Indian Soldiers, Policemen and Watchmen in China in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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> As soon as the rickshaw puller straightened up to go, the outstretched hand of an Indian policeman holding a gun blocked the way. The appearance of the man frightened the child. He hid his face in terror. 'There's nothing to be afraid of,' Mr Pan told the child. 'He is just an Indian policeman. Look at his red turban. Because back home we don't have policemen like him, we have to come here. With his gun he will protect us. Look at his beard, it's amusing. It looks like that of the arhats in the temples.'
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> The child was too frightened to look even at a beard like that of an arhat.[1]

Soldiers, policemen and watchmen formed a large as well as a highly visible segment of the Indian population in China in the century from the 1840s to the 1940s. This was a unique feature of this particular overseas Indian community. In contrast to this, the major trend in most other overseas Indian communities in this period was the migration of labour to work the fields, mines, railroads and other such enterprises. In China, unlike in many other countries, the British and other Western powers found a plentiful supply of suitable cheap labour for their enterprises. Hence, the scope for the import of Indian labour into China was extremely limited.

On the other hand, soldiering and guard duties were a field in which the demand for Indians was great among the colonial powers in China.[2] Britain,

[1] From Ye Shaojun, 'Pan Xiansheng zai Nanzhong' (Mr. Pan at Nanzhong), in *Zhonghua Xiandai Wenxue* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe), p. 102. I am grateful to Sharmishta Gupta Basant for drawing my attention to this passage and for translating it for me.

[2] Needless to say, Indians by and large served as soldiers and policemen in China for British interests only, as most of India had come under British control by the time Western powers became embroiled in hostilities with China from the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, at times other European powers also did seek to enlist the services of Indians in their police and armed forces in China and the Far East. A letter from the Portuguese Consul-General in Bombay to the Secretary of

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singly or in alliance with other powers, fought three 'China Wars' in this period, besides being involved in the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion. The colony of Hong Kong required continuous garrisoning in addition to a regular police force which, for various reasons, the British were unwilling to raise entirely from the local population. Moreover, because of the turbulent conditions in China during much of this period, and the strong undercurrents of hostility to foreign interests that periodically surfaced into open clashes, the British required the presence of reliable and experienced troops. Given the limited number of British military and police personnel that were available for protecting Britain's global interests, it was not surprising that the British authorities turned to Indian soldiers for their needs in China.

Although their duties were not exactly identical, soldiers, policemen and watchmen formed a single socioeconomic category among the Indians in China. Generally speaking, ex-soldiers or those from soldiers' families were the ones who found employment as policemen in Hong Kong and the treaty ports of China. In the same way, those retired or discharged from police or army services were the most sought after as private watchmen by both Chinese and European employers. Hence, the background and experience of these persons, the factors motivating them to come to China and their reactions to the conditions around them tended to be broadly comparable. Moreover, with their high visibility and striking and colourful appearance (especially since they were uniformed, and many had turbans and beards), this particular category of Indians tended to dominate the popular Chinese perception of Indians as a whole in this period.

THE ARMIES OF BRITISH INDIA, BRITISH RECRUITMENT POLICIES AND INDIAN EMIGRATION FROM PUNJAB

The First Bengal Native Regiment was raised by Robert Clive in 1757. This force included not just Bengalis but also others, like Pathans, Rajputs, Jats, Rohillas and men from other communities who were to be found in this region because of the Muslim conquest of Bengal and the politically unsettled conditions generally prevailing in northern India in this period.[3] In the initial stages, the three Presidencies under the East India Company, which were in a more or less constant state of hostilities with the forces of neighbouring Indian principalities and of other European powers like the French, recruited and organised forces of Indian soldiers on an *ad hoc* basis to meet their own military requirements. The Madras Regiment was founded in 1758, when the forces of the French were threatening to besiege Madras. Of the Madras Army, less than 12 per cent were actually Tamils, with

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the Government of Bombay Political Department in 1921 sought permission to raise a 'military police force consisting of Indian Mussulmans' on behalf of the Government of Macao (*Maharashtra State Archives*/General Dept. Comp. 478 (1921), pp. 1–16).

[3] F.G. Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to the Year 1895* (New Delhi: Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 1971), p. 5.

nearly three-quarters of the force consisting of those from Telengana as well as other communities.[4] By 1798 there were about 24,000 Indians in the Bengal Army, about the same number in the Madras Army and about 9,000 in the army of the Bombay Presidency.[5]

The military recruitment and organisation policies adopted by the British in India changed according to the changing security needs of the expanding British empire. Initially, the Company's forces were engaged primarily in extending the areas of conquest within India itself. The near-completion of this process by the mid-nineteenth century and the shift to concern with internal stability and security, compounded by the scare caused by the Rebellion of 1857, led to a search for the most suitable policy. This resulted in the adoption of the territorial system of recruitment, whereby regiments were raised from all communities within a particular province and served within that province alone, being despatched outside only in case of emergencies. One of the objectives was to prevent that kind of fraternisation among troops from different parts of India which had nearly sounded the death knell of the British Empire in 1857.[6]

The resurgence of concern with external security and expansion in the later nineteenth century, dominated by the perceived threat from Russia, led to another reconsideration of recruitment policies. The efficiency and battle-worthiness of troops against powerful and sophisticated enemies became the primary concern. This led to what was called the class system of recruitment, buttressed by the so-called 'martial races' theory. The emphasis was on carefully selecting homogeneous units composed of what the British authorities determined were the best available fighting material. Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1885 to 1893, argued that traditionally in India only certain groups bore arms and hence remained fit to bear arms.[7] The military authorities zeroed in on certain 'races', literally handpicking recruits from specified districts, villages and even families. It was not surprising that the class system of recruitment and the promotion of the 'martial races' theory coincided with what has been called the 'Punjabization of the Indian Army'.[8] British military authorities were virtually unanimous in their praise for the bravery, reliability and excellent physique of Punjabi and particularly Jat Sikh soldiers. Between 1862 and 1914, while the number of regiments from UP, Bengal, Bombay and Madras actually decreased substantially, the number of Punjab regiments more than doubled from twenty-eight to fifty-seven.

[4] H. Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta: Government Printer, 1922), pp. 45–46. See also E.G. Pythian-Adams, *The Madras Regiment* (Wellington: The Defence Services Staff College Press, 1958), pp. 2–3.

[5] Rajendra Singh, *History of the Indian Army* (New Delhi: Sardar Attar Singh, Army Educational Stores, 1983), pp. 76–77.

[6] See Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 35–36, for an account of British military policies in India.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Similar considerations prevailed when the British were faced with the problem of policing the newly-acquired territory of Hong Kong after the First Opium War, and the Malay States. For a number of years the British experimented with a variety of policies, including recruiting Malays and West Indians. A few British personnel were also inducted into the police force, but on the whole they were judged as being easily dissatisfied and hard to control. Chinese were recruited too, but in both Hong Kong and the Malay States the main law and order problem was identified as being the local Chinese population itself, and hence Chinese recruits were considered to be easily corruptible and untrustworthy. Indians were an obvious choice, but here again it was found that south Indians, just like the Malays, did not strike sufficient terror into the Chinese. Finally, in 1865–66, a Deputy Superintendent of the Hong Kong Police, C V Creagh, who had had first-hand experience of India, recommended that Sikhs be recruited. The first batch of 100 Sikh policemen, personally selected by Creagh, arrived in June 1867 on a five-year contract. Apart from their physical qualities, Creagh selected his recruits on the basis of their clean record and lack of exposure to undesirable influences. These new policemen so successfully struck fear into the hearts of the local population that they began to be sent to the Straits Settlements as well from 1881. To balance the Sikhs in the Hong Kong police force, the British authorities also recruited Muslim Punjabis from Jhelum, Multan and Kamalpur districts.[9]

The British went about the business of recruiting from the rural areas of Punjab for overseas duties systematically. The months of July and August, as well as January and February, when there was less work to be done in the fields and hence the men were more likely to be found in the villages, were judged to be the best seasons for recruiting. In general, those districts where agricultural prospects were not as good as others produced more and better recruits. However, this was not always the case, as some districts had a strong tradition of military service that overrode other factors. Sometimes, recruiters scouted for men in the seasonal fairs and melas held all over Punjab, but on the whole they preferred to recruit them from their own villages and in view of their relatives and neighbours since this, they believed, generated a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the recruits. In fact, the 'pull' exercised by an enthusiastic recruit on those close to him was considered to be so important that some units organised local camps where the recruits were given their first couple of months' training, so that others could see for themselves the benefits of military service.[10] This further reinforced the pattern whereby those enlisted in various army units tended to belong to the same areas and villages.

While perhaps a majority of those deployed abroad by the British for military or police duties returned home at the end of their contract, a number stayed on in

[9] The similarity between the circumstances under which Sikh policemen were recruited in both Hong Kong and the Malay States is remarkable. See K.N. Vaid, *The Overseas Indian Community in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1972), pp. 37–38; and G.S. Sandhu, *The Indian Cavalry: History of the Indian Armoured Corps*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1981), pp. 336–40.

[10] A.E. Barstow, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1899; reprint 1940), pp. 195, 200–2.

foreign locations, lured by the relatively better prospects there. It was but natural that, with their reputation as formidable fighters, Sikhs in Hong Kong, the various treaty ports in China and the Straits Settlements found employment as watchmen and guards in private service as well. In this connection it is significant that those very districts that provided the largest number of recruits for the British Army were the ones from which originated the largest section of Indian emigrants to the Far East.[11]

Whereas the migration of Punjabis outside Punjab had traditionally been confined largely to those from the commercial castes, especially the Khatris, the phase of Punjabi emigration that began in the middle of the nineteenth century has been characterised as 'a movement which largely derived from rural Punjab, which was initially based on police or military service, which offered hard work by generally unskilled labourers, and which assumed that the migrant would return to the Punjab after attaining the purpose for which he had left home'.[12] The reasons for this shift in the emigration pattern in Punjab are to found in the political as well as socioeconomic conditions that came to prevail in the region in the nineteenth century.

With the end of the Anglo-Sikh wars in 1849, a traditional form of employment for young men in the military service in the Sikh armies was closed off. Initially, the British hesitated to recruit the newly-vanquished Sikhs into their armies, even while they admired and respected their fighting prowess. This initial reluctance, however, was quickly dispelled by the events of 1857, where the tottering British power was virtually saved by the support from the regiments from Punjab, including those from the princely states of this region. Young Punjabi males, particularly those from the Malwa and Majha regions, once again found a career in military service, which, in many cases, took them overseas.

Unlike those areas which supplied the bulk of indentured Indian labour overseas, Punjab was not a region of chronic poverty, even though famines did strike parts of Punjab in 1861 and again in 1869. Nor was it, following the end of the Anglo-Sikh wars, plagued by political instability. Nevertheless, various factors contributed to the vulnerability of rural families in Punjab from the later nineteenth century, which necessitated their seeking various means to supplement their incomes from the land.[13] The absence of primogeniture in land, for one, led to the increasing fragmentation and uneconomic nature of landholdings. Even the increasing productivity of agriculture and the growth of agricultural output in this

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[12] W.H. McLeod, 'The First Forty Years of Sikh Migration', in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery (Eds.), *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989), pp. 34–35.

