

## Chapter 3

# 'A fine type of Hindoo' meets 'the Australian type': British Indians in Australia and diverse masculinities

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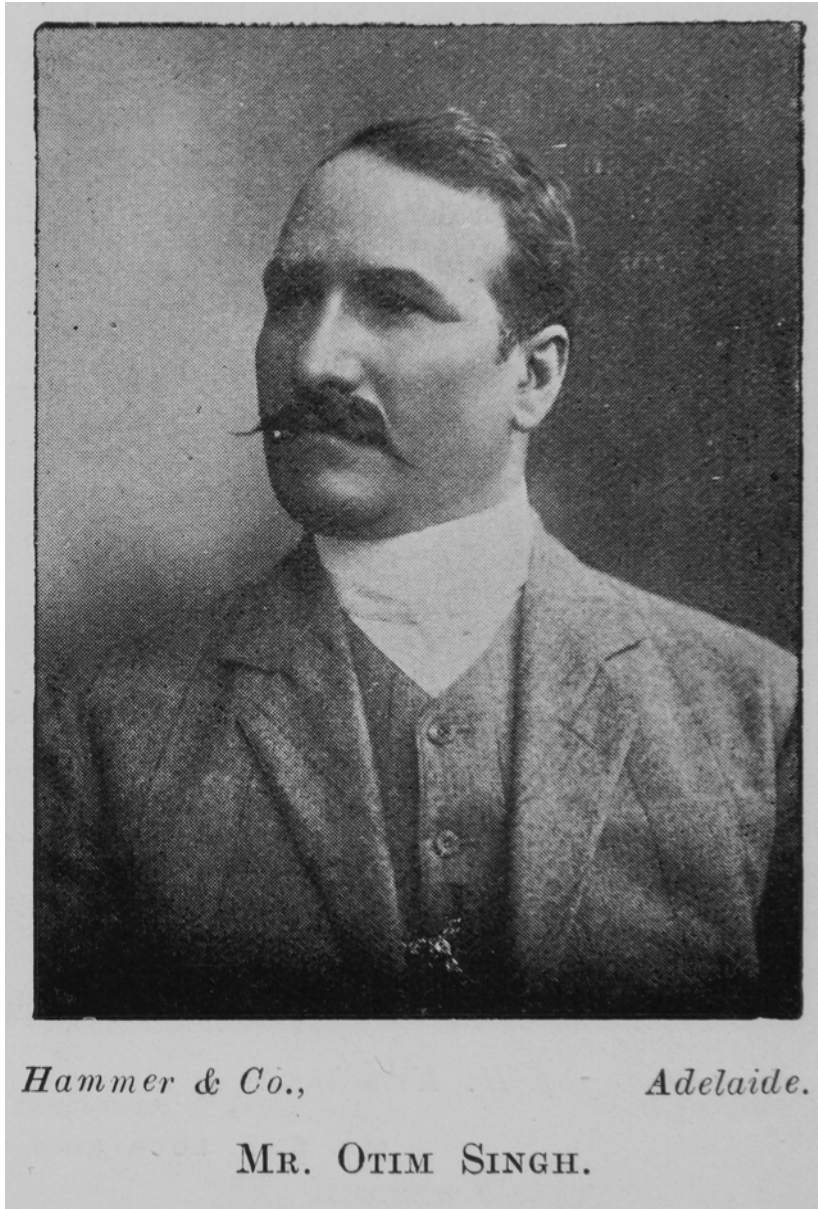
In about 1881, a young Punjabi Sikh from a landowning family, Otim Singh, left his home in Moga in the Punjab and began a journey that would take him to Sumatra, where he would work for five years, supervising Indian workers on an English-owned tobacco plantation, and where he also served with the British Mounted Police. He returned home to the Punjab and purchased land, but shortly after went to Batavia (Jakarta) to visit his brother. Thence he made the journey to Australia, arriving in Melbourne in 1890.<sup>1</sup> He was to live in Australia for the rest of his life and was able to prosper and make his way there, initially as a hawker and later as the owner of a large general store in Kingscote on Kangaroo Island.<sup>2</sup> Like the colonial gentlemen discussed by Cindy McCreery in this volume, Singh came to Australia in search of prosperity.

Otim Singh was one of the many British Indian men who were in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A. Palfreeman estimated that there were up to 7637 Indians in Australia during the first decade of the twentieth century,<sup>3</sup> while A. T. Yarwood set the 1901 population at 4681, declining by 1911 to 3653 and by 1921 to 3150.<sup>4</sup> These men and their part in Australian history have been virtually ignored and under-researched. In an Australian history conceptualised within the bounds of 'White Australia', these men were irrelevant to the national imaginary. With a transnational and non-racial lens, they can instead be seen as constituting the first wave of migration to Australia from the Subcontinent.

Studies of gender have become influential in the 'new imperial history'. In 1990, Jane Haggis called for a focus on 'gender as a relational dimension of colonialism'.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Angela Woollacott has noted the 'central role of gender in the British imperial enterprise'.<sup>6</sup> Much of the new scholarship in this field has emerged from the work of feminist post-colonial historians, who began by examining the role of white women in colonialism, and in particular their relationships with colonised women. The domination of white men in imperial spaces has also been examined by a number of scholars.<sup>7</sup> Philippa Levine has

written that '[t]he British Empire always seems a very masculine enterprise, a series of far-flung sites, dominated by white men dressed stiffly in sporting and hunting clothes, or ornate official regalia'.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 3.1: Otim Singh, an Indian man in business, Kingscote, South Australia.**



H.T. Burgess (ed) 1909, *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, volume 2, p. 1019.

