

# **“Rascally Pandies and Feringhi Dogs”: a study of British attitudes to Indians during the 1857 uprising**

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## **Introduction**

Indian history is, Stokes observes, popularly represented in the British imagination by three eras: Clive, the Sepoy Rebellion and Gandhi.<sup>1</sup> They stand out as the beginning, middle and end of Britain's presence on the subcontinent, drawing the fickle gaze through a combination of colourful events and their lively representation in the words and images recorded with such peculiar vigour by their protagonists. The opening gambit of the 'Mutiny' proper at Meerut on 10 May 1857 took most entirely by surprise, and the ensuing spread of the 'contagion' as regiment after regiment went up appeared overwhelming. Indeed, Fred Roberts, a Lieutenant in the Bengal Horse Artillery, reflected the general perception when he observed that the whole of Oudh was up against the British. The threat of outbreaks across India created enormous insecurity amongst the tiny British population, whose position was likened by an officer of the 13<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry at the heart of the crisis in Lucknow, to that 'of a man sitting on a barrel of gunpowder.'<sup>2</sup> For the modern reader, hindsight comes to the rescue, reminding us that the story has a satisfactorily Belloc-esque ending in store for the British: the villainous sepoy justly punished and rightful dominance reaffirmed, although nuanced now with the rhetoric of concerned liberalism. However, the men and women who suddenly found themselves fleeing homes in the cantonments from their own domestic and military servants could draw little succour from precedent or history. One result of the uncertain future facing these fugitives in their own Raj was an outpouring of writing detailing their battle for survival, a great deal of which has been published. It has been matched by an equally avid readership down the years.

These letters, accounts and journals give a fascinating insight into the currents of contemporary thought and feeling, clustered at the intersections of race, culture, religion and ideology that characterised both rebels and rulers. They form a highly partisan body of literature, even propagandistic at times, as the question of allegiance become one of increasingly vital importance. This study will mainly consider material published by the British protagonists, men and women, during or soon after the so-called Mutiny. The bulk of the sources used will be diaries, journals and letters, although some narratives, memoirs and histories will also feature. The special value of this material is the spontaneity with which it was written, exempting it from much of the distorting historiographical awareness that

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<sup>1</sup>E. Stokes, *The Peasant Armed*, p.1

<sup>2</sup>M. Edwards (ed.), *Maria Germon's Lucknow Journal*, p.18

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informs later work. That is not to say that it is free of historiography altogether – far from it. However, as the most primary of primary sources, it lacks the fissure between historiography and history itself which time characteristically jemmies wider. This study necessarily focuses heavily on British accounts, since Indian writing is rare in the English language, and, in the case of the few exceptions, heavily tinged with British complicity and patronage.

I don't mean to imply that these accounts provide a more 'truthful' version of events, for the circumstances of their writing clearly militates against the expression of balanced, carefully weighted arguments and feelings. Quite the opposite, in fact, as will be shown below. But it is precisely the magnifying effect of the crisis which is valuable, because it amplifies subtle undercurrents of British thought, and opens a window onto the personal sentiment usually disowned by Victorians in more normal times. As the sociologist Michel Crozier argued in a more modern context, 'crises are providential for the sociologist. They reveal the hidden truths of a social system better than anything else.'<sup>3</sup> Ignoring its breathtaking lack of empathy, this maxim holds equally true for the historian, if s/he can pick their way through the minefield presented by such emotive sources. As a crisis, the Indian Uprising exposes a seam of feeling whose rich pickings, once extracted, can be crafted into a valuable analysis of different aspects of Anglo-Indian social relations. With just such a goal in mind, this study proposes to divide the topic into three sections for examination through the sources. In a first part, the intrinsic attitudes of the British towards their Indian subjects will be discussed, followed in a second part by an analysis of the impact of experience in India on those attitudes. Lastly, it is hoped to draw on those findings to make some conclusions on the role and significance of this sort of colonial discourse.

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<sup>3</sup>M. Crozier, *The Stalled Society*, p.124

### Intrinsic British Attitudes

William Russell was *The Times*' Special Correspondent in India, his boots barely scrubbed clean of the mud of the Crimea when he arrived in Calcutta in the first days of 1858. Over the course of the fifteen months he spent reporting from India's most unsettled areas, he kept a detailed diary from which to draw future material, and while still on the high seas bound for Calcutta, he penned this vignette of the archetypal British officer and his attitude to Indians:

"By Jove! sir," exclaims the Major, who has by this time got to the walnut stage of the argument, to which he has arrived by gradations of sherry, port, ale, and Madeira, - "By Jove," he exclaims, thickly and fiercely, with every vein in his forehead swol'n like whipcord, "these niggers are such a confounded sensual lazy set, cramming themselves with ghee and sweetmeats, and smoking their cursed *chillumjees* all day and all night, that you might as well think to train pigs. Ho, you! *Punkah chordo*, or I'll knock - Suppose we go up and have a cigar!"<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the preceding paragraph, it is clear that Russell wanted to expose the irony of the Major's view. This is remarkable in itself, and the rest of his diary confirms that he was a steadfastly independent analyst of issues that many took as unquestioned fact. However, placing aside Russell's journalistic agenda, this image provides a useful starting point, in that it reflects a perceived reality.

Let us begin by noting the occurrence of the term "nigger," which contained pejorative connotations of West Indian slavery, and was, even in 1857, far from being a polite or acceptable appellation. The word appears in several of the sources, generally falling from the tongues of the rougher soldiery: 'It is charming to see the contempt with which Gunner Thomas Smith... elbows off half a dozen puny, gasping, grunting coolies... with a "Be off with you, Niggers!"'<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, talk of "having a crack at the niggers," and "polishing-off niggers" is usually the result of prodigious alcohol consumption or fury after reports of atrocities.<sup>6</sup> However, Atkinson's famous satire of 'Our Station' hinted at a more serious, endemic double standard in the British. Take, for instance, his sketch of 'Our Judge': 'There you see him in his court – niggers – ten thousand pardons! no, not niggers, I mean natives –

<sup>4</sup> W. Russell, *Mutiny Diary*, p.8; V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.7

<sup>5</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.43

<sup>6</sup> W. Russell, *Mutiny Diary*, p.67

sons of the soil – Orientals – Asiatics, are his source of happiness.’<sup>7</sup> The implication is, that in spite of British evangelism and Utilitarian rhetoric, and notwithstanding Government’s heavy reliance on servants, native soldiery and *pundits*, officials tended to feel that at heart, they ruled a land of ‘niggers.’ If this was a widespread tendency, it was flaunted by some, such as Major Barnston of the 90th Light Infantry, who arrived by troopship from Russia on 29 August 1857. In a letter to his brother, he described his first experience of the *palanquin*: ‘Such a miserable conveyance, between the heat of it and the moaning and groaning of the unfortunate animals - four niggers (with their faces hideously streaked with white paint, and each rib marked out in white) - who carried it.’<sup>8</sup> He and Majendie, as examples from the sources, both seem very apt to refer to ‘niggers’ as a matter of course, in spite of the former’s surprising enthusiasm for the qualities of the Russians and the Chinese that he encountered in Singapore. Edmund Hope Verney, a Mate of the Shannan Naval Brigade sent to Lucknow, wrote that ‘the English residents generally appear to me very prejudiced against the natives, and show this in their behaviour.’<sup>9</sup> When allied with the words of an anonymous Resident, an ugly scene is set: ‘The Sepoy is esteemed an inferior creature. He is sworn at. He is treated roughly. He is spoken of as “Nigger.” He is addressed as a “suar” or pig, an epithet most opprobrious to a respectable Native.’<sup>10</sup>

What emerges is a sense of the contempt in which the British generally held the East India Company’s Indian charges. Docking in Calcutta, Majendie observed with complacent amusement his compatriots’ ‘unjust, though somewhat natural desire to throw every nigger as he came on board over the vessel’s side.’<sup>11</sup> As even the title of his memoirs, *Up Among the Pandies* shows, acclimatisation did nothing to alleviate his dislike of the Indians initially described as ‘quite realizing one’s *beau idéal* of imps and others the inhabitants of “another place.”’<sup>12</sup> A commonly held view, here expressed by Fred Roberts, was that ‘all Natives are the same,’ indicating the sort of ignorance that many considered quite acceptable. His reasoning lead him on to conclude that the uniformity of the Indian’s character made British rule as detested in the Punjab as it was in Bengal. Thereafter, his letters frequently descended into exuberant schoolboy metaphor in descriptions of ‘giving the Pandies a damn good thrashing’ in ‘jolly’ sorties against comically fleeing rebels.<sup>13</sup> Red-blooded hunting metaphor

<sup>7</sup> G. Atkinson, *Curry and Rice*

<sup>8</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, pp.221-22

<sup>9</sup> G. Verney, *The Devil’s Wind*, p.103

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from S. Sen, 1857 in W. Broehl, *The Crisis of the Raj*, p.43

