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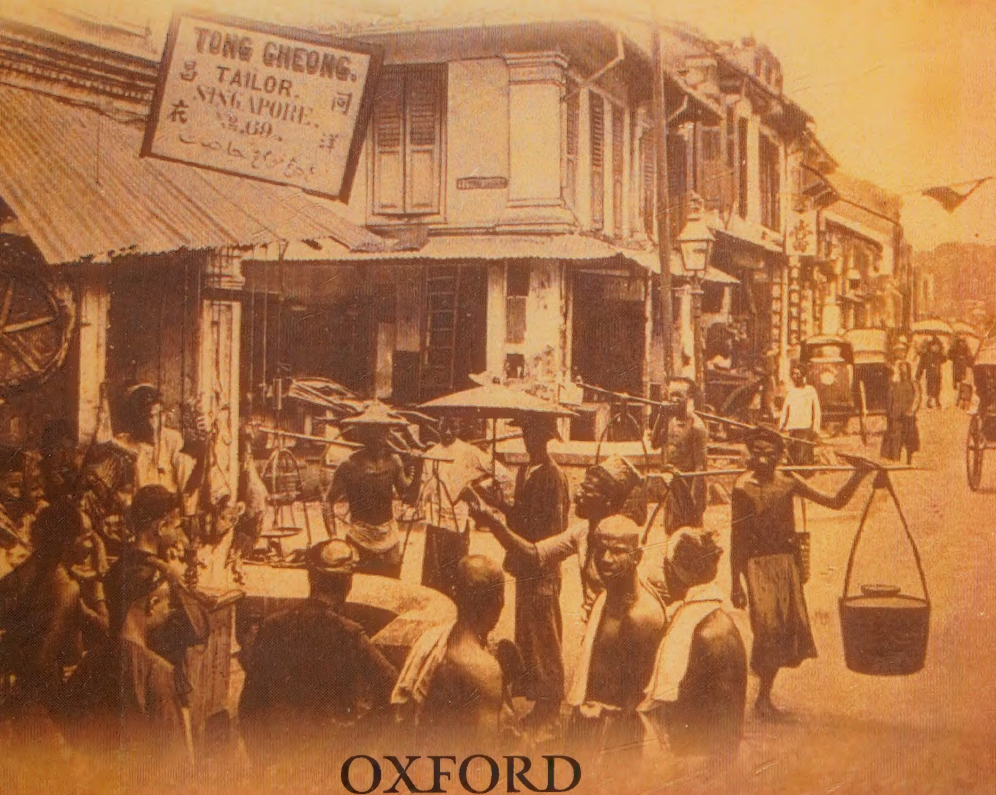
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INDIANS *in* SINGAPORE

1819–1945

DIASPORA IN THE COLONIAL PORT CITY

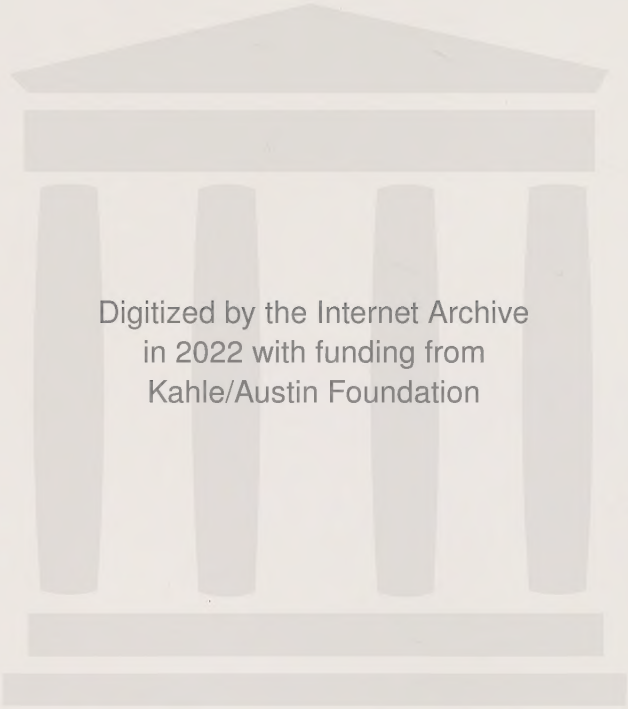


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DIASPORA IN THE COLONIAL PORT CITY

RAJESH RAI

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*To Nikita and Siyona,
for reminding me of the things that matter*

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Abbreviations

CIAM	Central Indian Association of Malaya
CID	Criminal Intelligence Department
CO	Colonial Office Records
EIC	East India Company
IIL	Indian Independence League
INA	Indian National Army
IOR	India Office Records
IPDF	Indian Passive Defence Force
IWA	Indian Welfare Association
IYL	Indian Youth League
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MCS	Malayan Civil Service
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPAJU	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
NAI	National Archives of India
NAS	National Archives of Singapore
PRO	Public Records Office (UK)
SIML	South Indian Muslim League
SSR	Straits Settlements Records
TRA	Tamils Reform Association
TRC	Tamils Representative Council
WO	War Office Records (UK)

Acknowledgements

I n the stillness of the night, sometime before World War I, young Kanta—barely fifteen—quietly left his home in Raini village, now in contemporary eastern Uttar Pradesh. He had been married only the day before, and was scheduled to escort his bride to her new home. His mind, however, was set on another journey, to a land he had heard of only in whispers and rumours, where kinsmen were said to have prospered, and where ordinary men could amass great wealth and become prominent landowners. For months, he had planned his escape. Arriving at the nearby town of Mau Nath Bhanjan before daybreak, he travelled by train to Benares and thence to Calcutta. His wedding gifts paid for the ship-journey to Singapore, a crossing eventually delayed when he was stranded for three months in Rangoon. When he finally arrived at the bustling port city, he served as a delivery boy at the post office, and at night, as an assistant watchman in a godown by the river. Gradually, he accumulated capital, and with the help of new friends, embarked on a money-lending business. He would return to India in the late 1920s, departing again to Singapore, this time with his wife. Theirs was a story of migratory success. Together, they had eight children and Kanta's business blossomed. By the 1960s, he owned several shop-houses in Singapore, a modest hotel in Calcutta and 100 hectares of land in and around Raini, where he also established a school. The roots of and journeys within this book are inextricably tied to the legend of Kanta Rai, the author's grandfather.

Many institutions and people have contributed to the making of this book and it is a pleasure to express my gratitude formally. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), National University of Singapore (NUS), generously supported my research, enabling lengthy spells of archival work in the UK. FASS also granted me a writing fellowship over six months in 2011, which was graciously hosted by the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at NUS, and which facilitated the completion of several chapters of this book.

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Introduction

For much of the nearly 150 years of colonial rule over Singapore, the thriving port witnessed the arrival of thousands of immigrants annually, mainly from China, India, the Malay Peninsula, and the Indonesian archipelago. Most saw their move to the island as a temporary, albeit necessary, sojourn. Toiling for years, often under arduous conditions, they held on to the glimmer of hope for a return to the warmth of their kith and kin, one day. Given the centrality of the 'homeland' in their mindset, it was hardly surprising that the mid-nineteenth century Governor of the Straits Settlements, Edmund Augustus Blundell, was doubtful of their future prospects in the colony:

No feeling of citizenship, no common desire to co-operate for future and general benefit, animates the mass, which like the tide, ebbs and flows at a particular period of the year, the flow bringing with it new and crude materials for the established institutions of the land, to exhaust their energies upon.¹

Blundell's portrayal, even if dismissive, contained a grain of truth. Many of these emigrants did, usually after accumulating some capital, return. Yet, among the tide, there were others—perhaps a minority—who did not make that journey 'home'. Layer upon layer, the ephemeral and the enduring created the conditions for the development of sustained diaspora(s) in the burgeoning city—communities that held on to their cultural heritage, even as the new context, inevitably, reshaped identities and posited new social linkages. The failure to recognize

the importance of these processes in the budding settlement marked the flaw in Blundell's assumption—from the gradual build-up of this 'mass' of 'crude materials' emerged the very foundation of multicultural Singapore.

This book focuses on the Indian component of Singapore's cultural mosaic, historicizing the diaspora's formation and development within the period of colonial rule, from its point of establishment in 1819, through to 1945, which marked the end of the Japanese Occupation of the port city. Since the British 'founding', Indians have constituted a significant minority here, a position that has continued to the present. In 2010, they comprised 9.2 per cent (348,120) of the total resident population of just under 3.8 million.² Recognized as one of the three main 'races' in Singapore, the state has since independence in 1965 maintained a commitment to preserving, even strengthening, Indian cultural identities. Although the community is not without problems, most scholars of the diaspora agree that Indians are well placed in the city. An Indian language—Tamil—holds the distinction of being one of the four official languages. Five others—Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu—are recognized second languages in the school curriculum. The Hindu festival Deepavali is sanctioned as a public holiday. Over 35 per cent of Indian residents hold tertiary qualifications, and the average monthly income of Indian households exceeded \$7,600 in 2010—a figure higher than any other major ethnic community in Singapore.³

The presence of an established diaspora is one factor that explains why the city continues to draw large numbers of Indian emigrants. From the 1990s, tens of thousands have arrived annually, some to settle permanently, others for shorter durations. They include wealthy entrepreneurs, top-tier professionals—engaged in practically every sector of the knowledge-based economy, especially banking/finance and information technology—as well as lower-skilled temporary workers hired for the construction industry and for domestic work. While the resumption of the flow from the subcontinent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has added a new layer to the Indian diaspora, immigrants or descendants of immigrants who arrived during the colonial period still comprise the majority of Singapore's Indian residents.

Ironically, despite their long-standing position, there exists no comprehensive account of the history of the Indian diaspora in Singapore

during the formative colonial period. Two important, albeit dated, works—Kernal Singh Sandhu's *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)*, published in 1969⁴ and Sinnappah Arasaratnam's, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, published in 1970⁵—still constitute the main sources on the Indian diaspora in Singapore during the colonial period. Sandhu's study—the product of painstaking archival research—examines occupational typologies and the schemes devised to recruit Indians for the Malayan economy, and details patterns of Indian population distribution and settlement during the colonial period. Arasaratnam's book is less detailed, and concentrates on the period after the 1880s, when the plantation economy in Malaya expanded exponentially. It can be distinguished from Sandhu's work in that it is more attentive to the development of political consciousness and changes in identity. That being said, both books privilege economic processes, at the expense of developments in the socio-cultural sphere.

In addition to the above, the key issue that arises from the dependence on these works is that the Indian experience in colonial Singapore is treated tangentially, only as a small subset of the wider Malay[s]ian story. Consequently, aspects crucial to the social, economic, and political life of Indians particular to Singapore have been neglected, subsumed or dealt with only in passing. For example, Arasaratnam dedicates about five pages of his study, and Sandhu, only two, to the Indian involvement in the Indian National Army (INA) and the Indian Independence League (IIL)—an experience crucial to understanding socio-political developments in the Indian diaspora in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. Even more troubling is the fact that the dominance of the wider Malayan experience in these works has sometimes given rise to flawed assumptions that, by extension, processes in the Peninsula were as significant in the port city. One problematic area, for example, pertains to labour migration connected to the plantation economy. As this book reveals, plantation labour—whether recruited through the exploitative indenture or *kangani* systems—which was crucial in the Malayan case, was not particularly consequential in Singapore. More pertinently, exploitative systems specific to the urban landscape of the colonial port city have largely been ignored.

This book accords primacy to the dynamic processes involved in the peopling, and the subsequent economic, religious, cultural, and

socio-political development of the Indian diaspora in the colonial port city of Singapore—experiences that at points connected with the wider Malayan experience, but were also characterized by difference. This study thus fulfils its primary aim of being a book-length work on the history of Indians in colonial Singapore—an (urgent) response to the compelling void. A second objective is to contribute to scholarship on the Indian diaspora during the colonial era by focusing on their experience in the urban landscape of the port city—a focus that has hitherto received little attention in extant scholarly works.

Emigrants and Settlers in the Colonial Port City—Diaspora with a Difference?

In Jayanta Kumar Ray's introduction to *Interpreting the Indian Diaspora* (2009), Ray summarizes the emergence of the Indian diaspora during the colonial period as follows:

In the colonial period the Indian diaspora emerged largely from the introduction by the British of a sophisticated version of slavery. This was called the system of indentured labour. It was essential for the British—who had to abolish slavery in the 1830s—to find substitutes for African slaves who would work in their sugar plantations.⁶

Since Hugh Tinker's 1974 study, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*, the indenture system and the exploitation of Indian labourers in the plantation colonies has inspired a vast coterie of works. Indeed, the exploitative experience of Indians in the far-flung sugar colonies—Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Natal, Surinam, Trinidad, and so on—dominates the literature of the Indian diaspora that emerged from colonial capital.

Alongside the sizeable body of works on the nature of economic processes on plantation estates, there is now an evolving literature that, without challenging the exploitation thesis, is more attentive to the diaspora's construction of social, cultural, and religious identities in the new environment. These studies suggest that the 'lost homeland'⁷ sustained in memory—however imprecise—became vital in shaping diasporic identities: 'We had brought a kind of India with us, which we could, as it were, unroll like a carpet on the flat land'.⁸ The shift towards examining socio-cultural developments and changing identities is

welcome, but the spectre of living in the distant plantation frontier—informed by a terminal disconnect from, and nostalgic ‘memories’ of, the lost homeland—resonates imperiously in these representations. This begs the question if all Indian diasporas produced during the colonial period were necessarily shaped by a ‘rupture’ from the homeland. If not, what implications did a more ‘connected’ position vis-à-vis the homeland have on diasporic socio-cultural forms?

When compared to the Indian diaspora’s experience in plantation colonies, far less has been written on other types of Indian settlement constituted during the colonial period. Hitherto, possibly the most influential work that engages the colonial period but shifts from the focus on Indian plantation labour is Claude Markovits’, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947*.⁹ Markovits’ study, which examines the phenomenal expansion of Sindhi trading networks that became ubiquitous in the British Empire’s ports and cities, reveals an alternate diasporic experience, marked by mobility and circulation across nodes spread over vast regions, and thus possibly better understood within the transnational networks’ frame.

This book also shifts away from the erstwhile focus on the Indian plantation labour diaspora, by concentrating on a distinct landscape—the port city—as a key site of diasporic settlement during the colonial period. There are some unique characteristics in the disposition of Indian diasporas in port cities—Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, and so on—as they developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Southeast Asia, these colonies may have initially emerged as trading outposts, but once successful, developed into complex multi-tiered economies. Usually the urban locality also functioned as a key administrative hub for the colonial power, which along with economic expansion, added to the diversity of immigrant occupational profiles. That is not to suggest that Indian plantation labour was necessarily absent in this setting, but that the heterogeneous socio-economic make-up of immigrant groups—merchants and traders, imperial auxiliaries, petty service-providers, and over time also English educated personnel engaged in professional work—had implications on diaspora formation at these sites. The prism of labour migration and trading networks in the erstwhile literature may be useful but is certainly not sufficient in explaining the complex socio-economic characteristics of the Indian diaspora in the port city. The multi-tiered occupational profile of the

Indian population in these locations draws attention to a variety of questions that are addressed in this book. What were the imperatives that fostered the movement of these diverse groups? What impact did their economic function have on patterns of emigration and settlement? How did the tiered social profile of the diaspora influence Indian religious-cultural production and socio-political identities in the port city?

Many of these ports saw a rapid increase in resident populations following the colonial entry. Over time, this created a densely populated landscape comprising a myriad of ethnic and religious groups, drawn to the opportunities that the new commercial hub had to offer. The 'topography of ... [these colonial] port cities', Amrith argues, came to be shaped by 'multiple diasporas'.¹⁰ Policies fashioned by colonial (mis)perceptions and ideologies were put in place to 'manage' the diverse ethnic groups. Such initiatives were also adopted in the predominantly rural colonies of the Empire, but they were acutely manifest in the urban landscape. In Singapore, the multiplicity of cultures and religions bound in the densely populated areas catalyzed diverse responses, with some posing challenges to the authorities' attempt to keep Asian groups apart. Trans-ethnic collaborative postures and 'hybridities' occasionally brought to the fore the limitations of colonial 'divide and rule'. On the flip side, proximal living sometimes accentuated sensitivity to difference which had the effect of sharpening boundaries of identity. For Indians in Singapore's urban multi-ethnic landscape, such responses occurred not just in relation to the other major Asian groups—the Chinese and the 'Malays'¹¹—but also at the intra-Indian level, across the spectrum of religious and linguistic groups that hailed from the subcontinent. The outcome of such identity-negotiations were never fixed but always characterized by fluidity—fashioned and re-fashioned by temporal changes in structure and agency, a characteristic of the dynamic landscape of the port city.

Another distinguishing feature of the diaspora in the port city was that it was well connected to the outside world. For merchants and traders, news from distant shores was crucial for their economic success. In Amitav Ghosh's novel *River of Smoke*, which depicts the travails of a nineteenth century Parsi opium trader traversing the ports in the South China Sea, the protagonist underscores the importance of '*khabar-dari*—keeping up with the news', 'a man who does not know the *khabar* (news) is a man headed for the *kubber* (grave)'.¹² Yet, the ramifications

of distant currents of information were not limited to the economic sphere, but also affected religious-cultural and socio-political change in the diaspora. This was especially evident from the second half of the nineteenth century as advances in communication technologies accelerated the flow of information and of people—emigrants, pilgrims, literati, and political notables—who brought ideas and news from distant shores. This created conditions in the port city that were quite unlike the diaspora forged on the ‘ruptured’ plantation frontier, where, as the extant literature suggests, socio-cultural processes were heavily shaped by derivatives of a remembered ‘homeland’. The sensitization to religious, cultural, and political currents from the subcontinent and beyond left a deep imprint in the construction and reconstruction of Indian identities in colonial Singapore. That is not to suggest that Indians in Singapore were bystanders shaped by external forces. On the contrary, among the settlers, were literati and wealthy entrepreneurs wielding influence, sometimes emerging as protagonists of change both locally and regionally. Even more, certainly by the close of the nineteenth century, the port city was not just a nexus where distant ideas converged but also a forum where these were discussed, debated:

Singapore formed part of an English-speaking, imperial chain of port cities around the Indian Ocean world, in constant communication with one another ... This was a world of journals and debating societies, of intellectuals engaged in constant conversation about social and religious reform, about political legitimacy, about economic changes, and about the condition of living in diaspora.¹³

In that reading, inhabitants of the metropolis were agents, but their formulations had to be continuously re-negotiated in the context of new social and political currents that swept the port city’s shores. What emerges then is the recognition that in the urban landscape, diasporic socio-political identities were strategic and contingent. This sometimes yielded a ‘cosmopolitan’ impulse, or as the case may be, further reified connections to the homeland across the Bay of Bengal.

About This Book

The specific features of diaspora formation and development in the dynamic landscape of the colonial port city punctuates this study of

Indians in Singapore. That account of the evolving diaspora, and the agency of its constituents, can be better understood in a chronological frame that facilitates cognizance of concomitant changes in colonial administration, policy, and ideology; transformations in the social, political, and economic landscape of the settlement; and an attentiveness to wider socio-political currents permeating the boundaries of the port city—all of which affected the lives of its inhabitants. Accordingly, *Indians in Singapore, 1819–1945*, has been structured in three parts—each segment reflecting specific periods in the historical development of the colony, corresponding with major political and economic changes, which left an imprint on the diaspora in Singapore.

The first two parts of the book analyze the evolution processes of the Indians within two time frames: the first part situated before, and the second part after, the 1867 transition of power from British Indian rule to the Crown. This structure is deliberate and symbolic of the transition as an event pivotal to the development of Singapore Indian society. Part I provides the foundation of the socio-economic profile of the early immigrants (Chapter 1), illustrating carefully the great diversity in the types of work and kinds of background that characterized the pioneers. This is followed by a comprehensive account of the migrants' variegated socio-cultural and religious activities (Chapter 2)—a much neglected aspect of the diaspora's historical accounts in extant literature.

Part II builds on this foundational layer with a follow up of migration trajectories and socio-economic profiles post-1867 (Chapter 3), addressing the complexities of a growing, increasingly diverse and gradually more permanent establishment during a period that concomitantly saw remarkable political, economic, and information-communication technology changes, and when Singapore evolved into a port city of global commercial importance. Resultantly, as diasporic settlement became more secure, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the significant turn to communal collectives for rights and representation to be established, and for identities to be politically recognized. The vigour of associational culture and organizational activity reflected both a pan-Indian consciousness as well as sharpened divisions along lines of religion, ethnicity, language, occupational class groupings, amongst others.

The final part of the book examines the Indian experience in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation—a watershed episode that

saw a significant break in erstwhile patterns of social, economic, and political development in the port city. War and the imperatives of the new colonial regime also distorted earlier Indian socio-political trajectories, such that certain strands came to be amplified, even as others were suppressed. The transformations that occurred in the diaspora during the Occupation call for a different type of analysis, requiring a contraction in the lens of social history to reveal, more closely, significant aspects of that experience. Accordingly, the chapters in Part III study the development of the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia (henceforth the Movement), including Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership of the INA and IIL. While that dimension has drawn considerable scholarly interest, here again the experience of the port city's Indian inhabitants has been treated tangentially. This study thus departs from the extant literature by focusing on Singapore's position as a key site in the development of the INA and IIL and the role of long-standing Indian residents here. In addition, the section addresses developments outside the fold of the Movement, revealing lesser known, yet crucial, aspects of the Indian diaspora's experience during the Occupation including: forced Indian recruitment in Japanese labour projects and resettlement schemes; the fate of Indians who remained (prisoners of war) POWs rather than join the INA; the misery and deprivation affecting Indians in the final phase of the Japanese Occupation; and attempts to forge alternative Indian organizations outside the purview of the Movement.

Terminology

Two words in the title of this book require explanation: 'Diaspora' and 'Indian'.

Diaspora

Diaspora is a contested word in academic circles. Historically connected to the dispersal of the Jewish people, it carries 'connotations of violence, catastrophe, alienation, loss, exile and return'.¹⁴ Over the last 30 years, the term has come to be used for many ethnic collectivities—Africans, Armenians, Chinese, Greeks, Indians, Italians, and so on—that have moved to territories beyond what they identify as their 'ancestral homeland'. The expansive use of 'diaspora' has also given rise to concerns

about indiscretion, which is manifest in the 'journalistic free-for-all'¹⁵ appropriation of the term for a wide range of differentiated experiences of movement and settlement. Indeed, the term diaspora 'has been willingly embraced as a self-descriptive category even by recent migrants and short term dwellers in foreign lands'.¹⁶ To prevent the conceptual category being rendered ineffectual because of unfettered use, scholars have sometimes intervened by listing key elements of the diaspora condition that draw from the logic of the original Jewish experience. In *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, Reeves and Rai emphasize 'collective memory', 'the will to survive as a minority', and 'the time factor'¹⁷ as key markers of the diaspora experience:

A diaspora exists precisely because it remembers the 'homeland'. Without this memory..., these migrants and settlers would be simply people in a new setting, into which they merge, bringing little or nothing to the new 'home', accepting in various ways and forms the mores and attitudes that already exist in their new country and society... The people of the diaspora, however, do not merely settle in new countries: they recreate in their socio-economic, political and cultural institutions a version of ... that homeland that they remember.¹⁸

The history of Indians in colonial Singapore is replete with examples that conform to even the most stringent definitions of diaspora. The forced expulsion of large numbers of Indian convicts to the penal settlement in Singapore is a clear case. A wide range of groups, labourers, 'free' migrants, certain types of imperial auxiliaries, servicemen, educated personnel, financiers, and even merchants, who ended up remaining on the island far longer than they may have originally intended, but nonetheless sustained in their social, religious, and cultural identities and forms the memory of the 'homeland'—all of these meet the definition set out by Reeves and Rai.

Yet, one has to acknowledge that many of the Indians who arrived in Singapore during the colonial period were sojourners that do not comfortably fit in the frame of diaspora. Indeed, the frequent turnover in the Indian population was a historical truism in the colonial port city, making it difficult to distinguish those who became the diaspora, and those who were only transient dwellers. Notable among sojourning sections included military personnel deployed for limited tenures, and traders who frequently 'circulated' over a vast region. Labour in the port city was also more mobile, and this along with well-developed

communication links with the subcontinent, and the stark difference in the number of males and females—an imbalance that far exceeded even that of plantation colonies—encouraged a tendency to move to and fro. It would, however, be an error to assume that because of their mobility, these sojourners did not influence the development of the diaspora. On the contrary, they too actively engaged in socio-political and religious-cultural processes in the new environment, and by bringing forth ideas from distant shores and sustaining connections to the subcontinent, added dynamism to diasporic identities in the port city's landscape.

'Indian'

Defining 'Indian' in Singapore is problematic. Official reports and discourse recognize three main 'races' in Singapore—Chinese, Malays, and Indians—alongside a fourth, labelled as 'Others'. A short entry in the glossary of the Singapore Census (2010) explains who is officially recorded as Indian here: '*Indians* ... refers to persons of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origin such as Tamils, Malayalis, Punjabis, Bengalis, Singhalese, and so on.'¹⁹ The use of the label Indian as an umbrella category for people whose origins can be traced to the subcontinent is an extension (though not exactly) of the manner in which the term was employed during the colonial period. The continued use of this formulation may understandably give rise to dispute in the context of the new nation-states that have emerged in South Asia since 1947.

Given that the umbrella use of the category Indian is sometimes contested, it may be more accurate to refer to these people as South Asian. Yet, in Singapore the term Indian certainly has greater resonance. It would not be uncommon for a person of South Asian origin, especially from amongst those who are part of the 'old diaspora'—that is, the immigrants or descendants of immigrants who arrived during the colonial period—to identify themselves as Indian even if their origins may now lie in areas outside the boundaries of the contemporary Indian nation-state. In comparison, the term South Asian is hardly recognized in the public sphere. Indeed, few in the island-city have an understanding of who exactly the term South Asian refers to, even if there is a gradual sensitization to differences between Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, and Bangladeshis.

The resonance of the term Indian over South Asian is one reason why this book has adopted the former in its title. The other is the fact that this study concentrates on the period prior to 1947, that is, before numerous new nation states emerged in the subcontinent. Given the temporal focus, the use of the category Indian to signify all those whose origins were from the Indian subcontinent—whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Tamil, or Bengali—fits more comfortably. The key exception during this period, were emigrants from Ceylon. Partly because of their distinct socio-economic profile they were sometimes separated from the Indian category in the colonial census. Yet, in a variety of social spheres the history of the Ceylonese community's experience in Singapore coalesced deeply with the larger Indian collectivity, so that a strict separation of treatment would go against the grain of ground realities. It is hoped that their inclusion in the coverage of this book will not raise strong objection.

Sources

The sources on Indians in colonial Singapore are widely dispersed. These include official and non-official records located in archives in Britain, Malaysia, India, and Singapore; newspaper reports; observer accounts of Singapore in the nineteenth century; Honours, Masters, and Doctoral dissertations in the holdings of the National University of Singapore's Central Library; souvenir magazines; and oral interviews held at the National Archives of Singapore. To this collection must be added the numerous published works that contain information relating to Indians in Singapore or deal with specific Indian communities—say for example Tamil Muslims, Chettiers, or Sikhs—or focus on certain themes, like religious practices or business networks.

The researcher of Indians in Singapore has to confront several hurdles in dealing with primary records of the colonial period. British colonial records and documents are scattered in many repositories. The British National Archives at Kew has a significant, but a far from complete, holding of colonial documents vis-à-vis the Straits Settlements and British Malaya. Some gaps have been filled by a turn to the India Office Library in London. Having said that there are documents that ought, logically, to exist but which the author was unable to trace. One notable example pertains to a number of Malayan Political Intelligence

Bulletin records in the 1930s. These files may well be missing. As several scholars have attested before, many British Malayan documents were destroyed or lost during the Japanese Occupation. Another possibility is that administrative changes may have rendered such documents being filed under a different—and less conspicuous—category. Indeed, I found this to be the case in several instances. One striking example was data pertaining to Indian labourers under contract in Singapore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century contained, strangely, in the records of the Straits Settlements Chinese Protectorate. Another difficulty relates to tracing information specific to Indians in Singapore. Considerable data concerned the wider Straits Settlements or British Malayan context without information specific to Singapore. Added to this is the issue that Penang was the first landing port for Indians arriving in the Straits Settlements and the Indian Immigration Department set up in the late nineteenth century was based there. This creates several problems. For example, no accurate information exists on how many emigrants proceeded from Penang to Singapore, nor of how many returned to India from Singapore. In certain cases where more detailed records have been kept, for example, of regulated indentured labourers, that information can be deciphered but requires cross-referencing from several documents. In other cases, such as for example merchants and traders, the researcher is forced to depend on more generic census figures that at best can only provide an approximate of the numbers moving to the colony. Newspaper reports aid in filling some of the lacunae in colonial documents. Partly because many newspapers were based in Singapore, there was a tendency to provide information specific to the situation here, and occasionally even the English press noted aspects of the social and cultural life of Indians here, which official documents tended to ignore.

A special note about sources during the Japanese Occupation is necessary. There exists a vast literature on the development of the INA and IIL during this period, specifically during Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership. These works, although useful, tend to focus on the overarching Movement, which has the effect of sidelining the involvement of Indians in Singapore. This study relooks at some of the earlier published material on the INA and IIL, which along with primary documents allows for a closer look at the Singapore experience of the Movement. A second issue pertains to sources on how Indian

inhabitants in Singapore were affected by the wider socio-economic conditions prevalent during the Occupation. Access to information on this aspect is problematic because of the paucity of literature on the experience of Indians independent of the INA and IIL. General historical accounts of the Occupation, in particular Kratoska's study, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History*, are useful although the coverage of Indians is limited.²⁰ As a supplement the author has turned to the large store of oral interviews held at the National Archives of Singapore. These testimonies, even if imprecise, are nonetheless extremely revealing of the lived experience of the port city's inhabitants during the Occupation.

Notes

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7. Vijay Mishra, 'Voices from the Diaspora', in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, eds Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 120.

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9. Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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12. Amitav Ghosh, *River of Smoke: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 61 and 124.

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I

Pioneers at the
Frontier: 1819–67

1 Merchants, Minions, and the Military

The formation of an Indian diaspora in Singapore can be dated precisely to the British founding of the settlement in early 1819. That pivotal event set in motion the process, which over time led to the establishment of a viable and varied community of Indian settlers. Amongst the Indian pioneers in the burgeoning outpost were soldiers, traders, convicts, and labourers. Why did they move to Singapore following the advent of colonial rule? What were the social, religious, and ethno-linguistic backgrounds of these early immigrants? What types of economic activity did they engage in at the early settlement? The answers to these questions are crucial in explaining the making of an Indian diaspora in Singapore, which by 1860 comprised the largest minority in the colony.

The early Indian presence in colonial Singapore was produced by the conjunction of diverse trajectories of migration, movements which can be better understood in a broader framework comprising four contextual elements. The first pertained to the location of the outpost in a region that had a long-standing Indian commercial presence. Centuries before the arrival of Europeans in Southeast Asia, Indian merchants and traders had traversed the waters of the Bay of Bengal, negotiated their ships through the Straits of Malacca, and extended their commercial networks to the South China Sea. Even as, from the mid-eighteenth century, they were gradually 'edged out of their position of equality with Europeans in the maritime commerce ... to positions of subservience',¹ traders from the Coromandel Coast had remained ubiquitous

in the Malay Archipelago. For these traders, their turn to Singapore was primarily because the emergent British outpost was situated at the centre of their traditional commercial routes, offering an excellent alternative to Dutch controlled ports that had come to adopt exclusive monopolistic policies.

The second context was connected to the eastward shift in the East India Company's (EIC) commercial operations from the late eighteenth century. To facilitate the burgeoning India–China and Malay Archipelago trade, the EIC depended heavily on 'country trade' ships, which involved European and Indian collaboration. Furber explains that in the 'country trade',

contacts between Europeans and Asians were most diverse. Every country-ship was herself a microcosm of such association ... between the European captains and the [Indian] *noquedars*, *serangs* and *tindals* with whom they dealt in recruiting their lascar crews ... [Records] at Madras show Indian merchants as co-owners [of ships] with European and Eurasian captains[,] ... Indian merchants [as] sole owners of 'country ships' commanded by European captains and also Muslim sea-captains as co-owners with Eurasians of Portuguese descent.²

Consequently, alongside traders from the Coromandel Coast, who were intimately acquainted with the region, the 'country trade' brought prominent India-based merchants, such as for example the Parsis, to the newly established British trading centre in the Malay Archipelago.

A third dimension was Singapore's rapid economic advance. Within two years of the British founding, Singapore's imports and exports exceeded \$8 million.³ Much of Riau's, and subsequently, Penang's trade was redirected to the settlement. Indeed, 'by 1867, Singapore [had emerged] ... second only to Calcutta among the Indian Government's ports'.⁴ The expanding entrepôt not only attracted Indian traders, but also gave rise to the need for labour for port activities, public works, and in other economic sectors, like agriculture. Correspondingly, the development of the civil establishment at the settlement also gave rise to the need for Indian servicemen.

The final and possibly most crucial element was the fact that for a period of over four decades of her early development from 1826 to 1867, Singapore, as part of the Straits Settlements,⁵ remained under the direct control of British India. This underpinned the movement of a diverse spectrum of Indian groups. With European administrators and

officers came their Indian servants. Indian troops comprised the mainstay of the military garrison. The administrative connection facilitated the movement of transported convicts from India.⁶ Moreover, because Singapore was a part of British India till 1867, the movement of Indian labour was left unchecked, distinguishing the Straits Settlements from other British colonies where Indian labour emigration would, from the 1830s, be subjected to Indian regulations.

1.1 The Colonial Military and the 'Bazaar Contingent'⁷

The *lascars* and sepoy of the 2nd Battalion 20th (Marine) Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry that arrived with Raffles were the first Indians recorded in modern Singapore.⁸ Studies of the Bengal Infantry inform us that the initial regiment originated from parts of modern Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, from where, until 1857, the Bengal Army drew its recruits.⁹ Under Hastings's charge as Governor-General of India, 'Bihar, Benares and Awadh became major sources of recruits with permanent recruiting centres established in Bhojpur, Patna, and Buxar in Bihar and Jaunpur and Ghazipur in Benares.'¹⁰ Although the specific religious and caste breakdown of the 20th (Marine) Regiment is not available, the Bengal regiments tended to be composed of 'Mohamedans, Brahmins, Rajpoots and Hindoos of inferior description',¹¹ with high caste Hindus comprising the majority of the Bengal Army at the time.¹²

The initial military contingent included some 120 Indian sepoy and lascars.¹³ In the colony's earliest years, military personnel were the most significant component of the Indian population.¹⁴ Tied to the garrison, were the quarters for the camp followers that included a 'bazaar contingent' made up of domestic servants, *chaiwallahs*, grooms, and dhobis.¹⁵ Drawn from the same areas from which the military was recruited, the camp followers would have largely been lower caste Hindus or Muslims, given that these occupations were considered 'polluting' for the upper caste sepoy. In 1825, the first regiment was relieved by the 25th (Marine) Regiment, Bengal Native Infantry, and in April and May 1827, troops from the 35th Regiment of the Madras Native Infantry took their place.¹⁶

From 1827 till 1872, various regiments of the Madras Army held the garrison in Singapore, only occasionally relieved by other forces, such as, for example, the Bombay Artillery in 1839, the Bengal Volunteer

Regiment in 1841, and the Bengal Artillery in 1850.¹⁷ These were larger than the initial units, and usually numbered about 600 soldiers.¹⁸ In terms of social composition, the Madras troops in the nineteenth century comprised a mix of groups primarily recruited from the Carnatic region, Trichonopoly, the Northern Circars, and Mysore, alongside a smaller number from northern India. Although there were variations amongst regiments, Muslims usually comprised between 30 to 40 per cent of these units, followed by upper-caste Telugus and Tamils, and a few Marathas, Rajputs, and Brahmins from northern India.¹⁹

Collectively the Indian garrison was crucial in Singapore's early development. They were required to do far more than secure the defence of the colony from external attacks. Military personnel were involved in clearing land, public works, and building batteries for defence. During times of crisis, such as, for example, Chinese 'riots', they were frequently called upon to undertake policing duties even after the setup of a police force in 1821.²⁰ Indeed, the position of the early garrisons suggests that their role in providing for the internal security of the settlement was imperative. When conflicts between Chinese 'secret societies' arose, it was not uncommon for the regiments' cannons to be raised, pointed in the direction of the Chinese settlement to act as a counter-threat.²¹

For most sepoys and lascars, Singapore was a temporary sojourn, and they usually left at the end of their two or four year tour of duty. A small number may have remained as quasi-civilian migrants as 'it was the accepted form and practice for the employees of the Company, including the garrison, to engage in ... farming and other commercial enterprise in order to supplement the Company's wages'.²² This pattern certainly existed in Penang. Writing to his superiors in Calcutta to replace two companies of sepoys, Francis Light argued that his troops preferred to become 'riots' [*sic*; more commonly *ryots*] in Penang for here they had grown wealthy through money-lending and had procured slaves:

Every female slave brought to market is purchased by them at price hitherto unknown to the natives ... and are either kept for their use or exposed to prostitution for their emolument. They are the money-lenders of the settlement and by an influence from mutual support they are enable[d] to recover when due the most nefarious engagements. They live in style equal to the more opulent inhabitants expending large sums on their weddings and feasts and annually remitting to their friends.²³

Even as the requirement to return at the end of the tour of duty became more stringent by the mid-nineteenth century, Sandhu posits that there were soldiers who returned to the Straits Settlements upon obtaining their discharge.²⁴

Settlement patterns in Singapore suggest that some of the military's camp followers may have indeed detached themselves from the garrison and remained for longer periods. Mention of the dhobi settlement can be found regularly in colonial records throughout the nineteenth century. They remained in close proximity to the initial encampment at the foot of Fort Canning Hill although the garrison itself had shifted to Pearls Hill in 1828. One can only conjecture that the dhobis' decision to stay put was premised on access to the freshwater stream and servicing those who resided in the vicinity. Noting the presence of a mixed group of Kling²⁵—an appellation, when used specifically, referred to Tamil-speaking Muslims, although often also used as a label for all southern Indians—and Bengalese—commonly referring to all northern Indians in Singapore—dhobis in the early 1860s, John Cameron wrote:

Shortly after leaving town ... [Orchard Road] follows the windings of a small stream ... in which the dhobis, or washermen, are busy from morning till night.... The men, generally strong, stalwart Klings or Bengalese ... seize the pieces of clothing one by one[,] ... dip them into the stream, swing them over their heads, and bring them down with their whole force on the stone slab.... It undoubtedly secures a matchless whiteness.²⁶

1.2 The Early Commercial Presence

The Indian commercial presence that developed soon after the British founding comprised a mix of groups, both in terms of the nature of their business activities and their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Amongst them were prominent merchants and traders, although many were also shopkeepers or small vendors who plied their wares by the Singapore River. Partly because of the tendency for these businessmen to 'circulate' over a vast region, colonial authorities did not maintain systematic records of their presence. That being said, in spite of their mobility, Singapore's rapid commercial advance ensured that some of these entrepreneurs certainly did, over time, establish viable roots in the colony. Moreover, through their 'circulations', these pioneering traders were also crucial in facilitating the movement of agents, servicemen,

and labourers from the subcontinent, thus catalysing the formation of an even more substantial diaspora at the new frontier.

Naraina Pillai, who joined Raffles on his second visit to Singapore in June 1819, has often been cited as the most prominent Indian businessman in early Singapore. Said to be of Tamil origin, Pillai was initially employed as a clerk in the colonial treasury before he ventured into business—setting up a brick kiln, and recruiting Indian carpenters and bricklayers from Penang to build houses. He went on to own a shop at the market place selling cotton piece-goods at what is today Cross Street, in the Central Business District in Singapore.²⁷ Pillai—often represented as ‘Singapore’s first building contractor’²⁸—may have propelled a strong Indian presence in that industry in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Armenian Church, which was built between 1835 and 1836 and is considered one of the finest monuments in early Singapore, had as its main contractor a Kling who was paid a sum of \$3,500 for the project.²⁹

Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast

Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast formed the earliest Indian commercial group to arrive in large numbers after the British founding of the settlement. Throughout the period of British Indian rule over the Straits Settlements, they constituted the most numerically significant Indian group engaged in commercial activities. Historical records of Southeast Asia employ a number of appellations to refer to these Tamil Muslims. The term *Chulia* was commonly used to refer to them in the early period, although over time the more generic label Kling was more frequently employed. These commercial emigrants and sojourners were not in a strict sense a uniform group and were subdivided into sub-groups, such as, for example, *Labbai*, *Marakkayar*, *Ravuttar*, and *Kayalar*, based on their ‘adherence to a specific [Muslim] law school, regional background, common economic activities, and most importantly a common origin’.³⁰

The regional trading networks of these Tamil Muslims were established well before the coming of Europeans. They occupied prominent positions in the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century, and were also highly influential in other Malay ports and courts where they came to be proffered important titles. Their position was affected by the arrival

of the Portuguese and the Dutch in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although they continued to be ubiquitous on the Burmese coast and ports in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and West Java. In part, the reason why Tamil Muslim traders remained prominent in the region in spite of the European presence lay in their long entrenched links with local courts and the interdependent relationships that they had forged with Europeans. Tschacher explains:

Europeans were ready to rent excess shipping capacity to Indian Muslim merchants, and also to transport the merchants themselves. If the Europeans provided Indian Muslims with shipping space and protection, Indian Muslims could provide Europeans with expertise of and links to Malay ports and courts. European traders often preferred to deal with Indian intermediaries, whose knowledge of both local society and languages as well as the court made them important contacts for foreigners.³¹

For Tamil Muslim traders, the emergent British position in the early nineteenth century Straits, with its promise of free trade, presented a commercial opportunity. Having established a relationship with EIC authorities in Penang, they were quick to venture to Singapore. In November 1822, the Chulia numbers had increased so much that they presented a petition to Resident Farquhar 'praying that a headman or Captain should be appointed for [the Chulia] mercantile and labouring classes'.³² The extent of their early importance was noted in a letter from Raffles in 1823, instructing Resident John Crawfurd to immediately suppress piracy in the Straits of Malacca that had resulted in 'the square-rigged vessels of the Chuliahs or natives of the Coromandel Coast ... [being] precluded from coming further than Pinang and Achin, and thus the trade of fifty or sixty brigs and ships are in a great measure lost to Singapore'.³³

In Singapore, these Tamil Muslims came to be involved in a variety of trades—textiles, gems, cattle, leather, tobacco, tin, areca nuts, among others. Their business concerns were, however, not limited to trade. Many were ship-owners, while the less affluent owned smaller cargo boats that plied the Singapore River. Others provided services as ship captains, officers, and crew members, while those in the riverine trade worked as lightermen, wharfingers, and general labourers.³⁴ Stephen Dobb's study of the Singapore River informs us that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Tamil Muslims were critical in facilitating commerce at the river and European merchants were especially

dependent on them. On the shore, a number of Tamil Muslims were engaged in money exchange, while others set up shops in the local bazaar selling textiles, and a variety of 'hardware and dry goods'.³⁵ The English naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace, observing Tamil Muslim shops in the Chinese bazaar in the 1850s, noted, 'the Klings ... almost always ask twice what they are willing to take. If you buy a few things of him, he will speak to you afterwards every time you pass his shop, asking you to walk in and sit down, or take a cup of tea'.³⁶ Beyond the retail sector, Tamil Muslims were also ubiquitous in the provision of services, for example, as ostlers and syces, bullock-cart drivers and laundry-men.

Parsis

Soon after the founding of the settlement, the centrality of Singapore in the India–China trade brought wealthy Parsi merchants to her shores. These traders had a long entrenched position in India. Facing persecution after the Arab conquest of Iran, they had settled in the subcontinent from the eighth century CE initially as artisans, agriculturalists, and minor traders. Following the British arrival, many moved to Bombay, which 'from its early days, [was] a cosmopolitan island on which Parsis flourished, first as middlemen in trade, then as independent traders'.³⁷ The Parsis began to venture to the Chinese coast from around the mid-eighteenth century. Collaborating with European merchants in the 'country trade', they engaged in the export of cotton and opium to China. At the time of Singapore's founding, their involvement in that trade had increased, in tandem with the growing demand for Malwa opium in China,³⁸ in which they specialized. Thampi highlights that prior to the Opium Wars, Parsi merchants were, 'numerically at least ... more prominent than even the private English traders on the China coast'.³⁹

Singapore emerged as an important stopover on the journey of these merchants to Canton and Macao, partly because the port provided an avenue to 'bypass the [East India] Company's restrictions on their participation in the trade between China and Britain by exporting goods from China to Singapore, and then reloading the same goods in other vessels bound for Britain'.⁴⁰ However, possibly due to their mobility, Singapore records tended to show that they were only a small group here. The first recorded Parsi, Muncherjee, was said to have arrived in Singapore shortly after the founding of the settlement. A plot for a Parsi

burial ground at Mount Palmer in Singapore was purchased in 1828,⁴¹ and by the mid-nineteenth century a lodge for Parsi travellers had been established in the vicinity, which also served as a venue for Zoroastrian religious ceremonies.⁴² By 1849, 23 Parsis were recorded in Singapore and their number gradually increased to 35 in 1871. Notwithstanding their small number, they occupied an important position in mid-nineteenth century colonial society in Singapore. At the time, the Parsi merchant D. Hormusjee, was one of the few non-Europeans called on to serve on the Grand Jury.⁴³ From the 1840s, in addition to trade, Parsis had ventured into land-broking and the local retail business. For example, in 1845, Cursetjee Frommurzee with his partner John Martin Little, set up a high-end merchandise company—'Little, Cursetjee and Co.'—catering to European tastes. That firm lasted till 1853, when, following a change in partnership, was renamed 'John Little & Co.',⁴⁴ still a major player in Singapore's retail sector to this day.

Nattukottai Chettiars

Amongst Hindu commercial groups in early Singapore, the most significant were the Nattukottai Chettiars, a tightly knit, caste-based community that hailed from 'Chettinad'—a cluster of 96 villages in an area that today straddles Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai districts of Tamil Nadu.⁴⁵ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Chettiars, or Nakarattars, were chiefly involved in the salt trade, a commodity they purchased from coastal districts in Tamil Nadu for sale inland. A decline in the trade in the late eighteenth century, and the subsequent monopolistic control over salt production by the EIC, pressed the Chettiars to turn to other commercial ventures including the cotton, pearl, and rice trade.⁴⁶ These new ventures resulted in an expansion of their mercantile operations beyond the Tamil mainland; northwards to Bengal, for rice, and across the Palk Straits to Ceylon, for pearls. To facilitate their long-distance trade, the Chettiars developed a sophisticated system of transmitting *hundis* (bills of exchange). This, together with the trust fostered between the Chettiars and their clients over time, enabled them to compete successfully with their rivals. Parallel to their trading activities, Chettiars began to engage heavily in financial services, which included 'money-lending, the remittance of funds between geographically distant locations, and even quasi-governmental treasury functions to the

extent that governing authorities made use of Nakarattar financial facilities'.⁴⁷ Their niche in money-lending was connected to the expansion of the colonial land revenue system in the Madras Presidency in the early nineteenth century. British land rent demands resulted in land owners relying on loans from, amongst others, the Chettiars, who would pay EIC officials in their bills of exchange and, in return, were provided 'the revenue of villages or sometimes of entire districts' as security.⁴⁸

Dealings between the Chettiars and the EIC facilitated their move from the subcontinent to British territories in Southeast Asia. Although enumeration exercises in Singapore did not include a separate category for the Chettiars, Ramanathan Chettiar's caste history informs that their earliest arrival in Singapore dates to 1825.⁴⁹ A letter from Farquhar to Raffles recommending 'that Sangra (or Sangara) Chetty should be chief of all Indians,... from January 1, 1823',⁵⁰ suggests that Chettiars may have arrived even earlier, although it is not fully clear, if Sangra Chetty, was indeed a member of that specific caste community.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Chettiar numbers in Burma, Penang, and Singapore escalated. The difficulties they faced in their business activities in the Madras Presidency from the 1840s had resulted in even more Chettiars venturing to profitable locales abroad. Dependence on land as collateral to agrarian farmers in the Madras Presidency had become increasingly risky because evolving laws under colonial control increased 'the time required to settle legal disputes over ownership and enforce a mortgage foreclosure'.⁵¹ Further, the founding of the Presidency Bank of Madras in 1843 marked the beginning of the exclusion of indigenous money-lenders from partaking in the finance and currency exchange for private European firms in Madras. At this time, the Chettiars also faced growing competition from other commercial groups in Madras—Nadar cotton traders in Tirunelveli, and *Marwaris* who had come to establish a hold on providing for the credit needs of Coimbatore-based cotton traders.⁵²

In Singapore, the Chettiars were able to pursue their financial ventures with greater flexibility. British banks refused to extend credit except to the most dependable clients who comprised mainly the established European firms. The top-ranking Chettiars were an exception to this norm because of the relationship of trust that they developed with British banks in the subcontinent. Over time, the Chettiars would carve a niche in money-lending in the region. Gaining credit from

British banks, or drawing from their parent companies' capital reserves, they extended loans to non-European traders and businessmen at a premium of between 24 and 36 per cent per annum; the high rates sustained by the considerable risk of default, and the limited sources of credit available to their clients.⁵³

1.3 Convict Labour

While Singapore's strategic location and its policy of free trade was successful in drawing merchants and traders, colonial authorities faced an uphill task in securing labour, especially for public works in the jungle-filled swampy frontier. There were few alternatives. Indian sepoys and lascars, though amenable to clearing land for the military camps, would have protested any extended involvement in menial labour. Colonial authorities also found it difficult to recruit Chinese or Malay labour for public projects.⁵⁴ Slaves from the Archipelago were not an option given Raffles' strong aversion to the practice, which had resulted in slavery being officially outlawed in 1823.⁵⁵ In the early years, Indian labourers comprised only a small number and tended to be tied closely to private enterprises by the Singapore River.

Employing transported convict labourers was attractive given limited options and the constraints on public works' expenditure. There were antecedents in British colonies—in the early eighteenth century, British convicts transported to North America were required to labour, and that experiment was followed by the large-scale transportation of British convicts to Australia from the late eighteenth century. However, the transportation of 'white' convicts was not an option for a multi-racial settlement like Singapore precisely because British control here rested on maintaining the spectre of racial superiority over the overwhelming Asian population, and there were concerns that the introduction of European convicts would severely damage that façade. Transported convicts from India, however, fit the bill. In the region, they had previously been employed for labour at colonial outposts. The year 1787 saw the first overseas penal settlement for transported Indian convicts established in Bencoolen, followed by Penang, in 1790, and the Andaman Islands, in 1793.⁵⁶

British officials in India were generally amenable to the transportation of convicts: The measure reduced overcrowding in the Company's Indian jails; it diminished the potential for unrest, especially when

used as an alternative punishment for convicts from the upper strata of society; and the measure was perceived as a deterrent because of the religious sanctions against crossing the ocean prevalent amongst certain Hindu communities.⁵⁷ McNair, the Superintendent of convicts in Singapore, explained:

To be sent to the 'kala pani', or 'black water', in a convict ship or 'jeta junaza', or 'living tomb' as they called it, meant especially to a man of high caste ... the total loss to him of all that was worth living for. He could never be received in intercourse again with his own people, and so strong are the caste ideas of ceremonial uncleanness that it would be a defilement to his friends and relations even to offer him sustenance of any kind, and he was in point of fact excommunicated.⁵⁸

In Singapore, Indian convicts were used as servants of European officers even prior to the official setup of the transported convict penal colony.⁵⁹ Their initial introduction was due to the frequency of convict escapes in Penang. In 1821, the Madras government, seeking a more secure location, enquired if some could be introduced in Singapore. Farquhar was amenable to this idea.⁶⁰ The opportunity to gain large numbers of transported Indian convicts in Singapore followed from the Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1824 which affected the closure of the British penal colony for transported convicts in Bencoolen. In April 1825, the brig *Horatio* arrived with the first batch of 80 Madras prisoners who had originally been transported to Bencoolen. A week later, 122 convicts from Bengal followed.⁶¹ They kept arriving till 1860, when the transportation of Indian convicts to the Straits Settlements ceased.⁶² Scholars estimate that as a whole, the Straits Settlements received between 15,000 and 25,000 transported Indian convicts.⁶³ The largest number of these prisoners were incarcerated in Singapore. Between 1833 and 1845 the number of transported convicts serving their sentence at any one time in Singapore averaged between 1100 and 1200. That average increased to about 1500 between 1845 and 1855, and from 1855 to 1865 exceeded 2000.⁶⁴ Prisoners convicted for serious crimes—murder, dacoity, and thuggee (armed gang robbery)—comprised a large segment, although many were also lower order felons. Others were political transportees who were involved in anti-British wars or rebellions in the subcontinent, for example the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845–46; 1848–49) and the Great Indian Rebellion (1857–58), alongside Adivasi groups who resisted British attempts at revenue collection.⁶⁵

In terms of composition, the penal colony was overwhelmingly male, and markedly so in the early years. While the number of women prisoners increased over time, even in the final decades of the penal colony, they comprised only 5 to 7 per cent of the total detainees. In 1861, of the 2173 convicts at the station, 124 were women.⁶⁶ Gender disparities notwithstanding, transported convicts reflected a cross-section of Indian society, drawn from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and a diversity of religious, caste, and regional/linguistic groups:

The men from India were Seikhs (Sikhs), Dogras, Pallis, or a shepherd race; thugs and dacoits from different parts of the Bengal presidency, and mostly from round about Delhi and Agra; felons from all parts of the Madras and Bombay presidencies, and a few from Assam and Burmah,... and a sprinkling of Cingalese (Sinhalese).⁶⁷

In 1857–58, the largest number of convicts arrived from the Bengal Presidency (890), followed by Madras (651) and Bombay (539), while those from Ceylon constituted less than 5 per cent of the total.⁶⁸ In spite of the diversity of linguistic backgrounds, McNair informs that ‘the Hindustani language ... was spoken by the bulk of the convicts in the jail’.⁶⁹

The initial transported convicts were interred in a godown by the eastern bank of the Singapore river. When the convict number increased, they were housed in temporary buildings at Bras Basah canal. Permanent structures for the jail were built there from 1841, by the convicts themselves.⁷⁰ Throughout its existence, the prison for transported convicts remained a lightly guarded institution—a situation informed by the miniscule sum allocated for its maintenance. Yet few escapes were recorded in Singapore. Punishments for attempted escapes were severe and included flogging. Further, markings on the body, such as *godna* (tattoos) on the forehead informing the nature of the crime committed, were used in the first half of the nineteenth century, and, ‘the mark of the *corah* (whip)’ or ‘scars from irons around the ankles’⁷¹ enabled easy identification of convicts and acted as impediments to escape. A further preventative factor was the difficult terrain and the dangers that lurked in the surroundings should convicts manage to abscond. Governor Blundell explained: ‘Generally a dense jungle, where, if they escape from tigers, they are pretty sure of falling into the hands of the Malays, who, for the reward always paid, are ready to make a seizure of them.’⁷²

Beyond the fear of punishment and the wild frontier, the management system employed at the penal settlement was also successful in mitigating attempted escapes. Over time, a system evolved whereby convicts were divided into classes, dependent in part on the severity of the crimes they had committed, the number of years they had served, and the perceived extent of their rehabilitation. The convicts' position in the prison's hierarchy dictated the extent of their misery. Attempts at absconding, failing to uphold respect and complete their duties resulted in relegation to work in the heaviest irons. On the flip side, with obedience and good work, convicts could move up the prison hierarchy and attain freedom. 'Good conduct' enabled them to be 'employed on roads and public works, having passed their probationary course'.⁷³ They could 'gradually [rise] to become officials, under the designation of Orderlies, whence they may rise to be Peons, Jemadars'.⁷⁴ As petty officers, they had authority over other prisoners and were crucial in the day-to-day functioning of the prison, the maintenance of discipline, and, ironically, 'policing' the penal settlement. Eventually, convicts could gain promotion to the highest class, where they were allowed a ticket-of-leave to stay out of prison and able to function effectively as a 'free' person as long as they attended muster on the first of every month. That hierarchical system, however, did not extend to female convicts. Demarcated in a separate class,⁷⁵ their position was more restricted than their male counterparts. They were not allowed to engage in labour outside the prison and were 'confined to their own portion of the lines ... secluded from all intercourse or communication with other people'.⁷⁶ Governor Blundell averred that 'a year of such life is quite equal to four years of a man's sentence'.⁷⁷ It was only after his intervention in 1855, that the sentences for women were shortened so that they were in a position to gain a ticket of leave within three to five years of good conduct.

At the penal settlement, mortality rates amongst transported convicts in the 1850s hovered between 6 to 7 per cent per annum.⁷⁸ Many succumbed to malaria or 'jungle fever'. Flooding and unhygienic conditions at their quarters or at distant worksites also accounted for cholera, dysentery, and gangrene—the other major causes of death. Prisoners transported from Bengal recorded the highest mortality rate. Colonial officials faulted authorities from Bengal for sending convicts 'in a most wretched condition ... perfectly helpless, either from old-age or

disease'.⁷⁹ 'Longing for the homeland' was also cited as a factor for the high mortality rate of upper-caste convicts from northern India. Senior Surgeon J. Rose reported:

The love of their native country is very great with them, and the idea of never again seeing their homes, their old and sacred places ... and loss of caste, act powerfully both on mind and body ... some obstinately refuse to eat at all.⁸⁰

McNair's *Prisoners their Own Warders* details the extent of convict labour contribution from the inception of the penal colony to its closure. In the initial years, convict labour was intermittently used for filling swampy land in the town area, laying out plots for building, and suppressing fires. In the 1830s, when the employment of convict labour for public works was regularized, they cleared jungles, reclaimed plots of land from the sea, and extended roads further inland such as Bukit Timah, Serangoon, New Harbour, Budoo (Bedok), and Thompson.⁸¹ Over time, they engaged in a variety of artisanal works⁸² although their most famed contributions were the large-scale building works—the Horsburgh Lighthouse, St Andrews Cathedral, and Government House (now called Istana). In addition, they were used as hospital attendants, as tiger hunters, and, in times of crisis, ironically, were placed in a policing role, and were instrumental in maintaining order at the settlement.⁸³ The best behaved convicts, referred to as 'special service men' were employed as orderlies and *punkah*-pullers in the homes of high ranking colonial officials, and in private houses of wealthy merchants. It was not surprising therefore to find that the close connection of convicts to colonial officials led to them being ascribed the label '*kumpanee kenaukar*'—in the service of the Company—implying that they held a position of authority.⁸⁴ In fulfilling the *raison d'état* of their transportation, i.e., the provision of labour, nearly all accounts suggest that the contribution of the Indian convicts was extraordinary. In the 1850s, Governor Blundell paid tribute to the contributions of the convicts:

The whole of the existing Roads throughout the Island, more than 150 miles in extent, every Bridge in both Town and Country, Jetties, piers, etc. have been constructed by Convict Labour. But not only is the Community indebted for these essential works to the mere manual labour of Convicts but by the introduction among them of a system of skilled labour, Singapore is indebted for works which could otherwise have been

sanctioned from the State funds. A Church has been erected every brick and every measure of lime in which has been made and laid by Convicts and which in Architectural beauty is second to no Church in India. Powerful batteries have been erected at various points and fortifications are now in progress by Convict Labour which would have been too expensive for sanction if executed by free labour while by means of Convict skilled labour, the whole of the public building in the place are kept in a state of efficiency and repairs...⁸⁵

In spite of their tremendous contribution, European inhabitants, in the wake of the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857, launched scathing attacks against the transportation of Indian convicts. That episode, discussed in Chapter 2, was crucial in ending convict transportation from India in 1860. In 1867, the transfer of the Straits Settlements from the British Indian Government to the Crown also brought to an end transportation from Ceylon. In 1873, the prison was shut, and while some were transferred to the Andaman Islands or returned to India, large numbers also received 'unconditional' pardons.

Throughout the history of the penal settlement, few transported convicts exercised the option of returning to India upon completing their sentence. This was possibly because, after the 1830s, there is little record of them being given a paid return passage.⁸⁶ McNair also suggests that those who went back 'found things so uncongenial that they returned to the Straits'⁸⁷ and this, in turn, may have influenced others to remain. For female convicts, return to the 'homeland' was effectively not an option given that they would have faced certain rejection by their families and kinsmen. Nonetheless, female convicts who remained were known to marry other convicts and settle here.

Convicts who remained in the settlement after the expiry of their sentences were employed in a variety of sectors. In the early 1840s, Major Low noted that large numbers of freed convicts settled in Singapore as cattle-keepers, bullock-cart carriers, and horse-carriage drivers.⁸⁸ Skilled artificers were able to gain employment in the private sector or in the civil establishment as overseers on public works. Some were even recruited into the police force. The savings that the convicts had accumulated, and the skills that they had gained during their incarceration enabled some to become successful businessmen and to acquire property, as in the case of the liberated—but unnamed—convict from Bengal who in July 1865 was reported to have left an inheritance of

50,000 dollars to his sons.⁸⁹ For the convicts who were not as fortunate, remaining in Singapore nonetheless provided a measure of security. Indeed, long after the transported convict jail was closed, the colonial government continued to provide a subsistence allowance for those who were classified as 'invalids' and unable to find work.⁹⁰

1.4 The Unregulated Movement of Labour

From the earliest years of the colony, Indian labourers were engaged in the construction industry and a variety of labour-intensive jobs by the Singapore harbour and river, including cargo handling and ship-repair. They were also known to serve as domestic workers, and over time were recruited for the plantation sector. Till 1867, the movement of Indian labour to Singapore was effectively free from regulations put in place to 'protect' Indian labour in the more distant plantation colonies that were outside the jurisdiction of British India. A corollary of Indian rule was that systematic records of labour immigration from British India to the Straits Settlements were not kept as such movements were deemed 'internal'.

Observer accounts and census data suggest that, amongst Indians, labourers from the Madras Presidency were preponderant. An important factor was the role of Tamil traders in introducing and, over time, facilitating the emigration of Indian labour. Traders from the Coromandel Coast often employed their own sailing ships to transport labour from the ports of Karaikkal, Nagore, Negapatnam, Pondicherry, and Porto Novo to the Straits Settlements.⁹¹ C.G. Master, the Chief Secretary to the Government of India informs of the genesis of this movement:

This traffic in fact originated in the restlessness of some of the sturdy Muhammadan (Lubbay) adventurers of Nagore, which is conveniently situated for such purposes on the border land of the French Settlement of Karikal. These men went over to the Straits Settlements, towards the close of the last century (sic) [i.e., eighteenth century], with a small cargo of labourers, whom they had decoyed from the estates of neighbouring Mirasidars, ... their venture proved successful; and a traffic, which seems to have been but a modified form of slave trade, thus began.⁹²

The Straits Settlements Factory Records dating back to 1794, state that 'the vessels of the [Coromandel] Coast bring over annually 1,300 or

2,000 men who by traffic and various kinds of labor obtain a few dollars with which they return to their homes'.⁹³

Push factors encouraged labour migration from southern India. 'Agrestic slavery' had long been a feature of the political economy of those districts in southern India from which labour emigrants to the Straits arrived.⁹⁴ The Methodist Missionary William Goudie described the lives of low-caste labourers as follows:

The first law of life in the *parchery* is that for every mouth that eats there must be two hands earning. From the child of four upwards they must all be breadwinners or they cannot be bread-eaters.... Life is almost literally from hand to mouth, and a few days without work or a sick person in the house means hunger.... And in years of drought there are much longer periods, when the life of the labourer is one long battle with the ghastly presence of hunger.⁹⁵

The spread and consolidation of colonial rule in southern India, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, added to their difficult circumstance. The introduction of the Ryotwari system, and the demand by the British for land revenue to be paid in cash, led to the decline of the smaller *mirasidars*. As big landlords and money-lenders took control of the former's lands, low-caste agrarian labourers lost their hereditary claims of land occupancy and were forced into 'exchang[ing] their customary "slave" status in relation to the village community ... for crippling forms of debt'.⁹⁶ In their desperate circumstances, emigration often became the only means to alleviate poverty and debt.

The demand for Indian agricultural labourers in Singapore followed from the gradual European involvement in the plantation sector. While European planters, through intermediaries, could avail Chinese labour, they did not solely depend on them as they perceived that they were at disadvantage when compared to Chinese planters. H. Price, writing on planting in Singapore in the nineteenth century, explained:

[Europeans] stood no chance in this line of business [agriculture] in competition with the Chinese. The European is very much handicapped when working with Chinese coolies, as their own countrymen get more out of them and at a cheaper rate. The Chinese also manage so that most of the wages which the coolies are paid come back through their hands as payment for opium, food and clothes.⁹⁷

To reduce their disadvantage, they sought other sources of labour. As Malays remained largely aloof from the European plantation sector, the only other options were Indian and Javanese labour. European planters also preferred an ethnic mix, in part to prevent labour stoppages, by playing off one group against another, and possibly as a measure that was perceived as able to increase productivity by encouraging inter-ethnic competition. This was clearly evident, for example, at the Chasseriau tapioca estate in Bukit Timah, where in the second half of the nineteenth century, Tamil, Chinese, and Javanese workers were put in separate gangs to foster competition between these groups.⁹⁸ European planters also turned to Tamil labour on grounds that the climate here was not very different from their 'homeland'. Amongst the large plantations that employed Tamil labour included the Kallangdale estate—established by William Montgomerie, former Superintendent of the Singapore Botanical Gardens in 1836—and the Balestier estate—run by the American Consul in Singapore, Joseph Balestier, from 1836 to 1852.⁹⁹

During this period, Indian labourers in the plantation sector were recruited through an unregulated form of indentured labour. Indenture differed from the movement of 'free' labour in that it effectively bartered the individual's freedom and labour for an extended period in exchange for a cash advance, payment of transportation costs, and the promise of paid employment. The measure was intended not only to ensure that the capital expended by the planters in the process of recruitment was protected, but also to tie labourers for an extended period of time so as to prevent labour shortages during critical periods, the consequence being a potential loss of crops for the entire season. Most accounts date the arrival of coolies on contract to the 1820s and 1830s.¹⁰⁰ Edwin Lee suggests that by the 1840s, significant numbers of indentured labourers from the Madras Presidency had begun to arrive, and that the period of their labour contract was 'three years compared to the one year or less in the case of Chinese indentured labourers'.¹⁰¹

The lack of regulation and control on Indian indentured labour in the Straits during this period effectively meant that the system contained all the exploitative characteristics of indenture, without any of the safeguards found in the more regulated forms adopted for plantation colonies outside British India. With no Emigration Agent to check on labourers procured for the Straits Settlements, 'speculators' had a free hand. Deception in the recruitment process was commonplace:

A shipowning merchant advances money to [*maistries* who] ... go about the villages and persuade coolies to emigrate. This they do by representing, in bright colours, prospects of enrichment.... The ignorant coolies believe easily.... The maistries, I am informed, get ten rupees a-head (sic) for every adult cooly they bring.... A less price is given for boys who are not in such demand; and a somewhat higher rate for young and good-looking women.¹⁰²

Worse still, there were numerous reports of kidnapping. For example, in February 1865, Madras authorities discovered several boys who had been abducted and forced on board in one of the largest ships destined for the Straits.¹⁰³

Conditions on board ships carrying labourers to the Straits—whether indentured or otherwise—were atrocious. Ship-owners loaded as many as possible with the aim of maximizing their profits. One inspection of a ‘coolly trader’ revealed ‘a beastly sight, coolies crowded together like beasts.’¹⁰⁴ There existed no proper provisions for food and sanitation on board, and vessels were in decrepit condition. ‘Kling speculators’ were said to: ‘employ a large amount of *chunam*, clay, or patch up holes with tarred canvas, and with a liberal display of black paint, white paint, and high colored flags entrap their countrymen as passengers.’¹⁰⁵ Consequently, it is not surprising that there were numerous disasters. In 1856, *The Straits Times* reported that:

Within the past twelve months the *Johanna* and two other Kling vessels which sailed from Singapore for the Coromandel Coast, with nearly eight hundred passengers, have never reached their destination.... The greater part of the passengers consisted of Kling[s] ... returning to their country, after years of toil and industry.¹⁰⁶

In 1859, regulations were put in place to improve the seaworthiness of ‘native craft plying the Bay of Bengal’,¹⁰⁷ and the following year Indian Passenger Act II was enacted to check overcrowding on board ships.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in spite of these initiatives, ship-owners continued to circumscribe regulations. In 1861, a British-registered vessel, licensed to transport 428 passengers, ‘managed to stow away 1,500. Of this number 400 died before reaching the Straits Ports.’¹⁰⁹ A real improvement in the conditions during the ship-journey for these labourers did not come about until more stringent regulations were put in place after the Straits Settlements was transferred out of Indian rule, and when steamships became the norm for the transportation of labourers between India and the Straits.

1.5 Personnel in the Civil Establishment

Throughout Indian rule over the Straits Settlements, the civil establishment in Singapore remained miniscule. Between 1830 and 1867, even as 'Singapore's population [had] quadrupled and her trade increased more than three-fold',¹¹⁰ the civil establishment and the salaries of its personnel remained largely static. Indeed, even in the final year of Indian rule, personnel listed on the payroll of the civil establishment throughout the Straits Settlements numbered barely 500.¹¹¹ In 1857, *The Singapore Free Press* suggested that 'there is probably no other government in the world so incapable of addressing the people as that of the Straits'.¹¹² The small civil establishment was due to two factors: the Indian authorities' reluctance to dispense resources and the persistent lobbying by influential merchants and traders against official attempts to raise taxes, which were necessary to strengthen the administration.

