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THE ASSASSINATION OF LORD MAYO: THE 'FIRST' *JIHAD?*

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ABSTRACT

In February 1872, Lord Mayo, Governor-General of India, was assassinated at the penal settlement of Port Blair in the Andaman Islands whilst paying a vice-regal visit to the Province of British Burma. His assassin, a Pathan from North West India who had been in the Peshawar police, made no attempt to escape. He had been serving a life sentence for murder, a murder of which he had declared himself 'Not Guilty'. The manuscripts and papers relating to the thorough investigation that was immediately launched into the death of the Viceroy use the word jihad ('struggle for the Faith') to explain the motivation for the assassination. However, intriguing unanswered questions remain that this paper will attempt to highlight. Was the alleged assassin a mere tool in a larger game of world politics? Was Lord Mayo's security detail deliberately slack in performing its duties? Based on the manuscript collections in the Cambridge University Library, this paper scrutinises the evidence and frames it within the colonial history of the loss of Burmese independence in three wars with Britain from 1824 to 1885.

Keyword: jihad, justice, muslim, Wahhabi, security

INTRODUCTION

On 8 February 1872, the Viceroy of India, Lord Mayo, was assassinated at Hopetown, Port Blair, Andaman Islands, by a convict, a Pathan from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of India named Sher Ali (or Shere

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Ali Khan).[1] The event shocked British India. It was entirely unexpected, and yet, given the context of the Wahhabi incitement of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, India's 'First War of Independence', (Allen 2006; Delong-Bas 2004) and the recent stabbing murder on 20 September 1871 of the Acting Chief Justice in Calcutta, John Norman, by a Wahhabi follower, a certain Abdoolah, it might have been expected that the Government of India should have been alert to the possibility of such a disaster recurring, especially since the trials in India of leading Wahhabis found to be preaching *jihad* and violent overthrow of the colonial government had only recently been concluded.[2]

In February 1972, Lord Mayo was on a vice-regal visit to the Province of British Burma, which, since the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, had been administered by a Chief Commissioner as part of the East India Company's (EIC) domains headquartered in Calcutta. British Burma, in the outlook of the EIC officials, was an extension of their territories.[3]

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[1] The Pathans or Pashtuns were one of many tribal peoples in the North West Frontier Province. There are said to be some six main sub-groups, of which Shere Ali's Afridi tribe was one. Pathans fought both for and against the British. During the civil disobedience movements of the 1920–1940s, the Khudai Khitmagar non-violent movement was formed by the Pathan leader, Abdul Gaffar Khan, in support of the Gandhian approach to achieving independence from the British (Bannerjee 2000).

[2] Wahhabism originated in what is now Saudi Arabia by a reformer of Islam, an Arab named Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. Born in 1702 or 1703 in Uyainah in Nejd, Al-Wahhab vigorously promoted monotheism and proscribed associationism as the 'true' form of Islam. In the intellectual tradition of the 13th century Sunni jurist, Ibn Taymiyya, Al-Wahhab was the author of two key texts, *Kitab al-Tawhid* (The Book of Unity) and *Kitab al-Jihad* (The Book of the Struggle). In 1744 Al-Wahhab and his vision of Islam were taken up by Muhammad ibn Saud, the progenitor of the Saudi clan that eventually, through violent conquest and forceful conversion, formed a united Saudi Arabia with Wahhabism as its ideological basis. Before Al-Wahhab's death in 1792, the scene had been set for the ongoing conflict between Wahhabism and other sects of Islam, Shia and Sufi, as well as Sunni and the non-Muslim world. During Al-Wahhab's lifetime, the Ottoman Turks were particularly in his sights. The intense enmity was mutual. Although Delong-Bas (2004) argues for a distinct difference between the original tenets of Al-Wahhab and contemporary expressions of Wahhabism as global jihad as professed since the mid-19th century by those Muslims who acknowledge being his followers, Wahhibism in the modern experience is inescapably associated with violent jihad, the forceful extirpation of those who disagree with its tenets. Delong-Bas argues that this is because contemporary fundamentalists like Osama bin Laden are in the line of the self-proclaimed Imam-Mahdi, Syed Ahmed (died in battle 1831), rather than Al-Wahhab himself; and that the injunction to *jihad* has changed from a defensive to an offensive concept and from a collective to an individual obligation that encourages martyrdom (Delong-Bas 2004: 242) for the purpose of overthrowing non-Islamic governments. Bin Laden himself is thought to have severed his connections with the current Saudi royal family after they permitted US troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia during the 1991 Gulf War, thus creating what for him was a *Dar ul-Harb* instead of the *Dar ul-Islam* (Abode of Islam) as previously.

[3] The transfer of power from the EIC to the British Government in 1858 only served to strengthen the notion of the incorporation of British Burma into Britain's Indian empire. These