<sup>11</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.11

<sup>12</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.11

<sup>13</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.56

is also common, where the escaping Sepoys or dispersing insurgents were described almost as sport for the British bulldogs and their cavalry.<sup>14</sup> For a display of the most astonishing lack of compassion, even by his own mean standards, we could do worse than to turn to the dependably prejudiced Major Barnston. In praise of Calcutta's scavengers he wrote, 'I don't know what we could do without them; all the dead niggers and every sort of filth is all nicely cleared away by morning, and nothing but clean, white bones left.'<sup>15</sup>

This same contempt is particularly evident in the way the British treated their servants, especially the darker side of the relationship that was mediated by the Sahib. Russell was horrified by the physical violence meted out to domestics, euphemistically termed 'licking', branding it indefensible by any man of feeling or education. Although Indians also beat their servants, they usually abided within mutually understood parameters that the British simply did not respect. In Fategarh, for instance, Russell found two domestics 'covered with plasters and bandages, and bloody... lying on their *charpoys*, moaning,' while the avenging Sahib sat 'sulky and sullen... [but with] no fear of any pains or penalties of the law.'<sup>16</sup> Roberts wrote rather ominously that, 'I have always kept my servants well in order, once they trip, I give it them well,' leaving little doubt that a good 'licking' would have been on the agenda.<sup>17</sup> Nor were these excesses confined to a strict master-servant environment, as it was reported that railway employees had been cautioned over their use of 'excesses and violence' against Indian navvies, too many of whom were getting killed. The law was no refuge for the victims, as many, including Russell and Dunlop, worriedly pointed out. The British were nigh on unaccountable, a sentence being unlikely in a native-brought trial before British judges during peacetime, let alone under the duress of Martial Law.

Demonstrating only too clearly the low value placed on an Indian life are the flippant descriptions of accidental killings. Lamenting his poor courage, Dunlop told of a Eurasian Volunteer, for example, who, imbibing a quantity of fortifying rum to steel himself for a sortie, enthusiastically shot a loyal Jat in the head and had to be sent home in disgrace.<sup>18</sup> The story was related in the terms of a regrettable tragicomedy. Sita Ram Pande's participation in this sort of value judgement through his view that, 'every Sahib taken away was as bad as two hundred men lost,' demonstrates clearly its pervasiveness.<sup>19</sup> Another derogatory motif

<sup>14</sup> G. Verney, *The Devil's Wind*, p.99; F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.62; V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.178

<sup>15</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, p.223

<sup>16</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.129

<sup>17</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.56

<sup>18</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.78

<sup>19</sup> Lunt (ed.), *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p.114

that recurs in the sources is the likening of regimental servants and animals by grouping them together in the stock-taking exercises that followed an attack. For instance, on 6 March before Lucknow, Russell wrote that 'the cannonade became brisk... so we went back to breakfast with a running accompaniment of round-shot flying before us into our camp. Some natives and some bullocks and camels had been killed...' <sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, after heavy fighting there on 11 November, Barnston reported complacently, 'several horses, niggers and bullocks killed during the two days.' <sup>21</sup> The apparently widespread British 'habit of putting natives "out of pain" as if they were animals,' horrified Russell, but not so much as to prevent him from succumbing to the popular comparison between Sepoys and monkeys. <sup>22</sup>

Further up the social scale, even powerful Indian allies were subjected to insolent treatment by the British. One famous example was the occasion that the Rajah of Patiala was required to dispense with the noisy pageantry vital to a man of his status, solely because Sir John Lawrence had unthinkingly called for him on a Sunday. <sup>23</sup> More deliberately contemptuous was the welcome shown to Munura-ud-Daula. An ex-minister of Oudh and related to the Royal Family, he was kept waiting with his retinue 'on broken chairs' for an audience with the Chief Commissioner by a pair of bickering British orderlies. <sup>24</sup> This neglect of the courtesies and ceremonies attached to power was a feature of British administration dangerously at odds with Indian expectations, particularly during the Uprising, as Magistrates delivered summary justice from horseback, in shirtsleeves or even from the bath. Interestingly, Russell compared the British official's approach to Indians with the manner in which a landowner might 'call on a gamekeeper in his cottage.' <sup>25</sup> Such a choice of metaphor testifies to the link, albeit unconscious, that British ideology made between conceptions of class and race, whose implication was to cast Indians as a sort of underclass. In this sense, at least, British racism was merely the expression of snobbish class attitudes in an appropriately distant foreign setting, and Indians were not its only victims. In a moment of revealing panegyric, the editor of Private Henry Metcalfe's *Chronicle* flattered his subject with 'a bouquet as of good wine which one has noted among the young men of these families.' Nor was it in any way likely that the delightful nose of the Metcalfe '57 would be spoiled by the Private's tendency to talk of 'Paddy Whacks.' Majendie was similarly scathing about the Highlanders, whose acquaintance near Oonao he reportedly made to the detriment of his ears,

<sup>20</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.70

<sup>21</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, p.239

<sup>22</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.80; R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.76

<sup>23</sup> C. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, p.37

<sup>24</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.118

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an opinion shared by Roberts, who relished the native belief that they were the avenging ghosts of murdered British women (based on the confusion of kilts and skirts). In proportion to their domestic prejudice, these three examples from the sources are also the most overtly racist in their Indian accounts, testifying to a link between the two.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the British maintained a stubborn attachment to social forms, even under the most testing conditions. One of the few surviving accounts from Wheeler's Entrenchment in Cawnpore reported that 'every woman retained her modesty and refinement to the last,' regretting, however, that 'it was not possible to observe etiquette and decorum.'<sup>26</sup> In Lucknow, the story was much the same, with contraptions for the maintenance of decorum erected in the women's rooms, and the habit of calling (albeit card-less) kept up. Even in the sweltering heat and indomitable grime of the campaign, regular soldiers wore their stiff collars and tight jackets, often changing shirts several times daily. The exceptions were revealingly rare amongst European troops, confined to the occasional khaki irregular and the so-called 'Dirty Shirts,' a gallant European regiment serving before Delhi which dispensed with formal dress. Such proper behaviour was the backbone of British society in India, to the confounding of newcomers, as Lady Canning protested in her diary: 'Neither C. nor I can get at all the people. Not a man has ever voluntarily spoken to me since I came to India.'<sup>27</sup>

Faced with such an abundance of evidence, Russell was led to the sorry conclusion that, 'the favourites of heaven - the civilisers of the world - *la race blanche* are naturally the most intolerant in the world.'<sup>28</sup> It is a charge that even he is not free of, as can be shown in a single example: that of his description of a servant's wife as 'fair to look upon, *in spite* of her Vandyck-brown skin.'<sup>29</sup> Racial intolerance and snobbishness are faces of the same coin, both built on a sense of superiority that we will come to shortly. It was perhaps an early example of the 'Island Mentality' in a continental setting. For 'India, be it observed in English speech, means the Europeans in India,' as Russell noted.<sup>30</sup>

Britons possessed a perhaps understandable tendency to seek out their own kind for company; a fact reflected in the very layout of camp and cantonment, which so clearly

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<sup>25</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.194

<sup>26</sup> J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.116

<sup>27</sup> C. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, p.28

<sup>28</sup> W. Russell, *Mutiny Diary*, p.8

<sup>29</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.163 (my italics)

<sup>30</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.285



separated Indian and European lines. Accordingly, Russell is alone among the sources<sup>31</sup> (beyond Atkinson's *Our Station*) in reserving explicit scorn for the insularity of station society. His criticism was aimed at Simla life, as he encountered it during his long convalescence, but even this little was expunged from the published diary by its editor, Michael Edwardes. In general, this was because the community mischievously sent-up by Atkinson found the rounds of calling, leaving cards, attending dances, dinners, amateur dramatics and church events a source of strength, particularly the Memsahibs whose lives were otherwise unencumbered with excessive activity. The ladies of Lucknow, for instance, initially set themselves to 'working, reading and music,' much as usual, in spite of the enemy menacing the Residency compound's perimeter. Their besieged group displayed a sense of solidarity that was only tested by extremes, such as selfishness with supplies or Martin Gubbins' conspicuous plenty. Ruth Coopland, an Agra inmate, described the 'healing effect' of the companionship of her little group of British women who had by the end of the year established a regular round of diversions and excursions. One such, in December, was held at the Taj Mahal: 'It was a very gay scene. In one of the mosques of the Taj, all the ladies, children, officers and soldiers were gathered; and here and there might be seen a native, looking green with rage at their sacred building being thus desecrated.'<sup>32</sup> The solace that the British found in one another as compatriots on foreign turf is evident in Muir's petition to God, 'with what pleasure we shall again renew regular postal communications! It is a strange feeling to be cut off from the world [i.e. the British] on all sides.' Leaving the native branch of the army 'at the expense of some steps,' due to dislike of Sepoy conduct, Major Hodson (of Delhi and Lucknow fame) commented of his transfer to the (European) 1<sup>st</sup> Fusiliers that, 'it is pleasant to have white faces about one, and hear one's own tongue spoken.'<sup>33</sup> A similar sense of relief colours Russell's descriptions of his stay at 'Luddylo Cazzle' outside Delhi, the home of Commissioner Saunders, where he enjoyed British company and comfort *en route* for Simla.

