

plan was supposedly for the *sepoys* to rise and take control of Fort William with the aid of the agents of the King of Oudh. As it happened, the fête was cancelled on account of a heavy downpour and the plot came to nothing – if indeed it had ever existed.⁶

The extent of the *sepoys'* fears and discontent, however, cannot be overstated. An anonymous petition of March 1857, addressed to Major Matthews of the 43rd Bengal Native Infantry, but intended for Major-General Hearsey, provides a unique insight into the mindset of the native troops at Barrackpore and their interpretation of events:

The representation of the whole station is this, that we will not give up our religion. We serve for honour and religion; if we lose our religion, the Hindoo and Mahomedan religions will be destroyed. If we live, what shall we do? You are the masters of the country. The Lord Sahib has given orders, which he has received from the Company, to all commanding officers to destroy the religion of the country. We know this, as all things are being brought up by Government. The officers of the Salt Department mix up bones with the salt. The officer in charge of the ghee mixes up fat with it; this is well known. These are two matters. The third is this: that the Sahib in charge of the sugar burns up bones and mixes them in syrup the sugar is made of; this is well known – all knows it. The fourth is this: that in the country the Burra Sahibs have ordered the Rajahs, Thakurs, Zemindars, Mahajans and Ryots, all to eat together, and English bread has been sent to them; this is well known. And this is another affair, that throughout the country the wives of respectable men, in fact, all classes of Hindoos, on becoming widows, are to be married again; this is known. Therefore we consider ourselves as killed. You all obey the orders of the Company, which we all know. But a king, or any other one who acts unjustly, does not remain.⁷

The authors of the petition further stated that it was evident that a British council had decided to distribute greased cartridges to the *sepoys* in order to destroy their caste. As a result they could not use them and requested that, if the cartridges were not withdrawn, Major-General Hearsey should simply discharge the *sepoys*; they would then leave. The petition was evidently written by NCOs and privates, as it clearly stated that all except two of the Indian officers at the station were on good terms with the men. Of the two officers mentioned, one was a Christian, and therefore seen to have abandoned his religion, and the other was a *jemadar* of the 43rd BNI who had apparently refused to submit the petition to the British officers and who was therefore

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Mangal Pandey

At Barrackpore, the *sepoys'* concerns over the cartridges were undiminished. At the beginning of March, a *jemadar* of the 70th BNI allegedly encouraged another officer not to bite the cartridges and told the *sepoys* that a disturbance would soon take place.¹ Numbers of *sepoys* were furthermore assembled in the *Jemadar's* hut on the evening of 8 March, although it is uncertain whether there was anything suspicious about the meeting. It was, however, against regulations and the officer was tried by a court martial and promptly dismissed.² Two *sepoys* of the 2nd Grenadiers, who were accused of trying to instigate a mutiny in Calcutta in March, were not let off so easily – both were sentenced to fourteen years of hard labour.³ The case was reported in *The Friend of India*, which also referred to the widespread tension amongst the native troops:

There has been a rumour for some days past of an intended mutiny at Fort William. It appeared to have arisen from the sulkiness and insolence of several *sepoys* who have been placed in arrest. The *Hurkaru* [newspaper] states that the *sepoys* put forth as the excuse for their discontent, the idea that the Governor General has promised the *Home Government* to convert them *all* in three years. The garrison at Fort William has manifested considerable sympathy with the 19th and the 34th Regiments of native infantry, and there is a slight suspicion that if these regiments be punished severely, the sympathy may not only be that of feeling but of action [italics in original].⁴

The rumoured mutiny at Calcutta was supposed to have taken place on 10 March when the Maharaja Scindia, who was visiting the capital of the presidency, had invited all the leading British officials and their wives to a ball at the Botanical Gardens.⁵ While the British were thus distracted, the

regarded as an outcaste.⁹ As a result of the *Jemadar's* refusal, the petition was simply left for someone to find, but the exhortation to deliver it to Major Matthews reflected in very tangible terms the *sepoys'* concern over religious transgression: 'Whoever gets this letter must read it to the Major as it is written. If he is a Hindoo and does not, his crime will be equal to the slaughter of a lakh of cows; and if a Mussulman, as though he had eaten pig; and if a European, must read it to the Native officers, and if he does not, his going to church will be of no use, and be a crime.'¹⁰ In this petition all the different rumours that had troubled the *sepoys* for months came together and gave form and substance to the idea of a fully fledged British conspiracy to ruin the religion of all Indians. The bone-dust and greased cartridges, the *chapattis* and the remarriage of widows were all part of the Company's elaborate plan. The *sepoys* had supposedly exposed this attempt to undermine their religion and now made their British superiors aware of their knowledge, suggesting that they should as a result simply be discharged. The authors of the petition were never identified, but they were likely to belong to the 43rd BNI, which nevertheless remained loyal to the British throughout the tumultuous events of the following months.