The masculinities of colonised men must also, however, constitute an important element in understanding the workings of imperialism. The connectedness of these various categorisations is crucial, as Catherine Hall has recently elaborated of colonial discourse: '[I]n demarcating black masculinity they enunciated white masculinity, in demarcating brown femininity, they elevated white femininity. Colonial discourses were critical to this process of mutual constitution.'<sup>9</sup> Mrinalini Sinha has delineated the colonial notion of the inferior masculinity of Bengali men, the 'effeminate Bengali',<sup>10</sup> against which was opposed the constructions of other Indian men as particularly martial and manly.

The Indian men under discussion here were framed by and addressed a number of different and at times contradictory notions about their masculinity, 'race' and ethnicity as they moved between Australia and India and within the varied situations and groups they encountered. Indeed, they existed within and related to diverse discourses about masculinities and, of course, as much as they were made and confined by such notions, they also negotiated them and made their own way in relation to them.

Richard White has demonstrated how the white man came into his own in the Australian colonies of the late nineteenth century and in early federated Australia.<sup>11</sup> Marilyn Lake also shows that the new nation—for the white 'race'—was inaugurated 'in a radical act of racial exclusion'<sup>12</sup> of those deemed inferior to the whites, who were destined, in this formulation, to carry the nation's destiny. Lake notes, furthermore, that this clear demarcation occurred amid 'postcolonial apprehensions' as the white man observed the rising power of colonised masculinities and anticipated 'white masculine humiliation'.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter explores some of the notions of masculinity with which the Indian men engaged and by which they were framed, examining these in relation to specific incidents and to the histories of particular men. Administrative practices such as those of the White Australia Policy, with which these men had to engage, also embodied these discourses. Of course, ideas of masculinity were also interwoven with ideas about race, ethnicity and religion. In drawing together understandings of Indian masculinities within the Australian environment with those relating to Australian men, this chapter furthers the 'goal of the trans-national...to unsettle national narratives'.<sup>14</sup> By viewing these men and their masculinities within a transnational context, the pervasiveness of colonial discourses around race and gender become apparent. Such a perspective makes clearer the fact that these men had stories and histories in the Subcontinent as well as in Australia. In naming and giving agency to individual hitherto nameless subaltern figures in the Indian diaspora to Australia, this chapter contributes to a greater understanding of Australia's transnational history.

It should be noted from the beginning that 'Indians' is a highly problematic term. Many of the men who came to Australia hailed from the Punjab, parts of

which are now in Pakistan. In Australia, they were often referred to, erroneously, as Afghans. Of course, they were also 'colonials' or Australians, but they were apparently not referred to or viewed as such. In exploring their histories within a different policy framework and historical period, I seek to locate them as Australian colonials who, like the other settlers in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Australia, sought to make their way in the new country.

### The 'manly Sikh'

Otim Singh's departure from his village, and his lengthy period abroad, must be understood in part in terms of indigenous categories, of the people and region from whence he came. It seems likely that he was from a landowning family that had a number of sons and could not provide 'for all members of the family at an adequate standard of living from the property group's holding in the village'.<sup>15</sup> Emigration for a short or longer period on the part of one or two members was a strategy adopted by such families to enable them to improve their land holdings and thus their ability to support sons and provide for daughters' weddings.<sup>16</sup> During the 1880s, men such as Singh who had worked in South-East Asia or had contacts there picked up news from other Sikhs that *Telia* (Australia) was open and that there were opportunities to be had there.<sup>17</sup>

Tom Kessinger has noted the potential of such emigration to repair family fortunes in the Punjab village of Vilyatpur. In 1903, 35 men, or approximately one-third of the men of working age, had gone to Australia.<sup>18</sup> The wealth that they brought or sent back into the village had a noticeable impact on land prices and the standing of particular families. In 1896, fourteen-year-old Isher Singh went to Australia with his uncle Naraung, himself only eighteen years old. These young lads were to be very successful:

Isher's stay in Australia was fruitful. When he returned in 1908 he had sufficient funds to take about eight acres by mortgage. By 1922 he had purchased six acres, which doubled his property group's holding. Naurang never returned to the village, remaining in Australia until his death many years later. He sent enough money through the government post office in the first ten years after his departure to put the property group into the mortgage market. His brother added three acres to the holding by 1922 and constructed a good-sized brick house in the village.<sup>19</sup>

As Kessinger points out, 'Migration was a group effort.' Although the individual man left the village, he did this in the interests of the whole group. Leaving his village 'meant separation from family, community, and, in most cases, the impossibility of producing legitimate heirs'. Given Punjabi values, Kessinger notes, 'the cost to the migrant was high. His only return was achievement for his family.'<sup>20</sup>

Otim Singh worked as a hawker and, like other Indian hawkers in Australia, he would have sent money back regularly to his family by means of postal orders or through trusted friends. He had no children. He was a successful businessman and, when he died in 1927, his estate was worth £10,000.<sup>21</sup> On the death of his Australian wife, the balance was to be sent to his heirs, his nephews Sundar, Eishar and Kham Singh of Bhgalawalla Village, Ferospur District, in the Punjab. His many years of work in Australia, as a hawker and subsequently as a shopkeeper, benefited his property group in his village.

