



tamasha

A The National Archives

Loyalty and Dissent

A collection of scripts from a Tamasha Scratch Night

In collaboration with The National Archives and supported by The Friends of The National Archives



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Plays first performed Friday 31 March 2017 at Rich Mix, London

INTRODUCTION

This volume contains bold new work from five playwrights from the Tamasha Developing Artists (TDA) programme. Each writer was commissioned to research and develop pieces inspired by documents held at The National Archives relating to the experiences of people from South Asia at the time of the First World War.

This event showcased the following five new short plays by Hassan Abdulrazzak, Amman Paul Singh Brar, Sharmila Chauhan, Amy Ng and Melanie Pennant, performed script-in-hand by professional actors, directed by Anthony Simpson-Pike and assisted by Mina Maisuria, both Tamasha Developing Artists. The performances were followed by an audience-led Q&A with the writers, director, Iqbal Husain (The National Archives outreach team) and chaired by Tamasha's Artistic Director, Fin Kennedy.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Hassan Abdulrazzak, Amman Paul Singh Brar, Sharmila Chauhan, Amy Ng and Melanie Pennant are members of TDA, a national artist development programme with a track record of providing high quality professional training and tangible professional opportunities for emerging and established theatre artists throughout their careers.

The National Archives is the official archive and publisher for the UK government, housing over 1000 years of iconic national documents. In 2016, they approached Tamasha due to its longstanding expertise in developing diverse new audiences and artists to collaborate with them as part of the centenary anniversary of the First World War. The five Tamasha playwrights spent time at The National Archives engaging with a range of rich material. These included reports about suspected 'seditionists' agitating for independence, accounts of South Asian soldiers fighting for the British Empire, materials from spies across the Empire, military intelligence reports, war diaries and reports from hospitals, including from the iconic hospital at Brighton Pavilion set up for injured Indian servicemen.

The scripts on this volume were in response to this treasure of material. Each play gives unique insight into this largely hidden heritage, bringing to life the frequently unheard voices from Britain's history and exploring the tension between loyalty and dissent to an all-powerful British Imperial State.

Tamasha and The National Archives intend for *Loyalty and Dissent* to be the start of an ongoing collaboration. The short plays may have potential as longer pieces and/or have an application in schools, colleges and universities, or for online learning, as well as provide seeds of inspiration for other forms of collaboration between the two collaborators.

We make them available here with kind permission from the writers, and to promote the project and collaboration for interested parties. Please note that all rights remain reserved; requests to reproduce or perform the plays should in the first instance be made to Tamasha: projects@tamasha.org.uk / 020 7749 0090.

THE PLAYS

***Smile* by Melanie Pennant**

Three Indian soldiers recover at the iconic hospital at Brighton Pavilion. Every detail is provided for but something isn't quite right. The soldiers question why the plentiful food and high quality care is served in the shadow of bars across windows and guards at the outer gates. Will they be honoured as the heroes the British have led them to believe or are they merely prisoners being readied again for war?

***The Radicalisation of Vir Singh* by Amman Paul Singh Brar**

Arjun sits restless and scared as he prepares to enter the battle field for the first time. Inspired by compatriot Vir's legends of mighty Sikh warriors, Arjun becomes resolute in his determination to bring honour to his family. But with false reports of cowardice emerging, what story will history remember?

***Cama* by Sharmila Chauhan**

In a trench in Marseille the loyalty of three Indian soldiers is tested when the legendary Madame Cama enters beseeching them to surrender for the good of the motherland. Will carrying on the fight really prove their fealty to the crown? Or is the battle for Indian independence the real fight that should be had?

***Step Child* by Amy Ng**

The British Government promises that all British subjects are equal before the law. But when America begins blocking the growing number of Indian Sikhs seeking to enter the US reneging on an Anglo-American treaty, will the British step in? A British spy and his wealthy Parsi informant discuss the potential revolutionary ramifications if the British do not.

***Corner of a Foreign Field* by Hassan Abdulrazzak**

October 1914 and a Maulana, Sadr Ud-Din, is embattled with Military Secretary to the India Office, General Barrow, over the appropriate burial grounds for Muslim soldiers. With Turkey entering the War on the side of the Central Powers much could rest on the decision that is made.

THE TEAM

Cast: Jim Conway, Umar Pasha, Kal Sabir, Sid Sagar, Peter Singh and Balvinder Sopal

Writers: Hassan Abdulrazzak, Amman Paul Singh Brar, Sharmila Chauhan, Amy Ng and Melanie Pennant

TDA Director: Anthony Simpson-Pike

TDA Assistant Director: Mina Maisuria

Dramaturg: Fin Kennedy

Stage Manager: Emma Lee Clegg

WITH THANKS TO staff at The National Archives, particularly Iqbal Husain and Sara Griffiths, Friends of the National Archives, Tamasha staff and Arts Council England.



Photo : Bettina Adela

Foreword

The idea to take our archival records and commission Tamasha to create short plays came out of my own long association with theatre. Having worked with theatre in this way elsewhere, I was aware of the power of engaging writers and a creative team to literally take the records from page to stage. And people who watched the performance appreciated this:

‘Can’t thank you enough. I have left here today knowing so much about history of my ancestors maybe. Such important plays’

And it is this ability of drama to take the written word and explore the underlying emotion and for that emotion to then connect with people that is uniquely powerful. The National Archives’ Director of Public Engagement, Caroline Ottaway-Searle following her visit to the rehearsals said: ‘such a great example of how archives truly do inspire’.

It is only now being recognised, as reflected in our records, what an extraordinary contribution Indian troops made at Britain’s hour of need at the beginning of the First World War¹. At the same time our records reflect the challenges posed to an all-powerful British imperial state and the tension that existed between soldiers and personnel ‘loyal’ to empire and those ‘dissenting’ voices that sought to agitate and fight to end imperial rule. And only now is it becoming more evident to second, third and fourth generation Asians here in the UK that aspects of their history is central to the nation’s story.

The writers and the creative team helped realise the extraordinary depth, complexity and nuances flowing from the historical figures in our records. The plays were also able to reflect in many touching and moving ways about the difficulties of recovering Imperial history and managing subject people.

This is collaborative working in the service of broadening and extending our understanding of what happened in the past: there is still a lot to learn about the colonial experience and projects like these are part of something much bigger that aims to do that. This is also a very important history: it contributes to the nation’s story in vital ways by making the whole stronger and allows us all to see ourselves more clearly. It is work of great responsibility and the use of creativity allows us to make it accessible and exciting.

Iqbal Husain

Outreach and Learning Officer
The National Archives

¹ At the beginning of November 1914 one third of the British Army on the Western Front came from India

Smile by Mel Pennant

Author's note

I knew very little about the role of Indians soldiers in the First World War nor had I visited the National Archives before. Boy, was I was missing out! The National Archives is a treasure trove and I was bowled over by how rich the stories of the the Indian soldiers during that period were - and we only touched the tip of a very big iceberg. "Smile" was inspired by some of the Sepoys' letters referenced in the original documents, the photographs from that period and the letters of Sir Walter Lawrence reporting on the conditions of English hospitals. The version of the First World War I knew, before this project, had very little colour in it. I did not see any people of colour in the "we" of "we won the war" and therefore gaining an understanding of the crucial importance of the Sepoys in the war was heartbreaking - they gave their lives and yet they have, for the most part, been written out of its history. "Smile" was my way of trying to shine a light on that absurdity. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to be involved in such an important project.



Photo : Bettina Adela

Outside the Royal Pavilion military hospital, Brighton, 1915.

Projected into the background is a picture of Pushtun/Pathan Sepoys.

The picture focuses in on three Sepoys.

The three Sepoys on stage have the same frozen position as the three Sepoys in the picture.

Tura Baz sits in the middle on a stall. Hakim Abdul stands to the left of Tura Baz and Shahab to the right of Tura Baz.

Tura Baz has a bandage on his leg, crutches by his side.

An English soldier moves amongst the frozen Sepoys, brushing dust off their shoulders, adjusting a button on a jacket etc. After a while, as he does this, each Sepoy he touches comes to life.

When the Sepoys talk to one another, in their own language, it is without an accent.

When they talk in English it is with an accent.

English soldier leaves the stage.

The Sepoys move from their positions and talk without an accent.

TURA BAZ

To Shahab.

See you've got everything then?

Shahab glances at Tura Baz in an abstract way. Doesn't respond.

Shahab pulls at his fingers and rubs at his skin.

HAKIM ABDUL

To Tura Baz.

And you?

Tura Baz rising stiffly.

TURA BAZ

Two legs, arms, hands, all my fingers, my eyes/

SHAHAB

A head.

TURA BAZ

Yes a head. Everything, except a broken leg but it can mend.

To Hakim Abdul.

And you? You have everything?

HAKIM ABDUL

Everything.

TURA BAZ

Then we must thank God that we are all whole and complete men here.

HAKIM ABDUL

But the real question is why are we here?

English soldier enters with a camera and tripod.

ENGLISH SOLDIER:

Right. Come together now chaps. Get together. That's it. Squeeze in now.

The Sepoys obey. Squeezing into the frame a little awkwardly.

Right. When His Majesty enters you will say...

The Sepoys talk with an accent.

SHAHAB

This English hospital is beyond belief.

TURA BAZ

Not even my own mother and father could have done more. This is freedom. This country compared with others is like Heaven/

HAKIM ABDUL

Hell...

English soldier attention's is aroused.

of a country. It's always raining. It never stops.

ENGLISH SOLDIER:

Very good. Be at ease. I just need to...

English soldier approaches Hakim Abdul and adjusts his collar.

Without accent.

TURA BAZ

To Hakim Abdul.

How long have you been here.

HAKIM ABDUL

Seven weeks.

TURA BAZ

I've been here five days.

HAKIM ABDUL

What was the first thing you noticed, when you arrived?

TURA BAZ

The nurses!

HAKIM ABDUL

No. What did you see?

English soldier approaches Tura Baz and unravels the bandage on his leg.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Just for the picture.

A beat as the Sepoys watch him.

