

**Lascars, c.1850 – 1950: The Lives and
Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial
Britain and India**

Ceri-Anne Fidler

Student Number 012526765

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2011

Cardiff University

School of History, Archaeology and Religion

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Summary of Thesis:

My PhD thesis focuses on the lives of Indian Lascars or seafarers in Imperial Britain between 1850 and 1950.

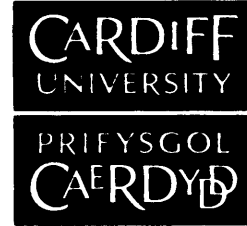
I explore their working and living conditions on these ships. Issues such as their health and accommodation on shipboard are discussed and compared to those of their British colleagues. The relationships and hierarchies of power on shipboard are also considered. My thesis challenges the perception that Indian seafarers' resistance was always lawful and not blind, personalised or violent (Balachandran). The concept of moral economy is employed to illustrate how Indian seafarers had certain expectations of their rights on shipboard and protested against violations of these standards when opportunities arose.

I explore British perceptions of Indian seafarers. For example, depictions of Indians in the British popular press are explored. The position of Indian seafarers in relation to other non-European seafarers is also considered.

My thesis explores how Indian seafarers constructed and negotiated identities both collectively and as individuals in different contexts and at different times. Building upon theoretical approaches to identity, I illustrate how Indian seafarers constructed multiple and fluid identities that changed over time. I describe how Indian seafarers were able to "shuffle identities like cards" (Colley) and illustrate the reasoning and choice behind their identities (Sen). I also consider how Indian seafarers constructed, negotiated and manipulated the boundaries of collective identities.

It explores the role of the family in the migration process, whether temporarily for work or for more long term migration and settlement in Britain. The role of the family in India in the decision to migrate and their support for absent seafarers is documented. The impact of prolonged absences of seafarers on family life is also explored. The role and status of Indian seafarers' families in Britain is also explored.

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Lascars, C.1850 – 1950: The Lives and Identities of Indian Seafarers in Imperial Britain and India

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List of Abbreviations

IOR: India Office Records, British Library.

IWM: Imperial War Museum, London.

IWW: Industrial Workers of the World.

MOL: Museum of London.

MRC: Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

NAI: National Archives of India, New Delhi.

NMM: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

P&O: Peninsula and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.

RCLI: Royal Commission on Labour in India.

TNA: The National Archives, London.

Glossary

Articles of Agreement: Contract between the seamen and Captain and Master of the Ship. Set out wage rates and conditions of employment.

Belaying Pin: A nautical instrument traditionally used to secure lines on square rigged ships. A solid metal or wooden bar with a curved top portion and cylindrical bottom part.

Bhandary: Cook.

Cassab: Crew member in charge of the deck stores.

Donkeyman: Crew member in charge of the operation and maintenance of auxiliary machinery such as generators, pumps and the “donkey” steam boiler – a boiler used to provide steam to deck machinery when the main boiler was shut down, for example when in port.

Fireman: A member of the engine room department responsible for shovelling coal into the boilers and maintaining the fires.

Lascar: A general term used to refer to all Indian seafarers, from the Persian-Urdu word lashkar.

Paniwallah or waterman: Crew member in charge of hoses on deck.

Poop Deck: Exposed partial deck forming the roof of a cabin at the rear of a ship.

Serang: Native boatswain or chief of a lascar crew. Each department had their own Serang.

Tindal: Native petty officer of Lascars.

Topass: Men engaged to do the dirtiest work on shipboard such as cleaning the lavatories.

Topi: Indian cap or headdress.

Tramp Ship: A ship which does not have a fixed schedule or definite route.

Trimmer/Coal Trimmer: A member of the engine room department. His role was to ensure that the fireman had adequate supplies of coal and moved coal between the bunkers and the engine room. Prepared the coal for the fireman’s use.

Windlass: Nautical equipment used to move heavy weights.

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Introduction

Conrad Dixon's description of Indian seafarers as the "forgotten seamen" has been challenged in recent years by a burgeoning historical scholarship.¹ Despite this, there has been no detailed investigation of the men's lives in their entirety, with scholarship concentrating on their public lives alone. This is in contrast to studies of other seafarers, such as the study of Kru seafarers. Kru seafarers' lives have been charted both in their country of origin as well as in the metropolitan settings. Thus we know a great deal about the Kru seafarers from their homes in present day Liberia, to the port community of Freetown, their lives and conditions of work on ships, and, finally, their lives in Liverpool.² In contrast, work on Indian seafarers has concentrated on a limited number of topics such as recruitment practices, the regulations and restrictions imposed upon Indian seafarers by maritime laws, their relations with British unions and finally Indian seafarers as representations in British imperial rhetoric. These astute studies have succeeded in shedding some light on the public lives of Indian seafarers and in casting them as historical subjects in the field of international maritime history. Nonetheless, there has been no in-depth study of their lives as a whole. The focus of existing studies is also limited to the public sphere. They rarely take into consideration the views of the men themselves but rather concentrate on how the men were constructed in various discourses.

In light of this lacuna, the aim of my thesis is to explore the lives of Indian seafarers from their original home in pre-partition Indian villages and families to their lives on board ships and finally their identities, lives and familial relationships both inside and outside their home in Britain. It pays particular attention to the views of the men themselves and to their personal or everyday lives. This thesis also attempts to expand our understanding of Indian seafarers by placing them in a comparative perspective. But before looking at these issues in more detail, there is a need to set out background

¹ Dixon, Conrad, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen", in R. Ommer and G. Panting, eds., *The Working Men who Got Wet*, St. Johns', Newfoundland, 1980, pp. 263 – 281.

² Frost, Diane, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999.

information and definitions concerning Indian seafarers that will aid the reader in understanding the rest of the thesis.

Who were the Indian “Lascar” Seafarers?

Before exploring the lives of Indian seafarers there is a need to set out background information to aid understanding of who the men were, where they came from, and how many were employed between the years 1850 to 1950. In addition, this section outlines definitions of terms that recur throughout the thesis. For example, throughout the period under investigation Indian seafarers were referred to as “Lascars” in both official and popular parlance. Etymologically, the term came from the Persian-Urdu word “lashkar” meaning army or camp follower. It was defined in the *Hobson-Jobson Anglo-Indian Dictionary* as “(1) an inferior class of artilleryman; (2) a tent-pitcher, doing other work which the class are accustomed to do; (3) a sailor”.³ Balachandran argued that the term was deliberately used to reinforce the idea that Indian seafarers were “coolies” because of the “original Persian term’s evocation of conscript labourers employed to carry loads for an army, camp or trading caravan”.⁴ Thus, the term “Lascar” was a rhetorical device employed to emphasise the difference between British and Indian seafarers. It was a loaded term that implied a difference in background, skill and seamanship.

While the term was generally employed in a broad and inclusive sense to refer to all Indian seafarers on shipboard it specifically referred to men who worked in the deck department. But Indian seafarers were also employed as engine room and saloon crews. Amongst these Indian crews, there were a number of different ranks of seafarers. At the top of the hierarchy within each department were the Serangs, the “native boatswain or chief of a Lascar vessel”.⁵ The Serang dealt with matters of recruitment and discipline on

³ Yule, Henry and Burnell, A.C., *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996 (Originally published London: John Murray, 1886), p.507.

⁴ Balachandran, Gopalan, “South Asian seafarers and their worlds, c.1870s to 1930s”, *Seascapes, Littoral Cultures and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges*, February 12-15th, 2003.
<http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/balachandran.html> [Accessed 19/10/2007].

⁵ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, p.812.

board ship and was also responsible for paying Lascars.⁶ The “tyranny” of the Serang became infamous owing to their alleged demands for bribes in return for jobs. It is thought that Serangs and Lascars tended to be from the same region or were linked through kin groups.⁷ Next in line was the Tindal, “the head or commander of a body of men... a native petty officer of Lascars”.⁸ To these ranks, M. Watkin-Thomas also added the Cassab who was in charge of the deck stores; the Bhandary or crew’s cook; and finally, the Paniwallah or Waterman in charge of the hoses on deck.⁹ These different rankings are explored in greater detail in Chapter One when I consider the hierarchies of power on ships carrying Indian seafarers.

Some preliminary information can be gathered from Dinkar Desai’s work on the recruiting grounds for Indian ports in his *Maritime Labour in India*. Crews recruited at Calcutta were composed of men from Sylhet, Noakhali and Chittagong in the engine room, with Noakhali and Chittagong men also employed as deck crew. At Bombay, the bulk of deck crews consisted of men from Malabar in Madras Presidency (present day Kerala) while engine room crews were composed of Pathan and Punjabi Muslims. At both ports, Goans manned the saloon department.¹⁰ The situation described by Desai applied to India before Partition, and it is in this sense that I use the term “India” throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, the changes wrought by Partition need to be considered as they still influence the story being told. For example, oral history testimonies of men who began their life in the merchant navy in British India recalled the impact of the Partition of India and the later formation of Bangladesh. Following the Partition of India in 1947, the province of Punjab was split between India and Pakistan while Noakhali, Chittagong and Sylhet became part of East Pakistan.¹¹ More changes followed the war of independence

⁶ Balachandran, Gopalan, “Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen, Calcutta, 1880-1935”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9, 1, 1997, p.3.

⁷ Adams, Caroline, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of pioneer Sylhetti settlers in Britain*, London: Tower Hamlets Arts Project, 1987, p.21. See also Balachandran, “South Asian Seafarers and their worlds”.

⁸ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, p.923.

⁹ Watkin-Thomas, M., “Our Asian Crews”, *About Ourselves*, No. 14, September 1955, p.312.

¹⁰ Desai, Dinkar, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, p. 21.

¹¹ A referendum was held in Sylhet which resulted in all but three thanas (districts) becoming part of eastern Pakistan, see Bhattacharjee, Nabanipa, “Unburdening Partition: The ‘Arrival’ of Sylhet”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No.4, January 2009, pp. 77 – 79. This resulted in Assam being partitioned, see Chatteji, Joya, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947 – 1967*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 69.

and establishment of Bangladesh in 1971. The areas previously in East Pakistan now became part of Bangladesh, affecting seafarers from Sylhet, Chittagong and Noakhali. The impact of these changes on the identities of the men is explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Early estimates of the number of Indian seafarers are erratic. There are difficulties in charting the number of Indian seafarers as no official data was collected on a regular basis. In light of such problems, historians such as Visram and Robinson-Dunn turned to unofficial sources to estimate the number of Indian seafarers employed in the early 1800s. Visram used “estimates and assumptions” to offer some idea of early numbers. For example, explaining the variation in figures she noted that “for 1814, Docker put the figure at ‘near 1600’ while another source reckoned that there were 2,000 in the Company’s boarding houses”.¹² Robinson-Dunn also used the unofficial estimates found in missionary reports. From these reports, Dunn estimated that 2,500 Lascars visited Britain between the years 1794 and 1814; and that by the nineteenth century between 10,000 and 12,000 came to the country annually.¹³ Thus, the period of my study was preceded by an early and increasing number of Indian seafarers in Britain.

The number of Lascars continued to increase during the period of my study as evident in official statistics. During the period 1890 to 1920, statistical information relating to the number of Lascars employed was printed in the “Annual Statement of the navigation and shipping of the United Kingdom”. I have collated this information in Table One on page five¹⁴. In 1891, Lascars formed 10 per cent of the total workforce on British ships. By 1920, they formed 20.5 per cent of the workforce. Thus, the numbers show a steady increase across the period. The most sustained increase in their numbers during this period took place on ships employed exclusively in the foreign trade. They also formed a

¹² Visram, Rozina, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, p.32. ‘Docker’ was Dr. Hilton Docker, Company physician to the East India Company’s Lascar barracks.

¹³ Robinson-Dunn, Diane, “Lascar Sailors and English Converts”, *Seascapes, Littoral Cultures and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges*, February 12-15th, 2003. The first set of figures is from ‘Lascars and Chinese: A Short Address to Young Men of the Several Orthodox Denominations of Christians...’. The second set of figures is from ‘Native Visitors from Africa and Asia’, *London City Mission Magazine*, 55, September 1890, p. 220.

¹⁴ Table One is constructed from the Annual Statements of navigation listed in the bibliography. No figures exist for the years of World War One owing to the “abnormal conditions caused by the War”, Annual statement of the navigation and shipping of the United Kingdom for the year 1919; 1921 (Cmd. 1419) XXXIV p. xiii. “Foreigners” were non-Britons other than Lascars.

Table One: Number of Lascars employed, 1891 - 1920

Constructed from information contained in the Annual statements of the navigation and shipping of the United Kingdom between 1891 and 1920.

	Partly in the Home Trade and Partly in the Foreign Trade									Annual Total		
	Total	Foreigners	Lascars	Total	Foreigners	Lascars	Total	Foreigners	Lascars	Total	Foreigners	Lascars
1891	61821	1016	0	6965	690	332	171694	28561	23703	240480	30267	24035
1892	62106	1114	0	7883	700	676	171746	29085	24723	241735	30899	25399
1893	62468	814	0	7905	833	181	170601	27872	24316	240974	29519	24497
1894	63207	1023	0	7557	956	177	169694	29071	25998	240458	31050	26175
1895	62181	1133	0	7654	876	602	170651	30326	27475	240486	32335	28077
1896	39955	1036	81	7159	797	739	172932	30921	29179	220046	32754	29999
1897	40493	1177	0	7608	930	1146	170700	31506	30338	218801	33613	31484
1898	40206	1229	0	7837	1018	878	172015	32740	31387	220058	34987	32265
1899	4113	1362	0	8794	1168	1330	208848	33201	32475	221755	35731	33805
1900	41712	1587	0	5649	911	366	177777	34036	35657	225138	36534	36023
1901	40779	1837	0	6792	1032	828	178410	34305	36603	225981	37174	37431
1902	40883	1975	0	7939	1278	1256	181848	36062	37921	230670	39315	39177
1903	40746	2191	0	7415	924	1113	185779	36713	39908	233940	39828	41021
1904	40957	2028	0	6026	878	734	188048	36195	41948	235031	39101	42682
1905	40230	1747	0	8440	1164	1362	189534	36082	42121	238204	38993	43483
1906	40652	1771	0	9025	1127	1406	193653	34928	42961	243330	37826	44367
1907	41364	2062	51	5682	888	647	200217	83830	43906	247263	86780	44604
1908	40691	1678	0	6354	789	692	196658	31565	43460	243703	34032	44152
1909	40148	1555	0	9240	942	1466	192393	28676	42494	241781	31173	42960
1910	39792	1499	0	11532	911	2436	191709	27112	41498	243033	29522	43934
1911	36247	1388	0	11769	895	1959	199257	27609	43493	247273	29892	45452
1912	35652	1330	0	10224	811	1599	205960	27886	45612	251836	30027	47211
1913	35283	1448	0	13303	1052	1993	207674	29255	44855	256260	31755	46848
1919	26149	1121	0	4509	522	156	202607	15005	46443	233535	16648	46599
1920	29077	1073	0	4671	595	0	211420	13551	50273	245168	15219	50273

Table Two: Number of Lascars employed, 1921 - 1938.

Constructed from information contained in Statistical Abstracts for the United Kingdom, 1921 - 1938.

					In the Foreign Trade							
	British	Foreign	Lascars	Total	British	Foreign	Lascars	Total	British	Foreign	Lascars	Total
1921	28424	802	27	29253	140352	14504	53513	208369	173110	15790	53540	242440
1922	28453	710	0	29163	137095	10557	54200	201852	169943	11563	55266	236772
1923	28305	721	0	29026	136654	10268	55875	202797	168085	11271	55935	235291
1924	25951	599	0	26550	136137	11228	54954	202319	167078	12285	54954	234317
1925	24608	407	0	25015	141842	11134	54668	207644	170364	11899	54969	237232
1926	20874	574	0	21448	133995	17801	56444	208240	154869	18375	56444	229688
1927	20827	629	0	21456	136588	18324	55060	209972	157415	18953	55060	231428
1928	20680	700	0	21380	139305	18144	56479	213928	159985	18844	56479	235308
1929	20906	666	0	21572	139414	19293	56203	214910	160320	19959	56203	236482
1930	24094	676	0	24770	136771	18231	56416	211418	160865	18907	56416	236188
1931	22533	657	0	23190	118020	14846	55373	188239	140533	15503	55373	211429
1932	21916	493	0	22409	109361	11837	52117	173315	131277	12330	52117	195724
1933	21037	379	0	21416	104802	10712	49080	164594	125839	11091	49080	186010
1934	20830	331	0	21161	104163	10599	48293	163055	124993	10930	48293	184216
1935	20720	269	0	20989	105045	8348	48009	161402	125765	8617	48009	182391
1936	20976	244	0	21220	108799	7649	47307	163755	129775	7893	47307	184975
1937	21454	261	0	21715	110845	8845	48658	168348	132299	9106	48658	190063
1938	21247	266	0	21513	109794	9590	50702	170086	131041	9856	50702	191599

sizeable percentage of the combined home and foreign trade workforce, varying between 5 per cent in 1891 and 21.1 per cent in 1910. But their employment in this sector showed no pattern of sustained increase. Between 1921 and 1938, the numbers of Lascars employed were reported in the annual “Statistical abstract for the United Kingdom”. The figures for these years are gathered together in Table Two on page six.¹⁵ These statistics show a continued increase in the numbers of Lascars employed on British vessels. In 1921, Lascars formed 22.1 per cent of the total annual workforce on British ships, rising to 26.5 per cent in 1938. The number of Lascars employed stabilised and levelled out during the 1930s but began to increase again toward the end of the period. This was possibly due to the impact of the Great Depression during the earlier years of the decade. After 1938, Lascars do not appear on the statistical returns. Despite this, it is possible to see that between 1890 and 1938 there was a steady increase in the number of Lascars employed on British merchant vessels.

This section has set out the definition of terms such as Lascar and other ranks of Indian seafarers on British ships. It has defined how the term “India” is used in the thesis while also noting changes in the national boundaries of the Subcontinent. The recruiting grounds of Indian seafarers have been outlined in addition to considering how changing national boundaries affected these areas. Finally, the steadily increasing numbers of Lascar seafarers in British Merchant Navy have been explored.

Historiography and Approaches

The following section reviews the historiography on Indian seafarers and demonstrates how my thesis builds upon it. My theoretical approaches and definitions of key terms are also discussed. I demonstrate the scope to expand our understanding of Indian seafarers by considering their lives as a whole including their personal or everyday lives, exploring the views of the men themselves and also by adopting a comparative approach.

While historical scholarship has analysed the recruitment practices of Indian seafarers there has been no consideration of the life and conditions they faced on board ships. For

¹⁵ Table Two was constructed from information contained in the statistical abstracts printed as British Parliamentary Papers and listed in the bibliography. The category “Partly in the home trade and partly in the foreign trade” was dropped after 1925. I have omitted it from my table for ease of use.

example, Balachandran traced the chronological development of recruitment at Calcutta from the situation in the 1870s, through the emergence of Indian seafarers' unions and the founding of the International Labour Organisation, to the abolition of brokers in 1934.¹⁶ He also traced the relationship between Indian seafarers' unions and the British state and unions. For example, he demonstrated how the British depicted the system of recruitment as evidence of Indian seafarers' coolie status.¹⁷ But he also discussed Indian seafarers' unions' attempts to reconfigure these British stereotypes by stressing Indian seafarers' identities as workers.¹⁸ This concentration on recruitment is not matched with accounts of the everyday living and working conditions Indian seafarers faced on British merchant vessels. In contrast, Chapter One explores the conditions they worked under and how they were treated. It compares, where possible, their conditions to those of other nationality seafarers. This allows for a better understanding of the conditions Indian seafarers faced in their everyday life on board British ships.

Chapter One also explores forms of protest and resistance Indian seafarers used to specifically address the conditions they encountered on shipboard. Historians have highlighted collective and individual forms of protest by Indian seafarers but have not looked at protests that specifically addressed shipboard conditions. For example, Balachandran's work on Indian seafarers' unions demonstrated their ability to challenge practices such as recruitment. Instances of individual agency have also been the focus of historical scholarship. For example, historians have uncovered examples of individual Indian seafarers' ability to move within the structures of Britishness and anti-alien legislation. But the historiography does not consider Indian seafarers' ability to contest detrimental practices on board ship.

There is also an absence in the existing historiography of forms of protest that were confrontational, dramatic and even violent. This corresponds to a move away from concentration on dramatic, confrontational protest in the wider South Asian historiography. Attention switched from the spectacular, explosive moments of

¹⁶ Balachandran, "Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen", pp. 1-18.

¹⁷ Balachandran, Gopalan, "Producing Coolies, (Un)making Workers: A (Post-)Colonial Parable for the Contemporary Present", Unpublished Paper, http://hei.unige.ch/sections/hp/Documents/Balachandran_Producing%20Coolies.pdf, [Accessed 20/02/2010].

¹⁸ Balachandran, "South Asian Seafarers and their Worlds, c.1870s to 1930s".

resistance and rebellion that were the focus of the Subaltern Studies School to forms of resistance that were “singularly undramatic” and that stopped short of “overt defiance”.¹⁹ James Scott argued that concentrating on periodic explosions overlooked the underlying vision of justice that informed them and their rational goals and targets.²⁰ Balachandran’s work appears to reflect these developments. He has stressed how Indian seafarers’ protests were not “arbitrary, blind, personalised or violent”.²¹ Indeed, they were “undemonstrative... even undramatic”.²² Instead, Indian seafarers always ensured that their protests were lawful.²³ His study also revealed that these undramatic protests were founded upon a rational basis and were carefully planned. He described “a certain rationality – a careful weighing of costs, benefits and opportunities”.²⁴ In Chapter One, however, I demonstrate that rational thinking does not have to be divorced from dramatic, confrontational and even violent resistance. This builds upon the works of Indian labour historians such as Chitra Joshi who argued that dramatic and violent forms of protest could also be carefully planned and executed. Joshi demonstrated that when the actions of individuals violated notions of justice held by workers, the target of opposition was the individual person. Chapter One demonstrates how Indian seafarers carefully chose specific targets when they used violent or confrontational forms of protest and thus deduces a rational decision making process behind their actions.

Chapter One also attempts to address the question of how the men perceived their work by employing the idea of moral economy. James Scott explored the concept of the moral economy in his study of South Asian peasants. He defined it as “their notion of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation – their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable”.²⁵ Thompson also described the importance of a “legitimizing notion” through which crowds believed that they were

¹⁹ Scott, James C., *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, London: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 26 – 27.

²⁰ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p.37.

²¹ Balachandran, Gopalan, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886 - 1945”, *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2008, p. 49.

²² Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p.70.

²³ Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p.59.

²⁴ Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p. 72.

²⁵ Scott, James C., *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University, 1976, p.3.

defending traditional rights and customs.²⁶ Within this framework I consider examples of Indian seafarers refusing to work and look at the reasons behind their protests. I explore instances where Indian seafarers defended their perceived rights or customs on shipboard such as food, working conditions and their treatment by Europeans and Serangs. I ask whether there was a certain level of treatment and care that they expected. By looking at when they resorted to these types of agency I hope to uncover what they understood as intolerable claims on their produce and their definitions of moral economy.

Chapter Two considers British perceptions of Indian seafarers. Laura Tabili included Indian seafarers in her definition of “Black Seamen” in interwar Britain and demonstrated how racist discourses concerning Black seamen were constructed. She demonstrated the role of the British state alongside British shipowners and trade unions in constructing racial difference. Her central hypothesis was that racism in interwar Britain was not a natural or inevitable reaction to immigration but was constructed by historical actors.²⁷ She illustrated the role of ship-owners, the state and the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union (hereafter NSFU) in constructing racial ideology, reinforcing racial subordination and re-colonising Black seamen in Britain.²⁸ For example, she argued that shipowners and employers used racial ideology to control their workforce by creating rivalry and opposition between non-European and European seafarers. Thus, employers imported and rehabilitated colonial racial ideology to justify the subordination of non-European seafarers while deriding European seafarers for lacking middle class, masculine virtues and for being rebellious compared to the “docile Black seaman”.²⁹ Employers were able to control their workforce by threatening each side with replacement by the other. The NSFU used similar threats to maintain the loyalty and cooperation of its members by using the threat of cheap black labour to persuade seamen to acquiesce with union policies.³⁰ The state also intensified control and policing to preserve imperial power by

²⁶ Thompson, E.P., “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”, *Past and Present*, 50, 1, 1971, p. 78.

²⁷ Tabili, Laura, *“We Ask for British Justice”: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.14.

²⁸ Tabili, *“We Ask For British Justice”*, p.3.

²⁹ Tabili, *“We Ask For British Justice”*, p.51.

³⁰ Tabili, *“We Ask For British Justice”*, p.83.

“reinforcing the global inequalities on which it rested”.³¹ Thus, racism was not an innate characteristic of interwar Britain but was constructed by an identifiable cast of historical actors.

Tabili’s observation that racism was constructed rather than an unavoidable reaction to immigration was undoubtedly important and innovative. Questions must be raised, however, with the historical actors identified by Tabili. Her account does not consider the role of the British general public, thus exonerating them and placing responsibility in the hands of the shipowners, state and Union. Indeed, Tabili depicted interracial solidarity on the basis of class.³² Critics of Tabili’s approach have labelled this an “over-rosy view of the potential for rank and file unity on the basis of class alignment transcending racial hostility.”³³ Others have highlighted the need for an examination of how racial ideology permeated British culture and society to understand why elites were so successful at employing inequality to their advantage.³⁴

By arguing that imperialism permeated British popular culture through the dissemination of inherent racist stereotypes within the imperial message, John Mackenzie has pointed historians towards a new and fruitful way of understanding racism.³⁵ Chapter Two explores how stereotypes about Indian Lascar seafarers permeated and were disseminated by popular culture. It takes as case studies newspaper reports of shipwrecks and also children’s stories. Historians studying Indian seafarers have not previously considered these sources and areas of study. My approach in Chapter Two also differs from Tabili’s as it does not consider non-European seafarers to be a homogeneous mass. Instead, Chapter Two explores how Indian and Chinese seafarers were treated differently by the NSFU. It demonstrates how and why the NSFU campaigns against Indian and Chinese seafarers differed. This approach is informed by Avtar Brah’s observation that minorities are positioned in relation not only to majorities but also with

³¹ Tabili, *We Ask For British Justice*, p.30.

³² Tabili, *We Ask For British Justice*, p.1.

³³ Midgley, Claire, Review: “New Imperial Histories”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, October 1996, p.551.

³⁴ Smith, Toni, “Review of ‘We Ask for British Justice’: Workers and Racial Difference in late Imperial Britain”, *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 40, Fall 1997, pp.317.

³⁵ Mackenzie, John, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, 1986; and, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1986.

respect to one another.³⁶ Adopting a comparative approach therefore enhances our understanding of Indian seafarers' position and experiences in Britain. Chapter Two also considers the differing positions assigned to non-European seafarers by the British state through the case study of the changing scope of Lascar Articles of Agreement. Chapter Three demonstrates how Indian seafarers manipulated such differences in response to the changes in their Articles of Agreement and to modifications to the boundaries of British citizenship and identity.

Chapter Three explores how Indian seafarers constructed their identities both individually and collectively. There has been a limited engagement with the topic of identity in the historiography despite affording an opportunity to uncover Indian seafarers' self perceptions and understanding. Historians have tended to focus upon the power of the British state to redraw the boundaries of identity and citizenship or to concentrate solely on the attempts by Indian seafarers' unions to fashion identities for Indian seafarers. In this section, I outline the arguments in the historiography and how my approach builds upon but differs from previous studies.

Some historians argue that the boundaries of British citizenship were contingent upon the needs of the time. Marika Sherwood demonstrated how the boundaries of British citizenship were extended to, and withdrawn from, Indian Lascars according to the needs of the British state. An exclusive definition of Britishness was reformulated in 1849 when previous legislation defining Lascars as "British in only certain parts of the world" was replaced with a definition of "British" seafarers as "natural born British subjects... Asiatic sailors or Lascars being natives of the East India Company territories".³⁷ According to Sherwood, the driving force behind this change was the increased demand for shipping created by the burgeoning products of the Industrial Revolution.³⁸ Sherwood's work helps us to understand the context in which Indian seafarers worked. It does not, however, consider the men's responses to these changing boundaries. This omission, inadvertently perhaps, depicts Indian seafarers as the silent and powerless pawns in the

³⁶ Brah, Avtar, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", in her *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.189.

³⁷ Sherwood, Marika, "Race, nationality and employment among Lascar seamen, 1660 to 1945", *New Community*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 231-2.

³⁸ Sherwood, "Race, nationality and employment among Lascar seamen", p. 232.

British play of power. Her discussion is also focused solely upon Indian seafarers, making it difficult to conceptualise their position as compared to other non-European seafarers.

Laura Tabili also demonstrated how Indian and other non-European seafarers were subject to changing definitions of British identity and citizenship. Exploring the case study of the 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien) Seamen Order, Tabili demonstrated how the boundaries of Britishness were redrawn along racial lines. The Order required coloured alien seamen to register with the police while simultaneously restricting the means of proving British nationality by removing the previously accepted seamen's discharge certificates. Tabili demonstrated the central role of the British state in formulating and enacting this legislation which restricted the scope of "Britishness" to white subjects, labelling it "state sanctioned racism".³⁹ She argued that the intention of the legislation was to confine all coloured seamen to labour contracts negotiated in the colonies.⁴⁰ Thus, the presumption of British nationality status was restricted to Australians and other white imperial subjects.⁴¹ While Tabili's study offers an astute analysis of the 1925 Order, it does not consider the reaction of the men who were labelled "Coloured Alien Seamen". Thus, again, the men are depicted as silent and powerless.

In contrast to these British dominated accounts, Balachandran demonstrated how Indian seafarers' unions attempted to counter British discourses. His work is set against a backdrop in which the British state and unions depicted Indian seafarers as docile and unmanly coolies. Balachandran demonstrated how Indian seafarers' unions attempted to reconfigure these stereotypes and so "advanced an alternative narrative about their own identities".⁴² Indian seafarers' unions stressed that the men were workers, not coolies. Balachandran's insightful approach challenges the assumption that the British alone held the power to define identities. It is, however, limited in its application. It does not consider how Indian seafarers constructed their personal identities utilised in the private sphere. It also restricts Indian seafarers' collective identities to interactions between

³⁹ Tabili, Laura, "The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 33, No.1, January 1994, pp. 56.

⁴⁰ Tabili, "The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain", p. 89.

⁴¹ Tabili, "The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain", p. 76.

⁴² Balachandran, "South Asian Seafarers and their Worlds, c.1870s to 1930s".

their unions and the British state and British unions. The construction and contestation of identities is also limited to workplace identities. Despite this, it does not tell us about identities on shipboard. Thus, the historiography only deals with the identities of Indian seafarers in a limited manner.

In recent years, scholars of identity have been criticised for not adequately defining the term. James Fearon, for example, pointed out that theorists rarely defined what they meant by the term and that this amounted “almost to a scandal”.⁴³ In this section, I explore different conceptualisations of identity and how they inform my study of Indian seafarers. The section concludes with the definition of identity I will use throughout the thesis. Recent approaches to identity have been centred on deconstructing essentialist definitions of the term. Essentialist identities are defined as those that assume an authentic set of characteristics, which do not alter across time leaving little room for agency. This has led recent works to a focus on differences both within and across identities and how the identity changes across time.⁴⁴ In particular, scholars from the disciplines of cultural studies and post-colonialism developed the concept of non-essentialist identity as multiple, hybrid and unstable or unfixed.

Stuart Hall, for example, rejected the idea of the “fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity” and redefined it as multiple, fluid and constantly in flux.⁴⁵ Hall’s definition recognised that difference persists in and alongside continuity making it difficult to maintain the idea of a single, dominant, all-encompassing identity.⁴⁶ Further, Hall emphasised that identities are derived from historical experiences, change over time and are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power.⁴⁷ Thus, the subject can assume different identities at different times from a multiplicity of possible identities.⁴⁸ Some argued this approach emphasised the possibility of choice and

⁴³ Fearon, James, “What is Identity (as we now use to word)?”, Unpublished Paper, 3rd November 1999, www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf [Accessed 12/03/2009].

⁴⁴ Woodward, Kathryn, “Concepts of Identity and Difference”, in Woodward (Ed.), *Identity and Difference*, Sage/Open University, 1997, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Hall, Stuart, “The Question of Cultural Identity”, in Hall, S., Held, D., and McGrew, T., (Eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 277.

⁴⁶ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in Rutherford, J., (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, and London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, p.227.

⁴⁷ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p.225.

⁴⁸ Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity”, p. 277.

transformation of identity.⁴⁹ It has been criticised, however, for its determinism in attributing power to grand ideologies and none to individuals.⁵⁰ Such criticisms particularly related to Hall's explanation of how people adopt different identities. For this, Hall drew upon Althusser's theory of interpellation. In Althusser's work interpellation is the process that leads to the production of the subject. It is "the moment in which a person is constituted as a subject thus recognising and acquiescing to their position within structures of ideology".⁵¹ Similarly, in Hall's work identities are "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us."⁵² The subject is then obliged to take up these positions while always knowing that they are "representations".⁵³ Thus, Hall's work curtails agency by suggesting that people have little choice in the identities they adopt.

Homi Bhabha also argued that the question of identification is never affirmation of a pre-given identity.⁵⁴ Bhabha's argument focused on complex and varied cultural contact and interaction to demonstrate that "rigid distinctions between the coloniser and colonised have always been impossible to maintain".⁵⁵ His conception of identity challenged the perception that the coloniser alone held the power to define and demarcate identities. Instead the coloniser's cultural meanings were open to transformation by the colonised population thus allowing for the possibility of negotiation of cultural meaning.⁵⁶ The presence of the alternative knowledge and identities of the colonised undermined the coloniser's attempts to produce a definitive, all-encompassing identity. Thus, applying Bhabha's theory to the study of Indian seafarers would challenge the assumption that the British state alone held the power to manipulate the boundaries of identity. Despite this, Bhabha's theory has drawn criticism for minimising the agency of colonised peoples.

⁴⁹ Yamamori, Toru, "A Non-Essentialist Approach to Identity: Sen and Cultural/Post-Colonial Theories", Workshop on Capabilities and Identity, Cambridge, 21-23 June 2005. http://st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/CSC/conference/capabilities-identity/Workshop_papers/ToruYamamori.pdf [Accessed 25.01.2009]

⁵⁰ Gauntlett, David, *Media, Gender and Identity*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.26.

⁵¹ Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, p.26.

⁵² Hall, Stuart, "Who needs identity?", in Hall, S., and du Gay, P., (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, 1996, p.6.

⁵³ Hall, "Who needs identity?", p.6.

⁵⁴ Bhabha, Homi, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative", in his *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004, p.64.

⁵⁵ Huddart, David, *Homi K. Bhabha*, London: Routledge, 2006, p.2-3.

⁵⁶ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, p.3.

Benita Parry argued that Bhabha's theory "displaces the theory of anti-colonial struggle or agency and emphasizes an uncertainty and stumbling in colonial power".⁵⁷ Also, Bhabha's depiction of two homogeneous identities – the colonised and the coloniser – does not account for difference within these identities. Such identities were cut across by other categories such as gender, generation and religion. For example, it is difficult to posit two undifferentiated spheres of coloniser and colonised in the case of Indian seamen. The "coloniser" consisted of different elements such as the British state and British Seamen's Unions. The "colonised", or Indian seamen, also consisted of several different groups such as Anglo-Indians, Sylheti Muslims and Goan Christians. Further, it restricts analysis to contact between the British coloniser and the colonised Indian seafarers. As a result, interactions between different groups of colonised peoples are overlooked. The implications of this become clear when we consider the work of Avtar Brah.

Avtar Brah also offered a critique of discourses of fixed origins.⁵⁸ Brah argued, however, that people can hold several different identities at the same time and not just across their lifespan. Further, she argued that there are multiple others embedded within and across binaries.⁵⁹ In comparison to Bhabha, Brah argued that "border crossings do not occur only across the dominant/dominated dichotomy".⁶⁰ She considered how minorities were positioned in relation not only to majorities but also with respect to one another.⁶¹ Thus, for example, Indian seafarers are positioned and relate to other "minorities". In this case the minorities would be the other non-European seafarers with whom Indian seafarers were competing with in the labour market. Thus, such an approach would highlight that Indian seafarers did not exist in isolation. It also allows us to explore a wider range of relations between different identity groups.

Amartya Sen also advanced a theory of multiple identities but in comparison to Brah the role of the subject in choosing between these identities was brought out more explicitly. Indeed, he wrote of the "need to recognise reasoning and choice in identity based

⁵⁷ Childs, Peter and Williams, R.J. Patrick, "Bhabha's Hybridity", in their *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, London: Prentice Hall, 1997, p.145.

⁵⁸ Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", p.180.

⁵⁹ Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", p.184.

⁶⁰ Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", p.210.

⁶¹ Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", p.189.

thinking". He argued that people chose between different identities in different contexts. This seems to afford a greater degree of agency as it shows a conscious decision making process behind appropriation of identities. He constructed a model of subjects holding several different identities having to weigh up the relative importance and significance of these different identities depending on the context.⁶² Subjects first had to decide what their relevant identities were and then weigh up the relative importance of them.⁶³ Sen did realise, however, that the existence of choice did not indicate that there were no constraints restricting choice.⁶⁴ Hence, Sen's model of identity overcame the reductionism of essentialism and its implications for agency. He recognised that a subject could hold multiple identities at the same time and emphasised the role of the subject in deciding which identity to use in different contexts.

The emphasis on shifting, hybrid and multiple identities neglects consideration of how subjects may construct an exclusive or exclusionary identity around a single point of identification. I look at instances where subjects resorted to exclusionary single identities as a method of resistance. In doing so I shall draw upon Frank Parkin's work on social closure. This explores how social collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. The eligibility criteria are based upon a singling out of certain identifiable social or physical attributes.⁶⁵ Strategies for laying claim to resources based upon exclusion and solidarism. Both strategies share the aim of protecting or enhancing its privileges by the process of subordination or creating another strata of ineligibles beneath it. In exclusionary social closure group advantages are secured at the expense of collectivities that are depicted as inferior while strategies of solidarism places claims upon resources which threaten to diminish the share of the more privileged.⁶⁶ For example, we can argue that British Seamen's Unions attempted to protect and enhance their share of the labour market through exclusionary social closure. That is, they attempted to define the eligibility criteria for employment on British ships to be "British imperial subject status" and

⁶² Sen, Amartya, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2006, pp.25-29.

⁶³ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p.24.

⁶⁴ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p.5.

⁶⁵ Parkin, Frank, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation", in Parkin (Ed.), *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, London: Tavistock, 1979, p.3.

⁶⁶ Parkin, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation", p.5.

“identity”. Indian seafarers then stressed their own eligibility based upon these criteria. However, there were also differences between Indian seafarers; for example, Anglo-Indians stressed their “Britishness” in comparison to the mass of Indian seafarers. These arguments are expanded in Chapters Two and Three.

Brubaker and Cooper called for a robust definition of the term identity and urged scholars to clarify how they intended the term to be understood. They suggested that identity consists of different characteristics, which the general term identity failed to convey. The first component of their definition was “Identification and categorization”. This covered how one identified oneself or how one is identified by others.⁶⁷ Their second component also involved individual or personal aspects of identity. “Self Understanding and Social Location” involved one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location and of how one is prepared to act. While self understanding can change over time, this aspect of identity was not restricted to situations of flux and instability.⁶⁸ The final component of Brubaker and Cooper’s definition of identity covered a collective sense of identity. “Commonality, connectedness and groupness” involves a sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group and involves both a sense of solidarity with their fellow group members and a felt difference from outsiders.⁶⁹ This is a useful approach as it encourages us to think about what we mean by “identity” and to be specific in our definitions.

My thesis explores both personal and collective identities as outlined by Brubaker and Cooper. Indian seafarers’ personal identities are explored in Chapter Three. The Chapter builds upon Hall’s assertion that identities change over time while retaining Brah’s argument that a subject can hold multiple identities simultaneously. It explores the changing nature of these identities. For example, it charts the changes in religious identity from being an active identity to a private, descriptive category. Using Brubaker and Cooper’s categories this change would represent a shift from “Self Understanding and Social Location” to “Identification and Categorization”. It also incorporates Sen’s argument by demonstrating Indian seafarers’ reasoning and choice in deciding between

⁶⁷ Brubaker, Rogers and Cooper, Frederick, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, Issue 1, 2000, p.14.

⁶⁸ Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, pp. 17-19.

⁶⁹ Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, pp. 19-21.

multiple identities in different contexts. Chapter Three also explores Indian seafarers' collective identities. It traces Indian seafarers' solidarity with fellow group members and how they experienced difference from outsiders. Indian seafarers' use of social closure is explored and how this was influenced by their position in relation to other minorities.

The concentration on the public lives of Indian seafarers through topics such as their treatment in British maritime laws and their unionisation has led to a neglect of their private and everyday lives. Chapter Four addresses this imbalance by exploring Indian seafarers' family lives in India and in Britain. It reveals something of the socio-economic background of Indian seafarers by exploring the issues of family structure and land ownership. My analysis of the role of the family in India is informed by recent trends in immigration history that called for an analysis of those left behind by migration streams. Thus, the role of the family in the decision to migrate and the support they provided to migrant seafarers are considered. But the chapter also explores the impact of migration upon gender relations and family dynamics. Gender relations refer to the relations of power between men and women that are revealed through practices such as the division of labour, roles and resources between men and women.⁷⁰ The roles and status of Indian seafarers' wives in the internal dynamics of the family are also investigated. Assumptions that Indian seafarers' families in Britain merely played a functionalist role by aiding assimilation are challenged. Chapter Three demonstrates that not all men wanted or sought out such relationships. It then moves on to consider the role British women played in maintaining relationships and links with India. The censure some men experienced as a consequence of their relationships with British women is also explored to demonstrate that these relationships were not merely ones of convenience but involved considerable risk.

In conclusion, the key themes that my thesis addresses are the everyday or personal lives of the men, understanding their agency and points of view in the work place and finally gaining a greater insight into their lives through a comparative perspective. Their everyday, private sphere lives are addressed by considering their lives and conditions on shipboard, their personal identities and their family lives. Their ability to challenge

⁷⁰ Agarwal, Bina, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.51.

shipboard conditions and their views of tolerable and intolerable practices uncovers some idea of how the men perceived their work. My thesis also highlights their agency in constructing personal and collective identities. A comparative approach is applied by comparing and contrasting their working lives with other seafarers, their positioning in British discourses and also by considering how other nationality seafarers featured in their construction of collective identities.

A note on Sources

The thesis uses a variety of different sources to track Indian seafarers' lives from their original homes in India to their lives on board ships and finally their lives, families and identities in Britain. Archival sources give rich details on the concerns and interest of the British Home and Imperial Governments in the lives of Indian seafarers. The voices of the men occasionally feature in these files through letters of petition and protest. These sources include government files held at the British Library, London; National Archives of India, New Delhi; and The National Archives in Britain. I also consulted the records of Indian seafarers who were held as Prisoners of War at the Imperial War Museum in London. Other sources included newspapers, periodical and journal articles that have not been used in any great depth by historians of Indian seafarers. Copies of the NSFU publication *The Seaman* were also consulted at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. Oral history sources were consulted through the works of Yusuf Choudhury and Caroline Adams. These, along with the autobiography of Dada Amir Haider Khan, allowed a rare insight into the minds of Indian seafarers. They share the difficulties, however, of potential problems with the memories of events being described. The men may have selected or omitted facts from the interviewers and they may also have imposed a narrative on facts that are not otherwise related. Nevertheless, these accounts are useful as they document "particular aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources" such as personal relations and the subjective meanings of lived experience.⁷¹ Finally, the reader should note that I have retained the original spellings contained in all of the above sources. This is despite the Anglicisation of the names of

⁷¹ Perks, Robert, and Thompson, Alistair, (Eds.), "Introduction", in their *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1998, p.ix.

Indian seafarers and of locations in India. I have chosen to retain these names to aid scholars who may wish to view these sources in the future.

Chapter One

Indian seafarers' conditions of life and work on British merchant ships

Writing in 1939, Dinkar Desai described Indian seafarers as “the most exploited vagabonds of the sea”.¹ This chapter explores their conditions of life and work on shipboard as well as forms of protest that directly addressed shipboard conditions. Despite a burgeoning historiography, the conditions Indian seafarers faced on board ship have not received scholarly attention. Instead, steady themes in the historiography have included recruitment practices, the regulations and restrictions imposed upon Indian seafarers by maritime laws, their relations with British unions and finally Indian seafarers' position in the construction of imperial rhetoric. In comparison, this chapter explores various aspects of life on shipboard such as wages, health, accommodation, food and shipboard hierarchy. The second half of this chapter seeks to expand our understanding of the methods Indian seafarers employed to challenge, resist and protest against shipboard conditions. It demonstrates how they used violent, dramatic and confrontational forms of protest in a selective manner. The concept of moral economy is employed to illustrate how Indian seafarers held certain expectations and understandings of their rights on shipboard and protested against violations of these standards when opportunities arose. Sources previously overlooked by historians, such as newspaper reports, British popular broadsheets and specialist medical journals are used. It also expands our understanding of their agency through exploring how and why they used intermediaries to voice their complaints.

Conditions of life and work on board ship

Contemporary accounts of the lives of seafarers in the British Merchant Navy depict a difficult life under harsh conditions. The accommodation or living space for crews, for example, was described with shock and horror. Recalling his inspections of British

¹ Desai, Dinkar, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, p. 18.

merchant seafarers' quarters, Fleet-Surgeon W.E. Home wrote of how "the amazement, and gradually, the horror, at the sight of what we then encountered are sentiments that remained fresh, at the end of five years experience sufficiently overwhelming to blot out most things".² The accommodation of Indian seafarers was no exception, as is evidenced in the following description from a Board of Trade Surveyor. The Surveyor noted that

As all the men, while the vessels are in London, are below at the same time either taking their meals or sleeping it will be seen how overcrowded and unhealthy the spaces are, and I may add that I would not enter them to make a proper inspection... owing to the smell and filth.³

Thus, living conditions on shipboard were difficult throughout the Merchant Navy. Indian seafarers, however, faced additional difficulties as Merchant Shipping Laws repeatedly allocated them less space than their European contemporaries.

Across several decades, Merchant Shipping Laws discriminated between the accommodation needs of Indian and British seafarers. Act I of 1859 allocated nine superficial feet of living space to Europeans, while each "Lascar, native seaman or other persons shipped on the same footing" was given four superficial feet.⁴ Crew space increased in size with the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1876 but the differentiation between Europeans and Indians remained. Europeans were now to be provided with 10 superficial feet or 60 cubic feet of space but Lascars were only entitled to 6 feet or 36 cubic feet.⁵ The issue of crew space was again revisited in 1894. Section 210(1) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894 stated that "every place in any British ship occupied by seamen and appropriated to their use, shall have for each of those seamen a space of not less than 72 cubic feet, and of not less than 12 superficial feet".⁶ The passing of this Act exposed a contradiction between British and Indian law and debate raged over which laws should apply to Indian seafarers serving in British merchant vessels. It appeared to remove the distinction between British and Indian seafarers. In 1906, however, the difference was reinforced by the passing of the Merchant Shipping Act. This Act

² Home, W.E., *Merchant Seamen: Their diseases and their welfare needs*, London: John Murray, 1922, p. 49.

³ The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA) MT 9/527: 11th October 1895: Forwarding extract from a speech delivered by the Hon. P. Playfair before the Viceroy's Legislative Council at Calcutta.

⁴ TNA MT 9/ 640: The Merchant Shipping Act 1894, Crew Space: Lascars: case for the opinion of the Law Officers and Mr Sutton. A superficial foot was a measurement of area, with one superficial foot being equal to one square foot. Cubic feet were used to measure the volume of crew space.

⁵ TNA MT 9/ 640: Indian Merchant Seamen's Act, 1876 (Act XIII): Accommodation of Seamen.

⁶ TNA MT 9/640: Board of Trade Circular, "Crew Spaces On Board Merchant Ships", January 1895.

increased the sleeping space for British seafarers but contained a stipulation that it was not to be applied to space “occupied solely by Lascars or appropriated for their use”.⁷ Thus, the accommodation allotted to Indian seafarers compared poorly to their British contemporaries despite three decades of maritime legislation on the question.

Commentators argued that Indian seafarers’ accommodation on British ships had serious consequences for the men. The impact on their health was particularly highlighted by the investigations of Fleet Surgeon W.E. Home. Home compared the death rates of European and Lascar seafarers for the period 1913 to 1914. He found that Lascar seafarers had a higher death rate of 5.4 per 1000 compared to 3.5 per 1000 for Europeans. Home argued that this illustrated the need for greater cubic space for Lascars.⁸ He also compared the death rates of the Merchant Navy to the Army and Navy. His results further highlighted the poor condition of Indian seafarers’ health. He found that men in the Merchant Navy had “about twice the chance of death” as those in the Navy or Army. The death rates per 100 were 7.79 in the Merchant Navy, 3.25 in the Navy and 2.99 in the Army.⁹ Thus, compared to men in similar occupations, men of the Merchant Navy experienced higher death rates. Indian seafarers’ death rates were, therefore, particularly high within an occupational group that suffered higher death rates than contemporaries in similar occupations.

Home’s investigations also revealed that Indian seafarers’ death rates from “infectious diseases” such as from pneumonia and phthisis (tuberculosis) were higher than European seafarers. This confirmed his fear that smaller crew spaces had a detrimental impact on the health of the men. The close, intimate living conditions of shipboard life facilitated the spread of infectious diseases. Table Three on page twenty-seven of this chapter collates the statistical information on death rates published by Home in *The Lancet*. The Lascar death rate for pneumonia fell from 1.16 per 1000 in 1921 to 0.53 per 1000 in 1930. The difference between the Lascar and British pneumonia death rates fell from 0.84 in 1921 to 0.2 in 1930. Thus, while the Lascar pneumonia death rate improved it still lagged some rate behind the British. The Lascar death rate for tuberculosis fell from 0.62 per

⁷ Merchant Shipping Act, 1906 [6 Edw. 7. Ch.48], Section 64.