[13] The various factors underlying Punjabi emigration in modern times have been thoroughly discussed by McLeod (*op. cit.*) as well as in his book, *Punjabis in New Zealand: A History of Punjabi Migration* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1986), pp. 13–30. See also Tom G. Kessinger, *Vilayatpur, 1848–1968: Social And Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1974); and Joyce Pettigrew, 'Socio-Economic Background to the Emigration of Sikhs from Doaba', *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 48–81.

period had some adverse effects on the cultivators. This was because, as output increased, the prices of agricultural produce fell, and many cultivators did not have enough money to pay the taxes, which, for the first time under the British, were fixed amounts which had to be paid in cash and not kind.[14] Indebtedness and alienation of land began to be serious problems among rural households.

Under these circumstances, families with at least one other son to carry on the family line in the village frequently took recourse to sending a younger son or sons to join the army or else overseas, in order to 'recover, preserve or improve family standards vis-a-vis other families'.[15] The decision was usually a collective one on the part of the family as a whole, rather than a decision made by the individual migrant himself, and tended to be inspired by the positive feedback received from earlier migrants. It was common for individual migrants to travel outwards from Punjab together in batches from the same village or area.

The remittances sent back by those who went abroad usually contributed significantly to preserving the landholdings of their families back home, for instance, by paying off mortgages, and to expanding their landed property as well. Other beneficial products were the ability to construct '*pakka*' houses, arrange marriages for sisters, and so on. Apart from those who went abroad as part of the army or police services, others ignored their status as landholders back home and were prepared to engage in any kind of hard labour that would yield some earnings. After leading lonely lives as expatriates, involving arduous work and much self-denial for a number of years, many of the migrants returned home. The bulk of the Indian soldiers, policemen and watchmen in China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were men from this kind of background.

THE DEPLOYMENT OF INDIAN TROOPS IN OVERSEAS ENGAGEMENTS

A large proportion of the British empire's overseas military engagements was fought with the use of Indian troops. It was Marquis Wellesley who, as Governor-General from 1798 to 1805, for the first time introduced the practice of sending Indian troops for service overseas. Overseas service for Indian regiments was always a voluntary affair under the East India Company. Initially, it was not popular with many soldiers, particularly Brahmins, of whom there were a particularly large number in the Bengal Army. To induce Indian soldiers to volunteer to serve abroad special benefits were offered, including enhanced pay, rations and pensions, extended leave with pay on completion of their tour of duty, and the choice of which regiment they wanted to rejoin in India once their service overseas was

[14] G.S. Chhabra, *Social and Economic History of the Panjab (1848–1901)* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1962), p. 303.

[15] Joyce Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

completed.[16] The reluctance of the Bengal Army soldiers permitted only a small force of Bengal volunteers to be sent to China from India when hostilities first broke out there in 1840. However, in the case of soldiers of the Madras Army, the willingness to serve overseas appeared to be greater. The entire regiment of the 14th Madras Native Infantry, for instance, volunteered for service in China in 1840. In recognition 'of the marked forwardness evinced by the Corps to proceed on foreign service', the force was presented with the badge of a Dragon and the motto '*Tayar-o-Wafadar*' (ready and loyal). These battalions also came to be known as the 'Golden Galley' for their repeated stints of service overseas.[17]

In 1801 a force comprising Indian soldiers was sent by Wellesley to Egypt to help check Napoleon's advance. Their services, however, were not required by the time they reached, as the French general in command had surrendered just the day before.[18] The Napoleonic Wars also saw the first occasion for the despatch of Indian troops to China. Six hundred Bengal sepoys under the command of Rear Admiral Drury arrived in September 1808 in Macao, the island leased to the Portuguese by the Qing Empire for commercial purposes. The purpose of their visit was allegedly to prevent Macao from falling into the hands of the French. The Portuguese did not welcome this intrusion, but were powerless to prevent it. Having already landed with his troops, the British admiral then made a formal request for permission to land, which was conveyed to the Jia Qing emperor at Beijing. The emperor was naturally incensed, and refused permission for the fleet to stay. 'Nine warships have come one after another,' he said to his officials indignantly, 'all loaded with cannon, ammunition and gunpowder. They dared to anchor at the Chi-Ching Ocean of the Hsiang-shan hsien. 300 barbarian soldiers boldly landed at Macao and lived in the churches of San-pa-ssu and Lung-sung-miao. They were divided into groups and ordered to guard both the eastern and western fortresses.... When the foreign barbarians dare to occupy the strategic spots of our frontier, we must not show the least sign of weakness or cowardice!'[19] Unwilling to enter into a confrontation with the Qing Empire at this stage, the British forces withdrew from Macao on 23 December of the same year.

[16] F.G. Cardew, *op. cit.*, p. 193. See also correspondence regarding relief of 2nd Madras Regiment at Chusan, between the Government of India, Military Department, the Government at Fort St. George Military Department and the Major General commanding the British forces at Hong Kong between August and November 1844 (National Archives of India [hereafter NAI], Foreign/8 February 1845/4–6/SC). In 1824 the 24th Bengal Native Infantry mutinied over the issue of going 'overseas' to fight in Burma. See Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 46.

[17] Geoffrey Betham and H.V.R. Geary, *The Golden Galley: The Story of the Second Punjab Regiment, 1761–1947* (Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 21–24.

[18] Rajendra Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–78.

[19] Cited in Fu Lo-shu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations (1644–1820)* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), p. 371. This version mentions just 300 soldiers. However, the official British Indian Army compilation, *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India*, Vol. 6 (Simla: Intelligence Branch, Army Headquarters, 1907–1913), gives the figure of 600 sepoys on p. 356.

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR, 1840–42

More than three decades were to pass before Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army engaged in actual combat with the Chinese for the first time during the First Opium War. It is an interesting fact that the Sanyuanli episode, famous in Chinese patriotic folklore as the occasion when thousands of Chinese villagers got together to drive off a detachment of British troops in May 1841, involved mainly a company of Indian soldiers from the 37th Madras Native Infantry (MNI). For more than a century from the time of the First Opium War, a very large number of Indian regiments did a tour of duty in China and Hong Kong and acquired battle experience there. These soldiers did a major share of the fighting in Britain's wars with China, and were also extensively involved in patrolling and guard duties. They were not confined to some remote border areas. On the contrary, the scene of their operations was the most densely populated region of China—the bustling cities and towns of the eastern seaboard and the Yangzi river region, like Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, Hankou and the surrounding areas, as well as the fast developing colony of Hong Kong. Hence, the impact of the presence of these soldiers on the Chinese perception of India and Indians is something worth considering.

The First Opium War involved not a single, continuous engagement of forces, but a series of armed encounters between the forces of the British and the Chinese, punctuated by negotiations and fairly lengthy periods of waiting for the arrival of reinforcements and for replies to communications sent to Beijing and London by leading military officers and officials on the spot. The first real armed encounter took place not near Guangzhou, which had been the locus of Sino-British confrontation till that point, but much further northward along the coast, at the town of Dinghai on Chusan Island in Hangzhou Bay. This town was attacked and occupied in July 1840 by a British force which included a battalion of Bengal Volunteers, the Madras Sappers and Miners, the Madras Artillery, and the 18th, 26th, 49th and 41st regiments of the MNI. Some of these troops were left in occupation of Dinghai for several months. Two companies of the Bengal Volunteers also took part in the same year in an armed action near Macao in the south, which was the only other such clash in the year 1840.

With the arrival of seven companies of the 37th MNI in December 1840, the force available to the British in China was greatly augmented.[20] In January they resumed active hostilities, this time choosing to force their way through to Guangzhou by attacking the numerous forts *en route*. On 7 January action commenced with an attack on Chuenpi fort, which was taken rapidly. As a condition for a truce, the British demanded, among other things, the cession of the island of Hong Kong, which they lost no time in taking possession of (on 26 January 1841), despite the Imperial Court refusing to ratify the terms of the truce. The

[20] In fact, the forces of the 37th MNI were to some extent diminished *en route* from India, when the transport ship *Golconda* sank with heavy losses on encountering a fierce typhoon in the South China Sea.

next two months saw the fall of the various defences on the approach to Guangzhou, until an armistice was signed on 20 March. Following this, the occupation of Chusan was also lifted, and some of the earliest arrivals from India, including from the Bengal Volunteers, were sent back home.

Various factors led to the raising of tensions to a fever pitch in the area around Guangzhou and to a groundswell of hostility towards the British on the part of the local population. These included British patrolling and reconnaissance activities in the surrounding countryside, resulting in depredations by their troops against local inhabitants,[21] as well as their drive to put pressure directly on the town of Guangzhou by occupying the heights to the north of the city towards the end of May 1841. This was the setting for the Sanyuanli incident. On 29 May thousands of Chinese from the villages north of Guangzhou began gathering in response to a general call to arms, following a clash between a British army patrol and some villagers in the hamlet of Donghua. On 30 May the British sent troops from the 37th MNI and 49th MNI, as well as from the Bengal Volunteers and the Cameronian Regiment, to disperse the Chinese. Initially troubled by the intense heat of midday, which caused several men to collapse from sunstroke, the troops ran into even greater trouble from a sudden, ferocious thunderstorm. In the confusion of blinding rain and the consequent flooding of paddy fields and ditches, a fifty- to sixty-strong detachment of Indian soldiers from the 37th MNI got separated from the main force. As the Chinese closed in on them, the rain also rendered the muskets of the soldiers useless because their gunpowder could not be kept dry. Although they were rescued from possible annihilation by the timely arrival of a detachment of marines, and although the armed villagers were quickly ordered to disperse by the prefect of Guangzhou, this particular incident greatly contributed to the confidence of the local Chinese militia groups that sprouted in this period.

The second northbound expedition of the British in this war, which set sail in August 1841, included, among others, men from the 36th and 49th regiments of the MNI as well as the Madras Sappers and Miners. After taking the fortified island of Gulangsu just opposite the port of Xiamen (Amoy), the expedition proceeded to recapture Dinghai. It then occupied Zhenhai on the point opposite the island on the coast and proceeded up the river to the town of Ningbo. Ningbo was taken and was occupied throughout the following winter by troops of the 36th MNI and others. During this period the battered 37th MNI, two companies of Bengal Volunteers, and troops from the 18th and 49th regiments, the Madras Artillery, and the Madras Sappers and Miners remained on garrison duty on Hong Kong.

[21] John Ouchterlony, a contemporary witness accompanying the British expedition, admitted to 'some excesses perpetrated by stragglers from the British outposts' around Guangzhou in May 1841. See his *Chinese War: An Account of All the Operations of the British Forces, From the Commencement, to the Treaty of Nanking* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 150. See also the reference in Frederick Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839–1861* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 16–17, 55–56.

