

# The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922

**Radhika Singha**

Jawaharlal Nehru University

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*Racial controls on Indian migration to the British Dominions can explain only some features of the compulsory passport regime as it crystallised in India during the Great War. The streaming of population movement across India's borders was shaped by regional geo-political imperatives as well. While race issues certainly haunted the Indian intelligentsia's stance on border management, its positions were also shaped by the class and gender parameters in which it cast citizenship. Both the colonial regime and the Indian intelligentsia conceived of the passport, for different reasons, not just as a document of identity and nationality but also as a civic testimonial which only some kinds of Indians were qualified to hold. Behind the seeming homogeneity of the 'international' form of the passport were accommodations to 'local' colonial protocols of recording and attesting identity, and keeping 'undesirables' under surveillance. However the new British Indian passport regime bore some trace also of the trans-national constituencies which intervened in the new order of travel being shaped by the Euro-American world.*

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Home is the place where  
When you have to go there  
They have to take you back

(Robert Frost, 'The Death of the Hired Man', 1915)

(T)he final result would be a standardized Indian passport, differing only in minor detail from the standardized form of the whole Empire and valid all the world over.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Note, Foreign and Political (F&P), Government of India (GOI), 7 April 1915, F&P, General, A, July 1916, (Proceedings) 1–65. All manuscript references are from the National Archives of India, Delhi, unless otherwise stated.

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There has been a spate of historical work on the place of the passport in the emergence of an international order of states made up of mutually exclusive bodies of citizens. As nineteenth century states took their subjects into a documentary embrace, national space was demarcated in procedures and documents which institutionalised the dividing line between citizen and foreigner.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the USA and West Europe, Torpey concludes that modern documentary controls over movement like the passport are an instance of powerful western states imposing their ways on the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> However this fine account does not really engage with the place of empire and the dependent colonies in the transformation of the international order of travel.

Radhika Mongia's influential article addresses the imperial context, focusing on the 'colour-bar' raised by the Dominions and concludes that the passport regime, which seems to uphold a universal principal of territorial sovereignty, 'is borne out of an attempt to restrict movement along national lines that are explicitly raced.' Mongia's argument is strongly structured along race difference and one problematic arc of movement—from India to the prosperous Pacific rim. The colonial regime in India is cast as complicit with exclusionary drives from the Dominions, a development 'cross-hatched' she states, with the emergence of Indian nationalism.<sup>4</sup>

This article argues that the compulsory passport regime introduced to India in World War one was shaped in complex ways by India's geo-political location in empire and not only by race issues in migration. A focus on the denser, more regionally oriented matrices of border-crossing across the land and sea frontiers of India allows us to understand why the Government of India (GOI) contended so persistently, right upto 1920–21, that its policy was one of non-intervention in free migration 'except in the case of indentured labour'.<sup>5</sup> Mongia argues that GOI took this position, because preventing Indians too directly from embarking for the Dominions would have compromised imperial legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> This article suggests that its stance was also shaped by imperial imperatives requiring a porosity of India's borders, most significantly, to maintain that circulation of Indian labour around the Bay of Bengal which sustained British plantations, oil-works, mines and harbour works in Malaya, Burma and Ceylon. This traffic, though structured by debt-relations, was classed as 'free' migration, a category which Mongia defines

<sup>2</sup> Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*; Caplan and Torpey, eds, *Documenting Individual Identity*. Other excellent explorations are Robertson, *The Passport in America*, and Doulman and David, *Every Assistance & Protection*.

<sup>3</sup> Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility', pp. 527–556.

<sup>5</sup> F&P, General, B, January 1922, 1034; India Office Library and Records (hereafter IOR), L/E/7/1188, File 162/1921. Among important works which look beyond east–west interactions to examine changes shaped within inter-regional networks: Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*; Sugihara, ed., *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy*; Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*.

<sup>6</sup> Mongia, 'Race, Nationality, Mobility'.

as ‘scattered’ and ‘infrequent’, but which in fact was a voluminous phenomenon by 1910, while indentured migration was dwindling away.<sup>7</sup>

My second line of argument is that behind the seeming uniformity of the ‘international’ form of the passport, are not only differences in national power, but also the variegated local practices and protocols which sediment around identity documentation. The permissive and regulatory drives which shaped colonial border-management produced a pile of travel and identity documents. From this heap, the Indian passport rose in symbolic significance from 1912 as that document which best captured the territorial coherence of India in the imperial and international sphere. Yet even during the first World War, when a compulsory passport regime was instituted, other travel documents were retained along certain channels of movement, or for certain categories of travellers.

The project of raising the Indian passport to a standardised imperial model was one which appealed to the GOI, aspiring both to achieve more clout in imperial councils and to soothe Indian anger about the colour-bar. The invocation of ‘international’ standards of border-regulation also allowed the colonial bureaucracy to label those ways of travelling as ‘anachronistic’ which seemed to undermine the efficiency of border-controls, as for instance, *pardah* practices, religious objections to photographs, or the tolerance displayed for the ‘beggar’ pilgrim.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, for reasons of political surveillance and its own geo-political compulsions GOI wanted to retain some of its own ‘local’ protocols for issuing travel documents.

Finally, the article suggests that trans-border communities of opinion, re-constituted by the experience of formal and informal imperial rule and strengthened by denser flows of people, goods, capital, information and opinion around the Indian Ocean in the late nineteenth century, managed to exercise some agency in the order of travel and migration being worked out by the Euro-American world and presented as the international norm.<sup>9</sup> Drawing upon Esenbel’s felicitous formulation, one can find in the story of the Indian passport, traces also of ‘an alternative, ambivalent arena of international relations between these so-called “Non-Western regions”... parallel to the interstate relations forged by the formal treaties and diplomacy dominated by the Western powers.’<sup>10</sup>

The article concludes with an assessment of debates about two important post-war enactments—the Indian Passport Act (Act XXXIV of 1920) and the Indian Emigration Act (Act VII of 1922). These reveal that the Indian intelligentsia’s stance on border management was one structured, not only by its reaction to the colour-bar in empire, but also by the class and gender parameters in which it cast citizenship.

<sup>7</sup> Commerce and Industry (C&I), Emigration, A, January 1918, 1–34; McKeown, ‘Global Migration: 1846–1940’, pp. 155–89.

<sup>8</sup> Singha, ‘Passport, Ticket and India-rubber Stamp’.

<sup>9</sup> See also Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*.

<sup>10</sup> Esenbel, ‘Japan’s Global Claim to Asia’, pp. 1140–70.

### Imperial Imperatives and the Matrices of Colonial Travel Documentation

In January 1915 a new passport design was introduced to war-time Britain and in December it was made compulsory for all British subjects leaving the UK. In July 1916 the Secretary of State for India suggested that GOI follow suit.<sup>11</sup> With the outbreak of war GOI had targeted ‘foreigners’ and ‘political undesirables’ for controls over exit, entry and residence but the proposal to institute a general and compulsory passport system was one it reviewed with some perplexity. Charles Cleveland, Director of Criminal Intelligence in India, described the proposal as a ‘startling innovation’ of limited surveillance value since the government already had powers to ‘prohibit egress under the Defence Act’.<sup>12</sup> After deliberating for seven months GOI issued a notification in March 1917 under Defence of India rules, making a passport compulsory for entry and exit into India by sea.<sup>13</sup> By one account India was the last of the territories of empire to do so.<sup>14</sup>

The Viceroy pointed out that the rules worked in ‘a few special exemptions... naval and military forces, crews of overseas vessels, pilgrims and also cooly traffic with Ceylon and the Malay States’.<sup>15</sup> A scan of the numbers involved reveals that by November 1918, one million combatants and non-combatants would have left from India for theatres of war overseas.<sup>16</sup> On the eve of the First World War, 17.5 per cent of sailors on British merchant ships were lascars from the Indian sub-continent and the percentage increased as British sea-men were drafted into the navy.<sup>17</sup> About 200,000 people, mainly labourers, travelled annually from the Madras Presidency to Ceylon and the Federated Malay States.<sup>18</sup> And even at the height of the war in 1917, GOI assisted some 1,300 Muslim pilgrims to embark for the Hijaz.<sup>19</sup> The new rules had greatly expanded the powers of the colonial executive to control border-crossing, but they had also worked in some swingeing exemptions.

