Military Aspects of the Indian Uprising

Mutiny at the Margins
New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857
Series Editor: Crispin Bates

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A Source Book: Documents of the Indian Uprising
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Series Note

THE volumes in this series take a fresh look at the Revolt of 1857 from a variety of original and unusual perspectives, focusing in particular on traditionally neglected socially marginal groups and geographic areas that have hitherto tended to be unrepresented in studies of this cataclysmic event in British imperial and Indian historiography.

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Contents

Preface

THE seven-volume *Mutiny at the Margins* series published by SAGE is the product of a research project of the same name undertaken at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, with funding from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. Taking place 150 years after the Indian Uprising of 1857–1858, the *Mutiny at the Margins* project was created to challenge conventional understandings of the uprising through thematic, collaborative research, a network of scholars centred on Edinburgh and international conferences. This innovative project aimed to confront some of the many myths surrounding popular and academic conceptions of the revolt, to move beyond traditional nationalist and imperialist perspectives, and to explore previously neglected margins in the history of this tumultuous event.

Marginality is invoked in several ways throughout the series. It is presented in the telling of tales that fall outside the mainstream historiography of the period and pursued chronologically as the historical context of the Indian Uprising is enlarged in an exploration of both the progenitors and consequences of 1857. The series ventures into overlooked geographical margins, both within India and overseas, with the global impact of the revolt being examined in Volume 3. Finally, a core purpose of the series is to emphasise the critical roles played by socially marginal groups in the uprising and to use this to highlight new areas of current research.

Independent scholars from across the globe came together for the *Mutiny at the Margins* project. This collaboration fostered ground-breaking research, aided by three international conferences held in Edinburgh, London and Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, and four workshops held in Edinburgh and at the Royal Asiatic Society in London. Altogether, some thirty leading Indian and Pakistani researchers were involved, along with a dozen academics from the United States and twice that number of participants drawn from universities across the United Kingdom and Europe. A majority of the chapters in the series are the product of the cooperative, committed and original endeavour of these scholars. The *Mutiny at the Margins* project was accompanied by a high level of public engagement, including a programme of public lectures, collaborative exhibitions, seminars

and workshops in Edinburgh and London. A number of source materials were published online, for the benefit of students and future researchers. These are to be found at www.csas.ed.ac.uk/mutiny.

The original research carried out by the Edinburgh-based scholars of the *Mutiny at the Margins* project forms a key part of the material for this series. It led to new insights into the British experience of 1857 regarding the experiences of white subalterns (men and women) and of the often overlooked British communities in areas peripheral to the revolts, as well as British attempts to explain the meaning of the uprising. The research of the Edinburgh team—comprising Crispin Bates, Markus Daeschel, Andrea Major, Marina Carter and Kim A. Wagner—addressed the involvement of Muslims and Dalits and the long-term impact of the events of the mid-nineteenth century for the development of Islamic political culture and identity. In addition, new investigations scrutinised the role of Indian Adivasis (or tribals) in 1857 as well as the economic consequences of 1857 in north India and in particular the huge impetus it gave to labour migration within India and overseas in subsequent years. Kim A. Wagner undertook further innovative work concerning the mutiny of the regiments at Meerut in May 1857 and description of the impact of 1857 within European literature.

The series comprises seven volumes, each with a distinct thematic focus:

- Volume 1, *Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality*, centres on unrest and disorder in the long history of resistance to colonial rule (the *belli* Britannica) prior to 1857 and the impact of the revolt itself in diverse localities within India.
- Volume 2, *Britain and the Indian Uprising*, looks at the varied responses of British missionaries, colonial leaders and working-class voices and how they reveal the multiplicity of British reactions to the revolt.
- Volume 3, *Global Perspectives*, widens the geographical remit of the series and examines the global dissemination and portrayal of the events of the uprising in the international press and literature. It also examines the impact of the events of 1857 and the socio-economic impact of displaced mutineers and their experiences in the broader colonial world.
- Volume 4, *Military Aspects of the Indian Uprising*, deals with how battles were won and lost and how the army reorganised itself after the revolt. It also touches on the thorny issue of how to define the events of 1857—a rebellion, a national uprising or a small war of the kind experienced in many colonial states.
- Volume 5, *Muslim, Dalit and Subaltern Narratives*, addresses the role of marginal and Muslim groups, respectively. The first half of the volume explores minority perceptions of the uprising, including Dalit narratives and the use of 1857 in their invented histories; the second half looks into

the response and involvement of different Muslim social groups, from civil servants, philosophers and logicians to the mujahidin, as well as exploring the experience of indigenous participants in their own words.

- Volume 6, *Perception, Narration and Reinvention: The Pedagogy and Historiography of the Indian Uprising*, moves into the territory of hagiography, historiography and pedagogy. It covers the reaction of people to the revolt and the various ways in which historians and the wider public in India have sought to understand, categorise, and at times distort or exaggerate, salient aspects and particular events.
- Volume 7, *A Source Book: Documents of the Indian Uprising*, is both a research tool and a teaching resource. This collection of documents drawn from the extensive research conducted during the *Margins* project employs images and texts to offer a unique range of 1857 sources, emphasising a subaltern perspective and designed to complement the previous six volumes of the series.

Collectively, the series presents the most comprehensive collection to date of historical writings on the Indian Uprising of 1857. It is hoped that it will provide a benchmark of research to inform and inspire future scholars and encourage new perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857 that are both respectful of previous interpretations and permitting of re-imaginings of the past that are suited to the twenty-first century. The body of research and writings contained in the seven-volume set is much more than a collection about the 'revolt'; it demonstrates that the events of 1857 were, in their origins, progress and impact, vastly more significant than is implied by the usual emphasis on a unique historical event, with ramifications that reach forward into the present day.

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Introduction

The 'Subaltern at Arms'

Gavin Rand and Crispin Bates

THE Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny amongst native troops at Meerut. It is perhaps surprising that the military dimensions of the uprising and the impacts of the events on those communities connected to the imperial military have since become somewhat peripheral in much of the historiography. While the imperial military was key to colonial accounts of 1857—underpinning the narrative and interpretive reconstructions of the mutiny and its suppression—the first nationalist histories retained the primary concern for the military dimensions of 1857, but inverted the focus of colonial historiography by centring their narratives on the 'revolutionaries' and their campaigns against colonial power.[1] Though colonial and nationalist historiographies are more subtle (and, in important ways, more similar) than this opposition suggests, the ensuing debates about the 'meaning' of the rebellion drew historians' focus away from the military encounters that comprised '1857'.[2] Subsequent accounts have usefully demonstrated the wider social, economic and political factors at work throughout the rebellion, thus broadening our understanding of the relationships and transmissions between the company, its armies and indigenous society but at the same time delivering few new insights regarding the military exchange which occurred in 1857–1858.[3]

The emergence of 'subaltern' histories, which sought to recover the histories of those marginalised in the extant literature, reinvigorated the historiography of peasant resistance in colonial India, leading to a number of important local studies that helped to demonstrate the specific and contextual nature of many incidents of rebellion.[4] This work usefully moved the focus away from the totalising narratives that dominated many colonial and nationalist accounts of the uprising. As valuable as these studies have been—both for their own insights and for the wider impact that subaltern approaches have had on subsequent scholarship—the military dimensions of the 1857 Uprising have remained

marginal in recent literature. Despite the fundamentally military origins of the rebellion and counter-insurgency, the histories of those who fought in and commanded the belligerent armies, their motivations, experiences and memories have received less scholarly attention than might have been expected. Similarly, while contemporary responses to the military rebellion have been usefully surveyed to reveal various competing narratives of class, gender, locality and religion, the contours of military life and administration during (and after) 1857 are less clearly defined. This absence reflects a wider neglect of the imperial military within the extant historiography: whilst both South Asian studies and 'the new imperial history' have enjoyed significant expansion in recent years, and questions of empire and military power are frequently invoked in wider discussions of modernity and global history, there are, with notable exceptions, relatively few accounts of the military in British India, unquestionably the pre-eminent imperial military institution of the colonial period.[5]

This volume seeks to address this lacuna, charting the origins, impacts and legacies of the rebellion by exploring the motivations, organisation and understandings of those who participated in the uprising and the campaigns to suppress it. Our aim is not to (re)assemble a singular narrative of the rebellion and counter-insurgency but rather to focus on the individuals and communities who participated in the military encounters of 1857–1858 and who were most directly affected by the effects of the rebellion. In foregrounding the military's role within the events of 1857–1858, the volume does not insist on the pre-eminence of 1857's military history but hopes instead to show that an attentive reading of this history can provide a productive means of approaching wider issues of historical import.

Given the scope of the wider literature, the relative absence of work focused on the military dimensions of the uprising is, ironically, further testament to the manifold social, cultural and global impacts of the 1857 Rebellion. As the other volumes in this series demonstrate, the events of 1857 were endowed with such significance because they were taken to be expressive of profound processes of historical transformation, intertwining the histories of South Asia and the British Empire in fundamentally new ways. In part, this significance was stimulated by contemporary technological developments, especially in communications and media, which helped to circulate news of the rebellions and counter-insurgency both within India and across the empire; related to this, the wider significance of the rebellion reflects the simultaneous development of a more popular, and contested, imperial public sphere in which justifications for formal imperial rule were reckoned alongside (and through) reformulations of gendered and raced national identities. If the rebellion, and campaigns to suppress it, brought these wider issues into focus, this was because of the vital role played by the imperial military—and especially by the company's native troops—in the emergence of the Anglo-centric 'world system'.[6] As well as hastening the end of company rule in South Asia, and the formalisation

(in theory, if not always in practice) of British colonial rule in India, the uprising demonstrated very clearly the precarious nature of the British hold 'over India'. In 1857, of the 277,746 troops engaged by the company in India, more than 80 per cent were themselves Indians.[7] While some 90,000 European troops had served in India during the campaigns to suppress the rebellion, most of the troops who undertook the counter-insurgency campaigns were locally recruited, and the overwhelming majority of the reconstituted imperial garrison remained Indian. Even the much-enlarged European garrison assigned to India after the rebellion was outnumbered by native troops at a ratio of nearly 2:1.[8] After the mutiny, as before, Indians continued to provide the military labour that made empire possible. This fact—discomfiting for and swiftly passed over in much colonial and nationalist historiography—underlines the complexity of imperial military arrangements. Understanding this complexity is vital to understanding the nature of the colonial state in South Asia.

The constitution of the imperial military, and the obvious shortcomings of bifurcated histories opposing 'European' and 'native' interests and agency, suggests the importance of a more considered reconstruction of the military encounter in colonial South Asia. The protracted argument over the labelling of the rebellion largely fails to provide this. As important as it has been, the debate about whether 1857 was a 'mutiny' or 'rebellion' fundamentally misunderstands the military relationship on which colonial power in India was based. The sepoys (of both the company and the Raj) were never simply 'subject' *to* the authority of their colonial paymasters; in important ways, they themselves actually 'constituted' that authority. Whilst company and colonial logic could only rarely admit of this truth, the fact remains—and this fact was made clear during the rebellion—that British power in India rested almost entirely on the military labour provided by the sepoys.[9] Explicitly recognising this truth should cause us to rethink the significance of mutiny in this context: though it is undoubtedly the case that some colonial commentators spoke of a 'mere military mutiny' as a means to delegitimise the (political significance of the) uprising, a better understanding of the importance of the sepoys to the company would endow the act of mutiny with much wider and greater significance.[10] If nationalist historiography objected to the labelling of the events of 1857 as mutiny, we might surmise that this was in part also due to the difficulty of reconciling the nationalist narrative with the crucial role played by Indians in securing and defending the British empire in India throughout the nineteenth century. With this important qualification in mind, it should be possible to assess the military dimensions of the 1857 Uprising—from its origins in the mutiny at Meerut through the wider rebellions to the anti-insurgency campaigns—whilst retaining a wider appreciation for the vital role played by the military in the connected histories of South Asia, Britain and empire in the nineteenth century. As Gautam Chakravarty's concluding chapter in this volume makes clear, the contest to 'name' 1857—as mutiny, rebellion or war of independence—is indicative of the wider issues at stake during

the reassertion of imperial control in 1857–1858, as also in the 'small wars' fought to secure and police the empire throughout the colonial period.

If the debate about the naming of the rebellion has obscured some of these important issues, it should nevertheless also remind us of the importance of understanding the motivations, objectives and understandings of those who participated in the uprising. Here again, there is a 'curious complicity' in much of the historiography, where the emphasis has typically been laid on the actions of prominent military commanders on both the British and rebel side.[11] Colonial narratives turned on the actions, and sometimes the inactions, of a handful of high-ranking military officers and civilian administrators. The rebellion defined a generation of Victorian military men, whose careers and reputations remained inextricably connected to the events in India in 1857. Whilst some, like Henry Havelock, died in India and thus secured their place as imperial martyrs, others, like F.S.R., later Lord, Roberts survived to play a key role in late Victorian empire.[12] The uprising also helped to confirm and to sanctify the central role of the military in the national and cultural registers of late-nineteenth century imperialism. This process, which was fed by the emergence of a popular press and the hagiography of prominent individuals such as Havelock, as much as by the proliferation of mutiny historiography, reflected the key role of the military in framing metropolitan narratives of 1857. Both Malleson and Kaye, whose histories provided (respectively) the first and most enduring accounts of the uprising, had served in the Indian Army, and though both authors provided a wider narrative of the rebellion and its causes, these accounts foregrounded the role of the military and relied heavily on sources of military origin. Military despatches, and the reportage which accrued to document the engagements that occurred during 1857 and 1858, were supplemented by personal narratives of the rebellion and eventually by edited collections of primary sources.[13] For the most part, nineteenth century publications tended to record the experiences of senior officers and colonial officials, and the roles played by 'ordinary soldiers'—particularly Indians—remain more obscure. Marginalised on account of both race and class, the histories of those Indians who fought against, as well as those who fought in the service of, colonial power have proved difficult for historians to recover. In part this difficulty is archival: where there are (relatively) extensive sources testifying to the mutiny experiences of colonial officers and officials, there are few to record the attitudes and opinions of the soldiers and peasants whose actions were central to the insurgency and its suppression.[14] This is particularly true of the rebel troops, whose motivations and experiences are extremely difficult to accurately gauge, especially within the reductive paradigms of nation and race which structure much colonial and nationalist historiography. However, while subaltern histories frequently remain, by their nature, partial and fragmentary, several of the chapters in this volume demonstrate that such histories can be productively reconstructed. As the chapters here demonstrate, the imperial military archive provides a rich collection of sources that reveal

much about the attitudes and motivations of the sepoys who played such an important part in the extension and defence of colonial power in South Asia during the nineteenth century.

Whilst many commentators were apt to remark that the British held India by coercion, rather than by persuasion, few remembered—or acknowledged—the fact that this coercion depended on persuading India's sepoys to accept and uphold military discipline. Given the vital imperial role played by Indian troops, military mutinies in colonial India inevitably carried wider political significance. This fact registers clearly in the archives, as James Frey's chapter demonstrates. Frey examines the Vellore Mutiny of 1806, exploring the parallels drawn between the 1857 Rebellion and the earlier rising at Vellore. Focusing on a range of largely overlooked primary sources, Frey's chapter illuminates the motivations of the Vellore mutineers, analysis which reveals much about the interior world of sepoy battalions and the increasing monitory and bureaucratic power of the emergent colonial state. Frey's chapter shows how, as in 1857, colonial interpretations of the Vellore Mutiny encoded various assumptions about the sepoys and their capacity for agency. In place of the greased cartridges of 1857, a redesigned military turban was thought to have offended the religious sensibilities of the Madras troops who, some suggested, feared its leather cockades signalled an attempt to convert them to Christianity. Alternative explanations emphasised widespread elite conspiracy; some identified Islam as a motive force for the uprising. The same explanations were revisited after 1857, and continue to feature in parts of the literature. However, as Frey demonstrates, none of these explanations can be wholly substantiated.[15] In fact, Frey's careful reading of the primary sources indicates that the Vellore Mutiny, and the subsequent disturbances in other elements of the Madras army, were principally caused by local resentments regarding military administration and discipline. While the new turbans were significant, there is little evidence to suggest that the sepoys feared forcible conversion, as contemporary colonial accounts suggested; rather, as Frey shows, the imposition of the new turban transgressed custom and practice regarding uniforms and flattened significant distinctions of rank and culture amongst the native troops. The mutiny at Vellore was less a reflex response to colonial modernisation than a reflection of the shifting and negotiated relationships of power on which the governance of the imperial military—and ultimately of the Indian empire itself—depended. The importance and multidimensional nature of these relationships are key to the history of the military in South Asia.

While the grievances of the Vellore mutineers reflected the problems of the early colonial military system, much of the historiography has overlooked these problems, focusing instead on the wilfully distorted renderings of the event first proffered by colonial administrators. In demonstrating the importance of reading colonial sources on sepoy insurgency for their blindspots and obfuscations, and by showing the transmissions which linked Vellore and 1857 in many colonial accounts, Frey's chapter provides an analytic and historical

context for the subsequent chapters. Frey also demonstrates how moments of Sepoy Rebellion illuminate wider historical processes—in the case of Vellore, this was the transition from a more negotiated model of military organisation and discipline, to one which was more rigid (and problematic)—providing a model for the study of such rebellions. However, the 'sepoy world' that Frey reconstructs from the investigations into Vellore remains largely beyond the reach of historians of 1857. With the exception of a few contested sources, notably Sita Ram's autobiography (discussed in this volume by Dasgupta), we have limited access to unmediated accounts of the sepoys' understandings of, and motivations for, participating in the rebellion.

Nevertheless, understanding the motivations, perception and experiences of combatants during 1857 is clearly vital to writing the history of the rebellion. Utilising a variety of previously unknown sources and reading colonial accounts 'against the grain', the chapters by Roy, Bates and Carter, Dalrymple and Dasgupta throw new light on the experiences of those who participated in the rebellion and the campaigns to suppress it. These chapters help to give us a better sense of the nature and course of the conflict, and the experiences of the combatants. Historians have frequently noted the ferocious brutality of the conflict—especially from late summer 1857—variously attributing the peculiar violence to the widespread circulation of atrocity rumours as well as (in some cases) racial and religious antagonism. Kaushik Roy's analysis of combatant motivation argues that the extraordinary violence manifested by both sides—violence which was directed against both combatants and non-combatants—served to foster distinct combat identities based around shared, often macabre, practices involving the mutilation of enemy dead. Comparing the brutality of the conflict in India with other examples of modern warfare, Roy suggests the particular manifestations of this brutality—for example, the collection of trophies and 'gruesome souvenirs'—are indicative of a process which enhanced soldierly identity and fostered collective motivation/unity. Whilst much of the debate about the nature of the conflict during 1857 has turned on the importance of race—as in the debate about Neill's infamous defiling of Brahmin prisoners at Cawnpore—Roy's chapter establishes wider parallels, which problematise simplistic equations of racial difference and extreme violence. The extensive use amongst combatants of alcohol and other intoxicants, as well as widely anticipated opportunities for plunder, were also significant factors in producing the barbaric nature of the conflict. Rumours of enemy barbarity—often inflected with colonial hierarchies of racial superiority—played an important role in conditioning and legitimising the violent reprisals undertaken during the counter-insurgency, though some instances of extreme violence were also shaped by tactical and material pressures. While race undoubtedly provided a means of narrating and legitimising extreme violence for some British combatants, for others, fighting both for and against colonial rule, religion performed a similar function. Roy's account emphasises the complexity and diversity of

combat motivation, confirming the widespread importance of rumour in stoking the conflict but rejecting the reductive explanations of much colonial historiography.[16]

One of the staples of colonial accounts was the role played by religion in provoking the rebellion and in sustaining the combatants' will to fight. The chapter by Bates and Carter explores in more detail the motivations of British soldiers and Muslim and Hindu rebels, focusing on the difficulty of reconciling elite explanations of the revolt with the attitudes and intentions of subaltern rebels. As already noted, religion was frequently invoked (by both sides) during the rebellion as explanation, justification and rallying cry—but the language of religion frequently provided a medium in which material and secular issues were expressed. Thus, while some of the leading antagonists—like Ahmadullah Shah, and colonial evangelicals like Havelock and Nicholson—understood the rebellion as a war of religion, many others, including co-religionists, interpreted the uprising in alternative ways, contesting and challenging the assertion that the conflict was primarily determined by religion. As Bates and Carter show, many prominent Muslims argued in favour of reconciliation with the British, challenging the legitimacy of jihadist narratives and justifications for the war. Many of these, the authors suggest, were likely to have been extracted from religious scholars under duress, as calculated attempts to maximise recruitment and support for the rebel cause. Though successful, for a time at least, in attracting recruits, the strategic value of such volunteering is far from clear. While Islamic insurgents—largely peasant volunteers rather than mutinous ex-sepoys—comprised a significant proportion of the rebel forces that concentrated in Delhi during 1857, Bates and Carter emphasise the difficulties this undisciplined force presented for the rebellion's putative commanders. Not only did such troops heighten communal tensions within the city—playing into British hands—but their presence also alienated many of Delhi's wealthy Muslim inhabitants, who feared that the rebels' principal motivation was 'for plunder'.[17] Though religion played an important role in motivating participation, Bates and Carter's contribution emphasises the importance of a more nuanced understanding of the role played by 'ghazis' in the rebellion, highlighting the intersection of, and frequent tensions between, religious, material and political imperatives.

A more nuanced account of 'ghazis', and their motivations, is also helpful in correcting the flattening simplifications of many contemporary, elite accounts that fail to recognise the complexity of the wider rebellion. Noting the widespread colonial belief that India's Muslims were central to the uprising, Bates and Carter suggest that this perception fed the counter-insurgency and encouraged some Indian Muslims to ally themselves with the rebels, reinforcing a cycle of rebellion. The fluid and reactive nature of the strategic situation which prevailed in India during 1857–1858 compounds the archival limits which make it difficult to reconstruct macro-histories of the rebels' motivations; however, Bates and Carter's reading of the diversity of religious motivations shows the

complexity of local calculations regarding loyalty and rebellion. This complexity, in turn, reveals the necessary workings of colonialism and the vital role of Indians within the colonial order: as later, post-mutiny accounts sought increasingly to distinguish between those Indians who were culpable for the revolt, and those who were not, so more complex causal narratives were articulated, in which the majority of the population were largely excused from direct responsibility. Thus, while a detailed reconstruction of the motivations of individual rebels remains extremely difficult, Bates and Carter demonstrate how the extant sources can be read to reveal a more complex account of the role played by religion in the events of 1857–1858. Crucially, and contrary to most colonial accounts, their chapter shows that religious justifications were as subject to material and political mediation as were more earthly matters of logistics and tactics.[18]

The frequently misunderstood relationship between religion, combatant motivation and rebel strategy is addressed in more detail in William Dalrymple's analysis of the 'siege' of Delhi, in many ways the most significant military encounter to take place during the rebellion. The failure of the rebel forces concentrated in Delhi to overwhelm the (much smaller) British force on the ridge above the city has long been identified as a vital strategic mistake that undermined the rebellion's momentum and allowed the British counter-attack to develop and consolidate. While colonial commentators explained the ending of the siege as confirmation of Britain's national and racial pre-eminence, a more complex strategic analysis is overdue. Dalrymple's chapter undertakes such an assessment, drawing on a range of previously unused archival material to demonstrate how, during the crucial early stages of the siege, logistical and administrative failures of leadership undermined the city's financial and commercial activities, draining the rebellion of its momentum and compounding problems caused by the absence of effective command and control. Where much colonial historiography attributed such problems to the deficiencies of the 'Oriental temperament', Dalrymple shows that the logistical and strategic failures of the rebellion reflected significant cleavages and tensions amongst the rebels which, subsumed in the initial stages of the uprising, gradually came to prominence, particularly as various, influential groups within the city came to believe that the rebellion was unlikely to succeed in its objectives. Crucially, Dalrymple's explanation demonstrates the impacts of the rebellion on the inhabitants of the city, charting the diverse reactions of the Indian population to the uprising to show how these, more than Orientalist claims regarding Indian character, influenced the course of events in 1857–1858. For example, the widespread looting—for both provisions and plunder—which accompanied the initial outbreak of the rebellion, alienated Delhi's wealthier residents, whilst in the absence of an effective police force, rural banditry disrupted the commercial and agricultural arteries which sustained the urban population and economy. Perhaps most importantly, the rebels failed to safeguard the city's reserves of munitions, with the result that by August, vital strategic supplies were nearly exhausted.

These factors played a crucial role in undermining the initially favourable strategic position of the rebels, especially as, by the end of July, the near-continuous stream of sepoys, ghazis and displaced civilians swelled the city's population to over 400,000. The expansion of the city's population—which might have provided a strategic advantage against the outnumbered British on the ridge—rapidly became the opposite, as large numbers of would-be rebels, and refugees, strained the city's resources towards breaking point. Drawing on archival testimonies from residents within the city, Dalrymple shows how pressure on the food supply, allied to the disruption of commercial activities and administrative arrangements, fatally undermined the rebellion's key, urban stronghold. Moreover, while colonial officers and historians typically perceived Delhi as the 'centre' of the revolt—the 'accursed city' according to the *Times*[19]—sources from within the city show that Delhi's residents responded to the uprising in far more complex ways. Dalrymple's evidence suggests that significant portions of the city's population were at best ambivalent, and sometimes actively hostile, toward the rebellion (especially towards those ghazis who had flocked to the city following the initial uprising in May). These examples demonstrate the variety of responses which emerged and indicate how the dynamics of the unfolding siege impacted on the attitudes of the population towards the rebels, the Mughal court and besieging British troops. The dwindling of the rebel force within the city is further testament to these dynamics: when the British counter-attack began in September, the rebel armies had been so reduced that they comprised just 25 per cent of the force that had been amassed in the city during June and July. The motivation of the rebels—even of those 'jihadists' for whom the rebellion was a war of religion—were clearly also subject to the mediation of material pressures, just as the reactions of the city's bankers and merchants were subject to their pragmatic calculations about the efficacy and likely outcome of the wider rebellion.

As with those who fought on behalf of the rebels, the motivations of those Indians who fought in the service of colonial power are often difficult to accurately document and substantiate. Though loyalty, like its antonym, was a significant—if often overlooked—trope in colonial accounts of the rebellion, the politics of the colonial archive render both liable to misrepresentation and corruption.[20] Nevertheless, understanding the military encounter necessitates a better understanding of the role and motivations of those thousands of Indians who chose to 'remain loyal' and fight on behalf of the colonial power. Sabyasachi Dasgupta's chapter explores two narratives of 'loyalty', analysing the local and contingent factors which motivated 'loyalty' during the rebellion. While the difficulties inherent in reconstructing the motivations and understandings of subaltern participants remain, the chapters discussed thus far suggest the importance—and the value—of undertaking these kinds of histories. Although based on sources that are more literary than archival, they nonetheless suggest insights into ideas of the period which can otherwise entirely elude the historian.

This volume is also concerned to explore how the events of 1857 were historicised and to examine the legacies of the uprising for colonialism in South Asia. As Kaushik Roy's chapter indicates, the mutiny campaigns were incorporated into colonial narratives that rationalised the shape of the post-mutiny Indian Army, in which Sikhs, Gurkhas and Pathans largely replaced the high-caste recruits of the pre-mutiny Bengal army. Whilst colonial accounts of the rebellion often stressed the brutality of native troops (both loyal and otherwise) and the fanaticism of some rebels, in the aftermath of the uprising such behaviour was frequently reconstituted as evidence of soldierly aptitude, providing an important trope for the emergent martial race discourse. The evident slippage between these accounts and the more complex realities which shaped subaltern motivations did little to neutralise the legacies of the rebellion, which shaped attitudes towards the Indian Army, and the Indian population, for the rest of the colonial period. However, Roy's chapter also shows how various local material and strategic imperatives informed recruiting policy during and after the rebellion, a further reminder that the effects of 1857 were complex and uneven. The remaining chapters, by Singh, Rand and Chakravarty, reassess the wider impacts of the uprising, focusing more explicitly on the way in which 1857 influenced the imperial military and the colonial state. These chapters do not propose a singular or definitive set of 'mutiny effects': rather, they show how the meanings and legacies of the rebellion shifted over time and according to context. The mutiny shaped the perceptions and self-perceptions of military communities and played a key role in informing colonial military practice, but the complexity that marked the event itself is also reflected in its legacies. Rand's chapter focuses on the evidence gathered by the Peel Commission—the colonial state's 'official' investigation into the rebellion—examining the various and often contradictory explanations offered for the uprising. Though no definitive prescription for post-mutiny reconstruction emerged from these investigations, Rand argues that the determined endeavour to understand the uprising extended an emergent discourse that emphasised the modernity of European rule and the alterity of the Indian population. This framework served colonial purposes—disguising the shortcomings of pre-mutiny intelligence and the contradictions of post-mutiny investigations—but it largely misrepresented the rebellion and its suppression. However, though the lessons of 1857 were constituted in partial and contradictory ways, this process had important consequences for the organisation of the Indian Army and the colonial state. Tracing the increasingly ethnographic bent of military and imperial administration in the latter part of the nineteenth century to the effects of 1857, Rand argues that 'the flood of knowledge produced after the rebellion ... overwhelmed the imperial authorities, [but] was latterly organised and put to use to make possible, rationalise and justify a whole series of transformations which fundamentally reorganised the imperial military'. From this perspective, the emergence of the martial race discourse in the 1880s may be seen less as a

break with post-mutiny policy and more as an effect of the stimulus provided by 1857 to extend colonial knowledge/power. Rand concludes by arguing that colonial responses to the rebellion are indicative of wider shifts in the nature of colonial rule, and suggesting the importance of a more determined engagement with the military history of the subcontinent.

Gajendra Singh's chapter also charts the effects of the rebellion, focusing on the plurality of martial race discourses that emerged after the rebellion and highlighting the instability that marked the evolution of such ideas across the period from the rebellion to independence. Singh's account of three distinct discourses of martiality demonstrates how ascriptions of martial aptitude were subject to change and revision in the century that followed the rebellion. Whilst 1857 was frequently presented as a decisive moment in the shaping of martial narratives—'the great test of national loyalty'—popular accounts testifying to the inherent martiality of certain groups, he argues, suggest a veneer of stability and coherence which martial narratives did not, in reality, possess.[21] In fact, as his reading of discourses regarding Sikhs, Dalits and Brahmins makes clear, martial status was constantly renegotiated, both as a result of imperial strategic imperatives (as in the immediate aftermath of 1857) and in response to the preferences and agency of the various communities from which recruits were drawn. Singh's chapter therefore emphasises the complexity and instability that were reflected in discourses of martial identity. Just as the motivations and experiences of both loyalists and rebels were more historically contingent than many colonial accounts allowed, Singh demonstrates, so were colonial understandings of Indian ethnography. Even the martial aptitude of the Sikhs, whose service in 1857 was widely held to be exemplary, was latterly subject to revision, as political and strategic pressures reconfigured the relationship between the colonial state and its native soldiery. Crucially, Singh's chapter demonstrates that narratives of martial aptitude were produced and shaped not only by metropolitan authors, but also by the peripheral exigencies of social, economic and cultural pressures, not least of which was the readiness, or otherwise, of Indians to enlist and conform to the ideas of loyalty and martial vigour which were ascribed to them. Such discourses were not simply metropolitan projections but were also the product of subaltern interventions, resistance and agency. Just as earlier chapters emphasised the complex interrelations that motivated the actions of individuals during the rebellion, Singh's chapter shows how the complexity and instability evident in many contemporary accounts of the rebellion played out in the contested memories and histories of the rebellion which circulated in official and non-official channels through the remainder of the colonial period. For the officers who commanded the Indian Army in this period, the rebellion became a touchstone against which contemporary concerns were evaluated. While the testimonies to lost martial vigour disguise the complex incentives which motivated 'loyalty' during the rebellion (and which also stimulated subsequent fears of disloyalty), they confirm the enduring impacts of the uprising and,

perhaps more importantly, point to the contested and negotiated relationship that sustained the uneasy military alliance between the colonial state and South Asia's various and shifting military communities. The chapters by Rand and Singh confirm Roy's reading of the mutiny's immediate impacts, but they also demonstrate that whilst memories of the rebellion remained a powerful presence in shaping attitudes towards particular communities, the more enduring legacy of the rebellion was its influence on military administration. After 1857, the 'army question' remained the central problematic of colonial rule in South Asia. These chapters, like those in the rest of this volume and series, demonstrate the many connections that link the events of 1857–1858 to the wider history of colonialism in South Asia and beyond.

These wider connections are explored in more detail in Gautum Chakravarty's concluding chapter, which revisits the 'old debate' about the naming of the rebellion. Having identified the (perhaps surprising) congruence of colonial and nationalist accounts, Chakravarty follows Buckler's alternative reading of the mutiny—and of the relationship between the emergent colonial state and the Mughal system it supplanted—in order to recast the events of 1857–1858 as one of the empire's 'small wars'. This reading of 1857 returns us to the wider relationships of power embedded in the territorial expansion of the colonial state, much as James Frey's account of the earlier Vellore Mutiny emphasised the macro-historical context of an increasingly monitory and wide-reaching colonial regime. While reading the rebellion in these terms, Chakravarty emphasises the similarities which connected the rebellion and counter-insurgency in India with similar incidents and campaigns throughout the colonial (and indeed postcolonial) world. Emphasising the tactical and strategic similarities which these conflicts share with the rebellion, Chakravarty's account suggests the importance of re-conceiving the military histories of 1857 in terms of the uprising's wider strategic significance and of recognising the ubiquity of power and resistance across the colonial world.

Ironically, given the wider impacts of subaltern studies, there have been few attempts to study those subalterns whose roles were very crucial to sustain the empire: the European recruits of the company's armies and of the line regiments posted to India throughout the century. Crucially, it was the military basis of East India Company rule that collapsed in 1857, and it was this collapse which hastened the end of the Company Raj and the beginnings of formal British imperialism in South Asia. This fact reinforces the centrality of the military dimension to the wider histories in which 1857 is a key moment. This volume attempts to bring this military dimension into better focus by addressing the experiences, motivations and understandings of the rebellion, amongst those individuals and communities who participated in military encounters and who were, therefore, most directly affected by them. At the same time, we are keen to avoid the style of military history writing in which the more accessible narratives of colonial officials and high-ranking soldiers are given precedence. By focusing

on the hitherto marginalised histories of 'ordinary soldiers', and Indian sepoys in particular, we aspire to bring these 'subalterns at arms' back into the mainstream of history writing and into our understanding of this epochal moment in British, Indian and global history.

Notes and References

1. Compare, for example, the focus of: J.W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857–1858*, 4 vol. (London: W.H. Allen, 1864–1880); Colonel G.B. Malleson, ed., *Kaye and Malleson's History of the Indian Mutiny, 1857–58*, 6 vol. (London: W.H. Allen, 1889–1893); V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857* (London: n.p., 1909).
2. S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1957); S.B. Chaudhuri, *Theories of the Indian Mutiny, 1857–9* (Calcutta: World Press Private, 1965).
3. There is now an enormous literature on the rebellion, but even some of the best wider histories of the imperial military do not examine the events of 1857. See S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); D. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India*, 1819–1835 (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995); D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Hampshire: MacMillan, 1994).
4. R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); G. Bhadra, 'Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven', in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press); R. Mukherjee, '"Satan Let Loose Upon the Earth": The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857', *Past and Present*, vol. 128 (1990), pp. 92–116.
5. More work in this field is emerging, though there remains a notable divide between works with a strategic and operational focus and those with a more social and cultural orientation. See, for example, K. Roy, *Brown Soldiers of the Raj: Recruitment and the Mechanics of Command in the Sepoy Army, 1859–1913* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008); H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). A notable exception is N. Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). A useful general collection is D.P. Marston and C.S. Sundaram, *A Military History of India and South Asia: From the East India Company to the Nuclear Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).
6. J. Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
7. Against 45,522 Europeans, 232,224 were Indians. See 'Appendix No. 15: An Account of the Military Force Employed Under Each Presidency in British India in Each Year from 1852 to 1857. Appendix to the Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Organisation of the Indian Army' *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1859, session 1, 2515, p. 21.
8. By 1865–1866, European troops (73,815) remained outnumbered by Indians (133,124) by almost two to one. See *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, 467. East India (military expenditure). Return to an address of the honourable House of Commons, dated 5 August 1871; for 'copy of all correspondence which has taken place since 1869 between the Governor General of India in Council and the Secretary of State for India in Council, in reference to possible reductions in the Indian military expenditure' (Enclosure in No. 1, p. 8).

9. In fact, as Metcafe's introduction to his *Two Native Narratives* indicates, this fact was recognised by contemporaries. 'Who was this John Company Bahadur who ruled so vast a territory as Hindustan? ... It was clear that "he" or "it" held India by a native army.... The truism was patent to everyone who devoted a moment's thought to the matter'. See C.T.M. Metcalfe, *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi* (Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1898), p. 8. Similarly, Charles Raikes explained, 'The mass of the people knew and acknowledged the supreme power of their English masters, but they attributed that power entirely to the bayonets of the Bengal Native Infantry, which held the forts, arsenals, and treasuries throughout the country.' See C. Raikes, *Notes on the Revolt in the North-Western Provinces of India* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1858), p. 158.
10. See R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, esp. pp. 18–76.
11. See, for example, the debate between R. Mukherjee, '"Satan Let Loose Upon the Earth"'; B. English, 'The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857', *Past and Present*, vol. 142 (Feb., 1994), pp. 169–178 and R. Mukherjee, 'The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857: Reply', *Past and Present*, vol. 142 (Feb., 1994), pp. 178–189. Also, see Herbert's discussion of General Neill's 'strange law', in C. Herbert, ed., *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 201–204.
12. Roberts devoted twenty-three chapters of his hugely successful memoirs, *Forty-one Years in India*, to the rebellion and its suppression. See F.S.R. Roberts, *Forty One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, 2 vol. (Guildford: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897). On Havelock and metropolitan reactions to his death in 1857, see G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994).
13 W.H. Russell, *My Diary in India, in the Year 1858–9*, 2 vol. (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1860); G.W. Forrest, ed., *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India, 1857–58*, 3 vol. (Calcutta: Military Department Press, 1983–1902).
14. There are notable exceptions, including Sita Ram's contested autobiography: see Sita Ram, *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* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1873). See also the recently translated account of Durgadas Bandopadhyay, a loyalist irregular in Rohilkhand, published as K. Roy, ed., *1857 Uprising: A Tale of an Indian Warrior* (New Delhi: Anthem Press India, 2008). Several native testimonies were published during the colonial period, though the provenance of such accounts is self-evidently difficult to substantiate. See, for example, Metcalfe's *Two Narratives of the Mutiny at Delhi*, which includes an edited account purporting to be from Mainodin Hassan Khan, who had served under the British as an Inspector of Police, and then under the rebel-led Mughal regime in Delhi during the rebellion, before fleeing to Arabia following the reassertion of British power. Mainodin eventually returned to Bombay and surrendered himself, after which he was acquitted of murdering Europeans and eventually granted a small donation 'in consideration of his services to Sir John Metcalf'. Perhaps the best collection of native testimonies is in the National Archive of India's 'Mutiny Papers', discussed in Dalrymple's chapter in this volume.
15. As with 1857, historians' difficulties in apprehending the causes of the Vellore Mutiny reflect, in part, the similar difficulties encountered by colonial officers and administrators, for whom the key determinants of the rebellion remained obscure (see also Bates and Carter on this issue).
16. Colonial accounts typically connected the role of rumour and its effects to a wider Orientalist discourse on 'child like' and fanatical sepoys. On rumour and its role in 1857, see K.A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Witney: Peter Lang Ltd, 2010); H. Bhabha, 'By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the mid-Nineteenth Century', in H. Bhabha, ed., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

17. Additionally, as Dalrymple shows in this volume, the difficulties encountered in trying to provision the rebel forces in Delhi were a major contributor to their ultimate failure.
18. The complexity of motivations was largely ignored in British accounts of 'the ghazis' which—in a reflection of their own world view—tended to emphasise the daring and fanaticism, as well as the bravery, of the rebels: hence making of them a worthy if not an entirely rational foe.
19. cf. Herbert, *War of No Pity*, p. 241.
20. As, for example, in the case of the moneylender whose account of the mutiny was compiled by his son in 1902, discussed by Dalrymple, in this volume.
21. G.F. MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1933). For an account of reactions to the role of the Sikhs and Gurkhas during the counter-insurgency campaigns, see Streets, *Martial Races*, pp. 52–86.

1

THE SEPOY SPEAKS
Discerning the Significance of the Vellore Mutiny

James W. Frey

THE Vellore Mutiny of 10 July 1806 has been cast as a harbinger, if not as a precursor, of the Mutiny of 1857. Charles E. Trevelyan composed a monograph comparing the Vellore Mutiny with the Sepoy Revolt then raging in north India, and John William Kaye included a digression on Vellore in the preface to his history of the Indian Mutiny, drawing clear parallels between the two events.[1] Over and done in eight hours, however, the Vellore Rising occupies, at best, footnote status in the grand scheme of South Asian history. Nevertheless, the Vellore Mutiny triggered non-violent disturbances at several other cantonments in south India, events that spanned an entire year, leaving a trail of documentation that dwarfs anything available for the various local insurrections that formed the Great Mutiny. Furthermore, despite its obscurity, the Vellore Mutiny was a fairly significant event in the history of the Madras Presidency. It was one of the last major episodes of violent resistance to British rule in south India. Occurring at a time when the colonial state was newly established, the mutiny also called into question the validity and strength of the new regime. The Madras authorities were forced to embark on an intensive investigation which, before it was finally called off, touched upon many different aspects of the sepoy's world, revealing the nexus between the sepoy army and the larger matrix of Indian society as never before.[2]

During the Crisis of 1857, the continuing loyalty of the Madras army proved strategically important to the restoration of British power in northern India. How could this loyalty be explained, especially when the Madras Presidency had its own history of sepoy mutinies? Some have argued that Vellore served as an 'inoculation' against the sort of mass mutiny that occurred fifty-one years later in the Bengal Presidency. The Madras authorities crushed the Vellore insurgents but learned their lesson: they retracted the 'objectionable' orders and innovations held to be the cause of the revolt and shored up the status of

their sepoys, which had been diminished not only by socio-economic forces, but also by the Westernisation of the military system. Through a series of careful compromises, the Madras Government built a new military ethos in the south which placed less emphasis on caste and religion as the basis of esprit de corps, focusing instead on discipline and efficiency.[3] These reforms were carried out, however, at a slow pace, usually by offering incentives to Indian officers and sepoys who voluntarily adopted a more Western outlook, and always with the understanding that *mamul*, or custom, might be negotiated but never taken for granted.

