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Exile in Colonial Asia

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THREE

“Near China beyond the Seas Far Far Distant from Juggernath”

The Mid-Nineteenth-Century Exile of Bhai Maharaj Singh in Singapore

Anand A. Yang

Guru Bhaie Maharaj Sing has been captured in the Jullundur Doab. . . . [S]o mischievous and so bold a traitor should be at once brought to trial, and, if convicted should be subjected to the heaviest penalty which public law can inflict. In deference to . . . the local authorities . . . the Bhaie should be . . . at once removed to Allahabad. The disciple who is stated to have been taken with him should be sent with him. . . . [F]urnish a guard sufficient to convey the prisoners . . . [and] take advantage of the escort provided . . . to guard the Bhaie to Allahabad, whence he will be conveyed to Calcutta.

—“Minute by the Most Noble the Governor-General”

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.” That striking opening line from Edward Said’s “Reflections on Exile”¹ serves well as an epigraph for this meditation about a Sikh named Nihal Singh, aka Guru Bhai Maharaj Singh, who was banished to Singapore for his tenacious military campaign against the British after their takeover of the north Indian kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Colonial authorities extended control over Punjab first as a protectorate in early 1846 and then followed up with its outright annexation in March 1849, when his youngest son, eleven-year-old Maharaja Dalip Singh, was deposed and the Sikh army disbanded. Eventually captured in Jalandhar (Jullundur) District in December 1849, Nihal Singh was quickly whisked out of Punjab under armed guard and sent to the headquarters town of Allahabad in the neighboring North-Western Provinces, from where he was taken to Calcutta to be transported overseas on the first available ship.

This chapter dwells on the “terrible” experience of Nihal Singh’s exile in Singapore, which can be recounted in some detail, including in his own

words and those of his “disciple” Kharak Singh. Such firsthand accounts of men and women incarcerated in penal colonies or colonial jails in the nineteenth century are rare, even for “state prisoners,” who were much more likely to leave behind paper trails because a greater proportion of them were literate, of elite backgrounds, and more closely surveilled by the colonial state than the rank-and-file convicts. My interest in his story is not only to document the subjective experience of physical and mental pain associated with exiles who are typically “cut off from their roots, their land, their past,” as Said has rightly emphasized,² but also because I wish to consider the lived experiences of political prisoners in relation to those of the transmarine convicts who resided alongside them but in very different circumstances. For the latter were transported to Southeast Asia from India and, to a lesser extent, from Sri Lanka, to service the projects of the emerging British Empire in the region, in effect becoming “convict workers,” as were prisoners in many penal colonies around the world.³

I begin by narrating the events that led to Bhai Maharaj Singh’s banishment, namely, his activities as a rebel against colonial rule, which prompted the authorities to condemn him as a “traitor” deserving of the most severe punishment legally permissible. For his fiercely subaltern career as a political, military, and religious leader explains why he was designated a “state prisoner” who had to be executed or expelled and, once the decision was made to banish him, “closely and carefully watched” in captivity. This chapter then traces his journey out of Punjab to Calcutta to highlight the experiences of prisoners sentenced to transportation in north India who were removed from the interior and remanded into the custody of Alipur Jail in Calcutta—and in western and southern India to Bombay and Madras, respectively—from where they were shipped overseas. It closes out the narrative by recounting Singh’s exile experiences in Singapore, from the time of his arrival on 9 June 1850 to his demise on 5 July 1856, a period during which its population of transmarine convicts increased from 1,402 to a little over 1,500.

I begin with Nihal Singh and why he was forcibly removed from India. He was banished because he was deemed a major threat to the consolidation of colonial rule in Punjab: he had joined forces with many of the leaders who opposed the British and remained on the battlefield long after most of them had laid down their arms. Furthermore, he enjoyed considerable support in the region, not only because he continued to beat the drums of war but also because he was highly respected as a religious leader. His role in the resistance to the British occupation became conspicuous in the wake of the First Anglo-Sikh War of 1845–1846 when he participated in the so-called Prema Conspiracy of 1847, hatched to restore the power of Rani Jindan, the

youngest wife of Ranjit Singh, and her son, the minor king Dalip Singh, by assassinating the chiefs, who vied with them for control of the *darbar* (royal court, executive government) in Lahore, and the British Resident, who had become the effective power in the Sikh kingdom.⁴

A resident of Ludhiana, Nihal Singh rose to prominence as a disciple of a highly respected leader named Bhai Bir Singh, a warrior ascetic who made a name for himself by establishing a gurdwara (place of worship and assembly) in Naurangabad near Amritsar, where hundreds of pilgrims were fed, and by mobilizing Sikh soldiers to side with the princes who sought to inherit the throne in 1839 following the death of their father, Ranjit Singh. He assumed Bir Singh's mantle after the latter's death in 1844 and was thereafter "held in as great esteem as his predecessor by the peasantry and nobility."⁵

A price of one thousand rupees on his head—eventually the reward was raised to the princely sum of ten thousand rupees—and the local authorities in pursuit following the exposure of the Prema Conspiracy, Maharaj Singh fled, periodically surfacing in the central Punjab area known as the *manjha*, or *doab*, to rally people to the cause of the *khalsa* (Sikh militant order) against the *feringhis* (foreigners, the British).⁶

British attempts to seize him led to raids on his *dera* (encampment or dwelling place of a religious teacher) at Amritsar and Naurangabad and confiscation of his property but not his arrest.⁷ When an uprising broke out in Multan—more than two hundred miles to the southwest—led by its *diwan* (governor), Mul Raj, in April 1848, he joined the revolt, accompanied by several thousand men he had recruited in the *manjha*. In the ensuing Second Anglo-Sikh War, the "rebels" were completely routed, thus bringing to an end resistance in the Punjab and the Khalsa Raj, and extending British rule over the entire region.⁸

While most leaders in Punjab capitulated, Maharaj Singh continued campaigning against the British, briefly fleeing to Jammu in the north to evade capture. Back in Punjab toward the end of 1849, he was finally captured near Jalandhar on 28 December, apparently in the midst of planning attacks on British troops stationed in nearby cantonments and the kidnapping of Henry Vansittart, the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar.⁹

By then, Nihal Singh was a celebrated military and religious leader. He was better known as *maharaj*, or king, a name he had acquired, along with the honorific *bhai*, meaning brother.¹⁰ "Sikh elites and masses recognized," as one scholar has remarked, that he possessed "the major characteristics of a bhai: the ability to expound on gurbani [i.e., the teachings of the Sikh gurus as recorded in the Adi Granth and Dasam Granth texts], piety, and a demonstrated capacity to work miracles. These features confirmed for his followers that Maharaj Singh was a holy man, and those who supported his

mission to check British expansion in Punjab were sure to earn religious merit.”¹¹ “Such fully realized men,” Harjot Oberoi adds, “were sometimes also honoured with the appellation Baba, and more rarely Guru.”¹² He was “much venerated” as well “by the women of the manjha,” many of whom were the wives and mothers of the Sikh elite.¹³