HAKIM ABDUL

The bars on the window? The barbed wire on the gates? The armed guards at every entrance? This isn't a hospital. This is/

SHAHAB

A prison. All around the walls cave in and they are burying us alive. We are broken and we can't hold up all their foreign soil. Our backs aren't strong enough.

English soldier returns to his camera and fiddles with the resolution.

TURA BAZ

Whispering to Hakim Abdul.

What's wrong with him?

HAKIM ABDUL

They call it hysterical spine. When the trench collapses in on them. It drives them...

Hakim Abdul indicates loony with his hand.

TURA BAZ

He looked fine to me.

HAKIM ABDUL

Looks can be deceiving.

ENGLISH SOLDIER:

Right. That's it boys. Fall back in now and look this way. Look at me. Look like you are enjoying it.

The Sepoys resume the same positions.

And?

With accent.

SHAHAB

Our duty is to die in battle. Everyone who is born has to die some day. Who remembers a man who dies in his own bed?

Shahab quick marches on the spot.

TURA BAZ

We thank your Majesty again and again and pray that your Majesty may rule over us for ever and ever.

SHAHAB

Amen.

Hakim Abdul looks down to Tura Baz questioningly.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Look this way.

HAKIM ABDUL

Every detail is taken care of. There are nine kitchens. Meat is slaughtered according to religious practices. Food is stored and cooked by men of the same caste. How happy we are that the English should be so concerned with the contents of our Indian stomachs.

Without accent.

Shame they couldn't put such efforts into preserving the contents of the Treaty.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Did you say Treaty?

With accent.

HAKIM ABDUL

No Sir. Meaty.

ENGLISH SOLDIER.

Perhaps we should stick to English. Easier for all concerned.

The Sepoys freeze.

The English soldier steps away from the camera and walks about the Sepoys as if introducing them to the King.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

To the audience.

Yes Your Royal Highness, they speak English very well. But still you must consider that these Indians are a simple and ignorant breed. They have what I'd call "oriental fatalism".

Laughs.

For them death is fated.

Much depends on the weather though - an Indian looks unfit on a cold wet day. He would look fit if he had arrived on a sunshiny day.

Beat.

"Thin?" Oh no Your Majesty, they are well fed. Food in abundance.

To the Sepoys.

Fall back then. At ease.

The Sepoys unfreeze. English soldier remonstrates with himself.

(To himself)

Food. I should have thought of that.

To the Sepoys.

Back in a jiffy.

The English soldier leaves. Tura Baz and Hakim Abdul relax.

Without accent.

TURA BAZ

What time is it?

HAKIM ABDUL

Looks to his pocket watch.

5:30.

TURA BAZ

The nurses will be along soon then.

HAKIM ABDUL

In India our sun rises.

SHAHAB

At 6 GMT they said prepare for attack. We waited.

There is a long uncomfortable silence.

SHAHAB

And then it came - it had no face.

Hakim Abdul makes noises of shelling - he whistles then makes an explosion noise. This noise could be repeated by a sound effect continuing in the background.

TURA BAZ

The food is nice. All you can eat. Nine kitchens.

HAKIM ABDUL

He's gone now. So you can stop.

Beat.

Where were you based? Your regiment?

TURA BAZ

Fifty seventh Rifles. Ypres. I had ten of the finest men our country has produced/

HAKIM ABDUL

Our country.

TURA BAZ

I know those men like the back of my hand/

HAKIM ABDUL

Our strength is in our men and our women.

TURA BAZ

Their sleeping habits, how they eat, what they think.

HAKIM ABDUL

We can think. For ourselves.

TURA BAZ

We are closer than family.

HAKIM ABDUL

And united we can rise.

TURA BAZ

No other man would you want to be at your side as you
enter the breach, in this Great Great War.

HAKIM ABDUL

Say their names.

TURA BAZ

Muhammad Usman.

Beat.

Ahmad Khan - a man who makes you laugh out loud even as the pain from your shattered leg makes you cry.

Abdullah Khan - would give up his own life to save yours....These are...

Finds it hard to say.

...Were.. my brothers.

HAKIM ABDUL

What did you see?

TURA BAZ

Things a man should never have to. The insides of men

worn like clothes.

SHAHAB

A head/

TURA BAZ

Yes....

HAKIM ABDUL

Then you have seen it. The bloody systematic slaughter of our men, and you must know the answer.

Beat.

Why are we here?

TURA BAZ

We do not speak the same language and I do not choose to see what you see.

English soldier enters with a bowl of fruit (including at least two pears) and puts the bowl on a table. He arranges the fruit.

TURA BAZ

To English soldier - with accent.

I understand that we may go sightseeing Sir? I would like very much to see where the King and Queen reside.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Pre-occupied with arranging the fruit.

Well of course old chap/

HAKIM ABDUL

Without accent.

If they are minded they will take you to an organ recital.

TURA BAZ

With accent.

Actually, I would like to meet the Brighton people.

Marked silence from the English soldier.

HAKIM ABDUL

Without accent.

Heaven forbid you speak to anyone outside of these walls. Heaven forbid you speak to their women.

TURA BAZ

I have come to like very much speaking to their women.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Old chaps, would you mind talking in English? I can't understand what you're saying.

Beat.

TURA BAZ

With accent.

There is this one pear in particular.

Tura Baz takes a pear from the bowl and examines it.

The finest pear I've ever seen.

English soldier takes a pear.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

I like pears too.

SHAHAB

With accent.

Big juicy plump ripe pears. Makes my mouth water.

TURA BAZ

With accent.

I've never tasted pears of this kind before.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

English pears are very good.

Tura Baz bites into the pear. English soldier bites into his pear.

TURA BAZ

With accent.

It is so sweet and succulent and in my five days here/

Hakim Abdul roars with laughter. Shahab laughs a manic laugh. English soldier a bit perplexed joins them.

HAKIM ABDUL

You haven't heard.

SHAHAB

Red Pepper don't want their fruit near our death beds.

Shahab gives the bowl of fruit to the English soldier.

There is no more fruit in the garden. The tree has stopped bearing. It has been cut down and its roots poisoned.

Tura Baz gets up.

TURA BAZ

You're mistaken.

Tura Baz looks at English soldier with the bowl of fruit in his hand.

ENGLISH SOLIDER

Actually, that's right. The picture looks much better without.

English solider holds out the bowl for Tura Baz to place his half eaten pear in it. English soldier takes the bowl off stage.

HAKIM ABDUL

Hakim Abdul pretends to be an English soldier. Stands upright.

Without accent.

Orders received from the very top echelons of the very top echelons of the British War Office:

"To whom it may concern dot dot dot, we've changed our minds. No more Pears to enter the Black Pepper hospitals, our Pears are being bruised, take them away yours sincerely by the order of the Red Pepper etc etc etc."

They don't want our black bodies being touched by their women and us experiencing their flesh for fear of contamination.

Teasing Tura Baz

What is it? You can always try to find your white woman. Well, what is stopping you?

Tura Baz looks out to the audience.

Just step past the guards with their arms. Over the six foot gates and the barbed wire, and into the town that you are forbidden to go to except under escort. Go then. Go and find your precious pear.

Beat.

Those are not our women. This is not our war.

TURA BAZ

This is my war. This is Muhammad, Abdullah, Ahmad's war. This Great war is what they held in their hearts as they drew their last breath. Those ten/

SHAHAB

Eleven, five hundred, fifty thousand.

Tura Baz looks to Shahab.

TURA BAZ

Brave brave soldiers. This is our war. This is our war.

Hakim Abdul shakes his head.

HAKIM ABDUL

They, you and I will be forgotten.

TURA BAZ

We will be remembered! Celebrated.

HAKIM ABDUL

Not with equality.

TURA BAZ

No one will forget what we have done for this country.

HAKIM ABDUL

An after thought. If that.

TURA BAZ

Our white brothers, their kings and queens and their sons and daughters will stand next to ours at cenotaphs and chant our names.

HAKIM ABDUL

And what if they don't? What will it mean if they don't?

TURA BAZ

Risaldar Badlu Singh,
Sepoy Chatta Singh,
Naik Darwan Singh
Negi, Rifleman
Gabar Singh Negi,
Lance-Daffadar Gobind
Singh, Lance-Naik
Lala, Khudadad Khan,
Mir Dast, Shahamad
Khan.

SHAHAB (shouting)

Sepoy Zewar Gul - son
of Gul Bad Shah, of
Tara Kili, Lance-Naik
Chanda Singh - of
Pandori, Amritsar,
Punjab, Sepoy Jalal
Khan - Son of Sharf
Ali of Bamla, Sepoy
Waryam Singh - son
of Punjab Singh of
Batala, Bhimber,

TURA BAZ

In war men die. All men die.

HAKIM ABDUL

But Black Pepper die first.

English Soldier rushes in.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

What's the noise?

A pause as he realises that something isn't quite right.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

Right. Now come on chaps. Let's really show His Majesty your fighting spirit.

Everyone is a bit more weary but they come together. The Sepoys freeze. The English soldier once again talks to the King.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

And all around there is good cheer and the men are most delighted to be called upon and so grateful for the wonderful building which reminds them of their heritage and let us not forget the nine kitchens, Your Excellency.

Food in abundance. The Indians are contented, cheery and smiling. There is wonderful camaraderie. They really do believe we are all in this together.

The Sepoys unfreeze. English soldier adjusts his camera again.

SHAHAB

Without accent.

Then we are deceived.

HAKIM ABDUL

When we are on their land they lock away their daughters, and lock us away. Then they tell us to/

SHAHAB

Smile.

ENGLISH SOLIDER

English.

SHAHAB

I have my own land. A wife. A child waiting to be conceived. A mother who mourns me. Men ready to replace me.

I have soil under my feet waiting to bury me. A grandfather who died. In his own bed. I do remember him.

Beat.

I have a broken back that cries out for the warmth of my hot sun. I just want to go/

Shahab sits.

TURA BAZ

Home.

SHAHAB

....Home.

HAKIM ABDUL

.....Home.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

English.

Shahab laughs.