In April, May and June 1842 fresh reinforcements that arrived from India included troops of Bengal Volunteers (Rajputs) and the 2nd, 41st and 14th regiments of the MNI. They arrived in time to take part in the third major phase of British operations, which was an offensive against the towns along the Yangzi river. While Ningbo was evacuated on 7 May, the troops headed for Chapu, capturing it on 18 May. In June Shanghai was briefly occupied. A bloody engagement, which led to the taking and virtual destruction of the town of Chinkiangfu in July, was the prelude to the final major assault on the Yangzi river port of Nanjing. It was there that the treaty that finally ended the First Opium War was concluded on 29 August. The troops left Nanjing only after the emperor's assent to the treaty was received on 15 September. In November the bulk of the British forces reassembled at Hong Kong. Apart from the garrison left there, the rest of the troops left China on 20 December 1842.

The climate and disease took a heavy toll of the early detachments of soldiers in China. Not just European soldiers, but Indian ones too succumbed to the heat and dampness in even greater numbers, particularly during the summer months. In 1842 25 per cent of the garrison in Hong Kong died of disease, while in 1843 casualties mounted to 39 per cent. The British Commander General D'Aguilar remarked that at that rate the retention of Hong Kong in British possession would require the loss of an entire regiment every three years![22] The problem was compounded by the lack of suitable accommodation. In the main theatre of war in south China dry firm ground on which to pitch tents was rarely to be found and tents often had to be set up in the midst of wet paddy fields. Even in Hong Kong it took some years before the troops were properly accommodated in barracks. While European soldiers were permitted to stay on board the relatively healthier environs of their transport ships, Indian soldiers were compelled to stay on shore in the 'wretched mat-sheds' made of bamboo leaves, which exposed them to the rigours of both the hot sun and the torrential rains in equal measure. 'Tent tests' conducted on these sheds showed the temperature inside to be as high as 97 degrees Farenheit.[23]

The situation was serious enough to warrant the institution of a 'Special Committee held to inquire into the causes of the mortality amongst the troops at Chusan'. Among other things, the Committee appears to have discovered food poisoning to be a factor in the high morbidity among the soldiers:

> A very great proportion of the Calcutta provision served out was of exceedingly bad quality, and this too at a time when good and wholesome provisions were procurable, at a reasonable price from two merchant vessels lying in Chusan Harbour which the Committee are surprized [*sic*] were not purchased by the Commissariat.[24]

[22] Alan Harfield, *British and Indian Armies on the China Coast, 1785–1985* (Farnham, Surrey: A. and J. Partnership, 1990), pp. 43, 47.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[24] NAI, India despatch to Secret Committee, No. 60 of 1841.

Among the regiments that suffered the most during the China campaign were the 37th MNI and the Rajput detachment of the Bengal Volunteers, which set out in 1842 from Calcutta, 900 strong, but returned with only 400 men the following year.

Shipwrecks, mainly on account of fierce typhoons encountered in the China Sea, also took their toll. The danger was not merely of capsizing and drowning in the stormy waters, as in the case of the *Golconda* in 1840, but an equally terrifying prospect was that of being blown off course and being washed up on the coast and falling into enemy hands. This is what appears to have happened to the ship *Nerbudda*, which was shipwrecked in the Straits of Formosa in September 1841. The passengers of this ship were mostly Indians—mainly the ship's lascars and camp followers rather than soldiers, and numbering about 300 altogether. When the ship floundered,[25] the eighteen Europeans on board escaped on lifeboats, making sure that not a single one of the others could follow suit by burning the last boat and pushing back the desperate men with bayonets. In trying to reach the shore, many of the men were killed by the Chinese. The rest—133 Indians altogether, according to the Chinese authorities—were immediately captured and sent to jail. A Swede who happened to be in the same jail as the Indians, and who later escaped, described how they suffered from the cold and from frequent thrashings. However, they were permitted to purchase rice and vegetables once a day from Chinese vendors who were allowed inside the jail for the purpose. Life in the jail went on until one day in August 1842 they were carried off in chairs with no inkling of the fate that was in store for them. According to the Swedish survivor, all except a few were executed at a public execution ground in groups of three or four—an act believed to be a retaliation for the slaughter of the Manchu defenders of Chapu. The handful of survivors of the *Nerbudda* were eventually handed over to the British authorities after the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanjing.

The account of the capture of these Indians is contained in the memorial of the military commander on Taiwan, purported to be based on the confessions of the 'chief' (*tou mu*) of the prisoners, a certain Mu-li-kong and others. In an effort to elicit information about the moves and the intentions of the British, as well as to gauge their strength, prisoners were systematically interrogated through the medium of interpreters known as 'linguists'. In some cases, these interpreters were captured Chinese 'traitors' (*han jian*) who had worked for foreigners. Between the dubious linguistic skills of these interpreters on the one hand, and the obvious ignorance and naïveté of many of the captured Indians, the Chinese authorities were hard put to ascertain anything of real value to their military preparations. The military commander Da Hong A lamented that the Indians (*hei yi*) were illiterates and a 'disorderly mob' of 'dolts' who were 'not able to clarify secret and important matters concerning the foreigners' affairs when asked'.[26] In a later memorial the Imperial Commissioner Qi Ying commented on the Indians encountered in the

[25] This incident is described both in John Ouchterlony, *op. cit.*, pp. 203–7 and 500–9, as well as in Chinese official documents. See the memorial of Da Honga, the military commander on Taiwan, in the *Qingdai Chouban Yiwu Shimo* (hereafter *YWSM*) (Dao Guang) juan 47, pp. 14–20.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

service of the British in a more sympathetic vein. While remarking that they were 'habitually fierce' in nature, he also referred to them as 'simpletons' who did not know how to escape from their slavery, and whom the foreign chiefs treated like beasts. He commented that the Indians had no choice but to listen to the orders of the foreign chieftains and willingly obeyed them.[27]

The confessions of Indian prisoners,[28] while revealing little knowledge of British military plans, nevertheless throw some light on the circumstances under which they came to be in China (allowing for some distortion in the process of rendering their testimony into Chinese). Irrespective of whether they wanted to avoid harsher punishment at the hands of their captors, most of those interrogated claimed that they were mere hired hands on board ship and denied being soldiers or having had anything to do with the fighting. They mention doing jobs like cutting grass (for fodder), washing clothes and so on. The confession of one 'Ma-mo' makes poignant reading:

> I don't know my age or my parents' names. I have a wife and two younger sisters. I come from Fan-lian in Bengal.... The Englishmen came to our country and told our headmen to sell them black men as labourers at the price of 3 or 4 yuan. If someone was not willing to go, the headman beat him up. I was sold to an English ship to wash clothes, sweep and do other odd jobs several months ago.... The Englishmen call soldiers *shu-zhi*. I am no use as a *shu-zhi*. I beg your lordships to give me food to eat and I would be very willing to serve here.[29]

Ma-mo's confession in addition included his description of some of the social and other conditions in his country, which the Chinese authorities duly recorded as follows: 'There are three classes of people in Bengal: the upper are white, the middle are [also] white, and the lower ones are black. They are all believers in the Catholic religion [*tian zhu jiao*]. I am a black, and can only do manual labour.' Further on, Ma-mo's confession reads: 'It is a long-standing custom that there is a king who looks after the affairs of state. Besides, there are several kings who only look after religious matters. Believers ascend to Heaven after death, while non-believers go to Hell. After eating food, I fold my hands and say my prayers. This is God's wish.' Elaborating further on Ma-mo's account, the official forwarding his confession added that, of the different classes of society in Bengal, 'the whites are shrewd, while the blacks are simple-minded'. He further

[27] *YWSM, op. cit.* (Dao Guang), juan 59, p. 49.

[28] The *YWSM* (*ibid.*) collection of documents record the transliterated names of several Indian prisoners captured on different occasions, including Ma-mo, Jia-hai, Jin-hai, Ma-la-nan, Hu-lin, Wen-gan, Ma-la-hua-li, Tu-xia ([Dao Guáng], juan 15, p. 22); Mu-li-kong ([Dao Guang], juan 47, p. 15); Shuang-guo and An-ma-na ([Dao Guang], juan 11, p. 314 [1964 ed.]); Zhan Ke and Chi Cha ([Dao Guang], juan 18, p. 607 [1964 ed.]); Chou-man, Ha-wu-li-er, Wu-bing-you, Sha Mu ([Dao Guang], juan 62, pp. 2425–2426 [1964 ed.]); etc.

[29] *Yapian zhanzheng ziliao congkan* (hereafter *YPZZZLCK*), Vol. 1 (Shanghai, 1954), pp. 245–47. Ma-mo's confession is also translated in Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 243–44.

mentioned that while the English were all white, there were also some 'whites' among those from Bengal, making it hard to distinguish them. 'It's easiest to distinguish the black ones,' he added.[30]

Except for the large group of Indians captured from the shipwreck, it appears that many of the others were captured when they strayed away from their encampment, either in search of fodder or to wash clothes, cut firewood, purchase provisions, etc. In one case, a surveying party consisting of one Englishman and five or six Indians was surprised by a Chinese patrol party.[31] The British generally referred to this as 'kidnapping'. One of them who was present during the campaign in China described how, during the occupation of Ningbo in particular, soldiers wandering the town in search of entertainment were often plied with drink by their Chinese hosts. Then, when they had become senseless with alcohol, they were tied up in a sack and bundled out of town disguised as a sack of goods![32]

In those towns that fell under British occupation in particular, the local Chinese had many encounters with foreign troops. On most occasions the towns were given over to systematic looting. A resident of Chinkiang, which was occupied in July 1842, recorded in his diary how some Indian soldiers (*hei gui*) planted themselves at a river crossing point and demanded foreign money from all those wanting to cross, getting incensed at those who could not pay.[33] The extortion and plunder was so systematic that looters even issued some kind of security certificates to the victims as a guarantee that they would not be harassed again. A perhaps more friendly form of interchange between the foreign soldiers and the Chinese was in the market. An English eyewitness described how troops that had occupied a pawnbroker's shop in Shanghai held a 'fair' to auction to local Chinese traders the goods they had looted from the shop! The exchanges and bargaining were carried on in a mixture of Chinese, English and Hindustani.[34]

A resident of Shanghai during the British occupation of the city, a certain Cao Sheng, left a colourful account of an encounter with a wayward Indian soldier who turned up at his house:[35]

> In the afternoon a *hei gui*, all drunk, tried to push his way in. When I anxiously pointed out the security certificate to him, he shook his head without any trace of fear. With his hands he made gestures and incessantly demanded foreign money. This continued for about half an hour.... [The Indian demanded foreign money] showing with his palm the sign for 50, but I shook my head and didn't respond. He gradually reduced it to 10, but I still didn't reply. Then he got disgusted and left.
>
> The door hadn't shut, when the devil, suddenly reappearing with an umbrella, summoned me. Seeing his intoxicated state, I went out again. I

[30] *YPZZZLCK*, *op. cit.*, pp. 246–47.
[31] *YWSM*, *op. cit.* (Dao Guang) juan 15, p. 22.
[32] John Ouchterlony, *op. cit.*, pp. 226–27.
[33] *YPZZZLCK*, Vol. 3 (Shanghai, 1957), p. 83.
[34] John Ouchterlony, *op. cit.*, pp. 312–20.
[35] *YPZZZLCK*, Vol. 3, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–35. See also Arthur Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

thought in vain how to get rid of him. I hadn't crossed the threshold when he started to rain blows on me. I initially put up with it, thinking to escape and run. Then I remembered that there were people inside; if he became recklessly cruel, what was to be done? Moreover, if I struggled with him in his drunken condition, what would happen?