Superiority was asserted in numerous ways which, though predicated on, did not necessarily directly express, the racial contempt demonstrated above. Hodson, for instance, expressed a common distaste for the 'regular Indian', or the Indianised Englishman, accordingly excluding half-caste children from an Asylum he was deputed by Sir Henry

<sup>31</sup> beyond the exceptional examples of Atkinson's *Our Station* and the noted critic Emily Eden who in *Up The Country* declared herself 'not very fond of Englishmen out of their own country,' exclaiming 'How some of these young men must detest their lives!' (J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.12)

<sup>32</sup> J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.225

<sup>33</sup> Hodson, *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, p.28

Lawrence to build near Simla in 1847.<sup>34</sup> His was a gradual change of attitude, perhaps reflecting the increasing confidence of the British as they consolidated their hold on the sub-continent. Although in 1846 his patron and friend, Lawrence, drummed into him the importance of learning Hindi, his diary had already begun to refer to 'niggers,' where in previous years he had preferred the term 'native.' In an account of his leadership of the Meerut Volunteers, or *Khakee Ressalah*, Dunlop reflected that the French, Germans and Italians all assimilated better in India than the English.<sup>35</sup> The specific exigencies of rule undoubtedly explain a measure of this contrast, as the British needed to maintain a culture that underlined and justified their dominance, arguably requiring a more coldly official approach to dealings with the ruled. Indeed, Dunlop continued that 'it is a patent fact, that the proud contempt which the Anglo-Saxon bears to the Asiatic has proved, to a great extent, the salvation of our Indian Empire.'<sup>36</sup> This 'proud contempt' that was such a feature of the Briton in India was actually a crucial part of the ideology and institution of government. In Russell's usual pithy idiom: 'my skin is the passport – it is a guarantee of my rank.'<sup>37</sup>

Thus, even instances of rapprochement were carefully portrayed in an ambivalent light, carefully avoiding any compromise with the social necessity of superiority. At the outbreak of the Mutiny, for example, Hodson was charged with raising a new regiment of native troops, largely Sikhs and Afghans, christened the Guide Corps. His success was such that, on returning from leave in November 1857, devoted Guides reportedly 'threw themselves down before the horse with tears streaming down their faces,' some having even been to Ambala just to 'hang around' his steps 'like so many faithful dogs.'<sup>38</sup> There are parallels here with Hodson's more famous kindred spirit, General Nicholson, whose reputation in the Punjab was gloatingly illustrated in several of the sources by the following story:

'They [the Sikh soldiers] used to be admitted to his tent in bodies of a dozen at a time. Once in his presence, they seated themselves on the ground, and fixed their eyes on the object of their admiration, who all the while went steadfastly on with whatever work he was engaged in, never even lifting his eyes to the faces of his mute worshippers. Sometimes... one of them would prostrate himself in prayer. This was an offense, against the comittal of which warning had been given, and the penalty never varied:

<sup>34</sup> Hodson, *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, p.32

<sup>35</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah*

<sup>36</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah*, p.157

<sup>37</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.166

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three dozen lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails on the bare back. This they did not mind, but on the contrary rejoiced in the punishment.'<sup>39</sup>

Wilberforce, who related this story, also mentioned a sect of 'wild fakirs' on the border that idolised 'Nickal Seyn' as some sort of deity. In both these cases, and others like them, the author presents his Indian subjects as a comical spectacle. Their loyalty is related to a charismatic individual, rather than British rule, illustrating yet another curious aspect of the Indian character, justifying the general belief that it was at best unreliable, at worst rotten.

Jane Robinson takes a slightly different stance on the gulf between the races, arguing that it was the appearance of 'an avatar of fair young English maidens, with the bloom of Western summer still on their cheeks,' that distracted British officers from their duties. 'The pleasures of the parade ground palled; the *babalogue* [paternalistic term for Indian soldiery] were whining interruptions all of a sudden, and the *bibi* [Indian mistresses]... became embarrassing and inconvenient.'<sup>40</sup> Either way, the distance was mutually accepted on ideological grounds, for as Mainodin wrote, 'however the British may regard themselves, they are regarded by the natives as trespassers.'<sup>41</sup> The British sense of exclusivity was predicated on deeply ingrained feelings of difference; that which had become the idiom of much colonial thought on India after the failure of the reform of the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a situation that was growing more pronounced with time. In 1837, a Farukhabad judge (later passed over for promotion) observed that, 'the majority purposely keeps aloof from the people, wrapped in their own dignity, which they think would be lowered were they to hold any communication with the natives.'<sup>42</sup> By 1858, however, this state had deteriorated, and Russell could note that 'there is no bond of union between the two, in language, or faith, or nationality.'<sup>43</sup> The Mutiny merely supplemented the existing taint of Indians with 'the mark of Cain', magnifying a polarising trend, and it is to this effect that we must now turn.

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<sup>38</sup> Hodson, *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, p.382-83

<sup>39</sup> J. Hewitt, *Eye-Witnesses of the Indian Mutiny*, p.34

<sup>40</sup> J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.13

<sup>41</sup> C. T. Metcalfe (Trans. Ed.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, p.31

<sup>42</sup> P. Mudford, *Birds of a Different Feather*, p.147

<sup>43</sup> P. Mudford, *Birds of a Different Feather*, p.147

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### **The Catalyst of India**

The experience of India found different expression among the Company's servants. Underlying this difference are essentially only two factors: the length of Indian service, and the particular branch of that service. On either side of the civil-military divide, there is an important distinction to be made between career India hands and those brought in to deal with the emergency; Roberts and Majendie clearly fitting into the latter category. Long-serving civil and military officers such as Hodson, Jacob and Dunlop were less given to reminiscences about the Alma Mater, and more apt to get on with the job in hand. However, the evidence of the sources suggests that the greater acquaintance with local life and its social structures learned from an important civil appointment made individuals even better disposed towards local inhabitants. Take, for instance, a Banaras judge's relation of his flight to Cawnpore via Dhurumpore, where a local *talukdar*, Raja Hurdeo Buksh, concealed and looked after a group of British fugitives. William Edwards' narrative avoids the usual binary British – Native opposition that characterises many of the other sources. He, and Dunlop to a lesser extent, referred to those Indians he met by their official title of *Thankur, Talukdar*, and so on. This trend is supported by *The Memoirs, Letters, and Diary of the Rev. Henry S. Polehampton*, which is appropriately meek and mild in its comments: 'The people are as civil as possible. I walked the other morning through the city [Calcutta] about three miles. I was alone among thousands. If the English had been unpopular, should I not have been insulted? Nothing could exceed the well-mannered behaviour of the natives.'<sup>44</sup> Ignoring the rather shaky logic regarding British popularity, perhaps occasioned by the Reverend's distance from the 'Row' up-country, there is a genuinely benevolent, albeit patronising, attitude in evidence here.

In contrast to their military compatriots, these civil servants often spoke 'Hindustanee.' Although it should be said that ability in the vernacular probably owed more to the length of service than to the branch, it still makes sense to characterise cultural sympathy along civil-military lines because the military emergency swamped India with newcomers, naturally of a less exalted mental dexterity than their more select civil cousins. In Dunlop's words, civil officers 'know by experience the heavy labours and responsibilities of distant officials, and those under the command of bigoted regimental officers, who since their

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<sup>44</sup> E. & T. Polehampton (eds.), *A Memoir, Letters, and Diary of the Rev. Henry S. Polehampton*, p.88

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schooldays, having received little enlightenment beyond the literature of the manual and platoon, look to their own hazy views of Civil science as the perfection of reason; who deem the people made for them and their men, not themselves servitors of the public.’<sup>45</sup> This bitterness was in part a reaction to the way that civil and military service interacted, for while the former was conceived as the goal and reward of a successful stint in the latter, high civil servants could be recalled to a military role, as they did in 1857. The careers of such key figures as Sir James Outram, both Lawrences and Sir Henry Durand are ample illustration of the permeability of the civil-military divide, which must have served to undermine the sincerity and commitment of officers in both Services.