SHAHAB

But they patch you up and send you back again. Did you now that? They send you back into the fire.

TURA BAZ

They send you back?

HAKIM ABDUL

They send you back.

TURA BAZ.

.....I can't. I....

SHAHAB

Only way to get home is to become half a man, a quarter of a man, an eighth of a man. You have to/

ENGLISH SOLDIER

English!

Shahab rubs at his hands and pulls at his fingers.

SHAHAB

Cut away at your hands, and your feet, chop off your own fingers - you have to become.....no man at all.

Shahab and Tura Baz examine their bodies, their hands.

HAKIM ABDUL

That's it. That's the answer.

ENGLISH SOLDIER:

Come on boys get together. Here we go, one last time.

This is your legacy.

The Sepoys come together.

TURA BAZ

(Out of the corner of his mouth to Hakim Abdul)

What's the answer?

SHAHAB

We don't exist. We die in vain.

TURA BAZ

We don't! We do exist!

Tura Baz tries to get up. Shahab puts his hand on Tura Baz's shoulder to stop him.

TURA BAZ

To the audience, pleading.

You can't forget us. You won't forget us will you?

SHAHAB

We are just outside the frame. In the space between the click and the image and in between the lines at WO 32 oblique 5110.

TURA BAZ

Come and find us.....Please.

Hakim Abdul removes his hand from Tura Baz's shoulder.

ENGLISH SOLDIER

And three, two, one. Smile.

Shahab smiles a manic smile the only full toothed grin we have seen for the camera all of the play and then his smile starts to fade.

We are left with the image we had at the beginning.

THE END.

The Radicalisation of Vir Singh by Amman Paul Singh Brar

Author's Note

The First World War was the first time Indian (now Indian, Pakistani & Bangladeshi) soldiers were used to fight for the British on foreign soil. It was also the first time such a number of Indians had been to Europe (130,000). This brought with it problems for the British. How to keep such numbers of Indians motivated and disciplined so far from home was a primary concern. This was also the time of the burgeoning Indian independence movement. Radical ideas of revolution, mixed with a world war and soldiers from one country fighting for another power made for a confusing and ultimately false situation. The majority of Indian soldiers were rural men fighting for a wage. I wanted to show and give life to these forgotten people who fought for the freedom of Europe, or so we are taught that's what WWI was for. In war the poorest and least protected die and the victorious and powerful get to write the history.



Photo : Bettina Adela

Characters

Lieutenant (commanding officer) 35 Sikh.

Vir Singh: 33 year old Sikh from Punjab.

Arjun Singh: 20 year old Sikh from Punjab.

Scene 1

March 1915 – Neuve Chapelle

Trenches

Indian Lieutenant already in the middle of his speech, he is reading from a sheet. ARJUN and VIR stand to attention.

LIEUTENANT

Hindu and Mohamedian will be fighting side by side with British soldiers and our gallant French Allies !

You will be the first Indian soldiers of the King Emperor who will have the honour of showing in Europe that the sons of India have lost none of their ancient martial instincts.

From the banks of the Ganges to the mountains of the Himalayas to the plains of Hindustan. The eyes of your countrymen are on you.

Hindu and Mohamedian will fight for your King Emperor and your faith so that history will record the doings of India's sons.

LIEUTENANT

Now, await orders. We'll be making a push shortly.

Lieutenant salutes. ARJUN and VIR salute. LIEUTENANT exits. ARJUN and VIR relax.

VIR sits cross legged on the floor. VIR starts to meditate. ARJUN is pacing. Getting up sitting down, fiddling with his equipment, walking back and forth.

VIR

Oi.

ARJUN

What?

VIR

Sit.

ARJUN

I can't.

VIR

I said sit. You're like my wife. Walking, moving, shifting, worrying. You heard him. The eyes of India are on us. We must be strong. Be a man. Now come here and sit.

ARJUN sits next to him. VIR closes his eyes. ARJUN starts humming or making some kind of sound to help him think.

VIR

Oh for fff...

ARJUN

what?

VIR

Didn't your father teach how to keep your mind still?

ARJUN

Did you notice? He didn't say Sikhs did he?

VIR

What?

ARJUN

He said Hindu and Mohamedian he didn't say Sikh.

VIR waves off ARJUN'S comment.

ARJUN

Don't you care that the people we're fighting for don't even call us by our own religion?

VIR

What's the name of this Battalion?

ARJUN

That's not the point.

VIR

Say it.

ARJUN

They think we're Hindu. We're not. We have a history. We have our own religion.

VIR

Why are you telling me this?

ARJUN

It's not right.

VIR

What's the name of this Battalion?

ARJUN

What have the German's done to us anyway?

VIR gets up and grabs ARJUN

VIR

What's the name of this Battalion?

ARJUN

The 47th Sikhs.

VIR

The 47th Sikhs. And why do they call it that?

ARJUN

Because it's for Sikhs.

VIR

Good. Now shut up and let me do my prayers.

VIR sits and meditates.

ARJUN cannot keep quiet.

ARJUN

I'm just saying if they're going to do a speech then they should at least./

VIR

/..Oh give me strength. What's got into you? I said keep your mind still.

ARJUN

I can't. I don't feel like I have my mind anymore. I feel as if I've got ten minds. Ten heads like one of those Hindu gods. Each one going a different way.

VIR

Ok. Relax. Arjun. It's OK to be scared. Now do like me.

VIR starts to take deep breathes. In the through the nose out of the mouth.

VIR

Better?

ARJUN

A little. And I'm not scared.

VIR

OK. Fine. Now repeat after me 'Satnam Sri wahe guru ji', 'Satnam sri wahe guru ji'

ARJUN

Satnam Sri Wahe guru ji, satnam sri wahe guru ji.

VIR/ARJUN

Satnam Sri Wahe Guru ji

“

“

VIR

Great is the guru who leads me from darkness to light !

ARJUN manages a smile.

VIR

So go on then. What's wrong? You are scared right?

ARJUN

No. Yes, a little. But I want to go home. I don't want to fight for the British. It's wrong.

VIR looks at ARJUN as if he's mad.

VIR

(imitating) I want to go home. I don't want to fight for the British. It's wrong.

VIR grabs ARJUN by the balls.

VIR

Are you a man? !

ARJUN

Yeah I'm a man...with a brain.

VIR

Where is it then? *(laughs at his own joke)*

ARJUN

Why are you here?

VIR

What?

ARJUN

Did you want to come all this way here? Leave your family and your land and come to fight against these foreigners?

VIR

I made a deal. And so did you. We fight. They pay us.

ARJUN

Do we get the same pay as the British soldiers?

VIR

Well...umm...I err

ARJUN

(imitating) Ummm...I er...have you forgotten how to talk?

VIR

You know what a warrior does?

ARJUN

His duty.

VIR

Oh so you are a proper son of Punjab then? Yes, his duty. And you know why?

ARJUN

Because God wills it.

VIR

Yes! And everyone knows it ! All of India, your family, your village, all Punjab will know how Arjun and Vir Singh went into battle in Europe and when they say our names they'll be like 'oh those guys were proper warriors!'. We will have honour.

Pause

ARJUN

I heard some of the lads say that if you get wounded to put copper in it. Or drink led mixed with curd. Or use the bhilwa plant over coals and let it smoke over your skin and then you'll get a rash.

VIR

And why would you do that?

ARJUN

Then they send you home.

VIR

Yes and put ear wax in your eyes too. I know about all that dishonourable bullshit. We're not like that ok?

ARJUN

I don't want to fight. I want to go home.

VIR

What like a dog with it's tail between it's legs?

ARJUN

No

VIR

So stop talking like that then. It's God's will what happens to us not ours.

Silence

VIR

We all want to go home Arjun not only you, but you signed up to be a warrior right? A soldier like Guru Gobind Singh. Was he afraid of death?

ARJUN

No.

VIR

Course he wasn't.

ARJUN

Have you heard of the Ghadar movement?

VIR looks around.

VIR

(low) What about them? Is that where you have got all this foolishness from? You shouldn't talk about them.

ARJUN

But I want to.

VIR

They won't help you. And if anyone hears you talking about them...you'll be in trouble.

ARJUN

They're saying the British are using us to save themselves. Giving us a few rupees and sending us to our death.

VIR shakes his head

ARJUN:

They're saying we should fight for our own country, fight for our own freedom and not fight people who have no quarrel with us.

VIR

They will kill more of our men by bringing all this confusion to our minds. We need to be strong. And where are they now these Ghadars? Are they going to help you here?

ARJUN

I'm not scared to fight Vir. I will do my duty. But I want to fight the right fight. I don't think this is the right fight. I want to die for my people. For my land. Not other people's. Especially those who've already put us under their yoke. I want to die with honour Vir Singh. If I die here I don't think it will be with honour.

VIR looks at ARJUN, a little unbalanced by what he has heard. To doubt his own honour is to doubt everything.

Off stage. A whistle blows.

LIEUTENANT

Ready yourselves men!

VIR and ARJUN stand ready to go into battle.

VIR

(less sure than before – as if reassuring himself rather than Arjun) There's a higher power Arjun. If people behave dishonourably then people will know. God will have the final say not us. We have our duty. We signed up as soldiers and if we die in battle so be it. But we will die with honour, we will do our duty for our brothers here. That is all we can do right now. Honour will out live us and so will shame. Now are you ready?

ARJUN

Yeah but.../

VIR

(interrupting)./I said Arjun Singh of the 47th Sikhs, son of Punjab are you ready to help your brothers in their hour of need.?! Will you stand with your brothers and fight!

ARJUN

Yeah. I will.

VIR

Good. Now come on!

ARJUN steps forward looking at the mayhem of industrialised war. He raises his left hand and closes his eyes. His hand is shot. He pulls it back holding it. He walks over to VIR who starts to bandage it.

SCENE 2

Enter *LIEUTENANT*

LIEUTENANT

Come on men, lets get back out there, lets keep the momentum going. This is no time to hide. Your brothers need you. Patch up those wounds double quick.

LIEUTENANT exits.

VIR is bandaging his hand.