⁸ Home, *Merchant Seamen*, p.70 – 71.

⁹ Home, *Merchant Seamen*, p. 82 – 3.

1000 in 1921 to 0.59 in 1930. The difference between the Lascar and British tuberculosis death rates decreased from 0.47 to 0.33 per 1000. Thus, there were still substantially more deaths among Lascars from tuberculosis than deaths amongst British seafarers. Home attributed these differences to Indian seafarers' smaller crew spaces. Thus, smaller crew spaces were not just uncomfortable for the men but led to overcrowding which facilitated the spread of infectious diseases.

Comparing the death rates of Lascar, British and foreign seafarers also reveal that Lascars persistently suffered the highest rate of deaths resulting from diseases. In 1921, death rates from diseases per 1000 men were calculated as 4.67 for Lascars, 3.16 for foreign seafarers and 2.08 for British seafarers.¹⁰ In 1922, death rates from disease remained higher among Lascars than the other two groups. Their disease death rates rose to 4.95, compared to 3.27 for foreign seafarers and 3.89 for British.¹¹ While 1923 saw a decrease in deaths caused by diseases amongst Lascars they still topped the scale at 4.14 compared to the British rate of 2.16. Home tells us that in 1925 Lascars had a higher death rate from disease than British seafarers but a lower rate of accidents.¹² In 1927 the gap between Lascar and British death rates from disease narrowed, the death rate for Lascars standing at 3.64 and a British rate of 3.10.¹³ Nevertheless, the death rates seem to suggest that Lascars were more susceptible to diseases whilst on service. This implies that the conditions Lascars faced on shipboard, such as their accommodation, led to a higher incidence of diseases. Charting disease mortality rates, however, does not give an accurate representation of the health of Indian crews. Disease mortality rates do not account for ill health or for disease that did not result in deaths. Thus those diseases, accidents and injuries which were not fatal are omitted from analysis. Disease mortality rates also pass over the medical treatments available, and whether there were differences in the treatment of the diseases of Lascar and British crews.

¹⁰ Home, "The Health of Merchant Seamen", *The Lancet*, Volume 204, Issue 5280, 8th November 1924, pp. 981 – 982.

¹¹ Home, "A Death-Rate for Merchant Seamen", *The Lancet*, Volume 205, Issue 5302, 11th April 1925, pp. 783 – 784.

¹² Home, "The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1925", *The Lancet*, Volume 210, Issue 5428, 10th September 1927, pp. 567 – 569.

¹³ Home, "The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1927", *The Lancet*, Volume 213, Issue 5517, 25th May 1929, page 1111.

A more complex picture of the health of crews emerges when we compare the hospital admission and subsequent death rates for Indians and Europeans. Tables Four and Five on pages twenty-eight and twenty-nine are constructed using health reports from the port of Calcutta between 1928 and 1932.¹⁴ The statistics differ from Home's as they do not contain information on pneumonia or tuberculosis. Nevertheless, they provide an interesting insight into the health of crews in Calcutta. I have used the statistics contained in these reports to calculate the admissions rate per 1000 men for both Europeans and Lascars. Over this five year period, hospital admission rates for Lascars were lower than those of Europeans. Dealing first with the types of diseases that the men were admitted to hospital for, it is clear that Lascars had both a higher rate of admission and a higher rate of deaths caused by Cholera. For each of the five years, Cholera was the main cause of admission for Indian seafarers. It also consistently caused a high rate of deaths following admission. In contrast, admissions of European seafarers suffering from Cholera remained low while there were no reported deaths from the disease. As Cholera was caused by contaminated food or water and poor sanitation, the figures suggest that Indian seafarers were more likely to come into contact with these conditions than their European counterparts.¹⁵ European seafarers were more likely to be admitted and to die as a result of Dysentery. Dysentery typically occurred in overcrowded areas with poor hygiene practices.¹⁶ This suggests, therefore, that European seafarers also faced difficult conditions on shipboard. The percentage of Europeans dying from Dysentery remained lower than the percentage of Indians dying as a result of Cholera. The following paragraph explores these differences in the admission and death rates of European and Indian seafarers.

¹⁴ The Tables are constructed from the health reports contained in India Office Records [hereafter IOR] V/24/3828. The health reports are as follows: Government of Bengal, *Reports of the Health Departments of the Ports of Calcutta and Chittagong for the Year 1928*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1929; Government of Bengal, *Reports of the Health Departments of the Ports of Calcutta and Chittagong for the year 1929*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1930; Government of Bengal, *Annual Reports of the Health Departments of the Ports of Calcutta and Chittagong for the year 1930*; Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot: 1931; Government of Bengal, *Reports of the Health Departments of the Ports of Calcutta and Chittagong for the year 1931*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1932; Government of Bengal Public Health Department, *Reports of the Health Departments of the Ports of Calcutta and Chittagong For the year 1932*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1933.

¹⁵ Speck, Reinhard, "Cholera" in Kiple, Kenneth, *Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 74 – 5.

¹⁶ Patterson, K. David, "Dysentery", in Kiple, *Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease*, pp. 105.

Table Three: Merchant Navy Death Rates, 1921 – 1930.

All death rates calculated per 1000 men

	Seafarers	Overall Death Rate	Pneumonia Death Rate	Tuberculosis Death Rate
1930	British	5.38	0.33	0.26
	Lascars	5.1	0.53	0.59
1928	British	6.45	0.38	0.18
	Lascars	4.63	0.82	0.45
1927	British	6.48	0.32	0.37
	Lascars	4.98	0.66	0.74
1925	British	5.51	0.32	0.07
	Lascars	7.07	1.03	0.97
1923	British	5.13	0.3	0.17
	Lascars	8.01	1	0.75
1922	British	9.83	0.43	0.48
	Lascars	9.78	0.95	0.99
1921	British	4.98	0.32	0.15
	Lascars	6.72	1.16	0.62

1930 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Health of Merchant Seamen in 1930", *The Lancet*, Volume 219, Issue 5671, 7th May 1932, pp. 1024 -1026.

1928 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Deaths of British Merchant Seamen in 1928", *The Lancet*, Volume 215, Issue 5556, 22nd February 1930, pp. 423 – 424.

1927 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1927", *The Lancet*, Volume 213, Issue 5517, 25th May 1929, page 1111.

1925 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1925", *The Lancet*, Volume 210, Issue 5428, 10th September 1927, pp. 567 – 569.

1923 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1923", *The Lancet*, Volume 206, Issue 5327, 3rd October 1925, pp. 731-734.

1922 Death Rates taken from Home, "A Death-Rate for Merchant Seamen", *The Lancet*, Volume 205, Issue 5302, 11th April 1925, pp. 783 – 784.

1921 Death Rates taken from Home, "The Health of Merchant Seamen", *The Lancet*, Volume 204, Issue 5280, 8th November 1924, pp. 981 – 982.

Table Four: European seafarers' admissions to hospitals the port of Calcutta, 1928 - 1932

Constructed from information contained in IOR V/24/3828: Bengal Public Health Department: Reports of the Health Departments of the ports of Calcutta and Chittagong, 1928-1936.

Diseases	1928			1929			1930		
	26,545 European Seafarers			25,694 European Seafarers			21,626 European Seafarers		
	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting In Deaths	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths
Cholera	2	0.08	0	2	0.08	0	5	0.23	0
Diarrhoea	16	0.6	0	22	0.86	0	23	1.06	0
Dysentery	47	1.77	4.26	33	1.28	0	35	1.62	2.86
Enteric Fever	6	0.23	33.33	4	0.16	0	5	0.23	0
Malarial Fever	21	0.79	0	18	0.7	0	11	0.51	0
Simple Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Influenza	6	0.23	0	9	0.35	0	11	0.51	0
Scurvy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Small-pox	0	0	0	2	0.08	50	0	0	0
Sunstroke	1	0.04	0	0	0	0	2	0.09	0
Other Causes	558	21.02	1.08	514	20	0.58	388	17.94	1.8
Total	657	24.76	1.52	604	23.51	0.66	480	22.2	1.67

Diseases	1931			1932		
	19,420 European Seafarers			18,091 European Seafarers		
	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths	Number of Admissions	Rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths
Cholera	2	0.1	0	2	0.11	0
Diarrhoea	2	0.1	0	6	0.33	0
Dysentery	19	0.98	0	48	2.65	2.08
Enteric Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malarial Fever	12	0.62	0	15	0.83	0
Simple Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0
Influenza	9	0.46	0	13	0.72	0
Scurvy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Small-pox	0	0	0	2	0.11	0
Sunstroke	4	0.21	0	2	0.11	0
Other Causes	491	25.28	0.61	332	18.35	0.6
Total	539	27.75	0.56	420	23.22	0.71

Table Five: Indian Seafarers' admissions to hospitals in the port of Calcutta, 1928-1932

Constructed from information contained in IOR V/24/3828: Bengal Public Health Department: Reports of the Health Departments of the ports of Calcutta and Chittagong, 1928-1936.

Diseases	1928			1929			1930		
	Number of Admissions	Admissions Rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths	Number of Admissions	Admissions Rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths
	96,908 Lascars			97,935 Lascars			92,714 Lascars		
Cholera	25	0.26	24	29	0.3	20.69	30	0.32	30
Diarrhoea	3	0.03	0	4	0.04	0	0	0	0
Dysentery	1	0.01	0	1	0.01	0	3	0.03	0
Enteric Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malarial Fever	2	0.02	0	1	0.01	0	0	0	0
Simple fever	0	0	0	1	0.01	0	2	0.02	0
Influenza	0	0	0	1	0.01	100	0	0	0
Scurvy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Small-pox	1	0.01	0	0	0	0	1	0.01	0
Sunstroke	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other causes	39	0.4	2.56	55	0.56	0	83	0.9	6.02
Total	71	0.73	9.89	92	0.94	7.61	119	1.28	11.76

Diseases	1931			1932		
	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths	Number of Admissions	Admissions rate per 1000	Percentage of Admissions Resulting in Deaths
	84,365 Lascars			81,360 Lascars		
Cholera	20	0.24	20	10	0.12	20
Diarrhoea	2	0.02	0	0	0	0
Dysentery	0	0	0	3	0.04	0
Enteric Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malarial Fever	7	0.08	0	5	0.06	0
Simple fever	1	0.01	0	1	0.01	0
Influenza	0	0	0	1	0.01	0
Scurvy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Small-pox	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunstroke	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other causes	90	1.07	6.66	79	0.97	7.59
Total	120	1.42	8.33	99	1.21	8.08

The highest numbers of Lascars were admitted in 1931, at a rate of 1.42 per 1000 men. The lowest rate of Lascar admissions was 0.73 per 1000 men in 1928. In contrast, the lowest rate for Europeans was 22.2 hospital admissions per 1000 men in 1930. Hospital admissions reached their highest point for Europeans in 1931 at a rate of 27.75 per 1000 men. A superficial analysis of these statistics suggests that European seafarers suffered worse health than Indians as they were admitted to hospital more often. Despite lower hospital admissions rates, however, a higher percentage of Lascars admitted to hospital died. According to the statistics displayed in Tables Four and Five, a consistently higher percentage of Lascars died following admission to hospital than did Europeans. The highest percentage of deaths following admissions was 1.67 per cent for Europeans in 1930 but 11.76 per cent for Indian Lascars in the same year. The lowest percentage of deaths following hospital admission was 0.56 per cent for Europeans in 1931 but 7.61 per cent for Lascars in 1929. Thus, while fewer Lascars were admitted to hospital a greater number died following admission. There is a sharp difference between the percentage of admissions resulting in deaths between Indians and Europeans over the period. Death rates for Indians remained substantially higher over the five years. For example, 1.52 percent of Europeans died following admission in 1928 while 9.89 percent of Indians died. The difference peaked in 1930 with 1.67 percent of Europeans admitted to hospital dying compared to 11.76 per cent of Indians. The difference remained high in 1932 with 0.71 percent of Europeans dying compared to 7.37 percent of Indians. The reasons behind these differences can be speculated upon. The statistics suggest that European seafarers may have been admitted at an earlier stage of the disease, receiving treatment sooner and thus had better chances of recovery. If Indians were admitted at a later stage of the disease when it was more serious and so difficult to treat it would lower their chances of recovery. As I demonstrate in the next paragraph, discriminatory practices in the medical treatment of Europeans and Lascars at Indian ports were rife and may have contributed to the differences in their survival rates.

Contemporary sources indicate that differences existed between the treatment of sick Lascars and European seafarers in the port of Calcutta. Dinkar Desai, for example, noted that "European, Anglo-Indian and Colonial" seafarers were admitted to "superior and

better equipped hospitals” such as the Presidency General Hospital.¹⁷ In contrast, “Indian, other Asiatic, and West Indian seamen” were treated at the Howrah General Hospital if possible but were also sent to Mayo, Sambunath Pandit and Campbell Hospitals.¹⁸ According to Mowat, the Howrah General Hospital was situated a long way from the dock area thus making it difficult for Indian seamen to attend.¹⁹ In addition, Mowat noted a tendency among doctors to use the free beds in hospitals for their private paying patients rather than Indian seafarers.²⁰ Thus, European seafarers requiring hospital treatment in Calcutta received better treatment than Indian Lascar seafarers. According to Mowat and Desai, a similar situation existed at Bombay. Desai argued, for example, that Indian seafarers often had difficulty securing admission to hospitals in Bombay. The views of the British Social Hygiene Council, reported by Mowat, also demonstrated shortcomings in the treatment of Lascars at Bombay. They found that “adequate [hospital] facilities maintained in accordance with the most advanced standards of scientific methods are not available for seamen visiting the port of Bombay”.²¹ These views suggest that Indian seafarers received inferior medical treatment to their European contemporaries in Indian ports. These differences can be seen as a contributory factor in their treatment and recovery at Indian ports.

Medical treatment at sea also differed for European and Indian seafarers. Under the English Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, foreign going vessels carrying one hundred persons or more were required to provide a doctor. The Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1923, however, only provided for a doctor when more than one hundred passengers or pilgrims were carried.²² In the absence of a doctor on shipboard, men were treated by the Chief Officer who followed guidance issued in a Board of Trade handbook. Thus, Indian legislation was disadvantageous when compared to British legislation. It was also alleged that doctors were “callous and altogether unsympathetic to Lascars”, although

¹⁷ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.159.

¹⁸ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.159.

¹⁹ Mowat, James, *Seafarers' Conditions in India and Pakistan: Report on Mission of Enquiry, October to November 1947*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1949, p.71.

²⁰ Mowat, *Seafarers' Conditions*, p.71.

²¹ Mowat, *Seafarers' Conditions*, p.70.

²² Mr. J.E.P. Curry, Shipping Master, Bombay, *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* [hereafter RCL], Volume 1, Part 1: Evidence – Bombay Presidency Including Sind (Written), p.180.

these claims were “universally denied”.²³ Indian seafarers who became unwell in Britain were also expected to meet the costs of their treatment from their wages. This was despite their wages being “computed on the basis of one standard of living, while the hospital charges in this country [United Kingdom] are computed on the basis of an entirely different standard”.²⁴ Only when a man became destitute did the owners become liable for his maintenance and repatriation.²⁵ While a sick Indian seafarer had wages to his credit he could not be regarded as distressed or destitute.²⁶ As a result, some men were left without wages at the end of their voyage.²⁷ In contrast, British seafarers left in foreign ports were protected by Section 34 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1906 which imposed obligations regarding their care and maintenance upon shipowners.²⁸ Thus, it becomes clear that differences existed in the treatment and care available to Indian and European seafarers in addition to the differences illustrated in health statistics. Indeed, the differences in their care can be seen as a contributing factor to the differences in the health statistics. The higher incidence of diseases and the lower standard of care offered to Indian seafarers made their lives at sea more difficult and dangerous.

The food supplied to seafarers is also revealing of the conditions of life and work on board ship. A balanced diet was of increased importance due to the nature of the manual labour work the men performed on shipboard, such as stoking the boilers or moving and preparing the coal. Prescribed scales of provisions for Indian seafarers were included in the Indian Merchant Shipping Acts of 1893 and 1923, and were also adjusted by the Governor General in Council during the intervening periods. Tables six to nine on pages thirty-five to thirty-eight demonstrate the changing nature of the scale of provisions over the years 1883 to 1937. They show slight changes to Indian seafarers’ provisions over the period. Quantities of ghee, salt and “curry stuff” remained the same while supplies of rice, flour and dal decreased in quantity. Meanwhile, the quantity of

²³ IOR L/E/7/696: Letter from Mr. Challis to Board of Trade, 13th January 1911; Department of Commerce and Industry, Government of India to Secretary of State for India, India Office, 12th March 1914.

²⁴ IOR L/E/7/1114 File 996: Letter from Mercantile Marine Department to Undersecretary of State, India Office, 23rd February 1922.

²⁵ TNA BT 15/62: T.W. Holderness, India Office to Board of Trade, 25th October 1912.

²⁶ TNA BT 15/62: W. Barnes, Board of Trade Finance Department Minute Sheet, 26th October 1912.

²⁷ IOR L/E/7/1114 File 996: Superintendent, Mercantile Marine, Rangoon to Marine Department, Board of Trade, 29th June 1921.

²⁸ IOR L/E/7/1133 File 3331: Commerce and Revenue Minute Paper, reference CR1842/23.

fresh meat issued increased. As a result, the scales had mixed benefits for Indian seafarers. Contemporaries believed that the diets of heavy manual workers ought to contain “a large amount” of animal fat.²⁹ From a contemporary perspective, therefore, the increasing quantity of fresh meat would be viewed as beneficial. But the scale could be viewed as deficient by contemporary standards as it was believed that people employed in heavy manual labour required large amounts of “energy foods” such as bread and potatoes.³⁰ The declining quantity of rice, one of the main carbohydrate groups in their diets, would therefore seem disadvantageous to the men.

The nutritional deficiencies of the Lascar scale of provisions can best be illustrated by the prevalence of Beriberi amongst Indian crews. Beriberi was a disease resulting from thiamine deficiency caused by a shortage of Vitamin B1 in the diet. Beriberi began with weakness and a loss of feeling in the legs, followed by swelling in the lower half of the body and could possibly result in heart failure and death.³¹ Death rates for Beriberi were not systematically recorded but where statistics exist they demonstrated that it affected a greater number of Indians than Europeans. In 1927 and 1925, Beriberi was the third highest cause of death amongst Indian seafarers at 0.28 per 1000 men in 1927 and 0.4 per 1000 in 1925.³² The Lascar Beriberi death rate was 0.16 in 1923 and 0.09 in 1922.³³ In contrast, there were no European deaths from Beriberi in 1927 and 1922 with a rate of just 0.01 per 1000 men in 1925 and 1923. From statistics alone, therefore, it is clear that Beriberi was a disease that particularly afflicted Indian seafarers.

It took some time for Beriberi to be linked specifically to deficiencies in Lascars’ diets.³⁴ Writing in 1902, D.W.K. Moody, who had previously served as a surgeon on P&O ships,

²⁹ Collis, Arthur and Greenwood, Major, *The Health of the Industrial Worker*, London: J & A Churchill, 1921, p.253.

³⁰ McDougall, Frank, “Trends in Food Habits”, *Food and Welfare*, Vol. 9, Issue 5, 1938, p.26.

³¹ Carpenter, Kenneth, *Beriberi, White Rice and Vitamin B: A Disease, a Cause and a Cure*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p. xi.

³² Home, “The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1927”, *The Lancet*, Vol. 213, Issue 5517, 1929, p. 1111. Home, “The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1925”, *The Lancet*, Volume 210, Issue 5428, 10th September 1927, pp. 567 – 569.

³³ Home, “The Deaths of Merchant Seamen in 1923”, *The Lancet*, Vol. 206, Issue 5327, 1925, pp. 731 – 734. Home, “A Death Rate for Merchant Seamen”, *The Lancet*, Vol. 205, Issue 5302, 1925, pp. 783 – 784.

³⁴ This was informed by wider trends in the understanding of Beriberi. The change from understanding the cause of Beriberi as a “poison” to awareness that it was a nutritional deficiency did not occur until the twentieth century. See Meade, “Beriberi” in Kiple, *Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease*, pp. 47 – 49.

argued that Beriberi was a “poison” that was portable and “probably microbiotic”.³⁵ The Board of Trade issued a circular notice to its officers in 1911 intended primarily for the use of vessels carrying “Asiatic” crews.³⁶ This notice indicates that Beriberi was starting to be linked to nutritional deficiencies as it was noted that the “polishing” of rice removed a substance needed to maintain a healthy body when rice was the chief food source.³⁷ The outbreak of Beriberi on the *Sutlej*, for example, was attributed to a nutritionally deficient diet. This was substantiated by the findings that Beriberi did not occur among European members of the crew who were not restricted to the Indian scale of provisions or to those of the “native petty officers, cooks and pantry servants, who had special facilities for adding to their rations”.³⁸ By 1936 it was noted that Beriberi was no longer prevalent among Lascars with only two cases recorded in the previous two years.³⁹ Although cases of Beriberi declined over the years, it is clear that it was a disease that particularly affected Lascars and was caused by their diet as outlined in the scale of provisions.

Dinkar Desai also claimed that Indian seafarers did not have a balanced diet and that their scale of provisions compared poorly to seafarers of other countries. The Indian scale of provisions, he argued, did not provide fruit compared to the seafarers of other nationalities such as British and also Finnish seamen who were given 400 grams of fresh or 150 grams of dried fruit every week.⁴⁰ The monotony of supplies outlined in the scales of provisions was also a common complaint of seafarers. Dada Amir Haider Khan recalled how the cook would attempt to exchange raw rice stored on board with local fishermen at ports of call, to allow some “variety to our monotonous, tasteless and deficient diet”.⁴¹ He also remembered other strategies such as “stealing potatoes, onions etc. from the stores”.⁴² Such cases suggest potential problems with the scale of provisions before factoring in problems with the supply of and quality of food given to Indian seafarers.

³⁵ Moody, D.W.K., “Beriberi as it occurs among the Lascar crews on board ship”, M.D. Thesis, Aberdeen, 1902, p. 24.

³⁶ IOR L/E/7/940 File 3127: “Beriberi” Marine Department, Board of Trade, February 1911.

³⁷ IOR L/E/7/940 File 3127: “Beriberi” Marine Department, Board of Trade, February 1911.

³⁸ IOR L/E/7/940: Report of F.M. Sandwith on the *Sutlej* Beriberi outbreak, 7th August 1914, p.1.

³⁹ IOR L/E/9/973: Revision of the scale of provisions supplied to Lascars on board foreign going ships.

⁴⁰ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.101.

⁴¹ Khan, Dada Amir Haider, *Chains to Lose: life and struggles of a revolutionary – memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan*, edited by Hasan N. Gardezi, New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, p. 89.

⁴² Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.101.

Table Six: Indian seafarers' Scale of Provisions, 1883

The Scale of Provisions prescribed under Section 28(1) of the Indian Merchant Shipping Act, 1883. Taken from Letter from Board of Trade to Mercantile Marine Office, 31st July 1919, IOR L/E/7/940 File 3127.

Measurements in pounds (lbs), ounces (oz) and drams (drs)

Ordinary		Cold Weather	
Item	Amount	Item	Amount
Rice	1 6 0	Rice	1 6 0
Flour	0 10 0	Flour	0 10 0
Dal	0 6 0	Dal	0 6 0
Ghee	0 2 0	Ghee	0 3 0
Salt	0 0 8	Salt	0 0 8
Curry stuff	0 1 0	Curry stuff	0 1 0
Dry fish at sea, 5 days a week	0 4 0	Dry fish at sea on 3 days a week	0 4 0
Fresh meat free from bone at sea on two days a week	0 4 0	Fresh meat free from bone at sea on four days a week	0 4 0
In harbour daily, fresh meat	0 4 0	In harbour daily, fresh meat	0 4 0
Vegetables dry at sea, such as onions, potatoes	0 6 0	Vegetables dry at sea, such as onions, potatoes	0 6 0
Vegetables fresh in harbour	0 8 0	Vegetables fresh in harbour	0 8 0
Tamarind	0 1 0	Tamarind	0 1 0
Tea	0 0 4	Tea	0 0 8
Sugar	0 1 8	Sugar	0 2 0
Lime Juice	0 1 0	Lime Juice	0 1 0
Oil (mustard)	0 0 12	Oil (Mustard)	0 0 12

Special Scale for the Bombay Presidency	
Ordinary	Cold Weather
Rice 1 8 0	Rice 1 4 0
Dal 0 4 0	Dal 0 4 0
Ghee 0 2 0	Ghee 0 3 0
Salt 0 0 8	Salt 0 0 8
Curry stuff 0 0 10	Curry stuff 0 0 10
At sea daily, dry fish 0 4 0	At sea daily, dry fish 0 4 0
At sea 2 days a week fresh meat 0 8 0	At sea 2 days a week fresh meat 0 8 0
Vegetables dry at sea and fresh in harbour 0 8 0	Vegetables dry at sea and fresh in harbour 0 8 0
In harbour daily, fresh meat 0 4 0	In harbour, daily fresh meat 0 4 0
Tea 0 0 4	Tea 0 0 4
Sugar 0 1 8	Sugar 0 1 8
Lime Juice 0 1 0	Lime Juice 0 1 0

Table Seven: Indian Seafarers' Scale of Provision for ports other than Bombay, 1931

General scale applicable to crews engaged at ports other than ports in the Bombay Presidency.

Extract from Gazette of India, August 1st 1931, IOR L/E/9/973

Item	Ordinary	Cold weather
	lbs. oz. drs.	lbs. oz. drs.
Rice daily	1 6 0	1 6 0
Flour daily	0 10 0	0 10 0
Dal daily	0 6 0	0 6 0
Ghee daily	0 2 0	0 3 0
Salt daily	0 0 8	0 0 8
Curry stuff daily	0 1 0	0 1 0
Dry fish at sea, on 5 days a week	0 4 0	0
Dry fish at sea, on 3 days a week	0	0 4 0
Fresh meat free from bone at sea	0 4 0	0
on 2 days a week		
Fresh meat free from bone at sea	0	0 4 0
on 4 days a week		
Fresh meat free from bone in	0 4 0	0 4 0
harbour, daily		
Vegetables dry at sea such as	0 6 0	0 6 0
onions, potatoes daily		
Vegetables fresh in harbour daily	0 8 0	0 8 0
Tamarind daily	0 1 0	0 1 0
Tea daily	0 0 4	0 0 4
Sugar daily	0 1 8	0 1 8
Condensed milk, per week	0 4 0	0 4 0
Lime juice daily	0 1 0	0 1 0
Oil (mustard) daily	0 0 12	0 0 12
Water as required		

Table Eight: Special Scale of Provisions for Bombay crews, 1931

Special scale applicable to crews engaged at ports in the Bombay presidency.

Extract from Gazette of India, August 1st 1931, IOR L/E/9/973

Item	Ordinary	Cold weather
	lbs. oz. drs.	lbs. oz. drs.
Rice daily	1 8 0	1 8 0
Flour daily	0 10 0	0 10 0
Dal daily	0 4 0	0 4 0
Ghee daily	0 2 0	0 2 0
Salt daily	0 0 8	0 0 8
Curry stuff daily (including kokam or tamarind)	0 0 10	0 0 10
Dry fish at sea, daily	0 4 0	0 4 0
Fresh meat free from bone at sea	0 4 0	0 8 0
on 2 days a week		
Vegetables, dry at sea and fresh in harbour, daily	0 8 0	0 8 0
Fresh meat free from bone in harbour daily	0 4 0	0 4 0
Tea daily	0 0 4	0 0 8
Sugar daily	0 1 8	0 2 0
Condensed milk, per week	0 4 0	0 4 0
Lime juice daily	0 1 0	0 1 0
Water as required		

Table Nine: Indian Seafarers' Scale of Provisions, 1937

Taken from Department of Commerce: Notification: Merchant Shipping, Simla, 22nd May 1937, IOR L/E/9/973.

Measurements in pounds (lbs), ounces (oz) and drams (drs)

	General Scale applicable to crews engaged at ports other than in the Presidency of Bombay and the Province of Sind		General Scale applicable to crews engaged at ports in the Presidency of Bombay and the Province of Sind	
	Ordinary	Cold weather	Ordinary	Cold weather
Flour or atta (Indian whole wheat flour) daily (a)	1 4 0	1 4 0	1 6 0	1 6 0
Flour or atta daily	0 8 0	0 8 0	0 8 0	0 8 0
Dal daily (a)	0 5 0	0 5 0	0 4 0	0 4 0
Ghee daily	0 2 0	0 3 0	0 2 0	0 3 0
Salt daily	0 0 8	0 0 8	0 0 8	0 0 8
Curry stuff daily (b)	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 0 10	0 0 10
Dry fish at sea 3 days a week (c)	0 4 0	0 4 0	0	0
Dry fish at sea daily (c)	0	0	0 4 0	0 4 0
Fresh meat free from bone at sea 4 days a week and in harbour daily	0 4 0	0 4 0	0 4 0	0 4 0
Vegetables dry at sea such as onions, potatoes daily (d)	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0
Vegetables fresh in harbour daily	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 10 0
Tamarind daily	0 1 0	0 1 0	0	0
Tea daily	0 0 4	0 0 8	0 0 4	0 0 8
Sugar daily	0 1 8	0 2 0	0 1 8	0 2 0
Condensed milk per week	1/3 0 0	1/3 0 0	1/3 0 0	1/3 0 0
Lime juice daily (e)	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Oil (mustard) daily	0 0 12	0 0 12	0	0

The food scales were not applied to Indian seafarers equally but differentiated between seafarers signing on at Bombay and those sailing from other ports. Those sailing from Bombay were entitled to a separate scale of provisions. The India Office suggested that a reason for this difference was “the fact that many of the Lascars engaged in these ports come from North Western India and have larger frames and are accustomed to a more liberal diet”.⁴³ This statement reflects contemporary understandings of Indian society as structured around “martial” and “non-martial races”. Men from northern India, in particular those from hilly and cooler regions, were understood to be “martial” races.⁴⁴ Martial races theory was, therefore, based upon an understanding that environment and biology created certain aptitudes.⁴⁵ Favoured groups included the Pathans, Dogras, Sikhs, Gurkhas and other Punjabi and border groups.⁴⁶ Their masculine virtues were in contrast to men from Bengal and Southern states, who were labelled effeminate.⁴⁷ Martial races seemed to possess obvious masculine qualities which the non-martial races lacked and the terms “martial” and “manly” were even used interchangeably.⁴⁸ This is a recurring theme in British understandings of Indian Lascar seafarers and is revisited throughout this chapter. Nevertheless, the scale of provisions highlights the practical consequences of this theory for Indian seafarers and demonstrates differences in the standard of living for Indian seafarers signing on at different ports.

Concerns were raised over the quantity and quality of the food supplied to Indian seafarers despite the scale of provisions. Some British authorities maintained that the scale of provisions was more than adequate for the needs of Indian seafarers. The Government of Bombay, for example, argued that seafarers’ provisions compared “favourably” with those set for native troops on field service.⁴⁹ The India Office also

⁴³ IOR L/E/9/973: India Office note by Sir John Megaw, 28th January 1937.

⁴⁴ Caplan, Lionel, “Martial Gurkhas: The persistence of a British military discourse on ‘race’” in Robb, Peter (Ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, 261.

⁴⁵ Robb, Peter, “Introduction: South Asia and the concept of race” in his *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Dirks, Nicholas B., *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 180; Streets, Heather, *Martial Races: The Military and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857 - 1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Sinha, Mrinalini, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

⁴⁸ Caplan, “Martial Gurkhas”, p. 270.

⁴⁹ IOR L/E/7/555: S.M. Edwards, Deputy Secretary to the Government of Bombay, to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry, 12th December 1907.

pointed out that companies such as the P&O usually supplied provisions in excess of the prescribed scale.⁵⁰ Other sources suggest, however, that the full quantity of provisions specified in the scale were not always provided. Complaints frequently emerged concerning the supply of food to Indian seafarers. Following the outbreak of Beriberi on the *S.S. Sutlej*, it was noted that “the natives... complained little about its [the foods] quality though they had much to say about the frequency with which they were regaled upon it in the absence of fresh meat and vegetables”.⁵¹ Indeed, the crew of the *Sutlej* complained that they did not receive their statutory supply of fresh meat, fruit and vegetables.⁵² The resulting investigation into the outbreak upheld the crew’s grievances, noting that “there appears definite ground for their complaint”.⁵³ Complaints of “insufficient food... no vegetables or meat” were made by the crew of the *S.S. City of Mysore* in 1918.⁵⁴ An earlier case on the same ship also suggests that an Indian seafarers’ position in shipboard hierarchies influenced the availability of food rations. In this instance, some members of the crew complained that:

Serang and Tindals made us work like Gadhas (donkeys) without sufficient food neither would the Serang ask the steward for our full ration, and as he was well supplied he did not care about us, neither would he speak to the Captain about giving us some money, but he as well as one or two of his relatives had all they wanted.⁵⁵

As I illustrate later in this chapter, complaints regarding the provision of food were frequently the cause of protests by Indian crews. Thus, Indian seafarers’ provisions were not always provided in the quantities stipulated in the scales of provisions causing hardships for the crews affected by lowering their standard of living and making them vulnerable to disease.

There is also evidence that some of the food supplied to Indian seafarers was of a poor quality. Evidence collected by the *Sutlej* enquiry illustrated the poor quality of provisions that could be supplied. An Indian Fireman on this voyage recalled that “we got all

⁵⁰ IOR L/E/9/973: Draft Paper: Tomkins, India Office to Commerce Department, Government of India, 4th February 1937.

⁵¹ IOR L/E/7/940: Inquiry into outbreak of Beriberi on *S.S. Sutlej*, p.28.

⁵² IOR L/E/7/940: Inquiry into outbreak of Beriberi on *S.S. Sutlej*, p.33.

⁵³ IOR L/E/7/940: Inquiry into outbreak of Beriberi on *S.S. Sutlej*, p.33.

⁵⁴ IOR L/E/7/780: Mr. Seal to Secretary of State for India, 25th August 1918.

⁵⁵ IOR L/E/7/780: Mr. C.M. Seal to India Office, 8th September 1914.

vegetables and other perishable eatables which were partly rotten... the rest of the voyage we had nothing but rotten salt fish full of maggots... the potatoes and onions given to us were half rotten".⁵⁶ Tamarind, the flavouring agent used in Indian cooking, was described as "perished on the surface, with the deterioration having penetrated to a considerable depth".⁵⁷ Adding to these problems, the prolonged storage of such supplies also decreased the vitamin content of grains and vegetables thus detracting from their nutritional value.⁵⁸ The *Sutlej* enquiry of 1918 revealed different standards of quality for the provisions supplied to Indian and European seafarers. It was noted that the fish would not be touched by Europeans or sanctioned by the Board of Trade but "from an Asiatic aspect it might be regarded as palatable".⁵⁹ Compounding this problem, inspections of provisions by port authorities were only carried out when there was "reason to believe, on complaints received or otherwise, that inspection is necessary".⁶⁰ Problems with the supply, quantity and quality of provisions demonstrate the conditions of work and life Indian seafarers' confronted on shipboard.

Exploring the wage rates of Indian seafarers provides a useful framework for a comparative analysis of their position within the international maritime community. Ravi Ahuja's study revealed that Indian seafarers "received as little as between one-fifth and one-third of the pay of European "able-bodied seamen" – a ratio that remained unchanged up to the 1980s".⁶¹ It is possible to expand upon Ahuja's statement by comparing Indian seafarers' wage rates to other nationalities. A statistical analysis of the figures provided by the Royal Commission on Labour in India offers a snap shot of the differences between British, Indian and Chinese seafarers. The statistics are reproduced in Table Ten on page forty-two.

⁵⁶ IOR L/E/7/780: R&S 3843 1914: Statement of Ujeer Ally, Fireman First Tindal.

⁵⁷ IOR L/E/7/940: Inquiry into outbreak of Beriberi on S.S. *Sutlej*, p.27.

⁵⁸ Beaton, G.H. and McHenry, E.W., *Nutrition: a Comprehensive Treatise*, Volume 3, New York: Academic Press, 1966, p. 149.

⁵⁹ IOR L/E/7/940: Inquiry into outbreak of Beriberi on S.S. *Sutlej*, p.27

⁶⁰ IOR L/E/7/940: D.D. Tankim, Letter from the GOI regarding inspection of Lascar food, revision of scale of provisions and supply of warm clothing, 19th July 1918.

⁶¹ Ahuja, Ravi, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c. 1900 - 1960", *International Review of Social History*, Volume 51, 2006, Volume 51, Supplement S14, p. 112.

Table Ten: A comparative table of wages in the Merchant Navy, 1930

Taken from "Memorandum of the Indian Seamen's Union, 3rd February 1930", Royal Commission on Labour in India, Volume 5, Part 1.2, Bengal including Coalfields and Dooars, p. 249.

Wages in pounds, shillings and pence

	British	Bombay Lascar	Calcutta Lascar	Chinese
Quarter Master	9 10 0	4 10 0	4 2 6	
Sailor	9 0 0	2 6 6	1 17 6	3 5 4
Greaser	10 0 0	2 19 3	1 19 0	3 19 4
Firemen	9 10 0	2 2 9	1 14 6	3 16 2
Assistant Steward	8 5 0	3 3 0	2 11 0	3 5 4

Indian seafarers' pay lagged significantly behind the pay of British and Chinese seafarers. British seafarers, for example, earned more than double the rates of Indians. While there was a large gap between Chinese and British wage rates, the wage rates of Chinese seafarers still ranked higher than the Indian rates. Shipowners and the state would have justified the higher rate paid to British seafarers on racial grounds. For example, it was argued that the lower rate paid to Indian seafarers was warranted as a greater number of Indian seafarers had to be employed to meet manning requirements. It was argued that for every British seafarer employed, two Indians would be required to complete the same work.

Paying Chinese and Indian seafarers at different rates can possibly be read as a policy of divide and rule. This policy could have been deployed to prevent seafarers from the two countries joining together in common demands and so threatening British shipping. Thus, Indian wage rates ranked significantly lower than their contemporaries from other countries. During World War Two, British officials became concerned about the gap between Indian and Chinese seafarers' pay. Their anxieties were heightened after a rise was awarded to Chinese seafarers. The Ministry of War Transport feared that as a result in an "awkward position" if any serious discontent developed among Indian seamen.⁶² They particularly feared that it would lead to ships being held up "owing to possible dissatisfaction on the part of Indian seamen with their remuneration as compared with that of other seamen".⁶³ Aftab Ali, Indian seafarers' representative and president of the All-India Seamen's Federation, played upon these differences while attempting to secure a new pay deal for Indian seafarers. Discussing the difference between Indian and Chinese wage rates, Ali stated that "discrepancy and differential treatment... were considered as being a gross iniquity by the different seamen's organisations abroad".⁶⁴ Not only, therefore, did Indian seafarers' wages trail behind those of other seafarers but Indian seafarers also attempted to implement an improvement in their own wages by comparing them to others and demanding parity.

⁶² TNA MT 9/3657: W. Kneale, Ministry of War Transport to K. Anderson, India Office, 8th July 1942.

⁶³ TNA MT 9/3657: N.A. Guttery, Ministry of War Transport to India Office, 24th June 1942.

⁶⁴ IOR L/PJ/12/630: Copy of a report dated 28.6.44 received from the Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta.

The Royal Commission on Labour in India also demonstrates differences in the wages of Indian seafarers engaging at Bombay and Calcutta. Seafarers engaging at Bombay earned considerably more than those engaging at Calcutta. Wage rates statistics contained in Tables Eleven and Twelve on pages forty-five and forty-six also suggest that these differences remained over time. The statistics demonstrate an increase in wages at both ports but not an equalisation between the two. Thus, Calcutta wage rates improved but remained lower than Bombay wage rates. Take, for example, the job of a Deck Lascar. Wages paid to Calcutta crews for this job rose from 16 Rupees per month in 1914 to between 18 and 25 Rupees per month in 1919. The same job in Bombay earned 20 Rupees per month in 1915 and between 22 to 30 Rupees per month in 1920. Paying seafarers from different ports at different rates can be seen as another example of the policy of divide and rule. Creating dissension between the men of the two ports could prevent them linking up and becoming more powerful thus protecting British ship owners' profits and maintaining a cheap supply of maritime labour. This policy certainly led to resentment building up between the men of the two ports. At Calcutta, it led to demands for the rate of wages prevailing in Bombay.⁶⁵ There were also accusations of the cheaper Calcutta crews being shipped to Bombay in addition to cases of Bombay crews being dismissed upon arrival in Calcutta so that they could be replaced with the cheaper crews.⁶⁶ This particular practice was said to have led to resentment among Bombay crews.⁶⁷ Thus, Indian seafarers as a whole received a lower standard of wages with differences existing between Bombay and Calcutta crews.

Indian seafarers did not receive the full monthly pay stipulated in their articles of agreement because they were expected to pay bribes to the Serang to secure their jobs.⁶⁸ The Serang paid the Ghat Serang for his job, and in turn recovered his losses and made

⁶⁵ IOR P/11178: Strike of Calcutta Seamen, 1922, p.51.

⁶⁶ National Archives of India, New Delhi [hereafter NAI] Department of Commerce, January 1933, File No. 12-MII(2)/32, Serial Numbers 1-14, Part B: Representation from the National Seamen's Union, Bombay, regarding the claim for compensation of certain Engine room crew of the SS Nerbudda against the British India Steam Navigation Company in respect of their premature discharge.

⁶⁷ Memorandum of the Indian Seamen's Union, *RCLI*, Volume 1, Part 1: Evidence – Bombay Presidency Including Sind (Written), p. 290.

⁶⁸ Dixon, Conrad, "Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen", in R. Ommer and G. Panting, eds., *The Working Men who Got Wet*, St. Johns', Newfoundland, 1980, p.266.

**Table Eleven: Comparison of Wage Rates for Calcutta (1914) and
Bombay (1915)**

	BOMBAY 1915	CALCUTTA 1914
Rank	Rs.	Rs.
DECK CREW		
Lascars	20	16
1st Tindal	32	28
2nd Tindal	27	24
Cassab	24	22
Winchman	24	21
ENGINE CREW		
Serang	37 to 42	35
1st Tindal	27	26
2nd Tindal	25	24
3rd Tindal	23	22
Cassab	22 to 24	24
Donkeyman	22 to 25	23
Oilman	21 to 22	20
Fireman	19 to 20	17
Trimmer	14 to 15	12

Constructed from information contained in:

“Table III: Bombay Rates of Wages in 1915 (excepting P&O)”, in Dinkar Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, pp.232 – 234.

“Table VI: Wages Rates at Calcutta in 1914 and 1919”, in Dinkar Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, p. 239 – 240.

**Table Twelve: Comparison of Wage Rates for Calcutta (1919) and
Bombay (1920)**

	BOMBAY 1920	CALCUTTA 1919
Rank	Rs.	Rs.
DECK CREW		
Tindal	46	37
2nd Tindal	37	30
Seacunney	69	55
Cassab	36	30
Winchman	36	28
Lascars	22 to 30	18 to 25
Bhandary	34	25
Topass	28	22
ENGINE ROOM		
Serang	75	60
1st Tindal	44	35
2nd Tindal	37	30
3rd Tindal	35	28
Cassab	35	28
Donkeyman	35	28
Oilman	32	26
Fireman	30	23
Trimmer	24	18
Bhandary	30	25

Constructed from information contained in:

“Table II: Bombay Rates of Wages in 1920 (excepting P&O)”, in Dinkar Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, pp.229 – 231.

“Table VI: Wages Rates at Calcutta in 1914 and 1919”, in Dinkar Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, p. 239 – 240.

profits by taking commission from the Lascars.⁶⁹ The practice of recovering these payments varied between the crews of the engine room and those on deck.⁷⁰ In addition to paying the Ghat Serang, the Serang and his Indian crew also paid bribes, or made a “present”, to the European Officers.⁷¹ Failure to pay these bribes resulted in harsh treatment on shipboard. An example of this is the case of Muhaya Sadameer and Bagga Boolta who reportedly rebelled because “their lot was made so unbearable” after failure to provide the ship’s engineer with a bribe. The crew of the *S.S. Clan Menzies* reported that they too “had a real rough time of it: sworn at, beaten, made to do work that was not theirs, and clean brass in a blinding storm coming up channel” because they had not paid a bribe to the Ship’s Officer.⁷² Thus, such bribes diminished an already low wage rate by international standards and had a negative impact upon working conditions and relations on shipboard.

It is impossible to explore relations on shipboard without considering the hierarchies that existed. In *Grey Dawn Breaking*, Tony Lane noted that hierarchy touched almost every aspect of shipboard life.⁷³ Hierarchies reflected the power relations between different people on shipboard. They represented asymmetrical relationships, with the “superiors” at the top of the hierarchy having more power and power over their “subordinates”. Such “power” was deemed necessary for the control and domination by some groups over others. In this case, the British sought to bolster their power over Indian seafarers by expressing it through the social structure they created on shipboard. Hierarchies on ships employing non-European seafarers were structured around racial difference. In her exploration of shipboard hierarchies, Laura Tabili illustrated how British shipowners maintained a racial division of labour that was also cut across by perceptions of gender and masculinity. She argued that Black seamen were usually appointed to menial and unskilled jobs such as those in the saloon or engine room. The work of managing the

⁶⁹ Dixon, “Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen”, p.266.

⁷⁰ Balachandran, ‘Searching for the Sardar: The State, Pre-capitalist Institutions, and Human Agency in the Maritime Labour Market, Calcutta, 1850-1935’, in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds, *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.224.

⁷¹ Balachandran, “Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880-1935”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9, 1, 1997, p.7.

⁷² For both cases see IOR L/E/7/696: Challis to Board Of Trade, 13th January 1911.

⁷³ Lane, Tony, *Grey Dawn Breaking: British Merchant Seafarers in the Late Twentieth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, pp.152 – 179.

kitchen and eating quarters carried out by stewards in the saloon department was perceived as “women’s work” while engine room jobs, such as stoking the boilers, were “not really seafaring”.⁷⁴ Such jobs were compared to the roles of white seafarers on deck, which were portrayed as skilled and masculine. Racial difference was consolidated further by the position of white men at the top of the hierarchy as Captains, Masters, Officers and Engineers. Thus, both race and gender were used to reinforce the subordination of Indian seafarers on shipboard.

Tabili’s astute observation can be expanded in the case of Indian seafarers. The division of labour on ships carrying Indian seafarers can be understood as an example of martial races theory in practice. Arising out of the belief that some Indian peoples were warlike while others were not, martial races theory depicted Indian society as structured around “martial” and “non-martial” races.⁷⁵ The Rebellion of 1857 was a pivotal moment in the redefinition of martial races. Groups who had remained loyal to the British during the Rebellion were categorised as “martial” races while those who had participated in the Rebellion were derided as inherently cowardly and feminine.⁷⁶ This “inbred martial skill” was attributed to race, climate and environment which led to the perception that men from certain races and areas of India were more “manly” than others.⁷⁷ Men from northern areas of India – such as the Pathans, Pujnabis and Sikhs – were labelled “martial races”.⁷⁸ In contrast men from Bengal and Southern states were labelled effeminate.⁷⁹ Despite their virility and masculinity the “martial races” lacked certain characteristics that were apparently inherent in Britishness. They were said to be subservient and docile to authority.⁸⁰ “Martial races” were also reputed to be intellectually backward.⁸¹ Indeed, this was seen as advantageous as intelligence in the colonised was believed to lead to

⁷⁴ Tabili, Laura; *“We Ask for British Justice”: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.48

⁷⁵ Omissi, David, “‘Martial Races’: Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India”, *War & Society*, Volume 9, Number 1, 1991, pp. 1 – 27.

⁷⁶ Streets, *Martial Races*, p.8,

⁷⁷ Metcalf, Thomas, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997pp. 125 – 128.

⁷⁸ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.127; Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press, 1995.

⁸⁰ Khalidi, Omar, “Ethnic Group Recruitment in the Indian Army: The Contrasting Cases of Sikhs, Muslims, Gurkhas and Others”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4, Winter 2001 – 2002, p.530.

⁸¹ Omissi, “Martial Races”, p.17.

“disloyalty and inscrutability”.⁸² While they were considered natural fighters, their leadership qualities were also doubted and it was said that the native officers lacked the initiative to be trusted with anything more than a company.⁸³ From the British point of view, the combination of these characteristics meant that they needed guidance and controlling by their British “superiors”. Thus, British masculinity was not threatened and prevailed over the Indian martial races. Martial races theory was used to guide recruitment to the Indian Army but also influenced recruitment for colonial employment more generally.⁸⁴ The next section demonstrates the influence of martial races theory on the employment of Indian seafarers and its role in structuring shipboard hierarchies.

In 1945 an article appeared in *The Syren and Shipping* describing the different types of Indian seafarers available for employment by detailing and comparing their supposed characteristics. Men from northern states were described in terms of their strength and masculinity. The article identifies certain “races” that were also targeted by the British for recruitment to the Indian Army. For example, men from Malabar were targeted by the British in post-Rebellion India.⁸⁵ In the article, seafarers from Malabar are described as “superb seamen” who were said to have “the sea in their blood”.⁸⁶ Punjabis also feature in the article as “fine specimens of men” who were “manly and energetic”. The description of Pathan seafarers concluded with the statement that “he is in every sense of the word a man”. Indeed, other contemporaries also held these groups in high regard. In 1903, Captain Hood described how other Lascars “could not hold a candle” to the Punjabi.⁸⁷ Alexander Parnis reflected similar sentiments in his statement that the Punjabis and Pathans were “of a higher caste and far superior to the Lascars proper”.⁸⁸ The *Syren and Shipping* article described all of these groups as employed in the engine

⁸² Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 180.

⁸³ Levine, Philippa, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 284.