Lower Burma, since the conclusion of the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826 that saw the Burmese regions of Arakan and Tenasserim ceded to the EIC, had close administrative, economic and political ties with the British authorities in India. Arakan had been forcibly incorporated into Konbaung Burma (1752–1885) during the reigns of the first three rulers of that last dynasty of monarchical Burma: Alaungpaya, Hsinbyushin, and Bodawpaya. It had long been a favourite destination for Muslim traders from Bengal and other parts of India and beyond (Bhattacharya 2007). The cross-border activities between British Bengal (Chittagong) and Burmese Arakan of a Muslim rebel, Chin Byan, had been a *casus belli* of the First Anglo-Burmese war in 1824, which the EIC had fought for strategic reasons, seeing Burma as an essential bulwark in protecting the Company's Indian possessions. Moreover, the EIC was acutely aware of Muslim rebel activity against its interests, originating from hideouts in Lower Burma (Bhattacharya 2007). As punishment for his support of the rebels and Wahhabi *jihadists* during the 1857 Indian Mutiny, in 1858 the aged last Emperor of Delhi, the Muslim Bahadur Shah, had been exiled to Rangoon, the main port and capital of British Burma. However, the Burmese Monarch of independent Upper Burma at the time of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, King Mindon, refused to take advantage of British difficulties, preferring to follow a policy of seeking to improve relations with his bellicose neighbours. Indian Sepoys (i.e., native infantry) had served with the British imperial forces in both the First and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars (Snodgrass 1827; Bruce 1973), and Indian immigration had increased since the incorporation of Burmese territories within British Indian domains. At the time of Lord Mayo's visit, there were 16,000 Indians living in Rangoon, 16 per cent of the city's population, who were engaged in both labouring and

ties were further strengthened after the 1885/86 Annexation of the formerly independent kingdom of Upper Burma, centered on Mandalay. The Burmese Nationalist movement, after the 1906 formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association and related Burmese Buddhist associations, had close ties with the Indian National Congress (INC) (established in 1885) and the Gandhian civil disobedience movements of 1920–1940, with some of its leading figures, such as U Ottama, travelling to India to confer with Gandhi, Ghosal, Chandra Bose and other INC leaders. During the debate over the 1937 dyarchy reforms, which gave the Province of Burma some measure of self-government through its own elected Legislative Assembly modeled on those introduced in India during the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of the 1920s, there were a number of Burmese politicians who did not wish to separate from India (Bhattacharya 2007). The present renaissance in India-Myanmar (Burma) relations arising from India's need to access the oil and gas resources of its neighbour thus builds on a long history of commercial, cultural, intellectual and political interactions between the two countries.

the professions (Bhattacharya 2007: 77)[4] It was not unusual, then, given the mixture of strategic issues commanding his attention, that Lord Mayo should form a plan to visit this part of the territories for which, as Viceroy, he had administrative responsibility.

With a large party, Lord Mayo and his wife set sail from Calcutta on the *Glasgow* on 24 January 1872[5], arriving in Rangoon, Burma, on the 28th, where he received a rapturous reception. The vice-regal party then proceeded to Moulmein in eastern Burma on 3 February, where Lord Mayo and his party again received a warm reception. He professed himself well pleased with the results of his visit, which he had evidently planned for some time, and for which he had consciously deferred other engagements in India. Since coming under British control at the end of the First Anglo-British War in 1826, Moulmein had become a key administrative centre that hosted the American Baptist mission in Burma and particularly the mission to the Karen. While stopping here, Lord Mayo specifically checked, in case any telegrams had arrived from India that required his attention. He was evidently concerned lest any untoward disturbances occur in India during his absence and was especially concerned about any events relating to the North West Frontier, where in the recent past (1827–31, 1838–40; 1853, 1856, 1858, 1863), Britain had fought a series of savage military offensives against various coalitions of tribesmen and 'Hindustani fanatics' (Allen

[4] Bhattacharya (2007: 83) points out that Rangoon underwent a rapid demographic change as Indian immigration increased throughout the period of British rule in Burma. By 1911, the Indian population (both Hindu and Muslim) in Rangoon amounted to 162,984 out of 293,316 persons, or over fifty percent of the total. The rapid increase in Indian immigration throughout the period of British rule in Burma caused deep resentment and eventually communal riots. The activities of the Indian chettiars, or moneylenders, during the 1930s, when land dispossessions increased, were a major motivating factor in the newly independent government of Burma. In 1948, it enacted the Land Nationalization Act, which remains in force.

[5] Those included in the vice-regal party were Marquis and Marchioness of Drogheda, Major and Mrs. Burne, Miss Milman, Miss Norman, Captain de Robeck, and an Aide-de-camp. The remainder of the party followed the next day in the steam ship *Dacca*, which had been placed at the Viceroy's disposal by the British Indian Steam Navigation Company. It consisted of: the Honourable Mr. Ellis, Earl of Donoughmore, Mr. and Mrs. Horace Cockerell, Col., Mrs. and the Misses Thuillier, Capt. Lockwood, Aide-de-camp, Major Taylor, Aide-de-camp, Dr. and Mrs. Barnett, Mr. Gerald Fitzgerald, Colonel and Mrs. Rundall, Mr. G Allen, Mr. and Mrs. Aitchison, Mr. and Mrs. Eustace Smith, Colonel Jervois, C. B., Count Walstein, and Mr. and Mrs. Halsey. University of Cambridge Library, Add. MS 7490/94/13, 'Record on Reason for Visit by Viceroy', made by Major Burne, Secretary to Viceroy, page 1 of 11 printed foolscap size pages.

2006). This term referred to Wahhabi inspired *jihadists* (such as Syed Ahmed, the self-proclaimed Imam-Mahdi or Saviour, finally killed in 1831 by the Sikhs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) who were seeking to cleanse the South Asian subcontinent of the British infidel forces and restore a *Dar ul-Islam*, or Abode of Faith. Annexations such as that of the Kingdom of Oude in 1856, the last independent Muslim kingdom in northern Hindustan, by the EIC under Lord Dalhousie, 'angered Muslim and Hindu alike' (Allen, 2006: 122). In the 19th century, as in the 20th and 21st centuries, these areas—the NWFP, Punjab, and Afghanistan—formed a key bastion in British/Western policy to contain Russian expansion into Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. The current war in Afghanistan is but the latest in a series of military offensives in this region launched with this objective in view. With such issues concerning the strategic security of British India on his mind, Lord Mayo was anxious to see for himself the situation in British Burma, the eastern flank of his dominions, where, it was reported, fleeing mutineers and *jihadists* had taken refuge (Bhattacharya 2007).