The project for a compulsory passport forced GOI’s different departments to justify their position if they wanted to retain older travel documents or to allow a particular population stream to flow in un-documented channels. Till this

<sup>11</sup> F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

<sup>12</sup> 14 October 1916, *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> ‘Note on passports’, 6 Feb 1919, Home, War, A, June 1920, 55–59. The notification was issued on 5 March 1917, then re-issued with slight corrections on 22 March 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Viceroy to Secretary of State for India (SOS), 3 March 1917, F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

<sup>16</sup> *India’s Contribution to the Great War*, 1923. This figure probably underestimates the penumbra of Indian labour around theatres of war in East Africa, Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

<sup>17</sup> Conrad Dixon, ‘Lascars: the forgotten seamen’, in R. Ommer and G. Panting, eds, *Working Men Who Got Wet*, pp. 265–81, 265.

<sup>18</sup> F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

<sup>19</sup> F&P, Secret, War, May 1918, 159–60.

conjuncture even the word ‘passport’ had not been sacrosanct to the document issued by GOI’s Foreign Department.<sup>20</sup> From 1882 India’s Home Department issued a ‘pilgrim passport’ to Muslims travelling overseas to the Hijaz, a designation changed to ‘pilgrim pass’ only in 1925.<sup>21</sup> In 1904, the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, designed an ‘Australian passport’, issued through Local Governments, a distinctive form which was retained in 1917 for travel to Australia. Indian literati, the prime target for political surveillance, had often been able to use a ‘certificate of identity’ in lieu of a passport and it was only in 1916 that these certificates were stamped with a warning in red ink: ‘This certificate is not a passport and does not of itself entitle the holder to a passport.’<sup>22</sup> The exemptions slotted into the 1917 compulsory passport ordinance compress a long history therefore of the different institutional channels which had emerged to shape cross-border mobility to imperial imperatives.

### Passports, ‘Coolie Agreements’, and Free Mobility

Right from the 1840s the East India Company’s government in India decided to keep apart its procedures for issuing a Foreign Department passport to British subjects, ‘native’ and European, who requested an official introduction for their travels abroad and procedures for drawing up the ‘coolie agreements’ which sent Indian labour overseas to the sugar plantations of empire.<sup>23</sup> In 1847–48, it had announced that for a fee of Rs1, British subjects, native or European, could acquire a passport from the Foreign Department at Calcutta, or through the Local Governments of Bombay and Madras. It rejected at the same time a proposal to deploy labour emigration agents to issue these passports, pointing out that these were not GOI employees and that they dealt with ‘natives of a different class.’<sup>24</sup> A symbolic distinction was thereby acknowledged between the Foreign Department passport which bestowed a right ‘to the protection of the British Crown’ and ‘coolie agreements’ structuring a class-defined migration, mostly within empire. This notion, that a passport wasn’t really a document meant for labour migrants, was one which GOI would resurrect again in the early twentieth century, to cope with the embarrassments of the colour-bar raised by the British Dominions.

Indentured migration was sanctioned only for some destinations such as Mauritius, the West Indies, and later Natal and Fiji. On paper it was supposed to

<sup>20</sup>Till 1833 to protect the East India Company’s trade monopoly, all Europeans, including non-official British residents, had to apply for a passport to travel in the interior of India. Other examples of ‘internal passports’ were the route-passes which district officers issued to shunt out some unwanted party, or the safe-conduct letter they bestowed on some notable. In 1856 GOI’s Foreign Department prohibited all internal passports, a ban enforced with consistency only from 1864.

<sup>21</sup>Act XI of 1925; Singha, ‘Passport, Ticket and India-rubber stamp’.

<sup>22</sup>F&P, General, B, April 1916, 163–64.

<sup>23</sup>Act XV of 1842, Act XXV of 1845.

<sup>24</sup>Foreign, Political, 2 September 1848.

be a state-regulated recruitment of labour based on 'voluntary contract', and not a new form of slavery.<sup>25</sup> The much denser flow of Indian labour to Burma, Ceylon, the Straits Settlements and Malaya took place outside this stream of 'assisted' or 'indentured' migration'.<sup>26</sup> This circulation was organised by debt, and mediated through fore-men of labour gangs, the *kanganis* or *maistris*. But GOI categorised it as 'free' or 'non-regulated' migration, thereby absolving itself of responsibility for welfare. Its argument was that these destinations around the Bay of Bengal were close enough for coolies to know about work conditions, they were required to give only a month's notice and could manage their own return.<sup>27</sup>

The increased density of passenger traffic around the Indian Ocean from the 1870s and related networks of credit, commerce and labour brokerage, created entrepreneurial opportunities for ex-soldiers, labour contractors and petty retailers from India.<sup>28</sup> In the reverse direction such entrepreneurial networks opened Indian markets and passenger traffic to Britain's business competitors, notably Japan.<sup>29</sup> They also seemed to undermine the discipline of Indian police and military contingents stationed along these routes.<sup>30</sup> Commercial and shipping networks between Arabia, India and South-east Asia were suspected of keeping Indian diasporas in the currents of pan-Islamic anti-imperialism.<sup>31</sup>

Moving along the sea-lanes to Singapore, Malaya, Siam, Shanghai and Hong-Kong, some Indians also gathered resources to venture further afield to Australia and Canada. British Indians began to press against restrictions on entry and settlement in prosperous parts of the empire, both by evasions and 'illegalities' and by testing judicial forums and forcing open debates about the norms of citizenship.<sup>32</sup> GOI's official position was that it could *inform* Indians about the immigration restrictions of British Dominions and the risk of being turned away. However, it could not undertake to enforce these rules by *prohibiting* departure, particularly if such restrictions were based too directly on race disqualification. The strategy

<sup>25</sup> Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*; Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*; 'Race, Mobility and the Passport'. What coolie agreements did not communicate was the power the planter wielded to interpret the contract, and to enforce it by penal provisions buttressed by local vagrancy laws. Mohapatra, 'Assam and the West Indies', pp. 455–480.

<sup>26</sup> Indentured migration to Malaya was abolished in 1910 but by then it had been overtaken by the *kangani* system.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates*, 1910. Madras Presidency officials took the position that this 'free' migration also allowed the 'depressed classes' that is 'untouchables' and other disadvantaged groups, to improve their status.

<sup>28</sup> Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*.

<sup>29</sup> For GOI Japanese business activity and commercial intelligence-gathering in India was surcharged with aspirations to pan-Asian hegemony and it scrutinised Japanese match-box labels and textile trademarks for hidden political messages.

<sup>30</sup> Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, p. 274; F&P, Secret, War, June 1917, 1–46.

<sup>31</sup> F&P, General, B, December 1918, 139–142; also Takashi, 'Muslim merchant capital'.

<sup>32</sup> Khushwant Singh and Satindar Singh, *Ghadar, 1915*.

it explored instead was to conceptualise the Indian passport as a civic testimonial, a document meant only for Indians of means, education and ‘respectability’, not simply an attestation of identity and nationality. Ideally this kind of Indian ought to be accepted as a settler anywhere in empire. If not, the passport would at least confirm that the bearer had a territorial affiliation and an identity of sufficient substance to which he or she could be returned. Thereby GOI hoped to keep empire-wide travel and short-term stay open for ‘respectable’ Indians, even if it could not guarantee empire-wide settlement. An understanding it reached with Australia in 1904 provided a template for this conditional order of mobility.

### The Australian Passport: Managing the Colour-bar

In 1901 the Australian Emigration Restriction Act instituted a dictation test in English or some other European language to exclude Asian settlers. In 1904 however, Australia offered to permit ‘bona fide’ Indian merchants, students and tourists to enter and stay for up to a year without the dictation test, ‘provided they were in possession of passports from the Indian Government *sufficiently* identifying them and *specifying* the purpose and probable duration of their visit’.<sup>33</sup> The offer was meant to attract the wholesale merchant, but to bar petty traders, artisans or labourers or ‘those whose object was to settle in Australia’.<sup>34</sup>

Lord Amphill, the acting Viceroy, responded effusively, wanting to publish the correspondence to suggest that the Australian government had acknowledged the standing of educated Indians in empire.<sup>35</sup> The official entrusted with this task stated wearily that he had ‘found it somewhat difficult to draft a letter which is to be read both by the Labour Party in Australia and the Congress Party in India’.<sup>36</sup> Yet it was the educated Indian who might have managed to pass the dictation test, so the concession hinged really on the kind of ‘bona fide Indian merchant’ who would be given a passport.