⁸⁴ For discussion of use of martial races in army recruitment see: David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860 – 1940*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994; Streets, *Martial Races*. For its use in wider recruitment practices see David Arnold, “Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859–1947”, in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, ed. R. Guha, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 1–53.

⁸⁵ Omissi, “Martial Races”, p. 10 -11.

⁸⁶ IOR L/I/1/840: Snipping from *The Syren and Shipping*, 3rd January 1945, “Types of Indian Seamen”, by a correspondent.

⁸⁷ Hood, Captain W.H., *The Blight of Insubordination: The Lascar Question and Rights and Wrongs of the British Shipmaster*, London: Spottiswode & Co., 1903, p.11.

⁸⁸ Parnis, Alexander, “A Word About Coloured Labour at Sea”, *Nautical Magazine*, July 1912, p.18.

rooms of ships. As demonstrated in Tabili's work, these jobs were viewed inferior to "proper" seafaring jobs but they did not carry the same gender connotations as jobs in the saloon and housekeeping departments. In contrast, jobs in the saloon department became synonymous with men from the more southern region of Goa. Indeed, in 1903, Captain Hood described Goa as "the land of servants that nowadays provides the Eastern fleets of British steamers with butlers, stewards, cooks, waiters and domestics".⁸⁹ "Types of Indian Seamen" described Goan seafarers but did not mention their masculinity or strength. Thus, non-martial races were relegated to those jobs deemed feminine while the men from the martial races were placed in strenuous jobs in the engine room. But the superior positions of Captain, Officers and Engineers were reserved for white men mirroring the application of martial races theory in the Indian Army. This was in part due to the perceived need to guide and control the martial races. While the *Syren and Shipping* article extolled the masculine qualities of the men from martial races it also made clear their need for guidance and discipline. For example, it noted Punjabi men "submit willingly to discipline... but it is necessary to be firm and fair in dealing with them".⁹⁰ Malabar and Pathans were also described as "amenable to discipline". Thus, we can see how martial races theory was used to structure hierarchies on shipboard.

There is still scope to expand our understanding of the operation of such hierarchies on ships that employed Indian seafarers. For example, scant attention has been paid to the visual assertion of this hierarchy. Wider ranging studies of clothing and identity in British India illustrated how classifications were created in official and public intercourse between Indian and British men.⁹¹ Clothing became part of a "system of codes of conduct which constantly distanced [the British] physically, social and culturally from their Indian subjects".⁹² Britons attempted to "orientalise" India in order to further emphasise their differences with the mass of the Indian population. For example, Cohn argued that army uniforms were transformed by the British exercising their fantasy of

⁸⁹ Hood, *The Blight of Insubordination*, p.52.

⁹⁰ IOR L/I/1/840: Snipping from *The Syren and Shipping*, January 3rd 1945, "Types of Indian Seamen", by a correspondent.

⁹¹ Tarlo, Emma, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1996, p. 13.

⁹² Cohn, Bernard, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p.111.

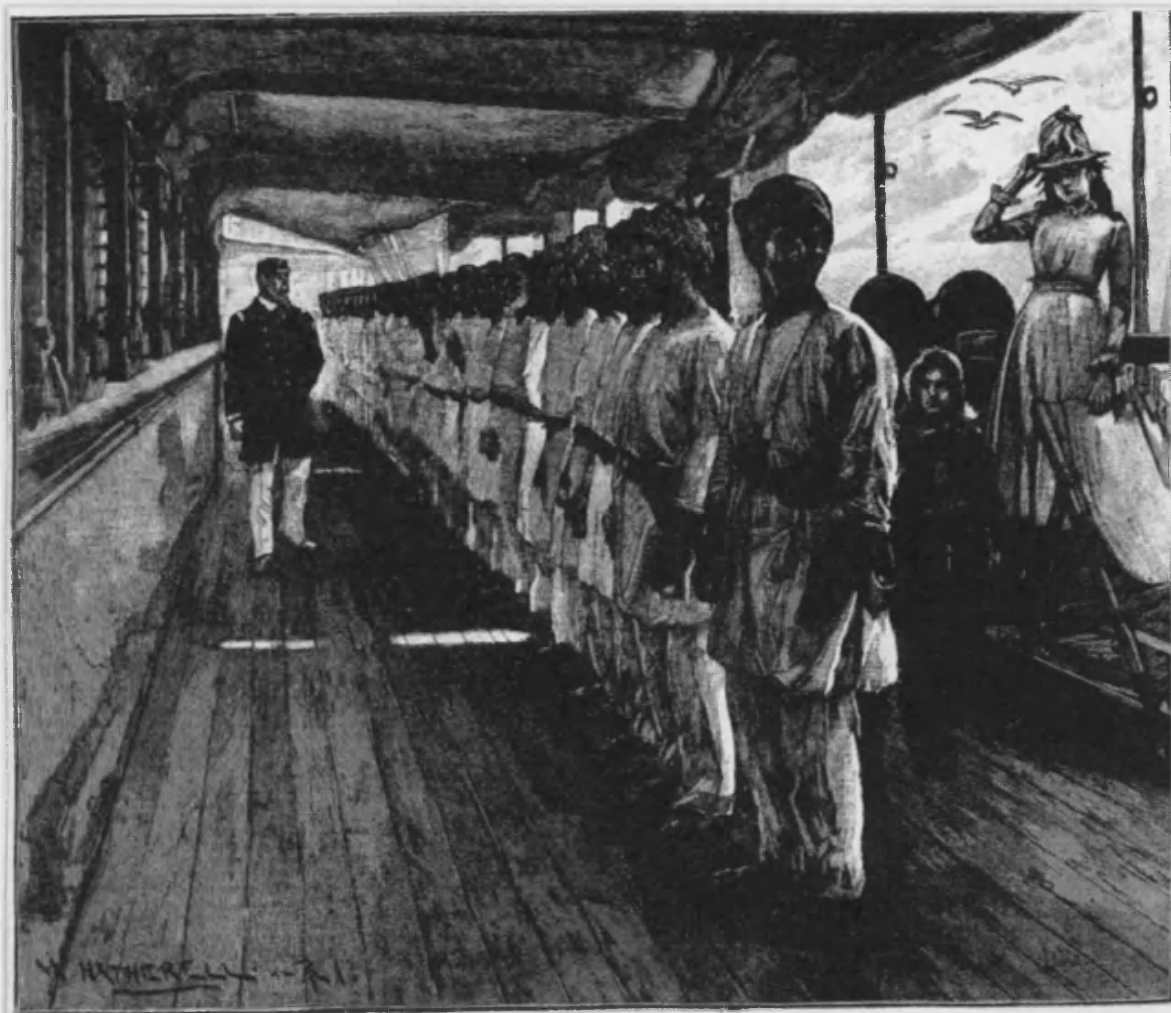
what an “oriental warrior” should look like.⁹³ Part of this transformation involved giving Indians exotic and distinctive head gear that clearly differentiated them from Britons. As a result, a visible hierarchy of power and difference emerged. Thus, while clothing is generally a neglected area in historical and anthropological studies of colonial India it is still a valuable avenue for analysis. This neglect in wider histories is mirrored in the study of Lascars and shipboard life. The next section illustrates how hierarchies of shipboard were asserted and cemented visually.

Hierarchies were asserted visually through the use of clothing and uniforms on ships where Indian seafarers were employed. These served to emphasize difference and hierarchy between Europeans and Indians. European officers wore traditional, tailored, Western style uniforms. This was in direct contrast to the basic and Orientalised uniforms issued to Indian seafarers. The pictures in Plates One and Two on pages fifty-two and fifty-three illustrate these differences. The European officers are easily distinguished by their dress thus reinforcing their prestige and status as compared to the Indian seafarers. We can also discern differences between different ratings of Indian seafarers. Plate Two shows an Indian seafarer walking alongside the European officers inspecting the Lascars. His position alongside the European officers differentiates him from the Lascars being inspected. The difference in status is also reflected in his uniform. Compared to the Lascars being inspected, this man is wearing an elaborate headdress and a pair of shoes. We can assume from his position in the picture in addition to the difference in his uniform that this man is of a higher ranking than the Lascars and it is likely that he is the Serang. The man at the far right of the picture standing at the end of the line of barefooted men is the only other Indian seafarer shown wearing shoes. This man was likely to be the Tindal, “the head or commander of a body of men... a native petty officer of Lascars” and would have been second in command to the Serang.⁹⁴ Such visual differences served to remind men of their rank and status on shipboard.

⁹³ Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, pp. 123 – 124.

⁹⁴ Yule, H., and Burnell, A.C., *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, Wordsworth Editions, 1996, p.923.

Plate One



SUNDAY MORNING PARADE OF LASCARS

"Sunday Morning Parade of the Lascars", *The Graphic*, Saturday,
February 2, 1889; Issue 1001, page 120.

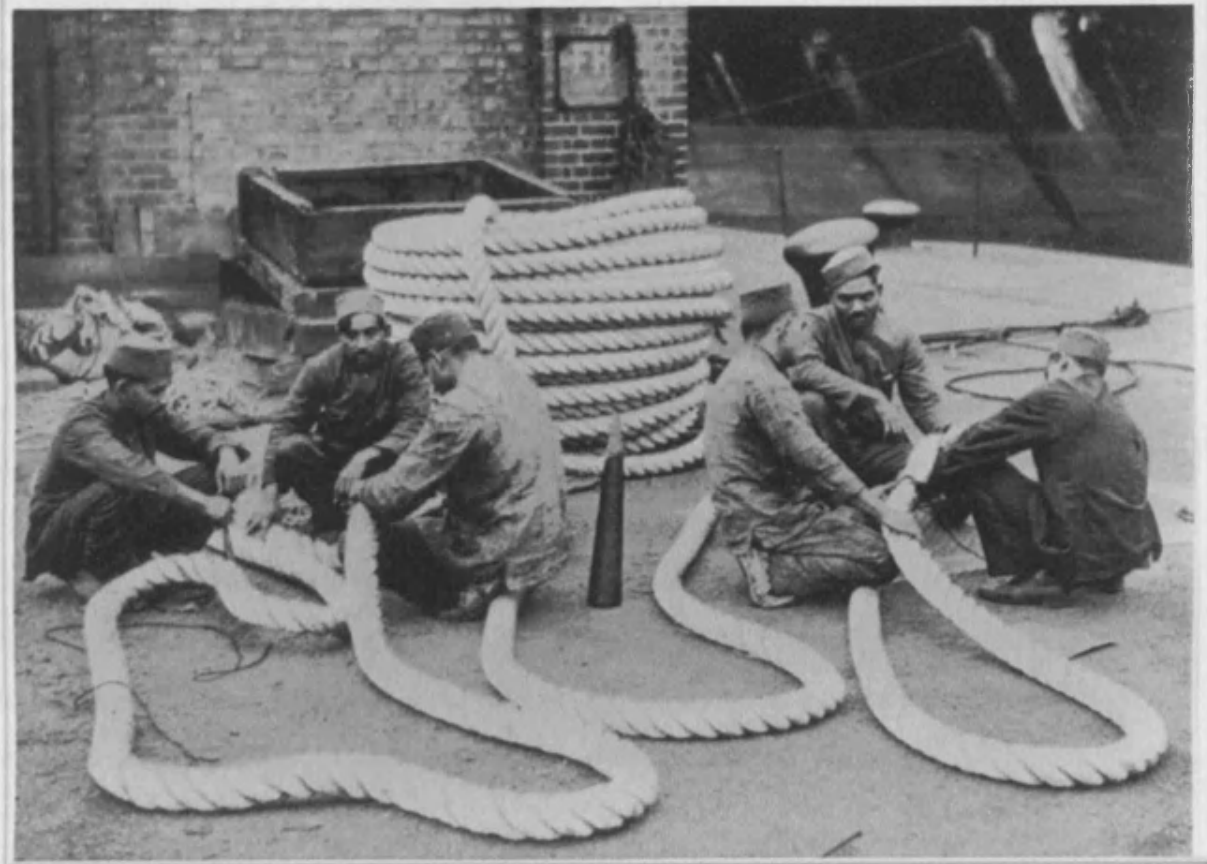
Plate Two



Row of Lascars in a line being inspected on board ship, 1935.

Museum of London, Accession Number DK1894NG.

Plate Three



Six Lascars squatting on the ground working on a large rope, 1936.

Museum of London, Accession Number DK2787NG.

The visual assertion of hierarchy through uniforms was also recorded in written sources. Watkin-Thomas described the uniforms of Indian crew and illustrated how uniforms were used to reflect rank and status. His article gives a clear picture of the graded scale of Indian seafarers, with those of higher rank and status wearing more elaborately decorated uniforms. For example, Serangs and Tindals tied “a colourful riband [ribbon] of Bengal tartan” around their topis in contrast to the plain red ribbon used by Kalasis or Lascars. Lower ratings such as the Cassab, Paniwallah and Bhandary did not use a ribbon. Thus, each rating could be identified by their uniforms. Serangs and Tindals were further differentiated “as befitting their importance”. Thus, they wore a richly embroidered lalchi, a tartan instead of a plain rhumal and painted fanciful designs on the tops of their topis.⁹⁵ From this description we can appreciate the extent to which hierarchy was reflected in dress. The differences in uniform that were a component of the shipboard hierarchy were noted in earlier writings too. The *Liverpool Mercury* recorded the visit of a Bombay Country ship in 1850 and described the differences between the Serang and Lascars. It noted that while the Serang’s “inferiors went about in strips of white linen, this dignitary was arrayed in a red army coat, brilliant with gold lace, a cocked hat and drawn sword”.⁹⁶ From these sources we can appreciate how uniform was a visual representation of status, rank and hierarchy on shipboard.

Such uniforms may have been worn for ceremonial occasions only. For example, the inspection of Lascars in Plate One is described as “The Sunday Parade”. At other times, these uniforms were replaced by basic work suits. For example, Plate Three on page fifty-four shows Indian seafarers at work wearing very different uniforms to Plates One and Two. Such occasions would have served the purpose of highlighting hierarchy, with uniform being a component of this. The act of parading for inspection by European officers and, as illustrated in Plate One, European passengers demonstrated to seafarers their rank and status on shipboard. The ritual and ceremonial aspects of such occasions would have highlighted the importance of the performance.

Historians of Indian labour history demonstrated how violent behaviour was employed to reinforce hierarchies. Exploring the use of violence by managers in mills, Chitra Joshi

⁹⁵ Watkin-Thomas, M., “Our Asian Crews”, *About Ourselves*, No. 14, September 1955, p.312.

⁹⁶ “A Bombay ‘Country Ship’”, *Liverpool Mercury*, Tuesday November 5th 1850, Issue 2238, p. 6.

concluded that “beating up and abuse” were visible assertions of hierarchical power over workers.⁹⁷ Violence against mill workers was a public act carried out in full view of fellow workers. Such abusive public acts were spectacles meant to intimidate and so produce docile, submissive workers respectful of hierarchies at the workplace.⁹⁸ Similar behaviour can be found in accounts of life aboard ship. Acts of violence by European Masters, Officers and Engineers were employed to discipline but also to reinforce hierarchy on shipboard. They were usually public acts conducted in view of fellow Indian seafarers. The treatment of the Indian crew of the ship the *Emily Augusta* provides an example of this. In this case the Captain of the vessel, Horatio Walters, was tried for the murder of a Lascar known only as “Abdullah”. The threat of violence to enforce discipline and respect for European superiors on shipboard is apparent in reports of the trial. For example, the Second Mate stated that “there was great difficulty in getting them to work without rope-ending them” with the Chief Mate also admitting to this practice.⁹⁹ The use of such aggressive behaviour to enforce discipline being the preserve of the European crew would have reinforced power relations on shipboard. Descriptions of the Captain’s actions illustrate the public nature of humiliation intended by these acts. They served to “teach a lesson” not only to the offending Lascar but to the entire Indian crew and hoped to produce a docile, submissive and respectful crew. The trial recorded the following events as evidence of the Captain’s brutality:

Abdullah was struck everyday by the Captain on the head and back. The night before Abdullah died he was in the forecastle apparently delirious, and witness received orders to get the man out and send him to the wheel. Witness could not get him out, and the Captain came and threw Abdullah out of the door and hit him two or three times about the back with a belaying pin... Witness subsequently saw the man fastened up and salt being thrown over him....¹⁰⁰

Joseph Salter also recorded this incident and described the victim being tied to a windlass while two people threw salt water over him.¹⁰¹ These examples illustrate the level of violence used while also demonstrating the public nature of beatings and abuse. The

⁹⁷ Joshi, Chitra, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003, p. 149.

⁹⁸ Joshi, *Lost Worlds*, p. 149.

⁹⁹ “Alleged murders on board ship”, *The Scotsman*, Thursday 26th November 1874, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ “Alleged Murders on the High Seas”, *The Scotsman*, Wednesday 18th November 1874, p.7.

¹⁰¹ Salter, Joseph, *The East in the West or work among the Asiatics and Africans in London*, London: S.W. Partridge & Co., 1896, p. 127.

insistence that Abdullah was brought from the fore-castle crew's quarters demonstrates the importance of such abuse being employed in public. Reports from the trial of John Perry, Master of the *Commodore Perry*, further reveal the extent of public humiliation used on shipboard. A Lascar witness at the trial stated that "he had been compelled by the Captain and the Chief Mate to eat pork – they had forced the pork into his mouth. He and other Lascars were beaten with pork. He had fat pork rubbed over his face".¹⁰² For a Muslim seafarer this would have been an extremely offensive act. Thus, we can see how public acts of violence intended to discipline and humiliate were used by European members of the crew.

Abusive, insulting and embarrassing language was another method used by European members of crew to reinforce hierarchy. We get an idea of the type of language used in the guides to Lascar languages prepared for the use of European officers. These dictionaries and guides included phrases to be used when addressing Lascars. Instructions translated into "Lascari-Bat" (the European term for the language of the Lascars) included "Obey me", "Your father and uncle are both good workmen... how is that you are so lazy and stupid?" and "Where is your country? Everyone there are 'junglies'".¹⁰³ We can understand how European members of the crew endeavoured to reinforce hierarchy and to create a submissive and docile crew through the use of abusive language and threatening behaviour.

The higher Indian ratings, such as Serangs and Tindals, used public acts of violence and humiliation to reinforce their position in the shipboard hierarchy. The Serangs and their officers acted as intermediaries between the Indian and European crews. As such, they were responsible for relaying orders to and disciplining the Indian crew. They too used the threat of violence to enforce discipline and work practices. The *Liverpool Mercury's* description of a "Bombay Country Ship" noted that the work of the Serang consisted of "flagellating the crew with the flat of his sabre, an exercise in which long practice had made him exceedingly expert".¹⁰⁴ Public acts of humiliation and abuse were used by

¹⁰² "The Police Courts – Thames", *Daily News*, Thursday 25th November 1858, p.7.

¹⁰³ Valentini, A.L., *Lascari-Bat: A collection of sentences used in the daily routine of modern passenger steamers where Lascars are carried*, London: Miller and Sons, 1896. Also see S. Chalmers Parry, *Lascar Hindustani for Ship-Surgeons*, London: W.J. Clark & Co., 1930.

¹⁰⁴ "A Bombay 'Country Ship'", *Liverpool Mercury*, p. 6.

Serangs to buttress their position in the shipboard hierarchy. Such abuse was not used simply as punishment for misdemeanours by Lascars. Instead, we can understand it as a public display of power by the Serang as a means of exhibiting and thus reinforcing their status on shipboard. A curious spate of “attempted murders” by Serangs supports this argument. In one case, the Bhandary or cook of the *S.S. Clan Leven* described how “the Serang of the steamer, Jian Ally, after abusing him kicked him overboard and that he was nearly two hours struggling in the water for life”.¹⁰⁵ A similar story exists in the “serious attempt” at murder of a Coal Trimmer on the part of the Fireman-Serang and Fireman-Tindal of the *S.S. Chupra*.¹⁰⁶ Such acts served as public examples of the power and status of the Serang to the inferior rank and file of other Lascars.

“They marched in a body from the liner”: Protests against living and working conditions on board ships

From the evidence presented so far, it would be easy to presume that Indian seafarers were powerless to resist or challenge shipboard conditions. In recent years, however, historians demonstrated Indian seafarers’ ability to challenge and resist practices that sought to subordinate them. Thus, Indian seafarers are depicted as people with the agency to gain some control over their lives. While outlining these perceptive accounts, this chapter demonstrates the scope to expand our understanding of Indian seafarers’ agency. This section pays particular attention to the absence in the existing historiography of forms of protest that were confrontational, dramatic and even violent. This absence reflects wider trends in South Asian history in the wake of the Subaltern Studies collective. Using newspaper reports that have been overlooked by previous historians it considers forms of resistance that specifically addressed shipboard conditions. Such forms of resistance included refusals to work, crews walking off ships en masse and the use of violence.

Historians have explored the agency of Indian seafarers at both the collective and individual levels. The ability of Indian seafarers to collectively challenge practices that were detrimental to their welfare is demonstrated in works focusing on their trade

¹⁰⁵ IOR L/E/7/502: Statement of Essack wd. Kara, Tindal of Runchorepasa.

¹⁰⁶ IOR L/E/7/478: Customs Shipping Office, Colombo to Marine Department, Board of Trade, 9th January 1903.

unions. Scholars such as Broeze and Balachandran explored the issues Indian seafarers' unions pursued, the difficulties they faced and the progress made. For example, union attempts to counter stereotypical depictions of Indian seafarers received attention from Balachandran. He argued that unions set out to address the perception that Indian seafarers were "coolies" who were useless except when led by a Serang.¹⁰⁷ Balachandran argued that unions attempted to advance an "alternative narrative" about Indian seafarers' identity.¹⁰⁸ Unions attempted to counter this narrative by arguing that Indian seafarers were individuals who came together for engagements under the Serang just as industrial work gangs came under a foreman. Broeze emphasised the agency behind union led acts, stating "whatever small improvements made in their conditions had been their own doing for which they did not owe gratitude to others".¹⁰⁹ Thus, Indian seafarers could unite together in their unions to challenge unfavourable practices and narratives. But the historiography has also shown that Indian seafarers could act as individuals. The case studies of Jan Mohammed and A.G. Straker are often used to demonstrate Indian seafarers' ability to manoeuvre within the structures of Britishness and anti-alien legislation. Despite previous residence and war service, Jan Mohammed was labelled an "alien" and denied entry to Britain. Undeterred, he eventually entered Britain as a stowaway where he proceeded to claim for war risks bonus and applied for an American passport to collect funds deposited there.¹¹⁰ A. G. Straker also "played on the vagueness of ethnic and national identification" by sometimes claiming to be a resident of Britain and sometimes to be a "Eurasian" from India to enable a cycle of claims for repatriation between the two countries.¹¹¹ Thus, the ability of Indian seafarers to challenge disadvantageous conditions and practices becomes clear. Despite these insightful studies, Indian seafarers' ability to contest detrimental practices onboard ship remains unclear.

¹⁰⁷ Balachandran, Gopalan, "Conflicts in the international maritime labour market: British and Indian Seamen, employers and the state, 1890 - 1939", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 39, No.1, 2002, p.95.

¹⁰⁸ Balachandran, Gopalan, "South Asian seafarers and their worlds, c.1870s to 1930s", *Seascapes, Littoral Cultures and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges*, February 12-15th, 2003.

<http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/balachandran.html> [Accessed 19/10/2007].

¹⁰⁹ Broeze, Frank, "The Muscles of Empire – Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919 – 1939", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, p.49.

¹¹⁰ Balachandran, 'South Asian Seafarers and their worlds'.

¹¹¹ Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment", p. 126.

Recent developments in the writing of South Asian history have moved away from the rebellions and revolutions that were the focus of the Subaltern Studies School. Instead, attention has turned to everyday forms of resistance that were “singularly undramatic” and that stopped short of “overt defiance”.¹¹² The “ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups” included slander, sabotage and false compliance.¹¹³ Such acts constantly realigned and challenged power relations by their persistent nature.¹¹⁴ This trend has been mirrored in histories of Indian seafarers. Norma Myers, for example, drew attention to Indian seafarers’ undramatic and non-confrontational forms of everyday resistance by tracing their “everyday survival within a white society”.¹¹⁵ The “mechanisms for survival” traced by Myers ranged from begging to selling the clothes and bedding issued by the East India Company.¹¹⁶ As Indian seafarers had to be clothed and maintained by the owners of ships, Myers argued that selling these items was evidence of Indian seafarers “working the system”.¹¹⁷ This illuminates another aspect of Indian seafarers’ methods of resistance. But again, this form of resistance is limited to times when Indian seafarers were in port and not when they were at sea. Nor did it directly address or challenge the conditions they faced onboard ships. Dada Amir Haider Khan’s recollections of stealing and selling food rations, outlined earlier in the chapter, are also evidence of everyday forms of resistance. Unfortunately, however, such forms of resistance feature rarely in the historical records.

There has also been a move away from exploring dramatic, confrontational and often violent resistance. This type of resistance was seized upon by scholars of the Subaltern collective as evidence of “a pure form of agency”.¹¹⁸ Indeed, explosive demonstrations

¹¹² Scott, James C., *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, London: Yule University Press, 1985, pp. 26 – 27.

¹¹³ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p.xvi.

¹¹⁴ Ghosh, Anindita, “Introduction”, in her *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007, pp. 14 – 15.

¹¹⁵ Myers, Norma, “The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 13, 2&3, July 1994, p.8.

¹¹⁶ Myers, “The Black Poor of London”, p.19.

¹¹⁷ Myers, Norma, “Lascars: Eastern Seamen in London”, in her, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, c. 1780-1830* London: Cass, 1996, p.113.

¹¹⁸ Anagol, Padma, “From the Symbolic to the Open: Women’s Resistance in Colonial Maharashtra” in Ghosh (Ed.), *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007, p.24.

were seen as indication of “an insurgent and autonomous self consciousness”.¹¹⁹ Subaltern scholars also portrayed violence as a particularly subaltern attribute. For example, Guha saw violence as the marker of the difference between subaltern and elite classes. He argued that “elite mobilisation tended to be relatively more legalistic and constitutionalist in orientation, subaltern mobilisation relatively more violent”.¹²⁰ A consequence of this dichotomy is that subaltern agency is depicted as the antithesis of the reasoned, rational behaviour of the elites. Balachandran’s recent work on Indian seafarers appears to directly challenge and reconfigure Guha’s argument. Comparing their protests to the authority they encountered, Balachandran concluded that Indian seafarers’ protests were not “arbitrary, blind, personalised or violent”.¹²¹ He also argued that Indian seafarers always ensured that their protests were lawful.¹²² Their protests were also informed by a certain rationality – “a careful weighing of costs, benefits and opportunities”.¹²³ They were “undemonstrative, indeed even undramatic”.¹²⁴ Thus, the protests Balachandran uncovered were inconsistent with the Subaltern School’s framework. Balachandran’s approach allows for a greater degree of agency. Rather than the blind violence of the crowd, he accounts for a rational, calculated decision making process. The protests Balachandran traces, however, are restricted to port locations and do not directly challenge or address conditions on board ship. Indeed, while Balachandran’s astute study illuminates Indian seafarers’ methods of resistance; he does not detail the practices they were contesting.

This chapter, however, argues that rational thinking does not have to be divorced from dramatic, confrontational and even violent resistance. Take, for example, the work of Chitra Joshi. She argued that when the actions of individuals violated notions of justice held by workers, the target of opposition was the individual person. Thus, violent retribution was carefully planned and targeted rather than uncontrolled confrontation.

¹¹⁹ Haynes, Douglas, and Prakash, Gyan, “Introduction: The Entanglement of Power and Resistance”, in Haynes and Prakash (Eds.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p.7.

¹²⁰ Guha, Ranajit, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” in Guha, R., and Spivak, G.C., (Eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.42.

¹²¹ Balachandran, Gopalan, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886 - 1945”, *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2008, p. 49.

¹²² Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p.59.

¹²³ Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p. 72.

¹²⁴ Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p.70.

The attacks highlighted by Joshi took the form of harassment, humiliation or physical attack with the intent of questioning or redefining the limits of authority.¹²⁵ Chakrabarty also argued that protesting became a “ceremony of defiance” where the “rebel worker inverted the terms of his relationship with the manager or the supervisor. In doing so the worker “overturned the two major everyday signs of his subordination: abusive language and physical violence”.¹²⁶ Newspaper reports of Indian seafarers’ resistance are used in this chapter to demonstrate that their use of violent, confrontational resistance does not necessarily mean that it was unrestrained or irrational behaviour.

The theory of moral economy builds upon the idea of a rational basis to violent and confrontational behaviour. Indeed, John Archer’s description of moral economy has several parallels with Joshi’s arguments. Archer argued that violent crowd action was not evidence of “mindless mobs running out of control” but rather of a careful selection of individuals who were viewed as cheating the moral economy.¹²⁷ In such circumstances, violence was viewed as “permissible”.¹²⁸ The term moral economy is synonymous with the works of E.P. Thompson and the earlier works of James Scott. Scott explored the moral economy of the peasant and defined it as “their notion of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation – their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable”.¹²⁹ He described how the violation of standards could lead to resistance “not only because needs were unmet, but because rights were violated”.¹³⁰ The importance of a “legitimizing notion” through which crowds believed that they were defending traditional rights and customs was emphasised by Thompson.¹³¹ This approach has been applied in parts to Indian labour history. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, wrote that time and again working class protest returned to the notions of “fairness” and “justice”. He described how “the worker reacts when he

¹²⁵ Joshi, Chitra, *Lost Worlds*, p. 168.

¹²⁶ Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890 - 1940*, Delhi: Oxford India, 1996, p. 182.

¹²⁷ Archer, John, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.37.

¹²⁸ Archer, *Social Unrest*, p.37.

¹²⁹ Scott, James C., *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University, 1976, p.3.

¹³⁰ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, p.6.

¹³¹ Thompson, E.P., “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”, *Past and Present*, 50, 1, 1971, p. 78.

sees himself being deprived of something that he thinks is justly his".¹³² Within this framework I consider examples of Indian seafarers refusing to work and look at the reasons behind this. I ask whether they were defending perceived rights or customs on shipboard such as food, working conditions and their treatment by Europeans and Serangs. Thus, I explore whether there was a certain level of treatment and care that they expected and were prepared to defend. By looking at when they resorted to these types of agency I hope to uncover what they understood as intolerable claims on their product and moral economy.

This chapter considers whether Indian seafarers used violent or abusive behaviour as a means of patrolling their moral economy. This approach is in contrast to Balachandran's argument that Indian seafarers' protests were not personalised, vengeful or violent.¹³³ There are several cases where Lascars refused to work or resorted to violence and aggression in order to defend perceived rights and customs as well as to resist intolerable claims on their product. Such actions map out their moral economy – a certain standard of rights, working practices and expectations which they believed they were entitled to. I also differ from the existing historiography by exploring forms of protest that either took place on board ship or that addressed conditions on board ship.

Balachandran argued that Indian seafarers' protests were informed by a "certain rationality" as demonstrated by their attempts to maximise success by ensuring protests took place within and were supported by the framework of the law. He concentrated upon refusals to work stemming from objections to transfers between ships as this was supported by British maritime laws. The transfer of Indian seafarers was supposedly regulated by laws preventing their transfer between British ports or to ships proceeding to ports outside of British India. These laws were intended to prevent Indian seafarers becoming destitute outside of India and so becoming a charge on the British state. In practice, officials relied upon the informal consent of Indian seafarers to unlawful transfers. Balachandran argued that Indian seafarers insisted upon the correct implementation of these laws when they wanted to contrive a lawful termination of their

¹³² Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, p. 178.

¹³³ Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts", p. 71.

contract ahead of its expiry.¹³⁴ Examples of this are found in contemporary reports of Indian seafarers' refusal to work. In 1917 the crew of a Clan Liner appeared in court charged with refusing to obey the orders of the Chief Officer. Upon completing their contracts they were placed onboard a ship to work the passage home to Calcutta. After discovering that the ship was going elsewhere first before returning to Liverpool they refused to continue to work and demanded to wait for a ship sailing directly to Calcutta.¹³⁵ A similar case existed in 1939 when the Lascars of the *Clan Lamont* resisted a breach of agreement. They insisted that they had been promised a return to India when instead they were placed on the *Clan Lamont* and taken to Glasgow.¹³⁶ Their protests against such transfers were conducted within the framework of the law and thus support Balachandran's argument that the protests of Indian seafarers were lawful and not arbitrary, blind, personalised or violent.

Indian seafarers also used the transfer laws to contest conditions on board ship and thus to reinforce their conception of acceptable or tolerable working conditions. The Indian crew of the *S.S. Ballochmyle* refused to transfer to the *Baron Dalmeny*, becoming "insubordinate and insolent" when requested to sign the Articles of Agreement.¹³⁷ As the *S.S. Ballochmyle* was docked at Barry while the *Baron Dalmeny* was in Belfast the Lascar crew were able to resist the transfer. They rejected the transfer because of the number of different castes and poor food supply on the *Baron Dalmeny*.¹³⁸ Thus, the transfer to a different port was not the issue but rather the conditions on the *Baron Dalmeny*. The case of the Indian crew of the *S.S. Clan Sinclair* mirrors this. The crew refused a transfer to the *S.S. Halesius* not because of an objection to the intended voyage but to the Master of that vessel.¹³⁹ Such case studies help us appreciate how lawful means of protest were harnessed to challenge relations and conditions on board ships. Thus, these Indian crews reinforced what they believed were acceptable or tolerable conditions of shipboard life. Despite this, Indian seafarers' resistance was not restricted to lawful contexts. They also

¹³⁴ Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts", p.60.

¹³⁵ "Charge Against 61 Lascars", *The Scotsman*, 12th November 1917, p.8.

¹³⁶ "Deserted their Ship: Court Orders Return of 14 Lascars", *The Scotsman*, 17th October 1939, p.11.

¹³⁷ IOR L/E/7/650: W.N. Bicket & Co., Liverpool to India Office, 6th October 1909.

¹³⁸ IOR L/E/7/650: Mercantile Marine Office, Liverpool to W. Holderness, India Office, "8 Lascar seamen ex *SS Ballochmyle*", 25th October 1909.

¹³⁹ IOR L/E/9/963: Mercantile Marine Officer, Glasgow to Mercantile Marine Department, Board of Trade, 19th August 1930.

used forms of protest deemed illegal by the British such as refusing to work and walking off the ship. Protests could also be dramatic, confrontational or violent. Furthermore, the nature of protests could be personalised. That is, protests were concentrated on specific people who had upset the moral economy by contravening the standards Indian seafarers expected on shipboard. Such protests could display a degree of logic and rationality in their planning and execution.

The British authorities considered their refusal to work to be illegal and leaving the ship as desertion. Thus, the risks associated with such acts were high. Despite these risks, Indian seafarers used these forms of protest when rights and obligations concerning food and water rations were not adhered to. As the following examples demonstrate, their protests could be dramatic, confrontational and even violent. These protests outlined their understanding of tolerable and intolerable claims on their product. In 1931 the Lascars of the *City of Perth* refused to work while the ship was in port at Singapore as they were dissatisfied with their food and treatment by European officers.¹⁴⁰ In a similar case, food rations were the basis of resistance for a crew aided by the All India Seamen's Centre. The Centre offered assistance to the 42 Indian seamen who were arrested for refusing to work unless the "very bad food they were getting was changed".¹⁴¹ Such refusals to work courted significant risk and were confrontational in their nature. They took place firmly outside of the structures of the law. These protests demonstrate Indian seafarers' ability to actively challenge the working and living conditions they encountered. By refusing to work over these issues, Indian seafarers outlined their understanding of intolerable claims on their product. Their range of protests extended beyond practical acts of resistance to those that were symbolically dramatic. In 1907, *The Daily Mirror* reported the case of 49 Indian seafarers who set out to "pay a ceremonial call at Buckingham Palace" to lay their complaint before the King.¹⁴² The crew were photographed in St. James's Park "patiently waiting to call on the King".¹⁴³ They had left their ship en masse and complained that they had been forced to do too much work and

¹⁴⁰ "Strike on British Ship", *The Scotsman*, 18th December 1931, p.9.

¹⁴¹ IOR L/E/9/976, Collection 141/24: Report by Surat Ali, All India Seamen's Centre, 1st May 1944.

¹⁴² "Lascars in the Park: 49 Dusky Visitors Who Tried to Call on the King Yesterday", *The Daily Mirror*, 28th February 1907, p.5.

¹⁴³ "Lascars in St. James's Park on their way to Call on the King", *The Daily Mirror*, 1st March 1907, p.11.

that the quality of the food was poor. Thus, they were able to actively challenge the working and living conditions they encountered in their working lives.

Protests over food and water could escalate beyond these levels, becoming increasingly dramatic and even violent. Refusals to work were not confined to port situations and refusing to work at sea could have dangerous consequences. But at times, the gravity of the situation demanded instant redress and so protests occurred at sea. In his memoirs, Dada Amir Haider Khan related an incident where protests over the lack of fresh water for engine room men resulted in the ship coming to a stop at sea. When the situation became “too much to tolerate” the men refused to work until the water pump was completely unlocked allowing them to have water as required.¹⁴⁴ Thus, they used a dramatic form of protest to seek a rapid solution to a problem at sea. Violent forms of resistance were used alongside those that were dramatic. The case of the *S.S. Yorkshire*, for example, demonstrated their use of violent resistance but also revealed the careful execution of such protests. In 1893, the Lascars of the *Yorkshire* were charged with refusal of duty and assault. The Lascars claimed that the engineers of the ship demanded money from them for drinking water, although this was denied by the engineers in question.¹⁴⁵ They were charged with assaulting the Second Engineer and seriously wounding him. Thus, their protest was directed against a carefully chosen target. The case of the *Yorkshire* served as an example where violence was permissible as individuals had disrupted the moral economy. By demanding money for drinking water, the Second Engineer had upset the moral economy and so opposition was targeted specifically at him. These were not the actions of “mindless mobs running out of control” but of crews selecting targets or individuals who were “cheating” the moral economy.¹⁴⁶ Thus, even violent protests were informed by rationality or logic.

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined the hierarchies of power that existed on ships employing Indian seafarers. From this, it would be easy to assume that Indian seafarers were the docile victims of European officers and Serangs. This section demonstrates their ability to challenge the actions of their “superiors” on shipboard. The Europeans at the upper

¹⁴⁴ Khan, *Chains to lose*, pp. 108 – 110.

¹⁴⁵ IOR L/E/7/304: Letter from Board of Trade Offices, Tilbury to Marine Department, Board of Trade, 5th June 1893.

¹⁴⁶ Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England*, p.37.

echelons of shipboard hierarchies were not immune to Indian seafarers' protests. For example, the crew of *Clan Macaully* "marched in a body from the liner" after "three of the officers tried to extort money from them" and being "rudely told to get on with their work" when they appealed to the Captain for protection.¹⁴⁷ The identification of specific persons reveals that this protest was directed against precise targets. The actions of the engineers and the Captain were seen as unacceptable and outside of the customary working practices that the crew expected. The crew staged their protest despite the risks and structures of domination that worked against them. The actions of the Europeans were so unacceptable that the crew stated they would "rather go to prison than back to the ship". They were sentenced to 14 days imprisonment and forced to forfeit two days' pay. We notice several other examples of Indian crews refusing to work because of European seafarers allegedly abusing their position in the shipboard hierarchy. In April 1921, 36 Lascars of the *Clan McGillivray* were charged with disobeying the Captain's orders. They had refused to work with one of the engineers who had been striking some of them.¹⁴⁸ They pleaded guilty to wilfully refusing to continue duty resulting in a sentence of six days imprisonment and fined two days' pay. In a strikingly similar manner, the crew of the *Clan Macbeth* refused duty at the last moment, arguing that "they had not been getting on with the Captain and they had made it up among themselves not to sail under him".¹⁴⁹ They faced imprisonment for seven days and were fined two days' pay after stating they would only sail if a new Captain was appointed. Forty Lascars of the *City of Roubaix* appeared in court charged with wilful disobedience of the commands of the Captain for refusing to work on the vessel while it was docked at Leith. They claimed that they had refused duty as they had been "insulted" by the Storekeeper and Second Engineer. Thus, they refused to work unless the Second Engineer and Storekeeper were removed from the ship.¹⁵⁰ Thus, despite the risks and chance of failure, Indian seafarers chose to resist when the actions of European officers infringed upon their understanding of their rights on shipboard.

¹⁴⁷ "Disobeyed Captain's Orders – 42 Lascars Imprisoned", *The Scotsman*, 22nd November 1926, p.5.

¹⁴⁸ "Lascars who disobeyed orders", *The Guardian*, 9th April 1923, p.9. See also "Disobedient Lascar Seamen", *The Scotsman*, 9th April 1923, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ "Refused to Sail – Lascars Sentenced in Glasgow", *The Scotsman*, 16th April 1925, p.5.

¹⁵⁰ "Lascar Seamen – Thirty Seven Fined for Disobedience", *The Scotsman*, 6th September 1930, p. 13. Also "Mutiny on British Steamer – 40 Lascars in Court", *The Guardian*, 6th September 1930, p. 19.

There are parallels between Indian seafarers' protests against European officers and Chakrabarty's assertion that protesting became a "ceremony of defiance" in which workers inverted signs of their subordination by appropriating acts of violence usually associated with Mill managers.¹⁵¹ Indian seafarers were not the powerless lower strata of shipboard hierarchies but were able to appropriate violent abuse to protect their own interests. Newspapers reported several cases where violent protests were directed at European members of crews. For example, the crew of the *Gaekwar* reportedly attacked their European officers. Their resistance arose out of their harsh treatment at the hands of the Chief Officer and refused to return to the ship so long as he remained.¹⁵² Thus, their violent protest was carefully targeted at individuals who cheated the moral economy by breaking customary shipboard rights. The *Gaekwar* case had strong similarities with the case of the *Clan McNeil*. The Chief Officer of the *Clan McNeil* was assaulted by four Lascars. He described how a Lascar "struck at his head with a club" while the others "advanced in a threatening manner". One of the Lascars stated that the attack had taken place because "the steward had called him a lazy dog and knocked one of his teeth out".¹⁵³ Furthermore, four Indian seafarers of the *City of Chester* were charged with assaulting the Chief Engineer and common assault of the Fourth Engineer. The attack took place after the Indian crew "resented an order" from the Fourth Engineer. As a result, the Indian crew "armed themselves with spanners, shovels and iron bars and attacked the Fourth Engineer, who was so severely handled that he had to be taken ashore".¹⁵⁴ Most strikingly, Bhagwar Jassiwarra was charged with the murder at sea of the Master of the *Buckingham*. He admitted the killing but urged provocation by ill usage. The Chief Officer appeared for his defence stating that the Master's treatment of the men was "brutal in the extreme".¹⁵⁵ Thus, protests and violence could be specifically targeted against individuals who transgressed acceptable norms of shipboard behaviour.

The behaviour of Serangs was another cause of Indian crews' protests. For example, the Indian firemen of the *City of Venice* were charged with disobeying lawful commands

¹⁵¹ Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, p. 182.

¹⁵² IOR L/PJ/6/429 File 1693: 17th September 1896: Case of certain Lascars sentenced to imprisonment at Liverpool.

¹⁵³ "Lascars Mutiny – Ship's Officers Attacked", *The Scotsman*, 12th May 1928, p.13.

¹⁵⁴ "Trouble in the Engine Room: Lascars' Alleged Mutiny", *The Scotsman*, 12th October 1928, p.14.

¹⁵⁵ "The Murder of a Fife Ship Master", *The Scotsman*, 17th March 1891, p.5.

following their refusal to work unless the Captain dismissed the Serang. They claimed the Serang had ill-treated and abused them.¹⁵⁶ Dada Amir Haider Khan recollected a similar dispute with the Serang of the *S.S. City of Manila* which resulted in the entire Indian crew walking off the ship. Khan formed part of an engine crew transferred to this ship to complete its crew. Upon arrival, they discovered “the Sarong [sic] with whom the previous crew had come was a very sorry man and if he remained we would all be in a lot of trouble”.¹⁵⁷ The crew then decided to “stick together” and leave the ship, refusing to return until he was removed. The Indian crew walked off the ship and were successful in getting the Serang removed.¹⁵⁸

The bribes demanded by Serangs have been well documented by historians but it seems Lascars believed there was a limit to these demands. British authorities believed that resistance against the demands of Serangs arose when they attempted to get more than was customarily paid. For example, the Marine Department of the Government of Bombay stated that there was a “more or less recognised scale for these charges” with complaints occurring in special instances such as “the rapacity of an individual Serang”.¹⁵⁹ This suggests that while Indian seafarers paid such bribes they believed there to be a customary limit. Contemporary newspaper reports record several cases of Lascars refusing to work with the Serang over bribes. Lascars of the *Clan Murray* “obstinately refused to move” from the docks and board the ship. In court they stated that “they would not serve under the Serang and alleged that he insisted on getting money from them”.¹⁶⁰ The crew of the *Clan Lamont* likewise deserted their ship and refused to return, alleging that their Serang had been taking their money.¹⁶¹ At Queen’s Dock, Glasgow, a Serang was attacked in the engine room where he was thrown to the ground and struck until he lost consciousness. The Indian seafarers asserted that the Serang had been demanding money from them.¹⁶² A similar limit appeared to exist for the demands

¹⁵⁶ IOR L/E/7/1350 File 2940: Extract from Daily Post, 31st July entitled “Indian Firemen’s Revolt: 34 men sent to Gaol” enclosed in letter from Chief Superintendent, Mercantile Marine Office, Liverpool to Assistant Secretary, Mercantile Marine Department, 1st August 1924.

¹⁵⁷ Khan, *Chains to lose*, 1989 p. 94.

¹⁵⁸ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, pp.94 – 97.

¹⁵⁹ IOR L/E/7/696: Letter from Marine Department, Government of Bombay to Department of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 22nd May 1913.

¹⁶⁰ “Disobedient Lascars”, *The Scotsman*, 19th May 1930, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ “Deserted their Ship: Court Orders Return of 14 Lascars”, *The Scotsman*, 7th October 1939, p.11.

¹⁶² “‘The Gandhi Feeling’ – Lascar Disturbance at Glasgow”, *The Guardian*, 7th June 1930, p.17.

of the Ghat Serang. In their evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour in India, the Indian Seamen's Union detailed the boycott of a broker. They wrote that "his continued fleecing and extortion of the seamen created such an embittered situation that the seamen refused to be recruited through him or any of his paid agents".¹⁶³ Such actions reinforced their definition and understanding of the acceptable level of bribes to be paid.

So far, I have demonstrated how Indian seafarers used violence in their protests in a highly selective and logical manner. Violent protests were directed at specific targets that had upset the moral economy rather than the actions of a "mindless mob". But not all instances of spectacular and violent behaviour were evidence of this careful planning and execution. Their actions were not always carefully planned and targeted. For instance, Indian seafarers were suspected of starting a series of fires on board ships in the late 1840s.¹⁶⁴ In response, the British government created the Bengal Ship Burning (Rogers) Committee of 1851 to enquire into the cause of the fires. The results of the enquiry suggested that Indian seafarers were deliberately setting ships alight for their personal gain. It was alleged that Indian seafarers purposely set fire to the ships before they got too far from the shore so that they could escape with the money from their advances. Evidence presented to the Committee implicated Indian seafarers in starting the fires. Following the burning of the *Buckinghamshire*, the men returned to shore where "most of them obtained fresh tickets under fictitious names and sailed".¹⁶⁵ Captain Fraser of the *Bombay Castle* believed the ship was deliberately set on fire. He recounted that "the next day, when I mustered the crew, they had on all their best clothes under their dirty clothes... It was evident to me that they had taken out their clothes before the fire had broken out".¹⁶⁶ The ship-burning incidents were not protests directed at specific issues or conditions on shipboard and thus differ from the violent and dramatic behaviour considered so far. Rather, they were opportunistic acts that sought to work the system to their own advantage and material gain. Such incidences appeared

¹⁶³ Indian Seamen's Union, Covering Letter, 3rd February 1930 in *RCLI*, Volume 5, Part 1.2: Bengal including Coalfields and Doors, p. 240.

¹⁶⁴ For example, "Naval Intelligence - Fearful Burning of the Buckinghamshire Indiaman", *The Scotsman*, 19th April 1851, p.4. Also, "Wilful Destruction of an Indiaman by Fire", *The Scotsman*, 1st September 1847.

¹⁶⁵ IOR V/26/750/3 Appendix B, Evidence of Rustomjee Cowasjee.

¹⁶⁶ IOR V/26/750/3 Appendix A, Evidence of Captain Fraser.

to rarely occur, as demonstrated by the establishment of a committee to enquire into the unusual circumstances.

This section demonstrated Indian seafarers' ability to actively challenge the conditions they encountered on shipboard. Indian seafarers did not restrict their protests to the structures of the law. Instead, they used forms of protest deemed illegal by the British such as refusing to work and walking off the ships. These forms of protest could be dramatic, confrontational and personalised. Their protests can be seen as attempts to outline and reinforce their idea of acceptable, tolerable working conditions. These ideas formed the "moral economy" of shipboard life – the standards and conditions they were willing to tolerate. They protested against violations of these standards when opportunities arose. Balachandran's study revealed that Indian seafarers would not defy the authority of the Master at sea but would wait until arrival in a home port to commence their protests. The case studies I uncovered included some examples of resistance at sea but these cases must be contextualised. Protests at sea occurred when the transgressions of customary rights posed an immediate threat. For example, Dada Amir Haider Khan's account of a ship coming to a stop at sea happened because of the withholding of water to the engine room crew in high temperatures. The crew refused to work as they believed that this was an immediate threat to the health and life of the crew. Bhagwar Jassiwarra's murder of his Captain was also attributed to the intolerable actions of the Captain which were "brutal in the extreme". Their use of violence as a means of protest was not the actions of a "mindless mob" but rather actions against the person who had violated the notions of customary rights. Thus, violent protests involved identifying specific targets. They persisted in these acts of resistance despite being declared illegal by the British authorities and thus diminishing any chance of success.

