran [a]round the dhobi lines in the band barrack, which is “C” block and I could hear firing going on in the lines, but I am unable to say where. There were a confused lot of men running about. A lot of men were running about with rifles in their hands and I could hear firing in the distance. I went into cover to the south of the band barrack. I remained under cover in this spot till about five o’clock. Then I crept along under cover in the direction of the range. I heard firing going on. I remained in the cover near the range for the whole night. I had intended to go to the Mess, but I was frightened.

[...]

I am absolutely unable to describe any reason for the disturbance. If I knew of any I would tell you at once, but I don’t. All I know is that when the outbreak occurred the ringleader appeared to be Imtiaz Ali who was shouting to the men.⁷⁶

The Court of Inquiry did use Sazawar’s deposition as further proof that the men of the 5th Light Infantry were worried at the prospect of being shipped to France, in spite of the brevity of his evidence. But Sazawar Khan neither confirmed nor denied this hypothesis.

There is a break in the stenographer’s transcription of Sazawar’s testimony before the *sipahi* appears once more on the page, indicating that he was either recalled or there was an adjournment in the proceedings of the Court. Whatever the cause of the lacuna, the testimony of the *sipahi* afterwards differed from what had had been recounted before. Lance Naik Feroze Khan was suddenly mentioned in Sazawar’s deposition and in particular his suspicious and ‘sulky’ behaviour before the mutiny:

There was a Lance Naik in my company named Feroze. About the 13th or 14th of February the Subedar Major commanding my company sent for all non-commissioned officers of my company to his quarters. Jemadar Hoshiar Ali was there,

⁷⁵ Testimony of Sazawar Khan.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

and the Subedar Major told us the regiment was not going on service, but [that] it was the desire of the Commanding Officer to know if it was a general wish and the Subedar Major wanted to know if we would volunteer for service. The Lance Naik said to me “Why don’t you volunteer?” Feroze Khan said this in a very insubordinate way. He belongs to the same village as the Subedar Major. The Subedar Major said “All right, I will give my name. Will you give yours?” A few days before the outbreak Feroze came back from Tanglin and I heard him say to the company “I am not going either to Hong Kong or on service.” I remonstrated with him and told him he was not to make such remarks to the sepoys. Feroze Khan has always been a very active man and has been a scout, and was always running about. When he fell out from the General’s inspection parade I began to think there must be something wrong with him and that he was sulky.⁷⁷

Sazawar also added that at Christmas the Non-Commissioned Officers of the regiment failed to offer their regards to their British Officers as they had done the year before, and implied that this could have been due to some simmering unease and disquiet:

[...] I recollect that last Christmas I said to Lance Havildar Taj Mohammed: “Let us go and make our salaams to the British Officers according to our custom.” Taj Mohammed said: “No, I am not going.” He gave no reason, but just said he was not going. It has been the custom for the majority of the Non-Commissioned Officers to go to see their British Officers on Christmas day to make their salaams, but last Christmas I went and saw the Havildar Major there and Babu Atta Mohammed [a clerk], but I saw no one else. I am unable to say what happened.⁷⁸

But the Court of Inquiry never utilized these adjuncts that Sazawar made to his testimony. It consisted of equivocation and not the ‘facts’ that the Members wished to hear.

Approver Sazawar’s frequent equivocation can be attributed to his desire to protect himself from prosecution. The accounts of civilian and military witnesses to what occurred to the fatigue, of which Sazawar Khan was part, offered a narrative that differed from what the Naik had recounted. Sazawar was unable to tell from where Sepoy Ismail had fired upon him, but, as far as Havildar Mohamed Yar Khan was concerned, the *sipahi* was only standing twenty yards away from the fatigue when he opened fire.⁷⁹ Khalasi Mahbub Khan seconded this and added that because the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Testimony of No.1663, Havildar Mahomed Yar Khan, “H” Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid.*

mutineer was standing upon the elevated veranda of the building housing the Quarter Guard, Sepoy Ismail could be clearly seen by everyone present.⁸⁰ Even an individual who did not see the shot being fired but only heard it such as Sambhudutt – a Singapore Indian who was running a grocery shop nearby – knew that the shot had to have come from the Quarter Guard because only those men had access to live rounds in the cantonment.⁸¹ Furthermore, the men of the Quarter Guard clearly saw Sazawar Khan even if he did not see them. *Sipahi* Mahbub Khan recounted that some hours after the mutiny began:

I saw Naik Sazawar Khan come to the Company kote, which is on the east side of “P” block and burst open the door with an axe and take out three or four rifles which he gave to the Malay States Guides, who came running from the direction of “B” Company barracks. I am not able to recognize these men [Malay States Guides]. I am prepared to swear to this. In the presence of Naik Sazawar [sic. I was in the presence?] that Subedar Dunde Khan who was standing up by his own Company shouted out to Naik Sazawar Khan to give rifles to the Malay States Guides. Naik Sazawar said “All right Subedar Sahib, I will.”⁸²

The only moment in his testimony where Sazawar did not prevaricate was when he mentioned the names of Lance Naik Feroze Khan and the Subedar Major. Yet the referencing of those names did not amount to a full disclosure of those whom Sazawar genuinely thought were at fault. The Naik’s explanation of the insubordinate behaviour of Feroze Khan before the mutiny, and Subedar Major Khan Mohamed Khan’s strange tolerance of it, was that Feroze belonged ‘to the same village as the Subedar Major’.⁸³ He did not dwell over the matter, but the regional loyalties that Sazawar condemned among some of the men helped to still his tongue when it came to condemning others. This is particularly the case with Acting Colour Havildar Jamaluddin Khan,⁸⁴ the man who was in command of the Quarter Guard at the time when the first shot was fired and a man who was both of the same caste and came from the same village as Sazawar. Jamaluddin was seen on the veranda alongside

⁸⁰ Testimony of Mahboob Khan, Khallassi or Storeman; *ibid.*

⁸¹ Testimony of Sambhudutt, Brahmin grocer; *ibid.*

⁸² Testimony of No.2210, Sepoy Mahbub Khan, “C” Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid.*

⁸³ Testimony of Sazawar Khan.

⁸⁴ Jamaluddin describes himself as ‘½ Colour Havildar’. He may have used that term to imply that he was an Acting Colour Havildar who had been promised a full promotion to that position. This, however, is not certain and it is possible that I am in error by describing him simply as an ‘Acting Colour Havildar’.

Sepoy Ismail by some men,⁸⁵ and was seen helping the mutineers by others,⁸⁶ but was completely absent in Sazawar's account.⁸⁷ One can only speculate over the precise relationship Jamaluddin and Sazawar had. Jamaluddin and Sazawar may have been related in some way, they may have been friends before entering the military, or perhaps the Naik wished to avoid difficulties from the soldier's family if and when he returned to his village. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that Sazawar sought to deceive the Court of Inquiry to protect Jamaluddin whilst casually impugning men who belonged to a different locality. Claiming to be a victim of the mutiny allowed him to achieve this end.

Occupying the Margins and 'Being' the Outsider: the Testimony of Dost Mohamed

The evidence of Sepoy Dost Mohamed, of 'B' Company, was not as full or as lengthy as that of other *sipahis*. The transcribed version of his testimony amounted to a single paragraph containing several succinct sentences. The reason for this is two-fold. Dost claimed that, as a newly recruited office orderly, he had barely spoken to other men in the regiment and so had little to tell:

I don't know who they were. I have only been two and a half months in this battalion.⁸⁸

Further, given that the Court of Inquiry was unlikely to include extraneous information in their reports, it is probable that the *sipahi's* statement was edited to appear shorter on the page than it actually was. Dost both claimed to be an outsider, and his testimony was treated as being marginal and incidental. But, as will be shown below, it is likely that Dost Mohamed wished to be seen as an individual who had

⁸⁵ 'Everyone was present in the Guardroom including the Havildar [Jamaluddin] when the first shot was fired. The Havildar at once gave the order – Guard turn out – and they fell in on the veranda.' Testimony of No.2612, Lance Naik Maksud, "D" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *SMR*; Section 3.

⁸⁶ 'Colour Havildar Jamaluddin came to the Armourer's shop about 6 o'clock on 15th February and told the Armourer to come and open the Treasure chest. The Armourer went to the quarterguard and tapped the Treasure chest and said he could not open it. He came back and told me to take a hammer and chisel and [to] try to open the Treasure chest. There were 20 or 30 men [a]round the chest when I was trying to open it amongst whom I recognized Havildar Jamaluddin. I said, after attempting [to open it] for some time, "I cannot open the chest" and then I went back to the Armourer's shop where I remained.' Testimony of Sepoy Karim Baksh, (one of several regimental carpenters), "F" Company, 5th Light Infantry; *ibid*.

⁸⁷ Jamaluddin's own alibi was that he was defecating on the lavatory at the time, so he can't have been involved. Of course no one actually saw him there, but that did not prevent the Havildar from sticking to his guns (metaphorically speaking).

⁸⁸ Testimony of Dost Mohamed.

nothing important to convey in order to avoid having to give a full account of the mutiny.

Dost's evidence, according to the transcription of it, began with the *sipahi* describing his lowly position in the battalion and how he was taken by complete surprise when the first shots of the mutiny were fired:

I have done about a year's service. On the 15th February I was orderly at the adjutant's office. Between 2 and 3 P.M. I was told to go and get my food. I was in the latrine when a shot was fired. I cannot say where it was [fired]. I washed my hands and came straight up to my Company lines. I found the Company Barrack absolutely empty. I got frightened, and I wrapped a blanket round myself and lay underneath a bed cot [...].⁸⁹

Hiding under a blanket only proved to be a temporary respite, for Dost was soon discovered by Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali and was told in no uncertain terms that he would be killed if he did not join the mutineers:

[...] whilst I was there Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali came in with two or three men and shouted out "Is there anybody in this barrack room?" and told his men to shoot anybody they could find. I got frightened and I flung off the blanket and ran up to Imtiaz Ali with folded hands. I said to him "Don't shoot me. I am office orderly and have just come back from duty". He said "I don't care a blow who you are. If you don't go and get a rifle and ammunition at once I will shoot you." Imtiaz Ali took me to the Company bell of arms [sic] and gave me a rifle, one of two or three which were there, and he gave me with his own hands two complete packets of ammunition and three chargers full. Imtiaz Ali had three other men with him, and he ordered me to go take up my position in an entrenchment which is near the other side of the Indian quarters.⁹⁰

After taking the rifle and ammunition from the Colour Havildar, Dost recounted that he fled into the jungle at the first available opportunity, stumbled upon Lance Naik Fazal Azim and buried the arms that he had been given:

I immediately ran away in the direction of the shops opposite the quarterguard and was shot at by all four. I got away into the jungle. I went straight over to Alexandra road into the jungle and then came to another road. On my way I met Lance Naik Fazal Azim of "D" Company who asked me where I was going. I said to him "I am going to Singapore." He said "Why? Are you not disaffected. I said "No, I am not."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

He said “Nor am I. Come along with me.” Lance Naik Fazal Azim and I hid our rifles with the ammunition in a pineapple field. I am prepared to identify the place where they were hidden. I never went to Tanglin [Barracks]. I stayed out all night and fed on fruit. The next morning we were going along the road to Singapore when we met two Europeans in a motor car. They stopped and took us in front of the motor to some Major. I cannot tell you his name, and we were arrested. I know no more. Three men who were with Imtiaz Ali fired at me when I ran.⁹¹

Thus, in his short stay in the dock, Dost Mohamed did not tell the Members of the Court anything they had not already heard. Imtiaz Ali and Fazal Azim, the only two *sipahis* that were mentioned by name in his account, were either already known to the Court as prominent mutineers or had already given evidence as Court’s approvers.

Dost was recalled by the President of the Court of Inquiry, Frederick Aubrey Hoghton, some time after he had first given evidence. The reason for this was that Dost had been ordered to lead a deputation from the Court to the location where he had hidden his rifle, so that it could be recovered, only for him to assert that he no longer remembered where he had dispensed with his arms: ‘On a former occasion he said he could find the place ... now he says he is not certain.’⁹² Dost Mohamed’s explanation was unconvincing. The *sipahi* claimed that he had lost all sense of his bearings after fleeing from Imtiaz Ali and he had had to rely on Lance Naik Fazal Azim’s judgement to tell him where he was when he was hiding his weapon:

I ran into the jungle close to the bunya [sic] bazaar, which is near the crossroads. When I got into the jungle I met close to a footpath, which goes in the direction of Mt. Faber, Fazal Azim. This was about 5 o’clock. Fazal Azim told me it was Green Hill.⁹³

Although the Court of Inquiry accepted that Dost was genuinely disorientated, it led its Members to re-examine other elements of the *sipahi*’s original testimony. Hoghton, in particular, barked at Dost Mohamed, ‘If they [the men that shot at Dost and who were accompanying Imtiaz Ali] belong to your Double Company you should be able to recognize them’.⁹⁴ The *sipahi*’s answer was not one that instilled the Court with any degree of confidence, but it did serve to allay any further questions they may have had: ‘he said he could not tell me’.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Dost's final statement that 'he could not tell' the President anything more had a double meaning. Dost Mohamed was both unable and unwilling to elaborate on his deposition, and there were parts of the *sipahi's* evidence that contained inconsistencies beyond those the Court recognized. One such instance was when Dost claimed that Imtiaz Ali gave him a rifle and ammunition from the Company Armoury. Whilst it was possible that he could have obtained a rifle from that place, Dost could only have been given ammunition from the regimental armoury – where all the mutineers were gathered. Another occasion was when the *sipahi* recounted that he had fired none of the rounds that he had been given. Fazal Azim claimed in his testimony that Dost Mohamed's rifle had been fired before the *sipahi* buried it, something he discovered by examining the weapon.⁹⁶ Finally, Dost changed his initial declaration that he had served for 'about a year'⁹⁷ in the battalion to 'two and a half months'⁹⁸ in order to emphasize his point that he knew few people in the regiment. In all these cases, Dost told half-truths in order to avoid being put into a position where he would have to name other soldiers – be it the *sipahis* who were at the regimental armoury, those with him when he had fired his rifle, or those he had known in his time serving in the battalion.

It would be mere conjecture on my part if I were to suggest that Dost Mohamed was a mutineer. There are hints and suggestions that he was involved in the mutiny but nothing more, and it is not clear if he was found guilty for any offence by court martial. Yet it was to make his name absent from later records and other accounts of the mutiny that was the purpose of Dost's testimony. Dost Mohamed may or may not have occupied a marginal role in the 5th Light Infantry – he was a lowly peon and he may genuinely have had few friends – but he also used the time given to him in the colonial courtroom to situate himself further on the margins than he might otherwise have been. The fact that the Court of Inquiry omitted the *sipahi's* name from later reports and that the transcribed version of his testimony was truncated shows that he was successful in his endeavour.

⁹⁶ Testimony of Fazal Azim.