The Department of Revenue and Agriculture in India, overseeing emigration at that point, designed the ‘Australian passport’ to give a very complete return address indeed;<sup>37</sup> and district officers in India were instructed to refuse the application form to those whom the Commonwealth deemed ineligible. However, GOI still balked

<sup>33</sup> 18 August 1904, Foreign, General, B, Feb 1905, 23–25. Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Governor-General India to Governor-General Australia, 17 October 1904, *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Orders, 18 October 1904, Foreign, General, B, February 1905, 23–25. Descriptive particulars and address were recorded in greater detail on the Australian passport than on the Foreign Department passport. The name had to be written both in English and the vernacular. The holder’s caste, clan, town and village of residence were noted, not just the district and state. It also recorded the probable duration and purpose of the visit, and the port of embarkation. F&P, General, July 1916, 1–65.

at preventing or punishing those who left for Australia without these passports, declaring that Indian emigration law did not authorise it to do so.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, District Magistrates began to be instructed informally to discourage the labourer, small peasant or petty retailer from setting out for British Columbia, California, or Argentina, by denying them certificates of identity.<sup>39</sup> Local Governments were told to refuse a passport and the Protector of Emigrants at Bombay began to withhold embarkation passes which made ship-owners reluctant to accept them as passengers.<sup>40</sup>

The official justification for refusing documentation was that this exodus was not a 'free' migration but a surreptitious form of 'assisted' or indentured labour recruitment, which was illegal except to specifically sanctioned destinations.<sup>41</sup> This was the contention even if the would-be emigrant was a reasonably solvent traveller paying his own fare, for instance a substantial peasant, or an ex-soldier with a pension. Officials also claimed that 'labour recruiters in disguise' were duping humble people by painting rosy prospects of their future, but there was no clear reference point for such an offence.<sup>42</sup> Just before the war GOI was exploring how it could prosecute someone for a crime termed 'inducing to emigrate by false representation'.<sup>43</sup> The difficulty which aspirants of the 'agricultural and labouring classes' began to encounter now if they wanted a certificate of identity led some in Surat to complain that they were being dissuaded from going to the USA 'because they might get too rich'.<sup>44</sup> The certificate of identity also began to turn into 'a saleable commodity' transferred from one person to another by so-called touts or 'disguised labour recruiters'.<sup>45</sup>

In 1912 new passport rules formally spelt out the position that, 'the mere fact' of being a British subject or subject of a Native State did not imply 'any vested right to claim a passport' and these 'should not ordinarily be granted to persons of doubtful character or respectability'.<sup>46</sup> To prevent the de-valuation of the Indian passport in the face of immigration barriers, GOI began to demand evidence of

<sup>38</sup> 'We weren't empowered under Indian Emigration Law', noted the Viceroy 'to control the emigration of free labourers, or of other persons of superior social status ... we do not think that we should ... be justified in assisting the Government of the Commonwealth to enforce a law which we regard as unjust to British subjects in India' IOR/L/PJ/6/758, File 1227/1906.

<sup>39</sup> Bombay, General, 1912, No. 56, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (MSA); Bombay, General, 1913, No. 51, MSA.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* The embarkation pass indicated that the regulations for 'assisted' emigration did not apply to that traveller.

<sup>41</sup> Indian Emigration Act (XVII of 1908).

<sup>42</sup> Memo, C&I, 10 July 1914, in Bombay, General, 1914, No. 1263, MSA.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> General Dept, 1913, No. 51, MSA.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Rule VII, Foreign, General, A, February 1912, 11–12.

‘means and respectability’. But it refused to publicly acknowledge that it was the colour-bar which was acting as a constraint upon the ‘passport-isation’ of travel.<sup>47</sup> Right upto 1921–22 its contention was that it would refuse a passport for want of ‘character and respectability’ but not to enforce the immigration restrictions of other British colonies.<sup>48</sup>

### Certificates of Identity and the Surveillance of Travelling Literati

However, in a pre-war world where paper walls were still not very formidable, GOI realised that putting too many hurdles in the way of getting a passport could compromise another imperative, that of keeping travelling Indian literati under surveillance. To prevent Indian students, from setting out without leaving any official trace at all, it fell back upon an identity document issued on much easier terms.

This was the certificate of identity attested simply at the district or city level, by the District Magistrate, the Commissioner of Police, or the British Political Agent of a princely state and, in the case of students, by their headmaster or principal as well.<sup>49</sup> This certificate could be submitted as proof of particulars when applying for a passport, whether in India, the UK, or at some British consulate. The official attesting it would therefore put in remarks such as ‘respectable person and fit to be entrusted with a passport’ and some comment about financial status, social background and loyalty. However in the pre-war era Indian travellers found that the certificate of identity, documenting as it did, name, nationality and residence, could often be used in lieu of a passport.

GOI went along with this because it felt that the certificate of identity, unlike the passport, did not put it under pressure to secure the bearer’s entry at the other end.<sup>50</sup> The distinctive feature of the certificate of identity was a column headed ‘Social or pecuniary status of father or guardian’, inserted to make families shoulder the cost of repatriating destitute students. Yet the main concern was to encourage travelling students to keep themselves in view, so officers were instructed to counsel needy applicants, but not to deny them a certificate.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Foreign, General, A, August 1908, 3–24.

<sup>48</sup> In 1917 GOI refused to reject a passport application simply because the person had failed to prove his or her right to enter a British colony. F&P, General, B, December 1917, 5–7; F&P, General, B, January 1922, 1034. However a GOI resolution of 28 November 1921 stated that ‘passports should not ordinarily be issued to Indians who would evidently be excluded’ because of the immigration regulations of the country to which they proposed to travel. The India Office hailed this decision as marking ‘a very desirable change’. IOR/L/E/7/1188, File 162/1921.

<sup>49</sup> Home, Public, A, July 1899, 418–39; Bombay, 1912, General, 1913, No. 52, MSA. The certificate of identity set out name, father’s name and caste, residence, age, nationality, social and pecuniary status of father or guardian, date of probable departure and object of visit to England or Europe. Copies were sent to the Under Secretary of State for India.

<sup>50</sup> Foreign, Internal, B, August 1901, 241.

<sup>51</sup> Home Department notification, 18 December 1914, Bombay, General, 1915, No. 360, MSA.

The Great War changed the objective from one of keeping students under surveillance to that of preventing them from leaving India. Nevertheless, till the passport was made compulsory, the principle that some documentation was better than none extended the life-span of the certificate of identity. In December 1915 the Secretary of State for India was still complaining that persons ‘of seditious tendencies’ had entered Entente and neutral countries, using merely this document.<sup>52</sup> On 8 March 1916, Local Governments were instructed not to issue a certificate of identity to persons of ‘doubtful loyalty’ and holders were warned that they could not use it as a passport.<sup>53</sup> Yet it was only in March 1917 when the passport became compulsory for all travellers by sea, that the certificate of identity was formally terminated as a travel document.<sup>54</sup>

### Creating ‘Legibility’ in an International State System

Much before this however, the war had brought substantial changes to the ‘look’ of the Indian passport and the rules for getting one. On 19 January 1915 a redesigned passport had been introduced in the UK. The single folded sheet of white paper was replaced by a pink paper folded between board-covers bound in blue with a gold crest. Where once the bearer’s mere signature had sufficed, there was a designated space for a photograph, supplemented by a detailed descriptive roll.<sup>55</sup> The British Foreign Office suggested that India also adopt this form to foster a uniform passport throughout the empire.<sup>56</sup>

British officials in India embraced the idea with enthusiasm, perhaps because they had their own investment in a standardised empire-wide passport. From Viceroy Curzon onwards GOI had begun to complain that the importance of India to Empire and the increased political complexity of ruling it was not sufficiently appreciated by London and the Dominions.<sup>57</sup> A redesigned passport which looked like the passport of the UK and the Dominions, may have promised to communicate the coherence of India as a distinct political unit which ought to be separately represented in the councils of empire. The Dominions had refused to accept India’s independent representation at imperial conferences, but in Imperial War Cabinet meetings during March–May 1917, India was represented separately by the Secretary of State for India and delegates sent by GOI.<sup>58</sup> GOI also hoped that a

<sup>52</sup> F&P, General, A, February 1918, 1–6.