On 18 March, Hearsey paraded the entire brigade at Barrackpore, and warned them 'of such characters, who endeavour to take the bread from the mouths of good *sepoys* by making them the instruments of their bad designs.'¹¹ In an elaboration of the by now well-established ritual of displaying samples of the cartridges, the Major-General sought to allay the *sepoys'* worries as far as the paper was concerned. Hearsey thus demonstrated how ordinary writing paper, commonly employed by natives, had a glossy appearance similar to the cartridges, although it was obviously quite inoffensive. The *sepoys* were even encouraged to visit the paper mill at Serampore and see for themselves how the paper was manufactured. Hearsey further harangued the troops for continuing to suspect the cartridges when he had, on several occasions, proved that they had no legitimate grounds for concern. The 19th BNI at Berhampore had unfortunately been 'misled by designing men' and had as a result mutinied. Now they were to be marched to Barrackpore and would be disbanded in front of all the regiments – including European ones. Mindful of the fears of the *sepoys*, Hearsey added, 'I inform you of this beforehand, because your enemies are trying to make you believe that European troops with cavalry and artillery will be sent here suddenly to attack you; these and such lies are fabricated and rumoured amongst you to cause trouble. That no European or other troops would come to Barrackpore until ordered to

do so by me and that I would give [you] timely intelligence of their coming here.'¹² Contrary to his intent, Hearsey may actually have aggravated the situation by confirming the various rumours that had already reached the *sepoys*. Among the *sepoys* lined up for parade, one in particular seems to have been alarmed by the Major-General's speech; this was Mangal Pandey, a Brahmin *sepoy* of the 34th BNI.¹³

The *sepoys'* fear of European troops was evidently no trifling matter, and even the men of the 19th BNI on their way to Barrackpore were concerned by the reports that 'two batteries of guns and Europeans were to be brought out against them.'¹⁴ During the afternoon of 29 March, two days before the 19th BNI was to arrive, fifty British soldiers of HM 53rd Foot came by steamer from Calcutta and disembarked at the Flag-staff Ghat just outside the station at Barrackpore.¹⁵ Mangal Pandey was in his hut in the lines, cleaning his musket, when he heard of the European troops a little after 4 p.m. Affected by the general nervousness among the *sepoys*, he was also inebriated from taking *bhang*, and when the news reached him he was seized by panic.¹⁶ Wearing his uniform jacket, cap, and *dhoti*, Mangal Pandey grabbed his musket and sword, and ran to the parade ground near the quarter-guard building. Clearly agitated, he called out to his comrades as he was loading his rifle, 'Come out, you *bhainchutetes*, the Europeans are here. From biting these cartridges, we shall become infidels. Get ready, turn out all of you.'¹⁷

Mangal Pandey tried to force a drummer to sound the alarm, threatening him with his musket, but the drummer was too scared to act. *Sepoys* in their civilian clothes were slowly drawn to the parade ground by the shouting, and Mangal aimed his musket at one, saying: 'Why are you not getting ready? It is for your religion.'¹⁸ Inside the quarter-guard, the officer in command, *Jemadar* Isuree Pandey of the 34th BNI, immediately sent two men off to inform the sergeant-major and field officer of the regiment. The *Jemadar* was clearly frightened by the prospect of having to face the agitated *sepoy*. In a state of panic, Isuree Pandey took cover behind a tree next to the building and ordered his men to close the doors of the nearby *kotes*, yelling to the drummer 'not to sound the assembly or he would be blown away from a gun.'¹⁹ Informed by the *Naik*, Sergeant-Major Hewson armed only with a sword arrived at the scene and Mangal Pandey immediately fired a shot at him but missed.²⁰ The guards were all taking cover behind the quarter-guard, and Hewson asked the *Jemadar* why he had not seized the *sepoy*. Isuree Pandey answered, 'What can I do; my naik is gone to the adjutant; the havildar is gone to the field officer; am I to take him myself?'²¹ The *Havildar* now returned,

having informed Captain Drury of what was going on, and the Captain had ordered for Mangal Pandey to be arrested. Hewson turned to the *Jemadar*, saying, 'Do you hear?'²¹ It was said that Mangal Pandey had taken *bhang* and the frightened Isuree Pandey did not answer the Sergeant-Major but kept repeating 'the man is mad, don't go near him.'²²