In terms of composition, the upper rungs of the civil establishment's hierarchy comprised only Europeans, while lower ranks were open to Eurasians and other Asian inhabitants in the colony. The number of Indians employed in the civil establishment far exceeded other Asian groups in Singapore. Amongst Indian personnel, Tamil Muslims comprised the largest numbers. Many transported convicts were also able, upon their release, to secure jobs in the civil establishment. Collectively they were employed as draftsmen, surveyors, clerks, court interpreters, harbour supervisors, overseers and foremen, postal sorters, apprentices, and peons and attendants.¹¹³ Indians were also heavily recruited for policing, and formed the mainstay of the lower ranks of the force.

Specific factors explained the disproportionate Indian representation. EIC Officials from India sometimes brought their subordinate staff upon their transfer to the Straits Settlements. There were also cultural imperatives. Quite unlike other Asian communities in Singapore at the time, Indians especially valued the prospect of working in the civil establishment, which they perceived as one of authority. Their language abilities and skill-sets were useful particularly in public works and at the harbour where large numbers of Indian labourers were employed. Transported convicts had, over their lengthy incarceration, also gained experience in jobs that were useful to the civil establishment, and, when released, the skills that they had developed rendered them potentially valuable recruits.

The preponderance of Indians in the police force was also a product of colonial racial thinking at the time, which tended to be averse to recruiting security personnel from racial groups perceived as threats to law and order in the settlement. From the late 1820s onwards, as the Chinese emerged as the single largest ‘race’ in Singapore, colonial officials became especially wary of the power wielded by the Chinese ‘secret societies’. By the mid-nineteenth century, colonial authorities held these societies responsible for the most dangerous outbreaks of violence in the colony, and Governor Blundell labelled the Chinese inhabitants of Singapore as:

Turbulent and self-willed, their clannish feuds are sources of great annoyance, inasmuch as there is no knowing when and where they may break out in open violence, which, though confined to aggressions on each other, is alike dangerous to the lives and property of all persons within the immediate vicinity of the uproar.¹¹⁴

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the Chinese were not recruited as policemen because of aspersions that ‘secret societies’ commanded their foremost loyalties. While over time ‘Malays’¹¹⁵ and other immigrants from the region did join the force, they were, in comparison to Indians, few in number. In 1856, the Deputy Superintendent of Police averred that of the 280 policemen in Singapore, only six were Europeans while the rest comprised mainly ‘Klings, Bengalees (sic.) and Malays’.¹¹⁶

1.6 Demographic Characteristics

Census operations conducted early in the history of Singapore did not account for the diversity existent within the Indian populace. In these enumeration exercises, they were often lumped together as ‘natives of India’ or in two regional categories, the ‘natives of Coromandel and Malabar’—referring to those who arrived from southern India—and the ‘natives of Bengal and Hindostan’—those who came from the northern parts of the subcontinent. These enumeration exercises inform that after the first two decades of the settlement, Indian civilians (i.e., excluding those in the military and transported convicts) comprised approximately 10 per cent of the total population (see Table 1.1). The number of Indians grew more rapidly from the second half of the

Table 1.1 Indian population in Singapore (1821–1860)

	1821			1824			1825			1826			
	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Natives of Coromandel and Malabar	132	646	110	{	390	687	3	690	573	32	605		
Natives of Bengal and other parts of Hindostan					366	196	30	226	257	127	384		
Total—Indians	132				756	883	33	916	830	159	989		
Total—Singapore	4,727	7,106	3,577		10,683	8,620	3,231	11,851	9,197	3,708	12,905		
	1827			1828			1829			1830			
	M	F	Total	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total			
Natives of Coromandel and Malabar	772	5	777	1,095	1,423	17	1,440	1,437	54	1,491			
Natives of Bengal and other parts of Hindostan	209	35	244	294	381	74	455	308	114	422			
Total—Indians (excluding convicts and military)	981	40	1,021	1,389	1,804	91	1,895	1,745	168	1,913			
Convicts		NA		NA	544	9	553		NA				
Military		NA		NA	602	—	602		NA				
Total—Singapore	10,307	3,425	13,732	14,885	14,578	4,241	18,819	12,213	4,421	16,634			

(Cont'd)

Table 1.1 (Cont'd)

	1832			1834			1836			1840		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Natives of Coromandel and Malabar	1,374	40	1,414	1,659	69	1,728	2,246	102	2,348			
Natives of Bengal and other parts of Hindostan	408	121	529	439	155	594	427	155	582			3,375
Parsees	2	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	2			2
Total—Indians(excluding convicts and military)	1,784	161	1,945	2,098	224	2,322	2,675	257	2,932			3,377
Total—Singapore	14,324	5,391	19,715	19,432	6,897	26,329	22,755	7,229	29,984			35,389
1860												
	1849			Total			M			F		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Natives of India	5,423	838	6,261				11,608	1,365	12,973			
Parsees	23	-	23					NA				
Total—Indians(excluding convicts and military)	5,446	838	6,284				11,608	1,365	12,973			
Continental Convicts								NA				
Military and Followers	609	-						NA				
Total—Singapore								59,043				81,734

Source: Hayes Marriot, "The Peoples of Singapore: Inhabitants and Population," in *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*, eds Walter Makepeace, Gilbert Brooke, and Roland Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), 355-57; Louis S. Jackson, "Census of Singapore and its Dependencies, Taken under Orders of Government in the Months of November and December, 1849", reproduced in *Journal of The Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia IV* (1850): 107-8.

1840s, so that by 1860 there were some 12,973 civilian inhabitants of Indian origin, making up more than 15 per cent of a total population of over 80,000. The number of civilians, together with that of the transported convicts and members of the Indian military (collectively over 3,000 in 1860), ensured that by this time, Indians constituted the second largest segment of the poly-ethnic population, lesser only than that of the 'natives of China'. Amongst Indians, the so-called 'natives of Coromandel and Malabar' constituted the majority. In 1836, for example, emigrants from southern India—the overwhelming majority of whom were Tamil speakers—comprised 80 per cent of the Indian population, although that figure did not take into account the military and transported convicts. The regional profile of the transported convicts—amongst whom many came via Bengal—showed a markedly different composition when compared to the civilian population.

The Indian pioneers were overwhelmingly men. In general the movement of women from the subcontinent was frowned upon, and even amongst the merchants and traders, a minute portion, if any, brought their families. Moreover, unlike regulated forms of indenture practised in plantation colonies, no regulations to increase the proportion of female labourers were passed in territories considered to be part of British India. Consequently, from 1821 and 1860, the proportion of women amongst Indian civilian inhabitants ranged from as low as 3 per cent to about 16 per cent. The proportion of Indian women amongst the 'natives of Bengal and other parts of Hindostan' was marginally higher than that of the 'natives of Coromandel and Malabar'. One possibility for this is that many amongst the former may have been employed as domestic servants of officials from Bengal. Additionally, Mani suggests that amongst Tamil Muslim traders, 'customary practices encouraged men to go overseas to bring home wealth instead of migrating with families for permanent settlement overseas'.¹¹⁷ That being said, such considerations held true for other Indians as well.

Early enumeration exercises in Singapore did not usually account for the religious profile of inhabitants. Given the lacuna, Louis Jackson's 1849 record of Singapore's inhabitants, is particularly instructive.¹¹⁸ This mid-nineteenth century account informs that, of the 6,261 civilian 'natives of India', the overwhelming majority, 4,915 (approximately 78.5 per cent) were Muslim; the remainder were Hindu (1,307 or 21 per cent), and a miniscule number Christians (39). At the time, 23

Parsis were recorded as residing at the settlement, although as in most census operations, they were marked out separately from the 'natives of India'. Jackson's record of the population is also useful in informing the occupational patterns of Indians in Singapore. Of the 4,937 'natives of India' listed as having a 'profession or calling', approximately 40 per cent were general labourers (1,956), 5 per cent were agricultural labourers (255), while 8 per cent were servants (415). Seventeen 'natives of India' and seven Parsis, were recognized as high-ranking merchants and clerks at the time. The largest segment of the Indian population comprised those categorized as engaged in 'miscellaneous' activities. A total of 2,294 (46 per cent) fell into this group, which would have included middle-ranking traders, shopkeepers and vendors, lower-ranking personnel in the civil establishment, and those involved in providing services—policemen, peons, boatmen, bullock-cart drivers, laundry-men, syces, and 'mechanics' amongst others.

Conclusion

The emigration of Indians to Singapore between 1819 and 1867 was shaped by diverse contexts: the location of the outpost in a region that had a long-standing Indian commercial presence; the coterminous extension of British control in India, which facilitated trade linkages and movement within the Empire; the port city's rapid rise as a trading centre; and the fact that for much of this period, Singapore, as part of the Straits Settlements, came under the direct control of British India. The conjunction of factors that underscored early Indian movement to the burgeoning trading centre also provides an explanation for the marked differences in the socio-economic profile of these emigrants—a distinctiveness that becomes especially evident when compared to the corresponding movement of Indians to plantation colonies in the Empire.

Colonial records and observer accounts reveal that while labour comprised an important segment of the early Indian population here, unlike the plantation colonies, they did not form an overwhelming number. Indeed, Indians were represented in nearly every strata of the colonial economy of the frontier port—as high-ranking merchants, financiers and traders, sepoys and policemen, dock-supervisors and boatmen, bullock-cart drivers, syces, and dhobis, among others. That

diversity was also manifest in the ethno-religious profile of these early sojourners and settlers. In terms of regional background, Tamils comprised the majority, but there were significant numbers who came from other parts of the subcontinent. Muslims constituted the largest proportion of the Indian civilian population during this period but Hindus were a significant minority. The disproportion in the number of Indian men and women in early Singapore was astonishing, even by the dire standards of gender imbalance in plantation colonies. That considerable difference in the number of men and women informed the tendency for most Indians, with the notable exception of the transported convicts, to remain in Singapore only for a short duration. This was especially the case for those engaged in commerce who frequently travelled to and from the homeland or 'circulated' along the various nodes that dotted their trading networks. These diversities—in occupation, ethnicity, and religion—and the transience of the overwhelming majority of Indians, informed the nature of the incipient diasporic society in the port city. As Chapter 2 will reveal, these characteristics, along with colonial policies and ideologies, and the context of living in the rapidly urbanizing cultural mosaic, would influence their settlement patterns and the features of their early socio-religious and cultural development in Singapore.

Notes

1. Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 199.
2. Holden Furber, 'Asia and the West as Partners Before "Empire" and After', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 28, 4 (1969): 713.
3. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–1975* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 13.
4. Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *India in the Making of Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Indian Association, 2008), 16.
5. The Straits Settlements, established in 1826, initially comprised three British-controlled settlements: Prince of Wales Island (Penang), Singapore, and Malacca.
6. Tan Tai Yong and Andrew J. Major, 'India and Indians in the Making of Singapore', in *Singapore-India Relations: A Primer*, eds Yong Mun Cheong and V. V. Bhanoji Rao (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1995), 5.
7. For a detailed account of the early Indian troops in Singapore, see Rajesh Rai, 'Sepoys, Convicts and the "Bazaar" Contingent: The Emergence

and Exclusion of "Hindustani" Pioneers at the Singapore Frontier', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 35, 1 (2004): 1–19.

8. Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore: From the Foundation of the Settlement on February 6th, 1819 to the transfer to the Colonial office on April 1st, 1867* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 60.

9. Amiya Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry: Its Organization and Discipline, 1796–1852* (Calcutta: Frima K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), 120.

10. Channa Wickremesekera, 'Best Black Troops in the World': *British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy 1746–1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 101.

11. M. L. Wynne, 'Triad and Tabut: A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula, AD 1800–1935', in *Triad Societies: Western Accounts of the History, Sociology and Linguistics of Chinese Secret Societies*, vol. 5, eds Kingsley Bolton and Christopher Hutton (London: Routledge, 2000), 187.

12. Wickremesekera, 'Best Black Troops', 98–100.

13. Kernial Singh Sandhu, 'Some Aspects of Indian settlement in Singapore, 1819–1969', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10, 2 (1969): 194; Alan Harfield, *British and Indian Armies in the East Indies, 1685–1935* (Chippenham, Wilts: Picton Publishing, 1984), 386.

14. In 1821, the total number of Indian civilians was only 132. Hayes Marriot, 'The Peoples of Singapore: Inhabitants and Population', in *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*, vol. 1, eds Walter Makepeace, Gilbert Brooke, and Roland Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), 355.

15. Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 130.

16. Harfield, *British and Indian Armies*, 137.

17. *Ibid.*, 128–9, 386–389.

18. The approximate is based on the 1829 census returns which enumerated the number of troops at 602. A similar figure, 609, was recorded in the 1849 census. Marriot, 'The Peoples of Singapore', 356–7.

19. H. Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1922), 45–50.

20. R. Braddell, 'Law and Crime: Law and the Lawyers', in *One Hundred Years*, vol.1, 161–2, 244.

21. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 645.

22. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 130.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Crawford's dictionary suggests that prior to the nineteenth century, the term Kling was used by local Malays for all migrants from the subcontinent as

'[Kelinga] being the only Indian nation known to the Malays, the word [Kling] was used by them for the people of India in general and for the country itself'. Cited in Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 73.

26. John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley and Malacca: Their Peoples, Products, Commerce and Government* (London: Smith, Elder, 1865), 78–9.

27. Rajesh Rai, 'Singapore', in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, eds Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 177.

28. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 15.

29. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 283.

30. Torsten Tschacher, 'The Impact of Being Tamil on Religious Life among Tamil Muslims in Singapore' (PhD thesis, National University of Singapore, 2006), 76.

31. Tschacher, 'The Impact of being Tamil', 26.

32. 'Notices of Singapore', reproduced in *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 9 (1855): 452.

33. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 119.

34. Tschacher, 'The Impact of being Tamil', 38–42.

35. Alfred Russell Wallace, 'In the Chinese Bazaar', in *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore*, comp. Michael Wise (Singapore: Times Books International, 1985), 60.

36. Wallace, 'Chinese Bazaar', 60.

37. John R. Hinnels and Alan Williams, 'Introduction', in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, eds John R. Hinnels and Alan Williams (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

38. Madhavi Thampi, *Indians in China, 1800–1949* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 70.

39. *Ibid.*, 76.

40. *Ibid.*, 84.

41. Marsita Omar, 'Parsi Lodge Cemetary', in *Singapore Infopedia* (National Library Board Singapore, 2009), accessed 22 March 2010, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1002_2009-11-02.html.

42. Phiroze N. Medora and Bonny Tan, 'Parsi Lodge Charity', in *Singapore Infopedia* (National Library Board Singapore, 2009), accessed 22 March 2010, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1593_2009-11-02.html.

43. *The Straits Times*, 4 December 1855, 4.

44. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 350.

45. Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, 'Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, eds K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993), 848.

46. David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 56–7.

47. Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India*, 60
48. Ibid., 61.
49. Ramanathan Chettiar, *Nattukkottai Nakarattar Varalaru* (Madras: Meyyappan Pathipakam, 1953), 27, cited in Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism*, 54.
50. R. B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India, A Rapid Survey of Over 2000 Years of Maritime and Colonising Activities Across the Bay of Bengal* (Singapore: The Malayan Publishers, 1936), 32–3.
51. Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism*, 64.
52. Ibid., 64–5.
53. Paul H. Kratoska, 'The Chettiar and the Yeoman', Occasional Paper, 32 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1975), 11.
54. Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 59.
55. That being said, reports of indigenous slavery in Singapore extended well into the second half of the nineteenth century.
56. Clare Anderson, 'Convict Migration', in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, 44.
57. Anderson, 'Convict Migration', 44.
58. J. F. A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (Westminster: A. Constable, 1899), 9.
59. McNair, *Prisoners*, 43.
60. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 69
61. Rai, 'Singapore', 177.
62. The transportation of Sri Lankan convicts continued till 1867.
63. Anderson, 'Convict Migration', 44; Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 65; Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 134.
64. McNair, *Prisoners*, 47.
65. Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 65.
66. William Orfeur Cavenagh, 'Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements, for 1860–61', in *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements, 1855–1941*, vol. 1, ed. Robert L. Jarman (UK: Archives Editions Limited, 1998), 278.
67. McNair, *Prisoners*, 89.
68. J. Rose, 'Report on the Jails and Jail Hospitals of the Straits Settlements for the Official Year 1857–58', in *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements, 1855–1941*, vol. 1, 133. In addition to Bengali-speakers, those arriving from Bengal included those originating from what is today Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Punjab, Haryana, and parts of northeastern India.
69. McNair, *Prisoners*, 73.
70. Ibid., 77–78.
71. Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 69–70.

72. Edmund Augustus Blundell, 'Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements during the Year 1855–56', in *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements, 1855–1941*, vol. 1, 26.

73. McNair, *Prisoners*, 84–89.

74. Blundell, 'Annual Report', 26.

75. Women, 'invalids', and 'feeble' convicts comprised the sixth class.

76. Blundell's correspondence to the Bengal Government, 10 November 1855, cited in Donald Moore and Joanna Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore* (Singapore: Donald Moore Press, 1969), 299–300.

77. Ibid.

78. Rose, 'Report on the Jails', 133.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., 134.

81. McNair, *Prisoners*, 44.

82. McNair lists the trades convicts were involved in: bricklayers and plasterers; brick and tile makers and potters; blacksmiths; basket makers; coopers; carpenters, cement and lime burners; gardeners; painters; lime and charcoal burners; plumbers; quarrymen; sawyers, stone cutters, and blasters; slaters; shoe and sandal makers; tailors; turners and weavers; wheelwrights; woodcutters; boatmen and stone masons. McNair, *Prisoners*, 90–91.

83. See Chapter 2, p. 53.

84. Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 72.

85. Blundell's correspondence to the Bengal Government, 10 November 1855, 299.

86. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 134.

87. McNair, *Prisoners*, 145.

88. Moore and Moore, *The First 150 Years*, 202.

89. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, 723.

90. In 1911, nearly four decades after the closure of the transmarine penal settlement, of the seven living Indian convicts in Singapore, six were defined as 'invalid paupers', and each received a subsistence allowance of \$60 per annum. CO 275/89, 'Indian and Ceylon Convicts', *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements*, 1911, 15.

91. David Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture in the Straits Settlements, 1872–1910* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2008), 68; R. K. Jain, 'South Indian Labour in Malaya, 1840–1920: Asylum Stability and Involution', in *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920*, ed. Kay Saunders (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 162.

92. Government of Madras, (Emigration) Proceedings in the Public Department, 19 March 1883, cited in Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 84.

93. IOR/G34/6, Straits Settlements Factory Records, vol. 6 (1794), 1 August, 1794, cited in Sunil S. Amrith, 'Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal', *The American Historical Review*, 114, 3 (2009): 550.

94. Fred W. Clothey, *Ritualizing on the Boundaries: Continuity and Innovation in the Tamil Diaspora* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 7.

95. Quoted in Clothey, *Ritualizing*, 7.

96. Jain, 'South Indian Labour', 168.

97. H. Price, 'Planting in Singapore', in *One Hundred Years*, vol. 2, 80.

98. Walter Fox, 'Early Planting Days', in *One Hundred Years*, vol. 2, 92–3.

99. Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 57.

100. Sandhu posits that 'indentured labour from India to Malaya could possibly predate 1823'. Arasaratnam informs that indentured labour was first used in the Straits Settlements in 1838. C. Kondapi suggests that the arrival of South Indian indentured labour in coffee and sugar plantations dated to 1833, while the South Indian Labour Fund Board avers that the system began in the late eighteenth century. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 78; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 11; C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838–1949* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1951), 41; Annual Report of the South Indian Labour Fund, 1959, 8, cited in Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 83.

101. Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867–1914* (Singapore: University of Singapore Press, 1991), 168.

102. CO273/45, Enclosure in Governor Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary to Government Fort St George, No. 39, 24 February 1871.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

105. *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1856, 5.

106. Ibid.

107. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 12.

108. *The Straits Times*, 2 February 1961, 1.

109. Ibid.

110. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 35.

111. CO 277/1, Straits Settlements Miscellanea, 1867, 109–82.

112. Cited in Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 35.

113. CO 277/1, Straits Settlements Miscellanea, 1867, 109–82.

114. Blundell, 'Annual Report', 28.

115. During this period most of those labelled as 'Malays' in the police force were Baweanese emigrants from Bawean island off the coast of Java.

116. In 1856, of the 280-strong police force in Singapore, only six were Europeans. Letter from George Wahab, Deputy Superintendent of Police to T.

Church, the Resident Councillor and Chairman of the Municipal Committee of Singapore, 25 February 1856, published in *The Straits Times*, 11 March 1856, 5.

117. A. Mani, 'Aspects of Identity and Change Among Tamil Muslims in Singapore', in *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 13, 2 (1992): 340.

118. Louis S. Jackson, 'Census of Singapore and its Dependencies, Taken under Orders of Government in the Months of November and December, 1849', *Journal of The Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 4 (1850): 107-8.

2 In the Poly-Ethnic World of the Port City

From its founding till the end of British Indian rule in 1867, Singapore's population resided mainly in a small region located on the southern coast of the island. In 1836, Singapore Town was approximately 3 miles from east to west and about 1 mile inland.¹ Rapid immigration had created a densely populated town with a complex socio-cultural milieu remarkably akin to J. S. Furnivall's description of a 'tropical dependency': 'one aspect of a distinctive character, common to all tropical dependencies that cannot fail to impress even the most casual observer [is] the many-coloured pattern of the population'.² The Indian emigrant to Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century would have disembarked in precisely such a labyrinthine habitat. Amidst the hustle and bustle that permeated the mouth of the Singapore River, he would have encountered, possibly for the first time, a poly-ethnic population comprising wealthy but a numerically small number of Europeans, an ubiquitous presence of 'Chinamen' with plaited hair that reached 'down to ... [their] heels',³ Malays 'chewing betel ... with their sarongs ... wrapped round their body',⁴ and a variety of other inhabitants that also included Indians.

This chapter examines the settlement patterns, socio-cultural development and the position of Indians in the port city over the period 1819 to 1867. Its focus is guided by several questions: How did the complex milieu of the port city affect the settlement patterns and socio-cultural formations of the early Indian immigrants and sojourners? To what extent did social structures in the 'homeland' shape the diaspora's

social, religious, and cultural formations? What impact did colonial control and the perceptions of those who had cultural primacy have on their position? Was the European dominance complete or were there examples of Indian resistance?

The incipient diaspora's development over this period was shaped by a variety of forces, some of which were in tension with one another. One was intrinsic, a product of the economic and social profile of the early immigrants—detailed in Chapter One—that reflected considerable occupational and ethno-religious diversity. At the same time, these immigrants were positioned as a minority in the 'kaleidoscopic cultural milieu'⁵ of Singapore Town, and thus while intrinsic variations may have generated pressures towards differentiation, their numeric subordination in a rapidly urbanizing settlement provided a counteracting force. That did not translate into homogeneity, but it did foster propensities towards pragmatism and collaboration.

The fact that the diaspora was positioned in 'a polyglot migrant world, dominated by a small European diaspora', in which 'the boundaries of race and power [were] set by colonial rule', also influenced its development.⁶ As discussed in Chapter One, colonial rule and European racial-thinking, influenced the procurement of personnel in the civil establishment, particularly for the security sector. This chapter reveals that European racial ideas also affected settlement patterns, guided the policies and laws that were put in place to manage the poly-ethnic population, and attempted to create boundaries along intra-Asian sociabilities by defining Indians 'in relation to the Malay and Chinese ethnic communities'.⁷ While this impacted the nature and the extent of the nascent diaspora's social forms, the boundaries instituted by the colonial power and European racial-thinking were not impermeable. Indeed, the miserliness of British Indian rule, along with the pecuniary behaviour of merchants, who opposed any attempt to raise taxes necessary for the strengthening of the civil establishment, ensured that the colony was governed by a skeletal administration—with limited resources available to mould 'native' interactions and potential hybrid formations, or to otherwise properly check activities deemed to be incendiary.

That said, by the 1850s the consolidation of colonial control and changes in European social mores saw regulations that increasingly impinged upon Indian social formations and religious-cultural

practices. This, alongside wider transnational developments—specifically the Great Rebellion in India in 1857—influenced the ways in which Indians came to be perceived by those who held cultural primacy in the settlement. Deemed in the first half of the nineteenth century to be unthreatening and useful to the development of the settlement, news of the violent outbreak in India resulted in Europeans viewing segments of the Indian community in Singapore with suspicion and distrust. That change had long-term repercussions on Indians in the diaspora, exacerbating European demands for an end to the transportation of Indian convicts, and contributing towards an end to British Indian rule over the Straits Settlements that was finally affected in 1867. The colonial state also began to take action against ‘incendiary’ Indian ‘secret societies’, and grew increasingly reticent in granting permission for public displays of their religiosity, which were deprecated by Europeans and represented as threats.

2.1 Settlement Patterns

From 1819 to 1867, the Indian concentration remained largely situated within the confines of the 3 square miles that defined Singapore Town, although the period did see the beginnings of settlement in peripheral areas such as Serangoon Road (now also known as ‘Little India’). From very early on in the development of the outpost, colonial policies vis-à-vis the settlement of ‘native classes’⁸ sought to demarcate differentiated quarters for them based on assumptions of a ‘hierarchical social taxonomy’.⁹ Although there were no clear designated areas for the minority, they tended initially to settle at the interstices of the other major ethnic groups in Singapore. Other key determinants that shaped Indian settlement patterns during this period included the nature of their economic activities, and in the case of the transported convicts, by the position of the colonial prison.

In the earliest years, the first proper sepoy camp set at the foot of Fort Canning Hill, towards the Singapore River and further to the freshwater stream (later known as Stamford Canal) saw the heaviest concentration of Indians. The initial Indian concentration was affected when in 1822, Stamford Raffles initiated a systematic plan, demarcating ‘the several classes of the native population’¹⁰ to manage the settlement’s rapidly growing population. That plan segmented the town into government

divisions, principle mercantile establishments, European residences, and for key 'native' communities. Raffles' decisions vis-à-vis the town plan, 'were based on his [notions of] ... a group's stage of civilization',¹¹ and also took into account commercial imperatives. Following from the plan, the quarter marked out for those postulated to be at the highest strata of colonial society, that is, primarily the Europeans, and also top-ranking merchants like the Parsis, ran parallel to the Government offices. The key commercial area, comprising the entire southwest bank of the Singapore River, was also 'appropriated for the use of European and other merchants'.¹² A large section of the town to the west of the Singapore River was demarcated for the Chinese, whose numbers had grown rapidly. The Bugis *kampong* was located to the east of the Sultan's residence—the farthest outskirts of the settlement¹³—while the Arab *kampong* was situated in the area between the Sultan's residence and the European quarters with the proviso 'of separating them as far as practicable from the European dwellings'.¹⁴

Effectively, Raffles' town plan had earmarked the earliest Indian concentration for government use. Consequently, in February 1823, Secretary L. N. Hull, demanded 'the removal of the Chuliah and dhoby encampment near the Sepoy Lines'.¹⁵ In its place, Raffles envisaged the 'the advantage of allotting a separate division for the town class of Chuliahs up the Singapore river'.¹⁶ The policy fragmented the Indian concentration, although their subsequent re-settlement did not follow the letter of the colonial town plan. Many migrants from southern India, particularly in private enterprise, shifted to the Cross Street and Market Street area, off the southern bank of the Singapore river, adjoining the quarters designated for the Chinese settlement—now 'Chinatown'. There Naraina Pillai had set up shop 'for the sale of cotton piece goods ... that became one of the biggest in the bazaar', until it was destroyed in a fire in December 1822.¹⁷ By the time of the earliest comprehensive town map, drawn in 1836, a road bearing the name Kling Street (later Chulia Street) had been marked out in that vicinity, reflecting the large concentration of southern Indians in that area.¹⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century, Chettiars engaged in money-lending activities had also set up their offices in the Market Street area.¹⁹ In close proximity, at the mouth of the Singapore River, Tamil Muslim boatmen plied their trade and had a near monopolistic hold over the ferrying of goods and people by the river:

The landing of the emigrants from the junks forms a very interesting sight.... They usually come on shore in large cargo-boats, each carrying from fifty to sixty persons.... A squabble would immediately commence between the Kling boatmen and the Chinese passengers, many of the latter being unprovided with the few halfpence required to pay their passage from the vessel. The Klings would bawl, and lay down the law in their guttural jargon, and the Chinese would remonstrate in scarcely less barbarous Fokeen, each being totally unintelligible to the other.²⁰

In spite of the colonial town plan, not all Indians vacated the plain off the northern banks of the Singapore River. The dhobi settlement remained close to the vicinity of the early Sepoy Lines for long after, occupying a large piece of empty land of approximately 5 acres that extended from Stamford Canal to what is today the Cathay cinema.²¹ Their locality marked the periphery of the segment designated for government offices to the area demarcated for the settlement of Europeans and wealthy merchants.

While observer accounts suggest that the Indian settlement on the periphery of Chinatown and Commercial Square predominantly comprised southern Indians, the Indian constitution northeast of the Singapore River reflected a greater regional mix. Colonial records and travel writings repeatedly inform that the dhobis comprised both Bengalese and Klings—the local appellation for northern Indians and southern Indians respectively. The ethnically heterogeneous colony of transported convicts was also situated in that vicinity—initially in an open shed by the northern bank of the Singapore River,²² then the area formerly occupied by the early-sepoy camp²³ and, subsequently, the Bras Basah prison that was situated at the periphery of the area for European settlement.²⁴ While most Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century lived in these two areas, there is evidence to suggest a move beyond these locations by the early 1830s. Indian Muslims constituted an important segment of the fast evolving multi-ethnic Muslim district of Kampong Glam. George Windsor Earl described Indians engaged in various professions in the locality in the first half of the nineteenth century: ‘Bengali washermen hanging out clothes to dry, and dairymen of the same nation milking their cows.... On the roads Klings will occasionally be encountered conducting tumbrils drawn by buffaloes.’²⁵

Indians had also turned to what later became Serangoon Road. Lieutenant Jackson’s 1823 town map referred to the preliminary path

as the 'road leading across the island'.²⁶ It connected important waterways like the Rochor and Kallang Rivers in the south and the Serangoon River in the north. During its initial development, the area had a distinct European presence, and numerous street names in the Serangoon Road area today signify that European influence. The suitability for cattle-rearing activities, given the 'abundant supplies of water and grass'²⁷ was an important deciding factor for the Indian settlers. One of the earliest historical references of an Indian presence on Serangoon Road can be traced to the attack on the house of a Bengalee in 1835: 'A gang of fifty or sixty armed Chinese attacked the house of [a] Bengalee ... at the new kampong, called Buffalo Village, now called Kandang Kerbau.... One of the Bengalis fired a musket from an upper window and killed one of the gang, who was carried off by his companions.'²⁸ Although it is unclear if these early Bengalee settlers were connected to the Indian penal colony, certainly many Indian convicts 'on their release ... found jobs as herdsmen and carried on trade in milk for the community'.²⁹

Convicts from the Indian penal colony provided the labour for the construction of Serangoon Road. Early maps of the area also reveal numerous brick kilns—an industry in which Indian convicts and labourers were heavily employed in until at least the early second half of the nineteenth century. Pieris informs that at 'the convict brick field in Serangoon Road ... sheds, kilns, pug mills, molding tables, and all the appliances necessary for handmade bricks were provided for, and a large dormitory surrounded by a stout fence was built for 120 convicts, of all classes, who were employed in this work'.³⁰ The road also facilitated the movement of materials from Pulau Ubin, where convicts were employed in granite quarrying and wood-cutting—materials that were subsequently transported by 'convict bullock carts and boats ... to sawmills and kilns closer to town'.³¹

The advent of European and American owned plantations added to the density of Indian agricultural labourers in the vicinity. Although in the 1820s agriculture in the area proximate to the 'core' Serangoon Road area was carried out by small-scale Chinese farmers, by the mid-1830s, Indian labourers had come to be employed in the cultivation of cotton, sugar, and nutmeg at the proximate Balestier and Kallangdale estates. The development of the Race Course in the early 1840s was yet another imperative affecting the drift of Indians towards the Serangoon area. While pony races were primarily a leisure activity for Europeans,

Klings and Bengalees were frequently employed as ostlers. By the 1850s, Captain George Dare observed that a Hindu cremation ground had also come to be situated in the vicinity of the Race Course.³²

2.2 Religious-Cultural Production

Indians, akin to the overwhelming majority of Singapore's early immigrant population, viewed their stay as dictated by economic circumstance rather than a genuine desire to settle. Singapore was a place of work, where they would live frugally, accumulate capital, and occasionally circulate to and from their homeland before embarking on their eventual return in the hope of enjoying the fruits of their labour. That inclination was exacerbated by the inordinate gender disparity, which acted against familial development and the establishment of firm roots—processes that were necessary as catalysts for institutional and organizational development. The overarching mindset of 'temporari-ness' influenced the nature and extent of socio-cultural production in the incipient diaspora, as did the heterogeneity of Indian groups at the settlement. Turnbull suggests that during this period,

Despite their numbers and their concentration in the urban area, the Indian community made ... comparatively little impact.... They had no leadership and were divided in background, language and religion. In the mid-nineteenth century there were seventeen ... Indian businessmen of standing in Singapore, but they were notable as individuals rather than community leaders.³³

In some arenas—vernacular education, for example—there was little development of note. Although Tamil language classes were introduced at the Singapore Free School in 1834, lack of support, teaching materials, and students, ensured their termination shortly after.

Yet, it would be incorrect to suggest that this period witnessed a lull in the development of Indian institutions, organizational activity, and socio-cultural production. In spite of the sojourning mindset, there were many Indians who resided in the colony for long durations. As discussed in Chapter One, a number of transported convicts were incarcerated for periods of over two decades, and for most, return was not an option. In the case of Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast—even if they tended to circulate to and from the subcontinent, they

had the wherewithal and numbers to sustain community formations. Institutional development was also evident amongst the numerically less significant groups, although their small number created a sense of pragmatism, ushering collaborative efforts across regional or caste-based lines in the development of temporary, embryonic edifices.

Indian socio-cultural production in Singapore during this period was primarily centred on elements of the religious-culture that these emigrants carried from their 'homeland'. This was most evident in the development of shrines. A similar increase was visible in the strength and followings of religious processions; interestingly, participation across religious lines was not uncommon in the diaspora—an inclusiveness that may indeed have been an extension of traditional religious-cultural practices. That said, the performance of processions was reshaped by the new context of the port settlement characterized by a shared multi-ethnic public space. Sunil Amrith explains that 'religious performances were enacted before an audience of others: British soldiers and administrators, Chinese and Malay residents. In this context, circulating religious practices had to change in order to accommodate themselves to new ways of sharing public space.'³⁴

Beyond shrines and processions, the mid-nineteenth century saw the formation of Indian 'secret societies'. It is unclear whether they drew on pre-existing formations in the subcontinent or if they were hybrid formations influenced by ubiquitous Chinese 'secret societies' in Singapore, or both. Mainly, they partook in religious-cultural functions. However, over time colonial officials perceived them as threats as they took on roles that extended beyond the religious-cultural domain.

Shrines

The formation and development of Indian shrines in Singapore, from the mid-1820s, provide valuable clues on the nature of the embryonic diaspora during this period.³⁵ The structure of these early shrines reflected the view amongst Indian emigrants that their stay on the island was temporary. On early Hindu temples, Clothey points out that 'the shrines were seldom more than a space and a ... simple representation of the deity. That these early shrines were temporary suggests the status of many of the early South Indian workers as 'sojourners', living and working, usually without families, away from home.'³⁶

In 1827, the Sri Mariamman Temple was established on South Bridge Road, in the Chinatown area. A small deity—‘Sinna Amman’—a minor representation of the Southern Indian goddess Mariamman—‘known for her power in curing epidemic illnesses’³⁷—was installed by Naraina Pillai in the temporary wood and *attap* structure. In 1831, the site was enlarged and, subsequently, a brick structure was laid circa 1843.³⁸ The development of the Sri Mariamman temple involved a variety of Indian groups including a diverse range of caste communities from the Tanjore district, and ‘in construction they used the help of convicts brought by the colonial government from all over India’.³⁹ The eclectic character of the Mariamman temple was reflected not only in the heterogeneity of backgrounds of those constructing and serving the temple, but also in the addition of subsidiary shrines—notably the inclusion, in a position of prominence, of the non-*Saivite* deity, Sri Rama, soon after the formation of the temple. These additions were partly a matter of sponsorship, but also an indication of the attendance by diverse groups of devotees, in addition to Tamil Saivites.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a Hindu temple was also established in the vicinity of the convict colony and the dhobi settlement. The date for the founding of the Sivan temple is obscure. A temporary edifice housing a sivalinga—said to have been long-worshipped—was shifted numerous times before being situated in 1850, at the start of Orchard Road (marked today by the Dhoby Ghaut subway station).⁴⁰ The development of the Sivan temple also involved the collaboration of a variety of Indian groups; to an even greater extent, it reflected the more heterogeneous character of the Indian population in that area given that the temple’s devotees and sponsors cut across regional lines. It included both northern and southern Indians, although it was ‘used chiefly by the Dhobies ... who live(d) in the neighbourhood’.⁴¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, benefactors included the Chettiars, but Clothey informs that a significant shrine in the temple also housed the goddess associated as Siva’s spouse, in contemporary Uttar Pradesh.⁴² In its contemporary form, situated at a site in Geylang East, the temple has sustained its architectural and ritual eclecticism, combining both southern and northern Indian features: ‘The ritual calendar includes elements to be found in many Tamil Saiva temples: the months bear Tamil names, and the Skanda Sasthi and Brahmotsavam festival held are common in South Indian Saivagamic

temples. Yet festivals such as the Vasantha Navarattiri ... and Vinayakar Caturti ... more popular in North India [are also included]'.⁴³

Numerous factors may have explained the willingness of the early Hindus to come together across caste and linguistic differences in developing their earliest temples. Given that in the first half of the nineteenth century Hindus comprised a minority of the total Indian civilian population, collaboration would have certainly been driven by a pragmatic impulse, without which it would have been quite impossible to establish and maintain these structures, and organize religious festivals and processions. An inclusive approach enabled benefactors and a fellowship that extended beyond regional or caste-based differences. Moreover, because these early Hindu emigrants viewed their movement as provisional, they may have been more willing to exercise flexibility. In the study of diasporas, flexibility amongst early pioneers was not uncommon, just as Ballard points out in the case of the early Sikh migrants in Britain, who, 'in terms of caste ... since overall numbers were so small, such differences were then of less significance than they are today'.⁴⁴ Indeed, amongst the early Hindus at the settlement, only the Chettiars were able, during this period, to establish a temple specifically for their caste-community. The Thendayuthapani Temple at Tank Road, dedicated to Lord Muruga, was established around 1858–59⁴⁵ when Chettiar numbers and affluence had grown considerably. The setup of their own caste temple, however, did not imply a withdrawal from their position as key benefactors of other Hindu shrines located within the settlement.

The early Muslim shrines in the Chinatown area were established, almost exclusively, by Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast. The Jamae Masjid Chulia built in 1826 on the street adjacent to the Mariamman Temple on South Bridge Road; the Al-Abrar Mosque, otherwise known as 'Kuchu Palli'—'hut mosque'—in Telok Ayer in 1827; and, the Nagore Durgah, constructed between 1828 and 1830, testified to the community's numbers and affluence in the budding settlement. Of the early Indians in the colony, Tamil Muslims were certainly best placed to sustain a distinctive sub-communal identity, yet it did not necessarily follow that the formation of their religious institutions meant rigid boundaries vis-à-vis other groups. The Nagore Durgah—a replica of the shrine in Nagore dedicated to the 'pan-Tamil' saint Shah al-Hamid—personified syncretism across religious lines. Tschacher

informs that at the original shrine for Shah al-Hamid in Nagore, 'Muslims and non-Muslims alike came to pray for a safe passage ... before their departure'.⁴⁶ It seems that the trans-religious constitution of followers was also evident here, and as in Nagore, 'not only was the shrine of Shah al-Hamid replicated[,] ... his festival got celebrated in much the same manner as in India, including a flag-raising ceremony and the anointment of the shrine with sandal paste'.⁴⁷ At the same time, in the diasporic community—the *durgah* adopted wider Islamic and European architectural influences, including, for example, Palladian features.⁴⁸ Although Indians comprised a minority in an area that was overwhelmingly Chinese, the increasing number of Tamils alongside the concentration of shrines created an enclave in Chinatown. This, as Amrith suggests, became 'a microcosm of South Indian society, reflecting the physical juxtaposition, even sharing of Hindu and Muslim places of worship, and the occasional conflicts between them over public space, both of which had characterized community relations in the Tamil country for centuries'.⁴⁹

Outside Chinatown, however, Indian Muslims tended to collaborate with other communities in mosque building. An example of this was the Benggali Mosque (later Bencoolen Mosque), established between 1825 and 1828 in the area of the early dhobi settlement. Originally an attap structure, the setup and fellowship of the mosque included a variety of groups, including the transported convicts, dhobis and the so-called 'Bencoolen' Malays. In 1845, Syed Omar bin Al Junied, 'an Arab merchant from Palembang', was a key sponsor in the building of a solid structure at the site on Bencoolen Street.⁵⁰ Similarly, trans-ethnic collaboration between Tamil Muslims and Baweanese emigrants was also evident in the 1846 formation of the Al-Abrar Mosque (later known as the Abdul Gafoor Mosque) on Dunlop Street—an arterial road that extended from Serangoon Road to the periphery of Kampong Glam.

Festivals and Processions

Historical records reveal that, during this period, several Indian festivals and processions were publicly carried out around Singapore Town. Amongst these were Churruck Poojah, Dusserah, Muharram, Thaipusam, and Timiti. These processions were initially organized in the Chinatown/Telok Ayer area and in the vicinity of the convict

settlement, although by the 1840s they had spread to the Race Course area in the vicinity of Serangoon Road. While they were expressions of traditional religious practice, Sinha suggests that these processions also served a variety of other functions in the diaspora, including 'spreading divine power, marking territory, enhancing unity and solidarity within the community, [and] registering religious distinction and difference'.⁵¹

On occasion Indian processions witnessed communal conflict across religious lines. In April 1836, the *Singapore Chronicle* reported a violent outbreak between Hindus and Indian Muslims in the Chinatown area:

No sooner did the procession enter the street where the Mahometan temple [*sic*] is situated ... [that] the Hindu procession was immediately attacked ... by the Mahometans in the streets with all descriptions of missiles.... In the heat of the affray the Hindus affected the entrance into the Mahometan temple and destroyed a goodly assortment of glass-ware, for satisfaction of which the Mahometans wished this morning to have returned the compliment by the demolition of the Hindu sanctum had they not been kept in check by the civil authorities.⁵²

Yet, the inference—based on instances of communal tension—that Indian processions were displays of overarching religious binaries is dubious, given that there was also strong evidence of eclecticism. During this period, Hindus and Muslims participated in each other's festivals and processions—particularly Muharram—the Shia festival which commemorated the martyrdom of Hasan and Hussain on the plains of Kerbala, and possibly also in the celebration of Dusserah. Such eclecticism was particularly evident amongst the transported convicts.

With the rapid increase in the number of Indians from the mid-1840s, Muharram processions began to be organized on a particularly large scale in Singapore. The festival, 'introduced either by Indian Muslim traders, the Madras native infantry, or transported prisoners', involved a 'diversity of participants ... Hindus, Muslim Indians, and Malays', and in Penang the culturally hybrid community of Jawi Peranakans 'were particularly prominent participants'.⁵³ Muharram was celebrated over ten days, and on the tenth night, a model of the tomb of the martyrs—the *tabut*—was carried to re-enact the funeral procession. Several Indian groups organized their own separate Muharram processions. Similar to urban centres in the subcontinent, it was common practice for neighbourhoods—the *mohalla*—to have their own festivities. As Masselos has noted for Bombay, the scale and extent of these processions often

served as symbolic representations of power and territorial control in an urban landscape⁵⁴—and this may possibly explain why Muharram festivals, in mid-nineteenth century Singapore, were being celebrated on a grander scale.

Historical records posit that these processions were a cause of concern amongst some Europeans in the colony, who from time to time called for a ban on these events. There were fears expressed by Europeans that the fervour evident during these processions could lead to violent outbreaks,⁵⁵ and, on occasion, these were also viewed as an affront to Christianity:

Can anyone blame a Government professing the Christian religion for preventing insults to that religion from being publicly exhibited?—or are they not duty bound to do so? need I ask whether such processions as we have seen in Singapore are an insult to that religion or not? and if they are, why not put an end to them ...⁵⁶

Indians resented the attempts by colonial authorities to restrict their religious processions. When, in 1833, some Europeans demanded an end to the public celebration of these festivals, the boatmen went on strike refusing to ‘convey goods to the [ships]’ forcing magistrates to grant permission.⁵⁷ Similarly, in May 1842, when authorities refused to allow Tamil Muslims the right to hold their Muharram processions,

on the following day all the Klings, men of every trade and profession at Singapore, struck work and even the petty shop-keepers amongst them closed their shops.... [This] caused a temporary inconvenience, especially amongst the merchants, from being deprived of the services of their boatmen and boats.⁵⁸

In that episode, European merchants were able to break the boycott by turning temporarily to Chinese boatmen. Nevertheless, the scale of processions—specifically Muharram—continued to escalate well into the 1850s. By that time, however, Indians were confronted by increasingly stiff European opposition to the public performance of their festivals—a matter we will look at more closely later in the chapter.

‘Secret Societies’

Organizations described by colonial authorities as ‘secret societies’ had been a feature in the port settlement since the 1820s. These primarily

referred to transnational social formations established by Chinese emigrants that were viewed as a serious challenge to colonial 'law and order'. Recorded acts of criminal conduct by Chinese secret societies date back to 1831⁵⁹ and the temerity of their transgressions had only increased in the ensuing decades—culminating in major outbreaks of violence in the 1850s. Around that time, there is evidence to suggest that Indians had also come to organize their own secret societies—the Red Flag and the White Flag—with connections that extended to other parts of the Straits Settlements. While initially established to aid in the organization of religious-cultural events, by the 1860s there were growing instances of conflict between the two societies—possibly in a tussle for influence over territory—and evidence, as well, of wider collaborations with the Chinese secret societies.

Edwin Lee suggests that transported convicts may have inspired the formation of the Red Flag and White Flag societies, pointing out that 'in the mid 1840s, the convict jail in Singapore had two well guarded men who had been heads of secret societies in India'.⁶⁰ Lee's view is supported by Wynne's study of Chinese and Muslim secret societies, which posits that the Indian criminal influence hastened the formation of Indian secret societies.⁶¹ An inquiry into Indian secret societies suggested that the White Flag was established in Penang sometime around the mid-1850s, and that, prior to this, it had for many years 'existed in some other form, such as the party of performers during the ... Moharram [festival]'.⁶² The Red Flag society was founded soon after the White Flag was established. Although Indian Muslims comprised the mainstay of the Red Flag and White Flag societies, their membership included Hindus, and extended beyond ethnic lines, with Jawi Peranakan and Malay constituents. The initial objectives of these Indian secret societies included attending to religious ceremonies and organizing processions:

The object of this (White Flag) society at the time of its establishment was a religious one, *viz.*—to attend and assist at the religious ceremonies of its members, such as marriages, funerals, circumcisions, etc., and its rules contained nothing bad, or injurious to the public.⁶³

Colonial records, however, suggest that over time, 'the religious matters have been neglected and.... all manner of evil is done, mischief plotted and combination made, to help members out of trouble'.⁶⁴ Between

1861 and 1862, violent outbreaks were recorded in Singapore involving the Red Flag Society—amongst whom Tamil Muslim boatmen featured prominently—and their rivals, the White Flag, which, according to colonial officials, comprised ‘of all the bad characters and prostitutes of Kampong Glam under the leadership of a time-expired convict’.⁶⁵ Connections between Indian and Chinese secret societies had also deepened. In Penang, the Red Flag Society and an influential Chinese secret society—the Toh Peh Kong—had, following a conflict in 1863, ‘entered into an alliance for offensive and defensive purposes’ as ‘the members of the two societies occupied the same part of the town and had houses in the same street’.⁶⁶ In Singapore, too, there were reports that by this time the Red Flag and White Flag had connections with the Chinese Triad Society.⁶⁷ Indeed, the territorial base and spatial patterns of operations of the Red Flag Society in Singapore—firmly entrenched in the Telok Ayer area of Chinatown—was remarkably akin to that of Penang where the society was also based in the Chinese-majority enclave. By the 1860s, colonial authorities had grown sufficiently perturbed by the influence of these Indian ‘secret societies’ to introduce measures to curtail their development. These attempts at instituting greater colonial control of ‘native’ social formations will be examined more closely in the ensuing section.

2.3 European Perceptions, Colonial Control and the Incipient Diaspora’s Position⁶⁸

In the colonial context, the perceptions of those who had cultural primacy, i.e., Europeans, had an inordinate bearing on the position of Asian immigrants in the settlement. As discussed in Chapter 1, European views of the Asian population in Singapore, as elsewhere in the Straits, were shaped by ‘racial frames’. Prior to the late nineteenth century, these frames were situational, and tended to be influenced by ‘the relative degree of power’⁶⁹ of a ‘race’, and the extent to which they were deemed as valuable to the colonial political-economy. The former was produced by the anxieties of the miniscule European population situated in a thinly guarded colony where Asians comprised an overwhelming majority. Turnbull notes that: ‘The European population experienced ... unease at being a small, almost defenceless, minority among thousands of Asians, and well-to-do merchants of all races

looked with misgiving at the mass of poor, illiterate, half-starving, rootless youths who came to seek their fortune in the Straits.⁷⁰

There was considerable diversity in the way Europeans viewed the different major 'races' in Singapore. In the mid-nineteenth century, European accounts tended to stereotype the Malay inhabitants as 'simple' and 'docile', who could 'improve by good treatment, and ... [are] readily amenable to the light of real civilization, if properly managed'.⁷¹ The European view of the Chinese was more ambivalent. Although recognized as an industrious race, Europeans had grown concerned of a potential threat from Chinese inhabitants in the wake of their dramatic rise in number. Colonial officials were especially disconcerted by the power of the Chinese secret societies, which they held responsible for numerous outbreaks of violence. That perception led Governor Blundell in 1856 to label the Chinese in Singapore as:

Turbulent and self-willed, their clannish feuds are sources of great annoyance.... There is no knowing when and where they may break out in open violence, which,... [is] dangerous to the lives and property of all persons within the immediate vicinity of the uproar.⁷²

In the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans generally viewed the Indian population in Singapore as 'peaceable' and useful to the development of the colony.⁷³ High-ranking merchants—specifically Parsis—mixed freely in European society and featured in their banquets and balls, some of which they organized. While the Parsis were an exception in that they were treated as separate from Indians, the unthreatening outlook towards most Indians stemmed from the fact that a sizeable section of the population was connected to colonial institutions and European employers, and there was recognition of their role in public works, the economy, and the security of the colony. As discussed in Chapter 1, Indians comprised much of the lower ranks of the police force, and the Indian militia had, from the founding of the settlement, constituted the mainstay of the military garrison here. These troops were crucial not only for external defence, but also to protect the Europeans from internal threats.

In the private sphere, Europeans employed Indians as domestic workers, labourers, and servicemen, and merchants were heavily reliant on Tamil Muslim boatmen. In public works, colonial authorities depended on the body of transported convicts. It would be fair even to surmise that, given their number, the convicts were significant in

sustaining a balance that colonial officials deemed as valuable to the security of the settlement, as they were said to be most feared by the Chinese.⁷⁴ Historical records show numerous instances in which the authorities turned to Indian convicts to help maintain order in the settlement. In 1851, when Chinese secret society members reportedly attacked Chinese Roman Catholic converts in the interior, leaving some five hundred dead, '[Indian] convicts were sent out in gangs to follow the rioters into the jungles and disperse them'.⁷⁵ In 1854, they were required to do the same in the even more serious pitch battles between Chinese secret societies, when after dispersing the assailants, these convicts were said to have 'duly returned to captivity'.⁷⁶

That said, by the mid-nineteenth century, growing affluence and improvements in communications technology, had ushered changes in European social mores, which in turn had a bearing on the manner in which they viewed the Asian inhabitants of Singapore. Turnbull explains:

Some Britons could now afford to visit England periodically, and all of them could keep their links with 'home' through up-to-date newspapers, regular letters and new books. The old free and easy... way of life changed to a more formal, consciously British middle-class society, staid, honest, respectable, unadventurous, narrow-minded, reflecting the values of mid-Victorian Britain.⁷⁷

With regard to the Indian population, Europeans grew increasingly uneasy over the continued transportation of large numbers of convicts to the settlement. In 1851, *The Singapore Free Press* launched a scathing attack on the policy:

We have not only our population, sufficiently disorderly in itself, contaminated by the felony of India, but the Government has further constituted the Straits Settlements [as] the receptacle for the convicts of Ceylon and Hongkong, thus making these settlements the 'common sewer' into which all the scum and refuse of the populations of nearly the whole British possessions in the East are poured.⁷⁸

In addition to criticisms over the transportation of convicts, the European community showed more disdain over the display of Indian religious-cultural processions in public places. Pieris, drawing on Bakhtin, theorizes that Europeans were antipathetic towards these processions because mid-nineteenth century bourgeois values associated

these displays of religiosity with 'carnavalesque' and, accordingly, to notions of 'degeneracy, dirt, and disease'.⁷⁹ Yet European stridency for an end to these public displays was met with growing resistance as the scale of processions had grown so extensive that colonial authorities were hard-pressed in trying to restrain them. Of particular concern to Europeans were the celebrations organized by transported Indian convicts. Their Muharram procession had emerged as the largest and most animated—*The Singapore Free Press* describing the festivities in the mid-1850s as 'saturnalia without restraint, their taboot ... the gayest and... the noisiest to be seen on public streets'.⁸⁰ Moreover the convict processions were particularly disconcerting because of the position of the convict settlement at the very heart of the European residential area and the colonial offices. In September 1856, attempts by officials to confine convict celebrations to the prison lines were resisted and consequently, 'hundreds of [convicts] ... forced their way out of the lines, and carrying their *taboot*, and lighted by torches, they marched in procession to the house of the Resident Councillor, where they vented their displeasure'.⁸¹

Yet, it would be an error to suggest that *at this point* relations between the transported convicts and the colonial administration were in crisis. Indeed, immediately after their intransigence during the 1856 Muharram festivities, the convicts quickly fell in line, and pleaded in the most subservient terms to the Governor and the Superintendent of Convicts. Beyond concerns of reprisal, their plea revealed the pan-religious affinities at the convict settlement and their usefulness to the colonial administration:

It is customary among the Hindoos and Mussulman to obtain on the day of Dussoharah and Mohorum Festival their indulgence; this have been allowed to the Convicts ... for upwards of thirty or forty years during which time there has never been ... any quarrel or disputes... The Convicts ... [will] cheerly perform their daily work to know that your Honor do take an interest to promote their happiness, the convicts are always ready to obey the order of their superiors...therefore the Hindoo and Mussalman Convicts ... humbly beg pardon ... [and] prostrate at your Honor's feet to forgive them if they have [committed] any crime.⁸²

In spite of their pleas, colonial authorities had decided to strengthen the regulatory framework to control Asian festivals and processions in the public sphere. In 1856, new Police and Conservancy Acts were

passed that empowered the police to put an immediate stop to processions and displays if these were deemed to be obstructive to public passage.⁸³ These Acts would be enacted in 1857, a year that also marked a crisis for the Empire, when British colonial control in India came to be severely tested following the advent of the Great Rebellion.

The 1857 Crisis

The year 1857 saw a marked change in the generally amicable view of the Indian population, as a sense of panic spread within the small European community here. That panic, and the concomitant change in perceptions, would have long-standing ramifications on the position of Indians in Singapore. News of the Great Indian Rebellion was crucial in accounting for the change in the European disposition, although a detour into attendant local developments are instructive and useful in contextualizing the panic. On 1 January 1857, a major strike was organized by local Chinese inhabitants—in response to the application of new Police and Conservancy Acts. Unconfirmed rumours circulating amongst European inhabitants at the time warned of ‘imminent Chinese riots’—and the English press reported that ‘monster meetings’ of Chinese secret societies had been organized.⁸⁴ Europeans were still nervous over a potential Chinese uprising, when a serious conflict involving Tamil Muslims broke. In early February 1857, two European policemen, drawing on powers enabled by the new Acts, had attempted to stop a Tamil Muslim festival at the mosque in Telok Ayer. In the ensuing conflict, the police resorted to the use of firearms that led to the death of two Tamil Muslims and injuries to several others.⁸⁵ Rumours of a Kling ‘riot’ travelled swiftly in European circles, and came to be magnified in the English press. Tainted reports were published that justified the hardline of the European policemen, while depicting the behaviour and actions of the Tamil Muslims in menacing terms:

A general attack was made upon [the police].... The Police party ... were forced to beat a sharp retreat to the Telok Ayer station, although not until they were all more or less injured by the missiles thrown at them. A furious assault was made upon the Police station; bricks and stones were thrown with great violence.... The assailants became almost frenzied, and by means of a ladder attempted to get into the Thannah.... Apprehensive of their lives the Police resorted to the use of fire arms.⁸⁶

Till then, the so-called 'riot' marked the most serious confrontation in the Settlement between colonial authorities and an Indian collective. For Europeans, it raised the spectre of multi-ethnic threats not just from the Chinese, but now also from the Indians, on whom they had long depended to sustain a balance that protected their position in the colony.

Relations between Europeans and Indians remained tense when news filtered of the rebellion of troops in India. As reports of the violence against Europeans in India spread, this effected widespread fears amongst European inhabitants in Singapore. Doubts were cast on 'the fidelity of the [Madras] troops'.⁸⁷ Rumours circulated that the transported convicts were planning a rebellion against Europeans in Singapore. Matters reached a feverish pitch in August 1857, when scrutiny of the Sikh political prisoner Khurruck Singh's conduct found that he had maintained 'treasonable correspondence with the native convicts at Singapore ... for the purpose of creating a disturbance'.⁸⁸ Khurruck Singh was deported to Penang, but this did not stymie European fears as fresh rumours had emerged that during the Muharram procession the convicts would 'break loose on the Town', and that they had seemingly conspired with the Indian troops to revolt against Europeans.⁸⁹

The 1857 Muharram festivities in Singapore, in effect, passed without incident. The Indian convicts—sensing the considerable fear in the European population—neither prepared a tabut nor carried out a procession. This, however, did not reduce the tension manifest amongst Europeans. The European community, by this time, was firmly lobbying for an end to the transportation of convicts from the subcontinent. Their opposition was propelled by the decision of the Government of India at this juncture to send convict rebels, and the most dangerous criminals from India to the Straits Settlements. The press, deprecating the decision, urged Europeans to 'repudiate the contamination cast upon our shores by the Government of India'.⁹⁰ Soon after, European residents petitioned the Indian Government, '[protesting] against this Settlement being any longer used for penal purposes, except for its own criminals'.⁹¹ Faced with severe pressure from European residents, Governor Blundell gave 'heartly support' to the petition.⁹² A further upshot of the opposition to the transportation of rebel prisoners to the settlement was the negative impact this had on the perception of European residents towards Indian rule over the colony. In September

1857, a petition by European residents in Singapore was sent to London, demanding that the Straits Settlements 'be placed directly under the Crown, with a separate Government, and not, as at present, under a delegated authority in India'.⁹³

Restrictions in the Final Years of British Indian Rule

The period after 1857 saw even greater restrictions imposed on the conduct of Indian religious processions in Singapore. Colonial authorities displayed a marked reticence in granting approval for Indian public processions, and even when endorsed, were heavily policed. In October 1859, during the Dusserah festival held near 'Buffalo Bridge', over a hundred peons and several European policemen were reported to have been on duty in the vicinity.⁹⁴ In 1860, the Mariamman Temple was refused permission to perform Timiti in public, the Governor's Council underscoring the need to 'prevent the Peace of the Town being in any way disturbed'.⁹⁵ Likewise in 1861, the Commissioner of Police rejected the celebration of the Dusserah festival in public.⁹⁶ While the public display of numerous Indian festivals were discontinued during this period, Muharram processions remained a feature in the 1860s, although, possibly because of greater policing and restrictions on the route of processions, the scale of the festival also diminished.

European concerns over potential danger from the Asian population continued to linger well after 1857. Their worries stemmed primarily from the activities of secret societies, particularly the larger Chinese ones, but also those that had been fostered by Indians, especially as clashes between the Red Flag and White Flag societies in Singapore and Penang became more frequent. Beyond posing a direct threat to 'law and order', colonial authorities were concerned of the extent to which these societies commanded the loyalty of their members, and if they also undertook quasi-governmental functions. More so, they were wary of inter-ethnic collaboration in these societies that had the potential of undermining colonial control, which had long depended on keeping 'races' separate.

Conflicts between the Red Flag and the White Flag reached new heights in 1864, suggestive of a struggle to extend territorial control and influence over the Indian population in the settlement. Tschacher attributes one such incident to a 'conflict about ritual "honors", a common phenomenon in 19th century South India'⁹⁷:

The 'Red Flags' seem for the first time to have taken precedence in the processions, an honor usually granted to the 'White Flags'. Secondly, the 'Red Flags'... marched down Cross Street in daytime, apparently the centre of 'White Flag' territory. Thirdly, they destroyed ... the tabut of the 'White Flags', the processional image of Imam Hussayn's tomb.⁹⁸

Masselos posits that in nineteenth-century Bombay, such 'forays' usually drew upon 'the same kind of territorial base', i.e., the mohalla, and that 'attacks on rival symbols and incursions into rival territories were not dissimilar to the structures of opposition long established in the Mohurram confrontations between moholla tabuts'.⁹⁹ In 1864, the Red Flag society launched large-scale attacks involving some 200 men, into White Flag territory in which 'houses were forcibly entered in open day in Cross Street, the inmates severely beaten and every particle of the goods in the house were smashed'.¹⁰⁰

Concerned by their increasing bravado, the authorities clamped down on the Red Flag and the White Flag in 1865. Six members were charged for riotous behaviour and other criminal acts. Amongst these included two Indian Muslim traders of standing, which European witnesses at the trial considered 'remarkably good characters in matters of business'.¹⁰¹ The proceedings in October received considerable press coverage that was informative of the nature and activities of these organizations. Witnesses at the trial informed that these societies raised funds for their activities by organizing 'dinner parties', in which 'guests' were pressured to contribute, thus 'swell[ing] the Societies' funds to thousands of dollars, which are expended throughout the year'.¹⁰² What was particularly troubling for colonial authorities was that the trial revealed not only inter-ethnic collaboration but also illicit connections between these societies and the police. About 15 or 16 Indian police peons had been offered incentives to join the Red Flag society and the 'society regularly paid ten dollars a month to the police in charge of [Telok Ayer police] station to wink at their proceedings'.¹⁰³ Although the clampdown and the incarceration of these members were said to have weakened these societies in Singapore, they continued to hold sway over segments of the Indian population for some time after.

The petitions by European inhabitants in the midst of the fear in 1857, ushered processes beyond the port city that had long-term repercussions on the position of Indians in Singapore. In 1859, Lord Canning—the Governor General of India—noting the antagonism of

Europeans in Singapore, posited that the Indian Government would have no difficulty in putting an end to 'the transportation of convicts to the Straits, *especially to Singapore*' since 'the Andamans have been occupied as a convict settlement'.¹⁰⁴ In 1860, the transportation of convicts from India to the Straits Settlements ceased.¹⁰⁵ This had serious demographic implications. It was one of several factors that explained why the number of Indians between 1860 and 1871 declined by nearly 20 per cent even as, concomitantly, the total population of Singapore increased rapidly.¹⁰⁶

Beyond the transported convicts per se, the 1857 petitions also triggered developments that left a wider imprint on the political development of Singapore. A debate ensued in the British parliament in April 1858, on whether control over the Straits Settlements should be transferred from the Government of India to the Colonial Office. Asked for his views on the matter, Lord Canning's response was decisive. His Minute in November 1859 barely concealed his exasperation with the lobbying of the European inhabitants in Singapore. Noting that although 'the strong desire for transfer which prevailed among [European inhabitants] ... in 1857, has very considerably subsided', he enunciated that 'no good and sufficient reasons [existed] ... for continuing the administration of the Straits Settlements on its present footing'.¹⁰⁷ His Minute put in motion the process for the transfer of political control over the Straits Settlements, from the Indian Government to the Colonial Office in London, in April 1867. This marked a decisive change in Singapore's position in the Empire, and simultaneously altered the position of Indians in Singapore as the island ceased to be a part of British India. The move also extinguished a key context that had underpinned Indian migration to the colony, and ensured that Indians would forever remain a minority in the port city.

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II

Diasporic Transformations in the Age of Mass Migration: 1867–1941

3 The Diaspora Reconstituted

The establishment of the Straits Settlements as a Crown Colony in 1867 corresponded to the beginnings of a period that witnessed a remarkable expansion in colonial empires. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the British Empire reached its apogee, ruling over a third of humanity. The age of 'high imperialism' was not only a matter of expanding colonial territories. Shorter oceanic routes, improvements in transportation, advances in industrial production, and a steep rise in global population, collectively accounted for an explosion in world trade. As crop and raw material production in the colonies intensified to feed the voracious demands of metropolitan centres, complex schemes were devised to secure even more labour. That context underpinned why, during this period, the export of Indian labour reached new heights—although immigration from India was not limited only to labour.

The transformations that characterized the era left a deep imprint on Singapore's development. If under British Indian rule Singapore had established its place as a key entrepôt for the India–China trade, she now assumed a commercial position of global significance. Propelled by the British expansion in the Malay States from 1874, the port city became a key outlet and a crucial processing centre for the produce of the Peninsula, and emerged as a major regional financial centre.¹ Barring the lean years of the Great Depression, Singapore's tremendous economic advance provided the backdrop for the near six-fold increase in the Indian population—from 10,694 to 60,207 over the period 1871

to 1940.² That increase, overwhelmingly the outcome of emigration, effectively reconstituted the diaspora.

What were the circumstances that underpinned the reconstitution of the diaspora? Was the large-scale movement of Indians to the port city simply a by-product of Singapore's economic advance or did other factors, such as changes in colonial racial thinking and kinship networks, also effect the exponential increase in their number? Did the end of British India's rule over the Straits Settlements impact Indian immigration patterns? Were there significant continuities from the earlier period, or were new entrants to the colony of a different social, ethnic, and religious makeup? What was the experience of these immigrants in the increasingly complex and multi-layered urban economy? Did Indians remain short-term sojourners or did the period see a change in disposition, towards more settled patterns? Finally, what effect did the numerical increase have on Indian settlement patterns in the port city? These questions guide the chapter's focus on Indian immigration, economic activities, and settlement patterns over the period from the transfer from Indian rule in 1867 to the advent of World War II.

Although late nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian emigration and economic activities in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States has received considerable treatment in erstwhile literature,³ this chapter will reveal that, in effect, the Singapore experience diverged considerably from other parts of the Peninsula. Not only was the proportion of non-labour Indian emigrants here considerable, even in the case of labour, variegated patterns were visible in the port city. The key systems used to procure Indian labour (i.e., regulated indenture and *kangani*) for the plantation sector in the Peninsula proved to be of little significance in Singapore. Moreover, Indian labourers in the port city were exposed to specific forms of exploitation and abuse, most of which went unchecked because Indian Government regulations were overwhelmingly focused on safeguarding only the plantation labour force.

Labour

With the end of convict transportation, the overwhelming majority of Indian labour migrants were procured from the Madras Presidency.

The overarching turn towards Madras was partly a product of European racial thinking at this time, which increasingly subscribed to ideas of 'biological racism'.⁴ Tamil labourers—particularly Adi Dravidas—were represented by Europeans as being *innately* adept for certain types of labour. This marked a change in thinking when compared to the early- and mid-nineteenth century, during which Tamil labour was procured as part of a strategy, of playing off one racial group against another, to prevent strikes; due to the difficulty in obtaining Chinese labour; or, because of notions that southern Indians could acclimatize more quickly to the weather in the Straits. One planter surmised the overarching European view held in the late nineteenth century:

As general all-round estate coolies I believe the people of this nationality [i.e., Tamils] ... to be second to none in the world Quiet, amenable to discipline, very quick to pick up and adapt themselves to any kind of work, ... the best of servants to a just master, and they will often settle down on an estate and remain there content with considerably lower wages than they might procure elsewhere ...⁵

Beyond European racial thinking, the existence of long-standing linkages facilitated the move of labourers from the Presidency. Another factor was the transfer of administrative control over the Straits Settlements—from the hands of British India to the Colonial Office in London, and its corollary the introduction of restrictions by the Indian Government, which had the effect of containing the procurement of labour from India largely to ports in Madras.

Over this period, Indian labour migration to the Straits and the Malay Peninsula can be broadly demarcated in three phases. The first, extending from 1870 to the early 1880s, was marked by strict Indian regulations. The second, from the mid-1880s to the 1920s, saw a reduction of controls on their movement to the region and various initiatives put in place to encourage immigration. The third phase extended from the 1920s to World War II, during which their movement was affected by the Great Depression, and growing restrictions put in place by the Indian Government. Collectively these three phases provide an overarching framework contextualizing the movement of Indian labour to the port city from 1867 to 1941. This will be followed by a focus on the specific types and conditions of Indian labour employed in Singapore during this period.