<sup>53</sup> F&P, General, B, April 1916, 163–164.

<sup>54</sup> Foreign, General, A, February 1918, 1–6.

<sup>55</sup> Lloyd, *The Passport*, p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> Foreign Office to SOS, 10 February 1915, F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> A former Indian Civil Servant concluded that the recognition of India’s individuality in international forums had expanded beyond her status as a subordinate country. Rumbold, *Watershed in India*, pp. 64, 125.

standardised empire-wide passport would buttress its efforts to secure empire-wide travel for deserving Indian subjects.<sup>59</sup>

Upto this point India's Foreign Department issued eight kinds of passports, four in black print for various categories of 'British subject' and the same in red print for family passports where the bearer's wife and children were entered on the same document.<sup>60</sup> In 1915 this multiplicity of forms was now deemed a local quirk which compromised a wider legibility for the Indian passport.

GOI decided to take the British Foreign Office passport as the model for its standard passport, but to use the simpler wording of the British consular passport. The British Foreign Office agreed on the condition that the bearer's photograph was always attached.<sup>61</sup>

A comparison of the old and new forms allows us to assess what colonial officials had in mind in striving for a 'recognisable' passport. The eight forms were replaced by a single form issued under the authority of the Viceroy and Governor General of India rather than under the seal of Local Governments because 'provinces such as "Bihar and Orissa" etc., are unfamiliar to foreigners and might lead to questions'.<sup>62</sup> However the entry against 'nationality status' would still record whether the bearer was a natural-born British subject, a naturalised British subject, or subject of a native state. The different jurisdictional frames which made up the Indian Empire had to be retained and princely India had to be reassured of its continued political salience.<sup>63</sup>

Another new feature was that the applicant and the person attesting the application had to make a formal declaration as to the truth of its particulars.<sup>64</sup> In Britain a range of people in civic life could attest the declaration.<sup>65</sup> The Foreign Department insisted that 'greater care' was needed in India, so the passport application could be attested only by a 'Political Officer, magistrate, Justice of the Peace, Police Officer not below the rank of superintendent, or Notary Public.' The paradox was that these functionaries had to declare that to the best of their *personal* knowledge and belief the declaration was true and that from their *personal* knowledge they could vouch that the applicant was 'a fit and proper person to receive a passport.'<sup>66</sup> As A.T. Maricair, member of the Madras Legislative Assembly and a shipping

<sup>59</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>60</sup> Foreign, General, A, August 1908, 3–24.

<sup>61</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65; SOS, 11 May 1915.

<sup>62</sup> H.V.Biscoe, 6 April 1915, *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> In May 1920 the phrase 'Indian state' had been substituted for 'native state' because of the demeaning connotations of 'native'. F&P, General, B, May 1920, 197–199.

<sup>64</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65. In March 1917 penalties were set out for false statements. F&P, General, B, July 1917, 146.

<sup>65</sup> The declaration could be verified by a Mayor, Magistrate, Justice of the Peace, Minister of Religion, Barrister at-Law, Physician, Surgeon, Solicitor, Notary Public, or a bank official.

<sup>66</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

broker and spokesman for merchants operating across the Bay of Bengal pointed out, this insistence on holding officers personally responsible made them reluctant to attest applications. He described how the one-rupee passport application-form meant an ordeal of wandering about between different tiers of officialdom.<sup>67</sup> A marked feature of the march of documentary government in the colony was that red tape strengthened the arbitrary powers of bureaucracy far out of proportion to its actual reach. This fostered delay and corruption, but it also served to remind 'respectable' Indians that 'objective' information about themselves had to be supported by evidence about their standing in trusted circles.

### The Contest over Identity Techniques and Protocols

#### Signature or Thumbprint, or the 'unveiling' Photograph

In one respect however the new passport rules of 1916 notched up a victory against race discrimination in identity protocols. The language in which literacy could be claimed and the techniques used to record and verify identity were issues integral to civic rights for 'Asiatics' in British dominions staked out for white settlers.<sup>68</sup> In 1912, when the Government of India introduced a descriptive roll to its passport, it began by insisting on both a thumbprint and a signature.<sup>69</sup> The Indian struggle against race-discrimination in South Africa, had created a special sensitivity on this issue and, in the face of criticism Government retreated and stated it had no intention of demanding a thumbprint from literate applicants.<sup>70</sup> The passport rules of 1916 were more categorical that while vernacular signatures had to be transliterated into English, thumbprints would be demanded only from illiterate applicants.<sup>71</sup> With new passport and immigration rules pouring in from different quarters of the world GOI felt it ought to make its re-modelled passport as complete as possible so it would be legible everywhere.<sup>72</sup> The new passport rules therefore called for 'small... duplicate un-mounted photographs' of the applicant, one of them to be certified by the person attesting the declaration.<sup>73</sup> Some officials speculated

<sup>67</sup> F&P, General, B, January 1920, 142.

<sup>68</sup> Singha, 'Settle, Mobilize, Verify'.

<sup>69</sup> Colonial bureaucrats had hailed the fingerprint as the more 'scientific' technique for recording and verifying the identity of Asiatics than the signature, contending that Indians had a special proclivity for fraud, that their vernacular signatures were unreadable and, if in English, then too much in the 'copy-book' style.

<sup>70</sup> Foreign, General, B, May 1913, 177–183. However, passport authorities retained a discretionary authority to demand a thumb-print in addition to a signature. *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Rule 9, F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>72</sup> See General, 1916, No. 477, MSA.

<sup>73</sup> Note, 26 March 1915, *Ibid.*

that ‘respectable Indians’ would object to *pardah* or *gosha* women having to submit their photograph to some official for verification.<sup>74</sup> Others made a passing reference to the expense of a photograph for humbler travellers and the difficulty of getting one at Persian Gulf ports.<sup>75</sup> However, the official stance was that any exemption would encourage ‘fraudulent misuse’ of passports and seditionists might enter or flee the country in disguise.<sup>76</sup> GOI also wanted to seize the opportunity to put *pardah* in its place as a local practice with no recognised standing in the order of international travel being shaped by the Entente powers. The war afforded a good reason for insisting on this formality, wrote J.L. Maffey of the Foreign Department and ‘reactionary regulations’ would not help the ‘anxious lord of the seraglio shepherding his flock through the embarrassments of a foreign port’.<sup>77</sup>

As the photograph entered the very definition of the passport under the Defence of India rules, petitions protesting against the photograph requirement for females began to come in from Bombay, a port with considerable passenger traffic to South Africa, East Africa and Zanzibar and from Hindu and Muslim merchants at Madras with business interests in Singapore and Malaya.<sup>78</sup> Why, asked one M.A. Sheikh, when Muslims objected to photographic representations of the human form, could the thumb impression, not be used as a substitute, as the Transvaal government had done for Indian settlers?<sup>79</sup>

In the 1880s when unwanted Asian immigrants dominated discussions about the passport system in the Euro-American world, it was the fingerprint rather than the photograph which had seemed the more promising weapon against impersonation.<sup>80</sup> In India colonial officials had hailed the thumbprint as the technique to capture and verify the identity of *pardah* women, particularly to enforce contracts and establish property ownership.<sup>81</sup> Some officials still favoured the thumbprint as a ‘sure proof of identity’ unlike the photograph which ‘as a rule’ was ‘*not a speaking likeness*’. Besides thumbprints would also allow the government, as one official joked, to contend with the more general feminine foibles which subverted descriptive rolls: ‘Passport descriptions are usually vague...and nearly every woman insists...that she has no “peculiarities”’.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>74</sup> F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99. *Pardah, gosha*: practises of female veiling and seclusion.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> 12 July 1915, F&P, General, A, 1916, 1–65. Note, A.H. Grant, Home Dept, 4 December 1916, F&P, Secret, General, April 1917, 35–42.

<sup>77</sup> Note, 12 July 1915, F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>78</sup> F&P, General, B, July 1916, 96–97; F&P, General, A, October 1917, 18–24; F&P, General, A, November 1918, 2–18; F&P, General, B, January 1920, 142.

<sup>79</sup> 29 May 1916, F&P, General, B, July 1916, 96–97.

<sup>80</sup> Galton, ‘Identification by Finger-tips’.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Settle, Mobilize, Verify’.

<sup>82</sup> November 1916, F&P, Secret, General, April 1917, 35–42.