Nihal Singh accrued these marks of distinction through his military and religious activities. His considerable local standing issued in part from his military exploits, which included “giving away swords” to his followers and mobilizing people to take up arms against the British. In the eyes of the colonial authorities, he was an “outlaw,” a man who became “a leader” by virtue of his striking presence on the battlefield astride a black mare and seemingly omnipresent because he would turn up in Amritsar one day and Lahore, some fifty kilometers away, the next. Increasingly, he “appeared at the head of large armed parties . . . possessing command of sums of money sufficient for lavish distribution to the poor and to those who came for service.” And he had a knack for evading arrest, supported as he was by local inhabitants who were unwilling to betray a leader they “respected for religious and political reasons,”¹⁴ notwithstanding the sizable reward offered for his capture.

Indeed, Maharaj Singh was their *bhai* and guru. He was known for his “incantations at Umritsar [Amritsar],” the religious and historical center of Sikhs. He was also acknowledged as a “miracle worker” whom people followed because of his religious teachings and prophecies and his remarkable ability to feed and provision them. He had acquired this latter reputation when he was in the *dera* of his guru, Bir Singh—he ran his master’s *langar* (free kitchen) and made sure that it never ran out of food. And once he took over from his guru, Maharaj Singh became even more renowned for possessing the gift of giving: always providing for his followers in times of need, whether they numbered a handful or several hundred. As the testimonies of his captured followers reveal, he devoted considerable attention and effort to securing “stores of grain” and other supplies for his entourage. No wonder the British government considered him a formidable opponent who had to be stopped: he had the religious, military, and political capital to wage “a people’s rising against the British political domination over the land of the five rivers and the Sikh gurus.”¹⁵

Perhaps nothing better illustrates his standing in the region than the hero’s reception he was accorded by the local population when he was finally taken prisoner. As his captor, Deputy Commissioner Vansittart, noted in his dramatic eyewitness account of the moment that his famous prisoner was ushered into the local jail in Jalandhar, even the guards acknowledged his authority and influence:

When Maharaj Sing and his companions were led into the Jail, some of the Seikh [Sikh] Guard bowed themselves down. During the whole day numbers of Hindoos had been gathering round the Jail with the view of casting their eyes on the building in which he was confined. . . .

When to this I add the fact . . . that seldom a day passed that hundreds of devotees did not worship him—that his presence in the Doab was well known to all the villages around . . . When all this is established . . . I assert that the Jalundhur is no safe place of custody for the Gooroo.¹⁶

As Vansittart's testimony indicates, the authorities were not confident about their ability to keep their famous prisoner under lock and key in the local jail. He was "not an ordinary man," the deputy commissioner insisted, underlining his point with an analogy that his superiors found highly offensive. What specifically upset them was Vansittart's claim that Maharaj Singh

is to the natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands, and are more implicitly relied on, than those worked by the ancient prophets.

But now the man has been captured, that vast power by which the whole Seikh [Sikh] mind from Pateela [Patiala] to Pesawur [Peshawar] is swayed is rapidly passing away. This man who was a God, is in our hands (unless he eludes our vigilance). An ordinary mortal and his schemes, already in part organized, are forever overthrown.¹⁷

Understandably, Maharaj Singh's exalted position in the community made the local authorities uneasy about the reliability of the local guards and the possibility of a jailbreak. Moreover, because he was not "an ordinary captive," Vansittart deemed it appropriate not to secure him in leg irons or body chains, choosing instead to bind his right hand "at night to the left hand of a determined Mussulman [Muslim]."¹⁸ In the deputy commissioner's eyes, this arrangement presumably militated against escape because he considered Sikhs and Muslims to be at loggerheads, which they were at times, although not always, as the shifting alliances among different groups during the Prema Conspiracy indicate.¹⁹ Part of the British concern about him also stemmed from the fact that their military victories did not ensure control of the region. As Charles Napier, the commander in chief of the British forces, noted, they had occupied the territory militarily but not conquered it as yet, because there were still large numbers of Sikh soldiers present who could rise against the government.²⁰

The famous rebel added to the deputy commissioner's anxieties by maintaining a "sullen silence." Briefly, he also alarmed local officials by refusing to eat, a decision that Vansittart construed as an attempt at self-starvation and martyrdom. Once he broke his fast, their next worry was that he would escape with the help of supporters both inside and outside the jail. As a precaution, Vansittart transferred him to the nearby cantonment, where he could be more securely guarded by the military.

There was little, if any, discussion among colonial administrators about their high-profile prisoner's alleged suicide attempt. No doubt there was not because Maharaj Singh seemed to have entertained that option for less than forty-eight hours, not nearly long enough for authorities in Jalandhar and Calcutta, let alone Jalandhar, Calcutta, and London, to communicate with one another. The deputy commissioner, however, was unequivocal about not allowing his adversary to become "an unperishable name amongst his followers." Better to have him live on and "pass the remainder of his days, whatever may be the time allotted him by government or by god, . . . [in] ignominy," Vansittart noted. "It would be a misfortune," he added, "if the man now a miserable captive should . . . die by starvation, and . . . have, after his death, a name, to be cherished by all posterity—a name, which if he be kept safe captive for 2 years, will die away and be half forgotten."²¹ Nothing in the colonial archives suggests that anyone recognized the irony in a situation where a "miracle worker," renowned for his resourcefulness in provisioning his followers, considered terminating his life by refusing sustenance willingly supplied by his enemies.

Much more deliberate were the calculations that went into determining an appropriate and efficacious punishment for Maharaj Singh. For the most part, Punjab authorities sought his immediate and complete removal from his territorial base of support, not just the region but all of India, with an eye to diminishing his fame, if not casting him outright into oblivion. In other words, they were intent on ensuring that his present and future would have no connection to his past, either substantively or spatially, and thus his removal from his roots and his territorial base. Relocation was all the more imperative because they considered him one of the few remaining stumbling blocks to their consolidation of control over the entire region and military recruitment efforts among Sikhs, who had more than proven their mettle as fighting men in the two Anglo-Sikh wars. For him, there was to be no trial as there was for one of his fellow rebels, Mul Raj.