⁹⁷ Testimony of Dost Mohamed.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusion: Contesting the Space of the Colonial Courtroom

By the time that Houghton had made his final report into the causes of the Mutiny, on 20th May 1915, 214 men had been punished for their involvement in the revolt. In addition to the 47 sipahis and NCOs that were executed and the 64 were given the sentence of ‘transportation for life,’ a further 73 were sentenced to be transported for up to 20 years and 28 were imprisoned.⁹⁹ Yet, as the testimonies of Feroze Khan, Fazal Azim, Sazawar Khan and Dost Mohamed show, the *sipahis* of the 5th Light Infantry were not quiescent victims of colonial justice. Instead, the soldiers re-appropriated the punitive, disciplinary space of the colonial courtroom. Feroze Khan fashioned an identity for himself as an intransigent mutineer so that the Court of Inquiry would be forced to question the reliability of the evidence he had given. Fazal Azim took on the guise of the Court’s approver and used it to weave his own narrative of events for the Court’s edification. Finally, when giving their evidence, Sazawar Khan and Dost Mohamed both utilized and played upon the President’s opinion of them – as a victim of the mutineers in Sazawar’s instance and as a lowly, marginal figure in the case of Dost.

Alongside the re-appropriation of the physical and linguistic space of the courtroom came the re-appropriation of what it meant to be a soldier in the 5th Light Infantry. Feroze Khan prompted the Court to dismiss his deposition as unreliable so that he would avoid naming men who had been involved in the mutiny by his side. Fazal Azim became an approver in order to construct an alibi for himself and other *sipahis* in his Company. Sazawar Khan clung to a partially invented sense of

⁹⁹ Two Indian officers were also executed.

The official breakdown of the sentences given are as follows:

‘Death: 2 Indian Officers; 6 Havildars; 39 Rank and File

Transportation for Life: 2 Havildars; 62 Rank and File

Transportation for 20 years: 1 Havildar; 7 Rank and File

Transportation for 15 years: 26 Rank and File

Transportation for 10 years: 30 Rank and File

Transportation for 7 years: 9 Rank and File

Rigorous Imprisonment for 5 years: 3 Rank and File

Rigorous Imprisonment for 3 years: 1 Rank and File

Rigorous Imprisonment for 2 years: 7 Rank and File

Rigorous Imprisonment for 1 years: 1 Rank and File

Simple Imprisonment without Solitary Confinement for 2 years: 1 Rank and File

Simple Imprisonment without Solitary Confinement for 11 months: 1 Rank and File (member of the Malay States Guides)

Simple Imprisonment without Solitary Confinement for 9 months: 6 Rank and File (members of the Malay States Guides)

Simple Imprisonment without Solitary Confinement for 1 month: 4 Rank and File

Simple Imprisonment without Hard Labour for 2 years: 1 Rank and File (member of the Malay States Guides)

Simple Imprisonment without Hard Labour for 1½ years: 3 Rank and File (member of the Malay States Guides)’

SMR; Section 2: Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry.

victimhood in order to defend a man from his own village. Lastly, Dost Mohamed claimed ignorance and a marginal position in the regiment so that he could avoid all questions about the identity of the mutineers. Intra-*sipahi* loyalty – whether ethnic, geographical, or regimental – was an ideal that the Indian Army encouraged in the belief it would make its troops better than they might otherwise be. In the early summer heat of colonial Singapore, it was these same ideals that were used to try and thwart the desire to discipline rebellious colonial soldiers.

CHAPTER 5
**‘BREAKING THE CHAINS WITH WHICH WE WERE BOUND’:
THE INTERROGATION CHAMBER, THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY AND THE
NEGATION OF MILITARY IDENTITIES, 1941-1947**

During the Second World War, the second largest rebellion of military personnel in the history of British (and Imperial) history occurred with the formation of the Indian National Army (INA)¹ from among the fifty thousand *sipahis* captured during the Japanese offensive through Malaya.² The history of the INA is well known: from its pronouncement and the gleeful throwing of caps and turbans in the air at the fall of Singapore on 17th February 1942;³ to its role in the thwarted Japanese invasion of India in March 1944; to the death of Subhas Chandra Bose in August 1945.⁴ It has been recounted in the memoirs of Japanese officers,⁵ influential INA personnel,⁶ and the sanitized narratives of British Intelligence Officers.⁷ The histories they have written will not be reproduced here. What will be discussed is the memorialisation of the INA in the testimony of the *sipahis* involved both during and immediately after the Second World War.

¹ Strictly speaking the term ‘Indian National Army’ ought to only be used for the first phase of its existence between 1941 and 1942, since it was reformed and renamed the *Azad Hind Fauj* (the Free Indian Army or Army of Free India), after Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore in 1943. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will use ‘Indian National Army’, ‘INA’ or ‘Azad Hind Fauj’ interchangeably. Many *sipahis* were unaware that the first ‘INA’ was ever disbanded and failed to draw any distinction between the two armies in their interrogations.

² It is unclear quite how many joined the INA. The final tally reached by (British) military intelligence was 23,266. That does not include the number of men who may have joined the INA and left again without British knowledge, or those that evaded capture altogether. ‘Indian National Army’, 28 January 1947; *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 3*; War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/WS/1/1578.

³ ‘At the close of my speech, I declared that about ten thousand soldiers of the Indian National Army had already joined the Indian National Army and that I was determined to go ahead with the expansion of this force until India was liberated. I then asked the soldiers to raise [their] hands if any one from amongst them would like to join this force and fight for the liberation of his country. There was a spontaneous response from all of the soldiers. Along with the raising of hands, thousands of turbans and caps were hurled up in the air in a frenzied fit of ecstasy. Almost all the soldiers jumped to their feet and filled the air with prolonged shouts of ‘Inqilab Zindabad’ (Long Live Revolution). It looked as if, overwhelmed with enthusiasm, the whole crowd had gone mad. It took me quite some time to calm them down [...]’ General Mohan Singh, *Soldiers’ Contribution to Indian Independence*, (New Delhi: Army Educational Stores, 1974), pp. 108-109.

⁴ There have been three commissions investigating the death of Bose (Shah Nawaz Committee of 1956; Khosla Commission from 1970-1974; and the Mukherjee Commission from 1999 to 2005). The last has thrown doubt on whether Bose actually died in August 1945. But, for the sake of simplicity, I am assuming that he did.

⁵ Fujiwara Iwaichi, *F. Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*; translated by Akashi Yoji, (Hong Kong: Heinemann, 1983).

⁶ Numerous memoirs of the INA have been written by its leading officers involved. Of particular interest are the memoirs of Colonel Shah Nawaz Khan, Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Colonel Prem Kumar Sahgal, Colonel Lakshmi Swaminathan (née Sahgal) and General Mohan Singh. Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, *From My Bones: Memoirs of Col. Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon of the Indian National Army*, (New Delhi: Aryan Books, 1999); Shah Nawaz Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*, (Delhi: Rajkumal, 1946); Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India’s Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*, (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1993) [based on conversations with Prem Kumar Sahgal and Lakshmi Sahgal]; Mohan Singh, *Soldiers’ Contribution to Indian Independence*.

⁷ Hugh Toye, *Subhas Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger*, (Bombay: Jaico, c.1959).

In the summer of 1945, a small group of captured personnel of the Indian National Army found themselves imprisoned in the depths of the Red Fort in Delhi. Each man was taken away, one after another, by a bespectacled 'Mr. Bannerjee',⁸ interrogated over their defections from the British Indian Army and accused of 'Waging War Against the King' in the tropical forests of Burma and Malaya.⁹ The interrogations did not go well. Major General Arcot Doraisamy Loganathan, the highest ranking member of the group, refused to accept that he and his men had committed a crime, and began to use the space of the interrogation room to interrogate the interrogators:

He has originated at CSDIC(I) the new term "BIFF" [British Influenced Indian Forces], which he has used objectionably on more than one occasion as an opprobrious designation of Indian officers working here. He has at the same time attempted to cross-examine such officers on *their* motives in remaining loyal and has given *them* subversive advice. On these occasions he has demonstrated an attitude to Indian members of the (British) Indian Army even more hostile than his attitude to the British.¹⁰

Loganathan and his fellow officers were not alone in their expressions of hostility. Of the 23,266 military personnel of the INA who were captured and then grilled by British Military Intelligence up to 28th January 1947,¹¹ only 3,880 men were deemed to be unconditionally loyal to the Crown.¹² But this was not because the majority of soldiers had suddenly become "Nationalistically" minded,' as British Officers sifting through their interrogations assumed.¹³ In the interrogation room, *sipahis* occupied a space in which they could reason, conceive and speak of the Indian National Army and of the British Indian Army. And in that space, more often than not, they simultaneously negated the conventions of the interrogation room and

⁸ 'Mr Banerjee' was how Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon's interrogator introduced himself when he was interned alongside Loganathan in the Red Fort. It is likely that that he was one of the men Loganathan termed a 'Biff'. Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, *From My Bones*, p. 403.

⁹ The charges laid against INA men fell under civil rather than military law. 'Waging War Against the King', contrary to section 121 of the Indian Penal Code, was a charge used for all those who were found to have joined the INA voluntarily. Additional charges of 'Murder' and 'Abetment of murder' were also laid in the INA trials.

¹⁰ Interrogation of Lt. Col./Major General Arcot Doraisamy Loganathan [sic.]; *CSDIC (India), No.2 Section Information Reports* [hereafter *CSDIC(I) Reports*]; INA Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 379/INA; Parts 17-22. Italics added.

¹¹ All save 176 of that number were *sipahis* or VCOs in the Indian Army before being captured. The remaining 176 were commissioned officers of the rank of 2nd Lieutenant or higher.

¹² 'Indian National Army', 28th January 1947; *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 3*.

¹³ Claude Auchinleck, C-in-C, Indian Army, *Typewritten minute marked "Strictly Personal and Secret" from General Auchinleck, concerning the effect on the Indian Army as a whole of the first trial of members of the Indian National Army, 12th February 1946*; Major-General Thomas Wynford Rees Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, MSS Eur/F274/95.

rejected the whole concept that a soldier ought to show fealty towards his officers – whether they led an Army formed for the freedom of India or for the defence of the Empire.

The other side of this rejection of military deference was the creation and relaying of histories of the INA in which ordinary *sipahis* were at the forefront. Individual soldiers, recounting the reasons and methods by which they had defected to the *Azad Hind Fauj*, spoke of vast conspiratorial networks or of them having been the personal envoys of nationalist leaders under the noses of their officers. Others explained what life was like within the ranks of the INA by referring to the plays that *sipahis* wrote and performed about their experiences. And yet more *sipahis* spoke of the mutinies and protests they had engaged to force the nascent rebel army into changing its policies when it was perceived to be failing its soldiers. In each type of testimony there was an elision between truth and fiction, but what remained constant was the paramount place the ordinary soldier had in these narratives.

This chapter will begin with an account of how and why the machinery for the interrogation of INA personnel was created. The first accounts of an anti-British army having been formed among Indian Prisoners-of-War paralyzed detailed analyses of why the defections had occurred and led to premature conclusions that the Army could recover and rehabilitate its soldiers if proper programmes were established. It will then discuss how *sipahis* subverted the whole process of the interrogation, by refusing to respect the ordinary relationship between interrogator/interrogated or officer/soldier, and investigate the *sipahi*-led histories that they created. In particular, the men of three units of the Imperial Indian Army and its Nationalist counterpart will be discussed: the 1/15th Punjabis, the ‘Dramatic Party’ and the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery. Each of the men of the battalions, regiments and units had different experiences in and of the INA. Their testimony further benefits from being more complete and from being summarized in a less disjointed and fragmentary manner than those of their peers.¹⁴

¹⁴ This is particularly so for interrogations that took place after the Red Fort Trial of (INA) Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Colonel Prem Kumar Sahgal and Major General Shah Nawaz Khan. After Claude Auchinleck (as C-in-C) commuted their sentences in January 1946 and made it clear that there would be no future prosecutions, the interrogators adopted the practice of interrogating *sipahis* in large groups (some as big as 30). The questions asked were also rarely more than inquiries into their date of birth, date of enlistment, standard of education and date of joining the INA. Only officers or men deemed to have played a ‘big part’ in the rebel Army were

Segregating 'White' from 'Black': the Need to Interrogate

Publishers in Britain have rarely presided over works devoted wholly to the subject of the INA.¹⁵ When the men of the Indian National Army or 'Jiffs' ['Japanese Indian Forces'] are mentioned, they haunt the periphery and are referred to in hushed whispers as in Paul Scott's *The Day of the Scorpion*:

He paused, opened his eyes, glanced at her. 'You know about the Jiffs?'

'Jiffs?'

'They're what we call Indian soldiers who were once prisoners of the Japanese in Burma and Malaya, chaps who turned coat and formed themselves into army formations to help the enemy. There were a lot of them in that attempt the Japanese made to invade India through Imphal.

'Yes, I've heard of them. Were they really a lot?'

'I'm afraid so. And officers like Teddie took it to heart. They couldn't believe Indian soldiers who'd eaten the king's salt and been proud to serve in the army generation after generation could be suborned like that, buy their way out of prison camp by turning coat, come armed hand in hand with the Japs to fight their own countrymen, fight the very officers who had trained them, cared for them and earned their respect. Well, you know. The regimental mystique. It goes deep. Teddie was always afraid of finding there were old Muzzy Guides among them. And of course that's what he did find. If Teddie had been the crying kind, I think he'd have cried. That would have been better, if he'd accepted the fact....'¹⁶

The failure to mention the INA after the Second World War is in part a reflection of reticence within the Indian Army to discuss the matter during the conflict. And the figure of Teddie unintentionally – or perhaps not, given that Scott served in the Intelligence Corps in India in the early 1940s – correlated with the belief in the higher echelons of the Indian Army that the INA soldier could be recovered for the Raj. It is how this article of faith came to be the official policy of the Indian Army, and how it resulted in the creation of interrogation centres, that will be discussed below.

The existence of the Indian National Army was publicly pronounced at Farrer Park in Singapore on the 17th February 1942, but it took several months for British forces in India to admit its existence to the War Office in London. There seemed to

interrogated individually and in depth from that time on. And even they, such as Colonel Pritam Singh who was the ADC to Subhas Chandra Bose at his death, were often questioned quickly and then released.

¹⁵ There are numerous works available with the INA as its subject in Britain, but none have actually been published in the country. The sole exception is Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper's *Forgotten Armies*, but the sections relating to the INA compare poorly to the discussions of nationalist movements in South-East Asia and Burma.