The next section reconsiders the World War Two strikes through the framework of moral economy. It considers not only how the act of striking was a means of defining the moral economy by Indian seafarers but it also investigates how the language of moral economy was manipulated as a propaganda tool to legitimise the arguments of the British authorities and Indian seafarers' representatives. The outbreak of World War Two saw an unprecedented wave of strikes by Indian seafarers. Hundreds of Indian seafarers simply refused to work under the changed conditions unless they were awarded a pay

increase with a war risks bonus. By December 1939, hundreds had been imprisoned after being charged with breaking their contracts. The demands of Indian seafarers and the pace of the strikes have been outlined in detail by Rozina Visram.¹⁶⁷ The motives of Indian seafarers in striking at this point are considered by some to have been opportunistic. Balachandran argued that they were motivated to go on strike as much by a keen sense of opportunity as by their abysmal conditions of work and pay.¹⁶⁸ This opportunity derived from war time conditions such as the tight war time labour market caused by an increase in demand and a slowing down of hiring. Realising their potential worth to British shipping in these conditions Indian seafarers saw an opportunity to force an improvement in their pay and conditions. Some contemporary opinion also contended that Indian seafarers were opportunistic. In an informal letter to the India Office, Harold Cayzer, owner of the Clan Line of ships, described the strikes as “profiteering of unskilled British Lascar Labour of the worst sort”.¹⁶⁹ Indian seamen’s representative Surat Ali’s call for Indian seafarers to “get as much as possible out of British shipping companies now that Britain is at war” can also be read as opportunistic.¹⁷⁰ The following section considers whether we can reconsider the motives for these strikes in terms of moral economy. It looks at how both the British authorities and the Indian seafarers’ representatives sought to legitimise their arguments by framing them within the vocabulary of the moral economy. As we shall see, such public arguments differ greatly from the views of Harold Cayzer. I reconsider claims of opportunism and ask whether the strikes were a response to customary rights and obligations suddenly being rewritten by wartime conditions of service.

Both the British authorities and Indian seafarers’ representatives constructed public discourses within the framework of the moral economy – what was moral, just and legitimate. With both sides striving to justify their viewpoint, the use of such language became an important propaganda mechanism. For example, public statements by Indian

¹⁶⁷ Visram, Rozina, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp.234-253.

¹⁶⁸ Balachandran, “Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts”, p.65.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, MT 9/3150: Harold Cayzer to India Office, 15th September 1939. The letter appears to be rather informal with the writer noting that he had “just got down to Glasgow from my shooting season in the North” and is signed off “Cheerio”.

¹⁷⁰ IOR L/PJ/12/630: Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, 24th January 1940, No. 159: S.T. Ally. Surat Ally (sometimes referred to as Surat Ali) was Secretary of the Colonial Seamen’s Association, the Hindustani Social Club and London representative of the All India Seamen’s Federation.

seafarers' representatives stressed how reasonable their demands were. We are told that Menon stated that the men were striking for "legitimate grievances".¹⁷¹ In commenting about the legal proceedings started against striking Indian seafarers, Surat Ali stated that "the men had been asking for reasonable wages and working conditions in view of risks attendant upon life at sea in wartime".¹⁷² The language of legitimacy and reasonableness was similarly utilised by the British. The British authorities prepared a statement for issue by the Indian High Commissioner following the prosecutions of striking Indian seafarers which they intended to use for propaganda purposes in India. An early draft of the statement read "The *justice* of the Lascar case that the pre-war contract of service was not strictly applicable under war conditions has been generally recognised, but in recent weeks shipowners have been compelled to take steps to enforce contracts of service entered into after the outbreak of war."¹⁷³ They made careful distinctions between reasonable and unreasonable demands. For example, a Ministry of Shipping minute sheet recorded that "the Board of Trade thought that the Lascars' demands for 100 per cent increase, plus in one case £10 extra, two new suits plus a bar of soap, were quite unreasonable".¹⁷⁴ Chinese seafarers likewise manipulated the language of moral economy to highlight the legitimacy of their claims. They wrote that "ratings feel that their claim for increment in wages is very fair as it is still below the British seamen's scale of wages".¹⁷⁵ The use of language of reasonable and fairness in such negotiations reflects the attempts of each side to gain the upper hand.

Viewing these strikes as purely opportunistic ignores the enormous changes seafarers' conditions underwent with the outbreak of war. The risks to life at sea rose enormously with the chance of ships being deliberately targeted by the enemy to take them out of service. Thus with the shift in working conditions came a shift in the expectations or moral economy of Indian seafarers. In line with the new conditions, old rights and obligations had to be altered. While some demands were excessive, most demands made were in direct relation to the risks they faced. The All-India Seamen's Federation

¹⁷¹ IOR L/PJ/12/452: Note of 15th November 1939: Report on the India League Conference, 11th November 1939.

¹⁷² IOR L/PJ/12/452: Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 154, 15th November 1939.

¹⁷³ TNA MT 9/3150: Ministry of Shipping Memo, F. Norman, 20th January 1939. Emphasis my own.

¹⁷⁴ TNA MT 9/3150: Ministry of Shipping Minute Sheet, F. Norman, 6th September 1939.

¹⁷⁵ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick [hereafter MRC] MSS.292/655/6: Letter from Chinese seamen delegates, no date specified.

argued that the demand for pay increases and war risk bonuses was due to the fact that “the contract they had signed before was for peace time”.¹⁷⁶ Thus, with the change in circumstance the rights and obligations of the shipping companies also changed. The Shipping Master of Calcutta also noted that Indian seafarers raised new concerns. With the threat of war looming, they began to raise the question of war bonuses and compensation to dependents should they be killed.¹⁷⁷ The crew of the *Umvoti*, for example, were reluctant to sail because of the submarine risk combined with the absence of a compensation clause in their contracts.¹⁷⁸ In addition, there was a feeling that any increases or bonuses should be fairly applied to all Indian seafarers. For example, the crew of the *Kindat* only agreed to sail after being reassured that any terms agreed for the *Birchbank* would be applied to them. Thus, strike actions were not simply opportunistic but reflected changing circumstances.

While the existing historiography considers in detail the complaints of Lascars when conveyed through their Unions, other forms of protest through intermediaries have evaded attention. Such forms of agency are important against a backdrop in which it is difficult to come across the direct, “authentic” voice of Indian seafarers in contemporary sources. The absence of a greater number of such appeals must be placed in the context of the difficulties Indian seafarers faced when navigating life in Britain. For example, many Indian seafarers were illiterate and could not speak English fluently. Additionally, they may have been unfamiliar with the workings of British institutions such as the courts. These factors combined would have created difficulties for Indian seafarers wishing to air a complaint. The next section explores Indian seafarers’ use of intermediaries who could speak English and who were more familiar with British institutions to air their grievances. It takes as case studies the actions of Charles Madhussudan Seal and Mr. A. Challis. Seal was described as a “pure blooded” Bengali whose family occupied a good social position in India while Challis was a lay missionary of the London City Mission. Both men were approached by Indian seafarers and relayed grievances on their behalf.

¹⁷⁶ TNA MT 9/3657: All India Seamen’s Federation: Memorandum, Indian Seamen in Merchant Navy.

¹⁷⁷ TNA MT 9/3150: Shipping Master, Calcutta to Mercantile Marine Department, Calcutta, 5th September 1939.

¹⁷⁸ TNA MT 9/3150: Telegram from Government of India, Commerce Department to Secretary of State for India, 20th September 1939.

The language barriers Indian seafarers faced are brought out explicitly in Seal's letters to the India Office. The language barrier often meant that the Board of Trade Officials to whom Indian seafarers went to make their complaints could not understand them. This resulted in their complaints rarely being taken seriously, with Indian seafarers being repeatedly told "Bye-and-bye, all right" instead of action being taken to redress the complaint.¹⁷⁹ Problems with translating different Indian languages caused further problems. For example, in one case the Board of Trade employed an Ex-Army Constable who had worked in the Punjab to translate the statement of an Indian seafarer who spoke "the Bombay Hindustani with a mixture of Marathi, which is quite different from the Soldier's regulation Hindi".¹⁸⁰ In another case, Indian seafarers from a different area of India and who spoke a different language to the complainant were used to translate and "misinterpreted all that transpired".¹⁸¹ Thus, we can begin to understand the difficulties the language barriers posed to Indian seafarers wishing to make a complaint and thus the importance of intermediaries.

Seal was repeatedly approached by Indian seafarers seeking redress to their complaints during the course of his employment by the Mersey Mission to Seamen. His role as an intermediary helping Indian seafarers navigate life in Britain becomes clear in his letters of complaint. For example, he stated that "the men, not knowing who to go to, have come to me".¹⁸² Thus, Indian seafarers turned to his knowledge of British institutions and the English language to gain information on how to best voice their complaints. Seal was able to help Indian seafarers by translating their complaints and conveying them to the authorities. For example, Seal would translate and write down the statements of Indian seafarers before sending them to the Board of Trade so that they could be understood.¹⁸³ In another case, Seal set out to help an Indian seafarer gain compensation for an accident which had disabled him for life. This included writing letters on his behalf to the shipping agents and insurance company responsible for the ship on which the accident occurred.¹⁸⁴ Thus, Indian seafarers could attempt to manoeuvre around the problem of

¹⁷⁹ IOR L/E/7/780: Letter from Seal to India Office, 8th July 1914.

¹⁸⁰ IOR L/E/7/780L Letter from Seal to India Office, 15th October 1914.

¹⁸¹ IOR L/E/7/780: Letter from Seal to India Office, 10th February 1914.

¹⁸² IOR L/E/7/780: Letter from Seal to India Office, 8th September 1914.

¹⁸³ IOR L/E/7/780: Letter from Seal to India Office, 15th October 1914.

¹⁸⁴ IOR L/E/7/780: Letter from Seal to India Office, 10th February 1914.

the language barrier by using intermediaries who were more conversant with the English language and the institutions of the British state.

Challis also relayed the complaints of Indian seafarers to British authorities. For example, he brought attention to a case on board the *S.S. Maloja* where the European Engineer demanded money for the appointment of the post of the Coal Trimmers Serang. A member of the crew who believed that he held a customary entitlement to this post asked Challis “to make a case of it”.¹⁸⁵ The “native quartermasters” of the *S.S. Clan Menzies* similarly “begged me to report their experience or to assist them to summon the officer”.¹⁸⁶ Their complaint arose out of their refusal to pay a bribe to the Serang to enable him in turn to offer a “present” to the Chief Officer. These two cases reflect a sense of moral economy – of protecting customary rights and expectations – present in other cases Challis represented. For example, he also related the circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of Muhaya Sadameer and Bagga Boolta. He argued that because the men had refused to pay the engineer “their lot was made so unbearable that they rebelled”.¹⁸⁷ In the same letter, Challis represented the case of the Indian firemen of the *S.S. Goldsmouth*. These men alleged that the engineer had deliberately taken on insufficient coal so that he could keep some of the money for himself. Challis argued that this led the firemen to a “desperate condition” as a result of which they attacked the Engineer. We can view the decisions of Indian seafarers to relay their complaints through such intermediaries as a deliberate act of agency. They perceived that using intermediaries who could represent their cases well would enhance their chance of success.

Conclusion

Indian seafarers faced harsh living and working conditions on shipboard. This became evident through exploring their accommodation, wages, health and food rations. Comparing these to their contemporaries from other nations highlighted the difficult life Indian seafarers found on British merchant vessels. Indian seafarers were also placed at

¹⁸⁵ IOR L/E/7/696: Letter from Challis to India Office, 15th March 1913.

¹⁸⁶ IOR L/E/7/696: Letter from Challis to Board of Trade, 13th January 1911.

¹⁸⁷ IOR L/E/7/696: Challis to Board of Trade, 13th January 1911.

the bottom of shipboard hierarchies; reinforced by martial races theory, clothing, violence and abuse. Our understanding of the agency and resistance of Indian seafarers has been expanded by challenging the perception that their resistance was always lawful and not blind, personalised or violent. Employing the concept of the moral economy allowed us to consider how Indian seafarers had certain expectations and understandings of their rights and customs on shipboard and protested against violations of these standards when opportunities arose. Their use of violence as a form of protest also formed an aspect of safeguarding the moral economy. Thus, it was not evidence of an unthinking mob but action largely pre-meditated and directed against the person who was seen to be cheating the moral economy. Finally, we also extended our concept of agency to include indirect appeals made through those more conversant with the English language and British institutions.

Chapter Two

British perceptions of and attitudes towards Indian Seafarers

This chapter diverges from the viewpoint of the Indian seafarer to consider British perceptions of them. It explores British perspectives from the viewpoints of the British media, State and Unions. The construction and dissemination of stereotypes of Indian seafarers in the British press demonstrates how racial and imperial ideology permeated British society but this issue has been neglected in the established historiography on Indian seafarers. I use newspaper reports of shipwrecks and children's periodicals to explore this issue. This chapter also adopts a comparative perspective with the aim of better understanding the position of Indian seafarers in British society. Thus British attitudes towards Indian seafarers are compared to their attitudes towards other non-European seafarers. For example, I compare the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union's campaigns against the employment of Indian and Chinese seafarers. The chapter considers how Indian seafarers were construed as a majority in a privileged position in some ways but as a minority in other ways. The consequences of these differing positions are explored in the next chapter where I shall illustrate how Indian and other non-European seafarers attempted to manipulate it to their advantage.

Scholars overlooked the popular perceptions of Indian seafarers due to a preoccupation with the attitudes of the British state and British unions. Laura Tabili's work, for instance, contemplated the role of British shipowners, the British state and the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (henceforth NSFU) in "constructing racial ideology, reinforcing racial subordination and recolonizing Black seamen in Britain".¹ Tabili built upon this evidence to conclude that racism was a construction and was not a natural or inevitable response to immigration. This undoubtedly was an important observation but questions must be raised concerning the historical actors identified by Tabili. Tabili's model of interracial solidarity on the basis of class failed to illustrate the everyday participation of the wider

¹ Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 3.

British population in the construction of racism and racist stereotypes. Scholars pointed to the case of the white working class participation in the 1919 Race Riots as evidence of Tabili's "over-rosy view of the potential for rank and file unity on the basis of class alignment transcending racial hostility."² In reviewing Tabili's book, Toni Smith invited us to consider how elites were successful in employing inequality to their advantage and called for an examination of how racial ideology permeated British culture and society.³ Smith's objection has parallels with John Mackenzie's work. Mackenzie also explored the perceived disjunction between popular and elite participation in imperialism. He challenged the perception of imperialism as a preserve of the elite by arguing that even if the majority of Britons "knew little and cared less about imperial philosophies and colonial territories" there was recognition that their imperial status set them apart.⁴ Key to this imperial status was a "worldview" embracing "cultural and racial superiority".⁵ Thus, racist stereotypes and hierarchies were inherent within popular imperialism.

Mackenzie argued that imperialism was reflected in and disseminated by popular culture. Thus, imperialism permeated modes of popular culture such as cinema, radio and literature. For example, Mackenzie argued that juvenile literature was one of the many vehicles for the dissemination of the colonial message. Young people's periodicals and journals related adventure tales set in the exotic locales of Empire. These stories contributed to the stereotype of the "colonial hero" who served as "prime exemplars of the master people".⁶ Such examples of the permeation of the imperial message and racist stereotypes in popular culture challenge Tabili's disjunction between the British public and the "racist" State and Unions. Expanding upon this line of analysis, this section considers the role of British popular culture in propagating and disseminating stereotypes and attitudes towards Indian seafarers. I consider the role of British popular culture in constructing and spreading stereotypes and "knowledge" of Indian seafarers through the newspaper press and children's periodicals.

² Midgley, Claire, Review: "New Imperial Histories", *Journal of British Studies*, 35, 4, October 1996, p. 551.

³ Smith, Toni, Review: "'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in late Imperial Britain", *Labour/Le Travail*, 40, Fall 1997, pp. 317.

⁴ Mackenzie, John, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1986, p. 1.

⁵ Mackenzie, John, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p.8.

⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 6.

“Courageous” Britons and “Cowardly” Lascars: reporting of shipwrecks in the British press

Stories of the tragedy and drama of shipwrecks carried a certain appeal to newspaper audiences. The popular press lamented the loss of life and property as well as analysing the circumstances surrounding a wreck. There were sharp differences in the reporting of shipwrecks involving British and Indian seafarers. Reports of shipwrecks involving British seafarers related tales of heroism and bravery. In contrast, the role of Indian seafarers in wrecks was seized upon by the press as examples of their incompetence and cowardice. Incidents involving both provided the opportunity for a public comparison of Indian and European seafarers. Thus, such reports played a role in the construction and diffusion of stereotypes relating to Indian seafarers.

Newspaper reports of shipwrecks involving British seafarers emphasised their courage and bravery. The infamous case of the *HMS Titanic* highlighted the heroism of British seafarers to contemporary audiences and also served as an enduring tale of bravery in the collective memory of the nation. The “heroism” of senior members of the crew was accentuated with headlines such as “Don’t mind me, save your own lives: Titanic Survivors Tell of Captain Smith’s Unselfish Heroism”.⁷ Indeed, Captain Smith became symbolic of the heroism of the seafarers on the *Titanic*. This was aided by the circulation of tales relating how he stayed on the bridge of the ship until it sank.⁸ Headlines such as “Captain Smith Dies like a British Sailor” and “Captain Smith died like a simple hero, as a British sea-captain should” added to the perception that such bravery was a particularly British attribute.⁹ The rhetoric of heroism was not restricted to senior officers and tribute was also paid to other members of the crew such as the “heroic engineers”.¹⁰ Such tales of heroism took on renewed importance in the British press during the American enquiry

⁷ “‘Don’t mind me, save your own lives’: Titanic Survivors Tell of Captain Smith’s Unselfish Heroism”, *Daily Mirror*, 29th April 1912, p. 6.

⁸ For example, “Where the Captain Stood Till Death”, *Daily Sketch*, 20th April 1912, reproduced in Dave Bryceson, *The Titanic Disaster: As reported in the British National Press, April to July 1912*, Yeovil: Patrick Stephens, 1997, p. 65.

⁹ “Captain Smith Dies Like a British Sailor”, *Daily Sketch*, 20th April 1912, reproduced in Bryceson, *The Titanic Disaster*, p. 66. “How the Titanic Heroes went to their Doom: Stories of Heroism and Horror”, *Daily Sketch*, 20th April 1912, reproduced in Bryceson, *The Titanic Disaster*, p. 67.

¹⁰ Charles Beresford, “The Wreck of the Titanic: Heroism Below Decks”, *The Times*, 22nd April, 1912, p. 10. Also “The Heroic Engineers who went down to a Man”, *Daily Sketch*, 20th April 1912, reproduced in Bryceson, *The Titanic Disaster*, p. 137.

into the disaster. In response to American criticisms, British commentators emphasised the heroism of the *Titanic's* officers and crew.¹¹ Barczewski demonstrated how the *Titanic* became emblematic of British heroism and a symbol of British national pride during an era in which "the relative maritime worth of nations was being assessed".¹² Thus, the sinking of the *Titanic* and the actions of her crew became synonymous with bravery, heroism and Britishness in the British press. Even today, the British "heroes" of the *Titanic* are remembered and lauded by the British press. But such rhetoric was not reserved for the *Titanic* alone. Other shipwrecks were also reported in a manner that emphasised the bravery of the British crew as demonstrated by the case of the *S.S. Kincora*. The *Kincora* collided with the *Oceanic* in the Irish Channel in August 1901 leading to the deaths of seven of the *Kincora's* crew. Reports praised the heroism of the *Kincora's* crew. For example, Fireman George Collins "who might have saved himself, but went below to endeavour to prevent the boilers from bursting".¹³ The crew of the *Oceanic* were also praised, with reports relating how "there was no panic, and the passengers cheered the sailors as they worked to save the lives of the men on the *Kincora*".¹⁴ Indeed, they were praised for their seamanship and congratulated for their "coolness and dispatch".¹⁵ Thus, reporting of shipwrecks served to bolster the stereotype of the brave British seafarer.

The reporting of incidents involving Indian seafarers provided a stark contrast. Take for example the sinking of the *S.S. City of Agra* in a gale near Finisterre in 1897 with the loss of thirty-one lives. Contemporary newspaper reports depicted this incident as typical of Indian seafarers' tendency to become "panic stricken". One commentator noted that "the Lascars became panic-stricken and not only were of no assistance but were a serious hindrance to the success of efforts being made to save life".¹⁶ Thus, the Lascars were depicted as lacking the valour and pluck of British seafarers. These "differences" were emphasised by directly comparing Indian and British seafarers. For example, another report on the *City of Agra* asserted that when a sudden emergency arose "the difference

¹¹ Barczewski, Stephanie, *Titanic: A Night Remembered*, London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006, p. 78.

¹² Barczewski, *Titanic*, p. 79.

¹³ "The *Oceanic* Sinks a Coasting Steamer", *New York Times*, 9th August 1901, p. 3.

¹⁴ "Oceanic's Passengers Praise Ship's Officers: Pleased with Work of Crew While Rescuing *Kincora's* Sailors", *New York Times*, 15th August 1901, p. 7.

¹⁵ "Oceanic's Passengers Praise Ship's Officers", *New York Times*, 15th August 1901, p. 7.

¹⁶ "Lascars", *The Scotsman*, 20th March 1897, p. 12.

between a European and a Lascar showed itself” and suggested that had the Europeans “been left to themselves they would have been able to manage it”.¹⁷ Thus, the “febleness” of the Lascars was emphasised through comparison with the supposed “superior” ability of their British contemporaries. Others attempted to apportion blame to certain groups of Indian seafarers. For example, one commentator differentiated between “Lascars proper and the native firemen” and argued that it was the firemen who were panic-stricken.¹⁸ This alludes to the differentiation among Indian seafarers themselves and will be shown more explicitly by other case studies in this section. Thus, the case of the *S.S. City of Agra* demonstrated how racialised stereotypes about the character of Indian seafarers were strengthened and disseminated in the press.

The sinking of the *S.S. Egypt* in 1922 was extensively reported in the press with the role of the Indian seafarers particularly emphasized. The *Egypt* had been travelling slowly due to dense fog when the French cargo steamer *Seine* collided into it off the coast of North West France leading to eighty-six fatalities. The reporting of this wreck in contemporary newspapers again contributed to the construction and dissemination of the stereotype of the panic-stricken, cowardly Indian Lascar. The popular press reported the incident with headlines such as “Terrified Lascars” and “Panic on the Sinking Egypt: Passenger Shot Dead by a Lascar”.¹⁹ Immediately following the disaster, rumours circulated in the press concerning the use of violence by panic-stricken Lascars on the *Egypt*. This included the story of a Lascar shooting a passenger “at point blank range” while he attempted to get his wife into a lifeboat.²⁰ Other stories circulated included the accusation that Lascars “seemed to go crazy with panic” and had pushed women out of the way and into the water.²¹ Such headlines and rumours fuelled the perception of the Lascars as incompetent and cowardly. The reporting of the disaster and subsequent inquiry also focused upon the difference between Lascar and European seafarers. For example, the press seized upon evidence from passengers emphasising the extent of panic among the Lascar crew. One passenger reportedly stated that “if the *Egypt* had carried a white crew

¹⁷ “S.S. City of Agra”, *The Scotsman*, 20th March 1897, p. 8.

¹⁸ “Lascars”, *The Scotsman*, 23rd March 1897, p. 8.

¹⁹ “Terrified Lascars”, *The Scotsman*, 1st August 1922, p.8 and “Panic on the Sinking Egypt: Passenger Shot Dead by a Lascar”, *The Guardian*, 24th May 1922, p. 7.

²⁰ “Panic on the Sinking Egypt”, *The Guardian*, 24th May 1922, p. 7.

²¹ “Egypt’s Survivors in London: Story of Armed Lascars Denied”, *The Guardian*, 26th May 1922, p. 9.

there would have been no loss of life”.²² The Chief Officer also stated that the Lascars were “terror stricken, frightened and useless” while “white men were not terror stricken but just jumpy and nervous”.²³ Such disasters were seized upon as an opportunity to compare the Lascars and Europeans. Thus, the stereotypes of the cowardly panic-stricken Lascar and the brave European or white seafarers were transmitted and strengthened in the popular media. In addition, such stories served to reinforce the supposed manly virtues of chivalry and morality of British seafarers. Indeed, such virtues were portrayed as particularly British characteristics.

In 1912, the P&O Liner *Oceana* sank in the English Channel following a collision with the barque *Pisagua* resulting in the loss of ten lives.²⁴ The press accused Indian seafarers of acting in a cowardly manner and also of endangering the safety of female passengers. Indian seafarers were blamed for crowding the lifeboats while female passengers were being boarded. Despite this accusation, other contemporary reporters endeavoured to find explanations for the Indian seafarers’ behaviour. The Court of Inquiry into the disaster found that “the khalasis (Lascar deck hands) behaved quite well, and that they were efficient and disciplined”.²⁵ The Inquiry did note, however, the “unfavourable opinion of the khalasis” formed by some of the passengers but argued that this “probably arose from their confusing the Goanese who are not specially noted for their courage, with the Lascar seamen”.²⁶ Later in this chapter, I explore the different positioning of Goanese seafarers from the mass of Indian seafarers. Others challenged the view that the Lascar seaman was not “worthy of his place under the red ensign” by arguing that the quality of Lascar seafarers had suffered as a result of their conditions of service.²⁷ For example, a popular viewpoint amongst medical experts was that forcing Lascars to work in cold climates “sapped their manhood”. Thus, the author concluded that “much of the poor quality that we term the cowardice and incompetence of the present day Lascar is due to the indiscriminate carrying of such crews all over the world”.²⁸ Thus, while the

²² “Loss of the Egypt: Bereaved Passengers and the Lascars”, *The Scotsman*, 28th July 1922, p. 3.

²³ “Terrorised Lascars on the Egypt”, *The Guardian*, 26th July 1922, p. 8.

²⁴ “Ten Lives are Lost by Sinking of Liner”, *New York Times*, 17th March 1912, p. 13.

²⁵ The National Archives, UK [hereafter TNA] MT 23/264: Loss of the S.S. *Oceana*: Finding of Court of Inquiry – Behaviour of Lascars.

²⁶ TNA MT 23/264: Loss of the S.S. *Oceana*.

²⁷ “Lascar Seamen”, *The Guardian*, 28th May 1912, p. 12.

²⁸ “Lascar Seamen”, *The Guardian*, 28th May 1912, p. 12.

author refuted claims of a racial characteristic that led Indian seafarers to act cowardly he did not attempt to refute the existence of such cowardice. We can, therefore, begin to understand how negative stereotypes of Indian seafarers were constructed and disseminated by popular culture.

The three case studies outlined above all reflect aspects of martial races theory as defined and described in the previous chapter. The effeminate, weak and cowardly Indians are set up as the antithesis of the manly and courageous British seafarer. The inclusion of such stereotypes, therefore, built upon but also reinforced contemporary understandings of how British and Indian society were shaped by masculinity. But the stories outlined above also differentiated between different groups of Indians. For example, reporting of the *City of Agra* wreck differentiated between “Lascars proper and the native firemen”, claiming that it was the firemen who were panic-stricken. This accords with the masculine construction of shipboard jobs as outlined in the previous chapter. Reporting of the *Oceana* disaster also accorded with the belief that men from some areas of India were more masculine than others. Southern groups, such as the Goans, were seen as lacking in the manly virtues of men from northern India, and particularly those from frontier states. Thus, the reporting of shipwrecks reflected contemporary understandings of how society was structured around masculinity. Building stereotypes of Lascars upon established discourses seemed to give them credibility. Thus, we can begin to understand how negative stereotypes of Indian seafarers were constructed and spread by popular culture.

The British “heroes” and Lascar “villains” of Children’s Adventure Stories

Other forms of popular culture were also used to spread and reinforce stereotypes of Indian seafarers. Children’s periodicals frequently carried stories with Lascars as key or supporting characters. The importance of children’s stories in disseminating the cultures and values of a society has been highlighted by a number of scholars. Kathryn Castle argued that children’s texts served the function of transmitting the complex imperial

message into a child's world effectively.²⁹ The importance of such stories to the imperial mission was highlighted by Martin Green who argued that adventure stories were "the energizing myth of English imperialism".³⁰ The "heroic masculinity" depicted in these adventure stories also became "fused in an especially potent configuration with representations of British imperial masculinity".³¹ Such stories contrasted the "heroic masculinity of Britons" with the "feebleness" and "cowardice" of colonised peoples. As such, they confirmed and supported the idea of the great civilising role of Britain and the inability of Indians to govern themselves.³² Thus, they played some role in reinforcing the stereotypes which sought to justify the imperial mission.

The courage and bravery displayed by the heroes of such stories also became synonymous with "Britishness" and thus outlined to young British boys the behaviour and characteristics they should aspire to. Thus, children's texts played a key role in helping to acculturate children into society and in teaching them to behave and believe in acceptable ways.³³ The actions of the "heroes" of adventure stories thus served as a model of acceptable and desirable behaviour. For example, writers such as Kipling filled their stories with images of the "brave, heroic, suffering and sacrificing English".³⁴ Children's stories sought to inform young male Britons of their position within the Imperial world, placing the boy "at the top of the racial ladder and at the helm of the world".³⁵ Children's stories also conveyed expectations and stereotypes concerning imperial peoples that served to reinforce the position of the Briton at the head of the racial hierarchy. Castle referred to this process as the creation of a cast of imperial subjects. These characters played an important role in children's stories by offering to the young a version of how to relate to the Imperial world and to the peoples who lived within it but also as examples of unacceptable behaviour.³⁶ Thus, differentiating between

²⁹ Castle, Kathryn, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism through Children's Books and Magazines*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 6.

³⁰ Green, Martin, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 3.

³¹ Dawson, Graham, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 1.

³² Anagol, Padma, "Literature as Ideology: Rudyard Kipling's Creative World", *Studies in History*, 3, 1, 1987, p. 89.

³³ Kutzer, M. Daphne, *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books*, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000, p. xi.

³⁴ Anagol, Padma, "Literature as Ideology", p. 88.

³⁵ Bristow, Joseph, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1991, p. 21.

³⁶ Castle, *Britannia's Children*, p. 8.

the improper behaviour of the imperial subjects and the proper behaviour of Britons helped such stories to drive home the “proper” deportment that young Britons should aspire to. Stories about Lascars served the purpose of disseminating values and attitudes supportive of the wider imperial mission as well as propagating stereotypes of and appropriate attitudes towards non-European seafarers.

In 1883 the periodical *Young Folks: A Weekly Paper of Instructive and Entertaining Literature for Advanced Boys and Girls* published a story featuring Lascars entitled “Little Carl: The Ocean Wai”. This periodical identified itself as playing an important role in the dissemination of acceptable values to young people.³⁷ This is evident in the motto of the paper, “To Inform, To Instruct, To Amuse”. We must situate the Lascar tale within this context. The story serves as an example not only of acceptable characteristics but of the relationship between colonisers and the colonial workforce. The Lascars form a subplot to the “Little Carl” serial story which narrated the tale of a shore visit by the “heroes” of the story, Carl Castleton and Albert Mattox. Albert Mattox rushes to the rescue of Carl Castleton when he is attacked by Lascars. The heroes of the story exhibit admirable and acceptable characteristics designed to inspire and encourage child readers. They are referred to as the “heroes” of the story who exhibit enviable strength. Albert Mattox is described as a “perfect Hercules in physical strength”.³⁸ Comparison with the Lascars enabled the author to depict this as a distinctly British characteristic. Mattox’s assault on the Lascars describes how he “lifted them from their victim as though they had been men of straw, and then smashed them down upon the earth”.³⁹ The language used to describe the actions of the Lascars and the British seamen is also markedly different. The Lascars are depicted as a menacing threat as they “dodged into a narrow, dark alley-way under a vine-clad old arch”. In contrast, Mattox’s attack upon the Lascars is described as a “thunderbolt”. Thus, desirable characteristics are illustrated through comparison with Lascars. The story also contributed to the constructions of stereotypes of Lascars as weak and cowardly.

³⁷ Such papers sought to replace the “penny dreadfuls” popular among young working class people and to replace them with a popular form of improving respectability. For more on this issue see Bristow, *Empire Boys*, Chapter One.

³⁸ No named author, “Little Carl: The Ocean Wai”, *Young Folks: A Weekly Paper of Instructive and Entertaining Literature for Advanced Boys and Girls*, Issue 681, December 1883, p. 203.

³⁹ “Little Carl: The Ocean Wai”.

Others stories conveyed similar values and beliefs. A story entitled “The Captain of the Raft; or, the Lascars’ Mutiny” was published in *Chums: An Illustrated Paper for Boys* in 1892. *Chums* was marketed as a wholesome weekly boys’ magazine. The “Captain of the Raft” was the story of a “mutiny” by Lascars following the outbreak of disease on shipboard. The story starts with the Lascars being caught while attempting to desert ship. Despite punishment, the Lascars deliberately set the ship alight and attempt to desert again but find themselves trapped on the ship with the European crew. This story ends with a tale of the survivors being rescued after considerable time adrift at sea on a hastily constructed raft. Young readers are again provided with role models exhibiting acceptable and inspiring characteristics. For example, the bravery and masculinity of the British crew is constantly contrasted to the behaviour of the Lascars, who are by inference described as effeminate. Discovering the Lascars attempting to set the ship alight, a British member of the crew dashed into their midst crying “You are not brave enough to fight us like men!”⁴⁰ Johnson, the character narrating the story, also described pushing the “despicable” Lascars out of the way while the British crew “laboured manfully to arrest the progress of the conflagration”. Thus, the British crew are depicted as manly and masculine through comparison with the Lascars. The story also sets out to teach its young British readers a lesson about relationships with colonial workers. It illustrates that the British characters know when to be both punishing and forgiving in their relationship with the colonial workers. Following the Lascars’ first attempt at desertion, the narrator related the hanging of a Lascar “mutineer” with the Captain declaring “Who still disputes the authority of an English Captain on his own ship?”. A lesson of forgiveness ends the story, with Johnson forgiving the Lascars for their “evil deeds”. Depicting the story’s European crew as heroes and clearly outlining their defining characteristics teaches young readers to “behave and believe in acceptable ways”.⁴¹ Such examples illustrate how the author understood power relations on shipboard and how he wanted to relay this message to his young readers. The Lascars’ characteristics and values are depicted as antithetical to those of the European crew. They are portrayed as menacing, cowardly and devious. For example, they are described

⁴⁰ Mansford, Charles J., “The Captain of the Raft; or, the Lascars’ Mutiny”, *Chums*, Issue 8, November 1892, p. 125.

⁴¹ Kutzer, *Empire’s Children*, p. xi.

as creeping about and planning their desertion under the cover of the night. Thus, through portraying the British characters as possessing desirable characteristics and emphasising this through direct comparison with the Lascars the story invests in stereotypes of Lascars as lacking in morality and masculinity.

“Lascar Loo: A Tale of the Malabar Coast” related the tale of a “mutiny” by the Lascars of the fictional vessel *Medusa* while she was operating with a depleted British crew. The main antagonist is identified as a man named “Lascar Loo” who takes advantage of the situation to ransack the ship. A cabin boy escapes the carnage aboard the *Medusa* and is subsequently picked up by another vessel, the *Rajah*. The *Rajah* locates the *Medusa* and discovers that only Lascar-Loo survives of the Lascar crew while the British Captain and Purser are found barricaded inside the Captain’s cabin. The Captain and the Purser are portrayed as heroes who “made a successful stand against their treacherous enemies”.⁴² In contrast, the Lascars are portrayed as devious and creeping about. Lascar Loo is described as a “tartar”, a fierce or formidable person. Furthermore, the Lascar crew are constantly compared to, and labelled, as pirates. Thus, the story constructs a stereotype of Lascars as treacherous and devious.

Other stories concentrated solely on the behaviour and characteristics of Lascars. A common theme was the unpredictable and unwarranted violence of the Lascars. For example, a subplot of the “Black Pirate” story published in *The Halfpenny Marvel* focused on the spite and anger of the Lascar character. It depicted a Lascar holding a grudge against a British seafarer resulting in an attempted murder by the Lascar. The Lascar is described as a vindictive, murderous wretch.⁴³ Kipling’s “The Limitations of Pambé Serang” also depicted the alleged bitterness of a Lascar. It told the story of Pambé Serang, a Malay born in India, and Nurkeed, “the big fat Zanzibar stoker”.⁴⁴ While their ship was at port, Nurkeed mistakenly ate Pambé’s food which led to a sustained campaign for revenge by Pambé. After completing the voyage, Pambé hears that Nurkeed has left for London and follows him there. Kipling narrates that Pambé grew sick

⁴² Leighton, Robert, “Lascar Loo: A Tale of the Malabar Coast”, *Young England: An Illustrated Magazine for Young People Throughout the English Speaking World*, Part 148, January 1894, p. 147.

⁴³ Blyth, Harry, “The Black Pirate”, *The Halfpenny Marvel*, Issue Number 4, November 1893, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Kipling, “The Limitations of Pambé Serang”, in *Life’s Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1964.

from waiting in the cold at Nyanza Docks but a trick of fate brings Nurkeed to Pambé's deathbed where the latter kills him. Thus, this story also builds upon the stereotype of the petty minded and vindictive Lascar.

Thus, children's stories served a number of purposes. They outlined acceptable values and behaviour to the next generation of the leaders of Empire with lessons in governance of colonial peoples. This included desirable characteristics such as masculinity, strength and courage. Stories also sought to teach children the appropriate ways to interact with colonial subjects. This was emphasised through illustrations of interactions with Lascars. The Lascars in these stories also serve to emphasise objectionable characteristics and behaviour. There are a number of direct comparisons between the behaviour of the insidious, cowardly Lascars and the manly, brave Britons. Other stories concentrated solely on portraying the immoral and corrupt behaviour of the Lascars. Thus, such stories also served to construct and disseminate stereotypes concerning Lascars and by default all colonial peoples. It taught young people not only how to deal with colonial peoples such as Lascars but also what to expect from them. In conjunction with the stories and stereotypes circulated in contemporary newspapers we can begin to understand how racial ideology permeated popular culture. In particular, we have illustrated the function of popular culture in building up popular "knowledge" of Indian seafarers. Such popular discourses ran alongside other public discourses concerning Indian seafarers such as those constructed by the British seafarers' Union and the British government. The next section considers how the British Union contributed to the construction of stereotypes and "knowledge" about Indian seafarers.

The NSFU's campaigns against Indian and Chinese seafarers

The international nature of the maritime industry resulted in a global labour market. Maritime workers from all over the world were brought into contact and competition with one another. This section considers how British seafarers handled such contact and competition. It takes as a case study the NSFU's attempts to restrict the labour market for British merchant vessels to British seafarers through analysing the NSFU's relations with and approaches to Indian and Chinese seafarers. This provides a further example of how Indian seafarers were depicted in a public level discourse. The comparative

approach also allows us to better understand the position of Indian seafarers. Scholars such as Laura Tabili have considered the relations between the NSFU and non-European seafarers, but I suggest that there is scope to expand their analysis. For example, Laura Tabili's adept account of the NSFU's relations with non-European seafarers suggests that Lascars and Chinese were paired in many discussions.⁴⁵ There were occasions when the NSFU deliberately blurred the lines in this manner and this was probably a tactical manoeuvre designed to address two "problems" at once. Comparing the Union's individual campaigns against Indian and Chinese seafarers reveals differences which demand our attention. In this section I argue that there are differences in both the messages and methods of these campaigns that were necessitated by differences in the status of Indian and Chinese seafarers. This comparison not only helps to illuminate the position of Indian seafarers but also shows that the NSFU took account of such differences resulting in campaigns that were carefully targeted and executed.

Balachandran's investigation of the relations between the NSFU and Indian seamen's unions demonstrated the British union's policy of "fatal philanthropy".⁴⁶ He applied this term to the British union's demands for equal conditions of work, accommodation and pay for seamen of both countries. Such demands were not inspired by concern for the Indian seamen. Instead, Balachandran showed how the "demands were intended to reduce the attractions to shipowners of employing Indian seamen".⁴⁷ Thus the NSFU had recognised that equality with British seafarers would make Indian seafarers more expensive to employ therefore reducing the economic inducement to their employment. I demonstrate the scope to expand this line of analysis by arguing that such an approach was not merely a ploy to displace Indian seamen from the British merchant navy. Instead, I argue that it was necessary to adopt such methods because of the status of Indian seafarers. This becomes evident through comparison with the NSFU's method of campaigning against Chinese seafarers and can be explained by the differences in their status. At the heart of these differences was the "imperial" status bestowed upon Indians which gave them juridical rights denied to the Chinese. Juridical rights included

⁴⁵ Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice"*, pp. 91 -2.

⁴⁶ Balachandran, "Conflicts in the international maritime labour market: British and Indian seamen, employers, and the state, 1890-1939", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2002, pp. 90 – 93.

⁴⁷ Balachandran, "Conflicts in the International Maritime Labour Market", p. 90.

the rights, protections and privileges of imperial citizenship such as the right to appeal to the India Office and the Imperial Parliament.⁴⁸ Thus, the concern of the NSFU was not merely a ploy to make Indian seafarers more expensive to employ but a necessary tactic if they were to confront the “problem” of Indian seafarers at all. Their agitation against Chinese seafarers could also draw upon a foundation of popular racism and stereotypes. For example, Joanne Cayford demonstrated how, prior to race riots in Cardiff, the Welsh popular press were involved in provoking popular fears of Chinese seafarers based on their “alleged immorality, sexual or otherwise”.⁴⁹ Such fears centred on their poverty, living standards, drug use and sexual behaviour, particularly with white women. Following the 1911 seafarers’ strike, Chinese seafarers were often despised as “strike breakers” too.⁵⁰ Finally, popular understandings of the “Yellow Peril” could also be manipulated.⁵¹ The campaign against Indian seafarers was conveyed through concern for the Indian Lascar while their campaign against Chinese seafarers took the form of an outright attack on the basis of their race and nationality. I shall also illustrate that in comparison to Chinese seafarers, the campaign against Indian seafarers was conducted via lawful and constitutional means.

One of the issues that the NSFU and its President, Joseph Havelock Wilson, seized upon was the amount of crew space allotted to Indian seafarers. It is possible to discern a deliberate reasoning behind their decision to pursue this particular issue as it allowed them to engage in a campaign against the employment of Indian seafarers within the framework of the law. The NSFU were able to make crew space an issue because of inconsistencies between the British and Indian merchant shipping laws. To understand these inconsistencies it is necessary to trace the evolution of the merchant shipping laws relating to crew space. The Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1859 (Act I of 1859) allocated Indian seafarers smaller crew spaces than they did to the British. Indian seafarers were allotted just four superficial feet of space compared to the nine superficial feet of space granted to European seafarers. The Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1876

⁴⁸ Benton, G, and Gomez, E.T., *The Chinese in Britain, 1800 – The Present: Economy, Transnationalism and Identity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, pp. 291 – 292.

⁴⁹ Cayford, Joanne, “In Search of ‘John Chinaman’: Press Representations of the Chinese in Cardiff, 1906 – 1911”, *Llafur: Journal of Welsh Labour History*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1991, pp. 39.

⁵⁰ Phillips, Chloe, “The Chinese Laundry Riots, Cardiff 1911”, MA History thesis, Cardiff University, 2007.

⁵¹ Benton and Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain*, p. 293.

increased the amount of space for both groups but the differentiation between Europeans and Indians remained. Europeans were granted ten superficial feet or sixty cubic feet of crew space while Indians were allowed six superficial feet or thirty-six cubic feet. In contrast, the British Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 stated that every place in a British ship occupied by a seaman was to be 72 cubic feet or 12 superficial feet. The 1894 Act did not differentiate between Indians and Europeans unlike the previous acts. Thus, with the passing of the 1894 Act a contradiction opened up between British and Indian law. It was this contradiction that the NSFU manipulated in the crew space debate. Havelock Wilson and the NSFU demanded that the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 be applied to Indian seafarers. They argued that the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1859 only applied to ships owned and registered in India.⁵² This left the Board of Trade and the British Government in a difficult position. They were faced with the options of either “refusing to prosecute for what is an undoubted offence under the Imperial Act, or initiating a prosecution for an act which is justified by the Indian Law”.⁵³ The matter was eventually resolved when the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company’s Petition of Right was rejected and the 1894 Act upheld.⁵⁴ Thus, the NSFU chose an issue to campaign against Indian seafarers where there was scope to challenge the terms of their employment legally.

Wilson was keen to stress the legality of this campaign against Indian seafarers. He defended his campaign by declaring “I have the law on my side and that is good enough for me”.⁵⁵ Presenting himself as the upholder and defender of the law, Wilson pursued the Board of Trade on the issue. He portrayed the Board of Trade as reluctant to act despite flagrant violations of the law. Wilson claimed that despite the P&O breaking the law he had been forced to resort to pleading the Board to enforce the law. He described how he had “urged” the President of the Board of Trade to “put the law into force”.⁵⁶ He also pleaded that “it is the duty of the Board of Trade to enforce the law”.⁵⁷ Wilson

⁵² Lascar Seamen – Question from Mr. Havelock Wilson, Hansard House of Commons Debates [hereafter HC Deb], 24th May 1895, Vol. 34, cc. 329.

⁵³ TNA MT 9/640: Letter from India Office to Governor General of India in Council, 31st August 1899.

⁵⁴ See TNA HO 45/10202/B32518 Petition of Rights and also MT 9/655 Application of the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act to Lascar Seamen: ruling given in the High Court of Justice on a Petition of Right.

⁵⁵ Civil Services – Question from Mr. Havelock Wilson, HC Deb, 2nd March 1900, Vol. 79, cc. 1610.

⁵⁶ Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 4th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 82.

⁵⁷ Civil Services – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 23rd February 1900, Vol. 79, cc. 1005.

mocked the Board of Trade for suggesting that he pursue a summons against the company for breaking the law, declaring "I am not paid by the Government to be Public Prosecutor".⁵⁸ Thus, Wilson was always careful to stress that he was working within the framework of and upholding the law. This was important given the imperial status of Indian seafarers. As I shall show later, their campaigns against Chinese seafarers were not restricted in this way.

The methods that the NSFU adopted in this campaign were constitutional. They pursued their campaign within the machinery of government. Wilson used his position as Member of Parliament to conduct the campaign by constantly questioning the Board of Trade during questions and debates in the House of Commons. For example, in 1895 he persistently questioned the Board of Trade on whether the Merchant Shipping Act had been applied in the case of the P&O steamship *Himalaya*.⁵⁹ As the campaign progressed Wilson's questions became "much more extended".⁶⁰ For example, in March 1899 Wilson pursued the Board of Trade for information on the P&O vessels *Himalaya*, *Oriental*, *Ceylon* and *Japan*. He asked detailed questions not only concerning whether the law had been broken but on the number of Lascars employed in each department and the amount of space allotted to them. The Board of Trade complained that these questions numbered over forty and were detailed and complicated in nature.⁶¹ Thus, Wilson used constitutional means to increase the pressure upon the Board of Trade.

Wilson used these question and debate sessions as an opportunity to broach other matters relating to Indian seamen. These included anxieties over their wartime employment. He expressed the fear that if Indian seafarers drove British seafarers out of employment then the country would be left at risk in times of war. He questioned whether Lascar seamen could be placed on board war ships "to do our fighting in the place of the British seamen?"⁶² He also cast doubt on whether the First Lord of the

⁵⁸ Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 11th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 1414.

⁵⁹ Lascar Seamen, HC Deb, 20th May 1895, Vol. 33, cc.1593-4; Lascar Seamen, HC Deb, 30th May 1895, Vol. 34, cc. 718 – 719; Accommodation for Seamen, HC Deb, 8th April 1895, Vol. 32, cc. 1135 – 1136.

⁶⁰ TNA MT 9/614: Board of Trade Surveyors' Office to Walker, Board Of Trade, 20th March 1899.

⁶¹ TNA MT 9/614: 20th March 1899 extract from Parliamentary Debates.

⁶² Merchant Seamen (Employment and Rating Bill) – Question by Wilson, HC Deb, 28th February 1896, Vol. 37, cc. 1434 – 1435.

Admiralty would employ them.⁶³ However, he did not explicitly question the loyalty of Indian seafarers to the British nation. As I shall illustrate later, the NSFU openly attacked Chinese seafarers on this issue and portrayed them as untrustworthy. Further concerns were raised in these questions over the consequences of overcrowding resulting from small crew spaces. Fears were expressed for the health of Indian seafarers and the British public. He specifically linked small crew spaces to Lascar deaths from consumption (tuberculosis) and other diseases of the chest.⁶⁴ He raged that “disease may be brought into our land by reason of that failure of duty, and thousands of people may die in consequence”.⁶⁵ A cholera outbreak in London, he argued, would be a direct consequence of the manner in which “this large and wealthy company treat the Lascar seamen”.⁶⁶ Thus, Wilson repeatedly attempted to link anxieties over epidemic disease and Indian seafarers, although he held the ship-owners responsible. These anxieties were still placed within the framework of concern for Indian seafarers.

Ship-owners were also blamed for the increasing employment of Indian seafarers. Wilson argued that he did not “desire that we should not employ Lascar seamen on British ships”.⁶⁷ He did, however, link the unemployment of Britons to the increased employment of Indians. Placing responsibility for this in the hands of the ship-owners, Wilson argued that “finding they could stow away a large number of Lascars in a small space, [ship-owners] were employing them in preference to British seamen” thus increasing the danger of the British seafarer becoming so scarce that “he would be regarded as a curiosity”.⁶⁸ Thus, while the Lascar was portrayed as a danger to the British seamen the responsibility for this was still placed in the hands of the ship-owners.

Thus, while Wilson used question and debate sessions in parliament to raise anxieties about Indian seafarers he never directly attacked or blamed them. Instead, culpability was placed in the hands of interested parties such as the ship-owners. These anxieties were also raised during questions and debates on the legality of Indian seafarers’ crew space. As I shall illustrate later, a legal context was not prerequisite for attacking the

⁶³ Strength of the Navy – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 5th March 1897, Vol. 47, cc. 144 – 115.