The controversy invites us to look more closely at the new UK passport, taken as the model for India. Following reports about trafficking in Indian passports, GOI had introduced a descriptive roll in 1912, three years before Britain.<sup>83</sup> Whereas the UK passport at the time required merely the bearer's signature, the Indian passport demanded entries for height, colour of eyes, colour of hair, 'any distinctive marks' and, if the applicant could not sign his or her name, then a thumbprint.<sup>84</sup> The descriptive roll added to the UK passport in 1915 was far more exacting, demanding entries against height, *forehead*, eyes, *nose*, *mouth*, *chin*, colour of hair, *complexion*, *face* and 'any special peculiarities'—the last a less tactful formulation surely than 'distinctive marks'. Having incorporated the photograph into the passport the authorities in Europe 'seemed loath to trust it fully'.<sup>85</sup> In fact one could speculate that it was not the exhaustiveness of this descriptive roll, but the element missing from it, which enhanced the bureaucratic reliance on the passport photograph. The thumbprint had risen to prominence as the conclusive element in the criminal *portrait parle* but could not be included in the British passport because of its association with surveillance regimes meant for criminals, colonised races and unwanted immigrants.<sup>86</sup> It was the photograph therefore which had to provide the sole indexical element in the UK passport.

At the same time, the conventions of portrait photography may have helped to ease both bureaucracy and citizenry into this now universalised regime of border surveillance. The fact that the applicant was allowed to submit his or her own passport photograph allowed some room for self-representation, distinguishing it, at least for some years, from the police 'mug-shot'.<sup>87</sup> The latter, as Jaeger points out, had taken a standardised form in the 1890s and to be photographed according to Bertillon's rules immediately cast someone as criminal.<sup>88</sup> Once submitted, the passport photograph was re-composed by a stamped seal into an officially verified likeness framed by other marks of the bureaucratic procedures by which identity particulars had been recorded and attested. Forwarding a specimen-form to guide some Punjab officers who complained they found it difficult to formulate entries against the new descriptive roll, the Foreign Department remarked that, 'These descriptions however must necessarily be somewhat vague, unless the holder of the

<sup>83</sup> Foreign General, B, May 1913, 177–83.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Martin Lloyd, *The Passport*, p. 107.

<sup>86</sup> Cole, *Suspect Identities*, pp.151–154. Higgs, *Identifying the English*, pp. 144–148.

<sup>87</sup> The Indian passport rules for 1915 stated merely that the photograph had to be small and unmounted. The 1938 passport photograph of one Begum Feroza Dulhan, in pearl-choker, sleeveless blouse and clinging sari, could, with equal panache, have graced a mantelpiece. Mss Eur A, 179, IOR.

<sup>88</sup> Jaeger, 'Photography: a Means of Surveillance?'. For the USA, Robertson argues that the passport photograph created a clash between the conventions of the portrait and those of the 'scientific image' which was associated with criminal and suspect populations. *History of the Passport*, pp. 82–88. Since individuals submitted their own passport photographs the transition may have been a more strung-out process, mediated by commercial and other interests.

passport possesses special peculiarities...and *the real clue* to the holder's identity is the photograph attached to the passport...'<sup>89</sup>

In its reassuring resemblance to the portrait photograph the passport photograph probably gave border officials the confidence that they could assess the sum of the parts, that they needed just enough resemblance to connect the bearer with his or her officially verified likeness on the document. The thumbprint, the more 'scientific' form of identification, seemed to vest the expert alone with this capacity.<sup>90</sup>

Looking around for precedents to justify his insistence on the photograph, J.L. Maffey, recalled that he had seen a photograph of the Begum of Bhopal 'in the Delhi Durbar volume'.<sup>91</sup> He was referring to *The Historical Record of the Imperial Visit to India 1911*, which has two photographs of Begum Sultan Jehan. One is a full-figure portrait of 'Her Highness the Nawab Begam of Bhopal, G.C.S.I, G.C.I.E, C.I.' in which her face is exposed to view.<sup>92</sup> Positioned by herself in a pillared hall, the Begum is a model of portly composure, a distinct look of Queen Victoria about her.<sup>93</sup> What the 'Durbar volume' comments on however is another photograph, in which the Begum presents herself before King George V and Queen Mary draped in 'a pale blue silk veil which completely concealed her head and figure, and a jewelled circlet and aigrette, and also the ribbon of the Star of India. Her Highness...made a single profound bow'.<sup>94</sup> It was the enveloping veil which dramatised the exotic and stirring spectacle of 'the only woman ruler of India' at this assembly.

There is no evidence that Government actually used this 'unveiled' photograph to counter petitions against the passport photograph. It would have posed a serious embarrassment to the Begum of Bhopal for there was a difference between a portrait in a lavish volume meant for restricted viewership and a photograph, verified by an official, then pasted onto a document which would circulate through unknown hands. For Indian merchants operating overseas, the circulation of the visual image of their female relatives outside family circles threatened to undermine their status.<sup>95</sup> Muslim merchants belonging to heterodox sects of Islam were especially vulnerable to imputations about a loss of respectability.<sup>96</sup> The feeling against submitting

<sup>89</sup> H.V. Biscoe, 29 October 1915, F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65. Emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> The objection one officer raised against allowing Muslims to substitute thumb-prints for photographs was that passport examination would be 'clumsy and slow' and require a staff of experts: Foreign, General, B, February 1922, 202.

<sup>91</sup> 12 July 1915, F&P, General, A July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>92</sup> *The Historical Record of the Imperial Visit to India*, 1911, facing p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>95</sup> In the Madras Legislative Council, A.T. Maricair declared that men were straying into 'undesirable lives' abroad because the photograph rule compelled them to leave their female relatives behind. F&P, General, November 1918, 2–8.

<sup>96</sup> F&P, General, A, October 1917, 18–24.

photographs of females was 'more acute in this part of the world than in India', stated a petition from the Indian National Association of Zanzibar, run by one of the leading Bohra merchants. Those who travelled only within India did not face the same problem as those who had to cross borders.<sup>97</sup>

Maffey could have found a very widespread precedent for female photographs on identity documents in the Mauritian 'portrait tickets' issued to ex-indentured labourers to certify that they were not absconding from their contract.<sup>98</sup> But officials had good reason not to invoke this precedent. In South Africa, 'respectable' Indians complained about regulations which forced them to produce identity particulars as and when required, reducing them to the level of coolies for whom such demands were routine. The most emotive expression of this sense of degradation was to declare that respectable Indian women were being equated with the coolie woman overseas, a figure treated both as the victim of sexual exploitation and as an embarrassment, because of her supposedly 'lower' standards of chastity. Maricair and others petitioning against photographs also objected to *pardah* women having to mark their thumbprints in the presence of some official, holding that the male relatives who accompanied them on their travels were sufficient guarantors of their identity and bona fides.<sup>99</sup>

The controversy about photographic record and attestation may have acquired an extra edge for merchants operating in South and East Africa where immigration regulations were defining family relationships more restrictively and demanding bureaucratic verification of marriage and legitimate descent.<sup>100</sup> To the embarrassment of GOI which had decided to hold firm on photographs, the authorities in Zanzibar and East Africa agreed to issue passports to *pardah* women travelling to India without insisting on photographs.<sup>101</sup> Trying to push Indian travellers to adopt 'cosmopolitan' norms of travel, GOI began to encounter the trans-national purchase of *pardah* norms. With protests welling in India against the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire and Britain's control over the holy places of Islam, GOI relented. Following requests from the Bombay and Madras governments, in October 1918 GOI dispensed with the requirement for passport photographs for *pardah* and *goshā* women entering from the Straits, Malaya, Mauritius, Nyaasaland, the East African Protectorate, Uganda and Zanzibar. In April 1919 the concession, which was reciprocal in nature, was extended to Persian Gulf ports and Iraq.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Indian National Association to British Resident, Zanzibar, 12 October 1917. F&P, General, A, November 1918, 2–18.

<sup>98</sup> Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers*, pp. 200, 206.

<sup>99</sup> See debate in Madras Legislative Council. F&P, General, November 1918, 208; F&P, General, B, January 1920, 142.

<sup>100</sup> C&I, Emigration, A September 1914, 1–4; C&I, Emigration, B, December 1916, 10.

<sup>101</sup> F&P, General, A, October 1917, 18–24.