Then a passerby said: 'Quickly go call out in the direction of the warehouse. The white devils will come and catch him. Every day this happens. Why not go quickly?' The foreign devil seemed to understand his words and looked at him angrily. Seeing his reaction, I called out loudly: 'I am going rightaway to the warehouse to ask the white devils to come,' and hurriedly made as if to leave, though I didn't actually go.

I hid a little while and then went back. The fellow had already vanished. There were only some broken teacups and wine cups and things lying around. When I asked my son about this, he said: 'When you left, Father, he came inside and stumbled and fell down flat twice. When he came to the middle room, he threw around household goods and went out.' I told my son, 'This security certificate is no use. Barely two days have gone by and they are being so wild and unruly like this. What kind of havoc will they wreak in the days to come?'

THE SECOND OPIUM WAR AND THE TAIPING REBELLION

About the Indian troops under the East India Company, it has been said that 'while they were conquerors in other lands they were defeated and enslaved at home'.[36] Perhaps at no other time was this anomalous position of the Indian soldiers more obvious than during the Second Opium War. As early as 1856 the British had determined to attack and occupy the city of Guangzhou, their continued exclusion from which was a sore point with them. For this purpose they marshalled a sizeable force under Lord Elgin. However, the great uprising of 1857 broke out in India, involving a major proportion of the soldiers of the East India Company. Elgin's force, intended for China, was in fact diverted to India for some time to help in the suppression of the uprising. In vain did the military authorities in Hong Kong complain that the troops on the island were 'in a most debilitated state' (on account of sickness), and were 'unfit to take the field'.[37] Governor-General Canning in India declared that 'it would be madness' to remove the European troops that were already overstretched in combatting the rebellion in different provinces.[38] However, it was felt that it would be a good idea to send off any detachment of sepoys that volunteered to go to China, as this would in a way 'save' them from getting infected with the rebellious spirit. By June 1858 some Indian troops were sent to China. These included soldiers from the 47th, 65th and 70th Bengal Native Infantry, as well as the 38th Madras Native Infantry. These took part mainly in operations in and around Guangzhou, which included

[36] Rajendra Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[37] NAI, Foreign & Political/27 November 1857/60–65/SC.

[38] NAI, Foreign & Political/27 March 1857/65/SC.

the burning and destruction of several villages that were perceived as strongholds of resistance to the British, even after a peace treaty had been signed with the representatives of the Imperial Government at Tianjin in June 1858.

After a second northward military expedition to the mouth of the Beihe river near Tianjin in June–July 1859 was beaten back by the defenders at the Dagu forts, the British and French jointly marshalled forces for another, more powerful, offensive. By this time, the uprising in India had been suppressed and the British were able to mobilise many more troops from India. The Indian troops included the 8th, 11th,15th and 19th Punjab Infantry and the Ludhiana Sikh Regiment, as well as the 1st Sikh Irregular Cavalry (Probyn's Horse) and the 2nd Sikh Cavalry (Fane's Horse). Apart from these, there also were the A and K companies of the Madras Sappers and Miners, the 2nd and 12th MNI and the 1st Light Infantry. Altogether, nearly 4,000 Indian soldiers were despatched. Out of the total of 419 officers in the 1860 expedition to Beijing, seventy were Indian. Since the terrain in north China was relatively dry and flat, this was the first of Britain's China campaigns in which cavalry was deployed. The preparations for and provisioning of this expedition were also much more elaborate than the earlier ones, with hay and forage for the horses being sent from Bombay, including even the despatch of Indian mules and bullocks accompanied by bullock-drivers from Madras and Bombay for the purposes of transport.[39]

Between August and October 1860 the combined forces of the British and French armies pushed their way from the coast to Beijing, entering the capital city for the first time on 13 October via the Anding gate in the north. Beijing was given over to loot and destruction, with many of its priceless treasures, including the Summer Palace, Yuanmingyuan, left in ruins or carted off.[40]

Following the conclusion of the second peace treaty on 24 October 1860, which was deliberately accompanied by a display at Beijing of the military strength of the Western powers, most of the troops, apart from the garrison at Hong Kong, sailed home. The exceptions were the detachment left at Tianjin and Dagu to enforce the payment of indemnity and that part of the expeditionary force that had been sent to the region around Shanghai to counter the advance of the Taiping army. The latter included the Ludhiana Regiment, the 11th and 19th Punjab Infantry, the 5th Bombay Light Infantry and a part of the Madras Artillery. These troops occupied the approaches to Shanghai, as well as the north gate, a building on Suzhou creek and the Ningbo guild-house.[41] A F Linley, an Englishman who sided with the Taipings and appears to have had the confidence of the Taiping King Li Xiucheng, mentions in his account that soldiers from a detachment from Agra also took part in fighting against the Taipings.[42]

[39] *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, op. cit.*, Vol. 6, pp. 420–21.

[40] Members of Probyn's Horse and Fane's Horse are said to have acquired 'fortunes' through loot in this campaign. See Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858–1947* (London: Viking Press, 1990), p. 32.

[41] *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 422.

[42] See A.F. Linley, *Taiping tianguo geming qinliji*, Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 214–19.

It was in the course of the campaign against the Taipings that many Indian soldiers deserted and went over to the side of the Chinese.[43] Zeng Guofan, the general in command of the Qing forces, wrote: 'I have heard that in laying siege to Yushan county town [in Jiangxi province] the rebel Loyal "Prince" Li Xiucheng had a number of dark-skinned foreigners among his ranks.'[44] Obviously, such Indians who deserted to the Taiping ranks were not a few in number. Reporting on another battle in Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, the general Li Hongzhang also referred to 'fifty or sixty dark-skinned foreigners' who stood atop the wall of the city they were defending for the Taipings and who fired at and killed the French officer Tardif de Moidrey.

In some cases these Indians appeared to have been among those who were captured during battle and made prisoners by the Taipings and were thereafter converted to the rebel cause. The fact that the Taipings' operations around Shanghai were under the direction of Li Xiucheng, by all accounts one of the most enlightened and committed of the Taiping leaders, may have had something to do with their change of heart. On the other hand, some Indians seemed to have decided to go over to the Taipings even without being captured by them. Linley's account mentions an incident in which his co-passengers in a sampan travelling upriver from Shanghai included a European and a 'bearded, swarthy East Indian' who were obviously running away to Taiping territory and taking pains to hide at the sight of any European vessel on the way. On another occasion, he describes how he recruited for the Taipings the services of a Sardinian adventurer. This Sardinian, who apparently knew the Hindi language well, was then left behind in Shanghai to assist in the recruitment of several Indian officers whom he knew in the 22nd Regiment[45] and in the 'Baluchi' regiment who were eager to join the Taipings.[46]

It must be noted that Indians were not the only foreigners who went over to the side of the Taiping movement. Nevertheless, the desertion by Indians in the service of the British during this period, however limited in scope, presaged a similar phenomenon half a century later when Indian soldiers and policemen in China, motivated by discontent with their conditions of service and by the call of the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, once again turned their arms against the British.

THE GARRISON AT HONG KONG

With the 'unequal treaties' and a relatively weakened and pliant Qing dynasty in place after the conclusion of the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, it was

[43] Various references to this phenomenon in contemporary Chinese and Western documents are listed in Yu Shengwu and Chang Chenkun, 'China and India in the Mid-19th Century', in P.C. Joshi (Ed.), *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1986), pp. 346–52. See also Lin Chengjie, *Zhongyin renmin youhao guanxishi, 1851–1949* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1993), pp. 48–51.

[44] Cited in Yu Shengwu and Chang Chenkun, *op. cit.*, pp. 346–47.

[45] Same as the 11th Punjab Infantry.

[46] A.F. Linley, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 526–28, 540–41.

nearly forty years before Britain needed to again import soldiers into China to fight a war there. Nevertheless, throughout these years, Britain maintained a ready force, which at all times included some detachments of Indian soldiers, at Hong Kong.

About 2,700 Indian soldiers were present at Britain's takeover of Hong Kong on 26 January 1841.[47] These soldiers were accompanied by camp-followers, including provisioners of Indian food items and other such goods. Indian troops were mostly accommodated at Sai Yung Pun, the Western military camp at West Point, Central, Chek Pai Wan (Aberdeen), Chek Chu (Stanley) and Sai Wan. As the colony of Hong Kong took shape, the temporary mat-shed accommodation for troops was gradually replaced by barracks. This took care of some of the problems of the troops, but not all. As late as 1850, one-quarter of the troops in one particular regiment died of fever. In September 1864, soldiers from one of the Indian regiments rioted for two days, along with some of the policemen and Malay seamen.[48]

Certain specialised corps of Indian military and semi-military personnel were formed in Hong Kong. One of these was the company of 'Gun Lascars', established to assist the main artillery units by doing some of the heavy pulling and other work associated with artillery. It initially consisted of one Jemadar, two Havildars, four Naiks and eighty-one lascars. In 1892, it became the Asiatic Artillery Company and was later reorganised with the more exalted titles of Hong Kong and Singapore Battalion Royal Artillery, and Hong Kong and Singapore Battalion, Royal Garrison Artillery in 1898 and 1899 respectively.[49] The military establishment also included a 'Mule Corps' composed mostly of Indian mule-drivers brought over from India specially for the purpose of facilitating transport on the island. In 1921 it had 580 men. This corps was even armed during World War II.[50]

In 1890 it was decided to raise a special regiment in India for service in Hong Kong.[51] A prolonged discussion took place in the various concerned departments of the British Empire about what kind of men would prove most suitable for this purpose. When at last it was decided to recruit from among the Muslims of Jhelum in West Punjab, the Governor of Hong Kong gave his approval somewhat grudgingly: 'The people of Hong Kong [*sic*] wanted to have Sikhs not Madrassee troops if they could not get Europeans. These Mohammedans of Upper India, if not actually Sikhs, will at any rate presumably be more warlike than the Southerners from Madras.'[52] A force of 1,012 men—all Indians except for eight British officers—arrived in Hong Kong in May 1892 and moved into the Whitfield Barracks at Kowloon constructed specially for the purpose. Within the

[47] K.N. Vaid, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[48] Barbara-Sue White, *Turbans and Traders: Hong Kong's Indian Communities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 4, 18–19.

[49] Alan Harfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 211.

[50] Barbara-Sue White, *op. cit.*, 31–32.

[51] See Alan Harfield, *op. cit.*, Chapter 10 (pp. 185–203) for a detailed description of this regiment.

[52] Cited in *ibid.*, p. 186.

first few days the soldiers of this regiment got into a clash with local Chinese workers, which ended only with the arrival of a police contingent that drove the soldiers back to their barracks.

A more serious clash took place when the British attempted in April 1899 to take over the New Territories of which they had obtained the lease from the Qing government. The British military camp consisting of soldiers of the Hong Kong Regiment at Tai Po was bombarded with guns and artillery fire from several thousand Chinese who had gathered on the ridge of the hills surrounding it to drive the British forces away. Reinforcements were brought up and the Chinese were eventually defeated. Nevertheless, tension was rife for some time afterwards and the Indian soldiers on duty had to strictly keep within the bounds of the camp.