⁶⁴ Merchant Shipping Acts Amendment (No. 2) Bill, HC Deb, 15th November 1906, vol. 165, cc. 147.

⁶⁵ Civil Services – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 2nd March 1900, Vol. 79, cc. 1610 – 1611.

⁶⁶ Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 4th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 852 – 853.

⁶⁷ Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 11th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 1408.

⁶⁸ Class II – Question by Wilson, HC Deb, 23rd August 1895, Vol. 36, cc. 703.

employment of Chinese seafarers. Wilson attempted to portray his campaign as supportive and protective of Lascars. In his rhetoric, Lascars were described as “poor men” or “unfortunate Lascars”.⁶⁹ Thus, Wilson continuously portrayed them as objects of pity in need of his help. He also depicted Lascars as the victims of the shipping companies. Wilson alleged that the shipping companies were “deliberately robbing the poor unfortunate seamen out of the very limited accommodation to which they are entitled by law”.⁷⁰ He argued that “there is no reason why they should be robbed of what they are entitled to have simply because they are poor unfortunate natives”.⁷¹ In contrast, Wilson depicted himself as fighting this battle on behalf of the Lascars arguing that he was looking for “justice for the Lascars”.⁷²

Comparing the NSFU’s campaigns against the employment of Indian and Chinese seafarers helps us to understand how they were differently positioned by the British. Indian seafarers were targeted in an indirect manner. The reasons the NSFU listed in support of the exclusion of Indians from the British mercantile marine were based upon an ostensible concern for their health and welfare. The campaign against Indian seafarers was also conducted in a constitutional manner on a legal basis. In comparison, Chinese seafarers were directly targeted and attacked on the basis of their nationality and race. The NSFU’s campaign tactics were not restricted to legal arguments or constitutional means. The pages of the official newspaper of the NSFU, *The Seaman*, frequently featured condemnations of Chinese seafarers. Common themes included the persistent and recurring portrayal of Chinese seafarers as a threat. The threat identified by the NSFU took on various forms. They argued that the employment of Chinese constituted a threat to the nation and Empire, to the livelihoods and employment of British seafarers, and finally to British society and “civilisation”.

In their campaign against Chinese seafarers the NSFU did appeal to the law at times. For example, the NSFU argued that Chinese seafarers should not be exempt from the Language Test stipulated in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906. The Language Test

⁶⁹ Lascar Seamen – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 23rd May 1895, Vol. 34, cc.193; and Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 11th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 1412.

⁷⁰ Civil Services – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 23rd February 1900, Vol. 79, cc. 1003.

⁷¹ Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 4th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 853.

⁷² Revenue Departments – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 11th May 1900, Vol. 82, cc. 1411.

examined the English language proficiency of foreign seafarers wishing to serve on British merchant ships. The test was not applied to seafarers from British colonies and protectorates. Thus, Chinese seafarers from Hong Kong or the Straits Settlements were legally exempt from the test. Wilson and the NSFU argued that a large number of Chinese seafarers were manipulating this exemption by falsely claiming to be from Hong Kong. They demanded that the Language Test should be applied to these men. Despite this, there were differences in how they approached the Language Test campaign to their campaign for an increase in crew space for Indian seafarers. The campaign against Indian seafarers had pinned the blame firmly upon the ship-owners. Indian Lascars were depicted as the helpless victims of an avaricious practice from which the NSFU were attempting to save them. In their campaign against Chinese seafarers, the Chinese seafarer himself featured as a central villain in the plot. The NSFU portrayed him as a sly and devious character who manipulated the Language Test exemption rules. An article in *The Seaman* described the actions of the “wily Chinaman” who claimed to be from Hong Kong.⁷³ The alleged scheming of Chinese seafarers was also emphasised. For example, the “wily Chinaman” was described as “playing a little trick for his own hand”.⁷⁴ Thus, Chinese seafarers were portrayed as devious characters and held accountable for unfair manipulation of the system.

The NSFU also pursued issues relating to Chinese seafarers through the machinery of government but they did not restrict the campaign to such methods. Questions were also raised concerning the employment of Chinese seafarers in Parliament. Wilson relentlessly pursued the Board of Trade on the application of the Language Test to Chinese seafarers. Wilson insistently pursued members of parliament and demanded explanation as to why Chinese seafarers who had been rejected at Barry after failing the Language Test were allowed to sign on at Cardiff.⁷⁵ Several deputations also called upon the presidents of the Board of Trade. A deputation called on Winston Churchill, president of the Board in 1908, protesting against the indiscriminate engagement of Chinese

⁷³ “The Man Behind the Wheel”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁴ “The Census of the Sea: How our Mercantile Marine Stands, The Hong Kong Dodge”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1912, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Chinese Seamen and the Language Test – Question from Wilson, HC Deb, 27th October 1908, Vol. 195, cc. 50.

seamen.⁷⁶ In 1914 another deputation called upon the then president John Burns to register their protests against “the steady increase in numbers of Asiatics upon British ships and the displacement of British labour by Chinese”.⁷⁷ In addition to this constitutional approach, the NSFU conducted a wide ranging campaign outside the walls of Westminster. This included measures that aimed to incorporate a popular audience, particularly the NSFU members. The official newspaper of the NSFU, *The Seaman*, was used to conduct campaigns against Chinese seafarers. Rallies and protests against Chinese seafarers were also organised.

The NSFU ran campaigns against Chinese seafarers in the pages of *The Seaman*. These campaigns were designed to work at a public level and to rouse the indignation of the Union’s members. They also deliberately singled out Chinese seafarers. Take as an example the advertisements in Plates Four and Five on pages ninety-eight and ninety-nine. Both advertised mass meetings and demonstrations against the employment of Chinese seafarers in May 1908. Plate Four placed Chinese and British seafarers in direct opposition to one another with the declaration “Jack Tar versus John Chinaman”. It promised a “Monster Procession and Demonstration... against the employment of Chinese Seamen”. Thus, this was a large scale expression of the anger and resentment against Chinese seafarers. Plate Five also announced the NSFU’s intention to hold “A Great Demonstration of Protest” against the employment of Chinese seafarers. Contemporary reports indicate that such protests were well attended. In June 1908, the *Guardian* described how “about three thousand seamen” attended a mass demonstration against the employment of Chinese seafarers in London’s Victoria Park.⁷⁸ These demonstrations illustrate the public and spectacular nature of the campaign against Chinese seafarers, especially when compared to the campaign against Indian seafarers.

The methods employed differ in other ways also. These protests were accompanied by a series of articles denigrating Chinese seafarers in *The Seaman*. These included articles

⁷⁶ “Chinese on British Ships: Deputation to Mr. Winston Churchill M.P.”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 9, July 1908, p. 6.

⁷⁷ “The Chinese Menace: Grave Crisis for British Seamen”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 37, March 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁸ “Chinese Sailors on British Ships”, *Guardian*, 15th June 1908, p. 11.

Plate Four

1908 Demonstration - The Voice of the North

The Voice of the North.

JACK TAR

versus

JOHN CHINAMAN

South Shields Speaks Out.

A Monster Procession and Demonstration as a protest against the employment of Chinese Seamen on British Ships, by which British Seamen are kept out of employment, and, with their families, are reduced to starvation and driven to the workhouse, will take place in

SOUTH SHIELDS

ON

Saturday, May the 23rd.

The following gentlemen, amongst others, will address the people:

MICHAEL JOYCE, Esq., M.P.
(Limerick City).

J. SUMMERBELL, Esq., M.P.
(Sunderland).

J. W. TAYLOR, Esq., M.P.
(Chester-le-Street Division).

J. HAVELOCK WILSON, Esq., M.P.
(Middlesbro').

J. R. BELL, Esq.
(District Organiser National Sailors' & Firemen's Union).

Sailors and Firemen, attend in your Thousands!

Taken from *The Seaman*, Number 7, Volume 1, May 1908, page 8.

Photographed and used with permission of Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

Plate Five

1908 Demonstration: Chinese on British Ships

CHINESE on BRITISH SHIPS.

A GREAT

DEMONSTRATION

OF

PROTEST

Against the Wholesale Employment, by
FEDERATION SHIOWNERS,

OF

Chinese Labour on British Ships

WILL TAKE PLACE ON

Sunday, May 31st next,
IN LONDON.

The following Societies have promised to take part in the Grand March which is being organised: THE STEVEDORRS' UNION, THE LONDON CARMEN, WATERMEN AND LIGHTERMEN, COAL-PORTERS, SAILORS AND FIREMEN.

The various contingents will assemble as follows: TOWER HILL, under the arches at Lemn Street Railway Station at 1.30 p.m. to march off at 2 sharp, and to proceed to the top of West India Dock Road, facing Burdett Road.

CANNING TOWN contingent will assemble at 1.30 p.m. at Canning Town Station, and will start for West India Dock Road at 2 o'clock.

POPLAR contingent will assemble at the West India Dock Gates at 1.30, and will start their march at 2.15. They will join the other contingents at the top of West India Dock Road and proceed to

VICTORIA PARK,

where the Mass Meeting will be held and resolutions submitted.

All Union Sailors and Firemen should purchase and wear a Union Button on this occasion.

Taken from *The Seaman*, Number 7, Volume 1, May 1908, page 8.

Photographed and used with permission of Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

Plate Six

"To the Poor House"



Taken from *The Seaman*, Number 8, Volume 1, June 1908, page 1.

Photographed and used with permission of Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

entitled “Chinaman as a Criminal” and “The Gentle Chinaman – Knives and Mutiny”.⁷⁹

The June 1908 issues of *The Seaman* carried an unfavourable caricature of Chinese seafarers on the front page. This image is reproduced in Plate Six on page 100. It shows a group of Chinese seafarers boarding a ship while the British seafarers are disembarking and following a sign labelled “To the Poor House”.⁸⁰ The picture clearly links the employment of Chinese seafarers to the unemployment of the British. In contrast, Indian seafarers were not singled out in this manner. Instead, the campaign against them was rooted in a superficial concern for their health and welfare. Thus, Wilson was able to cloak his real interests under a mask of concern for the Lascar seafarer. Even when other anxieties were being discussed, they were embedded in wider discussions concerning health, welfare and legalities.

The Union’s “Yellow Peril” campaign of 1914 reflected similar sentiments. It took place against a background of the rising employment of Chinese seafarers and growing antipathy from the NSFU. The NSFU launched this anti-Chinese campaign in 1914 in conjunction with other unions such as the Dockers’ Union, National Union of Cooks and Stewards and the Amalgamated Labourers. The campaign was framed within the wider discourse of the “Yellow Peril”. Drawing upon popular anxieties, the “Yellow Peril” was based upon the perception of a deadly threat posed to the “whites” by the “yellow hordes”.⁸¹ Such popular fears were manipulated by proclamations such as “our entire mercantile marine is threatened with being overrun by this horde of semi-barbarians”.⁸² Headlines in *The Seaman* played upon this background realising that it would have a resonance with its members and the public. “The Chinese Menace – Grave Crisis for British Seamen” declared a headline in March 1914; while others simply referred to “The Yellow Peril”.⁸³ The existence of an established racialised discourse upon which to base

⁷⁹ “The Chinaman as Criminal – A Blacklist of Yellow Men – Not Angelic by Any Means”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 7, May 1908, p. 3; and also “The Gentle Chinaman – Mr. Raeburn’s Pets – Knives and Mutiny – Celestial Innocents in the Dock”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 7, May 1908, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Mr Cuthbert Laws, referred to in the title of the picture was a key figure in the Shipping Federation. The aim of the shipping federation was to promote and protect the interests of shipowners. Thus, the cartoon suggests that it is in the interests of shipowners to employ Chinese seafarers.

⁸¹ Benton and Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain*, p. 293.

⁸² “The Shipowners’ Refuge”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 38, April 1914, p. 4.

⁸³ “The Chinese Menace – Grave Crisis for British Seamen”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 37, March 1914, p. 5.
“The Yellow Peril – Growing Volume of Protest”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 38, April 1914, p. 4.

their campaign differs from their campaign against Indian seafarers and may contribute to our understanding of why the two campaigns were so different.

During this campaign Union leaders recognised the scope to deviate from constitutional methods. The campaign utilised some traditional constitutional methods such as Parliamentary debates and deputations to the Board of Trade.⁸⁴ Demonstrations and mass meetings were also held nationwide during this campaign, with *The Seaman* regularly reporting meetings at union branches throughout the country.⁸⁵ Despite this, Union leaders clearly recognised the impact value that unconstitutional methods could have. Acknowledging that deputations were failing to move the Board of Trade, Wilson stated that “we have got to be prepared for something more drastic”.⁸⁶ Speaking at a mass demonstration, the President of the National Union of Cooks and Stewards stated that “if Mr. John Burns, who has recently been interviewed on the subject, did not do something they would do it themselves”.⁸⁷ This was a sentiment echoed by Wilson in his statement that “if they could not get redress by peaceful and honest means they were just going to take this job in hand for themselves”.⁸⁸ So pressing was this matter in the union’s eyes that they “pledged to exert every influence, constitutional or otherwise”.⁸⁹ This included threatening strike action “if they could not get the Government to do their duty”. These methods are a stark contrast to the constitutional and lawful methods used in the campaign against Indian seafarers. The difference between the two campaigns implies that Indian seafarers benefitted from a certain layer of protection against the full force of the NSFU.

The NSFU employed the notion of Britishness as a justificatory basis for excluding Chinese seafarers. Chinese seafarers were portrayed as a threat to the British nation, Empire and

⁸⁴ For information on a deputation to John Burns, see “The Chinese Menace – Grave Crisis for British Seamen”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 37, March 1914, p. 5. A report of parliamentary debates appeared in “Chinese Sailors at Liverpool”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 37, March 1914, p. 6.

⁸⁵ “The Great Campaign – Magnificent Series of Mass Meetings – Great Wave of Enthusiasm”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 40, May 1914, p. 5.

⁸⁶ “The Yellow Man Must Go! National Campaign opened at Hull”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 39, April 1914, p. 5.

⁸⁷ “The Great Campaign – Magnificent Series of Mass Meetings – Great Wave of Enthusiasm”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 40, May 1914, p. 5.

⁸⁸ “The Great Campaign – Magnificent Series of Mass Meetings – Great Wave of Enthusiasm”, *The Seaman*, Vol.1, No. 40, May 1914, p. 6.

⁸⁹ “The Yellow Man Must Go! National Campaign opened at Hull”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 39, April 1914, p. 5

the British character of the mercantile marine. At the same time, the NSFU portrayed British seafarers as having earned the right to jobs on British merchant vessels owing to their service to the nation and Empire. The two nationalities were directly compared to emphasise the seriousness of this “threat”. Recording the award of a Victoria Cross to a NSFU member, *The Seaman* questioned whether “services such as Sampson has rendered to the nation were to be repaid by the displacement of his comrades in order that greedy shipowners, by the employment of cheap Chinese labour, may fatten?”⁹⁰ Samson, the recipient of the medal, was portrayed as “typical of all that is best in the ranks of the mercantile marine”. In addition to the threat they posed to British seafarers, Chinese seafarers were depicted as a threat to the nation. *The Seaman* questioned “If the Chinaman is to supplant the Britisher in his national avocation, how will it be possible to maintain our supremacy on the sea?”⁹¹ Patriotic ideals were also manipulated to emphasise the “Chinese problem”. Take for example the cartoon entitled “The Language Test” reproduced in Plate Seven on page 101. The cartoon shows caricatures of Chinese seafarers queuing to sign on at a Board of Trade Office. The cartoonist derides the poor English language skills of the Chinese seafarers and the duplicity of the Board of Trade officials in hiring them. But the cartoon also manipulates notions of Britishness and belonging. The shipping office is replete with patriotic posters such as “Join the Navy and help Britain rule the Seas” and “Help to Keep England Free from Invasion”. This is particularly emphasised by the sign at the back of the office which reads “Wanted: Chinks for the Merchant Service and Englishmen to fight for them”. The juxtaposition of the Chinese seafarers with such posters emphasised the foreignness of the Chinese. Indian seafarers’ position as imperial citizens protected them from campaigns framed in this manner.

The Seaman was also used to construct and disseminate negative, discriminatory stereotypes of Chinese seafarers. Chinese seafarers were frequently portrayed as an “invading force”. For example, they were described as “infesting” Chinese boarding

⁹⁰ “Our Hero: Samson, V.C.”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 74, 1915, p. 5.

⁹¹ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick: MSS.175/3/14/1: Typescript/manuscript draft of ‘The Chinese Invasion of Great Britain’, National Union of Seaman, 1913: Chinese Invasion of Great Britain, A National Danger, A Call to Arms, p. 3.

houses denigrating them to a sub-human status.⁹² Other accounts were critical of the impact Chinese seafarers had on the surrounding environment and community. The areas where they lived were described as “rotten centres” emitting “the most degrading and demoralising influences”.⁹³ The author also argued that young women had been “lured to destruction” by Chinese seafarers. In 1916, the Chinese “incursion” was labelled as “a great peril” which was taking hold of parts of London.⁹⁴ Another article went as far as to claim that the presence of Chinese seafarers threatened “civilisation” in the East End of London.⁹⁵ Thus, the Chinese were portrayed as a destructive force which threatened the communities and environments they entered. The NSFU’s appropriation of this issue reflected popular concerns about the spread of immorality in the districts housing Chinese seafarers, as seen in Joanne Cayford’s study of press representations of the Chinese in Cardiff.⁹⁶ This can be compared to the concern for the health of Indian seafarers and the British population. While the NSFU portrayed Indian seafarers as importers of disease they still expressed some concern for the health of the Indian seafarers. In contrast, there was no such concern for the welfare of Chinese seafarers but overwhelmingly so for the British population.

The approach of the NSFU to Chinese seafarers contrasts starkly with their treatment of Indian and other colonial seafarers. Some members of the Chinese community felt that Chinese seafarers were being singled out. In 1914 members of the Chinese community of Liverpool wrote a petition to the Chinese Ambassador complaining about the NSFU campaign against Chinese seafarers. Their grievances included the charge that no attempt was made to boycott seamen of other nations.⁹⁷ Chinese seafarers certainly occupied a precarious position in comparison to seafarers of other nationalities, particularly when compared to seafarers who hailed from other colonies within the British Empire. NSFU leaders argued when applying the Language Test the term “Colonial” should only be applied in its “legitimate” sense.⁹⁸ Furthermore, they argued in

⁹² “Chinese in British Ships: How Coolies are Ousting British Sailors”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 4, February 1908, p. 3.

⁹³ “Mr. O’Connor Kessack on the Yellow Peril”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 40, May 1914, p. 8.

⁹⁴ “The Yellow Peril”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 94, June 1916, p. 5.

⁹⁵ “Justice Must Be Done”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 95, June 1916, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Cayford, “In search of ‘John Chinaman’”, pp.39-40.

⁹⁷ “Chinese and Our Campaign: An Impudent Production”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 42, May 1914, p. 6.

⁹⁸ “The Man behind the Wheel”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1912, p. 1.

that Chinese seafarers were displacing “Coloured Britishers”.⁹⁹ They maintained that “British white” and “British coloured” labour should not remain unemployed while Chinese seafarers were employed in their place.¹⁰⁰ Occasionally we find comparison of Chinese and Indian seafarers within the pages of *The Seaman*. *The Seaman* concluded that “the Chinese is... not nearly as useful or satisfactory a member as the Indian seaman”.¹⁰¹ As we have seen, both Indian and Chinese seafarers were depicted as prone to panic in the face of an emergency. Following the *Egypt* disaster, however, *The Seaman* challenged the depiction of Indian seafarers as cowards. A front page piece noted that “to brand the whole class of seamen of this nationality as cowards is at variance with the general experience”.¹⁰² Thus, it becomes evident that belonging to a nation within the British Empire afforded seafarers a measure of protection from the NSFU’s campaigns against them.

In conclusion, there were several differences between the NSFU campaigns against Indian and Chinese seafarers. In their campaign against Indian seafarers, the NSFU chose an issue where there was scope to challenge their employment within the framework of the law. Indian seafarers were viewed as the victims of the avaricious ship-owners who were violating the law. In contrast, Chinese seafarers were portrayed as actively flouting the law to serve their own purposes. The campaign against Indian seafarers was also conducted via constitutional means of protest through questions and debates in parliament. The anti-Chinese campaign was far more wide ranging and was conducted outside of the Houses of Parliament. Popular support was drummed up through mass meetings and demonstrations. The NSFU also realised the impact value of threatening unconstitutional methods such as a general stoppage. Criticisms and derogatory stereotypes of Indian seafarers were masked by concern for their health and welfare. Such concern was not a prerequisite for attacking Chinese seafarers. Indeed, the NSFU’s use of negative stereotypes concerning Chinese seafarers was reflected in and supported by popular perceptions of them. There are several reasons which account for these

⁹⁹ “Protest Meeting of Seamen: Shipowners strongly criticised”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 80, November 1915, p. 4; and also, “Chinese Labour on British Ships – Greatest Cowards Alive”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 80, November 1915, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ “The Chinese Menace, what of the patriotic British shipowners? Mr. McVey’s Indictment”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 1, No. 168, April 1919, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ “Against the Chinese Seamen”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 2, No. 262, August 1922, p. 2.

¹⁰² “The Lascar Question”, *The Seaman*, Vol. 2, No. 262, August 1922, p. 1.

differences. The NSFU took advantage of an established racialised discourse surrounding Chinese seafarers in making use of the threat posed by the “Yellow Peril”. Thus, they built upon and manipulated a history of racial discourse. Compounding this, India’s status as an imperial country meant that there was a greater knowledge of and about India while knowledge of China was on the ebb.¹⁰³ In addition, Indian seafarers’ status as imperial citizens afforded them rights and privileges denied to Chinese seafarers. This gave them a measure of protection from the campaigns of the NSFU.

In analysing these differences we can consider Brah’s contention that minorities are similarly or differently constructed in relation to one another.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the different positioning of these men by the British resulted in some being construed as a minority along one axis of differentiation but holding a more privileged position along another. Indian seafarers’ race meant that they were considered a minority, especially in relation to British seafarers. This meant that they were susceptible to attacks from the NSFU. However, they also held a more privileged position in comparison to Chinese seafarers on account of their imperial subject status. This tempered the NSFU campaign against them. Such a comparison helps to locate the position of the Indian seafarers in public level discourses. While they were targeted by the NSFU on the basis of the race, they were not subjected to as scathing an attack as Chinese seafarers.

We can also use the work of Frank Parkin to help us understand the NSFU response. Parkin argued that that social collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. The eligibility criteria are based upon a singling out of certain identifiable social or physical attributes.¹⁰⁵ He then argued that there are two strategies for laying claim to resources based upon exclusion and solidarism. Both strategies share the aim of protecting or enhancing its privileges by the process of subordination or creating another stratum of ineligibles beneath it. In exclusionary social closure group advantages are secured at the expense of collectivities that are depicted as inferior while strategies of solidarism places claims upon resources

¹⁰³ Benton and Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain*, pp. 290-1.

¹⁰⁴ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities”, in her, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 189.

¹⁰⁵ Parkin, Frank, “Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation”, in Parkin (Ed.), *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, London: Tavistock, 1979, p. 3.

which threaten to diminish the share of the more privileged.¹⁰⁶ The NSFU deployed strategies of exclusion to both Indian and Chinese seafarers. While the eligibility criteria for excluding Indians was based upon an ostensible concern for their health and welfare, the criteria for excluding Chinese was purely about race and nationality. We can argue that the NSFU carefully selected the criteria for exclusion based upon its targets. The differing positions of these men along axes of differentiation necessitated such an approach. Thus, for their campaigns to be effective they adopted “soft” and “hard” strategies of exclusion dependent upon their targets. Indian seamen faced racial discrimination in popular discourses too, as seen in the children’s stories and reporting of shipwrecks in the media. Yet their imperial subject-hood did give them some immunity in contrast to their Chinese counterparts. A distinction must also be drawn between the nature and purpose of the stereotypes appearing in the NSFU campaign and those portrayed through the popular press. The depictions of Lascars in the popular press were narrative descriptions that served to entertain and inform. In contrast, the NSFU used stereotypes of Chinese and Indian seafarers as the foundation for an active campaign against them. For their campaigns to be effective and successful, it had to acknowledge Indian seafarers’ special circumstances. Failure to do so could result in Indian seafarers’ protesting to the India Office and Imperial Parliament, thus endangering the continuation of the campaign. It may also have been the case that Indian seafarers were more likely to protest against stereotypes and campaigns that threatened their livelihoods. Chinese seafarers, however, did not have recourse to such influential and powerful institutions. Thus, their complaints would have carried less weight, rendering them more vulnerable to attack.

Fluid Definitions: The changing scope of Lascar Articles, c. 1859 – 1934.

The attitudes of the British governments also help us to understand the relative positioning of Indian seafarers to their other non-European contemporaries during this period. This section illustrates this through tracing the changing scope of Lascar Articles of Agreement. Articles of Agreement refer to the contract between the crew and Captain of a ship. They outlined the working conditions, salary and food rations to be supplied to

¹⁰⁶ Parkin, “Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation”, p. 5.

seafarers. There were different Articles of Agreement for different seafarers depending on their nationality, such as British, Lascar and Foreign Articles of Agreement. In particular, Lascar articles set out inferior pay, conditions and food rations in comparison to British and Foreign Articles. Lascar agreements also included a stipulation that Indian seafarers were not to be discharged in Britain. Shipowners had to either secure a working or passenger voyage back to the port of origin or employ Indian seafarers on round voyages. Shipowners were required to pay a bond as security for upholding these conditions. This was intended to prevent Indian seafarers being left destitute or jumping ship in Britain. Thus, it reduced the mobility of Indian seafarers.¹⁰⁷ Section 115 of Act I 1859 outlined these restrictions as they applied to “Lascars and other native seamen”. This definition was challenged and reworked over the period running from the 1880s to 1930s. Different nationalities were included and excluded at different times resulting in a complex and contradictory definition. Key to these changes were the desirability or otherwise of extending the clause on repatriation to a wider range of nationalities. Historians have been divided on the changing nature of the definition of “Lascars or other native seamen”. Balachandran argued that it was loosely defined in the early years incorporating a diverse range of seamen such as Chinese, African and Arab seamen. He argued that the definition became narrower following the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906 with its Language Test stipulation.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, Tabili argued that the term became applied to a wider range of people over time. She charted how “special articles customary in India” were “imposed” upon an ever increasing range of people such as Adenese, Somalis, Goans and Chinese.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, I argue that it is not possible to offer such generalisations or meta-narratives of how the term was defined. Instead, I illustrate the intermittent switching between wider and restricted interpretations of the definition throughout the period.

Contemporary opinion appeared to hold a wide definition of the term “Lascar”. This is evident in the work of Joseph Salter, published in 1873. Salter produced an illustration depicting Lascars as he understood the term, reproduced in Plate Eight on page 110.

¹⁰⁷ Ahuja, “Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900-1960”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 51, Supplement 14, 2006, pp. 118 – 119.

¹⁰⁸ Balachandran, G., ‘Conflicts in the international maritime labour market’, p. 77.

¹⁰⁹ Tabili, “The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 33, No.1, January 1994, p. 67.

Plate Eight: Lascars



Image from Joseph Salter, "The Asiatic in England; sketches from sixteen years work among Orientals", London, 1873. British Library, OIOC, T8683.

These included “Burmese, Bengali, Malay, Chinese, Siamese and Surati” seafarers. The picture reinforces this idea with Lascars of different nationalities shown with “unique” or distinct facial characteristics and dress, but within a close group setting. The distinctive physiognomic characteristics depicted in this picture need to be set in the context of the rising pseudo-scientific discourses that were experiencing increasing popularity in Europe. Such discourses sought to categorise human beings on a linear scale, with Europeans and particularly Britons at the top. Proponents of such theories sought out physical evidence amongst colonised peoples. This can be seen, for example, in Crispin Bates’ adept study of anthropometry in India. Bates detailed contemporary beliefs that all living things could be classified and fitted into a hierarchy.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear from Salter’s illustration that the intention was to group together various ethnic groups and nationalities under the umbrella term “Lascars”.

Despite this broad contemporary definition, British authorities appeared to view the definition as referring specifically to “natives of British India” as late as the 1880s. In 1888 the Advocate General of Bombay defined the term as relating to a native of India as defined by the territories vested in the possession of the Queen.¹¹¹ Thus, this was a specific and restricted definition. But this definition was not static and was disputed two years later. In 1890 it was suggested that the term should be expanded after the Political Resident of Aden pointed out that “Arabs, Somalis and others who were domiciled at Aden” were excluded from the definition despite their being subject to British laws. An extended definition was proposed for inclusion in the Merchant Shipping Consolidation Bill but this was postponed.¹¹² Despite this apparent willingness to extend the scope of the Lascar definition, the Government of India reiterated in 1892 that Section 115 of Act I of 1859 applied solely to natives of British India.¹¹³ Thus, we can see that in official minds, the term was rigidly and narrowly defined but open to challenges in this early period between the 1880s and 1890s.

¹¹⁰ Bates, Crispin, “Race, caste and tribe in Central India: The early origins of Indian anthropometry”, in Robb, Peter (Ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 222 – 3.

¹¹¹ IOR P/10793: Letter from GOI, Department of Commerce, no.6255, 15th September 1920 in A Proceedings, Serial No. 79, p. 345.

¹¹² IOR P/10793: Letter from GOI, Department of Commerce, no.6255, 15th September 1920.

¹¹³ National Archives of India [hereafter NAI] A Proceedings, Department of Commerce and Industry – Merchant Shipping, October 1907, Serial Nos. 36 to 39: Note by PFM, 31st July 1907.

The decades following the Language Test requirement set out in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906 saw an equally unstable definition. Balachandran argued that 1906 was a watershed moment and that after the Merchant Shipping Act the application of the term Lascar became restricted to Indian seafarers while Tabili argued that it was extended to seafarers of other nationalities. In contrast, we can trace the changing and unstable definition during these years. Between 1912 and 1913 a wider definition of “Lascar and other native seamen” was proposed. This reconsideration of the definition was set in motion by the Secretary of State for India. Writing to the Government of India in 1912, he questioned the restriction of the definition to natives of India and suggested that it was “clearly used in a large and general sense”.¹¹⁴ This led to an investigation between 1912 and 1913 by the Government of India and the India Office. The investigation explored the definition of “Lascar and other native seamen” intended by those who had framed the 1859 Act. The majority of opinion contemporary to the Act pointed to the wider definition of the term. For example, the Solicitor to the Government of Bombay in 1859 “took an extremely wide view of the term”.¹¹⁵ It was also shown that the Governor of the Straits Settlements raised concerns while the 1859 Act was being formulated that the native seamen of Singapore would be excluded from the scope of its definition. No alteration was proposed in 1859 despite these concerns which led the 1912 Government of India to conclude that “it seems a reasonable inference that it was not intended to confine the scope of the law to these seamen only, but to apply it to all Asiatic seamen engaged at ports in India”.¹¹⁶ As a result of this investigation the Government of India decided to accept the wider definition of the term “unless and until it should be upset by a final ruling in a competent court of law”.¹¹⁷

This wider scope of the definition was reinforced in 1913 following concerns that Indian seafarers were falsely representing themselves as being of other nationalities to avoid signing on Lascar Articles. Such concerns arose from a case where Indian seafarers had

¹¹⁴ NAI Department of Commerce and Industry, Merchant Shipping: March 1913, A Proceedings, Numbers 1 to 9: Revenue No. 89, Secretary of State for India to Governor General of India in Council, 20th September 1912.

¹¹⁵ NAI Department of Commerce and Industry, Merchant Shipping: March 1913, A Proceedings, Numbers 1 to 9: Note by P.T.M. 27th September 1912.

¹¹⁶ NAI Department of Commerce and Industry, Merchant Shipping: March 1913, A Proceedings, Numbers 1 to 9: Note by P.T.M. 27th September 1912.

¹¹⁷ IOR P/10793: Letter from GOI, Department of Commerce, no.6255, 15th September 1920.

presented themselves as natives of London and Port Said resulting in their being shipped without guarantees for their repatriation. The broad definition was seen as a solution to this problem and the Advocate General of Bengal recommended that the “Government of India would be safe in acting on the wider meaning of the term”.¹¹⁸ Despite these rulings, there was not a linear progression of the definition being widened to ever increasing nationalities of seafarers. The following section illustrates how the term was not applied uniformly to all groups thus rendering a generalisation about whether it became increasingly restricted or broadly applied difficult. It demonstrates that between 1917 and 1934 some groups such as Chinese seafarers were excluded from the definition while others such as Arab seafarers were increasingly brought within the scope of the definition. It also demonstrates both the advantages and disadvantages of serving on Lascar Articles during this period.

During this period, Chinese seafarers were singled out for exclusion from the definition of “Lascar and other native seamen”. This was sparked in 1917 after the engagement of Chinese crew on British Articles of Agreement for a Norwegian ship which was frowned upon by the Board of Trade.¹¹⁹ Following this, a dispute arose between the Board and the Government of India over whether Chinese seafarers were included within the terms of the definition. The Board of Trade maintained that Chinese seafarers were not included in the definition and that they should not be sent under any circumstances to the UK unless they could produce “documentary evidence” proving “conclusively” that they were British subjects.¹²⁰ In 1919, the “Chinese question” surfaced again. This time the Board of Trade argued that Chinese seamen shipped at ports in British India could not be considered to be Lascars and that they would have to undergo the Language Test if discharged in Britain.¹²¹ This was reemphasised in 1920 when the Chinese question led to a further redefinition of the term “Lascar or other native seamen”. In this instance it

¹¹⁸ NAI Department of Commerce and Industry, Merchant Shipping: January 1914, A Proceedings Numbers 1-4: Note by John F. Gruning, 2nd June 1913.

¹¹⁹ IOR P/10315: Letter from Department of Commerce, Government of India to Marine Department, Government of Bengal, 3rd October 1917 in Marine Proceedings, Serial No. 33, pp. 33 to 36.

¹²⁰ IOR P/10315: Letter from Marine Department, Government of Bengal to Department of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 22nd February 1918.

¹²¹ IOR P/11178: Board of Trade to India Office, 11th February 1919, in Bengal Marine Proceedings 1922, Serial No. 36, pp. 41 – 46.

was confined to “natives of India”.¹²² As a result of this definition, executive instructions were sent to Shipping Masters at Indian Ports notifying them that they should not permit the engagement of Chinese seamen on British ships without warning both the master of the ship and the men of the difficulty of discharging Chinese crews in British ports.¹²³ Thus, Chinese seafarers were also informally excluded from the provisions of Lascar Articles during this period.

While Chinese seafarers were being excluded from Lascar Articles, the contradictory and unstable nature of the definition continued with Arab seafarers. In 1920, the Government of India were accused of seeking to extend the “Lascar Privilege” to “all Arab and Somali negroes whether they are British subjects or not”.¹²⁴ The India Office raised the concern that men who were not Lascars in the legal sense would be shipped on Lascar Articles. A dispute between the Home and Imperial Government in 1921 illustrates how quickly the situation had changed. The Board of Trade insisted that seafarers engaging at Aden should be shipped on Lascar and not European Articles and warned that men not shipped as Lascars would be regarded as aliens on arrival in Britain.¹²⁵ The Government of India pointed to the problems with such a strict definition. For example, they pointed to the need for the ability to engage Adenese seamen on European articles on European ships calling at Aden to replace lost or sick seafarers. They decided to circumnavigate the problem by asking local authorities to make Masters and crews aware of the precarious position of Adenese seafarers in Britain.¹²⁶ Finally, in 1934 it was noted that plans were in progress to cover Arab and African seamen within the definition when the Indian Merchant Shipping Act was amended.¹²⁷ Thus, by comparing the case studies of Chinese and Arab seafarers we can see the difficulty in offering a generalised explanation of how the term was applied during the period 1906 to 1934.

¹²² NAI Department of Commerce: Lascar Seamen, November 1920, A Proceedings, Numbers 1-9: Note of W.T.M. Wright, 7th June 1919.

¹²³ NAI Department of Commerce: December 1921: A Proceedings, Numbers 1-7: Proceeding No. 5: Note by J.B. Taylor, 3rd August 1921.

¹²⁴ NAI Department of Commerce: December 1921: A Proceedings, Numbers 1-7: Proceeding No. 5: India Office to Board of Trade, 30th December 1920.

¹²⁵ NAI Department of Commerce: December 1921: A Proceedings, Numbers 1-7: Proceeding No. 5: Note by J.B. Taylor, 3rd August 1921.

¹²⁶ NAI Department of Commerce: December 1921: A Proceedings, Numbers 1-7: Proceeding No. 5: Note by J.B. Taylor, 3rd August 1921.

¹²⁷ NAI File Number 5-MII(4)/34, Serial Numbers 1-2, Part B, Department of Commerce, September 1934: Letter from the Principal Officer, M.M. Department, Aden, No. 24.S/282, dated 16th February 1934.

The definition was not applied uniformly to seafarers of different nationalities and so it is problematic to talk of the definition being progressively widened or restricted during this period. Instead, we see an intricate and complex definition that changed over time.

This changing and unstable definition further illustrates how seafarers of various nationalities were differently positioned by the British. As I illustrate in the next chapter, this becomes important when considering the response of Indian seafarers to changes in their status. We should also note that while seafarers of other nationalities were not restricted to Lascar Articles throughout the period, seafarers of Indian nationality were. Thus, they were restricted to inferior conditions of work and reduced food rations. For example, in the discussion on whether Chinese and Arab seafarers should be engaged on Lascar Articles their rejection of the food rations was deemed important. In 1904 it was noted that while engagement on Lascar Articles would not affect their wages, Arab seafarers preferred the “more substantial food of Europeans”.¹²⁸ Similarly, in 1917 it was argued that Chinese seafarers required the scale of provisions laid down for European seamen.¹²⁹ Being confined to Lascar Articles meant that Indian seafarers were restricted to the food rations stipulated by them. The clause that Indian seafarers were not to be discharged in Britain also made it difficult for them to desert their ships and escape such conditions. However, as I shall illustrate later, Indian nationality and British subject status could also prove advantageous to Indian seafarers. Thus, we must keep in mind that although they were construed as minorities along one axis of differentiation they were in a more privileged position along another axis.

Debate also focused upon whether and how the definition “Lascar or other native seaman” applied to different groups of Indian seafarers. This further highlights the fluid and at times contradictory nature of the definition. Anglo-Indians seafarers posed particular problems for the British authorities. The term Anglo-Indian had two different meanings during this period. Mrinalini Sinha defined the term as the official and non-

¹²⁸ NAI Finance and Commerce Department, Statistics and Commerce, April 1904: A Proceedings, Numbers 166-168; Marine Department, Government of Bengal to Finance and Commerce Department, Government of India, 10th February 1904.

¹²⁹ IOR P/10315: Letter from Marine Department, Government of Bengal to Department of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 22nd February 1918.

official Britons domiciled in India for an extended period of time.¹³⁰ But the term also referred to people of mixed European and Indian descent. Kenneth Ballhatchet described them as “on the margins of social distance”.¹³¹ Lionel Caplan defined Anglo-Indians as “‘hybrid’, ‘métis’ or ‘mesitzo’ populations, enduring legacies of the colonial encounter which fostered sexual relations between European men and local women”.¹³² They were commonly referred to as “half castes” but their spokespeople preferred the term “Indo-Britain” and later “Anglo-Indian”.¹³³

The Anglo-Indian issue first arose in 1904 but the suggestion that they be put on Lascar Articles faced opposition from the Local Governments and the Anglo-Indian community. Thus, the Government of India decided to leave it open to Anglo-Indians to engage upon either Lascar or British Articles.¹³⁴ Concerns were again raised in 1906 following the repatriation of destitute Anglo-Indians. This led the India Office to regard them as “natives of India for the purposes of Article 185 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894”.¹³⁵ The issue resurfaced again in 1910 with the publication of the Report of Distressed and Colonial Indian Subjects. The report concluded that the Master of a ship should sign an undertaking to bear the cost of repatriating Anglo-Indian seafarers.¹³⁶ This was rejected by the Government of India for fear that it would close an avenue of employment for Anglo-Indians and also having regard to the “class of men” would be derogatory.¹³⁷

The status of Goans was also problematic as they hailed from Portuguese India. In 1888 the Advocate General of Bombay stated that “persons born in French or Portuguese India” were not natives of India. The status of Goanese was broached again in 1906 in the discussion of the P&O practice of engaging Goanese on European Articles. This was

¹³⁰ Sinha, , *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press, 1995p. 23.

¹³¹ Ballhatchet, Kenneth, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793 – 1905*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, pp. 106 – 111.

¹³² Caplan, L, *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Post-Colonial World*, Oxford, Berg, 2001, p. 1.

¹³³ Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class*, p. 4.

¹³⁴ IOR L/E/7/481 File 819: Revenue and Statistics Minute Paper, No, 3062: December 1904.

¹³⁵ IOR P/7750: Letter from Collector of Customs, Bombay to Commissioner of Customs, Bombay, 14th June 1907.

¹³⁶ NAI File Number 40 of 1910, A Proceedings Numbers 1 to 15, Department of Commerce and Industry – Merchant Shipping Branch, May 1911: Report of the Committee on Distressed and Colonial Indian Seafarers, 14th April 1910.

¹³⁷ ¹³⁷ NAI File Number 40 of 1910, A Proceedings Numbers 1 to 15, Department of Commerce and Industry – Merchant Shipping Branch, May 1911: Note by “C.J.”, Department of Commerce and Industry, 12th April 1911.

deemed “quite illegal” by the Shipping Master at Bombay who urged that they should be treated as natives of India.¹³⁸ Objections to the practice were raised on the basis that they were “pure natives of India with not the remotest strain of European blood” and that by “no stretching of the terms could they be called Eurasian”.¹³⁹ Despite these objections, it was eventually decided that as the engagements operated to the advantage of the Goanese and did not lead to inconvenience they should be allowed to continue.¹⁴⁰ These case studies demonstrate the instability of the definition of the term “native of India” and how it was not applied uniformly to all groups. This illustrates how different groups of Indian seafarers were positioned differently by the British. Thus, Indian seafarers were not viewed as a homogeneous mass by the British authorities but rather a collection of differently situated individuals. In the next chapter, I illustrate how Indian seafarers were conscious of this differentiation and attempted to manipulate the divisions to their own advantage.

While British subject status resulted in their being restricted to Lascar Articles, the category did have some advantages for Indian seafarers. As I illustrated earlier, their British subject status protected them from the worst attentions of the NSFU and forced them to approach Indian seafarers in remarkably different way to other non-British seafarers such as Chinese. Their subject status also conferred advantages such as exclusion from the Language Test. It also conveyed some advantage to them when anti-alien legislation such as the Coloured Alien Seamen Order (CASO) was introduced. It was understood that Indian seafarers would be exempt from this legislation and that it was undesirable that British Indian subjects should be registered as aliens even temporarily.¹⁴¹ When Indian seafarers were forcibly registered under the Act their juridical rights such as the right to appeal to the India Office and the Imperial Parliament came into force. For example, the Glasgow Indian Union wrote to the India Office that “it would be quite obvious to you that Indians, as British subjects, could not be classed as

¹³⁸ IOR P/7750: Letter from Shipping Master, Bombay to Board of Trade, 10th September 1906 in Marine Proceedings Serial No. 68, pages 355 to 359.

¹³⁹ IOR P/7750: Letter from Commissioner of Customs, Bombay to Secretary to Government, Marine Department, 20th June 1907.

¹⁴⁰ NAI File Number 1 of 1908: A Proceedings Numbers 2-3, Department of Commerce and Industry – Merchant Shipping, January 1908: India Office to Marine Department, Board of Trade, 20th November 1907.

¹⁴¹ IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1: Secretary to Government of India, Department of Commerce to Secretaries of Bombay (Marine Department), Bengal (Marine Department), Burma (Finance and Revenue) and Madras (Finance Marine Department), 31st August 1926.

Aliens and we request that you would be good enough to protect the rights of Indians as British Subjects in this country and remove this legitimate ground of complaint".¹⁴² The imperial status of Indians also afforded them the protection of the Imperial Parliament. For example, Dr. B.S. Moonje raised the question of Indian seafarers' status in the Legislative Assembly. After hearing reports of coloured seamen being deported from Cardiff, Dr. Moonje asked whether Indian seafarers were included among the deportees.¹⁴³ He was assured that "there is not, and never has been, any question of deporting any British Indian".¹⁴⁴ Thus, their British subject status conferred some advantages on Indian seafarers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the positioning of Indian seafarers was complex. Public level discourses constructed and disseminated negative stereotypes of Indian seafarers. These included the perception that they were cowardly and immoral. Such stereotypes were disseminated via the popular press and even through children's periodicals. Placing Indian seafarers in a comparative perspective revealed the complex nature of their positioning by the British. While Indian seafarers were targeted by the NSFU they still held a more privileged and protected position than other non-European seafarers such as the Chinese. Exploring the NSFU campaign against the employment of Chinese seafarers illustrated that Indian seafarers had been relatively protected from the harsher aspects of the NSFU campaign. Their position in comparison to other non-European seafarers was considered through investigating the changing definition of "Lascar or native seaman". This illustrated how the British constructed minorities in relation to one another. It also showed the benefits and detrimental impacts of British nationality on Indian seafarers. The next chapter expands this line of analysis by exploring how Indian seafarer manipulated their British subject hood and also the differing positioning of seafarers by the British.

¹⁴² IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1: PSR Choudhury, Glasgow Indian Union to India Office, 17th Feb 1926.

¹⁴³ NAI File Number 451-MI(8)/29, Serial Numbers 1-5, Part B, Department of Commerce – Mercantile Marine I, June 1929: Legislative Assembly, Notice List No. 22-A, Serial No. 59, Register No. 769, Question from Dr. B.S. Moonje.

¹⁴⁴ NAI File Number 451-MI(8)/29, Serial Numbers 1-5, Part B: Letter from General Department, Office of the High Commissioner for India to Department of Commerce, Government of India, 14th March 1929.

Chapter Three

Positioning identities: The Indian seaman's perspective

The strength of local or regional identities amongst Indian seafarers is often presumed because of their use of chain migration networks based upon kin and regional affiliations. It is logical to assume that their use of these networks was founded upon and also strengthened their regional identities. The benefits of chain migration networks to Indian seafarers are indisputable and there is strong evidence demonstrating their use of these networks. Chain migration networks were an essential survival strategy for Indian seafarers and demonstrate how they mobilised and organised resources to adapt to new situations thus revealing their agency. But concentrating solely upon their use of regional identities presents Indian seafarers as one dimensional subjects and precludes consideration of how and when they used other identities. Regional identities have, therefore, taken on almost essentialist qualities in the historiography as authentic, inherent and unchanging. In contrast, this chapter considers a wider range of the identities Indian seafarers could employ. I demonstrate that Indian seafarers could hold multiple identities simultaneously and could choose to bring different identities to the forefront at different times. The context in which different identities were used is also explored. Investigating the reasoning and choice behind their use of different identities allows Indian seafarers a greater degree of agency.

Indian seafarers' collective identities are also explored. In particular, I investigate their use of "Britishness". The established historiography considered in detail the role of British authorities in drawing and redrawing the boundaries of "Britishness" over time. In contrast, this chapter considers the responses of Indian seafarers to these changes but also how they maintained and manipulated the boundaries of their own identities. For example, it explores how Anglo-Indians employed strategies of social closure to bolster their claims to resources. This explores how they used strategies of upwards social closure and constructed an inclusive interpretation of British identity that included certain groups of Anglo-Indians. At the same time, they used exclusionary practices of

social closure by constructing identities that excluded other Indians from Britishness to strengthen their own claim. This idea is further explored through case studies such as the tramp shipping subsidy, Coloured Alien Seamen Order and the rota system of 1930.

Chain migration and regional identities

This section explores Indian seafarers' use of chain migration and in doing so draws upon evidence from the men themselves. Chain migration networks operated within India allowing the men to find jobs upon ships but also functioned in Britain to help the men adapt and survive within British society. The drawbacks of using chain migration theory to uncover identities are also explored in this section. Chain migration emphasises the functional role of regional identities. I argue, however, that apart from functionality, Indian seafarers' use of regional identities portrayed a strong symbolic and emotional attachment. Additionally, chain migration theory places Indian seafarers into a closed system and does not examine the relations between different kin groups and regional identities. Furthermore, chain migration theory assumes that regional identities will be inherent and supplant other identities. This section demonstrates that not all of the men held a strong, intrinsic regional identity and that this could fluctuate over time and place.

John and Leatrice MacDonald defined chain migration as "the movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relations with previous migrants".¹ The connections that chain migration forged between the Indian subcontinent and Britain were examined by Roger Ballard. Ballard concluded that "ethnic colonies" in Britain rested upon parochial foundations.² Such was the strength of these parochial loyalties that they superseded other competing loyalties such as religion. In comparison to the steady nature of regional identities, religious affiliations and loyalties tended to be short lived and linked to specific issues.³ Indian seafarers'

¹ MacDonald, John and MacDonald, Leatrice, "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighbourhood Migration and Social Networks", *Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1964, p.82.

² Ballard, Roger, "Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh", in his (ed), *Desh Pardesh – The South Asian presence in Britain*, London: Hurst and Company, 1994, p.4.

³ Ballard, "Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh", p.4.

participation in chain migration networks were briefly outlined by Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur. They argued that overseas migration was strongly socially channelled, with kin helping each other to migrate. This resulted in close links developing between Britain and particular ethnic communities from the colonies, which were in turn rooted in specific villages.⁴ Chain migration also played a role in supporting migrants in the new country. Indian seafarers, for example, slipped ashore with the knowledge that their fellow countrymen would help them find work and accommodation.⁵ Ravi Ahuja and Gardner also argued that Sylheti seafarers' incorporation into the international labour market did not result in a "rubbing off" of Sylheti identity but rather led to a heightened awareness of it.⁶ As evidence of this, Ahuja tracked the maritime labour networks that "spanned the distance between recruitment ports and labour catchment areas".⁷ Crucial to these labour networks were the local agents, such as Serangs and lodging house keepers, in the recruitment ports. Thus, local identities were not just a descriptive classification that Indian seafarers used to express their identities. Rather it was an identity that involved a sense of belonging to a bounded group and a sense of solidarity with group members that formed the basis of active help.