Before leaving Calcutta, and in response to Judge Norman's assassination, Lord Mayo had reportedly declared his intention of destroying the Wahhabis (Allen 2006: 161). They had indeed suffered major losses during the British operations to punish the rebellious native infantry regiments in September 1857 as the authorities restored order after the massacres of the Indian Mutiny. As Charles Allen, whose great grandfather, George Allen, proprietor of the newspaper *The Pioneer*, was standing next to Lord Mayo at the time of the attack by Shere Ali, describes the situation, 'By the end of September 1857, Delhi was a ghost town, entirely cleansed of Muslims, who were now increasingly viewed by the British as the real enemy' (Ibid.). As Lord Mayo set out on his ill-fated journey, there were thus many sources of resentment arising from the conflicts with those over whom he had the power to administer British justice.

Major Burne, Lord Mayo's secretary, in the subsequent report of the investigation into the Viceroy's assassination, records:

> On receiving no further telegrams at Moulmein, and hearing by post that all was going on well in India, the Viceroy finally decided to proceed to the Andamans; and so anxious was he to reach in good time that we started from Moulmein at daylight on the 5th [February], in order to gain a few hours for the inspection of the Settlement at Port Blair.[6]

[6] Ibid., p. 2.

The Andaman Islands at this time shared with Australia a common historical heritage in that they were a penal colony within the British empire. They had been a staging post for the EIC forces in 1824, when the invasion of Burma was about to be launched (Snodgrass 1827; rpt. 1997). Situated on the east coast of South Andaman Islands, Port Blair was one of many fine harbours in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a fact that attracted the British to it in the late 18th century when they were establishing a global chain of strategic outposts from which to thwart French pretensions to naval supremacy.[7] First selected in the memorable year of 1789 by Lieutenant Blair as the place for a settlement, it was deserted in 1796 because of malaria and the hostility of the indigenous people and remained unoccupied until 1858, when the fallout from the Indian Mutiny the previous year meant that the British authorities in India decided Port Blair would be an ideal location to send mutineers.[8] It was not the only such destination; prisoners were also sent to the Straits Settlement, Malaya, Penang, and Mauritius. Despite the alleged despair of some Hindu prisoners at being sent overseas, *kalapani*, the first batch of 200 prisoners arrived at Port Blair in January 1858 under Dr. Walker, a ferocious superintendent inclined to use execution as punishment for the slightest infringement of the penal colony's rules. At the time of the ill-fated visit by Lord Mayo on 8th February 1872, there was a population of just over 8,000 residents at the penal colony, 7,000 of whom were convicts, around 900 females, and about 200 police. At the inquiry into the Viceroy's death, Burne stated:

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[7] There are 572 islands, of which 39 are inhabited today. R. Murthy, (2005) *Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Development and Decentralization* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications), p. 2. Originally called Old Harbour, Port Blair was renamed in 1858 when the colonial government resumed using it as a penal colony. K. Dhingra, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Twentieth Century: A Gazetteer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 34.

[8] An exploratory committee consisting of Dr. Mouat, Dr. Playfair, and Lieutenant Heathcote had been sent in 1857 by the Government of India to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to select a site suitable for a penal settlement, primarily for mutineers and rebels sentenced to penal servitude, and later for all convicts from India under sentence of transportation. University of Cambridge Library, Add. MS 7490/94/13, 'Record on Reason for Visit by Viceroy', made by Major Burne, Secretary to Viceroy, p. 3. After the launch of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement in India following the Rowlatt Act, the massacre of unarmed protesters at Jallianwalla Bagh, Amritsar, in 1919 by General Reginald Dyer, and subsequent civil disobedience actions through the 1930s up to the 1942 Quit India movement, the Andamans were the destination for thousands of political prisoners sentenced to transportation by the British colonial authorities in India. See Sherman, T.C. (2006), "The politics of punishment and state violence in India 1919–56", unpublished. Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of History, Cambridge University, August 2006.

> Port Blair is under the charge of a Superintendent, assisted by a Deputy and several other subordinate officers and overseers. The convicts are divided into 6 classes, according to circumstances and character, and are distributed in the various islands and localities of the harbour. The worst characters are kept at Viper Island. A detachment of British Infantry, a wing of Native Infantry, and a body of 200 Police are stationed at the Settlement. The total population, free and convict, amounts to about 8,000 men and 900 women.
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> We arrived at our anchorage off Ross Island at 9:00 a.m. on the morning of Thursday, the 8th February. I never saw the Viceroy so pleased or satisfied as at our early arrival, or so eager to land without delay to commence his inspection.[9]