¹⁶ Paul Scott, *The Day of the Scorpion*, (London: Heinemann, 1975 rpt.), pp. 373-374.

be a particular reluctance to openly discuss the matter to avoid embarrassing the British Empire in the eyes of its American allies.¹⁷ In a report finally written by the Directorate of Military Intelligence in India (DMI) on 12th November 1942, proposals were made for the future treatment of men who had joined the INA; but the language was riddled with late colonialist angst. Those Indian personnel who were adjudged to have ‘flirted’ with the INA without showing any commitment to the cause were to be treated as ‘White’ and were to be allowed to return to their regimental centres or sent on military leave after the War.¹⁸ Those who were subjected to ‘some propaganda’ and ‘have been affected thereby, but are not considered to be fundamentally disloyal’ were ‘Greys’ and they were to be quickly whisked off to ‘reconditioning camps’ upon recapture.¹⁹ And then there were the ‘Blacks’ (and occasionally the ‘Blackest of the Blacks’) who were as far removed from the ‘Whites’ as they could be for their ‘loyalty is definitely in question’ and they ‘are regarded as dangerous from a security point of view’.²⁰ Yet, although various categories were delineated by DMI, their report ended with the admission that it was impossible to tell who, if anyone, still felt ‘loyalty to the Sirkar’ with any degree of certainty:²¹

Indian military personnel are recruited from beaten armies, who have seen white troops on many occasions at their worst, being swept away by an Asiatic army. Upon these men incessant propaganda is played, not only by the Japanese but by their own countrymen. A study of Japanese broadcasts shows the most innocuous of the type of “news” regarding the war and India which is being incessantly dinned into their ears. In Major Dhillon’s [an escapee from Singapore who provided detailed information] opinion, since the arrest of Gandhi [following the ‘Quit India’ resolution], such propaganda has raised the percentage of the INA who are genuinely anti-British from

¹⁷ British Intelligence had heard of the INA but did not wish to disclose the matter to the United States. So when Viscount Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, was asked about the matter on 6 September 1942, he was ordered to respond in a curt manner:

‘We suggest that any answer sent to America should be couched in general terms only. There is, indeed, every argument for not giving publicity in cases of disloyalty among Indian Prisoners of War. The Japanese are undoubtedly pressing forward with plans for encouraging subversive activity in INDIA, and with the formation of the Indian National Army from Indian malcontents. Equally undoubtedly they have had some success in enlisting the support of disaffected elements, both Prisoners of War and civilian.’ MI2 Report, to the War Office, London, c.30 September 1943; *Indian Prisoners of War held by Japanese, Sep.-Dec. 1942*; Public and Judicial Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/PJ/12/641, File 2213/40.

¹⁸ General Staff Branch (MI Directorate), ‘The Problem of the Indian National Army and of Indian Military Personnel Rejoining from Japanese-Occupied Territory’, 12th November 1942, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*; War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/WS/1/1576.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

10% to 50%. We cannot afford to disregard the possibility that there is genuine belief that adherence to the INA is a service to the motherland.²²

The concerns of the DMI were echoed even more starkly by CSDIC(I) – the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India). The organization was initially established after the start of hostilities in Europe to interrogate detainees, defectors and prisoners of war suspected of harbouring detailed information about Nazi Germany. Its Indian branch was deemed initially to be of little import and it rarely compiled reports during the first weeks and months after its inception.²³ That changed in November 1942 when officers who had escaped from Japanese custody volunteered information about the INA, and when the Quit India movement created fears that INA agents were already working within India.²⁴ In the appendices that followed this initial report, the INA metamorphosed from an exploding shell to a monster and then to a disease that the British could not counter:

No one knew anything about the INA before the fall of Singapore. It came like a bomb-shell after the capitulation. [...] [But] The idea of a National Army has a great attraction for the rank-and-file. If one thinks "From where do our recruits come?" it will be found that they are [of] the same material and come from the same places where the Congress made frantic efforts to win over "the rural population of India." These seemingly inarticulate millions have in fact been made politically conscious to an appreciable degree by Congress propaganda. The modern recruit of the Indian Army is very different to his predecessor of 1914-1918. Hence this lurking danger, this already prepared foundation for [the] INA, is always there. A little real or imaginary grouse, a little subversive propaganda, and a reverse to the Allies have their hidden

²² *Ibid.*

²³ It only managed to produce 18 reports in the three years between September 1939 and November 1942.

²⁴ There was good reason for this. Individuals involved in the Quit India Movement, such as Jayaprakash Narayan, took inspiration from and tried to contact the INA. The information was, admittedly, extracted through torture and may not have been the whole truth. But it still makes for fascinating reading:

'I tried to contact the Subhas Bose but could not find a suitable person to arrange that contact. I wanted to consult him to chalk out a plan for coordinating our efforts for the liberation of the country. I wanted that he should continue his activities from outside while I should carry on my work from inside the country.

[...]

As far as [the] military was concerned we never asked them to desert. We had pledges of loyalty to the Indian Republic printed which were required to be signed by military men offering to join us. We were contacting them with a view to make them disloyal to the British Government and to get arms through them. This was also the work and an item in the programme of the Azad Senas. We knew that [the] military never revolted unless their masters were in a crippled state. We did not feel that the present international situation was such that the Government was weak and a military revolt could have been successful. We only wanted them to be ready for action when the Government was about to collapse. The Indian military is generally dissatisfied and we were able to win over 80 per cent of the men in [the] Air service, 50 per cent of Garhwalis, 50 per cent of Sikhs and we also succeeded in the formation of cells in all technical units stationed in Bihar and Assam.'

Extracts from Reports on Talks with Jai Prakash Narain, Recorded up to the 25th November, 1943; General Staff Branch to GOC Indian Army, 'Comments on the Subversive Activities in the Indian Army from Abroad and its Linkage with the Indian Nationalists Inside the Country: Issues Directions to Deal with the Situation'; T.R. Sareen (ed.), *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study, Vol. 1 (1941-1942)*, (New Delhi; Gyan, 2004), ps. 265-268.

possibilities [sic.]. This monster will not dare show its face till the last minute when prevention or cure may be impossible.²⁵

Thus the early conclusion reached by British Intelligence in India was that the *sipahis* who had joined the Indian National Army were all ‘black’ and were merely reflecting the dark thoughts that simmered in the hearts of all Indians.

The pervading melancholia seen in reports into the INA was dispelled in the months preceding Archibald Wavell’s ascension to Viceroy from Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in June 1943. On 18th March 1943, Wavell’s office circulated a memorandum into the origins of the INA that contradicted the early assessments of Intelligence officers. INA soldiers were no longer to be treated as dangerous radicals but as bewildered and confused soldiers who had been bullied into rebellion:

[The INA was created by the] Changes in the classes from which men and particularly Indian commissioned officers are drawn, [the] shortage of experienced British Officers with knowledge of the country and [who are] able to command personal respect and affection, combined with consistent “nationalist” propaganda which is sapping the foundation on which the morale and loyalty of the old Indian Army was based. At the same time the concept of “loyalty to India” which in theory should be developed by “nationalistic” propaganda is unable to replace the other loyalties referred to above in the case of newly introduced elements or the older elements (ie. the martial classes). The latter are so bewildered and confused by political developments which they do not understand but which they instinctively feel will react [sic.] to their disadvantage in the long run, that these older loyalties are rapidly losing their potency.²⁶

Wavell’s assessment of the INA was repeated a month later in a communiqué that was sent directly to the Directorate of Military Intelligence:

The Indian Army, as today constituted, contains two main elements – one represented by the older VCOs and men of the “martial races”, hitherto credited with a conservative attitude on political matters, and the other, newly enlisted classes and ICOs with “forward” political views. The latter probably now predominate at least in potential influence and at the same time, are, in theory, the most fruitful ground for enemy propaganda. Yet the bulk of the active INA personnel are representatives of

²⁵ ‘Appendix “A” to CSDIC (I) No.2 Section Report, No.19, 6th November 1942, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*, italics added.

²⁶ General HQ, India, to General Staff Branch, New Delhi, ‘Subversive Activities Directed Against the Military,’ 18th March 1943, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*.

the classes (Sikhs and PMs in particular) which formed the backbone of the prewar Indian Army. These are facts, which it would be wise to bear in mind [...].²⁷

The favoured solution of Wavell, therefore, echoed that of 'Teddie' in Scott's novel – the stoic British officer winning back control of the errant 'martial races' by looking them in the eye and shaming them once more into taking up the King's shilling. The only difference between Wavell and Teddie was that the former had the authority to create and change military policy.

On 3rd May 1943, Wavell announced that there would be active attempts to counter the propaganda and message of the INA:

[...] it was ruled [previously] that the dissemination of information about the INA and kindred activities should be confined [to British Officers] [...]. It has now been decided that we should put the situation plainly to all Indian ranks and prepare them to meet a method of attack which they are at present largely unconscious.²⁸

It took a year for this policy to be fleshed out further, by which time Wavell was firmly ensconced as Viceroy of India. Even with all his added responsibilities, he took a decisive role in what was finally proposed. Every commanding officer of every unit of the Indian Army was instructed to create "Josh" Groups'. Each of these were to parallel the activities of 'Jif' columns by 'immunising' soldiers before the latter was able to suborn them:

Josh is the strongest and most effective counter-propaganda method yet involved to combat the Japanese 'I' [Intelligence] offensive against the morale of Indian troops. "Jif" means Japanese inspired fifth column... "Josh" means "pep", and it is the morale counter-offensive weapon against these dangerous activities.²⁹

The precise means by which this was to be done was explained further. Any antipathy *sipahis* may have towards 'Britishers' would pale in comparison to the hatred that would be fanned for the Japanese:

Josh Groups are intended to: (a) build in every Indian soldier the knowledge and firm faith that the Japanese and everyone who represents the Japanese are his own personal enemies; (b) introduce stories of our victories against the Japanese and so turn the

²⁷ 'Subversive Activities Directed Against the Indian Army,' 29th April 1943, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1.*

²⁸ General HQ, India, to General Staff Branch, New Delhi, 3rd May 1943, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1.*

²⁹ General Headquarters (INDIA), New Delhi, to: - All Commanding Officers of Indian Army Units, May 1944, 'Instructions on Josh work and Josh group organization within units', *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1.*

conversation around to the topic of why the Japanese are India's enemies and why and how they will be defeated; (c) introduce stories of the bravery of Indian soldiers in action and his comradeship-in-arms with his Allies; (d) utilize entertainment, radios, dramas, information rooms, picture layouts etc., to bring home to the sepoy, through every medium that strikes his imagination, the existence of his chief enemy – the Japanese; (e) inoculate the Indian soldier with a sound factual basis of true knowledge so that false rumours and brazen lies spread by Japanese, Jifs and Japanese agents can be easily shown as such.³⁰

In addition to the creation of these instruments of inoculation within each military unit came the expansion of CSDIC(I) and attempts to diagnose and treat those men who had already caught the contagion. All captured INA personnel, regardless of their rank, were to be interrogated by the organization. The expectation was that they would be assessed somewhere between 'White' and 'Black', reconditioned, and then returned to their old military units. But, as will be shown in the remainder of the chapter, *sipahis* commonly refused to accept any of the medication that was on offer.

Being in the Employ of Hamare Neta: The Defection of "X" Battalion

On the 27th February 1943, 23 Sikh *sipahis* of 8 Platoon, "A" Company, 1/15th Punjab were sent on a fighting patrol near Buthidaung in western Burma. Their task was to search a village 'suspected of harbouring enemy troops'³¹ but instead the men of the Platoon used the opportunity to defect to the INA. As a result, the 1/15th Punjabis became the first military unit to be the sole subject of British intelligence reports relating to the INA. The men of the battalion were cited as an example of how low Indian soldiers had fallen. They were described as radical religious zealots and dangerous communist conspirators all in the space of two reports in March 1943. And they were such pariahs that even the name of the unit could not be mentioned but was effaced by a large "X". The reason for this was the means by which the men of the unit joined the INA, and the subsequent interrogation reports of the soldiers involved.

It was not the incident of the desertion itself that caused specific attention to be drawn to the *sipahis* of 1/15th Punjab. Similar stories had already been circulated of Indian soldiers crossing over to "F" Kikan and the Indian Independence League

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Interrogation of Sepoy Fakir Singh, 8 Platoon, A Coy, 1/15th Punjabis, 24th April 1944; *Arakan INA*; INA Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 379/INA.

throughout the Japanese advance into Malaya and Burma in 1941 and 1942.³² It was the fact that the men who defected were of the 'older "martial races"' and that they did so without any 'newly enlisted classes' or Indian Commissioned Officers being present that caused reports to be drafted about the matter in March 1943. In the first report there was an attempt to explain the defection of the Sikh soldiers as being due to their shared faith and in light of mutinies that had occurred among Sikh soldiers who had been ordered to wear steel helmets over and instead of their *pagnis* (turbans):

The Sikh Company first came to security notice [...] when a reservist, backed by three others, tried to make the wearing of steel helmets a religious question (September 1940). One of these reservists had already been noted corresponding with a Sikh NCO who had been imprisoned for playing a leading part in mass desertions of Sikhs from another unit on the eve of its departure overseas.³³

When, on 11th March, fourteen Hindu Jat *sipahis* of 'B' Company, 1/15th Punjabis also defected to the INA, this initial analysis was quickly revised. The blame was instead laid at the door of Communist *agents provocateurs* without much reason and less thought:

Following a police report by a man on leave that secret meetings were held in the unit by subversive elements, security investigations resulted in seven subjects being removed. While the investigations were in progress the Sikhs (reservists) deserted under suspicious circumstances. There is little doubt that this trouble was linked with the Kirti Communist plot, which formed the background to the 3/1st Punjab desertions, the RIASC [Royal Indian Army Supply Corp] mutiny in Egypt, and the CIH [38 Central India Horse] mutiny.³⁴

What marks these first reports into the defection of 8 Platoon, therefore, was this desperate desire to find some cause for *sipahis'* disloyalty that was external to their own body or consciousness.

It was as part of this attempt to find an external cause for the desertion and defection of men of the 1/15th Punjabis that Sepoy Fakir Singh was interrogated in depth in April 1944. The soldier gave an account in which the men of "A" Company were duped into crossing over to the Japanese. According to Fakir Singh, after the platoon had come under fire during their patrol, Havildar Surat Singh, the platoon

³² 'F' Kikan was the Japanese unit that helped to create the first INA, and was led by Fujiwara Iwaichi. His own book documents the origins of that organization and the Indian Independence League and their activity in winning over Indian soldiers as the Japanese advanced into Malaya. Fujiwara, *F. Kikan*.

³³ 'Extracts from "Security" History of 'X' Battalion', March 1943, *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

commander, conferred in secret with Havildar Major Massa Singh, Naik Jaggat Singh, Naik Kabul Singh, Havildar Mela Singh and Sepoys Gurdial and Dalip Singh. When the men dispersed,

The NCOs then returned to their sections and it was explained that the Platoon was to advance in the following order:-

Nk. Kabul Singh's Section

Nk. Jaggat Singh's Section

Hav. Mela Singh's Section.