At the highest level of government, Governor-General Dalhousie in particular, initially wanted to hang the "pestilent vagabond," as he termed Maharaj Singh, so that he would "meet with his long-standing deserts."²² But he subsequently backed away from insisting on "the heaviest penalty

which public law can inflict” and agreed that it was better to banish him than make a martyr out of him by executing him. “In deference to . . . the local authorities,” as he put it, “the Bhaie should be . . . at once removed to Allahabad. The disciple who is stated to have been taken with him should be sent with him.” He also insisted on “a guard sufficient to convey the prisoners . . . [and on] tak[ing] advantage of the escort provided . . . to guard the Bhaie to Allahabad, whence he will be conveyed to Calcutta.”²³

Legal justification for exiling Maharaj Singh entailed issuing a “warrant of commitment” under Regulation III of 1818, which allowed the government to “place under personal restraint individuals against whom there may not be sufficient ground to institute any judicial proceedings, or when such proceedings may not be adapted to the nature of the case, or may for other reasons be unadvisable or improper.” Such a warrant was authorized for “reasons of state” having to do with the “due maintenance of the alliances formed by the British Government with foreign powers, the preservation of tranquillity in the territories entitled to its protection and the security of the British dominions from foreign hostility and from internal commotion.”²⁴

In invoking the “Regulation for the Confinement of State Prisoners,” the governor-general sided with Punjab officials who sought Singh’s displacement “from the jurisdiction . . . and from among his own people; with a view to avoid the excitement and prolonged uncertainty which the delay necessarily attendant on a trial would create.”²⁵ Colonial administrators at all levels agreed, in other words, not to risk convening a trial in Lahore that would in all likelihood inflame and mobilize his supporters.

They also concurred that “personal restraint” in the case of Maharaj Singh meant banishment “at once beyond seas” and not merely expulsion from Punjab to “Hindustan” or north India, a punishment imposed on many of the other prominent Sikh rebels.²⁶ The lone objection to this interpretation of Regulation III came not from within the ranks of the government in India but from an official in Singapore, and then only after the prisoners had already arrived there. Apparently the local sheriff, with the support of legal counsel, challenged the guru’s internment in the Singapore jail. Although he eventually relented, his reaction led local officials to scramble to find other venues. For a while, they entertained the possibility of transferring the “state prisoners” to nearby Fort Cornwallis in Penang, where the men would have been under military and not civil jurisdiction.²⁷

As these deliberations leading up to the decision to exile Maharaj Singh indicate, colonial authorities perceived him as a significant threat to the consolidation of their rule in Punjab. Banishment was the only recourse once they had decided not to execute him, not only because it was considered second only to capital punishment in severity but also because it expelled

him not only from his home base but also from all of India—almost as if the only way to extirpate a larger-than-life figure with political, military, and religious standing was to erase his presence and, in the long run, any memory of him, or at least that was the intention behind removing him from Indian soil as expeditiously as possible and dumping him in faraway Southeast Asia. For him internal exile was not an option, no keeping under lock and key beyond Punjab, as was the punishment meted out to many of his fellow rebels. Overseas exile for the rest of his natural life was the most promising solution because it combined distance and time into a potent brew that offered the possibility of making his many followers forget him, of casting him into oblivion.

Convicts from India, by contrast, were routinely dispatched to Singapore and to the other penal colonies in Southeast Asia because they had been specifically sentenced to transportation for their “heinous offences.” They had been going to Singapore since 1825, and to Bengkulu in west Sumatra, Penang in present-day Malaysia, and other penal colonies in the region since the late eighteenth century. Such punishments were meted out either by the supreme court in the presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras or by the courts at the local level. Most offenders were sentenced to transportation for life, others for terms ranging from seven to fourteen years. At different times in the early nineteenth century, transportation was substituted in lieu of long-term sentences of imprisonment, at the behest of either the authorities or prisoners who chose banishment over the prison.²⁸

For Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh—the latter characterized in some colonial documents as the former’s “servant”—the journey seaward began on 3 January 1850. Under armed escort, they traveled first to the cantonment town of Ambala, a little over a hundred miles away. At the end of March, they were sent to Allahabad, almost five hundred miles away, where a contingent of Sikh rebels had arrived earlier in the month and were under lock and key in the Mughal fort. From Allahabad, located at the confluence of the Jamuna and Ganges Rivers, the prisoners traveled to Calcutta by steamer in April, a distance of another five hundred miles, as did their Multan co-conspirator, Diwan Mul Raj. By late April, all three men reached Calcutta and were consigned to the garrison barracks at Fort William, which they entered in *palkis* (palanquins) escorted by an armed guard.²⁹ Every step of the way, the two Singhs traveled under a “warrant of commitment” that underlined their treatment as requiring “personal restraint.”

Once they were in Calcutta, the orders from Governor-General Dalhousie were that the “Bhaee and his disciple should be dispatched to Singapore” right away. As for Mul Raj, whom Dalhousie had met earlier in Lahore and found “in a state of bodily and mental prostration” and seem-

ingly unable to “survive long enough to reach Calcutta,” he postponed his banishment indefinitely because he did not believe that the *diwan* would “reach Singapore, alive.” In his estimation “the distress on religious grounds, the agitation, the want of ordinary food, and the sea, would kill him.” And *that* the governor-general did not want to see happen, because his “death under such circumstances would receive the sympathy with which he was regarded, and would give for him the pity and admiration which attach to martyrdom of any kind.” About Maharaj Singh, however, he did not have any health concerns: he characterized the former as “strong and would not be endangered by the voyage.”³⁰

Indeed, there is very little of the rhetoric of mercy present in the colonial discourse about the Bhai, not only in comparison to statements made about his coconspirator Mul Raj but also in relation to other cases of political exiles. In sentencing political prisoners to transportation, the colonial government often made a point of emphasizing its quality of mercy by underlining its preference for inflicting more civilized and less sanguinary punishments than those allowable by its own laws as well those imposed by previous Indian regimes. In fact, such language and logic informed its development of transportation as a punishment that inflicted a “just measure of pain,” severe but not sanguinary the way precolonial punishments were, as the British were wont to emphasize.³¹

On 19 April 1850, Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh were handed over to Fort William. They were lodged, as was Mul Raj, in cells described as clean, with “plenty of space for air, and perfectly secure.” That is, they were under the watchful eyes of European guards, in Maharaj Singh’s case, of a European sergeant and, at night, European soldiers.