In thinking about such men's transnational lives, it is important to keep in mind the fact that they related to and were framed by differing and even contrasting notions of masculinity in Australia and in their home country. Therefore, while men such as Singh were working to lift their family's *izzat* (their honour) back in their home community, in Australia they were at times reviled and seen as outcasts on the lower rungs of a hierarchy of masculinities.

When Singh arrived in Melbourne in 1890, he learnt how to be a hawker from a compatriot and proceeded to work in the Western District of Victoria and across into the south-east of South Australia. While hawkers were often represented as being of great assistance to outlying settlements and welcome friends at scattered farms,<sup>22</sup> there was a certain amount of hostility towards itinerant hawkers in the Australian colonies during the 1890s.<sup>23</sup> Racial prejudice was central to this social anxiety. Indian hawkers, although they were British subjects, were marginalised in emerging white Australia because of their race. While the controversy in Victoria seemed to focus only on Indians, in South Australia the authorities refused in 1893 to renew hawking licences for Afghans, Assyrians and Chinese.<sup>24</sup> Popular understandings tended to push all those seen as not white into an inferior category. As an Adelaide *Register* columnist candidly admitted:

With true British arrogance we virtually regard all such, whether Chinese, Afghans, Syrians, Hindus, or Persians, as the scum and offscouring of the earth. They have committed the unpardonable sin of being coloured, and although they were not consulted in the choice of their complexion they must perforce be Ishmaelites.<sup>25</sup>

Itinerant hawkers were outside society in a number of ways: they had no fixed address and they were racialised. L. F. Benaud, the editor of the *Richmond River Times* in New South Wales, declared in 1896 that 'no greater pest is to be met in the country than the objectionable dirty Hindoo hawkers who infest many districts'.<sup>26</sup>

Hawkers were represented as a threat to women alone on farms, whom they would pressure strongly to buy their goods. A NSW Member of Parliament is

quoted in the 1890s as saying they 'become a menace to the safety and comfort of the inmate of the house' and use 'most insulting language'.<sup>27</sup>

Singh was more successful than many other hawkers. He became a property holder, establishing a store and enlarging it on a number of occasions. An enterprising businessman, he built up a large trade across Kangaroo Island, supplying townspeople, the farming community and the large summer-holiday trade.<sup>28</sup> His story of hard work and personal initiative from modest beginnings to prosperity was outlined in the *Cyclopedia of South Australia* in 1909, echoing most of those in this volume. These short biographical accounts of mainly white settlers told many stories, if not of 'rags to riches', then of the self-made man who had built his own prosperity.

Singh, however, as an Indian man, had to negotiate the problem of being seen as too successful. With the establishment of a federated white Australia from 1901, his position became more marginal. Federation was, after all, 'the coming of age of a white Australian masculinity'.<sup>29</sup> While some reviled the Indians when they were hawkers, critics also saw their movement into other occupations as equally threatening. In 1911, therefore, the NSW Minister of Lands, Niel Nielsen, noted of Indians gaining land in northern New South Wales:

The Hindoo applicants are undesirable settlers in many ways and in any community of white settlers are regarded with much disfavour amounting almost to complete aversion. The majority of the Hindoos in this state have started as small hawkers or pedlars and saved a fair amount of money; they are naturally acquisitive.<sup>30</sup>

In response to such charges, Singh might have been able to deploy a powerful colonial discourse by which the British had categorised and defined his people. Sinha, David Omissi and Thomas Metcalf have written about the categorisation of various Indian masculinities by British rulers. Certain groups were deemed to be 'martial races'—namely, the Sikhs and the Ghurkas. The former were often referred to as 'the manly Sikh' or 'the loyal Sikh'. Others, such as the Western-educated Bengalis, were termed 'effeminate Bengalis'.<sup>31</sup> Such categorisations could be limiting, but could also be productive for the individuals thus categorised.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Singh often referred to his family's loyalty to the British Raj, emphasising their military involvement—possibly a strategy for alleviating anxiety around his material success.

In the entry he contributed to the *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, therefore, we read: 'In earlier life he had a great ambition to join the British Army in India, and whilst in Sumatra served four years in the British Mounted Police.'<sup>33</sup> In his obituary in the *Kangaroo Island Courier*, we read that: 'His father and uncles were soldiers and fought with the British forces during the Indian Mutiny of 1857/8.'<sup>34</sup> Singh did not emphasise his British military links in the same dramatic

manner as did Sowar Saut Singh on one occasion in Singleton, New South Wales. When the governor, previously the commanding officer of his regiment in the Indian Army, visited Singleton, Sowar turned up 'in full regimentals', presenting 'an impressive figure'.<sup>35</sup> Otim Singh could, nevertheless, usefully deploy the late nineteenth-century construction of Sikhs as particularly martial and loyal. He seems to have been successful in this, as his obituarist noted that he 'belonged to that fine type of Hindoo known as Sikhs'.<sup>36</sup>