Hewson ordered the guards to load and fall in, which a few of them did, but some of the *sepoys* grumbled and did not react, and all the while the *Jemadar* remained indecisive. From time to time, Hewson looked out from behind the cover of the quarter-guard, and Mangal Pandey, who trained his musket at him several times, yelled: 'Get out of the way or I will shoot you.'²³ By this time, the parade ground was crowded with unarmed *sepoys* who were passively watching the spectacle. Mangal Pandey was still walking back and forth in front of the quarter-guard in a state of extreme excitement, haranguing his comrades: 'Come out, men; come out and join me - You sent me out here, why don't you follow me.'²⁴ A *Jemadar*, Gunness Lalla, tried to reason with the *sepoys*, telling him to lay down his arms: 'Haven't you heard that you are not to bite the cartridges? Don't make a disturbance.'²⁵

Summoned by the *Naik*, Adjutant Baugh now rode up to the quarter-guard, calling out: 'Where is he? Where is he?' Hewson tried to warn him. 'Sir, ride to the right for your life, the *sepoys* will fire at you.'²⁶ The warning, however, came too late, and Mangal Pandey fired and wounded the horse in the leg, bringing down both horse and rider. Once Baugh had disentangled himself, he got up and, seeing that Mangal Pandey was reloading his musket, the officer charged forward with a sword and one of his pistols in his hands. Hewson followed suit and, ordering the guard to follow him, he too advanced on the lone *sepoys*. As Baugh got closer to Mangal Pandey, he fired his pistol but missed and threw the now-useless one-shot weapon at the *sepoys*, who ducked the missile. The two officers both closed in on Mangal Pandey at the same time. Hewson made a cut at the *sepoys*, who parried the blow with his rifle, and the Sergeant-Major's sword broke at the hilt. Mangal Pandey seized his musket in his left hand and unsheathed his *tulwar*, first feigning a lunge at Hewson but then striking Baugh and completely disabling his left hand. The *sepoys* then lashed out at Hewson, who received a wound to the head. As the three men were engaged in the desperate struggle, an unarmed Muslim *sepoys* named Shaik Pultoo came to the officers' assistance and grabbed Mangal Pandey around the waist. Mangal Pandey was still fighting, and Hewson was fending off lunges even as Shaik Pultoo tried to restrain the *sepoys*. At this point, some of the guards came up and stepped in on the side

of Mangal Pandey. As Hewson was facing Mangal Pandey, he was struck at the back of his head with a rifle butt by one of the guards, and the officer fell to the ground. Getting up again, Hewson seized Mangal Pandey by the collar and struck him several times with the hilt of his broken sword. Mangal Pandey wounded the officer a second time on the head and Hewson was again knocked down from behind. Once on the ground, Hewson received several blows from the *sepoys*' rifle butts and he lost consciousness. Meanwhile, Baugh had been wounded a second time by Mangal Pandey, this time in the throat, and he, too, was struck from behind by the guards. Shaik Pultoo managed to pull Mangal Pandey away from Baugh, who then made his retreat. When Hewson came to, he 'saw the adjutant walking away, covered with blood,'²⁷ and both officers, heavily wounded, scrambled to safety.²⁸ Some of the many unarmed *sepoys* who had been passively looking on now interfered. As Shaik Pultoo later recalled, he 'had got Mungul Pandey down; a great number of the *sepoys*, in undress, were assembled around us, they abused me, saying "why don't you let him go," and struck me on the back and on the head with stones and shoes. I then let him go: the adjutant had got out of the way in the meantime.'²⁹ The Muslim *sepoys* received a light wound from Mangal Pandey as he let go of him.

While the struggle was going on, *Jemadar* Isuree Pandey was frantically trying to retain control of the *sepoys* inside the quarter-guard. There had been at least one shot fired from the quarter-guard, aimed at Baugh and Hewson, and a number of the guards had run out and assisted Mangal Pandey as he was fighting the two British officers, striking them with their rifle butts. Shaik Pultoo even said that someone from the quarter-guard had threatened to shoot him if did not release his hold on Mangal Pandey. The *Jemadar* did not know whom amongst the guard he could rely on, and when one of the guards sought to help the officers, Isuree Pandey asked, 'why are you going towards the sergeant-major?'³⁰ In the confusion and excitement, the *Jemadar* lost his head and actually prevented four of his men from assisting Baugh and Hewson, saying: 'Don't go unless I give you orders. Am I not in command of the guard?'³¹ One of the *sepoys* who had left the quarter-guard and struck Baugh and Hewson returned with blood on his pantaloons, and the *Jemadar* sent him away to change his clothes.³² Without a commanding officer to take charge, the *Jemadar* feared the consequences, and as the four guards wanted to assist Shaik Pultoo in seizing Mangal Pandey, Isuree Pandey again held them back: 'If you kill that *sepoys* you will be hung; and if he kills you, what shall I do?'³³

When Hewson walked away from the fight, wounded and covered in blood, Isuree left the quarter-guard and ran after him, asking who had struck him, 'Mungul or another *sepoys*?' Hewson cried out, 'You have acted shamefully, and I will place you under arrest.'³⁴ The officer reached out for the *Jemadar's* sword, but the latter retreated back to the quarter-guard. Here he vented his frustration on the *sepoys*, who were assembled inside the house, saying: 'You could have prevented this, if you had liked; you have connived at it?'³⁵ Realising that the blame for the guards' attack on Hewson and Baugh would ultimately fall on him, *Jemadar* Isuree ran off and reported the situation to the officer of the day at his nearby bungalow. The officer, however, ordered the *Jemadar* to return immediately to the quarter-guard, which was his responsibility. On his return, Isuree ordered the guard to load and got four of the *sepoys* ready.