Less than a month later, on 15 May, the two Singhs were placed on board the bark *Mahomed Shaw*, destined for China with a stopover in Singapore. They were remanded into the custody of a British military detail consisting of a sergeant, a corporal, and six privates and housed in a “good cabin,” while their guards were assigned “space between decks.” The sergeant’s orders were to keep the prisoners in “irons” until the vessel was at sea, and to ensure that they were turned over to the Singapore authorities “without irons.”³² There were also careful instructions about their food and water on board the ship, as there generally were for convicts and soldiers traveling overseas. However, as “state prisoners,” they were treated much more leniently than were convicts, for whom the very experience of reaching their penal destinations was much more varied and involved.³³

As “state prisoners,” Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh were handed over to the Singapore authorities with the same guidelines about being “placed under personal restraint” and “closely and carefully watched” that had

been in effect on their journey across north India. As before, “great importance” was attached to their “safe custody” and to their not being “treated with any unnecessary rigor.” In fact, the governor-general, who had visited Singapore earlier that year, specifically directed its officials to confine the state prisoners in the “upper rooms of the new gaol, as being both healthy and secure.” He also urged them “for some time to come, to have a special military guard set over the prisoners” consisting of “some trustworthy non-commissioned European officer, or government servant of some class. . . . No one should be admitted to the apartment occupied by the prisoners except with the knowledge of this officer, and he should himself see the prisoners at least twice every day.”³⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Messiter, in charge of the troops in Singapore, carried out this order by informing the civilian authorities that no one would be permitted to enter their chambers except for the sheriff, the assistant resident, and the surgeon of the jail.³⁵

State prisoners were treated both more and less severely than transmarine convicts. They were much more “carefully watched,” as is suggested by the “personal restraint” under which the two Singhs were held in Singapore and the extraordinary precautions taken en route to Calcutta, on board the transportation ship, and in the penal colony, including by ensuring that they were always in the custody of European guards. Such close supervision stands in sharp contrast to the practices developed for the discipline and surveillance of convicts. In fact, by the time the Singhs arrived in Singapore in 1850, prisoners served as “their own warders,” to quote a phrase bandied about by local authorities to characterize the system of self-discipline in practice there and appropriated by Major J. F. A. McNair, the comptroller of Indian convicts in the Straits Settlements between 1857 and 1877, as the title of his book on that subject.³⁶

The special status of the Singhs also came with tangible benefits, notably access to better rations. Their diet consisted of rice, flour, ghee (clarified butter), dal (lentils), sugar, salt, coffee, curry spices, onions, chilies, vegetables, dry dates, dry milk, and firewood, many more items than allocated to the rank-and-file convicts, as the senior administrator in Singapore noted in characterizing their allowance as “liberal.” Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh did not, however, consider their allowances sufficient. They asked for more; they requested and received a small stipend to hire a cook because the latter did not wish to fill that role. Less successful was Kharak Singh’s attempt to add a small quantity of bhang (marijuana) to his list of dietary needs.³⁷

Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh were also treated differently in that they did not have to engage in manual labor, which convicts from India were routinely charged with doing in Singapore and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In fact, the transportation of convicts in the early nineteenth century

was as much about mobilizing their bodies for building the infrastructure of the rising British Empire in the region as it was about punishing offenders by removing them from their homes and compelling them to cross the *kala pani*, or black waters.³⁸

Consider the lot of the fourteen hundred or so convicts, predominantly men, who were stationed in Singapore when the two Singhs arrived there. Much of the colonial discourse about this population revolved around their disciplining, about the techniques developed to manage and organize them in order to transform them into productive workers at minimal cost to the government. Consequently, parts of the annual reports on Indian convicts read as if they are balance sheets, with convicts constituting assets whose numbers were always in flux because of additions resulting from new arrivals and subtractions stemming from manumissions, deaths, or escapes; investments and the returns on them, denoted in terms of the roads, canals, bridges, buildings, and other work done, and their labor value in cash equivalents; liabilities made up by the costs incurred for feeding and sheltering the convicts; and the equity expressed as the surplus that the local authorities received from having convicts support their own keep and from freeing the local government from the costs of hiring paid labor.

State prisoners, by contrast, as the biannual reports mandated by Regulation III suggest, were not consigned to lives of labor. Not that Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh considered themselves better off than the convict workers. As their jailers consistently noted, both men continued to resist in their own way, Maharaj Singh by persisting in his silence; he barely spoke when he was first captured in Punjab and remained reticent throughout much of his captivity in Singapore. As his British visitors observed, he was quiet, seldom speaking “when spoken to” or “even when questioned by the visiting officer.”

Kharak Singh, on the other hand, was rarely bashful about expressing himself, even lashing out frequently. Whether he played this part because he was the mouthpiece for both men cannot be ascertained from the colonial archives. However, his master was certainly aware of his behavior because much of it was enacted in his presence. Their jailer bore the brunt of his verbal assaults. These apparently became so disrespectful that a senior administrator intervened and met with him in January 1851, some seven months into their first year in exile. As this official recounted, he went to “the very comfortable apartment allotted to the state prisoners . . . and found Kurruck Sing on his bed.” He took up “a chair close to him” and then proceeded to explain to the latter that he had been “sent to Singapore for safe custody by the government of India, [and] that . . . the Governor-General was anxious he should have every reasonable indulgence, [and] that it was unbecoming

on his part to use violence towards or be angry with the jailor, as he merely obeys orders.” Rather than heed the advice, Kharak Singh, as the Singapore Resident recounted, “interrupted . . . several times in a most disrespectful manner and when asked what he really wanted replied proper food” and “1000 rupees a day.” His demeanor “throughout was most violent, [and] he made use of terms extremely offensive in the presence of the sepoys which to me was particularly galling[;] it appears to me that the conduct of KS is, and has been such as to render coercive measures indispensable.”³⁹

In 1852, Maharaj Singh’s health began to fail, a change duly recorded in the official reports. Increasingly described as “emaciated,” he was no longer only portrayed as silent, although he continued to be taciturn. Kharak Singh, however, remained a study in contrast: a picture of “good health,” somewhat better behaved, but still “occasionally verging on disrespect.”⁴⁰

The following year, Maharaj Singh’s condition worsened, his list of ailments including “continued fever, cataract and irritation of stomach and bowels.”⁴¹ Later that year, the local medical officer found him in ill health, complaining “of pain and swelling of his feet and ankles, and . . . now all but blind from milky cataract in both eyes, he is able to distinguish black from white, but cannot guide himself from one place to another, his health in other respects is good, he eats well and is generally cheerful.”⁴²

His declining health prompted the resident councillor, the senior local official in Singapore, to write the governor of the Straits Settlements for “some trifling degree of relaxation” in the regimen of “personal restraint.” Noting that Singh had been in confinement since June 1850 and that escape was highly improbable, he proposed that the two state prisoners be permitted to have “an airing twice a week in a palankeen [palanquin], accompanied, of course, by the European in charge, and a responsible peon.”⁴³ The request was promptly denied.