Why the Bengal army did not also draw salutary lessons from Vellore is an intriguing question. Officers of the Bengal and Madras establishments often remarked upon the differences between the two services, especially during the few campaigns in which the two armies joined forces. Most of these differences were rooted in the varying socio-economic and political conditions of north and south India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, what exactly had occurred at Vellore was not widely known in the 1850s. The information available to the public regarding the Vellore Mutiny consisted of obscure polemical pamphlets that greatly distorted both the events and their significance.[4]

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the complex and interesting historiography of the Vellore Mutiny, but it should be noted that even most modern historians who have had an opportunity to work with the primary sources for the Vellore Rising have failed to understand them adequately. This is not surprising, for the records are riddled with deliberate misdirection. The mutiny embarrassed the Madras Government at a time when both the commander-in-chief of the Madras army, Sir John Francis Cradock, and the governor, Lord William Bentinck, were out of favour with the Court of Directors.[5] Cradock and Bentinck blamed each other for the mutiny and for the intriguing, if tedious, investigations that followed; later on, the Madras authorities tried to whitewash the whole affair and bury the details in the archives. The details included in official summaries or otherwise offered to the public were carefully selected and often taken out of context in order to support the various 'official' accounts of what had occurred at Vellore.

We may well ask ourselves how the Vellore Mutiny could have served as an inoculation against further mutiny if so little was known about the event. The answer is simple enough—the lessons of the mutiny were cast as fable rather than history, a counterpoint to the fable of the siege of Arcot, which emerged around the same time. The fable of Arcot conveyed the message that sepoys were not only loyal but even heroic figures, sharing their meagre rations with their British comrades. (Actually, the British force at Arcot was well supplied, and none of the existing accounts has anything to say about short rations!) As a fable, Vellore was easier for the British to ingest. Young officers entering the Madras service in the early nineteenth century all heard the cautionary tale from their

senior colleagues: there had been a mutiny at Vellore, where the sepoys' ire had been aroused by ignorance and insensitivity on the part of their officers. Thus junior British officers learned that they needed to acquire proficiency in Indian languages, understand the sepoys' culture and take the feelings of their men seriously or else the consequences might be dire. In this ad hoc way, the Madras army placed a high value on open-mindedness and tolerance. At the same time, however, the ultimate blame for the mutiny was removed from the sepoy army and cast upon convenient scapegoats—upon Christian missionaries, or upon the captive sons of Tipu Sultan, who had been languishing in exile at Vellore at the time of the uprising.[6]

For many of the officers most closely concerned with the events of the Vellore Crisis, however, the whole thing had ended badly. They had no desire to talk about the affair, and sincerely hoped that, in time, people would forget that the normally quiet, fifteenth century fortifications of Vellore fort had ever been the scene of a Sepoy Uprising. Memoirs of the period, in fact, tend to give the Vellore affair a wide berth. Unlike the Indian Mutiny, which the British puffed up into a heroic national myth in some ways, an epic of good faith betrayed, a tragedy and a tale of righteous revenge, the Vellore Crisis was a pathetic, tawdry failure, an unmitigated disaster with no redeeming aspects and no moments of personal heroism. As for the connection between the Vellore Rising and the Mutiny of 1857, I think it is fair to say that we have an illustration of Mark Twain's precocious but rather insightful quip: 'History doesn't repeat itself—at best it sometimes rhymes.'

The most widely known 'fact' about the Vellore Mutiny is that the rising occurred due to the introduction of a new type of uniform turban that the company's Indian soldiers considered to be a *topi*, or hat. The infamous turban of 1806, thus, matches the infamous greased cartridge of 1857. The sceptical historian of South Asia, of course, finds it hard to imagine that such trifles could provoke an insurrection: we have been trained to shy away from the old idea of Indians being somehow inherently 'driven' by religious concerns. Our scepticism is wise, I think, but in the case of the Great Mutiny, sepoys' fears regarding the Enfield cartridge were both real and important, at least prior to the mutiny. The famous Mangal Pandey incident at Barrackpur, celebrated (and exaggerated) by a recent Bollywood film, demonstrates this.[7] As was noted at the time, however, once the revolt began at Meerut, sepoys showed no reluctance to use 'any' cartridges available to them in order to fight the British.[8] Similarly, during the Vellore Mutiny, although a few sepoys were heard mocking the new turban, none were seen destroying it, and many of the mutineers captured by Colonel Rollo Gillespie's dragoons were actually wearing the 'obnoxious' headgear.[9] Not surprisingly, there is a tendency to view the Vellore turban and the Meerut cartridge as symbols representing the panoply of a more 'substantive' causality. As Ranajit Guha has pointed out, such symbols played a part in most colonial-era rebellions: in the indigenous context they were a means of mobilisation, while

colonial authorities focused upon these same symbols to prove that resistance to the colonial state was rooted in cultural conservatism rather than in developed political consciousness.[10] This is why we must be so sceptical and careful—as Guha and others have warned, colonial records represent constructed knowledge, and they can be twisted in all sorts of ways to yield very different types of conclusions.

It is certainly true that in the historiography of the Vellore Mutiny, the turban has been dismissed, more or less out of hand, and the 'blame' for the uprising sought elsewhere. Initially, most high-ranking British officials were convinced that the mutiny was the result of a conspiracy hatched by Indian elites, and immediately after the Vellore insurrection a witch-hunt was carried on throughout the Madras Presidency as interested parties interrogated large numbers of people in an effort to 'prove' the existence of a widespread anti-British plot. The investigations failed, but the idea of a plot continued to fascinate colonial administrators. It was easier for British policymakers to accept that Indian princes might be treacherous than to countenance the possibility that sepoys might have political abilities and aspirations of their own.[11]

On the other hand, some more recent studies of the Vellore Rising build it up into something that it clearly was not, trying to link the revolt to other local insurgencies in south India at that time, or trying to imagine that the mutiny and the disturbances that followed from some South Indian equivalent of the Great Mutiny.[12] The sources do not permit either assertion to be made: there is no direct evidence suggesting that the Vellore Mutiny and the other Madras army disturbances of 1806–1807 were anything other than sepoy protests, fairly limited in scope, and also confined to particular battalions, disturbances whose primary cause is to be found in the problems of the early colonial military system. Indeed, only about one-third of the Madras army was touched, either directly or indirectly, by the Vellore Crisis.[13]

However, before setting aside the problems of historiography altogether an important point must be made. A comparison of the existing studies of the Vellore Mutiny with the primary sources for the event indicates that since the early nineteenth century, when the first 'historical' account of the rising was penned, historians have relied more upon the published, official summarised explanations of what happened than upon the original documents, which contain the surprisingly candid testimony of captured mutineers and other eyewitnesses. Most of the problems and inconsistencies in the historiography can be explained by this mistake—even modern authors have allowed themselves to be misdirected by the wild imaginings of early nineteenth century colonial officials, and even those most enamoured of the idea of the 'subaltern' have been remarkably deaf to the sepoys' own subaltern voices.

My own study of the Vellore Mutiny has focused on the depositions of sepoys and other participants in the various events of the year-long Vellore Crisis.[14] Rather than trying to comprehend what happened 'top-down'—always a temptation when there are neat official summaries to be had—I sought the

meaning of the mutiny from below, looking for moments in which ordinary participants articulated what they thought they were doing, and why. Through this simple process, I eventually discerned a fairly clear pattern of responses, and this in turn shed an informative light upon the manner in which the colonial state, at its different levels, digested and either used or discarded each informant's remarks. What emerged, I realised, was an effort to quietly set aside and silence the indigenous, eyewitness account of the Vellore Crisis in favour of a heavily constructed, more ordered and politically palatable official version of the events and their meaning.

In the remainder of this chapter I will outline my main argument. However, in order to orient the reader and provide a context for the evidence on which my argument is based, I will begin with a summary of the main issues and events of the Vellore Crisis.

The Great Mutiny occurred only a few years after the completion of the major British conquests in northern India, a more or less peaceful period when the Bengal army was in its barracks and when reforms could be undertaken efficiently. The Vellore Mutiny occurred in a similar context. The Madras army spent the years 1747–1805 almost continuously at war. Sepoy battalions were on active service so frequently that the Madras authorities did not organise an adequate network of regular cantonments until the final defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799. Many units, in fact, lived in crumbling, old, pre-colonial forts or in increasingly shabby tents for years at a time, including the large and important subsidiary force at Hyderabad. The victories won by the Madras army during the Anglo-Maratha War, however, brought an extended period of peace to south India, a peace broken only by minor, short-lived *palegaru* uprisings.

In these circumstances, the Madras army settled down in cantonments, and the new commander-in-chief, Sir John Francis Cradock, embarked upon an ambitious reform of the army's disciplinary system, trying to complete the work that Cornwallis had begun over ten years earlier.[15] The 'improvement' of the sepoys' uniforms was considered by Cradock to be an integral and important part of these reforms. In November 1805 the Military Board approved a new, standardised regulation book for the Madras army, which included very specific rules governing how sepoys should wear their uniforms and how they should appear on duty—with beards and moustaches trimmed in a certain way and with no jewellery or 'caste marks'.[16] Finally, the Indian troops were to 'make up' a new turban designed by Major Bose of the 2/14th Native Infantry.

Although a soldier himself, the governor of Madras, Lord William Bentinck, was at the time primarily focused on a controversial debate concerning the land revenue system to be adopted in south India. Bentinck had been sent to Madras by the Court of Directors with instructions to trim the Presidency's bloated budget. Long years of war had required the Madras Government to devote almost all resources to military charges, and to borrow heavily to meet ever-escalating expenses. Upon his arrival on the Coromandel, however,

Bentinck had been asked by Governor General Wellesley to invest heavily in the Supreme Government's rather opportunistic, expansionist enterprise against the Marathas. By 1805, Bentinck found himself in trouble politically, his administration mired in various, increasingly interconnected scandals.[17] Pinning his hopes on the success of the *ryotwari* form of land revenue settlement—a panacea that might pay off the government's crushing load of debt and placate Leadenhall—Bentinck spent most of his time studying detailed reports from district collectors. By his own admission he failed to read Cradock's new military regulations. He simply approved the new codes arbitrarily, as did others, more experienced and usually more cautious members of the Council of Fort Saint George, such as William Petrie.

Cradock himself had questioned some of the new regulations that seemed to infringe upon Indian custom, or *mamul*, but he was assured by the adjutant general, Colonel Patrick Agnew, and by the author of the new regulations, Major Frederick Pierce, that the new code merely reflected the best practices currently in use in the most efficient battalions.[18] As for the new turban, it was modelled for the Military Board by sepoys, all of whom assured the commander-in-chief that this new style of turban was a great improvement over the old one. Of course, it is almost inconceivable that a sepoy would have said anything else to Cradock, and these particular sepoys were most likely 'pattern men'—that is to say, sepoys chosen for their close adherence to regulations, whose task was to serve as models for their comrades. Consequently, the Army Clothing Depot made up samples of the new turban, which were sent to regimental depots in April 1806, where the 'pattern men' of the sepoy battalions could have their company durzis, or tailors, make up exact copies.[19]

As a major station, situated only 90 miles from Madras, Vellore was one of the first cantonments to receive samples of the new turban. When the package was opened by one of the durzis of the 2/4th Native Infantry, however, he immediately declared that the thing inside was not a turban, but a 'Portuguese drummer's hat'. Another sepoy, present at the time, told the durzi not to say such things, but the tailor insisted that anyone who saw the new turban could not help but think that sepoys finally had been made to don hats. After some discussion among lower-ranking Indian officers and sepoys, the men of the grenadier company of the 2/4th informed their officers that they could not wear the new turban because it was a *topi* or hat; they continued to refuse to do so even when their commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Darley, had them assembled and challenged them, one by one, to accept the new turban. Indeed, the scene calls to mind Lieutenant Colonel Carmichael-Smyth's infamous cartridge parade of the skirmishers of the 3rd Light Cavalry on the eve of the Meerut rising in 1857—another insulting, public provocation with disastrous consequences. Darley ordered loyal sepoys to arrest the grenadiers, but the rest of the battalion protested, later that day, in solidarity with them, and order was restored only through the intervention of the Indian officers.

An enquiry followed, and most of the European officers sympathised with the sepoy protesters: they reprimanded Darley, but realising that sepoys could not be allowed to mount protests, they selected two hapless soldiers, who were sent to Madras to face a court martial and ultimately dismissed from the service. As a precautionary measure, however, the government removed the 2/4th Native Infantry from Vellore, where it was replaced by the 2/23rd, a newly raised unit from Trichinopoly.[20] Major Bose, perhaps concerned by this open rejection of his turban, ordered his own grenadier company at Wallajahbad to make up the new headgear, and the result was another protest, more arrests and an emerging crisis that the Council of Fort Saint George could no longer ignore.

At this point, Cradock favoured restraint, but Bentinck felt that insubordination could not be tolerated in the army—sepoy protests should be crushed, he argued, frankly reminding the Council that British rule in India was based on compulsion, not consent.[21] For a time, this hard-nosed approach seemed to work. The 2/23rd joined the 1/1st Native Infantry at Vellore, and both battalions dutifully set about making up new turbans, which they wore without complaint. Still, there were subtle hints that something was amiss—warnings from one nervous Muslim sepoy and an Irish soldier's widow who lived with a retired Paraiyar pioneer in the pensioners' lines, as well as a fakir's seemingly wild prophecy. But for one reason or another these warnings were downplayed or dismissed out of hand—indeed, the witnesses hardly seemed credible—and the soldiers at Vellore went about their normal business.

The 'normal business' of the Vellore garrison was to provide guards for the imprisoned family of Tipu Sultan, who were housed in an old palace inside the fort.[22] An elaborate security system, supervised by the paymaster of stipends, Colonel Thomas Marriott, had evolved since 1799, and as part of this system the responsibility for mounting guards inside the palace-prison belonged to the native infantry regiments of the garrison. Only Indian officers were permitted to supervise these sentries. British officers, in fact, were not allowed inside the palace—the only European permitted to have access to the Mysorean exiles was Marriott. On the night of 9 July 1806, guests entered the palace to attend a wedding feast. Thus, British officers were amazed when, at 2 o'clock in the morning, sepoys began to pour from their barracks and take up arms. The mutiny had begun.

For about eight hours, in the twilight of 10 July 1806, the Vellore mutineers struggled to seize control of the fort, killing approximately 100 British officers and soldiers. However, the sepoys failed to destroy the four companies of His Majesty's 69th Foot, who rallied, counter-attacked and captured the Main Gate, which they held until mid-morning, when a strong force of cavalry arrived from Arcot with galloper guns. Thousands more troops, by then, had been alerted and also were marching to Vellore, accompanied by heavier artillery. The British dragoons and Indian *sowars*, however, stormed Vellore fort almost immediately, without awaiting reinforcements, and those sepoys not killed in the initial charge

and pursuit either scattered into the countryside or were pulled out of hiding places inside the fort and permitted to surrender. Later, other sepoys from Vellore were taken up by the authorities at a number of places in the Carnatic.

British accounts of the mutiny tend to dwell upon how Colonel Gillespie climbed onto the Main Gate and how he was wounded leading an infantry charge to clear the way for the cavalry to enter the fort and engage the mutineers. What happened next, however, is not at all clear. Later on the government sought to minimise the number of people killed and wounded by Gillespie's troopers, and to this day we do not have a generally accepted count of the 'rebel' casualties, although a figure of between 600 and 700 dead is probably accurate.[23] To the dragoons storming the fort, it apparently must have seemed as if the entire place was seething with armed insurgents. In any event, the dragoons killed everyone in sight, offering no quarter until their officers were able to calm them down. Most of the sepoys made no effort to defend themselves—they either ran, accompanied by a large number of civilians, or else tried to hide. Many fleeing sepoys sought refuge in the fort temple, then being used as a magazine, where the deep gashes made by the infuriated dragoons' sabres can still be seen on the statues of the *kalyana mantapam*. When the dragoons rushed to the palace occupied by the sons of Tipu Sultan, the Paymaster of Stipends, Colonel Thomas Marriott, suddenly appeared, throwing himself in front of the gate, where he held back the furious troops, refusing to permit them to violate the state prisoners' privacy.

Gillespie, infuriated by the death of the garrison commander, Colonel Fancourt, an old friend—and perhaps moved by the presence of Fancourt's widow and other distraught English and Eurasian women—was eager for revenge.[24] Gillespie somehow was convinced that the mutiny was a Muslim plot fomented by the sons of Tipu Sultan and abetted by the large Muslim community of Vellore. Why he was convinced of this, however, is difficult to say because his terse report does not reveal everything that he must have seen and heard during the first few hours following the suppression of the mutiny.[25] Without waiting for instructions from Madras, Gillespie organised a court of enquiry, which began to collect evidence. Meanwhile, Cradock rushed to Vellore from Nandidrug, where he had gone for the summer, and Gillespie immediately convinced the commander-in-chief that the Mysorean princes were the true cause of the mutiny.

The governor-in-council ordered Cradock to return to Madras, where Bentinck forced him to issue a General Order rescinding the 'obnoxious' new regulations and the new turban in particular.[26] Gillespie's court was allowed to continue to operate, but only as an evidence-collecting body. A mixed civilian and military commission, meanwhile, was organised and sent to Vellore to study this evidence and question those who had witnessed the insurrection. Why all of this caution? Well, to begin with William Petrie, no stranger to controversy, had warned his fellow members of Council that the Court of Directors would not

take the news from Vellore lightly. However, the Council's views were divided. Cradock was convinced that the Mysorean princes were to blame for the mutiny, and that Colonel Marriott was either incompetent or was hiding evidence against the princes that might cast his security arrangements in a poor light. Even Petrie initially thought Marriott's behaviour rather suspicious.[27] Bentinck, however, felt that the cause of the mutiny was the new army regulations, and therefore supported Marriott, who had reached the same conclusion.[28]

The remaining events of the Vellore Crisis may be divided into three categories. One of these concerns the Mixed Commission's investigation of the causes of the mutiny, which dragged on until mid-August, generating hundreds of pages of testimony. Marriott was ordered to come to Madras and defend his policies, and he was able to do so to the satisfaction of the Council. Marriott's report on the incarcerated family of Tipu Sultan makes for fascinating reading, containing numerous intriguing details regarding the prisoners' character and their daily lives, but ultimately it boils down to one key point: during a period of nearly eight hours, when most of the fort was in the hands of the rebels, the princes remained locked away in their mahals. This, Marriott submitted, did not look very much like a Mysorean conspiracy.[29]

Fairly early on, it had become clear that although a great deal of suspicious activity was connected with Muiz-ud-Din, the most reckless and hot-headed of those princes who had come of age, neither he nor his brothers had openly supported the mutineers. Even so, rather than professing their innocence, the princes preferred silence, refusing to countenance the questions put to them by the Commission.[30] Their fate, in any event, was decided by the Supreme Government, which ordered the Madras authorities to separate the princes from their zenanas and send them into further exile at Calcutta, where many of their descendants still live to this day.

With the princes themselves off the hook, the Commission was ordered to focus on the mutineers, quickly isolating a small group of ringleaders whose names had resurfaced in the testimony of one witness after another. By threatening these men with capital punishment, and then offering limited pardons to those willing to cooperate, the code of silence that had shielded the ringleaders, allowing them to 'blend in' among the innocent, broke down. The investigating officers finally were able to build a coherent idea of what had happened.[31]

Having spent a great deal of time with the Vellore documents, I would not venture to say that the existing records contain every last detail regarding the mutiny. There is a great deal of information, but it is hardly comprehensive or conclusive. Indeed, most of the 'evidence' was contested in one way or another, and the officers who carried out the interrogations of the prisoners probably knew more than they were willing to divulge to the Mixed Commission or to the Council. To the discerning reader, it is clear that the Vellore records are constructed documents—they purport to lay out 'facts', but their real purpose is to persuade, and a complex array of political imperatives lurks behind each

page, depending on the identity and situation of the author, as well as upon the changing historical context.[32] The testimony of some of the witnesses, furthermore, appears to have been 'coached', perhaps even by the interrogating officers, who were not members of the Commission, but either Colonel Marriott or the adjutants of the mutinous battalions. Other depositions, however, have an unmistakable ring of authenticity to them, preserving the jumbled memory of an essentially chaotic event.[33] Unfortunately, at least two historians have attempted to use the Vellore documents to 'reconstruct' a teleology of the mutiny, but I am convinced that this is impossible due to the fragmentary and contested nature of so much of the key evidence.[34] What we have is not really a narrative, but rather a collage—often several points of view regarding the same small set of memorable images.

When all was said and done, the officers at Vellore found that the mutiny had been planned well in advance, although the plan had been set in motion prematurely due to fears of betrayal, thus taking everyone by surprise, including many of the would-be mutineers.[35] The 'plot' had begun shortly after the removal of the 2/4th Native Infantry, when the 2/1st had arrived at Vellore en route to another station. There had been a sort of 'emergency' meeting of Indian officers and sepoys belonging to the two battalions, at which it was determined that since they represented the senior unit of the army, the soldiers of the 1/1st should lead a unified sepoy protest against the new turban. If necessary, they should become martyrs for the sake of the rest of the army.[36] Within the regiment, meanwhile, the grenadier and light companies were expected to take the lead, and it was in these elite, hand-picked companies that most of the ring-leaders of the Vellore 'conspiracy' served.

Soldiers were selected for the grenadiers because of their bravery and physical strength, and for the light company because of their intelligence, initiative and agility. Because promotion within these companies was based on merit rather than seniority, the grenadier and light companies tended to attract the most ambitious soldiers. In many ways, the leading mutineers were all model sepoys, 'perfect at [their] ... drill', either men who had been with the army since childhood, starting out as officers' servants, or else men who had joined the regiment recently.[37] The latter, however, turned out to be well-educated, literate men, almost all Muslims, many of them people of fairly high status—and most of them, furthermore, were found to have been former soldiers, sometimes even officers, of Tipu Sultan's army.[38] This in itself was not surprising, since the Madras army had absorbed thousands of cast-off soldiers from the disbanded armies of Mysore, the Carnatic and Tanjore—even former French-trained *cipayes* who had served at Pondicherry, or in Raymond's corps at Hyderabad.[39] British officers, however, did not choose to pry into the origins of recruits, for the Madras army, unlike the Bengal army, often had difficulty finding sufficient numbers of men to maintain its established strength.[40] The 1/1st Native Infantry had been one of the units that took part in the storming of Seringapatam in

1799, and it had remained in Mysore for years, afterward, finding most of its new recruits locally. Later on, the battalion moved to Hyderabad, where even more Deccani Muslims joined the corps.

A group of palace servants connected with one of Muiz-ud-Din's *mard-i-admiyan*, Jamal-ud-Din, a foster-brother to the prince, seems to have been playing upon the Vellore sepoys' discontents.[41] When they became aware of the formation of a largely Mysorean cell within the 1/1st Native Infantry, the palace servants quickly offered to act as go-betweens, claiming to represent the interests of Muiz-ud-Din. Secret meetings were held at Jamal-ud-Din's house, at which it was decided to seize control of the fort through a sudden, well-organised coup. Higher-ranking Indian officers, British officers and sepoys deemed to be too loyal to be trusted were carefully kept in the dark while hundreds of other men were brought into the conspiracy, at various levels, through ceremonies involving oaths of secrecy. A Sufi dargah located just outside the fort was found to be a haven safe from the prying eyes and spying ears of Marriott's *harkaras*. Furthermore, the dargah of Amin Pir was a place where palace servants and Muslim sepoys could mingle without arousing suspicion. An inner cadre of enforcers, meanwhile, assured that the wall of silence remained unbroken.

When the mutiny occurred, it was these men, the Mysorean provocateurs and enforcers, who took action first, ordering the other troops to stand to, or else rushing off to carry out a simultaneous mass assassination of the garrison's commanding officers. The Vellore records, however, make it clear that only a fraction of the sepoys inside the fort cooperated with these committed insurgents, while some sepoys actively or passively resisted the coup attempt.[42] Among the sepoys who openly joined the insurrection, however, only a few supported the specific goals of the ring-leaders. For many of these mutineers, the reason for the revolt was the new turban, which some declared they could not wear and still retain their self-respect.[43] Other sepoys took up arms out of fear—fear of being driven from their caste and ostracised, a threat that had been specifically made by local caste elders and even by a few of the sepoys' wives.[44] At least half of the sepoys at Vellore, however, simply looked on, aghast—terrified, for the most part, and unwilling to act for one side or the other.[45]

The mutiny was thus a fairly limited affair, despite appearances, one pushed and pulled by numerous forces. The mutineers were at odds as to what should be done and were, furthermore, leaderless. It is hardly surprising that they were unable to secure the fort. Indeed, the confusion must have been apparent, and this perhaps explains why Muiz-ud-Din ignored the rebels' pleas to show himself and locked the doors of his mahal. A number of palace servants joined the insurgents and even fought with the surviving British troops, but it is clear that they acted on their own initiative, not on the orders of the princes. In the end, several palace servants were turned over to the civil authorities for trial, while a select group of nineteen mutineers were singled out, condemned and publicly executed on 23 September 1806.[46]

Only a few days after the Vellore Rising, there was a great deal of unrest among the sepoys belonging to the six battalions of the subsidiary force at Hyderabad. There, too, a politicised investigation ensued that revealed long-standing grievances, but also surprising informal linkages between Indian officers of middling rank and some of the Nizam Sikandar Jah's courtiers.[47] Given the political uncertainty and the matrix of competing factions surrounding the Asafiya court at that time, however, it is scarcely surprising that some of the Nizam's nobles sought allies even among the company's sepoys.[48] The voluminous correspondence connected with the Hyderabad 'disturbances', however, is written in a deliberately vague manner—hearsay carefully disguised by the Resident, Captain Thomas Sydenham, as evidence and presented in provocative ways. Equally vague and misleading was the correspondence of the commander of the subsidiary force, Colonel Montresor.[49] Indeed, so mysterious are the British records regarding what happened at Hyderabad that it is difficult to tell, even from a close reading of them, exactly what the sepoys there were supposed to have done. The governor general ordered the Resident to reprimand the Nizam, who was rather sympathetic to the sepoys' plight, but also cautioned the authorities at Hyderabad against transmitting further scurrilous accusations against the company's allies, unsupported by substantive, compelling evidence.[50]

During that summer, and through the end of the year, more 'disturbances' were reported from different parts of south India. Some of these disturbances were open sepoy protests and near-riots, but most were events conjured from the ether. What had happened at Vellore frightened many British officers. A number of officers became skittish, inclined to see every scowling sepoy as a potential murderer. For their part, sepoys also were alarmed—they were surprisingly well-informed about the mutiny, and viscerally shocked by the government's execution of so many soldiers whose only crime, as they saw it, had been to stand up in defence of their culture. Naturally, there was a great deal of loose and often angry, braggart talk, especially among troops off duty, or among friends who had been tippling in toddy houses.[51]

In the circumstances, unfortunately, petty servants' gossip was transformed into 'evidence' of 'mutiny' or 'conspiracy', and at several stations commanding officers investigated these rumours in an effort to prevent further Vellore-like massacres. Such investigations were undertaken at Wallajahbad, Seringapatam, Nandidrug, Bangalore, Bellary, Palaiyamkottai and Quilon. The most well documented of these incidents concerned the 2/18th Native Infantry, which supplied the garrison for both Bangalore and Nandidrug.[52] It is rather intriguing to read the accounts of these local investigations because they shed so much light on the normally unseen, inner world of sepoy battalions. Indeed, there was even a secondary investigation, carried on throughout the Madras Presidency, that attempted to discern whether or not itinerant fakirs were acting as the peripatetic agents of some deeply laid, widespread plot. However, taken as a

whole these investigations proved an embarrassment to those who organised them and perhaps an even greater embarrassment to the governor-in-council.

The most talented officers of the Madras army, those fluent in the local languages and thus most aware of the subtle undercurrents of south Indian society, had gradually persuaded Bentinck, at least, that carrying on a spate of secret investigations, far from proving anything, was actually fomenting anti-British sentiment. The Raja of Mysore's diwan, Purnaiya, a solid supporter of the British, was deeply annoyed by the investigations of Mysorean officials carried out in the native city of Bangalore, to which he referred as 'the swaggerings of *bhang* smokers'.[53] Even earlier in the summer, Thomas Oakes had replaced James Strange as the Third of Council, and he, too, was of the opinion that the cause of the Vellore Mutiny had been the new turban, that there was no need to imagine or seek out widespread political conspiracies.[54]

By early December, when Major Bose, the creator of the new turban, reported that his troops at Sankaridrug were on the verge of mutiny, even Cradock finally was moved to issue a General Order informing British officers that any further drastic actions, prompted by ungrounded fear, would result in serious charges. Bose, for one, was ordered to report to Madras and explain his lack of confidence to the Military Board in person.[55] James Welsh, temporarily in command at Palaiyamkottai during the 'disturbances' there, also was summoned to Fort Saint George to explain why, on the strength of a mere rumour, he had disbanded hundreds of sepoys and had sent misleading information to Travancore, resulting in the disbandment of even more men there, consequently leaving hundreds of miles of vital, strategic territory completely stripped of troops.[56] Thus, the Vellore Crisis ended, and it is not surprising that men like Welsh, later on, did not wish to discuss the matter in their memoirs.[57]

As William Petrie had anticipated, the Directors were shocked by the news from Vellore, and after a quick perusal of the first reports to reach England, they recalled both Cradock and Bentinck. In Madras itself, the events of the Vellore Crisis soon came to be superseded by the officers' mutiny—the so-called White Mutiny.[58] Seeking to clear their names, meanwhile, Cradock and Bentinck published lengthy pamphlets, selectively drawing on the Vellore documents to prove their respective cases. Cradock blamed the mutiny on popular resentment of the new civil administration, on provocateurs employed by various Indian powers and on the Mysorean princes. Bentinck steadfastly denied these charges and argued, instead, that the causes of the mutiny were military—that sepoys disliked the new turban, in particular, which they viewed as an attack on their religions and customs.[59] With another debate brewing in Parliament regarding renewal of the company's charter, partisans sought to blame the Vellore Rising on widespread fear of Christian missionaries, thus thwarting Evangelical efforts to amend the Charter in order to allow Protestant missionaries to work openly in British territory.

When one trims away all of the political misdirection that the Vellore documents contain, one is left with the bare bones, the testimony of dozens of sepoys who came before various panels of British officers, in one context or another, all insisting that the causes of the Vellore Crisis were the new turban, the new regulations and deteriorating service conditions. In my opinion, the sepoys of the Madras army made their case about as clearly as was possible; a group of Indian officers at Hyderabad even sent a long, articulate and detailed letter to their officers explaining their discontent and even offering suggestions for reform.[60] It is for this reason that I have sought to return the focus regarding the Vellore Mutiny to the new turban, which is the key to the real significance of what happened.

Why were sepoys so concerned about their turban looking like a hat? Hats are not entirely unknown in indigenous South Asian cultures, and many court turbans, built upon frames, albeit without brims, were remarkably hat-like. However, the Madras sepoys' remarks in 1806 always noted that the new turban was not just any *topi*, but one that called to mind a 'Portuguese drummer'—a person of low caste and status. What sepoys objected to most was the shape of the new turban.[61] The turban as such could hardly have been the cause of the Vellore Revolt because it was actually made by reshaping the materials of the old turban, using the same wire frame and the same blue broadcloth, to which the only additions were the new ornaments, a leather cockade and a feather hackle. British officers at first suspected that the leather cockade might be objectionable, but none of the sepoy witnesses drew attention to the decorations of the new turban: their persistent concern was its shape.[62]

The uniforms of Madras army battalions had evolved slowly, in an ad hoc manner, ever since sepoys first were clothed in red broadcloth coats in the mid-1750s. For decades, the clothing of sepoys was the privilege of the battalion commander, who stopped a portion of his soldiers' pay each month in order to pay local contractors to produce materials for uniforms. These, in turn, were tailored to fit each man by his company durzi—usually a sepoy who was trained as a tailor, or who took on such duties in order to earn extra money. Indeed, for many years the officers of sepoy battalions were paid out of the profits derived from the various stoppages imposed upon their soldiers' pay in order to procure uniforms and other supplies. The records of the Madras army, however, reveal that this devolution of logistics to the battalion level was extremely inefficient, since many units remained on active service for years, during which it was nearly impossible to replace anything.[63]

Thus, it was not without good reason that Cradock took in hand the problem of clothing the Madras army properly. His immediate predecessors also had expressed concern about sepoys' uniforms, as had Lord Cornwallis, a strong advocate of bringing sepoys up to the same standards as British troops in every way possible. In 1797, the Madras army had adopted a new turban to replace the 'flat' and 'loose' *urumal* previously worn by sepoys. This particular turban was

tall, made of blue broadcloth and wrapped around a wicker or wire frame; it had a flat top that sloped to one side, and was decorated much like the new turban of 1806.[64] Sepoys liked the turban of 1797, however, because it was rather fancy and, indeed, closely resembled the types of turbans often worn at Muslim courts, a detail hardly to be overlooked given that in many Madras battalions nearly half of the troops were Muslims.[65] One indication that sepoys enjoyed their old turban was that they wore it at a jaunty angle on their heads—an impractical, whimsical thing to do, but a subtle indication that they found their headgear 'fashionable'. Indeed, old drawings indicate that sepoys wore the turban in different ways, according to their own inclinations. Doubtless, sepoys were aware that their turban was part of a matrix of symbols that conferred status upon them, and for a great many soldiers status and reputation were nearly as important as their pay. Furthermore—and rather curiously—the turban of 1797 resembled a similar turban worn by many of Tipu Sultan's soldiers, and therefore can hardly have been construed as a hat, *topi-wale*, or 'hat-men' being one of the Sultan of Mysore's favourite euphemisms for the British.[66]

Major Bose, however, had designed his turban so that it could only be worn in one, regulation, uniform way—squarely upon the head, with the brim drawn down to just above the eyebrows, in the same manner as a European's hat.[67] In this way, all sepoys, regardless of caste, would look the same; and did the new regulations not also specify that Muslim troops were to shave their moustaches and beards, that caste Hindus must appear, on duty, without their sectarian marks? However, even more alarming was that Bose's turban sloped not to the side, but from front to back, exactly like the leather hats worn by half-caste drummers, which were themselves patterned on the shakos recently issued to European troops in south India. This was why, upon receiving the pattern for the new turban, the durzi sepoy at Vellore had declared it to be a 'Portuguese drummer's *topi*'.

During the so-called Pamphlet War that followed the Vellore Crisis, it was argued that sepoys feared that the imposition of 'hats' was intended to make them all Christians—that the *topi*-like turban was feared because it was a symbol of Christianity. Actually, this particular allegation appears only a few times in the Vellore documents, almost as an aside, and it is clearly unimportant. There were very few missionaries in south India in the early nineteenth century, and most of them were well respected and on very good terms with the indigenous population. The Madras army, meanwhile, employed only a handful of chaplains, mostly in and around Fort Saint George, whose commissions specifically restricted their ministries to the European community.

Indeed, what most concerned the sepoys about the British was that far from being ardent Christians, they seemed to have no religion at all. European officers of the Madras army at the time of the Vellore Mutiny were anything but models of moral rectitude. A hard-drinking set, fond of meat-laden curries, quick to challenge each other to duels, Madras officers—'Mulls' as they called

themselves—lived in a hybrid Anglo-Indian world that included hashish, zenanas and petty corruption, but often excluded the virtues of both the West and the East. British officers often were admired by sepoys for their courage, stamina and technical expertise, but at the same time it was understood that despite their political power, the British, as a group, were essentially unclean, ritually polluted, and therefore beyond the pale of polite society. This was why most of their household servants were either Muslims or untouchables. To many sepoys, British officers might be popular leaders, even friends on occasion, but most of them were opportunistic hedonists, while many of those who were not could be brutal martinets.[68] However, if a British officer knew what he was doing—and the Madras army could boast of a number of very talented officers—sepoys were willing to overlook any number of personal sins. This, in fact, was one of the points made by the memorial sent to the Government by the sepoys at Hyderabad: Indian soldiers were alarmed by the number of very young junior officers being sent out to command them—inexperienced teenagers, most of them—who clearly understood neither India nor their military duties. Worst of all, these young men could easily be led astray by bad examples.[69]

The 'Portuguese drummer's *topi*' was a double-edged symbol both of the problematic status of Paraiyar drummers and of the worst aspects of European culture. Even sepoys who were already Paraiyars—a fairly significant percentage of troops in the Madras army in 1806—refused to wear the new turban. Sepoys, living in a hybrid Anglo-Indian world themselves, had to maintain their status vis-à-vis their own indigenous cultures by drawing attention to the fact that they remained sons of the soil despite their red coats. Among the more responsible, culturally aware British officers, these delicate balances were understood, and thus sepoys were allowed to build their own huts, which were never inspected by European officers; sepoys constructed temples and mosques within their lines; 'caste marks' and other outward symbols of religious faith were tolerated and even encouraged, and Muslim sepoys allowed to entertain sufis and form Islamic study groups. Indeed, in every way possible, and sometimes even to the point of impracticality—as in the custom of permitting each soldier to cook his own food—the Madras army had made room for sepoys to be Hindus, Muslims and Indian peasants as well as soldiers of the Company Raj. The prevailing, albeit unwritten policy of tolerance even extended to allowing native officers to enforce basic, day-to-day discipline through battalion panchayats, and to the maintenance of a number of old customs adopted from pre-colonial Indian armies.[70] Thus a complex but resilient 'sepoy world' came into being, a negotiated space maintained by both sepoys and British officers through a dialogic process.[71]

The controversy regarding the new turban, and the voluminous testimony recorded in the Madras Presidency in 1806–1807 sheds light upon two related, rather crucial processes that are, to me, the most important aspects of the Vellore Mutiny. The attempt by Cradock to impose 'strict discipline' on the Madras

army, to regularise its largely informal 'internal economy', to borrow a frequently used, suitably ambiguous phrase of the period, marked the transition from a pre-colonial dialogic order, in which power was negotiated, to a bureaucratic colonial order in which power was delineated by inflexible statutes and subject to set procedures. Significantly, at the time this new way of thinking was almost as unfamiliar to British officers as it was to sepoys, and it is clear that during the investigation of sepoy discontent only a few individuals on either 'side' knew what they were doing: most of the British did not know when to stop asking questions, while most of the sepoys did not know when to stop talking. Some of the prisoners, rather more clever than either the British prosecutors or their peers, even managed to talk their way out of capital accusations and obtain full pardons! However, the historian can be grateful for the useful fruit of the many unguarded moments when so many ordinary people spoke their minds and had their words recorded.

Bose's turban, as we have seen, was problematic in itself, but it was also a symbol of something even more troubling for sepoys—the breakdown of the old dialogic order that had governed relations between British officers and Indian soldiers. In this order, the chief negotiators had been Indian officers—they were the key that allowed the company's cross-cultural military system to function. However, by reducing these men to the status of European non-commissioned officers, to the role of mere enforcers of rules rather than negotiators, Cradock and Agnew and other officers like them closed off the avenues that permitted a mediated, triangular, but often useful dialogue between coloniser and colonised. Through these avenues, officers once had been able to find out about disciplinary problems and deal with them before they reached a point of crisis. Often, a compromise suitable to all parties was the result, and sepoys viewed this as part of the way in which the company honoured the concept of *namak-halal*, a reciprocal relationship with its soldiers.[72]

At Vellore, however, 'strict discipline' merely meant the evolution of a culture of fear, in which sepoys who might have warned the British were too terrified to do so, and in which it was easy for the conspirators to discredit and even imprison the only sepoy, Mustafa Beg, who dared to step forward, prior to the rising, to divulge the plot.[73] Ironically, the new system cast high-ranking native officers as nothing more than parroting stooges of the British, thus cutting them off from the flow of information about battalion morale: sepoys' complaints stopped with the middling rank of native officers, who suppressed them for fear of being held responsible for any problems that might ensue. This same blockage of information, however, was what enabled the Vellore conspirators to keep their mutiny plot secret for so long despite the fact that so many men knew about it.[74] For their part, under the new system, the higher ranking Indian officers preferred not to know what was really happening—the whole point, it must have seemed, was to make sure that the army was 'complete' and 'correct' on paper, without regard to the real situation.

Considered more broadly, the Vellore Crisis points to the fundamental distinction between the pre-colonial and the colonial orders, and to some of the stresses experienced by Indian society as it crossed the threshold from one mode of existence to the other: to put it another way, the events at Vellore in 1806 allow us to observe, in detail, how at least one small but important section of south Indian society felt and reacted to the initial shock of modernity.

To return, in closing, to the connection between the Vellore Mutiny and the Indian Mutiny of 1857, we can, I think, see with greater clarity even more similarities and differences between these two events. To begin with, in 1806–1807, sepoys in south India organised themselves and stood up to the Company Raj, articulating rather complex socio-economic and political concerns and even following through with significant acts of violence and protests when the state tried to ignore their pleas. In the end, many sepoys were killed, and many others endured a year of imprisonment, while a handful of 'special cases' were permanently exiled to the penal colony of Penang for their role in the Hyderabad disturbances. Still, the sepoys achieved their object, forcing the company to relent, to change its policies and even replace top-level administrators and military officers. This was no minor achievement. In 1857–1858, something very similar happened on a much larger scale, after infinitely more death and destruction. The Bengal sepoy mutineers were slaughtered by the tens of thousands during the suppression of their revolt, but the rebels' overall effort led to significant changes in British colonial policies—indeed, to the end of the Company itself. The significance of sepoy mutinies cannot be denied, and was understood by some key British officials, both in 1806 and 1857, who tried to remind their countrymen that military power and coercion, not affection, was the real basis of the colonial state in India.

However, earlier in this chapter I quoted Mark Twain's quip that history rhymes rather than repeating itself. While the Vellore Mutiny and the Indian Mutiny both forced the British to alter their policies, neither event was a rebel victory. In 1806 and in 1857, some rebel leaders sought the overthrow of the colonial state, and that, of course, did not occur. Furthermore, the different contexts of the two events led to very different long-term consequences. In south India, the British eventually achieved their policy goal, the Westernisation of the Madras army, but they found that dialogue and compromises worked better than expectations of blind obedience and ramrod discipline. Thus, there was a continuity of institutional culture in south India. In north India, almost everything changed after 1857. In part, this was so because the mutiny had been put down with such ferocity, inspiring dogged, nearly suicidal resistance in its final stages. The old Purbiya sepoys drawn from the Bengal army's main recruiting ground of Awadh and Bihar ceased to exist. New military classes, drawn heavily from the Northwest Frontier and the Punjab, replaced the old Bengal army. A wholly new military system appeared as a result of the Mutiny of 1857, and the company's institutions, for the most part, came to a sudden end.