After Shaik Pultoo had released Mangal Pandey, the latter picked up his musket and was loading it, warning that 'If any one comes near me I will shoot him.'³⁶ Isuree Pandey later described how he ventured out in front of the quarter-guard, when Mangal Pandey 'loaded his musket and aimed at me. I then retreated, as I thought my sword was of the same kind as the sergeant-major's, which had broken.'³⁷ Mangal Pandey had come out of the struggle unscathed, but no less agitated. He continued his tirade, calling out to the assembled *sepoys*, now numbering several hundred: 'The magazine has come with the Europeans, and the Europeans are here to make us bite the new cartridges, and destroy our religion.'³⁸

When the commander of the 34th BNI, Colonel Wheler, finally arrived at the scene along with Captain Drury, he immediately ordered the guard to load their arms, which a few of them did 'rather sluggishly'.³⁹ Wheler repeated the order and told Isuree Pandey to get the guards to seize Mangal Pandey. The *Jemadar*, who had not regained his composure, hesitated and said to Captain Drury that 'It's no use, the men won't go; even if you go they won't follow you; they would take the man's part.'⁴⁰ The Colonel insisted, and after he repeated the order several times, some of the guards advanced slowly with Isuree Pandey in front. As soon as they realised that neither of the officers was with them, they stopped. 'What! Are not the colonel and Captain Drury coming?'⁴¹ The *Jemadar*, who was none too happy about leading the men against Mangal Pandey, ran back to Wheler to inform him that the men would not follow orders, and they were called back. One of the *sepoys* told Wheler that Mangal Pandey was a Brahmin 'and that no one would hurt him',⁴² and the Colonel realised that further attempts were useless. Drury too was not

certain of how the guard would act 'from their sulky and reluctant manner, also from their natural disinclination to kill a man of his caste, and also from the fear of opinion of their comrades in the lines, as it is possible to say, there being a very large proportion of Brahmans in the regiment, who were approving or otherwise of what the man was doing'.⁴³ The Captain eventually went to get a rifle to shoot Mangal Pandey himself.

It was now 5.10 p.m. and as the situation at the quarter-guard had reached a deadlock, the entire station was in a stir: 'all the *sepoys* of the brigade were turning out on their parade, and men were running in that direction from all quarters of the cantonment.'⁴⁴ Major-General Hearsey half-expected the native regiments to rise in mutiny, and he made preparations for the British troops and officers to assemble at the Governor-General's house and put up some form of defence. Hearsey, accompanied by his two officer sons, then galloped down to the parade ground of the 34th BNI. There they met with a scene of complete confusion: 'the whole of the front of the bells-of-arms crowded with *sepoys* in their undress and unarmed, the native officers of the 43rd Regiment, Native Infantry, with them, and endeavouring to keep them in order. The men of the 34th Regiment, Native Infantry, had also turned out unarmed to the right and rear of their quarter-guard.'⁴⁵

Ignoring the warnings that Mangal Pandey's musket was loaded, Hearsey ordered Isuree Pandey to follow him with the guard. The hesitant *Jemadar* simply responded, 'What does it matter – *kyapurwa* – he will only shoot some of us.'⁴⁶ The Major-General had drawn his pistol and was waving it at Isuree Pandey as he repeated his order, and the *Jemadar* eventually commanded the ten *sepoys* of the guard to load their muskets. Still on horseback, Hearsey advanced on Mangal Pandey, followed by the guard and a group of British officers on foot. As they closed in on the *sepoys*, one of Hearsey's sons called out, 'Father, he is taking aim at you, look out sharp.'⁴⁷ The Major-General replied, 'If I fall John, rush upon him, and put him to death.'⁴⁸ Mangal Pandey fired a shot, which missed its mark but stopped the advance of the guard for a moment. Mangal Pandey quickly loaded his musket, but realised that there was no way out and that he was about to be overpowered. The *sepoys* sat down and turned the muzzle against his own chest, pulling the trigger with his toe. The shot, however, did not kill Mangal Pandey, but 'made a deep graze, ripping up the muscles of the chest, shoulder and neck, and he fell prostrate'. As he lay on the ground, 'shivering and convulsed', Mangal Pandey's uniform jacket caught on fire from the muzzle-flash, but it was extinguished by Isuree Pandey and a *sepoys* of the

guard who rushed up.⁴⁹ They also removed the bloody *tulwar* that Mangal Pandey had wielded with such deadly effect. The heavily wounded *sepoys* was then conveyed to the hospital of the 34th BNI. Thus ended the first bloody incident of 1857.