What was granted in mid-1853, three years into their exile in Singapore, was an opportunity to send messages home. Maharaj Singh and Kharak Singh penned their letters in Gurmukhi (Punjabi script), dated them “Asadhā,” or the Hindu calendar month of June/July, to indicate when they were written, and addressed them to their *dera* at Naurangabad. They assured the Singapore authorities—none of whom were in any position to decipher the language—that their missives referred exclusively “to their present situation and family matters.”⁴⁴ Singapore sent their correspondence on to Calcutta, from where it was forwarded to the chief commissioner in Punjab, who translated the letters into English before delivering them to Amritsar. Presumably he had them translated by one of his Punjabi subordinates or, more likely, by the one or two missionaries from the American Presbyterian Mission

who were known to be the only Europeans with any fluency in the language.⁴⁵ Not finding the letters objectionable, the commissioner relayed them forward, although he ruled against anymore correspondence, a decision that the Calcutta government agreed with wholeheartedly, particularly as it adjudged them censurable. As the governor-general put it, the letters did not even mention “a word about ‘family affairs.’”⁴⁶

Actually they did, but only in the sense that their authors conceived of their religious brotherhood (*sadh sangat*) at their *dera* in Naurangabad as family. Furthermore, their letters were very much about their “situation,” which they clearly found to be abominable. Indeed, as their contents indicate, they are the only first-person expressions of the reflections and feelings of the Singhs in exile. Without such letters, as the examples discussed by Aldrich (chapter 2), Anderson (chapter 1), Margana (chapter 5), Paterson (chapter 9), and Ricci (chapter 4) in this volume also reveal, historians would know far less about the emotional state of exiles.

In part an appeal, in part testimony, and in part lament, Maharaj Singh’s letter, which deserves to be quoted at length, opens by referring to its author by both his original and acquired names, as if its intention was to detail the bleak life in captivity of both the individual and the religious and political leader he had become in the course of the wars against the foreigners:

Let the affairs of Nehal Sing and Maharaj Sing be made known to Guru Juswunt Sing Sahib, let him learn the particulars of his slaves. I drank neem three years, my eyes cannot see. Kurrug Sing continually forbade me to drink neem but I did not leave it off.

You have told me that a dog even will not befriend me. So not a single dog has been of any service to me. I had no idea then that what you said was true. I have now become well aware of it. Now kindly allow me to enjoy the company of your feet which are like the lotus.

Many were friends in prosperity but no one befriends in adversity. Meditate oh my heart says Nanak our god that he may assist thee in the end. We oh lord always forget thee, but thou art beneficent and the forgiver of sins. Who ever goes to see thee, is relieved of all worldly cares and troubles. Come to my aid. Oh lord now that I am on the eve of destruction. Oh true guide, the hope of the hopeless. I who am utterly hopeless adore you. I am the dust of your feet.

Deprived of all power placed in confinement, there is no remedy for me. Rughoo Nath is the only supporter who vouchsafes assistance in time. Power is restored I am set free every remedy is at hand. All blessings I received at your hand the moment you come to my assistance.⁴⁷

His health deteriorating with each passing month, Maharaj Singh understandably thought that his life verged on the “eve of destruction.” He had been drinking neem⁴⁸ consistently for three years—imbibing neem literally as well as metaphorically (i.e., drinking the cup of bitterness)—and that had turned him blind. In exile, he lamented, he had no followers; in confinement, he had been stripped of all his powers. Once he commanded *sardars* and subalterns alike; now, as he put it, he did not even have a dog “befriend” him, let alone be “of any service.” “Many were friends in prosperity but no one befriends in adversity,” he intoned. He regretted that there appeared to be no “remedy” for his predicament, which presumably was a reference to both his medical and incarcerated condition. The only hopeful chords he struck are when he invoked Guru Nanak, the founder of his Sikh religion, and expressed faith in the solace that comes from surrendering to his power and goodness. These lines, too, are highly suggestive, in that his allusions seem to be as much about seeking physical and spiritual release as they are about securing liberation from his “worldly cares and troubles.” If only he—the First Sikh Guru or Maharaj Singh’s family of gurus and disciples—could come to his “aid.”

Kharak Singh’s letter sounded many of the same notes struck by his master, but more overtly, thus seemingly paralleling the public roles they had played in exile. To begin with, he titled his missive a “petition” and then proceeded to affix an address to it as if to furnish a geographical grid of his location. In his words, he was lodged “at Singapore near China beyond the seas far far distant from Juggernath.”

Clearly, what his plea underlined in part by alluding to China was his physical distance and remoteness from Naurangabad. He was almost in China, far removed from Jagannath, which is a very long way from Punjab. After all, he had traveled to Singapore on board the ship *Mahomed Shaw*, headed for China. Furthermore, the Singhs were in Singapore, a predominantly Chinese settlement—more than half of its sixty thousand inhabitants were Chinese at the beginning of 1850. Indeed, to many a visitor the Chinese presence in Singapore was noticeable from the time they approached its harbor and saw that many ships “going to, or coming from, China . . . call at this port for news or supplies,” and from the many boats including “Chinese junks” always at the port.⁴⁹

That Kharak Singh invoked Jagannath to triangulate his location seems puzzling at first blush, but perhaps not entirely, because it refers, of course, to that well-known pilgrimage site in the coastal town of Puri, in the eastern province of Orissa, where a temple bearing the name of Jagannath, an avatar of Vishnu, has long been revered as a sacred site. A famous Hindu pilgrimage destination, it is also celebrated by Sikhs as one of the venues

that Guru Nanak is believed to have visited during his peregrinations. Perhaps Jagannath also came to mind because its principal festival, the Ratha Jatra, to which pilgrims flock from all over the country, is always held in Asadh, the very same month in which the two Singhs wrote their letters. Conceivable as well—although not verifiable—is the possibility that the allusion to the famous temple was made in the same vein that migrants did later in the century when they equated whatever ship they boarded with Jagannath, thus nullifying the ritual transgressions that necessarily resulted from crossing the *kala pani*, or black waters, and in the company of people of other castes and religions, with whom food and drink transactions were likely to be polluting.⁵⁰