The oral history accounts of Indian seafarers demonstrate how they used and participated in chain migration. Several seafarers recalled either giving or receiving help from other Indians in Britain. For example, chain migration networks were used to transfer information on the job market in Britain to potential migrants. An example of this is found in Anjob Ali's testimony. He recalled receiving a letter telling him that most of his relatives had left maritime employment and were now working in Britain. His relatives urged him to join them there.⁸ Nawab Ali also remembered helping men to jump ship in Britain:

⁴ Gardner, Katy and Shukur, Abdus, "'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian and I'm living here': The Changing Identity of British Bengalis", in Ballard, R., (Ed.), *Desh Pardesh*, p.144.

⁵ Gardner and Shukur, "'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian and I'm living here", p.147.

⁶ Ahuja, Ravi, "Networks of Subordination – Networks of the Subordinated: The case of South Asian Maritime Labour under British Imperialism (c. 1890 – 1947)", in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Ashwini Tambe (eds.), *Spaces of Disorder: The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2008, p.17. Gardner, K., *Global Migrants, Local Lives: travel and transformation in rural Bangladesh*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, pp. 269 – 281.

⁷ Ahuja, "Networks of Subordination – Networks of the Subordinated", p.20.

⁸ Choudhury, Yousuf, *Sons of the Empire: Oral history from the Bangladeshi seamen who served on British ships during the 1939-45 War*, Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group, 1995, p. 109.

I will tell you why there were too many Sylhetis. It was because we all helped each other. I brought twenty men myself, when the vouchers came in, and I must have brought two hundred from the ship in the war, so if each of them helped twenty more... you see how it happened... of course in those days we never imagined there would be so many people – we just wanted to help our brothers.⁹

Nawab Ali's role in assisting men beyond the initial act of jumping ship is evident in his account and demonstrates the practical help Indian seafarers in Britain offered their compatriots. He remembered assisting men with arranging their papers and searching for seafaring jobs on English Articles.¹⁰ Syed Rasul's testimony described receiving such help. He recalled his gratitude to his "village man" for helping him by purchasing clothes and taking him to the Labour Exchange.¹¹ Thus, regional identities were the basis for their actions and their reason for helping other men.

Regional affiliations played an important role before arrival in Britain. Men from the same village migrated to port cities in groups. Syed Ali, for example, joined a group of men leaving to find work in Calcutta.¹² Regional ties played a further role in the recruitment process. The crewing of certain shipping lines became the "birthright" of Sylheti men after Serangs became established with shipping companies resulting in "clusters" of regional and kin groups.¹³ Once Serangs were appointed to recruit a crew for a ship, they turned to men from their home villages or regions. The British authorities believed that this process guaranteed a harmonious crew. This in turn led to men from the same village serving together in close proximity on the same ships as is evident in the oral history testimonies of Indian seafarers. Moklis Miah recalled the intimacy of a ship's crew, revealing that "about forty crew members were in the engine room, amongst them were my own uncle... my next door neighbour and the rest were from other parts of Sylhet".¹⁴ Mothosir Ali's testimony reflected similar sentiments. He too remembered that most of the engine room crew "were from our area or related to us".¹⁵

⁹ Adams, Caroline, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, London: Tower Hamlets Arts Project, 1987, p. 89.

¹⁰ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.77.

¹¹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.185.

¹² Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.91.

¹³ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.15.

¹⁵ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.3.

Looking back to Brubaker and Cooper's definition of identity outlined in the Introduction, the above evidence supports the understanding of identity as grounds for social action. Rather than being merely a descriptive category that people used to explain their identities, regional identities appeared to be the basis for actions and thus active identities. Regional identities therefore appear to fall into Brubaker and Cooper's category of "self understanding and social location".¹⁶ Men benefited from the support regional identities brought, and participated in the cycle by helping other men from their home villages and regions. Thus, chain migration appeared to be based upon regional affiliations. What is missing from this account, however, is an understanding of why the men acted upon these identities. It does not account for an emotional attachment to these regional or local identities. Instead, chain migration theory is focused on the resulting consequence of emotional attachment.

Local identities did not merely play a practical or functional role through chain migration. They were also strongly associated with seafaring identities and mythological tales were used to support the men's claims to maritime employment. Such tales constructed collective memories of their communities' seafaring heritage and reflect the emotional attachment to regional identities. For example, Khala Miah described Sylheti seafaring as a historical inheritance, recalling that "for generation after generation we had the habit of going to sea to seek our fortune and at the same time keeping a family going in our home village".¹⁷ Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi also maintained that Sylheti men were seafarers as "it is in their blood":

The men of Sylhet district are seafarers because it is in their blood. Most of the people of Sylhet, [they] claim they are descendants of the Arabs. Arab people used to like travelling. Even before the Muslim rule of India they came as travellers to Chittagong, to Sylhet. They came as business men to Sind in India and many of them settled and that is why the Sylhet people, the Muslims especially, they like to travel. It is in their blood to travel the world.¹⁸

Regional identities were, therefore, an important constituent of the collective memories of the men. Collective historical memories foster and define group identities, telling a

¹⁶ "One's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act", Brubaker, Rogers and Cooper, Frederick, "Beyond 'Identity'", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2000, p.17.

¹⁷ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p. 120.

¹⁸ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.145.

group of people where they have come from, who they are and how they should act in the present and future.¹⁹ Thus, the Sylheti collective identities sought to provide the men with identities as seafarers thus legitimising their claims to employment. In addition, their attempts to link their personal histories to these identities demonstrate an emotional attachment.

Chain migration also depicts a closed system in which access to resources is restricted to men from the same community. It overlooks, therefore, relations between different kin groups and regional identities. In practice, men gained help from sources not related to their kin or regional grouping. Take, for example, the case of Altaf Ali from Comilla district who relied upon the help of his Sylheti contemporaries. Mr. Ali still recalled how "Sylheti people kept me and fed me as if I was their own close relative... I always worked with people from other districts, but none of them let me down, even when I was ill they looked after me".²⁰ In Ali's case, therefore, a shared regional background was not needed for a sense of collective identity to emerge. Nur Hassim's account reflected similar sentiments. He noted the "love and affection" shown to him by Sylheti men. Indeed, his bond with them was so strong that when he met people from his "native district" he decided against living with them as "I was very happy and comfortable with the Sylheti people... I stayed with the Sylheti people for a long time".²¹ Feelings of commonality were not therefore restricted to men from the same region or kin group. Instead, the common experience of migration appeared to be a uniting factor in the above accounts. This challenges the formulaic expectation that collective identities were simply founded upon kin or local identities.

An inherent strong regional identity is also assumed by chain migration theory. In addition, it is presumed that the strength of regional identities is unaffected by the migration process. Oral history accounts reveal that not all of the men experienced strong allegiances to their regional identities. Indeed, migration could weaken their regional identities as it disrupted their sense of connection and solidarity built upon common experience with fellow villagers. Nawab Ali recalled feelings of detachment

¹⁹ Gillis, John, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship" in John Gillis (Ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p.7

²⁰ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.45-6.

²¹ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.40.

after returning from employment on river boats. He recalled how he returned to visit his home village but “couldn’t stand to stay there” because “I had nothing to do there, nobody understood me, and I had seen so many different things”.²² Thus, his account noted that migration weakened his sense of regional identity as his new experiences made him realise the extent to which he had drifted apart from the people he left behind. A feeling of detachment and distance is also given in his account of his work as a fireman where “the crew were all Sylheti but nobody else from Badeshwar – all from other places like Ballaganj side... I have never been to that side – although I know nearly every corner of England”.²³ Thus, his sense of disconnection from his home region was emphasised by his greater knowledge of a foreign country. The Memorandum of the Indian Seamen’s Union submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour in India also reflected a sense of detachment from their home regions. It argued that “the only nexus that connects the seamen to their native village is nothing but a heart’s desire to see those who are dear and near to them”.²⁴ Thus, the attachment was to their families and not their home villages. This contrasts sharply with Ahuja’s belief that migration led to a heightened awareness of Sylheti identity. Not all Indian seafarers held a strong sense of attachment to their home regions and migration could also weaken regional identities rather than strengthening them.

Indeed, chain migration theory fails to account for changing identities and paints a static picture of regional identities. Thus, it does not consider how identities can change over time. Furthermore, as it assumes that the men would adopt a regional identity it does not account for how individual seafarers may have chosen to assume different identities at different times. In contrast, other scholars have argued that identities were not transplanted unmodified from the sending to host country even where chain migration was evident. Chitra Joshi wrote that there was no simple continuity with the community past. Instead, community rituals, practices, norms and values were reconfigured by the migrants.²⁵ Charles Tilly also wrote that categories belonged at the origin and not necessarily at the destination. The categories that survived depended upon a range of

²² Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 69.

²³ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.72.

²⁴ Memorandum of the Indian Seamen’s Union, *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India*, Volume 5, Part 1.2, Bengal Including Coalfields and the Dooars, 1931, p. 242.

²⁵ Joshi, Chitra, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003, 83-4.

factors such as the categories around which the people already at the destination organised their own lives.²⁶ In addition, migration created new categories and transformed existing ones. In light of this, the application of chain migration theory to Indian seafarers presents two problems. It oversimplifies both the regional identities and the identities of Indian seamen. Furthermore, chain migration portrays regional and kin based identities as immutable. But it also assumes that Indian seafarers would inevitably possess a strong sense of regional identity. This affords Indian seafarers little agency, as identity appears mandatory rather than a personal choice. In contrast, this chapter explores the range of identities that Indian seafarers could choose from and how they adopted different identities at different times. In the next section, I shall explore how identities arising out of religious considerations ran alongside other forms of identities.

Religious Identities at Sea and Ashore

The religious identities of Indian seafarers at sea and ashore are explored in this section. It investigates shifts and changes in the nature of religious identities. Thus, it demonstrates how Indian seafarers chose between different identities in different contexts. This section also illustrates that there were not necessarily rigid boundaries between identities. Rather than existing within clearly defined borders, identities could blend together. For example, religious identities cohered with and complemented regional identities. This is evident in the case of Roman Catholic Goanese seafarers. P.G. Kanekar's "Seamen in Bombay" recorded the Goanese practice of living in clubs known as "Kurs" while they awaited employment in Bombay. Kanekar wrote that the "bond of unity" was very strong in the Kurs, with each Kur belonging to one particular village.²⁷ Kurs were credited with inspiring a local patriotism and imbuing the Goanese with a spirit of co-operation "absent from other classes of seafarers in Bombay".²⁸ The Kurs were also, however, a focal point for religious worship and community. Kanekar reported that

²⁶ Tilly, Charles, "Transplanted networks", in Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia (Ed.), *Immigration reconsidered – History, Sociology and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.85.

²⁷ National Archives of India [hereafter NAI], Department of Commerce, File Number 56-MII/30: P.G. Kanekar, "Seamen in Bombay: Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of their Life and Work with Appendices containing other valuable information", p.5.

²⁸ NAI, File Number 56-MII/30: Kanekar, *Seamen in Bombay*, p.5-6.

the Kurs contained prayer rooms where daily prayers were offered as well as being the focal point for the celebration of the festivals of the patron saints of their village.²⁹ Thus, both local and religious identities were important aspects of the Kurs which in turn formed a chain in the migration process.

Religious identities could also be the basis of collective memories and identities. Thus, Indian seafarers used religious identities to foster perceptions that some religions were more accustomed to maritime work than others. This is evident in Haji Kona Miah's belief that seafaring was an occupation more suited to Muslims. He observed that "the Hindu people wouldn't go to sea so it was all Muslim people from East Pakistan".³⁰ This perception led some Indian seafarers to shuffle and even invent identities that increased their chances of securing maritime employment. Shah Abdul Mahid Qureshi believed that Surat Ali had misrepresented himself in this way. He argued that even the name Surat Ali was adopted with the intention of making others believe he was Muslim. Qureshi noted that men did not have to be Muslim to get a job but "the Serangs and all that were Muslim, so if you were a candidate to be in the sea service it was best to be a Muslim".³¹ Thus, religious identities were another strand or link in the chain migration process, forcing apostasy on the part of migrants who wished to make a better life abroad. An increasingly complex picture of chain migration therefore emerges that challenges the perception that it was solely based on regional affiliations.

Religious identities were not restricted to shore settings and chain migration but were also evident in shipboard life. The visibility of religion on shipboard can be illustrated by the photographs in Plates Nine and Ten on pages 128 and 129. The photograph in Plate

²⁹ NAI, File Number 56-MII/30: Kanekar, Seamen in Bombay, p.6.

³⁰ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.128.

³¹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.158.

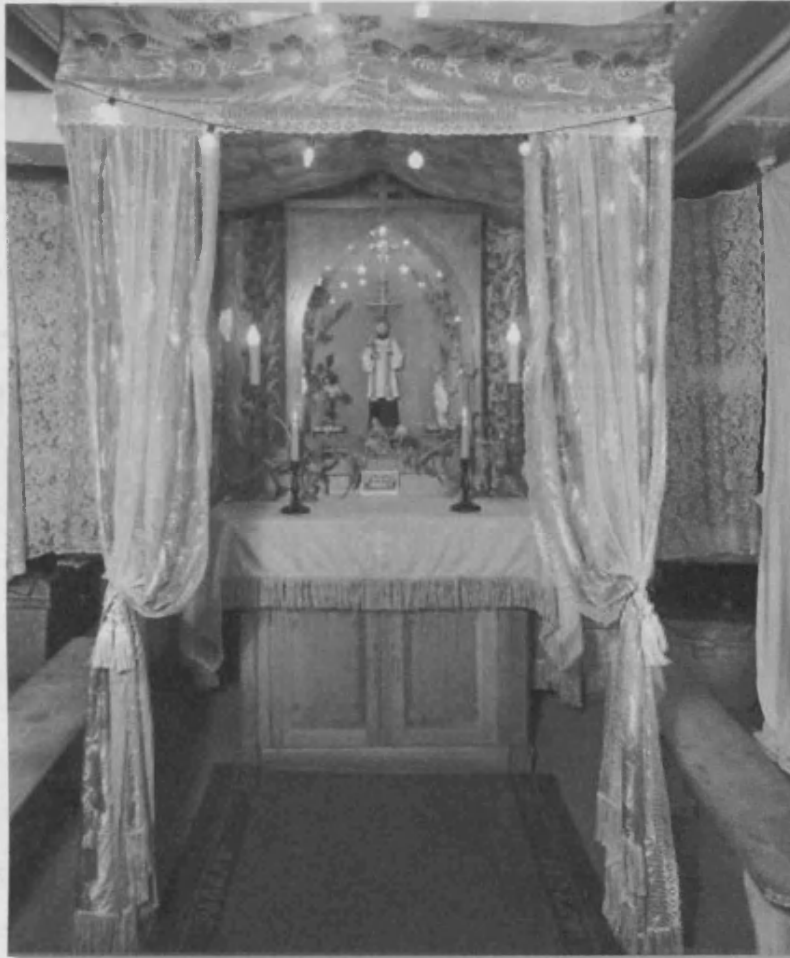
Plate Nine



Bengalen: At prayer on deck, 1910.

File Number N47906, National Maritime Museum.

Plate Ten



A Goan altar dedicated to St Francis Xavier on board the P&O liner 'Strathallen', 1938.

File Number H3800, National Maritime Museum.

Nine shows Muslim seafarers at prayer on the bow of the deck. There is no additional information with this picture to indicate whether it was a regular occurrence or related to a specific religious occasion such as Eid. Plate Ten shows a shrine used by Goanese seafarers, dedicated to Saint Francis Xavier. Saint Francis was reputed to have spent time in Goa as a missionary and his body was laid to rest at a church there. Both photographs illustrate that time and physical space was found on shipboard for religious worship.³² It seems, however, that the space allotted to the Muslim seafarers in Plate Ten was temporary. Their prayer session appears to be taking place where there is spare room on deck rather than having an allocated prayer room. In contrast, the shrine in Plate Ten appears to be permanent – it is an elaborate altar that would be difficult to move around. It also appears to be inside the ship and the net curtains indicate that this was separate from the crew's quarters. There may be several reasons for this. The European senior officers may have been more sympathetic to the Goans' Christian faith. A smaller number of Goans also would have been present on shipboard as they were employed solely in the saloon crew meaning that a smaller amount of space for religious worship was required. Nevertheless, the pictures demonstrate the visibility of religion on shipboard.

Time was also made for religious festivals and rites on shipboard. For example, the determination of an Indian crew to observe Ramadan reportedly led to fatal consequences. Ramadan entailed a month of fasting during which participating Muslims refrained from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset. According to newspaper reports, a crew of Indian seafarers were taken to Murmansk, present day north west Russia, where the sun "never set, or not so you'd notice".³³ Determination to maintain the fast despite the conditions resulted in the deaths of seventeen men.³⁴ This incident demonstrated the importance the men placed on maintaining religious festivals at sea. This was also evident in Dada Amir Haider Khan's description of the funerary rites for a man killed in an accident on board. In the absence of a religious leader the task was

³² We can also glean the importance of celebrating religious festivals or "feast days" from Valentini's Hindustani dictionary for British officers. See Valentini, A.L., *Lascari-Bat: A Collection of Sentences used in the daily routine of modern passenger steamers where Lascars are carried as the deck crew*, London: Miller and Sons, 1896, p.54.

³³ "At Random: Ramadan", *The Observer*, 10th November 1940, p.3.

³⁴ "At Random: Ramadan", *The Observer*, 12th March 1939, p. 13.

entrusted to a group of men “supposedly more knowledgeable in matters of religion than the rest”.³⁵ He described how they prepared the body “according to custom, as they perceived it” and followed Islamic funerary rites as closely as possible.³⁶ This passage illustrated that time and space was afforded to religious rites on shipboard. Furthermore, the importance of these rites to the men was brought out in the passage. Despite the absence of a religious leader on board, the men remained determined to administer appropriate rites for their colleague. These rites would have helped to cement community feeling during crucial times such as bereavement through collective grieving.

Religious identities extended beyond the function of rites and festivals. Religion was also a lens through which to view their experiences on shipboard. Dada Amir Haider Khan described being stationed at Basra during the British war against the Turkish in Mesopotamia. He wrote that the crew were “all sentimentally opposed to the war against our Muslim brothers on religious grounds”.³⁷ He described Pan-Islamic sympathy and how “any conversation on the subject of the war that occurred among the crew expressed prayer and support for a Turkish victory”.³⁸ He even visited soldiers from the Rawalpindi district serving in the war “to ask them how their consciences permitted an attack against fellows of their faith”.³⁹ The British Expedition to Egypt in 1882 aroused a similar response when the men refused to go on a mission which they regarded as one of “aggression against their fellow Mohammedans”.⁴⁰ Such responses were distinct from the feeling of commonality, connectedness and groupness evident in acts of worship and religious rites. This aspect of religious identity contrasts with the community feeling outlined in the consideration of religious rites above. It becomes clear, therefore, that there were several faces of religious identity and so it was not static or one dimensional. These stories additionally suggest that Indian seafarers were willing to take action on the basis of their religious identities. Finally, they imply that religious identity informed their political consciousness and demonstrated their willingness to take positions in a political

³⁵ Khan, Dada Amir Haider, *Chains to lose: life and struggles of a revolutionary - memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan*, edited by Hasan N. Gardezi, New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1989, p.71.

³⁶ Khan, *Chains to lose*, p.71.

³⁷ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.76.

³⁸ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.76.

³⁹ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.81.

⁴⁰ “Strike of Mohammedan Sailors in London”, *The Scotsman*, 4th August 1882, p.5.

conflict. Indian seafarers' political identities are explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Religious identities were also evident among Indian seafarers after they had settled in Britain. Here we must consider Roger Ballard's observation that religious identities tend to be short lived and linked to specific issues. To some extent the evidence of Indian seafarers in Britain supports this argument. An example of this comes from the oral history testimony of Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi and his recollections of the Partition of India. Qureshi was in Britain at that time and observed a change in his relationship with Hindus. As a result of a heated argument with a Hindu over his denouncing of Jinnah, Qureshi turned with renewed vigour to Islam. He recalled "I changed by attitude – I bought the religious book, my Koran... I started regular prayer and even today I do – I became a proper Muslim."⁴¹ Qureshi only became a "proper" Muslim in response to a specific event. Such an approach, however, concentrates on dramatic or spectacular events and their consequences upon religious identities thus neglects to consider everyday and private manifestations of religious identities. Such responses to the Partition also demonstrate how Indian seafarers were involved in politics. This aspect of their lives has not been addressed by the existing historiography. Where this has investigated politics, it has been restricted to trade union politics. It is clear from the above evidence that Indian seafarers were political beings too. This is considered in greater detail later in the chapter.

Investigation reveals private manifestations of religious identity existed alongside those inspired by dramatic occurrences. For example, we have just considered Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi's recollections of the impact of Partition. His recollections of the pre-Partition era described the absence of a community-based religious identity and thus a sense of connectedness or of belonging to a group. He told of how "in the early times the only religious thing was that after Ramzan, they used to go for the Eid prayers".⁴² Qureshi maintained his own religious beliefs and identity in private despite the absence of a community based religious identity. This is evident in his statement that "when I first came to London I took my Koran with me and I continued to read Koran, observe fasting

⁴¹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.166.

⁴² Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 160.

and regular prayer".⁴³ Similarly, the memories of Haji Shirajul Islam revealed a strong, private religious identity. His story revealed how he turned with renewed vigour to his religion after a period where he had not practiced regularly. He instructed his wife to tell people that he was in the bathroom if he received any telephone calls while praying as "I didn't want to make a fuss about being all religious, claiming to be a saintly person".⁴⁴ He also recalled his religious identity during his earlier years in Britain. He described how during his time as a waiter he would fetch alcohol for customers "but afterwards I would wash my hands really thoroughly, like we do before prayer".⁴⁵ This illustrates how such men could hold a religious identity privately even in the absence of a community religious identity. The private nature of this identity may have made it difficult to trace and thus contributed to Ballard's findings.

With the foregoing evidence it is possible to reformulate Ballard's observation. Indian seafarers' religious identity in Britain existed outside of dramatic events such as Partition as a private identity and not necessarily as a community identity. This suggests a shift away from the public and community-based religious identity on shipboard. In contrast, Diane Robinson-Dunn argued that Indian seafarers "saw their faith as universal and made it conspicuous in English society".⁴⁶ In support of her argument, Robinson-Dunn points to public celebrations such as "Mahommedan Jubilee" in which "the Lascars of the Mahommedan persuasion at the East end of town had a grand religious festival," with celebrations and parades through the streets. Festivals such as these can be compared, however, to Conzen's treatment of British migrants' celebrations of Saint's Days in America. Migrants became English and Scottish for the duration of the celebrations, but when the day was over became ordinary Americans again. Thus, such days acted as an "emotional safety valve, a sort of episodic communalism".⁴⁷ Other scholars pointed to the deliberate apostasy of Indian seafarers. Lahiri's study revealed Lascars adopted a "pluralistic and pragmatic approach" to religion, neither wholeheartedly embracing

⁴³ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 163.

⁴⁴ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Robinson-Dunn, Diane, "Lascar Sailors and English Converts: The Imperial Port and Islam in Late Nineteenth Century England", presented at Seascapes, Littoral Cultures and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges, Washington D.C., 2003.

⁴⁷ Conzen, Kathleen; Gerber, David; Morawska, Eva; Pozzetta, George and Vecoli, Rudolph: 'The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 12, No.1, Fall, 1992, p.19.

Christianity nor rejecting it so they could maintain their access to the benefits which accrued from contact with missionaries.⁴⁸

Indian seafarers changing religious identity after settling in Britain can be read as a form of apostasy designed to maximise benefits and resources. Tilly argued that chain migration reduced risks as “reliance on established interpersonal networks for information minimizes and spreads the risk”.⁴⁹ In theory, interpersonal networks established upon religious identities performed a similar function. However, this would result in resources and contacts being thinly spread. In contrast, interpersonal networks established upon local identities and kinship groups would have a smaller reach. Here we can adapt and apply Frank Parkin’s theory of social closure. This is the process whereby collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles.⁵⁰ This approach affords Indian seafarers a greater degree of agency. It allows us to explore the reasoning underpinning Indian seafarers’ decisions in choosing between different identities in different contexts. In contrast to established theories of chain migration it shows that local and kin based identities were not the only choice and invites us to consider why they chose such identities.

National and Political Identities

Exploring the national identities of Indian seafarers helps us to investigate the range of identities they had but also to appreciate how identities changed over time. The complex negotiation of national identities that Indian seafarers were often faced with is evident in oral history accounts. National identities were thrown into focus by large scale events such as the Partition leading to the birth of India and Pakistan and the later formation of Bangladesh. Nawab Ali described his participation in both campaigns. He related stories of Jinnah’s visit to London where “we invited him to a cafe in Backchurch Lane and gave

⁴⁸ Lahiri, Shompa, “Patterns of Resistance: Indian Seamen in Imperial Britain”, in Kershaw (Ed.), *Language, Labour and Migration*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, p. 171 – 2.

⁴⁹ Tilly, “Transplanted networks”, p.84.

⁵⁰ Parkin, Frank, “Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation”, in Parkin (Ed.), *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, London: Tavistock, 1979, p.3.

him a party and told him we wanted Pakistan".⁵¹ But he later supported the campaign for Bangladesh too. For example, Ali recalled with pride the role of family members as guerrillas in this campaign. He related similar stories of the various meetings and support for the creation of Bangladesh within the diasporic community in Britain.⁵² This illustrates a change in both personal and collective identities.

Contemplation of identity and Partition can also reinforce Amartya Sen's argument that existence of choice could co-exist with constraints restricting choice. Thus, although choices exist people may not be able to choose them. The impact of the Partition on Indian seafarers' identities illustrates that external factors can lead to confusion and restrict choice. For example, Fazol Karim recalled that "before the ship reached London, India was divided into two countries. I did not know which way to go, so I decided to stay in London".⁵³ The confusion caused by Partition is evident in other oral history accounts too. Abdul Malik's statement that "at that time seamen were coming here from Bangladesh... India... No – that time it had become Pakistan... I had a Pakistan passport" reflected some of this uncertainty.⁵⁴ Thus, responses to Partition illustrated the agency of Indian seafarers to construct identities but also how choice could be curtailed by outside forces.

Seafarers from the Indian subcontinent were also British subjects until Partition and the British withdrawal from India. Their use of British subject status as a collective identity is explored later in this chapter. However, a sense of Britishness was also among the multiplicity of personal identities that they could choose from. Nawab Ali recalled his resistance to joining the British Army or Air force. His refusal resulted in a trial where he was advised to plead that "the Government never helped me... only my family helped me, so why should I fight for Britain?" Despite this, Ali stated that "I did want Britain to win the war – I was born under the British flag and I support Britain".⁵⁵ Others maintained a hybrid identity. For example, Syed Rasul stated that "I still have my land

⁵¹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p. 84.

⁵² Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.84.

⁵³ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.24-5.

⁵⁴ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.118.

⁵⁵ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.78-9.

over there – it is still my own country. I think I am fifty-fifty, half Pakistani, half British”.⁵⁶ Thus, we can begin to reconstruct the wide range of identities Indian seafarers could choose from. Furthermore, “Britishness” demonstrates how individual Indian seafarers chose to portray different aspects of identity. The difficulties in constructing meta-narratives or generalisations about identity therefore become clear.

This is further emphasised by the case of Dada Amir Haider Khan. Khan was a seafarer from the Rawalpindi district of the Punjab. He ran away to sign up for the British merchant navy at a young age, but after becoming disillusioned with the pay and conditions jumped ship in America. Khan served in the American merchant navy before leaving to work in various occupations ashore. Khan displayed an initial apathy towards Britishness. He recalled his feelings on swearing an oath of allegiance to the USA, “I had never felt or declared any kind of allegiance to British India. The declaration did not mean disloyalty to India... it simply meant that I was renouncing my position as a British subject”.⁵⁷ Such feelings were accentuated and channelled by meeting members of the Gardar (or Ghardar) Party. The Gardar Party was founded by migrants in Canada and America who linked their ill-treatment in these countries with the political situation in India; “till she got her independence, no Indian could expect an honourable treatment in any country of the world”.⁵⁸ The term Gardar means revolt or rebellion and the party drew inspiration from the rebellion of 1857.⁵⁹ Khan described Gardar members as “the sworn enemy of British rule in India”.⁶⁰ Khan’s story contrasts sharply with those related above of Ali and Rasul. This again emphasises the difficulty in creating generalisations. It also demonstrates the range of identities Indian seafarers could choose from and their agency in selecting different identities.

His involvement with the organisation saw a change in the way he identified himself and the categories he used to describe his identities. He saw his involvement with them as seminal to the growth of his political identity. He recalled:

⁵⁶ Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, p.185.

⁵⁷ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.125.

⁵⁸ Chabra, G.S., *Advanced Study in the History of Modern India*, Lotus Press, 2004, p. 595.

⁵⁹ Prashad, Vijay, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, Page 127.

⁶⁰ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.208.

At the age of twenty I was experiencing a strong patriotic urge to work for the freedom of my country, though I did not have a systematic understanding of the political problems that confronted India. I knew that Indians must be allowed to rule their own country, and that British rule must be ended...⁶¹

He further added that “the idea of Indians being called British subjects seemed galling to say the least”.⁶² His involvement with the group thus led to a strong rejection of his identification and categorization as “British”. While demonstrating his detachment from “Britishness”, these incidents also illustrate the strength of his emotional attachment to the campaign for an independent India.

The change in his identity extended beyond a transformation in how he categorised himself. It also led to a change in his perception of his social location and of how he was prepared to act. Serving on ships would now “serve the national cause” by allowing him opportunities to smuggle firearms and literature to India.⁶³ He also actively sought to distribute Party literature amongst the Indian diasporic communities at different ports. He noted that he was “willing to neglect the duty for which I was employed to fulfil a higher form of duty – the duty to my native country, for which I was willing to face any consequences”.⁶⁴ His distribution of Gardar party literature led him into trouble in Hong Kong when the British authorities arrested him after boarding his ship and attempting to search his belongings.⁶⁵ Thus, we can see how the identities of Indian seafarers could change over time.

The Gardar Party was the first political organisation Khan was involved in. Khan later joined the Industrial Workers of the World (known as the IWW or Wobblies). This organisation aimed to combine first the North American working class and then the workers of the world into “One Big Union” and then a “workers’ commonwealth”.⁶⁶ His involvement with this organisation came about as a result of a diminution of his involvement in nationalist politics and organisations. He recorded a feeling of distance

⁶¹ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.216.

⁶² Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.217.

⁶³ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.216.

⁶⁴ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.222.

⁶⁵ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, pp. 233 – 245.

⁶⁶ Benton, Gregor, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917 – 1945*, New York: Routledge, 2007, p.11.

and isolation from the same: “there was no one who could enlighten me about happenings in India” and “thereafter I could very rarely find news of India”.⁶⁷ It was at this point that he joined the IWW. In some ways his association with this organisation fulfilled a need for a feeling of commonalty and connectedness. He stated that he joined the IWW as “class struggle and solidarity were more appealing to me than ever before”.⁶⁸ He also documented the close friendships between himself and fellow IWW members and recalled how members helped each other. For example he described how a fellow member helped him find his way around a new city and offered him money.⁶⁹ Charting the changing political identities of Khan reinforces how Indian seafarers could choose different identities at different times. Further, the help and support that his political identities opened up can be compared to the networks of information and resources associated with chain migration. Finally, his involvement in politics demonstrates how individual Indian seafarers could participate in politics. It demonstrates that Indian seafarers were not merely coolies or workers but political beings too.

Khan later joined the Communist Party of the USA and described his “passionate urge” to visit Russia. He was sent there and attended the “Eastern Communist University”. Other Indian seafarers were also involved in the Communist Party. For example, they were involved in transporting and distributing Communist reading materials. Suspicions were raised that Indian seafarers were responsible for the arrival of Communist literature at Bombay and Colombo.⁷⁰ There were also reports that Indian seafarers were transporting arms to Communist activists within India.⁷¹ This helps to illustrate the wide variety of identities of Indian seafarers. However, the case of a Communist consciousness or identity among Indian seafarers was fervently disputed. This was set against a backdrop of a general fear and suspicion of Communism from the 1920s throughout the period. Concerns centred on the ideological threat in addition to the danger Communist expansion posed to Britain and her colonies. The British government were gravely concerned with the spread of Communism among Indian seafarers and attempted to

⁶⁷ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.286.

⁶⁸ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.287.

⁶⁹ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p. 303-4.

⁷⁰ India Office Records [hereafter IOR] L/PJ/12/49 File 4968/21 Page 186: Extract from the Weekly Report of the Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department, Government of India, 19th November 1924.

⁷¹ IOR L/PJ/12/49 File 4968/21 Page 173: Indian Communist Party, 03.09.1924.

refute the existence of such an identity. They blamed Communist activists for “corrupting” Indian seafarers, thus denying that they could hold this identity or use this identity of their own choice. For example, we see references to “the ease with which an unintelligent class like the Lascars can be corrupted”.⁷² The presence of Communist or anti-British identities and feelings are attributed to the actions of such activists. For example, Charles Piper, member of the Communist Party of Great Britain was held liable for the actions of Indian “Lascars”:

After a few weeks the Lascars who had previously been well behaved and had shown no interest in politics, were heard voicing expressions such as “The King and Queen should be put in prison”, “Churchill should be shot” and “Britain betrayed Yugo-Slavia and Greece.” It was very obvious to Piper’s work mates that he was responsible for the sudden change in behaviour on the part of the Indians, but was never heard talking politics to them.⁷³

Thus, we can appreciate how the agency of Indian seamen to explore and employ different identities could be curtailed. The attempt by British authorities to control the portrayal of this identity was coupled with intense monitoring of Communist Party members as seen by the profusion of intelligence reports tracking their activities. The British authorities’ suspicions and intense monitoring of Communist Party activists may have resulted in such identities being pushed underground. This case study also serves to illustrate that Indian seafarers could not always choose how such identities would be portrayed.

This exploration of personal identities through personal narratives such as oral histories and autobiography has shown the breadth of the identities of Indian seafarers. It has expanded our frame of analysis beyond regional identities alone. It has shown how identities were not immutable but could change over time. The agency of Indian seafarers was illustrated through exploring how they could choose different identities at different times. At the same time, we recognised that that existence of choice does not indicate that there are no constraints restricting choice. For example, we considered how others represented the identities of Indian seafarers.

⁷² IOR R/20/A/3195 File 450: Letter from Secretary to Government of Bombay, Home Department (Special) to Secretary to Government of India, Home Department (Political), 8th August 1923, No. SD1392.

⁷³ IOR L/PJ/12/630 File 1373/39, page 117: Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 196, 25th June 1941: Communist propaganda amongst Indian seamen.

Collective Identities: Indian Seafarers' use of "Britishness"

The previous section used personal narratives to investigate personal identities but also how individuals invested in collective identities. The next section of this chapter explores the construction and adaptation of the boundaries of collective identities. Historians have not considered how Indian seafarers constructed, manipulated and maintained the boundaries of their collective identity. Instead historians concentrated on how British authorities redrew the boundaries of identity and belonging according to the needs of the times. For example, Marika Sherwood explored the various interpretations of British status that Indian seafarers were subject to at different times. She plotted how their British subject status became more secure as "the burgeoning products of the Industrial Revolution demanded new outlets, the demand for shipping increased and the old maritime laws were seen as an obstacle to growth in overseas trade".⁷⁴ Laura Tabili's analysis of the Coloured Alien Seamen Order also revealed the ability of the British authorities to revise the boundaries of Britishness.⁷⁵ Such approaches are useful for understanding the context in which Indian seafarers operated. However, it presents an unbalanced view of the topic. In contrast, this section investigates how Indian seafarers manipulated the boundaries of identities, particularly of "Britishness". It does this by retaining a comparative perspective. Exploring the wider labour market in which Indian seafarers were operating reveals the competition and competing identity claims they faced. Historians noted that competition in the international maritime labour market was discernible not only between British and Indian seafarers but also between various maritime networks of the Indian Ocean region and South Asia.⁷⁶

A theoretical framework to approach this topic can be constructed from the holistic approach to identity outlined in the Introduction. Investigating collective identities requires a conceptualisation of identity that reflects feelings of commonalty, connectedness and groupness. Homi Bhabha in particular concentrated upon the

⁷⁴ Sherwood, Marika, 'Race, nationality and employment among Lascar seamen, 1660 to 1945', *New Community*, 17, 2, p.232.

⁷⁵ Tabili, Laura, "The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 33, No.1, January 1994, pp.54-98.

⁷⁶ Ahuja, Ravi, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900-1960", *International Review of Social History*, 51, 2006, p. 129.

boundaries between identities. He argued that rigid distinctions between the coloniser and colonised are impossible to maintain. Instead, he demonstrated how the coloniser's cultural meanings can be appropriated, translated and rehistoricized by the colonised.⁷⁷ This takes place in the Third Space or boundary between these identities. If we apply this to the relationship between the British authorities and Indian seafarers we understand how the established historiography is problematic. Frank Parkin's theory of social closure can also enhance our understanding of this process. His study revealed forms of competitive social action designed to maximize claims to rewards and opportunities.⁷⁸ In the case of Indian seafarers, it can be argued that the British authorities were using practices of social closure based upon strategies of exclusion. Strategies of exclusion were the attempt by a given social group to maintain or enhance its privileges by the process of subordination or the creation of a group of ineligibles beneath it.⁷⁹ The British authorities used British nationality and subject status as the justificatory basis for excluding non-European seafarers from employment opportunities. In turn Indian seafarers deployed strategies of solidarism which attempted to exert pressure upwards and stake a claim to the resources and opportunities associated with British subject status. However, this restricts consideration to the boundaries between British and Indian identities.

Applying such an approach would present Indian seafarers as a homogeneous mass and neglect to consider differences among them. In addition, Indian seafarers did not exist in isolation but competed for jobs with British, European and other Non-European seafarers. Ahuja considered the competition between Indian and other maritime networks and noted that networks could be used to block off mobility opportunities for others. Thus, maritime networks structured the access of the various communities to the international maritime labour market.⁸⁰ However, Ahuja concentrated on the relationships and competition between different communities of seafarers. He did not consider in any detail the manner in which they could construct inclusive or exclusive identities in an attempt to structure access to resources. Thus, the actual processes of

⁷⁷ Bhabha, Homi, "The Commitment to Theory", in Bhabha, Homi (Ed.), *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Parkin, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation", p.4.

⁷⁹ Parkin, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation", p.4.

⁸⁰ Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment", pp. 129 -132.

inclusion or exclusion were neglected. Here we must recall Brah's argument that border crossings do not only occur across the "dominant/dominated" dichotomy and that minorities are positioned in relation not only to majorities but also with respect to one another.⁸¹ This affords a further opportunity to explore how the boundaries of identity were demarcated by considering whether different types of social closure were in operation. Parkin argued that social collectivities can use dual strategies of closure.⁸² Thus, Indian seafarers could use strategies of solidarism and inclusion in their relations with British authorities and seafarers but use strategies of exclusion towards other seafarers allowing them to maximize their claims to resources. We shall now explore this hypothesis.

Those at the boundaries of identities were often most vulnerable to shifts in their definitions. Anglo-Indians or Asians of mixed race descent were on the "boundary" between the Indian and British populations. They are described by Lionel Caplan as "'hybrid', 'métis' or 'mestizo' populations, enduring legacies of the colonial encounter which fostered sexual relations between European men and local women".⁸³ Ballhatchet described how Eurasians came to be viewed with "uneasy disfavour" as they threatened to bridge the distance between the ruling race and the people".⁸⁴ Before proceeding to consider the above debate, it is helpful to first consider the general position of Anglo-Indians under British rule. The status of Anglo-Indians was subject to flux and change over time.⁸⁵ The changes in the position of Anglo-Indians in British India were charted by Ronald Hyam. Hyam demonstrated how intermarriage between Britons and Indians was encouraged in the later eighteenth century and that Anglo-Indians were seen as the "bulwark" of the growth of the East India Company.⁸⁶ Attitudes began to change, however, during the 1790s. Events such as the uprising in Santa Domingo appeared to illustrate the disloyalty of Anglo-Indians. In 1791, Anglo-Indians were no longer

⁸¹ Brah, Avtar "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities", in her *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.189 and p.210.

⁸² Parkin, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation", p.13.

⁸³ Caplan, Lionel, *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Post-Colonial World*, Oxford, Berg, 2001, p.1.

⁸⁴ Ballhatchet, Kenneth, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793 – 1905*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Caplan, *Children of Colonialism*, p.4

⁸⁶ Hyam, Ronald, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, pp. 115 – 116.

appointed to civil, military or marine services in British India.⁸⁷ Tensions became increasingly fraught in post-Rebellion India as Britons became increasingly suspicious of Anglo-Indians and miscegenation was disapproved of.⁸⁸

Even when their status appeared to be stable there remained a measure of confusion and ambiguity. Caplan drew attention to their contradictory legal status under the British “which on the one hand encouraged them to think of themselves as no different from other Indians, and on the other fostered the conviction that they were British and shared the latter’s colonial aims”.⁸⁹ Thus, the British employed methods of exclusion and inclusion seemingly simultaneously. Portraying Anglo-Indians as no different from the mass of Indian society and thus as intrinsically “Indian” provided the British with justificatory basis for exclusion. Yet the British and European character of Anglo-Indians was also emphasized. Thus they were regarded as distinct from other Indians and allowed some of the privileges and opportunities associated with “Britishness”. For example, Anglo-Indians one or two generations removed from Europeans were permitted to be tried before a High Court rather than a “Native” judge.⁹⁰ This meant that in a time of crisis, such as the Rebellion of 1857, the British could draw on the Anglo-Indian population for support by stressing their loyalty and European character. We can see this process of portraying Anglo-Indians as “British but not quite” as an example of social closure as exclusion employed to exclude Anglo-Indians from a British identity and the opportunity and resources that came with this.

In addition to this, Anglo-Indian seafarers saw additional ambiguities and fluctuations in their status as “British” seafarers. The Anglo-Indian Association recalled how “suddenly in the year 1878-79 it was discovered... that persons brought up in this country were ‘wanting in backbone’”, leading to exclusion from the Pilot Service and to a belief among local shipping authorities that Anglo-Indians should only ship as “indentured Lascars” and not as British seamen.⁹¹ This was later declared “erroneous” and Anglo-Indians were permitted to ship on European articles again. In 1904 Anglo-Indian seafarers were faced

⁸⁷ Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, p. 97.

⁸⁸ Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, p. 118.

⁸⁹ Caplan, *Children of Colonialism*, p.94.

⁹⁰ Caplan, *Children of Colonialism*, p.95.

⁹¹ IOR, L/E/7/481: 21st March 1904: Imperial Anglo-Indian Association to Marine Department, Government of Bengal; Enclosure No. 2 in 2, in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433 of 1904.

with the prospect of losing the privilege to serve on British Articles of Agreement and being placed upon “Lascar” articles. This episode arose from several cases of Anglo-Indian seafarers becoming destitute in Britain. The problem as the British authorities saw it was of “Eurasians of Indian birth” being employed under the ordinary articles applying to British sailors and not under the special agreements which made the employer liable for their return to their native country.⁹² Thus, Anglo-Indian seafarers serving on British Articles of Agreement were not able to be “repatriated” at the expense of the shipping companies under Sections 125 and 185 of the English Merchant Shipping Act. Instead, the cost of their maintenance and repatriation fell upon the British state. It was against this background that the India Office decided to explore the possibility of Anglo-Indian seafarers being restricted to Lascar Articles.

The authorities and apparatus of the British state in India held contradictory opinions on this matter. The Acting Commissioner in Sind applied the definition of “natives” as set out in Article 37 of the Civil Service Regulations. This stated “natives” to be “Any person born and domiciled within the dominions of His Majesty in India... of parents habitually resident in India and not established there for temporary purposes only.”⁹³ The Advocate General at Bombay suggested the term “Native seaman” should include “every Eurasian of mixed race born in British India” but allowed that “Native seamen is thus a wider term than Lascar”. Others challenged this with the definition of native set out in the Resolution of the Government of India, 29th March 1901. This stated:

...Opinion is given that the words ‘native seamen’ as used in section 29 of the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1883 should not be held to include ‘statutory natives’ but should be read in the ordinary meaning of the word native as referring to the indigenous as opposed to the European or Eurasian inhabitants of India.⁹⁴

Thus we can see how the confusion surrounding the definition and status of Anglo-Indians under British rule created additional problems for Anglo-Indian seafarers. For these men, the problem extended from their status in British India to their working lives

⁹² IOR, L/E/7/481, 20th November 1903: R&S 2747/03, Revenue No.171, India Office to Governor General of India in Council.

⁹³ IOR, L/E/7/481, 9th May 1904: The Acting Commissioner in Sind to Marine Department, Government of Bombay; Enclosure 8 in No. 6 in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433 of 1904.

⁹⁴ IOR L/E/7/481: 13th April 1904: Bengal Chamber of Commerce to Marine Department, Government of Bengal; Enclosure 1 in No. 2, in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433 of 1904.

and definitions of their status abroad. Such confusion served to emphasize the argument that such men were not fully British.

The extent of the “Britishness” of Anglo-Indian seafarers was also questioned by British authorities. Some authorities constructed a sliding scale of the “Britishness” of the Anglo-Indian community that measured the extent of their British or European characteristics. For example, the Government of India’s summary of opinion stated that Anglo-Indians “approximate on the one hand to pure Europeans and on the other to pure Asiatics, while all degrees of colour between these extremes are represented”.⁹⁵ This proposed a wide and inclusive definition of the Anglo-Indian community. It suggested that while they may differ in the extent of their European characteristics there was some defining characteristic which meant that they should all be grouped under the term Anglo-Indian. The idea of a “scale” was echoed by the Commissioner of Customs, Salt, Opium and Abkari, Bombay. He argued that the terms “East Indian and Eurasian” included “persons of widely different classes”.⁹⁶ According to him, the different classes ranged from “those whose upbringing and habits are wholly European” to “others who, except by name and dress, are hardly to be distinguished from ordinary natives of India”.⁹⁷ Thus, he believed that race and assimilation to “European” characteristics were not uniform throughout the “Eurasian” population. As a result, the Commissioner believed it would be “inconvenient” to apply the same rules to all Eurasians. This understanding suggested that some privileges should be accorded to those Anglo-Indians portraying strong European characteristics. The Commissioner went on to discuss the injustice in “rendering all Eurasians without distinction subject to the same rules”. Despite this, there was no suggestion of allowing different rules for the more Anglicised groups of Anglo-Indians and additionally his proposals were not implemented. Thus, the response of the British authorities was to consider a wide and inclusive definition of Eurasian or Anglo-Indian.

⁹⁵ IOR L/E/7/481, 8th December 1904, No. 433 of 1904, Government of India to Secretary of State for India.

⁹⁶ IOR L/E/7/481, 1st March 1904: The Commissioner of Customs, Salt, Opium and Abkari, Bombay to Marine Department, Government of Bombay; Enclosure 4 in No. 6 in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433 of 1904.

⁹⁷ IOR L/E/7/481, 1st March 1904: The Commissioner of Customs, Salt, Opium and Abkari, Bombay to Marine Department, Government of Bombay; Enclosure 4 in No. 6 in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433 of 1904.

The replies of the Anglo-Indian associations contrasted with the opinions of the authorities as they challenged the inclusive definition of Anglo-Indian. Instead they emphasized the British and European characteristics of the Anglo-Indian community. They also contested the definition of Anglo-Indian that included those of “pure Asiatic class”. Instead, they constructed an exclusive identity that excluded those characteristics labelled as particularly Indian. For example, the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association argued that the reputation of Anglo-Indians was tainted by the “many persons of pure Asiatic descent, adopting European names and dress” who were “wrongly ranked” as Anglo-Indians.⁹⁸ In the same petition, the Association also derided the Government’s continued use of the term “Eurasian” after the community had rejected it. Thus they excluded those of “pure Asiatic descent” from Anglo-Indian identity. The authorities had used British characteristics as the justificatory basis for the exclusion of the Anglo-Indian community from a full British identity. They depicted Anglo-Indians as characterized by a hybrid British-Indian identity. This somewhat strengthened the argument that Anglo-Indian seafarers should be restricted to Lascar Articles. In contrast, the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association attempted to underplay the hybrid nature of Anglo-Indian identities.

Other Anglo-Indian Associations demonstrated similar responses. For example, the European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association stated that it was possible that some people of “Asiatic descent bearing Christian names” were manipulating the system and shipping on British articles. They made it clear, however, that “*the large majority are either of pure or mixed European descent, domiciled in India, and conforming as much as possible to English habits of life and adopting English ideas*”.⁹⁹ This statement depicted those of “Asiatic descent” as interlopers. In contrast, the “pure” nature of Anglo-Indians and their assimilation and adoption of English characteristics was highlighted. Thus, they attempted to draw a stark contrast between the two identities and communities. The desire to distance themselves from the mass of the Indian population was also evident in a further statement by the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association. This noted that while they did not wish to speak “slightingly” of those who attempted to imitate Anglo-Indians, they wanted to “*hold their community aloof from any section of their own or any other*

⁹⁸ IOR L/E/7/481 21st March 1904: Imperial Anglo-Indian Association to Marine Department

⁹⁹ IOR L/E/7/481 16th May 1904: European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association to Government of Bengal; Enclosure 1 in No. 3 in Government of India: Commerce Department, Despatch No. 433. Emphasis my own.

community, who may accept the conditions of foreign service but repudiate them when they fail from defects of personal and individual character".¹⁰⁰ Thus, they attempted to construct exclusionary strategies of social closure to protect their own access to resources and privileges.