VIR

Don't worry it's alright. In fact you are a lucky so and so.

ARJUN

What are you talking about? My hand's been shot !

VIR

You're lucky. I think it went clean through. Just make sure the bandage doesn't get loose. Don't want to lose blood. How's that? *(tightening the bandage)*

ARJUN

Good. Ow! How many did we lose?

VIR

Someone said it was eighty.

ARJUN

Eighty?

VIR

Yep two hundred injured.

ARJUN

This isn't war Vir. This is like the end of the world. How can men do this to each other? So many being killed like ants.

VIR

How did it happen?

ARJUN

What?

VIR

Your hand.

ARJUN:

It just....happened.

VIR looks at ARJUN.

ARJUN

I swear.

VIR

OK. Anyway on the bright side you my son are going to the best place in the world.

ARJUN

Yeah? Where?

VIR

Brighton !

ARJUN

Brighton? Where's that?

VIR

England. You're going to stay in the King of England's home.

ARJUN

Shut up !

VIR

It's true. OK, he doesn't live there now. But it's like an Indian Palace. And you'll see England. All the beautiful pink English children. The clean streets. The pubs if you're lucky. And the people will cheer you on.

ARJUN

Really? The British people like us?

VIR

They celebrate us. When I went the people wanted to touch me and my turban.

ARJUN

Did the English bathe you and feed you too?

VIR

No....they've brought in Indians to do that.

ARJUN

Oh. Aren't there enough English nurses?

VIR

I don't know (beat) You know what I heard?

ARJUN

What?

VIR

The granddaughter of Ranjit Singh looks after our Indian soldiers.

ARJUN pushes VIR away.

ARJUN

Don't bullshit me. I know I'm young but don't take the Maharaja's name in vain.

VIR

It's true. On the life of the guru.

ARJUN

Wow. I'm looking forward to this.

VIR

Exactly. Now. Go and see the Doctor who will send you to the hospital. And I'll see you when you get back.

ARJUN

Yes my brother.

VIR

Wahe guru ji ki khalsa (*Sikh greeting*)

ARJUN

Wahe guru ji ki fateh. (*Sikh greeting*)

VIR sits on the floor and starts to meditate.

ARJUN walks away. Enter LIEUTENANT who stops ARJUN in his tracks. LIEUTENANT examines ARJUN'S hand. LIEUTENANT beckons ARJUN to follow him. LIEUTENANT and ARJUN exit.

Scene 3

Enter LIEUTENANT holding ARJUN'S belongings, turban cloth, kurra (steel bangle) and Kirpan (Sikh ceremonial dagger). VIR is still sitting.

LIEUTENANT

Vir Singh?

VIR

(*getting up*) Yes sir !

LIEUTENANT

At ease.

VIR does so. LIEUTENANT hands Arjun's belongings to VIR.

LIEUTENANT

Arjun Singh asked that you send his things back to India.

VIR

Sorry sir?

LIEUTENANT

Am I not being clear?

VIR

Yes, sir I understand what you said, but I don't understand why I have to do that.

LIEUTENANT

I see. You didn't hear the news?

VIR

I've been on watch sir.

LIEUTENANT

Ah. Yes well. For his cowardice the medical officer instructed that Arjun Singh be made an example of and he was executed for dishonouring the regiment. Terrible business.

VIR

What? What did he do?

LIEUTENANT

I thought that was obvious. He shot himself in the hand. The command are onto this practice that a lot of the Indian troops have been doing, trying to get sent home. So they made an example of him. Make sure it sends the right message out. Stop it happening eh?

VIR

Sir he didn't shoot himself in the hand.

LIEUTENANT

What? Did you see it?

VIR

I....yes. Yes sir I did. Arjun is not a coward. He was a man of honour.

LIEUTENANT looks at VIR.

LIEUTENANT

It's too late now. What's done is done.

VIR

But. Sir. He was young. This is a mistake.

LIEUTENANT

keep your views to yourself. Unless you want to be court martialled for aiding a coward?

VIR

He was an honourable soldier.

LIEUTENANT

Did you hear me?

VIR

But his name, his family....

LIEUTENANT

This regiment is your family. Now that's enough or else you'll be on half rations. Understood?

VIR

Yes sir.

LIEUTENANT

Now is there anything else?

VIR

No sir.

LIEUTENANT

Good, get ready we're about to make a push.

VIR

Yes sir.

LIEUTENANT exits.

VIR holds ARJUN's belongings.

VIR sits and tries to say a few prayers but his mind is not still. He is agitated.

A whistle blows.

VIR gets up. He walks forward, closes his eyes and holds up his left hand ...

***Cama* by Sharmila Chauhan**

Author's Note

I've never written about war, nor violence. I've always found that part of history difficult to address and relate to – perhaps because there is so much of these things in our everyday lives. So when I was asked to get involved in this project I knew it would be a personal challenge and something that I would need to dig deep for.

As always I was interested in the stories about women during the war – but these were almost totally absent in all the records we looked at. However, there was one document that mentioned Madame Cama – just in passing – perhaps the involvement of a woman, an Indian woman, in the fight for freedom was of little importance. A little further research told me that she had set up her own sedition press (in Paris), helped design the Indian flag and gone into the trenches herself to talk to the soldiers. I felt both excited and sad that I had never heard of her before.

In finding Cama, I hope to have been able to connect the audience to a different energy, that was still so much part of the movement for Independence and illuminate a voice, that has for the most part been written out of history.



Photo : Bettina Adela

ACT I Scene 1

France. Just before dawn. Light comes on back stage and a shrouded figure is seen walking in the distance. Sound of army preparations for an imminent attack

Centre stage - A TRENCH - THREE INDIAN SOLDIERS

TAJPAL (mid 20s) is trying to sleep whilst TARIK (early 30s) holds a gun and keeps look out.

The third soldier, much younger RAJESH (barely 16) squats down in the mud - a blanket thrown over his shoulders. TARIK keeps looking over at RAJESH - worried.

TARIK

(hums a song in bits)

I see something! What is that? A figure hidden in the darkness, walking towards us. Is it Death himself?

Come to take me before the wretched dawn comes? Gently approaching, soft as a baby's breath...

(beat)

Argh! What am I doing? Must be going crazy! Eh, Rajesh come, come sit down..

He gets up and tries to move RAJESH - but the boy's teeth chatter even more and he refuses to move.

TARIK (cont'd)

Fine be stubborn. But when your haunches are sore you will fall into the dirt with those rats...

RAJESH is unmoved.

TARIK (cont'd)

And all the shit down there.

He tries again. Sound of distant gunfire.

TARIK attends to his post.

TARIK (cont'd)

(to self)

Nothing. Nothing there at all.

(beat)

What am I doing? Must be going crazy!

RAJESH moans.

TARIK (cont'd)

(looking out)

Eh, Tajpal brother - wake up... Is that how you prepare? With your eyes closed, dreaming the time away

TAJPAL doesn't stir. Smiles in his sleep. TARIK tuts, getting more agitated.

TARIK (cont'd)

Wake up brother - see the light is leaking through the sky...

Sound of pee. TARIK looks at RAJESH in frustration and concern.

TARIK (cont'd)

(sighing)

You will freeze - your piss will freeze like icicles in this wretched cold... They will fall off your backside as you walk.

Frustrated, TARIK gives up.

More gunfire. Lamplight flashes close by, just as TARIK looks away. He gets up and watches TAJPAL peacefully sleeping. Then he carefully extracts a pendant from TAJPAL's hand and drops it on the ground.

TAJPAL - handsome, Turbaned Sikh man with a baby face - wakes with a start. He finds the locket, opens it and takes out the strand of hair, smelling it.

TARIK (cont'd)

Eh, praaa - please. Look at the Boy - he's pissed himself.

TAJPAL hurriedly places the locket around in his neck and checks on RAJESH. RAJESH has his eyes closed and moans gently.

TAJPAL

Bloody hell.

TARIK

This is what happens if you sleep on the job...

TAJPAL

Did he eat anything yet?

TARIK shakes his head - picks up his gun and begins polishing it.

TAJPAL (cont'd)

Please Rajesh, let me help you?

RAJESH stands slowly, lifting his haunches, TAJPAL assists him. His clothes are blood splattered and now his trousers are wet.

TAJPAL (cont'd)

Come...

He leads him to the side and helps him to undress.

TAJPAL (cont'd)

And you're polishing your gun?

TARIK

Preparing. Not polishing. There is a difference.

TAJPAL

It all means the same in the end.

TARIK

To the naive eye - yes.

TAJPAL

Polish all you like - but we need to decide what to do about Rajesh...

TARIK

What can be done?

TAJPAL

He can't defend himself. In the battle/

TARIK

Wrap him up in this...

He throws over a blanket.

TARIK (cont'd)

I have some cotton for his ears.

TAJPAL

And if the Germans capture us?

TARIK

That's why I'm preparing.

(packing his Qu'ran into his blazer)

TAJPAL

Your Qu'ran in exchange for our lives?

TARIK

(pretending to kill himself)

Germans are bloody bastards. We'll finish the job ourselves.

TAJPAL

A young woman is seen walking on stage – she responds to TAJPAL'S words...

Only RAJESH is able to see her. He rises and gets up as if to see her more clearly

TARIK

Sky lightening - dawn is closer.

Sounds of guns cocking and nearby activity.

TARIK (cont'd)

We have surprise on our side. Allah will see to it...

Gun shots in the distance. TAJPAL looks up to the sky.

TAJPAL

Will there be no end to the White hunger?

TARIK

It's not a hunger it's a war praa.

TAJPAL

No it's a hunger - a dark hunger for life.

TARIK

Eventually gluttony leads to indigestion and a belly ache.

TAJPAL succeeds in sorting out RAJESH, and settles him down with TARIK's blanket.

LAMPLIGHT - the silhouette of a woman appears on stage.

(looking up at the sky)

RAJESH

Mother, mother...

The other two ignore him - partly as RAJESH's desire for home makes them feel something they are trying to repress. TARIK gets TAJPAL's gun and begins to polish it also.