The Hong Kong Regiment was disbanded in 1902, but soldiers from the Indian Army continued to garrison Hong Kong. Another flash point that brought these troops into action in Hong Kong again was during the revolution of 1911, which brought down the Imperial Government in China and which had repercussions on the British-governed island as well. The British were alarmed and dispatched posthaste the 25th Punjabi Regiment from Multan, the 26th Punjabis from Samana and the 24th Hazara Mountain Battery from Maymyo to pre-empt any attempt by the Chinese to push back into the New Territories. In the midst of the agitations in Hong Kong that accompanied the revolution in 1911, it was found necessary to have the Indian troops stage a flag-march.

During World War II, the Indian detachments on Hong Kong, which included the 7th Rajputs and the 2nd Battalion of the 14th Punjabis, suffered heavy losses in the fighting that took place. The casualty rate was as high as 30 per cent. The forces surrendered to the Japanese on 25 December 1941. The end of the war, accompanied as it was by preparations to transfer power in India, saw the beginning of the end of the nearly a century-long deployment of Indian troops in Hong Kong. From November 1946 the phased withdrawal of the Indian troops (minus the Gorkha regiments) from Hong Kong commenced with the departure of the Jaipur Guards.[53]

THE BOXER REBELLION

Sentiment against the intrusive foreign presence in China steadily picked up in the northern parts in the 1880s and 1890s, leading to a series of clashes and culminating in a popular movement to drive out the foreigners, known as the *Yi He Tuan* Movement or the Boxer Rebellion in the West. With the Qing court giving backing to the movement after some initial hestitation, the Western powers, including Britain, France, Russia and America, together with Japan, mounted a sizeable military force to march to Beijing, cow down the Qing rulers, lift the siege of the foreign legations in the capital and suppress the Boxer's fighting forces. Eighteen thousand Indian troops formed a major portion of the allied forces.[54]

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 437–45, 459–60.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 250.

The first set of Indian troops to be despatched was the 7th Bengal Infantry, which arrived at Dagu in mid-July 1900.[55] It was joined by the remainder of the force from India, barring those in the 2nd Brigade, consisting of about 3,000 men, which was left to garrison Shanghai throughout the operations in the north.[56] The Hong Kong Regiment too was sent to join active operations in north China.

This was the first of Britain's military operations in China that saw the despatch of troops from various princely states of India. Apparently, the rulers of these states vied with each other to offer men, money and equipment to be placed at the disposal of the Allied Expedition in China. 'I need not remind you,' wrote the Inspector-General of the Imperial Service Troops, Major J G Turner, 'of the enthusiasm with which certain Chiefs offered their Imperial Service regiments.' In the end, only four detachments of the Imperial Service Troops were carefully selected and sent to China. These were one cavalry regiment from Jodhpur, one infantry regiment from Alwar, the Camel Corps from Bikaner and one company of the Malerkotla Sappers.[57] The Maharajas of Bikaner and Gwalior personally went with the troops to China, and were granted Honours for this show of support. Except for a brief skirmish between a section of the Jodhpur Lancers and Chinese fighters near the Great Wall in January 1901, the rest of the Imperial Service Troops were not involved in actual fighting. They were instead engaged in garrison and escort duty, and patrolling lines of communication, while the Malerkotla Sappers were employed in building stables and temporary bridges, laying roads, etc.

Aided by abnormally dry climatic conditions, which assisted in the movement of men and equipment, the Allied Forces advanced towards Beijing. On the way they were involved in major engagements with Chinese forces at Beicang and Yangzun, and there also took place an encounter between the First Bengal Lancers and Chinese cavalry near Hexiwu. Dongzhou was occupied on 12 August. Entry into Beijing was forced through the numerous gates of the city on the 13 and 14 August, encountering heavy resistance along the way. The 1st Bengal Lancers, the 24th Punjab Infantry, the 7th Bengal Infantry and the 1st Sikhs were among the contingents that took part in the seizure of Beijing. The siege of the legations was said to have been lifted with the arrival of the 7th Rajputs.[58]

For the second time in less than half a century, the capital suffered looting by the rampaging foreign troops. While the Allied command was consolidating their occupation of the city, more detachments of Indian troops continued to arrive right through September 1900, including the 16th Bengal Lancers, the 3rd Bombay Cavalry, the 34th Pioneers, the Bengal Sappers and the 20th Punjab Infantry. These took part in the various reconnaissance and 'mopping up' operations against the Boxers, which included the burning down and complete destruction of several villages and towns in the regions, as well as the punitive expedition against the town of Baodingfu in October.

[55] The former Bengal Army had been bifurcated in 1895 into the Bengal and Punjab commands. F.G. Cardew, *op. cit.*, pp. 429–31.

[56] *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, op. cit.*, Vol. 6, pp. 455–56.

[57] NAI, Foreign/Internal–A/July 1900/223–49; and August 1902/137–42.

[58] Alan Harfield, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Besides the usual kind of booty, Indian soldiers during these operations also acquired all kinds of arms and ammunition—something that was a cause for some anxiety on the part of the authorities. The Bikaner detachment acquired 30,900 rounds of Lee Metford ammunition as a gift ('a very inconvenient gift', according to the Foreign Department) from the provincial authorities in China. However, in other cases, the arms and ammunition were acquired through loot and through brisk trade that appears to have been conducted amongst the soldiers of the Allied Forces during the campaign. The British authorities mostly decided to waive the regulations forbidding the private import of arms, and allowed soldiers to bring the arms they had acquired back to India with them. Nevertheless, they kept a careful record of each soldier and the arms in his possession.[59]

The China Expeditionary Force despatched by the British began to be gradually reduced from April 1901 and was deemed to have been formally disbanded by mid-July, but the troops were not fully withdrawn even after that. In fact, at the end of July the British government ordered the temporary reoccupation of the Summer Palace at Beijing by its troops, including two companies of the 7th Bengal Infantry, to bring pressure to bear on the Qing government.[60] For a number of years afterwards, Indian troops under British command continued to be stationed in both north and south China as a reminder of the power of the Western states and Japan to enforce their dictate.[61]

A unique and sensitive first-hand account of the Boxer operations by an Indian who was part of the Allied Expedition has come down to us. Gadadhar Singh was a soldier with the 7th Rajputs of the Bengal Army, one of the first Indian contingents to arrive in north China as part of the Expeditionary Force. His record of what he saw and thought throws light on the feelings that may have agitated some Indian soldiers who were gradually awakening to a sense of the injustice that was being perpetrated on the Chinese by the foreign powers, and were filled with despair at the role being played by Indians in it.[62]

Even before he arrived in China, Gadadhar Singh appears to have been filled with misgivings about his mission. 'A fear gripped my heart. God! Are you going to mete out the same fate to China too?.... Is the beautiful moon of China about to set? The dazzling sun of the land of the Aryans has already set.' Further on in his record he again expressed his empathy with the Chinese after actually witnessing some of the destruction that had been wrought by the foreign troops on their soil:

[59] NAI, Foreign/Internal–B/May 1901/266–67; February 1902/146–47; and July 1902/18.

[60] *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 514.

[61] Alan Harfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 309, 316, 318, 323. Some Indian soldiers seemed to have remained behind in China of their own volition when the rest of the troops were withdrawn, and to have sought employment in the treaty ports and points further north in Manchuria and Siberia. See the case of Sohan Singh, NAI, Foreign/External–B/June 1906/214.

[62] The passages from Gadadhar Singh included here are taken from the article by G.P. Sangal, 'An Indian Soldier Indicts War', *New Age*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1953, pp. 53–59. The excerpts in Sangal's article are taken from the original account written in the form of a diary from the battlefield in Hindi, and which was later published in India. The title of the original work has been translated by Sangal as *Thirteen Months Spent in China* by Gadadhar Singh.

> There was no occasion for our hearts to melt because after all we had come to fight against these very Chinese. But...seeing their colour which was similar to ours a sort of feeling arose in our hearts. The Chinese are Buddhists, India's co-religionists. Being inhabitants of the Asian continent they are our neighbours too. There is not much difference between their colour and ours, their customs and manners and ours. Why did God inflict such a calamity on them? Should we not have come to their aid instead?

Gadadhar Singh graphically described the horrors of the war and the atrocities inflicted on the Chinese in particular. By the time his regiment had reached Tianjin on 17 July, it had already been laid waste by the foreign armies. 'Tientsin [Tianjin] is a very big and prosperous city of North China,' he wrote. 'Or rather, I should say it was. For today it was a city without citizens, a house without the householders, a body without life.... The sky was still covered with smoke [when we arrived].... The river Peiho's water had become a cocktail of blood, flesh, bones and fat. Even to touch this water was to invite danger.' He described the systematic killings, arson and rape to which the population of Tianjin, Beijing and the numerous villages in between were subjected. Some of the incidents he mentioned showed that the atrocities were purely wanton, in which hapless persons were tortured merely for the fun of it. And 'all these sportsmen', he noted in disgust, 'belonged to what were called the civilised nations!'

Gadadhar Singh particularly castigated the French and Russian troops for their cruelty, but at the same time he did not spare his own countrymen: 'When the British Indian Troops reached Tientsin, the city was already under foreign occupation and all the inhabitants of the city had fled away. Only the sick, the wounded and the lame were left behind and seizing their possessions at the point of gun was the glorious pastime of our soldiers.' Describing how the soldiers did not hesitate to kill those from whom they looted, the diary acerbically commented: 'In India, the Municipalities used to engage Doms to kill dogs by paying them at the rate of two to four annas per dog and thus every six months or a year organised a campaign to give salvation to the souls of poor dogs. Same thing was being done here to human beings. Whoever had a few goods, got the gift of salvation. The only difference was that the dog-killers in India used to be Doms, the man-killers here included also the civilised gentle Hindus.' However, there were also other Indians, like an Indian Army doctor called Pandit Ram Datt, whom Gadadhar Singh noted as having tried their best in the face of all odds to save the lives of some Chinese.

For another fifty years after the Boxer operations Indian soldiers continued to be sent to the shores of China to defend the interests of the British. Yet the type of soldier represented by Gadadhar Singh was an altogether different sort from that represented by the 'Ma-mo' of the First Opium War, one torn between his duties as a paid soldier and the promptings of a nascent anti-imperialist consciousness. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the growth of militant nationalism in India which was bound to have, and did have, its effect on the soldiers, particularly on those whose horizons had been broadened through service outside India.