From the above sources, we can see that the British authorities constructed Britishness as an exclusive identity through emphasizing an inclusive definition of Anglo-Indian identity. They used Britishness as a justificatory basis for exclusion. In contrast, the Anglo-Indian community employed strategies of social closure as solidarity. They constructed an identity based upon their assimilation, similarities and connections to Britishness. This was an attempt to direct pressure upwards and stake a claim to the resources and opportunities associated with Britishness. At the same time they deployed strategies of exclusion towards the mass of the Indian population. They too adopted the mantra of "Britishness" as a basis for exclusion.

A further example of the vulnerabilities of those at the boundaries of identities is found in the debates surrounding the application of the British Shipping Assistance Act of 1935. The Act provided financial assistance to the Tramp shipping industry. Some contemporaries argued that subsidies should only be paid to ships employing British seafarers. As a result the criteria for British subject status became central to the debate. The demand that the subsidy be restricted to ships employing British seafarers demonstrates social closure based upon strategies of exclusion in practice. This arose from the perceived need to protect their resources, opportunities and privileges. In this case strategies of exclusion were employed to protect and enhance their employment opportunities on tramp ships. British nationality and subject status were employed as the justificatory basis for exclusion. Thus the boundaries of this identity were more carefully defined and controlled. For example, it was feared that vessels employing Lascars and getting subsidy at the same rate as vessels with white crews would be at an advantage.¹⁰¹ This led to concerns that the subsidy would encourage the employment of Lascars instead of crews to which the National Maritime Board's rates and conditions

¹⁰⁰ IOR L/E/7/481 21st March 1904: Imperial Anglo-Indian Association to Marine Department, Government of Bengal. Emphasis my own.

¹⁰¹ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from W. Carter, Mercantile Marine Office to Croft, India Office, 18th May 1939.

applied.¹⁰² The Trade Unions were also anxious that “nothing must be done which might encourage ship owners to employ Lascars instead of UK seamen”.¹⁰³ There are records of protests against ships receiving the subsidy employing Lascars coupled with a demand that the crews of ships receiving subsidy should be granted National Maritime Board wage rates.¹⁰⁴ The second demand was intended to reduce the employment of “Lascars” by making them more expensive to employ.

Government departments were also concerned with minimising the impact for the Lascars who were British subjects. Lumby, of the India Office, wrote of the necessity of considering British seafarers but of also taking into account the Government of India’s fear of changes which would prejudice the employment of Lascars.¹⁰⁵ The representatives of Indian seafarers also challenged their exclusion from the subsidy. Aftab Ali, leader of the Indian Seamen’s Union of Calcutta and the All-India Seamen’s Federation stressed the Britishness of Indian seafarers. He argued that “the members of his union could not understand why the British stipulated that only British sailors should be employed... when the Indian seamen themselves were members of the British Commonwealth”.¹⁰⁶ This was a direct challenge to the argument that jobs on ships receiving subsidy should be reserved for British seafarers. Ali challenged “Britishness” as the justificatory basis for excluding Indian seafarers by stressing their inclusion in this identity. The plight of Indian seafarers under the Act was also taken up by Jamnadas M. Mehta.¹⁰⁷ He attempted to legitimise his demand with the argument that “Indian shipping was effectively throttled a century ago... the presence of Indian seamen on

¹⁰² IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from W. Carter, Mercantile Marine Office to Croft, India Office, 18th May 1939.

¹⁰³ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Minute Paper by E.W.R. Lumby, India Office regarding United Kingdom Tramp Shipping Subsidy Scheme: letter from Board of Trade regarding employment of Lascars.

¹⁰⁴ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from W. Carter, Mercantile Marine Office to Croft, India Office, 18th May 1939.

¹⁰⁵ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Minute Paper by E.W.R. Lumby, India Office regarding United Kingdom Tramp Shipping Subsidy Scheme: letter from Board of Trade regarding employment of Lascars.

¹⁰⁶ Modern Records Centre [hereafter MRC], MSS.292/655/6: Report of meeting regarding employment of Indian seamen on British ships held at Transport House on Monday 2nd November 1936.

¹⁰⁷ Mehta was Chairman of the Indian Federation of Labour, Vice President of the Servants of India Society, and President of the BB and CI Railway Employee’s Union. He was the ex-finance minister for Bombay, a representative of the Democratic Swaraj Party and was elected as a Member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly. He later provided a foreword to the anonymously authored *Gandhi-Muslim Conspiracy*. He was linked to the Hindu Mahasabha and was also connected to the release of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1937.

British ships is but an inadequate compensation".¹⁰⁸ He extended his argument of support to other non-European seafarers. He argued that "Chinese, Arabs and Indians" were "as good British subjects as the MPs who demanded their dismissal". Mehta spoke from his somewhat powerful position within the Indian labour movements and the Indian independence movement. As we shall see, the inclusive identity he proposed differed to the strategies of individual seafarers who navigated the consequences of the act independently.

The Act additionally led to a debate that clearly illustrated the variety of positions and statuses held by Indian seafarers. The debate explored the wider interpretation of "Indian" and the various statuses attributed to different Indian seafarers. Discussions particularly centred on the "Britishness" of Indians who were British Protected Persons and Indian State Subjects. Initially Indians who were British Protected Persons were given priority over "other Aliens" but were only to be employed when no "suitable British subjects were available".¹⁰⁹ The protests of British Protected Persons were even compared to other "Aliens" such as Spaniards and Chileans although it was acknowledged that they were "British nationals in the widest sense of the term".¹¹⁰ It was recognised that the application of the Act created "discrimination between British Protected Persons and British Coloured Subjects" as well as between seafarers from British India and those from the Native States.¹¹¹ This emphasised the particularly vulnerable position of such men under the Act. In 1936 it was then decided that British Protected Persons could be employed on subsidized ships in the same way as British subjects if backed up by satisfactory evidence of their status.¹¹²

Those at the boundaries of British identity were particularly vulnerable and risked losing their employment upon British tramp ships. However, other Indian seafarers were mistakenly placed within this category. It is noticeable that such men stressed their

¹⁰⁸ MRC MSS.292/655/6: Letter from Jamnadas Mehta to Walter Citrine, Secretary to General Council, Trades Union Congress, 2nd April 1935.

¹⁰⁹ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from Vernon, India Office to Undersecretary of State, Board of Trade, 3rd October 1935.

¹¹⁰ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Employment of Protected Persons on ships in receipt of subsidy: Meeting 13th November 1935 in Carter's room to discuss Tramp Shipping Subsidy.

¹¹¹ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Employment of Protected Persons on ships in receipt of subsidy: Meeting 13th November 1935 in Carter's room to discuss Tramp Shipping Subsidy.

¹¹² IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Note by E&O2266/1936: Political Secretary (Internal).

Britishness and British subject status in their protests. For example, in 1935 Abdul Qayum wrote a letter of complaint after being refused employment on a tramp steamer. He emphasised “we are British seamen”.¹¹³ Qayum also deliberately differentiated himself and his colleagues from those of dubious British subject status. He wrote “we are [all] of us nine men British subjects, born in India and we have our British seamen’s passports, not British Protected and not alien and not otherwise”.¹¹⁴ He further emphasised this point in writing “I have a true British Indian seamen’s passport and my less fortunate countrymen who have issued to them a British Indian Protected subjects passport”.¹¹⁵ Thus, he employed downwards exclusionary tactics in order to differentiate himself from others to protect his own resources and privileges.

The above episodes help to illustrate Brah’s argument that minorities are positioned in relation not only to majorities but also with respect to one another.¹¹⁶ It shows that Indian seafarers were not a homogeneous mass and that there were differences in status amongst them. This also helps to demonstrate Brah’s argument that a group constituted as a “minority” along one dimension may be construed as a “majority” along another.¹¹⁷ We must also consider that differences existed between Indian and other non-European seafarers. The complaints of Mr M.A. Majid of the Indian Employees Bureau at Singapore illustrated such differences and how they could be manipulated. Majid ran an employment agency at Singapore recruiting Bengali Lascars and Malay deck crew. Majid complained that Chinese crews were being employed upon Admiralty vessels at Singapore to the detriment of “Lascar” crews. He attempted to stress the similarities between the Lascars and the British in an attempt to exert pressure upwards and stake a claim to resources and opportunities. At the same time he employed strategies of exclusion towards the Chinese seafarers who were competing for employment with the Lascars. He did so through contrasting the qualities and characteristics of the Chinese seafarers with the Lascars as “loyal British subjects”.

¹¹³ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from Mr. Abdul Qayum, South Shields, 3rd April 1935.

¹¹⁴ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from Mr. Abdul Qayum, South Shields, 3rd April 1935. Emphasis original.

¹¹⁵ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Letter from Mr. Abdul Qayum, South Shields, 3rd April 1935.

¹¹⁶ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities”, p.189 and p.210.

¹¹⁷ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities”, p.189.

Majid stereotyped Chinese seafarers and then compared them to the “superior” Lascars. He wrote that Chinese seafarers were engaged in “opium smuggling and other illicit trade activities”.¹¹⁸ In contrast, he argued that Bengali and Malay seafarers “are not smugglers, strikers, agitators, or victim of bad drinks/smokes/illicit trades, but loyal and strictly sober seamen of active parts”.¹¹⁹ His letter stressed that they “are in no way inferior to the Asiatic Seamen now serving”.¹²⁰ He also repeatedly emphasised the Britishness of the Indian and Malay seafarers. He did this by stressing that they were loyal and “British born”. For example, in a letter dated 1938 he emphasised that Bengali Lascar seamen were “loyal British born subjects” who had “rendered loyal and useful services to the Crown by serving on board the British Mercantile Marine”.¹²¹ He further highlighted their “loyalty” to Britain by arguing that “None of these Lascars having taken any part against the British Administration in India or elsewhere, for ill treatment and unjustices [sic]”. His repeated emphasis of their British credentials was the basis for his demand that they should be given preference in employment. For example, Majid attributed the unemployment and suffering of the seamen who were British subjects to the employment of Chinese. He wrote a letter of complaint stating that “Alien Chinese” were being employed while “loyal and competent British born subjects ‘Bengali Lascar and Malay Seamen’ suffer great hardships”.¹²² This statement stressed the British credentials of Lascars while simultaneously highlighting how “alien” Chinese seafarers were. Majid suggested that British “Lascars” should replace Chinese seafarers as they were “British born subjects” and so should have preference in employment.¹²³ Thus, we can see how Majid attempted to use Britishness as a basis for excluding Chinese seafarers from employment on British Admiralty vessels. Britishness was also used as a justificatory basis for closure based upon solidarity. Majid attempted to construct Britishness as a

¹¹⁸ The National Archives, UK [hereafter TNA], ADM 1/22978: M.A. Majid, Indian Employees Bureau to The Director of Stores, H.M. Admiralty, 29th June 1934.

¹¹⁹ TNA, ADM 1/22978: M.A. Majid, Indian Employees Bureau to The Director of Stores, H.M. Admiralty, 10th February 1934.

¹²⁰ TNA, ADM 1/22979: M.A. Majid, Indian Employees Bureau to The Director of Stores, The Admiralty, 23rd March 1937.

¹²¹ TNA CO/273/639/9: M. A. Majid, The Indian Employers Bureau, Singapore to Under Secretary for the Mercantile Marine, Board of Trade, 2nd September 1938.

¹²² TNA CO/273/639/9: M. A. Majid, The Indian Employers Bureau, Singapore to Under Secretary for the Mercantile Marine, Board of Trade, 2nd September 1938.

¹²³ TNA ADM 1/22978: Majid, Indian Employees Bureau to The Director of Stores, H.M. Admiralty, London, 29th June 1934.

characteristic of an identity that included British subjects and excluded Chinese seafarers. This moves beyond the historiography's concentration on how the British created and manipulated the boundaries of identity.

The protests of Majid demonstrated the competition for jobs between different non-European seafarers. The different positions and statuses accorded to these seafarers by the British authorities were highlighted during the times when the British manipulated and modified the boundaries of identity. These episodes emphasised the vulnerability of some groups and the relatively strong positions of others. Thus, such case studies allow us to explore how the different positioning of these men resulted in some being construed as a minority along one axis of differentiation but holding a more privileged position along another. They also illustrated that Indian seafarers were not alone in facing these obstacles. The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order is one example of how the British attempted to manipulate the boundaries of identity and change the criteria for British nationality. The Order can be seen as another example of social closure by exclusion with the intention of securing jobs, opportunities and advantages for a certain social group. In this case again, the justificatory basis for exclusion was British nationality and identity. For example, it was felt that "Asiatics" held a monopoly on jobs in the engine rooms of ships in the Far East. Thus, "it might reasonably be argued that having a monopoly in this field they could not reasonably expect to be allowed to compete freely in the restricted field left for white seamen".¹²⁴

The Order also created an additional layer of differentiation amongst non-European seafarers. It was understood that Indian seafarers would be exempt from this legislation as it was undesirable that British Indian subjects should be registered as aliens even temporarily.¹²⁵ It was even presented as a strategy of exclusion that benefitted certain non-European seafarers as it gave them "a definite status in this country" while preventing the entry of other coloured seamen who competed with them for

¹²⁴ IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1: Coloured Seamen – Notes of Conference held at Home Office on 5th November 1928.

¹²⁵ IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1: Secretary to Government of India, Department of Commerce to Secretaries of Bombay (Marine Department), Bengal (Marine Department), Burma (Finance and Revenue) and Madras (Finance Marine Department), 31st August 1926.

employment.¹²⁶ Despite this, several Indians were forcibly registered as Coloured Alien Seamen.¹²⁷ However, Indian and Adenese seafarers were the first amongst colonial seamen to be granted Special Certificates of Identity and Nationality.¹²⁸ These certificates allowed them to contest and avoid registration under the Order, placing them at in a privileged position compared to other non-European seamen.

Non-European seamen employed strategies of inclusion in their protests against registration. Examples can be seen in the protests against the Order from Adenese seafarers based in Cardiff and West Indians based in Barry. The Adenese, through their solicitor, emphasised how: “The trouble is that the Registration or Identity Card bears the word “Alien” or “Aliens Order” upon them... They consider themselves very much British indeed”.¹²⁹ In a letter to the Colonial Office, the West Indians emphasised their Britishness through specifically contrasting it with “foreigners”. They argued that despite being “loyal British subjects” and meeting the demands of the immigration authorities they received the “same kind of permit as actual foreigners, people of a different flag and language”.¹³⁰ They stated that they “disapproved” of the word alien being applied in their case “as we have never regarded ourselves as Aliens to Britain in peace or war”.¹³¹ This illustrated how they used the spectre of “foreigners” or “people of a different language or flag” to reinforce their portrayal of their own Britishness by direct comparison. A further letter emphasised that they were “genuine” British subjects and in comparison listed those groups whom they considered not to be, such as “Asiatics, Arabs or those of the natives of British Protectorates”.¹³² This again illustrates how when faced with certain situations seafarers could act to retain or stake a claim to resources associated with certain identities. This case study illustrates attempts at using an

¹²⁶ IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1: Aliens and Nationality Committee, Memorandum No. 185, Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order 1925.

¹²⁷ For example, see the protests of Patrick Fitzgerald and Abdul Gani IOR L/E/7/1494 File 1182. Also, the protests on behalf of Indians who were not seafarers in Glasgow in IOR L/E/7/1438 File 395. Finally, the protests of the Glasgow Indian Union also stresses that members, including those who were not seafarers, had been registered as Aliens. They demanded the protection of Indians as “British subjects in this country” in IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1.

¹²⁸ See IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1.

¹²⁹ TNA HO 45/12314: Geo. F. Willett, Solicitor, to Haldane Porter, Aliens Department, Home Office, 7th April 1925.

¹³⁰ TNA HO 45/12314: To His Britannic Majesty’s Colonial Secretary, April 14th 1925.

¹³¹ TNA HO 45/12314: To His Britannic Majesty’s Colonial Secretary, April 14th 1925.

¹³² TNA HO 45/12314: Barry Dock, C/O Missions to Seamen to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, April 30th 1925.

inclusive identity to exert pressure upwards. In doing so, the men had manipulated the differences that the British had created between the men.

Surveying such responses to the Coloured Alien Seamen Order also highlights the position of Indian seafarers. It allowed us to begin to consider Brah's argument that a group constituted as a "minority" along one dimension may be construed as a "majority" along another. We have seen that Indian seafarers were at an advantage or privilege compared to other non-European seafarers. Keeping this in mind, this section explores whether the more privileged position of Indian seafarers led to their being used in the inclusionary tactics of other non-European seafarers. The rota system introduced in South Wales, Hull and Tyneside in 1930 can be seen as a further example of the exclusionary practices of British authorities and unions. The rota was "introduced by the Shipping Federation and the National Union of Seamen... without official intervention".¹³³ The system was apparently designed so that those longest unemployed would have the first chance of employment. Tabili, however, wrote that the rota placed Arab seamen on a waiting list "confined only to the number and types of jobs the NUS [National Union of Seamen] considered fit for them".¹³⁴ The system was described by Lawless as a register divided into two parts, one for Arabs and another for Somalis, with those wishing to recruit Arab or Somali crews advised not to mix the two. Despite considering the implementation and operation of the rota system historians have not analysed the responses of the men it affected.

The seafarers affected by the rota highlighted their Britishness. This was an attempt to convince others that they did not deserve to be included in the disadvantaged identity. They attempted to emphasise their Britishness through comparisons with "others" who were not British. Their aim in doing so was to remove disadvantage and to secure the job opportunities, advantages and privileges that British identity was associated with. For example, a solicitor for the "Genuine Adenese" of Cardiff stated that they wanted to "receive preference, to the extent that they should similarly to other British subjects, be

¹³³ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: To Mr Turner, from C.E. Baines, Economic and Overseas Department, India Office, 4th April 1932.

¹³⁴ Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.108.

able to seek for a job themselves".¹³⁵ They employed exclusionary identities by deliberately contrasting their "genuine" or "real" British subject status to those Arab seafarers who were not British subjects. For example, one letter of complaint proclaims "why should the Federation treat us like the foreign Arabs whom they are belongs [sic] to Yemen and through them we suffer".¹³⁶ Another letter continued this emphasis, proclaiming "they claim that they are from Aden and they are given employment by the Shipping Federation and when we are the real British subjects and Aden born are starving with hunger in the British Empire".¹³⁷

These protests also attempted to construct an inclusive identity that included Indian and other non-European seafarers with stronger claims to British subject status. They did this through pointing out that "all the Indians, Egyptians, Maltese, Malays, Chinese and West Indians are exempted from the rota system" and demanded to be treated the same.¹³⁸ In particular, their status as British Indian subjects was evoked to claim equal treatment. For example, they lamented that "How is it that the Indian don't take number and we have to we are all under the Indian Government but why should they treat us different than anyone else".¹³⁹ They further highlighted their subject status by arguing that the rota was not binding on "British Indian seamen" carrying British Indian passports and that they were also "British Indian seamen born in Aden and he should treat us like the Indians..."¹⁴⁰

We can see how Indian seafarers were a minority along one axis of differentiation but were also constructed as a majority along another. Thus, while Indian seafarers employed dual strategies of closure based on both exclusionary and inclusive identities they could also be subject to upwards pressure through the inclusionary strategies of other "minorities". Indian seafarers' construction and control of the boundaries of identities has been illustrated. We have considered how they decided who belonged,

¹³⁵ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: B.W.I. Morgan, Solicitor, Cardiff to High Commissioner for India, 13th March 1931.

¹³⁶ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: Syed Akil Abdo Nomi and others, Cardiff, to Political Resident, 24th July 1931:

¹³⁷ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: Syed Akil Abdo Nomi and others to First Resident, Aden, 8th October 1931.

¹³⁸ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: Syed Akil Abdo Nomi and others to First Assistant Resident, Aden, 2nd October 1931.

¹³⁹ IOR L/E/9/962 Collection 141/10: Syed Akil Abdo to High Commissioner for India, 23rd April 1931.

¹⁴⁰ IOR/L/E/9/926: 24th July 1931: Syed Akil Abdo Nomi and others, Cardiff to Political Resident, Aden.

who did not and why. Furthermore, the exclusive and inclusive identities they employed to protect and enhance what they viewed as their rights and privileges were explored. We have also considered how Indian seafarers could be the target of the inclusionary strategies of other “minorities”.

Indian seafarers’ employment of inclusionary identities with the aim of protecting or gaining privileges and particularly their claims of inclusion within a British identity risked provoking British seafarers and their unions. Thus, most requests made on behalf of Indian seafarers did not demand exact parity with British seafarers. Those that did demand equality were restricted to certain contexts. Care was taken by various organisations to stress that there was no demand for exact equality with British seafarers. For example, a deputation from the Indian Seamen’s Union of Bombay regarding the accommodation of Indian seafarers stated that “they did not urge that Lascar seamen should be accorded equal treatment with European seamen as regards crew space” but that “the space at present allowed to Indian seafarers is inadequate and should be increased”.¹⁴¹ Mihbubul Huq and Aftab Ally of the Indian Seamen’s Union also argued that they did not want Indian seafarers to be put on the same terms as British. They stated “our point is that we must get our wages proportionately, adequately and justly... We do not want to come up to their wage level... but we do not like the great disproportion”.¹⁴²

The debate on climatic restrictions also emphasised that Indian seafarers were not a threat to the employment of British seafarers. For example, it was noted that if Indian seafarers were displaced owing to climatic restrictions or the short terms of their agreements they would “invariably” be replaced by Malays or Chinese and not Europeans.¹⁴³ While the Department of Commerce realised that opposition from British seafarers was likely, it was urged that “the removal of the restriction would result in the replacement of Malay and Chinese seamen (who are engaged in lieu of Indian seamen)

¹⁴¹ NAI Department of Commerce, January 1935, File Number 31-MII(5)/30, Serial Numbers 1 to 90, Part B: Extract from File NO. 21 MII(4)/30 regarding deputation from the Indian Seamen’s Union, Bombay urging consideration of various matters concerning Indian Seamen.

¹⁴² *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India*, Volume 5, Part 1.2, Bengal Including Coalfields and the Dooars, 1931: Interview with Mr. Muhbubul Huq, President and Mr. Aftab Ally, General Secretary, Indian Seamen’s Union p. 92.

¹⁴³ NAI Department of Commerce, September 1938: File No 11-MII(2)/37, Serial Numbers 1-9: Lascar Seamen’s Articles of Agreement: notes on the climate restrictions and short terms of the agreement.

and would not materially affect the interests of British seamen".¹⁴⁴ A further departmental minute also noted that "their removal would not in any measure trench on the sphere of employment of European seamen".¹⁴⁵

Where demands were compared to the conditions of British and European seafarers they were stated in a manner that was modified to complement or demonstrate advantage to them. For example, the Communist Party of Great Britain's statement on Indian seamen and the War asserted that Indian seamen's "conditions of work, the accommodation and the food scales are very much below the standard of white seamen, who themselves are one of the most exploited sections of the British working class".¹⁴⁶ Surat Alley's memorandum on behalf of the Colonial Seamen's Association similarly urged improvement in the conditions of Indian seafarers so that their "low wages and bad working conditions may not have its baneful effect on the standard of life of British seamen".¹⁴⁷ In addition, Dinkar Desai's "Maritime Labour in India" repeatedly emphasised the benefits to British seafarers of improvements to the working conditions of Indian seafarers. Desai recognised that British and European seafarers tried to exclude Indian seafarers from employment in order to safeguard their own working conditions and standards of living. In response, Desai stressed that "Indian seamen have no desire to lower the standards of their comrades in other countries and to base their claims for employment upon the cheapness of their labour".¹⁴⁸ He depicted the suggested improvements in the working conditions of Indian seafarers as beneficial to British seafarers. For example, he argued that the conditions of Indian seafarers had a demoralising effect on all seamen.¹⁴⁹ Desai took wage levels as a case study and emphasised that discrimination in wages adversely affected the interests of all seamen irrespective of their being Europeans or Indians.¹⁵⁰ He argued that the lower wages paid

¹⁴⁴ NAI Department of Commerce, September 1938: File No 11-MII(2)/37, Serial Numbers 1-9: Note by A.N.Puri, 5th April 1937.

¹⁴⁵ NAI Department of Commerce, September 1938: File No 11-MII(2)/37, Serial Numbers 1-9: Minute regarding India Office, No. E&O 8825/37, 24th December 1937.

¹⁴⁶ IOR L/P&J/12/630 File 1373/39: Communist Party of GB statement on Indian seamen and the War, 25th November 1939.

¹⁴⁷ MRC MSS.292/655/6: Copy of the Memorandum of the Colonial Seamen's Association included in Surat Alley's letter to Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, 5th December 1938.

¹⁴⁸ Desai, Dinkar, *Maritime Labour in India*, Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1939, p. 7-8.

¹⁴⁹ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.69.

¹⁵⁰ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.95.

to Indian seafarers were a threat to the livelihoods of British seafarers to demonstrate the advantage in removing the distinction. He wrote:

The low wages of Indians can be conveniently used as an argument by employers against the demand of European seamen to raise their wages. The employer can well say to European seamen: "If you demand more wages, we do not want you. We can get Indians who are willing to work at very cheap rates"... Thus the discrimination in wages helps the employers in exploiting all workers and also puts an obstacle in the way of workers for bettering their conditions.¹⁵¹

Thus, improvements to the conditions of Indian seafarers were portrayed as beneficial to British seafarers rather than as a threat.

Demands that requested absolute equality with British seafarers tend to be confined to certain contexts. Such demands could be made in the private sphere. For example, a group of Indian seafarers who were "approached and discretely questioned" stated the "intention of the crews to go on strike in the UK, demanding the same rates of pay as white British seamen... especially as white men could not do their work, owing to climatic conditions, and would certainly not attempt to do it at the rate of pay given to coloured men".¹⁵² Similar requests were made within the Indian public sphere. Several organisations interviewed during the course of the Royal Commission on Labour in India asked for equality for Indian seamen. The Indian Seamen's Union stated that "the Indian seaman should be given the same accommodation as English seamen" when replying to a question that specifically asked them to consider the "discrimination" in the allotment of accommodation between European and Indian seafarers.¹⁵³ When asked if they would like food "as good as given to the European seaman" the representatives of the Indian Seamen's Union stated that they claimed "equality in the quality of food".¹⁵⁴ The representatives of the Indian Seamen's Union of Karachi also felt that the racial

¹⁵¹ Desai, *Maritime Labour in India*, p.95.

¹⁵² IOR L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24: Report by Segt. Charles Taylor, N.J. Upadhyaya – Secretary and Organiser of the Indian Seamen's Union, no date.

¹⁵³ *RCLI*, Volume 1 Part 2: Evidence, Bombay Presidency including Sind (Oral): Mr. Mohamed Ebrahim, Serang, Acting General Secretary, Mr. A.B. Moraes, Joint Secretary, and Mr. P.G. Kanekar, Adviser representing the Indian Seamen's Union, p.225.

¹⁵⁴ *RCLI*, Volume 5, Part 1.2: Interview with Mr. Muhbulul Huq, President and Mr. Aftab Ally, General Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union, p. 86.

discrimination in wages “must be done away with”.¹⁵⁵ In this case they were asking for only a 50 to 60 per cent increase and compared this to “the fact that European seamen are getting 5 times the scale allowed to Indians”. Thus, while claiming equality they also attempted to demonstrate that there was little threat to the status of British seafarers.

Those involved in the Indian independence movement also stated demands in a similar manner. V.K. Krishna Menon was the founder of the independent India League in Britain.¹⁵⁶ This organisation aimed to support the claim of India for Swaraj. Menon made a speech in 1939 “stressing the fact that Indian seamen were only asking for the same rates of pay as British seamen”.¹⁵⁷ Jamnadas Mehta was also involved in the campaign for Indian independence but wrote from India. His tone was far more radical and demanding. Discussing the British Shipping Assistance Act he called for a ratio of 50 per cent “Oriental employees” on all British ships. Mehta warned of the retaliatory measures that Indians would be “forced” to adopt and concluded that “Indian Labour as a whole will feel bound to protest... the unemployment among British seamen, far from diminishing, will probably grow worse”.¹⁵⁸ Thus, their positions as members of the Indian independence movement allowed them greater freedom to draw direct comparisons while Mehta’s location in India allowed him to be more radical in his demands.

Conclusion

We have considered how identities were constructed and employed both at a personal and collective level. While recognising that chain migration, regional and kin identities were undoubtedly important to Indian seafarers we have expanded our knowledge of the range of identities they could hold. For example, religious and political identities were explored. Thus, Indian seafarers were not defined by a single identity but could pick and choose identities to suit the context. This highlights their agency and the conscious decision making process they employed. The changing nature of religious identities

¹⁵⁵ *RCLI*, Volume 1 Part 1: Evidence, Bombay Presidency including Sind (Written): Mr. Mulchand M. Kirpalani, Hon. General Secretary, Indian Seamen’s Union, Karachi, p. 233.

¹⁵⁶ Rozina Visram described him as the “driving force” behind the India League who “transformed it into a formidable pressure group at the heart of British politics”. See *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp. 320 -1.

¹⁵⁷ IOR L/PJ/12/452 File 721/32: Extract from New Scotland Yard Report 15th November 1939, No. 154.

¹⁵⁸ IOR L/E/9/955 Collection 141/3: Cutting from the Statesman, May 2nd 1935: Unfair Attacks on Indian Seamen: Mr. Mehta’s protest: Oriental Employees on British ships.

demonstrated this point. At the same time, we have recognised that identity choice could be restricted and that other interested parties could attempt to control the portrayal of identities. We considered how personal and collective identities could be manoeuvred to allow Indian seafarers to access resources and opportunities. For example, Indian seafarers used “Britishness” to bolster their claims to opportunities and resources. It therefore became something of a bargaining chip in their protests. Finally, we have considered how Indian seafarers could collectively employ both inclusive and exclusive identities and also how they were the subjects of the inclusive and exclusive identities of other seafarers. This demonstrated how Indian seafarers were a disadvantaged minority in some ways but a privileged majority in others. It demonstrated how Indian seafarers’ histories are interconnected with those of other non-European seafarers.

Chapter Four

The family lives of Indian seafarers

In contrast to an increasing interest in their public lives, the private lives of Indian seafarers remain unexplored. This chapter investigates the domestic backgrounds and family lives of Indian seafarers both in India and Britain. These issues left little mark on the historical record as they were largely conducted outside of the official record and public institutions. My chapter draws on oral histories and upon intermittent instances where family lives erupted onto the public record. Influenced by recent trends in immigration history, this chapter analyses the role of the family in the migration process and also the impact of immigration on family relationships and dynamics. Not all Indian seafarers settled in Britain permanently but the nature of the maritime industry resulted in a form of temporary migration as men were away from home for long stretches of time. Thus, I consider both prolonged absences and permanent migrations. The chapter also pulls together themes from previous chapters. For example, assimilation to British society is considered through Indian seafarers' marriages to British women. Thus, it continues to explore the changing nature of their local and national identities upon arrival in Britain as discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Two considered British attitudes towards Indian seafarers. This chapter continues this discussion by exploring British attitudes towards and perceptions of Indian seafarers' families. The chapter illustrates the agency of the men by showing how they managed their migrations and absences through their use of support networks. Finally, the chapter incorporates a comparative perspective by exploring how British attitudes towards Indian seafarers' families compared to other non-European seafarers. I first explore how the historiography has dealt with Lascars' backgrounds and family lives before moving on to look at families in India and then finally families in Britain.

The existing historiography: Immigration and Community histories

Works focusing on the family lives of Indian seafarers are rare. Those that have done so are explored in this section. The possibility of expanding upon these works by incorporating insights from wider histories of family and migration is also explored. Balachandran and Ahuja touched upon the families of Indian seafarers in India but have not explored them in any depth. Balachandran considered how British authorities used the Indian family in their attempts to shape the Indian maritime labour market. The British authorities wanted to create a “mobile, casual labour force of single, unattached urban-based male workers” and men with families obviously did not fit this dynamic.¹ Family allotments also helped keep wages up.² The changing needs of the maritime sector, particularly the expansion of steam shipping, necessitated a regular and reliable supply of seafarers. As a result, the circulation of men between the countryside and the port through kin networks became more common and thus the domestic background of Indian seafarers changed again.³ Thus, the backgrounds and family structure of men employed on British merchant vessels were manipulated to suit the needs of the time. Ravi Ahuja also touched upon the backgrounds and family structure of Indian seafarers. His study revealed Indian seafarers tendency to return to their home villages during labour intensive seasons of the agricultural year and thus demonstrated their agrarian and rural roots.⁴ The seafaring careers of the men were part of the household’s multiple subsistence strategies. Ahuja claimed that Indian seafarers were often the younger sons of smallholders who did not inherit the land.⁵ This suggests that Indian seafarers did not own or control their own land and that their migrations were simply to support the joint-family controlled land and properties. While the rural and agricultural backgrounds of Indian seafarers are undeniable there is still scope to challenge the assertion that they

¹ Balachandran, Gopalan, “Producing Coolies, (Un)making Workers: A (Post-)Colonial Parable for the Contemporary Present”, Unpublished Paper, http://hei.unige.ch/sections/hp/Documents/Balachandran_Producing%20Coolies.pdf, [Accessed 20/02/2010].

² Balachandran, “Producing Coolies”, p.13.

³ Balachandran, “Producing Coolies”, pp. 19 – 22.

⁴ Ahuja, Ravi, “Networks of Subordination – Networks of the Subordinated: The case of South Asian Maritime Labour under British Imperialism (c. 1890 – 1947)”, in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Ashwini Tambe (Eds.), *Spaces of Disorder: The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean*, Taylor & Francis, 2008, p.27.

⁵ Ahuja, “Networks of Subordination”, p. 26 – 27.

were not landholders. There is also scope to consider the internal relations of the family and the impact of temporary and permanent migration on families as illustrated by historians of immigration.

In contrast, historians and theorists of immigration placed the family in the home country at the centre of debate following a move away from older histories concentrating on the figure of the migrating male pauper. As a result, the single or married man seeking to amass capital with which to return to his native country is no longer the focus of studies.⁶ Attention initially shifted to women who migrated but extended to consider other instances of female and family involvement in migration flows. For example, the participation of family members in the decision to migrate has been explored. It is argued that the decision to migrate was not taken by the individual in isolation but involved family members, friends and peers.⁷ Thus, the household was the social unit which made decisions such as whether migration would take place, which family members would migrate and the resources to be allocated to the migration.⁸ Family support of the migrant has also been explored. Support in the form of loans, material support and childcare facilitated the migration of individual family members.⁹ These approaches highlight the need to consider the role of the family in India in the migration process.

Immigration theorists also considered the impact of immigration on gender relations and family relationships. For example, the impact upon the women and families left behind has been analysed by Pedraza who demonstrated the practical and emotional effect on the wives of absent male migrants. Practically, the women's lives became easier as they endured childbirth less and their children survived more often.¹⁰ Emotionally, Pedraza argued, the marriage relationship became more of a partnership as women acquired more control over their lives and a measure of dignity. Other scholars pointed to the

⁶ Pedraza, Sylvia, "Migration to the United States: Gender Aspects", in Smelser, N. and Bates, P., *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 14, p.9835.

⁷ Pryce, W.T.R., "Aspects of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish Migrations", in his, *From Family History to Community History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.32.

⁸ Pedraza, "Migration to the United States", p.9835.

⁹ Chamberlain, Mary "Gender and the Narratives of Migration", *History Workshop Journal*, 43, 1997, pp. 90-1.

¹⁰ Pedraza, Sylvia, "Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol.17, 1991, p.311

restrictions placed on women left behind by male dominated migration flows. Pamela Sharpe's study revealed that while it enhanced their decision making power and influence it also left women behind in the "traditional" sector, excluded from the "modern" world of men.¹¹ A recent study of Italian migration by Yans-McLaughlin made the pertinent point that although migration gave women additional responsibilities a wife's authority remained subject to the husband's.¹² Whilst reaching differing conclusions, such studies demonstrate the scope for exploring the impact of migration upon family and gender roles.

Historians of the South Asian diaspora have also neglected to study the families in the home country despite the profound social and ideological effects of migration on local society.¹³ Katy Gardner compared the large literature on South Asians in Britain with the little written on the communities which originally sent them.¹⁴ In contrast, her study specifically addressed the ideological change and the culture of migration in Sylhet. Her account covers both the family role in the process of migration and the impact of male dominated migrations on the families left behind. Gardner argued that migration was a household decision and was therefore organised and controlled within the household.¹⁵ She also demonstrated the impact on families and households when their members migrate. Noting that there are no universal rules regarding the effects of migration she demonstrated the variety of effects in Sylhet. These included absent households, absent men and family reunification in Britain.¹⁶ As noted in the introduction, Sylheti men were recruited for service on British merchant vessels at Calcutta. Her account does not, however, consider the families of Indian seafarers left behind in Sylhet because the changes experienced by their communities were "embryonic".¹⁷ She concentrated instead on later migrants and the impact their migrations had on Sylheti society. Gardner's account and the wider migration historiography demonstrate that it is possible

¹¹ Sharpe, Pamela "Introduction: Gender and the Experience of Migration", in Sharpe (Ed.), *Women, Gender and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2001, p.10.

¹² Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p.84.

¹³ Gardner, Katy, *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, p.2.

¹⁴ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.9.

¹⁵ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.112.

¹⁶ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, pp.114 – 120.

¹⁷ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.43.

to explore the impact of male dominated migration upon gender relations and internal family dynamics. My study also traces male dominated migration flows as Indian seafarers usually arrived in Britain on their own and occasionally sent for their families later. Later in this chapter I analyse the impact of their absence upon gender relations and power relations within the family.

The families of Indian seafarers in Britain have eluded analysis. Family life in Britain has not been a category of analysis for historians of Indian seafarers. Historians of the South Asian diaspora in Britain have also neglected to explore interracial families in detail. Katy Gardner's life histories of Bengalis in London chart the impact of migration on gender identities and relations. In this study, relationships with British women are classed as part of the transgressive behaviour young, single male migrants partook in before marrying Bengali women. Hence, she considers interracial relationships as irrelevant and not worthy of attention.¹⁸ Laura Tabili included Indian seafarers in her study of "Black seamen" in Britain. Examining the role of interracial settlements and families in Britain she concluded that interracial relationships provided Black men with a vital support network. Such relationships also encouraged and even accelerated the assimilation of Black seamen to British society.¹⁹ For example, British wives were more likely to be literate in English and conversant with British institutions and cultural practices.²⁰ In addition, marriage integrated men into local kin networks.²¹ Her work counters the eugenic discourse of British racial superiority employed by contemporary Britons. But her account is not without problems. By depicting linear assimilation to British society, Tabili does not place any value or function on the cultures and networks the men brought with them. Further, this approach does not allow for consideration of connections and relationships between families in Britain and those in the sending or mother countries.

¹⁸ Gardner, Katy, *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London*, Oxford: Berg, 2002.

¹⁹ The term assimilation is defined by Richard Alba and Victor Nee as the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences in their *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, London: Harvard University Press, 2003. Russell A. Kazal also defined assimilation as the processes which lead to greater homogeneity within a society in his "Revisiting assimilation: The Rise, Fall and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No 2, April 1995, p.158.

²⁰ Tabili, Laura, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.144.

²¹ Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice"*, p.145.

Thus, the families in Britain are depicted as cut off and isolated from the cultures of the mother countries. Furthermore, Tabili used the term “Black” seafarers to cover men from several different nationalities. Her use of the term therefore appears to homogenise their experiences and does not account for how men from different nationalities faced different problems in Britain. As I demonstrate later in the chapter, the British did not view all interracial families in the same way. Men from certain nationalities seemed to face a greater amount of criticism of their interracial relationships. Thus, the term “Black” seafarers would appear to hide these differences.

Tabili’s approach reflects the views of other migration historians. The family’s role in aiding migration to and assimilation into the host country was addressed by Kevin Schurer. He convincingly argued that the family played a key role in “supplying assistance, providing social introductions and creating employment opportunities” in the new country.²² Others saw intermarriage as a means of acquiring host country customs, language and skills in addition to providing contacts and connections with the local labour market.²³ The rates of endogamy (in-marriage) and exogamy (intermarriage) have traditionally been used as a measure of the assimilation of immigrant groups to the host society.²⁴ Endogamy involved marrying people from the same race or nationality, for example in this case Sylhetis marrying other diasporic Sylhetis. Exogamy was marriage outside of this group, for example interracial marriages to British women. These rates are seen as a measure of the interaction between immigrant groups and other groups in the host society.²⁵ Rates of intermarriage are also used as a predictor of assimilation due to the assumption that intermarriage would lead to the jettisoning of the migrant’s culture. It is often assumed, for example, that large numbers of interracial couples will lead to more children being raised in an ethnically mixed environment.²⁶

²² Schurer, Kevin, “The role of the family in the process of migration”, in Pooley, C., and Whyte, I., (Eds.), *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration*, London: Routledge, 1991, p.106.

²³ Meng, Xin and Gregory, Robert, “Intermarriage and Economic Assimilation of Immigrants”, *Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2005, p.136.

²⁴ Bugelski, B.R., “Assimilation through intermarriage”, *Social Forces*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1961, pp. 148 – 153. Also, Goebel, Michael, “Gauchos, Gringos, and Gallegos: The Assimilation of Italian and Spanish Immigrants in the making of Modern Uruguay”, *Past and Present*, Vol. 208, No. 1, 2010, pp. 191 – 229.

²⁵ Goebel, Michael, “Marriage patterns and ‘assimilation’ among Italian and Spanish immigrants in Uruguay, 1880-1914”, paper presented at Social History Society Conference 2010, April 2010.

²⁶ Goebel, “Gauchos, Gringos and Gallegos”, p.18.

Contemporary sources also support Tabili's argument. The oft-quoted case of Mrs. Mary Fayal demonstrated how British wives helped Indian seafarers deal with British institutions. Mrs. Fayal took charge of her husband's application for a British passport and also protested to the India Office on his behalf when he was registered as an alien.²⁷ Writing in 1951, Sydney Collins recorded what he believed to be the role of white women in interracial marriages and his arguments have several parallels with Tabili's. According to Collins, white women were an "intermediary" between her family and the white community therefore "concealing her husband's racial identity".²⁸ He argued that the necessity of this intermediary role rose out of racial and linguistic difficulties. Indeed, he believed that white women were held in high esteem by "coloured" men who "believe that it is possible to obtain a better understanding and greater assistance from them than a society in which they constitute the underprivileged group".²⁹

Despite this, the approach has several disadvantages. It depicts migrant families in the host or receiving country as cut off from families in the sending countries. It does not explore the internal relations and dynamics of the family in the host country as the male migrant undergoes the process of assimilation and adaptation to his new environment. There is also an assumption that intermarriage is the only form of adaptation to the new country. It presupposes that men would seek out these relationships and thus assumes that such a functional role was inevitable, wanted or necessary. Rather, as I shall illustrate later in the chapter, not all men wanted or sought out such relationships. British wives could also encourage the maintenance of cultural and familial links with India. Concluding in a simplistic manner that these relationships were merely relationships of convenience should also be avoided. This chapter will aim to explore these issues within the case study of Indian seafarers' families in Britain.

The limitations of the historiography as a whole become clear when compared to historical scholarship dealing with the families of other non-European seafarers. For

²⁷ Mohammed Fayal was a British Indian resident of the Peshawar district. Two letters from Mary Fayal appear in India Office Records [hereafter] IOR L/E/9/953 Collection 141/1. The first letter is undated; the second is addressed to the Colonial Office, 7th September 1925.

²⁸ Collins, Sydney, "The Social Position of White and Half Caste Women in Coloured Groupings in Britain", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 16, No. 6, 1951, p.800.

²⁹ Collins, "The Social Position of White and Half Caste Women", p.802.

example, Diane Frost studied the nature of Kru seafarers' families in Freetown and Liverpool. She explored the impact of the prolonged absences of men on their wives in Freetown and illustrated how these absences resulted in women assuming sole responsibility for the running of the home. Kru women became very influential in the family as they had total control over the money sent by their husbands and also sole responsibility for raising children.³⁰ Frost also charted the support systems women developed in response to their husbands' absences, such as the formation of women's societies.³¹ She compared this to Kru families in Liverpool where the wife was usually British. Her recognition of the role of British wives in the assimilation and adaptation of Kru men bears resemblance to Tabili's arguments. But the new networks of relations that the wives encountered are also explored. For example, Frost argued that "new relations were often formed with the husband's ethnic group, with the wider black community and with other women who had married black men".³² This was illustrated by wives moving to join their husbands and becoming resident in the black community.³³ Frost's approach demonstrates the scope for expanding our understanding of Indian seafarers' families. I explore these topics in the subsequent sections but first set out the sources I have used to reconstruct the family lives of Indian seafarers.

Review of Primary Sources: Oral Histories and Prisoner Of War Records and Petitions for Compensation

It is possible that the neglect of family life in the established historiography is due to the scarcity of sources. The voice of the families and wives of Indian seafarers are rarely accessible. Despite this, it is possible to build up a picture of their family lives and backgrounds. In doing so, I use a variety of sources including published oral history accounts. Such published accounts can be problematic as they tell us little of the relationship between interviewer and participant or how the interview was conducted. Gardner's life histories, for example, note that her identity as an English woman may

³⁰ Frost, Diane, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, p.163.

³¹ Frost, *Work and Community*, p.173.

³² Frost, *Work and Community*, p.206.

³³ Frost, *Work and Community*, p.227.

have influenced what many of her female interviewees were prepared to tell her.³⁴ There are also wider problems with oral history accounts. For example, potential difficulties with the interviewee's memory of the events described should be taken into consideration as "human memory is selective and sometimes faulty".³⁵ Also, the interviewee may select or omit facts from the interview and impose a narrative on facts that are not otherwise related. Despite such limitations, these accounts are useful as they document "particular aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources" such as personal relations and the subjective meanings of lived experience.³⁶

I also use the records relating to Indian Seafarers as Prisoners of War. Indian seafarers captured by German forces in World War Two found themselves placed in the Milag compound of camps at Bremervorde in Germany.³⁷ In 1943, Indian seafarers were moved to the separate Inder Lager camp at the compound. The correspondence of the Inder Lager was managed by Captain Herbert W. Jones who wrote letters on behalf of Indian seafarers to British and Indian authorities relating to life in the camp and family matters. These records provide a fascinating insight into the day to day life of the camp. They also allow us to reconstruct a picture of the lives of their families in India. While the letters relate to a relatively short period of time they offer a rare opportunity to glimpse into the family dynamics and relationships of Indian seafarers. During war time conditions, the British authorities recorded such information which at other times was neglected and thus does not survive in the historical record.

The records are not without problems and difficulties. Comparisons can be drawn with the soldier letters uncovered by David Omissi. He acknowledged that "when reading the letters, we are not simply eavesdropping on the innermost thoughts of the soldier or

³⁴ Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration*, p. 47.

³⁵ Yow, Valerie Raleigh, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, AltaMira Press, Second Edition 2005, p.20. A detailed account of "Oral History and Memory" can be found in Chapter Two (pages 35 to 68) of the same edition.

³⁶ Perks, Robert, and Thompson, Alistair, (Eds.), "Introduction", in their *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1998, p.ix.

³⁷ Gabe Thomas explained that the men were neither civilian non-combatants nor part of the armed forces and so were not full Prisoners of War. Instead, they were labelled Marine Civil Internees. This allowed the men to be held in "Prisoner of War Camps" for the duration of the War. See Thomas, Gabe, *Milag: Captives of the Kriegsmarine: Merchant Navy Prisoners of War, Germany 1913 – 1945*, Pontardawe: Milag Prisoner of War Association, 1995, p.63.

looking invisibly over their shoulders as they write”.³⁸ Omissi wrote of the “layers of filtration” present in the letters because of the use of scribes and censorship. Both of these issues also need to be addressed in regard to the Inder Lager records as Jones acted as a scribe for the men. It is also probable that families in India used scribes to compose letters to the men held in the camps. The problems relating to the use of scribes can be understood by exploring the role of Herbert Jones. Jones’s role as a scribe became increasingly important after June 1944 when the German authorities restricted outgoing mail to letters written in English because of the difficulties in censoring mail. Jones may have also been selective in the information he included in his letters as they had to be passed by both German and British censors.³⁹ The information contained in the letters is also selective in another way. The letters often contain information retrieved from the letters of relatives in India. However, this takes the form of excerpts and the original letters in their full sense are not preserved.

These sources share the disadvantage that they do not represent the voices of the families or wives of Indian seafarers. Petitions were received by the British Government from the wives and families of Indian seafarers, particularly concerning the issue of compensation for war deaths and injuries. Such petitions present us with an opportunity to gather information on family structure but lack data relating to the internal dynamics and relations of the family. The petitions also relate to specific periods in the life-course of the migration. Thus, uncovering the voices of the wives and families of Indian seafarers is problematic and prevents a line of enquiry from developing fully. The absence of their voices precludes consideration of the issues from their point of view. This is particularly important as there is evidence that women presented their accounts of migration in significantly different ways.⁴⁰ Despite this it is still possible to piece together an account of the backgrounds and lives of Indian seafarers. I now turn to consider what the sources reveal about the family lives of Indian seafarers in India.

³⁸ Omissi, David, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914-18*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999, p.4.

³⁹ For further information on the censorship of letters from the camps, see Thomas, *Milag*, pp. 175 – 177.

⁴⁰ Chamberlain, *Gender and the Narratives of Migration*, p.95.

The impact of migration on familial relationships in India

This section explores the family lives of Indian seafarers in their home country and villages. It demonstrates the everyday existence of families left behind by this male dominated migration flow. The impact of Indian seafarers' migrations upon gender relations within the family is considered. I explore whether migration resulted in women gaining greater independence and control over their lives and if this resulted in their marriage relationships becoming a partnership with both the husband and wife having equal power and influence. Control of the remittances of Indian seafarers is used to question the extent to which the wives of Indian seafarers gained increased independence and economic power. This section also demonstrates the negative impact of migration upon the family and household unit as witnessed in the breakdown of both the immediate and extended family made evident in a number of case studies. However, it also reveals the importance of family support to the migrant seafarer. This uncovers the role of the family in the decision to migrate and the internal power struggles and hierarchies enmeshed within the process. While historians such as Tabili emphasised the familial support network Indian seafarers could make use of in Britain, this section also explores the functional, supportive role played by the family in India. Thus, the impact of migration upon the family in India is explored from a variety of angles to gain a better understanding of their lives in the private sphere.