Amongst these prisoners were some of the Wahhabi leaders who, prior to the 1857 uprising, had preached *jihad* from mosques in Patna and Delhi. They were Muhammad Jafar, Yahya Ali, and Moulvee Ahmedoolla.[10] Put on trial at Amballa in April 1864 along with eight others whom the Government of India judged to be implicated in the events leading to the uprising, they had been sentenced to death by hanging. This sentence was commuted to transportation for life to the Andamans for them and seven co-defendants when the Government of India decided that execution would turn them into martyrs. An eleventh defendant, Muhammad Shafi, the financier of the Wahhabi movement at the time,[11] turned approver during the trial in order to save his life. His evidence and that of a Patna shoe-merchant, Elahi Baksh, had enabled a successful prosecution to be launched against Moulvee Ahmedoolla, elder brother of Yahya Ali. Moulvee Ahmedoolla was the former Deputy Collector of Income Tax and member of the Committee of Public Instruction, onetime friend and protégé of Sir Frederick Halliday, the former Secretary to the Home Department under Governor-General Lord Dalhousie and first Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal after the 1858 transfer of power from the EIC to the British Crown. Evidence obtained through these trials, both directly and inadvertently, eventually enabled the British authorities to take steps that temporarily impeded the power of the Hindustani Wahhabi leadership in the 1870s. However, its resurgence in 1878, and again in the

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[9] Ibid., p. 3.

[10] They were part of the Wahhabi council of five in Patna set up to carry on the legacy of Syed Ahmed (Allen, 2006: 97) in fostering militant Islam in the Indian sub-continent during the 1840s–1850s.

[11] Muhammad Shafi's other identity was that of a wealthy butcher in Delhi who contracted to supply meat to all of the British military establishments along the Grand Trunk Road (Allen 2006: 191).

1890s and 1919, led to further military actions on the North West Frontier and in Afghanistan.[12]

THE 'FIRST' *JIHAD?*

Mayo had had a very good trip up to this point. Although concerned about events in India, Burma had not given him any trouble. He had advised the Chief Commissioner, Ashley Eden, not to interfere in Upper Burma, at that time still an independent monarchy with its own King, Mindon, 'as the annexation of this or any adjacent state was not an event which he (i.e., Mayo) contemplated or desired.'[13] As the first Governor-General since Dalhousie (1855) to visit British Burma, his visit was a grand occasion. In Rangoon, on 30th January 1872, he held a Levee and Ball, and a Grand Public Ball on 2nd February. Pottinger records that a delegation of Karens addressed him, expressing thanks for the protection of British rule. When his ship sailed on 5th February, he was looking forward to seeing what improvements could be made in terms of penal policy at this outpost, which had a fearsome reputation. Interested in prison reform, Lord Mayo supported settlement policies that had the objective of rehabilitation for the less hardened criminals and economic self-sufficiency for the penal colony overall.

The documentation arising from the inquiry into Mayo's untimely death shows that those in authority amongst the colony's administrators were aware of potential threats to his safety from the island's convict population and had made detailed arrangements for his security during the visit. In his report on the events, Burne explained that before the Viceroy landed, the prison Superintendent, Major-General Stewart, came on board

[12] The letters of Private Copeland of the Fifth Hampshire Regiment, stationed in India throughout World War I, show his regiment being sent to Maymyo, Burma, in 1918 to keep a look out for any signs of insurrection. His stay in Burma was short. Despite there being much seditious underground activity amongst both Burmese in general and Burmese Muslims and Hindus as Germany sought to finance an uprising in Burma against the British (Bhattacharya 2007: ch. 3), Copeland's regiment was soon withdrawn and sent to the North West Frontier Province, where in 1919 a full-scale rebellion was soon to occur. Copeland's letters stop in mid-1918. It is not known whether he was involved in the fighting or whether he was de-mobilised and returned home. The fact that Britain kept three regiments stationed in India throughout the First World War when its resources on the Western Front were sorely stretched is a measure of how concerned the British government was that a further uprising along the lines of the 1857 one might occur. See Letters of Private A E Copeland, 2574, Signal Section, "D" Company,1st/5th Hampshire Regiment June 6, 1917 to April 8, 1918, Cambridge University Library, UL–RCMS 72.

[13] G. Pottinger, *Mayo: Disraeli's Viceroy* (Wilton: Michael Russell, 1990), p. 156.

ship and went over with Burne the arrangements made for Lord Mayo's security. Both had been in contact about these before the visit. Moreover, Burne states that the Viceroy had personally approved them. In his report on the investigation, Burne writes:

> Major General Stewart explained to me that he had taken every proper precaution; that he had caused guards to be posted at each locality, as well as an armed body of Police and Chuprassis to accompany the Viceroy.
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> The Viceroy was quite satisfied at what had been done, and I myself felt every confidence in General Stewart's arrangements for his safety, making no addition to them beyond warning the Staff present to keep their eyes open during the day, and as a matter of precaution to keep near the Viceroy in order to obviate any chance of possible danger to him.[14]

The Superintendent, Major-General Sir Donald Stewart, later Field Marshal Stewart, went on to have an illustrious career serving on the troubled North West Frontier. He had been appointed Superintendent at Port Blair in December 1971, only shortly before the Viceroy's visit, and was naturally anxious that the visit be a success. His security arrangements were a critical aspect of the visit and of the subsequent inquiry. He set out details of these arrangements in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 9 February 1872, written from Port Blair, as the initial examination of Shere Ali was being concluded. Reiterating that these arrangements had all met with the Viceroy's approval, Stewart had directed:

> That the convicts should all be kept at their ordinary work, and that petty officers in charge should see that no one was permitted to leave his gang. A detachment of free Police, armed with muskets, was to move with the Governor General's party in front, flank, and rear; and on Viper and Ross [Islands], where the worst characters are quartered, detachments of Native Infantry were in support of the Police, who had instructions to allow no one to approach His Excellency. On Ross and Viper [Islands] the whole of the troops were likewise under arms.
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> Some of the chief petty officers of stations were in the rear to see that convicts did not approach the Viceroy.[15]

Stewart's superiors were evidently satisfied that all reasonable security arrangements had been put in place for the visit; otherwise he

[14] University of Cambridge Library, Add. MS 7490/94/13, 'Record on Reason for Visit by Viceroy', made by Major Burne, Secretary to Viceroy, p. 5.