## The 'effeminate Bengali'

Such categorisations of the relative manliness and 'essential' qualities of various 'races' of Indian circulated widely throughout the British Empire and were so normalised that they were accepted as part of general knowledge. An incident when Nunda Lall Doss, a Bengali Christian, visited Australia in 1888, demonstrates the categorisation, pointed out by Sinha, of the Bengali as effeminate.<sup>37</sup> A journalist from the *Adelaide Observer* who interviewed Doss was determined to represent him as an example of such an 'effeminate Bengali'. In this remarkable interview, Doss can be seen resisting the deployment of this category against himself and other Indians. They had been discussing Chinese immigration and 'coolies' in general. Indeed, during the previous month, Doss had observed the great uproar that ensued in Sydney when some Chinese tried to land from the *Afghan*.<sup>38</sup> In Adelaide, the issue of the use of Chinese labour in the Northern Territory was being debated. The journalist, employing contemporary discourse around 'racial types', suggested that 'the Indian coolies [were] physically inferior to the Chinese'.<sup>39</sup> Doss disagreed, offering mock combat: 'Look at me, don't you think I am quite as strong as yourself?' The journalist rejected this trial of strength, admitting that Doss was 'physically, at any rate, my superior'. Determined to pursue the notion of the 'effeminate Bengali', however, he queried whether Doss was 'a specimen of the average Hindu'. Doss replied, 'Yes I am a fair specimen of the Hindus from the north of India. We have some very fine men amongst us.' Not convinced, the journalist asked finally: 'Are you a pure native?' Doss laughed outright at this suggestion and, with a little jibe about British drinking habits, replied, 'Yes I am glad to say that my ancestors never had a drop of spirits of wine in their veins', and he continued, after this assertion of his 'pure' lineage, deftly to link Indian and British ancestry: 'I have no British blood; but our native vernaculars when compared with your [W]estern languages show that after all the Indians and the British are very nearly related.'<sup>40</sup>

Here, Doss skilfully turns the discussion towards a claim of longstanding affiliation between the British and Indians by his reference to 'the theory of a common Aryan origin of Europeans and Indians', effectively deflecting the journalist's efforts to render him a mere object under surveillance.<sup>41</sup> Supporters of the London Missionary Society, which brought Doss to Australia, were

affronted by the journalist's aggressive and denigrating line of questioning and sprang to his defence. This defence was, however, itself couched in terms of 'racial types', alluding in a patronising manner to the notion of the ridiculously verbose Bengali that was part of the colonial characterisation of the effeminate Bengali:

The admission of *physical superiority*, unwittingly, no doubt, carried with it the implication of *mental inferiority*. With Mr Doss there is nothing artificial in thought and utterance. Whoever has heard him cannot but have noted the wonderful adroitness with which he picks his way along the stepping stones of English expression, and the exceedingly apposite and erudite manner in which he clothes his evidently *own* thinking in the garb of an alien tongue.<sup>42</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

## Restrictive legislation and masculinity

Doss was a brief visitor to Australia, unlike those Indians who lived in the country for many years and made their living here. With the passage of restrictive immigration acts in some colonies in the late nineteenth century and in particular with the passing of the national *Immigration Restriction Act (IRA)* in 1901, their situation worsened. The *IRA* deemed Indians to be prohibited immigrants, despite the fact that they were British subjects, and they had to contend with an array of administrative practices. Such discursive practices 'articulated and organized particular sets of relations', as Hall puts it, 'through the workings of knowledge and power'.<sup>43</sup>

After Federation, in general, no new immigrants from India were allowed to enter Australia and a whole system of surveillance and regulation of the lives and movements of British Indians in Australia was developed. This related chiefly to movements outside Australia and re-entry to Australia, and Indians domiciled in Australia found their mobility and the freedom to come to and go from Australia at will was restricted.<sup>44</sup> An identity document, the Certificate Exempting the Dictation Test (CEDT), was created in order to regulate the movement of Indians and other 'Asiatics' domiciled in Australia as they left and re-entered the country. The certificate involved the use of photographs—front and profile—a description of the holder and the taking of hand-prints and later of thumb-prints. A bureaucracy was created to oversee, regulate and register the movements of domiciled people from the classes of prohibited immigrants. Through such practices, these non-white men (and a few women) were rendered objects to be watched over, administered and controlled. In order to gain a CEDT, they had to provide references from members of the European community as to their character, and the local police checked with their referees and made inquiries into their activities and financial standing.



Such administrative processes inherently positioned these men as untrustworthy. A CEDT was therefore given to the applicant only when he was on board ship and about to leave port. Indeed, for each ship that entered and left a port, customs officers counted and listed the numbers of non-white passengers and crew. For such accounting, the passengers were regularly mustered on deck.<sup>45</sup> Information about the movements of non-white people was conveyed from customs at one port to the next with the special responsibility of the customs officer at the last port of call to note the departure of such passengers. When the person returned to Australia, the CEDT was taken back by the customs authorities and stored in the 'Strong Room' at Customs House. This was presumably to ensure that no other person could make illegal use of it to gain entry to Australia.