As did his master, Kharak Singh, too, entreated the gods in his missive not to forsake him. But he also brazenly proclaimed, “we,” that is, master and disciple, “will present ourselves before you.” Furthermore, right after the address—and, intriguingly, the letter is addressed to Bhai Bir Singh (presumably Maharaj Singh’s guru, who had died in 1844) and the religious community at the Naurangabad *dera* that Maharaj Singh had taken over from his master—are the words “we will come within one year.” A sketch of two figures then followed, one ostensibly representing a ship and the other the island of Singapore. “Not a word in the letter about family affairs,” concluded one colonial official, seemingly oblivious to the fact that both letters, on the contrary, were about precisely such matters in that they sought to reestablish communication with their religious brotherhood organized around their *dera*, the community that they considered their “relations and friends.”⁵¹

Meanwhile, Kharak Singh opened another front in his ongoing struggles with the local authorities. While the letters were in transit, he expressed a desire to become a Christian. As John William Ganno, the keeper of the Singapore jail, informed his superiors, he often found books on Singh’s table that the latter said were the scriptures in Hindustani. Singh also engaged him in conversation, apparently in Hindustani, about Moses and Jesus Christ and pointed to the similarities between Christianity and the Sikh faith. However, before these conversations could lead to a visit from the chaplain, Governor-General Dalhousie, who was regularly apprised about the “state prisoners” by the Singapore authorities, intervened. In his estimation, Kharak Singh’s interest in Christianity was “a very shallow desire” to seek a release, and while he was willing to allow a visit from a chaplain, he wanted the prisoner to know in no uncertain terms “that if he is playing a part and hopes to obtain liberty, by adopting Christianity, he is deluding himself and that, Christian or Sikh, he will equally remain in Singapore gaol.”⁵²

The letters never reached their destination—apparently no one was at the *dera* when the one and only attempt was made to deliver them. As for

Kharak Singh's flirtation with Christianity, that did not last long, and there are no subsequent mentions of it in the colonial records. While there is ample reason to doubt his desire for conversion, it is not something completely out of the realm of possibility. After all, Dalip Singh, the maharaja he and his master had championed, converted to Christianity in 1853, with the approval of Dalhousie, after first expressing interest in Christianity as early as 1850. News of this dramatic event, no doubt, was widely disseminated.⁵³

More than likely it reached the ears of the two Singhs in Singapore because they were joined by a number of Sikhs in 1853 who came as the newest batch of convicts. Perhaps not coincidentally, "a serious outbreak" occurred among these new prisoners in July 1853. Whether Maharaj Singh or Kharak Singh had a hand in it cannot be discerned from the extant records. The Singhs and the convicts would certainly have been familiar with each other's presence on the island, although their paths were not likely to cross routinely, and not often, if ever, because of the different disciplinary regimens under which state prisoners and convicts were kept.⁵⁴

Thereafter, the story of Maharaj Singh, stitched together from government reports, describes a person in increasingly poor health—his deteriorating condition at times eliciting sympathy in official quarters in Singapore and even in Calcutta. The January 1854 medical report indicating that he was "quite blind" from his cataracts, with "cure by operation" impossible, prompted the government in India to urge "everything . . . be done with a view to effect a cure."⁵⁵ No wonder his request for reading materials was approved. The books purchased for him arrived in Singapore in January 1855 and included a "Bible Hindoo in 2 volumes, new testatment 1 volume" and other items; for example, a 115-year-old manuscript copy of the granth [presumably the Guru Granth Sahib, or the principal scriptural text of the Sikhs] that cost Rs. 30–8, was procured in Lahore and then conveyed by bullock train to Calcutta from where it was shipped.⁵⁶

After the medical officer pronounced him "perfectly blind and incapable of moving about unaided" in early 1856, Singapore proposed allowing him a *gharry* (horse-drawn cab) so that he could ride a few miles into the country twice or thrice a week under the escort of a "steady and trustworthy official of the jail," whose job was to prevent "all strangers from having access to him."⁵⁷ On 5 July 1856, three days after the *gharry* order was issued, Bhai Maharaj Singh was dead. Thus his Singapore exile story ended, seemingly in obscurity, far, far away and without his becoming "an unperishable name" and "cherished by all posterity," as per the wishes of British officials. Exile seemingly had not only severed him from his roots and his past but shut down his memory and history so that his life of rebellion would have no future.

His “disciple,” however, was not done quite yet. In the aftermath of his master’s death, Kharak Singh was allowed to remain in the jail under police surveillance and granted an allowance of sixty rupees per month. By February 1857 he was permitted to reside wherever he chose to as long as he did not leave the island. Never one to refrain from speaking up, he right away asked for but was denied an increase in his allowance.⁵⁸

Nor did he contain himself for long in other ways. In August 1857 he was accused of having “formed association[s] with and obtained influence over the convicts at Singapore.” According to two prisoners who visited him, Singh proposed attacking and massacring the European community in Singapore while they were at church—a plan that resembled what had occurred at the outbreak of the Mutiny/Rebellion in the northern Indian town of Meerut in May 1857. When confronted by the Singapore authorities, Singh pleaded innocence: he proclaimed his loyalty to the British government and offered his “services” against the mutineers. Calcutta chose not to entertain his offer, noting instead that he was a “disciple of the Guru Maharaj,” wielded “considerable influence” among Sikhs, and was unlikely to use his “influence” for anything other than acts of “hostility to the British government.” Best to ship him off to Fort Cornwallis in Penang, where he would become “a perfect stranger” and “unable to perpetrate any mischief should he feel so inclined.” There he was to be kept, moreover, under “strict and rigorous confinement.” None of this placated Penang officials worried about having a dangerous “state prisoner”⁵⁹ on their island.

The change of address did not slow down Kharak Singh, who continued to press for special dispensations. In May 1858 he asked for permission to send a letter to his “friends in India.” His request was denied on grounds that state prisoners were forbidden to send letters. Convicts in the Straits Settlements were permitted to receive letters, but only after their review by the superintendent of convicts.⁶⁰ The last reference to Kharak Singh I have been able to locate is when he surfaced again in the colonial records in 1861, when he petitioned for his family to join him in Penang. Although the local administration was willing to accede to his request, Calcutta was not.⁶¹