With the two sepoys mentioned above, as connecting files back to the Company. In this order the Platoon advanced, led by the Hav. Major and the Pl. Commander for about one mile, when suddenly B312 [Fakir Singh] found that they had walked into the Japanese and that Hav. Surat Singh was carrying a white flag. The Pl. then laid down its arms and was marched off.³⁵

Fakir then recounted that the sixteen soldiers outwith Surat Singh's clique were not best pleased at being led over to the Japanese:

The next day Hav. Maj. Massa Singh and Havs. Surat Singh and Mela Singh were taken away and the men of the platoon began to argue about the desertion, those who were unwillingly captured blaming the NCOs already mentioned in the list above and also

L/Nk Hazara Singh

Sep. Dalip Singh

Sep. Gurdial Singh.³⁶

Fakir Singh's testimony confirmed part of what his interrogators had theorized. In his narrative, the *sipahis* were tricked into rebellion by their NCOs and rued their fate after the event. And, although Fakir Singh was only treated as a 'Grey' – largely because he claimed falsely that he later deserted from the INA – his account was treated, for a time, as fact.

It was treated as largely truthful until the interrogation of Havildar Surat Singh, the Commander of 8 Platoon, two years later.³⁷ When Surat was detained and interrogated in January 1946, it is clear that his interrogators hoped he would confess to having duped his men into defecting to the Japanese and the INA. The *sipahi*,

³⁵ Interrogation of Sepoy Fakir Singh.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ There are some conflicting accounts given before that date that suggest that Fakir was not being wholly truthful. But it does not seem to have challenged the prevailing notion that some or all of the men were duped into defecting.

however, refused to cooperate beyond relaying some basic details of his military service – that he had passed his matriculation exam, he had enlisted in 1/15th Punjab on 10th August 1932, and that he had become the Commander of 8 Platoon, “A” Company in July 1942.³⁸ Some time later, Surat was confronted with the captured diary of an Indian civilian working for the INA that made mention of him communicating and conferring with INA contact parties before his platoon crossed over. The only reply from Surat was that his captors had obviously fabricated the document:

27 Feb. '43.

Gobindara returned this morning. It is said that my letters have proven successful and that 23 men have come over who will be brought to us tomorrow morning.

28 Feb. '43.

After the morning tea, [I] saw the Indian soldiers who had come over on reading my letters. They were 23 Sikhs of A Coy of 1/15 Punjab Regt. They brought with them Bren guns, tommy guns, and many other weapons. Their commander's name is Surat Singh. They told us everything. Surat Singh is an honest and sincere man. The Japanese had a suspicion that these men had been sent as spies by the British, but after having [heard] their statements I assured the Japanese that these men were not sent by the British and that they had come over on reading my letters.³⁹

In the end, Surat's silence so infuriated his interrogators that the only judgment made of him was that he was 'an inveterate and bare-faced liar.'⁴⁰

But there was no truth to be discovered about what occurred in 1/15th Punjab. Even the most comprehensive of accounts from captured personnel contained elements of wilful fancy that their interrogators could not accept. Company Quarter Master Havildar Hardial Singh, for instance, mentioned that men in the battalion began to talk about the INA after several INA personnel 'in civilian dress' were captured in December 1942 and January 1943.⁴¹ Hardial also recounted that on 20th February 1943 every Platoon Commander of “A” Company was summoned before the Company Commander and told of 2 leaflets 'which were recovered by No.7 Pl. in

³⁸ Interrogation of Havildar Surat Singh, 1/15th Punjabis, 18th January 1946; 'Reports on Defections to the INA'.

³⁹ 'Extracts from “V” Section CSDIC Report No. F/298 dated 14th Dec. 45 on civilian JAGAT SINGH DHILLON @ DOST MOHD. who worked under HATTORI and TADAKURO in Arakan in 1943 as Chief Indian agent for the Akyab branch of Hikari Kikan'; *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Interrogation of Havildar Surat Singh.

⁴¹ Extract from supplementary statement by Havildar Hardial Singh, 1/15th Punjabis; *Arakan INA*.

the front area on a bamboo pole in a paddy field'.⁴² The Company Commander proceeded to read the contents of the leaflets aloud over the phone in front of Signalmen Balwant Singh, Kabul Singh and Girja Singh and,

[...] in a few hours the contents of the leaflets were known to just about all the men of 'A' Coy and general discussion[s] started on the following points mentioned in the leaflets:

- [The] INA had been formed in East Asia.
- Capt. Mohan Singh was its Commander.
- That [the] INA was formed for the Independence of India and that all Indians should join it.⁴³

Yet, as far as Hardial was concerned, that alone did not explain the actions of 8 Platoon. He instead wove a tale in which he and others had been anointed as envoys of Subhas Chandra Bose in September 1939:

At Alipore [Calcutta], B1205 [Hardial Singh] read in the newspapers of the powerful leadership of S.C. Bose, President of the Indian National Congress, and in a gurdwara which he often used to visit, B1205 found an opportunity of coming into contact with men of Congress sympathies. Sep. Gajjan Singh, 'A' Coy 1/15 Punjab, who belonged to the same village as B1205, was already in contact with a Congress agitator called Mulla Singh, a Sikh *durwan*⁴⁴ [sic.] in the house of the Maharaja of Nepal. Through Mulla Singh B1205 received an interview with S.C. Bose in the house of a friend of Mulla Singh somewhere between Alipore Road and Ballyganj Rly. Station. B1205 was thanked by Bose for offering his services and was advised to wait until a fully organized programme for India's independence was announced.⁴⁵

Upon realizing that others too had met Bose, Hardial claimed that all of the men began to talk of fighting for the independence of India before the INA had even been created:

[We] were all interested in discussions about overthrowing the British Govt. Serial 1 [Sepoy Shiv Singh] suggested starting a revolt within Fort William; Serial 5 [Lance Naik Mela Singh] suggested that they should desert and form into small armed bands and loot the rich, while Serial 7 [Havildar Major Nand Lal] rebuked them for this

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ It is uncertain whether Mulla Singh, who is described as a 'durwan', was a *diwan* or minister in Nepal, or whether he was a *darban* or courtier.

⁴⁵ 2 Section Report, 'Previous Congress Connections of Hav. Hardial Singh, CQMH, 'A' Coy., 1/15 Punjab'; 'Reports on Defections to the INA'.

wild and dangerous talk. B1205 [Hardial] suggested postponing all action in connection with these revolt[s] until Congress put its programme into operation.⁴⁶

Thus Hardial Singh created a narrative of the interrogation chamber in which the men of the 1/15th Punjab had always been anti-British and had always looked to defect. It is unlikely that he or others in his unit ever met Bose, but his repeated assertion that he had,⁴⁷ coupled with the silences and false testimonies of his peers, ensured that the “X” remained firmly in place whenever the 1/15th Punjabis were discussed.

Hiding in the Skirts of the Rani of Jhansi: Life in the INA

There was a change in the content of the interrogations after the surrender of Japan, the death of Subhas Chandra Bose⁴⁸ and the dissolution of the *Azad Hind Fauj* in August 1945. The end of the Second World War enabled CSDIC(I) to gain access to handbooks and directives intended for INA officers that only partially answered the question of how INA soldiers were treated.⁴⁹ To fill in those gaps intelligence officers began to ask *sipahis* what life was like after they had enlisted in the INA. The answers that were received were of ‘Art Sections’ drawing risqué cartoons, of Comedy troupes arranging burlesque shows and of ‘Dramatic Parties’ performing and writing their own plays. It was the latter group of erstwhile playwrights and actors that came to receive the most inquiry because one of its leading members, Dharam Chand Bhandari, was found to have been captured by British forces in the early months of 1946.⁵⁰ As will be shown, however, he was not the most cooperative of prisoners.

Bhandari was interrogated on 26th February 1946 and seemed at first to be unafraid of fully disclosing the details of his INA service. He stated that he was originally employed as a civilian ‘checker’ in the RIASC, supervising the reports of military clerks, before being ‘militarized’ and commissioned as a Jemadar on 10th September 1940.⁵¹ He confessed that he joined the INA in Singapore in May 1942 and was soon asked to organize ‘an entertaining publicity and propaganda

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Hardial Singh appears to have been interrogated on three separate occasions.

⁴⁸ Or rather the reported death since there was a great deal of uncertainty whether the news was accurate or some elaborate ruse on the part of Bose.

⁴⁹ *Discourse of Cultural and National Subjects for the Indian National Army*, (Syonan: Indo Sinbun Shan, 1943).

⁵⁰ It appears that Bhandari was being prepared for release without an in-depth interrogation before being hauled back into the interrogation chamber.

⁵¹ Interrogation of Subedar Dharam Chand Bhandari, Unit 203 Supply Pers. Section, RIASC; ‘Reports on Defections to the INA’; *CSDIC(I) Reports*; Parts 43-47.

programme'; which he interpreted as a writ to write and stage plays and dramas at Neesoon Camp (north of Singapore) for Indian Prisoners of War:⁵²

B1371 [Bhandari] started writing and staging patriotic dramas and through this and his speeches, he boasts of having inspired a great enthusiasm in the PW's and every one becoming imbued with "National Spirit." Following the example of B1371, others began to write dramas which were staged in various PW camps.⁵³

Bhandari commented that the plays became so popular and effective at winning new recruits for the INA that at least 43 amateur playwrights and actors were organized into a separate unit under his command.⁵⁴ Unfortunately for him his command of the 'Drama Party' ended in December 1943 when Bose wandered into one of his performances, 'found the plays vulgar and did not greatly like them,' and immediately ordered the unit to 'cease operations'.⁵⁵

When Bhandari was asked about the precise details of his plays, he suddenly fell into an awkward silence. After much prompting, he admitted the names of some of the plays that he had written, such as *Ekhi Rasta* (The Only Way), *Milap* (Unity) and *Balidan* (Sacrifice).⁵⁶ But he would say nothing of the content of these plays, which 'actors' had performed them, or how they had been staged. Bhandari's interrogators learnt from other sources some of the secular and radical nationalist themes conveyed through the performances; such as showing 'how Indians were treated with torture and brutality under the British yoke through the Indian Police' in *Ekhi Rasta*,⁵⁷ encouraging 'unity between Hindus and Muslims' in *Milap*,⁵⁸ and documenting how the anti-British struggle would spread when the INA reached Indian soil in *Balidan*.⁵⁹ Even when confronted with these accounts, Bhandari refused to say anything further. The only thing he did do was push a worn and tattered booklet across the table towards his interrogators with the words *The Rani of Janshi: A Play in Three Acts* stamped across the front.

According to its preface, the play was written by a P.N. Oak and was produced to commemorate the first anniversary of the founding of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment (the Women's Regiment) of the INA in July 1943 – 'a feat unique and

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Appendix A, Interrogation of Subedar Dharam Chand Bhandari.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

unparalleled in world history'.⁶⁰ There were few women protagonists in the play, however, and even fewer appearances by Rani Lakshmibai herself.⁶¹ Instead, the drama focused upon Indian soldiers and cantonment workers who mutinied and took up arms against their officers in Meerut in 1857. Act One, Scene One portrayed a weaver being arrested by *sipahis*, after their *sahibs* took objection to him selling Indian rather than British-made cloth:

Weaver: Shameless scoundrel! You came as petty hawkers and now you pose yourself to be a Government? What kind of Government? Which Government? An impertinent vagabond called Clive came here a hundred years ago to work on a job of two hundred rupees a month, and he treacherously ruined Sirajuddaula. Warren Hastings forged a document himself and hanged Nandkumar a wealthy citizen of Bengal for it. He starved the Begums of Oudh in a locked room and extorted all their wealth from them. Wellesley cheated many Rajas and now Dalhousie has begun annexing kingdom after kingdom. Is this what you call your Government? Speak out...speak out!⁶²

It was in order to 'speak out' that the soldiers witnessing the Weaver's arrest began to circulate chapattis to symbolically incite rebellion and to link his unjust treatment to the way in which they were being treated by their officers:

Sepoy: Anyway these chapattis have come in time, for in the name of "Discipline" that white fellow made us march for miles with hungry stomachs.⁶³

Later scenes in the *Rani of Zanshi* tried to demonstrate how undeserving British officers were of *sipahis'* loyalty. In Act One, Scene Two, for instance, a 'Major General' stumbles into a malapropism after demanding to know from his *dhobi* why his clothes were not being carried in pride of place upon the back of his donkey:

Major General: Capt. sab bhi gadha, Major sab bhi gadha, ham kion nahi gadha? [Captain Sahib is an ass, Major Sahib is also an ass, so why am I alone being deprived of that honour?]...Kalsay ham bhi gadha! [From tomorrow I must also be an ass!]

Dhobi: Accha sarkar, ap jarur gadha. Phir kalsay kion? Ajhi say ap gadha. [Right, Sir, you are definitely an ass. But why wait until tomorrow? Today you are already an ass.]⁶⁴

⁶⁰ P.N. Oak, 'Rani of Zanshi: A Play in Three Acts'; *Magazines and Pamphlets*; INA Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 291/INA.

⁶¹ Rani Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, was the queen of the princely state of Jhansi, and involved in the Uprisings of 1857. She died (reputedly) battling the 8th Hussars at Gwalior on 18th June, 1858.

⁶² 'Rani of Zanshi'.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

There is also an instance of crass mistreatment of Indian soldiers by their superiors that leads to mutiny in Act 2 and a pledge by soldiers to fight for the Rani of Jhansi in Act 3:

Instructor: Shut up! Now I will tell you something about “Discipline”. In this British Army of ours we have got to observe “Discipline” in every little thing. From tomorrow morning onwards all persons will “Fall in” to go to W.C. which will be known as the “W.C. Parade”: Later on you will all “Fall in” to go to the bathroom, then for physical training; then for parade and meals. For all these you will have to keep time, with the men in front.

The Men: But in the W.C. and in the dining-room how can we keep time with the men in front?

Instructor: It is a Govt. order and regulation!

[The Men Mutiny]

The Men: We are not ready to obey the orders of these white tyrants! Say ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’!⁶⁵

But why, if the play was so unashamedly anti-British, did Bhandari hand over a copy to his interrogators? The reason was possibly to do with the author of the play: P.N. Oak. Purushottam Nagesh Oak enlisted in the INA, served in ‘propaganda sections’, but was never captured by the British after the end of hostilities. According to his own account,⁶⁶ he skillfully evaded capture as he journeyed from Singapore to Calcutta in 1945 and 1946. It is possible that Bhandari knew this and that there was consequently little risk in divulging material written by Oak. It may also have been the case that Bhandari was more willing for Oak to face prosecution, in the event that he was found, than others in the ‘Dramatic Party’. P.N. Oak later became (in)famous in certain circles for writing *hindutva* histories after India attained independence and equally notorious for the dubious claims made within them that Christianity was really ‘Krishna-ity’ and that the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Agra were actually

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Or rather that of a crude website that was commissioned by him before his death in 2007. The website relates to one his last publications: ‘Taj Mahal: A Hindu Temple Vandalised’. <http://home.freeuk.net/tajmahal/index.htm>

'Hindu buildings'.⁶⁷ If Oak's beliefs were similar at an earlier stage of his life, it is likely to have conflicted with the secular mores of the INA.