Restrictions on Indian Labour Migration

The 1867 transfer fundamentally altered the position of the Indian Government vis-à-vis Indian labour emigration to the Straits. So long as the Settlements were a part of British India, labour emigration was deemed an 'internal' movement and, unlike most other colonies, there existed no specific controls to regulate the procurement of Indian labour or to check on labour conditions in the Straits. However, once the Straits ceased to be a part of British India, the Indian Government took on the role of 'protector' of these labourers destined for a different colony. This seriously constrained the emigration of Indians to Singapore and gave rise to a variety of abuses as desperate employers used illegal methods to bypass erstwhile Indian controls.

In 1864, the Indian Government enacted Emigration Act XIII, allowing the recruitment of Indian labourers only to the permitted colonies outside India that complied with the requirements put in place by the Indian Government to protect Indian labour.⁶ The Act—possibly anticipating the transfer of the Straits Settlements—excluded these territories from the definition of British India. Technically, Emigration Act XIII of 1864 rendered labour emigration from British India to the Straits illegal, although there was no actual disruption in the flow of labour until after the transfer.

Shortly after the transfer, concerns over Indian labour recruitment practices and the conditions of their employment resulted in the Madras Presidency placing an embargo on labour migration to the Straits. In 1870, W. J. Hathaway, acting Magistrate of Tanjore district, put up a notice in the *Tanjore Gazetteer* warning that, by the provisions of Act XIII of 1864, any attempt to induce labourers to immigrate to the Straits Settlements was illegal. His hard-line stance followed from reports of serious abuse in the system of procuring labour for the Straits. His investigations had revealed that 'there is a regularly organized system in this district of kidnapping men and children and taking them down to coolie godowns in Negapatam, to be shipped from there to Pinang and other places which are thus regularly supplied with men as coolies and girls as prostitutes.'⁷

Hathaway cautioned that recruitment of labourers for the Straits would be deemed as 'kidnapping'—'punishable with imprisonment for 7 years'.⁸ Employers in the Straits were hard-hit by the measures, especially because the end of convict transportation had rendered them

even more dependent on the supply from Madras. In Singapore, the editor of *The Straits Times* reported that 'the persons whose emigration from India is ... to be prohibited, become domestic servants, boatmen, syces and dock labourers, ... our prosperity, and our domestic comforts are alike threatened by the step.'⁹

The restrictions sparked protests. Employers beseeched the Governor of the Straits Settlements to end the disruption before the southwest monsoon—when the largest numbers of Indian labourers were transported—drew to a close. In July 1870, Governor Ord transmitted a plea to the Madras Government calling for a resumption of Tamil labour immigration.¹⁰ He underscored that labour migration to the Straits differed from other plantation colonies because of the long-standing connections with Madras, so that the movement of the vast majority of Indian labourers here was 'purely voluntary and uninterfered with by any one. Natives having friends in the Colony, and hearing of the advantages which it affords, come over for shorter or longer periods, and in many cases permanently settle here.'¹¹ The Madras Government was not convinced. The embargo would remain—the Governor of Madras in his response provided further evidence of deception and abuse in labour recruitment.¹²

The ban on labour migration to the Straits in 1870 and 1871 was, along with the end of convict transportation, crucial in explaining the nearly 20 per cent decline in the number of Indian inhabitants in Singapore in the 1871 census when compared to 1860.¹³ To bypass regulations, desperate employers turned to speculators who clandestinely recruited in villages, paid the travel advances of prospective emigrants, and tutored them 'to represent themselves as passengers' to the authorities in Madras.¹⁴ Officials were not the only ones deceived, *The Straits Times* reported that the labourers were also unaware that upon arrival they had to repay travel advances and other 'charges' borne by recruiters through contracts forced upon them: '... they are either at once engaged for long terms of service and swindled out of the greater part or all their advance, or taken ashore and kept under surveillance until they repay the advance'.¹⁵ Investigations in Madras also revealed that women and children were being abducted and transported to the French controlled port of Karaikkal where they were forcefully brought aboard ships bound for the Straits: '[In] less than three months in 1871, ninety two claims were registered by men seeking their wives and

children who, they claimed, had been seduced or abducted from their homes and traced to Karikal'.¹⁶

The illegal traffic did not satisfy the Straits' demand for Tamil labour. Ord sent representations directly to the Indian Government promising that, if the embargo was lifted, 'the Government of India may rely on the watchful care of this government over any men who may ... be sent over'.¹⁷ In June 1872, the Indian Government relented, passing Act XIV of 1872, *temporarily* allowing labour emigration to the Straits Settlements from the port of Negapatnam till the legislation of a permanent bill.¹⁸

The drafting of a proper bill, for the protection of Indian labour emigrants to the Straits Settlements, proved to be a long drawn process. Pending permanent arrangements, employers in the Straits remained vulnerable. The flow of labour was frequently disrupted when alleged malpractices by recruiters and shipping agencies were discovered by officials in Negapatnam.¹⁹ In late 1873, reports of atrocities on Indian labourers at the Tassek, Alma, and Malakoff estates in Province Wellesley also raised concerns of a break in Indian labour supply.²⁰ As news of these incidents spread to London, the Colonial Office, that had hitherto been sympathetic to the labour concerns of the Straits, attacked the Straits Government for the 'habitual disregard of ... the health of the coolie ... and of a system of brutal cruelty and ill-treatment'.²¹ The Straits Government, now isolated in its negotiations with the Government of India, was forced to concede to the demands of Indian authorities. The agreement formed the basis for Indian Emigration Act V in 1877, which was to become the legal framework for Indian labour emigration to the Straits for the next seven years.²²

The 1877 Indian Emigration Act was modelled after ordinances used for other British plantation colonies. At Negapatnam, an Emigration Agent for labour to the Straits had to be appointed. Every labour emigrant, with the exception of those who left independently and with their own means, would be contracted for an initial period of up to three years. A magistrate would confirm that labourers went willingly and understood the conditions. Colonial officials were required to inspect estates to ensure that labourers were being treated fairly—a measure that paved the way for the establishment of the Indian Immigration Department in the Straits in 1879.²³

The requirements of the Act were clearly problematic when applied to the Straits. Only labourers who came under the 'protective'

guidelines of the indentured contract, i.e., 'statute immigrants', could receive assistance to emigrate from British India. The emigration of non-statute labourers who received 'an advance or ... [had] their passage and subsistence paid, and ... [made] some sort of agreement or engagement as to future payment' was prohibited.²⁴ Most crucially, barring special exemption, indentured labourers were to be employed *only* in the plantation sector.

In effect, the new regulations ignored the variety of employment that Indian labourers engaged in, in ports like Singapore. The severe constraint on the supply of Indian labour in the non-agricultural sector resulted in desperate recruiters again circumventing controls by getting assisted labourers to pose as 'voluntary' passengers. Indeed, immigration records reveal that during this period, the number of so-called 'voluntary' passengers from India to the Straits far exceeded those who were indentured (see Table 3.1). Worse still, because immigrant labourers in urban sectors were posing as voluntary emigrants, they fell outside the purview of the protective mechanisms that had been put in place for indentured labour. Neither were plantation owners satisfied with the arrangement—indentured labourers for whom they had provided advances were often being 'crimped' to other locations and vocations upon their arrival in the Straits.

Easing Controls and New Initiatives

By the early 1880s, the difficulties caused by the existing regulations, alongside the British expansion in the Malay States and the development of the plantation economy there, intensified demands to ease restrictions on Indian labour migration. These demands came at a time when the Indian Government had, following the experience of the Great Indian Famine, become more amenable to accepting a 'more liberal and positive attitude' towards Indian labour migration.²⁵ The move to repeal restrictions was aided by favourable reports on the conditions of indentured labourers in the Straits.²⁶ Additionally the Straits Settlements, in 1882, had also strengthened the legal framework for protecting immigrant labourers in the colony by passing a general labour law, i.e., Labour Contracts Ordinance I.

In 1884, following the enactment of Straits Settlements Immigration Ordinance V that maintained safeguards for Indian statute immigrants,

Table 3.1 Indian Immigrant Arrivals in the Straits Settlements (1880–96)

	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888
Indentured labourers	1,191	879	1,452	1,450	1,539	1,642	2,748	4,736	4,684
Dependents	107	159	209	176	177	49	233	310	317
Other immigrants	3,755	5,769	8,276	8,979	14,365	19,819	17,316	12,156	15,812
Total arrivals	5053	6,807	9,937	10,605	16,081	21,510	20,297	17,202	20,813
	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	
Indentured labourers	2,747	2,960	3,443	1,628	2,106	1,688	1,549	2,652	
Dependents	293	172	293	423	237	113	88	158	
Immigrants	15,285	15,341	26,466	16,370	15,877	13,155	14,368	17,340	
Total arrivals	18,325	18,473	30,202	18,421	18,220	14,956	16,005	20,150	

Source: CO276/24, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1891, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 27 April 1892, 1399;

CO275/53, Annual Report on Indian Immigration, for the Year 1896, *Straits Settlements Annual Report* 1896, 110. The records until 1890 suggest that the numbers included Indians who arrived from Calcutta and Rangoon as well. It is unclear if the figures from 1891 onwards took into account Indian immigration from outside the Madras Presidency.

the Indian Government agreed to rescind its restrictions. A variety of assisted methods to recruit labour were legalized. Employers in the Straits—whether in the agricultural or non-agricultural sector—could now engage private recruiters, or their own *kanganis* to procure labourers through advances and payment of their transportation costs. While statute immigrants were governed by Ordinance V of 1884, the protection of other labourers came under the purview of the general labour law for the Straits Settlements. The latter specified that labourers engaged ‘in trades, service, menial employment & c’, who were provided with advances, could be subject to a written contract, which was usually for a shorter period of one year.²⁷ The ordinance also recognized verbal contracts. If the labourer refused to comply to the terms of the verbal contract, by, for example, not commencing service or absenting himself, the employer could issue a private summons. In theory, verbal contracts could be terminated with a month’s notice. That said, employers and labour contractors could levy debt charges to justify wage deductions and maintain a hold on the labourer over longer periods. Indeed, the only nominal provision that the Straits Settlements made, in exchange for the rescinding of Indian restrictions, was to put in place mechanisms to prevent these labourers from being siphoned off to ‘countries having no convention with the Government of India’, specifically the Dutch East Indies.²⁸

The lifting of restrictions in 1884 resulted in a sharp increase in Indian labour immigration to the Straits Settlements (see Table 3.1). By the late 1880s even employers who hitherto depended on indentured immigrants began turning to other methods to procure Indian labour in part because these were subject to relatively lax regulation. Paradoxically, after the 1884 Ordinance, Indian labourers who were not statute immigrants were (mis)labelled by the Indian Immigration Department as free or voluntary labourers. In practice the situation of these Indian labourers was far from free. Worse still, the purview of officials in the Indian Immigration Department in the Straits was limited to checking the conditions of only statute immigrants.²⁹ While, over time, the protective function of the Department extended to other forms of assisted Indian labour, this remained confined to those employed in agricultural work on estates. Indeed, till the advent of World War II, few, if any, checks were conducted on the conditions of Indian labour in urban settings like Singapore.

While the 1884 agreement eased regulations, this did not guarantee a supply sufficient to meet the enormous demand for Indian labour in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States. During this period, the development of the plantation sector in the Malay States was phenomenal—first in the cultivation of sugar, coffee, tapioca, and tea in the late nineteenth century, and then followed by the exponential increase in rubber estates from the early twentieth century. While the demand for Indian labour in the agricultural sector in Singapore only increased after the first decade of the twentieth century—following the expansion of rubber plantations here—the burgeoning Singapore economy had from the late nineteenth century already developed into a major distributor for the produce of the Malay States, thus requiring even more Indian labour for a variety of sectors, including transportation, the port and harbour, public works, and the municipality.

There were also important political considerations that triggered the call for more Indian labour. Colonial officials were concerned about the need to ‘balance’ the exponential increase in the number of Chinese inhabitants by recruiting from other sources. This was clearly articulated by Governor Frederick Weld in 1887: ‘I am ... anxious for political reasons that the great preponderance of the Chinese over any other race in these Settlements,... should be counter-balanced ... by the influx of Indian and other nationalities.’³⁰ Nowhere in the Straits was this more evident than in Singapore. In the 1870s and 1880s, the number of Chinese in Singapore had grown rapidly, while, with the restrictions on Indian labour migration in the concomitant period, the latter’s share of the total population had declined to just 8.7 per cent of the total population in 1881.³¹

The need for active measures to encourage Indian labour migration also grew out of the competition, from Burma and Ceylon, for Indian labour. The movement of Indian labour to Burma, a part of British India, was effectively not regulated, and transportation costs to Rangoon were lower. It was also difficult for the Straits Settlements to compete with Ceylon for Indian labour as it was ‘geographically almost a part of India, its climate and conditions thoroughly known, and with the advantage of uninterrupted intercourse from time immemorial, Ceylon must present greater attractions to the coolly than can be possible with the Straits’.³²

The measures put in place by the Straits authorities to encourage Indian labour immigration evolved over time. Sandhu informs that

advertisements were inserted in vernacular newspapers in which the Straits Settlements and the Malay States were represented as 'the land of opportunity and plenty'.³³ The Indian Immigration Department in the Straits also encouraged recruitment in southern India beyond the district of Tanjore. These efforts were aided by the extension of railways in the Madras Presidency so that recruitment was also done from the Tamil-speaking districts such as Trichinopoly, Madura, Salem, Coimbatore, Tinnevely, as well as the Telugu-speaking district of Nellore, and the Kannada-speaking district of Mysore. As communications improved, recruitment was extended to northern districts such as 'Godavery [and] Vizagapatam'.³⁴

Periodically there were initiatives to recruit labour from beyond the Madras Presidency. Most came via Calcutta, although attempts were also made to procure labourers from the Princely State of Hyderabad and the Bombay Presidency. The bid to procure labour migrants from these locations was however abandoned when the Indian Government issued a stern warning in 1902:

The Madras Presidency affords an ample field for recruitment and is the natural source of labour supply for the Straits Settlements. If it is found that the supply of coolies is insufficient, the Government of India apprehends that the reason will be found in the fact that the terms offered are not sufficiently attractive.³⁵

Notwithstanding the limitation, 'free' Indian labourers did arrive from areas beyond the Madras Presidency. The Acting Protector of Indian Immigrants in 1896 conceded that 'there is considerable [Indian] immigration by vessels arriving from Calcutta and Rangoon'.³⁶ Unfortunately, no proper record of these immigrants was kept by the Straits authorities, as the Indian Immigration Department was only recording Indian immigrants that arrived from 'Southern India' (see Table 3.2).

Beyond expanding the area of recruitment, increasing the number of Indian labour emigrants was also dependent on lowering transportation costs. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Straits Settlements was occasionally able to advantage from competition between rival liners that lowered shipping fares. The Straits Government also explored the possibility of a more direct method of lowering fares by subsidizing steamships. In June 1887, an agreement was reached with the steamship line of Messrs. Huttenbach, Liebert & Co. In exchange for the subsidy, the fare

Table 3.2 Immigrant Arrivals from Southern India to the Straits Settlements (1897–1938)

Year	Indentured Immigrants	Labourers with Aided Passage	Other Immigrants (Labour)	Other Immigrants (Trades & Misc. non- labour)	Total
1897	2,599	–	12,000*	6,000*	20,599
1898	2,989	N.A.	10,551*	5,274*	18,814
1899	4,677	2,217	8,058*	4,029*	18,981
1900	7,616	7,052	15,908*	7,954*	38,530
1901	2,785	3,476	14,665*	7,333*	28,259
1902	2,430	1,595	10,811*	5,406*	20,242
1903	572	1,980	12,985*	6,493*	22,030
1904	2,670	3,527	16,336*	8,168*	30,701
1905	4,823	7,686	18,020*	9,010*	39,539
1906	3,674	20,215	18,768*	9,384*	52,041
1907	5,499	23,121	21,281*	10,641*	60,542
1908	5,456	20,049	19,345*	9,672*	54,522
1909	4,119	20,289	16,939*	8,470*	49,817
1910	2,523	56,002	16,799*	8,399*	83,723
1911	–	78,356	20,077*	10,038*	108,471
1912	–	73,671	22,171*	11,086*	106,928
1913	–	91,236	18,231*	9,116*	118,583
1914	–	36,905	9,541*	4,771*	51,217
1915	–	54,881	13,628*	6,814*	75,323
1916	–	72,091	16,943	6,532	95,566
1917	–	78,407	7,985	3,685	90,077
1918	–	55,583	6,193	3,515	65,291
1919	–	88,021	7,780	5,632	101,433
1920	–	78,855	8,812	7,553	95,220
1921	–	15,413	18,750	11,510	45,673
1922	–	38,336	12,630	7,780	58,746
1923	–	30,234	10,608	8,860	49,702
1924	–	43,147	11,953	6,952	62,052
1925	–	70,198	13,209	7,301	90,708
1926	–	149,414	15,963	9,418	174,795
1927	–	123,826	21,349	10,957	156,132
1928	–	27,240	25,566	10,266	63,072
1929	–	82,183	22,825	9,244	114,252

(Cont'd)

Table 3.2 (Cont'd)

Year	Indentured Immigrants	Labourers with Aided Passage	Other Immigrants (Labour)	Other Immigrants (Trades & Misc. non- labour)	Total
1930	—	42,771	19,463	6,880	69,114
1931	—	111	12,003	7,578	19,692
1932	—	17	6,518	11,199	17,734
1933	—	20	9,222	11,000	20,242
1934	—	45,469	27,306	17,053	89,828
1935	—	20,771	25,625	18,795	65,191
1936	—	3,754	24,104	15,333	43,191
1937	—	54,849	50,128	17,589	122,566
1938	—	4,580	16,332	23,295	44,207

Source: CO275, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records* from 1897 to 1938.

In 1898, separate figures were not recorded for labourers provided with an aided-passage tickets. Dependents of indentured labourers and labourers with aided passage tickets have been included in the figure for 'Other Immigrants'. Figures with an (*) are based on estimates by the Indian Immigration Department that two-thirds of 'Other Immigrants' comprised labourers, the figure for total arrivals nonetheless are actual. Actual figures for 'Other Immigrants (Labour)' and 'Other Immigrants (Traders/Professionals etc.)' are only available from 1916. The figures include labourers who upon arriving in the Straits Settlements would have been destined to work in the Malay States.

of statute immigrants and 'free' labour immigrants was fixed at Rs 8, from Negapatnam to Penang, and Rs 11 for the journey to Singapore, and it was agreed that charges for all other deck passengers would not exceed Rs 10 and Rs 13 respectively.³⁷

In January 1908, the Government of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States³⁸ introduced the Tamil Immigration Fund, which proved to be the most significant initiative in increasing the supply of Indian labour. The fund, raised through a quarterly levy on employers of Tamil labour was used to provide a large number of labourers and their families with train fares from their district of origin to the depot in Negapatnam or Madras, as well as free steamship tickets from there to Penang or Port Swettenham. In 1924, to further prop the emigration of labourers from the Madras Presidency, the Indian

Immigration Committee offered a bonus of \$2 for every adult and \$1 for every minor, awarded on arrival in the Straits Settlements.³⁹

Although the Tamil Immigration Fund quickly emerged as a powerful instrument in encouraging labour immigration, employers of Indian labour in Singapore were initially excluded from the scheme because of the notion that the costs of paying the passage of Indian labourers to Singapore would be far greater than the revenue gained.⁴⁰ Consequently, in the initial years of the system, none of the workers getting aided passage were transported directly to Singapore. Employers in Singapore were not particularly perturbed because labourers who received aided passage could easily be ‘crimped’ off to the island after a short stint at their initial destination. As the editor of *The Straits Times* forthrightly suggested, ‘Singapore is not keen on cooperation in obtaining [Indian] labour, so long as the addition of a dollar or two a month will induce one’s neighbours coolies to leave him and come to us.’⁴¹ For nearly a decade after its inception, employers in Singapore were able to take advantage of this loophole to indirectly procure labourers without having to bear the cost of the levy. It was not until members of the Indian Immigration Committee protested that employers of Indian labour in Singapore joined the scheme in 1917.⁴²

Attacks on Assisted Labour Immigration

The agreement by the Indian Government to lift restrictions on Indian labour migration in 1884 saw a lengthy period of relatively uninhibited movement of labour from the Madras Presidency. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the indenture system faced scathing attacks from British liberals and Indian nationalists. In 1905, the Benares session of the Indian National Congress called for a ban of the system,⁴³ which was perceived by nationalists as inhumane and ‘an affront to India, a disgrace to its citizens.’⁴⁴ The fate of Indian indentured immigration to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States was sealed in 1910, when the Sanderson Committee in London, which audited the system, concluded that the high mortality rate among indentured labourers was ‘not satisfactory.’⁴⁵ The final Indian indentured contract in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States expired in 1913.⁴⁶

This closure however did not seriously impede the movement of Indian labour because, by this time, other methods of procuring labour

for the Straits Settlements and the Malay States had grown far more significant. That being said, after the ban on indentured immigration, nationalists and reformers in India focused on attacking other forms of assisted immigration, especially the kangani system of recruiting labour. To placate these attacks, the Indian Government passed the 1922 Immigration Act, marking a return of Indian restrictions on labour emigration to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States. A more balanced gender ratio for assisted labour was posited, i.e., 40 women for every 60 male immigrants. Under the Act, an Agent of the Government of India was appointed in Malaya, to safeguard the interests of Indian emigrants. The Act also stipulated that any assisted immigrant seeking to return to India for health reasons or because 'he has been unjustly treated by his employer...' was to be repatriated at the cost of the Government of the Straits Settlements.⁴⁷

In practice the stricter regulations were not initially stringently applied, and so they had no real impact on Indian labour immigration. However, a real decline in labour immigration was recorded following the onset of the Great Depression that severely affected the economy of the region. The Depression effectively put a stop to assisted migration and led to the repatriation of large numbers of labourers from the region.⁴⁸ The re-emergence of kangani recruitment after the economic recovery also proved short-lived. In 1936, a report by Srinivasa Sastri, the representative of the Indian Government who investigated the conditions of Indian labour in British Malaya, called for the abolishment of all forms of assisted labour immigration on the grounds that 'the labourer may be under some concealed obligation'.⁴⁹ Although assisted forms of labour emigration were not immediately abolished, the Shastri report was instrumental in initiating the demand by the Government of India for a restoration of Indian labour wages to levels prior to the Depression. When some rubber planters refused to comply, the Government of India, advised by Indian leaders in Malaya, responded by banning all forms of assisted labour migration to British Malaya in September 1938.⁵⁰

Specific Conditions in the Port City

In many respects the typology and conditions of Indian labourers in Singapore was more complex than the predominantly estate labour

force employed in the Malay Peninsula. Only a small number were employed in agriculture although an increase was recorded when large rubber plantations were established in Singapore after the first decade of the twentieth century. The mainstay of the Indian labour force in the port city was engaged in the municipality, public works, the harbour, railways, factories, and from the late 1920s at the Naval Base.

Indian labour in Singapore was procured through various formal and informal mechanisms: indentured labour; assisted labour, including the kangani system and subsidies for labourers by the Tamil Immigration Fund; 'unassisted' migrants; labourers 'crimped' from other parts of the Straits Settlements and the Peninsula; and those who upon completing, or indeed even escaping, from their contracts in plantations in the Malay States, arrived here. The proportion of voluntary Indian labour immigrants was higher in Singapore when compared to the Peninsula, although few of these would have been *genuine* voluntary emigrants. Many would have been offered advances and brought in surreptitiously to get around strict regulations. Others still would have received assistance by family and kinsmen that was in part supported by the long-standing Indian presence here. Because Indian and Straits authorities were focused primarily on protecting estate labourers, labour exploitation in the port city, particularly through the labour contractor system—a schema for employing labour, particularly relevant in urban areas—went largely unchecked.

Indentured Labour

During this period, Indian indentured labour was regulated under two different legal frameworks. The first, for 'statute immigrants', was developed on the basis of negotiations from the 1870s between the Government of the Straits Settlements and the Governments of India and the Madras Presidency—encapsulated in Straits Settlements Ordinance V of 1884. Labourers subject to a written contract under this Ordinance were under the purview of the Indian Immigration Department. In addition, from 1882 to 1913—a different type of written contract was also employed based on the general labour law for the Straits Settlements. The Indian Immigration Department however did not keep records of the latter because these labourers were outside the department's purview, and as such, of its protective custody.

Sandhu posits that over the period between 1872 and 1910, the average number of Indian labourers recruited annually as statute immigrants to the Straits Settlements and the Peninsula was approximately 3400.⁵¹ The overwhelming majority were Tamils alongside a smaller number of Telugu speakers. Most were untouchable or low-caste Hindu agricultural workers, as officers superintending emigration to the Straits Settlements at Negapatnam and at ports closer to Madras city were warned to reject 'Brahmins, Barbers, Baniahs, Muhammadans, Shop-keepers, Toddy-drawers, Bangle-makers, Weavers, Beggars' even 'if they are found physically fit'.⁵²

A miniscule proportion of these statute immigrants, however, arrived in Singapore. Prior to 1880, no proper record of their distribution in the Straits existed. While there were certainly Indian agricultural labourers in Singapore in the 1870s, for example, at a European tapioca estate in Bukit Timah,⁵³ it is unclear if these were indentured. Between 1880 and 1910, when proper records were kept by the Indian Immigration Department, only 555 statute labourers (including 11 dependents) were recruited for work in Singapore (see Table 3.3). Part of the reason for the small number was that an early attempt at employing regulated indentured labour for agricultural activities had proven disastrous. Between 1885 and 1887, 64 indentured labourers were recruited for the De Silva estate in Pulau Ubin. The estate's records clearly suggested that workers were dissatisfied. Between 1885 and 1887 there were 59 attempted desertions.⁵⁴ In 1887, H. A. Thompson, the acting Indian Immigration Agent declared in exasperation that 'the attempt to work statute immigrants in Singapore has been a complete failure, as 15 out of 24 men who entered into contracts have absconded to Johor, where they cannot be arrested.'⁵⁵ The ease with which indentured labourers could cross over to Johor was not the only cause of desertion. The conditions on the estate were appalling. In 1886, the mortality rate of Indian indentured labourers at Pulau Ubin exceeded all other estates in the Straits Settlements where indentured labour was employed.⁵⁶

Singapore received her next batch of statute immigrants in 1900. Over a period of three years, 442 labourers (including 11 dependents) were recruited for the construction of the Singapore-Johor railway. The record of that experiment proved to be as disastrous as the experience on Pulau Ubin. The project began ominously. Of the 325 labourers

Table 3.3 Statute Immigrants in Singapore (1880–1910)

Year	Area/Vocation	No. Arrived	No. Remaining at Year End	No. of Deaths	No. of Hospitalizations in the Year
1885	Pulau Ubin Estate/Agriculture	40	36	–	2
1886	Pulau Ubin Estate/Agriculture	–	24	2	10
1887	Pulau Ubin, B.P. De Silva Estate/Agriculture	24	7	–	1
1900	Singapore-Johor Railway Works	306 (inc. 11 dependents)	259	8	19
1901	Singapore-Johor Railway Works	–	156	32	389
1902	Singapore-Johor Railway Works	136	95	7	348
1905	Public Works Department	49	38	1	–
	Total	555			

Source: CO276/17, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1885, *Supplement to the Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 22 April 1886, 604; CO275/32, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1886, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1886, 318; CO275/33, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1887, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1887, 99; CO275/61, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1900, 201; CO275/64, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1901, 129; CO275/66, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1905, 99. The 1902 record speaks of 182 indentured labourers being sent to Singapore, but only 136 were employed here, the remainder were sent to work for the Malacca Public Works Department.

originally recruited, several died on the journey from Madras to the Straits. Upon their arrival in Penang, many partook in a daring escape:

...MUTHUSAMY... induced a number of the Statute Immigrants recruited for the Singapore-Johor Railway works to abscond from the cattle quarantine shed at Brick Kiln Road [in Penang] ... a Police Guard had been specially set to prevent coolies absconding. The watchman however went to sleep [and] ... during the night more than twenty coolies walked out in a batch.... Eight of them were eventually recovered...⁵⁷

Matters deteriorated further when these indentured labourers reached Singapore. On 4 October 1900, approximately a hundred of these labourers went on strike, marching to the government offices in town to represent their grievances. An enquiry into their grouses found that in addition to 'objections to the system of food supply adopted by the Railway authorities', the key factor that propelled the strike was

an unfortunate mistake.... The first batch of coolies (25 in number) were engaged at a higher rate of wages than the second (137 in number). The former were to receive under their agreements 22 cents a day for males and 20 cents for females, the latter 20 cents a day all round.... In consequence of this the men of the second batch became discontented.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding the legitimacy of their claims, colonial authorities came down hard on the 'ringleaders', five of whom were imprisoned.

Colonial records also reveal the atrocious work conditions on the Singapore-Johor railway. Eight deaths occurred in the first six months—the poorest record in the Straits Settlements that year. Officials attributed this to the nature of work that 'consisted mainly in excavation of new soil which is always liable to set free the germs of Malaria in tropical climates...' ⁵⁹ Appalled by the high mortality rate, the Superintendent of Indian Immigrants remonstrated against the use of agricultural labourers for railway construction, but little came of the protest. In 1901, the mortality rate escalated, claiming 32 lives. Colonial officials conceded that 'the health of the Railway coolies was very bad and the death-rate abnormally high' due to a lack of 'proper medical treatment'.⁶⁰ At the same time, they sought to deflect responsibility to the recruiting agency in Negapatnam, suggesting that '[the high mortality rate] is mainly attributable to the unusually bad physique of the coolies who were recruited.... Many of them were half starved on arrival, and never really recovered'.⁶¹

In a desperate attempt to escape their circumstances, 49 labourers absconded between 1900 and 1902. Most merged into the general population. Frustrated colonial officials conceded that, because of proximity of the town, 'the facilities for final escape are so great in Singapore'.⁶² Other labourers working on the railway tracks sought to get out through legal methods, 128 'redeeming' their contracts through repayment as soon as possible, and 14 others had their contracts cancelled through 'mutual consent'.⁶³ With the exception of 49 labourers who were procured for the Public Works Department in 1905, the use of statute immigrants in Singapore was discontinued.

Unlike statute immigrants, there is scanty information on Indian labourers subject to written contracts based on the general labour law in the colony. Paradoxically, whatever little information that can be traced of these labourers exists in the records of the Chinese Protectorate in Singapore. According to these records, from 1887 to 1913, some 3,200 Indian labourers in Singapore were subject to a written contract under the general labour law in the colony.⁶⁴ However, the overwhelming majority of these labourers—particularly after 1900—were not contracted to work in Singapore per se. Instead, they were usually dispatched, after signing the contract, to other locations, such as Dutch Borneo, the Christmas Islands, the East Coast states of the Malay Peninsula, Palembang, Johor, and the Riau Islands. The final written contract for an Indian labourer under the general labour law was executed in 1913, when a Tamil labourer was indentured to work in the Christmas Islands.⁶⁵

Other Types of Assisted Labour

Between 1884 and the Great Depression, labourers, who were not under the indenture contract but nevertheless received assistance through formal mechanisms, comprised the mainstay of Indian labourers in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States.⁶⁶ The importance of these systems in procuring labour for Singapore, though, is less clear partly because of the paucity of records on those employed outside the agricultural sector. Two overarching categories can be used to demarcate the assisted labourers who were not under an indenture contract: assisted 'free' labour and assisted 'independent' labour.

Assisted 'Free' Labour Assisted free labourers were recruited through a variety of mechanisms. Employers were known to go directly to India and procure labour, although the more common practice was to use private recruiters, or to deploy existing Indian supervisory staff—that is, usually *kanganis* but also *tindals* or *maistries*—for the purpose. Assisted free labourers were usually bound to a verbal contract under the general labour law, whereby the failure of labourers to perform his/her duties was—unlike indenture—not considered a penal offence, but a civil one. The wages of these labourers were assumed to be governed by the market, and *theoretically* if the labourer was dissatisfied with the wage rate, or of the conditions of labour, they could resign after providing a one-month notice.

In reality, the situation of these labourers was precarious. Indian Immigration Department officials were aware of the difficulties confronting these labourers but could not intercede as they fell outside the purview of the Department:

The so-called free labourers often endure ... far more [hardship] than the statute immigrants whose footsteps are guarded at every turn. The people I refer to are those who ... are employed ... in the towns.... No attempt has hitherto been made to do anything for them, and their lot is often of the hardest.⁶⁷

In 1898, A. H. Capper, the Indian Immigration Agent, requested that the Indian Immigration Department take charge of protecting free labourers, arguing that 'I fail to see in what essential particular these coolies were more free than statute immigrants; in fact I consider that, if anything, the former are in more need of protection than the latter.'⁶⁸ These arguments fell on deaf ears. In any case, for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the shorthanded Indian Immigration Department did not have the wherewithal to provide protection for free labourers. After the advent of the Tamil Immigration Fund, the Department did exercise greater checks on assisted free labour, although their duties remained mainly confined to the large agricultural estates and little was done to inspect the conditions of those working in urban areas.

A study of the *kangani* system—a method of recruiting labour from the Madras Presidency—is useful in illustrating how the procurement of assisted free labourers through supervisory staff tended to operate. The system, used initially in Ceylon, was employed in the Straits

Settlements and the Malay States mainly for recruiting labourers for coffee and, later, rubber plantations.⁶⁹ By 1905, the kangani system had emerged as the most important instrument for assisted free Indian labour immigration to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States.

In Singapore, colonial records suggest that kanganis were used to procure Tamil labour for coffee and pepper estates in Pulau Ubin in the 1880s.⁷⁰ That said, records of kangani recruitment, kept only after the turn of the century, show that in Singapore, labour recruitment from India by licensed kanganis was significant only from 1918 to 1930 (see Table 3.4). The recorded number of kangani recruited labourers for estates in Singapore over that period was 1129. The proportion of women recruited through the kangani system in Singapore was miniscule. Indeed, even after the 1922 Indian Emigration Act stipulation of the requirement to have at least two female migrants for every three assisted male immigrants,⁷¹ the rule was ignored in Singapore. Most kangani recruited labourers were employed on rubber plantations in Lim Chu Kang, Mandai, Nee Soon, Pasir Panjang, Seletar, Sembawang, and Woodlands, where kanganis were crucial in

Table 3.4 Labourers in Singapore Recruited by Licensed Kanganis (1918–30)

Year	M	F	Total
1918	162	14	176
1919	204	19	223
1920	154	13	167
1921	4	2	6
1922	56	11	67
1923	–	–	–
1924	7	5	12
1925	20	–	20
1926	8	4	12
1927	85	23	108
1928	12	9	21
1929	175	50	225
1930	64	28	92
Total	951	178	1129

Source: CO275, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records* from 1918 to 1930. The Indian Immigration Department in the Straits only maintained records of labourers recruited by kanganis in the Straits Settlements after 1899. From then till 1917, no kangani-recruited labourers were recorded in Singapore.

the supervision of labour.⁷² The official record of kangani recruited labour in Singapore is, however, certainly an underestimate, since recruitment by unlicensed kanganis was excluded. Also, official records did not account for Indian labourers who were procured by kanganis from other parts of the Straits Settlements and from the Malay States, and brought to Singapore.

When compared to indenture, the kangani system afforded ostensible advantages to employers and, seemingly, also for labourers. For plantation owners, recruiting through the kangani was cheaper than using commercial firms based in India, and since he would supervise them, the kangani had a vested interest in ensuring the 'quality' of recruits. For labourers too, aspects of the system were preferable. For one, unlike indenture, desertion could only be subject to civil proceedings. The kangani was also often viewed as a guardian, usually a man of respect from his/her own village, and this provided some support to the newly recruited labourer, at least during the initial period of adaptation. Since the kanganis' success in recruitment was dependent on his stature in the village, this in turn acted as a check on abuse, as news of ill treatment would filter back to the 'homeland'.

That being said, the system contained its own specific forms of exploitation. Although such labourers were officially designated as free, they were often subjected to an extended period of service—usually two years—until it was deemed that they had cleared their 'debt account', which comprised costs accrued in the process of recruitment, travel and living expenses. Moreover, since the kangani was not just a recruiter of labour but also a supervisor on the estate, he was bound to the employer, both for his position and the extent of his wages since he received a salary and a commission per day for every labourer that worked. Given these imperatives, it was not uncommon for the kangani to press labourers to work even when they were ill. Kanganis, by using the excuse of debt repayment, were known to collect sums beyond the monies owed to them and their hold over the labourer extended to the private realm, since he 'virtually controlled the domestic affairs of all labourers under him'.⁷³ A Labour Commission in Singapore reported that:

The [kangani became] ... the person on whom the labourers were completely dependent for work, wages and accommodation. The workers would become indebted to him and, because of low wages, could with difficulty redeem their indebtedness and assume free economic status.

Furthermore, recruitment of Indian labour took place by province and village and ... caste status, kept the various groups relatively immobile.⁷⁴

Assisted Independent Labour Assisted independent labour differed from assisted free labour in that the system was designed to reduce dependence on recruiters, with the Tamil Immigration Fund providing a paid passage for labourers. In the early years, nearly all of these labourers were recorded as employed in other parts of the Straits, the Federated Malay States or Johor. It was only from 1917, when employers in Singapore

Table 3.5 'Independent' Labourers in Singapore Assisted by the Tamil Immigration Fund (1917–38)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1917	14	–	14
1918	75	7	82
1919	8	2	10
1920	10	2	12
1921	1	–	1
1922	–	–	0
1923	–	–	0
1924	–	–	0
1925	–	–	0
1926	35	2	37
1927	133	33	166
1928	28	9	37
1929	2,195	203	2,398
1930	1,664	86	1,750
1931	–	1	1
1932	–	–	–
1933	–	–	–
1934	85	10	95
1935	41	26	67
1936	5	2	7
1937	287	15	302
1938	39	9	48
Total	4,620	407	5,027

Source: CO275, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records* from 1917 to 1938. Singapore employers did not participate in the Tamil Immigration Fund prior to 1917.

began to participate in the Tamil Immigration Fund, that assisted independent labourers were recorded as arriving here directly (see Table 3.5).

In Singapore, records suggest that the number of independent labourers who arrived through the paid-passage system was larger than other forms of assisted labour migration. The ethnic and religious profile of labourers who availed the Fund was similar to that of other assisted systems, i.e., comprising predominantly Adi Dravidas and lower-caste Tamils. The 1922 Indian Emigration Act's requirement for a 60:40 men to women ratio was ignored. Indeed, women accounted for only 8 per cent of the total assisted independent labourers who arrived here. Oral testimonies suggest most were procured to work as dockyard workers tied to the Singapore Harbour Board, as menial labour in the municipalities and public works, construction workers in the public works department, factory workers at Alexandra Brick Works, and as general labourers at the British Naval Base in Sembawang.⁷⁵

Assisted independent labourers, like most other labourers in Singapore during this period, would have been subject to the general labour laws of the colony. Many would have been subject to the abuses of the labour contractor system that was commonly used to employ labour in urban centres in the region. These conditions and the characteristics of the labour contractor system are discussed later in this chapter.

Unassisted and Other Miscellaneous Types of Indian Labour

From 1867 to the outbreak of World War II, unassisted immigrants comprised a substantially larger proportion of the Indian labour force in Singapore when compared to the Malay States. The key difference between unassisted labour emigrants and assisted independent labourers was that the former did not receive assistance through formal mechanisms such as an aided passage from the Tamil Immigration Fund. That is not to say that unassisted Indian labour did not avail to help in emigrating. Immigration through social networks had developed more extensively in Singapore than in the Malay States, precisely because of the long-standing Indian presence here. Many 'established' emigrants through frequent sojourns to the 'homeland' were known to provide or loan passage-costs and other expenses, and to aid the new migrant in finding accommodation and work. Emigrants who arrived through these social networks featured in a wide variety of jobs, including

stevedores, lighter-men, harbour workers, domestic servants, labourers for the municipality and public works, cooks, laundry-men, dairymen, and cattle farmers.

Although separate records of the movement of unassisted labour to Singapore were not kept, a sense of their distinctive background can be deciphered on the basis of records for the Straits Settlements as a whole. The ethnic and religious profile of unassisted labour migrants was more diverse when compared to indentured and other assisted forms of labour. Amongst these were labourers arriving via Calcutta, Bombay, and Rangoon. Yet, even in the case of unassisted labourers, the largest numbers came from the Madras Presidency. Indeed, records show that even when extensive formal mechanisms of assistance were in place, a considerable proportion of passengers arriving from Madras did not receive any formal assistance. While some of these would have comprised merchants, petty traders, skilled workers and educated personnel, late nineteenth century audits of the profile of unassisted passengers arriving from Madras suggested that between 60 to 70 per cent of these were in effect labourers. These records further reveal that unlike assisted labour, Muslims made up a considerable proportion of unassisted labour—Hindu males comprising 44.2 per cent, Muslim males accounting for 30.74 per cent, and females comprising 6.96 per cent, although the record does not detail the religious background of women.⁷⁶ Even after the advent of the Tamil Immigration Fund, large numbers of labourers from Madras did not receive aided-passage tickets. In the 1920s, Tamil Muslims arriving with their families from Kadayanallur, Thenkasi, Chenkottai, and Marathandapuram—a region affected by famine in the 1920s—comprised a significant portion of those who would have been counted as unassisted labourers.⁷⁷ When assisted immigration was banned in 1938, some labourers who had been repatriated following the onset of the Depression and sought to return also found ways to pay for their own passage, or convinced friends or family already settled in Singapore to remit money—ensuring that the movement of unassisted labour emigrants continued to feature until the advent of World War II.

The Labour Contractor System

Even though most Indian labourers in Singapore may not have suffered from the same disabilities associated with indenture and other

systems of assisted immigration employed for the plantation sector, nevertheless, working in the port city had its own disadvantages. In various sectors, labourers were only hired on a casual basis—so there was no guarantee of a fixed income. Moreover, unlike estates, responsibility for providing accommodation and food was not usually borne by employers. This was true even for the government departments where a significant proportion of labourers were required to find their own accommodation in exchange for a slightly higher—but insufficient to cover the cost of their lodging—remuneration.⁷⁸ Moreover, there were few employment opportunities for women in urban areas. In his 1936 report, Sastri averred that this was a serious problem in urban centres: 'On estates it is usual for the labourer's wife also to find employment either as a tapper or as a weeder. She thus makes a material contribution to the family income. In Government employ, however, it is the

Table 3.6 Key Employers of Indian Labour in Singapore (1919)

Place of Employment	Number
Alexandra Brick factory	163
Ayer Gumaroo	32
Buges Rubber Works	48
Bukit Panjang	87
Bukit Sembawang	340
Bukit Timah	186
Mandai Tokong	85
Nah Giap Seng	22
Oriental Telephone & Electric Co.	27
Pasir Panjang	359
Perseverance	59
Seletar	384
Ulobri	431
Ulu Pandan	99
United Rubber Plantations	405
<u>Government Departments</u>	
Botanical Gardens	185
Harbour Board	1,457
Municipality	2,804
Public Works Department	606

Source: CO275/101, Labour Department, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1919, 405–6.

exception rather than the rule for women to find paid occupations, and the total income of a household is therefore, liable to be much less than in the case of estate labour.⁷⁹

Exploitative practices specific to urban centres like Singapore compounded the difficulties of working in the port city. The most significant of this was the ubiquitous labour contractor system that 'began to feature widely in Asian countries with the extension of the factory system, or where bodies of labour worked under *quasi*-factory conditions'.⁸⁰ The system developed extensively from the late nineteenth century, and a significant number of workers were hired through labour contractors engaged by principal employers to fulfil specific tasks. Various reasons underscored why employers turned to labour contractors: the employer may not have wanted to deal with the workmen directly; the job required only temporary labourers; the irregular nature of work and fluctuations in the demand for labour that made the permanent hire of labourers impractical; urgent work that required a significant amount of labour.⁸¹ In addition, hiring labour contractors also allowed the principal employer to devolve responsibility towards workers that were required by labour ordinances.

Theoretically, labour contractors functioned between employers and labourers, although in practice, the system comprised a complex web of intermediaries, including the contractor himself, a subcontractor, the *kepala* (head foremen) and, below them, *mandores* who took charge of labour gangs of various sizes. Collectively, the contractors' powers were extensive: '[The contractor] usually attended to a large number of functions. He may have been a skilled labourer or an overseer as well as the de facto recruiter of workers, exercising the powers of punishment, dismissal and the granting of leave to individual workers.'⁸² The labourers themselves were procured either by the contractor or his functionaries, who also had the power to terminate the workers' employment.

The extensive control exercised by the labour contractor and his subsidiaries led to a variety of abuses. A Commission of Inquiry into the system of contract labour noted that, '[the labour contractor] is often only a dealer in the commodity "man". He does not work himself. He sits in his office and merely sells labour. In very few cases does one discover among these people any sense of social responsibility to the labour they use and to the community at large.'⁸³ For the labourer, the system gave rise to insecurity since jobs tended to be on a short-term

basis. After the job was complete, the labourer was effectively made redundant and there was no guarantee of work especially when economic conditions were bleak. Even when the labourer had a job, his payment was usually dependent on the number of hours he actually worked, so, if the work was delayed because of bad weather, for example, the labourer would not have been entitled to the full salary for the day.

There were also manifest abuses, in terms of wage payment, in the labour contractor system. Salaries were delayed as only partial advances were provided by principal employers. In addition, because labour contractors or their subsidiaries were responsible for the payment of wages, it was not uncommon for deductions to be made from labourers' salaries. This was usually on account of providing accommodation and food in lodging houses maintained either by the labour contractor himself, or by his subordinates:

A large number of Indians ... are housed by a *kepala* or headman representing their association or village. He rents a house which he equips with a series of bunks and a kitchen. He houses these men and arranges their contract for labour ... to a contracting agent for a fixed sum per man and accepts their wages. The contractor gives them so many days work per month, the *kepala* houses them, feeds and clothes them and pays them a certain amount of pocket money, and arranges for remittance of the balance of their wages to their families in India. Few of these men ever see the true value of the fruits of their labour.⁸⁴

Inquiries into the labour contractor system suggest that labour contractors were also known to engage in lending to the labourer. Debt was exacerbated by the casual nature of labour, so that in times when there was no work, the labourer had little choice but to borrow so as to meet the expenses for lodging and food. This, in turn, added to wage deductions when jobs became available, and, beyond the principal amount owed, there were also interest payments that had accrued. In addition to wage deductions, there was a tendency for contractors to overwork labourers. Principal employers seldom supervised the work of labourers directly and were primarily concerned with timely job completion. Consequently, although the contractual amount was based on the actual number of labourers hired, the contractor was in a position to profit by hiring a lesser number of men who were in turn pressed to complete the job by working extra hours without proper compensation.

Unlike systems of assisted labour for the plantation sector, the concerns of the majority of Indian labourers in urban Singapore received little attention from the Indian Immigration Department. The numerous commissions that were promulgated to look into the conditions faced by Indian labourers ignored the concerns of these labourers in urban centres. Assumptions that the general labour law was sufficient to protect Indian labourers in the port city were misguided. Not only did labour outside plantations contain its own specific difficulties, the exploitative practices of the labour contractor system rendered ineffectual the protective mechanisms of the general labour law. The ban on assisted Indian immigration in 1938 also had little effect on limiting the hold of the system, which till the onset of World War II, continued to affect the conditions of Indian labour in the port city.

3.2 Educated Servicemen

From the transfer to the advent of World War II, the civil establishment in Singapore expanded exponentially. Turnbull posits that

when the India Office gave up Singapore in 1867, its government scarcely impinged on the life of the Asian population.... By 1941 ... the government had succeeded in bringing the whole community into its executive and judicial system, developing specialized departments of administration and making provisions for education, health and social welfare, which formed the foundation for the modern state.⁸⁵

An important change manifest in the administration after the transfer was the growing emphasis on procuring personnel with a measure of English education along with requisite managerial and technical skills, even for subordinate positions in the hierarchy. Concomitantly, the expanding private sector also required educated personnel as clerical staff and to function as intermediaries between European employers and labourers.

The pool of educated inhabitants in Singapore in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was clearly insufficient to meet the requirements of the burgeoning economy and administration. Although Indians had always been well represented in the small civil establishment in Singapore, few of those recruited prior to 1867 had received any measure of formal English education. While such education

had been introduced in Singapore in 1823, educational development had proceeded at a lackadaisical pace—the 1870 Select Committee, inquiring into the state of education in Singapore, concluded that progress had been slow.⁸⁶ Beyond educational infrastructure—the shortage in local educated personnel was also due to the transient nature of the Indian and Chinese population. Amongst the more settled Malays, English education continued to be viewed suspiciously well into the twentieth century due to concerns of conversion, because most English schools were run by Christian missionaries.⁸⁷

Given the limited local supply, Government departments and private employers were pressed to look elsewhere. Britain, Australia or New Zealand were not effective options as the pay-scale at the intermediate and junior levels in Singapore was not attractive.⁸⁸ Educated personnel from the subcontinent, however, provided some recourse. By the second half of the nineteenth century, English education had spread in colonial cities in South Asia through the initiative of the Christian missionaries and colonial governments there. In Jaffna alone, American missionaries had set up 93 schools by 1830 and education in northern Ceylon was further propped by Roman Catholic missionaries and the Colonial Government, so that by 1888 ‘almost every child in the Jaffna peninsula attended school’.⁸⁹ Although not at the same pace, significant progress in English education was also manifest in key administrative centres of the Indian Presidencies and Provinces.

For educated South Asians, service in the civil establishment had become an important avenue to reinforce family income and to enhance status. While initially the preference was to work in the subcontinent, by the late nineteenth century the limited opportunities in the highly competitive government services in India and Ceylon made it difficult for those who were educated to secure jobs equivalent to their qualifications. At the same time, higher salaries offered in the Straits Settlements, when compared to the subcontinent, was a significant pull factor. Sandhu posits that ‘wages offered to clerks, teachers and technical assistants ... were substantially higher than those prevailing in Ceylon and two, three and, occasionally, four times as high as those in India’.⁹⁰

The movement of educated personnel was facilitated by the connection between civil establishments here and the subcontinent. Although officers from the Indian civil service were gradually withdrawn after

1867, both the civil administrations of Ceylon and the Straits Settlements shared the same channel for the recruitment of their officers.⁹¹ High-ranking European officials appointed to the Straits Settlements, after a tour of duty in Ceylon, were known to encourage the movement of junior officials who they deemed as better qualified when compared to local candidates. Among these were J. W. W. Birch, responsible for bringing with him several Ceylonese ‘white-collared’ personnel; and Sir Cecil Smith, Governor of the Straits Settlements between 1889 and 1893, who encouraged the procurement of Ceylonese educated personnel.⁹² Similarly, in the private sector, European employers whose businesses had either expanded or relocated from the subcontinent to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States procured clerical and supervisory staff from these locations. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Government Departments in the Straits Settlements also recruited educated personnel directly from the subcontinent. Information on job vacancies in the Straits Settlements was published in newspapers and government gazettes in India and Ceylon.

These ‘white-collared’ workers were employed as clerical officers and Tamil interpreters in the Colonial Secretary’s office; as engineers, surveyors, station-masters on the railways, and as inspectors and supervisors on roads and communications. Others took up jobs as surveyors and engineers at the municipality and as health workers. Indians and the Ceylonese comprised the mainstay of Asian teachers in mission and government-aided English schools in Singapore.⁹³ They were also well represented in the postal services, public utilities, the accounts division, courts, the public works and survey department, and the treasury. In the private sector, many were employed as clerks and as middle management staff, who, when holding supervisory positions on estates, ranked above the kangani. By the second decade of the twentieth century, a considerable increase was also recorded in the number of doctors, lawyers, and journalists coming from India.⁹⁴

From the late nineteenth century till the end of World War I, the Ceylonese—mainly Tamils, but also Burghers and a sprinkling of Sinhalese—comprised the largest numbers of ‘white-collared’ personnel arriving from the subcontinent. During the inter-war period, their numbers were matched and, over time, surpassed by educated Malayali personnel. Many of these were upper-caste Hindus, but amongst their number were also Syrian Christians and Catholics.⁹⁵ Others from the

subcontinent that were recruited as 'white-collared' personnel included Tamil-speaking Brahmins and Christians from Madras, Bengalis, and a small number of Punjabis.

In some sectors, there was a tendency for specific groups to dominate 'white-collared' jobs at the intermediate and junior levels. For example, while educated Ceylonese Tamils could be found in all civil establishments, they were preponderant in the railways. Similarly, Malayalis comprised a major segment of the British Naval Base administrators. The dominant presence of these groups may have been linked to their ability to act as intermediaries with Tamil labourers, but this was not the only reason. Indeed, the pattern was revealing of the influence of social networking on the procurement of 'white-collared' personnel. Once individuals had secured a position in an establishment they would become key nodes to aid fellow educated kinsmen and co-ethnics to secure jobs there. In the case of the Ceylonese Tamils, a significant feature was also the tendency for alumni to aid in procuring personnel educated in their former schools.

The influence of these social networks certainly did raise concerns that 'local-born' candidates were being excluded from appointments in the civil establishment. This was evident even in the mid-1880s. A letter to *The Straits Times* forum averred that

the danger [in Singapore] to the sons of the soil ... [arises] from outsiders Ceylonese and Madrassesees [*sic*], who are now finding their way increasingly not only in the Government departments but also into the Municipal service The objection lies in the Government and Municipality lending them a helping hand on the ground of their being highly recommended and backed up in influential quarters. Such a line of policy is only thinly veiled favouritism where local supply is available.⁹⁶

At the turn of the century the Colonial Government put in place measures—on paper, at least—favouring recruitment of locally educated personnel. In 1898, Frank Swettenham—who was appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1901 to 1904—issued a circular to officers of civil establishments emphasizing that 'when [an] application is made to fill any vacancy as clerk or overseer the claims of applicants born in the Straits must be considered in preference'.⁹⁷ In practice, however, by the early twentieth century, educated servicemen from the subcontinent were able to get around these controls quite easily. Once again, social networks proved crucial. An established emigrant could sponsor

kinsmen to take up education in Singapore for a period of one to two years, after which they would have met the criteria to qualify as a 'local' candidate.⁹⁸ Similarly, after 1921, a number of Indian doctors were also able to qualify as 'local' by taking a licentiate examination at the King Edward VII Medical School in Singapore. Indeed, in spite of attempts to increase local representation, the number of new emigrant Indians in civil establishments accelerated after the advent of World War I.⁹⁹ The emigration of educated servicemen from the subcontinent was so substantial that, by the 1920s, a number had to take up jobs below the level at which their educational qualifications entitled them.¹⁰⁰

The one area in the civil establishment where educated Indians faced a bias was in recruitment to the elite Straits Settlements Civil Service (amalgamated with the Malayan Civil Service [MCS] in 1919), which was effectively limited to Cadets of European descent. The appointment in 1896 of Ghulam Hafiz Sarwar from Punjab and E.L. Talma from West Indies as Cadets were exceptions. In 1922, when the Government of India demanded an increase in Indian representation in the MCS, the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements resisted on the premise that if Europeans were to be replaced in the MCS, Malay officers would take their place:

In connection with the admission of persons of other races into the higher ranks of the Civil Service arises the question of the legitimate aspirations of the Malays. It may be fairly said that the counterpart of the Indianisation of the service in India is the Malayanisation of the services in Malaya and the gradual substitution of Malay for European officers in administrative posts.¹⁰¹

Yet, in practice, few Malay officers were actually recruited to the MCS, the prevailing view being 'that most Malays would do well to remain agriculturalists'.¹⁰² Of the few Malays who were recruited into the MCS, their appointments were limited to the Federated Malay States, the coveted service in Singapore remaining, for all intents, a European-only establishment prior to World War II.

3.3 Security Personnel

Recruitment to the police force in the Straits Settlements had long been guided by the notion of threat that a specific 'race' posed. Concerns

over Chinese 'secret societies' that persisted well into the twentieth century, resulted in only a small number of Chinese being recruited to the police force—most of whom were detectives used for gathering intelligence. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Indians had for long been disproportionately represented in the police force. In the 1870s, most were locally recruited Tamil Muslims; their number added to by the heterogeneous mix of transported Indian convicts who had completed their sentence.

From the early 1880s, Punjabis began to establish a significant presence in the Settlement's security sector. The turn to recruiting policemen from the Punjab grew out of a crisis in the force in the 1870s. While the size of the force was increased immediately after the transfer, the number remained insufficient to cope with the growing population of the Settlement. In addition, there were persistent allegations of delinquency, abuse of power, and suspected criminal connections in the police. A Commission of inquiry, convened by the Governor in 1879, concluded that the erstwhile force indeed comprised 'an inefficient and very corrupt body of men', and recommended that 'it would be very advisable to introduce a certain number of Sikhs'.¹⁰³

The preference for employing Sikh security personnel paralleled developments in India. After the 1857 Indian Rebellion—in which the Sikh militia had proven loyal to the British—a systematic discourse had emerged that emphasized their 'martial' prowess. In the second half of the nineteenth century, which marked the heyday of theories of 'biological racism', colonial discourse increasingly represented Sikh security personnel as 'fairly uncorruptible, conscientious and generally quick to learn ... fairly suitable for all branches of the security services, but especially for armed police work or for military and para-military duties, where their stature, bearing and martial traditions and reliability were invaluable.'¹⁰⁴ The successful exploits of the Sikh police, introduced in Hong Kong in 1867, added to these impressions, as did the accomplishments of the Sikh, Punjabi Muslim, and Pathan policeman who dealt with feuding Chinese clans in Perak in 1873.¹⁰⁵ Altogether, this created the perception that Sikhs were especially useful in dealing with the Chinese population who 'appeared to have a healthy respect and fear of the capabilities of *Mungkali kwai* (Bengali [Sikh] devils)',¹⁰⁶ which in turn led to colonial officials viewing them as ideal for the Singapore situation.

Colonial discourse both in India and the Straits Settlements in the late nineteenth century increasingly stereotyped southern Indians as being inferior to northern Indians in the security sector: 'The men of Southern India fall far short, as a race, in possessing the courage and the military instincts of the men of Northern India'.¹⁰⁷ In the Straits Settlements, Europeans were scathing in their attacks on southern Indian policemen, who were deemed responsible for much of the inadequacy in the erstwhile police force. The *Daily Times* in 1872 reported that:

Our police consist at present mainly of Klings, with a slight sprinkling of Boyans and perhaps a Malay or two. Now we all know what Klings are—as a race they are weak-kneed, mendacious and cowardly—cruel when they have the power—and in fact about the very worst material from which to organize a police force, that could possibly exist... The physical weakness of the Kling is equalled and surpassed by his moral delinquencies. He cannot resist a bribe: and bribery has been the canker which has been and still is the chief cause of the practical inefficiency of the force.¹⁰⁸

Beyond instances of accomplishment and the 'martial race' theory, the turn towards recruiting Punjabi policemen also stemmed from the colonial administration's preference for security personnel who were perceived to be detached from the mainstay of the population in Singapore. Thus, a particularly important consideration was the caveat that 'they [Sikhs] had little connection with the rest of the people and were, therefore, equally suitable for dealing with [any group]'.¹⁰⁹ The desire to procure security personnel who were deemed to be 'independent' also emerged from allegations that Tamil policemen were connected to the predominantly Tamil Muslim 'secret societies'—the Red Flag and the White Flag—and, because of their long-standing presence, had also established relations with the Chinese secret societies.

There were important cultural considerations that drew recruits from the Punjab to the security sector. Tan Tai Yong points out that

the cultural propensity of certain social groups [in India], such as the ... militarized Jat peasantry, to readily pursue a vocation in arms should not be dismissed. In traditional societies where military service was regarded less as a professional career option than an assertion of social identity, self image and status were often powerful factors explaining the desire to bear arms.¹¹⁰

The transformation of the Punjab economy under colonial rule also encouraged mobility. Increasing prosperity 'allowed peasant families to pool resources together to enable at least one member of the family to afford the fare to the East'.¹¹¹ In the fertile plains of central Punjab (Manjha region), from which the largest number of Sikhs emigrated, population density was high and cultivable land costly. In these circumstances, remittances by those in service were crucial in paying land mortgages, house construction, provision of dowries, and expensive marriage celebrations.¹¹² In the predominantly Muslim-populated Salt Range Tract, land was far less fertile and 'economic depression was a powerful "push" factor for emigration', while the district of Rohtak in southeast Punjab witnessed seven major famines between 1860 and 1906.¹¹³

In March 1881, the first batch of 54 Sikh policemen arrived in the Straits Settlements, and, by November, a full contingent of 165 Sikhs was operational in Singapore and Penang.¹¹⁴ Over time, Punjabi Muslims were also procured for the purpose. As in the case of the British Indian Army, strict guidelines were adopted, limiting recruitment only to 'martial' Jat Sikhs or socially dominant 'blood proud' Muslim tribes.¹¹⁵ Because of the limited size of the police force in the Straits Settlements, only those able to meet the stringent physical tests could gain entry. Consequently, over time, policemen only accounted for a fraction of the Punjabis who moved to Singapore. Those who failed to meet the strict criteria for policing could, nevertheless, count on perceptions of their 'martial' prowess to get jobs as prison warders, or as watchmen and guards in the private sector.

In Singapore, the perception of 'martial' capabilities extended to other groups from northern India as well, collectively labelled under the misnomer 'Bengali'. Consequently, those from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also came to be well represented as security personnel in the private sector and as prison warders. Such jobs were favoured by these immigrants, because they were not considered menial and provided them with a measure of authority. Additionally, employers usually provided living arrangements for them which helped in accumulation of capital, enabling some to later take up businesses, particularly money-lending, to supplement their income.

In addition to the police force, Indian troops continued to be periodically used as the main military force guarding the settlement.

While the Indian garrison was withdrawn from Singapore in 1872, the Straits Settlements government found it difficult to secure European-only regiments to secure the colony. Consequently, from 1900 to 1915, British Indian Army troops were once again frequently deployed at the Settlements. Amongst these included regiments from the 3rd, 13th, and 16th Madras Infantry, the 73rd Carnatic Infantry, the 99th Deccan Infantry, the 3rd Brahmans, and the 5th Light Infantry.¹¹⁶ From time to time, the Malay States Guides—that comprised large numbers of Sikhs directly recruited from the Punjab—were also stationed in Singapore to reinforce the main garrison. After the 1915 mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry in Singapore¹¹⁷ however, Indian troops were withdrawn and it was not until 1940 when, given the fears of a Japanese attack, there was again the large scale deployment of British Indian armies here.

3.4 Growing Business Presence

The Indian commercial presence in Singapore grew in tandem with the port city's economic expansion. Long-standing commercial groups in Singapore, including Tamil Muslims and Chettiers, continued to play an important part in the business life of Singapore during this period, although some, such as the Parsis, were arguably not as influential as in the earlier period. After the transfer, the early entrepreneurial communities were joined by new commercial entrants. Collectively, the Indian business presence increased, both in terms of size and their ethno-religious diversity. The period witnessed an expansion in the geographical extent of the Indian trading networks even as earlier regional connections became more entrenched. Correspondingly, till the Great Depression, there was an almost continuous amplification in the value and volume of Indian businesses here.

As in the previous period, the consolidation of British rule in the subcontinent facilitated the entry of newcomers—the framework of the Empire offering both opportunities and protection. The extension of British influence in the Peninsula increased business prospects in the city. Singapore had become a key manufacturing and distribution hub in the region. Concomitantly, the growth of the Indian population here, increased local demand for textiles, goods, and provisions from the subcontinent.

The Chettians remained the most prominent Hindu commercial group from southern India, further entrenching their position in the later half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century following the British intervention in the Malay States. Beyond the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, they also strengthened their position in British Burma and in other parts of Southeast Asia, including Indo-China. Rudner posits that by 'the 1870s and 1880s [Chettians] financed most of the opium trade in Singapore and Penang'.¹¹⁸ Records also show that the Chettians became major land brokers in Singapore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, although the mainstay of their business continued to be banking—lending money to individuals who had difficulty in availing credit from European banks—and, in the process, financing the region's rapidly expanding plantation sector.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Chettian money-lending enterprises far exceeded the number of European banks. Those who borrowed from them were not only peasants, smallholders, and retailers. Their creditors included Malay Sultans and nobility, Europeans, and, many 'captain[s] of industry in the rich and powerful Chinese community owe[d] their early start in business to the ready and willing assistance extended by the Chettians'.¹¹⁹ By 1935, they were reported to have invested 'no less than four hundred millions of dollars' in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States.¹²⁰ Notwithstanding their considerable investment, the Chettian position weakened in the 1930s, in part due to legislation meant to regulate money-lending, but more so because of the Depression, during which their investments in plantations were hard-hit. While defaulter mortgages resulted in these financiers accumulating even more property, they 'were unable to reap the gains due to the prevailing economic conditions'.¹²¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Vellalar, Mudaliar, and other Vaniya castes from the Madras Presidency increased the number of Hindu commercial groups from southern India. The Vellalars came to establish an extensive trading network spanning the Coromandel region of Madras to Ceylon, Burma, the Straits Settlements, and the Malay States—and tended to be engaged in the supply of provisions and textiles. These groups had their own notable successes in the port city. P. Govindasamy Pillai, who arrived from Karaikkal in 1903 and began his career as a shop assistant, later became a household name in the retail of Indian groceries and textiles

on Serangoon Road.¹²² Another prominent businessman of the Nadar caste was Ramasamy Nadar, who built the foundation of his business on the supply of provisions to estate labourers, and went on, in the first half of the twentieth century, to purchase shop houses and properties from which he gained rental income.¹²³ Notwithstanding the prominence of these big businessmen, most Tamil Hindus who conducted businesses tended to be engaged in the small-scale retail sector, in service-provision—for example, as barbers and laundrymen—and as peddlers. They—along with emigrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—continued to have a hold on dairy farming in Singapore, while Tamil Hindu artisans established themselves as intricate designers of gold jewellery.

Although Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast remained ubiquitous in Singapore, by the late nineteenth century, they were no longer as dominant on the Singapore River and Harbour when compared to the earlier period. A variety of factors weakened their position. The extension of Dutch influence over Aceh in the 1870s undermined their traditional trading network in the region. Restrictions on ‘native’ shipping, from 1857 onwards, alongside the turn to steamships may have also had a negative effect. The bias in the nature of assisted labour migration that tended to exclude Muslims from the Madras Presidency would have also constrained the number of workers and labourers at their disposal. In spite of these difficulties, it would be an error to assume that the Chulias were not a major force after the transfer. Indeed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Chulia trade links with the Straits remained crucial for the development of their ‘homeland’ economy. The *Tanjore Gazetteer* informs:

The Marakkayans in Nagore procure pearls from the Gulf of Manaar and rubies from Burma, get them cut and polished by Linga Baliyas in Nagore, and do a large trade ... [with] the Straits Settlements... . Marakkayan women make pretty little boxes for betel and nut out of dyed palmyra leaves; they are exported to the Straits Settlements ... Nagore Musalmans make native scents which are very popular [and] are exported to the Straits Settlements live animals worth Rs. 4,27,000 of which the bullocks and sheep sent to Penang and Singapore were valued at Rs. 4,25,000 cotton and silk piece goods to the value of Rs. 13,34,000 of which 7,34,000 were shipped to the Straits Settlements... Nuts for betel were imported to the value of Rs. 8,33,000 in 1903–04.... Of these split and chang nuts came from the Straits Settlements.¹²⁴

While many of these Tamil Muslims in Singapore stuck to their traditional trades and continued to be engaged in currency exchange and as street-corner vendors of tobacco and stationery, others ventured into new economic activities. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they developed a strong position in the publishing industry located in the vicinity of Beach Road. Moona Kader Sultan—sometimes referred to as the ‘cattle king’—made a fortune from the livestock trade and also became a major land broker.

While entrepreneurs from the Coromandel comprised the mainstay of prominent Muslim businessmen from southern India, other Muslim groups from the region emerged during this period albeit on a smaller scale. From the 1920s, Tamil Muslims from the more inland areas of the Madras Presidency such as Tenkasi and Kadayanallur—many of whom worked as harbour workers—were also engaged in pedalling food or small woven items to supplement their family income. Muslims from the Malabar Coast were engaged in vending food and were particularly prominent in the Arab Street area. The exact date of their arrival to Singapore is unclear given that the early census records their numbers in the category ‘Natives of the Coromandel Coast and Malabar’. Oral testimonies, however, suggest that certainly by the early decades of the twentieth century, many Malabar Muslims had set up food stalls and were pushcart vendors of ‘ice-water’ and ‘ice-balls’.¹²⁵

Prior to the transfer, emigrants from other parts of the subcontinent comprised only a small component of the commercial life of Singapore when compared to their counterparts from Madras. That difference was largely due to the long-standing and persistent trading presence of Coromandel traders in Southeast Asia. The key exception, were the Parsis who engaged in the India–China opium trade, and had made forays in the up-market retail and property sector in Singapore. After the transfer, however, notwithstanding notable successes such as N. R. Mistri and P. M. Framroz, who ventured into the aerated water works business during this period,¹²⁶ Parsis remained only a small community, who arguably faded into the background as other Indian groups grew more conspicuous.