Basic information regarding family structure in India can be gleaned from the petitions for compensation resulting from the deaths of Indian seafarers during the World Wars. These petitions are limited in number and, as they relate to the World Wars, they are limited in scope too. But the families of Indian seafarers otherwise rarely feature in official government documentation. Thus, while the following figures are not necessarily representative, they give us some information on family structures that is otherwise inaccessible. The petitions challenge the assertion that Indian seafarers were the younger sons of smallholders who did not inherit the land but remained part of the household survival strategies. The evidence suggests that such a generalisation cannot be sustained. Some Indian seafarers certainly supported their parents, siblings and extended families. Take for example the case of Bawa Saheb Balu. The petition on behalf

of his parents and younger siblings stated that they had been wholly dependent upon his remittances and had been forced to earn their living through labour following his death.⁴¹ Likewise, Ebrahim Shaikh Eusoof Makhjnakar's remittances formed one strand of his family's subsistence strategy. His mother submitted a petition for compensation on behalf of herself and his younger siblings. This stated that they were partly dependent upon his wage but also that of his disabled father who was employed in Bombay.⁴² The parents of brothers Mahomed and Hossein Bhawodeen also petitioned to be compensated for the deaths of their sons. Their petition claimed that the parents, grandmother and siblings were wholly dependent upon the men.⁴³ Thus, there is some evidence to support Ahuja's assertion that Indian seafarers' migration formed part of the families' subsistence strategies through their contributions to support the family and family property.

The evidence covered in this chapter will also show that Indian seafarers' controlled or even owned their own land rendering problematic Ahuja's assertion that Indian seafarers were the landless younger sons of landowners. Ahuja's approach seems to suggest that the purpose of their migration was to support the family's land and property rather than their own personal land and property investments. In contrast, cases of family members taking control of land by force illustrate that the land in question was not a family enterprise but rather under the control and supervision of the individual seafarer. Other examples, such as the case of Rashid Ali, illustrate that Indian seafarers could be shareholders in land.⁴⁴ The repeated calls for property to remain with wives and other family members during their absences indicated Indian seafarers also owned or controlled plots of land. Other accounts deal more explicitly with the ownership of land. For example, Abdul Syed wished to purchase several plots of land while imprisoned in the Inder Lager.⁴⁵ Several other seafarers complained their families were facing difficulties

⁴¹ IOR P/10546: Letter to the Collector of Kolaba, No 221 1st Feb 1919.

⁴² IOR P/10546: B Proceedings, January 1919 Serial 14.

⁴³ The National Archives, UK [hereafter TNA] MT 9/1427: Marine Department, Government of Bombay to Department of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 10th December 1919.

⁴⁴ Imperial War Museum [hereafter IWM], Records of Captain Herbert W. Jones, Box Number 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Sylhet, 15th December 1944 on behalf of Rashid Ali, POW Number 302.

⁴⁵ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 10th March 1945 on behalf of Abdul Syed, POW Number 7270.

over land the men had purchased before leaving India.⁴⁶ In addition, the men could be tenants of landlords in their own rights. For example, Habib Ulla and Fazul Rahman complained that in their absence landlords were causing problems for their families.⁴⁷ Thus, a complicated picture of land ownership and land tenure appears.

While the above examples are useful for illustrating the family structure of Indian seafarers, they reveal little of the internal relations or power structures. In this section, I trace the internal power relations, gender relations and organisation of the families. A general picture of gender relations and family organisation needs to be set out before the impact of migration upon them can be evaluated. Bangladeshi society is usually characterised as patriarchal. It is both patrilineal and patrilocal.⁴⁸ Bina Agarwal argued that patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal residence “severely circumscribe” women’s autonomy.⁴⁹ Women’s relationship with the world outside the family was mediated through male relatives, thus reducing women’s ability to act as independent agents.⁵⁰ Their detachment from the outside world was also symbolised and enforced by the practice of purdah (veiling or seclusion of women). Purdah restricted women’s activities outside the home and so they were prevented from working in the fields, supervising cultivation or interacting in the market.⁵¹ Thus, work was divided into male and female spheres with men’s territory being outside the homestead.⁵² Women, meanwhile, performed all of the household’s domestic tasks.⁵³ The mother or wife of the patriarch would therefore be in charge of the administration of the household while the “ultimate

⁴⁶ For example, Khalil Rahman, POW Number 903, IWM 67/325/1-2(1), H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 11th March 1944. In the same records, Abdul Gunny, POW Number 268, also made similar complaints in H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 15th January 1944. The case of Turab Ali, POW Number 89076, is also stated in a letter from H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 15th January 1944.

⁴⁷ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 28th February 1944 on behalf of Habib Ulla POW Number 898 and also H.W. Jones to Judge Court of Sialdor, Calcutta, 16th December 1943 on behalf of Fazul Rahman POW Number 899.

⁴⁸ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.29.

⁴⁹ Agarwal, Bina, *A Field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.69.

⁵⁰ Agarwal, *A Field of One’s Own*, pp.268 – 270.

⁵¹ Agarwal, *A Field of One’s Own*, p.305.

⁵² Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.27.

⁵³ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.28.

head” was the male patriarch.⁵⁴ Thus, gender relations in rural areas and in Bangladesh circumscribed women’s independence.

As demonstrated at the start of this chapter, migration historians such as Pedraza argued that male dominated migration allowed women to acquire more control over their lives. Diane Frost also noted that the wives of Kru seafarers in Freetown became influential and powerful within the family as they controlled their migrant husbands’ remittances. Using the Prisoner of War records, this section explores whether a similar pattern can be discerned among the families of Indian seafarers in India. These records detail one off payments to families in India as well as regular monthly allotments. As the name and Prisoner of War number of each seafarer is given it is possible to account for duplicates. The monthly allotments to family members are used as the regular nature of these remittances would have cemented the position of the recipient within the family. The collated results are illustrated in Table Thirteen on page 175. The figures show that wives received fifty-five percent of the total monthly remittances. This was followed by mothers with thirteen percent, sons with eleven percent, and then brothers with eight percent. Wives were the chief recipients of monthly allowances for each band of monthly allotments. Other family members were identified as recipients of monthly allotments on the lower end of the scale (up to forty rupees) but wives remained the highest percentage of recipients amongst this group. For example, they received almost twenty-seven percent of all remittances in the Rs. 0 to 40 group, forty-five percent of remittances in the Rs.21 to 30 group, eighty-three percent of remittances in the Rs.31 to 40 group. Wives were also the main recipients of amounts over forty rupees. Thus, wives were the main recipients of monthly allotments. The next section questions whether we can presume that the wives of Indian seafarers thus gained more independence and power within the family because they were the main recipients of these allotments.

⁵⁴ Amin, Sonia Nishat, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876 – 1939*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996, p.38.

Table Thirteen: Monthly Remittances from Prisoners of War

Constructed from information in Imperial War Museum [hereafter IWM], Records of Captain Herbert W. Jones, Box Number 67/325/1-2(1)

Monthly Amount	Both Parents	Mother	Father	Wife	Brother	Sister	Brother and Sister	Son	Daughter	Uncle	Nephew
Rs. 0-20	1	8	5	11	8	1	1	4	0	1	1
Rs. 21-30		5	2	10	1			3	1		
Rs. 31-40		2	1	31				3			
Rs. 41-50				8				2			
Rs. 51-60				1							
Rs. 61-70					1						
Rs. 71-80				2							
Rs 80 +				1				1			
Total:	1	15	8	64	10	1	1	13	1	1	1
Percentage of overall total	0.86	12.93	6.91	55.17	8.62	0.86	0.86	11.21	0.86	0.86	0.86

The control exercised by the wives over remittances is evident within the letters sent from families in India. Serang Saliat Ulla's family, for example, complained that they were left without support following the death of his wife.⁵⁵ A number of families complained that the wives of Indian seafarers had returned to their families of origin, taking the monthly remittances with them. For example, Jacobullah complained that his wife had gone to live with her father.⁵⁶ He requested that his wife should return home so "the money can be used in looking after his own family and not that of his father in law".⁵⁷ He pleaded that the case be dealt with urgently because his family had no other means of subsistence. In another case, the children of Abdul Jabber were left in a distressed state after their stepmother returned to her brother's house.⁵⁸ Noaz Ullah's family reported their difficult circumstances after his wife was sent to her father's house following her alleged infidelity during her migrant husband's absence.⁵⁹ This left her husband's family without an income. Control over remittances thus increased women's economic power within the household and family. Bina Agarwal explored the intra-family process of bargaining and negotiation. In her account, a member's bargaining power was defined by a range of factors including the strength of the person's "fall back" position.⁶⁰ In the case studies illustrated above, the remittances can be seen to have improved the women's "bargaining power" by strengthening their "fall back" position. Controlling the remittances allowed Indian seafarers' wives the options of withdrawing support to their husbands' families. It therefore appears that controlling remittances allowed the wives of Indian seafarers more independence and economic power.

The letters also demonstrate attempts by families to control the women who were in charge of the remittances. Women could become the centre of power struggles between

⁵⁵ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Messrs Gray Dawes and Company, 2nd February 1944 on behalf of Serang Saliat Ulla POW Number 887755.

⁵⁶ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Sylhet, 18th November 1944 on behalf of Jacobullah POW Number 88285.

⁵⁷ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Sylhet, 18th November 1944 on behalf of Jacobullah POW Number 88285.

⁵⁸ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 6th January 1945. Also, IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 7th February 1944 on behalf of Abdul Jabber POW Number 229.

⁵⁹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Calcutta, 15th January 1944 on behalf of Noaz Ullah POW Number 88612.

⁶⁰ Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own*, p.54.

their natal families and their husbands' families. The letters of complaint from the male migrants' families can be seen as attempts to reassert control over the wives of Indian seafarers who had left their marital homes. Similarly, the wives of Indian seafarers did not always choose to return to their natal families. For example, the children of Abdul Jabar wrote "our stepmother wants to come and stay with us but her brother Ennus Meah does not allow her".⁶¹ Thus, while the wives appeared to control the remittances, it is unclear whether they were always in control of their own destinies.

The improvement in women's economic power within the household was also dependent upon the success of the migration. But long distance migrations involved considerable risk and were not always successful. Women who were reliant upon remittances were thus also exposed to these risks and the consequences of failure were dramatic. For example, the dependents of seafarers killed in service on the *S.S. Catania* were "purdah women" who owing to the deaths of their supporters were compelled to earn their livelihood by labour.⁶² In a similar case, the widow of Arsodealle Malo Hidger was compelled to support herself and her children through day labour.⁶³ The gendered division of labour in rural Bangladeshi communities was considered earlier in the chapter. Resorting to labour outside the home and breaking purdah entailed a huge loss of honour and hence status for women and their families. Gardner recounted the shame of purdah women forced to sell their labour both to the women and their extended kin groups.⁶⁴ Not only was it a source of shame to women but the dramatic decline in their status would surely have affected their bargaining power with their in-laws, wider kin and the local community. Thus, changes relating to migration that pushed women into the public sphere were not always beneficial or welcomed by the women.

Families left behind by male dominated migration flows faced additional risks to their position and status. Long distance migration involved the lengthy absence of the male breadwinner. For families of Indian seafarers interned in prisoner of war camps this was

⁶¹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 7th February 1944 on behalf of Abdul Jabar, POW Number 229.

⁶² IOR P/11188: Letter from the collector of Kolaba, no MSR 1-74, 9th February 1922.

⁶³ IOR L/E/7/1101: Department of Commerce, Government of India to Commerce and Revenue Department, India Office, 24th November 1921.

⁶⁴ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.71.

magnified but these case studies still give us an idea of the problems created. Absences resulted in an increased risk of land and property being seized by disgruntled family, kin and community members. For example, Rashid Ali shared some land with ten other men which his brother had been farming on his behalf. He complained that the other shareholders had taken the land away from his brother.⁶⁵ Thus, the family's subsistence strategy, of which Ali's migration was a part, was disrupted by local and contemporaries in his absence. The families of other seafarers faced similar problems. In another example, Abdul Ahad complained that his neighbours had built a house and road on his property.⁶⁶ Thus, again, members of the local community took advantage of the male head of the household being away from home for long stretches of time. The targets of these actions were not necessarily women but the entire family.

Disgruntled family members could also cause problems by forcefully taking the land and possessions of Indian seafarers. Bodiwan Juma complained that his brother had taken land "by force" and requested that it be returned to the control of his wife.⁶⁷ Noor Ahmad's brother sold their joint property without consulting him and had kept the proceeds.⁶⁸ Abdul Shahid alleged that his brother had sold his livestock and kept the proceeds of the sale.⁶⁹ Mozaffer Ahmed likewise claimed that his brother had sold land belonging to him and kept the money.⁷⁰ Dawood Meah's brother and nephews reportedly took possession of his land by force.⁷¹ Similarly, Ali Ahmed alleged that his brother and nephew were causing trouble over land and properties.⁷² The sister of Sheikh Noroo claimed that his brother and father-in-law had taken items from his

⁶⁵ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Sylhet, 15th December 1944 on behalf of Rashid Ali, POW Number 302.

⁶⁶ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Commissioner of Police, Chittagong, 3rd June 1944 on behalf of Abdul Ahad, POW Number 883.

⁶⁷ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 8th November 1944 on behalf of Bodiwan Juma, POW Number 7628.

⁶⁸ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Chittagong, 29th July 1944 on behalf of Noor Ahmad, POW Number 98098.

⁶⁹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 9th August 1944 on behalf of Abdul Shahid, POW Number 7270.

⁷⁰ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 22nd February 1944 on behalf of Mozaffer Ahmed, POW Number 886.

⁷¹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 17th October 1944 on behalf of Dawood Meah.

⁷² IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Chittagong, 28th February 1944 on behalf of Ali Ahmed, POW Number 89248.

property including jewellery, a gramophone and a sum of money.⁷³ Thus, we can see that although the temporary or permanent migration of Indian seafarers was part of the family's survival strategy their lengthy absences could also cause problems for the family members left behind. Female family members, however, faced additional difficulties and gender specific problems in the absence of male breadwinners. There were several cases amongst the Prisoners of War where wives had been removed from their marital homes by their families of origin. We have already considered the case of Abdul Jabber's wife and her brother's refusal to let her return to her marital home. Abdul Mahid also reported that his father-in-law had taken his wife away from his home and intended to remarry her.⁷⁴ Thus, while the absence of a family member had advantages in securing an additional income that contributed to the family's subsistence, it could, in an equal measure place families in precarious positions.

This disruption is in contrast to the trends traced by Katy Gardner. She argued that the absence of male heads meant that women relied upon the help of extended male kin. Her account traced the assistance offered to temporarily female headed households by extended kin and family. For example, women relied upon extended kin to perform tasks that would otherwise be the domain of their husbands. This allowed the gendered division of labour to continue and permitted women to remain within the domestic or private sphere. Male kin would thus attend to the management of the land and decisions over it.⁷⁵ As a result, women retained their status and respectability in the eyes of fellow villagers. The system was also beneficial to the extended kin and family who worked on behalf of the migrant and their immediate family. It was in the interests of extended family members to contribute to the success of the migration and they also benefitted from it. Being linked to a migrant through family or kin gave access to resources including migration networks and increased wealth.⁷⁶ This depicts a very different situation to the disruptive family and kin of Indian seafarers outlined in the previous paragraph. The reason for this difference may be found in Gardner's assertion that the changes

⁷³ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Calcutta, 22nd January 1944 on behalf of Sheikh Noroo, POW Number 1032265.

⁷⁴ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 26th July 1944 on behalf of Abdul Mahid, POW Number 89379.

⁷⁵ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.119.

⁷⁶ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, pp. 78 – 82.

experienced by Indian seafarers' communities were "still embryonic" while individuals were able to alter their economic position.⁷⁷ Thus, the benefits were limited to the seafarers and their immediate families and had not diffused beyond the household. This may have caused a degree of jealousy and opportunism amongst their extended kin and communities who saw a chance in Indian seafarers' absences to improve their own positions.

In addition to disrupting the cohesion of the extended family and kin groups, migration could also lead to the breakdown of the immediate family. The wives of Sahzid Ali and Doodoo Meah allegedly left their family homes to live with other men.⁷⁸ In a similar case, Noaz Ullah received news of his wife's affair and child with another man outside wedlock.⁷⁹ A man often remarried with the intention of his new wife caring for his children during his absence. Sometimes, however, the wives refused to care for children after the man had returned to sea or to Britain. Minat Ali received news that his second wife did not use his remittances to support his three children.⁸⁰ In another case, Mufiz Ullah was told that his thirteen year old daughter had left the family home owing to a dispute with her stepmother.⁸¹ Thus, migration could result in a degree of disruption for the families left behind, sometimes quite catastrophically for all concerned. It also contrasts sharply with the image of rural Muslim women depicted in the historiography, as outlined earlier in this chapter.

The position of women within migrant seafarers' families can be discerned from their role in decision making processes. Agarwal argued that women who participated in decision making may be said to have greater bargaining strength than those who were excluded from decision making altogether.⁸² The wives of Indian seafarers were included in decisions regarding marriage. For example, both Abdul Hakim and Abdul Mokim received

⁷⁷ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.43.

⁷⁸ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 12th July 1944 on behalf of Sahzid Ali, POW Number 267. Also H.W. Jones to High Commission for India, London, 22nd February 1944 on behalf of Doodoo Meah, POW Number 87736.

⁷⁹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Calcutta, 15th January 1944 on behalf of Noaz Ullah, POW Number 88612.

⁸⁰ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 13th July 1944 on behalf of Minat Ali, POW Number 239.

⁸¹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Mercantile Marine Department, Calcutta, 24th March 1944 on behalf of Mufiz Ullah, POW Number 7241.

⁸² Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own*, p.67.

requests from male family members for money to finance the marriages of their daughters but both men sent this money to their wives.⁸³ The wives of Indian seafarers were also involved in decisions relating to marriage in other ways. For example, Chand Miah recalled how his first wife “pressed” him to marry again when she became very sick.⁸⁴ They could also successfully resist decisions made by male relatives regarding marriage. For example, Abdul Malik told how his Indian wife, Atusan, refused his attempts to divorce her. He recalled how she stated “No – I don’t want another marriage, and whoever says I should, I am going to kill them or myself”.⁸⁵ Malik obeyed her wishes and instead of divorcing Atusan he took the decision to send her money to come to Britain to live with himself and his English wife. Thus, it seems that marriage was an area where wives held a degree of power. This concurs with Gardner’s account of Sylheti society where marriage negotiations were carried out by mothers, aunts and sisters.⁸⁶ In the domestic sphere, at least, the wives of Indian seafarers were involved in decision making processes.

The inner dynamics and power relations of the family are also evident in the role of the family in the decision to migrate or seek maritime employment. Some Indian seafarers did make the decision individually and independently of their families. For example, Dada Amir Haider Khan recalled running away from his family in the Punjab to join his brother in Bombay. Khan “quietly disappeared” from his brother’s Bombay home after discovering his brother’s plans to send him home to the family in Punjab.⁸⁷ Tales from other Indian seafarers revealed they too ran away in search of adventure without the agreement or consent of their families. For example, the cases of Sona Miah and Syed Ali reflected similar sentiments. Sona Miah’s story started with his running away without telling anyone. Similarly, Syed Ali remembered how he left home without telling his

⁸³ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Mercantile Marine Department, Calcutta, 11th May 1944 on behalf of Abdul Hakim POW Number 103266. Also, H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Mercantile Marine Department, Calcutta, 22nd February 1944 on behalf of Abdul Mokim POW Number 253.

⁸⁴ Choudhury, Yousuf, *Sons of the Empire: Oral history from the Bangladeshi seamen who served on British ships during the 1939-45 War*, Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group, 1995, p.57.

⁸⁵ Adams, Caroline, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, London: Tower Hamlets Arts Project, 1987, pp. 188 – 189.

⁸⁶ Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*, p.164.

⁸⁷ Khan, Dada Amir Haider, *Chains to lose: life and struggles of a revolutionary - memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan*, edited by Hasan N. Gardezi, New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1989, pp. 58 -66.

mother and joined a group of men leaving to find work in Calcutta.⁸⁸ These men were young and unmarried when they made the decision to leave their homes. For example, Syed Ali was only fifteen while Khan was initially rejected from the merchant navy for being too young.⁸⁹ For other Indian seafarers, however, the decision to migrate or seek maritime work was a family decision. Chand Miah recalled his mother's role in preventing him from returning to maritime employment by hiding his seaman's papers.⁹⁰ His mother reportedly stated that "all the men are on the ships, from now on you will have to stay at home and look after the family... I will not let you go on the ships, not while I am alive".⁹¹ This illustrates that the decision to return to sea and the prolonged absence this entailed was not always a decision that could be made independently. Instead, close family members seemed to have a major role in the decision. Recalling his plans to stay at home and avoid maritime employment for the duration of the war, Syed Rasul recollected his father's insistence that he should return to maritime employment as "the British need everybody for the war".⁹² His father was, therefore, instrumental in his swift return to maritime employment. Thus, we can see that parents employed some influence in the decision to migrate or to embark upon employment that would result in long durations of service abroad.

Pedraza's account of family decision making processes revealed that they were influenced by hierarchies of power within the family.⁹³ This is also shown in Indian seafarers' accounts of their decisions to migrate. While the opinions of parents and senior members of the household were respected, those of wives and young families did not always exert much influence. Describing the birth of his son, Haji Kona Miah stated that he left home to return to sea two months before the birth. He stated that "my wife complained maybe, but I didn't take any notice".⁹⁴ This has parallels with Abdul Malik decision to stay in Britain without consulting his Indian wife.⁹⁵ Instead, he wrote home to inform her after making his decision. Despite promising his "young family" that he would

⁸⁸ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.91.

⁸⁹ Khan, *Chains to Lose*, p.64.

⁹⁰ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.53.

⁹¹ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.53.

⁹² Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p. 184.

⁹³ Pedraza, "Migration to the United States: Gender Aspects", p.9836.

⁹⁴ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.134.

⁹⁵ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, pp. 188 – 189.

return soon, Anjob Ali deserted his ship in Britain.⁹⁶ Thus, some Indian seafarers disregarded their wives' opinions or simply did not ask for their opinion before leaving. Agarwal argued that bargaining power is revealed by whose interests prevailed in the final decisions made.⁹⁷ In this instance, it could be argued that the wives of Indian seafarers held little bargaining power and thus migration did not lead to an equalisation of gender roles within the marriage. Thus, we can discern a hierarchy of power and influence within the household and the impact of this upon both the temporary and permanent migrations of Indian seafarers.

Tabili depicted the families of Indian seafarers in Britain as an essential support network for the migrant seafarer. In contrast, the supportive role of families in India has been overlooked. The next section illustrates how family members in India supported the migration by taking control of the management of land and properties in the seafarers' absence and also in providing childcare. Without such support it is unlikely whether even a temporary migration could have taken place. It seems that when possible, Indian seafarers left the management of land to male members of the family. Habib Ullah left his wife in India while he pursued employment at sea. His wife, however, was not left in control of their land which was placed in the care of two of his uncles and she was not allowed any say in the management of the land. She even complained that she was not receiving any benefit from the land and was not allowed to do anything on it.⁹⁸ Rashid Ali similarly left his brother to farm his land on his behalf.⁹⁹ Abdul Shahid requested that his father in law look after his land until his return.¹⁰⁰ Turab Ali asked his brother in law to look after his land and interests in his absence.¹⁰¹ These examples illustrate the support structure Indian seafarers could make use of in their absence. The predominantly male control of the family land reflected the traditional division of labour in rural households with women restricted to work in the domestic and private sphere. Thus, from this

⁹⁶ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.119.

⁹⁷ Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own*, p.67.

⁹⁸ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 3rd June 1944 on behalf of Habib Ullah, POW Number 898.

⁹⁹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Sylhet, 15th December 1944 on behalf of Rashid Ali, POW Number 302.

¹⁰⁰ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Secretary, Military Department, India Office, 9th August 1944 on behalf of Abdul Shahid, POW Number 7270.

¹⁰¹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Tippera, 15th January 1944 on behalf of Turab Ali, POW Number 89076.

evidence it seems that the position and influence of women in the family was relatively unchanged by migration.

Indian seafarers delegated control to female family members in exceptional circumstances. For example, Abdul Ahad stated that he had “nobody at home except his wife to look after his property”.¹⁰² Thus, control of the land passed to the wife by default. In other cases, control of the land passed to women when disagreements arose amongst the family. For example, the sister of Sheikh Nooro was placed in charge of his house and property after the death of his wife.¹⁰³ His sister wrote that their brother was giving her “too much trouble” and had stated that “Noroo will not come back, so I am the sole proprietor of my brother’s property”. He also forcefully removed items from the home. Similar cases were represented in the letters of Bodiwan Juma, Dawood Meah and Ali Ahmed. Juma reported that his brother had taken his land by force and requested that it be returned to his wife so that she could look after it.¹⁰⁴ Dawood Meah’s brother and nephew were also accused of causing problems over land and properties and urged that the property should remain with his wife.¹⁰⁵ Finally, Ali Ahmed complained that his brother and nephew were making trouble over land and urged that “all his property must remain with his wife”.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the evidence from Prisoners of War seems to suggest that when possible the traditional division of labour in rural households was upheld. It was only in exceptional circumstances that women took over the management of land and property.

Family members provided additional support through childcare, although this was primarily the responsibility of wives and other female family members. Abdul Malik related his gratitude to his wife, Atusan, for her role in looking after their children alone while he was living in Britain.¹⁰⁷ Women’s central role in the childcare process is evident from Chand Miah’s account of his frantic search for a new wife to take over when his first

¹⁰² IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Commissioner of Police, Chittagong, 3rd June 1944 on behalf of Abdul Ahad, POW Number 883.

¹⁰³ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Superintendent of Police, Kidderpore, Calcutta, 24th May 1944. Also, H.W. Jones to Principal Officer, Calcutta, 22nd January 1944 on behalf of Sheikh Nooro, POW Number 1032265.

¹⁰⁴ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 8th November 1944 on behalf of Bodiwan Juma, POW Number 7628.

¹⁰⁵ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Noakhali, 17th October 1944.

¹⁰⁶ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Chittagong, 28th February 1944.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, pp. 188 – 9.

wife became sick as “we had a five year old daughter and there was no-one to take care of her”.¹⁰⁸ He recalled the “desperate” need to find a “housewife” to take care of the family. When wives could not provide childcare, however, other female family members stepped in. The case of Mokrom Ali highlighted the importance of female family members in providing child care for the family. After Mokrom Ali was presumed dead following an accident at sea, his wife received further bad news that her sister had become seriously ill and died from her illness. Believing that her husband had passed away and as there was no-one else to care for her sister’s children, Mokrom Ali’s wife went to look after them and married her sister’s husband.¹⁰⁹ When it was not possible for the wives of Indian seafarers to care for the children, the extended family stepped in. In particular, elder children were called upon to care for their younger siblings in their father’s absence. For example, Abdul Karim paid a monthly detention allowance to his son and requested that the son tended to the welfare of his other two children.¹¹⁰ Following the death of his wife Noor Meah requested his eldest son receive his detention allowance and that the money be used in looking after his house and four other sons.¹¹¹ Similarly, Andre Paulo Pereira asked his elder married daughter to look after his three other children following the death of his wife.¹¹² The extended family were also compelled to help with childcare. For example, Mazaffir Ahmad allotted money to his brother to be used for looking after his two children.¹¹³ Abdul Rahman was concerned that following deaths in the family the care of his three children had fallen to his elderly mother.¹¹⁴ This again illustrates the network of support the family provided to Indian seafarers in their prolonged absences at sea or in Britain.

While the sources used in this section do not present us with an exhaustive or representative picture they do offer glimpses into the familial arrangements of seafarers

¹⁰⁸ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.57.

¹⁰⁹ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.73.

¹¹⁰ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 27th September 1944 on behalf of Abdul Karim, POW Number 228.

¹¹¹ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 26th August 1944 on behalf of Noor Meah, POW Number 102445.

¹¹² IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 7th July 1944 on behalf of Paulo Pereira, POW Number 215.

¹¹³ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to Military Department, India Office, 26th August 1944.

¹¹⁴ IWM 67/325/1-2(1): H.W. Jones to District Magistrate, Chittagong, 22nd June 1944 on behalf of Abdul Rahman, POW Number 89694.

in India, particularly in the Sylhet and Chittagong, regions of current day Bangladesh. They revealed a complex picture of the impact of migration upon families in India. General studies of women's position in rural Indian society depict a strict, patriarchal society with women confined to the private sphere through practices such as purdah. The migration of Indian seafarers seems to have changed this slightly, although the results were not uniformly positive. Women saw an improvement in their economic power and bargaining position within the family through control of their husband's remittances although this led to attempts by their natal families and in-laws to control the women. Migration also involved considerable risk and women could experience a dramatic deterioration in their economic power and social standing when migration was not successful. The impact of migration upon the family or household unit was also explored. This section demonstrated how opportunistic kin and extended family took advantage of Indian seafarers' lengthy absences. I argued that this is in contrast to later migrations where the migrant's immediate family relied upon the support of extended family and kin and suggested that this was because the positive improvements had not yet had an impact upon the wider community or extended kin networks. The breakdown of the immediate family was also considered. This demonstrated a negative effect of migration but also showed that despite the outer show of restricted lives, the absence of the husband meant that women had greater freedom to pursue relations outside of wedlock. The role of the family in supporting the migrant seafarer was also addressed. We uncovered the gendered impact of migration upon the family demonstrating that wherever possible, the women's role was restricted to the private sphere. For example, women supported the migrant seafarer through providing child care. Only in exceptional and rare circumstances were women temporarily placed in charge of managing the land suggesting that it was an unintended consequence of the migration. Instead, the ideal was that women played a supportive role in the private sphere. Thus, rather than the mutual partnerships envisaged by Pedraza, there appear to have been less dramatic changes to women's position within the family.

Indian Seafarers' Families in Britain

The previous section considered how the supportive role played by families in India has been underplayed in the established historiography. In contrast, theorists and historians of migration have emphasised the supportive role families played in helping the migrant adapt and survive in the host country. Earlier in this chapter, I demonstrated how Indian seafarers' family lives in Britain have been overlooked by historians. Tabili's study stands alone in exploring the family lives of "Black" seafarers in Britain. Her definition of Black seafarers included those from the Indian Subcontinent. Tabili's study of interracial families in Britain sought to bolster her argument for interracial solidarity on the basis of class and thus to exonerate the British white working class from participation in the construction of racism. Thus, Tabili emphasised the positive, supportive role played by white women and families in Britain and so views these relations from a functionalist perspective. The supportive role envisaged by Tabili entailed helping the Black seafarers to adapt and assimilate to British society. This section challenges this assumption in several ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that not all men wanted or sought out such relationships, even if they intended to stay in Britain for a considerable time. It also argues that relationships with British women were not necessarily a one way street to assimilation. British women's role in maintaining relationships and links with India is demonstrated. In addition, I demonstrate that these relationships were not merely ones of convenience. While their beneficial advantages were stressed by Tabili, I demonstrate how interracial couples risked censure from their communities.

The importance of the support offered by British women in Tabili's account implies that relationships with white British women were essential to the survival and progress of Black seafarers in Britain. Oral history accounts suggest, however, that not all Indian seafarers in Britain sought out or wanted relationships with British women. Some sought to avoid these relationships and saw attention from white British women as a source of embarrassment rather than as a beneficial acquaintance. From a functionalist viewpoint, it could be assumed that those intending to settle in Britain would purposefully seek out these relationships to aid their integration but oral history evidence challenges this assertion. For example, Anjob Ali's oral history testimony recalled the distress he felt at

being pursued by white women in British factories. His account revealed his embarrassment and sense of unease at the attention he received from women:

I begged them to stay away from me but they wouldn't listen, I really began to feel embarrassed. They followed me to my home and stood by my door and kept knocking. I felt ashamed in front of my uncle and brother. I asked them not to go to my house but they laughed. The more I tried to stop the worst they got [sic].¹¹⁵

Ali's migration was part of the family's subsistence strategy and was intended to be long term. Despite trips home to visit his wife and family, he returned to work in factories in Britain and on British ships. Attar Ullah's account reflected a similar unease with the attention he received from British women in the workplace. He also recalled factory settings where he pleaded with women not to "bother" him and stated that he left two factories because of this unwelcome attention from "girls".¹¹⁶ Similarly to Anjob Ali, Ullah intended to stay in Britain permanently.¹¹⁷ Mothosir Ali's account has parallels with both Ali and Ullah. He recalled how "I never went with white women... I always had my cap on and kept away from women".¹¹⁸ Ali's migration to Britain was permanent despite the fact that he married and had a family in Sylhet. Thus, it becomes clear that not all men sought out these relationships regardless of their intentions concerning the length and purpose of their stay in Britain.

Indian seafarers' relationships with white British women did not make assimilation and the jettisoning of Indian culture inevitable. For example, some men simultaneously maintained marriages and relationships in Britain and India. Abdul Malik's stay in Britain became extended after he lost his savings through gambling. As a result, he told his wife in India that "I must have a woman".¹¹⁹ Malik married an Englishwoman and had children with both women. Thus, his relationship with his British wife ran parallel to his relationship with his Indian wife and therefore did not result in the severing of relations with India. Later in his life, Malik brought his Indian wife, Atusan, to live in Britain with Lily, his British wife. He recalled "We each have our own pension books... Atusan, me and

¹¹⁵ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.110.

¹¹⁶ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.198.

¹¹⁷ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.195.

¹¹⁸ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.8.

¹¹⁹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.119.

Lily, and we all live here with our cat Timmy”.¹²⁰ While this was a deviation from the norm it nevertheless demonstrates his ability to combine his families and support systems in both countries. Haji Shirajul Islam’s descriptions of his family have similarities to Malik and Atusan’s tale. Islam described his marriage and children with his British wife while simultaneously maintaining a wife and children in Dhaka.¹²¹ Thus, structurally at least, marriage and settlement in Britain did not result in a severing of relations with India. It is possible that this allowed the men to take advantage of support systems in both countries.

British women were not merely agents of assimilation but also played a role in sustaining relations between families in Britain and India. The case studies of Haji Shirajul Islam and Abdul Malik again illustrate this point. But they also demonstrate that British women could simultaneously help their husbands adapt to life in Britain while encouraging them to sustain relations with family in India. The support British women offered to Indian seafarers is apparent in Islam and Malik’s accounts. For example, Haji Shirajul Islam’s wife helped him to manage his restaurant business in Britain.¹²² Abdul Malik sought a white wife only when he landed in financial trouble and his stay in Britain was delayed beyond his expectations and he needed someone to help look after him.¹²³ Thus, their wives could be said to have played a role in supporting the men in Britain and helping them to adapt. Malik recalled, however, how keen his wife was for them both to travel to Pakistan.¹²⁴ Islam’s wife was also determined to visit India with him despite his attempts to discourage her.¹²⁵ He noted that despite this, she visited Sylhet three or four times. He related how “she got on well in Sylhet – she could speak our language and she liked our people very much”.¹²⁶ He even claimed that his English and Bengali wife were like sisters; that they loved and looked after each other, although we have no way of proving the wives’ opinions as these remain unrecorded.¹²⁷ Thus, there is some evidence

¹²⁰ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.122.

¹²¹ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.106.

¹²² Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.105.

¹²³ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.119.

¹²⁴ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.119.

¹²⁵ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.105.

¹²⁶ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.105.

¹²⁷ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.106.

to suggest that British wives encouraged the maintenance of links with families in India and not merely assimilation to British life.

Portraying these relationships in a functional manner depicts them as relationships of convenience which merely benefitted the men. Oral history testimonies reveal that relationships and marriages to white women in Britain were not merely for their convenience and practical benefits. For example, consider the testimony of Haji Shirajul Islam. He recalled his grief and trauma when his British wife died thus:

I never knew that people could love each other so much, we were like one life. When I came in, I used to tell her everything that happened, and she used to tell me everything. After she died I couldn't live here anymore, I couldn't do anything... I just fell apart for a while. My heart always wants her.¹²⁸

His description of his relationship with his British wife revealed a relationship based upon love and mutual respect for each other and each other's culture. It also suggests that the motivation for their relationship was love and companionship rather than the practical help she could provide in easing his assimilation to British society.

The benefits interracial relationships entailed must be balanced against their disadvantages. The criticism and even condemnation such couples faced from both the Indian diasporic and British communities are described in this section. The oral history testimony of Fazol Karim demonstrated the Indian diasporic community's disapproval of such interracial relationships. After his initial desertion he stayed in London with two of his cousins who were married and had children in Sylhet. He described these men as "very religious minded". Karim had jumped ship with the intention of signing on British articles of agreement and wanted to visit another cousin who had achieved this feat. He recalled the reluctance of his cousins to allow him to visit this man owing to their dislike of his decision to marry a white girl. He remembered how "both my cousins stopped me from going there... they thought that if I went there he might encourage me to marry a white girl".¹²⁹ Anjob Ali's embarrassment in front of his uncle and brother, as described earlier, could also be attributed to this.¹³⁰ Consequently, while such relationships could

¹²⁸ Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, p.106.

¹²⁹ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.25.

¹³⁰ Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, p.110.

be beneficial for expanding their support networks in Britain it could also lead to censure and thus a loss of support among their own community.

But interracial relationships also brought criticism from British society. Indeed, interracial relationships led to vociferous verbal attacks upon the couples. This would have inevitably have made life more difficult for the couple and restricted their resources and opportunities. Lucy Bland noted that interracial relationships aroused hostility, pointing to the 1919 Race Riots in British ports as evidence of the resentment and aggression they caused.¹³¹ She argued that white men's fury at interracial relationships instigated the riots.¹³² Thus, fears over miscegenation could lead to violence and aggression targeted at interracial communities.¹³³ The children of these relationships were also labelled half-castes and confronted difficulties in British society directly linked to their mixed racial heritage. For example, University of Liverpool social researcher Muriel Fletcher labelled the children "inferior" and reported the difficulties they later faced in finding employment in British society.¹³⁴

Anxieties over the "problem" of interracial couples became increasingly evident following the aftermath of World War One and the 1919 Race Riots. It was feared that the continuing presence of non-European seafarers in British port towns and the visibility of interracial couples would further inflame social unrest and violence. In the search for a solution, the idea of deporting or "repatriating" the men emerged. Repatriation was suggested by the Home Office and the police who believed that the only "solution" to miscegenation was to remove the heart of the problem and so "repatriate" the men.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Bland, Lucy, "White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War", *Gender and History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2005, pp. 29-32.

¹³² Bland, "White Women and Men of Colour", p.35.

¹³³ It was not, however, only Indian seafarers who aroused fears of miscegenation. Others in the Indian diasporic community faced similar accusations. Indian students, for example, were labelled "sexual predators" by British commentators. Thus, it was an issue of race rather than class or occupation. For further information on fears of miscegenation centred on Indian students see Lahiri, Shompa, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880 – 1930*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp.121 – 3. Indeed, the Indian male as a "sexual predator" was embedded in British imperial culture. For example, Ballhatchet noted the "jealousy felt by the dominant elite at the possibility of sexual relations between women of the elite and men of subordinate groups" in nineteenth century imperial India. See Ballhatchet, Kenneth, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their critics, 1793 – 1905*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, p. 6.

¹³⁴ Christian, Mark, "The Fletcher Report 1930: A Historical Case Study of Contested Black Mixed Heritage Britishness", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 21, No. 2/3, June/September 2008, pp. 213 – 241.

¹³⁵ Bland, "White Women and Men of Colour", p. 38.

Despite the links between the repatriation and fears over miscegenation, marriage or cohabitation with a woman in Britain made non-European seafarers less vulnerable to the repatriation campaign. Tabili noted that marriage thwarted official repatriation attempts as a man who founded a household established domicile in the United Kingdom.¹³⁶ In contrast, Tabili argued that single Black men were treated like transients despite their presumptive British status. This suggests that evidence of marriage and family in Britain was the central or decisive factor in their relative immunity from deportation.

But what would this repatriation campaign mean for Indian seafarers? Tabili's analysis suggests that those with families would be immune to official actions while those who were single would be treated as transients despite their British subject status. This seems to be partially reflected in the stance of the Home Office that while British subjects could not be compulsorily repatriated, unemployed coloured seamen should be "induced to return to their own countries as quickly as possible".¹³⁷ But the wider historical record challenges Tabili's assertion and suggests that those of British subject status were more secure while those of precarious British subject or British Protected Person status were at risk. Thus, repatriation was not merely a matter of colour, race or ethnicity but of British subject status.

Some men with families were not immune to official efforts to repatriate them. Take, for example, the case of Adenese seafarers. Adenese men were to be compelled to accept repatriation through withdrawing their maintenance should they refuse to accept repatriation. It was decided that "no exception" was to be made in the case of Adenese men who were married to "English wives" or who claimed domicile in Britain. Instead, they were to be allowed to remain until all others had been offered repatriation.¹³⁸

A later repatriation campaign also had a detrimental impact upon Chinese men with British wives and families in Britain. The campaign focused upon Chinese seafarers in Liverpool who had become "an undesirable element" owing to their alleged criminal

¹³⁶ Tabili, Laura, "'Women of a Very Low Type': Crossing Racial Boundaries in Imperial Britain", in Frader, Laura, and Rose, Sonya, (Eds.), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, London: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 177.

¹³⁷ TNA HO45/11017/377969, Home Office, 17th June 1919.

¹³⁸ IOR L/E/7/1102 File 8227: Report of a Conference held 26th June 1921.

activities, gambling and health problems.¹³⁹ The Home Office recognised that many of these men had “British born wives” but these women were dismissed as “of the prostitute class”. The existence of these women did not seem to pose an obstacle to the plans of the Home Office, it was merely noted that as they were of low class they “would not wish to accompany their husbands to China”.¹⁴⁰ The men were not informed that marriage to a British woman might entitle him to a claim to stay in Britain. Indeed, it was decided that it would be “unwise” to give the men “any indication” that marriage to a British woman would give him claim to domicile.¹⁴¹ A number of the men with children to British wives were “repatriated” to China and never saw their children again.¹⁴² Thus, we can argue that seafarers with British subject status were immune to such repatriation campaigns. Instead, campaigns focused upon men of uncertain or non British subject status. While Indian seafarers were likely to have suffered from some degree of popular hostility they were immune to official, state level hostility and campaigns.

This section has demonstrated that viewing the relationships between Indian seafarers and British women in a functionalist manner simplifies a complex situation. It assumes that all men wanted and pursued such relationships. This section demonstrated that even when men intended to stay in Britain for a long time, they did not necessarily seek out relationships with British women to help their assimilation into British society. Relationships with white women did not necessarily result in complete assimilation and the discarding of links to India. Indeed, British women could be instrumental in encouraging their Indian husbands to preserve familial and cultural links with the

¹³⁹ TNA HO 213/926: Note of a meeting held at Home Office, October 19th 1945: Repatriation of Chinese Seamen at Liverpool.

¹⁴⁰ TNA HO 213/926: Note of a meeting held at Home Office, October 19th 1945: Repatriation of Chinese Seamen at Liverpool.

¹⁴¹ TNA HO 213/926: Immigration Officers’ Report for the Port of Liverpool on the subject of Repatriation of Chinese Seamen, 14th November 1945.

¹⁴² The children of these men are currently pursuing a project aimed at recording what happened to their fathers. Many believed that they had been deserted by their fathers until uncovering the repatriation campaign. They have successfully installed a memorial plaque dedicated to their fathers at Liverpool’s Pier Head. It reads: “To the many Chinese Merchant Seamen who after both world wars were required to leave. For their wives and partners who were left in ignorance of what happened to their men. For the children who never knew their fathers. This is a small reminder of what took place. We hope nothing like it will ever happen again.” See Yvonne Foley’s website “Liverpool and its Chinese Seamen” [<http://halfandhalf.org.uk>].

subcontinent. Viewing these relationships from a functionalist perspective also infers that they were merely relationships of convenience. But beyond the practical benefits, such relationships could be based on mutual love, respect and companionship.

Relationships with white women also incurred certain disadvantages and could lead to censure by the Indian diasporic and British communities. It would seem, however, that Indian seafarers' British subject status spared them from the worst of the criticism and hostility.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has moved consideration of Indian seafarers' lives from the public to the private sphere. It explored the impact of Indian seafarers' migrations upon their families in India and uncovered mixed results. The absence of male breadwinners did not lead to a clear overall improvement in women's status and power within the marital relationship and family. While certain aspects of the migration, such as control of the remittances, allowed women a greater degree of economic power it also resulted in attempts to control them. It seemed that Indian seafarers and other male family members preferred women to remain within the domestic or private sphere. It was only in emergency situations that women acted as substitutes for their absent husbands within the public sphere through roles such as managing the land. The wives of Indian seafarers were also subject to the play of power hierarchies within the family. Thus, their opinions appeared to carry less weight than those of more senior women, such as mother in laws, in decisions regarding migration. The potentially devastating impact of migration was also charted through the breakdown of the immediate family and the opportunistic actions of extended kin and family. Family life in Britain was also considered. The chapter challenged the perception that relationships and families with white women played a simple, functionalist role. Not all men sought out relationships with white women and of those who did some did so for love and companionship. It also demonstrated that relationships with white British women led to popular and state hostility. Placing Indian seafarers in a comparative perspective, however, suggested that they were relatively immune to state efforts to control "miscegenation".

Conclusion

My thesis set out to explore the lives of Indian seafarers from their original home villages to their lives on shipboard and their lives in Britain. Taking into account the substantial gaps in the existing historiography, I also aimed to shed more light on the personal or everyday lives of the men and to place their views in the spotlight. Finally, I wanted to improve our understanding of Indian seafarers' lives by placing them in a comparative perspective wherever possible.

The everyday lives of Indian seafarers were explored at different points in their migratory histories. For example, their everyday lives on shipboard were explored in Chapter One which detailed their living and working conditions on British merchant vessels. My discussion of the everyday relations of power on shipboard revealed that Indian seafarers were placed at the bottom of shipboard hierarchies. These hierarchies were reinforced by martial races theory, enforced differences in attire, diet and wages, and the employment of violence and abuse by their European officers.

The everyday familial lives of Indian seafarers were the focus of Chapter Four. This chapter explored the impact of the men's migration on their families in India. Migration had a mixed effect upon the gender and marital relations in Indian seafarers' households. Women, particularly the wives of Indian seafarers, saw some improvement in their power and position in the family. For example, their economic power and intra-family bargaining position improved as they were the main recipients of the husbands' remittances. It seemed, however, that Indian seafarers and other male family members preferred women to remain within the domestic or private sphere. Women acted as substitutes for their husbands in the public sphere only when emergency situations arose. The potentially devastating impact of migration on familial life was also charted through the breakdown of the immediate family and the opportunistic actions of extended kin and family.

Indian seafarers' familial lives in Britain were also addressed in Chapter Four. The chapter challenged the received perception in the historical literature, that relationships with white women played a simple, functionalist role. It demonstrated that not all men sought out relationships with white women and, of those who did, some did so for love and companionship. The hostile reactions of the British public and state also challenged the perception that interracial relationships were an unproblematic method of assimilation for Indian seafarers.

Exploring Indian seafarers' identities revealed another area of their private, everyday lives. I explored how the men constructed their identities at sea and ashore in Britain by using their oral history testimonies. Their agency and the conscious decision making process behind their choice of identities was emphasised. It concluded that Indian seafarers were not defined by a single identity but could pick and choose identities to suit the context. Indian seafarers' construction of collective identities was also addressed. This revealed Indian seafarers' ability to manoeuvre the boundaries of their identities to gain or maintain access to resources and opportunities. Indian seafarers did this by employing both inclusive and exclusive identities. They were also subject to the inclusive and exclusive identities of other seafarers. My approach differed from the current historiography which places the power to challenge and define identities exclusively in the hands of the British.

I also attempted to uncover Indian seafarers' views on their shipboard lives in Chapter One. Employing the concept of the moral economy demonstrated how Indian seafarers held certain expectations and understandings of their rights and customs on board ship and protested against violations of these standards when opportunities arose. Chapter One also broadened the conceptualisation of Indian seafarers' agency and resistance beyond the parameters of lawful protests that were not blind, personalised or violent. It reconfigured the historiography's understanding of their use of violence as a form of protest, demonstrating how it was used in a careful, selective manner thus revealing a conscious decision-making process behind these acts. Chapter One also expanded the concept of agency to include indirect appeals made through those more conversant with the English language and British institutions.

A comparative approach was integrated throughout the thesis. For example, the conditions Indian seafarers faced on shipboard were compared to those of their contemporaries from other nations. A methodology that utilised a compare and contrast analysis pointed strongly to the conclusion that Indian seafarers faced a particularly difficult life on British merchant vessels. While Indian seafarers' interracial relationships with white women made them the target of racial hostility, placing them in a comparative perspective suggested that they were relatively immune to overzealous state efforts to control "miscegenation". Placing Indian seafarers in a comparative perspective revealed the complex nature of their positioning by the British in Chapter Two. While Indian seafarers were targeted by the NSFU they still held a more privileged and protected position than other non-European seafarers such as the Chinese. Exploring the NSFU campaign against the employment of Chinese seafarers illustrated that Indian seafarers had been relatively protected from the harsher aspects of the NSFU campaign. Their position in comparison to other non-European seafarers was considered through investigating the changing definition of "lascar or native seaman". This illustrated how the British constructed minorities in relation to one another. Chapter Three demonstrated how Indian seafarers' manipulated the differences created by the British to their advantage in constructing their collective identities. Overall, it appears that Indian seafarers' experienced inferior conditions on shipboard on account of their Lascar articles of agreement. Yet, at the same time their imperial subject status incorporated some advantages and also gave them a means of differentiating themselves from other non-European seafarers and, in doing so, secured certain advantages and resources. Thus, in concluding, we can invoke Brah's assertion that a group can be constituted as a "minority" along one axis but may be construed as a "majority" along another.

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