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‘A Soldier who Disobeys’—Reflections on the present through a Subaltern history of Civil Disobedience

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Abstract

What links Mumbai, India to Peshawar, Pakistan? A connection might be found in ‘Disobedient Subjects: Bombay 1930-31,’ a recent photo exhibition at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), Mumbai, particularly in a photograph therein depicting a baton charge on crowds gathered in Bombay to commemorate ‘Garhwali’ Day. The text accompanying the exhibit links the protests in Bombay to the tumult in Peshawar following a ‘coup’ on April 23, 1930. It mentions the refusal of the [largely Hindu] Garhwal Rifles to fight against the [largely Muslim] Pathans. This article takes off from the resonance of this extraordinary act of defiance in not only Bombay but other parts of British India, its suppression in official histories, be they British or Indian, to explore the formation of ethical solidarities not just in the time of anti-colonial struggle but even more so, in present times of global war drummed up by powerful states gone rogue. In a time of transactional politics when might alone makes right, what should be the individual and collective response to the total collapse of the (largely mythical) rules-based order? Through Rahul Sankrityayan’s ‘Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali,’ a biography of a soldier in British India who gets caught up in the anti-colonial struggle, who commits the ultimate betrayal of refusing to obey orders and who is eventually court martialled for mutiny, I argue for disobedience as a necessary safeguard of ‘civilisation.’¹

Keywords: duty, disobedience, rules-based order, war, conscientious objection, non-violence

Introduction

A bunch of policemen wielding batons to disperse a crowd—it could be a humdrum scene from any part of India given the myriad projects and thwarted aspirations that seek fulfilment every day, often through public protests that run foul of the law. What makes the picture different however is that not only is it in black and white but the policemen trying to ‘maintain order’ are both white and brown. The people who are running helter skelter to escape their blows are visibly brown, clad in kurta pyjamas, dhotis, and Gandhi caps. The photograph features in a recently concluded exhibition, ‘Disobedient Subjects: Bombay 1930–31’ at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), curated by Avrati Bhatnagar and Sumathi Ramaswamy from an album in the Alkazi Collection. Among the scores of similar photographs in the exhibition of public gatherings, of people,

both men and women, breaking the salt law, of police brutality, this particular photograph stands out because of the caption accompanying it, presumably from the original album—“The city police dispersing the Hugh [sic] crowds that had assembled to witness the proceedings on Garwali day.” What is ‘Garwali day’ and why were the people of Bombay moved enough to take blows for it?

At the height of the Salt Satyagraha, many parts of India including the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) rallied to honour the largely Hindu soldiers of the Royal Garhwal Rifles who chose not to fire on the unarmed, largely Pathan, protestors in Peshawar. Unlike the Jallianwala Baug massacre there’s only a passing mention of the massacre at Qissa Khwani Bazaar in official histories of independent India, of the brave non-violent resistance of the Pathans and of the equally brave refusal of the Garhwalis to fire on them.ⁱⁱ There is no mention of them in our school textbooks—the soldiers’ radical disobedience was perhaps deemed too dangerous even in independent India for the burden it might place on ordinary citizens, worse, soldiers, to not simply follow orders but to think, to exercise their judgement even while discharging their duty. This essay draws on a subaltern history of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the life-story of ‘Veer’ Chandra Singh Garhwali as told by Rahul Sankrityayan, to investigate the tension between ethics, duty, and justice.ⁱⁱⁱ

Further the essay explores the significance of the Peshawar *Kand* for the times we live in^{iv}—given the mutually exclusive imaginaries of ‘enemy’ nations, Mumbai today is at a great distance from Peshawar. At the same time, given the hyper-connected globalised world we live in, Mumbai, or India for that matter, is not so distant from any point on the globe, be it Palestine or Lebanon or Iran. Given the compression of our planet, is it possible anymore for individuals or nations to look away from, or hope to be unaffected by, genocides and bombings that take place elsewhere, acts of barbarity that are committed in the name of flag, country and freedom? Is there a framework, aside from ‘national interest,’ through which individuals and nations can articulate a response to such acts of moral depravity that do not simply threaten the remote ‘Other’ but also pose an existential threat to civilisation itself?

Finally, there is the question of whether the Other is an unchanging essence fixed in eternal opposition to the ‘Self.’ The logic that makes the ‘clash of civilisations’ a reality of our times leaves no room for any overlaps or negotiation, for the possibility of understanding or co-existence. How may we retrieve an idea of civilisation that speaks to our common human condition as well as our myriad goals?

To explore these questions, one needs to first retrieve the episode that has dropped out of our collective memory, simply because it was deemed either too marginal or too complex to figure in the simple narratives of the nation that have now become the norm. We will begin the fascinating story of Chandra Singh *in medias res*, with the salt satyagraha of 1930.^v The following paragraphs use Sankrityayan’s text to reconstruct in detail the circumstances leading up to a soldier’s betrayal. I stick closely to the tone and words of the original in order to convey Sankrityayan’s close identification with his subject and request the reader’s patience for what is bound to be a long exposition. Large sections of the article that recount events from Chandra Singh’s point of view might seem out of place in an academic piece of writing but they have been retained to demonstrate the state of mind of people who were thrown into circumstances beyond their control. Their struggle to become their most

authentic self is the struggle of every human being to break out of the prison of predetermined paths and goals.^{vi}

The Salt Satyagraha

“The nationalist sentiment was no longer the conspiracy of a few. Having broken its banks, it was flowing freely in India. Therefore, however much the English may have wished to hold on to Indian soldiers through trickery, they could not halt [the spread of] nationalism.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 129).^{vii}

The declaration of *Poorna Swaraj* in the Lahore session of the Congress on December 31, 1929 and the celebration of January 26, 1930 as Independence Day was quickly followed by the initiation of the Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi’s march to Dandi to break the Salt Law fired the imagination of people and everywhere, from Wadala, Bombay to Vedaranyam in Madras Province, people started emulating his example. The soldiers of the Royal Garhwal Regiment who were stationed at Peshawar Cantonment could not remain untouched by the fervour that was sweeping the land.

Even eight years before, at the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Havaldar Chandra Singh, an experienced Ohdedar in the army, had started attending Congress sessions. Once on hearing that Gandhi was coming to Dehradun, he had gone there in the hope of joining his ‘*paltan*’—he was confident that his experience of fighting in France and Mesopotamia would ease his way into Gandhi’s ‘army’ (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 94–95). He couldn’t meet Gandhi but he met another leader, one Pandit Motilal Nehru. Upon hearing of Chandra Singh’s aspiration to join Gandhi’s army, Nehru advised him to first get his name struck off from the regiment rolls and only then join the Congress because doing otherwise could attract severe punishment. A disappointed Chandra Singh returned home and soon after this, his regiment was sent to Waziristan. By the time he returned in April 1923, not only was he an ardent follower of the Mahatma’s Congress, he had moved away from the ritualistic caste-based religion of his birth and become an ‘unpaid preacher’ of the Arya Samaj.