Mangal Pandey survived his wounds and was treated in the regimental hospital. Later he was moved to a tent where the guards kept a close watch on him, as reported in the newspapers:

The man is in chains and it is needless to say will be hanged. He is however a very high caste Brahmin, and has numbers of friends and relatives in the corps, who will regard his having met such an ignominious fate as almost equivalent to loss of caste in their own cases. They have therefore, it is said, resolved to storm the guard tent and either rescue or kill the prisoner ... As to the prisoner himself, he is as dogged and stubborn as can well be conceived. He has resolutely refused food in the hope of starving himself to death, and there was a talk of the stomach pump being, *a la Palmer*, brought into requisition in his case. He also kept tampering with his wound in the hope that it may prove fatal.⁵⁰

During his subsequent trial, Mangal Pandey claimed that he had acted entirely on his own and had been under the influence of *bhang*: 'I was not aware at the time of what I was doing.'⁵¹ The proceedings failed to bring any further information to light. On 8 April, he was hanged in front of all the Indian and European troops at Barrackpore.⁵² An eyewitness account of the execution was later published in the papers:

At about a quarter to 6 a.m. Mungul Pandey was brought on the ground in a cart with the mehters⁵³ who had been procured to execute the sentence, escorted by a party of the Body Guard and HM 53rd Regiment. The cart was at once drawn up under the gallows, and the rope adjusted round the criminal's neck, when the cart was drawn away and the man left hanging. He appeared to suffer a good deal judging from the apparently convulsive throes. The General then addressed the Native Regiments, when they were marched up to the front of the gallows to see the man hanging and afterwards returned to their lines.

The man, it seems, had previously refused to make any disclosures, which it was expected might have been elicited, so there remained no alternative but to carry out the sentence.

We are told that the spectacle had a most disheartening effect upon the *sepoys* regiments upon the ground. The 34th were completely cowed ...⁵⁴

As the only soldier of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry, *Jemadar* Isuree Pandey was also tried for his part in the events of 29 March. According to Isuree himself, he had done everything in his power on that afternoon and he simply stated: 'Some of the *sepoys* on the guard were young, and there were no non-commissioned officers at the moment with me.'⁵⁵ While *Jemadar* Isuree was clearly not up to the task of commanding the quarter-guard that day, he did not collude with Mangal Pandey, apart perhaps from a more abstract sense of caste affinity. His first action had been to inform the British officers of what was going on, and he did the same after the guards knocked down Hewson and Baugh. *Jemadar* Isuree Pandey had no control over the situation. When he kept the *sepoys* of the guard from assisting the two officers, it was an ill-judged attempt to retain some sort of order. After all, it was *sepoys* of the guard who had turned against Hewson and Baugh, and Isuree Pandey had no idea how the men under his command would act once they left the quarter-guard. Moreover, the *Jemadar* was not the type of officer to lead by example, and in a tumultuous situation this had disastrous consequences. On 13 April 1857, Isuree Pandey was sentenced to death for failing to take adequate measures to seize Mangal Pandey, for having prevented *sepoys* from assisting Hewson and Baugh, and lastly for not having followed the orders to advance.⁵⁶ After some bureaucratic delays, the *Jemadar* was hanged on 21 April.⁵⁷ Rather than the defiant speech of a patriotic martyr, the final words of Isuree Pandey were a perfect example of scaffold contrition:

Sepoys! Listen to me. I have been a traitor to a good Government. I am about to be punished for my great sins. I am about to be hanged, and I deserve my punishment. *Sepoys!* Obey your officers, for they are your rightful and just rulers, or else you will like me be brought to the gallows. *Sepoys!* Obey your officers. Listen to them and not to evil advisers; I listened to evil advisers, and you see what I am come to. I call upon God to bless the Governor General, all the great gentlemen, the General and all the *sahib logue* [British] here present – Seeta Ram! Seeta Ram! Seeta Ram!⁵⁸

Such a speech was allowed, if not prompted, by the authorities, as it acknowledged the justness of the execution. It also served as an example to the *sepoys* who witnessed this demonstration of the power of the Government. There is little in his actions on 29 March which indicates that Isuree Pandey had actually 'listened to evil advisers', but this was the message that officers like Major-General Hearsey were keen to impress on the *sepoys*.