The Bengal army that arose from the mutiny was quite different from the old sepoy military system, and its successes during the latter half of the nineteenth century, ultimately, doomed the increasingly irrelevant Madras army. This is all the more ironic because the new Bengal army—hardly Bengali at all—was the antithesis of what the carefully Westernised Madras army had become. The post-mutiny Bengal army was, if anything, quite Indianised, albeit with a marked Pathani–Punjabi bias, being built on a core of Punjabi Muslim and Sikh regiments. The south Indian sepoy, meanwhile, gradually disappeared during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the only exceptions—ironically—being a handful of service units composed mainly of Paraiyars. Indeed, yet another irony is that the final dissolution of the Madras army was ordered and carried out by Field Marshall Lord Roberts, who had fought in the Indian Mutiny as a subaltern. Roberts' orders even went so far as to include the systematic destruction of almost all indigenous language documents archived by the Military Department of the Madras Presidency, thereby deliberately silencing and erasing the memory of the south Indian sepoy.

Notes and References

1. John William Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857–58* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896), pp. 204–225; Charles E. Trevelyan, *The Mutiny of Vellore: Its Parallelisms and Its Lessons* (Calcutta: Sanders, Cones and Co., 1857).
2. For a full and detailed treatment of this subject, see James W. Hoover, *Men Without Hats: Dialogue, Discipline and Discontent in the Madras Army, 1806–1807* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007), published under my former name.
3. Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, its Officers and Men* (London: Cape, 1974), p. 23. Mason's example, however, may well be a European fabrication; it is very unlikely that an Indian soldier, in the 1830s, would have spoken in this manner about the subject of 'religion', as if it were something that could be expunged, conveniently, from everyday life.
4. For a typical example of the popular understanding of the Vellore Rising, see Anonymous, *The Soldier's Companion, or Martial Recorder*, vol. 1 (London, 1824), pp. 80–81.
5. The only full account of Cradock's life is a fairly long article in Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 4 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885–1901), pp. 936–937. Also see Sir John Francis Cradock, 'Sketch of the Situation of Sir John Cradock', *Home Miscellaneous Series* (*HMS*), vol. 510, pp. 897–928.
6. Jörg Fisch, 'A Pamphlet War on Christian Missions in India, 1807-1809', *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1985), pp. 22–70; S.K. Mitra, 'The Vellore Mutiny of 1806 and the Question of Christian Mission to India', *Indian Church History Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1974), pp. 75–82. Also see James Mill, History of British India (London: J. Madden, 1844), pp. 123–144.
7. See the Hindi movie *Mangal Pandey* (2005). Despite the movie's obvious flaws, the many scenes depicting the sepoy lines and the manner in which sepoys mobilised themselves and interacted with their officers are very accurate.
8. For example, see Lieutenant Hugh Gough's description of the mutiny at Meerut, quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny: India, 1857* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 85.
9. BL/OIOC, Marriott's Testimony, 25 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 148–166.

10. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 267–268.
11. In the case of the Vellore Rising, this actually meant disregarding the report on the causes of the mutiny compiled by the very officers who had carried out the interrogations of the mutineers. See UN (University of Nottingham), Second Report of Forbes and Coombs, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, pp. 4403–4422.
12. For instance, see K. Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion: The First Indian War of Independence, 1800–1801* (Mysore: Rao and Raghavan, 1971); Perumal Chinnian, *The Vellore Mutiny: The First Uprising against the British* (Madras: P. Chinnian, 1982); P. Chinnian, *The First Struggle for Freedom in South India in 1806: Sporadic Events after the Vellore Mutiny* (Erode: Siva Publications, 1983). Also see Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 224–226.
13. The regiments most disturbed by the events of 1806 were all linked, either through long association, intermarriage or the transfer of 'drafts' at the time of their recruitment.
14. Originally, transcripts existed of all indigenous testimony in the various South Indian languages, but these either were destroyed when the military records were purged of indigenous language documents in the 1880s, or else have not been found. For a reference to the accuracy of the English translation from these transcripts, see Lt. Col. Ross Lang to GC/FSG (Governor-in-Council, Fort Saint George), 10 July 1807, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/60, 1806–1807. For the culling of the Madras Archives, see J. W. Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, vol. 1 (Madras: Government Press, 1882), introduction.
15. Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA), Cradock's Minute, 12 March 1805, *Madras Military Proceedings* (*MMP*), vol. 48, pp. 1246–1248; BL/OIOC (British Library/Oriental and India Office Collection), Pierce to Cradock, 26 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 463–465.
16. By 'caste marks', the British records refer to the use of *vibhuti*, or sacred ash, to denote ritual status or sectarian affiliation. Many sepoys may also have viewed their 'marks' as a kind of protective talisman.
17. For a good overview of Bentinck's administration in Madras, see Maya Gupta, *Lord William Bentinck in Madras and the Vellore Mutiny, 1803–1807* (New Delhi: Capital Publishers and Distributors, 1986).
18. BL/OIOC, Code of Regulations (1806), Section 11, Para 10; BL/OIOC, Cradock's Minute, 2 October 1806, *HMS*, vol. 510, pp. 274–275; Petrie's Minute, 29 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 508–515.
19 BL/OIOC, Agnew to Cradock, 18 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 345–350; Pierce to Cradock, 26 July 1806, *HMS*, pp. 450–461.
20. UN, Court of Enquiry Proceedings, 17–24 May 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 17–118; UN, Deputy Judge Advocate General Watson to Cradock, 12 June 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, p. 119.
21. UN, Cradock to Agnew, 16 June 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, p. 172; Cradock to GC/FSG, 29 June 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 175–178; UN, GC/FSG to Cradock, 4 July 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 179–181; Bentinck to Cradock (private), 4 July 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 192–193.
22. BL/OIOC, Harcourt to GC/FSG, 9 August 1806, 'Abstract of Males of the Blood of Hyder Ally', *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 93–98. Also see TNSA, Abstract of the Princes, their Relations, Domesticks, Women, and Children Residing in the Fort of Vellore, April 1806, *Madras Secret Sundries* (*MSS*), vol. 2-A, p. 1079.
23. One reason why it is difficult to estimate the casualties at Vellore is because the muster rolls of the two sepoy battalions have not been found, and it remains unclear how many troops were inside the fort at the time of the mutiny. Hundreds of sepoys belonging to the two battalions were outside the fort, in Vellore *pettah*, or else on detachment at Chittoor. For another estimate of casualties, see Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion*, p. 291.

24. For the testimony of these survivors of the mutiny, see TNSA, Mrs. Potter's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 913–916; Charlotte Watter's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 267–268.
25. UN; Marriott to Bentinck, 15 July 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/25, pp. 367–372; BL/OIOC, Proclamation by His Excellency, the commander-in-chief, 14 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 225–228.
26. BL/OIOC, GC/FSG to Craddock, 14 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 193–196. Signed, 'Bentinck for Council'. This is one of the rare instances in which Bentinck issued an order without waiting to consult first with the Council.
27. BL/OIOC, Report of the Mixed Commission, 9 August 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 103–121; BL/OIOC, Petrie's Minute, 21 August 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 509–513. Ironically, even some of the princes' courtiers criticized Marriott's behaviour during the mutiny: see TNSA, Mirza Chandmand Ali's Deposition, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 951–953; and BL/OIOC, Mirza Chandmand Ali's Testimony, 21 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 137–139.
28. BL/OIOC, Marriott's Testimony, 25 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 148–166.
29. TNSA, Marriott's Testimony, 1 August 1806, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 960–961. Also see TNSA, Muhammad Martaba's Testimony, 5 August 1806, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 978–986; Sepoy Murti's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 921–924; Harkara Gurruppah's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 905–908.
30. TNSA, Proceedings of the Mixed Commission, 6 August 1806, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, p. 987.
31. TNSA, Sepoy Ramjani's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 1000–1001; Sepoy Shaikh Nattar's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 1001–1003. Also see BL/OIOC, Jamadar Shaikh Qassim's Confession, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 7–17. Shaikh Qassim, for his part, decided to confess all even after he had been condemned to death, and despite the fact that he was informed that he could not expect to be pardoned.
32. For an illustration of these problems, which also serves as the basis for my methodology, see TNSA, Sepoy Grenadier Ramru's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 972–977. Sepoy Ramru and Sepoy Ramjani had been detailed to guard the doors of the princes' quarters on the night of the mutiny. Just a few minutes before the rising began, they started to discuss how they had joined the company's army, the changes being made to their uniforms, and their diverging opinions regarding loyalty and mutiny. Ramru's testimony is particularly vivid, yet quite candid and believable.
33. For instance, see TNSA, Sepoy Shaikh Imam's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 998–1000.
34. For the most ambitious teleological construction of the Vellore rising, see Pakkianathan Samuelraj, *The Mutiny at Vellore and Related Agitations, 1806–1807*. University of Saskatchewan, PhD Thesis (unpublished), 1972.
35. UN, Second Report of Forbes and Coombs, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, pp. 4403–4422.
36. A number of sepoys, in fact, reasoned that resistance, although necessary, was hopeless, and thus began to prepare themselves for 'martyrdom'—to become 'shahids'. For instance, see BL/OIOC, Jamadar Shaikh Qassim's Confession, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 7–17.
37. UN, Second Report of Forbes and Coombs, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, p. 4492.
38. Ibid., p. 4423.
39. For an example of such transfers from indigenous armies into the Madras army, see TNSA, Military Miscellany, vol. 45, p. 510, and vol. 46, p. 26. Also see Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, vol. 2, pp. 106–109.
40. For various examples of recruiting problems, see TNSA, *Military Miscellany*, vol. 1, 1778, pp. 347–349; TNSA, GC/FSG to Major Charles Campbell, 9 April 1765, *Madras Military Consultations* (*MMC*), p. 272; TNSA, Sir Archibald Campbell's Minute, 14 October 1788, *MMC*, pp. 3058–3060; Cornwallis Correspondence, vol. 2, p. 569; TNSA, Colonel Floyd to GC/FSG, 10 August 1795, *MMC*, pp. 2444–2445; TNSA, Brathwaite to Lord Edward Clive (confidential), 11 July 1800, MSC, vol. 11, pp. 595–615.

41. The term *mard-i-admiyan* means 'gentlemen-attendants', and is used in the Vellore records to describe the small groups of courtiers who continued to cling around each of the captive princes. They were tolerated by the British because they absorbed the princes' stipends, which otherwise might be employed to finance political schemes. Presiding over miniature, powerless courts also seemed to placate the princes, each of whom had taken the title of 'Sultan', vying to be recognised as the legitimate heir of Tipu Sultan.
42. BL/OIOC, Sepoy Ramaswami's Testimony, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 332–336; Havildar Vendameli's Testimony, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 356–358; UN, Sepoy Venkatchellum's Testimony, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, Appendix no. 29, pp. 4564–4565.
43. TNSA, Muhammad Martaba's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 978–986.
44. TNSA, Sepoy Shaikh Ahmad's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 919–921.
45. For example, see TNSA, Sepoy Grenadier Thandava Murti's Testimony, MSS, vol. 2-A, pp. 925–926.
46. For the civil arrangement of the palace servants, see BL/OIOC, Bentinck's Minute, 23 September 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, p. 377; BL/OIOC, Buchan to Special Commission, 26 September 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, pp. 379–380.
47. BL/OIOC, Sydenham to Bentinck, 14 August 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, pp. 48–58; Sydenham to Edmonstone, 22 August 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, pp. 259–280.
48. For more on the situation at Hyderabad, see Nani Gopal Chaudhuri, *British Relations with Hyderabad, 1798–1843* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1964), pp. 98–106; NAI, Henry Russell to Hastings, 24 November 1819, Hyderabad Residency Records, vol. 57, p. 253.
49. BL/OIOC, Montresor to Sydenham, 21 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 539–540; BL/OIOC, Sydenham to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 19 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 520–522.
50. TNSA, Sydenham to Buchan, 15 September 1806, *Madras Secret Proceedings* (*MSP*), vol. 5, pp. 1731–1755, paras 9, 11–19 and 21. For example's of Sydenham's deliberately misleading correspondence, see BL/OIOC, Sydenham to Bentinck, 24 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 525–526; Sydenham to Edmonstone, 26 August 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, pp. 281–296. Also see Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724–1857* (Hyderabad: Booklovers, 1963), pp. 206–207; and *Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad* (Hyderabad: Hyderabad State Committee Appointed for the Compilation of the History of the Freedom Movement in Hyderabad, 1956–1966), vol. 1, pp. 37–41; pp. 52–55.
51. TNSA, Subadar Abdul Qadir's Testimony, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2397–2398; Subadar Kasturi's Testimony, *MSP*, vol. 4, p. 2402; Jamadar Shaikh Dawood's Testimony, 26 October 1806, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2402–2421; Proceedings of the Nandidrug Court of Enquiry, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2393–2412.
52. TNSA, Sepoy Ranga's Testimony, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2408–2409; Sepoy Virasah's Testimony, *MSP*, vol. 4, p. 2409; Jamadar Sheikh Dawood's Testimony, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2422–2423; Testimonies of Subadar Kasturi, Naik Arnasum, Sepoy Muttu, and Mussalmani, *MSP*, vol. 4, pp. 2402–2407.
53. UN, Wilks to Bentinck, 23 October 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/49, pp. 348–377; Wilks to GC/FSG, 28 November 1806, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 3977–3997.
54. BL/OIOC, Oakes' Minute, 6 September 1806, *HMS*, vol. 509, pp. 143–148.
55. TNSA, Bose to Campbell, 7 December 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3737–3743; Bose to Fuller, 8 December 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3733–3736; Campbell to Bose, 9 December 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3731–3732; BL/OIOC, GC/FSG to SC/EIC (Secret Committee of the East India Company), 11 January 1807, *Secret Letters from Madras*, Series 1, vol. 3.
56. TNSA, Welsh to Dyce, 25 November 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3537–3554; Sepoy Aitwar Singh's Deposition, *MSP*, vol. 27, pp. 60–61; Hepburn's Deposition, *MSP*, vol. 28, pp. 859–861; Welsh to Campbell, 19 November 1806, *MSP*, vol. 23, pp. 3261–3262; Dyce to Buchan, 25 November 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3633–3644. Also see TNSA, Various Correspondence, *MSP*, vol. 28, pp. 930–969, and Cradock's Minute, 1 December 1806, *MSP*, vol. 24, pp. 3555–3559.
57. James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1830), p. 275.

58. Alexander Cardew, *The White Mutiny: A Forgotten Episode in the History of the Indian Army* (London: Constable, 1929).
59. Lord William Henry Cavendish Bentinck, *Memorial Addressed to the Honourable Court of Directors... Containing an Account of the Mutiny at Vellore, with the Causes and Consequences of that Event* (London, 1810).
60. University of Southampton Library (USL), 'Grievances of Native Soldiers', *Wellington Papers*, WP1/184/8.
61. UN, Kot Havildar Shaikh Imam's Defense, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/57, pp. 103–104.
62. BL/OIOC, Invalid Subadar Sayyid Chandmand's Deposition, 13 July 1806, *HMS*, vol. 508, pp. 135–136.
63. TNSA, Lieutenant-General James Stuart to GC/FSG, 6 March 1804, *MMC*, vol. 319-A, pp. 865–870.
64. W. Y. Carman, *Indian Army Uniforms, under the British, from the 18th Century to 1947*, vol. 2 (London: Hill, 1961–1969), p. 132.
65. Jafar Sharif, *Qanoon-i-Islam; or, the Customs of the Mussulmans of India*, 2nd edition (Madras: J. Higginbotham, 1863), Appendix no. 3, p. ix. The first English version of this work was translated and published by G. A. Herklots in 1832. On the ratio of Hindu to Muslim troops in the Madras Army, see Henry Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing in India, 1922), pp. 40–41.
66. For example, see Arnold W. Lawrence, ed., *Captives of Tipu: Survivors' Narratives* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 231.
67. General Order of the commander-in-chief, 15 November 1805, quoted in Carman, *Indian Army Uniforms*, vol. 2, pp. 131–132.
68. For more details, see Henry Dodwell, *The Nabobs of Madras* (London: Williams and Norgate, Ltd., 1926). Also see E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (London: Polity, 2001).
69. USL, 'Grievances of Native Soldiers', Wellington Papers, WP1/184/8.
70. For the existence of regimental panchayats, see BL/OIOC, Code of Regulations (1806), XVI, pp. 158–159.
71. Some awareness of this dialogic process is found in BL/OIOC, Sir Thomas Maitland to Lord Minto, 20 October 1806, *HMS*, vol. 510, pp. 399–409. Maitland, the governor of Ceylon, remarked to the governor general of India that the history of the Madras army had been the story of British officers 'persuading' sepoys to give up their prejudices—through leadership and negotiation rather than by force.
72. An example of how the system of dialogue worked in the Madras army is found in Captain Albert Hervey, *A Soldier of the Company: The Life of an Indian Ensign, 1833–43*, ed. Charles Allen (London: Joseph in association with the National Army Museum, 1988), pp. 73–74.
73. UN, Rustam Ali Shah's Deposition, *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, Appendix no. 2, pp. 4473–4474; 'Longer Examination of Rustam Ali Shah', *Portland MS.*, PwJb/59, Appendix no. 28, pp. 4557–4564.
74. TNSA, Sepoy Grenadier Ramru's Testimony, *MSS*, vol. 2-A, pp. 972–977; BL/OIOC, Havildar Taqir Muhammad's Testimony, *HMS*, vol. 507, pp. 269–271; TNSA, Havildar Yusuf Khan's Confession, *MSP*, vol. 5, pp. 1183–1189.

2

COMBAT, COMBAT MOTIVATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES
A Case Study

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MODERN scholarship on 1857 revolves around the debate over whether the uprising was a nationalist or a popular movement, or merely a military mutiny. One thing is clear. The British had to deploy a large military force which engaged the rebels both in conventional and low intensity conflicts for two and half years before *Pax Britannica* was re-established in north and central India. Many accounts produced by the British officials who participated in crushing the 1857 Uprising highlight the stereotypes that the sahibs held about the various groups of 'natives' with whom they interacted. When combined with the impacts of prevailing racial–biological thought, these images played an important role in shaping the construction of martial and non-martial identities amongst various colonial communities.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first shows the brutal and brutalising nature of the conflict in 1857, exploring the combat psychology of both British and Indian combatants. In considering why the war was fought so brutally, the chapter examines the 'will to combat' of the Sikhs and the Gurkhas, as well as of the British themselves. The role played by the interlinked issues of religion and caste, and the incentive of plunder in motivating different groups to participate in the combat is also probed. The second section takes up the issue of colonial identity creation/ascription amongst different groups of soldiers. The images that the British officers developed about different indigenous groups while fighting this barbaric war constituted the seedbed of the Martial Race theory. The rise of the 'martial races', and their displacing of the high-caste Hindu warriors of the plain, is set against the general context of the rebellion and against the particular legacies of the brutal, anti-insurgency campaigns of 1857–1858.

Since the sepoys and the *sowars* who participated in these campaigns were mostly illiterate, they have left us with few archival sources. Historians thus have to depend mainly on the documents generated by the colonial state and the writings of British officers. There are several problems in dealing with such one-sided evidence. S.B. Chaudhuri rightly says that all the contemporary British accounts of the mutiny are tinged with national pride and racial predilections.[1] Additionally, as Joanna Bourke has noted, such texts are not neutral carriers of information but are also, in and of themselves, important historical traces. In arguing for a wider reading of historical sources, Bourke points to the importance of the perceived and the imagined in shaping historical narratives. Many of the authors of military memoirs rely on inherited myth, which in turn generates new myth, becoming part and parcel of our historical understandings. This may be true not only for individuals but also for communities, as different communities remember warfare in different ways. The past is constructed not as fact but as myth to serve the interests of a particular community.[2] In other words, influenced by postmodernism, Bourke challenges the classic compartmentalisation of fact and fiction. Whilst analysing colonial accounts of 1857, the historian has to take into account the points raised by Chaudhuri and Bourke: not only do these sources reflect the Victorian ideas of race and national pride, but they also draw on, and reinforce, a series of mythic narratives which connect these ideas in new ways. Let us have a flashback to 1857 India.

Barbarisation of Combat and the 'Will to War' in South Asia during 1857–1859

The army in colonial India (British officered Indian Army plus the British regiments belonging to the home government and the EIC) was organised in four regional commands. Of these, the Bengal army was the largest, the Punjab Irregular Force/Punjab Frontier Force (henceforth PFF) was under the Punjab government, and then there were the smaller armies of Bombay and Madras. Just before the 1857 Uprising, the Bengal army's regular infantry numbered 83,946 men. Of these, there were some 26,983 Brahmins, 27,335 Rajputs, 12,699 Muslims, 1,118 Christians (mostly drummers and fifers) and 15,761 middle-caste Hindus. The regular infantry regiments recruited Brahmins and Rajputs from the districts of Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Rohilkhand, Allahabad, Jaunpur, Arrah and Agra. The Brahmins and Rajputs from Bihar and Awadh were known as 'Purbiyas'. Muslims from Rohilkhand dominated the cavalry. There were about 10,000 irregular infantry and cavalry in the PFF. Most of the *sowars* of PFF were Muslims from the Salt Range of west Punjab and Pathans from the Indus frontier.[3] To break the monopoly of the Purbiyas, in 1851 the government declared that each regular infantry regiment of the Bengal army

should fill 20 per cent of its strength with Sikhs. In practice, however, this requirement was rarely met, and most Bengal infantry regiments failed to recruit their quota of Sikhs. In 1856, only 3,000 Sikhs found places in the 74 regular infantry regiments of the Bengal army.[4]

About 70,000 soldiers of the Bengal army mutinied in 1857.[5] The colonial state fought the rebels with a mixture of British regiments, the PFF and the Gurkha regiments. The campaigns of 1857–1858 were characterised by extraordinary violence perpetrated not only by the sahibs and the EIC's Indian allies, but also by the 'rebels'. Brutality was directed not only against the combatants but was also directed, by both sides, against non-combatants. This type of war was new in India.[6] Contemporary witnesses to the fighting recorded the barbarous nature of warfare during 1857–1858. William Forbes-Mitchell wrote:

> On the part of the rebels, wherever they met a Christian or a white man, he was at once slain without pity or remorse, and natives who attempted to assist or conceal a distressed European did so at the risk of their own lives and property.[7]

The rebels regularly mutilated the dead bodies of the British soldiers. In March 1858, the personnel of the 56th Bengal Regular Infantry (one of the units that participated in the Kanpur massacre) took the trouble of severing the legs and hands from the dead bodies of British officers. Occasionally, the rebels cut off the dead British officers' fingers or toes.[8] Whilst the brutality of the conflict was unheralded in India, some South American tribes, like the Jivaro, had the custom of collecting heads of their dead enemies as trophies. Such trophies determined the warrior status of the combatants in Jivaro society.[9] As Bourke has noted, during the two World Wars gruesome souvenirs in the form of ears, fingers and skulls were taken from the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers. Trophy-collecting rituals enhanced soldierly identity and the self-worth of the combatants. Such identities were necessary in order to cement the bond between the combatants engaged in life and death struggle.[10]

Close quarter combat was indeed daunting and brutal. On 11 July 1857, on the bank of the river Ravi, John Nicholson's movable column caught up with the Sialkot mutineers. The latter group comprised of 1,000 personnel of the 46th Infantry Regiment and the 9th Bengal Cavalry Regiment. Reginald G. Wilberforce of the 52nd Light Infantry Regiment describes one gruesome scene vividly: 'I saw one Sepoy pierced through with a bayonet, and borne to the ground, the bayonet going into the ground and twisting so that it could not be withdrawn.'[11] After capturing Kanpur, Brigadier General J.G.S. Neill issued an order that all prisoners found guilty of murdering European women and children were to be taken into the slaughterhouse by Major Bruce's low-caste police. There, they were made to crouch down and lick clean a square foot of the blood-soaked floor before being taken to the gallows and hanged. The dried blood on the floor was first moistened with water, and the lash was applied till the prisoners kneeled

down and cleaned their share of the floor.[12] Neill rationalised his order in the following words:

> My object was to inflict a fearful punishment for a revolting, cowardly and barbarous deed, and to strike terror into the rebels. The first I caught was a subadar ... a high-caste Brahmin, who tried to resist my order of 25 July 1857, to clean the very blood which he had helped to shed; but I made the provost marshall do his duty, and a few lashes compelled the miscreant to accomplish his work. When done he was taken out and immediately hanged, and buried in a ditch by the roadside.[13]

On 15 September 1857, the British shot all those 'rebels' who tried to escape from Delhi.[14]

William Howard Russell, the *Times'* war correspondent, described an equally brutal engagement at Chuckerwallah Kothie in Lucknow on 9 March 1858.

> As they had killed a British officer of a Sikh regiment, several men, and wounded more, the troops were withdrawn from the house, and a heavy fire of artillery was opened on it. After the walls had been perforated in all directions with shot and shell, so that it seemed impossible for the little garrison to have escaped, a detachment of Sikhs rushed into the house ... some of the sepoys were still alive, and they were mercifully killed ... one of their number was dragged out to the sandy plain outside the house ... he was held down, pricked in the face and body by the bayonets of some of the soldiery, while others collected fuel for a small pyre ... the man was roasted alive.... No one offered to interfere! The horror of this infernal cruelty was aggravated by an attempt of the miserable wretch to escape when half-burned to death. By a sudden effort he leaped away, and with flesh hanging from his bones, ran for a few yards ere he was caught, put on the fire again, and held there by bayonets till his remains were consumed.[15]

As Forbes-Mitchell, a Crimean veteran, noted in his account of the rebellion, it was demoralising to engage in such a barbaric war.[16] But how, then, did the soldiers maintain their 'will to war' and why indeed had the war become so brutal? To approach an answer, an attempt is made here to recreate the emotional world of the sepoys and the sahibs by considering the accounts generated by the latter group. Bourke has suggested that emotions are an expression of power relations and that emotional experiences are conditioned by the cultural rules which govern emotional expression. Emotions are a form of social action that create effects in the world; effects that are interpreted in a culturally informed way by the audience. There are social norms for expressing fear and anxiety and no universal emotional reactions exist.[17] In his account of the American Civil War, Eric T. Dean Jr implies that combatants were alienated from those at home and were thus brutalised.[18] While Bourke challenges the brutalisation thesis, suggesting that in certain circumstances, combat experience could be relatively

un-traumatic, it remains to account for the brutality and savagery of particular wars. If combatants do experience exhilaration, as well as fear, empathy and rage, the relative ferocity of particular conflicts is an important subject for investigation.[19]

Bourke claims that the anticipation of danger is much more terrorising for combatants than is actual combat.[20] Images of the enemy may, therefore, influence the ferocity of combat, as one way to mitigate the terror inspired by war is to generate hatred of the enemy by dehumanising the latter. British accounts of 1857 frequently used animal imagery to describe the rebels. Typical in this sense are the memoirs of Colonel A.R.D. Mackenzie, aide-de-camp to the Viceroy, who noted:

> No quarter were ever given or taken before Delhi. If the mutineers had been cruel as the most savage of wild beasts, fearful was the revenge which many and many a time was wreaked on them by our maddened troops.[21]

Having rebelled against the British, the insurgents were thus denied any rational causative agency for fighting bravely and were dehumanised in the eyes of the British. Such dehumanisation may help to allay feelings of guilt and to legitimise brutal behaviour towards the hostile party. The enemy, writes Bourke, is always portrayed as the ultimate other.[22] Acknowledgement of the rebels' honour and courage in fighting effectively would have delegitimised the Raj. Since the British considered themselves rational, by implication, the rebels had to be irrational. Similarly, while the British were portrayed as chivalrous, the rebels had to be painted as 'fanatic savages'. Major General J. Outram in his report dated 5 October 1857 issued from Lucknow noted that the rebels were 'animated by an insane and bloodthirsty fanaticism'.[23]

Racism, asserts Bourke, further exacerbates atrocities in warfare.[24] Similarly, Craig M. Cameron has claimed that when no kinship is felt to exist between belligerents, combat can become more ferocious.[25] The conflict in 1857 was indeed in many ways a 'race war'. Among the British soldiers, hatred was directed towards a particular race and one of the defining characteristics of race was physiognomy. During 1857, George Pilkington Blake, a Suffolk squire aged eighteen was a subaltern in the 84th Foot. He wrote: 'for I do *hate* the race of men with their shaved heads and wished that I could throw them all down the well.'[26] Blake was referring to the Brahmins in the Bengal army's infantry—those derisively labelled 'Pandies' by the British during 1857. Blake's account seems to support Bourke's thesis. Having developed an intense hatred for the enemy, Blake enjoys killing them and apparently experiences no traumatic effects as a result of the combat. Similarly, Forbes-Mitchell noted that hatred towards the Purbiya 'race' encouraged the Highlanders to make forced marches under sun with a double load of ammunition.[27]

Besides being a racial conflict the campaigns of 1857–1858 also exhibited elements of a religious war. Religion, like racial difference, functioned as a morale booster for combatants. Captain Thomas Wilson, who was on the staff of Henry Lawrence, maintained a journal during the Siege of Lucknow. On 23 August 1857, he made the following entry: 'Divine service was performed at the brigade-mess in the morning, and in the afternoon, at Dr. Fayrer's; the sacrament was administered on both occasions.'[28] From dawn until 10 pm, the rebels cannonaded the Residency while continuous musketry fire was poured on the defenders. The religious service was performed in the midst of the firefight.[29] While Christianity motivated the British, Sikhism raised the spirit of the Sikhs who attacked the rebels shouting '*Jai Khalsa ji*'.[30] Islam had a similar effect on the followers of Prophet. While attacking the rebels, the trans-Indus Pathans shouted '*Allah-hu Akbar*'.[31] When the Secundrabagh in Lucknow was stormed on 16 November 1857, the Muslim rebels rushed towards the British soldiers with *tulwar*s shouting '*deen deen*'. Forbes-Mitchell noted that the scene was similar to the *Moharam* festival, in which Muslim devotees with sticks shout '*deen deen*' and engage in mock fights.[32]

In addition to race and religion, rumour added further fuel to the fire. In troubled times, people tend to believe in rumour. Rumour, as Richard Holmes has noted, flourishes in an environment where genuine information is hard to come by, and where there is a craving for news of any sort. Rumour has an important psychological function in explaining and relieving emotional tensions felt by individuals.[33] Rumour regarding the ungrateful 'Pandies', atrocities encouraged the British soldiers to take revenge on them. On 17 June 1857, one rumour that was circulating in Punjab was that the rebels had boiled a captain's wife alive 'in ghee'.[34] On 22 June 1857, John Chalmers, a lieutenant in the 24th Punjab Pioneers, wrote from Gujranwala in Punjab to his friend Bruce:

> Hundreds of Europeans have been murdered in cold blood; European ladies violated, publicly exposed, and then tortured to death. Soldiers have amused themselves by pitching European children about from bayonet to bayonet: in fact, they have tortured and murdered everyone they could overpower with a white face, or who, however black, professed Christianity, and this without respect to age or sex.[35]

Chalmers continued: 'I can assure you that my vengeance is so excited against the wretches, that I would gladly join in the compact said to be entered into, to give no quarter.'[36] Such vengeance was taken against Indians of all social rank, as William Hodson's execution of three Mughal princes at Humayun's tomb, on 22 September 2008, indicates. At that time, according to some reports, the British officers believed that the princes had organised massacre of the Christians at Delhi.[37]

Rumour, allied to a sense of vengeance rooted in the belief that the innocent white children and 'delicate' white ladies were hurt, thus combined with the practical necessities of campaigning to accelerate the barbarisation of warfare. As Forbes-Mitchell wrote in his memoir:

> The cowardly treachery of the enemy, and their barbarous murders of women and children, had converted the war of the Mutiny into ... a war of the most cruel and exterminating form, in which no quarter was given on either side. Up to the final relief of Lucknow and the second capture of Kanpur, and the total rout of the Gwalior Contingent on the 6th of December, 1857, it would have been impossible for the Europeans to have guarded their prisoners, and, for that reason, it was obvious that prisoners were not to be taken.[38]

Wilberforce noted in his memoir: 'We immediately executed all the male prisoners we got. There really was nothing else to be done, except to let them go free, and this, with the Kanpur massacre fresh in our minds, was out of question.'[39] The memory of Kanpur and the rumoured violations of European women were a potent mixture for the men of the British force. As Forbes-Mitchell wrote of the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders' campaign in Awadh in November 1857: 'Every man in the regiment was determined to risk his life to save the woman and children in the Residency of Lucknow.'[40]

Finally, for combatants on both sides, number of additional motivating factors can be identified. Greed offered a further incentive to the brutalisation of conflict. The commander of the Guides Corps, Henry Dermot Daly, noted in his memoir that tales of gold enticed many of the *sowars* from the Punjab.[41] On 20 March 1858, Chalmers wrote to his friend Bruce from Lucknow:

> We hope to get back to the Punjab at once, but our men have such lots of plunder, I do not know how we are to go. I have got a few good pearls and a shawl or two myself, and would have made a fortune if I could only have got a little leisure.[42]

Henry Mead, a journalist, argued that the Purbiyas rebelled because of an amalgam of religious feeling and greed for plunder, which they expected to acquire.[43] The bonds of loyalty created amongst the rebels by caste, and kin loyalties may also have enabled the Purbiyas to withstand the brutal 'face of battle'.[44] In the context of European warfare, John Keegan has suggested that intoxicating drink sustained men in combat.[45] This statement applies in the case of the war in India in 1857–1858. Most of the rebel sepoys took 'bhang' (an intoxicating drink which stimulated and excited them) before joining combat. It gave them 'Dutch courage' and made them more ready to undergo extreme fatigue and exertion.[46] Similarly, Wilberforce remembered that claret kept him going during the campaign, while many British soldiers consumed rum in order to overcome the stress and strain of battle.[47]

For the soldiers who fought in the brutal campaigns of 1857, combat motivation was the product of a variety of factors. The brutalisation of the war reflected the motivation of the combatants, as well as the fear and anger felt by the antagonists. The dehumanisation of the rebels that is reflected in many colonial sources provides a window into this complex process, and though our access to the mentality of the rebels is more problematic, it is reasonable to speculate that the regional, religious and cultural bonds shared by the Bengal sepoys were key to their combat motivation. Given the frequency with which such bonds were cited in colonial accounts of the rebellion and its causes, we can assume that such bonds played an important part in motivating the rebels to resist the British counterattack.

Construction of Martial Identities

> It must never be forgotten that the Great Mutiny of 1857 was suppressed with the aid of Indian levies.
>
> —Secretary of State for India, 2 March 1871.[48]

Even after the 1857 Uprising, the colonial government required Indian military manpower, both because each Indian soldier cost one-quarter of a British soldier, and because the climate of India did not suit the white soldiers.[49] The post-1857 Indian Army was largely composed of those communities that had remained loyal to the British during the uprising—to whom martial identities were increasingly ascribed—while those groups that had participated in the rebellion were demobilised and ascribed non-martial identities. For the colonial regime, this process served a number of purposes: martial identities aided battlefield cohesion and generated pride of craft on part of the warriors. Shared identities based on personal and clan affinities, as well as on common languages and places of origin, became more cohesive under the imperial military.[50] By making military service integral to their recruits' identities, the British fused ethnic ethos with the colonial regime in the hope that members of such ethnic communities would not only fight to defend the colonial state but also to uphold their communal pride. Moreover, crafting separate identities also prevented the genesis of any sense of homogeneity among the colonised, thus consolidating the colonial regime through a strategy of 'divide and rule'.[51]

Nationalism, asserts Benedict Anderson, is a cultural artefact of a particular kind. The nation, he continues, is an imagined political community: each nation is imagined as limited because each has finite elastic boundaries. No nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind, and each nation imagines that beyond it exist other nations.[52] Anderson's assertion could be also applied in the case of the martial identities manufactured by the colonial state. Heather Streets rightly asserts that the Sikh and Gurkha identities formed during and

after the 1857 Uprising were characterised by elements of chivalrous masculinity that intermingled with the notion of racial superiority.[53] This intermingling gave rise to the Martial Race theory which dominated recruitment of the Indian Army from 1880s onwards.

Shortly after the mutiny begun, the British started recruiting in the Punjab.[54] As early as 24 May 1857, John Lawrence, chief commissioner of the Punjab telegraphed to the governor general at Calcutta: 'It is faithful Native Troops which at present are wanted, and this defect we are endeavouring to provide for. In the meantime, our Punjab Regiments are concentrating towards Lahore. These troops do not sympathise with the mutineers.'[55] On 24 July 1857, Lieutenant Colonel J.D. Macpherson, military secretary to John Lawrence noted:

> Seven additional Regiments of Punjab Infantry are at once to be embodied from the four augmentation companies which were directed to be raised on the disturbances first breaking out ... we will soon be in a position to send further reinforcements to the army before Delhi, in considerable strength should it prove necessary.[56]

Within six months of the uprising, 34,000 Punjabis (mostly Sikhs) were organised in infantry regiments and some 14,000 irregulars were raised to form levies mainly from the Muslims of west Punjab.[57] By 1859, the colonial state had recruited 82,000 soldiers from Punjab.[58]

During the course of 1857 Uprising, the British turned from the high castes towards non-Hindu groups like the Gurkhas, Sikhs and trans-Indus Pathans. The shift in recruiting grounds was legitimised in the writings of various British officers who fought in the 1857–1858 war. Such accounts helped to construct martial identities for the groups joining the PFF and to construct non-martial identities for the Purbiyas. However, a point of caution is necessary while reading these texts: as Edward Said has pointed out, Orientalist discourses were frequently a product of colonial bureaucracies.[59] The production of the literature on the 'martial races' could be categorised as a form of essentialising Orientalist discourse, and the colonial scholar-soldiers who produced much of this literature were influenced by the racial determinism of nineteenth century Western academics.[60] In the British conceptualisation, there was much similarity between caste and race: religious underpinnings, together with occupational and hereditary manifestations combined, to define the nature of a caste/race.[61] Many scholar-officials thus conceptualised castes as ethnologically based races.[62] Due to the influence of Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, race theorists came to believe that acquired characteristics could be inherited, and thus a human hierarchy based on superior and inferior qualities was gradually constructed.[63]

Before 1857, the Purbiyas were regarded as yeomen peasants who were obedient, 'born' soldiers.[64] However, after the 1857 Mutiny, the British distrusted

the Brahmins, Rajputs and Muslims of north India and ceased to recruit from such communities. This policy shift was legitimised on ideological grounds by the British assertion that Hinduism bred servility and passivity, thereby inviting subjugation. Hence, it was argued, high-caste Hindus were non-martial.[65] To a similar end, Robert Henry Wallace Dunlop, the commander of an irregular cavalry regiment, argued in 1858 that the Muslims of Rohilkhand, many of whom had previously served in the Bengal irregular cavalry, were unreliable by nature.[66] Writing towards the end of 1857, Mead made disparaging remarks about the Brahmins and offered a positive appraisal of the Sikhs. He noted:

> the Bengal Brahmin ... is never more, but often less, than a fighting man, who has been pampered.... The Sikh is a born soldier.... In the field he is a match for any two or more Hindus, and prides himself upon his near resemblance to the European.[67]

Mead noted certain customs of the Sikhs that were considered conducive for generating professionalism among the soldiery. Unlike the Purbiyas, for example, the Sikhs did not care about caste taboos. Hence, they were willing to cross the *kalapani* (sea or ocean)—and the British government needed 'native' soldiery for overseas service. Second, unlike the Purbiyas, the Sikhs were willing to use entrenching tools and the construction of fieldwork was considered necessary for effective campaigning. Third, the Sikh soldiers were also willing to join a mess for taking food, inculcating regimental spirit [68]

The actions of such recruits in 1857 were often cited as evidence of their martiality. As Lieutenant Frederick, later Lord, Roberts, noted in a letter, dated 25 November 1857, to his mother:

> After breakfast on the 16th therefore, we started again, crossing the canal near the river, and making for a strong place called the Secundrabagh.... Colin ... brought the guns up, but they could not silence the heavy musketry which was streaming out from every inch of the building, so the Highlanders and the Sikhs were ordered to storm. It was beautiful to see them going at it, regularly racing to see who should be first in. They went, and before half an hour was over, nearly 2,000 Pandies were on the ground dead or dying.[69]

As commander-in-chief of India (1885–1893), Roberts was the father figure of martial race theory and was, to a great extent, responsible for the Punjabisation of the Indian Army from the late nineteenth century.[70] Richard G. Fox has suggested that the Raj promoted Sikhism as a separate religion and Singh(ism) as a discrete social identity based on that religion. During enlistment, all the Sikh recruits had to undergo baptism, while Sikh soldiers used a religious battle cry while fighting the rebels. [71] The British promotion of Sikhism thus further strengthened the hold of religion among the Sikh military personnel. The Jats

around river Ravi accepted Sikhism and, in increasing numbers, joined the Indian Army after 1859.[72]

Regardless of the British officers' rhetoric about the honour and courage of the 'martial races', the important issue is to analyse the motivation of those communities who joined the Indian Army during and after the Rebellion of 1857. Most of the Punjabis came from the 60,000 Khalsa soldiers who were demobilised after the two Anglo-Sikh Wars.[73] At Lahore, between August and September 1857, Captain F. Wale raised the 1st Sikh Irregular Cavalry from amongst the Sikhs, Muslims of west Punjab and trans-Indus Pathans. Many of the personnel had formerly served in the Khalsa army.[74] Significantly, many Punjabis joined the British only when they realised that the military balance was shifting against the rebels: the Sikhs from the tract between Sutlej and Ravi rivers, for example, joined the PFF only after Delhi had fallen.[75] In contrast, many ex-Khalsa chieftains who were without employment eagerly accepted the British offer to raise troops at the outbreak of the mutiny. In mid-May 1857, Brigadier P. James, commanding at Ferozepur, ordered General Van Cortlandt, an ex-Khalsa general, to commence recruiting Pathans and Sikhs.[76] During 1857–1858, when new regiments were raised, various Indian 'gentlemen of influence', notably those who came with a number of retainers, were given direct commissions as *subedar*s and *jemadar*s.[77] For example, the 15th Bengal Cavalry Regiment was raised in Multan and Derajat by a nawab who was appointed as the Indian commandant of the unit.[78] When Mir Mubarak Shah, a chief of Kohat, heard that the 1st Punjab Infantry had been ordered to Delhi, he got together eighty of his own followers and joined Major Coke at Karnal on 27 June.[79]

The readiness of the British to exploit such relationships reflected existing practice in the British Army, where the highland regiments were perceived as a kind of equivalent 'martial race'. In the highland society of Scotland, the chief of the clan was the father of the family. He exercised power over his tenants. So, when the British government ordered the clan chiefs to raise regiments, the clan members joined the units because they perceived that by joining the regiment they were paying rent in kind to their clan chiefs. Of course the Scottish regiments also included many urban proletariats from cities like Glasgow. The British realised this peculiar trait of the Highlanders, hence allowed the companies to be captained by the gentry of the clans like Campbell, Murray and Grant.[80] The British in India considered the Punjabi chiefs as equivalent to the Scottish clan leaders. The headmen of the village (Chaudhuri/Thakurs) were given commissioned ranks in the cavalry because the British believed that, as social superiors, such men could control their relatives and retainers who joined as *sowars*.[81] In 1873, Major General W.J. Hughes argued that the sons of border chieftains should be co-opted in the colonial regime by appointing them as captains of native troops and companies. In 1857, Hughes noted, this policy worked well.[82] Some years later, in 1879, Peter Lumsden, late Chief of Staff of the PFF claimed that 'It was the association of the army (PFF) with its local rulers

that enabled the Punjab Government, in direct communication with their local commander, Neville Chamberlain, to send such material assistance to the force before Delhi.'[83]

While the recruiting operations and combat experience in 1857–1858 drew on existing social structures, the events helped to codify various ideas about Indian martiality. For example, after participating in the counter-insurgency operations in Awadh, George Blake noted:

> the very numerous Afghan element [amongst the rebels?] ... fierce swordsmen who, sensing the trouble to come, had prolonged their normal winter visit to the towns of Oudh to find work. It was they who usually formed the spearhead of any attack which was pushed home, the sepoy having generally no great desire to come to hand-to-hand fighting with British soldiers.[84]

As swordsmen, the Afghans had no other option except to engage in close quarter combat while the Purbiyas took advantage of their smoothbore muskets to shoot at the British from a distance, actions which were considered unmanly. Blake's account of the conflict thus clearly demeaned the fighting capabilities of the disloyal Purbiyas. By contrast, Wilberforce asserted the martial traditions of the Pathans, identifying the widely circulated belief that the creed of the Pathans held that to be in action without individually killing an enemy was a matter of shame. Hence, in combat, he suggested, the Pathans engaged in heroic acts.[85] The image of the Afghans/trans-Indus Pathans as fierce and courageous tribesmen percolated into the army hierarchy and aided their recruitment in the post-1857 era.