As for Bhai Maharaj Singh, I have no evidence as yet that his memory was preserved in the immediate aftermath of his death either by the local Indian community in Singapore or by his fellow Punjabis in India. To my knowledge, no obituaries appeared in any published account in English or South Asian languages. The colonial records are also largely silent—no triumphalist account of his death in captivity and obscurity, in contrast to the exultation with which his capture in 1849 was reported. The official correspondence in Singapore and between the Straits Settlements and Calcutta takes note of his passing but says little else; his presence in Singapore is not

even mentioned in the extended history of the penal colony of Singapore written by the former superintendent of convicts, J. F. A. McNair.⁶² Nor do I have documentation to show that the arrival of Sikhs as policemen in Singapore in the 1880s—some two decades after their countrymen came as convicts in the early 1850s—followed by the in-migration of other members of the community ensured his memory and history on the island in the late nineteenth century. According to Choor Singh Sidhu (1911–2009), a judge of the Supreme Court of Singapore and a historian of Sikhism, he was informed by Sikh policemen in 1922 that the tombstone in the General Hospital grounds had once been at Outram Road, where Singh’s prison was located and where he was believed to have been cremated just outside the prison. That suggests that local people were familiar with the famous rebel who once lived among them. After World War II, Tamils began to place flowers at the foot of the tombstone. Sikhs followed suit, as did Muslims in the belief that it was a saint’s shrine (*kramat*). At some point local Sikhs built a structure over the tombstone, installed the Granth Sahib, and built a gurdwara, all of which was moved to Silat Road in 1966. Today his shrine, the Memorial Gurdwara of Bhai Maharaj Singh, adjoins the main place of devotion known as Silat Road Gurdwara Sahib. Before visiting the main gurdwara, worshippers typically visit his shrine first, which is held “in great reverence . . . [because it] earns the devotee great merit. It is believed that prayers recited sincerely from the heart are answered and vows have been fulfilled when a devotee worships at this shrine. This is the only Gurdwara Sahib in Singapore where *langar* is prepared and served everyday round the clock if necessary.”⁶³ As in his heyday, he is revered today as a “miracle” *bhai*. Maharaj Singh also lives on in regional and nationalist historiography, celebrated in Punjab and India since the 1960s as a “saint-revolutionary,” a “rebel,” and an early nationalist, as well as by Sikh communities everywhere. Exile was but a momentary rupture in the life and history of Bhai Maharaj Singh.

NOTES

Epigraph. “Minute by the Most Noble the Governor-General,” Document No. 26, in Bhai Nahar Singh and Bhai Kirpal Singh, eds., *Rebels Against the British Raj: Bhai Maharaj Singh (1810–1857)* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1989), 90–91. Doab refers to the river basin or land between two confluent or converging rivers.

1. Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173. See also Anderson’s chapter 1, “A Global History of Exile in Asia, c. 1700–1900,” in this volume.

2. Said, “Reflections,” 140.

3. See Anand A. Yang, “Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003):

179–208. See also Anoma Pieris, “The ‘Other’ Side of Labor Reform: Accounts of Incarceration and Resistance in the Straits Settlements Penal System, 1825–1873,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 2 (2011): 453–479; and Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore’s Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), regarding Bhai Maharaj Singh.

4. Punjab Record Office, *Political Diaries of the Agent to the Governor-General, North-West Frontier and Resident at Lahore*, vol. 3 (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1909), 175–176.

5. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 2, 1839–1964 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 64; Andrew J. Major, *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996), 40–124.

6. *Manjha*, or *doab*, refers to a tract between two rivers, in this case, to the area in Lahore and Amritsar Districts between the Beas/Sutlej and Ravi Rivers. It became one of the prime recruitment areas for the colonial military.

7. Punjab Government, “Political Diary,” 25 June 1847 and 30 June 1847, in *Political Diaries of Lieutenant Reynell G. Taylor, Mr. P. Sandy Melvill, Pandit Kunahya Lal, Mr. P. A. Vans Agnew, Lieutenant J. Nicholson, Mr. L. Bowring and Mr. A. H. Cocks, 1847–1849* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1915), 188, 201. Maharaj Singh’s confiscated property in Amritsar, which included fifty-five head of cow and buffalo, was sold for six thousand rupees.

8. M. L. Ahluwalia, *Sant Nihal Singh alias Bhai Maharaj Singh: A Saint-Revolutionary of the 19th Century Punjab* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972), 13–22; Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, 85–97; Major, *Return to Empire*, 81–124.

9. Ahluwalia, *Sant Nihal Singh*, 48–61.

10. W. H. McLeod, “The Meaning of ‘Sant’ in Sikh Usage,” in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarasisdass, 1987), 257–260.

11. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 122–123. The term *bhai* was used in “early Sikh tradition . . . as an honorific for the holy men of the Panth. To qualify for this title a person had to demonstrate a capacity to interpret the Adi Granth [Sikh scriptures], communicate the wisdom of the gurus it enshrined, and be publicly recognised for his piety. If in addition he could work miracles, heal the sick and give succour to the distressed, he was sure to occupy a position of considerable reverence and influence within the community.” See also Ricci’s chapter 4 in this volume for another example of a religious leader who provided his followers miraculously with food and sustenance.

12. *Ibid.*, 118.

13. Punjab Government, “Political Diary,” 22 June 1847, in *Political Diaries of Taylor*, 182.

14. Edwin Arnold, *The Marquis of Dalhousie’s Administration of British India*, vol. 1 (London: Saunders, Otley, & Co., 1862), 97–98.

15. Nahar Singh, *Documents Relating to Bhai Maharaj Singh* (Ludhiana: Sikh History Source Material Search Association, 1968), 6, 61–62, 265; Ahluwalia, *Sant Nihal Singh*, 8–9. See also the testimony of a military officer who believed that Maharaj Singh was someone the “[Sikh] army are anxious to canonize.” “Diary of Captain James Abbott, Assistant Resident, on Deputation to Huzara, 9 June 1848,” in *Political Diaries of Taylor*, vol. 4, 182.

16. H. Vansittart, Deputy Commissioner, Jalandhur, to D. F. McLeod, Commissioner and Suptd, 30 December 1849, in Singh, *Documents*, 91.

17. *Ibid.*, 92.

18. *Ibid.*, 93.

19. J. Royal Roseberry III, *Imperial Rule in Punjab: The Conquest and Administration of Multan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), 67–87.

20. Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 50. Mir also notes that Urdu rather than Punjabi was made the official language because of government fears that the designation of the latter would have heightened Sikh political aspirations.

21. Vansittart to McLeod, 30 December 1849, in Singh, *Documents*, 92–93.

22. Dalhousie, 15 December 1849, in J. G. A. Baird, ed., *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1910), 105, 195.

23. Minute by Governor-General Dalhousie, 13 January 1850, in *Rebels Against the Raj*, ed. Bhai Nahar Singh and Bhai Kirpal Singh (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1989), 90–91.

24. C. D. Field, ed., *The Regulations of the Bengal Code* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1875), 464.

25. P. Melvill, Secretary to the Board, to Sir H. M. Elliot, Secty, to government, 5 January 1850, in Singh, *Documents*, 100. Diwan Mul Raj, by contrast, was tried in court and convicted, his death sentence transmuted to transportation. See Sita Ram Kohli, *Trial of Diwan Mul Raj* (Patiala: Languages Department, Punjab, 1971).