Prominent amongst these were traders from Sindh. Claude Markovits’ and Scott Levi’s works have detailed the long-standing pre-colonial network of Sindhi merchants plying the subcontinent’s produce, primarily textiles, overland to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia, and to

maritime ports in the Persian Gulf.¹²⁷ The British annexation of Sind in 1843, and her incorporation into the Bombay Presidency in 1847, saw the movement of large numbers of Sindhi traders to Bombay. Those of the Hindu Bhaiband subcaste from Hyderabad and Shikarpur were especially prominent. Involved in the Malwa opium trade in the first half of the nineteenth century, Hyderabadi and Shikarpuri Sindhis came to peddle textiles and crafts in Bombay. These 'curios' proved especially popular amongst Europeans.¹²⁸

In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of Sindhi merchants venturing for markets beyond the subcontinent increased sharply. Shops selling curios began to dot port settlements in the Empire to cater to travellers keen on purchasing 'ethnic wares'. The Sindhi movement east of the subcontinent was also propelled by a shortage in the supply of goods. As the number of Europeans travellers increased—the small scale workshops in Sindh were hard pressed to meet the demand for Asian crafts. Added to this was the growing flavour for Oriental goods amongst Europeans, which in turn resulted in Sindhi traders moving as far as Japan to meet this demand. By the late nineteenth century, these merchants had come to establish their place as "global middlemen" between the Far East and India, where they procured the goods, mostly silk and "curios", and other regions of the colonial and semi-colonial world, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, the Mediterranean and Central and South America where they sold them to a mostly European clientele of international travellers as well as settlers.¹²⁹

In 1873, a major Sindhi firm branched out to Singapore—Assomull and Company, founded by Wasiamull Assomull.¹³⁰ A number of other Sindhi businesses were established soon after, including, for example, K. A. J. Chottirmall and J. T. Chanrai. The key niche that differentiated these Sindhi businesses from their Indian counterparts was the tendency to cater specifically to European interests and demands.¹³¹ The network of firms was extensive, with branches in key cities in East and Southeast Asia, colonies in the Middle East and Africa, and, over time, directly in London. In that expansive network, Singapore was a crucial node, acting as a key distribution centre for textiles and 'curios' imported from East and Southeast Asia, which were re-exported to markets in the West.

Gujarati merchants were the other major traders who moved from the western and north-western parts of the subcontinent. In spite of the

long-standing relations between Gujarat and Southeast Asia, merchants from that region had all but withdrawn from this region in the seventeenth century, and it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that they again began to carve a significant commercial niche here. Most came either directly from Surat, or via Bombay. During this period, they came to be heavily involved in the spice trade, for which Singapore was an important node in their trading networks that extended to Hong Kong, Indo-China, the Dutch East Indies, Thailand, Burma, Ceylon, India, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa. Bhattacharya informs: 'The main sources of raw materials were Malacca and Indonesia and the exports from Singapore included the sago flour, betel nuts, tapioca seeds and rattan, which were all sent mainly to India and chillies and turmeric powder were sent to Ceylon.... The raw materials were brought to Singapore and graded before being re-exported to other countries.' Other exports procured from the region (Thailand, the Dutch East Indies, and the Malay Peninsula) and sent via Singapore included coffee, tin ingots, gum benjamin, rice, sugar, canned pineapples, and gambier. The key imports from India included textiles, cotton, yarn, and jute, which were often sold to Chinese merchants in Singapore, and foodstuff such as lentils. Dates were imported from the Persian Gulf, while cloves and nuts were procured from East Africa.¹³²

The Gujarati merchants in Singapore were usually organized along religious lines, although even these were further divided according to subsect, caste, or regional affiliations. The initial arrivals in Singapore were predominantly Muslim, including Sunni Vohras and Dawoodi Bohras, who established the Burhani Mosque in 1829.¹³³ Amongst the pioneers included Karimbhai Ibrahim, Warim Bawa, Maskati,¹³⁴ and Mohammed Salleh Eusoof Angullia—who arrived in Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century and whose business empire extended from Southeast Asia to South Africa.¹³⁵ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, their number was added to by other Muslim merchant groups from Gujarat including Ismaili Khojas and Memons. Correspondingly, this period also witnessed the arrival of Gujarati Hindu and Jain traders. Amongst Gujarati businessmen as a whole, one of the most prominent in the first half of the twentieth century was Rajabali Jumabhoy. Chairman of the import-export giant 'Jumabhoy and Sons', he made immense contributions in public life—he was founder-member and Chairman of the Indian Chamber of Commerce,

served several tenures as President of the Indian Association, and was appointed a Municipal Commissioner in 1938.¹³⁶

Punjabis added to northern Indian commercial presence from the early twentieth century. Unlike policemen, those engaged in commerce tended to emigrate from urban centres in Punjab and most were either Hindu Brahmins and Baniyas or Sikh Khattris. Their arrival in Singapore was usually an extension of their commercial operations in Rangoon or Bangkok, where they had initially set up shops retailing Indian textiles. Like their Gujarati and Sindhi counterparts, Punjabis were also heavily involved in the textile and wholesale trade, and their networks, over time, extended further to Jakarta and Manila. From the 1920s, the Punjabi presence in the commercial life of Singapore was accentuated by those who ventured into the money-lending business—although on a smaller scale when compared to the Chettiers.

A corollary of the transfer in administrative control of the Straits Settlements, from the Government of India to the Colonial Office, was the concomitant strengthening of links between Ceylon and the Straits Settlements. That connection not only facilitated the move of educated personnel but also fostered the arrival of Ceylonese traders in Singapore. The Sinhalese comprised the mainstay of the Ceylonese business presence in Singapore and, from the late 1860s, engaged in trade, or served as jewellers, hoteliers, and confectioners. They were particularly renowned in the retail of crafted jewellery and gemstones imported from Ceylon. By the 1930s, the Sinhalese had established a strong presence in the sector with retail outlets at High Street, North Bridge Road, and Orchard Road.¹³⁷ The most notable, and possibly the most long-standing, was 'B. P. de Silva Jewellers', which was set up in 1872 by Gunawardena Balage Parolis de Silva.¹³⁸ An advertorial in *The Straits Times* at the turn of the century read: 'There is no better stock of jewellery than that of Mr. de Silva, of High Street.... De Silva have in their shop a magnificent display of assorted silver articles to choose from. There is Oriental art jewellery in abundance in gold and silver from India, Ceylon and China...' ¹³⁹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Indian commercial presence in Singapore was added to by those who may have originally arrived as servicemen, labourers, or as transported convicts. Experienced labourers, who rose in the hierarchy, turned to labour contracting over time. For many of these early settlers, land broking also

became an important avenue for upward mobility. Those subalterns able to accumulate capital, and procure land and property at relatively low costs, were well placed to profit from the increase in rent and land prices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Amongst these included Hunmapah, who left Mysore for Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century, and who gradually increased his holdings of properties in the Serangoon area. His son Hunmna Somapah—educated at St Joseph’s Institution—expanded the family’s properties, purchasing large tracts of land in the northern and eastern parts of Singapore.¹⁴⁰ Lakshmi Naidu recalls: ‘My grandfather [Somapah].... He got everywhere lands and houses. He got [houses and land] in Ayer Gemuroh and then Upper Serangoon, Tampines and behind market in Owen Road, Race Course Road,... Desker Road,... Upper Dickson Road, Upper Perak Road, Weld Road...’¹⁴¹ When Somapah passed away in 1919, he left an estate of ‘108 houses, shophouses, and shops, and four plantations’.¹⁴² In the late 1920s, Somapah’s son, Basapa went on to run a private zoo—*Babujan’s Singapore Zoo*—on a 20-acre plot of land in Punggol.¹⁴³

3.5 Changing Demography

The increase in the Indian population from 1867 to the Japanese Occupation was not even (see Table 3.7). Since emigration remained the most important variable in explaining population growth, migration regulations and economic conditions were crucial in accounting for fluctuations in numbers.

Sojourning patterns remained significant; large numbers—particularly labourers—tending to return to the subcontinent after a short duration in the port city. From the late nineteenth century to the early 1920s, Sandhu approximates that for every hundred Indians who arrived in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, over 60 returned to the subcontinent.¹⁴⁴ Numerous factors explained the tendency. Singapore was seen only as a place to earn a livelihood, save up before returning to the ‘homeland’.¹⁴⁵ Subsidized travel and better conditions on the ship journey at this time encouraged circulation, causing labourers to stay for about three years before returning to the subcontinent for a period of three to six months. The stark gender imbalance was also a crucial factor accounting for continued sojourning patterns. Even in the second decade of the twentieth century, when the number of Indian females

Table 3.7 Population of Indians (and Ceylonese) in Singapore (1871-1931)

Category/Year	1871			1881			1891			1901		
	Total	M.	F.	Total	M.	F.	Total	M.	F.	Total	M.	F.
Bengalis and c.	940	1,206	344	1,550	2,728	724	3,452	2,728	514	3,242		
Tamils and c.	9,297	8,380	2,095	10,475	10,171	2,332	12,503	10,841	2,950	13,791		
Parsees	35	22	6	28	41	13	54	18	8	26		
Sinhalese	7	39	3	42	143	16	159	194	50	244		
Others	415	33	NA	33	NA	NA	NA	750	0	750		
Total (Indians and Ceylonese)	10,694	9,680	2,448	12,128	13,083	3,085	16,168	14,531	3,522	18,053		
Total Population of Singapore	97,111	105,423	33,785	139,208	141,330	43,224	184,554	170,875	57,680	228,555		

Category/Year	1921			1931		
	M.	F.	Total	M.	F.	Total
Tamil	21,269	4,554	25,823	31,012	6,281	37,293
Telugu	122	29	151	70	55	125
Malayalam	1,267	112	1,379	4,144	246	4,390
Punjab	1,323	203	1,526	4,373	910	5,283
Bengal	1,633	197	1,830	869	29	898
Hindustani	737	155	892	NA	NA	NA
United Provinces	NA	NA	NA	1,074	29	1,103
Bihar and Orissa	NA	NA	NA	23	0	23

Pathan	115	6	121	NA	NA	NA
Gujarati	182	25	207	NA	NA	NA
Bombay	NA	NA	NA	494	129	623
Maharatta	7	1	8	NA	NA	NA
Gurkha/Nepal	2	2	4	21	1	22
Sinhalese	290	85	375	NA	NA	NA
Ceylon Peoples	NA	NA	NA	1144	501	1645
Others Unspecified	373	98	471	918	339	1257
Total (Indians and Ceylonese)	27,320	5467	32,787	44,142	8520	52,662
Total (Singapore)	285,176	140,736	425,912	357,691	209,762	567,453

Source: 1871 figures from 'Census Returns', *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*, ed. Walter Makepeace, Gilbert Brooke and Roland Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), vol. 1, 357-8; 1881 and 1891 figures from E. M. Merewether, *Report of the Census of the Straits Settlements, Taken on 5th April 1891* (Singapore: Government Office, 1892), 46-7; 1901 figures from J. R. Innes, *Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on 1st March 1901* (Singapore: Singapore Government Printers, 1901), 28-9; 1921 figures from J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921* (London: Dunstable and Watford, 1922), 190-1, 194; 1931 figures from C. A. Vieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census* (London: Crown Agent for the Colonies, 1932), 192, 200. Figures from the 1911 census have not been included in the table as the basis for categorizing Indians was language and thus quite different from other census. The total number of those enumerated as Indians in the 1911 census was 27,990. H. Marriot, *Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements, Taken on 10th March, 1911* (Singapore: Government Office, 1911), 66-70, 82. The category Bengalis etc. as employed from 1871 to 1901, was an overarching category for all northern Indians including, amongst others, those who arrived from Punjab and the United Provinces. The category Tamils etc. as employed from 1871 to 1901 was as an overarching category for all southern Indians including Telugu and Malayalam speakers.

for every 1,000 Indian males in Malaya as a whole was in excess of 400, Indian women comprised less than one-fifth of the total Indian population in Singapore.¹⁴⁶ Socio-cultural taboos remained crucial in impeding the emigration of Indian women. Indeed, as late as 1936, the Colonial Secretary to the Straits Settlements averred that 'the disparity in the sexes amongst immigrants is due more to social and caste conditions in India than to anything else. Not so long ago there were public celebrations in Singapore because one prominent member of the Chettiar community brought his wife to Singapore.'¹⁴⁷ That, however, did not explain the more marked gender imbalance in Singapore when compared to the Malay States. The greater disparity here was also because the provisions of the Indian Emigration Act of 1922, which required that for every 'five persons assisted to emigrate two shall be married women travelling with their husband',¹⁴⁸ were not extended to unassisted immigrants, who comprised the majority of Indians arriving in Singapore. Indeed, as detailed above, even in the case of those who were assisted, the number of women fell far short of requirements.¹⁴⁹ Worse still, unlike in the estates where women could find employment, there were few employment opportunities for women in the urban setting.

The lack of economic incentive and the considerable cost of relocating families meant that, most had to leave their spouses and families in the 'homeland', remitting funds to support them or to undertake capital investment there. During times of economic uncertainty, such as the Depression, when large numbers were repatriated, the view that Singapore was a transitory location was magnified.¹⁵⁰ While separate figures for Singapore are not available, Sandhu suggests that, in effect, the period extending from the late 1920s to the advent of World War II, saw an even greater 'turn-over' in the number of Indian population, with returnees accounting for over 80 per cent of the total Indian immigrants to British Malaya.¹⁵¹

Local-born Indians comprised only a small number precisely because of the lack of established Indian family units in Singapore. Census operations in 1921 and 1931, recorded that amongst Indians only 17 per cent of the total population were 'local' born (i.e., born in the Straits Settlements or the Malay States), a nominal increase from 16 per cent that had been recorded in 1911.¹⁵² In contrast the number of local born Chinese in 1921 was approximately 22 per cent, while in the case of the Malays, the figure exceeded 70 per cent.¹⁵³ Even amongst

locally born Indians, many tended to return to the subcontinent with their parents. In 1931, Census Superintendent Vlieland noted that, amongst Indians, 'the "turn-over" of population is rapid, and ... relatively few Indians born in Malaya remain here'.¹⁵⁴

Immigration and continued sojourning patterns had an impact on the ethnic and religious composition of the Indian population during this period. Regulations on the procurement of Indian labour and the entrenched links with the Madras Presidency ensured that Tamils continued to comprise the mainstay of the Indian population. In spite of the repatriation of Tamil labour during the Depression, they still made up over 70 per cent of the Indian population in the 1930s. In 1931, after the Tamils, Punjabis, and Malayalis comprised the largest component of the Indian population. Over the same period, census reports show a considerable decline in the proportion of Bengalis. This was probably not due to an actual decrease in number, but rather because of greater precision in later census operations that more accurately identified ethno-linguistic variations amongst northern Indians, who were previously lumped together in the Bengali category.

That said, when compared to the pre-transfer period, a significant change was recorded in the religious profile of the Singapore Indian population in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. After the 1870s, the number of Muslims arriving from the subcontinent was stifled, in part because labour migration schemes showed a distinct preference for lower-caste Hindu labourers. By 1921, Muslims accounted for just 30 per cent of the total Indian population in Singapore, and a decade later their proportion dropped to 26 per cent.¹⁵⁵ In comparison, by the second decade of the twentieth century, Hindus accounted for over 60 per cent of the total Indian population.¹⁵⁶ While the proportion of Indian Muslims declined, it should be noted that the ethnically mixed Muslim Jawi Peranakan population, was accounted for separately, under the label 'Malays and other natives of the Archipelago'.

Over this period, the breakdown of the Indian population in socio-economic terms became increasingly difficult to decipher because of the complexity of economic activities at the port city. For example, the 1921 census listed Indians as being engaged in over a hundred different occupations in some 25 'orders' of employment. Labour accounted for over 50 per cent of the Indian male population, of which—depending on definition—low-skilled workers comprised

approximately four-fifths and semi-skilled and skilled workers accounted for the remainder. Over 20 per cent of Indian males were engaged in services—like drivers, dhobi, hairdressers, boatmen, watchmen, etc. The commercial segment—traders, business proprietors, estate owners, money-lenders and money-changers—comprised over 10 per cent of the male population. At the time, professionals like doctors, lawyers, and administrators comprised less than 10 per cent of Indians in the city. The unemployment rate amongst Indian males was approximately 7.5 per cent, while the remainder included those attending school or engaged in other miscellaneous activities. The economic profile of the approximately 5,500 Indian females recorded in Singapore in 1921 is easier to define, although it makes for depressing reading. Of the total, 50 per cent were listed as unemployed, while more than 35 per cent were engaged in ‘household duties at Home [*sic*]’, and, discounting those attending school, the remainder were mainly engaged as agricultural and municipal labourers, domestic servants, restaurant keepers, hawkers, and midwives.¹⁵⁷ A decade later, the number of women had increased but there was no real change in their economic condition—of the 8,520 Indian women in the colony, 8,400 were recorded as having ‘no gainful employment’.¹⁵⁸

3.6 New Settlements

In spite of the haphazard nature of population growth and the continued sojourning patterns, the overall increase during this period was reflected in an expansion in Indian patterns of settlement. The proximity to areas of economic activity remained crucial in accounting for the location of residential areas. Unlike the initial years of Singapore’s development, during this period, there were no official policies designating spaces on the basis of ‘race’. That said, the initial policy, to some extent, had an effect on future settlement characteristics as emigrants tended to move to locales where they could find a support network.

The mainstay of the Indian population over this period continued to inhabit areas in, or which were proximate to, the municipality lines. Records show that the vicinity off the southern bank of the Singapore River, specifically Market Street and Chulia Street (renamed Kling Street temporarily), remained an important location for South Indian traders and businessmen—mainly Chettiars and Tamil Muslims. In and around

Market Street, dwellings were used to board large numbers of emigrants working in the area—reports of which surfaced when diseases spread in these overcrowded homesteads:

At No. 32 Market Street ... fifty or even sixty persons might, without risk, live in those houses, but double the number or more could not do so with safety ... cases of plague and other diseases dangerous to the public health have originated in these overcrowded houses.... Three chitties and two other Klings were charged under the Penal Code with concealing knowledge of ... small-pox.¹⁵⁹

These locales were significant for religious activities. Although the public display of Indian processions was checked during this period, during festivals that were permitted in public areas, such as *Thaipusam*—recognized as a public holiday from 1914¹⁶⁰—streets in that vicinity were cordoned off for the celebrations:

The Chetty Temple at Tank Road was en fete....The [*Thaipusam*] procession ... passed along Tank Road, preceded by a band of men carrying flags to the strains of native music.... The procession then wended its way along Orchard Road, Stamford Road, Hill Street, New Bridge Road, the Sepoy Lines and ... to the Temple at Outram Road. The procession started back ... and passed through, New Bridge Road, Upper Cross-st, Cross-st, Teluk Ayer Street, Market Street, Kling Street, North Canal Road, and thence to Hill Street..¹⁶¹

While the area proximate to Chinatown remained crucial for Indian traders and businessmen, census operations suggest that its importance as a residential area gradually declined at the turn of the twentieth century, in part because shipping and lighterage services—in which Indians were heavily engaged—shifted to the vicinity of Tanjong Pagar. In 1891, some 1395 Indians—nearly 9 per cent of the total Indian population—resided in Chinatown and proximate areas.¹⁶² By the turn of the century, their number in the vicinity had decreased to 782, less than 5 per cent of the total Indian population in 1901.¹⁶³

In the early twentieth century, about 10 per cent of the Indian population in Singapore, made up mainly of South Indian harbour and railway workers, were settled in the vicinity of Tanjong Pagar. This was close to the new dock, and the railway station which was initially situated at Tank Road in 1902, but later shifted to the Keppel Harbour. These workers initiated the development of numerous temples in the

area. As the majority of these labourers were Adi Dravidas, deities popular amongst them tended to figure prominently. Mani notes that caste-based 'distance maintenance' was also evident in the area in the early twentieth century. He suggests that in the Tanjong Pagar vicinity, 'the Kaunder Caste (caste-Hindu) and the Adi-Dravida were perched on opposite sides of the Anson Road'.¹⁶⁴ In close proximity, the Pearl's Hill area also marked the quarters of Indian municipal workers and hospital attendants, and, as well, the Sikh contingent of the Straits Settlements Police Force. The camp initially housed a gurdwara, which in 1924 was relocated to nearby Silat Road.

In the late nineteenth century, Ceylonese, Gujarati, Sindhi, and Tamil Muslim businessmen began to setup retail outlets on the prominent High Street on the northern bank of the Singapore river. With the growing popularity of Oriental fashion, Indian and Sri Lankan stores retailing gems, ornaments, and jewellery; silks, textiles, and curios from the subcontinent and East Asia; as well as general stores offering all manner of ornaments, garments, and accessories, along with tailoring services, became ubiquitous in the area. Amongst these included 'B. P. de Silva's jewellery store', 'Bombay Silk Stores', 'Doulatram's', 'K. A. J. Chottirmal', 'K. M. Oli Mohamed', 'M. S. M. Aboobakar and Co.', and 'P. Reloomal's Store',¹⁶⁵ whose clientele comprised the highest strata of Singapore society and wealthy travellers to the colony. While the lower floors of these shop-houses at High Street were used for business, the upper floors tended to be the place of residence for agents, shop assistants, and other subaltern personnel connected to the enterprise. Beyond High Street, some Indians remained in the early settlement area on the plain extending from the northern bank of the Singapore River to Bras Basah, although by this time, their number in the area had declined, largely due to the closure of the convict jail there. Of those who remained, most were washermen based at the Stamford Canal, or engaged in the provision of domestic services for Europeans residents and other wealthy merchants residing in the area.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Serangoon Road gradually established its place as the most important area of Indian settlement in Singapore. Following the path of dairy farmers who had moved initially, the later decades of the nineteenth century saw increasing numbers of Tamil traders and peddlers plying their trade in the locality due to the shortage of space in the city. Sharon Siddique

and Nirmala Purushottam, in *Singapore's Little India: Past, Present and Future*, state that the number of Indians purchasing land and property in the area increased rapidly from the 1880s.¹⁶⁶ In 1891, more than 12 per cent of the total Indian population in Singapore resided in the vicinity of the 'core' Serangoon Road area,¹⁶⁷ and, by the turn of the century, Indians comprised about 30 per cent of the total residents in the area.¹⁶⁸ That concentration further increased as the number of Indians arriving in the colony accelerated in the early decades of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, the 'core' area had become effectively an Indian 'cultural space', complete with shops selling foodstuffs and spices, ornaments, textiles and garments that catered to the needs of Indians residing in the area; sojourning musicians and dancers from the subcontinent were also known to perform at Indian associations or at vacant fields in the vicinity. The area became a focal point for Indian immigrants, many of whom, upon their arrival, made their way there to look for other kinsmen, accommodation, and job opportunities.

In the early twentieth century, Tamils comprised about two-thirds of the Indian inhabitants in Serangoon Road,¹⁶⁹ although the numbers of other Indians was significant enough for them to establish their own regional institutions in the vicinity. As in the Tanjong Pagar area in the 1920s and 1930s, Mani suggests that caste-based 'distance maintenance' was evident:

The Serangoon Road and the adjoining roads [were] ... peopled by caste-Hindus, whilst the area between Jalan Besar and the Rochore Canal was the Adi-Dravida Area. Though Municipality quarters spilled over from the 'Adi-Dravida' zone into Hindoo Road, Veerasamy Road and Cuff Road, they were only confined to 'the coolie' lines on one side of the road. 'Lorong Lalat' in the Adi-Dravida zone was ... the 'core' of this zone. Even today [*sic*], many Hindus refer to 'Lorong Lalat as the Street of Pari-ahs (untouchables)'.¹⁷⁰

Such spatial segregation also extended to temple worship: the Kalliamman Temple in Serangoon Road was 'patronised by caste-Hindus', while the Muneeswaran Temples 'at Jalan Berseh and at French Road became the centres of religious fervour for the Adi-Dravidas'.¹⁷¹ Where the Adi Dravidas formed a large concentration, such as on the periphery of Serangoon Road, they also maintained divisions between subgroups, the Pallans congregating nearer their shrine at French Road, while the Paraiyans resided closer to their shrine at Jalan Berseh.¹⁷²

Over time, increasing population density and demand for residential commercial space in the 'core' Serangoon Road saw the movement of larger numbers of Indians to *kampongs* towards the vicinity of Whampoa and to Kallang River. In 1916, with growing regulations to control overcrowding in the municipality, cattle farmers, who had been crucial to the early development of Serangoon Road, were pressed out of the 'core' area, and shortly after established their cattle shed in the marshy land closer to the Kallang River.¹⁷³

The Serangoon Road area was closely connected to two adjacent areas that were also important locations of Indian settlement during this period. To the southwest, Indians formed an important segment of the cosmopolitan vicinity of Bencoolen Street, Waterloo Street, and Queen Street. A number of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh shrines were established here. In addition to the early Benggali Mosque (renamed the Bencoolen Mosque)—whose fellowship continued to comprise large numbers of northern Indian Muslims—the Krishnan temple was founded at Waterloo Street in 1870, and a Sikh gurdwara was established at Queen Street in 1912.¹⁷⁴ Several Indian regional associations functioned here and colonial records affirm that, during this period, Indian businesses were also ubiquitous in this area. To the southeast of Serangoon Road, Tamil and Gujarati Muslim textile and jewellery traders constituted a key element in the business life of the ethnically diverse Muslim neighbourhood at Jalan Sultan and Arab Street. Collectively, even at the turn of the twentieth century, the adjacent areas housed more Indians than the 'core' Serangoon Road area itself.¹⁷⁵

While the largest number of Indians settled in the above mentioned areas, records of property sales show that some of the wealthiest Chettiars, Tamil Muslims, and northern Indians had come to reside in prestigious localities, such as Orchard, Tanglin, and around East Coast, that is, Meyer Road, Fort Road, Katong, and Siglap.¹⁷⁶ The latter was also popular with Ceylonese Tamils, who were crucial in the development of the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple in that area. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Indian concentrations could also be found in plantation estates deep in the interior of the island as well as around the British military establishments in the north, west, and eastern peripheries. Amongst these, the most significant was on the northern outskirts—at Sembawang, Admiralty, and Seletar—where a significant number of Malayalis and Tamils were employed in the

shipping industry, the naval base and on plantations. Here too, remnants of caste distance-maintenance were observed, with certain labour quarters designated for *Adi Dravidas*.¹⁷⁷

* * *

From the transfer in 1867 to the advent of World War II, an increase in Indian numbers was evident in nearly all sectors of the port city's economy. That being said, there were periods of stagnation informed by the end of convict transportation and the cessation of Indian rule over the Straits Settlements, which created impediments for the movement of Indian labour. Straits authorities were wholly unprepared for such a situation, and it took nearly two decades after the transfer before an agreement could be reached. Once a settlement was negotiated, a more consistent increase in the Indian population in Singapore was evident. In commerce, older trading networks were supplemented by the arrival of new business communities. The Indian commercial presence in Singapore increased not just in the size but also reflected greater ethno-religious diversity. A number of educated Indians arrived from the subcontinent, drawn to employment opportunities and better salary prospects in Singapore's increasingly complex bureaucracy and economy. In addition, colonial ideologies underpinned the procurement of Indian security personnel—mainly Sikhs. The number of Indian labourers increased but regulated systems to procure labour from India—chiefly the indenture and *kangani* system—were far less significant here when compared to the Malayan plantation sector. Also different was the nature of the labour experience in the port city. They were engaged in a wide variety of economic sectors with their own exploitative forms such as that evident in the labour contractor system which was used to employ harbour workers among others. The urban landscape also gave rise to specific problems, such as, for example, the lack of job opportunities for Indian women.

Collectively, the increase in population effected changes in the socio-economic and ethno-religious composition of Indian society in Singapore during this period. Indian Muslims now constituted a minority in the diaspora, while the proportion of lower-caste Tamil labourers grew significantly. The northern Indian commercial presence also increased. That is not to say that there were no continuities

from the earlier period. Most immigrants continued to arrive from the Madras Presidency, and Indians persisted with the view that their stay on the island was temporary. That propensity was not helped by the gender imbalance, which in the city remained remarkably lopsided. The proportion of females only increased after the advent of the Great Depression, which pointed to a gradual turn towards a more durable presence. That being said, the increase in the Indian population did lead to an expansion in settlement patterns beyond the confines of the earlier period so that in certain locales—specifically the ‘core’ Serangoon Road area—there developed a distinctive Indian presence. The changes in the demographic profile and the settlement patterns of the Indian population in Singapore after the transfer, aid in contextualizing the religious-cultural and socio-political transformations in the diaspora between 1867 and 1941. These are discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Notes

1. Paul H. Kratoska, ‘Introduction’, in *South East Asia Colonial History*, vol. 3, *High Imperialism (1890s–1930s)*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 3–5.

2. 1871 figure drawn from H. Marriot, ‘The Peoples of Singapore: Inhabitants and Population’, in *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*, vol. 1, eds Walter Makepeace, Gilbert Brooke, and Roland Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), 357; 1940 figure from IOR/L/P&J/8/262, Annual reports of Agent and Controller of labour (Malaya), 19.

3. For example, see David Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture in the Straits Settlements* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2008); R. N. Jackson, *Immigrant Labour and the Development of Malaya* (Federation of Malaya: Government Press, 1961); C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838–1949* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1951); J. N. Parmer, *Colonial Labour Policy and Administration: A History of Labour in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910–1941* (New York: Association of Asian Studies, 1960); and Ravindra K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

4. Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), xv.

5. Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 70.

6. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas*, 41; Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 87–8.
7. *Tanjore District Gazette*, 'Notice', 12 March 1870, enclosure in CO273/45 Governor Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary to Government Fort St George, 24 February 1871.
8. Ibid.
9. *The Straits Times*, 9 July 1870, 3.
10. Chairman of the Public Meeting in Penang and Province Wellesley to Governor Ord, Not Dated, enclosure in CO273/45 Governor Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary to Government Fort St George, 24 February 1871.
11. J. W. W. Birch to the Earl of Kimberley, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, 1 July 1870, enclosure in CO273/45 Governor Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary to Government Fort St George, 24 February 1871.
12. Chief Secretary Government of Madras to the Colonial Secretary at Singapore, 13 September 1870, enclosure in CO273/45 Governor Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary to Government, Fort St George, 24 February 1871.
13. See Chapter 2, pp. 57–58.
14. Cited in Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 95.
15. *The Straits Times*, 9 March 1872, 1.
16. Cited in Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 98.
17. J. W. W. Birch, Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements, to the Secretary to the Government of India, 11 May 1872, enclosure in CO273/57, No. 45.
18. CO273/77, Minutes of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, 4 July 1872; *The Straits Times*, 'Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council', 7 September 1874, 7.
19. *The Straits Times*, 27 March 1873, 10.
20. At the Tassek estate, Kurapen, a young indentured labourer found dead in the field, 'had not eaten for twenty-four hours before he died'. Five labourers from the Alma estate had arrived at the Butterworth Hospital in an 'emaciated state', three of whom died shortly after. Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 143, 145. The most serious case of negligence was reported at the Malakoff estate. Some hundred labourers had to be hospitalized and subsequent investigations ordered by the new Governor of the Straits Settlements—Andrew Clarke—revealed that at the estate 'the coolies were half-starved, beaten with great severity, [and] neglected when sick'. D. A. Caiman, 'Indian Labour Migration to Malaya, 1867–1910' (Unpublished B. Litt. thesis, Magdalen College, Oxford University, 1954), 90. For an in-depth study of the three cases, see Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture*, 143–61.
21. Herbert's Minute, 6 March 1874, enclosure in CO273/71, No. 397.
22. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the State of Labour in the Straits Settlements Protected Natives States—1890* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1891), 37.

23. Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 15.

24. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, 37.

25. Caiman, 'Indian Labour Migration to Malaya', 170. Caiman informs that the more liberal attitude was also the outcome of Indian labour emigration coming under the direct control of the Indian Government's Department of Revenue and Agriculture, which had 'less patience with the qualms of the Madras Government'.

26. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, 39.

27. CO276/13, The Labour Contracts Ordinance, 1882, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 17 February 1882, 129. The Ordinance specified that a contract of up to five years was permissible, although the Indian Government did not allow a contract for more than three years. The Secretary of State for the Colonies 'held the opinion that one year was the maximum which should be legally enforced'. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, Appendix F, f8.

28. CO276/20, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1888, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 5 July 1889, 1298.

29. The Madras Government was unclear as to the level of protection rendered by the Indian Immigration Department in the Straits Settlements to immigrant labourers: 'It appears that the Madras Government were under the impression that all Indian Immigrants are under the protection of this department. This has ... not been approved by the Straits Government. A small measure of protection to Immigrants not under indenture but employed in large gangs was recommended by the Labour Commission ... [but] this also has not been sanctioned...' CO275/47, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1893, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1893, 303.

30. Cited in Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 58.

31. Marriot, 'Peoples of Singapore', 357–8.

32. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, 43.

33. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 65.

34. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, Appendix J, j2.

35. CO275/66, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1902, 193.

36. CO275/53, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1896, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1896, 101.

37. CO276/19, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1888, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 653.

38. In 1896, the Malay States of Selangor, Perak, Negri Sembilan and Pahang were brought together in a Federation, known as the Federated Malay States.

39. CO275/139, Annual Report of the Labour Department, Malaya, 1935, *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements*, 1935, 767.

40. *The Straits Times*, 12 November 1907, 8.
41. *The Singapore Free Press*, 15 October 1919, 6.
42. *The Straits Times*, 13 May 1916, 7; *The Straits Times*, 15 May 1917, 8.
43. Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'Indian Leadership and the Diaspora', in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, eds Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 82.
44. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 15.
45. Cited in Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture in the Straits Settlements*, 198.
46. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 86.
47. CO273/524, The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture to the Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 3 January 1923, *Straits Settlements Original Correspondences* 1923.
48. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, *Report on the Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya* (New Delhi: Govt. of India Press, 1937). According to the Sastri report (paragraph 29), the government sponsored the repatriation of some 190,000 Indian labourers in Malaya and Singapore from 1930 to 1933.
49. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 29, 30, and 34.
50. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 109–15.
51. *Ibid.*, 307–8.
52. CO275/41, *Report of the Commissioners*, Appendix I, i2.
53. Walter Fox, 'Early Planting Days', in *One Hundred Years*, vol. 2, 92–3.
54. CO276/17, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1885, *Supplement to the Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 22 April 1886, 604; CO275/32, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1886, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1886, 318; CO275/33, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1887, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1887, 99.
55. CO275/33, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1887, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1887, 91.
56. CO275/32, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1886, *Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1886, 318.
57. CO275/61, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1900, 184.
58. *Ibid.*, 183.
59. *Ibid.*
60. CO275/64, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1901, 115.
61. *Ibid.*
62. CO275/61, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1900, 183.

63. Ibid., 201; CO275/64, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1901, 129; CO275/66, Indian Immigration, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1902, 197.

64. See CO275, Annual Reports on the Chinese Protectorate, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records* from 1887 to 1913. Exact figures cannot be ascertained because sometimes Indians were included in the miscellaneous category.

65. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 86.

66. Records of other types of assisted labour do not exist prior to 1884 because these emigrants would have been declared as 'voluntary' to get around erstwhile Indian restrictions that limited assisted movement to indentured labour.

67. CO275/53, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1896, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1896, 105.

68. CO275/55, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1897, *Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Records*, 1897, 170.

69. The large number of planters from Ceylon who arrived after the 1867 transfer were crucial in introducing the system here. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 89. While Sandhu dates the beginning of the kangani system in the Straits Settlements to the 1860s, Jain posits that the system was initiated in the early 1890s. R. K. Jain, 'South Indian Labour in Malaya, 1840–1920: Asylum Stability and Involution', in *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*, ed. Kay Saunders (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 171.

70. Cited in Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867–1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), 157.

71. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 98.

72. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000799/10, Interviewee: Douglas Hiorns, Reel No. 1, 10 July 1987.

73. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas*, 29

74. Government of Singapore, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the System of Contract Labour in Singapore* (Singapore: Government Printers, 1969), 5.

75. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000173, Interviewee: Mr Sundarajulu Lakshmana Perumal, 1, Reel No. 1, 28 April 1982. Perumal was an assistant in the Tamil Labour Company, one of the largest labour contractor firms tied to the Singapore Harbour Board in the 1930s.

76. CO276/24, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1891, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 27 April 1892, 1392.

77. A. Mani, 'Aspects of Identity and Change amongst Tamil Muslims in Singapore', *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 13, 2 (1992): 340.

78. In 1930, *The Straits Times* reported that only 26.8 per cent of Municipal labourers in Singapore were provided with accommodation. The Municipal

body proposed paying a sum of 50 cents per month to labourers who were not provided accommodation when rentals of quarters ranged from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per month. *The Straits Times*, 24 December 1930, 12.

79. Sastri, *Indian Labour in Malaya*, paragraph 25.

80. Government of Singapore, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the System of Contract Labour in Singapore*, 5.

81. *Ibid.*, 7–11.

82. *Ibid.*, 5.

83. *Ibid.*, 7.

84. *Ibid.*, 6. Italics mine.

85. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819–1988*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76.

86. C. Bazell, 'Education in Singapore', in *One Hundred Years*, 462.

87. Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, *Sojourners to Citizens: Sri Lankan Tamils in Malaysia, 1885–1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Sri Veera Trading, 1988), 53.

88. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 68.

89. Ramasamy, *Sojourners*, 42, 47.

90. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 69.

91. J. de Veere Allen, 'Malayan Civil Service, 1874–1941: Colonial Bureaucracy/Malayan Elite', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12, 2 (1970): 151, 158.

92. Cecil Smith, at a public banquet in Colombo purportedly averred that 'Ceylon was the recruiting ground for the Straits Settlements', *The Straits Times*, 9 May 1892, 2.

93. *The Singapore Free Press*, 8 October 1935, 6.

94. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 34.

95. Rajesh Rai, 'Singapore', in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, eds Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 178.

96. *The Straits Times*, 8 November 1886, 5.

97. Cited in Ramasamy, *Sojourners*, 64.

98. Ramasamy, *Sojourners*, 66–70.

99. CO273/63, *Blue Book of Statistics*, 1915, k12–k90.

100. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 34.

101. CO273/524, Letter from Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, (Emigration), *Straits Settlements Original Correspondence*, 30 November 1922.

102. Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867–1942* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1981), 130.

103. CO275/23, Report of the Police Commission, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements*, 1879, cclxxi, cclxxviii.

104. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 72–3.
105. Karam Singh, *The Sikh Police Contingent: Custodians of the Empire* (Singapore: Karam Singh, 2009), 10.
106. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 73.
107. David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 12.
108. Cited in Donald Moore and Joanna Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore* (Singapore: Donald Moore Press, 1969), 387–8.
109. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 73.
110. Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 79.
111. Arunajeet Kaur, *Sikhs in the Policing of British Malaya and Straits Settlements, 1874–1957* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), 23.
112. Yong, *Garrison State*, 88.
113. *Ibid.*, 83–4.
114. CO275/27, Report on the Straits Settlements Police Force and the State of Crime, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements*, 1882, 95.
115. Yong, *Garrison State*, 70–5.
116. A. G. Harfield, *British and Indian Armies in the East Indies, 1685–1935*, (Chippenham, Wilts: Picton Publishing, 1984), 388–9.
117. See Chapter 4, pp. 148–59.
118. David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 74.
119. *The Singapore Free Press*, 8 October 1935, 6.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Jayati Bhattacharya, *Beyond the Myth: Indian Business Communities in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 64.
122. *Ibid.*, 52, 57.
123. *Ibid.*, 57.
124. Rickets Hemmingway, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tanjore*, vol. 1 (Madras: Government Press, 1906), 126, 129–31.
125. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000894, Interviewee: Hamid, Karikakam Mahmood Shahul, Reel No. 1, n.d.
126. Bhattacharya, *Beyond the Myth*, 53.
127. See Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002).
128. Markovits, *Indian Merchants, 1750–1947*, 116.
129. *Ibid.*, 118–9.
130. *Ibid.*, 134.

131. Bhattacharya, *Beyond the Myth*, 48.
132. Ibid., 40–7.
133. Bibijan Ibrahim, 'The Dawoodi Bohra Muslims: Ethnic Boundary Maintenance' (Academic Exercise, National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology, 1976), 16.
134. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000787, Interviewee: Jumabhoy Rajabali, Reel No. 1, 16 June 1987.
135. 'Angullia Mosque', accessed 15 June 2009, <http://www.singapore-traveltips.com/angullia-mosque.htm>; also 'Angullia Story', Angullia Beach House Resort, accessed 15 June 2009, http://www.angulliaresort.com/angullia_files/angullia_story.htm.
136. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000787, Interviewee: Jumabhoy Rajabali, Reel No. 1, 16 June 1987.
137. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000381, Interviewee: Ven. M. M. Mahaweera Mahanayaka Thera, Reel No. 19, n.d.
138. 'B. P. de Silva Group of Companies', accessed 23 October 2011, http://www.bpdesilva.com/bp_de_silva_holdings.html.
139. *The Straits Times*, 14 December 1899, 3.
140. For example, an entry in *The Straits Times*, 12 June 1912, 8, reads: 'The following Singapore properties were disposed of by auction.... Freehold land off Geylang Road, area 186,455 square feet, H. Somapah and Koh Seck Lim \$2,450;... freehold land adjacent to the above, area 113,536 square feet, H. Somapah and Koh Seck Lim \$1,500.'
141. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000110, Interviewee: Lakshmi Naidu, Reel No.1, 13 October 1981.
142. 'The Basapas of Singapore', accessed 10 October 2011, <http://www.singaporebasapa.com/Welcome.html>.
143. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000546, Reel No. 58, Interviewee: Mohinder Singh, 6 April 1985. See also, R. B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya; A Pageant of Greater India, A Rapid Survey of Over 2000 Years of Maritime and Colonising Activities Across the Bay of Bengal* (Singapore: The Malayan Publishers, 1936), 33.
144. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 158.
145. A. Mani, 'Indians in Singapore Society', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, eds K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993), 791.
146. J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921* (London: Dunstable and Watford, 1922), 155. Women accounted for 5,398, or about 16.6 per cent of the 32,456 Indians enumerated in Singapore in 1921.
147. IOR/L/P&J/8/259, Letter from the Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements, to Girja Shankar Bajpai, Secretary to the Government of India, 15 January 1936, 336.

148. Sastri, *Indian Labour in Malaya*, paragraph 28.
149. Ibid.
150. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 105–11.
151. Ibid., 158.
152. Nathan, *Census of British Malaya*, 97.
153. Ibid., 98.
154. C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census* (London: Crown Agent for the Colonies, 1932), 70–1.
155. Ibid., 207.
156. Nathan, *Census of British Malaya*, 105; Vlieland, *British Malaya*, 207.
157. Nathan, *Census of British Malaya*, 302–8.
158. Vlieland, *British Malaya*, 276.
159. *The Straits Times*, 17 April 1905, 4. The article suggests that 50 to 60 labourers were housed at an Indian residence at 32 Market Street.
160. *The Straits Times*, 14 February 1914, 10.
161. *Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser*, 29 January 1907, 2.
162. E. M. Merewether, *Report of the Census of the Straits Settlements, Taken on 5th April 1891* (Singapore: Government Office, 1892), 54.
163. CO277/53, Straits Settlements Population. Census taken on 1st March 1901, in *Straits Settlements Blue Book*, 1910, Appendix P, 23.
164. A. Mani, 'The Changing Caste-Structure amongst the Singapore Indians' (Unpublished MA, thesis, National University of Singapore, 1977), 19.
165. *The Straits Times*, 14 January 1905, 8; *The Straits Times*, 2 October 1911, 9; *The Straits Times*, 8 September 1921, 3; *The Straits Times*, 16 January 1926, 10; *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1936, 7; NAS, Oral History Interview Accession Number: 000101, Interviewee: K. M. Oli Mohamed, Reel No. 1, 3 October 1981.
166. Sharon Siddique and Nirmala PuruShotam, *Singapore's Little India: Past, Present and Future* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), 27.
167. Merewether, *Straits Settlements*, 59.
168. CO277/53, 'Straits Settlements Population. Census taken on 1st March 1910', in *Straits Settlements Blue Book*, 1910, Appendix P, p28.
169. Ibid.
170. A. Mani, 'Changing Caste-Structure', 19.
171. Ibid., 22.
172. Ibid., 23–4.
173. Karpal Singh, 'An Indian Dairy in Singapore' (Academic exercise, Dept. of Geography, National University of Singapore, 1968), 5.
174. Ratnala Thulaja Naidu, 'Sri Krishnan Temple', Singapore Infopedia, 29 March 2003, accessed 15 February 2011, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_276_2004-12-24.html; Saran Singh Sidhu, 'Central Sikh Temple', accessed

February 15, 2011, <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/world-gurudwaras/central-sikh-temple-wadda-gurdwara.html>.

175. CO277/53, 'Straits Settlements Population. Census taken on 1st March 1901', in *Straits Settlements Blue Book*, 1910, Appendix P, 27-8. The 1901 census recorded 2307 Indians residing in the 'core' Serangoon Road area, while the number of Indians in the vicinity of Jalan Sultan, Arab Street, Waterloo Street, and Queen Street was 3709.

176. Property sales were regularly reported in *The Straits Times* during this period. See, for example, *The Straits Times*, 17 August 1925, 11.

177. Mani, 'Changing Caste-Structure', 15.

4 Repression, Reform, Rebellion

Railways and steamers transformed communications.... The Suez Canal was opened in 1869.... The telegraph reached Singapore in 1871. The automobile, the bicycle, and the oil-bunkered ship were to follow. By these means not only was trade revolutionized: states could be more integrated, and administrations more demanding and more effective. Books, ideas, and people travelled more. More education was needed even in colonial dependencies. New aspirations were to develop there as a result, and old ones to be given new forms.

Nicholas Tarling¹

Indian social formations in Singapore transformed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Along with significant changes in their socio-economic profile, that shift can be better understood in a wider frame that accounts for changes in and beyond the port city. In Singapore, colonial control deepened over this period. The police force, legal administration, and municipal services expanded. Educational infrastructure grew incrementally, and English education, especially, became an important instrument for upward mobility. The colonial state confident in its ideological, racial, and cultural superiority, increasingly intervened in erstwhile Asian socio-political and cultural formations and practices—particularly those deemed to be potential challenges to colonial ‘law and order’. New associations, better aligned to colonial imperatives, replaced older fraternities. Repression, however, represented only one facet of colonial rule. Managing colonial society required Asian ‘collaborators’, who as subaltern personnel in

the administration, or as recognized leaders of emergent community formations, could reach out to and influence the wider population.

That being said, disciplining society in the colonial port city was not a straightforward matter. The effects of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century revolution in information and communication technologies were particularly evident in urban centres like Singapore. Advances in technology deepened and intensified the extent to which local society was affected by distant social, political, and cultural currents. The port city became an important stopover in the travels of luminaries, preachers, and pilgrims, who alongside new waves of emigrants, brought 'with them not only their skills, capital or labour power, but ideas, cultural practices, sacred symbols, and ways of life'.² Thus, while colonial control encouraged the permeation of Occidental modernity and its attendant formations and ideas, the Asian inhabitants of Singapore also became increasingly conscious of socio-political currents emanating from India, the Middle East, and the Far East. Collectively these changes ushered new conversations and debates 'about social and religious reform, about political legitimacy, ... and about the condition of living in diaspora'.³

How did the colonial advance, the revolution in information and communications technology, and the increased flow of people in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century impact upon Indian society in Singapore? How did Indians negotiate the (re)construction of their social and religious formations in light of these transformations? What changes were manifest in their aspirations and patterns of identification? Did the growing consciousness of transnational political developments have an impact? These questions guide the chapter's focus on social developments in the Indian diaspora in Singapore for the period spanning from the transfer of the Straits Settlements in 1867 to the end of World War I. The chapter closes with a study of the mutiny of Indian soldiers in 1915—till then possibly the most significant direct challenge to colonial supremacy in the port city.

4.1 The Authoritarian Turn

Colonial governance took an authoritarian turn after the 1867 transfer. Concerted policies were put in place to check potential native challenges to colonial control. These were primarily directed at curtailing

the influence and power of 'secret societies', and further limiting the performance of Asian processions in the public sphere. Insofar as Indians were concerned, this especially affected the Red and White Flag societies, and the conduct of Muharram festivities.

In May 1867, serious clashes were reported between the Red and White Flag in Penang. During the Muharram festivities, a quarrel had occurred between the two societies that culminated in the murder of a diamond merchant.⁴ Following the 1867 'riot', colonial authorities became even more determined in refusing permission for Muharram processions, positing that these celebrations were a 'danger' to public peace. Onerous demands had to be met before licenses for processions were granted. Persons acting as sureties of proper conduct during these celebrations were subject to severe liabilities should any 'disturbance arise'.⁵ Yet, even adherence to these demands was not a guarantee that these processions would proceed. In 1875, after being initially promised permission, the Muharram procession in Singapore was stopped by the police 'in anticipation of a fight between the Red and White Flags societies'.⁶ In response to the ban, an irate organizer of the Muharram festivities appealed to the Governor for an enquiry of bias against Muslims as other 'subjects ... [are] allowed to have their procession[s]'.⁷ The protest came to naught, and it became increasingly clear by this time that colonial authorities were determined to allow the public processions to only be held if they were fully convinced that these would not lead to disruptions to public peace.

The Muharram clashes in 1867 also provided the impetus for the Governor of the Straits Settlements to push for more stringent regulations directed at curtailing secret society activities. In August 1867 the Preservation of Peace Act, better known as the Banishment Act, was enacted. The ordinance gave the Executive extraordinary powers to deal with civil conflict. The Governor and the Executive Council could proclaim a state of emergency, during which special constables could be conscripted; officials could order the dispersal of assemblies; the police were given powers to shoot 'rioters'; and the Governor could banish offenders or individuals who were deemed as potential threats.⁸

The legislation was too late however to deter another serious outbreak of violence in Penang, late in 1867, which involved 'Chinese secret societies as the main contenders and the ... [Red and White Flag] secret societies as their allies'.⁹ These riots were said to have

been triggered by a minor dispute—a White Flag member had thrown a rambutan peel at a Chinese member of the Toh Peh Kong society, 'and called him a thief'.¹⁰ In the ensuing conflict, the Red Flag joined hands with the Toh Peh Kong, while the White Flag formed an alliance with the Ghee Hin. Over a period of 10 days in late August and early September, 'the societies fought with stones, sticks, spears, swords and muskets making a battlefield out of Prince of Wales' Island'. At that point, in Penang alone, the size of the White Flag was reported to have been approximately 3,000, while that of the Red Flag was some 300.¹¹

A commission of enquiry into the 1867 riots delineated additional measures to contain the threat of secret societies—that were clearly showing themselves to be well organized, and made apparent the existence of deeper linkages across racial and religious lines:

The organisation and discipline of the societies appear to be as complete as that of any disciplined force of the Government.... these secret societies are extremely dangerous.... A notable circumstance ... which has rendered these societies more harmful of late, is, the combination of the Mussulmans and Hindoos with the Chinese...¹²

Subsequently, the 'Suppression of Dangerous Societies' Ordinance was enacted in 1869, which required all secret societies with more than 10 members to register at the Office of the Commissioner of Police. If any objective or activity of a society was deemed illegal, office-bearers could, on conviction, be subjected to a heavy penalty or imprisonment for up to two years.¹³ The 1867 Preservation of Peace and the 1869 'Suppression of Dangerous Societies' Acts were renewed annually and were made part of the common law in the Straits Settlements in 1872.

In spite of the new regulations, the Red Flag and the White Flag continued to operate unregistered, even though the existence and continued tensions between the two societies was public knowledge in Singapore. In May 1871, *The Straits Times* reported that at a Muslim purification bath ceremony:

There is a standing feud between ... the Red and White flag associations.... Wednesday was a Mahomedan festive day and they repaired [*sic*] in large numbers to the Geylang district.... The police had early intimation ... and were present in sufficient force to prevent [a clash]. The members are eager to have the quarrel out ... and a serious disturbance may occur at any moment.¹⁴

By this time, colonial officials had come to accept that these secret societies could not be curtailed through regulations alone. Direct measures were required to make effective the regulatory framework. The number of policemen in Singapore was increased from 385 in the mid-1860s to 550 by the 1870s.¹⁵ However, aspersions that the police force had connections with the Red Flag and the White Flag, continued—*The Straits Times*, for example, insinuated that ‘many of the police are members or partisans of the two hostile parties’.¹⁶ Some policemen were reported to have also established ties with the larger Chinese secret societies. Two prominent Chinese businessmen—Tan Kim Ching and Hoo Ah Kay—revealed at an enquiry in 1874 that several Indian policemen had indeed, joined ‘the Ghee Hin and other Chinese Kongsees’.¹⁷ It was only after the advent of the Sikh contingent in 1881 that concerns over connections between the police force and ‘secret societies’ diminished.

The regulatory framework was also further tightened. In 1879, when the Red Flag and the White Flag clashed in Malacca and investigations revealed that their influence had also increased in Singapore and Penang, colonial officials concluded that the complete suppression of these two societies was imperative. In 1882, amendments to the ‘Suppression of Dangerous Societies’ Ordinance, prohibited those born in the colony, or were British subjects, from joining secret societies.¹⁸ The change was intended specifically to curtail the Red Flag and the White Flag, as their membership, unlike the Chinese secret societies, was made up of those born in the Straits or British India (and thus British subjects). Indeed, Governor Weld had underlined that these amendments targeted the ‘Mahomedan Red and White Flag Societies [who] should be absolutely suppressed’.¹⁹ The Ordinance also acted as a deterrent against inter-ethnic collaboration since Chinese secret societies admitting Indians or Malays risked immediate censure.

The 1882 amendments marked the death knell of the Red Flag and the White Flag, which effectively became one of the earliest prohibited societies in the Straits. Following the implementation of the Ordinance, no further official record of these societies is available. Anecdotal accounts, however, suggest that some functionaries continued to operate surreptitiously. Even in the late 1880s, the Tamil newspaper *Singai Nesan* reported the involvement of Tamil Muslims, Chitties, and Malays in collaborative secret societies operating brothels in the Kampong Glam area.²⁰ That said, strict regulations and strong policing

had severely undermined the potential of inter-ethnic collaboration through secret societies. The larger Chinese secret societies, however, remained a potent force in Singapore well into the twentieth century.

4.2 Reform

The suppression of Indian secret societies and tightened restrictions concerning the conduct of religious processions somewhat reflected, the felling of an older order of inter-ethnic collaboration or, at the very least, a limitation of these formations and socio-religious practices in the public eye. For a period of over three decades from the 1880s to the advent of World War I, the colonial government faced no serious law and order issues from the Indian population in Singapore. Yet, despite the outward quietude, deeper transformations were underway in Indian society in Singapore—changes that would have long term socio-political implications. One factor accounting for the change was the gradual spread of education in the port city that, over time, strengthened the urban Indian (and Sri Lankan) literati in the port city. The period also witnessed the spread of Tamil vernacular education, which to some extent reified the linguistic and cultural influence of the Tamil country for those educated in such institutions.

Another important agent of change was the veritable 'information revolution' witnessed in the port city in the late nineteenth century. The extension of telegraph cables to Singapore via Penang and Madras, in 1870–71, enabled almost instantaneous transmission of news from distant locales of the Empire to the colony. By the 1880s, steamships had nearly all but replaced sailing ships for long journeys, which, beyond effecting the movement of goods and people, affected the speed at which information was disseminated.²¹ The deepening of information-communication connections further facilitated the spread of Occidental influences from the colonial metropolis. Yet, at the same time, ideas of social and religious reform and news of political developments from other locales also converged locally. An important source of such ideas emanated from Singapore's position as a centre for Hajj pilgrims, who upon their return brought with them the influences that they had been sensitized to on their journey to their religious 'homelands'. The influence of luminaries who travelled to and from the subcontinent during this period also encouraged the spread of these alternative intellectual currents.

Education

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the beginnings and subsequent proliferation of a class of urban Indian literati in Singapore. A considerable proportion was made up of educated emigrants who had been recruited for the expanding bureaucracy and private sector. Amongst more settled Indian inhabitants, there was also a growing emphasis on education—specifically English education—which came to be recognized as a means to secure employment in higher-ranking positions in the government service. By the late nineteenth century Indian children, largely from upper-middle class and merchant households, were already attending mission and public schools, such as the Raffles Institution, Anglo-Chinese School, St Joseph's Institution, and Victoria School. Their numbers increased following the 1901 education commission report that called for an expansion of secondary level education to meet the shortfall of personnel to fill clerical and junior official positions.²² Collectively, these groups provided the foundations for a new Indian elite, comprising those who were inclined to look upon their own society through the prism of Western scientific thinking that emphasized rationality, utility, and progress.

Others turned to Tamil-medium schools, the only option at this time in terms of an Indian vernacular education. In the second half of the nineteenth century Christian missions had set up Anglo-Tamil schools. This included the St Francis Xavier Malabar School, the Ladies Bible and Tract Society, and the Christopher Muruguppa Pillai School.²³ In 1881, two Tamil schools catered to the children of Tamil labourers—the Singapore Tamil Division and the Kampong Kilang Tamil Division. Tamil education was also provided through 'proprietary' schools—in 1884, seventy pupils were reported to be receiving Tamil education at seven such schools located at the 'South Bridge Road Hindoo Temple' (Sri Mariamman Temple), Serangoon Road, Rochor Road, and Kallang Road.²⁴ By the turn of the century, however, many Tamil language schools had 'gradually reduced their use of Tamil and were converted into Preparatory English Schools'.²⁵ Although 'proprietary' schools remained ubiquitous, they did not receive funding from the government, which in turn affected the standard of education they provided. Indeed, the only Tamil schools subsidized by the government at the turn of the century were Christian schools—Our Lady of Lourdes

Convent School and St Theresa's Convent Tamil School, which catered to the education of Indian girls.²⁶

A variety of factors explained the turn to Tamil schools. English schools followed a more rigid curriculum that would not have suited children from the lower classes for whom a full-time education was often not an option. Additionally there was an issue of cost, as well as distance, for those whose parents worked in factories and plantations in the periphery, since English-medium schools were mainly situated within the limits of the city. Cultural factors also played a role—those in the diaspora were keen to have their younger generation gain some mastery of their 'mother tongue'. That logic was especially the case for women's education, and even affluent parents, who were open to educating their daughters tended towards vernacular schools because of notions that English-medium education would lead to a loss of culture and language.

The dual system of education had long-term implications on Indian society in Singapore. For those who went through English-medium schools, Turnbull posits that a common English education would gradually bring 'together the English-educated of all races'.²⁷ These elite 'were characterized by wealth, high education and a keenness to assemble the accoutrements of a European way of life. Their social intercourse was normally through cosmopolitan clubs ... and inter-racial professional associations [and] ... other popular recreational organisations'.²⁸ Access to English-medium education also had the effect of creating 'a rift between the elite and lower classes within each community',²⁹ dividing, in the case of Indians, those who were English-educated white-collared professionals, and those who were from the lower-middle classes or who were labourers, who tended towards a vernacular leadership.

Yet these effects were not immediately manifest in Indian society in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In the hierarchical racial framework of the colony, being an English-educated Asian, even as it facilitated social mobility, did not translate into entering the highest echelons of society—an exclusive stronghold of the Europeans. The tendency for colonial policy to treat Asians separately, on the basis of ascribed markers of difference, in turn ensured that even professionals were not divorced from Indian communal setups. Additionally, the varied content of the transnational currents intersecting at the port

city also sometimes acted as forces that reified race, religion, and other traditional markers of identity. The segments that follow look at the early Indian vernacular press and the development of associations in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. They validate that communal identities remained significant for the upper echelons of local Indian society with the caveat that those operated by the literati were more collaborative across ethnic lines, and displayed a greater openness towards reform.

The Early Tamil Vernacular Press

The earliest vernacular presses in Singapore were founded by the Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast and the Jawi Peranakans. These groups had served as clerks, translators, and interpreters in the administration even before the 1867 transfer, and from an early period had functioned as teachers of the Malay language to Europeans. A number of Tamil Muslims and Jawi Peranakans also had long-standing experiences in the publishing industry as they had begun to work as apprentices in the Government and European presses by the mid-nineteenth century.³⁰

In 1873, C. K. Makutum Sahib, a Singapore-born Tamil Muslim established the Denodaya Press, 'which published Tamil, Malay, and English publications well into the twentieth century'.³¹ The press produced the first Tamil newspaper in Singapore—the *Singai Varthamani*—which began circulation around 1875. A year later, the Jawi Peranakan company introduced the *Tankai Nesan*, a Tamil newspaper edited by Munshi Mohammed Syed bin Mohideen. In 1887, the Denodaya Press also began the Tamil weekly, the *Singai Nesan*, although by this time the earlier Tamil newspapers published in Singapore had ceased.³²

Tschacher's detailed study reveals that the tracts published by these presses were remarkably informative of how segments of the Indian diaspora in the port city sought to reconcile tradition and modernity in the context of living in the British Empire in the late nineteenth century.³³ The coverage of the *Singai Nesan* personified the overlapping circles of Tamil Muslim identification in the diaspora: a deep connection to a pan-Islamic fraternity alongside an affiliation to the Tamil-speaking 'homeland'. There was a distinct religious focus—with local coverage centred on the celebration of religious rituals and festivals, and on

developments in the Muslim—specifically Tamil Muslim—community. The newspaper also catered to the outward gaze of the largely immigrant population, with attention paid to trans-regional developments in the Muslim world and southern India. For information on wider developments in the Straits and distant locations, the newspaper depended on the local English press. In reporting about developments in southern India and the Muslim world, the *Singai Nesan* also turned to two Colombo-based newspapers—*Muslim Nesan* and *Sarvajana Nesan*, as well as Arab sources and Urdu newspapers from India.³⁴

The *Singai Nesan* ostensibly displayed its loyalty to the British Empire—the subhead of the main title of the newspaper declared in English and in bold, ‘This Tamil journal “Singai Nesan” is designed to commemorate the jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen-Empress Victoria.’³⁵ The newspaper was reformist in advocating education as a means for individual and community upliftment. It carried warnings addressed to its readers—discouraging them from engaging in secret societies; applauding the Straits authorities for good governance; and for keeping a vigil in preventing the types of communal strife evident in India.³⁶ That said, on issues pertaining to the wider Muslim world, the *Singai Nesan*’s position to some extent differed from the English press in its support for pan-Muslim unity. Tschacher explains that these undercurrents came to the fore in the dissonant ways in which the *Singai Nesan* and the English press reported growing disaffection in the Arab Muslim world in the late 1880s. He cites, for example, the case of *The Straits Times* article entitled ‘A Mahomedan crisis’ in November 1887 that represented the rising disaffection in the Arab Muslim world as ‘a deep undercurrent of bitter fanatic feeling ... which only finds a vent in deeds of bloodshed and destruction’.³⁷ The *Singai Nesan*’s ‘translation’ of the piece in Tamil, instead portrayed the foment and growing disaffection in the Arab Muslim world as an ‘optimistic story of Islamic revival’ with the editor concluding that:

... the time is quickly approaching when ... all Muslims unite, bring the affairs of religion into the pure, old condition, make a sultanate from amongst themselves, perceive someone from those [of] the lineage of the Lord of Prophets and make him Caliph.³⁸

In 1890, the Denodaya Press ceased printing the *Singai Nesan* and it was not until three decades later before the next Tamil newspaper was

to be established in Singapore. The relatively short lifespan of all the early Tamil newspapers reflected the difficulties they faced in remaining financially viable. Nonetheless, by this time, a variety of vernacular journals published in the subcontinent had begun to circulate in the Straits Settlements. Access to these vernacular journals ensured that segments of the Indian population—even those without an English education—continued to be connected to ideas and news emanating from the subcontinent and beyond. For those who enjoyed both an English and a vernacular education, these journals enabled access to alternative reports beyond news published by the English press. Indians with knowledge of Malay—the *lingua franca* of the market—could also avail to local Malay journals.

New Organizations

Colonial records suggest a gradual increase in registered Indian-led associations from the late 1880s. By the advent of World War I, the Registry of Societies listed some 20 associations that were either Indian-only bodies or whose membership comprised a sizeable Indian constituency. This represented only a small proportion of the approximately 360 associations listed as existing in Singapore at the time.³⁹ Numerous factors informed the slow development of Indian associations in Singapore—the small size of the community; continued sojourning patterns that made it difficult to form and sustain these associations; and the limited number of educated elite and affluent merchants willing and able to provide leadership to manage these bodies that now had to comply with the onerous requirements of the new regulatory framework.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, with the exception of sports-orientated organizations, most associations in the port city with significant Indian participation were forged primarily along religious lines, i.e., Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Sikh affiliations. These were male-only bodies—a product of the stark gender disparity in the port city's diaspora and an orthodoxy that was reflected in an aversion to women's participation in communal bodies in the public sphere. Within that overarching religious frame, a small number of associations represented specific ethno-linguistic, regional, or sect-based differences. Conversely, till World War I, organizations formed along ethno-linguistic lines with a pan-religious membership were

an exception, as were pan-Indian or, for that matter, pan-Ceylonese organizations. The most dynamic associations established during this period comprised those that tended to act as umbrella-like religious bodies with a pan-ethnic membership led by the urban literati and affluent merchants. Often informed by notions of progress and reform, they were usually best placed to gain concessions for their constituency through petitions and representations to the colonial government.

In addition to the salience of religious identities, other factors accounted for the tendency of Indian associations to be constituted along religious frames. Because the colonial state was officially 'secular', the establishment and development of religious institutions, as well as the continuation of sacred practices depended on private initiatives; for which a collective existence that enabled a pooling of resources was useful, and even necessary. Moreover, during this period, reformist currents emanating from the subcontinent and beyond also displayed a strong concern with religion and religious practices. Additionally, colonial policies specific to Indians added to the propensity towards the setting up of religious associations. Although race was a key signifier in the management of the Asian population, when it came to Indians, communities were often marked along religious lines. Thus, for example, while a unitary Chinese Advisory Board was created to advise the state on policies vis-à-vis the entire Chinese population, no similar organization was formed at a pan-Indian level. Rather, in dealing with Indians, the colonial state, over time, created separate Advisory Boards along Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh lines—in turn creating a context in which attempts to bargain for concessions tended to be conducted along religious lines.