[15] Ibid., p. 11.

would not have been promoted or put in charge of the highly sensitive NWFP. As set out in Burne's report, Stewart, however, had made no special security arrangements for the Viceroy's unplanned, spontaneous visit, late in the afternoon of the 8th February, to Mount Harriet, the 1,100 foot peak across the harbour at Hopetown. Nevertheless, Stewart had ordered the same armed escort to accompany the party as had performed security duties during the tour of Viper and Chatham Islands. The Viceroy had apparently heard that the location might be suitable for a sanitarium and, having finished at Chatham Island sooner than expected, proposed that a visit to the Mount be made in the remaining daylight hours.

The assassin, Shere Ali, had planned his premeditated attack carefully. He knew he would be swiftly apprehended, tried and executed, an event that took place the following month. According to the testimony of his fellow convicts interrogated during the investigation, he had ritualistically made his farewells to them before the visit, preparing flour cakes for the 'Mussulmans' and sugar for the Hindus, gifts on which he expended all of his remaining money. At the subsequent interrogation, none of his fellow convicts had apparently picked up the signs of a man who was preparing for death, or so they said. To have acknowledged this would have been tantamount to declaring that they may have had foreknowledge of his intentions and would have implicated themselves in such a way as to bring them also under sentence of death as co-conspirators. Since three of the key leaders of the Wahhabi council of Patna, who had been strongly implicated in issuing *fatwa* calling for the 1857 uprising, were incarcerated at Port Blair during Shere Ali's time there, it is not impossible that there may have been a discussion to plan for the Viceroy's assassination. Knowledge of the impending visit by the Viceroy was widespread amongst the inmates at Port Blair; it was not a 'surprise' visit. There would have been ample time for ill-intentioned inmates to conceive of the assassination plan. On other occasions, it was common for one person among a group of willing assassins to 'take a straw' to carry out the deed, knowing that he was foreordaining his own death and that those left behind would celebrate him as a *shaheed,* a martyr. Yet, as Allen (2006: 112) admits, there is no extant evidence of any collaboration between Shere Ali and his three fellow Wahhabi inmates. Moreover, as Shere Ali, an Afridi-Pathan tribesman, had served the British well for some years as a cavalry trooper in Peshawar, first for Major Hugh James and then as mounted orderly for Reynell Taylor, who had rewarded him with 'a horse, a pistol and a certificate' (Allen 2006: 183), it may be that the three Wahhabi transportees suspected that he was an informer planted amongst them to obtain further information. Shere Ali's former master, Taylor, had played a critical role in suppressing the

mutineers during the 1857 crisis; he had been in the thick of the fighting and had sought to forewarn his superiors, especially Halliday, about the intentions of the Wahhabis in the early summer of 1857. According to Allen (2006: 183–184), Shere Ali, as his orderly, had been popular with the European officers and had in fact been so trusted that he had taken care of Taylor's children.

As the Viceroy returned from his climb up Mount Harriet—an unplanned change to his official schedule that no one could have anticipated—with evening darkness coming on, Shere Ali lay in wait for his chance. How he was able to get so close, given the security arrangements and directions for the convicts to be kept at their tasks, is a mystery. When the opportunity came, he leaped from his hiding place behind a rock and plunged an iron kitchen knife into the Viceroy's back, stabbing him twice. The chance had come when, again by chance, Major-General Stewart, who was at Mayo's side as he was about to step into the launch to take him back across the harbour to Port Blair, with Mayo's permission, turned aside momentarily to speak to a detachment of convict overseers waiting close by. The Viceroy's back was thus briefly exposed. The official report documenting the questioning of the assassin the following day, in identifying the motive for the deed, uses the word *jihad* on numerous occasions to explain Shere Ali's reason for his actions. The context of the report, penned amidst ongoing British fears of another uprising like that of 1857 and the recently concluded Wahhabi trials at Amballa, signals the authorities' consciousness of the historical continuum of *jihad*, which was confronting them in India, the Punjab, the NWFP and other parts of their empire. (In 1885 General Gordon was murdered in Khartoum, the Sudan, by another Mahdi). Thus, Shere Ali is said to have acknowledged being a Pathan and doing the deed 'by order of God (*jihad*)'. A note written in pencil, received at 1:50 p.m. on 9 February 1872 and written by James G Roper Curzon, 'a convict in charge of other convicts', which was forwarded with a report of enquiries to Mr. Hilton, Head Clerk, states:

> At his trial when asked if he had anything to say in his defence the assassin replied that he had nothing to say further than that the judge had heard the evidence and might decide as he wished and that when the account was made in the next world the judge would then know. He added that he did not care to beg for his life or words to that effect, but that on the day that he might be hanged he would make a statement. He said that he had no associate in his crime, but that God was his partner.[16]

[16] Add MS 7490/94/12.