The most important transformation however and one which, unlike the other two, was to stay with him until the end of his life was the influence of Marx and communism. Sankrityayan dwells on his slow exposure to communist ideas primarily through the world of print journalism. He writes that through newspapers like *Pratap* and *Vishwamitra*, Chandra Singh had learnt of the Bolshevik conspiracy case in Kanpur and he would closely follow accounts of the proceedings published therein. The Bolsheviks were familiar to him because of the reports he had read a few years earlier of the crushing of the Sultan of Turkey by the British, the resistance to the British in India through the Khilafat Movement, the *Hijrat* of thousands of Muslims to Kabul and from thereon to Russia, and their eventual return to India to join the freedom struggle.

Reading about the efforts of communists to organise workers and fight for their rights, an enamoured Chandra Singh “... realised that there is such a country in the world which is ruled not by the rich but by workers and peasants. Where all are equal.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 110). So, when the Civil Disobedience Movement started in March 1930 it could hardly have come as a surprise to Chandra Singh. As it gathered momentum across the country, life in the cantonment became even more regimented. He would sometimes sneak away with his comrades to the city at a distance of one mile, to read newspapers like *Chand*. It was on one such trip that he heard of the upcoming session

of the Congress to be held on April 12, 1930 in Peshawar. Sankrityayan paints a vivid sketch of those heady days:

“That day he left for the city with one of his friends, Daulat Singh, and at about 4 o’clock they reached a place called Kissa Khaana. They saw about two hundred red-shirted Pathan *swayam sevaks* (the *surkh posh* or Red Shirts, see f.n.8) carrying the tricolour, marching to the *pandal* accompanied by a musical band. Chandra Singh and Daulat Singh also went with them. There must have been about a thousand people at the gathering. The police and intelligence services were also present in large numbers. The President of the Assembly was Lal Badshah. He started his speech in Pashto of which Chandra Singh could not understand a word.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013).

Upon asking a policeman they were informed that the gathering had taken a vow that they would neither wear foreign cloth, nor use foreign goods, nor touch liquor, and other intoxicants. Merchants of foreign goods and liquor were warned that if they did not stop selling these by April 22, then the Congress would mount a *dharna* (sit-in protest) at their shops. Chandra Singh returned to the barracks and, as was his habit, narrated the happenings at Qissa Khwani to his comrades. Little did he or his fellow soldiers know that barely eleven days later they would be put to the ultimate test in the same bazaar.

Massacre and Mutiny at Qissa Khwani Bazaar

There are many conflicting narratives of what transpired in Peshawar in the fourth week of April 1930. The central event in most is the massacre at Qissa Khwani Bazaar on April 23 when armoured cars had run over and fired repeatedly at a gathering of unarmed Pathans—the ‘red shirts’—who had responded to the call of the Khudai Khidmatgar to join Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha.^{viii} Two platoons of the Royal Garhwal Rifles that were ordered to fire on the crowd chose not to obey. However, in what seems to be a nervous attempt at preventing the news of the mutiny or the circumstances leading up to it from leaking out, the soldiers were court-martialled, not for their actions of the April 23, but for their refusal to leave the barracks and go into the city on the following day (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 196). For the British, the need to suppress news of the massacre of April 23 overrode the need to bring the mutineers to justice. Instead, a charge of mutiny was levied for a much lesser infringement of orders, that of the April 24.

In order to reconstruct the chain of events of that fateful day I mainly rely on the findings of the Patel Committee appointed by the Congress Working Group. Another important source is Sankrityayan’s painstakingly researched *Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali* (1955) which provides the protagonist’s own recall of events. Two important sources that we know only through references in the above two reports are the report of the state-appointed Sulaiman Committee and the report of the committee appointed by the military for the court martial of the mutinous soldiers. In the paragraphs that follow, I will summarise the observations of various parties as a background to examining the significance of this rebellion not just for the Civil Disobedience Movement or the Indian freedom struggle, but for all struggle against injustice.

A Summary of the Events of April 23, 1930 from the Patel Committee Report

On April 5, the local Congress Committee resolved to picket liquor shops in Peshawar city. Upon a request by local liquor contractors for time to dispose of their stock the Congress committee notified that picketing would commence after 15 days, on April 23. As tensions built up, the All India Congress Committee deputation was barred from entering the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). On the evening of April 22, nine prominent leaders of the Congress were arrested and warrants remained in force against the remaining two.

On the morning of the April 23, there was a spontaneous *hartal* (strike) in Peshawar city. When the crowd gathered to support the volunteers on picketing duty, a sub inspector with armed constables arrived in a lorry at the Congress office with arrest warrants for the remaining two leaders. On the way to the police station, the lorry developed a puncture and instead of waiting for another lorry, the leaders volunteered to proceed on foot. The crowd took them in a procession to the Kabuli Gate police station. Once the leaders went inside, upon the request of the sub inspector the crowd began to disperse, shouting slogans of *Inquilab Zindabad*. It is at this point that, as per eyewitness accounts, two armoured cars drove into the crowd from behind at great speed and without any warning. Many were crushed under the vehicle. While some in the crowd, mainly volunteers of the Khudai Khidmatgar, started collecting the wounded and the dead, others put themselves in front of the vehicles trying to stop the assault. As one of the cars started reversing, an Englishman on a motor cycle who was coming up from behind hit the car. He was a despatch driver who fell to the ground and was immediately run over. Then, someone from one of the cars opened fire, due to which one of the cars ‘accidentally’ caught fire. The Deputy Commissioner of Police came out of one of the armoured cars and while entering the police station fell down unconscious (some witnesses stated he was hit by a stone from the crowd).^{ix} He soon regained consciousness and ordered the personnel in the armoured vehicles to open fire.

Many were killed immediately and many others wounded. A few people tried to intercede both with the authorities as well as the crowd to defuse the situation. The crowd was willing to leave as long as they could take the dead and the wounded and as long as the armoured vehicles were withdrawn. The authorities refused and as the stand-off continued, a second, more intensive round of firing began which went on for three hours, not just in the bazaars but also in the surrounding lanes. The crowd took the bullets on their chests—witnesses estimated two to 300 dead and many more injured (Patel 1930).

The committee reports that over the next one month and more, Peshawar descended into a ‘reign of terror,’ marked by multiple raids on Congress offices, denial of medical facilities to the wounded Khilafat volunteers and deliberate obstruction in the removal of bodies. Overnight on April 25, all forces were withdrawn and the city was left open to attacks from bordering tribes. Martial law was declared in Peshawar and the raids and firings continued unabated, including an ‘accidental’ firing on two children, and a firing, yet again, on May 31, on their funeral procession, even as the state-appointed Sulaiman Committee was in session.