INDIAN POLICE IN HONG KONG AND SHANGHAI

The archetypal image of the Indian in the eyes of many Chinese from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century—an image that has persisted even afterwards—was that of the turbaned, bearded Indian policeman. The Indian policeman first made his appearance in China in Hong Kong, shortly after its takeover by the British. William Caine, the first Chief Magistrate of Hong Kong, recruited a few ex-sepoys as policemen. In 1844 Assistant Superintendent of Police J Bruce organised about twenty-five Indians discharged from the army as a night guard that patrolled the area along Queen's Road. Under Charles May, the Captain Superintendent of Police from 1845 (and Police Magistrate from 1862), the police force consisted initially of almost equal numbers of Indians, Europeans and Chinese. Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of Hong Kong from 1859 to 1865, also recruited soldiers from the Bombay Native Infantry detachments which were stationed in Hong Kong after the Second Opium War. In addition, he brought over about 150 recruits to the police force from Bombay. By 1867 there were 377 Indians in the police force (mainly ex-sepoys from the Bombay Army), along with 132 Chinese and eighty-nine Europeans.[63] Thereafter, from the time Deputy Superintendent of Police Creagh's first batch of specially-recruited 100 Sikhs arrived to join the force, the Hong Kong police in the main ceased to rely on Indian Army detachments for the recruitment of its Indian personnel.

The demand for Indian policemen in Hong Kong came from the British conviction that potential recruits among the local Chinese were entirely unsuited to carrying out what was perceived as the main task of the police on the island at this stage—'to overawe the Chinese *lumpenproletariat*, composed in European eyes of the sweepings of Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province'.[64] Hong Kong in its early days as a British colony was a hotbed of crime and a base for the operations of smugglers, pirates, gamblers, pimps and others of their kind. Governor Davis, writing in 1844, declared categorically that he was 'convinced that a Chinese Police can never be trusted in this Colony. If not actually collusive with their countrymen, they have not the resolution to do their duty in case of Emergency, and it therefore follows that either a European or a Sepoy Police, or a mixture of both, will always be necessary.'[65]

As it turned out, European and Indian policemen and officers were themselves not in the least immune to the temptations of crime and corruption. The image of the Indian police and the colonial police force in general took a battering over a number of corruption and moneylending scandals. The most notorious of these was the one in Hong Kong in 1897–98, in which it was alleged that a large number of policemen were on the payroll of various illegal gambling houses. A

[63] Colin Crisswell and Mike Watson, *The Royal Hong Kong Police (1841–1945)* (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1982), pp. 13, 15, 25, 41. See also Henry Lethbridge, *Hong Kong: Stability and Change* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 122.

[64] Henry Lethbridge, *ibid.*, p. 106.

[65] Great Britain Colonial Office—Hong Kong: Original Correspondence (CO 129 series, microfilm, hereafter CO 129), 6:26, 21 June 1844, p. 282.

raid on some gambling houses had led to the discovery of account books which recorded identification numbers purported to be those of policemen who were on the take. On interrogation, the gambling house owners and watchmen testified that various Indian policemen stationed in the area used to visit them in plain clothes when off duty and demand money on a regular basis to leave them alone. The investigation, conducted in a summary fashion by the Captain Superintendent of Police May, led to the sweeping dismissal of a number of policemen, including nineteen Indians, of whom at least five had over ten years' service to their credit. One of them, Utter Singh, had in fact attained the highest rank of an Indian policeman, that of Sergeant-Major. The whole case turned out to be highly controversial, and the case against Utter Singh particularly so.[66] Forty-five Indian traders and businessmen on the island even sent a petition to the governor in which they charged that the case against Utter Singh had been 'prejudged and prejudiced'. They claimed that Sikh policemen, as a whole, while not being free of certain failings, were by and large 'dignified, sober and orderly men, obedient to discipline and devotedly attached to their officers'.

It took nearly half a century before a conscious policy of reducing the foreign element and 'sinicizing' the Hong Kong police force was taken up in earnest. Governor Kennedy (1872–77) began to reverse the trend of relying mainly on non-Chinese police. He pushed for the development of a predominantly Anglo-Chinese force, and took the initiative to shift most of the Sikhs in the force to jail duties. After him, in 1879, the police and jail staff were formally differentiated. Nevertheless, it was only from the 1890s that large-scale recruitment of Chinese into the police force began to be conducted. Even thereafter, there was a rough parity between the numbers of Indians and those of Chinese in the Hong Kong police force.[67]

Indian policemen continued to be an indispensible part of the colonial police force until World War II. However, during the Japanese occupation of China in this war, the Indians in the police and prison services found themselves in a problematic situation. On the one hand, they were a part of the British forces but the attitude of a sizeable number among them was 'sullen and uncooperative' towards the British.[68] On the other hand, the Japanese made a point of distinguishing between them and the British, and asked the Indians to keep on working in the force. Those who refused to do so were executed.[69] Most continued to serve under the Japanese. This factor, combined with the approach of Indian independence and the desire of the British to reduce the number of Indians who could claim British nationality, as well as the influx of Chinese from the mainland after the war, made the British take measures to eliminate Indians from the police force

[66] The details of this scandal, and the case of Utter Singh in particular, are to be found in the CO 129 files: 277/200, p. 138; 277/206, pp 293–300; 277/217, pp. 347–90; 278/254, p. 249; 293/149, p. 192; 296, pp. 238–68.

[67] K.N. Vaid, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[68] Colin Crisswell and Mike Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

[69] K.N. Vaid, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–45. In the first two months of the occupation, eight Indian policemen were executed by the Japanese.

in Hong Kong as rapidly as possible. By 1952, there were only three Indian policemen left in Hong Kong.

Indians were also employed in the police service in Shanghai and other cities of China which had foreign concessions, such as Hankou and Tianjin. In Shanghai the origins of the police of what came to be known as the International Settlement (*Gonggong zujie xunbu or gongbuju xunbu*) lay in the joint efforts of the British, French and Americans in 1854 to establish a force to guard their interests when faced with the Taiping Rebellion and the uprising of the Small Knife society. However, although Indian soldiers were used to confront the Taiping forces, it was not until a number of years had passed that Indians began to be employed on a regular basis in the police force. In 1880, only four Indians were listed as being present in Shanghai. However, by 1885 this number had increased to fifty-eight, mainly on account of the Indian policemen that had been recruited from the preceding year.[70] Indians were employed in area police stations as well as in military reserve corps. A contemporary Chinese source noted: 'In the 12th year of Guangxu [1886], there was established on the road south of the Song Lan Ge tea-house in the area of the Hu residence on Sima Road, a post exclusively manned by new police brought from India. With their faces as black as lacquer and their heads wrapped in red cloth, the Chinese call them "red-headed flies" [*hongtou cangying*]!'[71]

Pay and service conditions were obviously attractive enough to ensure a steady supply of Indians at most times to the police and jail services. For instance, in 1908 the pay of a sepoy in the Indian Army was Rs 9 per month, whereas an Indian policeman in China could earn the equivalent of Rs 26 to 30 per month.[72] The work was also considered to be less arduous than that of a soldier. Shanghai policemen were expected to do eight hours of duty every day in addition to attending at fires and being present in court when required.[73] Policemen were hired on contract for a limited term, usually five years. During the period of their contract they were not given leave (except for medical or other emergencies), but they were given an extended furlough at the end of their term. On an average, less than 5 per cent of the rank-and-file policemen could bring their families out to China with them. Most were supposed to have led very isolated lives, with almost no intermingling with either the local Chinese or the Europeans in the force.[74]

The pay and promotion prospects of Indian policemen were considerably inferior to those of their European counterparts. This was a source of dissatisfaction among them, particularly from the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the

[70] *Shanghai Yenjiu Ziliao* (Shanghai, 1984), pp. 99–100.

[71] Cited in *ibid.*, p. 100.

[72] Secretary of State for India Morley's letter to the Governor-General of India, 19 June 1908. NAI, Foreign/External–B/March 1909/40–41.

[73] NAI, Foreign/External–B/September 1906/185.

[74] Henry Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 178; Crisswell and Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 78. However, the *Hong Kong Census Report* for 1921 mentions that 'it is fairly common for Indians to marry Chinese especially as secondary wives', although it is not clear from the context which particular sections of the Indian community this refers to.

twentieth centuries.[75] Indian policemen, although they shouldered much of the heaviest burden of policing, could not usually aspire to rise above the rank of sergeant. In 1930, out of a total number of 691 Indian policemen in Shanghai's International Settlement, 594 were constables and eighty-eight were sergeants. Out of 255 police personnel above the rank of sergeant, only six were Indians (four sub-inspectors and two inspectors).[76] Jail staff considered themselves at a further disadvantage with respect to policemen. Nominally, the pay of jail guards was higher than that of the police constables. However, the policemen had benefits in the matter of leave and pension as well as the terms of remittance of pay, which effectively gave them a better deal when compared to the jail staff.[77]

Overall, Indians, particularly those from the Sikh community, made themselves indispensable in the British police forces in China. Writing to the British minister in Beijing in 1906, a judge of the Supreme Court of the International Settlement at Shanghai noted: 'The opinion is held here that Sikhs make cheap and efficient police for the rougher work of keeping order among the Chinese in the streets, and that they have done very well in cases of riot.'[78]

WATCHMEN

The number of Indian policemen in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Hankou and other Chinese cities was roughly matched by the number of Indians privately employed as watchmen. According to the report in the 1911 census of the Indian population of Hong Kong, Indian watchmen were to be found in the service of nearly all the foreign commercial companies, shops and hotels. Some were also guards on private ships. A large number were in fact employed by Chinese.[79] The Secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Council, J O P Bland, in 1903 noted approvingly: 'There is no doubt that as watchmen in the local mills and other places, these men perform very useful functions.' Indians who could not get employment as policemen in bigger cities often managed to find jobs as watchmen in the smaller towns and treaty ports where the foreign concessions were very small and did not have their own police services. 'In case of local disturbances,' Bland added, 'their presence in many places added to the available defence forces.'[80]

However, the watchmen also appeared to have been a cause for concern on the part of the British authorities. Unlike the policemen, they spread out more widely,

[75] See petition from Indian jail guards in Hong Kong of 25 January 1892. CO 129/254, No. 28, p. 151.

[76] 'Shanghai gong-gong zu-jie shi-gao' (Collected Material on the History of Shanghai), in *Shanghai-shi zi-liao cong-kan* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1980), p. 122.

[77] See petitions from jail staff of 1892, 1900 and 1910 (CO 129/254, No. 28, p. 151; 300, No. 368, pp. 354–61; and 365, No. 101, pp. 564–72.

[78] NAI, Foreign/External–B/March 1909/40–41.

[79] *Report on the Census of the Indian Population of Hong Kong Taken on 20th May, 1911* (hereafter *Hong Kong Census for 1911*) (from the Hong Kong Sessional Papers), p. 103 (56).

[80] NAI, Foreign/Secret–E/March 1907/96–98.

often landing up in small towns where there were few other Indians to fall back upon when they met with hard times. British consuls in these places not infrequently had to deal with cases of destitute ex-watchmen who had no money even to proceed to Shanghai or one of the bigger cities when they ran out of employment. Moreover, several watchmen were men who had been dismissed from the British police forces for some reason or other and were generally considered by them to be 'bad characters'. The British authorities would have liked to see these men return home to India, but as long as they could get private employment in China it was difficult to get them to do so. Since moneylending seems to have been an important secondary source of income for many Indian watchmen, this also led to their involvement from time to time in disputes with local people.[81] The authorities in Hong Kong at one point even considered the idea of registering all private watchmen and of enrolling them either in the police rolls or, since most were ex-soldiers, as a special section of the Indian Army reserve under the command of regimental officers of the garrison stationed at Hong Kong.[82]

MIGRATION TO AND FROM CHINA

Strictly speaking, the emigration of unskilled labour outside India without the prior permission of the government was prohibited under the Defence of India Rules. However, for a long time the Government of India was well aware of the emigration on their own initiative of Indians to China in search of jobs and, in fact, could have been said to have encouraged it.