<sup>102</sup> F&P, General, A, November 1918, 2–18; F&P, General, B, April 1919, 270–271; F&P, General, B, February 1920, 77–94.

### Defence of India Rules and Issues of Race, Gender and Class

Defence of India rules also impinged upon the European community in India, an illustration of the way in which war-mobilisation re-shaped norms of race and gender. Europeans deported from India or interned as ‘enemy aliens’ experienced a traumatic loss of the shield of ‘whiteness’. The new war-time roles adopted by European women led to changes in travel documentation. As British wives and widows in India began to journey home on their own, it was discovered that the passport application form had no entry for the wife’s place and date of birth which had to be squeezed into the column for her maiden name.<sup>103</sup> Earlier women who were not British subjects by birth, but had married a European British subject, would simply enter ‘British subject by marriage’ in the column for nationality status. As suspicions about spying extended to women, GOI demanded an entry on nationality status by birth as well.<sup>104</sup> To conserve passage for military use, passports were restricted to women involved in war-work overseas. Uneasiness about the mobility which war-related work vested in British women, often young and single, found expression in rumours about ‘immorality’, or in facetious stories about the encounter between female vanity and the construction of an institutional identity.<sup>105</sup>

A decisive factor in GOI’s 1917 decision to make the passport compulsory had been to ensure that British subjects in India observed their new obligations as citizens.<sup>106</sup> A February 1917 ordinance had made all male British citizens in India between the ages of 18–41 liable for general service and those between 41–50 for service in the Indian Defence Force. The Army Department wanted passport controls to prevent anyone slipping away to evade this obligation.<sup>107</sup> Compulsory passports also aided passage controls meant to conserve shipping for military use.<sup>108</sup>

However when the Army Department lowered its sights from European British citizens to the humblest of Indian subjects, it obtained an exemption from passport rules for the labourers, artisans and servants sent off to various theatres of war using military movement orders.<sup>109</sup> In Mesopotamia this flow would amount to a total of 293,000 non-combatants. For political reasons, namely an escalating campaign in India against indentured migration, this export of labour was not brought under the Indian Emigration Act of 1908. Instead a martial cloak was thrown over it and it

<sup>103</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

<sup>104</sup> F&P, General, B, December 1915, 116–118.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Hasty war-time marriages and separation allowances eked out by Government employment are going to be responsible for a lot of trouble in the future.’ *Times of India*, 8 September 1917, p. 12; also Wratislaw, *A Consul in the East*, p. 352.

<sup>106</sup> Home Secretary’s note, 9 February 1917, F&P, General, B, April 1917, 17–19.

<sup>107</sup> F&P, General, A, July 1917, 1–21.

<sup>108</sup> Viceroy to SOS, letters no 17 and 442, 30 August 1918, Chelmsford papers, Mss Eur/E264/9, IOR.

<sup>109</sup> F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

was cast as ‘military service overseas’.<sup>110</sup> In the case of South Asian lascars, whose numbers in British merchant shipping rose during the war, seamen’s certificates of identity and service were accepted in lieu of a passport.<sup>111</sup> It was only after the war, when controversy about ‘coloured’ sailors at UK ports escalated, that they began to be asked to produce passports to prove they were British subjects or face deportation as ‘aliens’.

The coolie-migrant posed the main conceptual problem for GOI’s efforts to devise a compulsory passport regime. Could passport protocols hitherto designed to exclude this figure now stretch to include him or her?<sup>112</sup> Could officers be expected to vouch from personal knowledge that some coolie was a ‘fit and proper person’ to receive a passport?<sup>113</sup> Would verification procedures create bottle-necks in labour supply? The Commerce and Industry Department fretted that compulsory passports would undermine a stance which had served GOI so well, that is, of claiming that it did not interfere in ‘free’ migration.<sup>114</sup> At its suggestion ‘bona fide labourers’ travelling to Ceylon and Malaya were exempted from having to carry passports.<sup>115</sup> As the war dragged on, further piece-meal exemptions were introduced to create a parallel, more relaxed documentary regime for labour.<sup>116</sup> The Commerce and Industry Department also insisted on the retention of the ‘Australian passport’, a concession secured with difficulty and representing India’s ‘attempt to comply with special stipulations by the Australian government.’<sup>117</sup>

### The Pilgrim Passport: A Necessary Anachronism

The March 1917 passport rules also exempted ‘bona fide Mahomedan pilgrims proceeding to, or returning from Jeddah or Basra.’ Thus Muslims continued to travel to the Hijaz on the pilgrim passport which was neither compulsory nor standardised

<sup>110</sup> Singha, ‘Finding Labour from India for the War in Iraq’, pp. 412–445; F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

<sup>111</sup> F&P, General, A, August 1916, 19–33.

<sup>112</sup> Chief Secretary Bengal, 4 May 1917, F&P, Secret, General, August 1917, 10–99.

<sup>113</sup> The Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, wanted to allow deck-passengers to embark with a simple permit (that is a single journey route-pass) because it would be ‘impossible for such persons’ to meet the criteria for a passport. *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Secretary, C&I to Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlement and Colonial Secretary, Ceylon, 8 March 1917, *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* However a passport was still compulsory for first and second class passengers traveling to the Straits and Malaya. A.T. Maricair complained that shipping companies were losing higher fares, because to avoid getting a passport, Indian merchants were entering emigration depots and travelling as coolies. F&P, General, B, January 1920, 142.

<sup>116</sup> Single journey route-passes in the form of police permits and certificates of identity had to be accepted in lieu of passports to facilitate the return of Indian labourers from Hong Kong, the Straits Settlement and the Persian Gulf during the war, F&P, General, August 1917, 10–99; F&P, Secret, General, A October 1917, 25–28.

<sup>117</sup> Note, 17 January 1916, F&P, General, A, July 1916, 1–65.

to the re-modelled Indian passport.<sup>118</sup> What did become virtually obligatory now for Hajjis was the requirement to purchase a return ticket in advance, a measure meant to bring poor pilgrims back to India in a shorter time and at their own expense.

A notable feature of the pilgrim passport was its group character—with the holder's relatives, associates and servants often also figuring in it.<sup>119</sup> However in the pre-war era, individuals granted a Foreign Department passport were also sometimes allowed to add the names of accompanying servants to it. This phenomenon emerged in the Australian passport as well, where the very narrowness of the categories of persons permitted to apply for one—namely 'bona fide tourists, merchants and students'—meant that accompanying relatives and servants had to travel on the same document.<sup>120</sup> GOI seemed remarkably ready to permit the eminent personage, whether some Indian prince cruising to Australia or a British officer setting off for a shoot in Russian Central Asia, to proceed literally as an estate, carrying on the one passport all the human resources needed to reproduce status abroad.<sup>121</sup>

Another distinguishing feature of the pilgrim passport was the importance GOI placed on its free and 'unconditional' issue.<sup>122</sup> Despite criticism in international forums that 'pauper' and 'mendicant' elements were allowed to overflow India's borders, it consistently refused to link a means test to the issue of a pilgrim passport and took practically no steps to verify the applicant's particulars. It relied on indirect means instead such as shipping regulations to discourage 'pauper pilgrims'. GOI also issued pilgrim passports and certificates of identity to non-British subjects on request, thereby extending imperial influence beyond India's borders. The legitimacy that the British empire claimed by conferring on Muslim subjects the 'freedom to travel to fulfil a religious obligation,' and the authority it thereby gained to monitor access routes into Ottoman territory were too valuable to sacrifice for the sake of passport regulations.

After Britain declared war on the Ottoman empire in November 1914, GOI discouraged pilgrims from setting out for the Hajj but did not actually prohibit their departure.<sup>123</sup> However in June 1916, when the Sharif of Mecca, with British backing, declared his independence from the Ottoman Sultan, GOI felt obliged

<sup>118</sup> For further details see Singha, 'Passport, Ticket, and India-rubber Stamp'.

<sup>119</sup> F&P, General, B., March 1915, 81–86. The organising role of pilgrim guides and passage-brokers provides one explanation for the 'band' character of the pilgrim passport.

<sup>120</sup> Foreign, General, A, February 1912, 11–24; Public, General Order No. 941, 10 August 1914, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai; F&P, General, July 1916, 1–65, pp. 32–33.