To draw a curtain over the crime, Peshawar was isolated from the rest of India. All Congress organisations, all youth organisations were banned. The Committee observes that “In spite of all this the spirit of the people has remained unbroken and strict non-violence has been observed.”

The findings of the Congress Committee challenged the government narrative which had squarely placed the blame on the Congress and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. According to the government, the two organisations had been working for several months in NWFP to prepare the ground for civil disobedience “by exploitation of local grievances and also by disseminating communist doctrines in the villages of Peshawar district.” The government version held that while nine leaders were arrested on the April 22, the two who were arrested on the morning of the April 23 were forcibly rescued by a ‘mob.’ Further it claimed that at the police station a stone was thrown at the Assistant Superintendent of Police who fell down unconscious. The crowd which was armed with hatchets, lathis, crowbars, and sticks turned violent and in order to curb the riot, the authorities had to resort to firing.

Examining the government charges one by one, the Congress Committee Report pointed out the disjunction between the government communiques issued on April 23, 27 and 28 and the proceedings of the Sulaiman Committee. The communiques had claimed that it was only when a riot had broken out at Kabuli Gate and the police were unable to control the situation, that armoured vehicles were deployed. However, the Congress Committee Report points out, the state failed to lead any evidence before its own committee regarding this version of events. It expresses surprise that the authorities had abandoned what should have been a vital part of their case. Further the authorities failed to lead any evidence to prove that people had “forcibly rescued” the two Congress leaders, that they had thrown stones and injured the Assistant Commissioner.^x Even the remaining allegation, that the crowd was armed with hatchets, lathis, and sticks was rejected by important witnesses who had deposed before the Sulaiman Committee. Corroborating the people’s version the witnesses had held, “that the people were peaceful and that they had no arms and were dispersing peacefully immediately after the leaders were admitted into the Thana.” (Patel 1930). This particular charge does not figure in the earlier communiques and, in an obvious instance of manufacturing evidence after the fact, makes its first appearance in a communique dated May 6, when reports of the massacre had already started circulating.

The Congress committee placed on record photographs of the crowd taken after the first round of firing wherein as per one witness “none of the crowd appears to possess a stick, a lathi or an axe. And in fact they did not have any such weapons.” It also placed on record the testimonies of high government officials before the Sulaiman Committee wherein they had emphasised that the crowd was unarmed and peaceful. The ultimate proof of the crowd’s restraint for the Congress Committee was the conduct of the Garhwali regiment:

“A very strong proof of the crowd being unarmed would be found in the conduct of the two paltoons of Garhwalis which refused to fire when ordered to. The Garhwali soldier is generally regarded to be loyal [to the Raj] and the sole ground on which these paltoons refused to fire was that people at whom they were asked to level their rifles were unarmed and peaceful.” (Patel 1930).

‘A Soldier who Disobeys’

What could have been the state of mind of the ‘loyal’ Garhwali soldiers when they received contradictory orders—the order, “Fire!” from the British commanding officer and the order, ‘Cease fire!’ from his subordinate, Ohdedar Chandra Singh? Was it a spontaneous reaction arising from the desire to protect the weak and the unarmed or was it the outcome of a radical transformation of battle-hardened hearts that had seen active service as British subjects in France, Mesopotamia, and Waziristan, but who were now hearing the call of a different drummer?

In the paragraphs that follow, we return to Chandra Singh’s recollection of events as narrated by Sankrityayan. The latter’s own life—his journey from being an activist of the Arya Samaj to becoming a Congress worker at the height of the freedom struggle, albeit a Socialist one, to his participation in peasant struggles as a communist—has interesting parallels with the life of Chandra Singh. It is no wonder that he chose to write a biography of an unlikely hero that history had forgotten. Chandra Singh’s act could only be understood as a considered response to the environment he found himself in, an environment that was the product of larger than life political and social forces that had been buffeting the world at the time. While constraints of space and time do not permit a discussion of other episodes in Chandra Singh’s life that were to politicise him, there is an attempt in the paragraphs that follow to follow Chandra Singh closely through Sankrityayan’s eyes in the days leading up to the mutiny. I rely on chapters 13–16 of Sankrityayan’s text covering the Salt Satyagraha, the Peshawar *kand*, the arrest and the court martial for the following summary.

Sankrityayan narrates that on April 19, 1930 when the salt law was being broken all over the country under Gandhi’s leadership, the Peshawar Congress Committee had also organised a meeting at Shahi Bagh. As Chandra Singh and his friend were sipping tea at a sweet shop, they saw people in horse carts and cars, on cycles and on foot, moving quickly towards the city. Learning of the Congress meeting, they too joined the crowd. At Shahi Bagh in a gathering of thousands, a Pathan stood on stage giving a speech in Pashto. Next to him the Congress tricolour fluttered in the breeze. On one side of the stage, water was being boiled in a pan to make salt.^{xi}

Although Chandra Singh and his friend could not understand the words of the Pashto speaker, they could see that the Pathans were full of enthusiasm. A Punjabi gentleman sitting next to them translated the words of the speaker—“The British have imposed a salt tax on us. Our country has mountains of salt, and salty seas full of salt, but we cannot make salt for our use even if we wish to. English salt comes from overseas and is sold here, that’s another reason why they do not allow us to make salt.” At this point another bystander turned to Chandra Singh and Narayan Singh and asked, “When these people sit on *dharna* at the shops selling foreign goods, won’t your *paltan* fire on them?” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 137)

We thus learn again that Chandra Singh and his friend do not even speak the language of the Pathans—they could very well be in a foreign land. And with Chandra Singh we realise that as soldiers sworn to protect the Raj, they are doubly estranged from the people.^{xii} From Sankrityayan’s narrative we learn that Chandra Singh who had received a packet of ‘Gandhiji ka namak’ from the Congress *swayamsevaks* ate some himself, and took the rest back to the cantonment to be distributed among soldiers of his battalion, along with strict instructions to not come to his room anymore to read

smuggled newspapers. The previous day he had been summoned by his superior Major Bronskill who had questioned him on his alleged proximity to the Arya Samaj and the Congress. Though the British had great faith in him and believed all the complaints to be motivated by envy, he was ordered not to mix with any of the soldiers.