TARIK

You were smiling, in your sleep...

(beat)

Tell me what did you see?

(moaning)

At the nape of her neck, her hair is soft and fine.

(familiar routine, they both know the words)

(MORE)

TARIK (cont'd)

Like silk

TAJPAL

Soft as silk, like a baby's.

TARIK

Like silk.

TAJPAL

The plait is thick and fat, pulled around the side, flowing over her breast...

TARIK

/Over the breast

TAJPAL

Over the breast, towards her navel. It moves as she walks... gently swaying...

They stand in silence at the contemplation.

Lamp light.

TARIK

Who goes there?

The woman disappears.

TARIK (cont'd)

Carry on praa. Rajesh is enjoying....

TAJPAL

Don't rush me! We must undress bit by bit,

(cocking gun)

RAJESH

Mother, mother... help me...

TAJPAL attends to RAJESH, soothing him.... RAJESH quietens down.

He sings a soft lullaby.

(moaning)

RAJESH (cont'd)

Mother, is it time for sleep?

TAJPAL

Yes, yes - time for sleep. Don't you hear the birds?

Singing their last songs... Now you must sleep.

Forget...

RAJESH nods.

(child like)

TAJPAL (cont'd)

Just rest now...

RAJESH begins to nod off.

*Figure dressed in as a soldier hurriedly enters
the trench. TARIK cocks his gun, TAJPAL hides...
It is Madame Cama in disguise.*

*She brandishes a leaflet with BANDE MATRAM on
it.*

*TARIK lowers his gun slightly, takes the leaflet
- reads it carefully.*

MADAME CAMA

Bande Matram!

TAJPAL

TARIK and MADAME CAMA stare at each for a few moments - wordlessly.

*TARIK looks at the leaflet and reads the front cover, while TAJPAL comes out from the hiding place and
approaches CAMA.*

devata, ek desh, ek bhasha; ek jati, ek jeev, ek asha

TARIK

Bande Matram! Hail Mother!

TAJPAL looks from one of them to another. He peers closer at Madam CAMA

TARIK (cont'd)

(he knows the words off by heart)

One god, one country, one language; one race, one being, one hope.

CAMA takes her hat off - revealing long hair and a woman's face.

TAJPAL

A woman?

TARIK

Madam Cama...

TARIK falls to his knees and prostrates. CAMA unfurls a large FLAG.

TARIK (cont'd)

(thrusting the leaflet at TAJPAL)

See praa, the paper... It is Madam's - what I've been telling you about. I told you I saw her once.

TAJPAL

We are about to go to battle sister. Why are you here?

MADAME CAMA

Loyalty to Great Britain is treachery to India...

TARIK

She has come to save us!

MADAM CAMA

Sons of India - you must join this fight!

She takes out a folded cloth - it is the first Indian flag - with stripes of yellow, green and saffron.

The colours are bright in the darkness...

MADAME CAMA

Behold, it is born!...I call upon you, gentle men, to rise.. .I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to cooperate with this flag. Hail Bande Mataram! Hail Bande Mataram!!

Both TAJPAL and TARIK bow down to the flag.

RAJESH looks on from afar.

MADAME CAMA (cont'd)

Touch it. *Your* flag. The flag of Hindustan!

TAJPAL

Saffron -

TARIK

The lotus - the sun...

They examine the flag - enraptured. TAJPAL is truly moved.

TAJPAL

The bright sun. The gentle breeze: Home.

MADAM CAMA

We raised this flag in Stuttgart - in front of hundreds of people - they recognised India as a free country!

TAJPAL

You have done all this?

MADAME CAMA

There are many of us. All fighting the same battle against the British: Paris, America, even in London!

Noises from nearby trenches... Flash lights - sounds of fighting.

They cower - as flashlights flood the trench for a moment. CAMA puts her hat on, TARIK throws her a blanket.

UNSEEN SOLDIER

On guard - there are insurgents on the loose.

TARIK AND TAJPAL IN UNISON:

Sir!

Lights move on.

TAJPAL

You'll get us all shot...

MADAME CAMA

One life is of no importance when - the lives of our brothers - are at stake!

TAJPAL

You're not afraid?

MADAME CAMA

If I die - the movement will continue.

TARIK

Madam, with respect - you can not save us. Not like this.

MADAME CAMA

You prefer to carry on blindly? Fight the battle of the White pepper?

RAJESH MOANS.

MADAM CAMA looks over at RAJESH

MADAME CAMA (cont'd)

He needs to eat. Be wrapped warm.

TAJPAL

We have given him all we have...

MADAME CAMA

The cold is already in his bones...

MADAM CAMA goes to RAJESH, with some food.

MADAME CAMA (cont'd)

What's his name?

TAJPAL

Rajesh...

RAJESH eats tentatively.

MADAME CAMA

He's just a child...

RAJESH

You came. You came.

MADAME CAMA nods, feeding RAJESH who seems surprisingly responsive.

MADAME CAMA

The black pepper is sprinkled across the battlefields -they marinate victory with our kin. We can not keep feeding the hunger of the white man...

TAJPAL

Without sacrifice there is no victory...

MADAM CAMA

Is it not your victory brother...

TARIK

He likes to 'eat the salt of the sirkar'

TAJPAL

I make a *living*. Give my family a chance.

TARIK

So you give up everything for that? Your freedom, your *Mother*?

TAJPAL

I have my duty. My honor. I will face my destiny with courage and conviction.

MADAM CAMA

Your courage is wasted here.

MADAME CAMA gently caresses RAJESH's forehead.

RAJESH begins to cry.

MADAME CAMA

Your death will mean nothing to them.

TAJPAL takes the flag and throws in on the ground. TARIK is angered...

TAJPAL

If death is certain then we must greet it with honour!

TARIK

Does your own life mean nothing to you?

TARIK (cont'd)

Your life means nothing if you give it away!

TAJPAL

Mutiny is certain death!

TARIK

I'm no coward!

BEAT.

MADAME CAMA

Think of her. Your Mother - the one who raised, fed and loved you. India has been agreeable, pliable, forgiving even - yet even though she has done all she can - they still ask Her to give her sons away? For *their* battle?

TAJPAL

But we have no choice.

TARIK

So we must fight for her!

MADAME CAMA

You talk of honour - resistance to tyranny is obedience to God himself?! Loyalty to oneself, your people and your land is the only way to God.

TARIK

Yes! We must revolt!! Fight the White Pepper!

TAJPAL

And where will you go?

TARIK

We will find a way to escape

TAJPAL

Back to India...?

MADAME CAMA shakes her head.

MADAME CAMA

This is a war.

TAJPAL

If you have no plan - it is because you believe we will die here!

TAJPAL throws down the flag onto the ground.

They all stare at it.

MADAME CAMA

There is a plan.

TARIK

Then tell us

MADAM CAMA

We do not ask you to revolt.

TARIK

No?

MADAME CAMA

There is something more powerful we ask of you. All of you.

TAJPAL

What more can you want of us?

MADAME CAMA

Surrender.

TARIK

Surrender?

MADAME CAMA

Better to abstain than to assist.

Silence.

TARIK

And what will they do to us?!

MADAME CAMA

You are better to surrender than to fight this war.

TARIK

So you ask us to find death with our enemy?!!

BEAT

TARIK (cont'd)

(very afraid)

Have you heard the stories of what they do to prisoners!?

MADAME CAMA

Lies. To make you stay and fight!

TAJPAL

Brother, we can not die with the enemy !

DAWN has arrived. SOLDIERS are mobilising: sounds of horses, soldiers climbing out of trenches, gentle singing.

MADAME CAMA

You are already *with the enemy*!

TARIK and TAJPAL take their guns and prepare to leave.

MADAME CAMA (cont'd)

Look...

RAJESH

Mother...

(picking up the flag)

Slowly MADAME CAMA wraps the flag around

MADAME CAMA

Go on. Free yourselves my sons!

They pause, unmoving.

MADAM CAMA

'March Forward! We are for India. India is for Indians! Hail and sing Bande Mataram!

MAMDAM CAMA watches them.

FINALLY - before TARIK or TAJPAL can make a decision - RAJESH, smiles and stands - lifting his hands up in surrender. He stands and begins to walk out slowly into the dawn...

Slowly TARIK follows in fear, hands raised.

MADAM CAMA (cont'd)

'March Forward! We are for India. India is for Indians! Hail and sing Bande Mataram!

Eventually, TARIK joins them.

MADAME CAMA watches.

***Step Child* by Amy Ng**

Author's Note

'Stepchild' was a joy to write. I was extremely fortunate that Iqbal Husain of the National Archives and the historian Rozina Visram had already done so much of the spadework, unearthing an absolutely fascinating 24 page report from one Dady Burjor, a Parsee merchant who acted as an interpreter at Angel Island for British Indian subjects wishing to enter the United States, to William Hopkinson, a former Calcutta policeman who had been seconded to Canada to keep the Indian 'seditionists' in North America under surveillance, and who was later assassinated by Indian revolutionaries.

The issues Burjor touches upon — white supremacy, terrorism, migration, obviously are extremely topical, but what really drew me to Burjor as a character was the titanic struggle visible, even through the polite prose of an official report, between loyalty and dissent to the empire in the heart of one man.

Burjor has left faint traces in the historical records. There is almost no mention of him in the secondary literature, and even his report seems to have been read by a limited number of officials, judging from the various comments and cover letters forwarding on the report from the British Consulate in California to the British Embassy in Washington D.C, to the Foreign Office. But he was forcefully articulate, very well educated, and deeply insightful about the complexities of the relationship between colonised and colonisers on the eve of the Great War. As a historian, such virginal archival material is a dream come true, and research into those on the margin of history frequently leads to paradigm shifts in the way we understand the past.

I can't wait to probe more into the mind and the global networks of this watcher in the shadows — Dady Burjor.



Photo : Bettina Adela

Characters

Dady Burjor

Wealthy Parsee merchant, who volunteers as an interpreter at Angel Island, San Francisco. Fifties. Speaks heightened RP.