Daly, the commander of the Guides Corps which took part in the Siege of Delhi noted that while the Pathans were dashing, the Gurkhas were stout and unflinching in their bearing.[86, 87] In 1858, Dunlop wrote that unlike the Purbiyas, the Gurkhas were reliable. The Gurkhas, he continued, were short, Tartar-featured and of great muscular development.[88] For the British, the Gurkhas approximated the Indian equivalent of the Scottish Highlanders and just as the highland tradition of the 'martial' Scots was manufactured, so a similar process was also evident in colonial India.[89] The British, for example, invented the term 'Gurkha', naming Nepalese recruits after a district in the northeast portion of the Gandak basin.[90] The British conviction was that the ancestor of the race whom they termed as Gurkhas hailed from the Gurkha district. A dynasty named Gorkha under Prithvi Narayan Shah united central Nepal in the eighteenth century. The imperial myth went on, stating that since the people from this district conquered Nepal before the British intervention, they were martial.[91]

Indigenous military culture also aided imperial stereotyping of certain communities as martial. Before 1814, the Purbiya deserters from the Bengal army drilled the Nepal army personnel who were from the Magar, Gurung and Limbu tribes. In many British interpretations, the members of these tribes

comprising the Gurkha community were deemed martial soldiers because of their military heritage and due to the terrain in which they grew up. Hence, men from these tribes were inducted in the Gurkha battalions that were raised by the British. In 1874, Lieutenant Colonel R. Sale Hill of the 1st Gurkha Light Infantry commented: 'the Gurkha's acquaintance with forest, makes him perhaps as a pioneer in the jungle, almost unrivalled, with his "*kukri*" to suit himself with, he is quite at home.'[92] The military tradition of the Muslims from west Punjab and the trans-Indus Pathans could also be traced back to the pre-British era. In 1807, after subduing the Pathans of Kasur, Ranjit Singh recruited them in his army. From 1857 onwards, they enlisted in the PFF. Similarly, the Rajputs and Jats of western Punjab who accepted Islam in the medieval age were termed as Punjabi Muslims by the British and were also enlisted in the PFF. The men recruited were retainers of the warlike, semi-autonomous chiefs who were reduced to submission by Ranjit Singh. Before 1845, large numbers of Muslim Rajputs from tribes including the Ghakkars and Awans from Jhelum and Rawal Pindi districts used to join the irregular cavalry of *Dal Khalsa*.[93]

The designation of certain groups as martial did not, however, depend entirely on the choices and biases of the imperial elite. The assumptions inherent within the indigenous society also shaped the martial race theory and related recruiting patterns. Among the Sikhs, for example, the Tarkhans and Lobanas were not respected because they were carpenters and water carriers, and so the British decided not to recruit those Sikhs practicing these two professions.[94] Occasionally, the British were fooled by the colonised, as in cases where prohibited castes passed themselves off as 'martial races'. In one such case, Chakers and Daroghas in Rajasthan joined the army by assuring British recruiting officers that they were Jats.[95]

Conclusion

The campaigns of 1857–1858 developed into a war of retaliation and revenge for both the sahibs and the sepoys. The conflict was also crucial in shaping the organisation of the post-war army: the experiences of various British officers during 1857–1858 played an important role in determining which Indian groups were subsequently identified as loyal and martial and which were regarded as disloyal and non-martial. While certain communities came to be regarded as inherently martial, often as a result of their heritage or environment, the warrior identities of other groups were simultaneously delegitimised. British analyses of the Pandies' combat motivations helped to construct an unwarlike image for the latter group. Identity creation is a process and not an event: the landmark 'event' of 1857 was key in the creation of the martial identities of various Indian groups, and this process continued throughout the nineteenth

century. In the post-1857 era, the British came to view Indian society as composed of martial and non-martial races. The theory advanced to justify this bipolar division is known as the martial race theory. In part, the shift from caste to race as an analytical category to understand colonial society was influenced by the emergence of racial theory amongst the late nineteenth century Western intelligentsia. Such thinkers tried to analyse the rise and fall of great powers as well as the subsequent degeneration of nations, with the help of quasi-biological race theories. However, for the colonial military, the seeds of such thoughts can also be traced back to the gruesome fighting of 1857.

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3

HOLY WARRIORS
Religion as Military Modus Operandi

Crispin Bates and Marina Carter[1]

Introduction

IT is notable that both sides involved in the violent conflict that began as a military mutiny and developed into a large-scale uprising of Indians against British colonial rule in 1857 used religion to legitimate their activities and to activate their respective forces. This military conflict took place in an age when, despite being projected as a confrontation of 'tradition' with 'modernisation', the opposing parties both inhabited worlds in which religious motivation and religious belief played a potent role. It may be argued that the rhetoric of religion was little more than a convenient tool through which secular issues could be debated and decided. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, religion could serve both as a powerful communicator and motivator for indigenous resistance on the one hand, whilst at the same time, it could be effectively used to divide the population and to serve as a commanding rationale for colonial counter-insurgency. This is not to assign religion a role as the primary objective cause of insurrection in 1857. It is nonetheless a recognition of the reality in which religion provided the discourse by which a wide variety of hopes, fears and aspirations on all sides could be expressed and that proved to be the potent rallying cry of all in the field of battle.

Religion, Warfare and the World in 1857

Rudrangshu Mukherjee has argued that in the nineteenth century, the customary Indian way of life was 'inevitably imbricated with religion'. This helps to explain

why the reforming zeal of British administrators was popularly viewed as 'an attempt to subvert the religion of Hindus and Muslims'. Hence, the Uprising of 1857 'displayed a very strong religious fervour' on the part of both Hindus and Muslims alike.[2] For a number of scholars of Indian history, however, to acknowledge the role of religion in 1857 was to see 'evidence of weakness of national consciousness'.[3] The 'misplaced strategies' of rebels came to be viewed as synonymous with their religious convictions, the primordiality of which entails flaws that help to explain the failure of the Uprising of 1857.[4] Such assessments, generally made by secular, left-leaning historians, also sought to counter the work of those whom Qureshi has described as 'right-wing writers', such as Ghulam Rasul Mihr whose 1857: *Pak-o Hind ki pehli jang-i azadi* (Indo-Pakistan First Freedom Struggle), published by Kitab Manzil of Lahore in 1957, extolled the exploits of the mujahidin, and Qadiri who contended that the key players in the uprising were jihadis whose participation was linked to the Waliullahi movement.[5] Far better, many South Asian scholars felt, to concentrate on allusions to 'peasant revolt' and other more acceptable characteristics of the 1857 conflict. This is surely one reason why the role of religion in 1857 has not received as much attention as it deserves.

More recently attempts have been made to restore the paramountcy of religious symbol and religious idiom in discussions of 1857. Seema Alavi has argued that 'the histories of both Hindu and Islamic derived anti-British struggles need to be integrated to the larger narrative of both 1857, and anti-colonial nationalism'.[6] Inevitably however, in this post-9/11 world, the temptation to revisit the 1857 Uprising as a clash between Islam and Christianity has problematised the debate further. Farhat Hasan, in his critique of William Dalrymple's study *The Last Mughal*, which he describes as an attempt to transpose the 'rival fundamentalisms' scenario onto 1857, has sought to refine the argument about the role of religion in the uprising. He asserts that 'jihad', in the context of those events, did not connote 'religious war'; rather, the term was used by both Hindus and Muslims to infer a fight against injustice.[7] It is difficult, nonetheless, to disagree with the conclusion of a recent article by Dalrymple:

> religion is not the only force at work, nor perhaps the primary one; but to ignore its power and importance, at least in the rhetoric used to justify the Uprising, seems to go against the huge weight of emphasis on this factor given in the rebels' own documents.[8]

At the same time, as Nile Green's well-timed book has ably demonstrated, 'Muslims and their religion were at times less the enemies of empire than its assistants ... the Islam of the Indian soldier was capable of assisting or resisting imperial agendas, lending mechanisms of loyalty no less than rebellion.'[9]

Religious fervour was, of course, as pronounced, if not more so, in Britain. In a perceptive article, S. Malik has demonstrated how 'in 1857 the Anglican interpretation of events in India produced an evangelistic zeal ... that permeated all walks of British life.' The revolt came to be seen as a trial to which God was subjecting the entire nation, and at the same time an opportunity for a nationwide cleansing. The author of *An Indian Mutiny Sermon* declared that God was trying Britain 'as gold is tried in the fire, that we may come out the brighter from the furnace'. By no less an authority than a Royal Proclamation, 7 October 1857 was declared as the 'Day of National Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayers' when Britons would collectively seek not only Divine forgiveness, but 'Divine help in the suppression of the revolt and the restoration of trust in Britain as the guardian of 150 million "heathen" Indians.'[10] On that day churches across Britain were filled to overflowing, and from the pulpits words vowing horrible vengeance were cloaked in religious garb and transmitted to thousands of reverent listeners.

At Crystal Palace in London the Reverend C.H. Spurgeon addressed what has been described as 'one of the largest congregations ever assembled': no fewer than 24,000 persons gathered to hear this 'holy man' pray that 'strength might be given the soldiers to execute the doom which justice demanded'. He called upon British troops to remember that 'they were not warriors only, but executioners, who were utterly to destroy the enemy who had defiled Britain and who had defiled themselves among men.' His sermon assured his listeners (and later his readers, for it was published) that the mutinous sepoys were 'our subjects rightly' and proclaimed that 'these men must be punished—both heaven and earth demand it'. He even went so far as to explain to his congregation that the wholesale slaughter of sepoys was 'not war. It was what earth demanded and God sanctioned, however dreadful may be the sacrifice of life involved.' And what about the religion of the Indians? The British could safely ignore it, for 'the religions of the Hindoos are nothing more nor less than a mass of the rankest filth that ever imagination could have conceived; the Gods they worship are not entitled to the least atom of respect'.[11] Spurgeon's words would certainly be considered an incitement to religious hatred today, but in 1857 he was no lone rogue; he was the voice of mainstream Victorian Britain. Special Psalms of 'lamentation and supplication' were widely circulated, calling upon God to strike down the rebels:

> Thou has made us small among the heathen
> Thou has covered us with anger and persecuted us.
> Servants have ruled over us and there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.
> Up, Lord, disappoint them, and cast them down.[12]

With religious sentiments at fever pitch, it was no surprise to find that military success in India was considered God's work. Reverend A.J. Nicholson, of the West London Protestant Institute, was praying with his congregation, calling upon God to 'lead our soldiers' when a messenger appeared upon the platform with a telegram announcing 'Delhi has fallen'. 'All the people dropped down at that moment on their knees to thank God who gave us victory.' As Malik caustically points out, 'in fact, Delhi had fallen to superior British technology three weeks before the Day of National Humiliation'.[13] Although there were diverse opinions amongst British Christians, many believed that the war against the Indian rebels was not simply blessed by God, but that it was practically a religious duty to crush the heathen. Dissident voices attempted to use the pulpit to preach a contrary message. Reverend Edmund Kell thus delivered a sermon on 'What Patriotism, Justice, and Christianity Demand for India' and informed his audience 'that every people has a right to choose their own form of government.' Public outrage forced him to issue a humiliating retraction. Hargrave Jennings was similarly ahead of his time when he called for the transfer of power in India from the British to a European consortium pending the handover of power to the Indians themselves at the earliest opportunity.[14]

Whilst dissenting voices were few and far between in Britain, in India influential Muslim clerics or imams profoundly disagreed in their stance on the 1857 War. Thus while Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah called for a jihad against the British, his ideas found little favour among the Delhi ulema.[15] In the India of 1857, however, moderation did not necessarily allow a Muslim cleric to escape criminalisation. The correspondence of Fazl-i-Haq contained much theological and practical criticism of rebel leaders, but he found himself imprisoned and transported to the Andamans having been swept up in a trawl for rebel accomplices in Lucknow. Other ulema, while initially distancing themselves from the revolt, later became convinced of the justice of the rebel cause, precisely as a result of the repression exacted by the British.[16] Not all fatwa issued in the India of 1857 were calls for holy war: fifty-three ulema of the Deoband seminary and other theological institutes declared, conversely, that British rule was preferable to the option then being mooted of a Russian takeover, since under British rule Indian Muslims were permitted to practice their religion.[17] As always, Muslim opinion was varied and complex. There was no central authority enforcing a single view or interpretation and many ulema believed that even under the East India Company rule, India had been a Dar al-Islam, or realm of Islam, in which Muslim law and beliefs could be freely exercised. To declare India a Dar al-Harb, or a realm of war, was to contradict this earlier view and to throw their entire following into turmoil. Many were, therefore, reluctant to commit themselves to open rebellion, a jihad against the videshis (or foreigners) and a completely uncertain future. Thus, despite the commonality of religious rhetoric, a variety of alternative and competing viewpoints were articulated.

The Draw of Religion: From Disaffection to Military Mobilisation

'The rebellion began with religion.' This was the stark judgement of an *arzi* (proclamation) issued in the name of Birjis Qadr, a rebel leader in India during 1857.[18] Analyses of the causes of the 1857 Rebellion and of the rapid spread of disaffected groups across northern and eastern India, both at the time of the conflict and in succeeding years, stressed the very real importance of religious beliefs both as a reason for widespread feelings of alienation in regard to British rule and as a means of mobilisation of a variety of individuals and groups who felt compelled to take up arms in defence of their faith. This section looks at the pull of religion, and the perception of faith-based issues as the starting point of disaffection in the view of both British and Indian observers, and as a powerful tool in the recruitment of a ragbag of armed resistance fighters.

From the outset, the British in India couched the mutiny in religious terminology. In the first days and weeks, the disaffection was primarily seen in terms of the objection of believers in a strong religion—Islam—to the propagation of Christian beliefs and practices. Hindus tended to be viewed more tolerantly, in the belief that their religious idioms and rituals were less conducive to the organisation of violent, religious-based resistance. G.W. Coopland, writing from Gwalior on 11 June 1857, echoed the views of many when he wrote 'as this is completely a Mahomedan rising, there is not much to be feared from the Hindoos of Benares; who are, moreover, cowardly, unwarlike Bengalees'.[19] Describing Havelock's march from Allahabad to Cawnpore on 7 July, the following differential appraisal of Hindus and Muslims was recorded: 'As they passed through the streets, the Hindoos evidently regarded them with dread, while the scowl of hatred sat darkly on the averted faces of the Mohammedans; whose disloyalty was becoming every day better known.'[20]

In part, the identification of Islam as a potent symbol of military mobilisation was based upon past experiences in which religious protest had been combined with socio-economic grievances to provoke outbursts of violent disorder, not necessarily directed against the British. In 1826, followers of Sayyid Ahmad had declared jihad against the Sikhs, while veterans of the Afghan War had a fund of stories about ghazi attacks in the late 1830s.[21] It was thus very much in the expected order of things for British observers of the stirrings of mutiny in the spring and summer of 1857 to see the machinations of maulvis (a title given to religious scholars or ulema) and mullahs (religious teachers) behind the hostile gaze of the Muslims they encountered.

The perceived importance of religion in military mobilisation was not entirely mistaken. Concrete examples of the employment of faith to drive recruitment to the rebel cause were all around in the India of 1857. Had not

the statement of rebel officers and sepoys to Bahadur underscored the prime motivation of revolt? They had asked a powerful rhetorical question: 'if the religion of a Hindoo or Mussalman is lost, what remains in the world?'[22] The preachings of Maulvi Ahmadullah in Lucknow and Faizabad were interpreted as a call to jihad by the British, who arrested and imprisoned him.[23] In cities across Awadh, NWP and western Bihar, writes Gyan Pandey, 'marginalised weavers and artisans came out in support of local rebel maulvis.'[24] Wahabi doctrines are mentioned in more than one historical assessment as influencing the decision of Muslim sepoys to join 'freely roaming ghazi bands'.[25] Wahabism is a conservative reform movement within Sunni Islam, which is attributed to Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, an eighteenth century scholar from Saudi Arabia, who advocated a return to the practices of the forefathers of Islam. Although demonised by colonial authorities (and some unimaginative contemporary authors[26]), those influenced by Wahabism were far from being a monotholic sect or community, and they were divided on the issue of rebellion. Rather than being inspired by Wahabism, many Muslim rebels were instead reportedly inspired by Sufi saints and a variety of mystic orders.[27] The religious calendar could nonetheless serve as a convenient timetable for revolt, if only for purely organisational reasons. Thus on 25 May, W. Edwards, the Collector of Budaon, learnt that 'the Mohammedans of the town of Budaon, who were on that day assembled for prayers on occasion of the Ede festival, were to rise at noon and create a riot'.[28]

Rebel army leaders soon found that religion as a mobilising strategy could appeal to both Hindus and Muslims and adjusted their recruitment strategies accordingly. *Fath-i-Islam* (Victory to Islam), for example, called upon Hindus and Muslims to unite to drive out the English as the only effective means of preserving both their faiths. Similarly, Khan Bahadur Khan, a rebel leader in Rohilkhand, took care to emphasise the need for opposition to the British by depicting them as 'people who overthrow all religions'. His proclamation contained a plea for Hindu–Muslim solidarity against the British, with the promise that cows would be respected and would not be slaughtered.[29] Correspondence seized between Lucknow 'conspirators' Pir Ali and Mashiuzzaman revealed active attempts to reconcile Hindus and various Muslim sects in the work of military resistance:

> I think we should not disagree with any caste and even with Hindoos for we should try and get our work done and in disagreeing there are countless disputes. For my part I am on terms with the Wahabis, with those who are weak and wavering and with many even of Shias and Rafzees.[30]

Rebels used the emotive language of religion in their efforts to mobilise support. The adversary was depicted as a 'malignant kafir' and as 'Nazarenes of bad religion', in correspondence discovered after the fall of Delhi. When attacked and killed, the British became 'travellers to hell' or 'entered hell by the

musketry of the sepoys'. Loyal Indians were condemned as 'well-wishers of the Kafirs' and hence 'enemies to religion', while rebel sepoys who headed for Delhi were characterised as 'firm and resolved on their own religion'.[31] The Azamgarh Proclamation, which is attributed to Firoz Shah, asserted that both Hindus and Muslims were being 'ruined' by the 'infidel and treacherous English'. Its author declared that it was his intention to 'extirpate the infidels' and to bring Hindus and Muslims together. [32] Tantia Topi's military strategy for the mobilisation of local chiefs was also hinged on religious idiom. In the words of Roy,

> Religion was proclaimed to be in danger.... The jeopardised religion allowed no choice. There could either be total crusade against the infidels or identification with them. If one supported rebellion it had to be an active one for the sake of the safety of religion. If one did not, he himself would become a polluting agent, an infidel, a Christian.[33]

Even petty potentates attempted to link themselves directly to God: in Hamirpur the following proclamation was read out in the villages: 'Khalq khoda ki, mulk badshah ka, Raj Peshwa ka, Hukm despat ka' (The world is God's the country is the emperor's the rule is Despat's). As has been noted by William Dalrymple, it is striking that rebel documents choose the language of religion rather than that of nationality or colour to decry their adversary. Rebel sources, he concludes, betray an 'emphatically religious articulation'.[34] These examples support Seema Alavi's assertion that 'both jihadis and Hindu rebel leaders and sepoys unproblematically used religious idioms and symbols to whip-up anti-British support.'[35]

God's Standard: Combat and Religious Symbolism

Just as the religious idiom was used to draw recruits into rebel armies, so religious symbols served to identify and characterise armed groups and to motivate adherents. When the 3rd Irregular Cavalry at Saugor decided to join the mutineers they adopted preparations for military action which were largely drawn from religious rituals. They 'went to the Masjid, and sharpened their swords. At the same time Subadar Shaikh Ramzan of the 42nd raised the Muhammadan flag and called for followers by beat of drum'.[36] When sepoys of the Gwalior contingent joined with a group of ghazis it was reported that Hindu and Muslim symbolism was effectively employed to join them in a shared religious cause—they swore 'on the Ganges water and Koran to stand by each other'.[37] According to Bihari folk songs, when rebel leaders Kunwar Singh and Amar Singh prepared for battle against the British they did so 'with a ritual bath and embalming of body with sandalwood paste'.[38]

British sources testify repeatedly to the presence of religious flags that acted as a call to arms and as a counterpoint to the regimental standards of the opposing army. In Benares, 'the green flag of holy war' was raised by Muslim weavers; when the police at Harda decided to join the rebels they 'attempted to raise the Muhammadan standard'. Similarly, when Maharaja Holkar reported on events on 4 July 1857, he complained 'the whole Residency was plundered and the Muhammadans raised the standard of religion'.[39] The author of the Azamgarh Proclamation conveniently offered a religious standard for Hindus as well as for Muslims, writing:

> I ... have, by the aid of the Majahdeens, or religious fanatics, erected the standard of Mohammed, and persuaded the orthodox Hindoos who had been subject to my ancestors, and have been and are still accessories in the destruction of the English, to raise the standard of Mahavir. Soldiers soliciting their fellow sepoys to rebel in Jhansi 'asked all men of the "deen" (faith) to flock to their standard.'[40]

The battle cry of the rebels was frequently commented upon by observers and participants in the events of 1857. The most common slogans, according to British reports, were explicitly religious. When the rebels in Bundelkhand threw open the Orchha Gate, they did so 'to the cry of "Deen ka Jai" [Victory to Religion].'[41] In his *Reminiscences*, Forbes-Mitchell, five miles from Bareilly on 5 May was faced by an onrushing group of '360 rohilla Ghazis'; as they made their 'furious charge', he reported that they were shouting 'Bismillah! Allah! Allah! Deen! Deen!'[42] On 23 May a group of 100 rebels heading for Delhi were overheard 'shouting deen'.[43] Each time the 2nd battalion Royal Sussex Regiment encountered 'fanatical Ghazees' the latter were heard to shout 'Victory!' 'Religion!'[44]

Rebel military groups sometimes adopted religious garb to distinguish themselves from the ranks of loyal sepoys. While they retained significant organisational and hierarchical elements of the British Army in which many had been trained, those who fought in the name of Islam often took steps to associate their new army with their religion. One of the best descriptions of a 'ghazi' force is that supplied by Forbes-Mitchell, who described their dress as a 'thick quilted tunic of green silk ... with green turbans and kummerbunds, round shields on the left arm, and curved talwars'. The vast majority of the ghazis he came across were not young, but 'were gray-bearded men of the Rohilla race'.[45] When, in mid-June 1857, Macpherson encountered a force of 200 ghazis under the command of a Muslim who had formerly been a native officer in the Gwalior contingent, he was struck by the guise of the former soldier of the British Army, who seems to have sought to represent himself as a religious leader and visited the enemy 'arrayed in green, fingering his beads unceaselessly'.[46] This was the rebel leader Jahangir Khan, who had transformed himself rapidly from havildar, into 'a ghazi leader of

the highest pretension of sanctity'; in effect he had become a 'military maulvi'.[47] These descriptions were not simply a product of the fevered imaginations of the terrified British. There are very similar reports from Indian Muslims who observed the movements of the new 'ghazi army'. Sa'id Mubarak Shah was residing in Delhi when he wrote a description of the arrival of five thousand men in the capital, 'the majority armed with gundasahs [battle axes] and dressed in blue tunics and green turbans'.[48] Some descriptions of 'ghazi' forces describe them as dressed up, not so much for battle but as if their purpose was a higher one, for which they needed to don special clothing as pilgrims do prior to embarking on the haj. The ghazis encountered at the battle of Aligurh on 24 August 1857 were 'dressed in garments white as the driven snow' while, in May 1858, as the British approached Sittana, the rebels who met them were all 'dressed in their best for the occasion, mostly in white but some of the leaders wore velvet cloaks'.[49] In another account, Lieutenant General G. Bryan Milman, commanding the 5th Fusiliers, described an attack by rebels on their camp in January 1858, with a loss to them of 100 killed, including seven men of rank. He wrote that

> one of their Prophet Leaders, who led their attack, was wounded and taken prisoner; he had shown great courage and complained of his own troops being cowardly. His dress was very curious on horseback, wearing a much ornamented red uniform with a long tail attached to represent the Monkey God Hanooman.

Six days later, following the death of 'the Monkey Prophet' it was reported that there has been no further attacks on the camp.[50]

It was evident that while the forces opposing the British in the India of 1857 made good use of their military training, so that the language of command for drill might still be English, and the battle formations learnt from the Anglo-Indian army were retained, the symbols of mobilisation and the multiple meanings of warfare had changed and were much more powerful. As Roy has noted,

> it was with frequent references to words like Deen and Dharam that the urgency for rising in arms was stressed. In the proclamations and parwanas [warrants] issued during the mutiny from all the major cities, rebellion was commonly presented as an imperative course of action for upholding a religion that was in danger under the English. [51]

It was a contest for preserving faith, which in a pre-secular era implicitly involved economic, political and social ends. The outcome was postulated in terms of the victory of religion, but this went along with concomitant gains in all the other spheres that a life of faith and divinely inspired justice would imply to its adherents.

Both for the British and for the Indians, the transformation of the war of 1857 into one of conviction provided combatants on both sides with a necessary

foundation for the terrible slaughter that confronted them. The use of religious language was employed as an effective means of dehumanising the adversary on both sides. An English officer writing about the Kanpur massacres termed it a period 'when Satan may truly be said to have been let loose upon earth'.[52] Continual references to the British as kafir oppressors had an equally powerful resonance for Muslim fighters. Rebel correspondence specified that prior to engaging in combat, rebel forces had met, and agreed 'to kill the Kafirs', acknowledging that 'the killing of them was necessary, moreover decreed by God'. The rebel troops who had sworn to kill the 'kafirs' were explicitly identified as 'jahadis' in the seized documents.[53] The rebel leader Mohammed Hasan of Gorakhpur stressed in a letter to Khairuddeen that 'the moral sustenance to keep the fight on against the British is drawn from God. If the British are mighty, God is "almighty".' In this way, as Rag argues, insurgent violence acquired 'the status of a religious service.'[54] Hindu fighters drew similar strength from the notion that the battle was being conducted in the name of the preservation of faith and custom. Bihari folk songs stressed that Kunwar Singh fought 'to keep safe our pride and our plenty/Our religion, our cows!'[55]

A spirit of religious fervour thus imbued in the rank and file was a potent device to ensure bravery in combat. There are numerous accounts by the British of incredible feats of courage shown by the 'ghazi' fighters. In one attack, a 'daring advance guard' composed of five men entered the camp of General Greathed 'playing tom-toms' before killing two soldiers.[56] During another encounter, while the British were firing rounds of artillery into a village near Mundasoore, the following incident occurred:

> All the while this firing was going on at the village, a fine fellow, dressed in white, with a green flag, coolly walked out from the cover, and sauntered leisurely along the whole line of our guns, while round shot and shell were whizzing about him in awful proximity. He occasionally stooped down, but never attempted to run; he then quietly retraced his steps, when a shot from Lieut. Strutt struck him just before he regained the village. Such a feat is almost incredible. What his object could have been I know not, except that it might have been a daring show of bravery to his fellows.[57]

Alongside such individual feats, the British observed much evidence of collective fervour and ritualistic behaviour in combat. The Royal Sussex Regiment at Aligarh on 24 August 1857 were struck by the 'uncommon valour' of a 'band of fanatic ghazees':

> they emerged from their ambuscade in a garden, snapped their scabbards into two, flung the pieces from them, flourished their flashing scimitars aloft, shouted 'Victory!' 'Religion!' and attacked the advance of skirmishers of the 3rd Europeans with such frantic fury and desperation that it went hard with our men till the guns were brought to bear.[58]

Religious faith also kept alive the spirits of the British at difficult moments of the long and arduous campaign. In a poetic tribute to Major Vincent Eyre, the religious symbolism is unmistakeable: We seemed by God forsaken, yet help was drawing near/Th'Artilery—the 5th—and the Buxar Volunteers'.[59]

Indeed, as Dalrymple has observed, 'the most extreme rhetoric came from the Evangelical Christians in Delhi' where the thirst for revenge was seen as a god-given right, and the resulting slaughter of the defeated was said to be sanctioned by God.[60] Sepoys, moments before execution, asked to explain their deeds, each reportedly replied, 'the slaughter of the British was required by our religion'.[61]

War and Martyrdom: Death in Battle as a Path to Paradise

The logical consequence of fighting a war from religious conviction was a readiness to die for one's faith. This was remarked upon frequently by the British as a notable characteristic of 'ghazi' fighters. Forbes-Mitchell stressed that they expected to die and did not attempt to escape:

> the Ghazis charged in blind fury, with their round shields on their left arms, their bodies bent low, waving their tulwars over their heads, throwing themselves under the bayonets, and cutting at the men's legs.... The struggle was short, but every one of the Ghazis was killed. None attempted to escape; they had evidently come on to kill or be killed, and a hundred and thirty three lay in one circle right in front of the colours of the Forty-Second.[62]

The 42nd Highlanders had a similar experience with a ghazi force at Bareilly on 5th May: 'The "Ghazees" came on, sword in hand, utterly regardless of death, over the bodies of their fallen comrades.'[63]

Some British accounts describe what amounts to ritual preparations for death on the part of the rebels. Major S.C. Macpherson reported on a group of thirteen ghazis, who seemed to have resolved upon death, returning to the fort of Gwalior and taking up their post on a bastion, the Muslim fighters were observed to have 'flung over the walls all their gold and silver coin, slew their women and children and swore to die.... On the bastion the fanatics withstood [the British] steadfastly and slaying, were slain.'[64] The thirst for martyrdom was noted not just by the British but by approving Indian observers and commentators. In his account of the Siege of Delhi, Moinil Huq remarked: 'The strong and brave Ghazi-Mujahids offered severe resistance and put up a strong fight.... They kept their feet firm even in hot encounters and met everybody who tried to advance. Many of them tasted the honey of martyrdom.'[65] Qeyamuddin Ahmad

has likewise reproduced British comments about 'brave' warrior Wahabis in his history of that movement:

> The fighting of the Hindusthanis was strongly marked with fanaticism, they came boldly and doggedly on ... in perfect silence without a shout or word of any kind.... The fight was short, desperate and decisive and in the end everyone of these brave, if misguided, warriors was either killed or captured.[66]

Of course, the purpose of combat for the ghazis, was not simply to be killed, but to kill the kafirs. The pamphlet *Fath-i-Islam* instructed the rebel sepoys at Delhi to rely on the strength of the ghazis 'to kill and pursue the unbelieving people as far as to Calcutta.'[67] In practice, the British reported that on the entry of their troops to Delhi 'many escaped sepoys and citizens' took up refuge in the old city of Delhi

> to hatch further mischief under the shelter of deserted mosques, forming extensive ruins near an old Mussulman burial ground. Most of the natives hiding here are said to be Gazees—men who are brought up to think that by killing, mutilating, and exterminating all the Feringhis, they are fulfilling the wishes of their Prophet, and gaining for themselves a happy place in Paradise.[68]

It was notable, for the British, that up to the moment of death, those with religious motivations remained staunch. Lowe remembered that a group of sepoy prisoners about to be executed by firing squad

> cried out to the last 'deen, deen!' Coopland, witnessing some sepoys being 'blown from the guns' reported, 'It was a long process, fastening them to the guns'; and an officer having said to a sepoy, as the latter was being tied on, 'it is your turn, now', the sepoy replied calmly, 'in one moment I shall be happy in Paradise'.[69]

British accounts of the ghazis project their dress, behaviour and 'fatalism' in exotic and Orientalist terms. The following account of a Rohillah encountered in Central India during the rebellion is typical of the genre:

> In the rohillah one encounters an implacable antagonist. His life, his position, his faith, lead him to look upon death with cold and dignified indifference.
>
> He is a fatalist, and thus life or death are to him as one. If fate wills that he dies in the heat of battle, death has but unloaded him of his burden at the journey's end, that he may enjoy the best of rest—eternal luxury and sleepy beatitude.
>
> To relate one little incident will suffice to show how these men face death and die upon the battle field.
>
> In this encounter with the enemy and the Mahidpore Contingent, Doctor Orr of the Hyderabad Contingent came up with one of the Rohillahs who was dressed in a very superior manner. He was a fine fellow, and perhaps a leader. He was requested to surrender, this he refused to do; he was then told that

unless he did so, death would assuredly be his portion. At this he scoffed and boldly defied the officer to combat.

Then ensued the struggle for life in deadly conflict, which he manfully maintained upon foot till the cold sharp spear of his antagonist pierced his breast; he then fell upon the field, cast an agonised withering look of a still unvanquished spirit at his foe, threw his arm across his eyes, and died without a groan! The Rohillah affects to despise death,—his faith teaches him that to die thus is to enter at once into the elysium of the blest, where every sensual pleasure will be meted out to him in undying sunny ripeness. Cradled in war, nurtured in arms, imbued with a pompous sense of their all-saving faith for time and eternity, proud by nature, and daring by habit, it is no wonder he forms a figure of no mean type in our pictures of the battle-field, or a foe by no means despicable in single combat.

I have seen him rush into the jaws of death as boldly as though the shackles of 'age, ache, penury, and imprisonment' had just been loosed, and a career as free and boundless as the wild horses were before him. Nor can we wonder at this, for Mahomet tells them in his Koran, 'the sword is the key of heaven and hell. A drop of blood shed in the cause of God, or one night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months in fasting and prayer. Whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven; at the day of judgment his wounds shall be resplendent as vermilion, and odorous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be replaced by the wings of angels and cherubim![70]

However, as we have seen, religion was not of significance solely to Indian belligerents. The British soldiers also acted upon and were inspired by perceptions of themselves as holy warriors, fighting an equally desperate battle, in which they envisaged themselves as the military wing of a civilising mission, to combat heathenism and to avenge 'savagery'. A striking example of the concept of Christian martyrdom and of war in the service of religion is given by William Forbes-Mitchell in an account of one soldier involved in the final relief of Lucknow in November 1857:

Quaker Wallace was a strange enigma.... When pressed to take promotion, for which his superior education well fitted him, he absolutely refused, always saying that he had come to the Ninety-Third for a certain purpose, and when that purpose was accomplished, he only wished to die

With his back to the field, and his feet to the foe !
And leaving in battle no blot on his name,
Look proudly to Heaven from the death-bed of fame.

...

When the signal for the assault was given, Quaker Wallace went into the Secundrabâgh like one of the Furies, if there are male Furies, plainly seeking death but not meeting it, and quoting the 116th Psalm, Scotch version in metre, beginning at the first verse:

I love, the Lord, because my voice And prayers He die hear.
I, while I live, will call on Him, Who bow'd to me his ear.

> And thus he plunged into the Secundrabâgh quoting the next verse at every shot fired from his rifle and at each thrust given by his bayonet:
> I'll of salvation take the cup, On God's name will call;
> I'll pay my vows now to the Lord Before His people all.[71]

The British were not averse either to using religion as an excuse for repression. Ahmad gives the example of the destruction of the two villages of Mangalthana, on the grounds that they were a stronghold for 'Hindusthani fanatics and thieves'.[72] Perhaps the most significant difference was not the motivation but the superior weaponry and technology which backed up the British forces, and which therefore enabled them to prevail, and spared them from the demonstrations of courage in the face of overwhelming odds which so often distinguished their adversaries.

Religion as a Diversionary Tactic in Warfare

There was one aspect of the War of 1857 which did provide the British with a distinct advantage and one which they used astutely in time-honoured fashion. This involved the opportunities that allowed them to play a familiar game of divide and rule, exploiting the religious cleavages in the ranks of the opposing force.

Historians of the rebel administration in Delhi have pointed to much evidence of tensions between Delhi residents, Hindu sepoys and Muslim mujahidin. Fears were expressed of projected cow slaughters at times of Muslim festivals, which sometimes led to street fights between the *purbeas* (north Indian sepoys) and the volunteers. Husain attributes rumours circulating in Delhi aiming to incite Hindus against Muslims to the work of British agents. He notes that the British too were able to use the religious calendar to their advantage—becoming 'quite active' as the festival of Bakr-Id approached and fostering fears that the majority Hindu sepoys would not permit either the azan (call to prayer) or the slaughter of cows.[73] Edwards made much (perhaps too much) of his success in dealing with 'hostile Muslims' by his use of divide and rule tactics. On learning of a projected rising in the district under his jurisdiction he reacted by calling together a group of notables,

> and by leading them into conversation, and reasoning with them, and above all playing off one party against another—knowing as I did that a bitter animosity existed between several of them—I managed to occupy their attention until the time fixed for the rising had passed.

The British even claimed to have access to a rival force of 'holy warriors'. In one account, Robert Thornhill, the judge of Futteghur is advised 'to endeavour

to get the assistance of a body of men in Furruckabad, called "Sadhs" a fighting class of religionists, who were supposed to be very hostile to the sepoys and would act against them.'[74] In another example, Khan states that

> Scindia, instigated by the English officers shut up in the Agra fort tried to use a section of sepoys against the other. He even went to the extent of offering bribes to the officers of the contingent and "their priests" for instigating the sepoys to continue to press their respective views vehemently.[75]

Another tactic of the British was to let rival groups do their work for them. In Budaon, fighting between Muslims and Hindus was reported which resulted in 'a number of heads of Hindoos ... exposed on poles at the entrance of the town.' In Rohilcund reports were received that

> the Mahomedans had begun persecuting the Hindoos ... slaying cows in the temples and prohibiting their sounding their "Sonks" (horns). The Thakoors had, in consequence, summoned the people to assemble and attack their persecutors. If they answer the summons, the Hindoos, from their superior numbers, may expel the other sect and in that event the Europeans may have an opportunity of returning to Rohilcund.[76]

Similarly, the part played by Kols led by Gonoo in Chotanagpur during the 1857 Uprising can be understood in the context of inter-ethnic rivalries.[77]

Pankaj Rag has shown how the British could use 'traditional' beliefs against the rebels. Rag suggests that there was deliberation in the decision of Captain Bruce of Kanpur to raise a police force composed of Mehtars [men of the caste of sweepers]. The commissioner of Patna gave explicit instructions to district magistrates to recruit only Dusadh and Chamar men for his extra police force.[78] It was certainly evident that in many cases religious divides prevented unity of action on the part of rebels. Khan, for example, has drawn attention to a clash between a rebel group composed of 'high caste Hindu' *purbea* sepoys who wished to relocate to Kanpur and Muslims from the Doab region and Gwalior who preferred to go to Agra and Delhi.[79] In the long run, one may well argue that one of the consequences of the War of 1857 was the example it offered to the British of how to manage religious groups both within their colonial armies and within the territories they controlled. Green has pointed out:

> As British officers in the Indian Army were aware in their paranoia over the supposedly divided loyalties of their Muslim troops and the ever present rumours of seditious holy men, religion was always a potentially subversive force in military life. As such, it needed to be channelled and constrained so as to best serve the interests of the army—that is, the achievement of its commanders' objectives.'[80]

The British would have many more opportunities between 1857 and 1947 to do just that (see Singh and Rand in this volume).

Divine Aspirations

Mid-nineteenth century British perceptions of Indian religious motivations were undoubtedly in part a reflection of their own and took the form of Orientalist imaginings of what heathen beliefs should be: crazed, irrational and inhuman. More than that: it was expressly the view of Biblical scholars of the time, who insisted that Christianity was the first and only religion to do away with rites of human sacrifice. Honest Christians could not help but anticipate the worst in their enemy. It was easier, furthermore, to believe the enemy were the victims of irrational belief than that they might have any practical cause for their resentment against British rule. This understanding facilitated and justified the many bloody, shocking (and in the long term strategically effective) massacres committed in the course of the British 'pacification' campaign—most notably in Delhi following the recapture of the city in September 1857. These views certainly coloured many of the accounts to which we have referred. Nonetheless the frequency of this testimony, and the passionate devotion to their faith expressed by many British soldiers, should alert us to the fact that this was a time when popular secular ideals of nation and citizenship were barely a glimmer on the horizon. The British Army itself was not yet a modern professional force: discipline was maintained by brutal means (unlike in the Indian Army where flogging had been banned in 1835), and the men went into battle fuelled with drink. Zealotry and blood-lust were essential qualifications in any army of this era and were most likely encouraged in the very Indian forces which the British had trained and now found as their adversaries. On both sides, issues of justice and rights were expressed in religious terms and the discourse of faith suffused every aspect of daily life. It is no surprise therefore that we find religion to the fore in 1857. It would be absurdly reductionist to insist that mid-nineteenth century expressions of belief can be straight-forwardly translated into modern terms as articulations of socio-economic and political grievances. However, religious and secular beliefs need not be seen in such dichotomous terms since this distinction was not perceived by contemporaries.