Nearly all contemporary accounts share a very strong reaction to certain events that took place during the suppression of the Uprising. Enshrined in the primary sources, they testify to the speed of the British gut reaction, and an ability to mobilise psychological forces faster than military ones. They have resonated down the historiography of the years without giving up their power, still provoking eponymous chapters in history books today. The Meerut outbreak is such an example, remembered for the killing of several officers and their families as Sepoys rampaged around the cantonments in the first serious action of 1857, although it was by no means the worst experience of its kind. It did, however, occasion a sea change in local British attitudes to their charges: one that is captured in Dunlop’s portrait of the Major Commandant of the Volunteers: ‘His portly figure, merry black eye, mildness of manner and uniform kindness to the natives, had given him among the sepoys of his own regiment, the name of the “Rajah Sahib.” But I have seen him almost frenzied, by the loss of near and dear relatives, look with horror on the native race, and advocate a retribution which would overwhelm the avengers as well as the former victims.’<sup>46</sup> Similar revelatory experiences undoubtedly resulted from individual incidents in many of the British stations. In the same way as Indian history has been popularly compartmentalised into three memorable eras, so the ‘Mutiny’ was characterised, and still is to some extent, by such crucial episodes. Inflated out of proportion to their significance, they could take on an almost sacred power, as shown by that prime example of this phenomenon, revealingly referred to simply as ‘Cawnpore’. It is in fact the name of a town (latter day Kanpur) just south of the Ganges, but in most cases it is used as shorthand for a full explanation of specific events that befell the British inhabitants there. That is, General Wheeler’s desperate defence of a feeble

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<sup>45</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.147

<sup>46</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, pp.62-63

entrenchment in its cantonments, his subsequent surrender to Nana Sahib's forces, and finally the ignominious massacre of his pared-down garrison of men, women and children.

The significance of the Cawnpore episode is not that around three hundred and fifty Britons were massacred, as other examples of such incidents could be found among both forces. Its provocation was twofold: Firstly, that the victims had been assured safe passage in return for their surrender, and secondly that around two hundred of their number were women and children, imprisoned and then killed on 15 July. It was a double transgression of the rules of engagement, and thus, more crucially still, a moral enormity for the British. Although Jane Robinson's book on women of the Mutiny, *Angels of Albion*, redounds with tales of feminine resourcefulness and stoicism in unpleasant circumstances, British morality looked on the presence of women at the heart of the trouble as regrettable, and decreed that they be untouched by the actual fighting. It was Nana Sahib's explicit attack on these women and children, involving them in the violence, which incensed so many about Cawnpore. In an epitaph demonstrating the pervasiveness of the British discourse, the Persian poet Ghalib encapsulated the almost holy sentiment regarding women:

"Oh, pity these fairy-faced, slim bodied women whose faces shone like the moon and whose bodies glittered like raw silver! A thousand times pity the children, innocent of the world, who put roses and tulips to shame and whose step was more beautiful than that of the deer and the partridge!"<sup>47</sup>

As if the massacre and stashing of two hundred corpses in a well were not horror enough, the incident was very quickly demonised with tales of children's eyeballs wilting on the tree trunk that had dashed out their brains, and, more subtly, the pitiful sight of little shoes and dresses lying tattered and stained about the notorious execution chamber, the Bibigarh. Many echoed John Chalmers' reaction, whose visit to the site of the atrocities incited in him 'feelings of revenge I never knew before,' the more forceful for his otherwise moderate letters.<sup>48</sup> Fred Roberts meanwhile told his sister in a letter of 25 August that, 'I would undergo cheerfully any privation, any amount of work, living in the hopes of a revenge on these cruel murderers... This feeling is shared by every European in the Camp.'<sup>49</sup> The Cawnpore experience in October was enough for Major Barnston to tell his brother that, 'I hope you will consider it a sufficient excuse for me to hang every black man I can get a particle of evidence against.'<sup>50</sup> It was almost unthinkable to say so, but there were those that

<sup>47</sup> Ghalib, *Dastanbuy*, p.32

<sup>48</sup> R. Terrell (Ed.), *John Chalmers' Letters from the Indian Mutiny*, p.129

<sup>49</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.45

<sup>50</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, pp.229

doubted the publicised extent of the horror. Russell was one such witness, Majendie arguably another, while Maria Germon recorded the incident on 18th July in a very neutral tone with none of the usual gory embellishments, even crediting rumours that some of the 56th Native Infantry had intervened on Wheeler's behalf at the fateful Satichaura Ghat.<sup>51</sup> However, such moderation was rare, as is shown by the breadth of awareness and depth of feeling about Cawnpore, observed by Russell on his journey up-country in the ubiquity of graffiti promising revenge and grisly retribution on the Sepoys. The British reaction was 'tribal... even atavistic,' and largely consensual, even *Punch*, a magazine not noted for its jingoism or unthinking patriotism leaping onto the bandwagon:

"And woe to the hell-hounds! Right well may they fear  
A vengeance - ay darker than we ever knew,  
When Englishmen, charging, exchange the old cheer  
For 'Remember the women and the babes whom they slew'"<sup>52</sup>

Massacres at Ambala, Jhansi and numerous other stations took on a similar symbolic importance in British perception, as did certain rebel leaders, such as Tatya Tope or the Begum of Oudh. The creation of foci of moral indignation around certain incidents located in time and space helped to validate and contemporise the stereotyping which was at the heart of colonial discourse. Being a two way process, the act of explanation provoked by the Uprising was to rebound back onto the rebels by forcing them to anticipate British reaction. For instance, ringleaders of the military uprising knew that they could better mobilise their comrades' support by firing prematurely on the British, for once this was accomplished, the whole regiment would be branded as insurgents, and individual moderation become pointless. This is Orientalism, of course – a system which characterised the way in which Anglo-Indian relations functioned.

Explanations had to be sought, and episodes such as Cawnpore only reinforced the innate sense of British superiority that has been discussed in the previous section. Against the Orientalist benchmark, the rebels not only disregarded the standard moral obligations of war by involving women and children, but they also lead a thoroughly uncivilised and typically disorganised campaign. On the first count, a proclamation attributed to the King of Delhi exhorted men, women and children of any age to assault Britons with 'stones, bricks, earthen vessels, ladles, old shoes and all other things, which may come into their hands.'<sup>53</sup> War waged by the innocent on the innocent was a double atrocity, and posed the British with a

<sup>51</sup> M. Edwardes (ed.), *Maria Germon's Lucknow Journal*, p.67

<sup>52</sup> From *Punch*, 3 October 1857 in J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.96

difficult dilemma over how to react. Rebels also used women and children for cover, as during their retreat within Delhi, or as hostages, because they knew the stiff British code relating to them. At Tuliwara near Bombay, for instance, insurgents threatened to massacre women and children in an unsuccessful attempt to get the safely shut-up British to surrender.<sup>54</sup> In battle before Aligarh in October, one 'villain' tried to ward off Roberts' avenging spear tip by grabbing a baby from its mother's arms and using it as a shield; to no avail, the baby being saved and the rebel killed.<sup>55</sup> That the British viewed, or certainly wanted to view, such behaviour as endemic, is clear from the endless references to the rebels in this language of child-killers and woman murderers.

On the issue of civility, Majendie grumbled that the rebels 'fire just the same at dinner hours (and they know perfectly well that we dine at 6pm) as they do at any other time of day,' continuing in mock schoolboy outrage, 'One night they were so horribly rude as to fire while we were playing a rubber of whist!'<sup>56</sup> Imagine! Similarly, the British put triumphant faith in the stories that the rebels were hopelessly divided, a fact confirmed by Indian civilian observers within Delhi, such as Ghalib and Mainodin, as well as spies and fugitives. Loyal sepoy's grudgingly conceded the assertion of Russell and others that the enemy performed less well under Indian officers, and in the British mind, all these factors combined to demonstrate that British rule alone was capable of providing order and consensus. Consequently, there are numerous reports of Indian villagers emerging joyously at the approach of torch-bearing British troops to enquire anxiously after the return of the British Raj - all apparently accepted at face value, without considering the obvious motive of self-preservation.<sup>57</sup>

The sources are rife with outraged references to the rebels' physical assault on the innocent, but they also reveal a more generalised form of this sentiment. Several accounts describe the ambient conditions that women were expected to endure in similar terms to the actual threat of violence. In Gwalior, for instance, 'it would be death to be exposed even for an hour to the sun,' and mindless of their ultimate fate, Roberts was likewise indignant at the exposure of the Cawnpore women in the entrenchment. It was a genuine problem, though, as every day more British soldiers dropped from cholera and sunstroke, sometimes falling dead out of a marching column at the roadside. Majendie confided to his readers that the hardships

<sup>53</sup> Quoted from *Freedom Struggle of Uttar Pradesh* in J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.56