Over the second and third week of April the battalion was placed on high alert, and as the day of the Congress *dharna* drew near, the activities in the cantonment left no doubt in anybody's mind about what was to come. On April 22, Chandra Singh, who had a stellar record as a teacher at the Pachmarhi Military School, was assigned the duty of training the battalion in 'musketry parade,' or drill with rifles. The British lost no time in indoctrinating the soldiers against the local population. They were informed that the Garhwali *paltan* was specially chosen to protect the local Hindu merchants who were being targeted by the Muslim majority. They were told that the Muslims loot their shops and also kidnap their women and children. No other *paltan* would have understood the plight of the Hindus, that is why "our Hindu *paltan* has been sent here. It is possible that to save Hindus we might have to go to the bazaar and fire on these miscreants." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 140–141). When a soldier stood up to ask how one could distinguish between a Hindu and a Muslim given that everyone speaks Pashto and sports the same attire and wears a beard, the British officer reassured them that they needn't worry, they would be told what to do by the Deputy Commissioner, by the police, and military officers who would be accompanying them to the bazaar.

As soon as the English officer left, Chandra Singh addressed the soldiers in the parade.

"These are all lies. There is not a shred of truth in the talk of a Hindu-Muslim conflict. This is neither a Hindu fight nor a Muslim fight. The fight is between the Congress and the British. The Congress people will hold a *dharna* in front of the shops selling British goods. The shopkeepers are agents of the British. They take the wealth of Hindustan and send it to England because of which Hindustan is so poor. The Congress has launched this movement to liberate [the country] from poverty and slavery. When the Congress brothers are fighting the British for the freedom of our country should we fire bullets on them? For us, instead of firing bullets [at them], it would be better to take bullets ourselves. Betrayal of the country is [nothing but the] destruction of our lineage." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 141–142).

As the soldiers furiously discussed these ideas with others after the parade, that same evening an order was issued that whenever any company, platoon or section receives an order to fire on rebels in Peshawar city, the signature of the officer giving the command needs to be obtained on a form. Officers were instructed to collect the forms from the battalion office.

Contrary to the government version of events that claimed the deployment of armoured vehicles and the firing that followed was on account of an uncontrollable riot, the troops were already being primed to fire on the satyagrahis days before the April 23 incident. This was obvious even to Chandra Singh and his compatriots, who called for an emergency meeting on the evening of April 22 to be attended by one member from each Company. The main item on the agenda was the question of what should be done if any Company was ordered to fire on Congress workers the following day. It was clear that the Garhwal *paltan* will be ordered into the city, it was also crystal clear that refusing to fire would be a major crime. The gathering discussed these matters and decided that they could not

bring shame to Garhwal by firing on the protestors, it would be better to die instead. After resolving to not fire upon Congress workers they started planning their approach. In every platoon and, if possible, every section, one person was assigned the responsibility of asking the soldiers to stand down whenever the order to fire was issued. In the little time that remained, word was spread through the ranks and files of the battle plan for the following day. Sankrityayan observes:

“It was on the strength of these soldiers that the British had established their rule, and even now it is on them that they were forced to rely. There is no doubt that the British thought the soldiers to be ignorant, rustic and ill-mannered. On every given occasion the lesson of *rajbhakti* [loyalty to the Raj] was thrust down their throats, and even worse, the thought was implanted in their minds that ‘we are your providers, you would die of hunger if not for us’.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 143).

That any expression of dissatisfaction would be met with crushing force was made clear to them time and again.

The following morning soldiers and officials of the ‘A’ Company were asked to fall in and be ready to leave for the city by 8 am. Due to the complaint against Chandra Singh, he along with 36 others were weeded out of the parade by Captain Ricket. The remaining 72 soldiers gazed at him mutely probably with thoughts of the impending calamity in their minds.

Chandra Singh knew that in order to rule out even the possibility of a mistake he had to find a way of joining the Company in Peshawar. Informing the Quarter Master that the soldiers had left for the city without water, he volunteered to take it to them on mule back. He convinced the officer by arguing that summer was at its peak, the soldiers would be thirsty but taking water from the wells was not an option for them as the Pathans are certain to have poisoned these. The officer immediately agreed.

When Chandra Singh reached Kabuli Darwaza, he saw that the 72 soldiers were stationed there. Handing over the water he went to meet the officers. A crowd of Pathans had assembled in the square and some soldiers informed Chandra Singh that a white man on a motorcycle had been just burnt to death there. When the latter was on his rounds in the city, a youth had set alight a rug doused in petrol and thrown it on him. Captain Ricket had ordered the Garhwali soldiers to rescue him but no soldier had come forward.

The ‘A’ Company was soon joined by the entire battalion as well as the brigade. The four battalions were despatched in different directions—three to guard the hospital, the armoury in the fort, and the imperial bank respectively and the fourth, Chandra Singh’s own battalion to maintain order at Kabuli Darwaza, also called Qissa Khwani Bazaar. At the last place where the crowd was gathered, he saw that troops of other squadrons had been brought in, along with their armoured vehicles.

“Soldiers and milita surrounded the city from all sides, war planes started hovering in the skies above. Even the cannons turned their noses towards the city. On the one hand the British were doing this, and on the other, the brave Pathans in the thousands were standing in front of the police station at Kissa Khani Bazaar [sic]. The Congress tricolour was fluttering in the skies above. Even the people of Kabul—who [often] come to Peshawar on business—were gathered in the thousands watching this

spectacle...In the upper storeys of houses, on the roofs of two and three storied buildings, women and children stood with their gaze fixed here. Everyone's heart was filled with apprehension and impatience, they knew not what was about to happen." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 145–146).

Soon an order was passed down the ranks and it fell to Captain Rickett to issue it to the assembled troops—"Garhwali Battalion, advance!" The platoons followed the order to advance, and when they arrived in front of the Congress procession, other orders followed in quick succession—"A Company, halt!", "Number 1, Number 2 Platoon, Inward turn!" and finally, "Stand guard!" At the last command, the bayonets pointed at the Congress flags and at the chests of the Pathans.

"Standing on all sides of the national flag were the brave Pathans. A Sikh leader stood on the stage giving a fiery speech, partly in Pashto and partly in Urdu. A voice would come from the crowd, "Naara -e -taqbeer" and from thousands of throats would rise the cry "Allah o Akbar", "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai". The skies were resounding with slogans." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 147).

The Garhwali soldiers were now standing very close to the procession and the Congress *swayamsevaks* were trying to reason with them in small groups. Captain Rickett, sensing the danger in this proximity, shouted for the crowd to be dispersed. He warned people that if they did not run away they would be certainly shot. But his cries fell on deaf ears. Even as the big government officials of Peshawar district sitting on top of Kabuli Darwaza watched the unfolding fracas, a note with a form attached was handed to Captain Rickett, the same form that officers were required to sign before giving the order to fire. He again shouted at the crowd to run away lest they be shot. When the Pathans did not flinch, came Rickett's order, "Garhwalis, three rounds, fire!" Ohdedar Chandra Singh was standing to the left of Captain Rickett, exactly where he wanted to be. Immediately, as per the plan, he cried out, "Garhwalis, cease fire!" Following Chandra Singh, the Ohdedars who had been given the responsibility for other platoons and sections shouted, "Garhwalis, cease fire!" All the Garhwalis lowered their rifles to the ground.