There were many objective reasons for discontent in India under the rule of East India Company that provided the context for the great insurrection of 1857. Although there were religious anxieties (focusing on the infamous greased cartridges), there were also many practical causes for the successive mutinies within the British Indian army that began at Barrackpore and then exploded upon the plains of north India at Meerut in May 1857. Nonetheless for those in battle it was religion above all that inspired men on both sides to risk their

lives. A belief in martyrdom and that their cause was blessed by God was a sentiment as likely to be found among Christian British as Muslim Indian soldiers. And while rebellious sepoys fought for a new order founded upon faith, so the British envisaged themselves as the military wing of a global civilising mission, bent upon the extirpation of heathen savagery. In far-flung lands, God rather than king and country proved to be the most effective rallying cry for British troops, and amongst the rebellious Indian sepoys '*deen*' and 'dharma' were the form in which patriotic ideals were expressed. The conflict embraced all the cruellest characteristics of medieval warfare, with British troops rewarding themselves with loot, and both sides resorting to cruel and bloody violence in the belief that this was the only language their opponents understood. However, to read from this polarity in conflict, a unity in beliefs would be a mistake. There were many British Christians who were critical of the conduct of the war and its aftermath, and disagreements about whose dharma and for what jihad the Indians at arms might be fighting were commonplace. Given the indirect nature of East India Company (and later British colonial rule) and its heavy dependence on local intermediaries, it would be foolish to see in this anything like the clash of civilisations hypothesis popularised by Samuel Huntingdon and originally aired as an explanation for the Opium Wars with China in the 1830s and 1840s. These were above all conflicts about power and resources, in which who controlled what and the legitimacy of those claims were expressed in divine terms, as they still are today. It is thus vital that we do not obscure the role of religion and its signal relevance to contemporaries simply because we inhabit a very different world today in which national and secular symbols are primordial. The power of this discourse should not be underestimated as motive for action, nor its many and complex meanings for those involved, not least of all because it was upon the rich and broad foundations of faith that many later nations were born.

Notes and References

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4

LOGISTIC FAILURES ON THE PART OF THE REBELS IN 1857

William Dalrymple

IN their letters from the front line, British participants at the Siege of Delhi in 1857 invariably attributed their success over far larger numbers of rebels to Divine Providence. This was particularly so of those of a religious bent: according to the British chaplain Padre Rotton, the rebels did not realise that the uprising was

> a battle of principles, a conflict between truth and error; and that because they had elected in favour of darkness, and eschewed the light, therefore they could not possibly succeed. Moreover, they had imbrued their hands in the innocent blood of helpless women and children, and that very blood was [now] appealing to heaven for vengeance. The appeal was unquestionably heard. The Lord could not do otherwise than be avenged on such a nation as this. [1]

There were more secular factors too to which the British attributed their own success, notably the leadership provided by men such as John Nicholson. Most of all, the British cited their own valour—often expressed in straightforwardly racist language—which they saw as a reflection of their 'vigorous' Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. For Robert Dunlop, for example, a civilian volunteer in the irregular cavalry unit known as the 'Khakee Ressalah', the military failure of the rebels proved to his own satisfaction what he had already long believed about

> the weak and childish but cruel and treacherous native character.... It is a patent fact that the proud contempt which the Anglo-Saxon bears to the Asiatic has proved, to a great extent, the salvation of our Indian Empire.[2]

Some British observers also cited the lack of military imagination on the part of the rebels, especially their failure to gather intelligence or coordinate effectively with other rebel centres such as Kanpur and Lucknow, and their

inability to persuade most of the independent rajahs of central India and Rajputana to join the revolt. Several writers commented on the Delhi rebels' failure to recognise how very easily they could have taken the British from the rear on the Ridge: 'Had the enemy had the enterprise to detach a strong force to his rear, we could not have sent more than five or six hundred men against it,' wrote John Nicholson on the 28th August. 'But it is too late for them to try that game now, and they know it, and are at their wits' end to devise some new plan of action.'[3]

To anyone within the walls of Delhi, however, there was a much more obvious reason for failure of the rebel army: the sheer chaos and administrative incompetence of the rebel government, and in particular their failure to feed or remunerate the troops who flocked to the Mughal capital. As the siege wore on it became increasingly clear that it was the failures of the rebels' administrative and financial organisation, at least as much as their military and strategic shortcomings, which would lead ultimately to their undoing. The rebel sepoys had created turbulence and chaos, but could not restore order. This failure was particularly debilitating in the countryside around Delhi, where the rebels' failure to establish a well-governed 'liberated area' or Mughal realm from which they could draw tax revenue, manpower and, most crucially, food supplies ultimately proved to be their single most disastrous shortcoming.

The result of this failure was, eventually, starvation, first for the ordinary people of the city and then for the sepoys. By the end of August disaffection had reached such a pitch that perhaps as many as 75 per cent of the rebel sepoys had already deserted the city before the British assault began on the 14 September: British intelligence and military estimates put the number of rebel sepoys who collected in Delhi as around 100,000 out of the total 131,000 rebel sepoys in the Bengal army. By the end of the siege, however, just before the assault, the British believed the number had fallen to a quarter of this. According to Lt. Kendal Coghill, 'The enemy had about 25 or 30,000 actual sepoys,' he wrote to this brother, 'and about 30,000 more ghazis, a race of devils and fanatics.' If Coghill was right—and there are a number of similar estimates—the freelance and militarily untrained Mujahidin probably made up at least half the rebel fighting force when the British finally commenced their assault on the city on the 14 September.[4]

Before the outbreak of the uprising, Delhi had well-stocked bazaars and one of the largest military arsenals in north India. But by the end of August, supplies of both food and munitions had run out. From the first arrival of the sepoys in the city, the rebels had looted to feed themselves. Some regiments had come to Delhi with plentiful supplies of food, but many more had not. In the first day of looting, on 11 May, the jewellers, money lending *Baniyas*, and the famous cloth merchants in the Chota Dariba bore much of the violence, as did Delhi's celebrated sweetmeat-makers. According to the newswriter Chunni Lal, 'the infantry troops forcibly entered and plundered the shops of the confectioners

in all the streets of the city.'[5] The moneylender Mahajan Narayan Das had his house looted and its entire contents removed. A jeweller named Mohan Lal was kidnapped by the sepoys and kept at gunpoint until he bought his way out of trouble by giving them ₹ 200.[6] Sometimes, however, the Delhi *wallahs* fought back: 'The infantry and cavalry made an attack on Nagar-Seth Street with the view to plundering it,' recorded the newswriter Chunni Lal. 'But the inhabitants closed the gates and attacked the soldiery with brickbats, and drove them off.'[7] In other places too the townspeople took the law into their own hands: in Hauz Qazi, for example, there was a riot 'between some Telingas and the residents of the Mohalla.'[8]

Judging by the petitions that poured in to the king, many of which survive in the National Archives of India (NAI) Mutiny Papers, particularly vulnerable were the suburban villages outside the city walls, especially Pahargunj, Nizamuddin and the Sabzi Mandi, which as the latter's name suggests, lived largely by supplying vegetables to the city. There the inhabitants found themselves at the mercy not only of the incoming sepoys, but also of mobs of Gujars from the surrounding countryside. One of the largest delegations to come before Bahadur Shah Zafar and beg for protection in the first days of the uprising arrived from the western suburb of Paharganj. The language they used to address the emperor was replete with the old Mughal titles—Zafar was addressed as the 'Throne of the Caliphate' and 'The Refuge of the Inhabitants of the World'—but the petition that was presented also demonstrated the reality of the utter helplessness of his regime:

> We poor folk, residents of Jaisinghpura and Shahganj, also known as Paharganj, have come together to the Luminous Presence, because from days of old our settlement was attached to the Royal Estate, yet now the Telingas come out from Ajmeri Gate and oppress the shopkeepers, and take goods by force without paying anything. The troops enter the houses of the poor and penniless and take anything they find—even the string beds, dishes and piles of firewood. Whenever your humble servants, or even our most respected citizens, go to the Telingas and plead with them about the misery to which they have been reduced, they merely threaten them with their guns and swords. We have been reduced to such extremities by the depredations of the troops that we submit this petition to His Majesty that He may turn his gaze of justice and commiseration towards us. Send a Royal Order to the Telingas that they give no more trouble, and that with the support of our gracious sovereign we may be left to live our lives in peace. May the sun of prosperity and success and all glory shine brightly, for your sake, O Lord of All! [9]

Another large delegation came to the fort from the city's provision merchants and corn chandlers, who complained that while seizing all their stocks the troops had paid 'not one pice and have threatened and beaten up all the merchants.'[10] The failure of the rebels to establish and maintain a rival system of order was one

of their principal weaknesses and was a major factor that helps to explain their inability to defeat the numerically inferior British forces. Even more fatal for the long-term success of the uprising, however, was the rebel administration's failure to guard the magazine, part of which had been blown up on May the 11th, but which still contained large stocks of vital arms and ammunition. According to Zahir Dehlavi, in the first week of the rising, 'There was no count of the number of rifles lying scattered around, as well as innumerable pistols. But within two or three days I was told that the rabble had carried away the powder, guns and canon, and only the canon balls were left.'[11]

By the end of the second week of the uprising even the formerly enthusiastic Maulvi Muhammad Baqar, editor of the *Dihli Urdu Akhbar* reported that:

> The population is greatly harassed and sick of the pillaging and plundering ... whether people of the city, or outsiders from the East, everybody is busy looting and plundering. The police stations do not have even an iota of control and authority. In the city and around and about, the Gujars and Jats have created havoc. The roads are blocked, and thousands of houses have been plundered and burnt. Great peril confronts all the respectable and well-off people of Delhi ... the city is being ravaged.[12]

From the beginning of the uprising, it seems that Delhi was effectively blockaded. This had little to do with the arrival of the British on the Ridge in June and still less to do with any ambition they might have had of encircling and besieging the city. Rather, it was caused yet again by the Gujar and Mewati tribesmen around the city who now effectively controlled most of Delhi's hinterland. Robbing anyone who attempted to move along the roads in and out of the capital, they kept the city in a far more effective state of blockade than anything achieved by the British to the north. Typical was the experience of the Haryanvi horse trader Mehrab Khan from Sohna. Realising that his horses would be worth a premium in war-torn Delhi, he brought three mares into town. He managed to sell two of the mares to some *sowars* stationed in Daryaganj, and was riding back home on the third horse, his takings in his pocket, when, he explains, 'near Mehrauli the Gujars pounced on me and looted me.'[13] The King's own property and servants suffered a similar fate. The sepoys looted the Royal Ice Factory outside Ajmeri Gate, pointlessly destroying the fort's stocks of ice.[14] Even the *harkaras*, the royal messengers, complained that they were being attacked by the Tilangas: 'they come to our houses, make trouble and loot their contents.'[15] The position in the countryside outside the city was even worse: when Zafar sent some riders to seek troops and support from the Raja of Alwar, Gujars attacked them on the road just outside Mehrauli; they returned naked and bruised, reporting that the Gujars had 'robbed them of their horses, clothes and money; that they had taken the King's letter and, tearing it up, had put the pieces back into their hands.'[16]

The failure of the rebels to create a 'liberated area' in the countryside was something Maulvi Muhammad Baqar recognised at the time and wrote about repeatedly in his editorials: 'What strange indifference,' he wrote,

> that we have not attempted to collect one single rupee of tax revenue. God knows what design or purpose there is in this failure, and what is causing such slackness.... Some or other Amir or nobleman should be deputed to collect tribute and revenue from the Rajahs and other notables, so that the administration and control of his exalted Majesty is established. At all places and districts where the Collectors of the *Kafirs* used to be posted, there a representative of his Exalted Majesty, as Ziladar, should be placed, along with some troops and the Islamic standard. The villages are already identified and marked, and money can be collected from there as prescribed. Everywhere a platoon or platoons should be posted. There is no doubt that without measures like this the notables and local potentates around these regions would not be able to give up the awe of the *Kafirs* which they still harbour in their hearts, and they will not give up of their deepest hope of seeing their own [Mughal] government restored.[17]

While economic and civil life was badly disrupted in this stage of the uprising, the rebel armies continued to grow in size. Although individual travellers and merchants found it difficult to travel on the roads after 11 May without an armed escort, huge numbers of sepoys continued to arrive in Delhi. On the first of July, for example, Bakht Khan arrived with four regiments of foot—around 2,300 men—as well as 700 cavalry, 600 artillery guns, including some much-needed horse artillery, 14 elephants, 300 spare horses, a train of a thousand bullock carts and camels carrying tents, ammunition, treasure worth ₹ 400,000, and, bringing up the rear, a further 'three or four thousand ghazis.'[18] By the end of July, the British estimated the rebel sepoys to number around 100,000, in addition to which around 25,000 untrained Mujahidin also turned up. All these had to be fed.

Although business was at a standstill, prices were now rising fast. The anarchy-induced blockade, combined with the large number of extra mouths to feed—including refugees from the countryside, Delhi may have swelled from a city of around 250,000 people to one sheltering around 400,000—led to rapidly dwindling supplies in the city and fast rising prices. 'People are beginning to suffer greatly for want of essential commodities,' wrote Maulvi Mohammed Baqar in the first issue of *Dihli Urdu Akhbar* to be published after the arrival of the British on the Ridge.

> Even if the essentials can be found they cannot be afforded because the prices are so high. Either the shops are shut, or when they are open there are a thousand people queuing for only one hundred pomegranates. The stuff that is there is of very poor quality, but hunger is the greater master and neediness a true slave

driver, so people will take what they can get and consider it a boon. As it is rightly said, 'if one cannot find wheat, barley will do.'

Bitter and dirty ghee sells for two sers a rupee; flour is almost impossible to find; white wheat has become like the [mythical] Anqa bird. Even then your problems are not over: you give it to the miller and after a thousand excuses he agrees to grind it; but by the time you come back he says a Telinga has seized it from him, and what could he do?

From the gardens inside the city, some mangoes and other produce does reach a few places, but the poor and the middle class can only lick their lips and watch as these fresh delicacies pass into the houses of the rich. The dandies of the city, and especially the ladies who are used to *paan* and tobacco suffer greatly since *paan* is now only available in one place—the bazaar outside the Jama Masjid—and there for as much as two paise a leaf, too expensive for most of us. Look at the lessons the Almighty has taught us: we used to be so fussy that we would reject the finest wheat and complain that our flour was too smelly and only good to be given to *faqirs*. Now we don't hesitate to fight for the poorest left-overs from the bazaars.[19]

The petitions presented to Zafar at this time included a number from the royal gardeners who complained that the Tilangas were raiding his fruit trees, despite the presence of the palace guards:

My Lord, our crop worth Rs 1000 consisting of bananas and grapes and plums was ready, but the Tilangas came and plundered it and whatever was left they are making away with too. The guards deployed by the government at the gate of the garden are wholly ineffective because the Tilangas do not heed them at all, and when they protest they merely snatch away their guns.[20]

A month after the outbreak, in mid-June, life was already proving very hard for the ordinary people of the city, especially the poor. With many of the Bhistis and sweepers pressed into service building and maintaining the city defences, the sanitation of the city had ceased to function: dead camels lay rotting even in the elite quarter of Daryaganj.[21]

There is a dissonance in the records between such accounts of chaos and, for example, police station attendance rolls, which show that officials of different sorts were still reporting for work, and doing their best to continue with their duties, albeit to little apparent effect. Similarly, the office of Mirza Mughal was issuing orders by the thousands, most of which has survived, but only a fraction of these seem to have been acted upon. 'Everyone is full of praise for the efficiency of the Kotwal of the city,' wrote Baqar in his paper,

but both high and low are helpless because of the lack of control over the Telingas. Many of the poor are said to be bordering on starvation ... money-lenders are lying low because of fear of the Telingas. The arrangement of two

> things is highly imperative and urgent: first the distribution of salaries, and secondly the restraining of the Telingas.[22]

If the sepoys refused to obey the *subedars* of other sepoy regiments, still less did they relish taking orders from the Delhi police; when the police attempted to prevent them from looting, they instantly fought back. At the Lahore Gate, for example, a policeman who tried to stop the Talingas looting was badly beaten up: 'Below the ramparts a barqandaz [armed police constable] noted some sacks of loot stashed by the wall and he challenged the owner,' the local police chief afterwards reported to the new kotwal, Muin ud-Din.

> The owner, a Telinga, argued back and unsheathed a sword. There was some jostling and raised voices, until some other Telingas came [to help their comrade] and hit the *barqandaz* until he was bleeding then they took him into their custody. The Telingas are meant to be royal servants. If this goes on then it will be impossible to maintain order and discipline.[23]

On another occasion, a policeman tried to stop a group of sepoys from running a protection racket in Gali Qasim Jan: 'They take bribes for all the stolen goods that pass,' reported the local *Thanadar* [police station chief] to the Kotwal,

> and if they are paid they let them be, but whoever does not give them a bribe is greatly harassed by the guards. Whenever the *barqandazes* of this police station who are posted there object, they abuse and threaten them. Recently it has got worse: they have begun arresting whomever they cannot extort money from, and now they are saying we should all withdraw from the police station and stop interfering with them.[24]

The presence of sepoys billeted all over the city brought ordinary life to a standstill. Even when the sepoys were not looting, fear of their violence and exactions paralysed commerce in the city. In July, Ratan Chand, the *daroga* of the Royal Estates, sent a beautifully composed Persian letter to Zafar begging him to take action to bring Chandni Chowk back to life,

> for the militia horsemen have taken quarters in the shops at the crossroads and tied up their horses there. Therefore most of the wholesalers who rent shops have fled, and those that remain are busy emptying their shops. This means that no income is available from rents, and even the shops that were repaired by the government have now gone out of business.[25]

The rich moneylenders continued to bear the brunt, yet even the most humble tradesman found that the presence of sepoys billeted anywhere in their vicinity meant people were too frightened to come out and buy their goods. On the 20 June the *Thanadar* in charge of the Chandni Chowk police station, Hafiz Aminuddin, wrote to the Kotwal that

> the person named Anandi, a woodseller, has pleaded that for the last eleven days a cavalry regiment has been quartered near Bagh Begum where his shop is located. As a result out of fear nobody comes to his shop to purchase anything and he is losing all his income. I was therefore wondering if the said shopkeeper may be allowed to move his shop from this place. Your command shall be executed.[26]

Ever since June, petitions from starving citizens, jihadis and sepoys begging for food and sustenance had been piling into the Red Fort, and the intense hunger on the streets of the city had become a prominent theme of the spies' reports sent to the British on the Ridge. As early as 7 June, even the employees of the Royal Household were complaining that they had received no rations for a month.[27] On the 12 June the deputy Kotwal wrote to his assistants begging them to find some food for the new battalions from Haryana who had just marched into Delhi. At the bottom is the reply: 'It is submitted that there is nothing left in the shops, no flour, no pulses, nothing. What should we do?'[28] By 15 June, the officers of the different regiments were coming to the Fort and complaining that their troops could not attack the British on empty stomachs, and that their sepoys had begun deserting Delhi, 'driven back by hunger before the battle is over.'[29]

Six weeks later, on 28 July, Kishan Dayal and Qadir Bahksh, *subedar*s of the Meerut sepoys, came to court to say their men were now starving. They had left behind in Meerut all their possessions when they mutinied, 'so are now very hard pressed. Some eight–ten days have passed and we have not even received a single chick-pea. My men are dismayed at the expense of everything, and there are no money-lenders who will give them loans.'[30] However, it was not just the moneylenders who withdrew their services, as the traders and shopkeepers also refused to provide credit: on 4 August, the Delhi confectioners went en masse to the Kotwal, and announced that since they had not been paid for past supplies, they would no longer provide sweets without payment in cash.[31] By 14 August, the newly arrived Nimach brigade was openly threatening to desert if it was not fed. The brigade's two *subedar*s came before Zafar to tell him of the full desperation of their situation:

> My Lord, this submission is about the Nimach force that arrived in the capital after traversing a great distance and overcoming many obstacles, with the expectation of serving your Imperial Majesty. Until now your obedient servants have themselves been paying the expenses of the horses, cavalry, artillery, cattle, elephants and camels. My Lord the cavalry and the artillery and the elephants and the camels belong to the Sarkar [British government] and until now whatever the circumstances, their allowances were always paid. But now, for four or five days, the entire force including the soldiers and the animals have been starving and there is no money left to pay even their basic expenses. All the

soldiers are determined to fight, but they ask us: how can a man who has been fasting for two three days do battle?

Therefore we hope that out of your largesse and largeness of heart can you please provide for all the expenses incurred by the Royal force and honour these humble ones with a reply. Otherwise kindly inform the soldiers, for until arrangements are made for payment, no soldier is ready to do battle. Please do not construe this as disobedience, but should you not want the Nimach brigade to remain, then kindly give us a clear answer. Whatever is ordained will happen. Innumerable petitions have been sent earlier but we have yet not received any response.

With the greatest respect, and devotedly,

General Sudhari Singh and Brigade Major Hira Singh[32]

In the event, the Nimach brigade were persuaded to stay, even though no money or food was immediately available; but spies reported a growing haemorrhage of deserters from the rebel army: according to one such spy, Turab Ali, in the first week of August alone 750 cavalrymen and 600 jihadis went 'to their native place ... because they could not obtain their daily bread in the city.'[33]

Throughout July and August the court of administration, led by Mirza Mughal, made frantic efforts to raise the money to pay for food and cover the expenses of the soldiers. At first they tried borrowing from the city's moneylenders, but only succeeded in raising ₹ 6,000, enough for only a few days' supplies. The *thanadar* of Chandni Chowk, who was given the job of extracting the money from the bankers and *Baniya*s of Katra Nil, reported 'that some of these people disappear into their houses; others do not give any response, while most make one excuse or another to keep this servant at bay, and are forever on the lookout for ways of evading their dues.'[34] A month later it was the same story: 'whenever this servant goes to their houses,' reported the *thanadar*, 'they shut their doors and do not give any reply. They vanish away.' A note at the bottom in Mirza Mughal's hand, and stamped with his seal, suggested a more vigorous approach: 'Proclaim an order,' suggested the Prince, 'that if these money-lenders remain hidden you will blow them from a cannon.'[35]

A message was sent to Laxmi Chand, the famously wealthy moneylender in Mathura, on the road to Agra, but although he was offered the position of *fotadar* (treasurer) in return for a loan of ₹ 500,000, he said he was unable to help.[36] In retaliation, the moneylender's Delhi agent was arrested and taken to the Bareilly troop's camp where he was 'ill-treated'.[37]

On the 7th of August, in desperation, Mirza Mughal arrested all the city's leading *Baniya*s and bankers and brought them to the fort, where they were threatened with death if they did not produce their fortunes and offer them for the uprising. Among those arrested were various former English officials,

including Munshi Jiwan Lal. He was bound and taken to the Red Fort, where he was horrified by what he saw:

> I was taken upstairs before Mirza Mughal. There I saw that a great crowd of people was assembled, but in a strange irregular fashion. On one side sat Mirza Mughal reclining on his pillows ... while in front of the Mirza was the famous Kuray Singh, the Tilanga Brigade Major, stretched at full length on his bed. There was not a semblance of court etiquette, and the King's officials were moving here and there without order. Lala Saligram, Ramji Das Gurwala and about 25 bankers were sitting there under arrest; I was also ordered to sit in the same row with them.
>
> Money was demanded from us and we were threatened so far that guns were placed over our shoulders and fired. But in spite of this our hearts remained firm, and we made up our minds rather to die than to yield to the threats of the rebels, and so we were kept in this sad condition [all night] until 4pm [the following day].[38]

When threatening the bankers had failed, Mirza Mughal tried to persuade the traders in the bazaar to supply ₹ 500,000, and also to provide food to the army on credit with the promise that 'money would be paid when the salaries were distributed.' But the traders refused to accept the court's word, even when pressured by the kotwal and threatened with imprisonment and the systematic looting of their shops.[39] By early August spies were reporting that many of the Punjabi merchants as well as 'Marwarees of Ashrafee ka Katra' had been thrown into jail until they paid up.[40] Many other moneylenders joined them there, including one of the most prominent of all, Saligram.[41]

There were also various attempts to raise ₹ 300,000 from the nobles of the city, and half-hearted efforts to tax the small area to the west of Delhi—the villages of Mehrauli and Gurgaon—that was still nominally under Zafar's control; but again little money was forthcoming.[42] By the end of the month, Mirza Mughal's men were so desperate for money that they had begun digging for buried treasure in the Mughal Bastille of Salimgarh, opposite the Red Fort. 'People say to the Emperor that the treasures of his forbears are buried here,' recorded the spy Gauri Shankar. 'Some even mention exact spots—but nothing has emerged yet.'[43]

By mid-August, the food shortages were beginning to bite. Several large delegations came before Zafar from their camp in front of Jama Masjid to tell him 'that they had no food and were starving'. In the weeks which followed large numbers of hungry sepoys and jihadis had begun to drift away every day from the city, despairing of continuing the fight if there was nothing to eat. According to one of the spies' letters, received by the British intelligence chief William Hodson on the 16th of August, Zafar was too depressed, detached and possibly now too unhinged, even to attempt to prevent them going, and in his own eyes at least had now removed himself from participation in the uprising: 'Yesterday

some two hundred Tilangas, fully armed, dressed and mounted, were on their way [out of the city] when some rebel forces stopped them, and reported it to the fort,' wrote an anonymous spy.

> The King called them to the court and asked them why they were going. They said, 'our wives and families would be worried about us; moreover there is nothing left to eat, that is the real reason why we are going.' So the King asked them to submit whatever arms and cavalry accoutrements they had, and then allowed them to go. He then openly declared in court, 'I do not care who goes or stays. I did not ask anybody to come here and I do not stop anyone [from leaving]. Whoever wants to stay can do so, otherwise they can go away. I have no objections. I have detained these arms so that if the English come here, I can hand it over to them. If the troops want them they can take it. I have no stake in the matter.'[44]

By the end of the month, the hunger had got worse still. On the 30th more disappointed, starving and emaciated troops came to the palace to declare that they could not go on unless they were fed.

> My Lord, from the day we arrived here we devoted ones have prostrated ourselves at your feet. But you have not provided any upkeep for us, and whatever we brought has been expended. If you cannot provide for us then you must tell us. There is so much starvation that we have no option but to break from your Majesty and go somewhere else. Except for your Majesty, everybody else in the city of Delhi, including the civil servants, are in alliance with the English.[45]

In contrast to this, the British on the Ridge had good supply lines to the north, and their early food shortages had now resolved themselves: a vast flock of sheep had been driven down from Ferozepur, providing welcome supplies of fresh mutton, while the pro-British Rajahs of the Punjab had begun sending down regular supplies of grain. A day's march to the north of Delhi, the Rajah of Jheend guarded an efficiently-managed British supply base at Rhai.[46] For those who could afford it, Peake and Allen of Ambala had opened a shop selling such rare exotica as tooth powder, pins, paper, chocolates and 'some good Moselle', though their brandy, at ₹ 8 a bottle, was out of the reach of most pockets. More affordable was the beer offered by the Parsi merchants Jehangeer and Cowasjee, who undercut Peake and Allen to offer for their 'best English bottled' for ₹ 15 a dozen.[47]

In the city meanwhile, it was not just money that was running out by the middle of August: supplies of gunpowder and guncaps were also running low. This was the single most startling example of negligence on the part of the rebel administration, for at the outbreak they had inherited the largest arsenal of weapons and ammunition in northern India. For the first 10 days of the uprising,

however, no guard had been placed over the munitions that had survived the 11 May explosion at the magazine, so that the townspeople, and even the Gujars from the countryside, had come and helped themselves.[48] The result was that by late July fuses for shells and percussion caps were both in short supply; gunpowder had run out, and attempts to manufacture it ran into trouble from the lack of saltpetre and sulphur in the city. Various attempts were made to send out to famous firework manufacturers across Hindustan for assistance; one of these

> Akbar Khan, a resident of Meerut went to the Princes and offered to make a projectile of such size and power that it would destroy a whole section of men. Convinced of his ability to do so, they advanced him the sum of Rs 4000 for expenses and ordered him to commence the work at once in the Palace;

but the experiment does not seem to have been a success.[49] There was even an attempt to use the alcoholic spirits seized from English houses to manufacture explosive, and on the 2nd of September '144 bottles of wine' were sent to the gunpowder factory, but the results were mixed at best. English observers noted that while the marksmanship of the rebel artillery remained very good throughout the siege, from July onwards it became increasingly common for the rebel shells to fail to explode, suggesting logistical failures rather than shortcomings in military skill.[50]

The most serious blow came on the 7th of August, when a stray British shell ignited one of the principal rebel gunpowder factories, located in Gali Churiwallan, incinerating 500 people working there. The sepoys assumed there had been treachery at work, and attacked the haveli of Zafar's Prime Minister, Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, whom they accused of treason. The haveli was burned to the ground, saddening the renowned poet Ghalib, who was a close friend of the Hakim. In *Dastanbuy*, he saw it as yet another assault on the highly cultured Delhi he loved. Although the Hakim's life was saved, wrote Ghalib, 'the mischief was not finished until the house was completely devastated.'

> That mansion, which in beauty and ornament, was equal to the painted palaces of China, was looted and the roofs were burned. The great beams and the inlaid panels of the ceiling were reduced to ashes. The walls were so completely blackened by smoke it seemed that, in grief, the mansion wore a black mantle.
>
> Do not be misled by the fortunes the skies may bestow
> The treacherous skies entangle,
> In anguish and torment,
> Those they formerly laid in the lap of love.[51]

In the city meanwhile, the people sat inside locked doors, trying to survive as best they could. As August progressed, the impression that emerges from the petitions in the Mutiny Papers in the NAI is of a wrecked, semi-derelict and starving city. Gamblers and what the petitioners refer to as 'rogues, rascals and bad characters' sat playing cards in the burned out houses that had been looted by the sepoys or received direct hits from British shells; one petition from Mir Akbar Ali of the Faiz Bazaar complains that the gamblers used to sit on the top of the ruins so that they could peer into his zenana courtyard, 'ogle the women within and shout abuses.'[52] Most shops were shuttered and empty, unless they had been taken over as billets for the soldiery, in which case dispirited sepoys could be seen sitting on the steps, 'smoking bhang and churrus'.[53]

Law and order remained as precarious as ever. Groups of hungry sepoys were still demanding protection money, most recently from the shop owners of Chandni Chowk.[54] Others raided neighbouring houses just to stave off starvation. The Gwalior Cavalry, which had been billeted in the Delhi haveli of Franz Gottlieb Cohe—the poet Faras—and had up to the middle of August behaved with unusual restraint, eventually went on the rampage in the adjacent mohalla, stopping in at the local police station on the way back to explain, 'we do not get to eat, therefore we plunder the muhalla.'[55] Outside the walls the situation was even worse: as early as June, Delhi's grass-cutters were refusing to leave the city walls unless accompanied by a military escort.[56]

The desertions continued throughout August: by early September British intelligence estimates put the number of sepoys in the city as low as 25,000, down from a peak of 100,000. When the British attacked the city on 14 September, they encountered far more resistance than they had expected. But the force they eventually defeated was starving, and had lost three quarters of its men to desertion and hunger. In the end, the rebels lost the city of Delhi not because of their lack of courage or even military incompetence, but because of the catastrophic logistical failure and the starvation that ensued even among the defending army.

Notes and References

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2. H.W. Robert Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah* (London: R. Bentley, 1858), p. 156–157.
3. Cited by Charles Allen in *Soldier Sahibs: The Men Who Made the North-West Frontier* (London 2000), p. 305.
4. See Coghill Letters, NAM 6609-139, letter From Lt. Coghill to his Brother, datelined Delhi, 22 September 1857.

5. Abdul Latif, *1857 Ka Tarikhi Roznamacha*, in K.A. Nizami, ed., Naqwatul Musannifin Series (68), (Delhi, 1958), p. 123. For the confectioners see *Proceedings on the Trial of Muhammad Bahadur Shah, Titular King of Delhi, before a Military Commission held at Delhi, on the 27th Day of January 1858* (London, 1859 [hereafter *Trial*]), Narrative of Chunni Lal, newswriter p. 103. See also Kedarnath's Journal, entry for 16th May. Diary of the spy Kedarnath, formerly clerk of the Delhi Gazette, published as Appendix No. 2 in 'Memoirs of Hakim Ahanullah Khan', edited by S Muinul Haq, *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, vol. 6 (Karachi, 1958). Also, *Dihli Urdu Akbhar* issue of 17 May, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
6. National Archive of India (NAI), Mutiny Papers, Collection 111a, no. 10, May 1857.
7. *Trial*, Narrative of Chunni Lal, newswriter, p. 103.
8. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 110, no. 270.
9. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 146, no. 3, May 1857.
10. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 125, no. 12, May 1857.
11. Dehlavi, Zahir, *Dastan i-Ghadr: Ya Taraze Zaheeri* (Lahore, 1955), pp. 82–83.
12. *Dihli Urdu Akbhar*, issue of 24 May 1857.
13. National Archives of India, Mutiny Papers: Horse trader, Collection 67, no. 76, 27 July. The previous item in the collection, no. 75, is Mehrab Khan's friend Rafiullah who says he came into town with the ghazis from Faridabad, sold his horse at the same time as Mehrab Khan sold his, was also robbed by the Gujars and was arrested along with his friend.
14. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 67, no. 14.
15. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 128, no. 43, 13 June 1857.
16. *Trial*, Narrative of Chunni Lal, pp. 105–106; also Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, ed. C.A. Bayly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 126.
17. *Dihli Urdu Akbhar*, issue of the 23 August 1857.
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19. *Dihli Urdu Akhbar*, 14 June, 1857.
20. See for example, NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 67, no. 12, 24 June 1857.
21. NAI, Mutiny Papers. Collection 111b, no. 14, 3 July 1857.
22. *Dihli Urdu Akbhar*, issue of 31 May 1857.
23. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 103, no. 24.
24. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 110, no. 293.
25. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 146, nos 13 and 14, 16 July 1857.
26. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 61, no. 76, 1 June 1857.
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28. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 128, no. 39, 12 June.
29. S. Moinul Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim Ahanullah Khan* (Karachi: Pakistan Historial Society, 1958), p. 16.
30. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 57, no. 185/186, dated 28 July 1857.
31. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 61, no. 296, dated 4 August 1857.
32. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 57, no. 328, dated 14 August 1857.
33. DCO Archive, Mutiny Papers, file no. 3, letter from the spy Turab Ali, 5 August 1857.
34. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 61, no. 547, Undated but probably late July/early August, 1857.
35. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 61, no. 396, dated 17 August 1857.
36. Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim*, p. 21. Before long the moneylenders of Mathura were actually raising armies to aid the British. See Stokes, *The Peasant Armed*, p. 232. To understand why see the excellent account of how the hated *Baniyas* of Mathura were attacked, looted and tortured at the outbreak of the uprising in Gautam Bhadra's essay 'Four Rebels of 1857' in *Subaltern Studies, IV*, ed. R. Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 254. This helps explain why Laxmi Chand may not actually have been in a position to help the rebels, even if he felt inclined to do so. It is

worth noting how much the rise of British rule in general, but especially in its infancy in Bengal, owed to the collusion of Indian moneylenders.

37. Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim*, pp. 28–29.
38. Jeewan Lal, *A Short Account of the Life and Family of Rai Jiwan Lal Bahadur, Late Honourary Magistrate of Delhi with Extracts from His Diary Relating to the Time of the Mutiny 1857 Compiled by His Son* (Delhi, 1902), pp. 43–44.
39. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 20, no. 14, undated but late August 1857; also Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim*, p. 29.
40. DCO Archive, Mutiny Papers, file no. 3, letter from the spy Turab Ali, 5 August.
41. Hassan Khan Moinuddin and Munshi Jeevan Lal, *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, translated by Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (London: A. Constable & Co., 1898), 'Narrative of Munshi Jiwan Lal', pp. 199–200.
42. For the nobles, see *Two Native Narratives*, p. 197; for tax collecting in Gurgaon see NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 20, no. 14, undated but late August 1857; also Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim*, p. 29.
43. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 20, no. 14, undated but late August, 1857.
44. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 15, no. 5 and 6, dated 16 August 1857.
45. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 70, number 243, dated 30 August 1857.
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47. Sir Henry W. Norman and Mrs Keith Young, *Delhi 1857* (London: W & R Chambers, 1902), p. 217.
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49. OIOC, Eur Mss, B 138, 'Account of Said Mobarak Shah'.
50. For lack of Sulphur see NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 15, no. 11, dated 21 August 1857. For the use of captured English spirits in gunpowder manufacture see Collection 60, nos 627–638. For problems in gunpowder manufacture see also DCO Archive, Mutiny Papers, file no. 50, 28 July 1857, New Delhi. Translation of a Letter from Munshee Mahomed Bakar, editor of the *Dihli Urdu Akbhar*, 28 July. For absence of percussion caps see H.H. Greathed, *Letters Written During the Siege of Delhi* (London: Longman, 1858), p. 45, and for failing shells see p. 67. For Gujars looting gunpowder in early days of the uprising see *Dihli Urdu Akbhar*, issue of 31 May.
51. Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, tr. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi, *Dastanbuy* (Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1970), p. 37.
52. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 62, no. 80, dated 3 August 1857.
53. OIOC, Montgomery papers, Mss Eur D1019, no. 174, *Delhee News*, 2 July.
54. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 62, no. 167, dated 5 September 1857.
55. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 67, no. 143, undated but late August.
56. NAI, Mutiny Papers, Collection 62, no. 54, dated 24 June 1857.

5

DURGADAS AND SITARAM
Tales of Loyalty in the Great Indian Uprising

Sabyasachi Dasgupta

> 'Gore Aye Gore Aye', 'Gore Aye' shabda jeno akash, patal, prithibipurna haiya uthilo. (The whites have come, the whites have come. The sounds of 'Gore Aye' reverberated through the sky, underworld and throughout the earth.)[1]

DURGADAS Banerjee's account of his adventures during the mutiny is full of dramatic passages and vivid imagery. Durgadas's account of the rebellion, at times both thrilling and compelling, captures the sheer dread supposedly felt by the mutineers at the coming British counter-attack. 'Gore Aye Gore Aye' suggests the anxiety of both mutinous soldiers and civilians in Bareilly at the prospect of English troops re-entering the city and wreaking their vengeance on its inhabitants. This anxiety is something that we will return to later.[2] Durgadas's narrative of the mutiny forms a major part of his autobiography *Amar Jivan Charit*. After joining the army as a clerk with the 8th Irregular Cavalry regiment in 1853 and following initial postings in Hansi and Burma, Durgadas's regiment moved to Bareilly in late 1856. It was here on 31 May 1857 that Durgadas was first caught up in the mutiny/revolt/war of independence, and Bareilly and Rohillakand provide the backdrop for his loyalist narrative of the rebellion.[3]

The other loyalist whose memoirs are explored in this chapter was a typical soldier of the Bengal army. Sitaram Pandey, putative author of the well-known memoir *From Sepoy to Subedar*, was born in the village of Tilowee in Oudh in 1797 and joined the army in 1812, at the behest of his uncle, a zamindar in the Bengal army.[4] This memoir was edited and first published on the initiative of Lieutenant Colonel Norgate of the Bengal Staff Corps in 1873. Sitaram, with whom Norgate shared a close relationship, is said to have composed his memoirs following his retirement. Some have questioned the reliability of Sitaram's memoir, suggesting that Norgate extensively interpolated his own views into the text.[5]. Yet even if it is more literary than archival in nature, it is contemporaneous, and the narrative at

least bears the hallmarks of close and potentially useful observation: it therefore merits serious and careful consideration. According to the account, Sitaram was, in many ways, a fairly typical Bengal recruit: high caste, from a middling agricultural background (his father owned 150 acres of land) with extant familial connections to colonial service.[6] However, like Durgadas and unlike the majority of Bengal recruits, Sitaram remained loyal to the British throughout 1857. We will examine the motivations for Sitaram's loyalty in due course, but it may be pertinent to note, at this stage, that the main value of Sitaram's account lies in its attempt to present native commentary on the forty-five years preceding the rebellion. Although the authenticity of Sitaram's account is contested, his memoirs of life in the Bengal army provide a uniquely wide-ranging account of colonial military service in the years prior to 1857. While much of Sitaram's narrative may be read as an affirmation of various Orientalist stereotypes, this chapter will explore to what extent Sitaram's account can help us to understand the causes and consequences of the rebellion and consider the motivations of those involved.

This chapter therefore seeks to examine questions of loyalty, resistance, nature and reasons for the revolt through an examination of two loyalist narratives. It also seeks to question traditional understandings of loyalty and resistance. Central to the argument is an attempt to question long-term, linear/teleological histories of 1857 that seek to establish a long and continuous history of discontent and resistance in the Bengal army.[7] I argue that such notions are inherently flawed and that our understandings of 1857 might be enhanced by a more deliberate attempt to evaluate the local and contextual forces that shaped rebellion and loyalty. The uprising in 1857 need not thus be understood primarily as an effect of long-term structural deficiencies in the army's organisation and management. Indeed, if the day-to-day disciplinary record of the respective armies can be taken as the index of disaffection, the Bengal army had a marginally better record than the Bombay army in the few decades preceding 1857.[8] Certainly there were some issues affecting the functioning of the company armies like inadequate avenues and the slow pace of promotion for native soldiers, the transition to a more impersonal mode of command, etc. But the moot point remains that these were not issues unique to the Bengal armies. Therefore a framework of explanation that looks towards factors of long-term decline in the Bengal army culminating in 1857 seems inadequate. As the examples considered here will demonstrate, loyalty and rebellion was conditioned by, and contingent on, a variety of local factors, many of which cannot be reduced to questions of imperial military efficiency.

This chapter further argues for a reappraisal of sources and, specifically, for a more deliberate engagement with first-hand autobiographical accounts and commentaries on 1857. I want to suggest that this reappraisal should go beyond the paradigm of colonial and indigenous sources. It is the historian's duty to engage critically with his or her sources, to read them against the grain

and to delve beyond the obvious. Too rigid a distinction between indigenous and colonial sources serves little purpose: as in the case of Sitaram's contested autobiography, the archival boundaries between colonial and native testimony are much more fluid than such a distinction allows.[9] It is in this spirit that the essay engages with the two loyalist narratives in question.