<sup>54</sup> G. Jacob, *Western India Before and During the Mutinies*, p.219

<sup>55</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, pp.81-82

<sup>56</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.234



of campaigning in India even turned one sour against one's fellow man. These discomforts ranged from cockroaches, jackals and mosquitoes to 'plagues of flies' and the 'hot, muggy atmosphere.' There is a sense in which these complaints personify uncontrollable features of India, as if not only the rebellious inhabitants, but also the climate and terrain of the country were pitted against the British. Both the environment and the rebels used the same unacceptable tactic of targeting the vulnerable and especially, women. This kind of symbolism is also present in Sita Ram Pande's account of his career in the Bengal Native Infantry where he discussed, at one point, the dissolving rapport between European officers and their native troops. Not only were the Sahibs less friendly and familiar with Indian customs than they had been, but latterly they had also been less able to tolerate the sun than when he joined the Company in 1812.<sup>58</sup>

This discourse was expressed in a broader idiom than simple dislike of the climate. Underlining both a sense of British racial isolation, and the theme of a hostile country, there was a recurrent expression of profound dislike for the country itself. At times, it seems almost as if the British protagonists fancied themselves merely on regrettable business away from the Home Counties. Majendie was foremost in this constant harping on the shortcomings of life in India: from the food and the marching, to the heat, dust and the jaded pretension of the buildings which reduced even Lucknow's beauty to an illusion of distance. He described his first months as a newcomer, or 'Griffin,' as 'the most miserable I ever spent in my whole life.'<sup>59</sup> Indeed, during a valedictory tour taken after the conclusion of hostilities in 1858, the only admiration he ventured to express was reserved for the gallows on Delhi's deserted Chadni Chawk. Roberts referred often to 'dear old England' in a misty-eyed way, and empathised with his mother over the misfortune of having both her sons 'in this horrid country.' As the ever-quotable Russell noted in his *Diary*, 'one great and distressing result of the violent shock which the mutiny has given the whole of the social relations of India, is a deep dislike to the country and to its inhabitants, which is evinced by a constant cry for "Home!"'<sup>60</sup> Even the usually mild Reverend Polehampton admitted of the 'bitter trial' of a Lucknow Chaplaincy that, 'of course, I often long to be in England, but this is not a bad country to be in. There is plenty of good society.'<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah*, chapter 10; W. Muir, *Correspondence from Agra During the Mutiny*, p.97; F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.140 etc.

<sup>58</sup> Lunt (ed.), *From Sepoy to Subedar*

<sup>59</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.129

<sup>60</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.202

<sup>61</sup> E. & T. Polehampton (eds.), *A Memoir, Letters, and Diary of the Rev. Henry S. Polehampton*, p.100

The combination of siege mentality and an already well-developed sense of aloofness, caused a proliferation of symbolism aimed at polarising protagonists into two broad camps: European and 'Mutineer'. This propaganda ranged from British 'Cawnpore' motifs of woman-and-child slayers with insatiable lusts, to rebel attacks on targets representing British authority.<sup>62</sup> In general descriptions of rebel depredations, for instance, Muir reserved special horror for the destruction of postal and telegraphic establishments in Lucknow, the breaking of presses and tearing of books at Secundra, and the inevitable razing of the cantonments at Mathura. By the same token, Pande was in awe of the speedy development of the freshly conquered Punjab several years earlier, where *dak* bungalows, cantonments and post offices mushroomed within six months, causing him to exclaim: 'Truly, the English are a remarkable people!'<sup>63</sup> There was a clear politics to infrastructure as symbols of power, whose corollary was the profound satisfaction that many officers took from the wanton destruction and senseless pillaging of India's architectural beauty, Majendie, for instance, revelling in the pock-marking of the Kaiserbagh and gloating at the ubiquity of British graffiti.

Racial exclusivity, already a feature of pre-1857 Anglo-Indian relations, was simultaneously forced onto and adopted by the British community during hostilities, as the experience of battle and confinement obliged Britons to rely more on themselves. Hodson's bleak comment that 'the natives will not serve us now,' is symbolic, as even the omnipresent servants became hard to find. More dynamically, there was a good deal of tub-thumping patriotism, causing Muir to write, in contradiction to most of the evidence, that 'it has been a glorious struggle for Englishmen, this. Old Asadulla [a native judge and special friend] could not have spoken more strongly than you or I, of the courage of the little bands of foreigners, holding their ground every here and there.'<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Griffiths asserted that the retaking of Delhi had 'proclaimed to the world that British soldiers... had fully maintained the reputation of their ancestors.'<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Dunlop looked back on the Uprising as 'the time... when all who bore the Anglo-Saxon name in this country must join their brethren to defend their supremacy, or die hard in losing it.'<sup>66</sup> The experience of suppressing the Uprising brought the British together, and their ultimate success appeared to vindicate their rhetorical stance and feelings of superiority. Illustrating the irreconcilability of the races, Barnston

<sup>62</sup> It should be mentioned in passing that in spite of the numerous rumours, Muir was unable to substantiate a single instance of rape during his investigation for Lord Canning. He believed that Hindus would not sacrifice their caste, nor Muslims their honour, and more generally, that British detachment discouraged any familiar approach. He noted indifferently that some women of colour might have been assaulted in this way.

<sup>63</sup> Lunt (ed.), *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p.159

<sup>64</sup> W. Muir, *Correspondence from Agra During the Mutiny*, p.47

<sup>65</sup> C. Griffiths, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi*, p.187

cheerfully noted how the Indian followers of his force besieged in the Alambagh at Lucknow were starving because British hands had polluted the plentiful food supplies. It is also interesting to note a story from the Second Afghan War related in Sita Ram Pande's memoirs, regarding an incident where European troops discovered an injured European deserter, and began to kick and bayonet him brutally. For, what this shows is that if anything was worse than a disobedient member of a servile race, it was a turncoat of your own race; a good one turned bad. Similarly, women who had survived capture by feigning conversion to Islam were not welcomed back into society. It was as if they were damaged goods. Their preferable course of action would have been to do the noble thing and submit to death.

As well as reducing the rebels to a racial stereotype that was often used to tar all members of that race, the British imputed a similar activity to their enemy. On the few fleeting occasions that British writers tried themselves in a rebel's dusty sandals, they invariably looked back towards their own lines to describe the view. The usual result was something along the lines of 'a dog of an Englishman' or 'Feringhi dogs.'<sup>67</sup> The evidence of certain proclamations and pamphlets circulated in Oudh suggests that religious and political leaders, such as the Maulvi, did attempt to mobilise popular resistance on religious grounds. Mainodin quoted some light verse of Bahadur Shah's devising on 2 August, which ran thus: 'May all the enemies of the faith be killed today; the Feringhis be destroyed, root and branch! Celebrate the festival of the Eed Kurban by great slaughter; Put our enemies to the edge of the sword – spare not!'<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, *The Fateh-i-Islam* urged action against the 'execrable Christians,' ruled by 'that ill-starred, polluted Bitch' who had 'given her consent to the spilling of innocent blood.'<sup>69</sup> What this seems to imply is that the rebel cause was as heavily charged with nasty racial prejudice as was the British. However, the popularity of such propaganda cannot simply be inferred from the tumultuous following of the Maulvi in Lucknow, or the rapid arming of the *Chowrassee Des* region. Bhadra's article reveals that participation was often prefigured by existing fault lines in local communities, polarising villagers into interest groups quite distinct from the issue of national uprising. As often as not, land or traditional rights were at the root of the local conflict, which blended caste, lineage and territorial characteristics. He tries to illustrate that local issues and supra-national concerns could coexist through the mediation of local leaders like Devi Singh in Matthura

<sup>66</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.3

<sup>67</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, p.231; F. Toker (Ed.), *The Chronicle of Private Henry Metcalfe*, p.65

<sup>68</sup> C. T. Metcalfe (Trans. Ed.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, p.177

<sup>69</sup> G. Bhadra, 'Four rebels of 1857' in Guha (Ed.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, p.171

and Shah Mal in Barout.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the racial view of the British may not have been paralleled amongst the insurgents on the scale that their mobilisation might suggest. It is important to note that British writing tends to ignore this.

In summation of all the Sepoy's shortcomings, even the usually generous Dunlop was moved to describe the Mutiny as an insight into 'the weak and childish, but cruel and treacherous native character.'<sup>71</sup> It is a concise statement of the British attitude to their charges, and merits some further deconstruction. In this formulation, the Sepoy was, first and foremost, supposed to be a coward. Indeed, every account consulted during this study asserts the same, with the exception of Charles Griffiths' uncommon respect for the rebels' tenacity. To be sure, there are numerous grudging compliments, notably for the accuracy and speed of the Delhi artillerymen who outgunned their British counterparts, but the overall tenor is expressive of scorn. Descriptions range in tone from Roberts' typical 'despicable set of cowards that... bury their faces in the dirt the moment that we show ourselves,' to the less judgmental Maria Germon, who noted on 18 August that 'the enemy might have come in easily if they had only had a little pluck.'<sup>72</sup> Even the Indian observers inside Delhi criticised the 'cowardly robbers,' who, 'in the absence of the English... were as lions, but on hearing of their approach... sought places of refuge, like rats in the presence of a cat.'<sup>73</sup> This was a characteristic for which Delhi's civilians, including King Bahadur Shah Zafar, harangued the rebels. By way of excuse, an Indian acquaintance of Dunlop's explained that, 'the whole fault is in the legs; often when we have made up our minds to die, and hear the cheer of the "Goras" (pale faces), our legs carry us off against our will.'<sup>74</sup> Aside from its somewhat esoteric defence of native character, this explanation is also interesting for its use of the term *Gora*, which demonstrates amongst the rebels a similar use of racial idiom to that of the British.