The use of *jihad* in such an official document might be thought unusual for this time. It was certainly not the first political assassination in British India. On 10 September 1853, Colonel Frederick Makeson, Commissioner of Peshawar and thus the most senior official on the NWFP in the Punjab, had been stabbed by a tribesman whilst working on his papers on the veranda of his bungalow. The man had approached him with a petition, and when Makeson took it to read, the assassin stabbed him in the breast with a dagger. Colonel Makeson died four days later. At his interrogation and trial, the assassin was said to come from a village in Swat, then outside British control. The assassin said that the deed was done to prevent invasion of his land; he was identified in the official report of the incident as a 'religious fanatic' intent on martyrdom (Allen 2006: 24). Like Shere Ali, he was tried and hanged as a common criminal; his ashes were thrown into the river in an attempt by the authorities to prevent the aura of martyrdom accruing to him the perception of him as a martyr. This event followed intimations to the authorities between 1848 and 1852 of a religious organisation consisting of Wahhabis in Patna that was amassing arms, ammunition and men in preparation for a war against the Government of India. Letters and other documents had been seized showing a secret supply route running from Patna to Peshawar via Meerut, Amballa and Rawalpindi, which would enable the conspirators to mount an uprising. Documents from the investigation show that the assassination had been carried out in response to a *fatwa,* or religious edict, against Colonel Makeson, who had led punitive raids into the NWFP the previous year. In the years leading up to the mutiny in May 1857, the Government of India had information from several sources showing that a violent *jihad* was about to be launched against their authority, and that a major strategy in which offensive was used to subvert the Bengal Native Infantry (BNI), which was composed mostly of Muslim sepoys. The defection of the 55th BNI signalled the onset of the Mutiny, and the ferocity with which it was pursued on both sides, both during the insurrection itself and in its aftermath, could be said to be a product of the *jihad* context.

The assassination of Judge Norman, Acting Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, on 20 September 1871, just a few months before Mayo's visit to the Andamans, where three of the Wahhabi ringleaders were incarcerated, was just the latest in a line of political assassinations undertaken in response to the call to *jihad.* Like the man who stabbed Colonel Makeson, Judge Norman's assassin was said to be a fanatical Muslim called Abdoolah. The Judge too was stabbed while going up the steps of the Town Hall at about 11 o'clock in the morning. Mayo had heard about the attack at Simla and had expressed profound regret. Pottinger

(1990: 179) notes that like Mayo, Norman was a good man, and there was apparently no motive for the attack beyond the politico-cultural one. During his trial, Shere Ali said that part of his motivation arose from the fact that his *brother* was the Abdoolah who had assassinated Judge Norman; however, further enquiries cast doubt on this. Stewart told Burne on 10 February 1872 of information received from an informant that Shere Ali's brother some nine years previously had only been old enough to herd the cows; at the time of Judge Norman's assassination, he would have been no more than 20 years old. The Abdoolah who had killed Judge Norman was said to be a much older man. It is possible that Shere Ali was using the term 'brother' in the wider cultural and religious context, rather than indicating a blood relative, that is, a 'brother in arms' or 'brother in *jihad.*' Reverend Worthington Jukes, a missionary at Peshawar (where Colonel Makeson had been assassinated) in the NWFP in 1872–1874, described the culture of political assassinations prevalent at the time and linked them to the British military operations in the region following the two Afghan wars of 1839–1840 and 1869–1870. He wrote:

> In Peshawar there is always a possibility of assassination. Missionaries as well as officers, take their lives in their hands. Mullahs in their ignorance and fanaticism, teach their pupils that one sure way of getting to heaven, is by murdering some European. One day I went down to the school as usual. On my arrival there, the Head Persian Teacher, Khalifa Mian Nathu, who was a Muhammadan, but very friendly with me, told me there was a fanatic about the playground, who was looking out for me. The fanatic enquired of several Muhammadan boys, when I was expected, and what I was like, thinking that as they too were Muhammadans, they would be sure to favour the attempt, but as they had some friendly feeling towards me, they were horrified at the idea, and at once reported it to their Persian teacher. Fortunately I did not meet him, but I reported the circumstance at once, as was my duty, to the Chief Police Officer, who doubtless had him watched. I heard nothing more about him.[17]

British colonial policy was to depoliticise violence against its officials and other Europeans; to not acknowledge the political dimension and to

[17] Reminiscences of Missionary Work in Amritsar 1872–1873 and on the Afghan Frontier in Peshawar 1873–1890, pp. 51–52, Royal Commonwealth Society MS, GBR/0115/RCMS 90, University of Cambridge Library. Worthington Jukes (1849–1937) was born in Canada, and educated at Blundell's School, Tiverton, and Trinity College, Cambridge (BA 1872; MA 1874), He was ordained deacon in 1872 and priest in 1874 and served as a CMS Missionary at Amritsar 1872–1874, and Peshawar, 1874–1890, until his wife's ill health compelled his retirement from the Society. He became Rector of Shobrooke, Devon, in 1890, where he remained until 1925. Jukes died at Exmouth on 10 March 1937.

treat all such activities within the framework of the criminal justice code as the products of momentary insanity. Such was the policy too when in later years, Bhagat Singh, the assassin of the police officer, J. P. Saunders, was hanged in 1931 for his murder; and in 1940 for Uddam Singh, who assassinated Sir Michael O'Dwyer at Caxton Hall, London, in revenge for O'Dwyer's role as Lieutenant Governor in approving General Reginald Dyer's actions during the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919 (Datta & Settar 2000).[18] In these cases, although both assassins were treated as criminals, tried and hanged, their compatriots immediately heralded them as *shaheed*, martyrs, a direct rejection of the colonial authorities' interpretation of their deeds. From one perspective, this dialectic—criminal or martyr—might be expected from those on opposing sides. Commenting on this aspect of the politics of punishment, both Taylor Sherman[19] and Satadru Sen[20] suggest that the colonial state sought to deny meaning to political protest and encapsulate it within an alternative framework of unthinking, homicidal impulse. But Shere Ali's actions could not be made to fit this pattern. Instead of the 'unprovoked attack' employed in many of the reports of criminal activities, the report of the investigation into Shere Ali's actions sought to uncover and emphasise his links with the Wahhabis on the North West Frontier.