Yet Bhandari's motives cannot wholly have been to implicate a man who had evaded custody or someone who he personally disliked. After all, it was presumably Bhandari's decision to have *The Rani of Zanshi* published as a booklet, to have it translated into English, and to privilege it by secreting it away on his person when other INA files and publications were being destroyed or seized by British forces. Moreover, Bhandari held on to his copy of the play for the weeks and months in which he was interned in Singapore, shuttled back to India, released and then recaptured when his interrogators realized how important he had been. And he only parted with it when confronted with summaries of plays that his interrogators had gleaned from other detainees. It was, I would argue, the dually transgressive and tractable quality of the *The Rani of Zanshi* that led Bhandari to having it among his few possessions when interrogated and to pushing it across the table when prompted to do so. The play could be read as an unvarnished version of why *sipahis* had joined the INA – because of their officers' ineptitude and the mistreatment of other Indians – and what the simple message of the INA was for its soldiers: 'We are not ready to obey the orders of these white tyrants! Say "Bharat Mata Ki Jai"!'⁶⁸ By the same token it was removed from the historical immediacy of *Ekhi Rasta*, *Milap* or *Balidan*, and could be passed off as a historical drama with the uncontroversial message that the *sipahis* of 1857 were given to intrigue and rebellion. The *Rani of Zanshi* could, therefore, defiantly communicate what Bhandari thought and wished to say even as he sat pliantly in the interrogation room.

Resisting the INA: Hong Kong and Punjabi Muslim Detainees

There was one last theme to the interrogations conducted by CSDIC(I): the detailed questioning of *sipahis* that came into contact with the INA but never joined it. Particular attention was given to *sipahis* who were captured outwith Malaya or Singapore, such as the 3300 men stationed at Hong Kong at its surrender on 25th December 1941. It was these soldiers, often classed as 'Whites', that were viewed as the most promising material for re-integration into the British Indian Army. And yet,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ P.N. Oak, *Rani of Zanshi*

even among these *sipahis*, very few, if any, were ever returned to their old regiments or expressed a desire to do so. Their reasons for not joining the INA or for actively resisting the *Azad Hind Fauj* were more complicated than their interrogators assumed. In Hong Kong, men were divided: along communal lines, by those that advocated and were willing to listen to a pseudo-Congress message and those that felt alienated by it, and by those who were willing to bear arms and those who no longer wished to do so.

At the fall of Hong Kong on 25th December 1941, *sipahis* from five Indian units were captured, the largest proportion of whom were classed as ‘PMs’ or Punjabi Muslims from the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery (HKSRA), the 2/14th Punjab, and the 5/7th Rajputs.⁶⁹ Four *sipahis*⁷⁰ from Hong Kong were involved in ratifying the creation of the (first) INA as delegates to the Bangkok Conference between 15th and 23rd June 1942. When they returned at least 500 Sikh and Hindu PWs volunteered for the INA, and various organizations were established ‘to carry out [INA] propaganda and look after the welfare of volunteers’ including the ‘Indian Welfare Committee’, the ‘Congress Committee’ and the ‘Azad School’.⁷¹ But there was a notable lack of enthusiasm expressed by Punjabi Muslim detainees for the INA and the nationalist organizations associated with it. When, for instance, ‘Indian Independence Day’ was celebrated on 9th August 1942 at the King’s Theatre, Hong Kong, ‘all the PW were invited to attend’ and ‘all Sikhs and Hindu PW in Mautau Chung’ camp accepted the offer.⁷² Yet only four Punjabi Muslims joined them. And, even when at the end of the event a procession toured around the city, only a handful more Muslim soldiers were persuaded to march along.⁷³

It was not for want of trying. Immediately after the surrender of Hong Kong, the Japanese believed that Punjabi Muslims were more likely to join the INA than other *sipahis*. 561 Muslim PWs were separated from other detainees in the first week of January 1942, housed in the Gun Club Hill Barracks in King’s Park, Kowloon,⁷⁴ and offered better rations than their peers elsewhere. They were joined by another 800

⁶⁹ The estimated number of Indian prisoners taken was HKSRA – 1500; 2/14 Punjabis – 900; 5/7 Rajputs – 630; Hong Kong Mule Corps – 250; RIASC Supply Section – 20. ‘A General Report on Indian PW in Hong Kong with Particular Reference to HKSRA’, 10th June 1946; *CSDIC (I) Reports*; Parts 8-12.

⁷⁰ Subedar Hakim Khan, 2/14 Punjab; Jemadar Aya Singh, HKSRA; Lance Naik Tara Singh, HKSRA; and Lance Naik Mohamed Iqbal (regiment unknown). Interrogation of Subedar Major Mohamed Ali, 30/8 Coast Regt., HKSRA, 14 May 1946; *CSDIC (I) Reports*; Parts 61-70.

⁷¹ ‘General Report on Indian PW in Hong Kong’.

⁷² Interrogation of Subedar Major Mohamed Ali.

⁷³ Leading to a total of ‘around 25’. Lance Naik (Clerk) Raghbir Singh, 36th Coast Battery, 8th Coast Regt., HKSRA, 25 May 1946; *CSDIC (I) Reports*, Parts 71-80.

⁷⁴ The barracks are, interestingly enough, still in use today by the Jiefangjun (People’s Liberation Army).

Punjabi Muslim PWs on 14th May 1942 and were encouraged to mix and have 'free intercourse'.⁷⁵ Only 100 of that number, however, agreed to bear arms under the Japanese and were sent as guard pickets to Guangzhou in mainland China.⁷⁶ Moreover, some of those that did volunteer had very specific reasons for doing so. Lance Naik Mohamed Shaffi, for instance, of the 5th Anti-Aircraft Regiment, HKSRA, volunteered in order to revenge himself upon superiors he accused of sexual assault and rape:

HK/141 [L/Nk Mohd. Shaffi] alleges that the behaviour of HK/140 [BHM Jahan Dad] with the men, especially those who hailed from districts east of Gujrat, was very bad. HK/141 accuses HK/140 of forcibly committing sodomy with him. Hav. Sher Baz also committed the same act with him on the instigation of HK/140. HK/141 requested HK/142 [Nk Gheba Khan] and Nk. Jamal Khan not to indulge in such unnatural and inhumane acts. While HK/141 was talking to these NCOs, HK/140 with Hav. Sher Baz, appeared in the barrack [room] and HK/140 threatened these NCOs and told them not to have anything to do with HK/141. Both HK/142 and Nk. Jamal Din confirm this and say that they declined to say anything to HK/140 about this matter.⁷⁷

Shaffi, once he had joined the INA, confessed that he used his position to have,

[...] many NCOs punished by the Japanese, he forced them to salute him and his relations with the Japanese were very intimate. He is also held responsible for the imprisonment of HK/140 and indirectly responsible for the death of Jemadar Ghulam Nabi.⁷⁸

The other *sipahis* in the group of 100 may have felt a keener attachment to the INA than Shaffi. The vast majority of Punjabi Muslim prisoners certainly did not, and, from what can be deduced from the interrogation reports, only four others joined.⁷⁹

Those non-volunteers who remained at Gun Club Hill began to actively resist joining the INA. At the barracks, Subedar Hakim Khan of 2/14th Punjab assumed

⁷⁵ Joint interrogations of Gunner Nazar Mohamed, 4th Medium Battery, 1st Hong Kong Regiment, HKSRA; Havildar Sagar Khan, 25th Medium Battery, 1st Hong Kong Regiment, HKSRA; Havildar Rehmat Khan, 18th Battery, 5th AA Regiment, HKSRA; and Havildar Ahmed Din, 36th Battery, Coast Regiment, HKSRA, 7th May 1946; CSDIC(I) Reports; parts 55-60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Interrogation of Lance Naik Mohamed Shaffi, 17th AA Battery, 5th AA Regiment, HKSRA, 13th May 1946; CSDIC(I) Reports; Parts 61-70.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ In all the interrogations only four other Punjabi Muslim *sipahis* (excluding VCOs) are said to have joined. It is possible, however, that others did do so. The men in question were listed as Havildar Jamroz Khan, 2/14th Punjab; Lance Naik Yar Khan, 2/14th Punjab; Lance Naik Barkat Ali, HKSRA; and Gunner Israel Khan, HKSRA. Interrogation of Subedar Major Mohamed Ali.

command and became ‘a favourite with the Japanese and the Indian quisling’.⁸⁰ Hakim Khan sought to remove from the barracks VCOs and NCOs who were seen as being pro-British, to drill the soldiers as if they were still on active duty, and separate the men in accordance with their views on the Indian nationalist movement.⁸¹ Each stage of Hakim Khan’s programme, however, met with protest. According to Sultan Ahmed, when the Japanese attempted to remove the Subedars and Jemadars of his detachment, the men,

[...] protested, and the remainder of the PW joined the VCOs and asked to be taken as well. After threatening them with death, the Japanese went away.⁸²

Gunner Nazar Mohamed and Havildar Khuda Baksh recounted what occurred when the men were asked to bear arms:⁸³

The Japanese asked the PW of HKSRA whether they were able to handle rifles. They all feigned ignorance. The Japanese said they would teach them rifle drill with staves, but the PW protested. The Japanese Officer asked for one man to step forward and explain to him why the PW would not parade with rifles. All the PW stepped forward but they were told again that only one man should step forward. Hav. Mohd. Akbar who was standing at the side of B1398 [Havildar Khuda But] in the front rank right flank, attempted to step forward, but was stopped by B1398. The Japanese Officer who was standing on the left flank saw the move and asked who the individual was who had stepped forward, but no one informed him.⁸⁴

And, when the ‘men began talking derogatively of Sub. Hakim Khan’ and the Japanese tried to separate the original group of 561 PWs from the 800 that arrived later, further trouble ensued:

When the party of “500” was ordered to march, those who were being left behind (ie. party of “800” and 60 men of the 561 party) rushed the gate with the hope of joining the others. This compelled the Japanese forces who were outside the Camp to open overhead fire. During the incident Sub. Hakim Khan had apparently hidden in his

⁸⁰ Joint interrogations of Gunner Nazar Mohamed et al.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Interrogation of Subedar Sultan Ahmed, (Battery and Regiment not listed), HKSRA, 10th May 1946; *CSDIC(I) Reports*; Parts 61-70.

⁸³ Nazar Mohamed’s account differed from Khuda Baksh’s account in one respect. According to Nazar Mohamed, after the men refused they were imprisoned and deprived of food and water for 24 hours, after which they agreed to bear arms. Joint interrogations of Gunner Nazar Mohamed et al.

⁸⁴ Interrogation of Havildar Khuda But, (Battery and Regiment not listed), HKSRA, 10th May 1946; *CSDIC(I) Reports*, Parts 61-70.

room. The Japanese finally managed to quell the disturbance. The water supply was cut off, and no rations issued that day. There was no sign of Sub. Hakim Khan.⁸⁵

The events at Gun Club Hill would have been classified as a mutiny had the men still been on active service. As it was, the barracks were closed, little more attempt was made to recruit Punjabi Muslims into the INA, and the soldiers themselves were organized into prisoner fatigues and sent to work in Guangdong Province in China.

The reasons why Punjabi Muslims in Hong Kong were reluctant to join the INA had little to do with any lingering attachment the soldiers had to the British Indian Army. CSDIC(I) did not even make that claim.⁸⁶ Instead, it reached the conclusion that it was the soldiers' attachment to 'their own VCOs and NCOs' that enabled 'the PMs' to 'gird their loins and resist the attentions of the INA'.⁸⁷ It is true that the soldiers at Gun Club Hill refused to be parted from their Indian superiors. That explanation, however, cannot account for the reluctance of Punjabi Muslim soldiers to follow Subedar Hakim Khan into the INA. Hakim Khan was also Muslim, was a VCO in 2/14th Punjab, styled himself as a colonel and informed the men on several occasions that he had been hand-picked by the Japanese as the personal successor to General Mohan Singh when the first INA was dissolved on 21st December 1942.⁸⁸

Thus additional motives need to be searched for. The interrogations reveal that the reasons were partly communal, largely a reluctance to accept the form of nationalism that was circulated in Hong Kong, and an almost universal reluctance by captured soldiers to bear arms again in any capacity. Hong Kong was the scene of protests by Sikh *sipahis* of the HKSRA and 2/14th Punjab in December 1940 after soldiers were ordered to wear steel helmets⁸⁹ over or instead of their *pagris*.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ It did, however, do so regarding the HKSRA in Singapore. 'A General Report on HKSRA, Singapore', 3rd June 1946; *CSDIC (I) Reports*, Parts 8-12.

⁸⁷ 'A General Report on Indian PW in Hong Kong'.

⁸⁸ It is difficult to know how seriously Hakim Khan was in making the last of these claims. The report detailing his interrogation is not very lengthy and mostly consists of him being labelled as 'the blackest of the black'. Interrogation of Subedar Hakim Khan, 2/14th Punjab, 29th May 1946; *CSDIC(I) Reports*, Parts 71-80.

⁸⁹ As per Indian Army Ordinance 994, of 6th September 1940.

⁹⁰ The official charges were: 'When on active service joining in a mutiny in His Majesty's military forces in that they at Hong Kong on or about the 20th day of December, 1940, when No. 2607, Havildar Gujjan Singh, 12th Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery, was marched in custody to the Guard Room of the 20th Heavy Battery (12th Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery), [the 82 accused] joined in a mutiny by moving in a body to the said Guard Room, entering the same and remaining inside, without having been ordered to do so.' And: 'When on active service joining in a mutiny in His Majesty's military forces in that they at Hong Kong between [the] 20th day of December, 1940 and the 24th day of December, 1940, joined in a mutiny by collectively refusing to take food.' *General Court Martial, Royal Artillery, Hong Kong, 20th January 1941*; (British National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey; WO 71/1057.

willingness of the same soldiers to then join the INA appears to have coloured the *Azad Hind Fauj* as a non-Muslim institution for Punjabi Muslim *sipahis*. Noor Mohamed disliked the Sikhs that joined the INA because they ‘did not pay proper respect to their officers and in some cases disobeyed their orders’.⁹¹ Mohamed Ali claimed that the Sikhs had been using Japanese words of command even before they had surrendered and that ‘Muhammedan PW had no relations or contacts with any of the Sikh PW, and their mutual relations were rather strained’.⁹² The unwillingness to countenance non-Congress nationalisms in the propaganda of the INA in Hong Kong helped to further this sense of alienation. No *sipahis* mentioned any particular sympathy for the Muslim League, but they certainly disapproved of the hanging of ‘framed pictures of Mahatma Gandhi’ in PW camps⁹³ or having to hear Hindu and Sikh *sipahis* chant pro-Congress slogans.⁹⁴ Finally, there was the incident at Gun Club Hill in which PWs refused to bear arms. In the interrogation reports, the soldiers involved described the protest as a ‘refusal’,⁹⁵ a ‘reluctance’⁹⁶ and a ‘feigning of ignorance’ that they had ever been ‘proper soldiers before’.⁹⁷ The inference was that the *sipahis* would never be ‘proper soldiers’ again. That was the conclusion CSDIC(I) ultimately reached. No Punjabi Muslim soldier captured in Hong Kong was invited back into the British Indian Army, and the HKSRA was unceremoniously disbanded.