Conversely, there was a tendency to describe effective native troops, or indeed any laudable action by an Indian, in European terms. Charlie Germon, for instance, complimented the Sikhs among the besieged forces at Lucknow with 'the spirit of Europeans,' for their part

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Presumably a reference to Queen Victoria.

<sup>70</sup> G. Bhadra, 'Four rebels of 1857' in Guha (Ed.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*

<sup>71</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.147

<sup>72</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.75; M. Edwards (Ed.), *Maria Germon's Lucknow Journal*, p.50

<sup>73</sup> Ghalib, *Dastanbuy*; Mainodin in C. T. Metcalfe (Trans. Ed.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, p.102

<sup>74</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, pp.12-13

in the bloody repulse of a rebel assault on July 20.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, after surviving ten months' concubinage by 'converting' to Islam, only to be sentenced to blowing away from a gun by the suspicious Nawab of Farrukhabad, Amy Hornes could only explain rescue at the hands of her *maulvi* by reference to his having visited England.<sup>76</sup> More generally, but equally revealingly, Dunlop wrote of Eurasians that the dominant side of their ancestry could be determined by their attitude in battle: cowards were considered predominantly Hindu, while the British heritage of more plucky fighters was stressed.<sup>77</sup> The only occasion on which the Sepoy's constitution escaped disparagement was that of his execution, where he typically 'died with a stoicism that in Europe would excite astonishment and admiration.'<sup>78</sup> Barnston observed at a hanging that a captured Cawnpore rebel 'seemed to care very little about it, and when the rope broke from his weight, he climbed up again as coolly as possible.'<sup>79</sup> Grudging respect, indeed. This fact received quite some attention in British accounts, perhaps for its congruence with the British conception of just retribution and ultimate contrition. Although the Christian ideal of a noble submission to death can be double-edged, on occasion being an act of martyrdom rather than an acknowledgement of sin, the heathen status of Hindus and Muslims in British eyes suggests the latter explanation.

The currency of Dunlop's second charge of 'weakness' is amply demonstrated by the undeniably paternalistic attitude betrayed in the sources. Observing tears at their disarming, Major-General Jacob, the Company's servant in charge of Rajputana, described the Sepoys of the 27<sup>th</sup> N.I. at Kolapur as 'but children of a larger growth.'<sup>80</sup> The motif of watery-eyed Indians recurs in British accounts to demonstrate mental frailty and childishness, even where such wild and belligerent men as the Irregular Sikhs and Afghans of Hodson and Nicholson were concerned. The tears that they apparently gushed forth at the news of their leaders' deaths were emphasised as a symbol of their weakness. As Jacob's use of word 'child' implies, the Company saw itself in a benevolent, fatherly role. It was in fact deliberate Company policy, according to Alavi, to insinuate itself into the family life of its Sepoys, the better for controlling recruitment and using it politically to assert dominance through the hegemony of its patronage.<sup>81</sup> The anticipated reward was loyalty, as Jacob illustrated by

<sup>75</sup> M. Edwards (Ed.), *Maria Germon's Lucknow Journal*, p.68

<sup>76</sup> J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.149

<sup>77</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*

<sup>78</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.12

<sup>79</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, pp.228

<sup>80</sup> G. Jacob, *Western India Before and During the Mutinies*, p.169

<sup>81</sup> S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, Chapter 3

The adoption of the Invalid *Thannah* system in 1780s, and the establishment of asylums in 1790s, the office of the Superintendent of Family Money and subsequent legislation such as that allowing Company intervention in

relating the case of an Indian informant who explained that, 'I have come to you, as the Sirkar is my *ma-bap* [mother and father].'<sup>82</sup> Thus, both directly in the questioning of Indian intelligence, and indirectly in the paternalistic mode of address or description, the British constantly affirmed their supposed supremacy. Combining these two tendencies in an exoneration of British policy before the charge of provocation, Muir declared that 'the Sepoys are children. It was no use reasoning with them... They had made up their minds.'<sup>83</sup>

In a mutually reinforcing edifice, this institutionalised condescension, also the product of perceived racial and intellectual, as well as religious and economic superiority, made the Indian's powers of autonomous reasoning the object of great cynicism amongst the British. Thus, in his discussion of plans to disarm the whole 64<sup>th</sup> N.I. at Ambala in October, Russell considered that the example of earlier fallen comrades should only keep the Sepoys loyal, 'if these extraordinary beings reason at all.'<sup>84</sup> Majendie, that ever-reliable source of prejudice, was more explicit still, describing his reception in villages to 'a sort of stupid wonder, which might have been the offspring of imbecility.'<sup>85</sup> On a more everyday level, the menial tasks performed by many servants, particularly the ever-present *punkah-wallah*, often earned them the charge of delinquency from ill-humoured masters, though this was, Majendie admits, as much the product of the relentless heat then any obvious failing. This discourse is a classic example of Orientalism, which created and reinforced a binary contrast between ruler and ruled, here in terms of reason, or rather Native lack thereof. Next to this, the specific causes are immaterial in comparison to their significance; Philindus' and Indophilus' arguments across the correspondence pages of *The Times*, persistently rooting the incomprehension that fuelled impressions of Indian stupidity in widespread British ignorance of Oriental languages, is simply spilled ink.<sup>86</sup> The significance of Sita Ram Pande's exposition of cultural difference is likewise important for its Orientalist assumptions rather than its precise content: 'Nothing pleases them [the British] more than a straight answer to a plain question, but the Indian does not usually understand this. He will also try to answer a question in such a fashion as will please the asker.'<sup>87</sup> This reflects the increasingly fashionable 'fundamental difference' ideology propounded by critics such as Disraeli and Sir Charles Wood (after 1857), and

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sepoxy inheritance, are all examples of this paternalism. Although most of these mechanisms had been abandoned by the late 1830s, the culture of condescension was entrenched.

<sup>82</sup> G. Jacob, *Western India Before and During the Mutinies*, p.180

<sup>83</sup> W. Muir, *Correspondence from Agra During the Mutiny*, p.6

<sup>84</sup> W. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p.191

<sup>85</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.259

<sup>86</sup> *The Times*, 30 December 1857, reprinted in *Correspondence relating to the establishment of an Oriental College in London*

<sup>87</sup> Lunt (ed.), *From Sepoy to Subedar*, p.174

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indeed, Sita Ram even continued to argue that the laws of the British were less suited to Indians than the Hindu code. *The Times* recommended his writing as invaluable for the Briton in India, but being published in 1863, it was clearly too late to change the perceptions of those involved in the Mutiny.

Little more need be said of the British view of Indian cruelties. Dunlop's dramatic image will suffice: 'The gentle Hindoo or the Indianised Mussalman, while he tortures and destroys his victim, is as selfishly and absolutely free of all feeling for his anguish as the jaws of the shark.'<sup>88</sup> Otherwise, such atrocities as Cawnpore or Delhi, where women were supposedly blown away from guns, provided all the evidence of Indian callousness that the British needed. The horror was aggravated by the fact that the insurgents had so recently appeared to be docile and manageable, raising in British nostrils the stench of betrayal. Take, for instance, Majendie's almost Shakespearean image of a 'dark and blood-stained hand in the reeking triumph of treachery.'<sup>89</sup> For the British, the very act of a Sepoy rebellion was a monstrous betrayal, given the fine pay and many privileges that soldiers obtained through service. Their general sense of outrage was further pricked by specific enormities, of which the episode of the 6<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry at Allahabad, begging to be let loose on the rebels, only to turn on its own officers, seemed emblematic. Such provocation led to the view expressed by Roberts, that the Sepoys had 'shown themselves at heart to be worse than even our enemies. No Sikh or Afghan ever abused and killed our women and children as these wretches have done.'<sup>90</sup> During the first weeks of confinement, Maria Germon's Lucknow *Journal* recorded numerous betrayals by those native troops that had initially stuck by the beleaguered British, symbolic of which was the death of a Major Gall, turned on outside the compound by his handpicked men while on a mission 'in disguise.'