The severity of the crime cannot be overemphasised—by breaching orders the soldiers had committed a crime that could attract the death penalty. However, as Sankrityayan remarks, the Garhwalis fearlessly demonstrated their loyalty to their *desh*.^{xiii} One Garhwali soldier, Udey Singh, even went to the extent of handing over his gun to a Pathan with the words, "Take this, brother...now you shoot us." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 147).

We learn from Sankrityayan's text that when the soldiers of Number 1 and Number 2 platoons laid their rifles on the ground, the commander of Number 3 platoon, Subedar Luthi Singh could not stand it anymore—he not only gave orders to the troops to fire but also fired three times with his pistol. His cook as well as one of the Section Commanders fired thrice like him. But the remaining soldiers of the platoon did not waver in their stance. A furious Captain Rickett turned to Chandra Singh with an uncomprehending question. Chandra Singh answered that the people were entirely unarmed—how could they fire on unarmed people?

Given the brutality of the administration and the shifting loyalties of some of the soldiers this could easily have taken a different turn. Sankrityayan muses, "Gandhi's fight was a peaceful fight. He did not inspire the people to take up arms. The rifles in the hands of the Garhwalis therefore were

of no use in that struggle. If the times had been different, who knows how it would have ended.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 148).

When it was clear that the Garhwalis did not wish to fire on their countrymen, within 10 minutes a platoon of 30 *goras* was sent who started shooting at the crowd.^{xiv} At the same time, a trench vehicle mounted with two machine guns tore into the Congress procession running over people while firing indiscriminately. Chandra Singh saw six people being crushed under the vehicle with his own eyes. The vehicle could only advance slowly—it is said that one Pathan who could not bear this anymore snatched a bottle of petrol next to the vehicle and throwing it on the vehicle, lit a match. All four-white people in the car were burnt to ashes.

The crowd ran in all directions, even into the by-lanes to take shelter. The site of the massacre was strewn with corpses, the dead and the dying. After some time, a few people and some soldiers too started picking up the dead and the wounded. There is no clear estimate of how many died. The British piled numerous corpses into the lorries and tipped them into the Kabul river. Later in jail Chandra Singh heard that about 300 people had been killed that day.^{xv}

Afterwards people climbed on to the roofs of houses and started throwing whatever they had at hand at the soldiers—stones, broken wooden boxes, bottles, axes. An axe hit captain Rickett in the face and he was grievously injured. Sixteen soldiers from Chandra Singh’s company were injured by stones and bricks. Chandra Singh himself was forced to take shelter to escape from the wrath of the people. In that confusion it was difficult to tell who was a friend and who a foe. As people blocked the streets, martial law was declared and the city was placed under curfew.

At this point it must be noted that Chandra Singh’s recall of the sequence of events—the fainting of the Deputy Commissioner, the arrival of armoured vehicles, the running over of innocent people, the death of the white man on the motorcycle, the firing from the vehicles and accidentally setting them alight—is slightly different from that of other eyewitnesses in the Congress Committee report. Close to 25 years had passed when Sankrityayan first met him to record his side of the story. But Sankrityayan’s vivid retelling is a departure from official narratives of the event, both of the British government and of the Congress. While the British enquiry justified firing on a violent ‘mob’ that had gone out of control, the Congress committee emphasised that the people were completely unarmed and their conduct was entirely non-violent. Chandra Singh’s version reveals the extreme provocation faced by protestors who were by and large peaceful. The situation was so tense that even he, as a person in uniform, was forced to hide from the crowd. The crowd was as ‘non-violent’ as it could be under the circumstances and acted with remarkable restraint. When thousands of individuals act as one, either with a belief in *ahimsa* (non-violence) or unshakeable faith in their leader, do individual instances of loss of control make the whole effort violent? The violence-non-violence binary fails, then as well as now, to take into account the huge imbalance of power between the State—armed to its teeth, and the people, who have no arms, and who, in the face of extreme provocation, resort to pelting stones.

Returning to Chandra Singh’s narrative we learn that the following day, on April 24, 1930, the Garhwali troops were informed that they would be again put on duty in the city where they will this time ‘have to’ fire. It was conveyed that any Ohdedar or soldier who refuses orders to fire on

Congress workers would be shot dead immediately. At the end of the dressing down, the troops were asked to fall in with their machine guns only to be informed that there would be a delay. This went on over the next couple of hours—orders to fall in were given, only to be retracted. The British were clearly in a dilemma—their trust in the loyal Garhwalis had been shaken like never before. Unable to believe that entire platoons could have revolted, they made attempts to identify the troublemakers who had given the cease fire orders. They were unsuccessful.

Chandra Singh decided against going to the meeting of Ohdedars called in the Officers' mess. Instead, he reminded the soldiers under his command of the ignominy that the Number 6 Gorkha Battalion and the 1/18 Royal Garhwali Rifles had brought upon themselves by firing on unarmed people in Jallianwallah Baug and in Malabar (on the Moplahs) respectively. "To oppress the Congress is to betray the nation. Today in Peshawar if [we] 800 Garhwali soldiers give up our lives in the name of the Congress, we will become immortal, the name of Garhwal will shine forever and the country will praise us..." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 154).

A sheet of paper was circulated for signatures of all the soldiers who did not want to go for duty that day. This effectively took the form of a mass resignation.^{xvi} Sankrityayan's biography of Chandra Singh that spans an entire life makes us aware of the distance he and the Garhwalis had covered to reach this point—from their villages as young, enthusiastic recruits of the *paltan* to the theatres of war in France and Mesopotamia as lesser humans fighting a foreign war to this far-flung corner of the Raj in India where their entire world as they knew it was being upended—by none other than themselves. For Chandra Singh and perhaps a few others, the break with their old way of life was complete, but for most the transition was not easy.

A dramatic incident narrated by Sankrityayan reveals Chandra Singh's grasp of the soldiers' dilemma and his appeal to them in a language they could understand, using the very articles of faith that had anchored their lives up to that point. When the soldiers were furiously discussing whether or not they can refuse orders to go into the city, Chandra Singh declared, "I swear on the Gayatri Mantra that I will not leave the barracks. As long as I breathe, I will abide by my words." (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 155). Sankrityayan describes how taking off his cap, grasping his *choti*, he recited the Gayatri Mantra and took an oath.^{xvii} The soldiers followed suit in the same fashion after which Chandra Singh asked them to put their signatures on a piece of paper demanding that their resignation be accepted within 24 hours.