Having arrived at Bareilly in late 1856, Durgadas settled down to a life of relative comfort. Though a Bengali, Durgadas had grown up in northern India and was familiar with the nuances and cultural milieu of the region. His house became a centre for '*mehfils*', providing a meeting place for some of the town's Bengali population that was distinguished by the abundant food, drink and general merrymaking.[10] In March 1857, Durgadas reports witnessing perceptible changes in the behaviour of the sepoys in the town. There were strong rumours that the company had used cow and pork fat to supply the greasing paper for the new-issue cartridges. These rumours, Durgadas reports, led to great tension in the army among both Hindu and Muslim sepoys, prompting speculation about imminent mutiny. Durgadas reports that dissatisfaction was most prevalent amongst the infantry, some of whom, he states, openly proclaimed that they would refuse to turn out on parade with the new gun. Plans to set ablaze the bungalows of the European officers were, reportedly, discussed. At this, Durgadas approached his regiment's commanding officer. The officer listened solemnly to Durgadas's concerns, before informing him that his spies had already apprised him of the situation. Moreover, as the commanding officer explained, the situation was grave in a number of other stations as well.[11] Having been asked for his own reading of the situation (perhaps a sign of the faith invested in Durgadas by his commanding officer), Durgadas replied that while the cavalry regiments might be relied upon, the same could not be said about the infantry and artillery regiments. Durgadas then related an exchange he had had with a sepoy in which the disgruntled infantryman suggested that the English and the Bengalis were in league with each other.[12]

As the tensions continued over the following months, Durgadas's memoirs record the increasing nervousness of the English inhabitants.[13] Finally, on Sunday 31 May, the regiment stationed at Bareilly broke into revolt. As befits a loyalist, Durgadas first received news of the rebellion whilst discharging his regimental duties; he and his brother[14] were alerted to the uprising while delivering the regiment's accounts to a senior officer. On arriving at the home of Lieutenant Adjutant Beecher, the two men noticed that something was amiss: the bungalow appeared deserted and the lone native attendant was cowering in fear. Asked the reason for his terror, the servant replied that the native troops in Bareilly had mutinied and Beecher had fled on horseback.[15] Unarmed, and alarmed by news of the revolt, Durgadas and his brother assessed their situation. In a dramatic account of his initial meeting with rebel forces, Durgadas reports the sudden sound of loud cannon, immediately followed by gunfire. Shots were flying all around Durgadas and his brother.[16] Smoke billowed from the bungalows of the

European officers and hung thick in the air. The scene, according to Durgadas, was one of absolute mayhem. The native servants were said to be running with their families without any definite sense of direction in the wild hope that they would somehow escape the random shooting. Durgadas describes in vivid detail the chaos that prevailed; some of the servants had their infant children around their shoulders while at the same time striving to dodge bullets. A few were hit by bullets and lay writhing in pain. Durgadas narrates how some were saying 'let us go to our villages' whilst some said 'let us go to the city'.[17]

Durgadas and his brother were in a dilemma: their implicit loyalty to the company threatened their immediate personal safety.[18] Proceeding towards their residence, the brothers encountered signs of further disorder and, on arriving in the vicinity, they observed from a distance that a group of some thirty sepoys were in the act of snatching a horse from its stable. Durgadas's trusted attendant Bhabani was rendering stiff resistance, but he was eventually overwhelmed by the rebels. Bhabani's loyalty stirred Durgadas's own, and his memoirs reflect the narrator's struggle to refrain from entering the fray. Having avoided confronting the rebels, Durgadas entered his house to find it ransacked and stripped bare of his belongings. He was particularly upset to find his favourite horse gone.[19]

While Durgadas's own 'loyalty' is unquestioned in the narrative, his memoirs reflect just how fluid, confused and ambiguous were questions of allegiance and obligation in the early stages of the rebellion. On encountering a troop of cavalrymen, Durgadas and his brother learned from the group's leader, Rissaldar Mohammed Shafi, that his men had intended to join the English but that, on approaching the English, the cavalrymen had been mistaken for mutineers, and the startled English had fled. The regiment's European contingent had made for the safe confines of Nainital. Despite their loyalist intent, Mohammed Shafi's cavalrymen were now faced with the prospect of having to ally themselves with the mutineers.[20]

The Bareilly mutineers were led by General Bakht Khan, whilst the scion of an old aristocratic family by the name of Nawab Bahadur Khan had established himself as Nawab in the district. Bakht Kahn induced Durgadas to join the rebels, inviting him to become paymaster of the rebel forces in Bareilly.[21] Durgadas, however, remained steadfast in his loyalty to the British, stating that he had partaken of the salt of the English and, further, that the mutineers had no order and organisation and that he could not be expected to serve in such a force.[22] The enraged Bakht Khan ordered Durgadas to be imprisoned, alleging that the Bengalis and the English were hand in glove.[23] Subsequently, the wider Bengali population of Bareilly would be accused of collusion with the British. Many of them were imprisoned; some were whipped, while others had to suffer their property being looted. Bareilly's Bengali population had been tarred with the brush of loyalty, and for this they paid a heavy price.[24]

Durgadas escaped the persecution in Bareilly, following the flight of the town's Europeans to Nainital. There he presented his credentials and was welcomed

into the service of the British, latterly raising a body of cavalrymen and seeing action in the campaigns against the mutineers at Kaladunga and Bareilly.[25] Having apparently distinguished himself in these battles—a fact which the British apparently attested after the mutiny[26]—Durgadas entered the city at the head of the colonial forces. Durgadas's account reports that all seemed deserted at first. Gradually people came out of their homes to give a tumultuous welcome to the British, leading us to infer that the people of Bareilly were relieved to see British troops after the oppressions they suffered at the hands of the rebels.[27]

The Loyalist and 1857

If Durgadas's account provides us with a significant native commentary on the rebellion, and on the forces that could shape and inform allegiance through 1857, his memoirs invite questions about his own, personal loyalty: why was Durgadas such an ardent loyalist? Was he representative of general Bengali attitudes or was he an exception? Who constituted a loyalist? Why does Durgadas remain a loyalist despite the fact that he loses all his property in the courts of the English, as he himself laments. Durgadas also had to suffer the ignominy of going to prison, though he does not specify the circumstances that led to his incarceration.[28]

One possible line of interpretation of Durgadas's memoir would be to read in his actions in 1857 the impact of Bengali notions of cultural superiority. This superiority was reflected in his oft-stated contempt for the Purbaiya soldier, who he claims lacked intelligence, method and organisation. His sense of cultural and professional snobbery is apparent throughout his memoirs. For example, during a discussion with English officials on the possibility of the mutineers advancing towards Kaladunga, Durgadas dismisses the prospect by emphatically declaring that these *sattu*-drinking soldiers are less than human and were incapable of launching offensives.

> Bidrohegan jodi Manush hoito, tahule ekdino amra
> Kaladungite tikite paritam na
> Chattukhor Dakatgulo Kapurusher ek shesh.
> Taharai aj Bhoye Sar Hoiya ache.
> Taharai etokhon Hoyto Bhabiteche-Jadi Kaladungite
> Engrez-Sena amaderkai akraman kore ta hole amra ki korbo
>
> [If the mutineers were human we would not have been able to last in Kaladunga. These Sattu-drinking dacoits are big cowards. They are the ones who must be lying motionless through fear. They must be thinking what are we to do in the event of the English army attacking us?].[29]

Whilst it is beyond the scope of the current chapter to trace the genesis of such ideas, it is clear that by 1857 Bengali notions of cultural superiority were

well established. Further, as Durgadas's account makes clear, a sense of cultural snobbery could play an important role in shaping Bengali attitudes towards the mutiny, as it did for Durgadas, whose own sense of identity disbarred him from allying himself with the Purbaiya rebels, whom he regarded as subhuman. While Durgadas's narrative cannot be said to be representative of general Bengali attitudes, his account does suggest some interesting ways in which Bengali identity could inform the meanings of 'loyalty' during 1857.[30] In the absence of similar volumes, Durgadas's autobiography provides an impressionistic but nevertheless potentially useful account of the personal circumstances of one of the many soldiers involved in the uprising.

Loyalty and Disloyalty

Whilst matters of loyalty and disloyalty were conditioned by local allegiances and tensions, it is important to recall that, in different circumstances, the Purbaiya soldiers who had rebelled had fought loyally for the company in countless engagements over the best part of a century. There had been long periods in the Bengal army when rates of dissent were very low.[31] This does not square with notions of continuous discontent and resistance by the Bengal sepoys, upon which some explanations of 1857 have depended.[32] The pattern in the Bengal army seems, on the contrary, to be a cyclical one of periods of calm and periodic instances of collective dissent. It is, therefore, very difficult to draw a linear teleology of increasing and constant disaffection culminating in 1857.

The problem lies with some of existing historiography on the mutiny that has sought to uncover its long-term causes and to portray the Bengal army as an institution burdened with disaffection, discontent and disciplinary problems, which culminated in the grand event of 1857. Much of this work posits a kind of linear history of continuous and increasing discontent ultimately crystallizing in rebellion. Alternative sources may present 1857 in a different light, emphasising that loyalty and rebellion were frequently influenced by factors that were local and contextual. As Durgadas's memoirs make clear, these allegiances could have been shaped in part at least by cultural tensions and dissonances amongst the various communities from which recruits were drawn. However, if Durgadas's account of the rebellion suggests how loyalty could be conditioned by the cultural prejudices of recruits, Sitaram—a high caste, Purbaiya recruit who remained loyal to the British throughout the rebellion—reminds us that loyalty or rebellion was never the product of these alone.[33]

In the months preceding the rebellion Sitaram, like Durgadas, had endeavoured to warn his commanding officer that the native troops were of a sullen disposition. However, unlike in the previous example, Sitaram's

commanding officer felt that the excitement would pass and did not deign to take any precautionary measures.[34] After leaving his regiment for furlough in April, Sitaram learned of the rebellions at Meerut and Delhi, but, having initially disbelieved the reports, he was convinced that the news was genuine after it was confirmed by the deputy commissioner.[35] On returning from the commissioner's office, Sitaram describes finding his entire village agog with the news of the mutinies at Meerut and Delhi, reporting that discontent spread very rapidly and that every native regiment was ready to mutiny. Reports came in constantly of fresh regiments having revolted and killed their officers, and, according to Sitaram, the whole of Oudh was inundated with rebel sepoys.[36]

One day a large party of rebel sepoys arrived at his village. Sitaram endeavoured to persuade them to disperse but the mutineers threatened to shoot him, branding him a traitor and taking him prisoner. According to Sitaram, the mutineer's intention was to take him to Lucknow where he would be punished for his loyalty to the British by having molten lead poured down his throat.[37] The rebels' leader showed Sitaram a proclamation from the 'King of Delhi', calling upon the sepoys to rise up and destroy the English, promising great rewards if they did so.[38] In exhorting the sepoys to fight for their religion, the proclamation emphasised that the company was seeking to make all Brahmins into Christians, highlighting that the new cartridges would force the sepoys to ingest beef and pork.[39] According to Sitaram, the proclamation was widely believed credible, and he reports that its contents had some effect even on him, although he was confident that the company would not interfere in matters of religion and caste. Despite this confidence, Sitaram reports his general anxiety over the avowed objectives of the company, citing a number of familiar complaints: the company had reneged on promises regarding field allowances, it had annexed Oudh unnecessarily and had provided for the extension of missionary activities.[40]

The activities of missionaries, in particular, seem to have irritated Sitaram: his autobiography records the aggressive proselytising of the missionaries and recalls their ubiquitous presence on the streets of Indian towns and cities, as well as their attempts to ridicule Hinduism and extol the superior virtues of Christianity. Despite missionary protestations to the contrary, Sitaram's account reports that the missionaries seemed to enjoy the support of the company.[41] If we are prepared to treat Sitaram's memoirs as at least suggestive of ideas prevalent at the time, his grievances might be taken to reflect the wider grievances of the Purbaiya sepoy. It is possible therefore that in the context of these wider grievances, the greased cartridge affair was sufficient to incite rebellion in circumstances where there had been a general breakdown in trust.[42]

Despite the circumstances, Sitaram's personal sense of loyalty/obligation, like that of Durgadas, overrode other considerations. In spite of his anxieties, Sitaram recalled that the company had been his protector and that he had partaken of its salt for some forty years. Thus resolved to support and assist the company, Sitaram was brought close to despair as the company endured a

series of military reverses during the initial stages of the rebellion.[43] However, Sitaram's fortune, like that of the company, began to improve. Whilst still a captive, Sitaram's group was confronted by a group of mounted white troopers near Kanpur. It was early morning, and the suddenness of the attack rendered all resistance on the part of the mutineers ineffectual. According to Sitaram, the mutineers fled into the jungle, leaving him to his own devices. Though he only narrowly escaped being shot by one of the troopers, Sitaram was saved when an officer fluent in Hindustani heard his pleas and ordered him to be released from his chains.[44] Following his release, Sitaram was enlisted in the corps and, while he was not a good trooper, the commanding officer, exploiting Sitaram's knowledge of Persian, appointed him interpreter. In this capacity, Sitaram spent six weeks with the regiment during which they apparently met and decimated several bodies of mutineers, including a hand-to-hand fight with a regiment of the company's regular native cavalry.[45]

After the mounted regiment returned to Kanpur, Sitaram joined an infantry regiment, and his memoirs suggest that he saw some action with his new corps. However, it is the (in)famous denouement to Sitaram's mutiny narrative that provides arguably the most significant—though not uncontested—exemplar of his loyalty. Whilst commanding a Sikh firing squad detailed with executing rebel sepoys, Sitaram discovered that one of the prisoners was his own son. Repulsed at the prospect of superintending his son's execution, Sitaram requested to be relieved of his duties in charge of the party. Though initially hostile to the suggestion, Sitaram's commanding officer assented to the request, and removed him from the command of the party. Sitaram's narratives record how his agony and moral dilemma was compounded by the taunts of the Sikh soldiers whom he heartily despised.[46] Sitaram's adventures in 1857 thus conclude on a personally traumatic note as he endured the agony of his own son being shot practically before his eyes. Yet, according to Sitaram, his apparent faith in the justness of the company's cause remained unshaken, even to the extent that he endorses the death sentence imposed on his son.

How, then, are we to account for this somewhat extraordinary narrative of Sitaram's loyalty? He did, after all, report some discontent and, in this, we may speculate that he was probably no different than most Purbaiya soldiers on this score. Yet Sitaram did not rebel, and his memoirs recount most conspicuous acts of loyalty. It is the nature of these acts, as well as the chronology of his career and the proximity of his views to those of his colonial contemporaries, that have led some historians to question the authenticity of his account. As we know that a minority of Purbaiya soldiers remained loyal during the rebellion, such a position is not implausible. Moreover, a closer reading of the narrative may suggest some wider factors that shaped Sitaram's behaviour. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to undertake a general enquiry into loyalty and mutiny, we may still speculate on Sitaram's position. Cut-off from the rest of his regiment, while on a furlough, Sitaram was isolated from the events that

triggered the mass uprising of the sepoys. Even amongst a disaffected regiment, not every individual within the ranks would be prepared to play an active role in an uprising, and fewer still would cross the psychological barrier necessary to kill their own superior officers. Once certain individuals have overcome this barrier others, discontented but wavering, may follow suit. In the case of the Bengal army, with its strong bonds of clan and caste allied to the shared experience of army life, peer pressure of this sort assumed an added importance and value. Once certain individuals in the regiment have mutinied, the entire regiment may feel compromised and could have no option but to join in.[47] We might speculate, then, that Sitaram's loyalty might have been tested more thoroughly had he been on service, within regimental environs, at the time of the rebellion. As it was, Sitaram's circumstances provided alternative possibilities, and although some episodes in his narrative may be challenged, a more sympathetic reading might reveal plausible explanations for his loyalty.

The Question of Masculinity and 1857

Sitaram and Durgadas thus present two contrasting instances of loyalty. While Sitaram was one of a minority of Purbaiya recruits who remained loyal during 1857, Durgadas possibly represented those middle-class Bengalis who were firmly allied with the British. Unlike most of this group, however, Durgadas played an active role in support of the company, while others were content only to convene meetings and pass resolutions which declared their loyalty. While I have already suggested that Durgadas might have shared with his fellow Bengalis a sense of cultural alienation vis-à-vis the mutineers, a close reading of his memoirs reveals that Purbaiya recruits probably evinced similar notions of superiority with regard to the middle-class Bengali. Such differences were, in effect, mutually reinforcing, and possibly served to further exacerbate the cultural divide. Though Sitaram seems to have crossed this divide, his personal circumstances—combined, perhaps, with Norgate's editorial pen—may help to explain his putative loyalty.

In his account of the pre-mutiny period, Durgadas's memoirs reveal how some of these differences may have been manifest, and suggest some of the means by which they could be mitigated. He reports, for example, that although he was a Bengali, the sepoys respected him since he was a Brahmin, and that they were also impressed with his physical prowess and wrestling skills. According to Durgadas, this latter ability amazed the sepoys, since it was widely believed that Bengalis were physically inept. One sepoy had reportedly asked, in disbelief, how it was that despite being a Bengali he could be so strong. Durgadas's reply—'Who said that a Bengali couldn't be strong? I know Bengalis who have the strength [of] ten of you'—contested representations of the physical weakness of Bengalis.[48]

While it is difficult to pinpoint the origins of Indian notions of regional physical differences, a recruitment policy based on selective enlistment within communities with a long tradition of military service and the exclusion of other communities who were lacking in the appropriate tradition was somewhat akin to the martial race theory that took centre stage in the colonial army post-1857. It was believed that the upper-caste sepoys from Avadh and Bhojpur who were termed as 'Purbaiyas' provided ideal recruits. They were brave, honourable and obedient and masculine looking to boot and often had a long family history of military service.[49] They were, in short, the epitome of all that was manly. It was but natural that a community that had been attributed such a marked martial hue would be preferred for enlisting.[50] The Purbaiya, having realised his exalted status within the environs of the Bengal army, managed to extract concessions in situations where his performance of military duties apparently conflicted with his religious sentiments.

In contrast, communities like the Bengalis were effectively disbarred from army service. While there was no official injunction, it was a tradition that Bengalis would not be taken in the army.[51] General C. Troup, the commanding officer at Nainital in 1857, mentioned in the certificate awarded to Durgadas for his services during the mutiny that he had never heard of a Bengali exhibiting such bravery.[52] The implication, of course, was that Bengalis as a whole were not known for their courage in combat. To some extent, these British stereotypes may have been internalised and appropriated by Indians. These images recur frequently in Durgadas's memoirs: while describing a Bengali doctor in the service of the English, Durgadas presents him as a caricature of exaggerated cowardice, making great fun of the doctor's attempts at horse riding and his terror at the prospect of riding lessons. After the mutineers attacked the station to which the doctor was attached, Durgadas reports the doctor's terror-stricken flight from the conflict, perhaps in an attempt to portray himself as an exceptional Bengali.[53] In this sense, we may judge that Durgadas's narrative reflects his desire to distance himself from the stereotypes of Bengali effeminacy. This may suggest a defence mechanism; a means of reaffirming his masculinity in the context of his interactions with communities who were considered martial and who fancied themselves as so.[54]

By contrast, the Purbaiya soldiers were celebrated for their masculinity and revelled in it. Of the various indices that formed their masculinity, wrestling—a practice embedded in the society from which they were recruited—held an important place in the world of the Purbaiya soldier. Prowess in wrestling endowed an exalted status, so that even white officers could acquire a special prestige if they excelled in the art of wrestling. Sitaram's memoirs, for example, include a description of a heroic English officer whom he admires. As Sitaram's description makes clear, a good deal of significance was attached to the fact

that the officer was an expert wrestler and could beat the native soldiers at their traditional sport. In the words of Sitaram:

> There were eight English officers in my regiment and the captain of my Company was a real sahib. His name was Burrumpel, he was six feet three inches tall, his chest was broad as the monkey gods and he was tremendously strong. He often used to wrestle with the sepoys and earned universal admiration for doing so. He had learnt all the throws and no sepoy could defeat him.[55]

Deeply inscribed notions of masculinity of this sort may help us to understand patterns of loyalty and rebellion during the uprising. Colonial bias towards the high-caste, masculine Purbaiya recruits resulted in their dominance of the Bengal army, a dominance which they retained till 1857 in spite of increasing competition from communities like the Gurkhas and the Sikhs. The common ties of caste, clan and residence shared amongst a vast section of the Bengal army no doubt facilitated the outbreak and spread of the revolt. However, pervasive notions of masculinity could also generate cultural dissonance amongst native troops, and these notions may have contributed to shaping distinct communities of rebels and loyalists during 1857. While the 'masculine' Purbaiya may have held the Bengali (and specifically the Bengali middle classes) in contempt, the Bengali probably regarded the Purbaiya as lowly, subhuman, retrograde, ignorant and driven by superstition. The mutual contempt resulted in a gulf that possibly made cooperation and collaboration difficult.

Memoirs as Sources

While the two narratives explored here have served thus far as an entry point to analyse the mindset of two loyalists hailing from diverse and antagonistic backgrounds, and who derived their loyalty from different vantage points, the accounts are also valuable as a means of exploring some of the long-term issues that have been identified as contributory factors in the rebellion. The memoirs of these two individuals may thus suggest some of the reasons for the military failure of the rebels.

Durgadas's account of the mutiny in Rohillkhand vividly reflects the dread that the impending arrival of the English in Bareilly excited in the mutineers. It appears that although the mutinous sepoys had crossed an important barrier by repudiating their allegiance to the company, many continued to be cautious about colonial retribution. If Durgadas's account is to be believed, the sepoys were invariably apprehensive about an open encounter with the British. Attacks against the British were often characterised by indecisiveness and procrastination leading, in turn, to decisive delays.[56] Sitaram makes a similar point, noting that

the rebels invariably sought to avoid open encounters with British forces.[57] Whilst rebel forces would withstand a single volley, they would frequently disperse before a determined charge by the company troops. Sitaram claims that he could not recall a single instance in which rebel troops withstood a company charge and noted, further, that the performance of the rebel troops at Delhi, where a body of men some 70,000 strong could not defend Delhi from 10,000 British-led troops, did not reflect well on the rebels' military capacity.[58]

Durgadas's and Sitaram's comments obviously need to be treated with caution. These are loyalists holding a low opinion of the rebels, whom they regard as renegades and men untrue to their salt. A certain amount of active bias against the mutineers, therefore, would inevitably inform their views. We might therefore dismiss such claims as the prejudices of loyalists eager to denigrate their foe. Alternative readings, however, are possible: the apparent apprehensiveness of the rebels in certain circumstances may suggest that residual anxieties concerning the power of the company or the superiority of English arms.[59] Alternatively, we might explain such behaviour by recognising that loyalty and rebellion were often determined by contingent factors, as shown above, and that, in such circumstances, flight or retreat, may attest to the more ambivalent commitment to 'rebellion' made by many of the so-called mutineers. In the absence of more extensive native testimonies on 1857, Durgadas's and Sitaram's observations at least deserve to be treated seriously, with attempts being made to corroborate or discount this reading through a detailed survey of the conduct of mutinous regiments, a survey for which unfortunately few sources may exist (although Roy and Dalrymple in this volume offer suggestions in this direction).

Conclusion

The native accounts considered above cause us to consider what are the best sources for exploring the phenomenon of 1857. A fresh perspective on 1857 certainly requires the creative use of existing sources, as well as a more comprehensive use of those that have been little used.[60] Such an examination may usefully contribute to the wider debates on 1857. While many mutiny historians continue to emphasise that religious unity was a key feature in the rebellion, Durgadas's account of life in Bareilly provides us with various instances of Hindu–Muslim conflict. In one case a Muslim—who during the British Raj had lost a legal case to a Hindu—utilised the rebellion to settle scores by hiring some goondas to throw pieces of a slaughtered cow inside his compound.[61] Some Hindu rebel soldiers happened to be in the vicinity of the Hindu's house and intervened. This led to what Durgadas describes as a full-fledged fight between the Muslim goondas of the city and the Hindu soldiery.[62] There were also instances of Hindu merchants being tortured for money by the

mainly Muslim soldiery of the Nawab. Durgadas represents these as instances of Hindu–Muslim conflict.[63] Were these ostensible instances of Hindu–Muslim conflicts really class conflicts and the settling of old scores that had their origin in non-religious issues, or was there a cultural angle that cannot be explained by economic reductionism? On such points, conventional works of history have their limitations. While they may enlighten us about the reasons and nature of the revolt, they often do not give us a concrete sense of the event, about what the mutiny really meant for people living through the experience. If only in imaginative terms, it is here that autobiographies and literary accounts of 1857 may have a role to play. As with the partition of 1947, or the many Australian convict and Afro-American slave narratives that have been studied by historians—from Olaudah Equiano to Frederick Douglas and Miles Franklin—it is often only literature and literary memoirs that can provide us with an insight into the emotions and experiences of those involved in traumatic events of the past. Autobiographical accounts of 1857 by Ghalib[64] and Durgadas, alongside the native accounts edited by Metcalfe, although highly contested, may therefore still provide us with a useful entry point from which to begin to relate the histories of those times.

We have in this chapter used the memoirs of Durgadas and Sitaram as an entry point to probe the complex nature of loyalty and resistance during 1857. While it is hazardous to make definitive statements on the basis of two autobiographies, I have suggested possible readings and emphasised the contingency of concepts like loyalty and rebellion. These local and contextual forces, for example, regarding notions of masculinity (or the perceived lack of it), may have played a bigger role in shaping the dynamics of events than has been given credence. In the absence of a larger corpus of source material, historians must probe those that are available and, on the basis of these, endeavour to address and interpret, rather than simply ignoring, the interrelations of loyalty and rebellion during the Great Uprising of 1857.

Notes and References

1. Durgadas Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit* (Reprint, Calcutta: Ananya Publishers, 1954), p. 90.
2. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit* (Reprint, Calcutta: Ananya Publishers, 1954). He wrote his memoirs at the behest of the editor of the Bangabasi magazine, Jogvesh Chandra Bose. An early version of his autobiography was possibly published in Janabhoomi around 1890–1891. Durgadas makes an allusion to overhearing people discussing his published memoirs in Janmabhumi while he was on the train to Calcutta in 1890. In 1889 he had met Jogesh Chandra Bose, who gave him the idea of writing it, so it could have been slightly earlier than 1890–1891.
3. Ibid., the concluding part of Durgadas's adventures would be set against the picturesque settings of Nainital, which remained in the hands of the British and to where he escapes to raise a body of loyalist troops for the English.

4. Tilowee, now in Uttar Pradesh. The controversy surrounding Sitaram's memoirs is well known. See James Lunt, ed., *From Sepoy to Subedar, being the Life and Adventures of Subedar Sitaram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army written and related by himself* (Reprint, Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970), translated and first published by Lieutenant Colonel Norgate, Lahore, Bengal Staff Corps in 1873. The memoir will henceforth be referred to as *From Sepoy to Subedar*.
5. Patrick Cadell makes a strong case for Sitaram's memoirs being genuine. He wrote an article strongly espousing its authenticity in the 1932 issue of the 'Journal of the United Service Institution'. In general I feel that the memoirs contain large elements of verisimilitude though the views of Sitaram expressed in the book are heavily influenced by Colonel Norgate's transcription. The demand for caution in analysing Sitaram's utterances in no way detracts from the usefulness of the memoir. To dismiss it as purely fictitious (on the basis, for example, of its chronological inconsistences) would be to entirely miss the point and to apply a standard of verification far higher than that applied to many other autobiographical works and sources derived from colonial archives.
6. For an analysis of the recruitment policy of the pre-1857 Bengal army and the people who were typically recruited refer to Chapter 4 of Sabyasachi Dasgupta, *In Defence Of Honour And Justice: Sepoy Rebellions in the 19th Century* (New Delhi: Primus, forthcoming).
7. Two prominent proponents of the long term decline thesis are Amiya Barat and Saul David. For a detailed exposition of the long term decline thesis see Amiya Barat, *Bengal Native Infantry: Its Organisation and Discipline, 1796–1853* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962) and Saul David, *Indian Mutiny, 1857* (London: Penguin, 2002).
8. It would be prudent to remember that, in some cases, the loyalist in 1857 had been the rebel during the Vellore Mutiny of 1806, and vice versa. For a detailed discussion on these issues see Sabyasachi Dasgupta and Kaushik Roy, 'Discipline and Disobedience in the Bengal and Madras Armies,1807–56' in Kaushik Roy, ed., *War and Society in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
9. Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastunbay: A Diary of the Indian Revolt of 1857*, translated from the original Persian with a critical Introduction by Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1970). Hassan Khan Moinuddin and Munshi Jeevan Lal, *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, translated by Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (London: A. Constable & Co., 1898). Syed Ahmad Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* (Reprint, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000). Khan originally wrote the tract in Urdu in 1858 and its title was '*Ashab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*'. He was in effect the first Indian who dubbed it a revolt, something that transcended the appendage of a mere mutiny.
10. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, p. 31.
11. Ibid., the commanding officer is not mentioned by name.
12. The sepoy in question would be in all probability from Awadh, which would refer roughly to modern day Uttar Pradesh, or he could have been from present day eastern Bihar.
13. The commanding officer at Bareilly revealed to Durgadas during his conversation that reports of simmering discontent had emanated from several stations. The sepoys in Bareilly had an inkling of the impending storm and became increasingly belligerent. At the beginning of May a select body of sepoys comprising representatives from the infantry, cavalry and artillery were said to have met to discuss matters. The sepoys were still wavering and could not come to any definitive decision. Simultaneously, the English were holding secret meetings to which certain trusted natives such as Durgadas and Mohammed Shafi, the Rissaldar of the 6th Cavalry Regiment stationed at Bareilly, were invited. Both he and Durgadas assured the English that the cavalry would not revolt and would if required put down any intended mutiny by the infantry regiments, thus hinting at a divide between the infantry and cavalry troops. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, pp. 50–51.

14. Ibid., p. 54.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 56. 'Abar Godum Godum shabde topdhani haite lagilo. Pralay Kaler Jeno Maha-Kallol smukhito hoilo' (Again the air reverberated with loud sounds of cannon fire. It appeared as if the destruction of the world was approaching).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 71.
19. Ibid., p. 70.
20. Ibid., p. 68. The English had prior information that the sepoys would mutiny on the 31 May 1857. They therefore assembled in a mango grove to decide on a joint course of action. They were relying upon some trusted native officers and sepoys to carry them to the idyllic safety of Nainital. Presently the imagined danger they perceived from Rissaldar Mohammed Shafi's men, who were in reality galloping to join their side, provided the impetus for them to escape toward Nainital.
21. Ibid., p. 86.
22. Ibid., pp. 100–101.
23. Ibid., *Angrez aur Bangali sab ek hai* (The English and the Bengali are hand in glove). Durgadas and his brother go to a temple after the mayhem and converse with a sanyasi. It is here that a body of cavalry troops led by a Duffadar arrives and requests him to accompany them. One must mention that Durgadas was on ostensibly good terms with the majority of native troops stationed at Bareilly, as he lent money to a large number of them.
24. Ibid., Durgadas says that the Bengalis of Bareilly had to undergo extremely harsh conditions in prison. The ceilings leaked, and the advent of the monsoons made the jail a damp and miserable place. There were no proper mattresses to lie down on, and the rains had muddied them. Coupled with these were the heavy chains and the periodic blows of the prison guard Banergee, *AmarJivana-Charit*, pp. 250–255.
25. Ibid., p. 289. The situation was grave as the mutineers were close at hand in Haldwani. The need of the hour was to advance and occupy Kaladunga: this held the key to the defence of Nainital. Durgadas's tribulations read like a thriller. He is put under house arrest under the guard of a body of troops with whom he is on friendly terms. Durgadas eventually manages to escape from the house and initially takes refuge in the house of a famed dancing girl, Panna, whom he had recently saved from the clutches of a rapacious zamindar. (This section of the narrative has many of the characteristics of British colonial adventure stories that are typical of the era.) The vacating of Bareilly by Bakht Khan and his troops emboldens Durgadas to re-enter Bareilly, but he is soon forced to escape to Nainital following an arduous route through jungles where he experiences many other travails. There he raises a body of horsemen to fight against the rebels.
26. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, p. 90.
27. Ibid., p. 350. Durgadas paints us a vivid picture of the alleged anarchy that prevailed during the rule of the rebels in Bareilly. 'Might is right' was the order of the day, and women and property were not safe, see pp. 145–160. There is also an underlying anti-Muslim bias in Durgadas's narrative that would be evident from my renderings in the main text of his depiction of Hindu–Muslim conflict during rebel rule. Rebel rule is represented as a return to the tyranny of Muslim rule from whose clutches English rule had liberated the Hindus. Durgadas further claims that ordinary Muslims prayed for a return to English rule, for the rebellion had brought no tangible benefits: rather, it had brought chaos. Durgadas hints that it was the Muslim elite who sought to gain most from the end of English rule.
28. Ibid., p. 6. Durgadas is very circumspect about the circumstances that led to this disaster and his ultimate imprisonment. The entire episode is presented very sketchily in the text.
29. Ibid., p. 321.

30. It is generally held that the Bengali intelligentsia that had benefited materially and socially from colonial rule firmly supported the company during 1857. Benoy Ghose has roughly argued to this effect in his article 'The Bengali Intelligentsia and the Revolt', in P.C Joshi, ed., *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium* (Calcutta, Delhi: K.P. Bagchi and Company, first published in 1957). A perusal of the *Hindoo Patriot* edited by Harishchandra Mukherjee does indicate the presence of such sentiments. Although loyalist, the journal was not necessarily servile. Thus despite condemning the sepoys as ignorant and ridden with superstition, the editorials and certain articles in the newspaper were occasionally critical of the European community and adopted a tone of qualified rather than outright approval of British rule in India. See, Benoy Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century: Bengal*, vols 4 and 5 (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979).
31. See Dasgupta, *In Defence of Honour and Justice*, Ch. 2.
32. A considerable body of mutiny literature argues along these lines, either explicitly or implicitly. Some of these are: John William Kaye, *A History of the Great Revolt* (3 vols) (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1864, Reprint, Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988). See also Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny: Giving a Detailed Account of the Sepoy Insurrection in India and a Concise History of the Great Military Events which have tended to Consolidate British Empire in Hindostan* (London: London Printing and Publishing Company, 1858–1859); Barat, *Bengal Native Infantry*; D. Vinayak Savarkar, *India's War Of Independence, 1857–1858* (London, 1909, Reprint, New Delhi, 1970); S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty Seven* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1957); R.C. Majumder, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957).
33. James Lunt, ed., *From Sepoy to Subedar*, pp. 165–166.
34. Ibid., p. 163.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., pp. 163–164.
37. Ibid., p. 164. Sitaram interestingly mentions that the leader of these mutineers was a sepoy though there were two *subedars* in the party. Ibid., p. 165. These were unsettled times and normal hierarchies were not operating. Therefore, it is nothing unusual for a sepoy to command a body of troops, despite the presence of two *subedars*. I have argued elsewhere that the revolt witnessed the common sepoy taking a very active rule, often rendering the authority of the native officers ineffectual.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., pp.165–166.
40. Ibid., pp. 165–166.
41. Sitaram, however, did not lose faith over the enormous good fortune of the company. He was also of the firm belief that the mutineers who had committed such enormous crimes could not possibly enjoy a sustained spell of good luck and implies that their crimes would catch up with them soon. Ibid., p. 166.
42. Ibid., p. 165. For a deeper exploration of the role of rumour and the greased cartridges affair in inciting the mutiny at Meerut in May 1857, see Kim Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857 Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).
43. Ibid., p. 166.
44. Ibid. Sitaram says that though the original intention of the mutineers was to march to Lucknow they changed their mind supposedly after receiving direct orders from the Nana Saheb.
45. Ibid., p. 167.
46. Ibid, p. 168.
47. The recruitment policy to the infantry units of the Bengal army till 1857 was strongly biased in favour of high caste recruits from the Bhojpur region of modern day Bihar and Avadh, which roughly corresponds to modern Uttar Pradesh. Recruitment usually happened through serving soldiers on leave. They were asked to bring back clansmen, relations or neighbours from their

villages. This resulted in strong and unique ties among the soldiers. In addition there was of course the natural bonding that army discipline and training implied in any professional army, see Dasgupta, *In Defence Of Honour and Justice*, Ch. 2.

48. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, p. 10.
49. The long traditions of military service in Oudh and Bihar are described in Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethno-history of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
50. Ibid.
51. Kaushik Roy, 'Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army 1859–1913', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 34, no. 3, (July 1997), pp. 321–354.
52. Ibid., p. 5.
53. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, p. 321.
54. Both Ashish Nandy and Mrinalini Sinha deal with the issue of masculinity under colonialism. However, their discussion stresses the interface between colonialism and indigenous society and its impact on notions of masculinity. They do not much address the perceptions and images of indigenous communities vis-à-vis one another. See Ashish Nandy, *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford Publishing House, 1983) and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). However, we must be alive to the fact that Durgadas was writing in the 1890s, a period in which such stereotypes, according to Mrinalini Sinha, had taken firm root.
55. Lunt, *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p. 23. It must be admitted that Sitaram's account of the ideal European officer squared with that of certain classic colonial stereotypes.
56. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, pp. 90–91.
57. Lunt, *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p. 167. Again the possibility of Norgate imposing his own biases on Sitaram cannot be ignored.
58. Ibid.
59. The actual breaking out of mutinies in several regiments may have been at moments when the sepoys felt emboldened to cross the threshold because they believed that they had hapless English troops in their power. The prospect of fighting British regiments fully prepared and armed to the teeth may have been different.
60. Rajat Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonalty and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall Of A Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (Delhi: Penguin, 2006). In the process, one needs to examine again clichéd questions such as the issue of religion and the revolt of 1857, especially in the light of the recent work of Rajat Ray and William Dalrymple. Was it a war of religion or was religion merely an overarching framework for the expression of economic and professional grievances of the sepoy? While one may differ with Dalrymple, it is true that the majority of mutiny historians have taken it for granted that 1857 was a glowing instance of Hindu–Muslim unity.
61. Banergee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, p. 158.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p. 159.
64. See Ghalib's *Dastunbay*.

6

RECONSTRUCTING THE IMPERIAL MILITARY AFTER THE REBELLION

Gavin Rand

THIS chapter explores imperial military administration in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion. In focusing on the various ways in which 1857 was understood and interpreted, as well as on the 'lessons' the events were thought to convey, I also want to explore how reactions to the rebellion influenced military and colonial strategies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. If it is widely accepted that 1857 had a profound impact on the ideologies of colonial rule in South Asia and beyond, we have less sense of the administrative mechanisms on which governmental practices of rule devolved. By examining the transmissions between 1857 and the 'martial race' reforms of the 1880s and 1890s, this paper seeks to illuminate certain key aspects of military administration that have been rather marginalised in much of the existing literature.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, race and (especially) caste were key explanatory tropes for colonial administrators and historians alike, and one of the principal 'lessons' of 1857, as we will see, emphasised the importance of surveying, monitoring and regulating the ethnography of the recruits who made up the Indian Army.[1] This reading of the rebellion, and the administrative measures which derived from it, had significant consequences in the late nineteenth century. In the immediate aftermath of 1857, ethnographic knowledge was harnessed in order to diversify recruiting so as to ensure that no single group predominated in the ranks of the imperial military, while subsequently, under Roberts, ethnography legitimised the narrowing of recruitment to certain 'martial races'. Often regarded as a distinct break with post-mutiny policy, Roberts' martial race project is better understood as an effect of the post-1857 settlement. The apparent discontinuity reflects more the problems associated with organising and processing knowledge in the aftermath of the rebellion (and the gradual resolution of these problems in the 1870s and 1880s) than it does a fundamental shift in nature of military administration.

The processes by which military policy and strategy evolved during the late nineteenth century also have a bearing on wider historiographical questions. The debates around the notion of Indian 'difference', for example, have rarely engaged with the wealth of archival sources documenting the history of the Indian Army, arguably the key imperial institution for the newly constituted Crown Raj. If the colonial sense of Indian alterity was hardened by the rebellion—as in some ways it clearly was—it is also important to recognise the ways in which 1857 helped to give shape to colonialism's sense of its own modernity. Readings of 1857, and formulations of military strategy after the rebellion, turned increasingly on an opposition that anticipated the impacts of scientific and technological developments whilst reflecting on the alterity (and backwardness) of the sepoys (and the Indian population more generally). This tautology had an important impact on military administration in the late nineteenth century as discourses promising a 'scientific' treatment of imperial military strategy were mobilised to justify wide-ranging reforms. The martial race reforms, however, do not simply represent the hardening of a notion of Indian difference, for behind the shift to the martial army lay a series of administrative and economic imperatives which the ascendant martial race discourse rather obscured. Exploring these issues allows us to grasp much more fully how, why and to what extent notions of race informed colonial rule in the period.

The Lessons of the Past

> Assuredly the past contains valuable lessons which may well be remembered with profit when the day of action comes.
>
> —Government of India, *The Revolt in Central India, 1857–9* (1908).[2]

Contemporary responses to the rebellion were numerous and varied greatly in range, content and objective. Nevertheless, such enterprises shared a number of significant features. From the initial 'on-the-spot' accounts of officers and administrators, through the extensive regional 'narratives' prepared during the course of the counter-insurgency operations in 1857–1858, to the exhaustive investigations convened at the behest of the metropolitan authorities, interpreting the rebellion was always, as Ranajit Guha argued, an exercise in counter-insurgency.[3] However, the post-1857 proliferation of writing on and about the rebellion suggests, in important ways, the weakness of the colonial state rather than its strength: an example of what C.A. Bayly has called an 'information panic'.[4] Although the central problematic of post-mutiny reconstruction—the organisation of the imperial military—was frequently constituted in such a way as to negate the fundamental challenge to colonial authority implicit in the rebellion, the extensive investigations are themselves testament to the profoundly destabilising effects of the uprising.

The Royal Commission formed in July 1858, under the charge of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Peel, to consider the reconstruction of the imperial military took evidence from some fifty witnesses, each considered 'expert' in various aspects of imperial military practice. In March of the following year the commissioners submitted their report to Parliament: a concise seven pages, accompanied by more than 600 pages of dense addenda, supplementary papers and appendices. The report was the culmination of an extensive investigation into the mutiny: both in London and in India official enquiries into the causes of the uprising had begun shortly after the scale of the rebellion had become clear. Some months before the formation of the Royal Commission, Parliament had initiated its own enquiries into the causes of the rebellion, calling for information on the various castes from which the East India Company had latterly recruited its armies.[5] At the instigation of the Viceroy, a similar survey was undertaken in India.[6] The connection posited between recruitment, caste and the rebellion is significant and reflects the widely held contemporary perception that the preponderance of Brahmins in the Bengal army—described by one officer as 'a quasi-Masonic body'—had precipitated the rebellion.[7] Many of the 'narratives' and first-hand accounts produced by officers serving in India made this link and it was processed, much in the fashion described by Guha, into the rump of colonial historiography.[8] Irrespective of the many problems that this rendering of the rebellion encodes—especially in overlooking the diverse regional characteristics of insurgency—the formulation was commonplace.