At the turn of the century, amongst Indians, Muslims were the most active in forging associations. While some of their religious groupings tended to show ethnic exclusivity, there were also those that comprised a multi-ethnic mix of Indians, Jawi Peranakans, Arabs along with a small number of Malays. Most were intended for recreational, cultural, or strictly religious purposes, although a notable few had wider aspirations—engaging with currents of progress and reform, and acting as protagonists in the upliftment of the community. Amongst these, the Muslim Association emerged as the premier Muslim organization in Singapore in the period prior to World War I. Its leadership comprised the top echelons of the Muslim literati and businessmen in Singapore,

nearly all of whom at this time were either of Indian or of Arab descent. Its Indian leaders were mainly Gujaratis and Tamils, and, in the period prior to World War I, included A. M. S. Angullia, Ahmed Marican, M. H. Dawood, M. A. Patail, Alikhan Suratee, Muhamed Hussain Namazie, Abdul Kader Palekat, and Alibhoy Rajbhoy, amongst others.⁴⁰

The Muslim Association, influenced by Occidental notions of progress alongside reformist currents emanating from the Muslim world—including the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and India—sought ‘Muhammadan advancement and unity in Islam’.⁴¹ Concerned by the perceived backwardness of Muslims in education, the Association sought to encourage English education, and knowledge of arithmetic and the sciences. The emphasis on English-medium education was not divorced from a desire to propagate an understanding of Islamic texts. For these purposes, an Anglo-Arab school was setup in the first decade of the twentieth century. Like the reformist Singapore-based Malay journal *Al-Imam*, which began circulation in 1907, the Muslim Association was concerned with getting ‘Muslims to make that great leap forward into the modern world, by convincing them that knowledge and progress were an intrinsic part of ... Muslim life’.⁴²

Beyond educational objectives, the Muslim Association sought to redress perceived disabilities confronting Muslims through petitions to the Government. There were, for example, demands for a Muslim Advisory Board, which could act as an official advisory body to the Government on matters pertaining to religion and custom, and calls for the inclusion of Muslim representatives in the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowments Board that had been established in 1906.⁴³ Between 1911 and 1913, the Muslim Association organized deputations and petitioned repeatedly for the recognition of Hari Raya Puasa and Hari Raya Haji as public holidays. In that effort, the Association showed that it was adept in galvanizing wider support, by holding meetings with other Muslim organizations, and bringing religious leaders together to agree on the exact date for these holidays.⁴⁴

The Association was well placed to gain concessions from the government. Its educated and affluent members cultivated relations with officials—frequently hosting sporting events and lavish ‘tea parties’ for European officers. It keenly displayed its loyalty to the British Empire. On the passing away of King Edward VII in 1910, the Association hosted a substantial function at the Victoria Memorial Hall—an event attended

by senior European officials and members of the Malay royalty.⁴⁵ This in turn, resulted in the Muslim Association gaining considerable recognition from the colonial authorities. Many of the Association's leaders were accorded titles such as Justice of Peace (JP). In 1910, A. M. S. Angullia, described by colonial officials as 'one of the most enlightened and up-to-date Mohammedans of Singapore'⁴⁶ became the first Muslim representative to be appointed as Municipal Commissioner in Singapore.⁴⁷ The Association's most significant achievement prior to World War I was possibly in getting the Government to accede to recognizing the day after the close of the Muslim fasting month—Hari Raya—as a public holiday in 1914.⁴⁸

Although the late nineteenth century did witness a significant increase in the number of Hindu shrines in Singapore, the formation of Hindu associations was more gradual when compared to Indian Muslim ones, increasing steadily only from the first decade of the twentieth century as their numbers grew exponentially. Affluent businessmen and educated personnel, including many Ceylonese Tamils, were crucial in providing leadership to these organizations. During this period, Hindu associations were sometimes established along *Saiva* or *Vaishnava* lines. The former was overwhelmingly Tamil in its following, whereas the latter, although also mainly comprising of Tamils, reflected a more varied ethno-linguistic composition.⁴⁹ The period also witnessed the establishment of numerous organizations that were influenced by 'neo-Hindu' reformist currents that had spread in the subcontinent in the late nineteenth century. Amongst the reforms they advocated included ridding caste and 'backward' customs, and emphasizing educational development.⁵⁰ Most of these organizations were catalyzed by travelling missionaries who were keen to spread their message of religious reform in the diaspora. Possibly the most significant of these was Swami Vivekananda who visited Singapore in June 1893 en route to the September 1893 World Parliament of Religions conference in Chicago.⁵¹ Vivekananda's visit ushered the beginnings of the movement of missionaries from the Ramakrishna *math*, which in turn catalyzed the formation of at least two associations during this period—namely, the Arya Sangam and the Singapore Vivekanantha Sanmarka Sangum.⁵²

Another Hindu reformist organization that established its place in the port city during this period was the Young Men's Arya Samaj—

formed in 1914.⁵³ Its constituency and activities were revealing of the characteristics of these Hindu reformist organizations, and its management, at this juncture, reflected an inclusive character, comprising a mix of Tamils (both from Ceylon and the Madras Presidency), Malayalis, Punjabis, and emigrants from the United Provinces. The socio-religious activities of the Young Men's Arya Samaj suggested a progressive outlook. On the first anniversary of the organization, a crowd gathered to watch a dramatic enactment of 'Raja Harishchandra', and frequent discussions and debates were carried out on topics that dealt with 'prevailing issues in Hindu society', 'Female Education', 'Renaissance in Asia', and 'Idol Worship'.⁵⁴ The activities of the Young Men's Arya Samaj also showed attempts to connect to non-Hindu groups—Muslim speakers were occasionally invited to deliver talks on 'Hindu-Muslim unity' at the premises of the Association. Likewise, the premises of the ethnically heterogeneous Arya Sangam were also periodically used by Muslim associations to conduct their meetings and lectures.⁵⁵

The closest that Hindus came to establishing an umbrella Hindu body prior to World War I was the Hindu Association, formed in 1913.⁵⁶ Like the reformist organizations, the Association predominantly comprised middle-class Hindu members with a heterogeneous ethno-linguistic composition. The Hindu body, however, was not as effective as the Muslim Association in providing leadership to its disparate constituency, and neither did it receive the same recognition from the colonial authorities. Attempts by the organization to act as an umbrella body for Hindu groups was particularly resisted by the Chettiers, who viewed the organization as dominated by non-Tamil Vaishnavas. This was not necessarily a just representation given that the leadership of the Hindu Association included many Tamil Brahmins and Ceylonese Tamils, who would most certainly have been Saivas. Divisions between these segments were clearly manifest, for example, on the issue of gazetting a Hindu public holiday for the port city. In 1914, when the Legislative Council recognized Hari Raya as a public holiday for Muslims, it also amended the Holidays' Ordinance to mark out Thaipusam as a public holiday on account of 'the influx of large numbers of Hindus from British India'.⁵⁷ The colonial decision was possibly influenced by the affluent Chettiar community's support for the festival, and the fact that Thaipusam had long been recognized as a holiday in Penang. The move sparked an outcry amongst sections of the Hindu population in

Singapore. The Hindu Association took the lead in organizing protests, demanding recognition for Deepavali instead of Thaipusam on the grounds that the former was a public holiday 'observed throughout India'⁵⁸ and was celebrated by 'both sections of Hindus, viz., Shaivas and Vaishnavas', whereas the latter was a Tamil-specific festival celebrated 'only by Shaivas'.⁵⁹ In February 1914, a deputation representing a variety of Hindu ethno-linguistic communities met the Governor to argue the case in favour of Deepavali.⁶⁰ Meanwhile sections of the Tamil Hindu population led by Chettiers responded with a petition in favour of Thaipusam. The Chettiar-led contingent argued that the attempt to substitute Deepavali for Thaipusam represented the wishes of only one section of the Hindu community—the Hindu Association—whereas 'the Thaipusam festival is in fact kept by the whole Hindu community in Singapore.'⁶¹ While the latter was an exaggeration, the legislative council decided, for the time being, to maintain Thaipusam as a public holiday, with the caveat that in the future if the legislature 'considered that those in favour of the Deepavali holiday... made out the stronger case they could always amend the bill'.⁶²

The 'Deepavali or Thaipusam' controversy had the effect of galvanizing the Hindu Association to move in the direction already set out by the Muslim Association, that is, to call upon the government to establish a Hindu Advisory Board made up of Hindu representatives who 'know something at least about Hinduism and its ceremonies' and could advise the Legislature, the Municipality, and the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowments Board on matters concerning Hinduism.⁶³ At the same time, the dispute reflected an emerging fractiousness in Singapore's Hindu population in the second decade of the twentieth century, which at this stage was manifest primarily as a binary between sections of the Tamil Hindu population led by the affluent Chettiers, and a heterogeneous ethno-linguistic mix of middle-class Hindus. During the inter-war period, as the Hindu number increased further, and exclusive groupings became more viable, a broader splintering along regional, vernacular, caste, class, and sectarian lines became even more manifest.⁶⁴

To some extent, the tendency to splinter was also evident amongst the smaller Indian communities, although it is unclear if these were necessarily fractious during this period. The key Indian Christian organizations, established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,

included the Indian Catholic Union, the Indian Catholic Benevolent Society, and the Indian Christian Association⁶⁵ which, in spite of carrying an 'Indian' banner, included numerous Ceylonese members. The Sikh institutions were either connected to the police contingent or, in the case of free emigrants, to the gurdwara established on Queen Street in 1912.⁶⁶ As for the Ceylonese, even as a number of Tamils amongst them participated in broader Hindu and Christian organizations, the educated and affluent community was able to establish its own exclusive bodies, i.e., the Ceylon Tamil Association and the Aryan Sinhalese Fraternal Association, which represented the community's ethno-linguistic and religious affiliations.⁶⁷

4.3 The 1915 Indian Sepoy Mutiny

The period before World War I had seen a gradual increase of organizational activity within the Indian population in Singapore. A concurrent development was that of a moderate brand of political bargaining that involved the presenting of petitions and representations to the Government, of which gaining religious, social, and educational privileges were its aims. Given the general political quiescence of the Indian population, colonial authorities were taken by surprise when, in February 1915, some seven months after the advent of World War I, Indian soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry—the main garrison guarding Singapore at the time—mutinied, killing 41 soldiers and civilians, and leaving several others wounded.⁶⁸ This segment provides a short narrative of the mutiny and the reasons for its failure. It goes on to consider the causal factors that directly and indirectly informed the revolt. The latter is particularly instructive in throwing light upon the wide array of influences—specifically Indian nationalist and pan-Islamic ones—circulating in the colony at the time of World War I. This will be followed by a study of the longer-term effects of the revolt on colonial policies vis-à-vis the Indian population in Singapore.

The Revolt

From April 1914, the 5th Light Infantry was deployed as the main garrison guarding Singapore. The 800-strong Indian Muslim regiment, recruited from northern India, was to be transferred to Hong Kong on

16 February 1915.⁶⁹ Prior to their departure, however, rumours had spread in the contingent that they would instead be transported to the Western front or, even worse, requisitioned to fight against Turkish forces allied to Germany.⁷⁰ The soldiers were particularly disconcerted by the prospect of the latter, given that this meant fighting soldiers of the Ottoman Caliphate, who were fellow Muslims.

At 3 p.m. on 15 February—the day of the Chinese New Year—a single gunshot by Sepoy Ismail ushered the start of the Indian Sepoy Mutiny. Shortly after, sepoy from one Company raided a motor lorry, which was loaded with over 30,000 rounds of ammunition, while soldiers from another broke into an ammunition store. They were soon joined by the two other Indian Companies. The mutineers then divided themselves into groups. One party proceeded to Tanglin where the German prisoners of war (POWs) were incarcerated.⁷¹ There they killed several British and Malay soldiers, dispersed the guard, and released the POWs. The Germans, however, did not join the mutineers, although 17 of them took the opportunity to escape.⁷² A smaller party of rebels proceeded to the Sepoy Lines on the periphery of Chinatown, and, in the process, massacred more British officers and civilians, before breaking into the Central Prison in the heart of the city. Meanwhile, the third and largest group of about 150 mutineers attacked the lines of the Malay States Guides Artillery, where they executed the European commander of the detachment, and intimidated the predominantly Sikh and Punjabi Muslim force, demanding their dispersal. Some from this group went on to occupy a trench at Labrador Hill from which they shot and killed many more British civilians.⁷³

Upon receiving news of the outbreak, Arthur Young, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, declared martial law. At this point, the position of the British authorities was perilous, they had less than 200 military-trained men at their disposal.⁷⁴ To check the mutineers' advance, a motley collection of personnel—including volunteers from the Japanese community—was mobilized. The Sultan of Johor led 391 officers and men of the Johor regiment to aid the British resistance.⁷⁵ Help was also received from ships in the vicinity. The commander of the HMS *Cadmus*—anchored in Singapore waters—immediately ordered 'the whole ship's company ... seamen, the paymaster, cooks, and others' to 'intercept the mutineers'.⁷⁶ Shortly after nightfall on 15 February, the sailors of the HMS *Cadmus* dealt the first serious blow to

the mutineers, killing and wounding a number of sepoy, including a key ringleader—Chisti Khan—on Keppel Road. Over the next four days, more allied ships responded to the emergency messages sent from Singapore including the French cruiser *Montcalm*, the Japanese ships *Otowa* and *Tsushima*, and the Russian cruiser *Orel*.⁷⁷ Support from these allied forces ensured that the revolt was effectively quashed by 20 February.

A total of 614 men of the 5th Light Infantry had surrendered by 22 February. One month after the outbreak, only nine mutineers were unaccounted for, and they too surrendered on April 30.⁷⁸ At the end of the court martial proceedings, 201 Indian soldiers were convicted. Of these 45 were sentenced to death, while the remainder were subject to varying terms of imprisonment. The execution of rebels was done in full public view, reportedly with some 15,000 inhabitants of the city witnessing the scene at the Outram Prison.⁷⁹ The final execution was carried out on 31 May. Kasim Mansur, a Gujarati Muslim owner of a rubber estate in Pasir Panjang, was sentenced to be hung after being found guilty of treason. He and Nur Alam Shah, the imam of Kampong Java Mosque—deported for preaching sedition and aiding and abetting a mutineer—were the only civilians in Singapore sentenced for their involvement in the mutiny.⁸⁰

In the erstwhile literature of the mutiny, there is little dispute in explanations for the failure of the revolt. The mutineers, after their initial moves, clearly did not have a proper plan of action. None of the Indian officers seemed to be in any position to afford proper leadership and neither were they able to win over the support of German POWs. The mutineers had also not countenanced the support colonial authorities could avail from the exterior, i.e., from Johor, and from ships situated in the vicinity of the port. Another important factor accounting for the failure of the revolt was due to the negligible backing from the wider Asian population in Singapore. M. G. Maxwell's early account of the mutiny suggests that:

... the native population of Singapore Island was quiet throughout. Chinese, Malays and Tamils pursued their normal vocations, as though nothing unusual was occurring. No crowds collected, and far from there being any panic, there was, amongst the Chinese in particular ... an imperturbability which amounted to unconcern.... The natives of Northern India [also] showed no sign of sympathy with the mutineers.⁸¹

Causes

While there is little difference in assessments of the failure of the mutiny, there is divergence concerning its causes. The official Court of Enquiry conducted in the aftermath of the revolt posited that the mutiny was primarily the outcome of 'the very unsatisfactory state of discipline ... in the 5th Light Infantry'—marked by dissensions between British officers, and amongst Indian officers and the rank and file, and averred that these divisions were 'bound to initiate a state of unrest and a readiness for any form of mischief'. The enquiry also suggested that a section of the German POWs, who were guarded by the 5th Light Infantry, may have 'had a hand in bringing about the Mutiny ... [through] tales of German ascendancy and loss of British prestige'. This, along with concerns over promotion in the Indian ranks, were listed as contributory causes. The enquiry acknowledged that the state of discipline in the contingent may have 'furnished a fertile field for the sowing and growth of fanatical and seditious ideas' from 'rank seditionists of Indian nationality amongst [Singapore's]... residents':

The town and settlement of Singapore ... enjoy a widespread and unenviable notoriety as being a focus for Indian seditionists passing to and from the Far East and America.... There would appear therefore, to be a good deal of force in [Commanding Officer] Lieut.-Col. Martin's contention that the dispersion all over Singapore,... of his regiment, lent itself to his men being subjected to the evil influences of the seditionists, especially at the various quays and docks where the guards were posted.⁸²

That said, the Court did not further that particular line of enquiry in seeking to establish causality.

Revisionist works on the subject suggest that the Court of Enquiry's report was concerned primarily 'with the question of quick punishment of the mutineers',⁸³ and was relatively blasé in its efforts at identifying and elucidating on the wider influences that may have informed the making of the mutiny. One possibility was the connection of the mutiny to wider transnational currents of Indian anti-colonial propaganda, which were readily available in the port city at the time. By the early twentieth century, 'revolutionary conspiracies which aimed at the overthrow of the British Government in India by violent means' had spread to Indian communities located beyond India's shores.⁸⁴ Some of these revolutionary ideas had even been conceived in the diaspora.

The timing of the mutiny in Singapore certainly pointed towards a link to these revolutionary ideas. The Ghadar Party⁸⁵—one of the most prominent transnational Indian anti-colonial groups operating at the time of World War I—had conspired to foment a mass rebellion of Indian forces against the British authorities precisely in February 1915. Initially organized on the Pacific Coast of the United States, the founder-leader of the Ghadar Party, Har Dayal had, following the advent of World War I, moved to Berlin where ‘Ghadr became the nucleus of an “Indian Political Department” which worked under the “guidance” of the German War and Foreign Officers. Its primary object was to ferment revolutionary activities among Indian troops in India and overseas ... emissaries of Ghadr travelled throughout India, and also to Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan’.⁸⁶

By 1914, Ghadar Party propaganda was available in Singapore. Puri notes that ‘in America, Canada, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila, Penang and Singapore’, Ghadar literature was read at Sikh congregations and its teachings circulated seemingly ‘with deadly effect among Sikh immigrants’.⁸⁷ Indeed, the Court of Enquiry proceedings, without directly mentioning Ghadar Party literature, did aver that prior to the 1915 mutiny, ‘there [was] ... a good deal of sedition *talked* by the men of the Sikh watchman class’.⁸⁸ The influence of these ‘seditious’ ideas was, however, not limited to Sikh watchmen. Kuwajima informs that Gurdit Singh, an influential businessman who had been a long-time resident of Singapore, had, during his 1914 stay at a gurdwara in Hong Kong, ‘delivered a speech, supporting Indian nationalism expressed in the *Ghadar* [newspaper]’.⁸⁹

The spread of anti-colonial ideas amongst Indians in the port city would have certainly been exacerbated by the tragic *Komagata Maru* episode in 1914, which became symbolic of the racial discrimination suffered by Indians in the British Empire. In April 1914, Gurdit Singh had chartered the ship *Komagata Maru* to transport 376 Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, most of whom were ex-soldiers, from Hong Kong to Vancouver. Authorities in Vancouver refused to land the passengers, citing technical infringements, although the underlying basis was race-based exclusionary immigrant policies operational in Canada at the time. The refusal sparked an outcry. The Ghadar Party drew on the humiliating treatment meted out to passengers of the *Komagata Maru* to rally support for its call for Indians to revolt against British rule in

India. At special gatherings in cities on the Western Coast of the United States, leaders of the party exhorted Indians to return to the 'motherland', 'to start a war of independence ... [and] expel the British from India'. From the United States, 'ship after ship carried groups of highly surcharged [*sic*] revolutionaries to the shores of India'.⁹⁰

On 16 September 1914, the *Komagata Maru* arrived in Singapore on her way back to India. British authorities concerned that there would be social unrest if these passengers were allowed to land, ordered the ship to proceed to Calcutta. Yet, while the authorities managed to prevent direct contact with these passengers, they could not curtail the stop-over of other Ghadar Party activists in Singapore on their way back to India from the United States. A number of them resided in Singapore in late 1914, during which they reportedly sought to 'tamper' with the local militia stationed here.⁹¹ News of the tragic fate that befell passengers of the *Komagata Maru* upon their return to India further stirred anti-colonial sentiments. Upon arriving at Budge Budge port in late September 1914, the ship's passengers were ordered to immediately board a train that would take them to Punjab. Their demands to go to Calcutta instead were rejected, and in the protest that followed, 20 passengers were shot dead by British soldiers.⁹² In the aftermath of the slaughter, Jagat Singh, a Sikh resident in Singapore, succeeded in convincing the Malay States Guides to refuse service in East Africa in December 1914. In eschewing the transfer, an anonymous writer from the Guides penned a contemptuous letter to his Commanding Officer:

...the memory of our brethren who have been shot in the Komagata Maru case have troubled and grieved us, ... we can never forget the kindness of the [British] Indian Government [for the slaughter]....When we have no right to walk freely on our own land then what do you want from us in other countries? As we are butchered in our own country we ... refuse to fight except on the terms mentioned in our agreement...⁹³

Indian anti-colonial sentiments represented only one aspect of the 'seditious' influences circulating in the region during this period. When in late October 1914 the Ottoman Caliphate openly allied itself with Germany, British authorities were seriously concerned over the loyalty of Muslims in the Empire. In Singapore, sections of the Muslim population had expressed their sympathies for the Caliphate. For example, when conflict broke out between Italy and Turkey in 1911–12, the *Singapore Free Press* reported that 'in Singapore ... special prayers

were given in every mosque for the [Turkish] Sultan and his Muslim subjects'.⁹⁴ When Britain declared war on Turkey in November 1914, colonial authorities, concerned by the fatwa issued in Turkey 'calling on the Muslims of the world to unite and support the Caliphate above all else',⁹⁵ took pains to emphasize that the war was not directed against Muslims. They were also troubled by the fact that Turkish propaganda that spread to Southeast Asia tended to combine the appeal to pan-Muslim sentiments with that of Indian anti-colonialism. For example, the November 1914 issue of the *Jahan-i-Islam*, intercepted by British authorities in Burma, contained a speech by the Deputy Commander of the Turkish military force, Enver Pasha, who called on Hindus and Muslims to unite against British rule in India: 'This is the time that the *Ghadar* should be introduced in India.... Hindus and Muhammedans, you are both soldiers of the army and you are brothers, and the low degraded English man is your enemy; you should become *ghazis* (fighters against infidels) by declaring *jihad* and by combining with your brothers to murder the English and liberate India.'⁹⁶ Ghadar publications also followed suit, altering their discourse by combining anti-colonial rhetoric with a direct appeal to pan-Muslim sentiments in an effort to win support from Indian Muslims.

Farish Noor suggests that, for Indian Muslims in Singapore, such rallying calls 'were difficult to ignore'.⁹⁷ Certainly, two civilians were sufficiently affected to act upon them—the Gujarati planter and businessman, Kassim Mansur, and his associate Nur Alam Shah, the imam of a mosque in Kampong Java. Mansur maintained close contact with the Malay States Guides, and the Court of Enquiry Report on the Mutiny noted that he too had 'a hand in the refusal of the Malay States Guides to proceed on Field Service'.⁹⁸ In late December 1914, Mansur sent a letter to his son in Rangoon that was intended for delivery to the Turkish consul asking 'for a Turkish warship to be dispatched to Singapore to take the Malay States Guides to any place where they would come "into conflict with British troops"'.⁹⁹ Both Nur Alam Shah and Kassim Mansur had also engaged with the sepoys of the 5th Light Infantry. These sepoys also attended prayer service at the mosque in Kampong Java, where Nur Alam Shah frequently 'preached the rankest sedition against the Government and everything British, and incited Sepoys to rise against the British, telling them that a German warship was about to arrive in Singapore'.¹⁰⁰

The correspondence of the mutineers revealed evidence of the resonance of pan-Islamist propaganda and rumours. One such rumour circulating amongst the sepoys in the period immediately before the mutiny was that the German Kaiser had converted to Islam. Writing to his father, Lance Naik Fateh Mohammed exclaimed: 'The Germans have become Mohammedans. Haji Mahmood William Kaiser and his daughter has married the heir to the Turkish throne, who is to succeed after the Sultan. Many of the German subjects and army have embraced Mohammedanism. Please God [*sic*] that the religion of the Germans [Islam] may be promoted or raised on high'.¹⁰¹ The German POWs incarcerated at Tanglin may have played on these religious sentiments. Brigadier Ridout, in a letter to the Indian Chief of General Staff noted that: 'There is no doubt that 5th Light Infantry had come to think that the Germans were Mohammedans. It came to my notice about the middle of January 1915, that the German prisoners ... were in the habit of saying prayers at sundown in Mahommedan fashion, and pretended to recite the Koran'.¹⁰² The possibility that the sepoys guarding the prisoners had come to believe that the German prisoners were co-religionists may have added weight to the influence that some, such as the German POW, Oberleutenant Lauterbach had on them. In his memoirs, Lauterbach posited that he had indeed influenced the Indian soldiers into thinking that 'Now, when the war is going on in Europe... is the best chance you will ever have to get rid of your masters'.¹⁰³

Given the connections to the Ghadar Party and the anti-British pan-Islamist propaganda, the suggestion by the Court of Inquiry that the Indian Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore was primarily a matter of indiscipline and internal dissension is difficult to sustain. Although the link between the sepoy mutiny in Singapore and the wider Ghadar Party attempt to foment a general rebellion amongst Indian troops in February 1915 has not been firmly established, the testimony of Lauterbach, written many years later, in which he suggested that members of the 5th Light Infantry did try to coordinate an uprising with other Indian forces in the region, is telling:

[On] February 11... [a Sergeant from the 5th Light Infantry] informed me that the regiment at Guadalompure [*sic*. Kuala Lumpur?] had refused to join in the proposed outbreak. His regiment... was composed entirely of... followers of Islam. The others were Hindus, and Sikhs from the Punjab. Unfortunately they never could be made to put together.¹⁰⁴

From the above, it is also evident that undercurrents of anti-colonial dissent had, certainly by the time of World War I, begun to permeate even in the wider Indian population in the port city. The fact that this was not manifest in open support for the mutineers at the time should therefore not necessarily be rendered as a reflection of the overwhelming Indian loyalty to colonial rule, but possibly a pragmatic cognizance of the futility of what was effectively a badly organized move. At the same time, the lack of civilian support also revealed that the influence of these currents in the wider Indian population in the port city had not, as yet, matured.

Implications

The Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore had longer term implications on the relationship between colonial authorities and the Indian population in Singapore. Their loyalty was questioned in the aftermath. Letters to the English press frequently cast aspersions on the fidelity of the Indian population. Even Chettians were not spared, and were specifically targeted for their perceived parsimony in aiding the war effort.¹⁰⁵ Farish Noor suggests that, as a result of the mutiny, British authorities increasingly came to regard Indian settlers as 'a potential fifth column that could strike at the Empire from within... No longer deemed as *loyal subjects* who could be relied upon in time of need, the Indian subjects of the colonies—and the Indian Muslims in particular—would be watched, followed, spied on and treated as the *mistrusted Other* who had to be kept at bay'.¹⁰⁶

Shortly after the Court of Enquiry had emphasized flaws in the military and police intelligence gathering mechanism, a political intelligence bureau was established in Singapore. Helmed initially by Deputy Superintendent Hector Kothavala from the Bombay Police, and David Petrie, assistant to the Deputy Inspector of Police in the Punjab, the activities of the intelligence bureau during the war years centred on countering 'Ghadr and German intelligence activities'.¹⁰⁷ The intelligence bureau paved the way for the formation, in 1919, of the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) which in its early years was 'focused on keeping under surveillance supporters of the Indian national movement in the Straits Settlements'.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the intelligence bureau, new regulations were put in place to check the potential seditious activities amongst Indians. Indian

subjects residing in Singapore were forced to register with colonial authorities, a requirement 'which caused considerable ill-feeling'.¹⁰⁹ The Seditious Publications (Prohibition) Ordinance was enacted in late 1915, and most of the publications that were initially prohibited, were mouthpieces of Indian nationalist or Muslim religious-political aspirations.¹¹⁰ Indian Muslims, who had long been involved in the publishing industry in Singapore, were especially affected as their activities 'were monitored constantly'.¹¹¹

After the mutiny, colonial authorities in the Straits were increasingly disposed to the view 'that ethnic and religious bonds could not be weakened despite years of military training and discipline, and that fellow-feeling could only be guaranteed among fellow Europeans'.¹¹² Consequently, the deployment of Indian garrisons in the Straits was suspended, an embargo that extended until the advent of World War II. After the Mutiny, the Straits Settlements Government passed the Reserve Force and Civil Guard Ordinance that required every British subject of European descent aged between 18 and 38 residing in the colony to join the Volunteer Reserve Force or undergo military training.¹¹³ This was possibly the first British colony to introduce compulsory military service.¹¹⁴

Concerned by the aspersions cast on Indian fidelity, sections of the Indian population responded through activities that showcased their loyalty to colonial rule. At several meetings organized by the Sikh community, declarations were made of 'loyalty to our gracious King'.¹¹⁵ Sikh watchmen increased their contributions to British War Relief Funds.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Indian Muslim leaders such as Mohammed Salleh Angullia and Mohammed Ali Namazie were instrumental in galvanizing some three thousand Muslims to pledge 'the absolute loyalty of all Mahomedans in the colony'.¹¹⁷

Even if some of the participation in the mass rally may have been pretence, the success of the Muslim Association's leadership in organizing the display, highlighted to the authorities the importance of further cultivating the elite so as to reach out to the wider Asian population.¹¹⁸ After the mutiny, measures to draw these elites closer included more generous distributions of titles such as 'Justice of Peace' (JP), and the greater incorporation of Asian leaders in government councils. Concomitantly, the Government established advisory boards to aid in the management of Indian communities. In these, the Government

took after a model established in 1889 for the Chinese, in the form of the Chinese Advisory Board. The difference was that a unitary board was not put in place for Indians. Indeed, a conscious policy was enacted to ensure that, as far as Indians were concerned, advisory boards were to be separate and formed primarily along religious lines. The first to be created was a Muslim Advisory Board in June 1915, comprising a number of Indian representatives from the Muslim Association.¹¹⁹ The objective was to make the elite members of the Board, ‘cognisant of the reasons for Government policy’ which they could ‘communicate to their compatriots’.¹²⁰ At the same time, the Advisory Board was intended to detect potential problems, and possibly aid in settling concerns before these escalated into a crisis. At its inauguration, the Colonial Secretary averred that the Muslim Advisory Board would ‘act as a means of expression for the Mohammedan community in matters relating to their religious affairs, customs, health and conditions... The board’s decisions and opinions would have considerable weight with the Government’.¹²¹ In November 1915, the Government followed suit for the Sikhs by inaugurating a Sikh Advisory Board,¹²² and in 1918 the Singapore Hindu Advisory Board was established.¹²³ While collectively these advisory boards sought to forge links between the Government and the elites, they also served as a means for the Government to ‘spy’ on the latter’s sympathies. As such, political intelligence files revealed that a key objective of the European members appointed to these boards was ‘to obtain a clearer view as to [which Muslim, Sikh and Hindu] members on each Board [were] thoroughly loyal’.¹²⁴

* * *

Although socio-political change amongst Indians in Singapore was tampered by the ‘largely immigrant and in part still migrant’¹²⁵ population, the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was nonetheless distinctive in initiating changes with long-term social and political implications. That transformation was partly caused by an increasingly assertive colonial state curtailing Indian practices and social formations—such as ‘secret societies’—that were rooted in the period prior to the transfer. That authoritarian turn, may have emerged out of a fear of the unknown or uncontained, but it reflected the growing pervasiveness of colonial power and a certain confidence in European notions of progress.

The wide-ranging changes ushered during this period provoked diverse responses from Indians in the port city. As evident in the early vernacular press, the key problematic for Indian society involved balancing tradition and socio-religious identification with the onslaught of colonial modernity, and growing sensitization to the wider transnational currents emanating from the subcontinent and beyond. The attempt to balance tradition with notions of progress and reform also featured in the new types of associations that Indians forged during this period. Most tended to follow religious lines. The more dynamic ones—usually led by the Indian literati and the upper echelons of the business community—were actively engaged in reform at the intra-community level. Beyond the issue of reform and representation, these associations depicted wider trends in Indian community life. In the case of the Muslim Association an inclusive pan-ethnic posture was clearly manifest. Hindu associations, however, were seemingly more divided along ethnic or sect-based lines, although a number of reform-based organizations did show a propensity towards pan-ethnic membership.

To varying degrees, these associations, by engaging in forms of political expression acceptable to the colonial government—i.e., petitions and representations to gain concessions for their ‘community’—represented the development of a rudimentary political impulse in the diaspora. Notable leaders from these organizations would over time emerge as representatives of their religious communities in officially sanctioned bodies—instruments that were used by the colonial state to manage potential dissent and possibly also to effect ‘divide and rule’. That said, Indians in the port city were certainly not insulated from wider currents of anti-colonial dissent that circulated in the region. Indeed, the study of the causes of the mutiny reveals how porous the port city was to such currents of political dissent. Even if, with the notable exception of the 5th Light Infantry and a select few civilians, these were not effective in catalyzing a more broad-based and assertive political posture at this juncture, the continued connection to these currents was a portend of developments that were to follow.

Notes

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22. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 194.
23. Danapaul Saveri Dass, 'Tamil Education in West Malaysia and Singapore, 1860–1970' (MA thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 1972), 24; S. Samuel Dhoraisingham, *The Founding of Singapore's Tamil Schools*, accessed 4 April 2009, http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/singapore/facts_old_singapore/354/the_founding_of_singapore8217s_tamil_schools.php.
24. Dass, *Tamil Education*, 22, 24.
25. 'Tamil Education', in *Singapore: The Encyclopedia*, ed. Tommy Koh (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 533.

26. Dass, *Tamil Education*, 28.
27. Turnbull, *Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, 195.
28. Rajeswary Ampalavanar, 'Social and Political Developments in the Indian Community of Malaya, 1920–41' (Unpublished MA thesis, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1969), 16–17.
29. Turnbull, *Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, 135.
30. William Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 48–9.
31. Torsten Tschacher, 'Witnessing Fun: Tamil-Speaking Muslims and the Imagination of Ritual in Colonial Southeast Asia', in *Ritual, Caste, and Religion in Colonial South India*, eds. Michael Bergunder, Heiko Frese, and Ulrike Schroder (Halle: Franckesche Stiftungen zu Halle, 2010), 191. Tschacher informs that the 1872 publication of 'a collection of poetry entitled *Munajattuttitratu* [written] by Mukammatu Aptulkathiruppulavar of Nagore' marked the beginnings of Tamil language publishing in Singapore.
32. Dinesh Sathisan, 'The Power of Print: Tamil Newspapers in Malaya and the Imagining of Tamil Cultural Identity, 1930–1940' (Unpublished MA thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2008), 8.
33. See Torsten Tschacher, "'Walls of Illusion': Information Generation in Colonial Singapore and the Reporting of the Mahdi-Rebellion in Sudan 1887–1890', in *Singapore in Global History*, eds. Derek Heng and Syed Muhd. Khairuddin Aljunied (Amsterdam: ICAS/Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 67–88.
34. Tschacher "'Walls of Illusion'", 74.
35. See note under the header of *Singai Nesan*.
36. *Singai Nesan*, 18 February 1889, 1–3.
37. Cited in Tschacher "'Walls of Illusion'", 76.
38. Tschacher "'Walls of Illusion'", 77.
39. For a listing between 1890 and 1900, see CO275/61, 'Chinese Protectorate', *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements*, 1900, 129–32. For a list at the end of war, see CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 1918, 563–9. Some Indian associations formed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century ceased soon after their formation. The tally excludes business and trade organizations as these were exempt from registration.
40. *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1915, 10.
41. *The Straits Times*, 25 May 1912, 11.
42. Lee, *The British as Rulers*, 264.
43. *The Singapore Free Press*, 6 February 1909, 7.
44. *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 October 1915, 5.
45. *The Straits Times*, 14 May 1910, 7.

46. Cited in Lee, *The British as Rulers*, 270.

47. *The Straits Times*, 24 December 1910, 7.

48. *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1914, 8.

49. Amongst the turn of the century Hindu sect-based organizations included the Singai Sivanaysa Sangam, the Singanager Valeeba Bhajavatha Sangam, and the Sri Narasimha Perumal Bhakta Sabha. CO275/61, 'Chinese Protectorate', *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements*, 1900, 129–32.

50. Vineeta Sinha, "Religiously-Inspired", "India derived" Movements in Singapore', in *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, ed. Lai Ah Eng (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 143–4.

51. 'Ramakrishna Mission Singapore', accessed 10 June 2011, <http://www.ramakrishna.org.sg/RKMissionSingaporeLink.asp>.

52. The Arya Sangam was registered in 1910. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 1918, 564. The Vivekanantha Sanmarka Sangam was listed as 'exempted from registering' in 1915, although it is unclear when the organization was actually formed. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 1918, 569.

53. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 1918, 568. The organization was listed as 'exempted from registering' in 1914, the same year that it was formed. *The Straits Times*, 5 May 1915, 8.

54. *The Straits Times*, 21 May 1915, 6; *Ibid.*, 22 December 1916, 8.

55. *The Straits Times*, 24 January 1912, 6.

56. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 1918, 568; *The Straits Times*, 14 May 1913, 8.

57. CO276/72, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 9 January 1914, 34.

58. *The Singapore Free Press*, 29 January 1914, 12.

59. *The Straits Times*, 27 January 1914, 8.

60. *The Straits Times*, 21 February 1914, 8. The deputation reportedly comprised 'Messrs. Nagar Das, Bombay; Wasiammulla and Chotirmal, Hyderabad, Sindh; Mungal Singh and H. Somapah, Hindustanis; Dr Bardham, Bengali; Voor Singh and Punjab Singh (Serg-Major), Punjabi; Tamby Rajah, Jaffnese; Dr Veerasamy, Mr Kathiroyson, and Mr M. V. Pillai, Straits Hindus; Mr Singarampillai and Mr Sivakadacham, South Indians; Messrs. Sandy Pillai and Arunasalam Pillai, Malacca Chitties; and Veeraragava Aiyer, Brahmins'.

61. *The Straits Times*, 29 January 1914, 10.

62. *The Straits Times*, 14 February 1914, 10.

63. *The Singapore Free Press*, 20 January 1914, 7.

64. See Chapter 5, pp. 167–75.

65. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 26 April 1918, 568; The Indian Christian Association was founded in July 1906. *Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser*, 19 July 1906, 2.

66. Central Sikh Gurdwara, 'Central Sikh Temple', accessed 15 June 2011, http://www.sikhs.org.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=37

67. CO276/83, *The Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 26 April 1918, 564, 568. The Ceylon Tamil Association was officially registered in 1910.

68. R. W. E. Harper and Harry Miller, *Singapore Mutiny* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), xi–xv. There are conflicting reports of the numbers killed. For example, T. R. Sareen posits that 'in all 12 British officers from different regiments and 15 civilians were killed.' T. R. Sareen, *Secret Documents on Singapore Mutiny, 1915*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Mouno Publishing House, 1995), 16. An individual count based on the Court of Enquiry Report suggests that the number was higher than the toll posited by Sareen.

69. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 2; Sho Kuwajima, *The Mutiny in Singapore: War, Anti-War and the War for India's Independence* (New Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, 2006), 63. Originally these troops were slated to be transferred on 18 February 1915, but due to the early arrival of their transporting ship, the date of departure was brought forward.

70. The letters of soldiers to their relatives in India in February 1915 clearly displayed this concern. These letters have been reproduced in Sareen, *Secret Documents*, vol. 2, Exhibit B, 718–31.

71. F. A. Hoghton (Brigadier-General), 'Report in Connection with the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore (1915)', Singapore, 20 May 1915, reproduced in Sareen, *Secret Documents*, vol. 1, 28. During the war, German ships were seized and their crew interned. German residents were also incarcerated, and their property confiscated. C. M Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–1975* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.

72. Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 79.

73. Hoghton, 'Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry', 31.

74. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 101.

75. Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, 130.

76. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 103.

77. Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 84–5.

78. *Ibid.*, 87.

79. *The Straits Times*, 26 March 1915, 7. Execution in public had ceased since the 1890s, but was revived in the case of the mutineers as a reminder of the fate that awaited those who rebelled against colonial authority.

80. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 197, 206. Jagat Singh was later charged in Penang for conspiring against the government. *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 June 1915, 10.

81. Cited in Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 80.

82. Hoghton, 'Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry', 36–39.

83. Sareen, *Secret Documents*, vol. 1, 18.

84. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 4.

85. The Ghadar Party was the label commonly used for the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, after its founding leader Har Dayal established an independent press in San Francisco that published the paper *Ghadar*. Harish K. Puri, 'Revolutionary Organization: A Study of the Ghadar Movement', *Social Scientist*, 9, 2/3 (1980): 54.

86. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 9.

87. Puri, 'Revolutionary Organization', 56.

88. Dudley Ridout, 'Report from Brigadier-General Ridout, General Officer Commanding, Singapore, with Remarks on Proceedings of Court of Enquiry', Singapore, 27 August 1915, reproduced in T. R. Sareen, *Secret Documents*, vol. 2, 698.

89. Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 19.

90. Puri, 'Revolutionary Organization', 59.

91. Ridout, 'Report from Brigadier-General Ridout', 698.

92. Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *India in the Making of Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Indian Association, 2008), 32.

93. Cited in Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 30–1.

94. *The Singapore Free Press*, 10 October 1912, 236.

95. Farish A. Noor, 'From Empire to the War on Terror: The 1915 Indian Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore as a Case Study of the Impact of Profiling of Religious and Ethnic Minorities' (Working Paper, No. 206, Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2010), 13.

96. Cited in Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 41.

97. Noor, 'From Empire', 13.

98. Hoghton, 'Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry', 39.

99. Harper and Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, 205.

100. Hoghton, 'Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry', 40.

101. Cited in Sareen, *Secret Documents*, vol. 1, 290.

102. Ridout, 'Report from Brigadier-General Ridout', 699.

103. Cited in Kuwajima, *Mutiny*, 74.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *The Straits Times*, 12 April 1916, 10.

106. Noor, 'From Empire', 16, 18.

107. Leon Comber, 'The Singapore Mutiny (1915) and the Genesis of Political Intelligence in Singapore', *Intelligence and National Security*, 24, 4 (2009): 536–7.

108. *Ibid.*, 540.

109. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 130.

110. *The Straits Times*, 17 November 1915, 8. The list of seditious publications reported included: *Al-Hilal*, *Comrade*, *Al Islam*, *Free Hindustan*, *Liberty*, *Ghadr*, *The Hindustan Student*, *History of India* (or *Tarik-i-Hind*), *Neem Hakeem Khatre Jan*, *Ghadr-ki-Gunj*, *Umachan*, and *Fatwah-i-Jehad Mukdus*.

111. Noor, 'From Empire', 16.

112. *Ibid.*, 17.

113. *The Singapore Free Press*, 24 June 1915, 10.

114. Vickna S. K. Anandarajah, '1915—a Near Run Thing: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915', Ministry of Defence, Singapore, 2009, accessed 10 June 2011, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/about_us/history/the_early_years/v13n02_history.html.

115. *The Singapore Free Press*, 28 September 1915, 5.

116. *The Straits Times*, 12 April 1915, 12.

117. *The Straits Times*, 8 March 1915, 8.

118. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, 13 April 1923, 6 (paragraph 74).

119. Amongst its leaders included Mohammed Salleh Angullia, Mohammed Ali Namazie, H. G. Sarwar, and Kadir Sultan. *The Straits Times*, 19 June 1915, 9.

120. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, 13 April 1923, 6.

121. *The Straits Times*, 19 June 1915, 9.

122. CO276/78, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 26 November 1915, 1748.

123. CO276/83, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 22 March 1918, 414. The appointees included N. Veerasamy, Chimandass Roopchand, Rai Sahib Ishwar Dass, Vadilal Purshotumdas, M. V. Pillai, Supramaniam Chitty, Mangal Singh, and N. Kathirayson.

124. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, 13 April 1923, 6.

125. Saul Rose, *Britain and Southeast Asia* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1960), 79.

5 Diasporic Formations in the Inter-war Years

The inter-war years witnessed a period of considerable social and political ferment amongst Indians in Singapore. A remarkable expansion was recorded in the number of organizations established by Indians. The increase in cooperative activity fostered a surge of diasporic socio-cultural production—new religious, recreational, and vernacular institutions were initiated while those set up earlier were further developed. At the same time, the proliferation of organizations also reflected proclivities that were sometimes at odds with each other. There were manifest tendencies towards particularism on the religious and socio-cultural front, with practically every discernible marker of Indian identity acting as a potential signifier of difference. Not surprisingly, fractiousness surfaced occasionally between Indian collectives, produced by differences in identity and ideological tensions.

The inter-war period was also significant because of the establishment of Indian outfits that were clearly influenced by political currents emanating from India. In the lead up to World War II, arguably, Indian nationalism was the most influential strand affecting Indian political consciousness in the port city. The period also saw the development of the Tamils Reform Association (TRA), drawn to the ideology of the Dravidian Movement in Madras, and the South Indian Muslim League that paralleled the evolution of the Muslim League in India. The spread of communist ideas also left a mark, sometimes coalescing with Indian nationalism in a common anti-imperialist position, and, over time, fostering greater labour assertiveness. Consequently, and especially after

the Depression, politically orientated Indian organizations began to display a more radical posture—encouraging the development of trade unions, petitioning political leaders in India for support, and organizing hartals to improve labour conditions.

The thrust of this chapter features how the Indian social and political environment in Singapore transformed in the inter-war years. It is guided by questions fundamental to the issue of identity in the diaspora: What were the forces that influenced Indian cooperative activities and how did this effect the trajectory of socio-cultural production during the inter-war years? What common features were most important for a sense of community identification? Along which lines was fractiousness most evident, and what were the factors that informed these tensions? What effect did transnational socio-political currents have on Indians living in the port city, and how was this manifest on the ground in the lead up to World War II?

5.1 Religious-Cultural 'Particularism'

Religion remained an important foundation for Indian organizational activities in the aftermath of World War I, although there was a definite turn towards cooperative activities along various other identity markers, including ethnicity, language, and caste. Take the case of Malayalam-speakers for example. At least five associations, informed by various ascriptive boundaries, were established over this period—the Malayalee Association (founded in 1918), the Malayalee Hindu Samajam (1926), the Malabar Muslim Jamaath (1929), the Syrian Christian Association (1929), and the Travancore Association (1929). Even amongst the Sikhs, for whom religion and ethnicity overlapped, institutions tended to be formed along the specific subregions from which they originated. The Gurudwara Sahib Sri Guru Singh Sabha (1918) was constituted by those who traced their origins to the Malwa region, the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha (1924) for those who came from the Majha region, while the Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Sabha (1926) represented emigrants from the Doaba region of the Punjab.¹ Indian business associations that developed in the 1920s tended also to be constituted along particularistic lines. The Sindhi Merchants Association registered in 1922 was followed by the formation of the Indian Merchants Association (1924), which in spite of its name, represented, in its early years, 'only

one section, the Gujaratis.² In 1931, the Chettiers followed suit by establishing their own Chamber of Commerce.³

A key factor accounting for the turn towards religious and cultural particularism in the inter-war years was the marked intensification of the involvement of the Indian middle class in cooperative activities. The mobilization of the middle class can be better understood in the context of changes in the demography and composition of the Indian population. The number of Indians in the port city had doubled between 1891 and 1921, and a further 60 per cent increase was recorded by the end of that decade.⁴ In the aftermath of World War I, the Indian elite and middle class collectively made up about 30 per cent of the total Indian population in Singapore—a proportion that was significantly higher when compared to the Peninsula.⁵ Although the gender imbalance in the Indian population remained marked in the port city, amongst the elite and the middle class there was a greater tendency to come with their families, settle for longer periods and consequently, 'they were more disposed (and had the wherewithal) to plant permanent institutions, acquire property, and acclimatize themselves generally'.⁶ The increase in the size of the diaspora made the development of organizations based on particularistic lines viable, whereas this might not have been feasible in the past. Effectively this rendered pragmatism-informed collaboration less necessary. This tendency extended to even the smaller segments of the Indian population, including minorities from northern India.

Given their increased engagement in organizational activities, it follows that Indian middle class social values also affected the modes of social and cultural production in the port city. To a considerable extent, the Indian middle class displayed a penchant towards conservatism, which was manifest in the desire to maintain specific ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural norms of their 'homeland'. The conservative impulse was especially marked in Indian enclaves. As these enclaves became more concentrated, the 'gaze' of kinsmen generated further pressures towards orthodoxy. The tendency for established emigrants to help kinsmen to secure employment opportunities in sectors where they had acquired influence accentuated this by creating an overlap between markers of ethnic identity, occupation, and settlement.⁷

In Singapore, the involvement of the Indian middle class in cooperative activities strengthened institutional development in the religious

sphere. This was particularly evident amongst Hindus and Sikhs whose numbers had grown rapidly in the early decades of the twentieth century. Shrines that were earlier only makeshift structures were refurbished and formally consecrated. Religious festivals representing specific regional traditions, such as for example, Pongal, Onam, Holi, and Vaisakhi became commonplace and were organized on a grander scale. Trained religious specialists were procured for the proper conduct of prayers, rituals, and ceremonies. Beyond serving strictly religious functions, these shrines began to assume a wider social role for the community as a place hosting meetings, ceremonies, and cultural events.⁸

The shrine's wider social role fostered a closer connection between places of worship and specific subregional or caste groups—effectively creating sacred spaces where the social functions and traditions of 'insider' communities were catered to. This had long been the case for the Thendayuthapani Temple established by the Chettians, but by the second decade of the twentieth century other regional or caste groups were also in a position to do the same. As numbers increased, collaboration became less evident in the religious-cultural sphere, even for non-affluent groups. This tendency effectively created shrines that were more exclusive in character, in turn galvanizing others who did not have their 'own' places of worship to develop religious institutions for their community.

Vernacular Education

Alongside religion, the inter-war years also witnessed a gradual increase in the provision of Indian language education. This was in part galvanized by fears amongst 'the older people ... [of] the growth of a generation which could not read or write its ... vernacular'.⁹ In Singapore, quite unlike estates in the Peninsula where Tamil schools were supported by the government, the onus to provide vernacular education was left primarily to Indian communities. In the port city, the colonial government afforded little backing for Tamil language education and none whatsoever for the other Indian languages. In 1932, Governor Clementi even withdrew grants-in-aid for Tamil vernacular schools so that 'only Malay education was provided free and primary education in English was subsidized'.¹⁰

Yet, notwithstanding the lack of official support, the number of Tamil language classes increased from the second decade of the

twentieth century. In the mid-1920s, two schools, alongside a small number of 'village' institutions provided Tamil language education to about 130 students.¹¹ In 1932, the Ramakrishna Mission established the Vivekananda Boys School and later the Sarada Girls School, both of which ran Tamil language classes at its Norris Road premises.¹² In the late 1930s, a Tamil school was set up in Tanjong Pagar catering to children of Tamil Muslim families from Kadyanallur, Tenkasi, Chenkottai, and Marathandapuram.¹³ Although the standard of Tamil-medium education remained below that of English-medium schools, by this time, the better-equipped Tamil schools were able to offer primary level mathematics, science, and music lessons. Children from middle-class homes who went to English-medium schools, had also begun to attend 'Tamil [language] classes after regular school hours' so that in the lead up to World War II, there were about one thousand pupils enrolled in '4 Mission Tamil Schools [and] 14 private schools'.¹⁴

There was also a gradual increase in facilities for the study of other Indian languages, although when compared to Tamil these were largely embryonic. Interest vacillated because students tended to take up these languages on a part-time basis, in addition to attending English-medium schools. Classes were typically conducted in private premises or in the confines of associations or religious institutions. In the case of Hindi, private tutors began offering language classes around World War I. These were run in homes in the Serangoon Road area, and by the 1920s some students had already taken the Hindi paper at the Cambridge exams. In 1930, the Arya Samaj introduced Hindi classes at its premises at Rowell Road. A total of 57 students registered during its first intake, and soon after the number increased to 80.¹⁵ By 1934, the organization had developed a separate unit for educational purposes—the D. A. V. Hindi School—which offered both Hindi and English lessons.¹⁶

While most students studying Hindi were from a Hindi-speaking background, by the late 1930s the language was also being studied by other Indians—in part due to notions that with the spread of Indian nationalism, Hindi 'stood all chances of being adopted as the future lingua franca of India'.¹⁷ Vilasini Perumbulavil—from a Malayalam-speaking family—states that during this period she took up the study of the language precisely because her father felt that 'being Indian, we ought to learn [Hindi]'.¹⁸ From 1939, Hindi classes were also being

organized at the Naval Base area and at the premises of the Indian Youth League (IYL) at Race Course Road.¹⁹

In the inter-war years, gurdwaras played a crucial role in the development of Punjabi language education in Singapore: 'Punjabi education in the early days was available only at Sikh gurdwaras In 1920 there were only two well-established gurdwaras Tuition in Punjabi was available from the *granthis* at these gurdwaras From 1921 to about 1925, I learned Punjabi at the Sepoy Lines gurdwara on Pearl's Hill.'²⁰ While there exists no record of institutions teaching Malayalam, Malayali associations were nevertheless active in promoting vernacular literary and theatrical activities during this period, and a Malayalam newspaper—*Kerala Bandhu*—had also been established in the late 1930s.²¹

Caste

While the engagement of the middle class in organizational activities accelerated the production of Indian socio-cultural phenomena, at the same time, their conservative social values also produced fractiousness. One outcome of this conservative turn was the greater tendency to maintain caste rules and distinctions as practised in India. This was reinforced by the rapid influx of lower-caste and Adi Dravida labourers in the early twentieth century, which further added to the tendency to differentiate along caste lines. Mani posits that during the 1920s and 1930s, 'caste as a social system was superimposed on the political super-structure of the island. It was further enhanced by the fact that Indians lived in enclaves. In each of these enclaves the social system of the Indian village was recreated, with minor modifications.'²²

As discussed in Chapter 3, during this period, 'distance maintenance' between caste-Hindus and 'untouchables' was practiced, and in Serangoon Road, Tanjong Pagar, and at the Naval Base, enclaves were marked for the Adi Dravidas. In these areas of Indian concentration, even Chinese stall owners purportedly recognized caste-differences in the Indian population, and so as not to alienate upper-caste Indian clients, they sometimes refused to serve Adi Dravidas or marked out different sections for them. Adi Dravidas were required to undertake 'their customary obligations, such as carrying the corpses of deceased high caste men and beating the drum at funerals.'²³ Apart from restrictions on

the entry of Adi Dravidas to caste-Hindu homes, they were also barred from entering 'mainstream' Hindu temples.²⁴ The latter restriction was an additional factor accounting for the proliferation of makeshift Adi Dravida shrines during this period.

Mani posits that Adi Dravidas did sometimes resist these caste taboos, which occasionally generated clashes along caste lines. That being said, the sojourning tendencies of lower-caste labourers also generated pressures towards conformity. The labourer upon returning to his village in India, was expected to 're-enter his niche in the social order. He could not do so if he was seen to have followed socially unconventional behaviour'.²⁵ Given that imperative, it was not surprising that differences were even maintained between Adi Dravida castes: 'The Adi-Dravidas seemed to have maintained their internal differences within their own enclaves. In the case of the Jalan Besar area, where the greatest number was concentrated, a clear division ... existed amongst the Adi-Dravidas The Pallans being of higher category ... had their own shrine at French Road, whilst the Paraiyans had their shrine at Jalan Berseh'.²⁶ The gradual increase in the number of Indian women from the 1920s added to the propensity to differentiate along caste lines. Indeed, concerns over sexual transgression sometimes resulted in 'widowed women being "kept" by members of her caste, so that she would not be "polluted" by other castes'.²⁷

Given the intensification of caste-based identification, a number of associations were formed on this basis. Amongst Tamils, caste associations forged during this period included the Vannia Kshatriya Sangam (registered in 1916), the Kallār Mahajana Sangam (1923), the Dakshina Bharata Brahmana Sabha (1925), and the Yadava Sabha (1929).²⁸ By the late 1920s, Adi Dravida groups had also begun to organize themselves. In 1928 several Adi Dravida castes petitioned the municipality for land to build their own temple.²⁹ That attempt at collective bargaining catalyzed the formation of the Adi Dravidas Association later that year. Caste associations were not limited to Tamils. In the relatively small community of emigrant Hindus from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, upper-caste *Bhumihars* established their own organization in 1929.³⁰ These divisions also resonated in other Indian communities, even if this did not culminate in the formation of caste associations. In broader ethno-religious associations, there existed factional struggles for leadership along caste-lines. Even amongst Sikhs, whose religion rejected

caste, the institution emerged as a signifier of difference, especially as more non-Jat Sikhs arrived in the colony.

Regional Divisions

During this period, 'pan-regional' divisions in the Indian population, specifically along north Indian and south Indian lines, deepened. Some of the bases of that division were long-standing. Official discourse and census categories in Singapore had from early on in the history of the settlement identified these groups separately.³¹ Linguistic differences were marked—north Indians usually able to communicate or understand some measure of Hindustani, Hindi, or Urdu, while the overwhelming majority from the south were Tamil speakers. What changed from the late nineteenth century onwards was that these differences increasingly came to be wedded to economic patterns. Indeed, after the closure of the transported convict prison, few north Indians in Singapore were engaged in menial jobs, whereas labourers comprised the predominant group amongst south Indians. Economic differences sharpened as north Indian businessmen grew increasingly prominent in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As far as Hindus were concerned, religion, in itself, was not sufficient to bridge the regional divide. Some of this was already manifest in the Hindu public holiday controversy mentioned in Chapter 4³²—those in favour of Thaipusam overwhelmingly comprised Chettians and other Indian Tamils, while northern Indian Hindus firmly backed Deepavali. To some extent sect-based differences, and ritual-worship practices also tended to follow regional patterns. Moreover, by the 1920s, there were concerns especially amongst the numerically smaller north Indian Hindu groups that institutions which had been shared previously were increasingly coming under the exclusive hold of the larger south Indian groups. For example, the administration of the Krishna Temple at Waterloo Street, which had long been an important venue for north Indian devotees was increasingly controlled by Tamils and Telugus.³³ Indeed, as some of these shared shrines were developed and refurbished in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, they increasingly followed more closely south Indian styles and patterns of ritual-worship. Consequently, beyond the desire to maintain specific regional practices, fears of a south Indian 'takeover' may have also explained

why a number of exclusive north Indian associations were established in the 1920s. These included the North Indian Hindu Union (1922), and the North Indian Hindu Funeral Association (1921), which was later renamed as the North Indian Hindu Association.³⁴ The fissure was evident even in Hindu reform organizations, which in the previous period had seen a collaboration of professionals across regional lines. Unlike its predecessor, the Young Men's Arya Samaj, which had ceased by the mid-1920s, the Arya Samaj, registered in 1927, was dominated by north Indians. Possibly the only notable Hindu reformist organization that did not follow this trend was the Ramakrishna Mission—its leaders and fellowship continued to comprise a mix of north Indians and south Indians.³⁵

Fissures in Pan-Muslim Associations

In the inter-war years, organizations with significant Indian Muslim participation faced numerous difficulties. British surveillance on pan-Islamic organizations had tightened considerably after the 1915 mutiny. Comparatively, few Indian Muslim organizations were established during the inter-war years, partly because colonial authorities viewed new Muslim associations with suspicion and were stringent in approving their registration. A second issue developed from the growing 'Malay distrust and suspicion of the other Muslim groups' that made inter-ethnic collaboration in existing pan-Muslim organizations increasingly tenuous. The perception had spread that Indians and Arabs, who hitherto dominated the leadership of collaborative Muslim unions, 'could not be depended upon to promote the welfare of Malays'.³⁶ With the emergence of the Malay elite, these pan-Muslim organizations increasingly witnessed struggles for leadership along ethnic lines. Even the well-established Muslim Association was affected by dissent, and many leading Malays withdrew from it, turning instead to more exclusive ethnic-based organizations such as the Singapore Malay Union, set up in 1926.³⁷

Notwithstanding British surveillance, transnational Islamic socio-religious impulses continued to influence the Indian Muslim community in Singapore, although serious breaks were also recorded at this time between those advocating reform and those inclined towards orthodoxy. One example was the Anjuman-i-Islam, established in

Singapore in 1921 shortly after the visit of the missionary Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din from London's Woking Mosque. The organization was influenced by the anti-British Khilafat Movement initially, but shifted to a more strictly socio-religious reform posture when Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar from the Straits Settlements Civil Service took over leadership.³⁸ Soon after its formation, however, the reform-orientated organization was ridden with controversy—orthodox Muslims casting aspersions that the Lahore Ahmadiya Movement (whose teachings influenced the Anjuman-i-Islam), was 'heretical'.³⁹

Indians Vs. Ceylonese

Fractiousness was also visible along Indian and Ceylonese lines, a division that was partly a product of the high socio-economic standing of the Ceylonese community. As an overwhelming number of the Ceylonese were educated middle-class professionals, many of whom were high ranking officials in the colonial government, this, according to Arasaratnam, generated 'a feeling [of] superiority over the Indians'.⁴⁰ Dawood Shah, editor of the Madras-based Tamil journal *Darul Islam*, noted during his tour of Singapore and Malaya: 'Like Brahmins have done well for themselves in [India]... Ceylon migrants have got appointments as officers and clerks. There is greater unity to be found among them. The Ceylonese do not associate [with] Indians.... And the Indians seem to dislike the Ceylonese...' ⁴¹ Additionally, there was a perception amongst Indians that colonial policy tended to favour the Ceylonese. As the Government increased Asian representation in official bodies, the Ceylonese, though far smaller in number when compared to Indians, were disproportionately represented in public bodies such as the Municipal Commission and the Hindu Advisory Board. In the inter-war period, the division along Indian and Ceylonese lines was exacerbated as consciousness of Indian nationalism spread—a matter that is discussed below.

5.2 Socio-Political Dynamics

While trends in the religious-cultural sphere chart a turn towards fragmentation, socio-political trajectories in inter-war years ushered moves that forged unities at various levels. During this period, socio-political

change amongst Indians in Singapore was heavily influenced by political developments in India. Particularly notable were the effects of Indian nationalism, which, through numerous Congress-led civil disobedience campaigns after World War I, had transformed into a mass movement in India. Given the preponderance of Tamils, Indians in Singapore were also especially conscious of political developments in the Madras Presidency. Political positions in Madras, where Congress-led Indian nationalism was challenged by movements that emphasized Dravidian identification, were replicated in the diaspora. That is not to say that in the diaspora adherents of the Dravidian Movement were necessarily unsympathetic towards Indian nationalism, but there were fissures when the Indian Congress adopted policies that went against Dravidian ideology. In the lead up to World War II, the spread of communism and the influence of the Muslim League in India added to the complexity of the Indian socio-political scene in the port city.

Colonial authorities in Singapore were hard pressed in isolating the local population from these political currents. In spite of tighter regulations and the Criminal Intelligence Department's (CID) surveillance, the extent of media-communication linkages and the large-scale circulation of people to and from the subcontinent made it difficult to stymie the flow of 'seditious' materials. In the port city, Indians could get their hands on a variety of newspapers and journals to monitor political developments in the 'homeland', including those sympathetic to Indian nationalism such as *Swadesamitran*, *Swarajiya*, *The Hindu*, *Madras Mail*, *Servant of India*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Young India*.⁴² The influence of Indian nationalism extended to the 'local' Tamil vernacular newspapers such as the Kuala Lumpur-based, *Tamilaham*, which began in 1921, and *Tamil Nesan*, that was printed from 1924.⁴³ The Dravidian Movement's literature was also distributed here, and at least three Tamil newspapers supportive of the movement—*Munnetram*, *Seerthirutham*, and the *Tamil Murasu*—were published in Singapore.⁴⁴ The frequent visits of Indian notables to Singapore further sensitized the diaspora to the trajectory of politics in India. Indeed, following Gandhi's assumption of the leadership of the Indian Congress, a concerted policy was put in place to deepen linkages with overseas Indian communities. Similarly, the 'father' of the Dravidian Movement—E. V. Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar)—also toured Singapore and Malaya at the onset of the Depression.

Alongside Indian political currents, reforms in the local colonial administration catalyzed the formation of socio-political organizations in the diaspora. Policies intended to increase Asian representation in Legislative Councils and Municipal Commissions in the Straits Settlements and Malaya, reinforced moves to forge collective bodies that were better positioned to bargain for their own representatives to these institutions. Also crucial in informing socio-political foment was the effect that the Depression had on the region, leaving in its wake a people hardened by the experience, and more open to radical forms of dissent to achieve their objectives. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Depression, a distinct transformation was manifest in Indian labour—long perceived by Europeans as ‘docile’, they became a far more assertive force.

These socio-political developments can be better understood in two chronological parts. The first extends from the end of World War I to the late 1920s, when, notwithstanding the growth of Indian nationalism, little was achieved in the diaspora beyond the formation of an association that sought to unify diverse Indian religious and ethnic groups. The second part analyzes socio-political developments from the Depression to the advent of World War II—characterized by the strengthening of links between Indian socio-political organizations in Singapore and the Peninsula, and greater demands for Indian representation in the Legislature and the Municipal Commission. Concomitantly, rivalry amongst collectives influenced by Indian politics sharpened. What was also noticeable were growing connections between Indian professionals and labourers; and the colonial authorities often leaning towards a hard-line stance to check collective action by Indian labourers.

The Decade after World War I

Shortly after World War I, intelligence reports suggested that ‘anti-British feelings [were frequently] ... aired’ in urban centres like Singapore.⁴⁵ The flow of ‘seditious’ literature from India to the port city increased after the war, in tandem with trends of political activism in India. Although materials arriving by post were scrutinized and sequestered, they could be procured from neighbouring regions, which were not under direct British control. For example, during the Congress’ Khilafat and Non-cooperation campaigns in India from 1919 to 1924, literature

on the movement had been passed on to bookstores run by Indian Muslims in Singapore from Johor.⁴⁶ Such 'seditious' literature was also disseminated to Singapore via the Dutch East Indies.

The initial responses of Indians in Singapore to heightened political activism in India were fragmentary. Shortly after World War I, some individuals in Singapore had raised funds in support of the Non-cooperation Movement in India. There were also associations, which, following the Congress' boycott of British textiles, advocated the purchase of *khaddar*—Indian hand-produced textiles and cloth. In December 1922, Harbaksh Singh, employee at a sports outfit company in Singapore, reportedly burnt 'in the presence of the firm's staff ... all his own personal foreign (i.e., non-Indian) made clothing'.⁴⁷ The vigilance on Indian activities by CID 'spies', ensured that colonial authorities were able to deal with these acts with relative ease. In early 1924, for example, the CID checked the perceived political turn in the Singaimanava Sentamil Sangam by threatening to banish a notable who publicly opposed the purchase of English clothes.⁴⁸

In spite of these restrictions the desire for a unitary pan-Indian fraternity that extended beyond ethnic and religious affiliations, did culminate in the formation of the Singapore Indian Association in 1923. The decision to form the organization was also precipitated by Governor Guillemard's measures to increase Asian participation in the Legislative Council and Municipal Commissions in the Straits Settlements. From 1921, key organizations in Singapore were granted the privilege to nominate representatives to the Municipal Commission.⁴⁹ Consequently, an apex body that brought Indians in the port city together regardless of ethnicity or religion, was perceived as useful for the entry of Indian representatives into these prestigious bodies. At this time, the setting up of associations to strengthen the political position of Indians in the region was also encouraged by key notables, including the Agent of the Government of India to Malaya, D. Arulanandam Pillai, and the newly appointed member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, P. K. Nambyar.⁵⁰

Although the Singapore Indian Association was a relative latecomer, in that similar organizations had been setup earlier in Taiping, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Teluk Anson, and Seremban, there were distinctive features in the Singapore-based Association that concerned the colonial authorities. Several distinguished professionals and merchants had

joined the organization.⁵¹ The Association's early constitution ensured the representation of different Indian ethnic strands. A diversity of religious backgrounds was also evident in its membership, with Muslims and Christians comprising a significant proportion of its leadership. Indeed, the CID described the Association as 'the first known attempt to unite Indians, including Hindus and Muslims, in Malaya'.⁵² The Association also immediately sought to extend its membership to the Ceylonese. However, colonial authorities, perturbed by the possibility of a pan-South Asian alliance under the auspices of the Indian Association, restricted the organization's membership only to British Indian subjects.⁵³

Political intelligence reports suggested that some of the early leaders of the organization sympathized with anti-colonial objectives: D. J. Dawson, a notable in the Association was said to have proclaimed 'that the British should grant Home Rule to India'; Dr Chotta Singh was reportedly a 'Gandhi-ite';⁵⁴ the wealthy businessman, M. H. Dawood, seemingly 'a supporter of the Khilafat movement'; and Bashir Ahmad was said to hold strong 'anti-British' sentiments.⁵⁵ These reports posit that some early leaders were keen on the organization being 'both [Indian] Nationalist and Communist' and that there were connections between leaders of the Singapore Indian Association and the communist-inclined British Indian Association in Surabaya.⁵⁶ British concerns were added to by the fact that the newly formed Association hosted key dignitaries from India, including Rev. C. F. Andrews—'the champion of Indian labour'—and the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1924. During his visit, Andrews, along with Indian Association leaders, had inspected 'rubber estates..., Admiralty coolie lines and Municipal houses for Indian employees' to better understand the conditions of Indian labour in Singapore.⁵⁷

The authorities' concerns of the incendiary potential of the early Indian Association were clearly exaggerated. Most members were in fact 'very loyal to the British regime', especially since, with the exception of some independent professionals and businessmen, the remainder were Government employees, who 'could not be otherwise disposed'.⁵⁸ Although early days witnessed 'stormy meetings' between the so-called 'extremists' and the 'loyalists', the latter quickly emerged as the dominant faction.⁵⁹ Consequently, beyond calls for Indian unity, there is little evidence to suggest that the organization had a significant anti-colonial

or pro-labour component. Indeed, for much of the 1920s, the Indian Association functioned primarily as a social club for recreational and cultural pursuits, with occasional 'tea parties' to felicitate notables who were granted honours or prestigious positions by the colonial government. Far from being communist-orientated, most Indian Association members were not even keen on associating with labourers. Netto posits that: 'Some said that if the labourers were admitted, they would come half-naked to the meetings. Others were reluctant to mix freely with the "lower orders", as the coolies were referred to'.⁶⁰

The Indian Association, however, did introduce some initiatives to improve the conditions of the Indian working class, although in the 1920s these were largely piecemeal, 'top-down', and with no engagement in trade union or agitational activities. For example, from 1926, the Association's journal, *The Indian*, published English and Tamil articles on the problems of alcoholism in the Indian working class and recommended that the government close toddy shops. In 1927, a 'Social Services Section' was promulgated, which organized talks and distributed pamphlets to labourers on the spread of disease and the need for proper hygiene. In the same year, the Association started free night schools in arithmetic, reading, and writing. The organization also made some headway in forging links with the Ceylonese community by encouraging the formation of the Indian and Ceylonese Ladies Club in 1931.⁶¹

In the late 1920s, the Singapore Indian Association gradually expanded its network by establishing links with other Indian Associations in Malaya. A key instrument towards greater coordination between the various regional Indian Associations was the All-Malaya Indian Conference that was convened in 1927 and whose third meeting was hosted by the Singapore Indian Association in December 1929.⁶² In the initial years, these conferences were primarily a platform for moderates to discuss and urge colonial authorities for reforms on issues that concerned that Indian community, such as Indian vernacular and English education; Indian representation on Councils, public bodies and the higher ranks of the Malayan Civil Service; and the registration of Hindu marriages.