Mangal Pandey's one-man mutiny was not the result of a carefully planned plot. Like earlier panics, it reflected the general anxiety and sense of despair amongst the *sepoys*. The troops of the 34th BNI had explicitly been told that European soldiers would be coming to Barrackpore to disband the 19th BNI, but this did not put their fears to rest. Mangal Pandey was recorded as having called out, 'You have incited me to do this, and now you *bhainchutes*, you will not join me', and this has been seen by some as proof that he was set up, that he was merely a pawn in a much wider conspiracy.⁵⁹ Another, and perhaps more obvious, interpretation of Mangal Pandey's statements would be that he was referring to the general talk and rumours that had been circulating amongst the *sepoys*. It is known that there had been talks in the 34th BNI of rising against their officers and offering resistance before European troops forced the *sepoys* to bite the greased cartridges. When he heard that European troops had arrived at Barrackpore, Mangal Pandey had, in his drug-induced state of mind, simply acted on that impulse. Once he had taken the initiative and done what everybody had been talking about doing, he berated his comrades for not joining him. But that afternoon, Mangal Pandey's fear was not shared by the hundreds of *sepoys* who stood by as he tried to raise the alarm. In contrast with the men of the 19th BNI a month before, none of Mangal Pandey's comrades panicked or tried to arm themselves. The majority of the *sepoys* seem to have regarded his actions as those of a madman, some saying simply that 'He is mad, he has taken *bhang* to excess',⁶⁰ while a native officer of the 34th BNI told a friend, 'I don't know what has come over Mungul Pandey'.⁶¹

The actions of the *sepoys* of the guard clearly indicate that there was some sympathy with Mangal Pandey, but it seems to have been related to different issues. When a British officer of the 34th BNI reproached the men who stood idly by as their officer was being attacked, 'they all seemed to regard the charge as a frivolous one and some of them even laughed at it'.⁶² Adjutant Baugh was in fact extremely unpopular with the *sepoys* of his regiment, as he had refused to prevent European troops from bathing in a tank used by the *sepoys*, which polluted the tank.⁶³ Baugh had furthermore been the cause of the removal of the late *Havildar-Major*, and this resentment seems to have held back the *sepoys* on 29 February when they were called upon to seize Mangal Pandey.⁶⁴ As had been the case at Barrackpore in 1824 and Berhampore on 26 February, personal issues between the *sepoys* and their officers thus played an unexpected role. In that connection it is notable that Mangal Pandey, a Brahmin *sepoys*, was being attacked by two British officers,

with the aid of a Muslim *sepoys*. The *sepoys* of the guard who struck Baugh and Hewson was a Brahmin, while two Sikh members of the guard sought to come to the officers' assistance, but were held back by the Brahmin Isuree Pandey. What determined the actions of each individual *sepoys* at Barrackpore on 29 March could thus very well have been determined by factors entirely unrelated to Mangal Pandey's fears of the approach of European troops and the polluted cartridges.

'Those wicked men who have misled and ruined us'

With order restored, Major-General Hearsey could prepare for the arrival of the 19th BNI, which was to be disbanded at Barrackpore on 31 March. Aside from Mangal Pandey's attack on his officers, and the *sepoys'* general passivity, the British had good reason to be worried, and the arrival of the mutinous regiment was awaited with great trepidation. Just a few days before, on 27 March, Colonel Abbott at the nearby depot of Ishapore had received a stark warning:

An intelligent native came today to warn me that we must stand upon our guard on the arrival of the 19th Regt at Barrackpore. For that the Sipahis of Barrackpore are determined that if the Govt attempts to disarm the 19th Regt they will oppose it looking first to their officers (I supposed him to mean by this that they would settle them) & then to their own defence.

That not only all the regiments of Barrackpore are engaged in this determination but that they have corresponded with the whole native army & that all the 70 Regiments (as he calls them) are agreed to stand by one another. That they will not suffer the 19th to be disarmed. That they will march in our service whenever ordered, but will on no account enter any vessel lest the Govt make away with them.

That there is much going on which they will on no account reveal to him or to any person not in the plot.⁶⁵

When Abbott had asked why the *sepoys* were prepared to risk everything by turning against the Government, his informant replied 'that all the wealthy natives of Calcutta have promised to support any who lose service in this

cause. That they, the sipahis, have told him in the hope that he may be able to furnish them with gunpowder from the agency. That the Bungalows were burnt lately to keep up the spirits of the men.⁶⁶ The Colonel placed great trust in the information, and wrote a hastily composed letter to the army staff at Calcutta, warning them of what might happen when the 19th BNI arrived at Barrackpore. To Abbott it seemed as if the *sepoys* were planning to use the disbandment as an occasion to test the strength of the British, and if possible to provoke a response that might result in the mutiny of native regiments all over India. The Colonel, however, was also aware that he might be considered an alarmist:

I am aware that it is very difficult for persons dwelling in Calcutta to believe in the existence of such plots. I myself whenever I enter that city are [*sic*] tempted to regard them as a dream. But I have from the first understood this mutiny to be only part of an extensive design. I have from the first understood that the appropriation of Oude would band together against us every native prince in India. The Oude King was the submissive of all the dependent princes. The crime for which he forfeited his sovereignty was that of which every native prince is conscious: he misgoverned his dominion. I have also always foreseen that so soon as the freedom of the press began to be understood by the natives it would be impossible to rule India with a native army. I presume that no argument can be necessary to prove anything so self-evident and I have been sure that the instant war was declared with Russia, her secret agents would be sent to stir up the native princes and to corrupt the army. For it is thus and not by the bayonet that Russia makes war. The native press since the seizure of Oude has understood its own power and no doubt native papers stirring up the people and army are in circulation throughout India unless we suppose the King of Oude to be asleep ... For all these reasons I would earnestly recommend that the Govt should be prepared for something much more dangerous than a military mutiny.⁶⁷

Abbott was particularly worried by the fact that no *sepoys* had so far come forward to provide information to the British, which suggested that they were dealing with no ordinary mutiny: 'The ultimate design of the conspirators are [*sic*] probably known to a very limited number. The bulk of the army are acting upon the terror so systematically inspired into their minds by the agents of the conspirators.' Worst of all, he argued, the British had themselves contributed to this situation by prohibiting various indigenous practices such

as polygamy, which united all Indians against the Government.⁶⁸ Faced with mutinous troops, the British could not afford to take any chances when the time came:

At the disbanding of the 19th we should be so strong as to render resistance quite hopeless even if the whole native force combines. If [we are] powerful and determined, I doubt whether any but a few of the more desperate will stir. I would guard against treating a whole corps as mutineers because one or two may fire their pieces. I think it certain that those who live with ropes round their necks will go all lengths in order to incite others.

I think that the danger of alarming the force into open mutiny by precautions should give way in this peculiar case to the greater peril of inviting resistance by an insufficient array of force. For I hold it certain that in the latter case we shall have to shed blood freely.⁶⁹

Abbott ended his letter on a sombre note of warning:

There is a possibility undoubtedly that the information just now communicated to me may have been communicated with a view to deter the Government from disbanding the 19th Regiment. This I do not think to be the case however. The 19th mutinied at the instigation of the mutineers at Barrackpore. According to Hindoo prejudice and their code of honour they are bound to support the 19th and nothing but the certainty of instant destruction as the consequence will prevent them. I have always understood this.⁷⁰

The letter must have confirmed Major-General Hearsey's worst expectations. Barrackpore had, after all, been chosen as the most suitable place to disband the 19th BNI for exactly this reason, but now it seemed as if the British were themselves holding the spark to the powder-barrel. As a last-minute precaution, Hearsey appears to have sent for the Governor-General's bodyguard in order to augment the two British regiments that had already been ordered to attend the disbandment. On the morning of 31 March, Major-General Hearsey personally rode out to meet the 19th BNI as they finally arrived at Barrackpore. It was later reported that there had in fact been an attempt to coordinate a mutiny and that 'in the evening before the 19th regiment marched into Barrackpore, they received a requisition from certain men of the 34th to murder their officers, and to march into the station two hours before the time ordered, when the 34th would at once join them. To

this the 19th *sepoys* replied that they had no complaint against their officers, and that they would do nothing of the kind.⁷¹

The 19th BNI marched into Barrackpore in perfect order, and was immediately drawn up on the parade ground, where the regiment was officially to be disbanded. Apart from the four Indian regiments of the station, there were of course the British troops at the ready. One newspaper described how: 'The bayonets of two Royal Regiments, and the sabres of the Body Guard on the parades of Barrackpore were calculated to awaken vivid reminiscences of Paget [the famous British surgeon].'⁷² The men of the 19th BNI were given their last pay and informed that transportation had been arranged for their baggage for the journeys back to their respective villages. According to Hearsey, the *sepoys* of the 19th BNI 'loudly bewailed their fate, many men saying the regiment had been misled ... by the 34th Regiment, Native Infantry, on which corps they vowed vengeance'.⁷³ A *sepoym* of the 19th BNI supposedly asked his officer: 'Give us back our arms for ten minutes before we go; and leave us alone with the 34th to settle our account with them.'⁷⁴ This seems to confirm that the rumours regarding the cartridges had first been communicated to the 19th BNI by the detachments of the 34th BNI, which were at Berhampore prior to the outbreak there. The men of the 19th BNI may have felt a sense of betrayal; they had refused to accept what they believed to be the polluting cartridges. Now they were suffering the consequences, while the 34th BNI stood idly by on the parade ground, witnesses to their disgrace. Before the proceedings were over, Hearsey addressed the entire brigade, including the 2nd, 34th, 43rd and 70th BNI, and assured them that the Government had no interest in interfering with their religion, and that their lenience towards the 19th BNI was proof of this.⁷⁵ In the event, nothing further happened, and the troops quietly dispersed once the ceremony was over. Whether the warnings had been exaggerated or the presence of British troops really did avert a mutiny will never be known.