The same evening the soldiers were asked by the authorities to surrender their weapons and were moved in the dead of night to Peshawar railway station. Despite all efforts to transport them in secret, news of the events at Peshawar had travelled beyond the city. As the train pulled into Haripur station, the British were irked to find that vats of tea had been kept boiling on the platform as a welcome for the Garhwalis who had refused to fire on the defenceless. Soon, another train came in from the opposite direction and stopped right next to them. It was carrying soldiers of the Number 5 Gorkha Battallion sent as replacement for the Garhwali regiment from Abbottabad to Peshawar. Hearing of the events at Peshawar, the Gorkha Battallion too promised that they will not fire on their countrymen.

‘A’ for Abbottabad

In May 2011, Abbottabad, a town in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan found worldwide notoriety thanks to the American raid to capture and kill Osama bin Laden. In an alternative history of the freedom movement however ‘A’ could very well have stood for Abbottabad, the city that in April 1930 turned out to welcome the heroes of Peshawar. Despite the secrecy with which the Garhwalis were transported, the news of them refusing to fire had spread across the country. People from Lahore and Rawalpindi had piled into lorries and set out for Abbottabad. From the railway station, the prisoners were forced to trudge 15 miles through pouring rain to reach the place of their confinement. Wherever they were recognised, they were met with affection, sympathy and slogans of ‘*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai* (Long live Mahatma Gandhi!)’ and ‘*Garhwali Veeron ki Jai* (Long live the heroes of Garhwal!)’. In Abbottabad city too, everywhere people lined both sides of the road and showered them with flowers and slogans.

In Kakul cantonment near Abbottabad, Chandra Singh was separated from the 67 others who had been arrested, and kept in solitary confinement. One incident from this period of incarceration deserves special mention for what it reveals about the formation of affinities beyond Self and Other. The jail conditions were deplorable and Chandra Singh especially had to endure the worst. He was kept in chains all day—the chains would only be removed when he needed to use the toilet. After using the toilet, he would wash his hands at a tap next to the masjid, within the jail grounds. A maulvi lived in the masjid with a small child, probably his grandson. By now, word had spread that the Garhwalis had put their lives at risk by not firing on the Pathans, who were Muslim. So, the people of Kakul would find every pretext to send tokens of their appreciation to the prisoners. The maulvi was no exception.

Whenever Chandra Singh came to the tap near the masjid to wash his hands the maulvi, without meeting his eye, would start reading out the newspaper loudly to his grandson, “Son, today everywhere in the Muslim world people are praying to God for these people.” (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 186–187). He would tell his grandson of the news from Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, and Lahore. Through him, Chandra Singh got to know about the persecution of people considered their sympathisers in Peshawar and also of the lathi charge on a procession of women in Bombay who had come out in their support. One day the maulvi also asked his grandson whether the prisoner would object to eating the food cooked by him. Chandra Singh who had long abandoned notions of caste purity replied in the negative and the guards, soldiers themselves, agreed to this small concession. From then on, the maulvi would provide food to Chandra Singh and also the news in the same fashion. As the anti-colonial struggle fractured along religious lines elsewhere in the sub-continent, in this remote corner of ‘India,’ a friendship had been forged between two communities that had no bond with one another, whether of blood or religion or ethnicity.

The court martial at Kakul near Abbottabad was the first since the mutiny of 1857, a fact that was reported widely in leading newspapers of the day. On June 12, after being held guilty and stripped of his rank and uniform, Chandra Singh began serving his sentence of rigorous life imprisonment at Abbottabad jail. From Abbottabad jail he was sent to Dera Ismail Khan, from there to Bareilly and thereon to Naini (Allahabad) and Lucknow.

Far from being the end point of Chandra Singh's life, the Peshawar mutiny marks his political birth. During the 11 years he spent in jail, he met political leaders of all persuasions. And it was in jail that from being an admirer of the Congress and the Arya Samaj, he would become a confirmed communist for life. His increasing disillusionment with the Congress and his personal and political struggles post-independence have been described in detail by Sankrityayan in his biography and I would encourage the interested student of history to study it. But the question remains—why is it important to remember Chandra Singh today?

The Value of Disobedience

In his essay, 'Civil Disobedience' Irfan Habib writes, "...no court martial in the world could deny to these Garhwalis the place they came to occupy in the hearts of the Indian people." (Habib 1997). This was perhaps true of that tumultuous period when alongside the reports of the arrests of Gandhi and other Congress leaders and of the sporadic episodes of violence that occurred when the peoples' non-violent resistance wore thin, the Garhwalis still found space in national news.^{xviii} Reflecting on the events of the time in his autobiography published six years later, Nehru writes:

"The biggest news of all that came to us in those early days [of Civil Disobedience] was of the occurrences in Peshawar on April 23rd, and subsequently all over the Frontier Province. Anywhere in India such a remarkable exhibition of disciplined and peaceful courage before machine-gun firing would have stirred the country. In the Frontier Province it had an additional significance, for the Pathans, noted for their courage, were not noted for their peaceful nature; and these Pathans had set an example which was unique in India. In the Frontier Province also occurred the famous incident of the refusal to fire on the civil population by the Garhwali soldiers. They refused to fire because of a soldier's distaste for firing on an unarmed crowd, and because, no doubt, of sympathy with the crowd. But even sympathy is not usually enough to induce a soldier to take the grave step of refusing to obey his officer's orders. He knows the consequences. The Garhwalis probably did so (in common with some other regiments elsewhere whose disobedience did not receive publicity) because of a mistaken notion that the British power was collapsing. Only when such an idea takes possession of the soldier does he dare to act according to his own sympathies and inclinations. Probably for a few days or weeks the general commotion and civil disobedience led some people to think that the last days of British rule had come, and this influenced part of the Indian Army. Soon it became obvious that no such thing was going to happen in the new future, and then there was no more disobedience in the army. Care was also taken not to put them in compromising positions." (Nehru [1936] 1982, 214).

When Nehru sent his autobiography along with other books to Chandra Singh who was in Lucknow jail at the time, his uncharitable description of the mutiny as the casual act of soldiers who got carried away thinking independence was near, who would never have signed up had they known it was to be long drawn struggle, so upset the latter that he refused to accept it. We learn from Sankrityayan that many years later Nehru, upon learning of the reason for Chandra Singh's anger, accepted his ignorance and promised him that he would change the section in the American edition of the book (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 245–246).

But we find that despite all the adulation they received in different parts of the country, despite public acknowledgements of their bravery by Congress workers and others, the Garhwalis continued

to be a source of discomfort to the leaders of the Congress. After this release from jail, Chandra Singh had spent many months at both Gandhi's Sevagram and at Nehru's residence in Allahabad. And when India secured independence, he took it upon himself to find some means of sustenance for the court-martialled soldiers many of whom were over age, and all of whom were now poverty stricken and unemployable. Handing over a memorandum to the prime minister of the newly born nation, he proposed that the Peshawar *Kand* be marked as a national day, that the soldiers be given a pension, that the families of the soldiers who had died receive some support. Nehru's angry outburst, that a *baaghi* (rebel or mutineer) cannot ask for recognition, left Chandra Singh at a loss for words. As Sankrityayan writes, this was the same Nehru who had called him 'Veer' in front of an assembly of college students in Lucknow, whose father, Motilal Nehru, had extracted a promise from both Gandhi and Nehru on his deathbed that they will not forget the brave Garhwalis. Chandra Singh's response to Nehru reveals his anger and hurt, "That Field Marshall [Gandhi] who you serve as General, I'm his foot soldier. Today you are Prime minister and I, a rebel!" (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 394–395).