<sup>121</sup> An anonymous reviewer of this article suggested that, far from dying away, the master–servant relationship re-surfaced in such new forms of governmentality. It is interesting certainly, that the new Indian Emigration Act of 1922 specifically exempted Indian domestic servants travelling abroad with their employers from the rules laid down for taking skilled labour out of India: (section 22, Chapter IV, Act VII of 1922).

<sup>122</sup> In contrast Rs1 was charged for a Foreign Department passport and, in 1883, rules were set out for acquiring one.

<sup>123</sup> Bombay, General, 1916, No. 946, MSA.

to demonstrate that access to the holy places would not be disrupted. It began to re-issue the pilgrim passport, a document of remarkable simplicity now with all Ottoman regulations deleted from it. However the pre-paid round-trip ticket was made virtually compulsory now, but to soothe the outcry against it, it was subsidised for some years to keep the price down to Rs 125.

The pilgrim passport assumed a new role at this juncture as an identity document meant to suture pilgrims to their subsidised return tickets and to discourage 'pauper' pilgrims from selling these off and lingering on to beg their way home. There was also a sharper concern during the war-years to prevent pan-Islamic spokesmen from slipping into India in the return flow of pilgrims. Yet, GOI still hesitated to make the pilgrim passport compulsory, or to bring its identity protocols up to the standard of the re-designed Indian passport. A Bombay committee set up in April 1919 to re-model the Hajj passport decided against adding a thumbprint 'lest pilgrims think they were being compared to convicts', or a photograph for fear of religious objections.<sup>124</sup> GOI tried to use the compulsory return-ticket to keep the 'pauper' pilgrim to a fixed circuit of mobility, but wanted the pilgrim passport to continue to communicate the promise of 'freedom to travel to fulfill a religious obligation'.

### **The Indian Passport Act (Act XXXIV of 1920): Post-war Closures**

If in 1916–17 GOI was somewhat overwhelmed by the call to fashion a compulsory passport regime, by May 1918 it was pressing the home authorities to perpetuate the system in peacetime.<sup>125</sup> It wanted a continuation of its war-time powers to deny passports to 'undesirable Indians' and a reciprocal understanding from the UK and all British consular authorities that they would not give 'undesirable persons' a visa for India, or at least, not without consultation.<sup>126</sup>

Interestingly, it was in these inter-departmental discussions that the colonial executive also raised the issue of whether all returning Indians had, ipso facto, a domiciliary right in India. Could their entry never be barred? For GOI the threatening figure here was the Indian who had been out there somewhere during the war, getting 'contaminated' by seditious nationalism, pan-Islamic anti-imperialism, or Bolshevism and would return to a country seething politically in 1919–20. Anticipating great public opposition to this proposition, GOI scaled its goal down to the more limited one of ensuring that 'seditious' Indians did not slip back in

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Legislative, September 1920, 138–150. In August 1919, worried that Britain might retain the passport regime only for aliens, GOI suggested that India's post-war passport policy might be allowed to diverge from that of the UK because of her 'special situation'. GOI's Commerce and Industry Department, overseeing labour migration, was the only department which favoured a post-war relaxation of passport rules. *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> W.H. Vincent, Home member, Viceroy's Council, 18 December 1919, Home, War, A, June 1920, 55–59.

undetected. However it held that the screening process for a visa could not be restricted only to foreigners; it had to extend to other (that is non-Indian) British subjects as well. GOI's list of undesirables included 'persons convicted of grave offences, of a nature that would make them undesirable citizens, pimps, prostitutes, etc. and persons likely to cause disorder or foment sedition by reason of their revolutionary political views, e.g.—Bolshevists, Sinn Feiners, members of I.W.W or the revolutionary party in Egypt.'<sup>127</sup>

Not only was the colonial executive's conception of 'undesirable' politically very broad, it had overtones of race regulation as well. It held that passport controls could quite legitimately be used to discourage 'irregular alliances' between white women and Indian men which damaged colonial prestige.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand in Britain, as the Secretary of State for India tried to explain, with the cessation of hostilities the passport system could be defended only if 'restrictions on the movement of British subjects...[were] abrogated to the fullest extent possible and passports...regarded *merely as documents of nationality and identification*'.<sup>129</sup> This was not a position that GOI felt comfortable with. It wanted to hold onto the principle that the passport was 'a definite recommendation to good treatment', a testimonial which, therefore, could also be withheld.<sup>130</sup>

Britain's more liberal stance on issuing passports also posed a dilemma in discussing exit rules from India. Could someone, not criminal or dangerous enough to require restrictions within India, be denied a passport to travel abroad? A 'note on passports' by K.S. Fitze, Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, revealed GOI's unease that it might have to issue passports to all and sundry and as a matter of course because 'ingress into...civilized countries' was otherwise 'forbidden' and that consequently passports had 'largely lost...[their] pre-war significance as a *privilege* accorded to loyal citizens and *sunk* to the level of the identity-certificate or police permit issued to suspicious and unpopular immigrants'.<sup>131</sup>

GOI resolved the dilemma by making passports compulsory for entry into India, but not for exit. This seeming withdrawal from regulation was in fact the appropriation of a bureaucratic weapon of great power. By simply rejecting a passport application the executive could rely on the harder boundaries of post-war states to make it difficult for that traveller to get entry elsewhere. It could also count on the refusal of shipping companies to issue a ticket if the passenger could not produce

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* B.G. Horniman, editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, deported from India in 1919, would be refused a visa to return to India in 1924. GOI was also determined to scrutinise missionary entry more strictly to discourage political activity.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*; also F&P, General, File 241.G.1924; File 294/1927/Jails.

<sup>129</sup> SOS to Viceroy 15 March 1920, F&P, General, File 241/G/1924. Emphasis added.

<sup>130</sup> Home, War, A June 1920, 55–59.

<sup>131</sup> 6 February 1919, *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

a passport with a visa.<sup>132</sup> Indian legislators, politically moderate by and large, do not seem to have fully registered the degree to which the post-war order of travel had changed.<sup>133</sup>

The Passport Bill introduced on 25 February 1920 in the Indian Legislative Council was an 'enabling' measure, empowering the executive to formulate the rules which would make the passport compulsory for entry into India.<sup>134</sup> Introducing the Bill, H.R.C. Dobbs, Foreign Secretary, said the executive required this wide discretionary authority because conditions of travel were changing so rapidly that every change could not be referred back to the legislature. The official case for perpetuating war-time passport controls concentrated ferociously on the special danger to India of Bolshevism. In a statement both somewhat inaccurate and anachronistic, Dobbs declared that the object of the Defence of India passport rules had been to check 'actual or potential spies and Bolshevik propagandists'.<sup>135</sup> The end of the war had not reduced the danger of this 'pernicious propaganda' whose aim was to 'create hatred and strife not so much between the Government and governed as between the "haves" and the "have nots"'.<sup>136</sup>

Government was concerned that Bolshevik agents might filter into India from Central Asia, or from Persia, via the Nushki railway.<sup>137</sup> However, Dobbs may have also harped on the threat of Bolshevism to stoke anxieties about post-war social and political flux in India. For instance, B.N. Sarma, a moderate Congressman, supportive of recent constitutional changes, was receptive to the idea that all modern states had to empower themselves against the entry of 'undesirable foreigners, unsettling minds'.<sup>138</sup> But he, together with G.S. Khaparde and Kamini Kumar Chandra, also expressed an unease about the extensive powers granted to the executive to formulate passport rules. Sarma and Khaparde insisted in particular that the

<sup>132</sup> Legislative, September 1920, 138–50, p. 33. GOI would advise Local Governments not to issue passports to anyone who would be excluded by the immigration law of the Dominions or who would be regarded as 'undesirable' in empire. Eugenic danger jostled now with political danger in the definition of 'undesirability': someone mentally or physically defective, or who suffered from 'loathsome, dangerous or contagious disease', or was likely to foment disorder, sedition or revolution, or was a convict, criminal, or earned a livelihood by an 'immoral profession'. GOI to Local Governments, 28 November 1921, IOR/L/E/7/1188, File 162/1921.

<sup>133</sup> The liberal politician, V.S. Srinivas Sastri, was on the select committee which reviewed the passport Bill, but would complain only much later that passports were being denied 'for purely political causes'. Sastri, *The Rights and Duties of Indian Citizens*, 1935, p. 74.