Conclusion: Negating Military Identities

There is a perceptible silence in accounts of the Indian National Army. It is not because there is any shortage of narratives from an Indian perspective. As a result of the clamour made during and after the INA trial of Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Shahnawaz Khan and Prem Kumar Sahgal in November and December 1945, not only have the accounts of INA officers been published (and embellished) but its court

⁹¹ Interrogation of Subedar Noor Mohammed, 36 Coast Battery, 8 Coast Regt., HKSRA, 2nd April 1946; *CSDIC(I) Reports*, Parts 48-54.

⁹² Interrogation of Subedar Major Mohamed Ali.

⁹³ ‘He was carrying framed photos of Mahatma Gandhi, Capt. Mohan Singh, Lt. Col. Gill and a booklet, containing many other photos to show to the PWs. He told them about the Bangkok conference which was then in progress.’ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ ‘Messrs D.M. Khan and Parwani, visited Mautau Chung Camp and gave anti-British propaganda lectures and advised the PW to co-operate with the Japanese. This was the real beginning of subversive activities. At the end of the lecture large number[s] of Sikhs and Hindus shouted “Inquilab Zindabad!”. S.M. Karnail Singh’s attitude from this day was changed – he was the first one to cheer the lecturers.’ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Joint interrogations of Gunner Nazar Mohamed et al.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Interrogation of Havildar Khuda But.

proceedings can still be found sitting in certain bookshops.⁹⁸ But all of these narratives are from the perspective of officers and none from the overwhelming majority of *sipahis* that staffed the institution. More often than not, the idea that ordinary soldiers had voices and opinions is not even present in these narratives. In an interview with the late Colonel Pritam Singh, former aide-de-camp to Subhas Chandra Bose, the question of how and why the men of the Kapurthala Light Infantry agreed to join the INA was met with a smile and a laugh:

It was simple. I told the men under my command that I was going to join the INA and that they must join too.⁹⁹

Hopefully this chapter will have gone some way to filling that lacuna. 'Other ranks' of the Indian Army who came in touch with the INA did have their own reasons and methods of joining it, of resisting it, and their own accounts of what life was like in the institution.

This chapter, however, was not intended to just give a voice to the voiceless. As Jacques Derrida remarked, any 'reversal' of a 'metaphysical edifice' is 'at once contained within it and transgresses it' and what is needed is to deconstruct,

[...] through a meditation of writing which would merge as it must, with the undoing [solicitation] of onto-theology, faithfully repeating it in its totality and making it insecure in its most assured evidences.¹⁰⁰

This thesis has sought to shed some light on the strings that pulled *sipahis'* testimony in certain directions: various censoring authorities and the individual or collective body of the soldier. In the interrogation of INA personnel who and what acted as a censor is easy to explain: it manifested itself in CSDIC(I), the interrogation room and the angry voice that penned an accompaniment to each report. The physical presence of the *sipahi* in this testimony is harder to summarize in a single sentence because it was everywhere. The interrogations of 'X' Battalion are marked not by a refusal to cooperate but by a failure to respect the whole process and the relaying of alternate and fanciful tales. The grilling of Dharm Chand Bhandari resulted in a narrative being woven through a fictional play. And the questioning of Punjabi Muslim

⁹⁸ Particularly the Defence Address by Bhulabhai Desai. V.S. Kulkarni and K.S.N. Murty (eds.), *First Indian National Army Trial*, (Poona: Mangal Sahitya Prakashan, 1946).

⁹⁹ Pritam Singh, interview held at Doiwala, Dehradun dist., Uttarakhand, March 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1997 repr.), pp. 65-73.

detainees in Hong Kong resulted in tales of mutiny, dissent and the inferred message that they were no longer willing to bear arms for the Raj. In each type of testimony, the *sipahi* – whether real or imagined – was paramount and the physical presence of the interrogator was of lesser importance and at times completely ignored.

It is unsurprising that no INA personnel were invited back into the Indian Army in either its colonial or post-colonial guise.¹⁰¹ Regiments such as the HKSRA were quietly disbanded in 1946¹⁰² and most others divorced from British military planning. Part of the reason may have been the enduring hostility of Jawaharlal Nehru or Mountbatten to the INA, but that does not explain the failure to reintegrate men who only had a tangential connection to the rebel army. It was ultimately a decision taken by *sipahis* themselves. Few of those interrogated expressed a desire to serve as soldiers once more, but rather did quite the opposite: they negated or rejected their military identities. As Claude Auchinleck, the last Commander-in-Chief of the colonial Indian Army, admitted in 1946, the elements of fantasy that under-pinned the colonial Indian Army had been dispelled. And its officers had some hard truths to face:

It is quite wrong to adopt the attitude that because these men had been in service in a British controlled Indian Army that therefore their loyalty must be the same as British soldiers. As I have tried to explain, they had no real loyalty towards Britain as Britain, not as we understand loyalty.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The exception is the Pakistan Army which did invite (at least some) officers to re-enlist. The invite was not extended to the rank-and-file.

¹⁰² 15th October 1946 to be precise.

¹⁰³ Claude Auchinleck, *Typewritten minute marked "Strictly Personal and Secret"*.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

In 1922, Kazi Nazrul Islam, the Bengali poet, published *Bidrohi* or *The Rebel Warrior*:¹

Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: I raise my head high!
 Before me bows down the Himalayan peaks!

Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: rending through the sky,
 surpassing the moon, the sun,
 the planets, the stars,
 piercing through the earth,
 the heavens, the cosmos
 and the Almighty's throne,
 have I risen, the eternal wonder
 of the Creator of the universe.
 The furious Shiva shines on my forehead
 like a royal medallion of victory!

Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: My head is ever held high!

I'm ever indomitable, arrogant and cruel,
I'm the Dance-king of the Day of Doom,
I'm the cyclone, the destruction!
I'm the great terror, I'm the curse of the world.
I'm unstoppable,
I smash everything into pieces!
I'm unruly and lawless.
I crush under my feet
all the bonds, rules and disciplines!
I don't obey any laws.
I sink cargo-laden boats, I'm the torpedo,
I'm the dreadful floating mine.
I'm the destructive Dhurjati,
the sudden tempest of the summer.

¹ This is the translation employed by Asian Dub Foundation in the track 'Rebel Warrior'; Asian Dub Foundation, *Facts and Fictions*, (Nation Records, 1995). It could also be translated as 'Rebel' or 'The Rebel'.

I'm the Rebel, the Rebel son
of the Creator of the universe!²

It is significant that the work was immortalized in print only two years after Nazrul left the Indian Army as a Quartermaster-Havildar in the 49th Bengalis.³ The 'cargo-laden boats', the 'torpedoes' and the 'mines' were something he saw as his battalion was shipped to fight in Mesopotamia. And the ode he wrote to that joint ideal of both 'Rebel' and 'Warrior' was an act of self-realization: a desire to be the Rebel now that the War was over; to become the logical product of his military service.

Nazrul offers a way to make sense of the testimony-ies of all *sipahis* during the Two World Wars. It can be seen as an echo of Nazrul's poem: a journey towards a clear, distinct goal of rebellion. But that has not been my intent, and to impose such a metanarrative upon the material discussed in this thesis is intensely problematic. Rather than concluding that *sipahis* were both Rebels and Warriors, I will argue that they were neither one nor (quite) the other.

Failing to Be that Rebel

There is no shortage of studies of rebellion or resistance in South or Southeast Asia. But with the emergence in recent years of what may be broadly categorized as 'postcolonial histories', they have taken one of two forms. Deciding what is and what is not resistance is collapsed into studying the identity of the rebel; or vice versa, studies of the act of rebellion subsume any individual actors. This thesis and its subjects fit poorly into either category. *Sipahis* fail the test of being sufficiently subaltern, and their testimony is not as 'hidden' as it ought to be.

The journal *Subaltern Studies* embodied the hopes and desires of a generation of anti-colonial historians, even though the numbers of those involved in its production were small and they were writing (almost exclusively) about colonial India. Its contributors sought to retrieve a subaltern history that rewrote the received accounts of colonizing academics and (contemporary) ruling elites. It was to be a history of the voiceless, the excluded, of those that had been denied subjectivity under the yoke of essentializing colonial knowledges and fantasies:

² Kazi Nasrul Islam, *Bidrohi*; translated by Sajed Kamal; http://www.nazrul.org/nazrul_works/s-kamal/poem_rebel.htm.

³ During the latter half of 1920 when the regiment was being disbanded (it was not fully disbanded until 24th February 1921).

Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics. In other words, when the proverbial clod of earth turns, this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history. Even when this historiography is pushed to the point of producing an explanation in rather more human terms it will do so by assuming an identity of nature and culture, a hall-mark presumably, of a very low state of civilization and exemplified in ‘those periodical outbursts of crime and lawlessness to which all wild tribes are subject’, as the first historian of the Chuar rebellion put it. Alternatively, an explanation will be sought in an enumeration of causes – of, say, factors of economic and political deprivation which do not relate at all to the peasant’s consciousness or do so negatively – triggering off rebellion as a sort of reflex action, that is, as an instinctive and almost mindless response to physical suffering of one kind or another (e.g. hunger, torture, forced labour, etc.) or as a passive reaction to some initiative of his superordinate enemy. Either way insurgency is regarded as external to the peasant’s consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness.⁴

Under the challenges posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the aims and language of Subalternists were tempered. Attempts to discover that comprehensive peasant consciousness and restore his/her subjectivity were abandoned. Instead, more nuanced efforts were made to find those that occupied the margins, focus upon his/her fragmentary appearances in the archive (or outside it), and so avoid the perils of creating new delimiting subjects in place of the old:

My Rani stands, liminally, on the shadow-border of the prehistory of this colonial/postcolonial (dis)continuity. She can be invoked, for she is Fateh Prakash’s mother, and he is in history, when history is understood on the Western model. But she cannot be commemorated.⁵

A re-orientation also took place in the writings of James C. Scott, but one that sent him spiralling in the opposite direction. Scott’s early work focused on the class relations in a Malay village in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* and *Weapons of the Weak*. His fieldwork led him to pose the question why ‘the poor sang one tune when they

⁴ Ranajit Guha, ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’; idem (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005 rpt.), pp. 18-19.

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003 rpt.), p. 240.

were in the presence of the rich and another tune when they were among the poor'.⁶ The conclusion reached was that there was an alternate peasant consciousness at play that informed acts of surreptitious resistance:

The argument for false-consciousness, after all, depends on the symbolic alignment of elite and subordinate class values – that is, on the assumption that the peasantry (proletariat) actually accepts most of the elite versions of the social order. [...] [But] any groups social outlook will contain a number of diverse and even contradictory currents. It is not the mere existence of deviant subcultural themes that is notable, for they are well-nigh universal, but rather the forms they may take, the values they embody, and the emotional attachment they inspire.⁷

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, the subject and intended audience widened in scope. Scott's village became the archetype for a multitude of other 'forms of domination': 'the master and the slave, the landlord and the serf, the high-caste Hindu and untouchable'.⁸ The link between them was the presence of the 'hidden transcript' that was articulated both by the dominant – 'representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed' – and by the dominated – 'a critique of power spoken behind the[ir] back'.⁹ They further shared the potential to evolve into what is more easily recognizable as 'resistance':

Many, perhaps most, hidden transcripts remain just that: hidden from public view and never "enacted". And we are not able to tell easily under what precise circumstance the hidden transcript will storm the stage. But if we wish to move beyond apparent consent and to grasp potential acts, intentions as yet blocked, and possible futures that a shift in the balance of power or a crisis might bring into view, we have little choice but to explore the realms of the hidden transcript.¹⁰

It would be easy to conclude that there are elements of both approaches in this thesis and leave it at that. Unfortunately, it is not so simple. I am indebted to the writings of Subalternists and Scott, but hampered by the failure of *sipahis* and their testimonies to live up to all that they ought to be. There was nothing marginal about the existence of *sipahis* under the British Raj. They were at the heart of the colonial stage in India as constant objects of a split diachronic/synchronic vision of martial

⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), Preface.

⁷ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 40.

⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Preface.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

narratives and military regulations. *Sipahis'* voices were not to be repressed or ignored, but censored; privileged in the sense that they were to be recorded, listened to, and stored for posterity. But their testimonies are also incomplete. *Sipahis'* voices are fragmentary and their testimonies have aching holes in them that cannot be fully filled. The possibilities of other testimonies existing in German, Italian or Japanese archives remains unrealized here, in this thesis, because of my own linguistic failures.¹¹ And even if I were to find other material in other languages, it too would be subject to the perils of archivization. *Sipahis'* voices have been institutionalized, in a Derridean sense, made unhidden by that very process even before I (or others) gain access to it:

It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public [...].¹²

In other words, *sipahis* fail to be sufficiently subaltern. To adopt a study of the marginal for those that were at the heart of colonialism is the reverse of what contemporary Subalternists would propose. At the same time there is no comforting veil of 'hidden-ness' to *sipahis'* testimony and the ease of composing a single, unbroken chain where dissent morphs into rebellion is not available to this or any other historian.

So what is available and what can the historian achieve? An alternative way of writing has to start by being mindful of one's own limitations, and the limitations of history-writing as a mode of analysis. One must write, as Spivak remarks, not in expectation that one day those limits will be overcome but in the realization that 'systematic research cannot capture what the everyday sense of self shores up'.¹³ The *sipahi's* complete self is unavailable and unreachable to the historian. At the same time, any transferential relationship, whereby the historian lives through his/her subject and the soldier of the past becomes a model for what those in the present can do, is closed. What remains open is that sense of haunting; of incompleteness:

I pray instead to be haunted by her slight ghost, bypassing the arrogance of the cure.
[...] To be haunted is also to lay to rest any hope of "detecting the traces of [an]

¹¹ Phillip Scheffner's film *The Halfmoon Files* indicates what can be done when working with the sound recordings of Indian POW in Germany during the First World War. Phillip Scheffner (dir.), *The Halfmoon Files: A Ghost Story* (2007). And Nobuko Nagasaki has painstakingly collated the testimonies of Japanese working alongside the INA during the Second World War, but has, unfortunately for myself, only published in Japanese. Nobuko Nagasaki et al (eds.), *Shiryoshu Indo Kōkumingun Kankeisha Shogen*, (Tokyo: Kenbunshuppan, 2008).

¹² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 2.