Gandhi too, Sankrityayan points out, deliberately refused to recognise the importance of the mutiny at Peshawar by the Garhwali soldiers. It was as if he did not want to admit of any other effort for Indian independence barring his own Non-Cooperation Movement. In an interview given to a French journalist he is reported to have said, "A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks the oath which he has taken and renders himself guilty of civil disobedience. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey; for when I am in power, I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers. If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power." (Dutt 1940, 333).

'Guilty of civil disobedience'—this pronouncement of guilt by the Mahatma must have stung Chandra Singh more than the sentence given by the military court. How ironic that the apostle of non-violence who roused the masses to revolt through movements like non-cooperation and civil disobedience should deny a soldier the right to heed his conscience, his 'inner voice'—the very inner voice, the ultimate arbiter, to which he himself avowedly often took recourse in times of confusion, in order to resolve grave ethical dilemmas. Did the spiritual Gandhi not think of his favourite scripture where another soldier is wracked by doubt over the duty that is required of him—"How, having killed our own people, could we be happy, Krishna?" (Sargeant 2009, 75). In the *Bhagavat Gita*, Krishna ultimately convinces Arjuna of his duty as a kshatriya to fight the 'righteous' war, but this was neither the first time nor the last that questions were raised about the righteousness of war and the duty of the citizen or soldier, either to fight or desist. Arjuna's bow slips out of his hands at the prospect of killing his own kin.

Chandra Singh's dilemma at Peshawar is similar, however the definition of kin is stretched to accommodate not just blood relations, not just the people of Garhwal, but all the people suffering colonial oppression, who he had come to identify as his own. It did not matter that they were Pathans, Muslims, people of another faith, who spoke a strange incomprehensible language (Pashto), who were even then and are especially now considered to be the mortal enemies of Hinduism.^{xix} In the period after the Non-Cooperation Movement Muslims had grown increasingly disenchanted with the Congress and newspaper reports of civil disobedience corroborate their near total loss of faith in the party leading the movement. But even in this atmosphere of mistrust the Garhwalis saw the Pathans as their own, as fellow sufferers of colonial oppression. That singular act of solidarity broke centuries-

old entrenched walls of suspicion and hatred, endearing them to Muslims everywhere, even to those affiliated to the Muslim League (Sankrityayan [1955] 2013, 370). It forged a bond of kinship that briefly bridged an ever-widening chasm.

What of the British to whom the Garhwalis had sworn loyalty and whose wars they had made their own? As the people who had fed them, clothed them and raised them from lives of deprivation, were they not kin? A few soldiers did question Chandra Singh's betrayal for the shame it had brought upon Garhwal which up till then had an exemplary record of military service. Even Gandhi and Nehru, as we have seen, did not condone this act of rebellion. This inexplicable act of disloyalty has meaning only when seen not as an abandonment of responsibility but as the ultimate act of responsibility as a human being—the deliberate transfer of loyalty from the all-powerful oppressor to the oppressed, who is entirely without power. In one way it can be read as the colonial subject's journey from *raj bhakti* to *desh bhakti*, with the caveat that for Chandra Singh the *desh* that was taking shape was not the nation-state with infinite instruments of coercion at its disposal, but the ordinary masses, with whom he felt as one due to the commonality of their suffering, not just in the colonial period but even more so in the period after independence.

The radical responsibility of the act is revealed by an act of omission that occurred 10 to 15 years later—the silence, rather, the concurrence of the Germans (the elite as well as the masses)—during the extermination of Jews in Hitler's concentration camps. Reporting on the trial of Eichmann in 1961, Hannah Arendt noted the complete lack of remorse on his part accompanied by the assertion that he was only doing his duty (Arendt 1964). Eichmann and others like him who had committed these unforgivable crimes were complacent in the belief that their only responsibility as soldiers was to obey orders. This—thoughtlessness and not inherent evil—is what, Arendt argues, made possible the holocaust. Upright citizens following orders makes not for a harmonious world but for a world devoid of responsibility. This is what still makes possible heinous acts like the recent bombing of a girls' school in Minab, the genocide in Gaza and the continued attacks on Lebanon even after the declaration of a cease fire.

If Chandra Singh and his comrades had followed orders, if they had abided by the code of honour that binds 'martial' races like the Garhwalis unquestioningly to their duty, if they had lived by the *kshatriya dharma* of their ancestors, they would have had an illustrious career in the army and retired with a comfortable pension, perhaps as highly decorated soldiers deserving of the nation's admiration and respect. They would have also acted in bad faith, in the Sartrean sense. Instead, acknowledging and reflecting on the contradictions in their (human) life, the inherent ambiguity of their (human) situation, they exercised their freedom of choice thereby transcending the prison of their identity (Sartre [1948] 1960). The prison of identity could be a caste identity, an ethnic identity, a religious identity, an occupational identity or all of these—any sense of the Self that fixes one in an unchanging transcendental essence thereby occluding the human being's radical freedom to choose. The human being, as the one entity whose existence precedes essence, has not only the freedom to choose but also the responsibility of living by that choice. Man, Sartre writes, creates himself through his actions. And in choosing for himself, he chooses for all men.^{xx} Each time he acts, he wills himself into being—action is creative not just of the man who acts but also of the very image of man, of man 'as he ought to be.' Chandra Singh's radical disobedience thus, I argue following Sartre, has legislative force for humanity 'as it ought to be.'

Uses of the Past

The entire history of western philosophy could not prevent the holocaust. In his trial Eichmann even famously took recourse to Kant, albeit a distortion of Kant, to justify his actions. He claimed that following the categorical imperative he had lived by Kant's principle of duty his whole life till the point when, confronted by the Final Solution, he felt he couldn't follow it anymore, as the situation was beyond his control. Tying this to his assertion of having only followed orders, and only followed the law, Arendt observes, "What he failed to point out in court was that in this "period of crimes legalized by the state", as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or the law of the land - or, in Hans Frank's formulation of "the categorical imperative in the Third Reich", which Eichmann might have known: "Act in such a way that the Fuhrer, if he knew your action, would approve it." (Die Technik Des Staates, 1942, pp. 15–16)" (Arendt 1964, 229–230).