William Hopkinson

Eurasian. Former policeman in Calcutta. Now a British spy in charge of combating Indian sedition in North America. He is darker skinned than Burjor. Thirties. Has cultivated a Yorkshire accent, which slips into Indian when stressed.

January 1914.

A room in a brothel in San Francisco Chinatown. A large bed. Red lanterns. A fireplace.

A girl lies across the bed, face turned away from the audience, smoking an opium pipe.

Enter DADY BURJOR, impeccably dressed in a 3 piece suit. He looks around, obviously agitated. Since there is nowhere else to sit apart from the bed, he stands.

Enter WILLIAM HOPKINSON. He is dressed as a middle-class Indian student in a starched white kurta. He looks at BURJOR, enjoying the older man's discomfort, chuckles, and takes out some Indian food which he proceeds to spread on the bed. He squats down to eat.

HOPKINSON

'Ey up Burjor. Dig in. I've not had a finer goat curry in the New World.

BURJOR

Mr. Hopkinson —

HOPKINSON

And the biryani! A pan-Indian feast at the Berkeley revolutionary meeting. They thought I was fresh-off-the boat, plied me with food —

BURJOR

No thank you. Mr. Hopkinson —

HOPKINSON

Scratch a Parsee's Savile row suit, and you always find a puritan.

BURJOR

Sir —

HOPKINSON

Mango, Burjor? A Dussehri mango — surely a mango can't be polluting —

BURJOR

I have eaten, thank you. Mr. —

HOPKINSON

The seditionists have transcended all caste restrictions - or so they claim. Brahmin eating out of the same bowl as Shudras — *(mock sentimentally)* It's ever so touching.

BURJOR

I am not a seditionist.

HOPKINSON

Of course not. You know which side of your bread is buttered.

BURJOR

I am a loyal servant of the British empire.

HOPKINSON

The seditionists love your cousin — 'Madam Cama'.

BURJOR

All Bombay Parsees are related.

HOPKINSON

Tell her she'd still be a barefoot peasant if it weren't for the Empire.

BURJOR

She is an extremely reckless and stupid girl

HOPKINSON

Tell her that from me, won't you? When you're next in touch.

BURJOR

I am not. Sir —

HOPKINSON

They were selling postcards of her wrapped up in this new Indian flag she designed — the Indian Joan of Arc!

HOPKINSON hands BURJOR a postcard. BURJOR takes it without looking and puts it in his pocket.

BURJOR

This place is not safe.

HOPKINSON

You Parsees! And you wonder why we don't recruit Parsee soldiers. Maybe you don't have what it takes to be a spy.

BURJOR

I'm not a spy.

HOPKINSON

An informer. Better? *(beat)* This is the safest place in town.

BURJOR

A brothel in Chinatown is the safest place in San Francisco?

HOPKINSON

Opium cures a hundred ills — don't you believe in your own product? You're far more likely to get a dose of the clap in those posh establishments in Pacific Heights. Though they've just recruited a Russian ballet dancer who can do the most fantastic contortions —

BURJOR

The British consulate —

HOPKINSON

That bunch of toffs! My in-laws are visiting from London. Highgate London. 24 hours of Highgate London and I was craving Asiatic filth and vice.

HOPKINSON pours dahl into the hollow of the prone girl's neck, and dips some naan bread into the dahl.

BURJOR

Mr. Hopkinson!

HOPKINSON

She's dead to the world. The finest opium from the Burjor warehouses.

BURJOR

I only deal in cigars.

HOPKINSON

Your uncle's finest opium then. A pipe for her, a pipe for the Madam.

BURJOR

She's so young.

HOPKINSON

Behold the fruits of your labour.

BURJOR

In trade, as in all else, the Empire led, and we followed. *(beat)* I only trade cigars.

HOPKINSON pulls out the opium pipe from the girl's mouth. She wails.

Hopkinson!

HOPKINSON stares at BURJOR. He deliberately dangles the pipe in front of the girl, and she grabs at it.

HOPKINSON stuffs the pipe into her mouth.

HOPKINSON

(contemptuously) The British consulate.

BURJOR

I only meant...it's less suspicious. Parsee merchants go in and out of the commercial —

HOPKINSON

They let you in the tradesman's door. Flippin' 'eck, Burjor, where's your pride? Here, all men are brothers. The only colour that matters is the greenback. And such an ingenious system of hidden entrances and exits! The Madam assures me no two johns ever cross paths. And where else can I enter an Indian and leave a Sahib?

HOPKINSON takes out a tweed suit from the wardrobe and changes. There is something distinctly lower class about his suit. He sits on the bed, using the prone girl as a backrest, his legs stretched out.

HOPKINSON

So what's so burning it couldn't wait till the New Year?

BURJOR

I'm sorry but — Merry Christmas, Mr. Hopkinson.

BURJOR hands HOPKINSON a present.

HOPKINSON tears open the wrap to reveal two dark haired porcelain dolls.

For your two little angels.

HOPKINSON

That's very kind of you, old boy, but they prefer blond dolls. Keep them for your grand-daughters.

BURJOR

But surely your daughters are dark —

HOPKINSON

Their mother is blond. It's imprinting. Biological. Like a duckling.

BURJOR

Then it gives me pleasure to think they will play with beautiful dark dolls.

Beat.

HOPKINSON places the dolls on his bag.

BURJOR

I'm sorry to interrupt your Christmas.

HOPKINSON

Oh I was glad to get out. In-laws and moving boxes.

BURJOR

How's the move?

HOPKINSON

Poshest neighbourhood in Vancouver.

BURJOR

Congratulations.

HOPKINSON

Aye...it's Vancouver. It's clean, it's green, and so is boiled cabbage.

BURJOR

You want to go back to India?

HOPKINSON

(sharply) No. *(beat)* You know what I don't get? Same solid English stock in both America and Canada, but America is just — zing — electric, sizzling. What do they have that we don't?

BURJOR

More migrants?

HOPKINSON

That's seditious. *(pause)* So spit it out, Burjor. What is so burning it couldn't go in a report?

BURJOR

You'll get your report, Mr Hopkinson. But there are some things — how do I say this? — the right inflection, the right nuance, impossible in a report destined for the imperial government's files. Some things only a man like yourself, who has imbibed India with his mother's milk, can understand. *(beat)* You asked me to report on the characteristics of Indians entering the United States through San Francisco. The labouring classes are exclusively from the Punjab —

HOPKINSON

Sikhs?

BURJOR

Some Muslims too.

HOPKINSON

(beat) There were Sikhs there tonight. Real peasants all right. Didn't touch the food — none of this pan-India pan-caste nonsense for them. But they were many.

BURJOR

I'm not surprised.

HOPKINSON

And we thought Sikhs the least likely group to turn against us.

BURJOR

The Parsees are the most loyal —

HOPKINSON

Your business interests are aligned with the empire.

BURJOR

I like to think of it as a special relationship.

HOPKINSON

But the Sikhs! They're a martial race. Loyal to the Father-Mother King. Backbone of the Calcutta police force —

BURJOR

Yes, many of the local Sikhs are former imperial policemen from Calcutta, Shanghai, Hong Kong.

HOPKINSON

So why have they gone over to these seditionists —

BURJOR

They're economic migrants. You know the conditions in the Punjab. They become radicalised in America because there are real grounds for — discontent.

HOPKINSON

So what did they expect? That white labourers were going to embrace them after they've driven down wages —

BURJOR

In no other species do the unfit and lazy demand special protection against the hardworking and fit.

HOPKINSON

Ha! So the Asiatic are the rightful winners of the evolutionary contest? Revolutionary, Burjor.

Beat.

BURJOR

In all fairness, the majority of white Americans are friendly.

HOPKINSON

So what's getting their goat?

BURJOR

The perceived indifference of the British authorities. The injustice —

HOPKINSON

What has their treatment in the States got to do with us?

BURJOR

Under the terms of the 1815 treaty between Great Britain and the United States, all British subjects may freely enter America. The Americans now use means tests and health exams to deny Indian British subjects this right. The British government does nothing.

HOPKINSON

You know very well why we can't intervene.

Beat.

BURJOR

I know the Empire dare not set a precedent for free movement of Indians into majority white countries. I know the White Canada, White Australia, White South Africa people are baying for blood. But this is unjust, illegal, and above all else, short-sighted.

HOPKINSON

Several steps above my rank, old chap. Put it in a report.

BURJOR

Which will never get read. Unless I have a champion. (*beat*) The wonder is that not more of them are radicalised. Indians, *British subjects*, are excluded from all corners of the empire; Indians are beaten up in South Africa, in Canada, in Australia. The racial theories coming out of South Africa —

HOPKINSON

That's not us, that's —

BURJOR

Dutch settlers. I know. But the British government does nothing —

HOPKINSON

As if Sikh peasants care what was happening on the other side of the world! It's these *revolutionaries*... Who are they? Where are they from?

BURJOR

All over. The British Raj. Burma. Afghanistan. They're university students.

HOPKINSON

Why here? Why now? Why aren't they going to England anymore?

BURJOR

Acceptance.

HOPKINSON

(barking laugh) Acceptance? *(waves a newspaper at BURJOR)* Have you read the news today?

BURJOR

Every country has its lunatics. But listen — last month, five Sikh labourers were arrested on a streetcar for being too noisy and white San Franciscans defended them against the police. I've never seen anything like that. Certainly nowhere in the Empire...

HOPKINSON

Is that why you sent your son to Harvard?

BURJOR

(beat) He's there for the business contacts.

HOPKINSON

A few years of polo and punting used to be good enough for Indian high society.

BURJOR

Three generations of Oxbridge and still no closer to becoming English. *(beat)* Indians here will be American in a generation.

HOPKINSON

Americans are working on a law to exclude all Indians.

BURJOR

That's impossible.

HOPKINSON

I've seen the draft.

BURJOR

On what legal basis? We're British subjects!

HOPKINSON

Geography. They'll exclude immigrants from a certain geographic latitude.

BURJOR

The British government will protest energetically - I hope. *(beat)* Out of self-interest alone if nothing else. What if half of all imperial subjects, the Indian half, conclude that British promises are empty? That India is only the stepchild of empire?