Indians protested against the policies and administrative processes of the White Australia Policy on a number of fronts. They drew up petitions, demanding that their rights as British subjects be honoured. Just as Sowar Saut Singh sought to bypass colonial authority by calling attention to his links with the Governor of New South Wales, the Indians' protests and petitions were often addressed across national boundaries to the British Colonial Office or the India Office in London or even to the Viceroy in India. Others directed their complaints to the Indians Overseas Association, which had its headquarters in London. Within Australia, some individuals contested the application of the discriminatory processes to their movements. I have discussed elsewhere the struggle of Sher Mohmad for exemption from thumb-printing and from the requirement to get references each time he wished to visit India.<sup>46</sup> In 1929, he wrote testily to the officials administering the legislation, asserting his right to be treated as a person, a modern citizen and a businessman who had contributed to the making of Australia: 'I have already furnished the Customs with many such certificates and my character is proven beyond any doubt. The process of obtaining the certificates is most painful and humiliating and not necessary in my case.'<sup>47</sup>

The undignified and un-manly character of hand-printing was eventually recognised by an alteration to these requirements, allowing them to be omitted for some more prominent 'Asiatics'. The Customs Officer therefore wrote in 1912 of Rochimull Pamamull, who had a shop in Coles Arcade in Melbourne: 'As Mr Rochimull Pamamull is a well known business man, the handprints need not be taken.'<sup>48</sup> Similarly, when the businessman Marm Deen left Melbourne with his wife and children in 1912, only a family portrait was taken to allow them to re-enter Australia. Deen's status was such that he seemed to correspond directly with Attlee Hunt and other senior officials. Perhaps it was felt that to treat him in an undignified manner would be demeaning to these prominent white men with whom he dealt.<sup>49</sup>

After 1919, British Indians resident in Australia were permitted to apply to bring their wives and minor children to live with them in Australia, thus making it

possible for the families to also gain resident status. This allowance was curious given that Indians were not seen as appropriate settlers. Indeed, it came because of the pressure exerted on Australian authorities by imperial authorities as a result of India's great contributions in terms of fighting men and funds to the British war effort. An applicant, however, had to satisfy a number of requirements before his family could join him. He had to prove that it was *his* wife and children who would enter Australia and that the children were indeed minors. Most important was the requirement that the authorities be satisfied that the applicant had sufficient funds to support his family and a suitable home in Australia to house them in an appropriate manner. Many if not most applications seem to have been rejected.

This new policy was run through with paternalism. Some Indians were refused permission to admit their family because their residence was not seen as suitable. Police would make an inspection of the Indian applicant's house and inquire into his financial position to determine whether he could support a wife and children in a suitable manner. Implicit in this practice was the belief that the 'white standard' of civilised behaviour had to be affirmed and that an Indian man might not know how to look after his wife and family in a manner appropriate to a 'civilised' community.<sup>50</sup> Implicit also was the notion of the 'Bengali man as effeminate and incapable of caring for his own dependants'.<sup>51</sup> There were not many applications for wives and children to join men in Australia, and they were often refused on grounds that were presented as solicitous and gentlemanly official concern for the woman.

Gola Singh, who worked as a labourer in the Clarence River district of New South Wales, was the first to apply. In 1918, just as the agreement with the Indian Government was being finalised, he sought permission to bring his wife, Harman Kor, to Australia when he returned from India.<sup>52</sup> The officials made a number of inquiries, asking what occupation he would follow in Australia and how he planned to support his wife and make a home for her. Gola Singh understood the drift of these questions, informing them that he planned to take a farm on lease on the Clarence or Richmond Rivers: 'I do not want to work about like before.' The officials rejected his application, advising him 'to defer bringing your wife to Australia until after you have carried out your intentions of leasing a farm or until you have re-established your self in some suitable occupation that will enable you to provide a satisfactory home for your wife in Australia'.<sup>53</sup>

Sirdar Singh, a South Australian hawker and businessman and a veteran of the Indian and Australian armed forces, was more successful when he applied in 1936 to bring his wife to Australia. An inspector from the Investigation Branch of the Attorney-General's Department looked into his situation, discussing his affairs with one of his referees, a representative of G. & R. Wills, the import and

export company with which Singh dealt. The inspector concluded: 'Applicant is well-spoken and a good business man. It is unlikely that he would be unable to satisfactorily provide for his wife.'<sup>54</sup>

Otim Singh went back to India only once, in 1927. He applied for permission to bring his nephew from India as a substitute, to take his place in the store and help his wife during his absence. The policy of substitutes allowed for a man who was planning to return to India for a year or two to temporarily bring out a close relative to look after his business interests in his absence. As was normal with such applications, the Investigation Branch was asked to assess Singh's worth and his standing in the community and also whether 'his white wife would be able to manage the business during her husband's absence'. The officers made inquiries 'of principal business houses in Adelaide and at Kingscote'.<sup>55</sup> The local police at Kingscote also made inquiries and the report read, 'Otim Singh had an old established business as a General Storekeeper at Kingscote, Kangaroo Island and is well spoken of by residents of good standing there.' They also checked if Susannah Singh would be supported in her husband's absence. The implication here was that an Indian man might just leave and abandon his wife, that he might not know how to behave in an appropriately masculine manner. Something of Susannah Singh's feelings about such inquiries can be heard in the official report of her reply: 'Mrs Singh intimated that if her husband left Australia he would do so with her full knowledge and consent and that she had no reason to doubt that she would be fully provided for.'<sup>56</sup>