Chandra Singh and his compatriots—rustic, uneducated, unsophisticated foot-soldiers of the Raj—had neither the confidence nor the privilege of the refinements of western civilisation. Instead, they were weighed down by an inherited tradition which imposed on them ideas of duty, loyalty, and sacrifice, which defined their place in the world, circumscribing their choices and goals. For the 'well-adjusted' individual secure in the unchanging, eternal wisdom of (religious) tradition, ethical choice is not difficult—it is predetermined, already given. Even when the struggle is scarring, religion provides the soothing balm deflecting responsibility for the moral choices one makes. But to those without easy beliefs to ground their existence, the path is more complicated.

When faced with a *dharma sankat* (moral dilemma), Chandra Singh, unlike Arjuna, could not or does not take recourse to the timeless sermon of a transcendental being. Being very much of this world, formed by its vicissitudes, and with no belief in the transcendental, he turns his back on inherited tradition—the tradition of the Garhwali regiment, the tradition of the *kshatriya*, religious tradition—to make what was undoubtedly a difficult choice, though a free choice in the Sartrean sense. And in fashioning himself thus, he opens up possibilities of freedom for all humanity.

Post-script

Bombay, from where we had begun, was to see yet another mutiny, this one on the eve of independence, in February 1946. The revolt of the sailors of the Royal Indian Navy which began on February 18, 1946 provoked the condemnation of leaders from both the Congress and the Muslim League. The very next day, news had travelled across the Arabian Sea, to Karachi, where naval ratings went on a lightning strike. While in Karachi six soldiers were killed, and sympathetic token strikes were reported from military units across the country, in Bombay students boycotted classes but themselves had to face police repression (Chandra 489–476). As people held the city to siege, the troops opened fire killing 208 civilians and injuring over a thousand. Most of these were workers organised by the Communist Party which alone had lauded the actions of the naval mutineers (Chandra 223). The solidarity of the working class with the soldiers of the naval mutiny stands as another remarkable expression of empathy as well as disobedience from the people of Bombay.

Endnotes

ⁱ I thank Ganesh Devy, Gaurav Gadgil, and Krishna Dange for their invaluable comments on this essay. I'm particularly indebted to Kanchana Mahadevan for taking the time to read multiple drafts and pointing me to texts for further study. While some of their suggestions have been incorporated to strengthen my argument, due to constraints of time and space I haven't been able to do justice to the many rich areas of enquiry that they have opened up. I hope to return to these questions in a separate study.

ⁱⁱ There is only a brief mention of the episode in Bipan Chandra, et al 1988, and a more extended discussion in Habib 1997. Mirroring the neglect on the Indian side is the near total obliteration of the episode in Pakistani historiography. See Shah 2013 for a detailed account of the episode and an examination of the reasons for its suppression in accounts of the freedom struggle.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963) was a writer, translator, scholar of Buddhism and inveterate *ghummakkad* (wanderer) whose corpus of works exceeds a hundred. Apart from his widely translated work '*Volga se Ganga Tak*' (From Volga to Ganga) he has left behind a four volume autobiography, many travelogues documenting his wanderings in Asia and Europe, a 'manifesto' or *shastra* of travel, a masterly study of the history of Central Asia, extensive studies of Buddhist philosophical texts, biographies of figures such as Emperor Akbar, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse Tung, and short stories and historical novels such as the one that is the subject of this paper. His historical novels mostly focus on figures of his time, like Chandra Singh. The reader interested in Chandra Singh's life might also benefit from reading his biography of Sardar Prithvi Singh, a revolutionary of the Ghadar Party who was imprisoned in Kala Pani (as the confinement in the Andaman Islands was infamously referred to). A brief though interesting sketch of an Indian soldier in the Second World War, 'Kaptaan Lal' (Captain Lal, 1961) was to be Sankrityayan's final work.

^{iv} I stick to the term *kand* used by Sankrityayan which, when translated into English as 'episode,' loses the connotation of something scandalous.

^v The term *Veer* is often affixed to warriors who have demonstrated courage on the battlefield. Nehru among others are said to have used it to refer to Chandra Singh and Sankrityayan's sympathetic biography takes forward the appellation.

^{vi} This point, which I develop later in the text, is taken from Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism", also translated as "Existentialism is a Humanism"

^{vii} All translations from Sankrityayan's text are mine.

^{viii} The Khudai Khidmatgar, also known as Surkh Posh or the Red Shirts, a Pashtoon reform movement that started in the North West Frontier Province during the colonial period, was to become a vital arm of Gandhi's non-violent struggle under the leadership of Bacha Khan or Badshah Khan, in other words, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known in Indian nationalist historiography as 'Frontier Gandhi'. See Shah 2013 for a discussion of the role of Pashtoons in the anti-colonial movement.

^{ix} Some of the details are contradicted by Chandra Singh's version as narrated to Sankrityayan

^x Here 'Assistant Commissioner' presumably refers to the afore-mentioned Deputy Commissioner

^{xi} As we saw in the photographs that were a part of the exhibition at CSMVS, except for the detail of the Pathans who spoke Pashto, this very scene was being enacted that day as well as in the weeks and months to follow in thousands of places across the country.

^{xii} Sankrityayan's repeated emphasis on the incomprehensibility of language gestures to what he considers the traveller's, and by extension the human being's, obligation to strangers, "It is intensely human to help strangers, to consider it one's duty to offer assistance to those whose language we do not understand" (Sankrityayan 1994, 19, cited in Srivastava 2002, 393). Read thus, the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between Self and Other marked by language makes solidarity, though difficult, obligatory at a human level.

^{xiii} I have left this term untranslated as it is difficult to posit a stable anti-colonial or nationalist sentiment among soldiers of the Garhwali regiment. What we see is not loyalty to the country or nation understood as a stable category but a growing identification with the people who experience subjection.

^{xiv} The term *gora* is often used in the narrative for white soldiers who received a differential treatment from native Indians in all the wars that the regiment fought across Asia and Europe.

^{xv} While the official estimate was only 30, most accounts of the time put the figure closer to 200.

^{xvi} Many of those who had appended their signatures to the ‘mass resignation’ paper later retracted their stand during the court martial. The accused entered a plea of ‘not guilty’ to the charge of mutiny. The rationale of the defence lawyer is presented by Sankrityayan in the preface and also in chapters 15–16 of the text.

^{xvii} The *choti* is the tuft of hair sported by high caste Hindu men as a sign of their superiority. Sankrityayan’s ironic use of the incident throws light on Chandra Singh’s ongoing transformation from a caste Hindu to a cadre in many progressive people’s movements.

^{xviii} Newspapers like the Bombay Chronicle for instance carried reports on the massacre and the mutiny, the proceedings of the trial and the various protests in support of the Garhwalis

^{xix} “For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. To choose between this and that is to affirm at the same time the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all.” Sartre [1948] 1960.

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