The Depression and After

In his study of the effects of the Depression on Singapore, W. G. Huff underscored that,

Few economies ... have undergone a macroeconomic shock more severe than that experienced in the 1930s depression by Malaya.... Between 1929 and 1932 the value of Singapore's rubber exports declined by 84 per cent, and that of tin, the other regional staple, by 68 per cent. The total of Singapore's merchandise exports fell by 59 per cent and imports declined by 58 per cent.⁶³

The Great Depression impacted all segments of Indian society in Singapore. While statistics specific to Singapore are not available, in Malaya as a whole, more than half the number of Indian workers lost their jobs.⁶⁴ For Indian merchants and traders, the decline in the value and volume of trade was added to by the heavy losses they suffered from commodity and currency speculation. Pressed by demands from creditors, Rajabali Jumabhoy was forced to close several branches of the trading giant Jumabhoy & Company.⁶⁵ Chettiar money-lenders were hard-hit as enterprises and plantations, for which they had provided capital, went bust. Smaller-scale Sikh money-lenders were not spared: Narain Singh, a watchman-cum-money-lender, committed suicide in 1933, when 'his debtors had gone bankrupt, and he owed \$156 to another man'.⁶⁶ Indian educated personnel also faced serious difficulties, and many who lost their jobs were reduced to living on handouts. Needless to say, conditions were most desperate for unskilled Indian labourers. Over the period 1930 to 1933, large-scale unemployment resulted in nearly 200,000 Indian workers being repatriated from the Straits Settlements and the Malay States.⁶⁷ Yet, many, particularly those with little savings, desperately avoided repatriation as their families in the 'homeland' depended on remittances for their livelihood. One effect of this was the movement from Johor to Singapore by large numbers of Indian labourers made redundant on rubber estates, in the hope of finding work—only to discover that conditions in the city were no better.⁶⁸

The dire economic circumstances led to a temporary slowdown in political activities. Indeed, the Indian Agent M. K. Nair noted that 'the financial stringency has caused a lull in the activities of most of the Indian Associations in the different parts of Malaya, which I am sorry to observe are fast reverting to a position merely of sports, literary and social clubs'.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the Depression did see the gestation of linkages that would foster greater Indian political assertiveness in subsequent years. Communist groups had initiated a policy to draw Indian

and Malay members into the predominantly Chinese-constituted trade unions here.⁷⁰ The dire circumstance also propelled political leaders in India to focus their attention on the conditions of Indians in Malaya and Singapore. This was manifest in an increase in the number of deputations sent from India, which had wider implications in fostering ties between political notables from India and leaders of Indian outfits located in Singapore and the Peninsula. Finally, the experience of the Depression left Indians who had remained in the region visibly ‘hardened’, and in the aftermath there was a clear recognition of the need to engage in cooperative activities if they were to protect and advance their social, economic, and political position in the diaspora.

Indian Nationalism and Trade Union Activities in the 1930s

Numerous issues concerned Indian nationalist outfits in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States in the 1930s. These were drawn from a general perception ‘that in the public life of the country the Indian community is not as a rule regarded as of equal status with other communities.’⁷¹ Specifically, there were concerns that Indians were under-represented in law-making bodies and in the higher ranks of the civil service; that not enough was being done to improve the position of Indian labourers, in terms of wages, educational facilities, and toddy control; and finally that Indian divisiveness had for too long acted against the formation of unified pan-Indian bodies that could better represent their interests in various spheres of activity.

The recognition of the value of a unified posture pressed organizations in Singapore influenced by Indian nationalism to forge even closer links with fraternal bodies in the Peninsula. The resumption of the All-Malaya Indian Conference after a lapse in the midst of the Depression saw immediate moves to form interest-based Indian organizations. One outcome was the formation of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935, which replaced the Gujarati-dominated Indian Merchants Association.⁷² The organization quickly developed into an influential body, and in its initial year boasted a membership of 62 firms who collectively dominated the import and export trade between India and Singapore.⁷³ The resumption of the All-Malaya Indian Conferences was also crucial in ushering in the formation of a federated All-Malaya Indian organization—the Central

Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM)—in late 1936.⁷⁴ Its constituent units comprised 16 organizations, i.e., twelve Indian Associations and four Indian Chambers of Commerce and Merchants' Associations,⁷⁵ and both the Singapore Indian Association and the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce comprised a part of CIAM.

From the mid-1930s the Singapore Indian Association, joined by the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce, began to actively lobby for their own representatives to be included in governing councils and bodies. They were perturbed not only by the fact that erstwhile bodies were overwhelmingly composed of European and Chinese representatives, but also that colonial authorities in the Straits had a policy of drawing nominees from the religious advisory boards to signify Indian interests. The practice had been instituted following the recommendation, by the 1921 select committee that sought to reform governing councils in the Straits Settlements, that 'the British Indian community (including Ceylon) should have two representatives and that in practice one should be a Mohamedan and one a Hindu'.⁷⁶ Viewed as an attempt to divide the Indian population along religious lines, a reader with the alias 'Indian Christian' condemned the practice: 'All Indians are not Hindus: there are many of Mohamedan and Christian denominations who are out of the pale of the Hindu Advisory Board and it is unjust on the part of the Government to deny them a voice in deciding who should represent them.'⁷⁷ By the 1930s, the Indian Association was insistent that it was best placed to nominate Indians to the Singapore Municipal Commission as the organization was 'non-sectarian': 'The Hindu and Mohammedan Advisory Boards may be useful ... [but] many Indians consider that the selection of persons best qualified to sit on the Municipal Commission or on any other public body should be left to the Indian Association, a non-sectarian body.'⁷⁸

The affiliation of the Singapore Indian Association to Indian organizations at the pan-Malayan level drew the former into the wider politics of Indian representation in the Legislative Councils and Public Bodies in the Federated Malay States. In 1928, after repeated petitions by Indian organizations, colonial authorities had acceded to the nomination of a representative, with the caveat that he was to represent both the Indian and the Ceylonese community. This in turn resulted in Indians and the Ceylonese community competing for their own candidate to be appointed. When J. R. Vethavanam, a Ceylonese,

was appointed member of the Selangor State Council in 1935, Indian Associations in the Peninsula and Singapore protested, demanding an Indian representative instead.⁷⁹ The division between Indians and the Ceylonese on the issue of representation extended to Singapore. Evidently, the first South Asian to be appointed in the expanded Municipal Commission in Singapore in 1921 was the Ceylonese lawyer M. V. Pillai who was nominated from the Hindu Advisory Board, and that trend continued long after.⁸⁰ Concerned that the Ceylonese were being favoured over Indians as representatives in governing councils in the Straits Settlements, demands were made to treat the two groups separately: 'No Ceylonese can represent Indian interests in the local Council. Indians and Ceylonese are entirely different nationals. If the Ceylonese want representation, let them seek it quite independently. Provided their importance and numerical strength justify it...'⁸¹

In spite of its lobbying, the Singapore Indian Association achieved only limited success on the issue of increasing Indian representation in governing bodies at the local level. While it is true that the number of Indians appointed as Justices of Peace (a largely honorific position), and those nominated to lower-level Public Boards, increased in the second half of the 1930s, prior to World War II, no representative of the Singapore Indian Association was appointed to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council. Even in the case of the Municipal Commission, the colonial government effectively continued to maintain the policy of drawing nominees via the religious advisory boards, although to allay criticism, notables of the Indian Association and the Indian Chamber of Commerce were sometimes appointed to the Hindu and Muslim advisory boards and in turn nominated to the Municipal Commission.

While the connection between the Singapore Indian Association and pan-Malayan Indian organizations was not particularly effective on the issue of representation, these ties did have significant implications in shaping the Association's trajectory towards representing Indian labourers' interests. That move needs to be understood in the context of growing labour unrest in Malaya in the second half of the 1930s. The experience of the Depression, coupled with the forging of links with the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party (MCP), had made Indian labourers more open to agitation to meet their demands. The assertiveness of labourers in the Peninsula directly influenced

developments across the causeway. For example, in 1934, 'twenty Tamils on bicycles' from the Central Workshops in Kuala Lumpur arrived in Singapore and instigated Indian railway workers to join the strike.⁸²

From the ranks of the educated middle-class, Indians with an anti-imperial bent also began to '[champion] ... more forcefully the cause of [Indian] labour'.⁸³ Shortly after the formation of CIAM, these professionals had gained control of the organization. Leaders such as N. Raghavan developed close connections with Indian nationalist leaders, and were more willing to take 'definite stands on colonialism, nationalism, and political rights'.⁸⁴ They were galvanized by the frequent visits of Indian personalities to Singapore and the Peninsula—notably Srinivasa Sastri, head of the Indian labour delegation, in late 1936 and early 1937; Jawaharlal Nehru, President of the Indian National Congress, in May 1937;⁸⁵ and Hriday Nath Kunzru, President of the Servants of India Society, in January 1939. Encouraged by these leaders, CIAM became more involved in Indian trade union activities in the late 1930s, and its leaders were increasingly inclined to the view that improvements in conditions of Indian labour depended on curtailing Indian labour emigration, so that greater leverage could be exerted on employers to increase wages and improve the conditions of Indian labourers already residing in Singapore and the Peninsula. Their connection to Indian nationalists made the Indian Government especially attentive to their views on the conditions of Indian labourers in Malaya. It came as no surprise therefore that when wage cuts on Indian labourers were introduced by some rubber planters in the second half of the 1930s, CIAM was able to convince the Indian Government to ban all forms of assisted Indian emigration to Malaya in 1938.

The situation in Singapore paralleled developments at the pan-Malayan level. English-educated professionals deeply influenced by Indian nationalism and engaged with labour issues, had come to the fore. Key leaders included S. C. Goho and K. P. K. Menon. These lawyers were actively engaged in acting for Indian labourers in Singapore in the second half of the 1930s. K. P. K. Menon represented the interests of thirteen thousand Indian workers from the Municipality and Harbour Board when a major strike broke out in December 1936.⁸⁶ Both leaders negotiated a settlement for Indian workers during the serious outbreak of labour militancy at the Singapore Traction company in 1938 that lasted for six weeks.⁸⁷ Goho was also heavily involved in the formation

of the Johor Indian Labourers Association in 1939 and engaged in settling labour disputes there.⁸⁸

As these middle-class professionals who favoured a 'more radical course' gained prominence, a split emerged with Indian merchants who continued 'to be conservative, keen to toe the Government line and not to arouse the displeasure of the colonial rulers'.⁸⁹ That fissure was punctuated when these new leaders began organizing and acting for Indian employees of firms owned by Indian merchants. Their demands for better working conditions pressed the Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1939 to declare a weekly day off for employees of member firms.⁹⁰ In 1938, a number of young English-educated middle class professionals—perturbed by the perception that the Singapore Indian Association was dominated by conservatives—came together to form the Indian Youth League (IYL). The IYL, headed by Goho, grew rapidly after its formation—oral accounts suggest that prior to the outbreak of World War II the organization had over 2,000 members.⁹¹ The League organized large-scale celebrations to mark Gandhi's birthday, ran Hindi classes, and organized theatricals. At its events, IYL leaders were known to deliver aggressive political speeches in line with Indian nationalist aspirations—in spite of the presence of CID officers.⁹² Shortly after its formation, the Singapore IYL was recognized as a key CIAM affiliate, and Goho was appointed as Raghavan's deputy in CIAM in 1939.⁹³

By the turn of the decade, IYL leaders were in a position to take control of the Singapore Indian Association. They were supported by recent emigrants from India, who were strongly disposed towards Indian nationalism, and who had become members of the Indian Association. In 1939, when moderates in the Singapore Indian Association, concerned by the infiltration of 'radicals', sought to ban 'agitation ... in the association in connection to Indian politics',⁹⁴ an overwhelming majority rejected the resolution. A second resolution 'to restrict voting powers and the privilege of holding office in the association only to those who had resided five years or more in Malaya'⁹⁵ was also thrown out. By 1940, the ascendancy of the 'radical' educated professionals was complete when Goho was elected President of the Singapore Indian Association.⁹⁶

Goho's tenure, which continued till the advent of World War II, saw a deepening of ties between the Singapore Indian Association, the IYL, and CIAM, and taking an even more pro-active role in demanding better wages and working conditions for Indian labourers at the pan-Malayan

level. Indeed, in the period immediately before World War II, Indian labour in Singapore and the Peninsula had ostensibly become even more assertive than Chinese labour unions. This was in part because following the Japanese invasion of China, the latter had received strict instructions from the Chinese Communist Party in Malaya 'to stop all anti-British movements and consolidate the anti-Japanese fronts'.⁹⁷ Particularly serious Indian labour disturbances were recorded in the Klang valley in May 1941. Colonial authorities brutally suppressed the Klang strikers. An emergency was declared in Selangor, and colonial authorities deployed a battalion of Indian troops and armoured cars to end the picketing. Orders were given to shoot those who broke the curfew, resulting in the death of five strikers, and the arrest of 326 labourers. Of these, 220 were detained under the 'Banishment' Regulation, with a view of deportation to India.⁹⁸ Goho managed to negotiate a deal that saw an increase in the wages of Indian labourers, but relations between British authorities and Indian labourers had been severely undermined. The Klang strikers represented 'a major landmark in the coming of age of Indian working-class consciousness and of its militant leadership', and Arasaratnam suggests that the violent manner in which they were suppressed 'sharpened the anti-imperialism of the Indian community as a whole and serve[d] ... to explain its actions under Japanese Occupation'.⁹⁹

The Dravidian Movement

While the Indian nationalist-orientated educated middle class represented a top down connection to Indian labourers, the 1930s also witnessed radicalism spreading from below, by 'leaders who were proximate to that class' and who were able to spread their socio-political views in the vernacular.¹⁰⁰ From the late 1920s through the 1930s, the Dravidian Movement, which had emerged as a significant force in the Madras Presidency after World War I, left a deep imprint on Tamils in Singapore. The tenets of the Movement rested on the notion that Dravidians 'had been subjected to racial ... suppression by the Aryans'¹⁰¹ and that over several millennia, Brahmins had entrenched Aryan 'tyranny' in southern India through the caste system. In the early twentieth century, the Movement in Madras had grown popular in a socio-political milieu that was characterized by:

(1) the near monopoly over the public administration of Madras Presidency exercised by the English educated Brahmins; (2) the privileging of Sanskrit as their own distinct cultural marker and the simultaneous inferiorisation of Tamil culture/identity by them; and (3) the efflorescence of a kind of Orientalist scholarship which offered a picture of glorious Tamil/Dravidian past/identity as distinct from Sanskrit/Aryan past/identity.¹⁰²

Dravidian populism contained a variety of strands, of which the most significant in the inter-war years was the Self-Respect Movement organized in 1926 by E. V. Ramasamy Naicker—often referred to by the honorific ‘Periyar’. The Movement had a robust anti-Brahminical stance, and ‘denounced caste observances, child marriage, and enforced widowhood’.¹⁰³ Over time Periyar developed a comprehensive programme ‘dedicated to [the] moral, religious and social reform’¹⁰⁴ of Tamil society. His views were propagated through numerous Tamil journals, including *Kudiarasu*, *Puratchi*, *Pakutharivu*, and *Vidudhalai*.¹⁰⁵ Although initially independent of a direct political affiliation, the Self-Respect Movement’s programme shared commonalities with the ideology of the South Indian Liberal Federation (better known as the Justice Party), which had been established in Madras in 1917. The Justice Party’s fervent opposition to ‘Brahmanical tyranny’, and its emphasis on breaking down caste barriers and uplifting depressed castes, drew considerable support from middling and lower-caste Tamils and Telugus in Madras.¹⁰⁶

By the late 1920s, the circulation of journals and the movement of people to and from the Presidency had facilitated the spread of Dravidian consciousness amongst Tamils in Singapore. Propagators of the Movement in Singapore and the Peninsula included Tamil journalists, schoolmasters, and vernacular-educated *kanganis*, who were inspired by the notion of social and religious reform and the upliftment of the lower-castes.¹⁰⁷ Periyar’s visit to Singapore and the Peninsula in December 1929 and January 1930, on the invitation of a young Singapore-based Tamil writer—Thamizhavel G. Sarangapani—was monumental in galvanizing the Movement here.¹⁰⁸ During his tour, packed audiences witnessed Periyar’s delivery of scathing attacks on the caste system, and were inspired by his call for an end to deep-seated social inequalities in Tamil society, and the necessity for Tamils in Malaya to unite and join the Movement by establishing ‘self-respect associations’.¹⁰⁹

Periyar's visit galvanized the formation of the Tamils Reform Association (TRA) in Singapore in 1932. Early leaders of the TRA included Sarangapani, A. C. Suppiah, Damodaran Pillai, and Nagalingam Mudaliar.¹¹⁰ The Association's objectives drew directly from the ideology of the Self Respect Movement:

To promote the welfare of Tamils of both sexes;... to promote the attainment of social equality among all Tamils by the abolition of all distinctions based on birth;... to raise the social status of Tamil women and afford them all their due rights and privileges and... to encourage thrift, economy and temperance ... among Tamils.¹¹¹

Prior to 1935, the TRA was not a particularly effective unit and had less than 100 members. The organization would probably have ceased if not for the patronage of a small coterie of Tamil businessmen. Most members were young adults educated in the Tamil medium and drawn from the middle and lower middle class. Tamil conservatives and even the Adi Dravidas avoided the early TRA due to concerns that it was 'atheistic' and 'radical' in its social orientations.¹¹² In its first three years, the Association did, however, make some headway in cultivating links with other Tamil associations in Singapore by facilitating combined meetings. This enabled the TRA to gain support for the formation of a Tamils Representative Council (TRC) in 1933, aimed at representing Tamil demands collectively to the Government.¹¹³

In 1935, the TRA set up its inaugural office at rental premises in Klang Road, and commenced publishing the *Tamil Murasu*, which became its mouthpiece. The newspaper's circulation increased rapidly. Subscribers were drawn to its highly emotive editorials that were acrid in denouncing Brahmins, Brahmanical Hinduism, and the caste system that were cited as the key reasons for the 'lost glory of the Tamil civilisation':

Recently, the Aryans' entry into India endangered our civilisation. They fused caste into their religion and termed us—Tamils who were once the paragon of civilisation—sons of courtesans ... and prostitute's people [sic]..., through which, they enslaved us.¹¹⁴

The paper encouraged education; advocated temperance; opposed ritual animal sacrifices and religious practices that involved self-immolation—such as carrying *kavadis* and fire-walking; and supported inter-caste and widow remarriages. The popularity of the *Murasu*

strengthened the organization's profile, increasing its membership to 450 by July 1935.¹¹⁵ The strong anti-caste posture of the newspaper and its demands to abolish discriminatory practices towards 'untouchable' groups also gradually drew Adi Dravida support for the organization.

The increase in membership enabled the TRA to expand its operations. Different sections were set up to achieve its social goals, and three-year plans adopted to guide the progress of these units.¹¹⁶ The TRA's Literary Section was especially active, and its efforts developed the Association's premises as a hub for lectures and debates that propagated the ideology of the Dravidian Movement. Large scale theatricals—such as 'Sugunasuntharan' and 'Gowri Shankar'—were staged to raise funds, sensitize members to the evils of the caste system, and to encourage a reformist outlook.¹¹⁷ The Association also encouraged Tamils to settle permanently in the colony, a position that had been adopted by Periyar during his tour. This call was possibly influenced by the overarching view held by TRA leaders that lower-caste Tamils were better off here than in the Madras Presidency. The TRA also actively propagated Tamil education, aiding in the establishment of Tamil language schools at workers quarters, and lobbying the Government to provide support for Tamil schools. In 1935, the Association achieved some success in this regard when the Government acceded to resuming grants-in-aid to Tamil schools.

Amongst the TRA's notable achievements in the second half of the 1930s included the propagation of 'reform' marriages. These marriages sought to bypass traditional Hindu religious ceremonies that involved Brahmin priests, and were carried out by leaders of the Association. In the late 1930s, considerable publicity was given to both inter-caste and inter-racial marriages conducted by the organization.¹¹⁸ The organization also strongly advocated Hindu widow remarriages. In the second half of the 1930s, the TRA joined Indian nationalist orientated organizations in lobbying the government to pass a Registration of Hindu Marriages Ordinance. The move for a legal means to determine Hindu marriages had gained prominence reportedly because the practice of 'enticing away married women' had grown increasingly common amongst Indian labourers, in part due to the great disparity in the gender profile.¹¹⁹ Although a Registration of Hindu Marriages Bill was not legislated, these pressures did lead to the enactment of the Civil Marriages Ordinance in 1940, which allowed non-Muslims to contract a recognized monogamous marriage through a government-appointed

registrar.¹²⁰ The organization's attempt to lobby the government and the Hindu Advisory Board to ban self-mortification during religious festivals were less successful. Indeed on issues pertaining to the reform of religious practices, the TRA gained little broad-based support even from the Tamil population.

In the political sphere, the TRA sought to increase Tamil representation in Government boards and councils. The TRC became the key platform to demand more Tamil representatives in the Hindu Advisory Board and the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowments Board. The Government, however, took little heed of these calls. Nonetheless, the move to increase Tamil representation was instrumental in the TRA's efforts to foster unity amongst Tamil organizations. Beyond the local scene, the organization was able to develop close connections with Tamil associations in the Peninsula. Sarangapani was particularly active in supporting the Malayan Tamils conference—the key forum through which Tamil leaders at the pan-Malayan level connected. In 1941, when the TRA hosted the pan-Malayan Tamil Conference in Singapore,¹²¹ the organization was well positioned to form an All-Malaya Tamils Association along the lines of CIAM—that initiative, was, however, disrupted by the advent of the Japanese Occupation.

It would be fair to say that the 'radical' bent of the Singapore TRA was limited to the social reforms that it advocated. There is little evidence to suggest that the organization was anti-colonial in its posture. At TRA organized meetings with other Tamil associations, Tamil loyalty to British rule was vociferously expressed.¹²² Unlike some of its affiliates in Malaya, the TRA in Singapore was also not as active in engaging with Tamil labour unions. That is not to say that the TRA was unconcerned with issues such as depressed wages, but rather that its initiatives were primarily in terms of advocacy rather than agitation. The Association's lack of initiative on this front may have been due to the salience of Indian nationalism at this juncture and the growing engagement of the IYL and the Singapore Indian Association on Indian workers' issues, which imposed limitations on the extent of the former's influence. Direct engagement with labour agitation may not have been favoured also due to concerns amongst TRA leaders of a potential backlash from colonial authorities. Indeed, unlike Indian nationalist orientated outfits, the TRA could not count on the support of nationalist notables in India or the Indian Agent in Malaya to protect its position.

Notwithstanding collaboration on specific issues, the TRA's adherence to the ideology of the Dravidian Movement did lead to fissures with Indian nationalist orientated organizations. The TRA frequently attacked the Indian Association on the grounds that it was seemingly unrepresentative of Tamils, and was dominated by northern Indians. The antipathy was returned by the Indian Association which viewed the TRA as a 'communist' organization that fissured the Indian community along 'racial' and vernacular lines, and sought to exacerbate existing divisions between northern and southern Indians. For these reasons, Indian nationalist leaders such as Nehru and Sastri, during their visits to Singapore, were advised by the Indian Association to avoid meeting TRA leaders—moves which in turn sparked protests amongst the latter.¹²³

Tensions between Indian nationalist orientated organizations and the TRA escalated after 1937, when the Congress party-controlled legislature in the Madras Presidency introduced Hindi as a compulsory subject there. In response, Periyar had launched a strident anti-Hindi campaign in Madras that forced the Congress government in the Presidency 'to change Hindi from a required to an optional subject in schools'.¹²⁴ In Malaya, the Congress's decision in favour of Hindi was applauded by the CIAM and the Congress-orientated Tamil newspaper, *Tamil Nesan*, both of which encouraged the use of Hindi as a common language for Indians.¹²⁵ The TRA, following Periyar's line, vociferously protested the imposition of Hindi language education in southern India, and its leaders were deeply involved in anti-Hindi campaigns in Malaya and Singapore. On occasion TRA leaders like Sarangapani went to the extent of advocating a pro-Urdu line in India, a move that was consonant with Periyar's support for the Muslim League in the late 1930s:

In Malaya, several anti-Hindi rallies have taken place. No pro-Hindi rally has taken place in any nook thus far.... Hindi is a blind language (loud applause).... I strongly say that if Urdu was made the common language of India, it would help promote a sense of Hindu-Muslim unity (loud applause).¹²⁶

Indeed the language issue was a salient one amongst Tamils in Singapore, and the strong line that the TRA advocated may have been instrumental in the reported increase of its membership to some 2,000 in the period before the Japanese Occupation.¹²⁷

The South Indian Muslim League

While Indian nationalism and the Dravidian Movement represented the two most significant political currents from the subcontinent in the 1930s, a third strand connected to the Muslim League in India emerged in 1936, when the South Indian Muslim League (SIML) was established in Singapore. While the formation of the Association was certainly influenced by the growing popularity of the League in India, it was also in part catalyzed by the growing paralysis of pan-ethnic Muslim associations in the inter-war years. That context would have certainly informed a focus on political developments in India.

The membership of the SIML mainly comprised South Indian Muslim merchants and traders, many of whom maintained close connections with other Muslim associations and the TRA. The initial activities of the League in Singapore were primarily socio-religious and cultural, including for example, the celebration of Prophet Mohammed's birthday, facilitating lectures by visiting dignitaries, and organizing tea parties to honour members who were bestowed with titles such as Justice of Peace from the colonial regime. The Association's activities grew increasingly political just before the Japanese Occupation. This turn needs to be understood in the context of wider political developments in India. The Indian provincial elections in 1936–7 had seen the Indian National Congress coming to power in several Indian provinces. The refusal by the Congress to enter into a coalition with the Muslim League after the elections had ruptured relations between the two political parties. In the aftermath, Muhammad Ali Jinnah—leader of the Muslim League—grew increasingly strident in his attacks on the Congress, and began to advocate the possibility of a separate homeland for Muslims in India.

In 1937, the SIML joined hands with the TRA in denouncing the Indian National Congress's advocacy of Hindi as a language of unity in India.¹²⁸ In 1939, when Jinnah alleged that Congress ministries had failed to safeguard Muslim rights in India, the SIML joined in the condemnation of the Congress and forwarded a resolution to the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, pleading for an investigation: 'As the Congress ministries failed to safeguard the legitimate rights of the Muslims and disdained their reasonable requests, this meeting strongly condemns them and requests the Viceroy to investigate the wrongs done.'¹²⁹ When

in 1940, the Muslim League in India passed what came to be known as the 'Pakistan Resolution', SIML leaders, during Jinnah's birthday celebrations, fervently supported the move for a separate homeland for India's Muslims.¹³⁰ Three months later, Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, headed a delegation that included a number of SIML representatives from Singapore to the 28th session of the All-India Muslim League.¹³¹

Although the SIML was a fervent advocate of the Muslim League's cause in India, the organization had limited appeal in Singapore. Ampalavanar suggests that an important reason was the constitution of its leadership that was drawn 'from the mercantile class and not from the English educated middle class who were the more articulate section of the population'.¹³² Moreover, the organization had focused solely on political developments in India, with no real attempt to reach out and represent the interests of workers and the lower-middle class. Finally, and possibly the most crucial factor for the limited appeal of the SIML in Singapore was the very fact that at the local level, there was little in the way of tensions between Hindus and Indian Muslims.¹³³

* * *

The vigorous organizational activity in the diaspora during the inter-war years was catalyzed by various factors: the increase in Indian numbers; the growing involvement of the middle class in cooperative activities; a gradual move towards more settled patterns among certain sections of the Indian population in the 1930s; and the influence of transnational socio-political currents, of which the most vibrant during this period were those emanating from India.

There was clear evidence in the 1920s and 1930s to suggest an increase in religious-cultural production—makeshift shrine structures were refurbished, Indian vernacular education became more available, and diasporic associations proliferated. In this sphere, however, pragmatism-induced collaboration was less visible when compared to earlier periods. The increase in numbers enabled support for community-specific institutions. The conservative tendencies of an emergent middle-class leadership coupled by the movement of families sharpened tendencies towards particularism in the diaspora, which in certain domains gave rise to fractiousness. In the context of more concentrated settlement patterns and increased lower-caste Tamil labour emigration,

paradoxically, caste emerged as possibly a more potent signifier of difference than in earlier periods. Regional fissures also became more marked—particularly along north and south Indian lines—although divisions were evident even within these overarching boundaries.

Concomitantly, the diaspora was affected by a spectrum of Indian political currents—Indian nationalist, Dravidian, and in the late 1930s, the Muslim League. If at one level the influence of these strands generated new unities, differences in ideology also sometimes sharpened existing identity-based fault lines. The trajectory of these strands in the diaspora to some extent followed developments in India. Certainly by the second half of the 1930s, Indian nationalist-orientated organizations in Singapore had begun to adopt a more assertive posture. That turn was informed by deepening connections with affiliate bodies at the pan-Malayan level, frequent visits by prominent Indian political leaders concerned over socio-economic conditions in the diaspora, and growing linkages with an increasingly restive Indian labour in the aftermath of the Depression. Gradually a leadership more inclined towards a radical posture took control of Indian nationalist outfits in the port city. Yet, by no means did Indian nationalism have a monopolistic hold on diasporic political loyalties. Propped by political developments in the Madras Presidency and the energy of its leaders who emphasized caste reform and Tamil identification, the Dravidian Movement, had also emerged as a significant player prior to the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific.

Notes

1. CO276/116, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 8 May 1930, 787–806.
2. Interview with R. Jumabhoy, cited in K. Mullaiselvi, 'The Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce, 1935–1980', (BA Honours thesis, Department of History: National University of Singapore, 1989), 22.
3. S. P. Thinnappan and S. N. Vairavan, *Nagarathars in Singapore* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, 2010), 26.
4. See Chapter 3, pp. 111–116.
5. J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921* (London: Dunstable and Watford, 1922), 273–6.
6. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 82.
7. A parallel can be drawn to the United Kingdom where an increase in Indian emigration in the 1960s also saw a turn towards orthodoxy in that diaspora.

Ballard posits that '[as] chain migration brought kinsmen and fellow villagers together in ever larger residential and occupational clusters ... they began to reconstruct a familiar social order around themselves, complete with all its associated cultural norms. All of a sudden conformity mattered'. Roger Ballard, 'Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh', in *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. Roger Ballard (Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1996), 15.

8. F. W. Clothey, *Ritualizing on the Boundaries: Continuity and Innovation in the Tamil Diaspora* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 72.

9. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 100.

10. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–1975* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 137.

11. IOR/L/E/7/1341, *Annual Report of the Agent of the Government of India in British Malaya*, 1926, 1.

12. Danapaul Saveri Dass, 'Tamil Education in West Malaysia and Singapore, 1860–1970' (MA thesis, Faculty of Education: University of Malaya, 1972), 29.

13. A. Mani, 'Aspects of Identity and Change amongst Tamil Muslims in Singapore', *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 13, 2 (1992): 340.

14. Samuel S. Dhoraisingam, 'The Founding of Singapore's Tamil Schools', n.d., accessed 4 April 2009, http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/singapore/facts_old_singapore/354/the_founding_of_singapore8217s_tamil_schools.php.

15. *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 January 1931, 18.

16. *The Singapore Free Press*, 22 January 1934, 3.

17. *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 January 1931, 18.

18. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 002437, Reel No.: 3, Interviewee: Perumbulavil Vilasini, 28 September, 2000.

19. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025, Reel No.: 1, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, 26 February 1982.

20. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001323, Reel No.: 9, Interviewee: Choor Singh (Justice), 4 October 1991.

21. James Gomez, 'Consolidating Indian Identities in Post-Independence Singapore: A Case Study of the Malayalee Community', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 25, 2 (1997): 47.

22. A. Mani, 'The Changing Caste-Structure amongst the Singapore Indians' (MA thesis, National University of Singapore, Singapore, 1978), 19.

23. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 65.

24. Clothey, *Ritualizing*, 71.

25. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 66.

26. Mani, *Changing Caste-Structure*, 24.

27. *Ibid.*, 23.

28. CO276/116, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 8 May 1930, 796–7.

29. *The Straits Times*, 4 January 1928, 8.

30. CO276/116, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 8 May 1930, 796–7.
31. See Rajesh Rai, 'Race and the Construction of the North-South Divide amongst Indians in Colonial Malaya and Singapore', *South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies*, 27, 2 (2004): 245–264.
32. See Chapter 4, pp. 146–48.
33. Rajesh Rai, 'Homogenisation and Fragmentation, Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Development of Hinduism in Singapore', *South Asian Diaspora*, 1, 1 (2009): 7.
34. CO276/116, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 8 May 1930, 791–2.
35. *The Singapore Free Press*, 20 August 1928, 14.
36. Khoo Kay Kim, 'Malay Attitudes towards Indians', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, eds. K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 269.
37. Ibid.
38. CO537/916, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, July/August 1923, 11.
39. CO537/936, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, September 1925, 5.
40. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 87.
41. Cited in S. M. A. Fakhri, 'Print Culture amongst Tamils and Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia, c.1860–1960' (Working Paper, No. 167, Madras Institute of Development Studies [MIDS], Chennai, 2002), 12.
42. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, April 1923, 7.
43. Dinesh Sathisan, 'The Power of Print: Tamil Newspapers in Malaya and the Imagining of Tamil Cultural Identity, 1930–1940' (MA thesis, Department of History: National University of Singapore, 2008), 8.
44. Michael Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), 78.
45. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, April 1923, 6.
46. CO537/931, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, April 1925, 6.
47. CO537/908, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, January 1923, 7.
48. CO537/923, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, March 1924, 4.
49. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–1975*, 157.
50. CO537/918, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, October 1923, 5.
51. The list of its early leaders included, amongst others, Mahmood bin Haji Dawood, Anukul Chander, S. Bashir Ahmad, Hirakchand Kummarji, Ahmed Ali Khan Surattee, E. V. Davis, J. M. Dorairaj, R. B. Krishnan, J. Louis, K. Nagutha Maricar, Dr Chotta Singh, and Rajabali Jumabhoy. Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians: 1923–2003* (Singapore: Singapore Indian Association 2003), 31–43.
52. CO537/932, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, May 1925, 6.
53. CO537/919, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, November 1923, 8.
54. CO537/911, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, April 1923, 6.

55. CO537/932, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, May 1925, 6.
56. Ibid.
57. CO537/926, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, November 1924, 6.
58. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 84.
59. CO537/932, *Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, May 1925, 6.
60. Netto, *Passage*, 36.
61. Ibid., 48, 60–3. The name of the Indian and Ceylonese Ladies Club was changed to the more generic Lotus Club in 1932 to draw women from other communities. The activities of the club included the celebration of Mothers' Day, holding discussion forums on women's issues, and fund-raising efforts for destitute women and children through gala-dinners and cinema shows.
62. Ibid., 45.
63. W. G. Huff, 'Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression', *Economic History Review*, 54, 2 (2001): 290.
64. Ibid., 309.
65. Loh Kah Seng, 'Beyond "Rubber Prices" History: Life in Singapore during The Great Depression Years (MA thesis, Department of History: National University of Singapore, 2004), 48–9.
66. Seng, 'Beyond "Rubber Prices" History', 43.
67. Huff, 'Entitlements', 310.
68. Ibid., 312.
69. M. K. Nair, *Annual Report of Agent of the Government of India in British Malaya for the Year 1932*, 24.
70. CO 273/561, Confidential correspondence from R. Onraet to H. Fairburn, 1 April 1930.
71. IOR/L/P+J/8/261, Private correspondence from Lilingthow to Amery, 18 April 1941.
72. K. Mullaiselvi, 'Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce', 20.
73. *The Straits Times*, 17 September 1935, 13.
74. CIAM was officially registered in early 1937. Rajeswary Ampalavanar, 'Social and Political Developments in the Indian Community of Malaya, 1920–41' (MA thesis, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1969), 86.
75. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia*, 90.
76. CO275/104, *Straits Settlements Legislative Council*, 1921, C.33.
77. *The Straits Times*, 21 February 1921, 10.
78. *The Straits Times*, 20 April 1936, 19.
79. CO273/660/7, The High Commissioner, Federated Malay States, to The Secretary of States, 10 June 1940.
80. *The Straits Times*, 26 February 1921, 10.
81. *The Straits Times*, 6 February 1934, 6.
82. *The Straits Times*, 2 May 1934, 13.

83. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'Malaysian Indians: The Formation of an Incipient Society', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, 199.

84. Arasaratnam, 'Malaysian Indians', 199.

85. Nehru's visit to Singapore on 26 May 1937 was said to have seen a crowd of twelve thousand gathered at the Railway Station to receive him, and some 70,000 Indians attended his rally at Farrer Park. CO273/634/9, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence, 'Visit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, President of the Indian National Congress', 7 July 1937, 10–11.

86. K. S. Jomo and Patricia Todd, *Trade Unions and the State in Peninsular Malaysia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 60–1.

87. *The Singapore Free Press*, 22 August 1938, 2.

88. Ampalavanar, *Social and Political Developments*, 91.

89. *Ibid.*, 82.

90. *The Singapore Free Press*, 7 October 1939, 5. In practice Indian employees in numerous Indian firms continued to be subject to a seven-day work week in spite of the decision. *The Straits Times*, 2 November 1939, 4.

91. Estimate by Dr K. R. Menon, a high ranking functionary of the IYL just prior to the outbreak of World War II. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025/09, Reel No. 2, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, 26 February 1982.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *The Straits Times*, 26 July 1948, 5.

94. *The Straits Times*, 3 April 1939, 12.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 September 1941, 5.

97. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 166.

98. Chandra Muzaffar, 'Political Marginalization in Malaya', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, 214.

99. Arasaratnam, 'Malaysian Indians', 201.

100. *Ibid.*, 199.

101. Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, 'Is there a Tamil "Race"?', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140.

102. M. S. S. Pandian, 'Notes on the Transformation of "Dravidian" Ideology: Tamilnadu, c. 1900–1940', *Social Scientist*, 22, 5/6 (1994): 85.

103. Robert L. Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965), 26.

104. Rajeswary Ampalavanar, *The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya, 1945–1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981), 4.

105. Hardgrave, *Dravidian Movement*, 26.

106. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

107. A. Mani, 'Indians in Singapore Society', in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, 199.

108. *The Straits Times*, 26 December 1929, 14.
109. Vasandakumari Haridass, 'Tamils Reform Association, Singapore (1932–1961)', *Tamil Peravai*, 1 (1976/7): 65.
110. *Ibid.*, 67.
111. *Ibid.*, 65.
112. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 002307, Interviewee: Vaidyanathan Thirunavukkarasu, Reel No. 7, 5 May 2000.
113. *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 February 1933, 5.
114. *Tamil Murasu*, 8 September 1936, cited in Sathisan, 'The Power of Print', 41.
115. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 002307, Interviewee: Vaidyanathan Thirunavukkarasu, Reel No. 7, 5 May 2000; Membership approximates gathered from the *Tamil Murasu*, 1935–40, cited in Haridass, 'Tamils Reform Association', 68; Membership figure in 1935 also cited in *The Straits Times*, 8 July 1935, 12.
116. Haridass, 'Tamils Reform Association', 68.
117. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000588, Interviewee: Natesan Palanivelu, Reel No. 8, 2 August 1985; S. Varathan and S. Hamid, *The Development of Tamil Drama in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Indian Artistes' Association, 2008), 17.
118. Possibly the most prominent example of a 'reform' marriage conducted by the TRA was in 1936 when a Tamil man married a Jewish lady. *The Straits Times*, 5 June 1936, 12.
119. *The Straits Times*, 22 February 1930, 19.
120. *The Singapore Free Press*, 4 November 1939, 2.
121. *The Straits Times*, 10 April 1941, 10.
122. *The Singapore Free Press*, 15 May 1937, 15.
123. *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 January 1937, 3.
124. Hardgrave, *Dravidian Movement*, 27.
125. *The Singapore Free Press*, 23 December 1937, 11; *The Singapore Free Press*, 26 November 1937, 1.
126. *Tamil Murasu*, 13 January 1938, cited in Sathisan, 'The Power of Print', 53.
127. NAS, Oral History Interviews Accession No.: 000588, Interviewee: Natesan Palanivelu, Reel No. 8, 2 August 1985.
128. Ampalavanar, *Social and Political Developments*, 96.
129. *The Straits Times*, 26 December 1939, 10.
130. *The Straits Times*, 26 December 1940, 11.
131. *The Singapore Free Press*, 17 March 1941, 7.
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133. *Ibid.*

III

The Japanese Occupation and the Indian National Army

6 Imperatives of the New Order

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore extended over a period of three and a half years, and is remembered by all inhabitants of the port city as an era of darkness—characterized by scarcity, suffering, and a fear of Japanese brutality. Yet notwithstanding the distress, for many Indians here, the Japanese Occupation was also an extraordinary episode because Singapore (renamed *Syonan-to* by the Japanese) functioned as the nerve centre of what was commonly referred to as the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia (henceforth the Movement), with the Indian National Army (INA) as its military wing and the Indian Independence League (IIL) as its civilian-political arm. Possibly no other aspect of the history of Indians in this part of the world has received as much scholarly attention as the formation, development, and the eventual collapse of the INA. There are good reasons for the fascination: the role of Subhas Chandra Bose—the renowned Indian nationalist and former President of the Indian National Congress—in leading the Movement from July 1943; the direct involvement of the Indian diaspora in the struggle to free India from British rule; and the fact that the trial of INA detainees at the Red Fort in the aftermath of the war left a veritable imprint on Indian politics.

The experience of Indians in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation comprises two key elements. Firstly, the INA and IIL story, which was an integral part of the history of Indians in Singapore during this period. The local Indian populace was heavily involved, and even if a number remained distant, they were indirectly affected because

the INA and IIL had a significant bearing on Japanese policies towards Indians in Singapore. Also crucial to our understanding is how Indian inhabitants were affected by the wider socio-economic conditions prevalent during the Occupation—a facet that has received far less scholarly attention.

This chapter focuses on the Indian experience from the period immediately before the war in the East to mid-1943—just before the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose to Singapore. It begins with a study of how Indians responded to the outbreak of hostilities and follows with an elucidation of the formation and development of the INA and IIL after the Japanese takeover. During this phase Singapore emerged as the most crucial centre for the Movement, and leaders based in the port city comprised a key component of its leadership. An examination of the reasons for the involvement of these leaders reveals that notwithstanding a sense of patriotism towards India, they were strongly motivated by the desire to protect Indian civilians and soldiers from Japanese abuse. The study examines how Indian civilians were affected by Japanese rule and the prevailing socio-economic conditions in the city, and the extent to which the IIL proved useful in alleviating their distress during this phase of the Occupation. Finally, the chapter investigates the tensions that led to a crisis in the INA and IIL in December 1942, and concludes with a study of the transformations evident in the Movement in the first half of 1943.

6.1 The Garrison City

It would not be far off the mark to suggest that Singapore was turning into a garrison city in 1941. In the context of a possible Japanese offensive, Singapore witnessed a huge influx of Commonwealth troops.¹ Two full British Indian Army Divisions, the 9th and the 11th—about 37,000 Indian troops—were deployed in the Peninsula and Singapore, comprising over 40 per cent of the total British force in Malaya.² Large guns had been mounted at various ‘strategic’ locations (which retrospectively proved largely useless because they were pointed in the wrong direction). The abundance bred an air of confidence that this was sufficient to protect Malaya should the Japanese dare to strike—a sentiment added to by the arrival of the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle-cruiser *Repulse* to the Singapore naval base on 2 December.³

There were, however, serious concerns. The British air force was skeletal and the army lacked tanks because of the presumption that tank-warfare was not suited to Malayan conditions. The Indian Divisions were especially ill-equipped. Worse still, many of the Indian soldiers were boys in their teens, packed-off to the front after only a brief stint of basic military training. In the short time that they were deployed, 'peasants who had grown up amid bullock carts had to become accustomed to ... Bren Gun carriers, mortars and radio sets'.⁴ They would soon have to handle such complex military equipment in combat conditions.

Also troubling was the possibility of Indian troops with suspect loyalties. Concerns over the commitment of Indian soldiers to the British Empire were connected to the open recruitment policy adopted by the Indian Army in the late 1930s to cope with the demand for soldiers following the advent of World War II in Europe. Voluntary recruitment was a significant change from earlier times when Indian soldiers were only drawn from families and clans that had a long tradition of serving in the British Indian Army. The British Indian Army swelled from 200,000 in 1939 to 900,000 by the end of 1941,⁵ but many who joined were not raised in an environment where to serve, fight, and die for the British Raj was a badge of honour. The possibility of suspect loyalties was added to by the fact that some Indian Officers in the British Indian Army felt discriminated against and treated as second grade officers. These concerns over loyalty were not unfounded. Captain Mohan Singh—second in command of the 15th Brigade, 1/14 Punjab Regiment deployed in northern Malaya in early December 1941—was said to have exclaimed to friends at a party just before the onset of the war, 'don't be surprised if you see me as your liberator coming down fighting the very British whom I'm going now to defend'.⁶ His words would prove ominous.

Even if some military commanders were concerned, the civilian population was left in the dark—official policy emphasizing the need for journalists to maintain morale and prevent panic.⁷ Rumours of Japanese espionage activities did occasionally raise anxiety. Disturbing intelligence reports also sometimes surfaced: at a dinner function hosted by P. Chand—a high-ranking Indian Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) officer in Singapore—intoxicated Japanese guests had reportedly blurted that 'in a short time [the Japanese] ... would be attacking Singapore'.⁸ Yet, such drunken utterances were treated

casually. In 1941, the *Singapore Free Press* reassured its readers that ‘the majority of well-informed people do not believe that the Japanese in their present difficulties will branch out on fresh ventures’.⁹

6.2 War, Evacuation, and the Indian Passive Defence Force (IPDF)

Singapore roused to the reality of war in the early hours of 8 December 1941. Japanese aircraft raided key airfields, the Naval Base, the dock, and the business hub. Simultaneously Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and landed three army divisions in southern Thailand and northeast Malaya. The Japanese bombing of Singapore extended over three months—intermittently in December, incessantly in January and early February. A bomb crashed through the roof of the Tiwary home at Birch Road. It was a dud, and the inhabitants escaped with minor injuries.¹⁰ Other installations, buildings and offices struck were not so fortunate. Eight days after their celebrated arrival, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* were destroyed by Japanese torpedo bombers off the coast of Kuantan. By early January, plumes of smoke emanating from ravaged military and economic installations had engulfed the city. In one Japanese attack, the Indian base hospital at Tyersall was gutted by fire, and ‘nearly all [of] the two hundred patients were burned to death’.¹¹

The British responded to the Japanese attacks by landing more troops from India and Australia, increasing the total British force in Malaya to ‘between 125,000 and 138,000 men’.¹² By January, however, the arrival of more soldiers inspired little confidence. Japanese planes were by this time dropping propaganda leaflets urging Asians to free themselves from the yoke of British Imperialism, and ‘the [Indian Sepoy] mutiny of 1915 ... lay like a shadow over the conversation’ of European officials.¹³ The concentration of Indian soldiers on the island was thus a source of anxiety. Press censorship was further tightened, and newspapers, which had initially focused only on the daring of ‘white’ troops, were, in early 1942—as part of the counter-propaganda drive—making it a point to headline the unswerving loyalty and brevity of Indian soldiers.¹⁴

For many Indian civilians in Singapore, the immediate response to the bombing campaign was to attempt to evacuate. S. C. Goho, President

of the Indian Youth League (IYL) and the Indian Association, and Rajabali Jumabhoy, Chairman of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, took charge of Indian evacuation efforts.¹⁵ These were plagued with difficulty. European evacuees took precedence. Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan observed that amongst those escaping from Penang who disembarked in Singapore, their 'color ... was pure white'.¹⁶ Worse still, for much of December, 'ships left Singapore ... half empty' because bureaucratic controls made it difficult to get permission to evacuate.¹⁷ When controls were loosened in January, vessels could not cope with the demand. Goho and Jumabhoy sent cables to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Viceroy, appealing for more ships. Guidelines were set for Indians seeking to leave; priorities of passage were allocated to women and children, men over 50, and the sick.¹⁸ In practice, those who had official connections and were able to pay top dollar were often the first in line: 'By spending hundreds of dollars, a cousin of Lakshmi [Swaminathan] ... wrangled passage for himself and family'.¹⁹ Kanta Rai—an Indian money-lender—managed to board ship, but only because he received a 'stamped pass' from an official contact. Getting on board was not a guarantee for safe passage: many ships were sunk—bombed by aircraft, or torpedoed by Japanese submarines operating in the Straits of Malacca and the Bay of Bengal. Indeed, the vessel that Jumabhoy boarded in early February 1942 capsized by the Palembang River in Sumatra. Some 1,000 Indian and 50 non-Indian passengers on board were transferred to Batavia, and from there sent by a 'cattle ship' to Colombo and thence to Tuticorin.²⁰

The rapid British capitulation put paid to hopes of escape for most Indians in Singapore. Goho remained and played a key role in organizing relief efforts in the three months extending from the initial Japanese air-raids to the British surrender of the island. The IYL aided in the establishment of the Indian Passive Defence Force (IPDF). With some 800 volunteers, the IPDF set up bomb-shelters in Serangoon Road, Farrer Park, and Bukit Timah and constructed relief camps catering to about 25,000 Indian refugees—part of the massive influx escaping the Japanese advance in the Peninsula. As the bombing intensified, the IPDF ran an ambulance service for injured civilians and soldiers. Drawing from medical supplies at the Naval Base, it supported emergency hospitals that reportedly rehabilitated as many as ten thousand soldiers and civilians.²¹ IPDF operations became even more danger-

ous when Japanese forces crossed over into Singapore on 8 February 1942—braving Japanese gunfire and mortar attacks, the ambulance service moved to and from the battle lines to recover casualties.²²

The British surrendered Singapore on 15 February 1945. Two days after, about 45,000 British Indian Army POWs (prisoners of war) were assembled at Farrer Park.²³ The Indian POWs were confused. Why had they been detached from their British officers? Some feared the worst. They had witnessed how the British had protected their own, and were disturbed by the possibility that Indian soldiers had been sold out. They had also seen the brutality of the Japanese and the atrocities they had committed. Captain Shah Nawaz recalled, 'I had a feeling of being completely helpless, of being handed over like cattle by the British to the Japs...'²⁴ An appreciation of what was to follow requires, as background, an understanding of a mission set for Major Fujiwara—an intelligence officer of the Japanese Imperial Army—six months earlier.

6.3 A Secret Mission and the INA Initiative

In September 1941, Fujiwara had been ordered to proceed to Bangkok from where he was to engage in intelligence operations intended to 'cultivate ... Japanese-Indian co-operation' in preparation for a possible Japanese attack on Malaya.²⁵ In Bangkok, he established contact with Pritam Singh, an ardent Indian nationalist who had escaped arrest in India, and who functioned as the General Secretary of the Indian Independence League (IIL) in Thailand. After several secret discussions in October and November 1941, Fujiwara, with Pritam Singh's assent, devised a plan to win over British Indian soldiers when hostilities broke out in Malaya: 'I.I.L. and Fujiwara intelligence unit agents should guarantee the lives of Indian prisoners of war, to win them to the I.I.L.'s ideals ..., and finally to organize an Indian national army with which we would appeal to Indian soldiers in the British-Indian forces.'²⁶

Fujiwara and Pritam Singh followed the advance of Japanese troops from southern Thailand to Malaya. By mid-December 1941, an initial IIL base was established at Alor Star junction in northern Malaya where Fujiwara and Pritam broadcast their intentions to Indian inhabitants. Taken in by the display, Indian plantation owners in the area informed Fujiwara of retreating British Indian soldiers. They were soldiers of the

1/14 Punjab Regiment, who, exhausted after several days of jungle trekking, agreed to surrender.²⁷ Amongst them was Captain Mohan Singh who was tasked to manage both the Indian POWs and to maintain law and order in the area. Impressed by his leadership, Fujiwara informed Mohan Singh of Japanese support for Indian independence from British rule, his wider objective of raising an Indian army, and offered leadership of the force to the Captain.²⁸

Mohan Singh was hesitant; concern over Japanese sincerity stemmed from stories of Japanese atrocities. Yet, he envisaged that such a force could be potentially useful as a safeguard for 'Indian soldiers and to protect Indian civilians and property from Japanese exploitation'.²⁹ Assuaged by Fujiwara's sincerity and recognizing the possible use of the force, Mohan Singh agreed to cooperate in raising an army that came to be known as the Indian National Army (INA). He was immediately tasked to spearhead a propaganda campaign to win over British Indian army soldiers. This was effected by early January 1942. At the Slim River battle 100 km north of Kuala Lumpur, the INA propaganda campaign caused considerable confusion amongst British Indian Army soldiers. Out of the 2,000–4,000 Indian soldiers taken as POWs after the Slim River battle, many reportedly agreed to transfer their allegiance to the fledgling INA. It came as no surprise that after this British defeat, General Percival immediately withdrew the 11th Indian Division from the front line. Given the success, the Japanese now envisaged the possibility of a wider role for the INA in ensuing campaigns. A contingent of over 200 Indian soldiers moved south with the Japanese to Johore.³⁰ On 7 February, about 20 of these men were involved in the battle for Singapore, successfully diverting British attention towards Pulau Ubin—on the east of the Johor Straits—as the main body of Japanese soldiers landed on the island's northwestern coast.³¹ Pritam Singh and Mohan Singh arrived in Singapore the day after the Japanese takeover. The former immediately set about contacting leaders of the local Indian civilian community, while the latter dispatched INA propaganda agents to soften the ground amongst Indian POWs.³²

6.4 The Establishment of the INA and IIL in Singapore

On 17 February 1942, the 45,000 Indian POWs gathered at Farrer Park listened intently to Major Fujiwara. The Japanese officer promised

that they would not be treated as prisoners but as brothers, and underscored that Japan would help in India's struggle for freedom from British imperialism. To many of the POWs gathered, Fujiwara appeared genuine though not particularly inspiring. Mohan Singh's address that spoke of the aims of the INA and urged his compatriots to 'seize the opportunity and rise for the motherland',³³ was purportedly more impressive. The POWs were not required to make an immediate decision on joining the INA. But most sources agree that there was a fair degree of support for the INA from the rank and file. Whether this was truly because of patriotism or simply from a sense of relief that joining the INA afforded the opportunity to escape POW treatment is unclear. What is certain is that the Indian officers were less enthused. Beyond mistrust of Japanese intentions, their reticence stemmed from long-standing loyalties to the British Indian Army. There were others who doubted Mohan Singh's leadership. Indeed, many officers in the crowd outranked the Captain and felt that he had been propped by the Japanese merely by happenstance. A few high-ranking officers, however, were amenable to joining even at this early stage—notably Colonel Gill and Major Bhonsle.³⁴ That said, the majority of the Indian soldiers gathered were not as yet, convinced. The Gurkhas would overwhelmingly refuse,³⁵ the INA had little to do with their political aspirations.

Fujiwara met civilian leaders of the Singapore Indian community after the Farrer Park address. He described initial discussions with S. C. Goho and K. P. K. Menon as 'intimate',³⁶ although Goho's and Menon's accounts emphasize that they were suspicious of Japanese intentions and that the meeting was not as warm as suggested.³⁷ The concern to protect the life and property of the local Indian population was, however, crucial in Goho and K.P.K. Menon agreeing to set up the IIL in Singapore. A meeting of local Indian leaders held shortly after saw the appointment of the two stalwarts as President and Vice-President of the Singapore IIL, respectively.

6.5 Protection from the 'Pacification'

The early connection between the Japanese forces, the INA, and the IIL provided a protective cover for Indians during the Japanese 'pacification' of Singapore in February and March 1942. Japanese soldiers

committed wanton rape and ravage during this period, and the murderous *sook ching* saw the slaughter of some 50,000 Chinese inhabitants in Singapore and the Peninsula.³⁸ Indians caught stealing were usually let off only with a warning, whereas the 'Chinese were summarily decapitated and their heads put on public display'.³⁹ B. H. Melwani vividly describes how Japanese soldiers dealt with Chinese inhabitants suspected of looting:

We had a warehouse opposite 52 North Bridge Road in Chin Nam Street.... We found that the doors were broken open and 75% to 80% of the goods were looted... we found two of the [Chinese] residents of Chin Nam Street wearing goods (pyjamas) which were imported by us. So we told this Japanese ... [who] said, 'Okay, you go back, we'll get you the goods'... we heard two shots and we found that two people were shot by the Japanese... 50% of the goods looted [were soon returned] ... to the warehouse.⁴⁰

Indians may have been protected from the worst of the early atrocities, but fear resonated everywhere. Like other inhabitants of Singapore, they did not escape inspections, checks, and harassment by the dreaded Kempeitai, so that well after the initial purge their very mention evoked a sense of terror. Neither were they saved from the day to day 'disciplining' that followed the takeover. In the early months of the Occupation, Japanese soldiers, ubiquitous everywhere on roads, were quick to administer a hard slap 'if the bow you made as you passed did not satisfy them'.⁴¹ These slaps did more than just educate inhabitants in the Japanese art of greeting—they served as a reminder of who was in power, and were also useful to check pompous behaviour and ostentatious display that had long been the preserve of the higher echelons in British colonial society. Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan observed that 'the smarter the appearance of the passerby, the more probable this treatment (slapping)' and so 'like everybody else she took to wearing casual dress'.⁴²

The brutality of the early Occupation went a long way in shaping Indian attitudes towards the Japanese. The IIL leaders were also disconcerted. Pritam Singh, troubled by the early massacre, confided to Mohinder Singh—later a wartime correspondent—'It's all wrong. No, we must not do this'.⁴³ Goho was so disturbed by the *sook ching* that he complained directly to Fujiwara: 'Major, do you know that the Japanese Army is arresting Chinese in Singapore without discrimination and is

committing massacres? The brutality cannot be described in words. Has the Japanese Army lost its mind?... Can you stop it?'⁴⁴ His protests may have had little impact—but the brutality that they witnessed left Indian leaders apprehensive of working with the Japanese, and concerned over the latter's intentions vis-à-vis India.

6.6 Early Development of the Movement

To further the organization of the Movement, a conference for Indian leaders from East and Southeast Asia was scheduled in Tokyo from 28 March to 30 March 1942. Prior to the Conference, Indian leaders from Thailand and Malaya gathered in Singapore for initial talks. Rumours had spread that the Indian Congress would not support the INA and IIL. Apparently Jawaharlal Nehru had already remarked that, 'Indians residing outside India [should] ... not interfere in Indian politics and that those who do so could be considered traitors'.⁴⁵ In the circumstance, they agreed that it was necessary to reach out to the Indian Congress and gain its approval. In addition, Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership was viewed as essential to legitimize the INA and IIL and to prevent aspersions that they were Japanese 'quislings'.⁴⁶ These considerations influenced the position of some of the delegates at the Tokyo meeting.

The Tokyo Conference in late March began ominously. K. A. N. Aiyer, Satyanand Puri, Pritam Singh, and Captain Mohammed Akram, key representatives of the Southeast Asian and INA contingent, perished in a plane crash en route. Upon arrival, the rest of the contingent was informed that in dealing with the INA and IIL, the sympathetic Fujiwara would soon be replaced by Colonel Iwakuro.⁴⁷ While Iwakuro was a more senior officer, leaders of the IIL in Singapore and the Peninsula would find his liaison agency—the Iwakuro Kikan—to be far more difficult to deal with. They were also possibly troubled by Japanese Prime Minister Tojo's message at the conference suggesting Japan's intention to invade India, as it could not 'remain indifferent to the fact that Britain is going to make India, the base of its Eastern defence'.⁴⁸ Although Tojo's statement was a bluff as the Japanese Army had no intention of opening a new front in India at this time, Goho, Menon, and Raghavan were not keen on complicity in a Japanese-led invasion of India without establishing the consent of Indian nationalist

leaders, and they certainly did not want British Imperialism in India to be replaced by a potentially more brutal Japanese force.

At the Conference, fissures emerged between delegates from Southeast Asia and East Asia. Indian leaders from East Asia did not share the anxiety to get Congress's support for the Movement, nor did they seek to press for the transfer and leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Instead, they put their support behind Rash Behari Bose, the Japanese-favoured candidate, to take headship of the Movement. A former revolutionary linked to the Ghadar Movement, Rash Behari had settled in Japan from 1915, married a Japanese wife and had a son who served in the Japanese Imperial Army. He would later be characterized by Mohan Singh as 'a well known Japanese puppet', an outlook that was strengthened by the fact that his position was supported by an influential circle of Japanese civilians.⁴⁹

Raghavan and Menon drafted the resolutions at the Conference to limit what they perceived as an attempt by the Japanese to wrest control of the Movement. The Japanese Government was requested to extend to the IIL and the INA 'all facilities to come into contact with the [Indian] National leaders, the workers and organisations in India',⁵⁰ so that consent could be gained. The meeting resolved that branches of the IIL and the INA would come under a central body—the Council of Action. Rash Behari Bose was appointed interim President of the Council of Action, with the caveat that representatives to the body would only be elected later, at a Conference in Bangkok. To ensure that Indian delegates from Southeast Asia comprised the majority in Bangkok, a resolution was included that the size of delegations at the latter Conference would be proportionate to the Indian civilian population in respective territories.⁵¹

In mid-June 1942, over 100 IIL and INA delegates gathered in Bangkok. The contingent of Southeast Asian and INA representatives far outnumbered those from East Asia. That being said, developments at the Conference did not augur well for the future of the Movement. New binaries had emerged, not just between East Asian and Southeast Asian civilian delegates, but also between INA representatives and civilian leaders from Singapore and the Peninsula. Some civilian leaders were affected by rumours that Mohan Singh, now conferred the rank of General, had approached the Iwakuro Kikan to do away with the civilian leadership.⁵² Fears that Mohan Singh sought a military takeover of

the Movement were added to by the large number of INA delegates in Bangkok. Goho suggested that: 'Among the delegates of the Bangkok Conference there were about thirty Indian military men who followed a system of bloc voting and were prepared to obey the wishes of Captain Mohan Singh.... The Malayan delegates, at one stage, threatened to withdraw from the movement on account of this bloc voting of the military.'⁵³

In Bangkok, Mohan Singh was officially appointed Commander-in-Chief of the INA, although ultimate authority rested with the five-member Council of Action—headed by Rash Behari Bose, with Raghavan in charge of organization, K. P. K. Menon of publicity and propaganda, Mohan Singh as army commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Gilani as head of military training. To placate fears of Japanese control, the Japanese government was requested to make declarations on a number of issues including:

...that the INA would be given the status of an allied army on equal footing with the Japanese Army;... that the INA was to be used only for the struggle of Indian independence;... [that] the Japanese Army would hand over properties owned by Indians and left behind by them to the Council of Action ... to manage and control ... and advance the income ... for the use of this movement;... that the Japanese Government use its good offices to enable Subhas Chandra Bose to come to East Asia.⁵⁴

6.7 Japanese Policies, Socio-Economic Conditions and the IIL

Even if fissures at the Tokyo and the Bangkok Conference did not bode well for the future of the Movement, the IIL in Singapore was expanding rapidly. Shortly after the Tokyo Conference, Singapore had overtaken Bangkok as the key sphere of League activities in the region. From early on, large numbers of Indians were drawn to the IIL office at Waterloo Street. Its success in generating support was partly because the Singapore IIL was built on the frame of the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) and its affiliate Indian nationalist organizations that had been established prior to the War. The connection to IIL branches in the Peninsula was strengthened at a meeting of Indian representatives in late April 1942, when a central body—the All-Malaya IIL—was established.⁵⁵ The All-Malaya IIL headquarters

was also based in Singapore, due to the large concentration of Indian soldiers and civilians here, but also because the main offices of the Japanese liaison agencies—the Fujiwara Kikan, and later the Iwakuro Kikan—were based in the city.

The earliest to flock to the Singapore IIL were civilians who had long sympathized with Indian nationalism. But the expansion of the organization was not only due to its political role. Indeed, Lakshmi Swaminathan suggests that the League in 1942 'did not seem to her to be seriously in the business of securing India's independence'.⁵⁶ What then accounted for the League's growth? What function did the organization serve for Indian civilians? The answers to these questions can be better understood in the context of the policies put in place by the Japanese to govern the local population; and the socio-economic conditions at the time.

Following the so-called 'pacification', the Japanese, who were 'acutely sensitive to race',⁵⁷ established separate units to administer the different 'races' of Singapore. Consequently, the IIL, beyond its political function, served as the key Indian link organization to the Japanese administration. In April 1942, when the Japanese introduced a Family Registration system with identification certificates for police protection and purchasing rations, permits for Indians had to be countersigned by the IIL.⁵⁸ Non-Indian South Asians—specifically the Ceylonese—also fell under the administrative purview of the IIL and could become members.⁵⁹ The IIL membership card identified a person as an Indian (even if they were Ceylonese), and the organization was authorized to issue travel passes. Membership afforded a measure of protection from potential abuse by Japanese soldiers. K. R. Menon posits that 'whenever a Japanese saw an Indian, they immediately asked, "Are you a member of the Indian Independence League?" If they are not, they'll get slapped.... So to avoid the slaps they ... became members'.⁶⁰

Another factor drawing Indians to the IIL was the welfare work that the organization undertook. Indians had not been spared from the repercussions of the breakdown in the pre-war economy. While Indians engaged in certain occupations were quite well placed—medical practitioners for example, tended to be well treated and provided with extra rations⁶¹—many other educated professionals were not as fortunate. European businesses were shut. Those who had long served as clerks and teachers were hard-hit by 'the closure of schools, reductions in

staffing levels in government departments, and a loss of clerical positions owing to the sharp decline in foreign trade'.⁶² A small number were appointed as administrators in the League while others were recommended for work in Japanese departments, but the organization only could salvage so many.

The Japanese authorities had little sympathy for educated personnel who remained jobless, and demanded that they 'go back to the land'.⁶³ Consequently, unemployed urban workers were pressed into cultivation, but because 'they had no experience of farming ... they found it difficult to survive'.⁶⁴ Those who were fortunate enough to hold on to office jobs found the working environment transformed under the Japanese administration. Educated personnel were now required to perform duties that in earlier times they would have held as beneath them. The Japanese, however, extolled the performance of these tasks as a virtue. Damodaran—who joined the Japanese military survey department as a draftsman—was aghast when he was ordered to sweep the floor and clean the office at the end of the day.⁶⁵ Educated personnel who held jobs were also 'encouraged' to farm: 'The Japanese ... encouraged the people to do their own cultivation in order to ease food shortage. And there was not a single patch of land without any form of cultivation. Even along the roadside, the path, the grassy path, ... that place was cultivated with tapioca or vegetables...' ⁶⁶ The pressure on educated personnel to perform what they perceived as 'menial' work had significant implications. It created egalitarian pressures in Indian society that for long had been hierarchically fragmented by class and caste. This may not have translated in immediate support for Indian nationalism, but it did foster the possibility of a more resolute sense of Indian unity in time to come.

Educated personnel were not the only ones to suffer from economic hardship. The decline in shipping meant that Indians who were engaged as dock labourers were pressed out of work. In the Peninsula, Indians heavily employed on rubber estates were hard-hit by the slump in the demand for rubber. In May 1942, the Japanese attempted to salvage the situation by setting up a syndicate of 18 Japanese rubber companies known as the Singapore Rubber Association (*Syonan Gomu Kumiai*), that 'allowed laborers to work for ten to fifteen days a month, paying wages that were slightly below prewar levels', and during the remainder of their time, they were 'encouraged' to grow

food.⁶⁷ That being said, labour unemployment remained high. To provide relief, the IIL raised funds and was extended some, albeit limited, help from the Japanese administration. K. M. Rengarajoo—an IIL functionary—posits that this was crucial in explaining why there was always a crowd at the IIL office: 'The crowd come [to the IIL] for many purposes—people wanted to get themselves enrolled as a volunteer, people have come for some medicines and treatment also, we were running ... relief camp[s].... So with all these problems,... Indians always crowded there.'⁶⁸

If the League managed to provide a thin economic safety net, the organization, in the first year of its existence, could afford little in terms of education which was left to the Japanese administration. As in the case of other inhabitants, the education of Indian children was badly affected. English-medium schools were replaced by Japanese-medium schools, Tamil vernacular schools were slow in re-opening with few receiving government approval, possibly also because of the IIL's pro-Hindi stance. Although records for Singapore are not available, in Selangor, of the 228 Indian schools that functioned in 1940, 'all remained closed until July 1942, and at the end of the year just twenty-two were operating'.⁶⁹ In Singapore, many Indian students turned to Japanese-medium schools. Narayana Karuppiiah speaks of the experience as elementary in its standard of education, and reports that he received training in basic Japanese syllabary, logographic writing and speech, as well as learned to recite some Japanese songs.⁷⁰

Notwithstanding the administrative and socio-economic functions of the IIL, it would be an error to suggest that the organization ignored its *raison d'état* of cultivating Indian patriotism. The newspaper *Azad Hind*, which was started in northern Malaya during the Japanese advance, was transferred to Singapore after the setup of the IIL there.⁷¹ The IIL's propaganda machinery expanded when the Iwakuro Kikan took over from the Fujiwara Kikan in May 1942. For this purpose, the liaison agency worked with K. P. K. Menon—head of publicity and propaganda of the Movement—and developed an elaborate framework to evoke a sense of Indian patriotism and spread anti-British sentiments. The weekly IIL newspaper *Young India* began circulation by September 1942⁷² and this along with radio broadcasts, pamphlets, lectures, dramas, and moving pictures were used to disseminate propaganda. From August 1942, short wave radio stations were set up in Singapore, Bangkok, Rangoon,

and Saigon, which broadcasted propaganda directly to India in a bid to encourage 'revolutionary fire'.⁷³

The political activities of the IIL in Singapore tended to parallel developments in India. In August, when the Indian Congress launched the Quit India Movement, the Singapore IIL followed suit with a series of mass meetings. A Japanese Radio Broadcast in mid-August claimed that hundreds of thousands of Indians in Singapore and the Peninsula had rallied to demand India's freedom. These displays aided in the growth of the organization, so that by the end of August, the IIL in Singapore had reportedly doubled its membership. In early September, another gathering in Singapore to protest the arrest of Gandhi and other Indian nationalists was attended by thirty thousand residents, according to Japanese reports.⁷⁴ While many Indians participated in these activities because of genuine affiliation, there were others for whom such overt displays of Indian patriotism was a safeguard against potential harassment by Japanese officials. Ahmad Khan noted that 'those houses or blocks occupied by local Indians,...hoisted the flag of the Indian National Congress and put up the photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. And Japanese Occupation Army,... respected that and did not interfere with the people ... who had the flag hoisted.'⁷⁵

Hindus and Sikhs comprised the majority of Indian civilians who flocked to the IIL in 1942—the latter in part also because of Mohan Singh's leadership of the INA.⁷⁶ Indeed, issues pertaining to the lopsided religious composition of the IIL had arisen early on in the development of the organization. At a meeting of leaders called in late May 1942, objections were raised due to the small number of Muslims on the Representative Committee. Ahmad Khan—a Special Branch agent before and after the Occupation—posits that relatively few Indian Muslims came forward, because a number '[sympathized] with the Muslim League ... [that] was not so anti-British'.⁷⁷ Yet even if they 'turned their faces away from the IIL',⁷⁸ Indian Muslims were careful not to display obvious opposition due to concerns of retribution.