Most of those Indian men who lived out their days in Australia had to spend their declining years alone, dependent only on other old men who, like them, were virtually relics of a previous more relaxed immigration regime. There are a number of files that demonstrate the strict and cruel administration of the regulations, which were designed to limit the growth of non-white populations in Australia. These regulations made it impossible for such men to enjoy the comforts of fatherhood. Khair Deen was share-farming with Joe Khan on a banana farm at St Helena's, Bangalow, in New South Wales. He had been in Australia since 1891, apart from making some trips home to visit his family. He had some property in Australia: his share of the farm was worth about £100. In 1941, he applied for his son Biroo, born in 1921, to come to Australia to live with him.<sup>57</sup> His solicitors in Lismore forwarded his application, noting that he had been back to India in 1920–22 and 1935–37. His application for his son to join him was refused, as the customs officials had no record of his going to India in 1920–22. They claimed that he went to India in 1914–19 and therefore assumed that Biroo was either no longer a minor and eligible to enter Australia or that he was not Deen's son. While a number of these Indians were rather vague about the dates of their visits to India and the ages of their children, it is also possible that Deen sought to deceive the authorities so that he could have the comfort of his son's

company in his declining years and see his property in Australia passed on to his kin. Although his solicitors asked for the decision to be reconsidered, it was once more rejected. He applied again in 1942, noting that '[a]t the present time my eyesight is failing and I am finding it somewhat difficult to carry on without help'. This application also appears to have been rejected.<sup>58</sup> Deen died alone in Australia. In 1944, Biroo wrote from the Punjab seeking to know about this father's estate.

A crucial element in the foundation and maintenance of the White Australia Policy was the attitude of organised labour to 'coloured' labour. The first issue on the 'Fighting Platform' of the Australian Labor Party in the early twentieth century was 'Maintenance of a White Australia'.<sup>59</sup> British Indian workers in Australia had to contend with the view that they were taking away white men's jobs. During a 1919 industrial dispute in Queensland about the rights of Indians to work cutting sugar cane, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) secretary for far north Queensland sent a telegram to the Industrial Arbitration Court in Brisbane, pointing out that cane growers were defying the court's direction to employ white labour:

Hambledon growers engaging coloured gangs as usual. This certain [to] cause trouble as large number of men are unemployed...Number [of] coloured gangs also engaged for South Johnstone. Members [at] Johnstone refuse [to] crush cane harvested by aliens.<sup>60</sup>

In a letter of protest addressed to the British Secretary of State for India in 1934, a Brisbane man, S. W. S. Ismail, outlined the great power that the union movement had to deny him and his former compatriots work, even though they had been in Australia for up to 40 years and had children—'our unfortunate offspring'—to support. He wrote:

I beg to ask your influence about us in Australia, the hardship us Indian subjects in Australia. We are outclass still. Certain liberty we had here not half enough 100 married Indian in Australia. We having very rough passage. Even we can't get A.W. U. ticket from the Australian Workers Union. Other nation[alities] can join and can get a ticket and go where is works are valuable [available]. In our case we go to the employer for work first, they ask us, have you any ticket. That mean A.W.U. if we say no, he advice [sic] us to get a ticket and work are waiting for us. and we go to so call union, pay the money, whatever is due. They simply refuse us.<sup>61</sup>

## Good citizens

While the organised labour movement could marginalise some Indian men, making it difficult for them to earn a living, others were accepted in the wider community in other ways. Some Indian men were drawn into sections of the

Australian community as good citizens and trustworthy businessmen. Here, the emphasis was on their honesty, probity and public-spiritedness. These values were recognised and acknowledged, despite 'racial' differences. Judith Brett has argued that in the first half of the twentieth century,

citizenship was not primarily a status conferred by the state but a capacity of individuals to subordinate self-interest to the common good. This broader concept of citizenship was expressed through people's participation in the voluntary activities for the social good.<sup>62</sup>

Pam Oliver, for example, has discussed how Japanese people living in Sydney before World War II gained social acceptance through their involvement in community and voluntary activities.<sup>63</sup>

Otim Singh's life on Kangaroo Island can be understood in this light. In his obituary, his public-spiritedness was emphasised, and we read that he 'interested himself in local affairs, always being willing to assist in any movement for the good of the town and district'.<sup>64</sup> Singh took part in social activities befitting his business position. He appears to have been a member of the Freemasons in the Kingscote Lodge of the Royal Ancient Order of Buffaloes. In 1911, when the first Kangaroo Island Agricultural Show was held, he was on the committee and part of the group of leading citizens who dined with the governor, appearing in a photograph taken to commemorate the occasion.<sup>65</sup> He was also involved with the local Vigilance Committee, a group of businessmen seeking to advance the interests of the township of Kingscote. He spoke at valedictory dinners for departing bank managers and other prominent citizens.<sup>66</sup>

A close reading of the local newspaper for 1916–17 reveals that he was often a generous donor to fundraising activities. Late in 1915, therefore, he contributed prizes to the Kingscote School prize-giving. During the war years, he made contributions to the Wounded Soldiers Club and the South Australian Soldiers Fund. On New Year's Day 1916, he presented an 'ambulance car', presumably a toy, for an Art Union that raised £1.16. When some South African soldiers had a rifle-shooting match against the Kingscote Club, Singh presented £1.1 to the highest scorer in the match.<sup>67</sup> Such demonstrations of loyalty to the British Empire not only asserted his public spiritedness, they emphasised his common cause with other members of the local community.