¹³ Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 239.

uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the replaced and barred reality of [a] fundamental history, [in which] the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and necessity," [...]. If for us the assurance of transference gives away to the possibility of haunting, it is also true that for us the only figure of the unconscious is that of a radical series of discontinuous interruptions. In a mere miming of that figure, one might say that the epistemic story of imperialism is the story of a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured.¹⁴

Performing at the Limits of Knowledge

To allow oneself to be haunted, in the Spivakian sense, is not an admission of defeat. I started this thesis by expressing my intention to write a history that would emplot the witness and treat testimony as a process, praxis or act rather than static text. To do so allows one to study representations of agency more complex than what is made permissible by searching for signs of the perfect rebel. In this manner, a history operating at the limits of history-writing need not itself be limited.

The Handbook programme, discussed in Chapter 1, lacked the enduring clarity it ought to have had in its pursuit for ethnological truth. The fantastical language used and stereotypes created for various *sipahis* borrowed from drama and fiction and slipped seamlessly back into it during and after the end of the British Raj. Fenimore Cooper and Scott's frontiersman found his way into descriptions of Pathans; Kipling's Brahmins reflected (and perhaps pre-empted) martial race ethnologies of his time; and the makers of Star Trek could not help invoke the spectre of the martial Sikh when creating their genetically engineered, superman, Khan Noonien Singh. The published volumes of the Handbooks were often swiftly discarded or replaced, but the negatives that helped to create them lingered on: to be referred to when new martial races had to be found or discarded ones resurrected.

The porous impermanency of what and who was a soldier under the British Raj allowed, and in some ways mandated, a return of *sipahis* into these racial fictions. But it was by, what Homi Bhabha would term, a 'metonymy of presence' instead of a simple reversal of that 'gaze of otherness'.¹⁵ Chapter 2 showed that *sipahis* constantly added adjuncts to their terms of service in their letters. From sexual encounters in Brighton, to malingering in Flanders to fabricating means to return home in the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

¹⁵ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, pp. 126-127.

Second World War, *sipahis* demanded the fulfilment of or additions to soldiering ‘contracts’. With a few exceptions (Jagu Godbole), this occurred without soldiers perceiving their own activity as being particularly disloyal. Instead, petitions were arranged and means of leave falsely secured in the expectation that individuals would remain soldiers or would soon return to being so. Those who permanently left made it clear that they had fulfilled, or at the very least conformed to the letter of, the oaths of fealty they had made when enlisting.

The return of the soldier and his presence was not just felt in discussions of terms of service. Chapter 3 charted at least some of the re-appropriations that took place among Muslim *sipahis* during the life of the Snowball letter. A pre-existing chiliastic missive became a vehicle to offer rejoinders to Ahmadi missionaries. Its language then slipped into the everyday prose of *sipahis*’ letters; both internalized as a call for soldiers to reform their own behaviour and externalized to reflect the course of the First World War. Something similar, as demonstrated by Chapter 4, could occur in the colonial courtroom. The linguistic and physical space of the proceedings of the court martial was re-appropriated by *sipahis* of the 5th Light Infantry to save their own lives, or those of friends and family. It was often achieved by incriminating other *sipahis* or even their own selves. The reasons, whether out of spite, self-sacrifice or peer-pressure, are only hinted at. What can be deduced is that alongside the selective use of the physical and linguistic space of the courtroom came the re-appropriation of what it meant to be a soldier in the 5th Light Infantry. The strategies used by the four *sipahis* mentioned in the chapter – of unrepentant mutineer, approver, victim or outsider – conformed, in part, to the expectations colonial authorities had of its colonial soldiers in order to thwart military justice.

Finally, in the interrogations of Chapter 5, many colonial *sipahis* refused to be soldiers. The expectations of what CSDIC(I) had of captured INA personnel were clear: to interrogate, discover how involved they were in the rebel army, and prescribe a course of reconditioning so that they could be re-inducted into the Indian Army proper. Instead of the interrogations being a chance to explain what actually happened or for individuals to redeem themselves in the eyes of their former *sahibs*, they allowed *sipahis* to create their own histories of the INA that avoided the language of wholesome praise or wholesale condemnation. So the names of battalions remained effaced with glaring ‘Xs’. Individuals avoided answering any questions of note except through profoundly anti-British plays. And even those who had engaged in protests

against the INA during the Second World War eschewed declarations of loyalty for the quiet inference that they no longer wished to serve again in any capacity.

What marks this praxis of testimony is performance: an engagement that is selective and is more profound than the Utopia of resistance. To perform is at once to adhere to a set script but also to inject that script with forms of emotion and re-interpretation which can significantly alter the end product from the playwright's intent. Letters, depositions and transcripts of interrogations are remarkable for how much they allowed the ghostly return of soldiers despite the constant effacement of the censor's pen. Performance permits for a wider array of potential agency, and to read more, and more subtly, into the actions and words of individuals than many historians have been accustomed to accept. *Sipahis* added words to their scripts as adjuncts were added to the terms of their military service. They also re-drafted their own stage directions as they occupied courtrooms or discussed Islam in ways that threatened the maintenance of colonial military order. In addition, performance sanctions a non-coloniality which is different and more engaging than narratives of anti-coloniality in the tricontinental, or 'Third', World.¹⁶ To accept that *sipahis* performed is to also accept that there were moments of non-performance when they were off-stage. This immanency of non-performance, of a non-colonialness, pre-empted the embracing of the Congress tricolour or its political alternatives of the red and green flags. It explains how swiftly colonial mechanisms of violence and control were dismantled in South Asia, and how elaborate and enduring attempts at nation-building have had to be after (various) Independence(s).

Finally, to view testimony as performance turns the act of history-writing into something that is essentially performative. Prosopopoeia is made impossible by the mutability of testimony. The best that can be done is to conjure up a spectre which is not able to definitively convey what preceded or followed a moment of testimony-writing, nor what definitively linked one form of testimony to another. Moreover, I have ended up mirroring some of the strategies of both censor and soldier in deciding what is worthy of comment and what is not, emphasizing certain characteristics above others, and grouping forms of testimony into chapters. Constructing a definitive narrative becomes an impossibility, but that very impossibility shows facets of how

¹⁶ A term used, but not coined, by Robert Young. In his words, it 'avoids the problems of the "Third World", the bland homogenization of "the South", and the negative definition of "the non-west" which also implies a complete dichotomy between the west and the rest which two or more centuries of imperialism have hardly allowed.' Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009 rpt.), p. 5.

colonialism operated for those that were neither colonizer nor quite colonized; and representations of agency that were more complex than the nihilism of despair or the narrative of progress.

Appendix I
List of Battalions and Regiments of the Indian Army,
1914-1918

Cavalry

Governor General's Bodyguard
Governor's Bodyguard, Madras
Governor's Bodyguard, Bombay
1st Duke of York's Own Lancers (Skinner's Horse)
2nd Lancers (Gardner's Horse)
3rd Skinner's Horse
4th Cavalry
5th Cavalry
6th King Edward's Own Cavalry
7th Haryana Lancers
8th Cavalry
9th Hodson's Horse
10th Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers (Hodson's Horse)
11th Prince of Wales's Own Lancers (Probyn's Horse)
12th Cavalry
13th Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers (Watson's Horse)
14th Murray's Jat Lancers
15th Lancers (Cureton's Multanis)
16th Cavalry
17th Cavalry
18th King George's Own Lancers
19th Lancers (Fane's Horse)
20th Deccan Horse
21st Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (Frontier Force)
22nd Sam Browne's Cavalry (Frontier Force)
23rd Cavalry (Frontier Force)
25th Cavalry (Frontier Force)
26th King George's Own Light Cavalry
27th Light Cavalry
28th Light Cavalry
29th Lancers (Deccan's Horse)
30th Lancers (Gordon's Horse)
31st Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers
32nd Lancers
33rd Queen Victoria's Own Light Cavalry
34th Prince Albert Victor's Own Poona Horse
35th Scinde Horse
36th Jacob's Horse
37th Lancers (Baluch Horse)
38th King George's Own Central India Horse
39th King George's Own Central India Horse
40th Cavalry Regiment
41st Cavalry Regiment
42nd Cavalry Regiment

43rd Cavalry Regiment
 44th Cavalry Regiment
 45th Cavalry Regiment
 Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (Frontier Force) (Lumsden's) Cavalry

Sappers and Miners

1st King George's Own Sappers and Miners
 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Sappers and Miners
 3rd Sappers and Miners

Artillery

21st Kohat Mountain Battery (Frontier Force)
 22nd Derajat Mountain Battery (Frontier Force)
 23rd Peshawar Mountain Battery (Frontier Force)
 24th Hazara Mountain Battery (Frontier Force)
 25th Mountain Battery
 26th Jacob's Mountain Battery
 27th Mountain Battery
 28th Mountain Battery
 29th Mountain Battery
 30th Mountain Battery
 31st Mountain Battery
 32nd Mountain Battery
 33rd (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 34th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 35th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 36th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 37th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 38th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 39th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 40th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 41st (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 42nd (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 43rd (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 44th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 45th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 49th (Reserve) Mountain Battery
 50th (Reserve) Mountain Battery

Infantry

1st Battalion, 1st Brahmans
 2nd Battalion, 1st Brahmans
 1st Battalion, 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Rajput Light Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Rajput Light Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Rajput Light Infantry
 1st Battalion, 3rd Brahmans
 1st Battalion, 3rd Gaur Brahmans
 1st Battalion, 4th Prince Albert Victor's Rajputs
 2nd Battalion, 4th Prince Albert Victor's Rajputs
 1st Battalion, 5th Light Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 5th Light Infantry

1st Battalion, 6th Jat Light Infantry
2nd Battalion, 6th Jat Light Infantry
1st Battalion, 7th Duke of Connaught's Own Rajputs
2nd Battalion, 7th Duke of Connaught's Own Rajputs
1st Battalion, 8th Rajputs
2nd Battalion, 8th Rajputs
1st Battalion, 9th Bhopal Infantry
2nd Battalion, 9th (Delhi) Infantry
3rd Battalion, 9th Bhopal Infantry
4th Battalion, 9th Bhopal Infantry
1st Battalion, 10th Jats
2nd Battalion, 10th Jats
1st Battalion, 11th Rajputs
2nd Battalion, 11th Rajputs
1st Battalion, 12th Pioneers (The Keat-i-Ghilzai Regiment)
2nd Battalion, 12th Pioneers (The Keat-i-Ghilzai Regiment)
13th Rajputs (The Shekhawati Regiment)
14th King George's Own Ferozepore Sikhs
1st Battalion, 15th Ludhiana Sikhs
2nd Battalion, 15th Ludhiana Sikhs
16th Rajputs (The Lucknow Regiment)
1st Battalion, 17th Infantry (The Loyal Regiment)
2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry (The Loyal Regiment)
1st Battalion, 18th Infantry
2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry
1st Battalion, 19th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 19th Punjabis
20th Duke of Cambridge's Own Infantry (Brownlow's Punjabis)
1st Battalion, 21st Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 21st Punjabis
1st Battalion, 22nd Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 22nd Punjabis
1st Battalion, 23rd Sikh Pioneers
2nd Battalion, 23rd Sikh Pioneers
3rd Battalion, 23rd Sikh Pioneers
24th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 25th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 25th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 26th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 26th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 27th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 27th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 28th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 28th Punjabis
29th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 30th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 30th Punjabis
31st Punjabis
1st Battalion, 32nd Sikh Pioneers
2nd Battalion, 32nd Sikh Pioneers

3rd Battalion, 32nd Sikh Pioneers
 1st Battalion, 33rd Punjabis
 2nd Battalion, 33rd Punjabis
 1st Battalion, 34th Sikh Pioneers
 2nd Battalion, 34th Sikh Pioneers
 3rd Battalion, 34th Sikh Pioneers
 1st Battalion, 35th Sikhs
 2nd Battalion, 35th Sikhs
 36th Sikhs
 37th Dogras
 38th Dogras
 1st Battalion, 39th Garhwal Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 39th Garhwal Rifles
 3rd Battalion, 39th Garhwal Rifles
 4th Battalion, 39th Garhwal Rifles
 40th Pathans
 1st Battalion, 41st Dogras
 2nd Battalion, 41st Dogras
 1st Battalion, 42nd Deoli Regiment
 2nd Battalion, 42nd Deoli Regiment
 1st Battalion, 43rd Erinpura Regiment
 2nd Battalion, 43rd Erinpura Regiment
 44th Merwara Regiment
 45th Rattray's Sikhs
 46th Punjabis
 47th Sikhs
 1st Battalion, 48th Pioneers
 2nd Battalion, 48th Pioneers
 49th Bengalis
 1st Battalion, 50th Kumaon Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 50th Kumaon Rifles
 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force)
 52nd Sikhs (Frontier Force)
 53rd Sikhs (Frontier Force)
 1st Battalion, 54th Sikhs (Frontier Force)
 2nd Battalion, 54th Sikhs (Frontier Force)
 Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (Frontier Force) (Lumsden's)
 2nd Battalion, Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (Frontier Force) (Lumsden's)
 3rd Battalion, Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (Frontier Force) (Lumsden's)
 1st Battalion, 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force)
 2nd Battalion, 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force)
 1st Battalion, 56th Punjabi Rifles (Frontier Force)
 2nd Battalion, 56th Punjabi Rifles (Frontier Force)
 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force)
 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force)
 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force)
 1st Battalion, 61st King George's Own Pioneers
 2nd Battalion, 61st King George's Own Pioneers
 62nd Punjabis
 1st Battalion, 63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry

2nd Battalion, 63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry
64th Pioneers
1st Battalion, 66th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 66th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 67th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 67th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 69th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 69th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 70th Burma Rifles
2nd Battalion, 70th Burma Rifles
3rd (or 5th) Battalion, 70th Burma Rifles
4th Battalion, 70th Burma Rifles
71st Punjabis
1st Battalion, 72nd Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 72nd Punjabis
1st Battalion, 73rd Carnatic Infantry
2nd Battalion, 73rd Malabar Infantry
74th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 75th Carnatic Infantry
2nd Battalion, 75th Carnatic Infantry
1st Battalion, 76th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 76th Punjabis
79th Carnatic Infantry
80th Carnatic Infantry
1st Battalion, 81st Pioneers
2nd Battalion, 81st Pioneers
82nd Punjabis
83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry
84th Punjabis
85th Burman Rifles
86th Carnatic Infantry
87th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 88th Carnatic Infantry
2nd Battalion, 88th Carnatic Infantry
1st Battalion, 89th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 89th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 90th Punjabis
2nd Battalion, 90th Punjabis
1st Battalion, 91st Punjabis (Light Infantry)
2nd Battalion, 91st Punjabis (Light Infantry)
92nd Punjabis
93rd Burma Infantry
1st Battalion, 94th Russell's Infantry
2nd Battalion, 94th Russell's Infantry
1st Battalion, 95th Russell's Infantry
2nd Battalion, 95th Russell's Infantry
1st Battalion, 96th Berar Infantry
2nd Battalion, 96th Infantry
1st Battalion, 97th Deccan Infantry
2nd Battalion, 97th Deccan Infantry