HOPKINSON

Like I said, old chap. That's several grades above my rank. I don't make policy.

BURJOR

What about Canada? Such a law would embolden the White Canada party. I have seen what they do in South African schools, the racial police, picking on the black-haired children, the ones with a hint of tan in their skin, looking for that single drop of dark blood. Being half Highgate London won't spare your daughters —

HOPKINSON

And half Yorkshire. I was born in Yorkshire. I am a pure blooded Yorkshireman. And if anyone slanders my honour

BURJOR

Forgive me, Sahib. I have never considered Indian blood dishonourable.

HOPKINSON

I shall demand satisfaction.

Pause

HOPKINSON puts on his coat to leave.

Now if you'll excuse me I have a rather pressing engagement with a lovely Russian ex-ballerina in a certain establishment in Pacific Heights. I'd ask you along but it's strictly whites only.

(glances down at the prone girl)

She's paid for. Have her if you want.

BURJOR takes out a bag of Mexican food and hands it to HOPKINSON, who opens it, surprised.

What's this?

BURJOR

Guacamole and tacos. A Mexican delicacy. It is a curious but little known fact that the Mexican street food trade in San Francisco is dominated by Punjabi Muslims who have grown moustaches. On my way here, one of them asked me to give this 'to Sahib Hopkinson, with compliments.'

Pause.

HOPKINSON springs into action, taking a Sikh costume out of the wardrobe, tearing off his English suit and putting on the Sikh garb at great speed. He wraps the turban so that he is unrecognisable.

HOPKINSON

And you wait till now to tell me? They've been following me — they've been keeping tabs — the number of death threats I've —

BURJOR

I assure you, I was just as surprised —

HOPKINSON

You're in danger too! They know about you! They'll execute you as an informer! Unless...(beat) a wealthy Parsee merchant like you, acting as a humble interpreter for Indian immigrants at Angel Island. Your son at Harvard. Your cousin a known seditionist. Idiot! *(he hits himself hard on the head)*

BURJOR

Sahib, I am a loyal subject of the true Father-Mother King.

HOPKINSON leaves hurriedly.

BURJOR looks at the prone girl. He puts one of the dolls next to her.

He takes out the postcard with Madam Cama wrapped in an Indian flag and looks at it.

He throws Hopkinson's discarded English suit into the fire, and watches it burn.

The End

***Corner of a Foreign Field* by Hassan Abdulrazzak**

Author's Note

You honour the dead by giving them decent burial. That impulse is ingrained in mankind and some argue, it forms the very origin of religious practice. It is the issue at the centre of Sophocles' *Antigone*. During the First World War, Britain relied on Indian soldiers, many of whom belonged to the Muslim faith. The records at the National Archives reveal an intriguing story of a tug of war between an Imam, Maulana Sadr ud-Din and the British authorities regarding the establishment of a dedicated cemetery for the Muslim fallen. The record reveal Sadr ud-Din to have been a highly articulate man who knew what buttons to push in order to get what he wants. After the war, the imam moved to Germany where he went on to write the first German translation of the Quran. The cemetery he established in Woking was vandalised in the wake of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech and eventually became derelict after the bodies were exhumed and moved to Brookwood military cemetery. However, in November 2015, the burial ground was turned into a 'Peace Memorial Garden' dedicated to all the Muslim soldiers who died in both World Wars. I'm grateful to have been given the opportunity to delve into the archive and breathe life into this forgotten yet entirely fascinating piece of British Indian history.



Photo : Bettina Adela

Characters

Maulana Sadr ud-Din,

Let.Col. Sherman,

General Barrow,

Bilal

Sadr ud-Din and Bilal should speak with a light accent when talking to each other. Sadr ud-Din should speak with a somewhat thicker accent when addressing Sherman or Barrow. A slash (/) indicates an interruption. Words in brackets are not to be spoken.

Scene 1: Netley, October 1914

An open field. Lt. Col. Sherman is showing Maulana Sadr ud-Din around the grounds.

Sherman

And so the cemetery will be built here, close to Netley hospital, as soon as the purchase is finalised. What we would really like from you, Mr. Sadr ud-Din is direction regarding how this cemetery should look, what provisions you need, etc. The rituals and particulars of the Muslim faith are somewhat of a mystery to us, I am afraid. We wish to proceed quickly. For the benefit of all concerned.

Silence as Maulana Sadr ud-Din seems far away, lost in thought.

Mr. Sadr ud-Din?

Sadr ud-Din

All concerned?

Sherman

Yes.

Sadr ud-Din

Meaning the India Office and the War Office.

Sherman

It is the men, I am thinking of primarily. To honour the sacrifice of Muslim soldiers for their King. Now, Mr. Sadr ud-Din, if you would care to instruct me regarding the optimal layout/

Sadr ud-Din

Lt. Col. Sherman. Do you really want my advice or is my coming here a mere formality?

Sherman

I assure you it is no formality.

Sadr ud-Din

Then my advice is that you do not purchase this land.

Sherman is taken back by this.

Sherman

Sir, the matter is almost decided.

Sadr ud-Din

It would be best if it were undecided.

Sherman

May I know the reasons for your objection?

Sadr ud-Din

To gain access to the land one has to pass through the Christian part of the cemetery.

Sherman

Does that matter?

Sadr ud-Din

It does not seem appropriate.

Sherman

Perhaps if we construct a separate entrance /

Sadr ud-Din

Imagine if a famous Muslim were to be buried here, the coming of some Raja or Nawab to visit will be greatly inconvenient, with Netley being some 50 miles away from London.

Sherman

Well, yes, I suppose.

Sadr ud-Din

That dignitary will regret the lack of foresight of the British authorities/

Sherman

My superiors are not going to like this/

Sadr ud-Din

(Continuing)

And that could have all sorts of unintended consequences.

Sherman

What exactly / (do you mean)?

Sadr ud-Din

(Continuing)

Besides who will come to conduct the funeral prayers? I cannot come here every day from Woking.

Sherman

So what is the solution?

Sadr ud-Din

A plot should be purchased near the Mosque in Woking. A cemetery can be established there immediately, and I will be responsible for conducting the funeral prayers.

Sherman

I will report your recommendations but I can not guarantee/ (anything).

Sadr ud-Din

Naturally the bodies will need to be sent to Woking from Netley by motor car. And the coffins draped with the union flag.

Sherman

(Somewhat irritated)

Anything else?

Sadr ud-Din

There is something you should make clear to your superiors...

Scene 2: India Office / Sadr ud-Din's office at Woking Mosque

Split scene. General Barrow is Military Secretary to the India Office. Bilal is Sadr ud-Din's assistant.

General Barrow

Outrageous.

Sherman

He was most adamant.

Bilal

Did you have to antagonise them, Maulana?

Sadr ud-Din

Would you rather I kept silent, Bilal?

General Barrow

Tell him it will be Netley or nothing.

Sherman

I don't think his request is entirely unreasonable.

Sadr ud-Din

I have a duty towards these soldiers.

General Barrow

Who will foot the bill for this cemetery he wants at Woking?

Sherman

This is a small price to pay perhaps.

General Barrow

The man is simply too lazy to conduct the funerals at Netley. We mustn't let him override what has been decided.

Sherman

There is perhaps more at stake than you realise...General Barrow, sir.

Bilal

We're guests in their country. You should've just said yes.

Sadr ud-Din

Don't you see Bilal, I refused for their sake also.

Bilal

I don't catch your meaning, Maulana.

Sherman

Turkey, sir.

General Barrow

What about Turkey?

Sherman

They are a party to the war now. On the side of Germany.

Sadr ud-Din

Turkey changes everything.

General Barrow

I am not a complete imbecile.

Sherman

I am sorry sir, I did not mean / (to suggest you were).

General Barrow

To the point, Sherman, and quick.

Sherman

What he made clear sir, is that Muslims in India will have to consider whether it is right to fight against fellow Muslims.

General Barrow

And what can sway them?

Sherman

Well sir, what he said is that from a religious stand:

Sadr ud-Din

It can be argued that Muslims are obliged to stand with the King as he is their sovereign and the holy Quran stipulates that you must give obedience to those in authority.

General Barrow

Excellent! I had no idea the Quran was so conducive to the conduct of empire.

Bilal

Ah! But there is a catch, Maulana, isn't there?

Sadr ud-Din

You are right, Bilal

Sherman

There is a catch, sir.

General Barrow

What catch?

Sherman

The stipulation is void if the sovereign proves unjust, sir.

General Barrow

Unjust how? Did he specify?

Sherman

Not exactly. He framed his argument in a positive light:

Sadr ud-Din

If news reaches Muslims that the government has made allowances for all their needs, and given consideration to all the religious requirements, it will prove very beneficial.

Sherman

In other words it will prove detrimental if news reaches India that the government has failed to give their Muslim soldiers appropriate burial.

General Barrow

I hear a crack. It must be the sound of my arm being twisted.

Bilal

I don't understand why you are making so much trouble, Maulana.

General Barrow

Look into it.

Sherman

Sir?

General Barrow

The cemetery at Woking, man. The cemetery at Woking.

Sadr ud-Din

Something odd happened to me Bilal.

General Barrow

Let's be done with it.

Sadr ud-Din

When I disembarked from the train at Netely, I wept.

General Barrow

Some 7000 Indians are at the front in France.

Sadr ud-Din

I was so ashamed I hid my face in my handkerchief so I wouldn't catch the attention of the passing public.

General Barrow

Soon the wounded will start arriving/

Sadr ud-Din

The thought that I had to lay the foundation/

General Barrow

at Netley.

Sadr ud-Din

with my own hands.

General Barrow

at Brighton.

Sadr ud-Din

of a cemetery for my own brethren, it overwhelmed me.

Bilal

It is a heavy responsibility, Maulana.

General Barrow

Many of them will give up the ghost, right here on England's soil.

Sadr ud-Din

They have left everything behind in our country to fight and shed their blood for England.

General Barrow

We need to have some arrangement in place and soon. No matter how rudimentary.