There are other examples of Indians resident in Australia being generous philanthropists and good and respected citizens. In 1913, when Rahma Khan, a hawker from around Moama, New South Wales, was going on a visit to his homeland after some 20 years in Australia, his business colleagues wrote warm references for him. One local merchant wrote that he trusted 'as he leave these shores he will enjoy the blessing', and Mr W. Williams, a former chair of the local hospital board, noted that Khan 'has given valuable assistance to many

charitable institutions including the Echuca Hospital'.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in 1912 the Mayor of Bendigo wrote of Jumea Khan as 'a most respected citizen of this city', and two local businessmen expressed the 'hope [that] he will have a pleasant voyage to his native home "India" and a safe return'.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

The social location of British Indian men in Australia is complex and contradictory, as is their location within Australian history. They had to carefully negotiate a multiplicity of meanings around masculinity. While honouring notions of manhood learnt in their communities of origin, they might have found themselves positioned as unmanly and suspect as they plied the trade of hawker in the Australian countryside. The discourses of empire and the categorisation of certain types of Indians could disadvantage them but could also be used to claim respect within the Australian community. While the policies and administrative practices of the White Australia Policy restricted their opportunities to be husbands and fathers and denied their humanity, some could demand recognition of their rights as British subjects by emphasising Indian contributions to British military successes and could seek to be exempted from the more humiliating aspects of the procedures. While the aggressive masculinity of the organised labour movement attacked their presence in the labour market, there were other opportunities, especially for successful businessmen, to be accepted as good citizens. Fortunately, some Indian men, such as Otim Singh, were able to manipulate these contradictions and turn them to their advantage.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Burgess, H. T. 1909, *Cyclopedia of South Australia. Volume 2*, Cyclopedia Company, Adelaide, pp. 1019–20.

<sup>2</sup> See Allen, Margaret 2008 (forthcoming), 'Otim Singh in White Australia', in N. Bierbaum et al. (eds), *Something Rich and Strange*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide.

<sup>3</sup> Palfreeman, A. 1967, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Yarwood, A. T. 1967, *Asian Migration to Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Haggis, Jane 1990, 'Gendering colonialism or colonising gender?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 13, no. 1–2, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> Wollacott, Angela 2006, *Gender and Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59–73.

<sup>8</sup> Levine, Philippa 2004, 'Introduction: why gender and empire?', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, Catherine 2004, 'Of gender and empire: reflections on the nineteenth century', in *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Sinha, Mrinalini 1995, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York.

<sup>11</sup> White, Richard 1981, *Inventing Australia*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Lake, Marilyn 2003, 'On being a white man in Australia, circa 1900', in Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102. See also Allen, Margaret 2008 (forthcoming), 'Through colonial spectacles', in K. Douglas and G. Bastin (eds), *Journeying and Journalling*, Lythrum Press, Adelaide.

- <sup>14</sup> Ghosh, Durba 2005, 'National narratives and the politics of miscegenation', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, p. 32.
- <sup>15</sup> Kessinger, Tom G. 1974, *Vilatpur 1848–1968: Social and economic change in a North Indian village*, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, p. 138.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163–77.
- <sup>17</sup> McLeod, W. H. 2000, 'The first forty years of Sikh migration', *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh identity, culture and thought*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 250.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- <sup>20</sup> Kessinger, *Vilatpur 1848–1968*, p. 171.
- <sup>21</sup> Last will of Otim Singh, Probate Registry Office, Supreme Court, Adelaide, No. 48675/1927.
- <sup>22</sup> Datta, S. K. 1924, 'India and racial relationships', *Young Men of India*, vol. 35, no. 8, August.
- <sup>23</sup> See Brewster, Athol 1978, *The Indian hawker nuisance in the colony of Victoria 1890–1900*, Hons History Thesis, University of Melbourne. My thanks to Dr Andrew Brown-May and Athol Brewster for access to this thesis.
- <sup>24</sup> See reports in *Register*, (Adelaide), 22 April, 1 May, 5 and 7 July 1893.
- <sup>25</sup> *Register*, (Adelaide), 5 July 1893, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> *Richmond River Herald*, 10 January 1896, quoted in Potts, Annette 1997, "'I am a British subject, and I can go wherever the British flag flies": Indians on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales during the federation years', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 62, September, p. 105.
- <sup>27</sup> S. T. Whiddon, MP, in *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 85, p. 3962, quoted in Potts, "'I am a British subject'", pp. 105–6.
- <sup>28</sup> See Allen, 'Otim Singh in White Australia'.
- <sup>29</sup> Sinha, Mrinalini 2004, 'Nations in an imperial crucible', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, pp. 181–202, esp. p. 184.
- <sup>30</sup> Enclosure in No. 37, NSW Minister of Lands, Colonial Office (CO), 886/4/21, Public Records Office (London); Niel Nielsen wrote this minute in 1911.
- <sup>31</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; Metcalf, Thomas R. 2007, "'A well selected body of men": Sikh recruitment for colonial police and military', in Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine and Frank Trentmann (eds), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, empire and transnationalism, c 1880–1950*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, pp. 146–68; Omissi, David 1991, "'Martial race": ethnicity and security in colonial India, 1858–1939', *War and Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1–27.
- <sup>32</sup> Indeed, Metcalf (in "'A well selected body of men'") has argued that a number of Indians sought to be included in the category 'Sikh' because of the opportunities for employment it offered. Angela Woollacott (2007, 'Rose Quong becomes Chinese: an Australian in London and New York', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 129, pp. 16–31) has discussed how Rose Quong could use orientalism to make a career performing 'Chineseness'.
- <sup>33</sup> Burgess, *Cyclopaedia*, p. 1020.
- <sup>34</sup> *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 10 December 1927.
- <sup>35</sup> Green, W. C. 1961, 'The Indian hawkers of the Upper Hunter', *Score and Upper Hunter Historical Journal*, vol. 2. p. 213.
- <sup>36</sup> *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 10 December 1927.
- <sup>37</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*. Woollacott (*Gender and Empire*, p. 88) has noted: '[T]he plasticity of colonial discourse meant that other Indian men could be included in the slur.'
- <sup>38</sup> See Allen, Margaret 2006, "'The Chinaman had no fault except that they were Chinese": an Indian view of Australia in 1888', in S. K. Sareen (ed.), *Australia and India Interconnections: Identity, representation and belonging*, Mantra, New Delhi, pp. 202–17.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Chat with an Indian missionary', *Adelaide Observer*, 30 June 1888.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*; all quotations from the interview are taken from this source.
- <sup>41</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 20. On the circulation of the notion of Aryanism, see Ballantyne, Tony 2001, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Christian Weekly & Methodist Journal*, Adelaide, 29 June 1888, p. 1. Although dated after the *Observer* interview, it refers back to it.