The situation seems to have changed somewhat from the beginning of the twentieth century. The authorities in India, Hong Kong and London, as well as the British consular representatives in China, repeatedly expressed apprehension over the unchecked emigration of Indians to the Far East. Various reasons were given for this. One was related to the growing problem of destitution. As one of the British consuls in China expressed: 'It is seldom that a week passes in a port such as Chefoo without the arrival of some "Civis Britannicus" who has come to the end of his resources and can neither support himself nor get away again.'[83] The Secretary of State for India commented that the Government of India 'consider it undesirable to encourage the emigration of Indians generally and of Sikhs particularly by undertaking liability on their account when abroad.'

A more serious cause for concern was the discovery that Indians from the police and armed forces were drifting into the employ of other foreign powers in the Far East. The decade or more preceding the outbreak of World War I saw increasing militarisation on the part of the big powers, new alignments amongst them and the intensification of big power rivalry in the Far East. As early as 1902

[81] For references to such problems involving Indian watchmen, see for instance NAI, Foreign/External–B/June 1906/214 and March 1909/40–41.

[82] CO 129/346, pp. 215–22, 11 February 1908 and 415, pp. 19–23, 1 December 1914.

[83] NAI, Foreign/External–B/June 1906/214.

there were reports that Sikhs had been employed by the Germans at Kiaochou, while some had been selected for service by the French in north China.[84] The British were even more worried by the news that Indians were proceeding to Manchuria to seek employment under the Russians, with whom the British had a particularly intense rivalry in that part of the world. The Acting Consul-General at Shanghai reported that from January 1902 114 Indians had applied for passports to 'Asiatic Russia'.[85] The fear was expressed that even though these men were to be employed mainly as watchmen they would be used by Russia against Britain in the event of war. Most of those wanting to go to Vladivostock were refused passports, except for 'substantial Indian merchants'.[86] It was felt that the recruitment of Sikhs by foreign powers was particularly undesirable at a time when it was getting difficult to find enough suitable men from 'the fighting races' to man the Indian Army regiments, and when British police forces in Hong Kong and China were plagued by constant resignations by men in search of better pay and service conditions in other places. The fears of the British authorities were only to some extent relieved after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, which resulted in Russia's defeat and evacuation from Manchuria.

From the last years of the nineteenth century China and Hong Kong also increasingly came to be transit points for Indians seeking employment in the Americas. Canada and the United States were favoured destinations for these men who sought employment as labour mainly for the railway and lumber companies of Canada and farms of California. The wages they could get in these places was usually far more than they could aspire for in China. The word spread quickly and triggered off a spate of resignations from the police and jail services in the treaty ports and Hong Kong. In 1907 policemen of the Shanghai International Settlement went on strike for the first time over their pay and service conditions. Ultimatums were given to the authorities by the police and jail staff there and in Hong Kong to either increase their remuneration or else face mass resignations. Regarding the petition of the jail staff of Hong Kong in 1910, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Crewe, remarked with some concern that 'something will have to be done if the present terms don't keep men in the service or attract newcomers'. Both in the case of the jail staff of Hong Kong as well in the case of the Shanghai policemen, the situation was deemed serious enough to warrant pay increases.[87]

Both Canada and the United States soon imposed regulations drastically curtailing the immigration of labour from India and Asian countries.[88] This did not deter aspiring jobseekers using the China route to emigration. On the contrary, it led

[84] CO 129/312, p. 86, 25 July 1902.

[85] NAI, Foreign/Secret–E/March 1907/96–98.

[86] *Ibid.*; CO 129/353, p. 455, 11 December 1908.

[87] CO 129/365, No. 101, pp. 564–72. See also *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao, op. cit.*, p. 100, regarding the dissatisfaction among Indian policemen in Shanghai. According to this source, men who were getting paid 16 to 22 yuan per month as salary in Shanghai heard reports about how their compatriots in America and Russia were earning as much as the equivalent of 60, 80 or even 100 yuan.

[88] Canada began to restrict Indian immigration from 1908, while the US followed suit in the same year.

to hundreds of Indians seeking to leave China for other countries that were ill-prepared to receive them. In July 1907 the British Consul at Lima, Peru, reported on the arrival of an 'invasion' of some 200 Indians from Hong Kong, most of whom he declared were destitute and in ill-health, and unfit for work of any kind. That did not stop him from literally passing on the problem by directing them on to Jamaica where they were told they could find jobs. The Government of Peru, the laws of which apparently did not prohibit the landing of immigrants, tried on its part to deter the Indians from coming by raising the consular fees at Hong Kong from $5.40 to $63 at one go![89] In 1908 there was an equally sudden arrival of Indians from Hong Kong in German New Guinea. According to the Governor of German New Guinea, the Indians here were not satisfied with the terms of work offered, leading to most of them going back to Hong Kong.[90] Apparently, both in the case of the rush to Peru and the exodus to German New Guinea, competition between rival steamship companies seems to have had something to do with the phenomenon. For instance, two rival steamship lines on the Yokohama–Callao route were believed to have offered through their agents a premium of one pound sterling per passenger, and that this had led to local agents within the Indian community promising an 'El Dorado' in Peru to waiting emigrants.

Some Indian emigration agents seemed to have used ingenious methods to try and get their clients from China to the Americas. From mid-1911 about 150 Indians per year left Hong Kong for Manila in the Philippines, where an Indian watchman named Barkat Ali would get them registered and arrange for their stay in Manila for six months. After that they would sail for America on the Great Northern Railway Company steamer *Minnesota*, which plied the Hong Kong–Manila–Seattle route. The reason for this was that the Commissioner for Immigration in Seattle had apparently ruled in the preceding year that, since the same immigration laws applied to the Philippines as to the United States, any Indian who had established a minimum of six months residence in the Philippines had an automatic right to land in the US![91]

To deal with the phenomenon of Indians leaving their police and jail services in China and Hong Kong and seeking more lucrative employment elsewhere, either in China or in other countries, the British authorities came up with various schemes and regulations to control independent Indian emigration to China and to ensure repatriation of Indians from China. One of these was the scheme to end the practice of recruiting Indians for the services locally in favour of recruitment directly from the Indian armed forces in India, which took shape in 1906–7. In September 1906 a call was issued for volunteers from Indian Army cavalry and infantry regiments from among Jat Sikhs, Dogras, Punjabi Muslims and Pathans

[89] CO 129/344, pp. 512–15 and 341, No. 249, p. 444.

[90] CO 129/395, pp. 355–62, 19 June 1912. Similar reasons found many Indians also sailing for Mexico, since US regulations permitted aliens with two years' residence in Mexico to enter the the US, bypassing quota restrictions (NAI, Foreign and Political/1923/1306-G).

[91] NAI, Foreign/External–B/September 1906/185; March 1909/40–41; and Foreign/Secret–E/June 1908/386–90.

only, for three years' service with the Shanghai Municipal Police. On 31 October a notice was issued by the British Consul-General at Shanghai ending local recruitment of Indians by colonial and municipal administrations in their own settlements as of 1 January 1907. In addition, the 'British Concessions in China Municipal Police Regulation, 1907', together with 'The Police Discipline Regulations, 1907', prohibited and made provisions for the punishment of those who: (*a*) while serving with the Municipal Police of British concessions in China, deserted or tried to desert; and (*b*) incited a serving policeman to desert.

The authorities were optimistic initially about the consequences of these measures. A note from the Military Department of the Government of India dated 26 January 1908 claimed:

> Sikhs now go out to Hong Kong and Shanghai at their own expense in order to get service in the police, because that is at present the only way in which such employment is obtainable. As soon as they find that men on the spot are rejected in favour of those recruited through the recruiting staff in India, free emigration, if not actually stopped, will at any rate be effectively checked, which is what is wanted by the Government of India.[92]

However, by mid-1908 there is evidence that they had begun to doubt the effectiveness of their schemes, and by the end of 1909 the Secretary of State for India decided to altogether abandon the scheme of trying to recruit candidates for the police forces in China through the recruiting staff in India.[93]

Within a couple of years, the British authorities had the opposite problem on their hands: Indians had begun to *return* to China from America, frustrated by lack of employment opportunities. The 1911 census of the Indian population of Hong Kong mentioned that emigration to America was 'practically at a standstill'. In 1914 the Governor of Hong Kong reported to the Secretary of State for India about the passage of 415 Indians through Hong Kong on their way back to India from Canada and the United States.[94] The effects of the legal restrictions on immigration into the United States and Canada, as well as economic factors such as a slump in the lumber trade, had begun to make themselves felt. The return of Indians from those countries contributed to a situation of growing unemployment among the Indians in China. A resolution of the Government of India, Commerce and Industry Department (Emigration) of 26 June 1913 warned:

> Intimation has been received from His Majesty's Secretary of State for India that there is little probability of natives of India finding employment in Shanghai and Hankow as watchmen or in similar capacities. The Governor-General-in-Council accordingly requests all Local Governments and Administration to

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] CO 129/354/pp. 5–12, 15 June 1908; Maharashtra State Archives (hereafter MSA)/Political Department/186(1910)/141/29–34.

[94] *Hong Kong Census for 1911, op. cit.*, (Table XLI), 103 (56); and CO 129/414, pp. 69–72, 29 October 1914.

> make the above intimation as widely known as possible, particularly in places from which emigration to China is believed to be most common. Intending emigrants should also be warned at the ports of embarkation of the risks they run in proceeding to Shanghai and Hankow.[95]

The forward movement of Indians continuing to try and proceed to America combined with the wave of returning Indians led to a congregation of Indian males in Hong Kong and Shanghai in particular, who had no jobs and an uncertain future. The situation coincided with the spread of militant Indian nationalism and with the growth of movements that found a strong base among Indian workers and students outside India, including the United States and Canada. The British authorities in Hong Kong and China knew that they had a tinderbox on their hands, and orders were issued to keep a close watch on the movements of Indians with a view to nipping in the bud any signs of 'sedition'. Their greatest fear—one that turned out to be justified—was that the contagion of disaffection would spread from these Indians to those in the garrison and police forces. From being the ones who did the policing for the British in China, Indians there began to become the *object* of policing. The Shanghai Municipal Police, for instance, created a special 'Indian section' within it, known as Section 4 or S4, whose objective was to gather information on Indians, infiltrate their organisations and gather evidence for their conviction and deportation in case they were engaged in activities construed as seditionist.[96] Initially, it had four Sikh staff members and infiltrators in it under the command of D I Sullivan. Later it was expanded to include one detective sub-inspector, two detective sergeants, five Indian detectives, two Chinese detectives and one Chinese secret agent.