<sup>134</sup> Legislative, September 1920, 138–150. This time the passport was made compulsory for entry by sea and air and by certain points along the land frontier, but not for exit from India.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 72. The Foreigners Ordinance, No. III of 20 August 1914, was supposed to have taken care of 'actual or potential spies'; and in March 1917 when the Defence of India passport rules were introduced, the 'Bolshevik' revolution had not yet taken place.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> F&P, General B, Secret, September 1920, 170–174.

<sup>138</sup> Indian Legislative Council, 25 February 1920, Home, Police, Deposit, March 1921, 13.

rules should not be used to bar Indians returning home.<sup>139</sup> The latter had another concern—could the passport Act prevent British Indians going to Indian princely states and vice-versa? W.H. Vincent, the Home member, denied that any subject of a princely state had ever been excluded from British India.<sup>140</sup> Yet controls over internal mobility, meant for ‘foreigners’ were sometimes deployed against Indians as well.<sup>141</sup> The Foreigner’s Ordinance, which permitted any alien to be registered and restricted to residence in a specified area, had been extended by an Ingress into India ordinance to apply to any other person who might injure the ‘safety, interests, or tranquillity of the State’.<sup>142</sup> It was used to restrict some 3000 Punjabis returning from South-East Asia, Canada and the USA to their villages, a scheme meant to restabilise the ‘spoiled’ migrant by replanting him in rural hierarchy.<sup>143</sup> In post-World War I India, ‘internal’ borders such as those demarcating the princely states, or the Burma province, would acquire fresh importance as cordons against ‘nationalist’ infection.

Despite such misgivings the Select Committee on the Passport Bill, which included six Indian members, introduced only one significant change. The definition of a passport was amended so that the requirement for the photograph could be waived when necessary.<sup>144</sup> The universalising indexicality of the passport photograph had to give way to the norms of *pardah* practice, norms being worked quite flexibly into modern travel regimes around the Indian Ocean.

### **Sovereignty and Territorial Closure: Nationalising the Labour Market**

To fully understand the investment which Indian elites developed in border controls we have to turn to the much more intense debates about the Indian Emigration Act of 1922 (Act VII of 1922). GOI’s war-time policies in relation to exit had been shaped not only by a concern to hold back seditionists, but also by the need to deal with a widespread campaign for an end to indentured labour migration.<sup>145</sup> On 12 March 1917, almost simultaneously with the new passport rules, a Defence of India notification had suspended all unskilled labour migration from India ‘except to the extent necessary to supply the wants of Ceylon and Malaysia’.<sup>146</sup> The notification in effect stopped indentured migration while not interfering very much with ‘free’ labour migration around the Bay of Bengal.

<sup>139</sup>This option had been discussed, though GOI denied it.

<sup>140</sup>Home, Police, Deposit, March 1921, 13.

<sup>141</sup>The Bombay government often used the Foreigners Act (Act III of 1864) to deport ‘troublesome’ people back to their ‘original residence’ in some princely state. Bombay, Judicial Dept, 1916, No. 426, MSA; Home, Political, File 130/1/1928.

<sup>142</sup>Ordinance V of 1914.

<sup>143</sup>Singha, ‘Punished by Surveillance’.

<sup>144</sup>Home, Political, March 1921, 13.

<sup>145</sup>*A New System of Slavery*.

<sup>146</sup>The concession made in favour of labour migration to Ceylon and Malaya would be re-iterated again in the March 1917 passport rules.

In 1922, in the aftermath of a stormy Non-Cooperation movement, GOI decided to woo public opinion by a bill to formalise the abolition of indentured migration and to vest the Indian legislature with complete control over the emigration of unskilled labour.<sup>147</sup> Indian legislators supported the idea of stringent controls, invoking the need to protect the illiterate coolie, to uphold national prestige and to develop India's own agriculture, industry and public works. However N.M. Joshi, the labour nominee, held that the new Emigration Act should be reviewed after 5–10 years so that labourers were not permanently stripped of the right to go abroad to better their condition.<sup>148</sup> B.N. Sarma insisted that the measure was necessary to safeguard the illiterate masses and that a legislature which was 'democratising rapidly' could be trusted to do so. He added that a State was entitled to fix the conditions for emigration, even to prohibit it altogether: 'there is no such thing as a right of emigration to every individual or a natural right to emigrate from his own State....'<sup>149</sup>

Members of the Indian intelligentsia had sometimes noted, with appreciation, the powers claimed by Japan over her subjects in the name of 'national efficiency', including the authority to restrict emigration so she could side-step Asiatic exclusion laws in Canada and the USA.<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless startled by Sarma's assertion, N.M. Joshi pointedly asked whether he was not 'referring to immigration', only for Sarma to insist that he was indeed 'talking of emigration, not immigration'.<sup>151</sup> Joshi lost the debate, but not before making a moving critique of the idea that labour was:

a commodity which, if it is very dear in this country, should not be exported....a commodity which if we supply it to the Colonies, must bring us some reward in return....Is the liberty...of the unskilled labourer the same thing as the export of wheat....Is the political status of the labourer in India itself recognized?.... Has the labourer got a vote?<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

The argument that the compulsory passport regime emerged in India in response to race-based exclusion in the Dominions does not tell us the full story. This article suggests that the 'international' form of the Indian passport has to be examined against the back-drop of a complex spectrum of travel and identity documentation structured by the geo-political and economic imperatives of empire. Muslim pilgrim traffic, for instance, had to be managed to allow British posturing in Delhi and Cairo that it was 'the largest Muhammadan empire' in the world. Another imperative was

<sup>147</sup> Legislative, A, July 1922, 1–19.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>150</sup> See Mitra, *Indian Problems*, pp. 161–162; Sarkar, 'The Futurism of Young Asia', pp. 521–541.

<sup>151</sup> Legislative, A, July 1922, 1–19.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

to ensure the flexible deployment of Indian military detachments from the Persian Gulf, on the one side, to Tianjin in China on the other.<sup>153</sup> The overwhelmingly important issue was to organise the circulation of South Asian labour to plantations, mines and ports of empire, but indentured migration had to be distinguished from slavery. Later, as campaigns against indenture mounted, ‘free’ migration had to be distinguished from this ‘assisted’ stream. In the period of the Great War, GOI had to ensure that non-combatant labour being sent for ‘military work overseas’ was also kept at a conceptual distance from indentured migration. Characteristic of the contradictory drives which made up colonial border-management was the simultaneous concern to keep ‘free’ labourers, military and police personnel circulating around India in the ‘regional’ circuits where they were needed, while discouraging them from venturing outwards across the Pacific and elsewhere. One way to do so, without actually prohibiting departure, was to deny labourers an officially documented identity along certain lines of movement. Certification of identity was given more freely to educated Indians and substantial merchants both in acknowledgement of their standing with government and to keep them under surveillance.

In July 1916 when GOI was called upon to subsume all these different travel regimes into the compulsory passport system, it found the idea quite overwhelming. The solution it adopted was to set out a compulsory regime, then work in exemptions which would accommodate long-term imperial imperatives.<sup>154</sup> Even in its war-time incarnation therefore, the British Indian passport, did not displace all older travel documents. Nevertheless, both for the colonial executive, seeking more heft in imperial councils and for the Indian intelligentsia seeking national sovereignty, the idea that this document would capture the distinct territorially-bounded political identity of India, in the same standardised format as it did for the UK and the Dominions, exercised a definite attraction.

In the aftermath of the war, GOI focused on the need to put radicalised returning Indians under surveillance and to disrupt the forging of trans-national, anti-imperial alliances. For the Indian intelligentsia, it was emigration as much as immigration which framed the assertive claim to sovereignty. An ‘illiterate, unskilled labouring’ population had to be kept within national boundaries for its own protection and for India’s economic development and her international standing. If the colonial executive had decided that it would continue to treat the British Indian passport as a form of commendation, then Indians of ‘means, education and standing’ also accepted, though for different reasons, that the passport was a form of civic credential for which only some sorts of Indians could qualify.

<sup>153</sup> The Indian Army Act of 1911 laid the legal foundations for the use of the Indian Army as an ‘imperial force’. Legislative Dept, March 1911, 158–78.

<sup>154</sup> In some respects the war, requiring as it did a huge mobilisation of men and material from India and a propaganda exercise to conciliate trans-national Muslim opinion, sharpened some of these imperatives.

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