THE WAHHABI CONNECTION

Burne's report of the assassination draws out the political links to events on the North West Frontier. He records that at the moment of being struck, the Viceroy called out: 'They have got me!' It was his deputy, the Honourable Robert Napier, who, on assuming control of the administration, interpreted

[18] Bhagat Singh was a Marxist and member of the Hindustani Social Revolutionary Association; he had tired of Gandhi's non-violent approach. His murder of J. P. Saunders was said to be in revenge for the death of the social activist Lala Lajpat Rai during the 1919 disturbances at Amritsar, a seminal event that had a profound effect on the direction of the Indian nationalist movement. Likewise, Uddam Singh was motivated by the same set of circumstances when the colonial authorities included humiliation—crawling—as well as physical punishment and arbitrary executions in their response to the protests at Jallianwalla Bagh. Uddam Singh had in fact wounded several others, including Lord Zetland, when he fired several shots at Sir Michael O'Dwyer, but only he was killed instantly. The others recovered. Uddam Singh's remains were repatriated to India in 1975 at the request of the Indian Government.

[19] Taylor Corpus Sherman, (2006) The Politics of punishment and state violence in India 1919–56, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of History, Cambridge University, August 2006.

[20] Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 55.

this statement as referring to the Wahhabi movement. Burne described the Viceroy's last moments as follows:

> The Viceroy ran a few paces forward, and fell over the pier into some shallow water to the left. We left the assassin and ran to his help whilst struggling in the water, and assisted him out. At that particular moment, we had no idea he had been mortally or seriously hurt, for he helped to raise himself from the water, and had his senses fully about him.
>
> When lifting him up, however, I saw, for the first time, that he was bleeding copiously. He said, "Burne, they have hit me", he walked firmly, felt his shoulder and said "I don't think I am much hurt." We laid him on a kind of platform or cart that was near at hand on the pier, but no sooner had we done so, than matters became serious, and blood began to flow rapidly. We did our utmost to bind up his terrible wounds. For a moment we discussed the advisability of sending for a Medical Officer from Chatham Island, or taking the Viceroy off to the ship. The Viceroy faintly said, "Take me to the ship." We immediately lifted him up, assisted by the sailors, and carried him to the boat. The last words that he spoke were, "Lift up my head," which he said twice whilst we were carrying him.[21]

Napier's interpretation of the Viceroy's words may have had some substance to it. Grievances in the NWFP were high. Mayo's last letter written prior to his departure for the Andamans showed that he was concerned about Wahhabi activities. They had been active during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, when some of the leading mutineers were shown to be followers of Wahhabism. Since then, they were known to be fomenting rebellion in the Punjab; and in January 1872, one month before Mayo set out to inspect the penal settlement in the Andamans, a force of around 200 Sikhs had attacked the Malodh Fort. The officiating Deputy Commissioner of the NWFP, Cowan, had tried 70 who had surrendered, and had 49 of them executed. Cowan was later dismissed from the force for this deed. The Commissioner of the Amballa Division, Forsyth, had hanged another 16. Horrified, Mayo had ordered the executions stopped immediately. Despite Mayo's having negotiated an end to the civil war in Afghanistan by installing a ruler whom the Government of India thought it could control (as distinct from the candidate favoured by Russia, which had just occupied Bokhara), he knew that the various sects on the frontier, especially in Swat

[21] University of Cambridge Library, Add. MS 7490/94/13, Record on Reason for Visit by Viceroy, made by Major Burne, Secretary to Viceroy, p. 6.

and Buner, were committed to overthrowing the Raj.[22] During the investigation into the Viceroy's assassination, Napier declared: 'I cannot for a moment believe or suppose that the deed was the result of an extended *conspiracy* (italics in original). I believe it was an act of *fanaticism* (italics in original) probably connected with the Wahabee organization.'[23]

Whether Napier's supposition is correct or not, Mayo had been sufficiently concerned about issues in the NWFP to stop in Moulmein on his way to the Andamans to check his mail. He was particularly concerned about Colonel Pollock, the former commanding officer of the convict, Shere Ali. In Rangoon, Burne records, Mayo had been concerned about Colonel Pollock's safety during his journey to Seistan and other matters and were anxious about Khelat affairs in the NWFP.[24]

In addition to these possible ideological dimensions, the assassin, Shere Ali, also had a personal grievance. He had served for some years in the Peshawar Police and had been Colonel Pollock's orderly in 1869. He had been accused of killing another man, Hydur, a resident of Kudum, near Peshawar, in broad daylight. However, Shere Ali maintained his innocence. He stated that he had been going to Colonel Pollock's house at the time and was near the location where the man, his known enemy, was killed, which caused suspicion to be fixed on him. However, the killing was known to be part of a long standing family feud, and Shere Ali was said to have taken leave to carry it out. This circumstance did not reflect well on his explanation. Although he says he was considered not guilty by his own officers, he was convicted of the murder in April 1869 and sentenced to be hanged, but this sentence was changed by Colonel Pollock to transportation for life to the Andamans. He arrived in May 1869, having come via Mooltan, Karachi and Bombay.[25] He was acknowledged to have been well behaved since his arrival, his only offence being unlawful possession of five

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[22] Pottinger, pp. 173–174. Ram Singh, who was involved with the Kukas (Sikhs), who had attacked the Malodh Fort, though he protested his innocence of any foreknowledge of the attack, was imprisoned for

[23] Quoted in Sen, p. 56.