26. Melvill to Elliot, 5 January 1850, in Singh, *Documents*, 100.

27. Resident Councillor (R.C.) to Governor, 18 June 1850, Singapore: Letters to Governor, January 1850–December 1850.

28. See Yang, “Indian Convict Workers.”

29. *Allen’s Indian Mail, and Register of Intelligence for British and Foreign India, China*, vol. 8, January–December 1850, 349.

30. Governor-General Dalhousie, 22 March 1850, in Singh, *Documents*, 142–143.

31. Anand A. Yang, “Bandits and Kings: Moral Authority and Resistance in Early Colonial India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 4 (2007): 881–896; Yang, “Indian Convict Workers.”

32. Singh, *Documents*, 152–159; *Allen’s Indian Mail*, 378.

33. Yang, “Indian Convict Workers.”

34. Offg. Secretary, Fort William, Foreign Dept., to Govt of Straits Settlements, no. 1227, 7 May 1850, in Singh, *Documents*, 158–159.

35. Lt. Col. E. Messiter, Commanding, Singapore, to R.C., 11 June 1850, Singapore: Letters to Governor, January–December 1850.

36. See Anand Yang, “Mobilizing Convict Bodies: Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption, and States*, ed. Renate Bridenthal (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

37. R.C. to Governor, Singapore: Letters to Governor, 25 June 1850, January–December 1850.

38. See Yang, “Mobilizing Convict Bodies,” for a discussion of the multiple reasons for developing transportation as a punishment in colonial India.

39. R.C. to Governor, 22 January 1851, Singapore: Letters to Governor, May 1850–May 1852; R.C. to Governor, 28 August 1852, Singapore: Letters to Governor, July–December 1852. Some scholars have speculated that Kharak Singh may have been whipped for his “offensive” behavior.

40. To Officiating Governor, Prince of Wales Island (POWI), Singapore (S), and Malacca (M) 28 August 1852, India Judicial Proceedings, 27 August–22 December 1852, 24 September, nos. 15–43.

41. Offg. Governor of POWI to Secty, Government of India (GOI), Home, 15 January 1853, India Judicial Proceedings, 7 January to 24 June 1853, 16 February, no. 3.

42. Jas. Cowper, Resident Assistant Surgeon, to T. Church, R.C., 1 July 1853, in Singh, *Documents*, 193–194.

43. J. Church, to Secty to Governor of Straits Settlements, 1 July 1853, 193.

44. Church to Secty, Straits Settlements, 2 August 1853, 196. See also Paterson's chapter 9 in this volume for a discussion of the linguistic challenges colonial authorities faced with letters written by Vietnamese exiles in classical Chinese or in the Vietnamese-based character system rather than in Romanized form, which they were better positioned to translate.

45. Mir, *Social Space of Language*, 58–61. Persian and Urdu were the administrative languages of the region until 1854, when Urdu was designated the sole official language of the colonial government in Punjab. Although local officials were aware that Punjabi was the colloquial language of the majority, few were familiar with it in the 1850s and 1860s.

46. India, Board's Collection, F/4/2570, 1853–1854.

47. Translation of Letter from Maharaj Singh to Bhai Jaswant Singh, Naurangabad, near Bhgyrowal, pargana Tarn Taran, Amritsar, Asadh 1853, in *ibid.*

48. Neem, or *Azadirachta indica*, is a tree whose leaves and flowers are bitter but consumed in various ways for their medicinal properties.

49. L. S. Jackson, Assistant Resident, Singapore, to R.C., 25 January 1850, Singapore: Letters to Governor, January–December 1850; W. Tyrone Power, *Recollections of a Three Years' Resident in China* (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), 93; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865), chaps. 3, 5, 8.

50. On the historical significance of Orissa to Sikhs, see Himadri Banerjee, *The Other Sikhs: A View from Eastern India*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), 73–119.

51. See Anand A. Yang, "The Long and Short of Bihari Peasant Migration" (paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies, Toronto, 15–18 March 2012).

52. "Kurruck Sing at Singapore," Minute by Governor-General, 14 October 1853; and S. Garling, Asst. Resident, to T. Church, R.C., 31 August 1853; in India, Board's Collections, 1853–1854.

53. Dalhousie to Sir George Couper, 3 March 1851, in Bikrama Jit Hasrat, ed., *The Punjab Papers: Selections from the Private Papers of Lord Auckland, Lord Ellenborough, Viscount Hardinge, and the Marquis of Dalhousie, 1836–1849 on the Sikhs* (Hoshiarpur, Punjab: V. V. Research Institute Press, 1970), 246.

54. Letter from R.C., Singapore, 7 July 1853, no. 122, India Home Miscellaneous Proceedings, vol. 530, 1853. The newly arrived Sikh prisoners were thereafter divided up: some sent to Malacca, others to Penang, and the rest confined in special cells in Singapore.

55. Singapore, Governor's Diary, Foreign and Military, 1852–1856, 14 January and April 1854.

56. R. Cox, Offg. Secty., Penang, to R.C., 20 January 1855, and Cox to Governor, 29 January 1855, Singapore: Letters from Governor, 1855.

57. R. Church, secty., to R.C., no 247, 2 July 1856, Singapore: Letters from Governor, 1854, 1856.

58. Secty. GOI to Governor, 28 April 1857, Singapore: Letters from Governor, 1857–1858.

59. "Narrative of the Proceedings of the Government of the Straits during the Second Half of 1857," Home Miscellaneous, vol. 528, 1856–1859; R. B. Chapman, Offg. Undersecretary, GOI, to Blundell, Governor, 30 September 1857, Singapore, Governor's Letters from Bengal, 1857; Blundell to R.C., Penang, 8 August 1857, Singapore: Governor's Letters to Resident Councillors, 1856–1857.

60. F. L. Playfair, Acting Secretary, to R.C., Penang, 13 July 1858 and 1 October 1858, Letters to Resident Councillors, 1857–1859.

61. Governor to Secty., GOI, 1 September 1861, Governor's Letters to Bengal, 1860–1861.

62. J. F. A McNair (assisted by W. D. Bayliss), *Prisoners Their Own Warders: A Record of the Convict Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements Established 1825* (London: Westminster, 1899).

63. His importance in Singapore is commemorated in Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, *Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji 150th Anniversary 2006* (Singapore: Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 2006), which includes a chapter (chap. 2) adapted from Choor Singh Sidhu's book, *Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji, Martyr of the Sikh Faith*.

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