At times there was also visible dissatisfaction amongst Tamil speakers for the pro-Hindi bias in the early IIL's activities. This was clearly manifest at the Great Indian Independence Rally held at Farrer Park on 12 August 1942. On that occasion, reportedly tens of thousands of Indians had demonstrated carrying posters demanding Indian independence. Kratoska informs that at that gathering 'speeches were

delivered in Hindi and in English, but a scheduled Tamil translation was not read out because the sound system failed'.⁷⁹ This omission led to an inflammatory situation. K. P. K. Menon later explained the reason for the failure in providing a Tamil translation in the *Syonan Times*, but also admonished Tamil protesters, pointing out that 'communalism had no place in the national movement'.⁸⁰

The Japanese recognition of the IIL as the only political organization for Indians in Singapore meant that associations that were perceived as potentially divisive were pressured to close their offices. The move to 'purge' these organizations began following the takeover of the Iwakuro Kikan in May 1942. In August 1942, Japanese reports claimed that branches of the Muslim League in Singapore and the Peninsula had seemingly 'merged' with the IIL by an Act 'approved by all the Indians of the Moslem League in all parts of the peninsula'.⁸¹ In reality, Muslim League branches had been shut down by the Japanese on the advice of IIL leaders.⁸² Other notable organizations that ceased to function at this time included the Tamils Reform Association (TRA), which like the Muslim League, was perceived as a divisive 'communal' organization from the standpoint of the IIL leadership.

6.8 The First INA and the Fate of Indian POWs

The development of the INA in Singapore was initially haphazard. By late March, 'rifts, schisms and quarrels' had developed and there were serious misgivings over allying with the Japanese.⁸³ Giani posits that even the sympathetic Fujiwara had grown impatient with the indiscipline evident in Indian camps: 'There have been innumerable complaints against Indian troops ... cases of looting, etc. Indian soldiers should realise that even if they are free they cannot expect to enjoy full liberty'.⁸⁴ Fujiwara's message was an important signal to speed up recruitment for the INA, differentiating those willing to volunteer from those who did not.

The 'Bidadari Resolutions' of 27 April 1942, based on discussions between Mohan Singh and several senior Indian officers, accelerated the formation of the INA. The resolutions informed that recruitment to the INA would officially begin on 9 May 1942.⁸⁵ By September 1942, about 42,000 Indian soldiers⁸⁶ had pledged their allegiance to Mohan Singh and the INA. Amongst these were 400 officers of the British

Indian Army, of which 250 were part of the Indian Medical Service.⁸⁷ Given the concerns over allying with the Japanese, what accounted for the rapid success of the recruitment drive?

Various factors explained why so many Indian POWs joined the INA in 1942. Some genuinely sympathized with Indian nationalism. Yet, at the trial of INA officers after the war, 'only three V.C.O.'s (Viceroy Commissioned Officers) claimed to have been influenced by patriotism alone in joining the I.N.A. in 1942'.⁸⁸ Beyond patriotism, many officers cited a combination of motives: grievances of differential treatment vis-à-vis British officers in the British Indian Army; a perception that by joining they could provide security to the local Indian population; and the view that the INA was 'a useful instrument for protecting India from the excesses of probable Japanese invasion'.⁸⁹ A number of officers posited that they joined the INA in 1942 to protect soldiers in their unit from maltreatment.

There was certainly a difference in the conditions of those who joined the INA and those who chose to remain POWs. Recruits were provided proper rations, were relieved of fatigue duties, and were called upon to do proper military and policing duties—including, for example, guarding POW camps—jobs where they wielded authority. At volunteer camps, entertainment programmes were frequently organized—including patriotic theatricals and song nights that were also used as instruments to get POWs to join the INA. High-ranking INA officers reportedly 'had plenty of freedom of movement, and they made frequent visits to various cabarets, restaurants, and hotels with orchestras and young waitresses'.⁹⁰

Most accounts agree that conditions for those who refused to join the INA were appalling. From May 1942, 'volunteers' were separated from POWs. Thousands of British Indian Army POWs were requisitioned by the Japanese for forced labour. Of these, many would be dispatched to Thailand and Borneo for railway construction work and other fatigue duties. Those who were sent to concentration camps in Papua New Guinea and the South-West Pacific suffered an even more forbidding fate. Transported by 'torture ships', which were sometimes crammed with as many as 2,000 men, they were forced to labour under conditions of stark deprivation.⁹¹ Most Indian POWs who were sent to New Guinea and the South-West Pacific would not return. In mid-1944, when rations at a labour camp in New Guinea were exhausted,

Lance Naik Hatam Ali testified that Japanese soldiers, 'started selecting prisoners and every day one prisoner was taken out and killed and eaten by the Japanese'.⁹²

POWs who remained in Singapore were removed to concentration camps. At these camps, 'no food was given to them for days and such food as was given was extremely bad. No medical aid was given at all'.⁹³ Captain Dhargalkar testified that at the Bidadari concentration camp, there were 'quite a good few Indian ranks being beaten by Fateh Khan, the Second in Command in the camp', and that at the Buller Camp, 'prisoners ... [were] tied up to trees, beaten and generally maltreated'.⁹⁴ Byron Farwell posits that Gurkha POWs were subject to severe punishment:

When none of the Singapore prisoners of 2/2nd or the 2/9th Gurkhas signed up for the I.N.A., their Gurkha officers and N.C.O.s were taken away to Skeleton Camp for intensive coercion.... Twenty-six were selected for brutal treatment, then returned to camp 'to think again'... [Gurkha officers] were made to work at heavy tasks, clubbed with rifle butts, brutally beaten with poles, and sand was mixed with their food.... Subadar-Major Chethabhadur of the 2/9th was put in a small cage, starved, left for long periods in solitary confinement and beaten.... Subadar-Major Harisung Bohra of the 2/2nd was blinded and repeatedly beaten with bamboo poles; he died of internal haemorrhages...⁹⁵

Oral testimonies suggest that during this period the INA set up its own version of the dreaded Kempeitai that was deemed responsible for torturing British Indian Army POWs who were perceived to be disseminating anti-INA propaganda.⁹⁶ These reports were later confirmed by Rash Behari Bose: 'I was horrified ... to learn of the atrocities.... Many of our poor brethren were shot while many were tortured, humiliated or sent to concentration camp and thus by sheer threat and violence he (Mohan Singh) demoralised the majority of officers and men and compelled them to become volunteers...'⁹⁷

While some joined the INA to escape torture, others had more subversive motives for volunteering. Major M. S. Dhillon saw the army as an instrument through which he could potentially escape to India and rejoin the British Indian Army. Others sought to sabotage the INA from within or to circumscribe its development. Indeed, Lieutenant Colonel Gill conceded at the court martial after the war that he had joined the INA primarily to retard its growth.⁹⁸

After the Bangkok Conference there was also consideration of the possibility of enlisting volunteers from the Indian civilian population in Singapore and Malaya. The initiative was said to have received 'enthusiastic response', and Mohan Singh's recruiting officers had 'been overwhelmed with civilian offers of service'.⁹⁹ Notwithstanding the intention, there is no record of civilian enlistment into the INA at this stage, in part because, in 1942, Japanese officials were not willing to consider an operational INA force beyond a single division—and by August the number of Indian Army volunteers had already far exceeded that.

6.9 Crisis in December 1942

On 1 September 1942, the 1st Division of the INA—comprising the Azad, Gandhi, and Nehru guerrilla brigades—had been established with some 16,300 officers and men.¹⁰⁰ The possibility of using the force for active operations stemmed from a change in Japanese military strategy in the second half of 1942 that sought to take out British positions in the northeast of Assam to secure the Burmese frontier. For the purpose, Mohan Singh and Iwakuro had agreed to send the 1st INA Division to Burma, and advance troops were already dispatched in September. Yet within four months, the 1st INA division would be dissolved. Its Commander Mohan Singh was arrested, and all the members of the IIL Council of Action resigned, with exception of Rash Behari Bose.

The remarkable turn marked the culmination of tensions between Indian leaders of the Movement and Japanese authorities, and differences in the IIL-INA leadership. With the growing possibility of the use of INA forces at the Burma–India front, Indian leaders were concerned that they had not received formal responses from the Japanese government to the IIL resolutions in Bangkok. The INA had also not been recognized by the Japanese as an allied army. Mohan Singh was perturbed that the Iwakuro Kikan had not handed over control of all Indian soldiers to his charge. Tensions between Mohan Singh and the Iwakuro Kikan mounted in October 1942 when the latter set up a department that took control not only of the remaining Indian POWs, but also of the 25,000 excess INA volunteers who were not part of the 1st Division. It was clear to Mohan Singh that the Iwakuro Kikan was adamant on requisitioning large numbers of Indian soldiers for

forced labour or to be used 'as slave troops'.¹⁰¹ Beyond concerns for their safety, this directly conflicted with the General's aspirations of raising a second INA Division.

As tensions between Mohan Singh and Iwakuro mounted, a serious impasse arose between IIL leaders and Japanese authorities over the control of Indian evacuee properties in Burma. The IIL's demand for the ownership of these to be transferred to the Movement was not acceptable. Lieutenant-Colonel Kitabe, head of the Burma branch of the Iwakuro Kikan, admonished IIL leaders for presuming that the Japanese Government was bound by the resolutions in Bangkok that called for the transfer of Indian properties: 'It was all right for the Bangkok Conference to pass those resolutions, but you will be mistaken to think that those resolutions are binding on the Japanese Government.... Any decision of the Council of Action, in order to be worked upon, must be such as to be found acceptable to the Japanese Government.'¹⁰²

The rift widened as Indian leaders grew frustrated with increasing Japanese interference in INA and IIL operations. Mohan Singh felt that Japanese control over INA personnel directly undermined his position as Commander of the army. Moving up the INA hierarchy by curry favouring Japanese officers was certainly evident by late 1942.¹⁰³ Promotions and transfers were being made without Mohan Singh's consent. The differentiated centres of authority created a situation not conducive for maintaining military discipline. In the IIL propaganda office, staff appointments were also being made without K. P. K. Menon's approval, and the Japanese censor was modifying news programmes and broadcasts to India. Seemingly, a frustrated Menon had, in response, ordered Indian correspondents in his charge to limit favourable comments of the Japanese: 'K. P. K. Menon told us, "Please mark time. Mark time. Don't write anything in favour of [the] Japanese unnecessarily."' "¹⁰⁴ Suspicions were not limited to the Indian side. The Japanese had also developed serious misgivings about the loyalty of several Indian personnel. In late 1942, an intelligence and propaganda operation at the Burma-India border under Colonel Gill's charge was found to have been complicit in providing information to the British.¹⁰⁵ IIL-INA difficulties were compounded by serious differences between the members of the Council of Action. Raghavan was especially perturbed that Mohan Singh was making unilateral

decisions on INA troop transfers to Burma without first consulting the Council of Action.¹⁰⁶

When Rash Behari Bose arrived in Singapore late in November 1942, he found the relationship between Indian leaders and the Japanese liaison agency in tatters. The situation worsened soon after a tense meeting between Iwakuro and Mohan Singh in early December where the latter had refused to sanction further troop movements to Burma, hinted at the possible dissolution of the INA, and openly criticized Japanese imperialism:

We knew your policy in Manchuria and China. We have ... seen your ways in Malaya and heard about Burma.... [We] hope that Japan will be wise enough to adopt a different policy in different territories. We cannot tolerate these types of government in our country (India), so before taking any further steps we want definite assurances.¹⁰⁷

With no response from the Japanese Government forthcoming, by 8 December 1942, Mohan Singh, Gilani, Raghavan, and K. P. K. Menon had all submitted their resignations from the Council of Action.¹⁰⁸

Worse was to follow. Mohan Singh—who remained the Commander of the INA—vociferously attacked Rash Behari Bose in his addresses to INA officers insinuating that the latter had collaborated with the Japanese ‘to sell [out] the 400 millions in India’.¹⁰⁹ He refused Rash Behari Bose’s order for a meeting with INA officers, positing that ‘the members of the Indian National Army are pledged to me (Mohan Singh) and me alone’.¹¹⁰ On 29 December, effectively a year to the day when Mohan Singh took up the responsibility to lead the army, he was dismissed as Commander of the INA by Rash Behari Bose, and arrested. Prepared for the eventuality, Mohan Singh had already disseminated a sealed order for the dissolution of the INA: ‘The Indian National Army will be dissolved shortly.... In the event of my being separated from you before such an order is issued, the dissolution will take place automatically and immediately’.¹¹¹

The very existence of the INA was in question following Mohan Singh’s arrest. INA activities grounded to a halt. In despair, thousands of soldiers were said to have removed INA badges from their uniforms and sought to revert to their status as POWs. Sikhs comprised the largest numbers who withdrew. The repercussions extended beyond the army. Sikh civilians also distanced themselves from the

Movement: 'The crisis [in December 1942] ... was a blow to the Sikh Community... the removal of Mohan Singh [as Commander of the INA] shattered their hopes'.¹¹² The IIL leadership was shaken. K. P. K. Menon favoured disbanding the League, and took no further part in the Movement. N. Raghavan and S. C. Goho, however, preferred continuing the IIL as they saw it as crucial in providing a semblance of protection for the local Indian community, and they were also concerned that disbanding the League would effectively mean an end to the main organization providing relief work for Indians in the Peninsula and Singapore. Even as they faced criticism in some Indian circles, Raghavan and Goho did not relinquish their position as the respective heads of the All-Malaya IIL and the Singapore IIL. Goho later explained that he and Raghavan were concerned that the Japanese would replace them with their own stooges: 'The Japanese money was flowing and there were quite a number of men who were prepared to do anything for them. If we had all resigned, the Japanese would have taken complete control and many bad elements would have got into and controlled the organization'.¹¹³

6.10 Salvaging the Movement

Between January and June 1943, Rash Behari Bose assumed direct control of the Movement. This interregnum has often been represented as an uninspiring chapter in the history of the IIL and INA. That outlook has been shaped partly by perceptions amongst local Indians in Singapore and the Peninsula that Rash Behari Bose was a Japanese 'stooge', and also because unlike Subhas Chandra Bose later, or for that matter Mohan Singh before, he was not recognized for his ability to stir functionaries. Mehervan Singh recounted that:

He (Rash Behari Bose) [sic] was not successful, unable to gain the confidence of either the civilian Indians or the British Indian Army personnel. He was more Japanese than Indians [sic]. The Japanese cap he donned irritated some people.... He was an old man.... he could not go along with us because we were youngsters who were born after he left India.... He was thirty years behind the situation [in India].¹¹⁴

To some extent that standpoint has been added to by fractures in the development of the Movement on the ground. Undoubtedly, the size of the

INA diminished, and many key Indian civilian leaders withdrew because of their perception that Rash Behari Bose, with the help of the Iwakuro Kikan, was seeking to establish a dictatorial hold over the Movement.

The assessment is prejudiced as it does not properly acknowledge the tremendous difficulties that Rash Behari Bose confronted in the wake of the December 1942 crisis. No doubt Japanese involvement increased during this phase, but it was precisely because Rash Behari was trusted by the Japanese that the INA and the IIL were retrieved from the brink of collapse. Over these six months he managed to gain key concessions from the Japanese vis-à-vis the Movement. Important reforms were made to the INA and the IIL, which enabled the inclusion of segments of the Indian population that had hitherto maintained a distance. Although Rash Behari Bose has not been sufficiently credited for this, many of the initiatives undertaken during this period were crucial in laying the foundation for the expansion of the Movement under Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership later.

Immediately after the debacle in December 1942, Rash Behari Bose declared Mohan Singh's INA-dissolution order as invalid. Iwakuro followed suit with a public statement to allay concerns amongst INA personnel: 'The Indian National Army will [not] be used for any purposes other than those provided in the resolution(s) of the Bangkok Conference'.¹¹⁵ In January 1943, Rash Behari toured INA camps addressing the concerns of soldiers. The confidence-building measure allowed Bose the opportunity to explain his version of the crisis. Several senior Indian officers, especially those who had doubted Mohan Singh's leadership, now came to the fore. This laid the basis for the set up of an INA Committee of Administration comprising high-ranking officers such as Lieutenant-Colonels J. K. Bhonsle, M. Z. Kiani, and Loganadan, and Major Prakash Chand.¹¹⁶

By February 1943, the situation in the INA had begun to stabilize. Discipline was restored and the distribution of rations and clothing to INA personnel resumed. On 6 February 1943, Rash Behari Bose submitted a plan to Iwakuro to reform the INA. To prevent a military commander assuming powers to the extent that Mohan Singh had wielded, Rash Behari emphasized that the INA would be an army of the IIL '[and] under the control of the Council of Action'.¹¹⁷ A military department established in the IIL, to which the INA commander was answerable, would take charge of 'matters concerning the military administration

and operations'.¹¹⁸ Recruitment to the army would be purely voluntary. He also sought to push through in his reforms, the demand that had long plagued the relationship between Mohan Singh and the Japanese, i.e., that the INA should have equal standing as 'armies of allied nations of Japan'.¹¹⁹

Iwakuro fully endorsed the plan.¹²⁰ The Iwakuro Kikan followed with carrot-stick measures to increase the number of volunteers to the INA. For Indian soldiers who had sought to revert to POW status after Mohan Singh's dissolution order, the door to the reorganized INA was temporarily open. However, if they had not volunteered following the reorganization of the INA, they would be deemed as POWs and immediately placed under Japanese control, with no protection from INA commanders. To bolster support, Iwakuro met Indian officers to further allay concerns. From these talks, it was evident to him that bringing Subhas Chandra Bose to Singapore would significantly strengthen support for the INA. Aware that Rash Behari was amenable to handing over leadership to Subhas, Iwakuro promised that he would do his utmost to secure the latter's arrival.¹²¹

The reform of the INA was completed in March 1943. By the deadline for volunteering, about thirteen thousand officers and men had joined. Amongst these were some Indian POWs who had not joined initially, but were more amenable to volunteering after Mohan Singh's resignation. Having said that, large numbers—particularly Sikhs—refused. Like thousands of Indian POWs before, many of those who did not re-enlist were transported to concentration camps for forced labour¹²²—not only to fulfil Japanese needs, but also as a measure to limit their influence on those who had volunteered.

While Rash Behari Bose had busied himself with reorganizing the INA, the Iwakuro Kikan put in place measures to bolster Indian civilian support for the Movement. The Indian Youth Movement was established and seemingly, Iwakuro's lieutenants had 'hired some young men in Singapore and elsewhere, to organize rallies and meetings...'¹²³ The Japanese saw the youth group as an alternative support-base, especially in the case that IIL leaders were to withdraw en masse. K. R. Menon, Raja Ram, and Narayanasamy,¹²⁴ functionaries of the former Singapore IYL, were reportedly crucial in gathering support for the Youth Movement. Many Tamil labourers joined, and the strength of the Indian Youth Movement was clearly evident by 26 January 1943

when Indian Independence Day was celebrated in Singapore and the Peninsula with considerable gusto.¹²⁵ Goho—aware that this was a move to sidestep the existing IIL leadership—objected to the set up of the Indian Youth Movement by arguing that there was ‘an understanding ... that no other [Indian] political organisation would be allowed to function other than the Indian Independence League’.¹²⁶ His protests were ignored.

Meanwhile, following K. P. K. Menon’s resignation, the *Iwakuro Kikan* extended its hold over the IIL propaganda machinery. Indian journalists were increasingly pressured to toe the Japanese line. K. R. Menon informs: ‘We were taking the news from the radio, from the various stations.... And news that [was] favourable to the Japanese we sent to the press. The other news we did not give to the press, but gave to the Japanese officers concerned...’¹²⁷ Goho was also being marginalized in the decision-making process of the Singapore IIL. A concerted move was in place to replace the leadership of the IIL branch by ‘men in whom the Japanese had more confidence’.¹²⁸

Raghavan and Goho were clearly frustrated by these developments. They were convinced that Rash Behari Bose was colluding with the Japanese to establish a dictatorial hold over the INA and IIL. In a last-ditch attempt to prevent a complete take-over, Raghavan called a meeting of IIL Territorial Committee leaders from Singapore and the Peninsula in mid-February and based on discussions sent an ultimatum to Rash Behari Bose. He threatened that ‘members of the Territorial Committee and presidents of branches would resign’ if their conditions were not met:

Civilian members of the IIL should be consulted in the matter of recognition and expansion of the INA;... the development of information and publicity work should be left entirely in the hands of the Malaya IIL with advice from *Iwakuro Kikan*;... vacancies in the Council of Action to be filled at the earliest opportunity;... the attempt to organise the Indian Youth Movement by the *Kikan* should be stopped...¹²⁹

Raghavan also expressed his concern that little was being done to alleviate the socio-economic problems confronting the Indian civilian populace and requested that the Japanese authorities provide ‘generous assistance’ to the IIL so that it better deal with ‘local problems involving education and economic development’.¹³⁰ Indeed, consolidation of Japanese control had not led to a stabilization of socio-economic

conditions. A year into the Occupation, unemployment remained a major problem in the city. At the same time, with growing shortages even of basic necessities, the prices of goods had escalated. Attempts to regulate prices had seen the rise of a bustling 'black market' in Singapore. Traders and businessmen hoarded goods and sold these at higher prices in private. There was a severe shortage of cloth, although in this trade some functionaries of the IIL, through their links with the Japanese, were said to have prospered at the expense of others:

Some cloth dealers ... who had influence ... with the Japs [*sic*] and with the Indian Independence League were appointed authorized cloth dealers... thousands of yards of cloth were supplied to them from stocks seized from old established firms carrying large stocks. The cloths were to be sold for coupons, but the public suffered terribly because the merchants hid the good cloths from public view and sold them at black market prices...¹³¹

Rash Behari may have been sympathetic to some of the conditions underlined by Raghavan, but viewing the ultimatum as a move to destabilize the Movement, he refused to concede. In early March 1943, Goho resigned as the head of the Singapore branch of the IIL and N. Raghavan relinquished the Presidency of the All-Malaya IIL. M. Sivaram who was appointed the Director of the IIL radio broadcasting and Chief Editor of the *Indo-Shimbunsa*, posits that the resignation of these popular civilian leaders saw 'chaos and confusion [in IIL branches] throughout Malaya [and] ... local branches of the League lost many of their former leaders and supporters'.¹³²

Reforms in the Making

Measures were put in place to limit the fallout. The increase in political tensions in India, where Gandhi had gone on a 21-day fast in February and March 1943, served as a useful instrument to galvanize political support in the diaspora. Rash Behari underlined that the IIL's programme would remain true to the 'aims and intentions of the Indian National Congress'.¹³³ Demonstrations and fasts were organized in sympathy for Congress leaders arrested in India.¹³⁴ Indian Youth Movement leaders went around Singapore in lorries waving Congress Flags, some enthusiasts reportedly taking the opportunity to berate Raghavan and Goho as 'British fifth columnists'.¹³⁵

A series of reforms to the IIL followed. The IIL headquarters in Bangkok was shifted to Singapore, and the transfer of several key personnel aided in strengthening the bureaucratic framework of the organization here.¹³⁶ The Indian Youth Movement was absorbed into the IIL, and would henceforth function as its youth group. Indian leaders who did not resign were pushed up the IIL hierarchy, and efforts were made to reach out to notables who had thus far remained distant from the Movement. M. M. Lukshmeyah replaced Raghavan as President of All-Malaya IIL, while A. Yellapa took over from Goho as head of the IIL Singapore branch. The new office-bearers in the Singapore branch of the IIL included Maganlal Nagindas as Finance Officer, and the popular Tamil leader, G. Sarangapani, who took charge of Propaganda and Publicity.¹³⁷ Amongst other notables in Singapore and the Peninsula who came to the fore during this period were J. A. Thivy, a key leader of the Indian community in Perak, and Bashir Mallal, who had been involved in the formation of the Singapore Indian Association in 1923, and had considerable support amongst local Indian Muslims.

With full control established over the IIL and the reforms to the INA complete, Rash Behari Bose put forward further initiatives. Amongst the more prominent activities were the beginnings of civilian recruitment for the INA, which followed from calls by members of the former Indian Youth Movement to be part of the INA. A Naujawan corps was established to train young civilians to become revolutionary soldiers. Qualified youth leaders could join the Bharat Youth Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur and after completing a four-month course, these individuals would be eligible to join the INA.¹³⁸ Indeed, by late April 1943, Rash Behari Bose claimed that 1,000 civilians from Singapore and the Peninsula were being trained for the INA. The Azad School was established in Singapore for the purpose of training young and educated local Indians to become future INA instructors.¹³⁹ Rash Behari announced plans for the set up of Indian national schools in Singapore to strengthen ideological training for students: 'A Movement for boys and girls and under 17 will ... be started. In all National Schools Hindustani will be taught, patriotic songs will be sung and significance of daily saluting of National Flag will be taught.'¹⁴⁰

A women's section of the IIL was also put in place through the encouragement of Lakshmi Swaminathan, who—under Subhas Chandra Bose—would lead the *Rani of Jhansi* regiment: 'There were

lots of people who had come from up-country [Malaya] ... and who were living in refugee camps [in Singapore], and there were lots of sick [people] among them. So we formed this committee and we used to go to those camps and look after the sick people.'¹⁴¹ Seemingly, Rash Behari Bose also hinted at the possibility of a fighting role for women, although the formation of a women's militia was only concretized after the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose.¹⁴² Finally, attempts were made to try and win back Sikh support for the Movement. For the purpose, a large-scale commemoration of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre was organized in June 1943, which was followed by the celebration of Udham Singh Day at the Cathay Hall—to honour the assassin of Michael O'Dwyer, the former Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, who had endorsed the massacre.¹⁴³

The Singapore Conference

From 27 April 1943 to 30 April 1943, a conference of IIL delegates from East Asia and key INA personnel was held in Singapore. Guised as a follow up to the Bangkok Conference, the gathering was clearly intended to 'rubber stamp' Rash Behari Bose's control of the Movement. The IIL constitution was redrafted and Rash Behari Bose was declared President and Chief Executive of the organization. Only he could nominate a successor to his position. He was given full powers to decide on military policy 'in consultation with the War Council' that included Lieutenant-Colonel Bhonsle—the Director of Military Bureau—and Lieutenant-Colonel M. Z. Kiani—the Chief of General Staff.¹⁴⁴ The Council of Action was reconstituted comprising Bose and two nominated members—John Thivy and A. Yellappa—both of whom served only in an advisory capacity. The Bangkok Resolutions demanding assurances from the Japanese Government were done away with. In its place, General Tojo's statement in the Japanese Diet in February 1943, expressing his support for the Movement, was deemed as sufficient evidence of the Japanese Government's '[unstinting] support to the cause of complete independence and full sovereignty of India'.¹⁴⁵

If some delegates at the Conference were apprehensive over the degree of power accorded to Rash Behari Bose in the new constitution of the IIL, they were placated by hearsay that Subhas Chandra Bose was on his way to Singapore. News that the Japanese liaison agency

Iwakuro Kikan would be replaced by the Colonel Yamamoto led Hikari Kikan added weight to these rumours. Yamamoto had maintained close contact with Subhas Chandra Bose in Germany. At the final session on 30 April, Rash Behari Bose confirmed that the whispers were true—'Subhas Chandra Bose who is expected shortly in this part of the world will be ... [my] successor.'¹⁴⁶

Notes

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54. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 78.
55. Giani, *Indian Independence*, 54.
56. Fay, *Forgotten Army*, 92.
57. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 92.
58. Ibid., 79.
59. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000553, Interviewee: Mehervan Singh, Reel No. 21, n.d.
60. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025, Interviewee: Dr K.R. Menon, Reel No. 4, 26 February 1982.
61. Fay, *Forgotten Army*, 89.
62. Paul H. Kratoska, 'Labor in the Malay Peninsula and Singapore under the Japanese Occupation', in *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 240.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 241.
65. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000127, Interviewee: Damodaran, s/o Kesavan, Reel No. 1, 19 November 1981.
66. Ibid., Reel No. 5.
67. Kratoska, 'Labor in the Malay Peninsula', 238–9.
68. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K. M. Rengarajoo, Reel No. 5, 8 August 1984.
69. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 125.
70. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000050, Interviewee: Narayana Karuppiiah, Reel No. 1, 25 June 1984.
71. Giani, *Indian Independence*, 59.

72. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts on the Activities of I.N.A. and Provisional Government of Azad Hind', reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 3 (1943-44), 280.

73. NAI, F. No. 101, INA Papers, 'Outline of the Propaganda Scheme of the Indian Independence League', 24 October 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941-2), 194.

74. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 278.

75. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000400, Interviewee: Ahmad Khan, Reel No. 10, 2 March 1984.

76. Mamoru Shinozaki, *My Wartime Experiences in Singapore*, Oral History Programme Series No. 3 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), 89.

77. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000400, Interviewee: Ahmad Khan, Reel No. 11, 2 March 1984.

78. Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, 89.

79. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 105.

80. Ibid.

81. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 282-3.

82. NAI, INA Papers, 164/H/INA Ministry of Defence Historical Section, 'Report by a British Agent on the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia', 25 November 1945, reproduced in T. R. Sareen, *Select Documents on Indian National Army* (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1988), 251-2.

83. WO 208/833. 'Interrogation Report of General Mohan Singh', 1945, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941-2), 385.

84. Giani, *Indian Independence*, 57.

85. Fay, *Forgotten Army*, 94.

86. Estimates of the number of British Indian Army POWs who joined the INA between April and August 1942 range from 20,000 to 45,000. Mohan Singh's own estimate was 42,000, cited in Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 221. A similar number is posited in Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 59.

87. Gerald H. Corr, *The War of the Springing Tigers* (London: Osprey, 1975), 121.

88. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 70.

89. Ghosh, 71.

90. Mahmood Khan Durrani, *The Sixth Column: The Heroic Personal Story of Lt.-Col. Mahmood Khan Durrani* (London: Cassell, 1955), 100.

91. G. J. Douds, 'The Men Who Never Were: Indian POWs in the Second World War', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 27, 2 (2004): 202.

92. Cited in Douds, 'The Men', 206.

93. Cited in Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 87.
94. Ibid.
95. Farwell, *Gurkhas*, 192–3.
96. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000400, Interviewee: Ahmad Khan, Reel No. 10, 2 March 1984.
97. NAI, F. No. 311/INA Papers, Rash Behari Bose, 'Our Struggle', Pamphlet, 27 December 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941–42), 239.
98. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 64.
99. Ibid., 98.
100. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 83.
101. Public Records Office, WO 208/833, 'Interrogation Report', 396.
102. Cited in Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 88.
103. Durrani's account although problematic for its bias against the INA, provides numerous instances of such machinations. See Durrani, *Sixth Column*.
104. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000546, Interviewee: Mohinder Singh, Reel No. 13, 6 April 1985.
105. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 86, 95.
106. Ibid., 85.
107. NAI, F. No. 45/3, IIL Papers, 'Minutes of the Meeting between General Mohan Singh and Colonel Iwakuro', 2 December 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941–42), 223.
108. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 95. Raghavan's reason for resignation differed from the rest. He was incensed that Mohan Singh had acceded to sending some INA troops to Burma without prior consent from the Council of Action.
109. Mohan Singh's address to the officers of the INA on 9 December 1942, cited in Giani, *Indian Independence*, 127.
110. NAI, F. No. 311/INA Papers, Rash Behari Bose, 'Our Struggle', Pamphlet dated 27 December 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941–42), 233.
111. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Secret Orders of Mohan Singh', 21 December 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941–42), 234.
112. NAI, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts of a Report on the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia by N. A. K. Mufti, Special Branch, Police, Singapore', 25 November 1945, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 5 (1944–45), 75.
113. Typescript confidential note received by the INA History Committee in 1945 from S. C. Goho, INA History Committee Files, All-India INA Relief and Enquiry Committee, Delhi, cited in Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 114.
114. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000553, Interviewee: Mehervan Singh, Reel No. 19, n.d.

115. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers. 'Statement by Iwakuro Kikan', 29 December 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 1 (1941–42), 249–50.
116. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 122.
117. NAI, F. No. 45/3, IIL Papers, 'Rash Behari Bose to Colonel Iwakuro', 6 February 1942, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 17.
118. Ibid., 18.
119. Ibid.
120. NAI, F. No. 45/3, IIL papers. 'Colonel Iwakuro to Rash Behari Bose', 6 February 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 21.
121. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 128.
122. Toye informs that many of these POWs were sent to Papua New Guinea, Java, and Sumatra. Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of a Revolutionary* (London: Cassell and Company, 1959), 13.
123. M. Sivaram, *The Road to Delhi* (Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1967), 91.
124. NAI, INA Papers, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 25 November 1945, 77.
125. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 123.
126. NAI, INA Papers, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 25 November 1945, 76.
127. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025/09, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, Reel No. 5, 26 February 1982.
128. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 91.
129. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 99.
130. Ibid.
131. Cited in Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 194.
132. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 91.
133. NAI, F. No. 45/3, IIL Papers, 'Rash Behari Bose to Colonel Iwakuro', 6 February 1942, 18.
134. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 282–4.
135. NAI, INA Papers, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 25 November 1945, 78.
136. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 99.
137. NAI, INA Papers, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 25 November 1945, 77, 81.
138. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Statement of Rash Behari Bose', 5 April 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 65–9.
139. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Opening Address of Rash Behari Bose at the I.I.L. Conference in Singapore', 27 April 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 78–9.
140. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Statement of Rash Behari Bose', 5 April 1943, 65.
141. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001182, Interviewee: Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (group interview), Reel No. 1, 23 August 1990.

142. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Opening Address of Rash Behari Bose', 27 April 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 79.

143. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 283.

144. NAI, F. No. 45/3 IIL Papers, 'Proceedings of the I.I.L. Conference held at Singapore in April 1943', 27 April 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 90–1.

145. Ibid., 91.

146. Minutes of the open session of the Indian Representatives in East Asia on 30 April 1943, cited in Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 132.

7 The Price of Freedom

From July 1943 to the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Subhas Chandra Bose—the renowned Indian nationalist leader and two-time President of the Indian National Congress—took charge of the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia. In historical works and popular memory, this period has been recognized as the zenith of Indian nationalist fervour amongst Indians in Singapore. The sense of mission to free India from colonial rule galvanized a hitherto unseen level of pan-Indian unity in the diaspora. Under Subhas' leadership, tens of thousands of Indians in Singapore were directly engaged in the struggle to free India from British rule. Young civilians flocked to join the Indian National Army (INA), and many came to be deployed on the Burma–India frontline. The INA campaign ultimately proved a military failure, but for many who were involved, the experience is remembered as a heroic chapter in the history of the Indian diaspora in Singapore.

Historical works on the Indian diaspora in Singapore during this period have focused primarily on the development of the INA, and especially Subhas' role in the making of a revolutionary force. While these elements comprise important components of the Indian experience, the 'voices' of subalterns affected by these developments has received less attention. Their testimonies suggest that while many were indeed imbued with a sense of mission to free India from British rule, there were also some who saw the demands imposed on them as excessive, and felt that the pan-Indian unity that was fostered was not necessarily the outcome of a genuine transformation in consciousness but

rather forced upon. This chapter seeks to trace the development of the Movement in Singapore and the changes that took place under Subhas' leadership. While a key concern is to understand the reasons why so many Indian civilians in the diaspora joined the Movement at this time, the study is attentive to the limitations of the Movement's appeal, especially from mid-1944 onwards, as news of the military failure of the INA began to spread.

The chapter also historicizes lesser known aspects of the Indian experience in Singapore during this period, elucidating developments outside the Movement that impacted the diaspora. Indeed, these two years arguably coincided with the most difficult phase of the Japanese Occupation. Economic conditions deteriorated rapidly. Like other ethnic groups in Singapore, Indians were affected by scarcity, malnutrition, and shortages of medical supplies that collectively led to a rapid increase in mortality rates in the port city. Simultaneously, large numbers of Indians were compelled to work on Japanese projects like the infamous Thai–Burma 'Death' Railway from which many did not return. Relocation schemes put in place to cope with food scarcity in the city also resulted in some Indians being 'encouraged' to migrate to new settlements where conditions proved arduous. Collectively the Indian experience during this watershed period left a deep imprint, with longer term implications on the socio-political development of the diaspora in the port city.

7.1 'Total Mobilization'

On 2 July 1943, an exuberant crowd welcomed Subhas Chandra Bose (commonly referred to by the honorific 'Netaji') at the Kallang aerodrome in Singapore. Two days later, Indian Independence League (IIL) delegates, INA and Japanese officers gathered at the Greater East Asia Theater (Cathay Hall, Singapore) to witness the formal handover of control of the Movement from Rash Behari Bose to Netaji.¹ In accepting charge, Subhas delivered the first of his many awe-inspiring speeches in Singapore—announcing plans to set up a Provisional Government of Free India (Arzi Hakumat-E-Azad Hind). In the weeks that followed, Netaji worked at an extraordinary pace to put in place measures necessary for the formation of the Provisional Government. His residence in Singapore—a seafront villa at 61 Meyer Road²—was constantly

'besieged by callers' including Japanese and INA officers, IIL leaders, prominent Indian civilians, and 'hundreds of others who came only for a "darshan" of the great leader'.³

Subhas' first task was to lift morale in the INA force. On 5 July, he reviewed INA troops at the Padang where he delivered the famous *Dilli Chalo!* (Onwards to Delhi!) address. Observer accounts suggest that the effect of Netaji's arrival on the 13,000-strong force was instantaneous. Lieutenant-Colonel Sahgal—who later assumed the position of Assistant Chief of Staff and Military Secretary of the INA—noted a distinct change amongst soldiers:

A large number of people went out of the INA with Mohan Singh. And morale was naturally low. When Subhas came, the whole thing changed.... Subhas Chandra Bose was a known Indian national leader.... Everybody felt he would be [more] acceptable to the people of India than Mohan Singh.... The coming of Subhas Chandra Bose completely revolutionised,... the whole movement because people had great confidence [in him]...⁴

The following day, the INA was on parade again, this time reviewed by the Japanese Prime Minister. Tojo, impressed by the display, was said to have granted immediate approval for 'the establishment of [a] ... provisional government [of Free India]'.⁵ The Japanese Prime Minister's presence was a clear indication of support for Subhas' leadership. Additionally, it underlined Netaji's reach in Japanese political circles, which had the effect of limiting Japanese interference in the development of the Movement.

Attempts were made to enlist Indian POWs who had withdrawn from the INA after December 1942. This proved difficult. Only 2,000 more joined.⁶ Recruitment was limited by the fact that a substantial proportion of the POWs (prisoners of war) had, by this time, been transported to Japanese-controlled territories outside Singapore for forced labour. Subhas' appeals for the return of those who had been dispatched was refused by the Hikari Kikan—the Japanese liaison agency that had replaced the Iwakuro Kikan.⁷ The limitations of the POW recruitment drive meant that the prospects of building a sizeable INA force now rested heavily on mobilizing civilian volunteers.

The wave of enthusiasm in civilian circles following Subhas' take-over offered hope. More than 60,000 Indians attended Netaji's first public address at the Padang on 9 July 1943.⁸ On that occasion he

underscored that the success of an INA attack on Indian soil depended on the ‘total mobilisation’ of manpower and resources of the Indians in Southeast and East Asia. By ‘total mobilisation’ he meant drawing all segments of Indian society in the support of the League’s activities, and to build an army that he envisaged would over time be 300,000-strong. Able-bodied men and women were encouraged to volunteer for the INA—the latter for the newly created Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Boys and girls under the age of 18 could enlist at the Junior Cadet Schools, the *Balak Sena* and the *Balika Sena*—preparatory institutions for the INA that provided basic military, drill, language, and ideological training to boys and girls. Others still could serve in IIL departments. Subhas underlined the need for the Movement to be financially independent and demanded that the Indian population in East and Southeast Asia provide generous monetary assistance for the purpose.⁹ Observer accounts of the rally on 9 July 1943 suggest that the audience was clearly inspired. Wartime journalist, K. R. Menon, remembers the address as:

... a grand affair... the whole Singapore was here to welcome him.... And mind you, it was raining cats and dogs... there was not an inch of space that was vacant there. Men, women and children, they were drenched to the skin. They never budged an inch because his speech was so spell-bound [*sic*]... even the heavens were moved to tears hearing his speech.¹⁰

In the weeks that followed, 13 recruitment offices were set up in Singapore to cope with the influx of civilian volunteers for the INA.¹¹ They came from various social backgrounds: ‘They were ... ordinary people,... government servants,... business people,... labourers—all walks of life. They simply throw away their incomes [*sic*]. Even some fellows are milkmen... their cows also they brought to the movement. They said, “You take the cow, or dispose the cow, we are coming into the movement.”’¹² Oral testimonies suggest that young labourers comprised the largest numbers. Teenagers cast aside parental opposition for what they perceived as a greater purpose: ‘[My father] was totally against it.... I told him “now it’s time for me to serve ... the country and I must do my duty to gain India’s independence. I am sorry ... no one can stop me [from joining]... the INA to fight for independence. We cannot be slaves forever”’.¹³

The response was so great that on 13 July, the secretary of the INA department of recruitment was pressed to issue a directive to temporarily turn volunteers away.¹⁴ Stringent tests were introduced to

limit candidates for the prestigious Azad School where instructors were trained. In addition to the Azad School situated at Gilstead Road, three camps—the largest at Seletar and two subsidiary sites at Braddell Road and Bidadari—were demarcated for the training of civilian volunteers in Singapore.¹⁵ An Officer Training School also functioned at the Nee Soon Camp.¹⁶ Along with centres established in Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, and Ipoh, these camps ‘could accommodate up to 10,000 men’ and in 1943, they operated ‘close to full capacity’.¹⁷ To prevent further delay, the volunteers themselves surmounted the challenges posed by the damaged facilities at these camps. They said: ‘We can do whatever necessary repairs, we can do it ourselves. We got all the skilled people, we know people who know carpentry, we know people who can repair the roofs... so give us a chance, give us certain materials.’¹⁸

Because INA camps could not cope with the influx, many volunteers initially received part-time training by instructors in their locality. Here, while continuing with their professions, they would undergo two hours of physical exercises, drill, and Indian ‘spiritual’ activities daily, along with a weekly route march. Only those who were deemed to be ‘the best men from local training’ were called up for full-time training.¹⁹ Girishchandra Kothari, trained at the Officers Training School in Nee Soon, listed his routine as follows: ‘We’re taught map reading, tactics, then drills.... After that, came weapon training like rifle, pistol, light machine-gun, medium machine-gun, 3 inches mortar, 4 inches mortar and grenades.... After that came lessons in history, in Indian history ... [then] we had group discussions about revolutions like French revolution, Chinese revolution and Russian revolution.’²⁰ Upon completing the full time course—usually four months for infantrymen, and about a year for officers—they were absorbed as operationally ready servicemen of the INA.²¹

Although female recruitment to the Rani of Jhansi Regiment did not take place at the same pace as male volunteers, the size of the force gradually increased. Lakshmi Swaminathan, the commander of the women’s regiment, visited areas of Indian concentration in Singapore and Malaya to encourage women to join: ‘I started touring all the areas where Indians were living [in Singapore].... And then I went up-country ... to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and recruited from all those places.’²² Some women were known to have ‘besieged recruiting offices, often in the face of parental opposition.’²³ Entire families were known to join

the INA, 'the husband joined, the wife joined and the brothers and sisters'.²⁴ Although the age limit for volunteers to the Rani of Jhansi Regiment was 18 to 28, older women were incorporated as support staff. The commander of the regiment explained:

There were some [ladies].... They were over 45 years or so.... And I said, 'I am very sorry you're too old, you won't be able to join'... [they] went to him (Netaji) ... and said, 'Please tell her that we volunteer [*sic*]. We know we are old and we probably can't do strenuous work. We'll do the cooking.' And they volunteered as cooks...²⁵

Estimates of the size of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment vary, Lebra positing that 'the Regiment grew gradually to five hundred, though later, some assert [that it would have been] one thousand or even fifteen hundred'.²⁶

Although large-scale civilian recruitment to the INA reflected the most distinct aspect of the Movements' development during this phase, Subhas' call for 'total mobilisation' also saw an increase in the number of IIL personnel. Precisely because the IIL Headquarters was based in Singapore at this time, local volunteers comprised most of the functionaries. Textile trader, B. H. Melwani, posited that 'my duty was getting supplies for the army and the league. If there is anything connected to textile or anything, they want to make uniform.... I have sources, being in that trade [*sic*].'²⁷ Abdealli Motiwalla supplied stationery and paper to the INA and the IIL.²⁸ Hena Sinha was persuaded by Bose to volunteer for the IIL's Social Welfare Department.²⁹ T. Karmakar—then the President of the Arya Samaj in Singapore—headed a team of IIL civilian engineers attached to the INA.³⁰ Like him, doctors, medical orderlies, and nurses from Singapore were attached as civilian support personnel to the INA.

While the success of civilian voluntarism to the Movement in late 1943 and early 1944 exceeded expectations, financial contributions from Indian communities in the region fell short, and were insufficient to meet the expenses of the rapidly burgeoning Movement.³¹ The extent of contributions tended to be inversely related to affluence. Subhas noted that poorer sections were especially generous in providing financial support:

I have come across instances of the spirit of sacrifice among our poor brethren which would bring tears to the eyes of even a stone-hearted

man. A washerman came to me and gave his 'all'.... A poor ill-clad Indian who was a barber came forward with 200 dollars which represented his savings for years.... Especially moving are the sacrifices of our Gowala brethren. These brothers came, gave all the cash they had, all the cattle they possessed and offered themselves as volunteers for the Indian National Army.³²

On the other hand, Netaji criticized well-to-do Indians in Singapore for being tight-fisted. Getting wealthy Indians to contribute through persuasion had met little success. An Indian who had escaped from Malaya in September 1943 informed Allied interrogators that 'wealthy Indians were eager to convert their property into cash or other valuables which could be hidden' because they were 'so pressed ... for "voluntary" contributions [that] they want to pose as property-less'.³³ After the establishment of the Provisional Government of Free India in October 1943, Netaji threatened to persecute affluent Indians who refused to contribute:

I have heard that some of the rich people have been saying that we are a nuisance and that the nuisance would be over when we leave Syonan on our march of India.... To these misguided friends, I have to say that there are only two alternatives before them; either they must become true Indians and do their duty at this hour of need or they must say that they are friends of Britain and be treated as such.³⁴

Consequently, from late 1943, the Provisional Government asserted its authority over the property of those who dodged payments, and there were instances when merchants were taken into custody. A more regular system of procuring funds from the Indian community was put in place, which required Indians to declare their assets based on which levies varying between 10 to 20 per cent were imposed.³⁵ Japanese soldiers were also called upon to aid enforcement: 'If they did not give.... You just tell [the Japanese officials].... The moment they see a Japanese [soldier] with you, they will give out the whole thing [*sic*] in order to save their lives'.³⁶

7.2 Explaining the Success of Civilian Recruitment

By 1944, the IIL in East and Southeast Asia had about 350,000 members, and the INA had swelled to 'three divisions of 10,000 men

each, [excluding] ... independent companies and battalions holding [another] ... 20,000 volunteers under training'.³⁷ Many were local-born, or if not, had mostly lived in Singapore and the Peninsula. Why did so many of them volunteer for the INA? Why were they willing to fight, kill, and possibly even die for India when their connection to the 'motherland' was so tenuous?

The narrative above suggests that Netaji was crucial in imbuing an extraordinarily strong sense of patriotism towards India. Historical accounts posit that Subhas' abilities as an orator par excellence, alongside his long-standing credentials as a recognized Indian nationalist leader were certainly crucial. In addition there was widespread consensus that under his charge, Japanese interference 'in the direction of [the Movements'] affairs' would be checked.³⁸ Oral testimonies suggest that Netaji also spent considerable time motivating functionaries. Meetings and post-dinner discussions with officers and civilian leaders extended to the wee hours of the morning, and at these sessions, Subhas persistently reminded officers to build the morale of those under them. Participants at these meetings observe that Netaji was able to fit so much in a day precisely because he was known to sleep for less than three hours.³⁹ A Japanese Colonel remarked to Prime Minister Tojo during his visit to Singapore, 'This Indian leader lives 24 hours of every day only in complete disinterested dedication to the cause of his country's emancipation. He is stoicism itself and has not shown any interest in the common pleasures of life'.⁴⁰

Additionally, while many INA and IIL notables during this phase were those who had emerged during the Rash Behari Bose interregnum, Netaji did not ignore those who had grown disenchanted after the December 1942 debacle. Subhas especially sought out N. Raghavan, the popular Malayan Indian leader and convinced him to rejoin the Movement. Raghavan recounted that: '[Netaji] said, "Raghavan, the position has changed." "How?" I asked. "It's like this,... if I had to choose between you and the Japanese I'd choose you."... It broke me down. I went with him and joined the government...' ⁴¹ Nevertheless, Netaji was pragmatic enough to recognize that not all who had grown disillusioned could be won over, or for that matter were useful to further the cause of the Movement. He did not press for Mohan Singh's release from detention, expressing to Mohan that 'there is a group outside who is discontent with your leadership. The moment you come out there

will be trouble. It is in the interest of the movement that you remain here longer.'⁴² But he did secure better accommodation for Mohan Singh. Neither did Subhas turn to K. P. K. Menon, who was vitriolic in condemning Netaji for letting his 'hatred of British rule blind him to Japan's real purpose'.⁴³

Netaji's efforts to reach out to religious minorities and the diverse Indian ethno-linguistic communities in the diaspora were critical in extending support for the Movement. He ensured that the Provisional Government of Free India—established on 21 October 1943—comprised representatives from different religious and regional groupings. Half of the eight INA members in the Government were Muslim.⁴⁴ Subhas was sensitive to minority concerns. When informed by Muslim representatives in Singapore that they objected to singing 'Bande Mataram' because of its Hindu overtones, the Hindustani version of Rabindranath Tagore's patriotic song, 'Jana Gana Mana', was adopted as the IIL anthem.⁴⁵ The 'springing tiger', the most prominent insignia on INA uniforms drew from 'Tipu Sultan of Mysore's gallant resistance against the British'.⁴⁶ *Ittefaq* (unity), *Etmad* (faith), and *Kurbani* (sacrifice), all Urdu words, were adopted as the motto of the INA. During his trip to Burma in late September 1943, Netaji made it a point to visit the tomb of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor of India, and on seeing it in a dilapidated state called on Burmese authorities to carry out repairs. This was interpreted by the press there as an indication of 'his profound love and respect for Muslims'.⁴⁷ When Hindus complained to Netaji of partiality shown by Muslim officers, he usually let such matters slide. Lakshmi Swaminathan posits that Netaji held firmly to the view that the majority ought to be generous towards minorities:

[Netaji] felt that minorities not only must get their rights, they must also be given a little more... minorities should be recognised, their culture, their language, their religion... should be recognised... in addition to that, we can even go out of our way to be generous to them. He was criticised by many people for that. But he said, 'In the long run this is going to help us make the country feel one, if we treat our minorities not as minorities, but as younger brothers and sisters whom we always are [a] little more lenient towards'.⁴⁸

When compared to his predecessors, Subhas was certainly more successful in drawing Indian Muslim support for the Movement. Comprising some of the wealthiest Indian Muslim merchants in the region, they became key

financial contributors to the Movement. Beyond monetary support—a growing sense of Indian fraternity across religious boundaries was evident in the diaspora. In March 1944, on the occasion of Prophet Mohammed's anniversary, Abdul Aziz, a prominent leader of the Indian Muslim community in Singapore noted that 'thousands of Indians, irrespective of caste or creed, are mingling in mosques and eating the same food'.⁴⁹ On that occasion, Aziz, who had previously remained aloof from the Movement, rallied Indian Muslims to 'sacrifice everything ... for the glory of our motherland'.⁵⁰ Possibly the most notable example of Netaji's success in winning Muslim support was the change in the disposition of Lieutenant-Colonel Shah Nawaz. Shah Nawaz had originally joined the INA in May 1942 only so that he could '[better] protect Muslims ... not simply from the Japanese, but from ill-treatment at the hands of other Indians'.⁵¹ At the trial of INA officers after the war, Shah Nawaz told the court that under Subhas' leadership, 'for the first time in my life I saw India through the eyes of an Indian'.⁵²

Netaji was also sensitive to the concerns of Tamil speakers. Although Hindustani was prescribed as the main language of the Movement, Indian newspapers and journals published in Singapore now contained substantial Tamil segments, while speeches at public meetings included Tamil translations.⁵³ On key occasions—for example when 30,000 Indians at Farrer Park took an Oath of Allegiance to the Provisional Government—many addresses were delivered in the Tamil language.⁵⁴ Such measures went a long way in reassuring Tamils in Singapore that being Indian did not entail a homogenization that affected their ethno-linguistic identities.

Nowhere was the experiment of bringing together diverse Indian regional, religious, and caste groupings more evident than in INA training camps. One of the first measures Netaji introduced was the abolishment of INA regimental units based on regional and religious lines. Viewed as extensions of British 'divide and rule', he emphasized that there would be no 'water-tight compartments based on the religious faiths of the members'—an initiative intended to cultivate a consciousness of being 'Indian first and Indian last'.⁵⁵ Only Indian languages would be used as the medium of instruction and communication in the Army, and Indian spiritual, cultural, and military traditions were incorporated in training. Damodaran, a civilian draftsman attached to the INA, posits that volunteers in his unit represented a cross section of

Indian ethnic groups: 'We came across everybody—south Indian, north Indian, central Indian, east ... everybody'.⁵⁶ Oral testimonies reveal that the experience of living in camps with Indians of differing social, religious, linguistic, and caste backgrounds left a deep impact on volunteers. They shared food from a common kitchen, and ate together. Although 'beef and pork were never served',⁵⁷ other religious or caste-based taboos were not recognized. Ram Prasad, who had volunteered for the INA in 1943, recounts:

There were problems initially, particularly on issues related to food. Some Hindus were concerned about who was preparing the food and did not like eating with the lower castes or Muslims. When the officers heard of it, they were furious, and told us that it was because of such disunity that the British were able to conquer India. Seeing the example of the officers of different castes and religions eating together, the higher caste Hindus stopped making a fuss on the issue.⁵⁸

Netaji also challenged social exclusion beyond military quarters. Invited to a religious ceremony at the Chettiar temple in October 1943, he initially refused⁵⁹ as the temple had for long refused entry to lower-caste Hindus. This was in spite of the fact that his attendance would boost Chettiar financial support for the Movement. Subhas only agreed when the Chettiars allowed their temple doors to be opened to all communities for a national meeting, which he attended, 'flanked by his Muslim comrades Abid Hasan and Mohammad Zaman Kiani'.⁶⁰

Bose also sought to reach out to the Ceylonese community. While a small number of Ceylonese youth had been recruited as IIL intelligence agents even prior to Netaji's arrival, the extent of their involvement was limited due to the fact that many Ceylonese had served as administrators in the British colonial regime and also because the *raison d'état* of the Movement—Indian independence—was not a salient issue for them. Under Subhas, the IIL initiated a Ceylonese wing, branches of which mushroomed in Singapore and the Peninsula in late 1943 and early 1944. Ceylonese notables were propelled in the IIL hierarchy. M. V. Pillay—a criminal district judge during the Occupation—headed the Ceylonese Department in Singapore, and for a brief period in 1944 was also Chairman of the Singapore IIL.⁶¹ A series of mass meetings were organized by the Ceylonese Department to call for Ceylon's independence from British rule.⁶² IIL propaganda also underscored the strong cultural, religious, and linguistic bonds between Indians and

Ceylonese, and emphasized that Ceylon's independence was bound with the struggle for India's independence.

It would, however, be an exaggeration to suggest that Indian civilian participation in the Movement was only due to the initiatives and persona of Netaji. K. R. Menon asserts that:

Indians ... join[ed] the Indian National Army to save their skin ... [from Japanese] atrocities ... which is better?—to get into a military uniform ... for India's independence or to get beaten to death by the Japanese militia?... By joining the Indian National Army you get fine dress, you get fine food, you can march, you can have drinks, you can keep your health good.⁶³

This view runs contrary to most historical accounts that emphasize a transformation in Indian socio-political consciousness during this period. Yet, the importance of a pragmatic impulse cannot be discounted. Certainly Subhas' takeover coincided with a period in which economic conditions began to deteriorate rapidly in Japanese controlled territories. Additionally if they did not join the INA, able-bodied Indians, especially those who were unemployed, would have certainly been vulnerable to recruitment for forced labour on Japanese projects. A closer look at the experience of civilian labourers employed on these projects is useful not only to understand how volunteering for the INA afforded an 'escape', but also to appreciate a hitherto lesser known aspect of the experience of thousands of Indians in Singapore and Malaya during the latter half of the Occupation.

7.3 Forced Labour

From March 1943, following serious military reverses in the Pacific and facing the possibility of an allied advance on the Burma front, the Japanese administration accelerated the development of strategic works in Southeast Asia. Although POW labour had long been used for such projects, civilians were increasingly turned to for the purpose. In April 1943, a Labour Office was formed in Singapore to tighten control over the workforce and register unemployed workers.⁶⁴ Similar units were set up in the Peninsula, and from these lists, labour was dispatched for a variety of tasks. On projects where extensive manpower was required Japanese authorities not only procured those who were unemployed

but also redeployed workers from other sectors of the economy. Many of these civilians were employed on construction projects—including the building of railways and aerodromes—for earthworks and to bolster food production.

Working conditions at these sites were unforgiving, and malnutrition and disease accounted for high mortality rates. Those fortunate enough to return, 'often needed hospital treatment for malaria, malnutrition and skin ulcers'.⁶⁵ Indian labour was procured for some of the harshest projects, including the infamous 415-kilometre Thailand–Burma 'Death' Railway. Constructed 'through a rugged, trackless, and pestilence-ridden tract of jungle',⁶⁶ the railway was intended as a crucial land supply route for the defence of Burma, given that sea lanes to Rangoon were open to attacks from allied submarines and aircraft.⁶⁷ On the Thailand–Burma Railway, the Japanese had turned to civilians to augment the POW workforce when they realized that the target date for completion in August 1943 could not be met.

Labour was initially drawn voluntarily—potential employees promised salaries that were approximately three times the prevailing rate in Singapore. Shinozaki Mamoru—the Japanese Welfare Officer in Singapore—offered 'beggars and homeless people collected in a police roundup', the 'opportunity' to work on these projects.⁶⁸ IIL functionaries were sometimes used to procure Indian labour. Shanmugasivanathan—employed at the Government Health Department in Singapore during the war—recounts:

[IIL functionaries] went to ... government departments,... [to recruit] people. Of course we were not ... aware of what the purpose was. Only after the arrival of the Japanese [officials], people came to know that they want[ed] ... workers for the Burma–Siam Railway... some were happy to join, some were reluctant... even I was... willing to go... [But] being a small boy [*sic*], the Japanese [official] said... 'You are not wanted. Get out'.⁶⁹

Employees were told that the duration of work was three months, and that they would be provided 'free rail travel, housing, food, and medical services, and would be paid 1 dollar per day, with an advance of 10 dollars on signing the contract'.⁷⁰ These terms were attractive in the context of increasingly difficult circumstances in the Peninsula and Singapore, where rations had been systematically reduced. With little or no knowledge of the conditions that they would be subjected to,

‘some thought that Thailand was a better place because of the abundance of rice’. Others still were deceived by the slogans employed by the recruiting agents such as, ‘Let’s go to *Thai-nadu!*’, which to the labourer literally meant in Tamil a call to return to the ‘motherland’ (*Tai-nadu*).⁷¹

Travelling south from Thailand to Singapore in March 1943, M. Sivaram—the Chief Editor of the *Indo-Shimbunsa*—witnessed the mass movement of Indian labourers travelling in the opposite direction:

We saw dozens of military trains coming up the Peninsula... all full of Indian laborers for the Japanese military railway.... Each wagon carried a couple of hundred ... people. Men, women, and children were huddled together in the sweltering heat.... The sight of these unfortunate people, crowding the rice depots at the railway stations, was indeed heart-rending—a jostling bunch of humanity in hunger and distress, shouted at, cursed and slapped by everyone.⁷²

Eye-witness accounts reveal the horrendous conditions of the labourers sent to work on the Thailand–Burma Railway. I. Sanjiwi, an Indian employed on the project, remembers being sent to Kanchaburi by freight train, where he joined about 700 labourers who were escorted through jungle by Japanese soldiers: ‘Each labourer carried a sack of rice on his back and walked through the jungle for seven days. Along the way [we] ... saw many dead bodies, abandoned and covered with flies.’⁷³ Housed in spartan camps in jungle thickets, provided with meagre rations, subjected to gruelling working hours, and maltreatment by Japanese supervisors, tens of thousands succumbed to death and disease. Malaria, beriberi, dysentery, and diphtheria were common ailments, although cholera was the most prevalent cause of death. Eber Rowell—a British POW—informs: ‘[The Indians] in the camp ... called Tonchan or Han Chee ... suffered very badly. They had poor food, practically no clothes, and when cholera attacked them ... majority of them died.’⁷⁴ British POW—Major Bangs—posits that the Japanese provided little, if any, medical aid to civilians working on the project. Indeed his account suggests that the Japanese, possibly for fear of the spread of disease, forcibly killed those who had succumbed to illness:

The Indians who were up the railway ... died in ... thousands... [the Japanese] didn’t really do anything at all... they were scared stiff [*sic*] of any illness... there was an attap hut full of Indians with cholera and they set it on fire and burnt them all, still alive. And there was another place

up the railway, where we had to dig a large grave and put in the dead bodies... on one occasion one of our soldiers said, 'This man is not dead'. And the Japanese just came up with his rifle and bashed the sick man's head and then he was dead.⁷⁵

Rumours of the horrors on the Railroad project spread in the second half of 1943 when the initial workers dispatched did not return.⁷⁶ From July 1943, Japanese authorities, faced with a continued labour shortage, increasingly had to use coercion to procure workers. On rubber estates in the Peninsula, labourers were forcefully loaded onto trucks destined for the Railway. Devan Nair⁷⁷—whose father was a clerical officer on a rubber estate in Johor—remembers that: 'the Japanese had a nasty habit of swooping down on a rubber plantation. 20 or 25 lorries, picked up every labourer in the estate. Put them on it and they were never seen again. They were taken to build the Siam death railway.'⁷⁸ If in rural areas labourers were known to run off into the jungle to avoid capture, the possibility of escape was more difficult in urban locales such as Singapore. The Japanese were known to spring 'traps' on unsuspecting civilians: 'They blocked off streets or the entrances to cinema halls and checked the papers of all those caught inside, allowing men with employment to go but taking others away to become laborers. Similarly, men found sitting around in coffee shops were liable to be seized and put to work on construction projects.'⁷⁹

Allied estimates posit that over 78,000 civilians from the Peninsula and Singapore were used for just the construction and maintenance of the Thailand–Burma Railway. A breakdown of Asian labour units for the Thai–Burma Railway reveals that amongst civilians, Indians comprised the majority followed by a large number of Malays.⁸⁰ One can only conjecture that this may have been linked to Japanese concerns that Chinese workers could engage in sabotage. Most of the Indians used for the project were from Malayan plantations, although Indian workers from government departments including the railways, post office, and public works, were also recruited from Singapore. By the end of September 1945, nearly 30,000 of the civilian employees working on the Thailand–Burma Railway were reported to have died.⁸¹ These figures do not adequately represent the extent of mortality. They exclude those who perished from diseases after repatriation. Neither do these statistics include mortality amongst those who were said to have 'deserted'. Nakahara suggests that many of the 24,626 individuals

listed as deserters would have perished soon after, given that they were recorded to have fled when cholera was spreading. Including the latter, he posits that some '51 per cent [of] laborers from Malaya' died, although he acknowledges that from the interviews he conducted, even that figure is probably an underestimate.⁸²

7.4 The Struggle for India

*There in the distance, beyond that river, beyond those jungles, beyond those hills, lies the promised land—the soil from which we sprang, the land to which we shall now return...*⁸³

*India is calling... Three hundred and eighty-eight millions of our countrymen are calling. Blood is calling to blood. Arise!... We shall carve our way through the enemy's ranks, or, if God wills, we shall die a martyr's death. And, in our last sleep, we shall kiss the road that will bring our army to Delhi. The road to Delhi is the road to freedom. Chalo Delhi!*⁸⁴

—Netaji's farewell to troops moving to the
Burma–India warfront, February 1944

From late 1943, a sense of expectancy prevailed amongst the Movement's functionaries that the INA would soon be engaged in a battle to free India from British rule. In August, the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters had issued orders to the Japanese Southern Army to prepare for a military offensive aimed at taking control of Imphal⁸⁵—the capital of the north-eastern Indian state of Manipur. Japanese officers had initially envisaged limiting the INA's function in the campaign to intelligence activities, but the rapid expansion of the INA and IIL after Subhas' arrival had added a new dimension. Netaji pressed for a more significant INA role and was adamant that in the conflict 'the first drop of blood shed on Indian soil be Indian'.⁸⁶ The demand was not just symbolic, it was necessary for the success of the propaganda drive—to portray the Campaign not as a Japanese offensive for military-strategic reasons, but an attempt to liberate north-eastern India from British control. Netaji had long expressed confidence that following an INA attack on India, 'a revolution will break out, not only among the civil population at home, but also among the Indian Army which is now standing under the British flag. When the British Government is thus attacked from both sides—from inside India and from outside—it will collapse...' ⁸⁷

Bearing in mind these considerations, the Southern Army, had, by late 1943, reconciled to employing larger numbers of INA troops at the front.

Netaji's arrival in Rangoon on 7 January 1944 coincided with the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters' green signal for the Imphal Campaign. That evening, the transfer of the Free Indian Provisional Government Headquarters from Singapore to Burma was broadcast on Rangoon Radio.⁸⁸ Lieutenant-General Kawabe—the Commander of the Burma Area Army—confirmed that INA personnel would enjoy equal status with soldiers of the Japanese Army and promised that upon taking Imphal, the Free India Provisional Government would take over the administration of Manipur.⁸⁹ By March 1944, the strength of the INA forces in Burma was approximately 13,000,⁹⁰ and included the mainstay of the INA operationally ready units—the No.1 Division of the INA comprising the Subhas, Gandhi, Azad, and Nehru regiments.

The Imphal Campaign began in mid-March 1944. Three Japanese Divisions each with detachments of INA soldiers comprised the mainstay of the approximately 120,000 soldiers engaged for the offensive. To facilitate the speedy movement of troops, soldiers were equipped lightly with rations sufficient only for three weeks. The Japanese-INA force progressed rapidly in the early weeks of the Campaign: 'The Japanese and INA troops, mostly foot soldiers lacking vehicles and artillery, or any air support literally galloped through mountains and jungles, smothering or routing the enemy on the way ... traversing on foot some 200 kilometers of very hard terrain...'⁹¹ A propaganda offensive was launched following reports that Japanese-INA forces had crossed the Indian border on March 19. Indian soldiers in the British Army were urged to rebel and join the INA: 'We call upon every Indian to destroy the Anglo-American war effort in India by systematic sabotage and thereby hasten the successful conclusion of the war for our country's freedom.'⁹² By early April the outlook was promising: the 15th Division had occupied the hills overlooking the Imphal-Kohima road by 3 April; on 6 April, the 31st Division had reportedly taken Kohima—a key junction between Imphal and Dimapur in Assam; and on 10 April one segment of the 33rd Division was positioned at Torbung—just 50 kilometres south of Imphal.⁹³ Expecting a swift victory, Kawabe acceded to Netaji's request for the 2nd and 3rd regiments of the INA—which had arrived in Rangoon only in March—to join the mainstay of the forces at the front.⁹⁴

Outside the war zone, Subhas expedited the administrative setup for the takeover of Indian territories. Lieutenant-Colonel Chatterji was appointed the Governor of the newly liberated territories in India and the Azad Hind Bank was established in Rangoon to manage the Free India Provisional Government's finances and issue its own currency.⁹⁵ The size of the Government was expanded, and amongst key appointments included N. Raghavan, who replaced Chatterji as Finance Minister. Two vice-presidents were appointed to administer the IIL in Southeast Asia: S. A. Ayer, the Minister of Publicity and Propaganda, would be Senior Vice-President of the League managing operations in Burma and Thailand; while J. Thivy, then Secretary-General of rear headquarters in Singapore, was promoted to Junior Vice-President in charge of the League's activities in Singapore and Malaya.⁹⁶ In early April the advance headquarters of the civilian administration moved from Rangoon to Maymyo, a hill-town in Central Burma.