From a civil angle, the Uprising seemed to be the contemptuous discarding of the gift of good government and stability at the feet of a munificent Company, particularly in view of the participation of some of its greatest beneficiaries – the recently 'emancipated' Oudh landowners and the Jats of Haryana.<sup>91</sup> The rhetoric of the British philanthropic movement, Utilitarians and Evangelists propounded the impression that Government was engaged in a social project with the interests of India at heart. In this conception of reality, the Uprising appeared to be gross ingratitude, only confirming the Indian's feeble character. Thus, William Edwards observed gloomily, but without surprise that his favourite orderly had

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<sup>88</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.38

<sup>89</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.4

<sup>90</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.6

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quickly looted his house the moment he left to attend to the outbreak of disturbances at Kussowra on 1 June.<sup>92</sup> Such sentiment expressing the sense of betrayal British people felt is in no shortage; a sentiment arising from and exacerbated by the fact that the rebels belonged to a subject race. Russell was eloquent on this point, describing the conflict as 'a servile war and a sort of Jacquerie combined,' in addition to 'a war of religion, a war of race, and a war of revenge.'<sup>93</sup>

Yet, precisely its servile nature presented a fundamental tension - that between racial exclusivity and dependence. If there was one thing that the Mutiny had shown, it was, in Muir's lament, that 'we have been hitherto so utterly and entirely dependent on our Sepoys.'<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the Uprising itself might not have been quelled, but for the neutrality and outright support of so many villagers, Sepoys and Indian civil officials. The British took servants absolutely for granted. The army was painfully aware of this weakness, as columns of moving troops resembled 'a menagerie of men and beasts,' stretched over miles by the rabble of bullock carts and camels accompanied by hundreds of *syces*, *khitmutgars*, *coolies*, *chuprassies*, *dooly*-bearers and myriad other domestic servants. Barnston despaired of this peculiarity of the Army in India, whereby 'in three days, my two hundred men, who could work like horses at Banca and in the Transit [his troopship from the Crimea], have been forced into a state of helplessness.'<sup>95</sup> His was a common cry of despair: 'People don't cut their own nails in this country!'<sup>96</sup> Even those such as Barnston and Majendie, who initially found the culture of servants so alien, came quickly to terms with it; the latter demonstrating this in his explanation of an 'amusing' pastime during the retaking of Lucknow, which involved throwing stones at scurrying and burdened domestics to simulate the more-than-abundant sniper fire.

Nor was it confined to military life. Where, for instance, would the civilian have been without the ubiquitous *punkah wallah*? Many women, too, found life hard without their habitual *ayahs*, *dhobis* and assorted other domestic helps. Maria Germon bemoaned her helplessness 'with not a single person to do a thing for me,' after the remaining servants had run off into the night following the failure of the first relief of Lucknow. Augusta Anson, wife of the ill-fated Major-General, headed a group of women that sought security from Simla's tense atmosphere by travelling north, and even scrambling desperately about the

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<sup>91</sup> E. Stokes, *The Peasant Armed*, Chapter 4

<sup>92</sup> W. Edwards, *Personal Adventures during the Indian Mutiny*

<sup>93</sup> W. Russell, *Mutiny Diary*, p.29

<sup>94</sup> W. Muir, *Correspondence from Agra During the Mutiny*, p.30

<sup>95</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, p.222



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misty hills, they thought nothing of the accompanying team of *ayahs* and *khitmutgars* that nursed their children and brought them food. It is as if these servants did not register in the British mind alongside their despicable compatriots, being invisible until they actually disappeared, whereupon they were suddenly missed. The whole 'Mutiny' episode is characterised by this curious British double-standard, which allowed the absolute condemnation of all and every Indian in one breath to be accompanied by the assumption that individual servants and Sepoys could be nothing but loyal.<sup>97</sup> Psychologically, it is perhaps the latter reliance which so excited the former vitriol. Certainly, this bizarre blindspot caused British Commanding Officers to falter indecisively during the crucial first weeks of the Mutiny, leaving so many Sepoys free and often armed to join the rebels in Delhi and Lucknow.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned dependence on servants, it is interesting to note the barometric shift in British attitudes to the servant-master relationship. The accounts of Maria Germon and other women suggest that, while close domestic servants were still considered almost part of the family, trust was failing - Hodson writing as early as 5 June that he could no longer get servants.<sup>98</sup> There was a complete lack of consensus on the conduct of servants during the Uprising, *The Times* insisting on 'the uniform fidelity of the native domestic servants,' while General Neill found that the officers' servants 'behaved shamefully, and were in on the plot, all but the lowest caste ones.'<sup>99</sup> The ever-jaded Roberts believed there was not 'one single Native in the whole country who would not go against us, if they did not think they were better off by remaining on our side.'<sup>100</sup> His view was that the longer the assault on Delhi was delayed, the less sure one could be of the Indian troops. This was not entirely without foundation, as the evidence from Lucknow's first relief suggested that the resolve of native servants and troops to stand by their erstwhile masters weakened in the face of hardship and time. It was clearly a sore issue, as *The Mutinies and the People* was proffered by its author, the mysterious 'A Hindu', as a vindication of Indian loyalty, and positively overflows with favourable references from grateful Sahibs, made in British periodicals and newspapers. Its statements of native fidelity show that the petitioning Rajas, landowners and others were acutely aware that their fortunes were bound up with those of Government.

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<sup>96</sup> W. Barnston, *Letters from the Crimea and India*, p.228

<sup>97</sup> W. Russell, *Mutiny Diary*, p.287

<sup>98</sup> Hodson, *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, p.39

<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1857; J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.129

<sup>100</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.52

There are, of course, examples of positive sentiment regarding the Indian character which contradict the general assertions of this study. Across the whole spectrum of British accounts, there are plenty of wonder-struck comments at the beauty of Delhi and Lucknow and speculation over the plunder contained within, and even some mean praise for camp life, which Verney called 'little worse than a picnic.'<sup>101</sup> He, for one, consciously went against the grain by trying to earn the gratitude of his servants with kindnesses, saying 'I find the natives of India most tractable, and the better classes, servants etc., grateful and honest.'<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, Reverend Polehampton found Indians 'particularly clean, modest and decent,' a fact that he saw reflected in his Lucknow chaplaincy, which he esteemed to possess a vastly superior sewerage system to that of Shrewsbury.<sup>103</sup> Yet, even where attempts were made to differentiate types of 'native,' they were framed in Anglocentric terms, not escaping the Orientalist discourse, but simply approaching it with a positive agenda. Take, for example, Dunlop's observation that 'many in England seem to class all tribes of Indians together, whereas Hillmen and Sikhs are less like the Poorbeas than Englishmen are like Russians.'<sup>104</sup> The comparison is particularly revealing in the context of the recent Crimean War. However, the impact of this observation is limited by the fact that even the almost universally popular Gurkhas, not to mention the less amicable but respected Sikhs, appeared in accounts in lauded contrast to the treacherous Sepoy, rather than as a force in their own right.

The war was at times abstracted to the point of farce in the accounts of participants, and the enemy appears to become almost irrelevant. At Lucknow, for instance, where airborne iron was such a natural phenomenon that it excited comment only when it caused an annoyance, Mrs Harris casually mentioned an 18-pounder that had crashed through her room 'upsetting everything,' including a carefully organised screen for the maintenance of propriety.<sup>105</sup> Many of the ladies' descriptions of shot describe it in terms of irritating results, almost as if it were its own agent, and not the fruit of enemy malice. It is also astounding how some of the officers' accounts are able to focus so wholeheartedly on home news, society gossip in India and, chief among distractions, the competition for medals and promotion. Roberts is perhaps the most flagrant example of what can seem at times like a rather callous

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<sup>101</sup> G. Verney, *The Devil's Wind*, p.104

<sup>102</sup> G. Verney, *The Devil's Wind*, p.103

<sup>103</sup> E. & T. Polehampton (eds.), *A Memoir, Letters, and Diary of the Rev. Henry S. Polehampton*, pp.145-46

<sup>104</sup> R. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Resselah*, p.5

<sup>105</sup> J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p.209

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preoccupation with a brevet major and rumours of a Victoria Cross.<sup>106</sup> Hodson, too, was eager to relay the slightest hint of praise, commendation or reward to his audience at home, although it must be said that he achieved it with rather more dignity than Roberts was able to muster.

The reality of war sometimes faded from the accounts altogether, as some appear to have treated the whole campaign in India as a mixture of good sport and fine opportunity. While still in transit, for instance, several officers feared that the fall of Delhi and the relief of Lucknow would deprive them of "a crack at the niggers" after all.<sup>107</sup> Majendie was even able to illuminate the comedy of it all during the horrendous looting and recapture of Delhi: 'Sometimes a man, out of whose head all ideas of discipline had not been driven, would pass by and make a desperate effort to salute you from beneath his plunder, struggling to free a hand for the purpose, or, in happy forgetfulness, bringing a cackling hen up to his cap with military precision.'<sup>108</sup> On the whole, though, these examples are exceptions to the rule, merely reminding one that unanimity is a practical myth. Nor can they be described as weakening the assumptions of colonialism simply because they are not negative in outlook, for assumptions continued to be made.