Certainly, the bulk of the evidence gathered by the Peel Commission emphasised the connections between the ethnography of the Bengal recruits and the uprising. In fact, while much of the labour of the Royal Commission was focused on the European elements of the imperial garrison, the commissioners' report frequently emphasised the colonial specificity of the native army, concluding that many of the questions referred for their consideration appeared beyond metropolitan resolution. The apparently intractable nature of the problems confronting the commissioners was manifest in a number of ways but was most evident in their reluctance to provide definite answers to the questions set in the terms of the enquiry. While content to fix broad parameters for imperial strategy, the commissioners reached few definite conclusions and frequently chose to defer the authority vested in them to the expertise of the authorities in India. Thus, while it was recommended that the proportion of European to Indian troops should not exceed 1:3—and 1:2 in Bengal—the commissioners declared themselves unable to reach a definite conclusion on the size or distribution of the imperial garrison.[9] Though a number of questions were resolved by the report, these were typically discreet and relatively minor issues: it was widely agreed, for example, that native troops should be excluded from the artillery (and other 'scientific arms' of the service), and that it would be inexpedient to raise colonial troops from outside the subcontinent for

service in India. More complex questions—regarding regimental organisation, for example—were rather fudged.[10] Having thus 'disposed' of the questions referred for their enquiry, the commissioners appended to their report a series of further recommendations, including the widely cited suggestion that the native army be a mixed force, in which various 'nationalities and castes' were 'mixed promiscuously through each regiment'. It was also suggested that the uniform of native troops be modified—for the purpose of 'assimilating it more to the dress of the country, and making it more suitable to the climate'—and that the powers of regimental commanding officers be increased.[11] These points aside, the commissioners avoided specific recommendations and, in concluding their report, declared that they had

> felt themselves precluded from entering into minute details, on many subjects referred to them for inquiry, from an apprehension of fettering the free action of the authorities in India, on points of a purely local nature, which, they conceive, must ultimately be decided in that country.[12]

In part, the tentative nature of the commissioners' recommendations reflects the practical limits and pressures that confronted the British in the aftermath of the rebellion. Radical restructuring of the imperial military was constrained by the financial restrictions which the mutiny bequeathed and, more importantly, by the readiness of various Indian communities to enlist: the organisation and structure of the new army was shaped above all by the levies inherited from the counter-insurgency operations. Recalling Ripon's description of the post-1857 settlement as 'purely accidental', David Omissi rightly emphasises the pragmatic and reactive nature of the administration in this period.[13] The commissioners' rather insipid recommendations and the apparently limited impact of their report have left the Peel Commission peripheral to much of the historiography. Sandwiched between the bookends of the rebellion on the one hand, and the rise of Roberts and the martial races on the other, the mechanics of reconstruction and developments of the 1860s and 1870s are obscured in much of the current literature. Heather Streets' recent history of the martial race theory, for example, notes the important roles played by the key 'martial races'—especially the Sikhs and the Gurkhas—during the rebellion and establishes some connections between 1857 and the emergence of the martial army in the 1880s, but does so principally by focusing on metropolitan reportage.[14] While popular accounts of the counter-insurgency operations (and especially of the role played by particular groups in such operations) undoubtedly shaped narratives of martial masculinity, it is hard to believe that the good service of such regiments during 1857–1858 was central to the genesis of the martial race theory.[15] In those few accounts where the evidence gathered by Peel is discussed at some length, as in K. Roy's work, the very different strategic rationale invoked after 1857 is compared with that which catalysed Roberts' reforms in the 1880s—a comparison which

tends to downplay the important administrative and epistemological continuities which bridge the two periods.[16]

While there were clear strategic differences, there was also significant continuity between the post-mutiny reconstructions and the rise of the martial army under Roberts. In military praxis as in other aspects of imperial policy, 1857 prompted a reconfiguring of the terms in which imperial policy was reckoned—emphasising the importance of national, India-wide metrics for administration—and this shift, in itself, was to exercise a significant influence on the reconstruction of the Indian Army.[17] Although many of the prescriptions offered in the aftermath of the rebellion were contradictory, and though the Royal Commission undeniably offered an inconclusive raft of recommendations, the injunction to study, record and monitor the ethnography of the native army was shared even by those who urged fundamentally dissimilar measures. Though the lessons of 1857 were very often contested, the impulse to learn those lessons was a powerful motor for long-term change, and the settlement that emerged after 1857 had a profound impact on the ways in which these lessons were constituted in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The synoptic overview of India, the military and the sepoys which evolved during this period was developed in large part (and in particular terms) as a response to the rebellion. The ethnographic rendering of 1857—and of the Indian Army and population—was key to many of the (often very different) prescriptions for the Indian Army offered after the rebellion and also underwrote the martial reforms of Roberts in the 1880s. If we are to properly understand the shift to martial recruiting in the latter part of the century, we need first to understand the terms in which rebellion and reconstruction were made legible and intelligible.

Reconstruction

> Manifestly, the question is far from being a mere technical matter; it is one involving grave political, financial, and even social considerations, and claims to be considered as a measure of Imperial moment.
>
> —Political and Military Committee of the Council of India, 1859.[18]

By foregrounding the role of the military in debates on imperial policy, the rebellion had a profound impact on metropolitan interest in the Indian Army. In part, as the Political and Military Committee made clear, such interest reflected the scale of the crisis precipitated by the mutiny. As one correspondent to *Colborn's United Service Magazine* emphasised in 1859:

> It is ... essential to the successful development of our Indian future, that the native army shall be reorganised on a plan which shall eschew all errors of our

> former system ... by keeping the Sepoys under a really effective discipline, while respecting their religious prejudices and so arranging the terms of service as to render it their interest to be faithful to their salt.
>
> Our true policy is to treat the social organization of India as we do its famous river and accepting the general course it has marked out for itself, turn it to the very best advantage. As we embank and deepen the river, construct docks to be filled by its waters and preserving all its customary commercial marts connect them by our steamboats in substitution for their antiquated craft, so should we deal with the ancient institutions of the land which, however, vitiated in the course of ages, were originally suited to the genius of the people, and when reformed and impartially administered are much more the likely to afford the ground-work of future benefits than any wholesale substitution of English laws, excellent in themselves, but unsuited by circumstances to a people who move in one settled track.[19]

The metaphoric opposition of (colonial) engineering and (Indian) nature that frames this narrative suggests the way in which 1857 was constituted as a marker of Indian 'difference'. It is something of a historiographical commonplace that, by cementing the widely held perception of India's alterity, 1857 had a profound effect on the nature and range of colonialism in South Asia. Victoria's post-mutiny declaration is seen as an indication of the way in which the British attempted to consolidate their rule in a more 'Oriental' framework—seeking out the 'natural leaders' of the population, and curtailing the reformist impulses of the earlier 'liberal' imperialists. However, as the Ganges metaphor indicates, 1857 not only bolstered a sense of Indian alterity and tradition, it also helped to crystallise the opposite sense of colonialism's modernity and to frame reconstruction in terms of this opposition.[20] In the wider historiographical debates on the notion of Indian difference, the implicit, corollary hardening of a sense of British modernity has sometimes been rather overlooked. The intermingling of icons of engineering and nature, of the modern and the ancient, and of the West and the East, was a key element in many readings of the rebellion.[21]

Much of the evidence gathered by the Royal Commission, and many of the prescriptions offered for reconstruction, turned on similar notions. This was clear, for example, in a metaphor invoked to give substance to arguments in favour of the policy of ethnographic 'divide and rule'. Hinting at the way in which administration was to be engineered after the rebellion, Elphinstone declared that 'the safety of the great iron steamers is greatly increased by building them in compartments [and] I would ensure the security of our Indian empire by constructing our native army upon the same principle'.[22] 'Surely', another officer asked, 'in refitting a ship saved from foundering by its watertight compartments, we should not think of removing them?'[23]

This rationale drew on a particular reading of the rebellion that fixed the blame for the rebellion on the preponderance of the high castes in the Bengal

army, as well as (in some cases) on India's Muslim population.[24] Whether the rebellion was thought to have originated in 'Brahminical conspiracy' or in 'fanatical Mahommedanism', it was widely agreed that ethnically homogenous corps had contributed to the rebellion and were therefore to be avoided in the future. As the Peel Commission discovered, however, there was little unanimity over the best means of achieving the balance anticipated in the metaphoric iron steamer. While some advocated a system of 'general mixture', in which recruits were mixed without regard to caste, race or religion, other officers—including the influential Punjab Committee—urged the importance of maintaining the 'distinctiveness' of the various groups from which the new army was to be recruited.[25] Here again, however, various methods were suggested: some urged, for example, that recruiting and organising corps by district would militate against wider combination, as had occurred during 1857. Others advocated recruiting by 'class', a term vaguely synonymous with ethnicity, so that each regiment might be composed of four or five ethnic groups (each formed into their own company) but in which no single group dominated.

On this point, as on many others, the Royal Commission had failed to reach a definitive conclusion. Beyond, therefore, recommending a 'promiscuous mixture' of 'different nationalities and castes', the Peel Commission made no definite recommendation regarding the mechanisms by which mixture was to be effected. To talk of 'reorganisation' is, in this sense, something of a misnomer. In fact, the imperial authorities were content to allow the extant structure to persist, rationalising their 'decision' on the grounds that the local authorities were best placed to make judgements on matters of detail.[26] Even within the military establishment, however, there was little agreement on the detail of reconstruction. As Rose, the commander-in-chief, wrote to Wood, the Secretary of State, in 1862,

> The authorities, and arguments, used by them, in support of their different systems or sorts of mixture are so good, that as long as the principle of non-unity of races or sects in Regiments is acted on, it would, perhaps be safer not to insist, too rigidly, on the assertion of any particular principles of mixture, but watch carefully the progress and success of each of them.[27]

This process of enumeration and surveillance was enacted through the transmission of various forms, circulars and reports, which were gathered and compiled in the Military Department. It was, in effect, to this centre of expertise and administration that both the metropolitan and imperial authorities devolved much of their authority. While in some senses the Peel Commission offered a rather anodyne prescription for the Indian Army, the pragmatic bent of imperial policy in this period should not detract from the qualitative extension of surveillance directed towards the native army. After 1857, the strategic logic

of divide and rule was premised on an administrative regime of monitor and control.[28] It is the expansion of this 'ethnographic modality' which is most striking in the 1860s and 1870s.[29] Though orientated towards a very different strategic end, the means by which post-1857 military policy was conceived and the mechanisms by which the strategy was realised bear much more in common with those that gave shape to the martial army under Roberts than has hitherto been widely recognised.

Many of the administrative mechanisms that became familiar in the latter part of the century were first proposed in the immediate aftermath of 1857. Brigadier Steel, for example, advocated the establishment of regional recruiting centres for 'distinct races of military character and taste', suggesting (amongst others) 'Allyghur for Jats, Umritsar for Seikhs and Goozerat for Punjabees'.[30] Other officers recommended appointing European specialists—'good linguists ... [with] a knowledge of the native character'—to superintend recruiting.[31] In time, recruiting depots under 'specially selected officers' were formed for each of the principal 'martial races' and while, in 1857, ideas regarding 'fighting spirit' and 'military character' were rather more nebulous than they were to become, the sense of continuity is clear. Moreover, as suggested by the Punjab Committee's recommendation that 'a relative proportion of the respective castes ... be fixed and adhered to', the previous measures reflect the wider belief that ethnography was to be monitored, mobilised and marshalled.[32] In keeping with this injunction, throughout the 1860s deviations from the prescribed composition of the native regiments were permitted only upon the sanction of the military authorities.[33]

However, while ethnography was thus made central to the process of reconstruction, there remained a good deal of ambiguity regarding distinctions of race, caste and tribe. An investigation into the utility of various 'low caste' levies raised during 1857 was abandoned in 1861 when it emerged that while some officers had raised troops from sweepers and outcastes, others understood the term to refer simply to those regiments raised without Brahmins.[34] This is simply one example of the numerous, wider ambiguities which inflect colonial knowledge in this period and which (amongst other factors) militated against radical change in the aftermath of the rebellion. This ambiguity was reflected in much of the evidence gathered by the Royal Commission, where geographic and regional distinctions overlapped and complicated religious and ethnic identities. Nevertheless, the administrative impulse to know India after 1857 is evident throughout the process of reflection and reconstruction undertaken by the imperial military. However, as the diversity of opinion gathered by the Royal Commission makes clear, while there was general recognition that ethnographic knowledge was key to the business of administering the native army, there was much less agreement on the precise mechanisms by which such administration could be carried forth and, often, widespread confusion over the most salient aspects of Indian ethnography, culture and tradition.

In part, the injunction to know India and its peoples is characteristic of the period.[35] Certainly, the various interpretations of the uprising tended to connect to and draw strength from the widespread perception that the rebellion had arisen (in part at least) because of the company's failure to pay heed to the specificities of Oriental administration. It was widely suggested, for example, that the system of courts martial had, in the eyes of the native soldiers, demeaned the personal authority of European officers. The Punjab Committee submitted that

> it is not to be doubted that the gradual weakening of commanding officers has hastened the gradual dissolution of the discipline of the native army. We are a free people, rejoicing in constitutional liberty, and we have loved to treat our native army in the same way, forgetting that they are not yet ready for it.... What they respect is power in their immediate superior; not power a thousand miles off, in some jealous constitutional check.[36]

The calls to invest in European officers 'magisterial powers' befitting 'Oriental depots' were, of course, in many ways a reaction to the rebellion and the palpable loss of control it represented. However, as with the earlier metaphors rooted in engineering and technology, they also suggest the hardening of an idea of racial difference. This was similarly represented in various other measures anticipated in the period as, for example, in the calls to 'Orientalise' the sepoy's uniform—one of the few points on which the Royal Commission was able to agree in 1859. The 'miserable spectacle [of sepoys] buttoned up' in English accoutrements, like the diminution of powers of European officers, was read as symbolic of the way in which pre-mutiny policy had adopted a reformist bent, fundamentally unsuited to the Indian population and implicated, therefore, in the rebellion.[37]

The event of 1857 not only catalysed the shift to the Crown Raj (and in doing so reconfigured Indian military issues within a new, pan-imperial context) it also centred ethnographic knowledge as the critical metric for the administration and organisation of the imperial military. On both these counts, the injunction to know, record and monitor the ethnography of the Indian military helped to prepare the ground for the reforms of 1880s and 1890s. Additionally, the ceding to the military establishment of authority over recruitment enabled Roberts to oversee the development of an administrative system that was able to effect and give coherence to the martial race reforms.[38] While the post-1857 settlement was pragmatic and reactive, it nevertheless set the terms in which subsequent strategies were elaborated. If the information panic which followed the rebellion rather overwhelmed the military during the 1860s and 1870s it was a necessary precondition of the shifts which took place under Roberts.

Reorganisation

> From the time that I became Commander in Chief in Madras until I left India the question of how to render the army as perfect a fighting machine as it was possible to make it, was the one which caused me the most anxious thought, and to its solution my most earnest efforts had been at all times directed.
>
> —F.S. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India* (1897).[39]

The undeniably pragmatic and reactive nature of military administration after 1857 is often contrasted with the apparently more purposeful, reformist command of Roberts. The opposition is typically explained by the escalation of Anglo-Russian tension and the onset of the 'great game'. However, as we have seen, many of Roberts' reforms were rooted in the administrative strategies that were developed after the rebellion. The gradual evolution of an administrative mechanics apparently capable of organising and processing the range of knowledge collated after 1857 is apparent throughout the 1870s. In part, of course, the more confident tone of the late 1870s reflects the temporal and psychic distancing of 1857. The narrowing of the recruiting grounds from which the Indian Army drew was concomitant with the streamlining of the forms of knowledge that both shaped and rationalised colonial understandings of the military. It was in 1874, for example, that Napier (the commander-in-chief) ordered the preparation of short, ethnographic surveys of the principal 'races' from which the native army was recruited—documents that directly prefigure the familiar caste handbooks that emerged around the turn of the century.[40] The confidence invested in the synoptic ethnographies and taxonomies of race which accrued after 1857 was central to the emergence of the martial army under Roberts: the transmissions between 1857 and the martial race theory on this account are at least as significant as the oft-invoked good service rendered by the Sikhs and Gurkhas. Indeed, while the martial army was constituted to a fundamentally different end—an anticipated conflict with Russia—it was organised along familiar lines, although class regiments gradually displaced class company regiments as the number of favoured 'races' was reduced to the familiar mantra of Sikhs, Gurkhas and Pathans.

The proliferation of knowledge about the native armies after the rebellion mirrors the wide-ranging attempts of the new Crown Raj to constitute itself in place of the East India Company.[41] In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, this process involved devolving much of the detail of military administration to 'experts' in India, despite there being, in fact, no real consensus on the mechanics of reconstruction. Nevertheless, the surveillance and monitoring of the native army shifted into a fundamentally new register after 1857. Because of the way in which regimental organisation had been settled after the rebellion, routine enquiries into matters of efficiency, discipline and economy were viewed

through an optic which stressed the ethnographic distinctiveness of the classes that composed the various regiments.[42] After 1857, officers who wrote about their experience with Indian regiments were likely to recall their commanding certain 'races' or 'castes', rather than (as previous officers had) their experience in charge of composite regiments.[43] The administrative settlement centred on ethnography thus developed a self-reinforcing momentum in which race and caste seemed evermore pertinent to military strategy and organisation. This momentum culminated in Roberts' martial race reforms in the 1880s and 1890s.

By rendering 1857 as a product of Indian backwardness, colonial interpretations of the rebellion helped to make the events of 1857 an exemplar of the colonial project in India: as the earlier Ganges metaphor made clear, this involved the binary of colonial science/technology to Indian nature/tradition. The mechanical metaphor offered by Roberts—'a fighting machine'—plays on similar signifiers. More concretely, many of the measures anticipated in the fraught aftermath of the rebellion were ultimately realised under Roberts and alongside the changing strategic contexts which have rightly been seen as central in the shift to martial recruiting, we also need to recognise the gradual evolution of an administrative praxis which made the martial army both practicable and apparently desirable. The rhetoric of scientific and technological advance that underpins the 'Report of the Eden Commission' of 1879, for example, refigures as fact many of the technical and techno-scientific projections and fantasies of the post-mutiny period. In place of the tentative recommendations of Peel, Eden declared confidently that 'India can have a simpler, cheaper and *more scientifically constructed* military organization, with far greater security than the present system actually gives'.[44] This confidence was fed in part by the forms of knowledge gathered and submitted to the commission and in part by the faith then invested in the power of modern arms, communications and infrastructure.[45] Nevertheless, while in some ways a break from 1857, Eden was also, in many ways, part of a clear continuum: the enumeration of population and the reckoning of strategy in terms of such knowledge was key to the commission's report. Statistical returns from the presidencies provided a means of calculating the relative strategic pressures across India and, where the previous Peel Commission had baulked at making concrete suggestions on the distribution of forces, the latter commission declared that its recommendations were 'based upon sound geographical, political and military reasons ... the internal security of the country [will be] enhanced, and our military power increased by this readjustment'.[46]

The apparent concentration of technical and scientific expertise (and power) in the hands of the British helped not only to restore imperial confidence but also served to cement the sense of difference of which 1857 was taken as a marker. The perceived military and strategic significance of the railways and telegraph in 1857, as much as the wider sense that the rebellion was a product of Indian

ethnographic alterity, helped to develop this sense of difference and to invest in technology and science a particular coherence and authority.

This confidence depends in part on a tautology and on a particular vision of empire that premises the opposition of colonial modernity and Oriental tradition (and which, in this context, as we have seen, drew some of its coherence from the rebellion). In fact, the increasingly hegemonic language of 'science' provided a means of justifying and rationalising measures aimed principally at attaining a new degree of economy in military organisation.[47] The viceroy, in particular, sought to manoeuvre the commission to reduce military expenditure by effecting reductions in the less 'efficient' Madras army. Though in time 'efficient' came to be synonymous with both 'martial aptitude' and 'fighting spirit', in its 1879 iteration, the term accurately signifies the economic forces which made southern recruits more expensive than those from the north. The labour market in the south was much more diverse than that in the newly annexed north, and hence the costs of employing and victualling Madras recruits far exceeded those which were accrued in recruiting from, for example, Punjab.[48] The codification of notions of martiality—and the evolution of an administrative framework that legitimised and gave coherence to a recruiting praxis based on the 'logic' of martiality—thus overlapped economic and strategic imperatives. Just as ethnographic alterity provided a palatable framework in which to interpret the rebellion, so the apparent confidence of the Eden Report disguised the economic imperative that underwrote the reforms. What was claimed as a language of science and increasingly, of race, was in many ways a convenient means of realising and rationalising administrative economies.

In using ethnography to provide a synoptic rendering of the Indian population, and in framing questions of recruiting and organisation in ethnographic terms, the 'reconstruction' of the military after 1857 set the context within which Roberts' reforms were elaborated. While new ideas about race and science provided the epistemological framework for the shift to martial recruiting, these were worked out and rationalised by officers whose experience was of working in regiments structured according to ethnography. In this sense, it is scarcely surprising that race became such a pervasive fixture of subsequent military stategies. Race, however, is only one element of this story: in the 1870s, a desire for economy was framed and rationalised by a language of science in which race and ethnography figured centrally. By the 1880s, new strategic imperatives reconfigured this debate around an increasingly coherent, and apparently scientific, notion of martiality. The martial race reforms, then, are best understood not as a break with the praxis that emerged after 1857 but as a reconstitution of the impulse to know, which was manifested after the rebellion. While the flood of 'knowledge' produced after the rebellion rather overwhelmed the imperial authorities, it was latterly organised and put to use to make possible, rationalise and justify a whole series of transformations that fundamentally reorganised the imperial military.

To properly explain this process, we need to better understand the mechanisms by which the martial army was recruited and recognise the extent to which such developments drew on, and grew out of, the post-rebellion settlement. Behind the shift in recruiting there evolved an administrative machinery which enabled the British to mobilise certain communities and to rationalise the restricted recruiting strategies which developed in this period. It was this praxis, and the ethnographic modalities on which they were based, that were the principal legacies of the rebellion. As they were rearticulated in the 1880s and 1890s, these mechanisms effectively enabled British officers to overlook the economic factors that helped explain why recruits were more easily sourced from Punjab than from Madras. Though Eden Vansittart is best known as the author of the first of the influential recruiting handbooks, his work in the recruiting depot at Gorakhpur was significant also because he developed a series of administrative and bureaucratic mechanisms by which recruiting could be carried forward and through which the success of his operations be represented. Vansittart pioneered new methods of monitoring and recording the stature of the recruits processed by the depot under his charge, establishing metrics to reward recruiters for enlisting 'first-class specimens'.[49] As his annual reports make clear, he was able to persuade Roberts of the success of his operations at Gorakhpur in part by demonstrating the marked improvements in the physique of recruits enlisted at the depot.[50] Ethnography and enumeration thus fell in together in the service of the imperial military to lend a veneer of scientific and statistical coherence to martial race recruiting. Though the improvement in Gurkha recruiting was attributed to the inherent martiality of the Nepalese, the apparent success owed much to the readily quantifiable and calculable terms in which Gurkha recruiting operations were formatted and to the economic incentives provided for recruiters who could satisfy such metrics, as well as to a series of political accommodations reached with the Nepalese authorities. In administrative and practical terms, the methods developed by Vansittart and the hardening of a notion of Nepalese martiality suggest the ways in which the 1857 settlement evolved into the martial race theory.

There are similar, wider parallels which connect 1857 with the martial race period and which give further reason to view the late-nineteenth century reforms in the context of post-mutiny reorganisation. The social engineering that some officers anticipated might be possible with India's low castes (but which was quickly deemed to be impossible because of the pervasiveness of caste and its social hierarchies) was effectively enacted in the mechanisms through which Sikhs and Gurkhas were rewarded for their service. As well as cultivating relations with local groups, recruiting officers were responsible for coordinating the distribution of pensions, for overseeing a series of labour exchanges for 'loyal' pensioners, and in the case of some Gurkha regiments, for facilitating the transit of Nepalese women to establish what were, in effect, government-subsidised Gurkha colonies.[51] The establishment of institutions for the so-called

line boys of Gurkha regiments—at the same time that such institutions were being abolished in the other presidency armies—is another example of the way in which the relationship between the colonial state and certain communities was deliberately engineered in a manner quite distinct from that projected by the martial race ideologues. As R. Mazumder has shown, the close relationship between the imperial military and the Sikh communities of Punjab was key to the economic growth and relative prosperity of some of the region's communities in the latter nineteenth century.[52] While quite different from the kinds of alliances anticipated by some in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, the relationships that developed between the colonial state and the so-called martial races were also, in many ways, remarkably similar.

That the rebellion had a profound impact on the nature of colonial rule and on the ways in which the imperial military was regarded is widely agreed. However, much of the literature on the history of the Indian Army in the late nineteenth century posits a clear delineation between post-mutiny strategies and those which developed in the context of the 'great game'. While there clearly is an important shift in the strategic context in this period, there are significant continuities in the administrative means through which strategy was developed. To understand this process, we need to take these mechanisms seriously. The terms in which the mutiny was made legible and the mechanisms by which the military was reconstituted after 1857 shaped military administration for the rest of the century (and arguably until independence in 1947). The event of 1857 not only transposed issues of military organisation into matters of pan-imperial importance, the rebellion also foregrounded a particular reading of Indian society (and colonial rule) in which ethnography was central to administration. If this was, in one sense, little more than a means of neutralising the political agency manifested by rebellion and a convenient way of rationalising the hotch-potch nature of the post-1857 native army, it was also to have profound effects on colonialism in India: taken up and developed by men like Roberts and Vansittart—men whose military experience was shaped by the system that developed after 1857—this way of thinking about military strategy provided a means and a rationale for thoroughly reorganising the army (a process which had profound impacts not just on the military but on aspects of Indian society and politics throughout the subcontinent). The increasingly scientific and technical terms in which recruiting and organisation was rendered reflect the reconfiguration of colonial rule after 1857 and, in this sense, also help to illuminate a number of wider historiographical issues.

The ongoing debate about the notion of Indian 'difference', and the apparent hardening of such concepts after the rebellion, has only infrequently engaged the literature and sources on the colonial military. This is unfortunate, especially as the military records of the period provide many rich veins of archival material. For us to properly understand the history of post-mutiny military reconstruction and the emergence of the martial races, we need to recognise the wider shifts in

colonial rule which took place in the late nineteenth century: the elaboration of new taxonomies of martiality in the 1880s should be situated alongside the parallel and similar developments which codified the ethnographic basis of other forms of labour in India; especially notable, for example, on the railways or in colonial understandings of indentured labour. While we need to understand the reorganisation of the imperial military in the context of the wider history of the period, we need also, conversely, to rethink the wider history of the period in the light of the evidence suggested by the imperial military. If the emergence of a notion of difference after 1857 was key to shaping aspects of colonialism in India (as well as of a new sense of empire and national identity in the metropole), the history of the military after 1857 also tells us something about the way in which this notion of difference was elaborated, the purposes it served, the issues that it seemed to illuminate as well as those which it manifestly obscured. There are still lessons to be learned from 1857.

Notes and References

1. Here and throughout, I use the term Indian Army to refer to the 'presidency armies', along with the Punjab Frontier Force—the body of Indian troops typically referred to by colonials as the 'native army'.
2. Government of India, *The Revolt in Central India, 1857–9* (Simla: Government of India Press, 1908), p. XIV.
3. R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) *passim*. A survey of contemporary writing on the rebellion is provided by G. Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
4. C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 369–371.
5. 'Orders issued by Court of Directors regarding the castes of Hindoos from which the Native Army is to be recruited.' 5 February 1858, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1857–1858 session (129), XLIII, pp. 1–15.
6. H.M. Durand's survey collected the opinions of various officials in India, posing a series of questions regarding the 'races, tribes [and] castes' from which the military was recruited—and those that were excluded—as well as on the agency employed to facilitate recruiting and the measures necessary to 'improve the future composition' of the army. Durand's survey was submitted to the authorities in India and in London and was published as an appendix to the Report of the Royal Commission.
7. W. Hough argued that the problem was 'we had nearly one third of Brahmins in our native infantry'. See W. Hough, *Hints regarding the re-organisation of the Bengal Army, and as to the best means of preventing Mutinies in the Indian Army* (London: Benton Seeley, 1857) pp. 14–15; Meadows Taylor explained that the Brahmins 'would not allow intermixture of other classes; they recruited themselves.... Can anything more pregnant with mischief be imagined?' See M. Taylor, *Letters from Meadows Taylor Esq.* (London: J.E. Taylor, 1857); also J.H. Hodgson, *Opinions on the Indian Army* (London: W.H. Allen, 1857).
8. See the Government of India's compendium of regional narratives, published as *Narrative of events regarding the mutiny in India of 1857–58 and the restoration of authority* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1881) and, for example, C. Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny*,

vol. I (London: London Printing and Publishing Co., 1857); J.W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857–1858*, vol. I (London: W.H. Allen, 1864).

9. The commissioners reported,

> The second question, viz., the "permanent force necessary to be maintained in the Indian Provinces respectively, after the restoration of tranquillity," does not appear ... to admit of a reply, in a definite numerical form, as the amount of force must depend on the probability of either internal disturbances or external aggression. The estimates of force given in the evidence are most conflicting, ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 Europeans.... This amount and distribution, however, must always be affected by the political exigencies of the country; the introduction of railroads, and river steam navigation, the establishment of fortified posts, and other military considerations.

See 'Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Organisation of the Indian Army, together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix', British Library, India Office Records, L/MIL/17/5/1622, p. ix. Henceforth: 'Report of the Peel Commission'.

10. On the question of officering native regiments, the commissioners endorsed various aspects of extant practice and, cautioning against any radical change, emphasised the importance of allowing a degree of autonomy to 'Local Authorities'. See 'Report of the Peel Commission', pp. xii–xiv.
11. 'Report of the Peel Commission', p. xiv.
12. Ibid., p. xv. The limited range of the commissioners' recommendations met with some criticism. One officer complained that 'after so long an incubation ... surely something systematic could have been determined upon, and not merely the ventilation of a host of opinions extracted from the evidence of officers'. See Anon., 'Sir Charles Wood and the Reorganization of the Indian Army', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, Part II (1860) p. 325.
13. D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994) pp. 6–10.
14. H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).
15. Though the sense that particular Indian communities had 'proven' their loyalty during the rebellion became a key trope of latter discourses of martiality, this was a retrospective rather than a contemporary interpretation. In the immediate aftermath of 1857, there was little support for an ethnically homogenous army—even one composed of those ethnic groups which had remained 'loyal'.

    The commander-in-chief, for example, objected to a proposal to keep Gurkha regiments ethnically distinct, describing the proposals as 'full of risk'. See 'Mayhew to the Government of India', 5 October 1861, BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241, p. 100. The secretary of state agreed, noting that 'we beat the Purbeahs by the Sikhs and we may have to reverse the operation' cited in A.H. Shibly 'The Reorganisation of the Indian Armies, 1858–1879', PhD thesis, University of London, 1969. Even Roberts, who would become the most vocal advocate of the martial races, initially dismissed the idea of an army drawn from only a few communities, writing to his mother from the camp before Delhi that if 'our army is composed of Sikhs and Punjabees, the opposite extreme, we shall have the same work again some day'. See F.S. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny by Fred. Roberts* (London: MacMillan, 1924), p. 56. Additionally, even before 1857, some of the core tenets of what would become the martial race theory had been elaborated: the martial heritage of the Sikhs and the Gurkhas, for example, had been identified well before the rebellion. The genesis of the martial race discourse thus had both a longer and rather more complex genealogy than is reflected in an account which focuses exclusively on the legacies and memories of the counter-insurgency campaigns of 1857–1858. See B.H. Hodgson,

'Origin and Classification of the Military Tribes of Nepal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. II (Jan – Dec 1833), no. 17 (May 1833), pp. 217–224; *Parliamentary Papers*, p. 138.

16. K. Roy, 'Recruitment doctrines of the colonial India Army: 1859–1913', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1997), pp. 321–354; 'The Construction of Regiments in the Indian Army, 1859-1913', *War in History*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2001), pp. 127–148.
17. On the production of Indian 'national space' after 1857, see M. Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); N. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
18. 'Report from the Political and Military Committee of the Council of India, 30th June 1859' BL, IOR L/MIL/17/5/1625.
19. Anon, 'Our New Bengal Native Army', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, Part I (1859), p. 459. The interest in Indian issues represented something of a shift: as in metropolitan political circles, before 1857 imperial issues had long been marginalised within the metropolitan military journals. As the author complained, the 'Indian Army... [has] so long been regarded as one of those tabooed subjects, which no man unconnected directly with the late Company's service could possibly master, that the recognized organs of the profession rarely contain any allusion to them'. For more, see T.R. Moreman, 'The Army in India and the Military-Periodical Press, 1830–1898', in D. Finkelstein and D. Peers, eds, *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
20. This is an important point, but it should not be overstated. There is much evidence to show that, along with this sense of racial difference, there was also, always, a corollary recognition of similarity. Moreover, class often undercut simplistic racial binaries: it was widely feared, for example, that frequent contact between European and Indian troops would undermine the 'prestige of the race', by exposing the latter to the former's drunkenness.
21. This was at least partly reflected, for example, in the circulation of the 'greased cartridge' explanation, which brought together several of these key tropes: the dangers of too radical a programme of reform, the religiosity and apparent irrationality of the natives, and at once the dangers and promises that technology made manifest for colonialism in India. For a useful discussion of the impacts of notions of science and technology on post-mutiny colonial rule, see G. Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
22. Cited in D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994) p. 9.
23. 'Suggestions for the Re-organisation of the Bengal Army, Drawn up at the Time of the Re-capture of Delhi by an Officer Who Has Passed 34 Years in Military, Civil and Political Employ in India', BL, IOR L/MIL/17/5/202; George MacMunn's 1911 volume *The Armies of India* rearticulated the post-rebellion settlement in the context of the martial race theory, noting that the 'watertight compartments' were intended to provide security against combination, but also to develop the sepoys' 'feeling of clan emulation and martial characteristics to the full'. While the latter claim assumed more importance in retrospect than it had originally carried in 1857, MacMunn was certainly correct to note that the system established after 1857 had 'gradually led to a very close study of the clans and races of India'. See *The Armies of India*, Painted by Major A.C. Lovett, Text by Major G.F. MacMunn (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911) p. 119.
24. Roberts, for example, in a letter to his Mother on 24 July 1857 suggested that 'the Musalmans are at the bottom of it'. See F.S. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 30. According to John Fitchett, a drummer of the late 6th Native Infantry at Cawnpore, 'two Muhammedans ... came into the lines of the regiment to incite the men to mutiny', see 'Depositions Taken at Cawnpore under the Direction of Lieut. Colonel G.W. Williams', BL, IOR L/MIL/17/2/498. Rose fixed the blame for the rebellion on India's Muslims: 'It is quite useless, again to go over ground so thoroughly beaten as that of Mahommedanism

being the great anti-British element in India; before the mutinies this was only an apprehension but the history of those events has proved it to be an axiom', British Library (BL), India Office Records (IOR) L/MIL/7/7241.

25. As H.M. Durand noted, the views of the Punjab Committee—Lawrence, Chamberlain and Edwardes—were deemed particularly valuable in the aftermath of the rebellion, as the 'Punjab furnished a large part of the native army now existing'. See 'Report of the Peel Commission: Appendix', p. 179.
26. The Political and Military Committee of the India Council agreed: 'In an army employing Affghans, Seikhs, Goorkhas, Hindoostanee Mussulmans, and Hindoos of every caste and province, none are likely to judge so well as the local authorities what precise composition may be expedient'. See BL, IOR L/MIL/17/5/1625.
27. BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
28. Major Williams, Superintendent of Police in the North-western Provinces, advocated an even more pervasive monitorial regime. Williams explained that the causes 'which led to the mutiny were, under all circumstances, in silent operation in the huts of every native regiment. Emissaries were entertained, extensive correspondence was kept up, rumours were circulated, grievances magnified, and mutiny matured in the lines, without the slightest check or hindrance on the part of the native officers'. Drawing on Bentham's panoptican, Williams designed a form of military lines in which the native troops were to be housed in 'open barracks ... so that European officers could look after the men, and the men could not entertain propagators of sedition'. While Williams' Benthamite barracks were little more than colonial fantasy, they illustrate a widely-held belief that synoptic surveillance was key to the disciplining of the native troops and to the security of the empire. See 'Report of the Peel Commission: Supplementary Papers', p. 308.
29. As represented, for example, in the revision and extension of bureaucratic mechanisms for the compilation of annual caste returns. For this, and other similar measures, see BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
30. The rather ambiguous distinction between regional and ethnic identities in Steel's proposals helps to explain why there was little agreement over whether region or ethnicity offered the better protection against combination. To further complicate matters, as Colonel Burn noted, those Sikhs attached to the corps in Delhi in 1857 had mutinied, whereas those regiments which were 'distinct' had not. See 'Report of the Peel Commission: Appendix', pp. 179–209; Anon., 'Our Sepoy Army', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, Part I (1870) p. 11.
31. 'Report of the Peel Commission: Appendix', p. 187.
32. Ibid., p. 182.
33. 'The Secretary of State was of opinion that in such corps a discretion should be left to commanding officers to enlist the fittest men, but that they should be required to submit periodical castes returns, so that any deviation from the authorised proportion of classes might be checked.' Despite this injunction, subsequent orders indicate that these aspirations were never fully realised: by the end of the 1860s, government published confidential orders urging the importance of communicating accurate information to the centre and reminding commanding officers that they were obliged to seek sanction before modifying recruiting. Further, similar orders were issued again in 1871. See BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
34. In the aftermath of the 'Purbiya mutiny', many British officers looked to the low castes as potential allies of the Raj and the levies raised during the counter-insurgency campaigns were thus regarded with some interest during the early 1860s. As K. Roy has noted, for some British officers such levies offered a mechanism for social engineering—Lieutenant Colonel Bruce noted, for example, that while 'the Brahmins or Mahomedans may hope that they may be restored as rulers, and be always ready to attempt usurpation ... this can hardly be the case with the lower orders, whose ambition would not extend beyond a rise in the social scale which

could only be achieved under our Government'. However, not only was such a strategy at odds with the drift of post-rebellion policy to reconcile colonial rule with the traditional contours of the Indian social but the confusion that attended debates on the 'low caste levies' frequently frustrated attempts to evaluate the utility of the new corps: the degree of confusion is suggested by a series of increasingly exasperated annotations scribbled over Bruce's report on the low castes. See BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/7236; K. Roy, 'Recruitment doctrines of the colonial India Army: 1859–1913', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1997), p. 334.

35. See, for example, the illustrated taxonomy of Indian ethnographic types prepared by Kaye, Watson and Meadows Taylor and published as *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations with Descriptive Letterpress, of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan, Originally Prepared under the Authority of the Government of India and Reproduced by Order the Secretary of State for India in Council* (London: W.H. Allen, 1868). In style and content, the 1868 volume foreshadows MacMunn's collection on India's military races. For more, see N. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 149–228.
36. 'Report of the Peel Commission: Appendix', p. 182. Paradoxically, while some officers suggested that the system of courts martial 'bewildered' native soldiers, it was widely believed that the sepoys were able to manipulate the system to their own advantage. See, for example, Anon, 'Review of the Rebellion in India, And its Causes', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, Part I (1859), p. 567; Anon, 'Our Sepoy Army', p. 5.
37. Anon, 'Our New Native Bengal Army', p. 481.
38. In his campaign for reform of recruiting during his command, Roberts dwelt heavily on the importance of 'local' knowledge, criticising the 'erroneous' belief that Southern Indians made equally good soldiers as recruits from the North. See BL, IOR L/MIL/17/5/1615, vol. III, p. 51.
39. F.S. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander in Chief* (London: Richard Bentley, 1897), p. 441.
40. BL, IOR European Manuscripts (MSS Eur.) F114.5.4. By 1875, H.W. Norman reported that 'when officers advocate their corps being formed of one class, they almost invariably desire that this one class should be Sikhs or Gurkhas or Pathans, who are supposed to be the best soldiers; but we do not want an army only composed of these men', BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
41. The gathering and centralisation of knowledge of this kind is evident in fields of economy and geography, as well as in those of population, society and culture. M. Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
42. See, for example, the collected papers on reorganisation at BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
43. See, for example, 'Goorkha', 'Notes on the Goorkhas', *Proceedings of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1871), pp. 17–32; N.C.P. Price, 'Notes on the Sikhs as Soldiers for our Army', *Proceedings of United Service Institution of India*, vol. 2, no. 12 (1872), pp. 57–70; J.J.H. Gordon, 'The Dogras', *Proceedings of United Service Institution of India*, vol. 3, no. 15 (1873), pp. 31–44. Many of these papers found their way into the subsequent 'official' recruiting handbooks.
44. 'Report of the Special Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor General in Council to enquire into the Organization and Expenditure of the Army in India', BL, IOR L/MIL/7/5445, p. 30 (emphasis added).
45. In fact, the findings of the commission were heavily influenced by the views of the viceroy, Lytton, who pressed for reductions in military expenditure—principally by effecting reductions in the less 'efficient' Madras army—as a way of easing the financial crisis of the 1870s and as part of his wider campaign to abolish the Presidency system. See B. Robson, 'The Eden Commission and the Reform of the Indian Army—1879–1895', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 60, Spring (1982), p. 5.

46. The lieutenant governor of the Punjab—described as 'home of the most martial races of India, and the nursery of our best soldiers'—reported that 'the state of feeling towards the government is excellent ... the people of the Punjab will remain well disposed and loyal'. See 'Report of the Special Commission', p. 39.
47. It is no coincidence that the notion of the 'scientific frontier' was invoked in this period as way of justifying a revision of military strategy on the Northwest frontier.
48. The additional costs involved in recruiting and supplying the Madras army were widely recognised but were seldom acknowledged to have a substantive bearing on imperial military strategy. Notions of declining martial aptitude provided a more nebulous, but in some ways more convenient means to explain the readiness, or otherwise, of various communities to enlist in military service. See testimonies on regimental recruiting in BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7241.
49. See BL, IOR Military Proceedings, P/3477, June 1889.
50. In 1889, Vansittart reported that 'as compared with the two former seasons ... every regiment has this season gained in physique'. The 1889 cohort were, on average, younger (by around three months), taller (by more than an inch) and with a greater chest girth (by an inch and a quarter) than those enlisted just two years previously. See BL, IOR Military Proceedings, P/3477, June 1889.
51. In 1875, C.H. Brownlow bemoaned the failure of government to maintain better relations with retired native soldiers, recounting a story of an elderly native officer who, having been retired some years before the rebellion, presented himself to the British on hearing of the rebellion. Wounded in the early stages of the siege of Delhi, he recovered to lead his men in the final assault in which he was killed 'fighting among the foremost'. Such men, Brownlow complained, were 'lost to us both as citizens and soldiers'. C.H. Brownlow, 'Notes on the Native Army of Bengal; Its Present Material and Organization, as compared with the Past', reproduced in IOR L/MIL/7/7241, pp. 155–159. On Gurkha recruiting, see BL, IOR Military Proceedings, P/3172, July 1890; BL, IOR L/MIL/7/7054.
52. R.K. Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

7

FINDING THOSE MEN WITH 'GUTS'
The Ascription and Re-ascription of Martial Identities in India after the Uprising

Gajendra Singh

> Who and what are the martial races of India, how do they come, and in what crucible, and in what anvils hot with pain spring the soldiers of India, whom surely Baba Ghandhi never fathered? Who is the great bearded Sikh with his uncut Nazarite hair, his curling beard, and the enormous head-dress with encircling quoit? Where does the square-shouldered Musalman of the Punjab fit in the system of India, or the lithe Mahratta? ... Does the squat, pug-faced little Mongolian Gurkha with a Kilmarnock cap on the side of his little head fit [in] at all with the tall Rajput longhead, and where comes in the Pariah of Madras who builds the Empire's frontier roads, damned by some coal-black mammy of the South? ... Indeed, to understand what is meant by the martial races of India is to understand from the inside the real story of India ... in India we speak of the martial races as a thing apart because the mass of the people have neither moral aptitude nor physical courage ... the courage we should talk of colloquially as 'guts'.
>
> —George Fletcher MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India.*

THERE are few works of colonialist hubris more often quoted than Lieutenant General Sir George Fletcher MacMunn's *The Martial Races of India.* Citing his short, clipped prose has become something of a convention when surveying the nature of military recruitment after the uprisings of 1857—both in academic volumes and the slightly less reified pages of *Wikipedia.*[1] In this regard this article is no different. Although, as will soon become evident, MacMunn's account is introduced here principally to demonstrate how inadequate his writings are in explaining the multiplicity of martial theories of race and recruitment that were articulated from the late nineteenth century.