In Southeast Asia, INA propaganda focused on accelerating the 'total mobilisation' of Indian manpower and resources. To celebrate the Japanese-INA hold over parts of north-eastern India, the Provisional Government declared 6 April to 13 April April as 'National Liberation Week'. IIL branches organized mass meetings filled with panegyric celebrating Netaji's leadership and the bravery of INA soldiers at the front. An elaborate program was put in place in Singapore in preparation for the fall of Imphal, including mass rallies, radio programmes, and parades by the young boys and girls of the *Balak Sena* and *Balika Sena* corps.⁹⁷ The *Azad Hind* newspaper—based on Japanese communiqués—detailed the 'rout' of British forces in north-east India and suggested that thousands of Indian soldiers had deserted the British Army and joined the INA. Occasionally propaganda material included embarrassing blunders. Sivaram notes:

A set of photographs said to have been taken 'somewhere in liberated India' ... showed soldiers of the Indian National Army entering an unnamed Manipur village ... and a group of villagers, carrying Indian national flags greeting the army of liberation ... but some readers recognized the scenery, ... as the corner of a lane in the Bukit Timah area of Singapore. They also identified some of the 'Manipuri villagers' as cadets of the field propaganda unit...⁹⁸

Regardless of such gaffes, the Movements' functionaries in Singapore remained convinced that the Japanese-INA force would soon declare

victory. Financial contributions to the Singapore IIL soared, and the air of confidence in the League saw even those who had hitherto remained 'fence-sitters' emerging as vociferous supporters of the movement.⁹⁹ Even when the announcement of the fall of Imphal did not materialize on the expected date, i.e., on 29 April (the Japanese Emperor's birthday), morale amongst functionaries in Singapore remained high, and Indians were said to have joined 'the Japanese in celebrating Tencho Setsu (the Emperor's birthday) in a big way'.¹⁰⁰ Festivities continued in May with the Anniversary celebrations of the 1857 'Indian War of Independence'.¹⁰¹ Expectations of a British capitulation continued, as evident in the large numbers that flocked INA recruitment centres. In May alone, 10,000 Indians signed up for the INA in Singapore.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, the cost of maintaining supply lines to the INA in Burma had spiralled. In late May, Netaji, frustrated by the lack of information on developments on the battlefield while in Maymyo, left for Rangoon—where he raised about five million rupees in cash and valuables.¹⁰³ In June, Subhas raised funds in Singapore and the Peninsula. Raghavan's prominence in the local Indian community aided in increasing contributions, and during that trip some 13 million dollars in cash and pledges were obtained from Singapore, Malaya, Sumatra, and Java-based Indian merchants. Before leaving for Burma in late June, Subhas—still confident of prospects at the front—reviewed the formation of the INA 3rd Division, and ordered the 2nd to prepare for a move to Burma in July and August.¹⁰⁴

Netaji came to know of the catastrophic defeat of Japanese-INA forces at Imphal a week after his return to Burma. Paradoxically, he was informed of the Japanese decision to abandon the Campaign while Indians in cities and towns in East and Southeast Asia were celebrating 'Netaji Week'—for which the Singapore IIL branch screened open air 'footage' of the INA's 'march into India'.¹⁰⁵ The 'military balance' in the Campaign had shifted in favour of British forces in mid-April.¹⁰⁶ The lightly-equipped Japanese-INA troops were woefully short of ammunition, and due to the limited rations they carried, faced starvation as the conflict extended. The arrival of the monsoon in May added to their misery. Supply lines to the militia, spread thin by the speed of the initial advance, became impossible to sustain as mountainous jungle tracks turned into slippery mud-dregs. Possibly of all the INA forces, the worst fate befell the Gandhi Regiment led by Lieutenant-Colonel

I. J. Kiani. Informed in mid-April that Imphal could be taken at any moment, the Regiment had hurried to the front carrying only 'fifty rounds of ammunition per man'.¹⁰⁷ By the time they set up camp at the front, the force was already depleted by the spread of disease. In the battle for the Palel airfield, the thinly armed force faced impossible circumstances—an ambush by the Gurkha Rifles was followed by attacks to the rear by the British Frontier Force Rifles, an air strike and concentrated artillery fire. These and subsequent fire-fights ensured that by the time the contingent withdrew, battle-casualties, disease, starvation, and desertion had reduced the two thousand-strong regiment to about six hundred.¹⁰⁸

A variety of factors informed the Japanese-INA defeat in the Imphal Campaign. The numerical advantage of British forces (numbering some one hundred and fifty-five thousand in Imphal and Kohima), was added to by the overwhelming superiority of Allied air-power.¹⁰⁹ With no air cover to speak of, Japanese-INA positions suffered from persistent air strikes. British forces, even during critical periods, had remained well-stocked as supplies were air-lifted to Imphal. Sivaram informs that an entire British Indian Division had been transported to the front by air.¹¹⁰ In the northern sector, British positions were reinforced by allied troops arriving by rail, and this soon ousted the temporary Japanese-INA hold over Kohima.

The failure of the Campaign was also because the INA's propaganda efforts in India proved ineffective. The large-scale desertion of Indian soldiers from the British Army did not materialize. The British censured news of the INA's participation so that the press in India largely spoke of the conflict in the north-east as a battle between British and Japanese forces. British counter-propaganda at the battlefield succeeded in portraying the INA as a puppet force of a cruel Japanese administration. Concomitantly, Allied aircraft air-dropped leaflets onto INA positions, promising 'good treatment' to Indian soldiers who returned to their ranks and tempting them with 'excellent food, clothing and medical attention as well as substantial pay and reward',¹¹¹ and this, over time, also proved to be useful in encouraging desperate INA soldiers to desert.

In mid-July, the INA Divisional Commander ordered the withdrawal of the remaining Regiments from the front. The announcement provided little relief. INA forces retreating from the Chin Hills to the Chindwin River were massacred: 'Hundreds died when enemy planes

attacked the boats in which they tried to cross the Chindwin and its tributaries... an unknown number died of the sheer exhaustion of running for their lives'.¹¹² As hunger and depravation took hold, open conflict broke out between Japanese and Indian soldiers. Indian officers claimed that supplies intended for their use never arrived, and insinuated that the Japanese had siphoned these off. On the flip side, Toye suggests that Indian soldiers stole rations from the Japanese, and posits that in one instance 'the Japanese bayoneted to death I.N.A. soldiers as enemy spies'.¹¹³

Retreating INA soldiers trickled into safe-havens beyond the Chindwin in July. Damodaran—a draftsman from Singapore at INA base camp in Maymyo—witnessed their arrival and posited that many were suffering from dysentery and malaria, and the shortage of medicines at the military hospital added to the difficulty in treating the wounded.¹¹⁴ Beyond the physical toll, soldiers unable to come to terms with the horror of the experience went 'stark mad'.¹¹⁵ The Rani of Jhansi Regiment comprised the backbone of the medical relief corps at the military hospital in Maymyo. Some two hundred nurses of the Regiment would remain there for about six months, attending to the wounded and disease-stricken soldiers.¹¹⁶

Netaji realized the enormity of the disaster two months after the withdrawal. Journeying through Upper Burma in September, he witnessed hundreds of Indian and Japanese bodies rotting by the banks of the Chindwin. Records compiled in September and October showed that only 2,600 of the approximately 6,000 INA soldiers on the frontline of the Imphal Campaign returned, and of these 2,000 required immediate medical treatment.¹¹⁷ Estimates of the mortality rates amongst Japanese soldiers vary—about 50 per cent of the army or approximately 50,000 to 65,000 soldiers died.¹¹⁸ The Campaign was the heaviest battlefield disaster ever suffered by the Japanese Army. Shortly after the news of the defeat, the Tojo cabinet resigned. For the INA, the failure at Imphal put paid to the dream of marching to Delhi. From then on the INA would remain a defensive force. Possibly the only silver lining was the brevity displayed by the civilians who had joined the INA:

[The] mark of heroism was particularly characteristic of the young civilians who joined the Indian National Army.... They had joined up, not by compulsion ... but for the love of their motherland ... these patriotic volunteers ... proved their fighting acumen under the most challenging

circumstances. The experienced Indian soldiers always reserved a part of their ammunition to fight the rear-guard action, but these youthful soldiers of freedom charged at the enemy with the bayonet, when they had exhausted their ammunition...¹¹⁹

7.5 The Final Phase—Economic Conditions and Resettlement Schemes

The final phase of the Occupation, marked by rapidly deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the city, was miserable for Indians in Singapore. Heavily dependent on provisions from the region, the city was plagued by a severe food-shortage. The disruption in rice-supplies followed an increase in submarine attacks in the Bay of Bengal from autumn 1943.¹²⁰ The Japanese Army's policy of stockpiling reserves for their crumbling war-effort further diminished the extent of food available to non-Japanese civilians. Allocation of rice for males, which had been cut to 12 *katis* per month in September 1943, was trimmed further to 8 *katis* in February 1944. Women received less—only 6 *katis* per month in the concomitant period. When the Allied bombing of Singapore and Malaya began in November 1944, the monthly food ration for non-Japanese civilians was reduced to starvation levels—1 *kati* of rice, 1.5 *katis* of rice flour, and 0.5 *katis* of beans.¹²¹ Vallupillai—a clerical officer prior to the Occupation—had by this time become 'bony, thin. And... had to pull [his] belt to keep [his] cloth together [*sic*].'¹²² Malnutrition and shortage of medical supplies rendered the civilian population increasingly susceptible to disease, and ailments that could otherwise have been treated easily, became life-threatening. Beriberi, fever, pneumonia, and tuberculosis were the major causes of mortality.¹²³ Recorded deaths in Singapore in 1944 and 1945 exceeded live-births by more than 20,000.¹²⁴ Had it not been for the relief provided by allied forces in the last quarter of 1945, the mortality rate amongst civilians in Singapore would have certainly been higher.

The cost of living also skyrocketed. In a desperate bid to meet their economic expenses, the Japanese military administration flooded the Singapore and Malayan market with currency notes—issuing some \$4 billion in 1944 and the first half of 1945, and possibly another billion in the final month of the war.¹²⁵ Yet with diminishing supplies and little economic activity, inflation escalated to hitherto unseen

levels. The bustling black market that 'fed the growing corruption in the Japanese military administration' added to rising prices.¹²⁶ To put the extent of hyperinflation in Singapore in perspective: in July 1944 'foodstuffs' cost 30 times more than what they did in December 1941, by December 1944, over 50 times, and by May 1945, over 160 times.¹²⁷ In the final months of the Occupation the Japanese currency circulating in Malaya and Singapore—popularly known as 'banana notes'—was effectively worthless, and 'illegal' foreign currency and barter became the norm for exchange.

Singapore was fast turning into a city of vagrants. Amongst these were retired employees of the former British colonial administration, who, long denied a pension, were reduced to destitution. Charitable bodies—formed along ethnic lines—provided a measure of relief: the Blue Cross for Chinese inhabitants; the Malay Welfare Association for Malays; and the Eurasian Welfare Association for Eurasians.¹²⁸ The IIL had, prior to Subhas Chandra Bose's arrival, also served needy Indians in Singapore, but Netaji's 'total mobilisation' campaign had seen the near complete shift of the organization's manpower and financial resources towards the war-effort. Indian relief camps that had earlier provided aid to the impoverished and the refugees had been redeployed for military purposes, so that from the second half of 1943, Indian destitutes were either sent away or 'were removed ... to Pungol with no proper arrangement'.¹²⁹

The IIL did not completely withdraw from welfare provision, but focused its efforts only on the Movement's functionaries. The IIL's women's wing remained crucial for the purpose—providing nurses and administrators, and raising funds through charity events.¹³⁰ Hena Sinha recounts that she was required to assess the food and medicine needs of 'the little hospitals ... [near] Bidadari... where the wounded, [and] the sick [INA] soldiers used to stay'.¹³¹ Yet, unlike other ethnic communities, there was no similar institutional support available to the wider Indian population. Given the food scarcity in Singapore, a number of Indians who had landholdings or familial connections in Malaya relocated there. Amongst them were educated personnel, who were forced to take up farming to sustain their families. Ambiavagar Velayuther—a teacher at Victoria School during the Occupation—'slipped away' to the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur in 1944, and raised cattle and planted vegetables for a living: 'My wife had inherited some vacant lots of land

[from her father].... I went there, bought a couple of cows, tilled the soil, planted some vegetables and was able to rear some poultry... we also resorted ... to sell[ing] some of the vacant lots of land, to support our family...'¹³²

Most Indians, however, could not avail similar support. As conditions deteriorated, notables, including the Ceylonese medical practitioner P. T. Nathan, who had remained aloof from the IIL, appealed to Shinozaki, for a Welfare Association for Indians along similar lines employed for the Chinese, Malays, and Eurasians.¹³³ Consequently, in April 1944, the Japanese Welfare Officer approved the Indian Welfare Association (IWA).¹³⁴ Shinozaki posits that the supporters of the IWA were 'mostly Muslims', and that many 'were opposed to the Indian Independence League'.¹³⁵ Despite such aspersions, there is evidence to suggest that connections existed between the IIL and the Indian Welfare Association at least in the early stages of the latter's development. M. V. Pillay, who in mid-1944 held the position of Chairman of the IIL Singapore branch, also led the IWA, and the IIL Singapore branch premises at Waterloo Street was used for the Welfare Association's meetings and as a venue to collect donations.¹³⁶

In July 1944, the IWA established a Welfare Home for vagrants that doubled as a medical centre.¹³⁷ The organization was also engaged in the resettlement of Indians from Singapore to Bintan Island—one of a number of relocation projects initiated by the Japanese to check growing food scarcity in the city. In June 1944, the IWA announced that Indian families moving there would be provided quarters, four acres of 'extremely fertile' land for cultivation, and a stipend of 300 yen.¹³⁸ Contrary to the Association's propaganda, living conditions in the new colony proved arduous. Rengarajoo, an IIL functionary who checked on the conditions of Indians who had relocated to Bintan found that, 'the health [of residents] was very bad. The food and especially the water condition [were] very bad. A lot of people [became] sick.... People really suffered'.¹³⁹

By late 1944, relations between the IWA and the IIL had deteriorated. Popular notables who had moved away from the IIL—such as for example S. C. Goho—had joined the Welfare Association,¹⁴⁰ adding to concerns that the limited resources in the community would be divided. N. Raghavan, in charge of fund-raising for the Azad Hind Provisional Government, was particularly opposed to the formation

of an alternative organization for Indians in Singapore. Open conflict between the two groups was reported at a fund-raising event organized by the IWA at Jalan Besar when, seemingly, INA soldiers and Azad School trainees had disrupted proceedings. In September 1944, M. V. Pillay, an intermediary between the two organizations, had resigned from the IIL.¹⁴¹ In mid-1945, Netaji requested Shinozaki that the IWA be transferred to the IIL. The Welfare Officer refused. Subhas did not press the issue, positing that 'he understood the situation in Syonan'.¹⁴² Indeed, by that time conditions in Singapore had deteriorated to such an extent that charitable institutions could do little to alleviate the abject poverty that prevailed in the city.

7.6 The Movement Disintegrates

Netaji's request to Shinozaki was revealing of the desperate position of the Movement. When Subhas returned to Singapore in mid-December 1944, morale in the IIL and INA presented a stark contrast to that which he had witnessed just six months earlier. Stories of the Imphal disaster had spread in INA and IIL circles, ushering in a sense of despair. In the context of the allied bombing campaign of Singapore and Malaya, which had begun a month earlier, Netaji's reassurances did little to stem the rot. Hedging on the premise that it was only a matter of time before the Japanese were defeated, many Indians avoided paying their dues to the IIL. The number of volunteers also dropped steadily so that in December 1944 only 560 civilians joined the INA. By that time 'there were already 2,000 deserters at large in Malaya, and 200 men were disappearing from the training camps every month'.¹⁴³

Disillusionment spread further when soldiers of the INA 3rd Division learnt that they would not be sent to Burma but would remain garrisoned to defend the Japanese position in Singapore and Malaya. This not only extinguished whatever hopes they may have had of participating in the struggle to free India, the decision also had serious implications on local race-relations as now Indian soldiers could be used to stem growing local unrest against the Japanese administration. From late 1944, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA)—a force comprising mainly local Chinese inhabitants linked to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP)—had, with the support of allied air-drops of arms and ammunitions, stepped up

guerrilla attacks on the regime, and there were real concerns that the Japanese would use the INA 3rd Division to put these down.

Many volunteers preferred to abandon the INA rather than to fight locals in the defence of a Japanese administration for which they had little sympathy. Fleeing into the Malayan jungles, some deserters would forge links with the MPAJA. For these politicized individuals who now had 'no hope of liberating India, the alternative of liberating Malaya began to seem far more attractive'.¹⁴⁴ Stenson suggests that over time the influence of MPAJA and the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (MPAJU) extended to INA camps and training centres: 'A few M.C.P. cadres and sympathizers were present from the start. They soon gathered sympathizers who ... were interested in socialist ideas and who were ready to co-operate with an anti-Japanese movement. Their efforts to gain further adherents rapidly bore fruit because of the demoralization ... of the I.N.A.'¹⁴⁵

While the breakdown of the INA in Singapore and Malaya was a process that stretched from late 1944 to the Japanese surrender, the disintegration of the INA troops positioned at the Burma battlefield was more rapid. By mid-January 1945, British troops had already progressed to the Irrawaddy. Worse was to follow. Relentless air strikes on INA and Japanese positions were followed by the advance of Allied mechanized columns. By March, '[INA] soldiers were [being] sent into battle with no communications, with little transport, with few support weapons and far too little ammunition. They were left without boots and with their clothings in rags.'¹⁴⁶ 'Suicide attacks' on British tanks only delayed the inevitable.

In terms of casualties, the 'Battle for Burma' proved to be 'a greater debacle for I.N.A. than the [Imphal] ... Campaign'.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, from mid-February to April, between 6,000 and 7,000 INA soldiers were killed in Burma.¹⁴⁸ Amongst those who perished included high-ranking officials such as A. Yellapa, the former head of the IIL Singapore branch. Over 5,000 INA soldiers surrendered or were captured by British troops. Those detained suffered further ignominy. Damodaran who was incarcerated following the surrender informs: 'We were not given the war prisoner status ... 'JIF' (Japanese-Indian Force) Cage ... that was [what] our camp was called in Chittagong ... it was pretty bad. There was a shortage of water.... We got to dig well ... to go and line up and get water and hardly enough to drink. Nothing to bathe or anything...' ¹⁴⁹

By April 1945, Netaji had prepared INA troops for a final defence of Rangoon, but he found little support—General Aung San's Burmese National Army had by this time revolted against the Japanese. The INA forces were however saved from fighting for Rangoon as the Japanese had decided to withdraw even before the arrival of Allied troops. On 24 April, Subhas along with some 200 high ranking officials of the Movement and the remaining women of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment left for Thailand by road. The majority of the INA survivors in Burma, however, remained stranded. Long after the surrender of Rangoon, thousands of INA soldiers could not be accounted for. Some had embarked on an arduous trek to Thailand while others removed their military gear and amalgamated into the civilian population. Many remained fugitives. Amongst these was James Puthuchear, a volunteer from Johore. Barely 20 years old when he fought in the Imphal Campaign, he was also part of the reconstituted INA forces in the 'Battle for Burma'. After the Allied takeover of Burma, he escaped from Rangoon to Calcutta, and while in Bengal turned 'vaguely sympathetic to the Communists'.¹⁵⁰ In 1947, Puthuchear would move to Singapore and in the mid-1950s emerged as an important trade union leader and a key member of the People's Action Party.

Upon his return to Singapore in mid-June 1945, Netaji focused on broadcasting propaganda towards India, but he could not ignore the decomposition of the Movement on the ground. In July, he ordered the construction of a memorial dedicated to INA martyrs. More demands for money were made. But in a context informed by 'political disillusionment and personal hardship', such demands were deemed as 'oppressive'.¹⁵¹ Social fragmentation amongst South Asians was also increasingly manifest, and 'Muslims, the Ceylonese and Chettians dragooned into the IIL..., protected their special interests as best they could'.¹⁵² Subhas, Raghavan, and Thivy toured INA garrisons in the Peninsula after 'Netaji Week', to salvage whatever morale and discipline remained in the decaying force. Indeed, communist influence in these camps had deepened, and in the Peninsula, INA soldiers were covertly supplying medicines and food to the guerrillas. The loss of a sense of mission alongside expectations that British forces could return at any time had further escalated desertion rates. In early August a mutiny broke out at the INA training centre in Seremban, and armoured troops and soldiers had to be dispatched from Singapore to restore order.¹⁵³

While the causes of the revolt are not fully clear, oral records suggest that senior Indian Army officers had rebelled in the hope that they would be better placed when British forces arrived.¹⁵⁴

On his return to Singapore from Seremban, Netaji received news of Japan's decision to surrender. On 15 August, he delivered his final radio broadcast from Singapore in which he paid tribute to the sacrifices of Indians in East Asia:

A glorious chapter in the History of India's struggle for Freedom has come to a close and, in that chapter, the sons and daughters of India in East Asia will have an undying place.... You sent an unending stream of your sons and daughters to the camps to be trained as soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj and of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Money and materials, you poured lavishly.... Posterity will bless your name, and will talk with pride about your offerings at the altar of India's freedom.... Do not be depressed at our temporary failure.... There is no power on earth that can keep India enslaved. India shall be free and before long.¹⁵⁵

Three days after, Netaji sustained fatal injuries when his plane crashed in Taihoku, Formosa.¹⁵⁶

7.7 Assessment and Aftermath

In his assessment of how ethnic groups in Singapore were treated under Japanese rule, Shinozaki avers that: '[Indians] were looked after by the Japanese Army very kindly... [Indian troops] cooperated with the Japanese Army, so they were well treated and protected.... But the Chinese and Eurasians were in a very hard situation'.¹⁵⁷ Shinozaki's view, and the attendant notion that Indians suffered less adversity when compared to other communities, has continued to hold sway in the way in which the experience of the Occupation is remembered in Singapore.

That presumption is questionable. Indian POWs who did not join the INA were subject to severe maltreatment and were dispatched to concentration camps from which many did not return. The fate of Indian civilians pressed into forced labour during the Occupation was no less tragic. Arguably Indians were especially hard-hit by the breakdown of the economy in Singapore and the Peninsula because '[they] were precariously dependent upon the wage economy that could not operate under Japanese military occupation'.¹⁵⁸ While the Movement may have provided Indians with a degree of protection and a sense of

mission during the Occupation, yet, Subhas' 'Total Mobilisation' campaign also placed onerous demands on the diaspora, both financially and in terms of the many lives that were lost in the Imphal Campaign and the 'Battle for Burma'. Possibly the most telling deposition against the notion that Indians 'suffered less' are mortality rates during the Occupation. In the last two years of the Occupation, Indian mortality rates far exceeded their proportion of the total population in the port city.¹⁵⁹ Population figures compiled before and after the Japanese Occupation seem to corroborate that view. Comparing census figures in 1941 and 1947, Kratoska posits that for Malaya as a whole, 'the figures indicate that the Indian population declined by more than 19 per cent (from 744,202 to 599,616), while the Malay population appears to have grown by 11.5 per cent during the occupation, and the Chinese by 10 per cent'.¹⁶⁰ While it is true that in terms of population change, Indians in Singapore fared slightly better than those in the Peninsula, even here their numbers lagged behind the other major Asian communities.¹⁶¹

In assessing the impact of the Occupation, the other key issue concerned how Indian involvement in the INA and IIL affected socio-political developments both in India and the diaspora in the ensuing period. Previous studies show that the INA certainly left an imprint on Indian politics in the aftermath of the war. By late 1945, Indian public opinion had come to view INA soldiers as patriots. News of Subhas' death had added to public sympathy for these detainees. British authorities, alarmed at the prospect of political unrest, were pressed into limiting the prosecution of INA personnel only to those considered to be '[a] danger to security'.¹⁶² Indian National Congress leaders, even if they may have been opposed to the INA during the war, quickly recognized the political value of supporting those detained. At the public trial of INA personnel charged with treason at Delhi's Red Fort, which began in early November 1945, Nehru himself participated in the defence of key INA officers—Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, P. K. Sahgal, and Shah Nawaz Khan.¹⁶³ In the midst of the trial, violent demonstrations erupted in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and the Red Fort was besieged by thousands of protestors. These INA officers were convicted on 3 January 1946, but political expediency forced the British Commander-in-Chief to commute their life sentences so that they were immediately released.¹⁶⁴ By that time, stories of the INA's valour had

inspired even British Indian military personnel.¹⁶⁵ Sympathy for INA detainees, along with demands for better conditions, wages and food, were crucial in informing the revolt of British Indian Navy personnel at Bombay harbour in February 1946. The spread of the revolt, growing protests by Indian nationalists, and the recognition by this time that Britain could not, for much longer, hold on to India, put paid to the possibility of further trials—effectively leading to the release of the remaining INA prisoners.¹⁶⁶

While INA personnel were hailed as heroes in India, the situation was quite the opposite in the diaspora. Following the Japanese surrender of Singapore, Indians (especially those connected to the IIL and INA), were immediately placed on the defensive in the multi-ethnic city as, 'I.I.L. and I.N.A. members were stigmatized as fascists and Japanese collaborators'.¹⁶⁷ Notable leaders were indicted for their connection to the Movement. Amongst these included N. Raghavan, John Thivy, S. C. Goho, and G. Sarangapani. The remaining IIL leadership adopted a low profile in the wake of public attacks against those branded as Japanese collaborators. The fact that the British re-occupation forces comprised mainly Indian soldiers, however, spared Indian civilians from even greater impetuosity by those seeking retribution.

Cracks in the pan-Indian unity fostered during Subhas' leadership of the Movement were immediately visible. Following the British arrival on 5 September 1945, Shinozaki remembers that, 'the Gurkhas ... [upon seeing] the INA's memorial tower ... began to knock it down. Many Indians nearby ... clapped their hands at this. I thought to myself, these same people were before in the INA'.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Indian Muslims and the Sinhalese, had organized 'victory parades' to welcome the Allied forces, during which they professed their unwavering loyalty to the British. Fear of persecution resulted in some functionaries of the IIL denying their connection to the Movement. Concerned over job prospects in the British administration, many educated Indians pledged that they had remained loyal to the British throughout the Occupation, and had only joined the IIL under duress. Others even turned against their IIL counterparts, informing the authorities of the latter's involvement in anti-British activities during the Occupation. Although fears of persecution amongst ex-functionaries of the Movement were allayed after the sentence of Dhillon, Sahgal, and Shah Nawaz was commuted in Delhi, developments during the interim period had taken a heavy

toll on the Indian leadership, and resulted in considerable divisiveness and ill-feeling.

That is not to suggest that the political passions aroused by the IIL and the INA experience were completely extinguished in the aftermath of the Occupation. The changing political landscape after the British takeover ensured that those who had been mobilized would not remain quiescent for long. Indeed, even as the British return had been welcomed by most inhabitants in the port city, the administration soon recognized that a return to the pre-war colonial order was unfeasible. The fallibility of the Empire had been exposed, and the experience of the Occupation had hardened the population. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which had quickly emerged as a major political force, flexed its power immediately after the British return, demanding 'the establishment of representative government; freedom of speech, assembly and association; the provision of free education ... provision of work and the control of prices of essential goods'.¹⁶⁹ In late 1945, while the high-ranking leaders of the IIL remained under investigation, lower-level Indian functionaries forged close connections to the MCP. In October 1945, with the MCP's support they formed the Indian Democratic Youth League in Singapore to disseminate 'anti-British propaganda particularly among ... discontented Indian youth'.¹⁷⁰ Former functionaries of the Movement were also heavily involved in the communist-backed labour unions that had mushroomed in Singapore and the Peninsula.

During Nehru's visit to Singapore and Malaya in March 1946, released IIL leaders such as Thivy and Raghavan were encouraged to re-establish an organization along the lines of the former Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM). This led to the formation of the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in August 1946, which would serve as an umbrella body representing Indian interests in the Peninsula and Singapore. The MIC, under Thivy, immediately sought to galvanize support by underscoring the organization's connection to the former IIL and INA. Its first major all-Malaya event was the celebration of 'Azad Hind Day' on 21 October 1946, marking the anniversary of the formation of Subhas Chandra Bose's Provisional Government.¹⁷¹ The MIC's attempt to galvanize support on that basis had limited resonance in the new political environment, where dissent increasingly took the form of mobilization along labour lines. The elite-laden leadership of

the Singapore Regional Indian Congress (SRIC)—the key affiliate of the MIC in the port city—was not well connected to labour. Moreover, the new Indian labour leaders were clearly suspicious of these elite, and resisted the possibility of handing over leadership. The *Malayan Daily News* commented: 'Labour organisations came forward and took on the leadership of the Indian masses under very trying conditions and [at] a time when the pandits of the CIAM thought it healthier to skulk in the background.... Labour today in the bitterness of past experience, has taken leadership unto itself.'¹⁷²

Divisions, increasingly manifest along communal lines, further undermined the MIC's attempt to foster Indian unity. Political developments in the subcontinent had deepened communal fissures in the diaspora. Hindu–Muslim relations in the port city deteriorated in the wake of the movement towards the Partition of British India. As news of communal violence in India spread, pitch battles between Hindus and Muslims erupted in areas of Indian concentration in Singapore. In June 1946, Hindu–Muslim riots in Singapore, 'resulted in the death of two and the arrest of forty-four on charges of illegal possession of arms'.¹⁷³ In August 1946, branches of the Muslim League in Singapore and the Peninsula, declared a one-day hartal in support of Jinnah's call for direct action.¹⁷⁴ This was followed by another round of Hindu–Muslim violence in Kandang Kerbau, Cecil Street, Kampong Java, and Geylang Serai.¹⁷⁵ Although British authorities were quick to clamp down on the violence, relations between Hindus and Muslims remained estranged till the end of 1947.

The revival of links with the subcontinent also sharpened ethno-linguistic cleavages within the community. The Dravidian Movement, which had been suppressed throughout the Occupation, once again emerged as a potent force, drawing together large segments of the Indian community under the Tamil banner. G. Sarangapani took the lead, reconstituting several Tamil organizations that had become defunct. A branch of the Dravidar Kazaghram party—initiated by Periyar in 1944—was also set up. A steady inflow of Tamil labourers arriving from the Madras Presidency bolstered the position of the Dravidian Movement. Connections were also established with the Tamil Muslim community, the South Indian, and the Nattukottai Chambers of Commerce, and 'an informal coalition was forged ... [with] Indian leaders of the Singapore F.T.U. (Federation of Trade Unions), such as P. Veerasenan'.¹⁷⁶ By 1947,

the Dravidian Movement in Singapore was in a position to stake a claim for Tamils to take leadership of the Indian community. In September 1947, decrying the decision by the colonial administration to appoint a north Indian to represent Indian business interests in the Singapore Legislative Council, Sarangapani urged Tamils to secure a hold of key Indian representative organizations:

We are always ousted under the pretext of being a 'section', although we form 80 to 90 per cent of the Indian population [in Singapore and Malaya].... now it is time to put an end to this usurpation of our rights.... Any Indian organisation which is not fully represented by the Tamils ... is not at all a representative body and is not entitled to speak on behalf of the Indian community...¹⁷⁷

The end of the Japanese Occupation in August 1945 had brought to the fore new issues of citizenship, political, socio-economic, and minority rights in the diaspora. Indians would take an active part in these processes—albeit in diverse positions. Some would play a key role in multi-ethnic political bodies tied to ideological and class-based interests, while others would concentrate on mobilization along pan-Indian or particularistic ethno-linguistic lines. Others still would turn to pan-Islamic formations, forging linkages with co-religionists in the Malay and Arab community. The negotiation of these diverse strands in the late 1940s and the 1950s would leave an important imprint on the position of the Indian diaspora in the independent city-state of Singapore that was to follow.

Notes

1. Joyce C. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1971), 119.

2. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K M Rengarajoo, Reel No. 7, 8 August 1984.

3. Romen Bose, *A Will for Freedom: Netaji and the Indian Independence Movement in Singapore and Southeast Asia, 1942–1945* (Singapore: VJ Times, 1993), 25.

4. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001182, Interviewee: Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (group interview), Reel No. 2, 23 August 1990.

5. Fred Saito and Tatsuo Hayashida, 'To Delhi! To Delhi! 1943–1945', in *A Beacon across Asia*, eds. S. K. Bose, A. Werth, and S. A. Ayer (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973), 181.

6. K. K. Ghosh, *The Indian National Army: Second Front of the Indian Nationalist Movement* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969), 152.

7. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 152.

8. Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of a Revolutionary* (London: Cassell & Company, 1959), 82.

9. NAI, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts of a Report on the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia by N. A. K. Mufti, Special Branch, Police, Singapore', 25 November 1945, reproduced in T. R. Sareen, *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study*, vol. 5 (1944–5) (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2004), 83.

10. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000050, Interviewee: Narayana Karuppiyah, Reel No. 2, 25 June 1984

11. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 152.

12. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K. M. Rengarajoo, Reel No. 6, 8 August 1984.

13. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000050, Interviewee: Narayana Karuppiyah, Reel No. 2, 25 June 1984.

14. IIL Headquarters, 'Department of Recruitment Circular', 13 July 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–4), 152.

15. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K. M. Rengarajoo, Reel No. 6, 8 August 1984.

16. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000549, Interviewee: Girishchandra Kothari, Reel No. 10, 16 April 1985.

17. Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (London: Hurst, 1998), 107.

18. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K. M. Rengarajoo, Reel No. 6, 8 August 1984.

19. IIL Headquarters, 'Department of Training Circular', 13 July 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 155.

20. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000549, Interviewee: Girishchandra Kothari, Reel No. 10, 16 April 1985.

21. Ibid.

22. NAS, Interview with Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (Group Interview), Accession No. 001182, Reel No. 2, 23 August 1990.

23. Lakshmi Sahgal, *A Revolutionary Life: Memoirs of a Political Activist* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997), 141–2, cited in Joyce C. Lebra, *Women against the Raj: The Rani of Jansi Regiment* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 76.

24. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001182, Interviewee: Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (group interview), Reel No. 2, 23 August 1990.

25. Ibid.

26. Lebra, *Women against the Raj*, 77.
27. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000146, Interviewee: B. H. Melwani, Reel No. 3, 15 December 1981.
28. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000204, Interviewee: Abdealli K. Motiwalla, Reel No. 2, 17 May 1983.
29. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000354, Interviewee: Hena Sinha, Reel No. 8, 21 October 1983.
30. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000127, Interviewee: Damodaran, s/o Kesavan, Reel No. 3, 19 November 1981.
31. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 158.
32. 'Subhas Chandra Bose's Speech', 24 October 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943-44), 239.
33. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 109.
34. 'Subhas Chandra Bose's Speech', 24 October 1943, 240.
35. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 160.
36. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025/09, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, Reel No. 7, 26 February 1982.
37. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 209.
38. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025/09, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, Reel No. 7, 26 February 1982.
39. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000354, Interviewee: Hena Sinha, Reel No. 8, 21 October 1983.
40. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 181.
41. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 78.
42. Cited in Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 124.
43. Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 222.
44. The following comprised the first Provisional Government of Free India: Subhas Chandra Bose as Head of State, Prime Minister and Minister of War and Foreign Affairs; Captain Lakshmi, the Minister of Women's Organization; S. A. Ayer as Minister for Publicity and Propaganda; Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Chatterji, Minister for Finance; and A. M. Sahay, as Secretary with Ministerial rank. Eight military advisers were appointed to the Government, all of whom were former British Indian Army Officers. The Government included a legal adviser, A. N. Sarkar, and seven civilian advisers comprising key IIL leaders of Indian communities in East and Southeast Asia: Rash Behari Bose from Japan (Supreme Adviser); A. Yellappa from Singapore; J. Thivy from Malaya; Karim Ghani from Burma; Debhnath Das and Sardar Ishar Singh from Thailand; and D. M. Khan from Hong Kong. INA Trial Papers, 'Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind by S.C. Bose', 21 October 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943-44), 220.

45. NAI, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 25 November 1945, 89.
46. Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 257.
47. PRO, WO 208/818, 'British Intelligence Assessment of Bose and His Activities in East Asia after his Arrival from Germany', 15 October 1943, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 212.
48. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001182, Interviewee: Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (group interview), Reel No. 3, 23 August 1990.
49. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts on the Activities of I.N.A. and Provisional Government of Azad Hind', reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 3 (1943–44), 282.
50. Ibid.
51. Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, 227.
52. Cited in Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, 228.
53. Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent*, 257.
54. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 279.
55. K. S. Giani, *Indian Independence Movement in East Asia: the Most Authentic Account of the I.N.A. and the Azad Hind Government* (Lahore: Singh Bros, 1947), 23–4.
56. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000127, Interviewee: Damodaran, s/o Kesavan, Reel No. 3, 19 November 1981.
57. Lebra, *Women against the Raj*, 57.
58. Author's interview with Ram Prasad, 12 October 2003.
59. Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent*, 256.
60. Ibid.
61. NAI, F. No. 164/INA, 'Extracts', 85.
62. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 284–5.
63. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000025/09, Interviewee: Dr K. R. Menon, Reel No. 7, 26 February 1982.
64. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 186.
65. Ibid., 183–4.
66. Michiko Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour on the Thailand–Burma Railway', in *Asian Labour in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 250.
67. Bruce E. Reynolds, 'History, Memory, Compensation and Reconciliation: The Abuse of Labour along the Thailand–Burma Railway', in *Asian Labour in the Wartime Japanese Empire*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska, 327.

68. Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour', 253.
69. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000263, Interviewee: Shanmugasivanathan, Reel No. 5, 7 April 1983.
70. Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour', 253.
71. M. Sivaram, *The Road to Delhi* (Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1967), 102.
72. Ibid., 101–2.
73. Cited in Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour', 253.
74. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000186, Interviewee: Eber Clever Rowell, Reel No. 13, 24 July 1984.
75. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000103, Interviewee: Dato Haji Mohamed Yusuf Bangs, Reel No. 6, 18 September 1981.
76. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 183.
77. C. V. Devan Nair served as the 3rd President of the Republic of Singapore from 1981 to 1985.
78. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000049, Interviewee: C. V. Devan Nair, Reel No. 6, 9 January 1981.
79. Kratoska, 'Labor in the Malay Peninsula', 243.
80. WO 325/56, 'Report on Coolie Camp Conditions on the Burma–Siam Railway during the Period November 1943 to August 1945', cited in Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour', 252.
81. WO 325/56, 'Report on Coolie Camp Conditions', 252.
82. Nakahara, 'Malayan Labour', 252.
83. Cited in Sivaram, *The Road to Delhi*, 182.
84. Cited in Toye, *The Springing Tiger*, 103.
85. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 199.
86. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 170.
87. Ibid., 121.
88. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 177.
89. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 173.
90. 'American Intelligence Report on the Activities of the Indian National Army', n.d., reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 2 (1943–44), 306.
91. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 203.
92. *The Syonan Shimibun*, 23 March 1944, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 3 (1943–44), 57–61.
93. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 204–5.
94. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 224.
95. Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 204–5.
96. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 194–7.
97. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 277–8.
98. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 196.

99. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 131.
100. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 199.
101. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 298–9.
102. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 131.
103. Ibid., 111.
104. Ibid., 112–3.
105. 'Netaji Week' was organized to celebrate the anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose's takeover of the Movement. NAI, INA Papers, 164/H/INA, Ministry of Defence Historical Section, 'Report by a British Agent on the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia', 25 November 1945, reproduced in T. R. Sareen, *Select Documents on Indian National Army* (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1988), 300–1.
106. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 182.
107. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 224.
108. Ibid., 124; 226–27.
109. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 182.
110. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 201.
111. Ghosh, *Indian National Army*, 189.
112. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 203.
113. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 125.
114. NAS, History Interview Accession No.: 000127, Interviewee: Damodaran, s/o Kesavan, Reel No. 5, 19 November 1981.
115. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 204.
116. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 001182, Interviewee: Dr S. Lakshmi and Colonel P. K. Sahgal (group interview), Reel No. 2, 23 August 1990.
117. A. J. Barker, *The March to Delhi* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1963), 226.
118. Toye posits that some fifty thousand Japanese soldiers died in the Imphal Campaign while Saito and Hayashida approximate the number of Japanese casualties at 65,000. Toye, *The Springing Tiger*, 125; Saito and Hayashida, 'To Delhi!', 207–8.
119. Sivaram, *Road to Delhi*, 202.
120. Hiroshi Shimizu and Hitoshi Hirakawa, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy: Japan's Economic Advance into Singapore, 1870–1965* (London: Routledge, 2002), 127.
121. WO 203/4499, 'Food Control Department (Syukoryo Ka)', cited in Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 252.
122. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000339, Interviewee: Valuppillai s/o Pandarapillai, Reel No. 3, 21 October 1983.

123. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 276.
124. Shimizu and Hirakawa, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy*, 129.
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126. Lee Geok Boi, *The Syonan Years: Singapore under Japanese Rule 1942–1945* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 1947), 140.
127. WO 203/4499, 'Food Control Department', 202–3.
128. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 103–4; 109–14.
129. NAI, INA Papers, 164/H/INA, Ministry of Defence Historical Section, 'Report by a British Agent', 25 November 1945, 285.
130. *Ibid.*, 301–2.
131. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000354, Interviewee: Hena Sinha, Reel No. 8, 21 October 1983.
132. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000355, Interviewee: Velayuthar Ambiaavagar, Reel No. 8, 26 October 1983.
133. Mamoru Shinozaki, 'My Wartime Experiences in Singapore', Oral History Programme Series No. 3 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), 89.
134. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 286.
135. Shinozaki, 'Wartime Experiences', 89–90; 94.
136. NAI, INA Papers, 164/H/INA, Ministry of Defence Historical Section, 'Report by a British Agent', 25 November 1945, 286.
137. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000339, Interviewee: Valuppillai s/o Pandarapillai, Reel No. 4, 21 October 1983.
138. Office of Strategic Service, United States Government, Report No. 226, 'Intercepted Radio Broadcasts', 287.
139. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000276, Interviewee: K. M. Rengarajoo, Reel No. 8, 30 January 1985.
140. Lee Geok Boi, *Syonan Years*, 245.
141. NAI, INA Papers, 164/H/INA, Ministry of Defence Historical Section, 'Report by a British Agent', 25 November 1945, 286–8; 302.
142. Shinozaki, 'Wartime Experiences', 94.
143. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 131.
144. Michael R. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), 101.
145. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism*, 101.
146. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 143.
147. F. No. 601/7378/H.S., 'Military Intelligence on the activities of the I.N.A. in Burma during 1945', reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 4 (1944–45), 178.
148. F. No. 601/7378/H.S., 'Military Intelligence', 176.

149. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000127, Interviewee: Damodaran, s/o Kesavan, Reel No. 5, 19 November 1981.

150. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000570, Interviewee: James Joseph Puthuchear, Reel No. 1, 15 June 1985.

151. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism*, 98.

152. *Ibid.*, 101.

153. Toye, *Springing Tiger*, 163.

154. NAS, Oral History Interview Accession No.: 000553, Interviewee: Mehervan Singh, Reel No. 22, n.d.

155. INA Trial Papers, 'Subhas Chandra Bose's Special Message to Indians in East Asia', 15 August 1945, reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 4 (1944–45), 205.

156. PRO, WO No 208/863, 'Military Intelligence Note on Last Movement of S.C. Bose', reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 5 (1944–45), 19.

157. Shinozaki, 'Wartime Experiences', 88.

158. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 102–3.

159. Based on statistics compiled in Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya*, 316, 318.

160. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 317.

161. These figures, as representative of the population change during the Occupation, are, however, subject to dispute. This is in part because the enumeration exercise was conducted two years after the end of the Occupation, during which time there was considerable emigration from, and immigration to, the city. Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 318.

162. F. No. 601/12539/H.S., 'Report on Security Measures Taken by the British against the Indian National Army during the War', reproduced in Sareen, *Indian National Army*, vol. 4 (1944–45), 256.

163. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 202.

164. Giani, *Indian Independence*, 164.

165. Some of the affected personnel were stationed in Singapore as part of the British force that retook control of the port city in September 1945.

166. Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, 209.

167. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism*, 141.

168. Shinozaki, 'Wartime Experiences', 95.

169. Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism*, 107–8.

170. Rajeswary Ampalavanar, *The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya, 1945–1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981), 20.

171. *The Straits Times*, 20 October 1946, 7.

172. *Malayan Daily News*, 24 April 1946, cited in Stenson, *Class, Race and Colonialism*, 147.

173. Ampalavanar, *Indian Minority*, 28–9.
174. *The Straits Times*, 16 August 1946, 3.
175. *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 September 1946, 5.
176. Stenson, *Class, Race*, 144.
177. *The Straits Times*, 30 September 1947, 7.

Conclusion

Once a sojourning crowd of mainly labourers and traders, by the mid-twentieth century the Indian inhabitants of Singapore had come to be empowered with a sense of identity and purpose, asserting their claims on the land on which they stood. Their historical journey from itinerant migrants in search of sustenance and profit to politically conscious stakeholders deserves a multi-layered analysis, sensitive to their agency amidst concurrent frameworks of influence, which informed their position. The fact that the port city was an open and porous site of confluence for the multiplicity of ideas that converged on its shores, and thus stood relative to events beyond it, was a truism, but its inhabitants were anything but passive recipients that were swept away by transnational currents. Rather, as agents, and by virtue of their unique vantage point in a frontier settlement that transformed into a metropolis of global significance, local Indians actively met the plethora of forces, negotiating their position vis-à-vis the powers at hand and external processes in motion, be they colonial ideology and control; regional developments in the Malayan hinterland; revolutions in technology and communication; continuity via connection to the Indian 'homeland'; or the adversities brought on by the Great Depression and the Japanese Occupation. In its contextualization of the history of Indians in colonial Singapore, this treatise has fundamentally sought to give precisely such credence to the role played by the people of the port city.

The Singapore Indian Experience vis-à-vis Malaya

As a distinct space, the experiences and identity of Indians in colonial Singapore stands apart not just as a condition of the diaspora that is different from the lives of Indians in the subcontinent, but in this case, apart also from the conditions of Indians in the Malayan Peninsula. This book has argued against the oversight in extant literature that subsumes the historical experiences of Singapore's Indians within those based in the Malayan hinterland. That is not to suggest that the experience remained altogether disconnected and mutually exclusive. In fact, just as the evolution of Indian society in Singapore was relative to external factors, its position vis-à-vis the hinterland must also be seen as such—relatively. In their conjoined history, especially after the British intervention in the Malay States from 1874, various points of interaction between the two surfaced, of people circulating across relatively open boundaries; on religious grounds such as through the pan-Islamic front in the wake of Britain's war with Turkey; on associational platforms such as the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) and the All-Malaya Indian Independence League (IIL); or even through underhanded solidarity, such as in the procurement of banned materials that passed from Johore to Singapore and circumvented British control.

That being said, this book has provided a concrete basis to show how the port city's experience diverged from the Malayan case. The plantation labour experience—and its related forms of exploitation under colonial authority, had limited standing in the context of Singapore's urban landscape. Instead, other forms of labour and its respective maltreatments such as the labour contractor system had a greater bearing. Relatedly, during this period, the urban economy also offered fewer employment opportunities for women, which, alongside regulations to enhance the number of Indian women on the plantation frontier, explained a very long-lasting and more glaring gender disparity in the port city. Further, there was greater diversity in the professions taken up by Indians in Singapore and consequently, an arguably more complex occupational class spectrum emerged. Added to this was the very specter of living in the urban environment of the port city, marked by multifarious connections to the outside world, which in turn influenced distinct responses in the diaspora. With such differences made

apparent, this book has attempted to distinguish the conditions of the port city's inhabitants rather than have their nuances diluted in a convenient pan-Malayan conflation.

Conflict and Collaboration—Complexity in the Diaspora

One of the interesting facts that emerge from this exploration of the Indian experience in Singapore is how strategic and contingent their responses and solidarities were in the port city. Indeed, from the onset of colonial establishment, tension—at times dormant, at other times palpable—existed alongside collaboration amongst its members. Their seemingly meandering positions were not, however, arbitrary, and need to be understood in the context of the complex composition of the diaspora in the port city.

Even as Tamils comprised the majority of Indians in Singapore, the diaspora was always a mosaic of diverse religious and ethno-linguistic groupings. If that disposition rendered the formation of communities along a particularistic core possible, conversely the context of living as a minority, also informed a pragmatic, or sometimes inspired, turn towards pan-ethnic or pan-religious unions. This was evident, for example, amongst the early Hindu pioneers, who set aside ethno-linguistic and caste-based boundaries in the common cause of constructing shrines and organizing festivals and processions; or the even wider pan-Islamic associations that Indian Muslims engaged in at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, when tensions arose, such unities could also quickly unravel, propelling a return to the compact particularistic core, or even widening rifts such as in the form of the contentious north-south divide, which remains alive even in current perception amongst Indians in Singapore. This division was clearly evident in the context of rights and representation in official bodies, as well as in the reactions of the diaspora towards political developments in the subcontinent, including the pro-Hindi stance advocated by Indian nationalists and, the Dravidian Movement-inspired, Tamils Reform Association's (TRA) opposition to this. In a similar vein, conflict such as through the Deepavali (mainly 'northerners') versus Thaipusam (overwhelmingly 'southerners') public holiday controversy in 1914, illustrated yet another dimension of the schism between north Indians and south Indians.

On such issues, colonial rule was never an innocent bystander. Much has already been said about policies put in place to create barriers between Asian sociabilities, for example, by marking out the landscape of early Singapore Town according to 'race'. The authorities also actively suppressed the potential of multi-ethnic alliances forged through secret societies by deliberately clamping down on Indian-dominated ones, and censoring Chinese secret societies that admitted Indian or Malay members. In this way, they kept the population in check and limited inter-ethnic collaboration, implicating in the process, the nature of multi-ethnic co-existence in the longer run. Following from the logic of such policies, there would have been pressures towards a crystallization of 'racial' identities, but the Indian case was complicated by the fact that colonial ideology and discourse went further, by reifying boundaries even at the intra-Indian level. Consequently, some segments of the Indian population were made out to be innately predisposed towards certain kinds of work—such as Tamil labourers from Madras of Adi Dravida caste for menial labour, while the Sikhs, highly regarded for their loyalty to the British during the 1857 Indian rebellion, were rewarded as a 'martial race', and therefore construed to be more apt as security personnel. With colonial regulation enforced, this racial ideology meant that those who could or could not work in respective areas of employment was frustratingly pegged to background. As Indian nationalism emerged as a political force, measures akin to 'divide and rule' according to religious divisions—employed blatantly in the subcontinent—were also adopted here. Accordingly, advisory boards—along Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim lines—were set up to represent Indians in a fragmented religious frame, which was quite unlike the unitary advisory board that the authorities established to represent the Chinese in Singapore.

In the complex diaspora of the port city, ascribed markers of difference and colonial policies were, of course, not the only informants of tension and collaboration. In the multi-tiered political economy of the port city, hierarchies of occupation, educational level, and class reinforced segmentation amongst Indian groups, even as they created the potential for alternate forms of solidarity. This was sometimes evident in fissures between the vernacular and English-educated Indian elite, or in the 1930s, as labour demands for better terms that conflicted with the interests of Indian employers. That already variegated disposition

was further complicated by differentiated trajectories of migration and settlement. Concerns about 'local born' candidates losing out to new migrants were manifest even in the late nineteenth century, when the colonial authorities began heavily recruiting English-educated professionals from India and Ceylon to join the civil establishment. The trepidation of long settled members when recent arrivals seemingly engineered a takeover of the Singapore Indian Association just before the Japanese Occupation represented another facet of such binaries. It is a sensitive subject that remains salient to the present day, where it is now contextualized as the dilemma between the rights of citizens versus the allure of 'foreign talent' vying for the economic prosperity of a global financial and trading hub. Even as this issue, in its contemporary form, has taken on a more formidable posture, clearly the right of stakeholders to job security and other related issues, had long emerged as potential conflicts of interest. In this way, the diaspora in the port city, was, and remains, a highly intricate creature—with layers of complexity between the 'old' and 'new' waves of migrants, sojourners, and settlers.

Indeed, with constant circulation in these early waves of migratory movement, the state of affairs of Indians in the port city is best described as being not only complex but highly in flux. The cyclical pattern of labour migration that was left unhindered while Singapore remained an extension of British India meant that even as a greatly diverse populace formed the residual base of the Indian diaspora, fresh input by layer upon layer of newer migrants was mostly unceasing. In this context, the transmission from 'homeland' to diaspora of information and way of life in general, was hardly ever a straightforward one. Tradition, cultural values, and religious custom such as by way of the performance of processions and rituals had to be adapted and reproduced in acceptable capacity under the watchful eye of the colonizers. Rules and regulations restricting festive display bred resentment amongst affected Indians towards the authorities and as a result served as a uniting front on matters of such grievance. Yet, this would later unravel as fissures within communities themselves, when members stood on opposing ends of either wanting to reform or retain a conservative approach to their socio-cultural lifestyles in the diaspora; the gaze of the colonizers occasionally being taken over by acts of self-censorship as the presence of kinsmen in the diaspora grew, sometimes leading to paradoxical pressures to conform more closely to ways of life

enacted in the 'homeland', even if these may have been repudiated or pragmatically set aside previously.

In the 126 year history detailed in this book, the pace at which these transformations occurred always remained unique to the conditions of the diaspora and never entirely in tandem with external forces of influence alone. As reasoned earlier, the settlers were agents in their own right and they were mindful of their position firstly as an inherently heterogeneous entity themselves and secondly, of their standing within a multi-ethnic polity that involved other major races such as the Chinese and the Malays. This type of environment engendered a heightened sensitivity amongst Indian inhabitants towards the twin notions of shared space and one's place in that space, it is both a sensitivity necessitating compromise and one that would later assume assertiveness in demands for the recognition of communal rights. In this manner, cultural matter in the diasporic context needs to be understood as a product imported from the 'homeland' that gets appropriated under colonial regulation and with respect to shared multi-ethnic space not just the one time, but is subject to repeated reassessment as conditions in the diaspora change.

Connections with the 'Homeland' and Beyond— the Port as a Site of Confluence

In the port city, the diaspora's connections to the 'homeland' came not only in diverse ways but were also multi-directional. It is then perhaps more accurate to say that connections *to* the 'homeland' were simultaneously met by connections *from* the 'homeland', and further shaped by transnational currents beyond the region. Ironically, the overarching colonial bridge of authority and imposition not only motivated these connections but also enabled their sustenance, most evidently through the large scale movement of people facilitated by the context of the Empire. In addition, there were a few key tools that connected Indians in the port city with not just the 'homeland' but also Indians circulating beyond the region. These were the revolutions in technology that improved both means of transport and communication, and which in turn greatly expanded the scale of migration and facilitated the swift reach of the press that notwithstanding colonial attempts at censorship, served as a regular political mouthpiece to disseminate propaganda in

order to rouse powerful sentiment in the populace. Collectively, they ensured that in the port city, the connection of the Indian diaspora to the 'homeland' was not just nostalgic, but also neoteric.

It is vital to bear in mind that the very openness of the port city also meant that its people were not just tempted by Western ideals of progress that emerged overwhelmingly with the global revolutions in technology and deepening control of the Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but were also constantly influenced by alternative ideas, perpetuated by triggers in the 'homeland' and the surrounding region. The appropriation of these alternatives, was not simply a product of the diasporic condition—which marked the outward gaze of the immigrant population—but also of frustration with the glass ceiling of colonial rule that made certain that their august credentials would never suffice for entry into the European-only highest strata of Singapore society. That frame, in turn often pressed them towards a modern engagement with their own traditions, which may have involved propensities towards reform, but concomitantly ensured that even these literati were not divorced from their diasporic roots.

As the diaspora kept abreast of developments in India and beyond, conditions ripened for the emergence of parallel socio-political forms in the port city. This was most apparent in the vigorous organizational activity and associational culture that emerged as the diaspora became more settled. Their initial concerns were socio-religious reform and communal rights, but over time grew increasingly politicized in tandem with developments in the 'homeland'. This was further catalyzed by the fact that Singapore, situated in/as a geopolitical hotspot, was a crucial stopover site for many influential political figures (that is, Indian nationalists and notables of the Dravidian Movement) and even mobilized passengers in transit (that is, *Ghadar* activists), who bypassed colonial ability to prevent interaction with local Indians. Their brief stay was on occasion enough to evoke the desired support for what then became a shared cause created through a united feeling of brotherhood, often in opposition to the British.

For the colonizers, these alternative sources of influence more often than not threatened the status quo and in effect risked, as in the case of the 1915 mutiny, an extemporaneous political overhaul. This in turn sparked colonial responses that involved a tightening of control through more extensive surveillance and censorship, and the frequency with

which the whip of 'banishment' was utilized. Such measures could contain, but certainly did not smother, the political hardening of identities, which, especially after the Great Depression, closely mirrored the politics of the subcontinent—with matching establishments of Indian nationalism with the Singapore Indian Association and the more 'radical' Indian Youth League; the Dravidian Movement with the Tamils Reform Association; and the Muslim League with the South Indian Muslim League. Each one an indication that the diaspora was afar but not adrift.

In this regard, pan-Indian unity could be realistically conceptualized in the event of war and control by an alternative (anti-British) colonial power. That being said, during the Japanese Occupation, mobilizing Indians in the struggle to overthrow British rule in India still required an intricate negotiation of the diaspora mosaic and sensitivity to its diverse concerns. Protection from abuse, escape from prisoner of war (POW) status or Japanese labour projects, were all powerful instruments, but ultimately leadership was crucial in gathering the support of the masses. In this regard the iconic Indian revolutionary Subhas Chandra Bose proved most successful. Yet, even as Indians in the port city were inspired by Subhas, their heavy involvement in the Movement must be taken in the light of the delicate position they occupied as being truly in the middle of it all. As such, rather than embrace blindly a sudden urge for patriotism that propelled them forward to serve 'their country', there is a need to be sensitive as well to other more pragmatic considerations to explain more fully why it was that thousands volunteered. Tragically, the all-encompassing sphere of influence that was Netaji's charm, ended up being mirrored by the merciless extent of hardship for the Indians in the port city; the evolution in concept of what 'total mobilisation' first signified and what it later came to mean—onerous demands and a grave fate for the Indian civilians—becoming darkly ironic. In light of such evidence, the book has argued that there is much to be debated about the general presumption that Indians suffered comparatively less during the Occupation. Rather, it has proposed that they were essentially stuck in the middle of unravelling (and changing) circumstance.

To Surmise

As a historical account, this book has purposefully structured the development of Indian society in Singapore in chronological order. It has

set out with a focus on Singapore Indian history within the period of colonial rule, from its point of establishment in 1819, through to 1945, when the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia disintegrated and the surrender of Japanese forces saw the British return to resume control, albeit in an environment hardened by the effects of war and the Occupation, with a population determined to lay claim to their rights in their home city.

In exploring this history, the book elevates Singapore's urban landscape-cum-port-city experience as the key site of analysis. It reveals both the distinct experience of Indians in Singapore, and accords to their journey a crucial role in informing Singapore's development overall—as a city; a multi-ethnic urban landscape; a commercial hub, and so on. The book has illustrated the importance of the multi-faceted nature of connections that existed between the diaspora and the 'homeland' and beyond, all of which enabled the growth and development of the port city. It gives precedence to the colonial outpost as having been integrally connected as an interlinked node relative to many others, over dominant threads of rupture, which tend to circumscribe the condition of the diaspora as separate, and linked mainly through nostalgia. In fact, as the book has shown, the connections here were real-time, active, and constantly informing developments in both the 'homeland' and in the diaspora.

While the scope of the book closes just after the British return in 1945, it leaves the readership with several provocative implications. The diaspora is at this point an agitated lot, no longer willing to compromise in the manner that its pioneers did. Their position in this regard, had significantly changed and the colonial framework that once dominated the activities of the migrants was, by 1945, a pale shadow of its former self. Enduring markers were now clearly reflected in the divisions that remained. They would grow increasingly complex in time to come, even as new imperatives and movements embellished the already elaborate texture of the diaspora in the port city.

Glossary

Adi Dravida	'indigenous people of Dravida land'; a term used in Tamil Nadu for the people traditionally treated as 'untouchables'
Adivasi	umbrella term for the ethnic and tribal groups who comprise the aboriginal population of India
<i>azad</i>	free
Azad Hind Fauj	Indian National Army
Bande Mataram	'Hail to the Motherland'; the national song of India
Baniah/Baniya	a diverse set of Hindu castes traditionally engaged in various types of business activities
Bengalee/Bengalese/Bengali	literally 'people from Bengal', although in Singapore the category was, throughout the colonial period, commonly used as an umbrella term for all north Indians
Bhaiband	'brotherhood'; a sub-caste originally from Sindh who came to be heavily engaged in transnational mercantile activities
Bhumihar	an upper caste community mainly found in parts of what are today the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

Brahmana/Brahmin	member of the highest division of the Hindu caste system; the priestly caste
Bugis	one of the largest ethnic groups in the province of Sulawesi, Indonesia
<i>chaiwallah</i>	tea vendor
Chettiar	when used generally, refers to mercantile castes from southern India, although often used specifically to denote the Nattukottai Chettiars, also known as Nakarattars, a prominent caste community hailing from an area that today straddles Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai district in Tamil Nadu, who were traditionally engaged in mercantile and money-lending activities
Chulia/Chuliah	a term commonly used in Singapore and Malaya to refer to Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast, who were heavily engaged in commercial activities
<i>chunam</i>	plaster
Churruck Poojah	'the hook-swinging festival'; a Hindu festival involving male performers suspended in the air by iron hooks embedded in their muscles, and swung round a tall pole
coolie/cooly	unskilled manual labourer
dacoit/dacoity	a bandit or armed robber; banditry
<i>darshan</i>	'sight'; usually used to describe a devotee seeing or beholding a holy personage, image or sculpture with reverence and devotion
Dawoodi Bohra	followers of a subsect of Ismaili Shia Islam, many of whom are found in Gujarat
Deepavali	the Hindu festival of lights, usually celebrated in the month of October or November

dhobi/dhoby	washermen
<i>durgah</i>	a Muslim shrine built over the tomb of a revered religious figure
Dusserah/Dussoharah	Hindu festival held in the month of September or October celebrating the triumph of Rama over Ravana
<i>ghadar</i> /Ghadar Party	'rebellion'; the name of an anti-British revolutionary organization and movement, formed in 1913 by Indians on the west coast of the US and Canada
godown	a warehouse, usually found at a dockside
Gowala	a caste traditionally engaged as cowherds in northern India, the term is also sometimes used generically for northern Indians engaged in dairy farming
<i>granthi</i>	the caretaker of a gurdwara and reader of the sacred Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, who also officiates at Sikh ceremonies
gurdwara/gurudwara	a Sikh place of worship
Hari Raya Haji	Muslim festival held on the tenth day of the last month of the Islamic calendar which commemorates the sacrifice of Ishmael by Abraham
Hari Raya Puasa	'festival of fast breaking'; Muslim festival celebrated at the end of the month of fasting
hartal	a strike or public protest
Holi	the Hindu festival of colours, celebrated during spring
<i>hundi</i>	bills of exchange
<i>imam</i>	a position of leadership in Islam; mosque prayer leader
Ismaili Khojas	a Muslim community, many of whom are found in Gujarat, and traditionally engaged in mercantile activities
Jana Gana Mana	national anthem of India

Jat	a peasant caste, mainly found in the Punjab and what is today north-western Uttar Pradesh
Jawi Peranakan	Muslims of mixed Indian, Malay, and sometimes Arab descent found throughout Singapore and Malaysia (especially Penang)
Jemadar	a junior Indian officer in the British Indian Army, with a rank approximate to that of lieutenant
<i>kampong</i>	village
<i>kangani</i>	overseer or foreman; an Indian labour recruitment system in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, used primarily in Ceylon and Malaya
<i>kati</i>	a unit of weight equivalent to approximately 600 grams used mainly in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia
Kempeitai	the military police of the Japanese Army.
Khatttri	a trading and mercantile caste mainly from the Punjab region
Khilafat	the Khilafat Movement (1919–24) was a protest campaign launched by Muslims in British India calling for the British Government to protect the position of the Ottoman Caliphate after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I
<i>kikan</i>	‘organization’; the Fujiwara Kikan, Iwakuro Kikan, and Hikari Kikan (each succeeding the other in that order) refer to Japanese military intelligence groups and liaison organizations which handled relations between the Japanese government/army and the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia
Kling	an appellation used in colonial Singapore and Malaya as a label for

	all southern Indians, but when used specifically, referred to Tamil-speaking Muslims; the term is now widely considered as offensive
Kongsee	a Chinese clanhouse
Kshatriya	a member of the second division of the Hindu caste system; the warrior caste
<i>lascar</i>	A soldier or a member of a ship's crew, mostly recruited from India
<i>maistri/maistries</i>	supervisor; a system of Indian labour recruitment in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, used primarily in Burma.
<i>mandore</i>	the head of a labour unit who usually took on a supervisory function
Marwari	an ethno-linguistic mercantile group originating from the Rajasthan region of India
masjid	mosque
<i>math</i>	monastic order
Memon	a Muslim community from north-western India, traditionally engaged in mercantile activities
<i>mirasidars</i>	hereditary land owners
<i>mohalla/moholla</i>	an area of a town or village; a neighbourhood
Moharram/Mohorum	Shia Muslim festival held annually and over ten days in remembrance of the death of Hassan and Hussain, the grandsons of the Islamic prophet Muhammad; also the first month of the Islamic calendar.
Muharram	
Mudaliar	an upper caste community found mainly in Tamil Nadu
Nadar	a prominent caste group in Tamil Nadu traditionally engaged in mercantile and entrepreneurial activities
Naik	a military rank equivalent to Corporal in the British Indian Army

Nakarattar	a prominent caste community hailing from an area that today straddles Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai district in Tamil Nadu, and who were traditionally engaged in mercantile and money-lending activities; <i>See</i> Chettiar
<i>naujawan</i>	youth
<i>noquedar</i>	ship captain
Onam	a popular festival in Kerala that commemorates an incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu, and is celebrated over a period of ten days in August and September
<i>padang</i>	an open playing field located in the prime business district of Singapore
Pallan	a caste group in Tamil Nadu, traditionally engaged in agricultural work and treated as 'untouchable'
Paraiyan	'drummer'; a caste group in Tamil Nadu, traditionally engaged as drummers during festivals and ceremonies and treated as 'untouchable'
Pongal	an abbreviation for the Tamil harvest festival, <i>Thai Pongal</i>
<i>pulau</i>	island
<i>punkah</i>	'fan'; large swinging ceiling fans were commonly used during the colonial period
Rajpoot/Rajput	warrior caste in northern India
<i>ryot</i>	peasant land holders
Ryotwari	a system used to collect revenue from land cultivators in British India
Saiva	followers of Saivism
<i>samaj/ samajam</i>	a society or movement
<i>sangam</i>	association, community
sepoy	an Indian soldier
<i>serang</i>	boatswain
<i>sivalinga</i>	a representation of the Hindu deity Shiva

Skanda Sasthi	Indian festival dedicated to the Hindu deity Skanda, usually observed in the months of October or November
<i>sook ching</i>	'purification through purge'; a Japanese military operation aimed at eliminating anti-Japanese elements from the Chinese community in Singapore
<i>taboot/tabut</i>	representations of the tombs of Hassan and Hussain, grandsons of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, taken out in procession during the Muharram festival
Sunni Vohra	a Sunni Muslim community found in large numbers in urban centres of Gujarat and Sindh
Thaipusam	a Tamil Hindu festival, celebrated on the day of the full moon in the Tamil month of Thai, which commemorates the birth of the Hindu deity Murugan
<i>thannah</i>	police station
thug/thugee	when used generally can refer to individuals engaged in a variety of criminal activities, when used specifically refers to an organized gang of Indian assassins and murderers who often used deception as their <i>modus operandi</i>
Timiti	the Hindu fire-walking festival originating from Tamil Nadu, which is celebrated in October or November
<i>tindal</i>	Indian petty officer in charge of lascars; supervisor of a gang of labourers
Vaisakhi	a festival celebrated in April by Sikhs and northern Indian Hindus, albeit for different reasons. For Sikhs, the festival commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa, or the order of fully initiated Sikhs, whereas for Hindus in northern India, the festival marks the beginning of the New Year

Vaishnava	Adherent of the branch of Hinduism in which the deity Vishnu or one of his incarnations (usually Krishna or Rama) is worshipped as the supreme God
<i>Vaniya</i>	when used generally, refers to a diverse set of castes traditionally engaged in business; also used specifically to refer to a caste group in southern India traditionally engaged in oil processing and trade
Vasantha Navarattiri	a festival dedicated to the worship of the Hindu deity Durga, held over nine nights, and during which a fast is usually observed
Vellalar	a high-ranking caste community from Tamil Nadu, traditionally engaged in agriculture and with significant land-holdings
Vinayakar Caturti	festival celebrating the birth of the Hindu deity Ganesha, usually held in August and September

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'No feeling of citizenship, no common desire to co-operate for future and general benefit, animates the mass, which like the tide, ebbs and flows at a particular period of the year, the flow bringing with it new and crude materials for the established institutions of the land, to exhaust their energies upon.'

—Edmund Augustus Blundell
Governor of the Straits Settlements, 1856

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