- <sup>43</sup> Hall, Catherine 2004, 'Of gender and empire: reflections on the nineteenth century', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, pp. 46–76, esp. p. 50.
- <sup>44</sup> Allen, Margaret 2005, "'Innocents abroad" and "prohibited immigrants": Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890–1910', in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in transnational perspective*, ANU E Press, Canberra, pp. 111–24. See also Jones, Paul 1998, *Alien acts: the White Australia Policy, 1901–1939*, PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne.
- <sup>45</sup> See Day, David 1996, *Contraband and Controversy: The customs history of Australia from 1901*, AGPS, Canberra, pp. 70–1.
- <sup>46</sup> See Allen, Margaret (forthcoming), "'He has been a good citizen": Sher Mohamad and his finger prints', in Ralph Crane, Anna Johnston and C. Vijaysree (eds), *Empire Calling*.
- <sup>47</sup> Sher Mohamad, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), PP4/2 1936/801.
- <sup>48</sup> Roehumull [sic] Pamamull, Certificate of Exemption from Dictation Test, NAA, B13 1912/5677.
- <sup>49</sup> Mr and Mrs Marm Deen and Family, Readmission to Australia, NAA, B13 1922/7393.
- <sup>50</sup> Lake, 'On being a white man in Australia', p. 108.
- <sup>51</sup> Hall, 'Of gender and empire', p. 51.
- <sup>52</sup> Gola Singh, Readmission, NAA, A1 1919/14322.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Sirdar Singh, NAA, D596 1936/162.
- <sup>55</sup> Re Singh, Otim, NAA, D1915 SA 1589.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Khair Deen (Indian), Application for Admission into Commonwealth of son Beer (Biroo) Deen, NAA, SP42/2 C1945/1260.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Markus, Andrew 2003, 'Of continuities and discontinuities: reflections on a century of Australian immigration control', in Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard (eds), *Legacies of White Australia: Race, culture and nation*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, p. 186.
- <sup>60</sup> See file on Indians in Queensland 1912–23, L/E/7/1246, in File 2754, India Office Industries and Overseas Department, Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library.
- <sup>61</sup> S. W. S. Ismail, Brisbane, to Right Hon. Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, London, in L/P & J/8/189 (Collection 108 2A: Indians in Australia, 1928–1947), Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library.
- <sup>62</sup> Brett, Judith 2003, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 63–4, quoted in Oliver, Pam 2007, 'Japanese relationships in white Australia: the Sydney experience to 1941', *History Australia*, vol. 4, 1 June 2007, pp. 5.1–5.20.
- <sup>63</sup> Oliver, 'Japanese relationships in White Australia'.
- <sup>64</sup> *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 10 December 1927.
- <sup>65</sup> Photograph, 'Official Show Dinner, 1911', in Cordes, Neville 1986, *Kangaroo Island, 184 Great Years: A history in photographs, 1802–1986*, Island Press, Kangaroo Island. The original photograph is on display at Hope Cottage, National Trust Museum, Kingscote, Kangaroo Island.
- <sup>66</sup> *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 9 May 1916, p. 4; see also 13 June 1908, p. 7.
- <sup>67</sup> *Kangaroo Island Courier*, 29 April 1916, p. 5.
- <sup>68</sup> Rahmatt Khan, Application for Certificate of Exemption for Dictation Test, NAA, B13 1913/2065.
- <sup>69</sup> Jume Khan, Certificate Exempting Dictation Test, NAA, B13 1912/16684.