[24] The Khelat or Khilafat referred to the Muslim concept of the Caliphate, which was officially abolished after World War I during the Paris peace treaty discussions in 1919. The dismemberment of Turkey and formal abolition of the Caliphate by Britain and France and their allies was a source of considerable resentment in many parts of the Muslim world and contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in the NWFP in 1919.

[25] Notes from verbal and written statements made by Maj. Gen. Stewart, C.B, Superintendent of Port Blair, to Major Burne, 10 February 1872. Mayo Collection, Cambridge University Library, MS 7490/94.

pounds of flour. During interrogation the day after the assassination, he was described as being a Mohammedan Pathan of the Kooka-Kheyl tribe, about 25 years of age, 5 feet 10 inches in height, who had served Colonel Pollock since 1867. At Port Blair, he had worked as a barber since May 1871. He evidently had known of the impending visit of the Viceroy and had planned his attack with meticulous care.

A CONSPIRACY?

The general convict population at Port Blair, according to Superintendent Stewart, was greatly dismayed at the attack on the Viceroy. They had been hoping that the visit would provide the opportunity for some remissions, or exercise of clemency, the vice-regal prerogatives. Sherman (2006) has shown that justice under the raj was a rather precarious affair, often carried out in the collective with little real attention to ascertaining beyond doubt whether an accused was guilty or innocent; evidence was treated rather cavalierly, with the notion that if a person were wrongly convicted, that would give the senior representatives of the raj the opportunity to display magnanimity. In Shere Ali's case, there was little doubt that he was guilty of the assassination of the Viceroy, having been apprehended on the spot; but there could well have been a miscarriage of justice with regard to his original conviction and transportation for life to the Andamans. Similarly, there could have been a number of other convicts in similar circumstances who may have been hoping for the opportunity to bring their cases to the Viceroy's attention. Burne records that as Mayo toured the settlement, a group of convicts sought to present a petition to him, but were prevented from doing so by Superintendent Stewart. On Mayo's death, the convict population was fearful that they might be implicated in a wider conspiracy. The investigation sought to uncover any signs of this, but concluded, consistent with colonial policy, that the assassin had acted alone. Recalling the tragic events of the day, Burne had also correlated them with 'recent events in India', i.e., the Wahhabi trials and the assassination of Judge Norman, and surmised that some of the answers to the investigation's questions would be found there. Letters found amongst Shere Ali's belongings, written in Persian, were translated and combed for signs of a wider conspiracy. All convict communications were vetted, and their letters home were opened and examined in Calcutta. Full inquiries were made into Shere Ali's family connections, but no evidence of a wider conspiracy was proven. In India, the leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities all sent

letters of condolence to Lady Mayo on the loss of her husband.[26] Given the thoroughness of the investigation and the predilection of those responsible for the enquiry to frame Shere Ali's actions within the context of Wahhabi *jihad* ideology, it is possible that he was motivated not by politico-cultural causes, but by a sense of injustice at being punished by those whom he had served so well. It is noteworthy that, similar to the assassin of Colonel Makeson, Shere Ali does not seem to have been hailed as a martyr by his Pathan brothers, whereas the politics of independence transformed the later murderers, Bhagat Singh and Uddam Singh (p. 18), into national martyrs who gave up their lives for the cause of freedom from colonialism. Shere Ali's claimed 'brotherhood' with the Abdoolah who had killed Judge Norman may have been an attempt to dignify his own actions by having them placed within the martyrdom category, rather than simply being those of a common criminal.

CONCLUSION

Lord Mayo's death was certainly neither the first nor the last political assassination in British India driven either by ideology or personal grievance. Both Aung San in Burma (1947) and Mohandas Gandhi (1948) in India were to fall to assassins' bullets, as did several of India's post-independence leaders, including Indira Gandhi and her son, Rajiv Gandhi. This was one of the risks of holding public office in an expanding empire that encompassed a multitude of different cultures and peoples. But whatever the faults of the colonial authorities—and there were many—one cannot help but notice their policy of depoliticising such actions and treating them within the ordinary criminal justice framework. If such justice on occasion was arbitrary and even unjust, it was a policy pursued with deliberate calculation in order to deny the halo of 'martyrdom' to those who

[26] The marriage of Lord and Lady Mayo was said to have been a love match; it produced seven children. The House of Lords proceedings of 22 July 1872 voted Lady Mayo one thousand pounds per annum annuity for life, 'in view of the circumstances of his death'. Mayo's body arrived by the *Glasgow* and then the *Daphne* at Calcutta, 17 February 1872, where the late Viceroy lay in state for two days before being transported via Bombay to Ireland. A public funeral was held in Dublin on 25 April. Lord Mayo was buried in accordance with his wishes, in the churchyard at Johnstown 'in a place which he had chosen before he went out to India'. (Pottinger, p. 185).

engaged in it. This of course did not prevent similar tragic events from occurring on numerous occasions, but one might question whether the policy may have contained such tendencies in a more efficacious manner than if the alternate policy had been pursued, a perspective that may shed some light on approaches to dealing with current proclaimed manifestations of *jihad.*

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