Thus far, this study has tried to focus attention on two distinct phenomena which bear upon the way that the British reacted when the shots of the rebels rang out in 1857. It has argued that attitudes native to the British expatriates serving in India leading up to, and during, the Uprising were based on notions of racial exclusivity which are betrayed in a blend of outright racism, contempt and social exclusiveness. Furthermore, the experience of India itself tended to strengthen such tendencies by emphasising insular station life and its anachronistically severe form of etiquette. Rebel behaviour, especially atrocities, the hardships of campaigning and the usual vicissitudes of Indian life further alienated even experienced civil and military servants, but doubly so in the case of the legions of green and fresh-faced personnel hurriedly sent to deal with the outbreak. Bearing in mind the tendencies exposed by this survey of attitudes, it is time to turn to the final part of the study and draw some conclusions on the nature and role of these sources.

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<sup>106</sup> F. Roberts, *Letters Written During the Indian Mutiny*, p.52

<sup>107</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.7

<sup>108</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, pp.231-32

## **Conclusion**

This study has aimed to examine the racial attitudes and assumptions of British civil and military servants in India towards the people and the nation that they administered through an examination of primary sources. The thoughts forged and penned at the heart of the social and military crisis of the 1857/8 Uprising provide an unusually frank and spontaneous insight into what is essentially a complicated psychological landscape, making the diaries, journals and letters analysed above so valuable. In such a non-physical and nuanced world as that of one race's attitudes to another, the following conclusion will attempt to consolidate the findings of the preceding analysis and put them in context.

In the first place, and most starkly of all, the British accounts demonstrate the widespread use of epithets and abusive terms to refer to Indians. This suggests that the context in which Britons came to India was one of racial superiority – something which an educational tradition of racial pride buoyed up by class sensibilities will have done nothing to diminish – where even the Scots and the Irish found themselves at a disadvantage, as the sources hint. In this light, it should be no surprise to find such derogatory attitudes towards half-castes, nor to witness such off-handed insolence to Indians of status on behalf of some British administrators. Indeed, contemporary South Africa provides an analogous example of the origins and form of British racism, which time would see to its terrifying logical end. At worst, as we have seen, Indians were classed alongside beasts, while even the fairest Briton (see especially Dunlop above) considered that The Sepoy merely exaggerated the typical indigenous traits of cowardice, stupidity, treachery and cruelty.

India honed British social instincts by promoting an existence for Britons that revolved around the Station and its customs, and by enforcing a set of social relations that clearly operated according to race-defined tiers. This was as evident in the talk at the Club as it was in the tone employed with any sort of Indian – from the lusty 'licking' of errant servants to the constant snubs offered to high-ranking Indians. Assumptions of fundamental difference between the races remained untouched as the analysis of the day shifted from the liberal project of the Utilitarians to the post-Mutiny theory of irreconcilable separate spheres of development. Empirically confirmed, such difference was at once explanation and justification of British rule, and such hegemony was naturally seen as evidence, institutionalising a racially defined ruler-and-ruled mentality. Records left by the early sailors

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and traders that experienced pre-British India speak of a less prejudiced relationship between the races, where a man was judged more on character than on skin colour. The Mughals could be treacherous and mean, perhaps, but they were both more powerful and usually wealthier than the Europeans who ventured into their lands. It seems that with strength and success grew arrogance. For the purposes of cultivating an awe and respect of British power, and since total military domination was impossible, a social chasm was most easily maintained along racial lines. However, this also imposed a blindness to the dangerous reality of the impact of British administration on India, obscuring for instance the need to accompany power with pomp and ceremony.

Interestingly, the sources showed that the attitudes of long-serving Britons in India were always more respectful and benevolent than those of their greener colleagues. This suggests that the confidence and familiarity which accompanied long association with an area and its inhabitants eroded the innate prejudice that was shipped out from British schools. Initially, expats far from the familiarity of Edinburgh or the Home Counties huddled together in a tight society that even Lady Canning found claustrophobic and unfamiliar, but they became more sympathetic over time.

Historians and sociologists often describe relations between the races as a discourse, in that it was a two-way communication. Under British rule, such a discourse was not one of equal give-and-take, but was based on the ability of the observed and ordered Indian to mediate and affect those observations and orders. Thus the sources show rebel leaders trying to win support by using the British tactic of emphasising racial difference to their followers, or forcing Sepoys to fight for their lives by firing on the British. This in turn fulfilled and reinforced British views that they were fighting against brutal religious fanatics. This, of course, is 'Orientalism,' the self-fulfilling European analysis of India which whose pseudo-scientific basis lent credibility to observations of racial and cultural difference.

The framework of Orientalism encouraged the formulation of a very clear binary conception of the situation in 1857/58, which is exaggerated in the literature examined above. The range of motifs such as 'child-killing', 'cowardly' or 'indolent' recur to form a symbolism indistinguishable from Orientalist stereotype. The clearest examples of the process of stereotyping to be found in writing were in response to key incidents under the catalysing effect of what I have called the 'Cawnpore syndrome'. In this respect, the literature is a body of propagandistic snapshots that cumulatively propound a British interpretation of 1857. Although this study has concentrated on narrative writing, the discourse was equally

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conducted in images (see figures above), law, architecture, trade, religion, and all the myriad other ways in which perceptions are expressed.

It may be overstating the consciousness of this habit to say that writers had an agenda, but even now the accounts still generate a momentum which imparts certain suggestions to the reader. Firstly, British rule is justified through the negation of the monolithic alternative of 'native rule' by its faction, corruption and barbarity. Secondly, unpleasant British behaviour during the Uprising is partially vindicated and belittled in significance as the just wage of insurgency. Thirdly, the accounts serve to polarise all the middle ground in the conflict into one or other of the camps, no doubt mobilising moderate enthusiasm for and Indian acquiescence in, the British campaign. And to these insistent voices from the texts, psychologists could no doubt add a host of undertones.

The key historiographical importance of Mutiny writing has been very explicitly demonstrated by Majendie, who likened the Uprising to 'the romances of old, wherein... all the characters are heroes.'<sup>109</sup> This sort of lionising approach – unchallenged until Guha and the Subaltern school – has informed, underlain and tainted much of the historiography of the Mutiny, surfacing in an unerring failure to accord powers of agency to the rural insurgents, and even the Sepoys themselves. The widespread nature of disturbance and uprising is explained, instead, by stressing the leadership of religious fanatics like the dreaded Maulvi of Faizabad, disgruntled Rajahs, like Jai Lal Singh or fiends-in-female-form, such as the Begum of Oudh or the Rani of Jhansi. Alternatively, the ideological sting of organised popular opposition (see Bhadra article) could be removed from rural disturbance by attributing it to an endemic anarchy and confusion, characterised by the Gujars, who became synonymous with criminality in British writing.<sup>110</sup> This is very relevant to colonialism's later reaction to nascent Indian political opposition, which showed that little had changed since 1857.

It still remains to be said that Mutiny writing from the heart of the 1857 Uprising was a call to arms and a denunciation of the rebels as much as personal testimony. This analysis puts flesh on the aptly assembled bones of Bhadra's formulation: that in British writing 'an insurgent is not a subject of understanding or interpretation but of extermination, and the discourse of history, far from being neutral, serves directly to instigate violence.'<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> V. D. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, p.96

<sup>110</sup> E. Stokes illustrated the falsity of this characterisation, by showing that the Gujars were merely the victims of poor quality land, and just as capable of peaceful cultivation as any other group, if given the means to support themselves.

<sup>111</sup> R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in Guha (Ed.) *Subaltern Studies III*, p.20

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This study witnesses the failure of the relationship between the British and India herself, as alongside the growing distaste for 'the Natives' the British increasingly felt a kind of elemental hostility in the climate and the geography of the country they ruled.

**Epilogue**

In the light of recent world events, it seems more pertinent than ever to take note of the lessons of western colonialism which are contained in historical sources. Orientalism is as healthy as ever, as are some of the less pleasant aspects of the religious and racial relations of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As a flashpoint, the Mutiny in particular illustrates the dangers of making assumptions about unfamiliar nations and their people. It is arguable that much of the tension between 'the West' and Islam can be put down to the blindly hegemonic systems of the former, and the dangerous assumption that all the world can be judged by standards and processes which they have had a feeble role in forming. We take the free market, democracy and personal liberty as self evidently valuable goals, but we must recognise that other cultures and religions may disagree, without descending into the mire of weak-minded relativism. It seems more vital than ever to realise that there are victims of our economic and political freedom; that which has, after all, been built on generations of exploiting countries like India, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. We cannot act as if we have had no part in the shaping of the states we now take as enemies.