RISING SUPPORT FOR ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND FOR THE ARMED OVERTHROW OF BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

The story of the Indian soldiers, policemen and watchmen in China in the twentieth century would be incomplete without an account of the remarkable transformation that took place in their loyalties under the impact of the national movements in India and China. From being the pillars of the British interests in China, they became a most serious threat to these very interests, creating a nightmarish scenario for the British authorities in China and Hong Kong, as well as in India and London.

The political radicalisation of this section of the Indian community began with the work of the Ghadar Party in China, which coincided with the growing frustration of Indian emigrants proceeding to or returning from the US and Canada in the period just before and during World War I. The Ghadar Party, with its headquarters in the US, believed in the necessity for the armed overthrow of British rule

[95] MSA/General Department/51 (1913)/979/1–4.

[96] Frederick Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927–37* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 142–45.

in India. They systematically began to collect money, men, arms and material for this purpose. A key aspect of their work was propaganda aimed at undermining the loyalty to the British crown of the Indian armed forces. Various channels were used to send copies of their journal, *Ghadar*, to different regiments of the Indian Army. Much of the literature destined for India was routed via China and via the Indian regiments stationed in China and Hong Kong.[97] These troops, along with Indian policemen in Chinese cities, were themselves the target of propaganda and as a means of reaching out to other regiments in India.

The *gurudwaras* (the Sikhs' place of worship) in Hong Kong in particular, which had become seething cauldrons of insubordination due to the presence of a large number of unemployed emigrants, were regularly visited by men of the regiments stationed in Hong Kong as well as members of the police force. The British authorities on the island were most alarmed at the impact of the fiery talk of these men. In 1914 they tried to prohibit Indian soldiers and policemen from visiting the *gurudwara* in Hong Kong, but this rather drastic measure was violently resented. Deciding that it would be wiser to reopen the *gurudwara* to the men of the armed forces while keeping a discreet watch over them, Governor May rescinded the closure. Feelings among the Indian regiments were further inflamed by the famous *Komagata Maru* incident which directly contributed to the mutiny of the Indian regiment stationed at Singapore in 1915, the first such mutiny by an Indian regiment since 1857.[98]

The Ghadar Party's conspiracy to overthrow British rule in India by armed force during World War I was detected and defeated before it could do much actual damage. Nevertheless, the rising tide of nationalism in China in the period from 1925 to 1927 provided the next occasion for a serious display of insubordination on the part of the Indian armed forces and policemen stationed in China. In 1925 Guangzhou witnessed an unprecedented strike and boycott by the Chinese people directed against British and other imperialist interests. The shooting down of striking Chinese workers at Guangzhou in the summer of 1925, in which Indians were used, was vehemently denounced by Indian nationalists in India and abroad.[99] The paper *United States of India* of July 1925 wrote:

> Our head goes down in shame to know that our brethren in China have sunk so low as to kill innocent Chinese, with whom we have no quarrel whatsoever....

[97] Don Dignan, *The Indian Revolutionary Problem in British Diplomacy, 1914–1919* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1983), pp. 32–33.

[98] CO 129/424, pp. 109–16, 21 September 1915. In April 1914, 337 Indian passengers (of whom 238 embarked at Hong Kong and Shanghai) boarded the Japanese ship *Komagata Maru* bound for Canada. They were refused permission to disembark on reaching Vancouver. Their treatment at the hands of the authorities in Canada and back in India inflamed nationalist sentiment among Indians. For a comprehensive account of the *Komagata Maru* episode, see Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the* Komagata Maru: *The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[99] See Sohan Singh Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History*, Vol. II (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1978), pp. 259–61, for Indian reactions to the 30 May 1925 and subsequent events.

> All that India can do now is to ask her sons to refrain from fighting against the Chinese and offer an apology to the Chinese nation for the misdeeds of Indian soldiers.

Rash Behari Bose in Japan reacted with the words: 'As an Indian I hang down my head in shame for the unpardonable sin of my Sikh countrymen. They have committed a great crime against humanity. Their action has tarnished the name of Mother India.'

Very soon, news began to filter out of China that Indian troops in China had started refusing to obey orders to fire on the Chinese, and that entire regiments had to be transferred and replaced as a consequence. The *United States of India* in September reported an instance of seventy Indian members of the Hong Kong police quitting the force in sympathy with the Chinese and in protest against the repression unleashed by the British. These men were said to have then presented themselves *en masse* before the Governor of Guangdong, offering their services to him. The Governor initially hesitated to take them up on their offer. Whereupon the men are reported to have told him: 'We have burnt our boats. There is no going back. You can utilise us for China's cause or kill us—as you please.' The Governor was then said to have given employment to these Indians.[100]

The rapidly increasing tempo of the nationalist struggle in China further galvanised the process of the political radicalisation of Indians in China. By 1927 the Guomindang–Chinese Communist Party alliance had launched the Northern Expedition to reunify the country, threatening the privileged enclaves and concessions of the foreign powers as well. The rapid pace of the Expedition and its apparent power to sweep all before it seems to have had an electrifying effect on the local Indians. British efforts to rush more Indian troops from India at this time were again widely condemned by Indian nationalist forces in India and abroad.[101] The sentiments expressed by Indian nationalist opinion were accompanied with concrete measures to prevent the newly arrived Indian troops in China in 1927 from obeying the orders of their British superiors. According to a report in the *China Weekly Review* of 6 August 1927, Indian troops on their way to China had been told that the Chinese had vandalised Indian religious places, molested Indian women and so on. 'But they were met, almost at the dock, by certain men of their own nationality, who were working for the cause of Indian freedom among the large groups of Indian police and watchmen already in Shanghai.... The reaction of the troops when they discovered the untruth of the stories which had been circulated among them was great', and the troops had to be hastily shifted out to Hong Kong. Reports in various papers also claimed that the Indian police in the Hankou Concession had defected to the Chinese side, and that the

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 260. While the authenticity of this particular report is open to question, instances of fraternisation between Indian police and troops and Chinese nationalists were common enough in this period to make it plausible.

[101] NAI, Foreign and Political/1927/622-X. See also Sohan Singh Josh, *op. cit.*, pp. 261–64.

entire Indian force in the Shanghai police were similarly preparing to go over. The revolutionary Hankou government is said to have actually offered to give military training to 1,000 Indians and to pay them not less than what they had been receiving from the Shanghai Municipal Corporation. The rank-and-file men were being offered $40 per month and more senior men $50, while a drill instructor was offered $100 per month as salary.[102]

In the heady days of the late twenties it seemed as if the interests and sentiments of militant Indian nationalists in China and of militant Chinese nationalists had finally converged, at least partially, erasing the legacy of the preceding three-quarters of a century in which Indian troops had been used again and again to fight the Chinese. However, from the thirties the Japanese occupation of China began to cast its long shadow over this comradeship. A sizeable portion of the Indian community in China, including those from the soldier–policeman–watchman category, came to identify themselves voluntarily or otherwise with that trend of Indian nationalism represented by the Indian National Army and Subhas Chandra Bose that sought the support of Japan. Its political organisation, the Indian Independence League, rapidly assumed a prominent place in the life of the community in Shanghai and other places, particularly after Japan's formal entry into World War II in 1941 and the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore in 1943. Given the strong army–policeman component within the Indian community, as well as the tradition of support for movements to overthrow the British domination of India by force of arms, it was not surprising that there was real enthusiasm for the League and the Indian National Army, and for the venture to march on India's borders in the company of the advancing Japanese armies.

With the defeat of Japan and the end of the war, Indians who were accused of collaboration with Japan, particularly League office-bearers and those in the police services, now felt the full force of retaliatory measures on the part of both British and Chinese authorities. They were rounded up and detained in large numbers. With foreign concessions in China wound up and no money or prospects of employment, hundreds of former policemen and watchmen had no option but to clamber on board crowded ships bound for India with whatever they could salvage from a lifetime in China, in the British-sponsored mass repatriation of Indians carried out at the end of the war. The thoroughness of this exodus was quite unique in the history of the Indian diaspora.

[102] David Petrie, *Communism in India, 1924–27* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1972), pp. 208, 217. The extract from the *China Weekly Review* is cited in a background paper on 'Indian Minorities in South and East Asia: The Background of the Indian Independence Movement Outside India', prepared by the United States Government Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Research and Analysis Branch in September 1944 (R. and A. No. 1595), contained in Moti Lal Bhargava, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in South-East Asia and India's Liberation War, 1943–45* (New Delhi: Vishwavidya Publishers, 1982), Appendix A, p. 221. See also Sohan Singh Josh, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

CONCLUSION

The fact that a significant proportion of Indians in China from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century consisted of soldiers and policemen in the employ of the British ought to have been a significant factor colouring the Chinese perception of Indians in the modern period. An indication of this can be seen in the words of the poet Xu Zhimo, who wrote in a regretful vein in 1923: 'I dare say when we look at an Indian we do not pity him, we despise him. I think Indians are the most misunderstood people there are; although they are in Asia, too, most people think of them as the same as the red-turbaned Sikh policeman on the streets.'[103] Similarly, the revolutionary M N Roy, who had some first-hand experience of China, wrote in 1926 that because of the large number of Indian troops and policemen in some of the Chinese cities 'the rickshaw coolies and street urchins stand in greater fear of the Indians than of the English or other foreigners.'[104]

The Indian soldiers, policemen and watchmen who went to China in this period by and large belonged to the category of economic migrants. As much as Indian traders and businessmen and labourers and farmers who went overseas, they were motivated by the need to find a source of livelihood and better the economic situation of their families. What was special about them was that most belonged to those families and communities with military service as a traditional profession and the ability to bear arms a special qualification. Economic considerations, rather than loyalty to the British empire *per se*, were the main factors motivating them to take up service with the British forces in China.

It is clear that the British authorities greatly underestimated the capacity of this particular group of Indian emigrants to turn against them. Under the impact of the nationalist currents of the twentieth century, smouldering with discontent over perceived racial discrimination against them and economic frustration, they repeatedly challenged the colonial authority. There are few parallels to this among other overseas Indian communities in this period. The real danger to British authority from the nationalism manifest among these Indians came from the fact that it was mass-based and rooted chiefly in the personnel of the army and police forces. This meant, first, that a major prop of British interests in China—Indian soldiers and policemen—was rendered unreliable in crucial periods. Second, it meant that guns intended for use against enemies of the British Empire could be and were turned against the British themselves. Finally, it meant that disaffection could and did spread like lightning along lines of kinship and social ties, as well as along the network fostered by the military organisation itself, all the way from North America to China to South-East Asia to India, and in the reverse direction.

The participation of Indians in China, particularly those of the security forces, in the struggle against British imperialism—often in direct collaboration with Chinese nationalists—opened up very real possibilities for reversing the

[103] Cited in Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 241.

[104] Sibanarayan Ray (Ed.), *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Vol. II (1923–27)* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 574.

stereotype of the Indian emigrant as a tool of imperialist interests who had no place in a China free from imperialist domination. However, this was not to be. In the complicated politics of World War II, it was Britain that was an ally of Nationalist China. Indian nationalists in China (even if not all of them) sought the patronage of Japan, the enemy of China. The end of the war found Indians divided, demoralised and widely regarded as 'collaborationists' who had sided with the enemy of the Chinese. The story of this particular group of Indians in China had unfortunately come a full circle.

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