Recent scholarship into the nature of colonial martial theory in India can be broadly divided into three categories. Stephen P. Cohen has sought to place the origins of the racial theory within the institution of the Indian Army itself, and in particular to the link between climate and soldierly valour that was made by the first commander-in-chief of the (united) Indian Army, Frederick Roberts.[2] Early post-colonial scholarship inspired a generation of historians to view the objectification of Indian *sipahis* in terms of the wider essentialisation of all Indians by the colonial metropole (for example, Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* and Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity*).[3] Finally Heather Streets has elegantly, if not wholly convincingly, asserted that what occurred in colonial India should be seen in terms of a single transnational and pan-colonial imperial discourses of race and masculinity.[4] Irrespective of the superficial differences that they may contain, however, the same similar premises and similar comparable conclusions are reached in all three. Each version postulates a single and unchanging discourse of 'martialness' that was applied to India's soldiery, even though they may dispute its precise origins. Furthermore their conclusions are dependent on dissecting a remarkably small number of published works—Roberts' memoirs in Cohen's case, works of fiction and poetry for Nandy and Sinha and the eponymous MacMunn for Streets.

The chapter seeks to demonstrate that if one goes beyond a limited canon of published texts and focuses instead on material produced by and for military and civilian officials, the reader is confronted by a multiplicity of martial stereotypes prone to fluctuation and evolution over time. Following the events of 1857, there were repeated efforts by colonial military officers to close the gap between more idealised images of colonial soldiers in India and the realities they lived. The most sustained effort came at the tail-end of the nineteenth century. 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.[5]

This chapter will attempt 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, refound or reproduced in subtly different ways. Three such negatives will be exposed below: of Sikhs, Pathans and Brahmins. While these do not amount to all the different constructions of martiality that were imagined and reimagined in colonial India, they do each map the type of shifts that could occur in each discourse of martialness between 1857 and 1947.

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[6] and even permeate 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.[7]

(Un)Fortunately the crew of the enterprise did not always get it right. The martial characteristics ascribed to Sikhs proved mutable. After 1857, a series of discourses developed which both 'martialised' certain Sikhs and created various micro-narratives to justify the recruitment of Sikhs from particular areas, castes and sub-castes. These were substantially revised in the twenty years after the First World War and even abandoned altogether during the 1940s.

Following the annexation of Punjab by the East India Company in 1849, the Board of Administration was established to govern the new province and immediately raised five regiments of infantry and cavalry from the former Kingdom consisting of 'men, habituated from childhood to war and the chase'.[8] 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 200 in infantry and 100 in cavalry regiments.[9] To some extent this changed with the outbreak of 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 Delhi[10] or Calcutta?[11]

The systematic ascription of martial qualities to Sikhs by the army had to wait until Frederick Roberts became commander-in-chief 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 Brahmins were condemned for their caste prejudice,[12] urban Sikh Khatris for their reluctance to take to the plough,[13] and low-caste Sikh Mazbhis for their supposed criminality.[14] 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....[15]

Consequently, it was Sikh Jats who were favoured for recruitment. During the First World War they formed the majority of the 12 to 20 per cent[16] of all Indian 'fighting men' that were Sikh.[17]

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 on the 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 from Jat in the Majha from what the British had grown accustomed to in the Malwa:

> The Manjha [or Majha] Sikh is as 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.[18]

Even within these areas not all Sikh Jats were considered suitable for military service, with innumerable distinctions posited between *gol*s of Jats of 'not very good quality'[19] and those sub-castes within both the Majha and Malwa areas that were thought to be especially suited to the military life. Among these, according to both Bingley and the later colonial officials of Amritsar district, were the Sindhus or Sandhus found in thirty-two villages of Tarn Taran tahsil near Amritsar;[20]

> [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.[21]

Lastly, although the Sindhu Jats recruited from Tarn Taran tahsil were regarded as 'fine specimens of the human race',[22] the sons of military pensioners that were settled in the canal colonies of western Punjab evidently were not, at least not according to those settlement officers pressed to explain why so few Sikhs from this area were willing to take up the King's shilling.[23] Bingley's handbook, therefore, attempted to rank Sikhs in accordance with a racial rather than religious understanding of Sikhism.

Bingley's study of Sikh martiality did not prove as authoritative as either he or his superiors would have liked. In particular, praise for Sikh Jats was tempered in the changing political climate that followed the First World War. After 1918, although official histories praised the 'Black Lions' of the Khalsa who died nobly defending the honour of the king-emperor,[24] the landscapes in which those lions pranced was decidedly murkier. Following the revolutionary Ghadar 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 [recruiting] 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 was burnt. Also at Gujranwala, the Tahsil, District Court, Post Office, Church, Railway Station and Dâk Bungalow were burnt.[25]

Reports from those parts of Punjab that were largely untouched by demobilization violence, or by the later Akali movement, 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'.[26] And the figure of the Sikh even began to intrude upon reports previously restricted to the troublesome and conspiratorial 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.[27]

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 plagiarised 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 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.[28]

The Indian Army became the one means to inoculate the Sikh from this pernicious disease. And where the army failed, 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 Ghadar 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 was not merely not orthodox in its religion, but would seem to have been in some danger of falling away from Sikhism altogether'.[29] 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 their 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.[30]

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 (turbans). 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.[31] This in turn 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'.[32] Those within the Indian Army, however, perceived the problem to be more substantive. While the authors of secret memoranda were confident enough to declare in 1941 that 'nationalism' as a creed had no following in the armed forces,[33] and that the educated congressman 'was an object of contempt'[34] 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.[35]

Thus, not only did the proportion of Sikhs in the Indian Army fall, from the 12 per cent it stood at in 1925 to 10 per cent in 1942 and even lower in 1946,[36] 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',[37] came to be viewed 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.[38]

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.[39]

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 class' from other 'Muhammedans of Punjab' in military and civil reports.[40] 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 ...[41]

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 NWFP 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.[42]

C.M. Enriques, 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.[43]

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.[44]

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.[45]

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 Afghanistan were present in the ranks of the Indian Army,[46] and thousands more were recruited for paramilitary 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 towns[47] and was accused, more specifically, of diluting his frontier blood by cavorting with 'untouchable' 'Chamar women'.[48] 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.[49]

The Afridis, hailing from the country south and west of Peshawar, were identified as 'wiry and strong' with 'excellent discipline' largely because they all recognised their common kinship from one 'common ancestor'.[50] Khattaks were praised for being 'more civilised and respected than other Pathans' because of their tendency to reside in tight democratic communities that suited them to a soldiering life.[51] 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 very unfit for enlistment under any circumstance.[52]

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 realising that military discipline superseded 'tribal loyalties'.[53] 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.[54] 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.[55]

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 per cent of the total,[56] despite the fact that 15 per cent of the Indian infantry companies sent to France in 1914 had once been exclusively Pathan.[57] 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 recognised and legislated against in British Naval and Military law from 1866, when 'Sodomy with Man or Beast' was declared a military offence.[58] 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 the partial admissions of same-sex relationships by Pathan soldiers as late as 1917.[59] It was only in the climate of the 1920s and 1930s when frontiersmen were no longer to be as valorised 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.[60]

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. [61]

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.[62]

In the early years of the Second World War the total number of troops from the NWFP rarely surpassed 6 per cent and little effort was made later to recruit more Pathan *sipahis*.[63] The new image of the Pathan was not the noble frontiersman but the deviant tribal.

Rediscovering the 'Oldest of the Martial Classes':[64] 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 invented narrative of Subedar Sita Ram, published in 1873,[65] 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 ...[66]

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, 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'.[67] 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 *sipahi*s for their adherence to caste prejudice, their poor physique and their lax morals.[68] While the recruitment of Brahmins from the United Provinces [hereafter U.P.] was curtailed for a time following 1857, the recruitment of soldiers from these communities never ceased entirely, and the soldierly reputation of the Brahmin was rehabilitated as British Imperial power in India began to wane.

In his novel *Kim*, first serialised 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:

> [Kim's] 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 ...[69]

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. If 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.[70] The caste 'exclusiveness' and intricate purification ceremonies practiced by Brahmins from northern India were seen 'as inimical to military efficiency'[71] in military handbooks, as for Kipling,[72] especially when it led to overt 'bigotry' against others.[73] Finally, the Brahmin's famed 'love of thrift' was not only seen as leading to cases of embezzlement by Brahmin non-commissioned officers (NCOs),[74] but was also connected to the 'deep and tricky character'[75] of Brahmins that fostered regimental discontent.[76] 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 when its soldiers were found to object to the 'group system of messing' enforced by its commanding officer, that could have led to ritually impure non-Brahmins preparing their food.[77]

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'.[78] 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 Brahmans [*sic*] 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.[79]

To this end, a distinction was drawn between Brahmins in the rural areas of the U.P., who exercised a sacerdotal function as part-time 'priests', and who were under no circumstance suited for military life,[80] and those 'secular' Brahmins who occupied no religious role in their villages and from whom recruits ought to be obtained.[81] Furthermore, as these 'secular Brahmans' were ranked in order of which 'tribe' or 'sub-tribe' of U.P. Brahmin would furnish the most soldierly of recruits, it was those communities that would eat animal flesh and who tilled the soil as labourers or landed agriculturalists that were most highly prized. The reason for this was because they had surpassed their Brahminical heritage by being 'cultivators pure and simple'.[82] 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 in which the Brahmin agriculturalist was held by the Second World War that 37,000 'Brahmans' were recruited in the artillery, engineers, infantry and Royal Indian Army Service Corps; and three-quarters of them were rural Kanoujiyas.[83]

Other Brahmins recruited into the Indian Army, such 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 be 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', and no loss of Rajput royalty had occurred that would have thrown the Hindu population 'wholly into the hands of the Brahmans'.[84] 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',[85] 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'.[86] 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.[87]

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, by the end of 1940, all of the 28,071 Dogras in the Indian Army were grouped together in the same companies and sections regardless of caste,[88] because,

> ...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.[89]

Thus, the image of Norgate's faithful Brahmin was revived, albeit in a different form, as narratives of martiality in India changed, which helped to fill both the material gap in the numbers of the Indian Army in the Second World War, and the gap in the psyche of the colonial military establishment that was searching for new soldiering classes to replace the ones 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 in no way constitutes an innovation.[90]

Conclusion: Finding Men, Following Negatives

A history of the handbooks that emerged after 1857 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 Frederick 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 the failings and virtues of all Indians: inscrutable in their fidelity and their treachery. But the negatives never or rarely outlasted their production. Bingley produced his *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 recruited by the Indian Army in a different guise long before their sudden rediscovery by Claude Auchinleck as 'the oldest of the [martial] classes'.[91]

So what use are the handbooks for the historian if they were so easily discarded and so poorly representative of soldiers? For an historian of the Indian Army, their use comes from the fact that 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'.[92] 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 in the twenty-first century in order to excuse/justify wars of occupation/liberation in Afghanistan.[93]

If the handbooks were recurring colonial fantasy, so were they a recurring colonial nightmare. The events of 1857 only existed in an abstracted form in the handbooks and its associated literature. Mention was made of it only in stern explanatory paragraphs preceding the happier ethnographic terrain of collating local parables, jokes and stories. Yet the 'Great Mutiny' permeates through the double exposure of that colonial lens. It appears as a ghostly presence whenever bungalows were set alight, explanations had to be sought for high rates of desertion, and when a military class suddenly proved itself no longer worthy of recruitment (or the reverse). The (re)production or (re)abandonment of handbooks are a blueprint to where things went awry: where *sipahis* acted in a manner akin to that of their peers in 1857. And, if *sipahis* were not aware of the exact effect their actions had in metamorphosing fantasy to horror, there were, at times, deliberate invocations of the mutinous spirit of 1857 among soldiers ready to rebel in the First and Second World Wars.[94]

Notes and References

1. The Wikipedia entry on 'Martial Race' quotes only one 'British scholar' on the matter. Unsurprisingly that 'scholar' is George MacMunn. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_Race (accessed 05 November 2012).
2. Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley: California UP, 1971), pp. 46–48.

3. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 6 onwards. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
4. '... this book claims that the British Army in India was neither apolitical or marginal to British culture; rather, its representatives exerted considerable efforts trying to shape the values of Victorian culture.' Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 2.
5. 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.
6. 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 the turban.

   Shiromani Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, to Dominque de Villepin, Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes 13 February 2004. http://www.sgpc.net/dastar/index.asp (accessed 05 November 2012).
7. 'Space Seed'; *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Series 1, Episode 2 (1967).
8. *Punjab Administration Report*, Lahore: Government Printing, 1849–1851; R.K. Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 9.
9. Mazumdar, *Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, p. 8.
10. 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'.

11. Friedrich Engels, 'The Revolt in India', published in the New York Daily Tribune, 1 October 1958; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence, 1857–1859* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, reprint 1988), p. 152.

12. A.H. Bingley, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs* (Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1899), p. 37.
13. Ibid., p. 39.
14. Ibid., p. 49.
15. Lepel Griffin; Ibid., p. 93.
16. A number of 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 per cent. *India's Contribution to the Great War, published by Authority of the Government of India* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1923), Appendix C.
17. The total Sikh population in Punjab was some 3,238,803 according to the Census of 1921.
18. Bingley, *Handbooks: Sikhs*, pp. 29–30.
19. Such as between Doaba Sikhs nearer the Majha area, areas bordering the Himalayas, etc. Bingley, *Handbooks: Sikhs*, Ch. 5.
20. *Punjab District Gazetteers: Vol. XXA, Amritsar District, 1914* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1914), p. 84.
21. *District Gazetteers: Amritsar, 1914*, pp. 33–34.
22. *District Gazetteers: Amritsar, 1914*, pp. 33–34.
23. *Gazetteer of the Chenab Colony, Vol. 31A, 1904* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904), p. 158.
24. Frederick Yeats-Brown, *Martial India* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1945), p. 31.
25. It is also intriguing to note that an attack on a minister's house is deemed of more import than the destruction of Government buildings. One can only presume that it was because the latter had become commonplace. *Punjab District Gazetteers: Vol. XXXIVA, Gujranwala District, 1935* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1936), p. 36.
26. The Akali movement was concerned with the reform of Gurdwaras. B.H. Dobson, *Final Report on the Chenab Colony Settlement* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1915), p. 37.
27. East India Sedition Committee, 1918 (Rowlatt Committee), *Report of Committee Appointed to Investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India* (London: HM Stationary Office, 1918), p. 68.
28. 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, reprint 2004), pp. 19–20.
29. Ibid., p. 25.
30. Ibid., pp. 54–55.
31. '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).
32. Winston Churchill; 'Subversive Attempts'.
33. *Class Composition of the Army in India*, War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library (L/WS/1/456), p. 23.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 24.
36. Ibid., p. 31.
37. Lit. 'There is One Revered, Timeless Truth'.
38. 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.
39. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*; Introduction and Notes by David Blair (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, reprint 2002), p. 8.
40. 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).

41. 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.
42. *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.
43. Enriquez, *Pathan Borderland,* pp. 52–53.
44. R.T.I. Ridgway, 40th Pathans, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Pathans* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1910), p. 19.
45. Enriquez, *Pathan Borderland*, p. 89.
46. *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).
47. 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.
48. Ibid., pp. 47–48.
49. Ridgway, *Handbooks: Pathans*, p. 15.
50. Ibid., pp. 50–51.
51. Ibid., p. 94.
52. Ibid., p. 56.
53. '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.
54. '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*, 2nd edition (Delhi: Government Central Press, 1923), pp. 11 and 30.
55. Ibid., p. 4.
56. Eight from a total of 152; 'Statements Showing "Class Composition" of Newly Raised Indian Infantry Battalions, on 1 January 1917', *Class Composition.*
57. Eighteen 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.
58. Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), pp. 79–80.
59. 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, *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1917–1918*, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library (L/MIL/5/827) Part 2.

60. Maurice Willoughby, *Echo of a Distant Drum: The Last Generation of Empire* (Lewes, East Sussex: Book Guild, 2001), p. 21.
61. Ibid.
62. MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, p. 244.
63. Extrapolated from figures on the Indian Army, 1/1/41, and later, *Class Composition.*
64. 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).
65. 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 Alison Safadi, '*From Sepoy to Subedar/Khvab-o-Khayal* and Douglas Craven Phillott', *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 25, (2010), pp. 42–65.
66. Foreword by Sitaram in James Lunt, ed., *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* (Reprint, Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970), p. xxix.
67. Sita Ram, '*From Sepoy to Subedar*', p. 164.
68. 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), pp. 545–569; and Channa Wickremesekera, '*Best Black Troops in the World': British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1746–1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002).
69. Project Gutenburg e-book by Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, release date 2000, posting date Jan. 2009, p. 134.
70. A.H. Bingley and A. Nicholls, *Caste Handbooks for the Indian Army: Brahmans* (Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1897), p. 42.
71. Bingley and Nicholls, *Handbooks: Brahmans*, p. 46.
72. As with the village Brahmin encountered in Chapter 3. Kipling, *Kim.*
73. As apparently among the Kanoujiya Gaur Brahmins of U.P. Bingley and Nicholls, *Handbooks: Brahmans*, p. 18.
74. Ibid., p. 42.
75. Ibid., p. 51.
76. In Kipling's work the same village Brahmin referenced above tries to steal the purse of a Tibetan lama after slipping an opiate into his drink. Kipling, *Kim*, p. 50.
77. This is the conclusion drawn by the presiding officers at the courts martial, although the testimony of the soldiers themselves indicates that they had other concerns. *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).
78. Bingley and Nicholls, *Handbooks: Brahmans*, p. 10.
79. Ibid., pp. 7–9.
80. Ibid., p. 20.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., p. 13–20.
83. *Typewritten minute marked 'Strictly Personal and Secret' from General Auchinleck,* BL/ Mss Eur F274/95, 12 Feb 1946, p. 4.

84. 'It is in Kangra, and perhaps in Kangra alone, that we find caste existing nearly in the same state as that which the Musulmin invaders found it when they entered the Punjab. It is certainly here that the Brahmin 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.
85. Bingley, *Handbooks: Dogras*, p. 25.
86. Ibid., p. 24.
87. Ibid., p. 26.
88. 'Annual Return Showing the Class Composition of the Indian Army etc., on 1st January 1941', *Class Composition.*
89. Bingley, *Handbooks: Dogras*, p. 71.
90. Auchinleck, 'Note on the Size and Composition'.
91. Ibid.
92. *Our Sowars and Sepoys: Official Text-Book for the Lower Standard Examination in Urdu (English)* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1941), Preface.
93. 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, *New York Times*, 7 June 2009.

94. Consider, for instance, both Ghadar propaganda during the First World War and the plays staged by the 'Drama Parties' of the Indian National Army during the Second. Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ghadar Movement, Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983). Gajendra Singh, 'Breaking the Chains with Which We Were Bound': The Interrogation Chamber, the Indian National Army and the Negation of Military Identities, 1941–1947', in Kaushik Roy, ed., *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 493–518.

8

MUTINY, WAR OR SMALL WAR? REVISITING AN OLD DEBATE

Gautam Chakravarty

Mutiny or War

IT often seems as if that old dispute—whether the Rebellion of 1857 was a mutiny or a national war of independence—began only in the early twentieth century, as a new generation of radical nationalists began to challenge the decrees of colonial historiography and to write their own versions of the past. There is, of course, a reason for this assumption. Savarkar's polemical work, *The Indian War of Independence*, came out in 1909 in a political atmosphere dominated by Swadeshi, by the Surat split in the Congress, and by terrorist groups working in and out of India.[1] As if to aid the self-constitution of the new nationalism of these years, Savarkar's book argued strenuously for the first time that what the British had so far described as merely a mutiny was, in fact, a war of independence, much like the American War of Independence, and directed moreover against the same imperium.

Savarkar was certainly not the first Indian writer to reflect on the event as a whole. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab-e-Bagawat-e-Hind* (Causes of the Indian Rebellion), Dorabhoy Franjee's *The British Rule Contrasted with its Predecessors*, and *The Mutinies and the People* by Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee had appeared within two years of the event.[2] But these accounts by a modernising Muslim in British service, a Bombay Parsi and an anglicised Calcutta publicist, respectively, all shared the sizeable British opinion that the rebellion was no more than an aberration; that whatever political freight or popular energy it may have possessed was essentially retrograde and incoherent. In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, when British power seemed invincible, the authors of these texts tried to distance the peoples they claimed to represent from the rebels and their cause, and to assure the government of their loyalty. Such anxieties about loyalty are

absent in the major nineteenth century Indian account of the rebellion, *Sipahi Juddher Itihasa* (History of the Sipahi War) by Rajanikanta Gupta, which was written between 1870 and 1900 and published in five volumes.[3] Based on John William Kaye's *History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864–1876), the main burden of Gupta's work was to show how, on some crucial points, the Indian view of the event was quite different from the view that British historians took, and that such difference was evidence of a fundamental difference of racial feeling and national memory. While this recognition of divergent interpretations was itself a sign of the times—*Sipahi Juddher Itihasa* was after all written in the decades that saw the rise of the Indian National Congress and its slow but irreversible radicalisation through the 1890s—Gupta's history hardly disturbed the half-century-old consensus that Savarkar would prise open with his 'war of independence' thesis.

Savarkar relied largely on British sources, yet his conclusion about a general state of war, fired by an intuitive but coherent idea of a nation, and overriding communitarian difference, gave a radical genealogy to the extremists and revolutionary terrorists, who could now turn for inspiration to the violently anti-colonial and indeed 'nationalist'—resistance of an earlier generation. By turning the mutiny into a war, and the rebels into 'nationalist' heroes, *The Indian War of Independence* inaugurated a potent Swadeshi historiography of the rebellion, which tells us perhaps as much about the choices that Indian nationalism faced in the first decade of the twentieth century, as about the rebellion itself.[4] But if this quarrel over history mirrored the growing irreconcilability of nation and the empire—an irreconcilability that Edward John Thompson lamented in *The Other Side of the Medal* (1925)[5]—and if it revealed a new phase of Indian nationalism, it was certainly not unique in the annals of the rebellion.

The dispute over an appropriate description of the events of 1857 began almost immediately, indeed, in June 1858, when the adjutant general of the Bengal army, a Colonel George Bruce Malleson, published from Calcutta a slim but shrill pamphlet titled, *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army*.[6] Malleson's blow-by-blow account of the events at Barrackpore, Danapur, Meerut, Delhi and Kanpur between March and June 1857 had one basic point to make: that what had begun as 'a military mutiny ... speedily changed its character and became a national insurrection'.[7] In explaining why this happened, Malleson interestingly put the blame not on Hindu superstition or Muslim fanaticism—those staples of popular British accounts of the rebellion—but on the functionaries of the East India Company's civil service, who, in trying to preserve 'their own domination ... extending over a hundred years ... had completely failed in attaching even one section of the population to British rule'. But more than the civil service, 'the real author of the mutiny' was Lord Dalhousie, the governor general in the years leading up to the rebellion, who, with his reckless annexation of kingdoms, his land resumptions in the north-western provinces and

intrusive social reforms, had created conditions for a widespread and rebellious combination of soldiers, peasants, landowners and the nobility.[8]

I shall return to the charges against Lord Dalhousie later. For now let us contrast Malleson's view with that of a minor civil servant, Charles Raikes, who was a judge at the Agra Sadar Court in 1857, and a witness to the rebellion in Mathura and Agra. In his *Notes on the Revolt in the Northwest Provinces of India* (1858), Raikes wrote that he attributed:

> the existing disturbances in India to a *mutiny* in the Bengal army, and to that cause alone; I mean that the exciting and immediate cause of the *revolution* is to be found in the mutiny. That we have in many parts of the country drifted from mutiny to *rebellion* is all too true; but I repeat my assertion: that we have to deal now with a *revolt* caused by a mutiny, and not with a mutiny growing out of a national discontent.[9]

It is hard to miss the apologists' tone in Raikes's strained description, where 'revolution', 'rebellion', 'revolt' and 'national discontent' are finally reduced to the relative simplicity of a mutiny. Neither Raikes nor Malleson are, however, isolated cases. In the records and debates that appeared within the first two years, the military tried to absolve itself by pointing to a general state of discontent that led to the mutiny in the Bengal army, while for the civil service, it was expedient to claim that the genesis of the disturbance lay simply in military indiscipline, and thus, to contain the event through a deft semantic manoeuvre. By the mid-1860s, however, the dust had settled on this controversy in British official circles and in official historiography. The new consensus about the rebellion-as-mutiny that now appeared was of course shaped by the aftermath of the rebellion. The Crown replaced the company in November 1858, the rebellion died out by the end of 1859, and under the new peace of the Raj it made little sense to insist on the 'national' character of the rebellion.

The Malleson–Raikes dispute was, however, not only about a long-standing rivalry between the civil and the military arms of the company's Indian administration; a rivalry that had simmered through much of the century in the periodical press, in official records and memoirs and even, at times, in fiction. The rivalry was perhaps understandable, for while the company's army conquered and held new territories, in its wake came the civil service, which often represented metropolitan theories and practices of government, and administered, the lands and the peoples, often in ways that the old India hands in the army considered foolhardy. But behind this turf war, lay a more fundamental, and trickier question: of what the 'first one hundred years of British rule in India' had done or undone, and with what consequences.[10] Malleson had raised this question when he wrote about a hundred-year-old failure of the civil service, and it was the same question that would reappear, though with another inflection, in nationalist historiography of the rebellion.

What is remarkable is how much there was in common between the accounts of Malleson and Savarkar, one by a colonial officer writing in 1858, and the other by a revolutionary terrorist fifty years later. Like Malleson, Savarkar had argued, on the evidence of civil rebellion, that there was more to the event than a mutiny. This, along with the leadership of the old royal houses of Delhi, Awadh, Bithoor and Jhansi, and the signs of a premeditated conspiracy, led both authors to draw nearly identical conclusions about a 'national insurrection' or 'war of independence'. Moreover, Malleson's accusation that the government had failed in securing the loyalty of even one section of the population to British rule in a hundred years was a necessary proposition for Savarkar; only, in his case, the real author of the discontent was not Dalhousie or the civil service alone, but the very fact of British presence in India as a colonial state.

At this point it might be interesting to turn to another historian of the rebellion, John William Kaye, who published the first volume of his book *The History of the Sepoy War in India* in 1864.[11] Kaye was well suited for this task, having succeeded John Stuart Mill as the secretary of the Secret and Political Department of the India Office in 1858.[12] Kaye's title, which signals the difficulty of naming the event, seems to gesture towards a weak compromise between the two schools of thought. While the word 'sepoy' is a nod at the mutiny theory, the word 'war' suggests an event more critical than military indiscipline or a law and order problem. Though as a title the phrase 'sepoy war' is both awkward and vague (the sepoys being meant to fight wars makes the phrase tautological), it is already an admission of the failure of monocausal explanation. While earlier historians such as Charles Ball, E.H. Nolan and Robert Martin had begun their works with a general account of India, Kaye begins with an extended reflection of the causes of the rebellion.

Within Kaye's consideration of the causes of the rebellion he develops a wide-ranging critique of the first hundred years of British rule in India. Though Kaye had earlier written an eulogistic account of British progress in India in his 1851 book *The Administration of the East India Company, The Sepoy War* is more chastened and circumspect, and it shows how the 'progress of Englishism' in government, education, technology and social reform were fundamentally responsible for the rebellion. Against the verities of liberal-utilitarianism and philosophic radicalism inspired by Bentham and James Mill, which had through the decades argued for more strenuous changes in India, Kaye now seeks to return to a more conservative and cautious approach to Indian society and politics. Moreover, in trying to show the link between liberal political theory as applied in India and the rebellion, the first volume of *The Sepoy War* actually discloses a hidden similarity between the company's recent activities in India and republicanism, whether in England or in France. For years, Kaye wrote:

> clever, well-read secretaries with a turn for historical illustration discovered a parallel between this grievous state of things in Bengal and that which preceded

> the great revolution in France, when the privileges of the old nobility pressed out the very life of the nation, until the day of reckoning and retribution came, with a dire tyranny of its own.[13]

Thus, in seeking to forestall a future popular outburst against a seigneurial tradition, exactly what did not happen in France, by means of timely reforms, the company's liberal administrators produced a 'reign of terror' that affected all classes in the north Indian countryside. Kaye goes on to write that 'a revolution in landed property, brought about by means of English application' threw up dangerous and 'disaffected classes who bided their time for the recovery of what they had lost, in some new revolutionary epoch'.[14] Foreshadowed already by the developments of the decades leading up to 1857, that revolutionary epoch is configured by Kaye as the counter-revolutionary 'Sepoy War', when the Indian 'ancien regime' returned to claim its lost rights and privileges, and to bring vengeance on the authors of the original terror.[15]

The Buckler Thesis

This fifty-year-old dispute over an appropriate description, which first appeared between the civil and military arms of the colonial state, and subsequently between nationalists and the apologists of empire, is a useful indicator of the ways in which history could be appropriated and represented by different interests, often in highly literary ways. In the writings of both the partisans and opponents of the mutiny thesis, the same set of dramatic and actions and characters, drawn from very nearly the same archive, are tugged about in different directions and made to signify altogether different things. Though Mallesson did speak about a hundred-year-old background of misrule, and Savarkar about the lack of principle underlying British rule in India, neither had fully unpacked the implications of their claims.

The first critique of the grounds on which terms such as mutiny or national war made sense appeared in a 1922 article by Francis W. Buckler, who was then Muir professor of history at Allahabad University. In the 'The Political Theory of the Indian Mutiny', which appeared in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Buckler began in the late eighteenth century, when the East India Company began to change its character from a mercantile company to a territorial power.[16] For its role in helping the Mughal emperor against his rebellious governor in Bengal, the company was itself appointed the governor, or *subedar*, of the province of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. All Mughal *subas* had *subedars*, so there was nothing particularly unique about what happened in 1764; only, the *subedar*, in this case, was not a tributary king or a Mughal nobleman, but an English trading company with an eye for the main chance and a

well-trained mercenary army. As *subedar*, the company had to pay the emperor not only a due portion of the revenue from the territories it held on behalf of the emperor, it had to do so with an annual ceremonial visit to Agra or Delhi, where successive governors general paid homage and tribute to the emperor in durbar and paid *nuzur*, for which the emperor in turn offered his servant, the *subedar*, gifts, robes of honour and his blessings. The company continued this practice until 1833, annually confirming its subordination to the emperor at a public ceremony, whose rituals went back to the Safavi rituals of kingship that Akbar had imported from Persia in the late sixteenth century.

High Mughal forms of authority may have persisted, but the Mughal empire fell apart through the eighteenth century, even as the company, in the time-honoured fashion of restive and ambitious *subedar*s, began to pursue its own interests and ambitions, which were mercantile, military and political, though not always in that order. Throughout the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the company's territories grew rapidly, eating into other erstwhile *suba*s and provinces such as Awadh, the Deccan and central India, and chipping away inexorably at Mughal authority, even as the company kept up the appearance of its original constitutional obligation to the emperor. For Buckler, the company was perhaps the most sustained and draining enemy of the Mughal state, and quite apart from encouraging the secession of the *suba* of Awadh, from 1772, the company even began to keep for itself the revenues of Bengal, the richest of the Mughal provinces, instead of tendering it to the imperial treasury.

Buckler argues that the show of constitutional obligation to the emperor was not the only role-play the company was obliged to perform. In the British Parliament, where its trading charter was renewed every twenty years, the company kept up another pretence: that it was the protector, on behalf of Britain, of territories of the Mughal empire, and that the *nuzur* the governor general paid annually at Delhi was only a pension for an improvident monarch. After 1764, the company had thus two masters to serve, one in Delhi and the other in London. As Buckler demonstrates through a close reading of Mughal farmans, while the company was given the right to trade in India by Parliament, all its territorial rights and the right to administer justice and collect revenue came neither from the English Crown or Parliament, nor from military strength, but from the farmans of the Mughal emperor. It was as *subedar* that the company represented itself in the Mughal court, and that was how they were recognised by the other territorial powers in India.

Buckler's following point was brilliantly simple. Compounded by the omissions and commissions of the double obligation to the emperor and to Parliament, the company's administration from the late eighteenth century 'assumed an attitude and pursued a policy towards the Mughal emperor, which to him could appear in no other light than that of high treason; and, the culmination was reached when Dalhousie and Canning attempted to tamper

with the right of succession'.[17] Buttressing this political and constitutional history with a close reading of *The Proceedings of the Trial of the King of Delhi* and other evidence, Buckler's case was that in 1857, the soldiers of the Bengal army, along with the ecumenical classes, the traditional elite and the people at large, turned against the insubordinate company-as-*subedar* on behalf of their *de jure* lord and master, the Mughal emperor.[18] The essay ends with the startling claim that: 'if there was any mutineer in 1857, it was the East India Company', and the use of the word 'mutiny' in subsequent writing was a wilful obfuscation of the constitutional basis of British power in India.[19] But this obfuscation had a long history. Buckler shows how, aided by a propaganda machine run by its historians and publicists, the company 'evolved a fictitious history of India, until, in the first half of the nineteenth century, side by side there existed a politically effective Empire with an accepted history of its non-existence'.[20]

Buckler added that the guilt the British ascribed to the emperor, cleverly renamed 'the king of Delhi' in judicial documents, 'recoiled on the Company, his disloyal vassal, since his difficulties arose mainly from the Company's intrigues and from the fact that after 1772, the Company reneged on its obligation to tender the revenue of Bengal'.[21] For Buckler, it was this hundred-year-old story of insubordination and betrayal that the loyalists of the emperor had tried, though vainly, to amend. Despite the constitutional formalism that underlies the essay, or perhaps because of it, there is in Buckler an unmistakable moral tone that is reminiscent of Edmund Burke's criticism, made well before the Hastings' trial, that the 'Company never has made a treaty that it has not broken', or that 'there is not a *single* prince, state, or potentate, great or small, in India, with whom they [the Company] have come in contact, whom they have not sold'.[22]

Curiously, Buckler was quite positive about the future of the new dispensation, had the rebellion been successful. At the end of the essay, he observed about the state of Delhi in the summer of 1857 that

> cruelties, deaths, financial and other disorders are subordinate to the main issue. Temporary administrative chaos was inevitable when the officers of the great vassal had to flee from their posts. But there is little if any evidence to show that recovery was impossible had the outbreak been successful.[23]

Rebellion and Small War

Buckler's formalist interpretation was largely ignored by later historiography, and the mutiny or national war debate died out after a brief revival in the centenary publications of 1957. Thereafter, the interest in the discovery of covering law models or 'causes of the rebellion' was replaced by a new attention to specific acts of resistance at particular localities. First evident in S.B. Chaudhuri's

books, *Civil Disturbances During British Rule in India*, and *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies*, this interest reappeared with microeconomic detail in the studies of rural revolt by Eric Stokes, and later by Rudgrangshu Mukherjee, Gautam Bhadra and Tapati Roy.[24] With its focus on discrete acts of resistance by local actors, communities and social groups, and in recovering the fragmentary voices, visions, symbols and other traces of peasant consciousness, the new scholarship on the rebellion represented a breakthrough in the historiography of the rebellion, and was itself contiguous with the rise of subaltern theory and history writing in India. But while the new history opened up the old nationalist–imperialist logjam in historiography, the focus on particular instances of popular resistance made it harder to speak about the rebellion as a unified event, or to locate the event alongside other similar events elsewhere in the world. Yet, what is difficult is not always impossible, and it may even be necessary work, in any contemporary commemoration that remembers the event as a whole, to readdress the rebellion in terms of a general theory, though without reviving the old, indeed misleading, totalisations that were the basis of the mutiny or war dispute.

While there is a good bit of literature on the military aspects of the rebellion, on the strategies of the rebels and British campaigns of reconquest, there is little or no work that views the rebellion in the light of long and dense history of colonial conflicts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Walter Laquer, John Lonsdale, and Moor and Wesseling have variously shown, Britain was involved in close to eighty-two 'irregular' colonial military campaigns between the 1830s and 1870s.[25] Add to this the Anglo-Egyptian war (1882), the Belgian–Arab war (1892–1894), the Germany–Tanganyika war (1905), the Anglo-Burmese war (1885), the Franco-Madagascar war (1894–1895), the Aceh war (1873–1879), the second British-Afghan war (1878–1880), the Italo-Ethiopian war (1895–1896) and the Franco-Indo-Chinese war (1882–1884), and one gets an idea of the ubiquity of indigenous resistance to colonial advances and interventions.

The increasing frequency of conflicts in Asia and Africa—and surely the Rebellion of 1857 should be included in any list of these—led to the making of a theory of colonial or irregular warfare in the 1890s. The first important work on the subject was *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (1899) by Major C.E. Calwell of the Intelligence Department at the War Office in London. Though Calwell does not expressly discuss the Indian Rebellion, much of his discussion on strategic and tactical issues applies to the rebellion. Calwell began with an initial distinction between the conduct of European warfare and colonial warfare, or between big and small wars.[26] While big wars were fought between states on well-defined battlefields and employed regular troops and conventional strategies, the small war was typically between a (colonial) state and loose bands of militias without a central military or political command structure. Calwell noted that 'strong and well-organized opponents ... were the

earlier adversaries for the Europeans, both militarily and politically, both during conflict and thereafter', but that 'an enemy with lower degree of organization, which limited itself to guerilla activities, was much more difficult to deal with', mainly because the civilian and the combatant were often indistinguishable.[27] Moreover, small wars were different from conventional wars between European states in that the former 'were conducted to establish permanent presence', and thus 'a purely military approach was insufficient', for 'account always had to be taken of civilians'.[28] This attention to the civilian population during insurgency was of course twofold: it could mean what is now popularly known as 'winning hearts and minds', but could also mean punishing the civilian population since the combatants were closely merged with civilians. Calwell further distinguished between three types of small war: these were (*a*) wars of conquest and annexation, (*b*) wars of subjugation and pacification and (*c*) wars of discipline and punishment. In all three cases, small wars were 'expeditions against savages and semi-civilised races by disciplined soldiers, campaigns to suppress rebellions and guerilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field'.[29] The irregular nature of these conflicts called for an equally unconventional response. The absence of a clear political core and the fluidity between the civilian and the combatant called for direct assault on the population, for the strategic principle was that of 'overawing the enemy by bold initiative and resolute action'. This meant the use of light mounted brigades or flying columns (instead of static defence), unusual tactics, a scorched earth policy, the avoidance of prolonged conventional campaigns, behind-the-lines action and, lastly, bluff and bluster. For Calwell, 'this is the way to deal with Asiatics—to go for them and to cow them by sheer force of will'.[30]

Calwell's proposals on the conduct of the small war find an echo in accounts of the so-called 'pacification' of Punjab and the North-West Frontier from the late 1840s and of course in histories of British military campaigns during the rebellion. The attacks on the civilian populations between Allahabad and Kanpur by the reconquering army from Banaras, the destruction of standing crops, the sack of Delhi, the recruitment and deployment of the Delhi Field Force and the killing of the Mughal princes by Captain Hodson were all examples of irregular warfare meant to cow the population and to engage a fluid enemy. At the same time, the theory of the small war that Calwell developed on the basis of nineteenth century colonial conflicts had, and indeed continues to enjoy, a long afterlife. As Wesseling observes:

> Colonial armies were accustomed—and often compelled—to attack continuously, irrespective of their chances of success, in order to sustain the image of European superiority. It is not difficult to discover the connection between this approach and the predominant mentality of 1914–18, which focused sharply on willpower, morale and holding the offensive.[31]

The story of the small war, and that of the Indian Rebellion, does not end there. Calwell's theory and practice of the small war reappeared in 1940 in an US Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*, which, with periodic updates, is still the standard handbook for counter-insurgency operations, in such diverse theatres as Vietnam, Nicaragua, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.[32] With newer forms of imperialism on the rise, and new interventions by western states in non-western polities and societies, 'asymmetric' conflict between governments and non-state actors seeking to overthrow the state with non-conventional means have become a dominant concern in strategic studies in the last two decades.[33] And, as the most important new theatres of insurgency are in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, the records of colonial warfare in these and contiguous parts of the world are once again in the news, as sources of valuable information on strategy and tactics. More than ever before, contemporary British and American security policy is turning to nineteenth century irregular colonial warfare, of which the Indian Rebellion is perhaps the centrepiece, for lessons in the containment of terrorism, counter-insurgency, disarmament, surveillance and the re-tailoring of small war strategy and counter-insurgency for Islamic societies. As one strategist at the RAND Corporation has recently observed:

> Insurgency and counter-insurgency ... have enjoyed a level of military, academic, and journalistic notice unseen since the mid-1960s. Scholars and practitioners have recently reexamined 19th—and 20th—century counter-insurgency campaigns waged by the United States and European colonial powers.... The professional military literature is now awash with articles on how the armed services should prepare for what the US Department of Defence refers to as 'irregular warfare', and scholars, after a long hiatus, have sought to deepen our understanding of the roles that insurgency, terrorism, and related forms of political violence play in the international security environment.[34]

This new prose of counter-insurgency—to borrow the phrase from Ranajit Guha—gives us a fresh context for returning to the Rebellion of 1857.[35] The rebellion has all the ingredients of the contemporary insurgency–counter-insurgency scenario where conventional armies are faced with unconventional, or non-classical military situations: traditional societies, expropriated elites, religious motivation, conceptions of religious war, loose networks of resistance, and fluidity between combatants and civilians. The rich dividends of the local studies of rebel actions and motivations are already with us: it is perhaps time to look again for an aggregative reading of the rebellion and to relocate the event in a long history of colonial, neo-colonial and neo-conservative conflict making.

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Index