Sadr ud-Din

I will not accept a second best arrangement.

General Barrow

Speed is of the essence.

Sherman

Yes sir.

Bilal

This will not end well.

Scene 3: Horsell Common, May 1915

Maulana Sadr ud-Din and Bilal are wading through the muddy field.

Sadr ud-Din

(exasperated)

Astaghfer Allah [begging the forgiveness of God]

Bilal

We'll have to make do.

Sadr ud-Din

Are you serious Bilal?

Bilal

What can we do?

Sadr ud-Din

The land is waterlogged!

Bilal

Perhaps the dead don't mind.

Sadr ud-Din

I mind. I can not bury our fallen in this place.

Bilal

It is near the mosque, Maulana as you asked. And they've handed you the keys. It's too late.

Sadr ud-Din

I have been tricked. This is not what I wanted.

Bilal

You asked for too much. I told you.

Sadr ud-Din

To have a gravedigger at a cemetery?

Bilal

A cemetery without a gravedigger seems somewhat on the pointless side, I grant you that.

Sadr ud-Din

No fence to keep out dogs. And some people around here are in the habit of rearing pigs.

Bilal

Pigs in a Muslim cemetery might pose a slight problem.

Sadr ud-Din

Your talent for understatement is unsurpassable, Bilal.

Bilal

But you have the ground, Maulana. That's an achievement, isn't it? How much did it cost?

Sadr ud-Din

That's not your concern.

Bilal

Oh Maulana, do you imagine that I would go around spreading rumours, saying you are making a killing out of killing?

Sadr ud-Din

Are you questioning my integrity, Bilal?

Bilal

Oh Maulana, Allah forbid. You are straighter than an English ruler. Which is why you will share with me how much the ground cost.

Sadr ud-Din

A £1000 pound. Satisfied?

Bilal

(whistles)

A man with that kind of money could easily afford four wives.

(Wistfully)

Ah, four wives.

Sadr ud-Din

You can't afford one wife, so stop dreaming.

Bilal

Sorry, Maulana.

Beat.

Do you not get lonely sometimes?

Sadr ud-Din

I focus on the work. I suggest you do the same.

Bilal

I miss my mother's golgappa.

Sadr ud-Din

Learn to cook it and you will cease to miss it.

Bilal

I have looked for the ingredients in the market. I found nothing. The food is unbearably bland here. Maulana, sir, do you not think we are on the wrong side?

Sadr ud-Din

What do you mean?

Bilal

I heard the Germans are building a mosque that will be as magnificent as the dome of the rock in Jerusalem.

Sadr ud-Din

I will not hear such seditious talk.

Bilal

You would be more respected in Germany.

Sadr ud-Din

Enough!

Bilal

But you yourself said it, Maulana. They have given you waterlogged land. There isn't even a hut to keep the bodies overnight. There is no caretaker to open the gate. There is barely a gate! Is this not an insult?

Silence.

Sadr ud-Din eventually nods.

Bilal

What will you do?

Sadr ud-Din

Speak with Sherman.

Scene 4: India office.

Sadr ud-Din

Have they not died for England?

Sherman

Mr. Sadr ud-Din/

Sadr ud-Din

Answer the question. Have they not sacrificed their lives for King and country?

Sherman

I am sympathetic to your plight.

Sadr ud-Din

Then do something about it Lt. Col.

Sherman

The cost of this war is unimaginable. We all need to tighten our belts.

Sadr ud-Din

Are you telling me that the bodies of English soldiers are left out over night, under the elements, in your cemeteries?

Sherman

Of course not.

Sadr ud-Din

And is there not talk of building lavish memorials for the English dead?

Sherman

I would not say lavish. Fitting, but not lavish.

Sadr ud-Din

Let me speak with him.

Sherman

That will not be wise.

Sadr ud-Din

I demand to speak with General Barrow.

Sherman

You should convey your displeasure to him in writing.

Sadr ud-Din

No.

Sherman

Mr Sadr ud-Din/

Sadr ud-Din

These past several months, I have spent most of my time engaged in meeting with go-betweens such as yourself. And this has got me precisely nowhere. I want to speak with General Barrow directly.

Sherman

The letters would be to your advantage.

Sadr ud-Din

I fail to see that.

Sherman

They provide a record that the War Office and the India Office must address.

Sadr ud-Din

Let me speak to him.

Scene 5: General Barrow's office.

General Barrow

We offered you the ground at Netley.

Sadr ud-Din

You are not listening.

General Barrow

Then we suggested you bury them at Brockwood. But you insisted on a dedicated Muslim cemetery. So we provided the ground at Woking.

Sadr ud-Din

It is not fit for purpose.

General Barrow

Perhaps you are not fit for purpose.

Sadr ud-Din

Excuse me?

General Barrow

Sir Walter Lawrence, the War Office Commissioner for Indian Hospitals, is displeased with your conduct. In a report to Lord Kitchener of which I happen to have a copy, he describes you as being exceedingly 'difficile'.

Sadr ud-Din

Difficile?!

General Barrow

It means hard to deal with.

Sadr ud-Din

I know what it means.

General Barrow

He says your object is to make mischief. And I must say, I agree with him.

Sherman

Sir, let me assure you/

General Barrow

Quiet Sherman!

Silence.

Are you an *agitator* Mr Sadr ud-Din?

Silence.

Is that your game?

Silence.

Do your sympathies lie with the Turks?

Sadr ud-Din

I could not bury the dead soldiers in the marshy piece of unfenced ground over which people and dogs could stray: therefore I buried twenty-five of them in the Mohammedan burial ground at Brockwood at my own expense.

General Barrow

Perhaps you are one of those Muslims who thinks they would fare better in Germany.

Sadr ud-Din

Brockwood is now *full*.

Beat.

I have already buried three in Woking but the ground is in such a disgraceful state that it would not do to allow the Indian soldiers to go and see the burial-place of their comrades. They have frequently asked, but I have had to put them off because – *being a loyal subject of His Majesty* – I did not desire to raise the resentment which must inevitably be felt when the truth becomes known of the manner in which the British Government have treated their dead heroes.

General Barrow

The Muslim religion is very broad-minded and reasonable. We do not think it is necessary to even have a dedicated cemetery.

Sadr ud-Din is shocked.

Sadr ud-Din

You wish to take back what little you have given?

General Barrow

It is a matter of war. Wherever someone dies, let him be buried there. We can not spend more on this...this project of yours.

Sadr ud-Din

When Germany invaded Belgium, Britain was woefully unprepared. Your army was inadequate to cover the front. Had it not been for the Indian soldiers you would have lost access to the Channel ports.

General Barrow

Those sacrifices have been duly noted.

Sadr ud-Din

'Duly noted'? I have had bodies sent to me bearing the wrong names: bodies sent without any flowers: bodies sent to me at any hour of the day or night/

General Barrow

Good day, Mr. Sadr ud-Din/

Sadr ud-Din

(Continues)

without previous notice, and no respect shown for them whatever – not even any military demonstration at their graves/

General Barrow

Lt. Col. Sherman, would you show the imam out?/

Sherman is like a deer caught in the headlights between these two men.

Sadr ud-Din

(Continues)

No caretaker is provided for the Cemetery If a visitor desires to go there, I myself the head of the Mohammedan Church in England/

General Barrow

Sherman!/

Lt. Col. Sherman

Yes Sir!/

Sadr ud-Din

(Continues)

am compelled to go with the key and admit the stranger.

Sherman grabs Sadr ud-Din by the arm and pulls him towards the door. But Sadr manages to free himself and faces up to Barrow.

Sadr ud-Din

So how exactly has their sacrifice been ‘duly noted’?

General Barrow

Out!

Scene 6: Woking Mosque

Bilal and Sadr un-Din are lowering a body wrapped in white cloth into a simple wooden casket. They stand back, catching their breath.

Bilal

The bodies just keep coming. And no end to the war in sight.

Sadr un-Din

I feel ashamed.

Bilal

Don't be hard on yourself.

Sadr un-Din

I failed to provide decent burial for these men.

Bilal

I keep telling you this is not our country. There is only so much we can expect to achieve.

Sadr un-Din

The British are not even paying for the cemetery out of their own pockets. It is funded by the India Office which relies on taxes levied on Indians.

Bilal

We will bury them the best we can.

They fix the lid of the casket.

Bilal

I know what will cheer you up, Maulana. Some home cooked golgappa! I received a parcel from Lahore with some spices. And a wonderful letter from my mother saying she has found me a most suitable bride. What's wrong Maulana, you seem agitated?

The word 'letter' has ignited a thought in Sadr un-Din's mind.

Sadr un-Din

Lt. Col. Sherman was right. The British have a reverence for letters. And so I will start a bombardment campaign of letters.

Bilal

Allah help us, you will not let this go, will you?

Sadr un-Din

I will write to Lord Headley.

Bilal

The Muslim convert? With the Arabian Nights turban and massive moustache?

Sadr un-Din

Yes him. And also to Lord Kitchener and to the Agha Khan and to whoever will listen to our plight. Grab pen and paper, quickly, quickly.

Bilal runs around like a headless chicken trying to find pen and paper.

Bilal

Would you rather not go and eat some golgappa?

Sadr un-Din

Bilal!

Bilal

Alright. Alright.

Bilal finds pen and paper.

Sadr un-Din

Ready?

Bilal

Fire away.

Sadr un-Din

Let's aim for the heart. Lord Kitchener, the War Office. Are you writing Bilal?

Bilal

Is it haram to use the casket as desk?

Sadr un-Din

Just write, will you!

Bilal

OK, OK. *(then muttering to himself)* I will go to hell for this, no bride, no golgappa, but OK.

Sadr un-Din

(Dictating)

I desire to point out to the government the very grave danger of allowing the impression to gain ground in India that England is not showing sufficient respect to the memories of her Indian heroes. I need not enlarge upon the very serious effect which an exposure of this kind would make, both among the soldiers at the front, and the entire population throughout India.

Bilal

Should you not veil the threat a little, Maulana?

Sadr un-Din

The time for veiling is past.

The End.