1st Battalion, 98th Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 98th Infantry
 1st Battalion, 99th Deccan Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 99th Deccan Infantry
 1st Battalion, 101st Grenadiers
 2nd Battalion, 101st Grenadiers
 1st Battalion, 102nd King Edward's Own Grenadiers
 2nd Battalion, 102nd King Edward's Own Grenadiers
 1st Battalion, 103rd Mahratta Light Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 103rd Mahratta Light Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 103rd (Kolhapur) Mahratta Light Infantry
 104th Wellesley's Rifles
 105th Mahratta Light Infantry
 106th Hazara Pioneers
 1st Battalion, 107th Pioneers
 2nd Battalion, 107th Pioneers
 108th Infantry
 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry
 110th Mahratta Light Infantry
 111th Mahars
 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry
 1st Battalion, 113th Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 113th Infantry
 114th Mahrattas
 1st Battalion, 116th Mahrattas
 2nd Battalion, 116th Mahrattas
 1st Battalion, 117th Mahrattas
 2nd Battalion, 117th Mahrattas
 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry (The Mooltan Regiment)
 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry (The Mooltan Regiment)
 120th Rajputana Infantry
 121st Pioneers
 122nd Rajputana Infantry
 1st Battalion, 123rd Outram's Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 123rd Outram's Rifles
 1st Battalion, 124th Duchess of Connaught's Own Baluchistan Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 124th Duchess of Connaught's Own Baluchistan Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 124th Duchess of Connaught's Own Baluchistan Infantry
 1st Battalion, 125th Napier's Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 125th Napier's Rifles
 126th Baluchistan Infantry
 1st Battalion, 127th Queen Mary's Own Baluch Light Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 127th Queen Mary's Own Baluch Light Infantry
 1st Battalion, 128th Pioneers
 2nd Battalion, 128th Pioneers
 1st Battalion, 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis
 2nd Battalion, 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis
 130th (King George's Own) Baluchis (Jacob's Rifles)

1st Battalion, 131st United Provinces Regiment
 2nd Battalion, 132nd United Provinces Regiment
 1st Battalion, 133rd Regiment
 1st Battalion, 140th Patiala Infantry
 1st Battalion, 141st Bikanir Infantry
 1st Battalion, 142nd Jodhpur Infantry
 1st Battalion, 143rd Narsingh (Dholpur) Infantry
 1st Battalion, 144th Bharatpur Infantry
 1st Battalion, 145th Alwar (Jai Paltan) Infantry
 1st Battalion, 150th Indian Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 150th Indian Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 150th Indian Infantry
 1st Battalion, 151st Sikh Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 151st Indian Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 151st Punjabi Rifles
 1st Battalion, 152nd Punjabis
 2nd Battalion, 152nd Punjabis
 3rd Battalion, 152nd Punjabis
 1st Battalion, 153rd Punjabis
 2nd Battalion, 153rd Punjabis
 3rd Battalion, 153rd Rifles
 1st Battalion, 154th Indian Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 154th Indian Infantry
 3rd Battalion, 154th Indian Infantry
 1st Battalion, 155th Indian Infantry
 2nd Battalion, 155th Indian Infantry
 1st Battalion, 156th Indian Infantry

Gurkhas

1st Battalion, 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment)
 2nd Battalion, 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment)
 3rd Battalion, 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment)
 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)
 2nd Battalion, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)
 3rd Battalion, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)
 1st Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles
 3rd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles
 1st Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles
 1st Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)
 2nd Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)
 3rd Battalion, 5th Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)
 1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles
 3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles
 1st Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles
 3rd Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles
 1st Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles
 2nd Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles

3rd Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles
1st Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles
2nd Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles
3rd Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles
1st Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles
2nd Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles
1st Battalion, 11th Gurkha Rifles
2nd Battalion, 11th Gurkha Rifles
3rd Battalion, 11th Gurkha Rifles
4th Battalion, 11th Gurkha Rifles

Appendix II

List of Battalions and Regiments of the Indian Army, 1923-1942

Cavalry (mechanized between 1938 and 1939)

Governor General's Bodyguard.
Governor's Bodyguard, Madras.
Governor's Bodyguard, Bombay.
1st Duke of York's Own Skinner's Horse).
2nd Lancers (Gardner's Horse).
3rd Cavalry.
4th Duke of Cambridge's Own Hodson's Horse.
5th King Edward's Own Probyn's Horse.
6th Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers.
7th Light Cavalry.
8th King George's Own Light Cavalry.
9th Royal Deccan Horse.
10th Queen Victoria's Own Guides Cavalry (Frontier Force).
11th Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (Frontier Force).
12th Cavalry (Frontier Force).
13th Duke of Connaught's Own Bombay Lancers.
14th Prince of Wales's Own Scinde Horse.
15th Lancers.
16th Light Cavalry.
17th Queen Victoria's Own Poona Horse.
18th King Edward's Own Cavalry.
19th King George's Own Lancers.
20th Lancers.
21st King George's Own Central India Horse.

Sappers and Miners

King George's Own Bengal Sappers and Miners.
Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners.
Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners.
Burma Sappers and Miners.

Artillery

101st Royal (Kohat) Pack Battery (Frontier Force).
102nd (Derajat) Pack Battery (Frontier Force).
103rd (Peshawar) Pack Battery (Frontier Force).
104th (Hazara) Pack Battery (Frontier Force).
105th (Bombay) Pack Battery.
106th (Jacob's) Pack Battery.
107th (Bengal) Pack Battery.
108th (Lahore) Pack Battery.
109th (Murree) Pack Battery.
110th (Abbottabad) Pack Battery.
111th Dehra Dun) Pack Battery.
112th (Poonch) Pack Battery.
113th (Dardoni) Pack Battery.

- 114th (Rajputana) Pack Battery.
- 115th (Jhelum) Pack Battery.
- 116th (Zhob) Pack Battery.
- 117th (Rawalpindi) Pack Battery.
- 118th (Sohan) Pack Battery.
- 119th (Maymyo) Pack Battery.
- 120th (Ambala) Pack Battery.
- 121st (Nowshera) Pack Battery.

Infantry

- 1st Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 2nd Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 3rd Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 4th Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 5th Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 10th Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment.
- 1st Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment.
- 2nd Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment.
- 3rd Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment.
- 5th Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment.
- 10th Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment.
- 1st Battalion, 3rd Madras Regiment.
- 2nd Battalion, 3rd Madras Regiment.
- 3rd Battalion, 3rd Madras Regiment [Disbanded before the start of the Second World War].
- 4th Battalion, 3rd Madras Regiment. (Wallajahbad Light Infantry).
- 10th Battalion, 3rd Madras Regiment.
- 1st Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers.
- 2nd Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers (King Edward's Own).
- 3rd Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers.
- 4th Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers.
- 5th Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers [Disbanded before the start of the Second World War].
- 10th Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers.
- 1st Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 2nd Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 3rd Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 4th Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 5th Royal Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 10th Battalion, 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.
- 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's).
- 2nd Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Prince of Wales's Own).
- 3rd Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles.
- 4th Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Outram's).
- 5th Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Napier's).
- 10th Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Shekhwati).
- 1st Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment (Queen's Own Light Infantry).
- 2nd Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment (Prince Albert Victor's).
- 3rd Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own).
- 4th Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment.
- 5th Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment.

10th Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment. (The Lucknow Regiment).
1st Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment.
2nd Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment.
3rd Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment.
4th Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own).
5th Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment (Burma).
10th Battalion, 8th Punjab Regiment.
1st Royal Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment (Light Infantry).
2nd Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment (Mooltan Regiment).
3rd Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment.
4th Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment [Disbanded before the start of the Second World War].
10th Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment.
1st Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment (Duchess of Connaught's Own).
2nd Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment.
3rd Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment (Queen Mary's Own).
4th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own).
5th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment (King George's Own Jacob's Rifles).
10th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment.
1st Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment (King George's Own Ferozepore Sikhs).
2nd Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment (Ludhiana Sikhs).
3rd Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment (Rattray's Sikhs).
4th Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment.
5th Battalion, 11th Sikhs (Duke of Connaught's Own).
10th Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment.
1st Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own Sikhs).
2nd Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs).
3rd Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs).
4th Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs).
5th Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides).
5th Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides).
1st Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Coke's).
2nd Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles.
4th Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Wilde's).
5th Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles.
6th Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Scinde).
10th Battalion, 13th Frontier Force Rifles.
1st Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment
2nd Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own Bronlow's).
3rd Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment.
4th Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment.
5th Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment.
10th Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment.
1st Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.
2nd Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.
3rd Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.
4th Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.
10th Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.
1st Battalion, 16th Punjab Regiment.
2nd Battalion, 16th Punjab Regiment.
3rd Battalion, 16th Punjab Regiment.

10th Battalion, 16th Punjab Regiment.
 1st Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment.
 2nd Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment.
 3rd Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment.
 10th Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment.
 1st Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles.
 3rd Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles.
 10th Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles.
 1st Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment (Russell's).
 2nd Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment (Berar).
 3rd Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment.
 4th Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment.
 5th Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment [Disbanded before the start of the Second World War].
 10th Battalion, 19th Hyderabad Regiment (Russell's).
 1st Battalion, 20th Burma Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 20th Burma Rifles.
 3rd Battalion, 20th Burma Rifles (Kachin).
 4th Battalion, 20th Burma Rifles (Chin) [Disbanded before the start of the Second World War].
 10th Battalion, 20th Burma Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 1st Madras Pioneers.
 10th Battalion, 1st Madras Pioneers.
 1st Battalion, 2nd Bombay Pioneers.
 2nd Battalion, 2nd Bombay Pioneers (Kelat-i-Ghilzie).
 4th Battalion, 2nd Bombay Pioneers.
 10th Battalion, 2nd Bombay Pioneers (Marine Battalion).
 1st Battalion, 3rd Sikh Pioneers.
 2nd Battalion, 3rd Sikh Pioneers.
 3rd Royal Battalion, 3rd Sikh Pioneers.
 10th Battalion, 3rd Sikh Pioneers.
 1st Battalion, 4th Hazara Pioneers.
 1st Kumaon Rifles.
 2nd Kumaon Rifles. [Disbanded before the Second World War and then re-formed].
 1st Battalion, 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment).
 2nd Battalion, 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Maluan Regiment).
 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles).
 2nd Battalion, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles).
 1st Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles.
 1st Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles.
 1st Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force).
 2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force).
 1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles.
 1st Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles.
 2nd Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles.
 1st Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles.

2nd Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles.
1st Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles.
2nd Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles.
1st Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles.
2nd Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles.

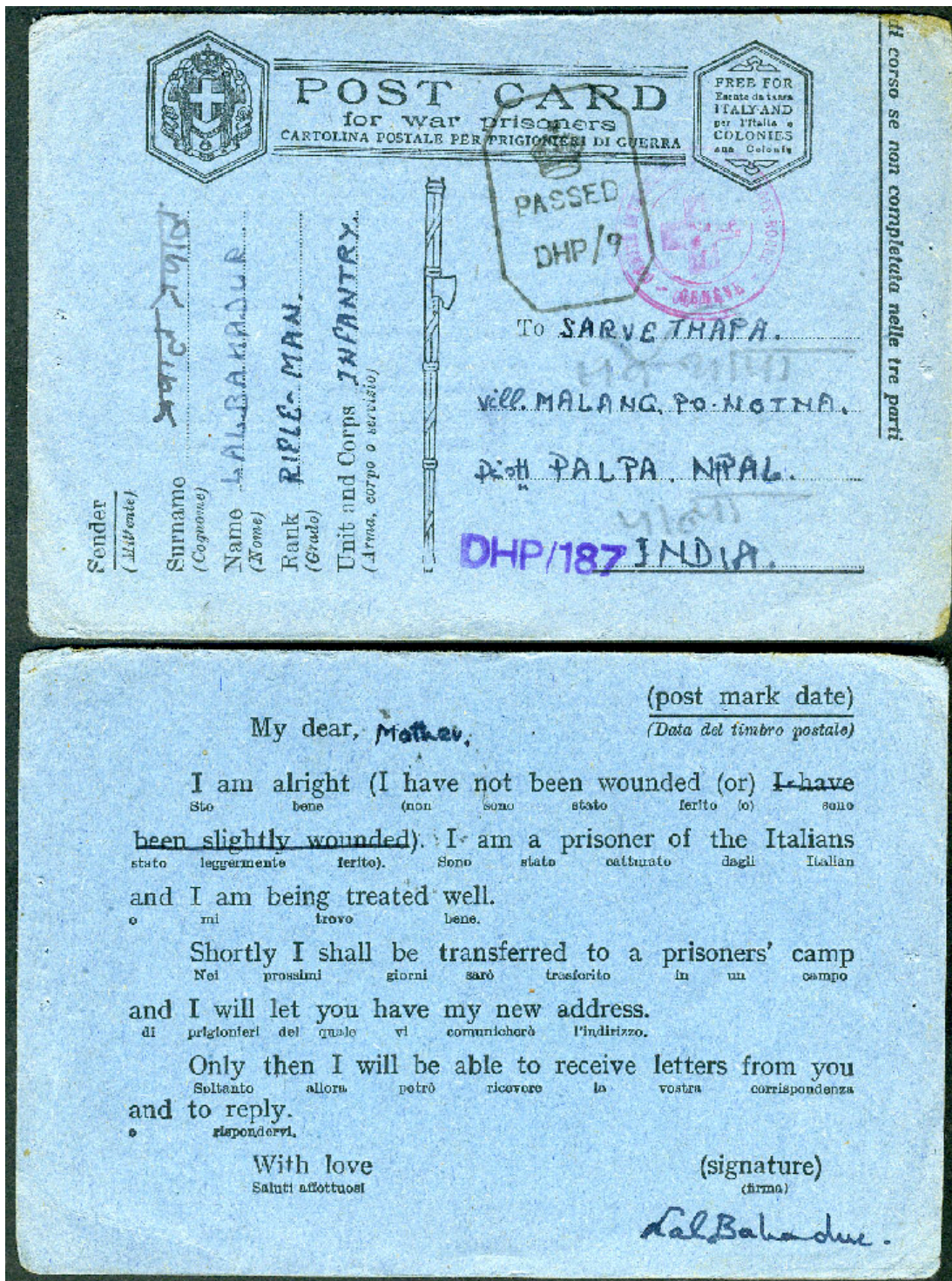
Appendix III
Images of Censored Correspondence Sent
During the Second World War



Cover of a 'Letter Card'. From a Gurkha soldier, 26th Indian Infantry Brigade, Kifri, Iraq, to Palpa, Nepal. 12th June 1943.



Envelope of a Censored Air Mail Cover. Garhwali Soldier, 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, Ansariya, Lebanon, to Dehradun, UP, India. 5th July 1943.



POW Postcard. Gurkha Soldier, Italy, to Palpa, Nepal. c. 1943.

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