On the same day as the regiment was disbanded, a section of the men of the 19th BNI submitted yet another petition to Hearsey, in which they stated that if they were pardoned, they would go wherever they were ordered. The petition referred very briefly to the 'advice of some wicked men', which had been the cause of the outbreak of 26 February.⁷⁶ Hearsey immediately replied that if the petitioners would provide information on those who were behind the mutiny, he might be able to intercede on their behalf.⁷⁷ The petitioners responded with the following account:

We received your honor's answer to our petition, dated 31st March, yesterday evening, regarding our giving up the names and rank of those wicked men who have misled and ruined us, and thoroughly understand the good advice you have written on our behalf. Alas, if we had known the names and rank of those who have misled us, we should have handed them up immediately before this misfortune overwhelmed us.

Firstly – The men who are acquainted with the names and ranks of those instigators are at enmity with us and friendly with them, because, being young, they are independent of the Hon'ble Company's service, and they began with this mutiny with a view to our ruin only, and this is the reason they do not tell us.

Secondly – On the night that this conspiracy took place, we left them and went to our colonel. By so doing we placed ourselves in opposition to them, neither did they consult us nor tell us their plot; even now they do not trust us. When this is the case, they will never assist us in our miserable state by giving up their names and rank. In our opinion the guard of the 34th was the cause of the mutiny. But we cannot recognise any of the guards who kindled it, that we may prove it against them. We have given you a true statement. You can use it as you like, with a view to our long service and old age, to keep us from starving. Hoping for a speedy answer. We shall ever pray.⁷⁸

The petitioners evidently consisted of the native officers and veterans among the *sepoys* who maintained the desire to serve under the British. The petition thus reflects a significant point relating to the general sentiments of the *sepoys* in the aggrieved regiments during the early months of 1857: a considerable number of them, especially amongst the officers, were not actively involved in the disturbances, but instead provided information to their superiors or acted as mediators between the panicking *sepoys* and the British. This account of the so-called instigators implied that they were younger men who had not been long in the employment of the Company, and therefore did not feel the same sense of duty towards their regiment. Older *sepoys* and native officers, on the other hand, were entirely dependent on their position in the army and the pension provided for them when they retired. Accordingly there seems to be an issue of market forces and opportunities of employment – older *sepoys* had invested their entire careers in service with the Company, while the younger *sepoys* had not. The division between the *sepoys* was between those who still had faith in the paternalistic Company, and those who did not, and this seemed to be a generational issue. It is also noteworthy that

the older *sepoys* of the 19th BNI emphasised the role of the 34th as the main agitators in their petition.⁷⁹

Hearsey's curt reply to the second petition was that, as he had previously stated, he could not help them unless they provided information about the 'wicked instigators'.⁸⁰ The disbanded *sepoys* of the 19th BNI eventually returned to their respective villages in the districts to the north-west of Barrackpore. Although these men were thought to be 'orderly, respectful and submissive', the authorities were still worried what further trouble they might cause once they left the supervision of British officers.⁸¹ It was thus suggested that the local authorities and police be warned 'to obviate the possible evil effect of so many discharged men being for a time at large in the neighbourhood of the presidency'.⁸² Lord Canning personally ordered Mr Ward of the Thagi and Dakaiti Department to have native spies follow the disbanded *sepoys*, but the attempt to gather further information was unsuccessful.⁸³ The British were clearly not satisfied that the mutiny of the 19th BNI had been spontaneous and they wanted to establish whether the Hindu or Muslim *sepoys* were most disaffected.

In the event, the official concerns were not unfounded. At Cawnpore, disbanded men of the 19th BNI were later heard telling locals that 'we shall quarrel with Government presently; for new cartridges prepared with cows' and pigs' fat are going to be served out, and the *sepoys* refuse to receive them'.⁸⁴ According to another native account, the men of the 19th BNI stated, 'We have lost our bread, but have held fast to our religion. The Government wanted us to bite the cartridges, and thus lose our caste, but we would not do it'.⁸⁵ Whether the *sepoys* were actively trying to sow discontent or were merely voicing their anger is unclear; what is, however, certain is the fact that the disbandment of *sepoys* in the spring of 1857 led to a further dissemination of fears and resentment against the British Government.

The events of the preceding months had also brought the loyalty of the *sepoys* at Barrackpore into question, especially the 34th BNI. After the trials of Mangal Pandey and Isuree Pandey, a court of inquiry was accordingly set up to determine the state of the regiment. Most of the British officers of the 34th BNI had actually noticed a lack of respect and sullen attitude on the part of the *sepoys*, and the Sergeant-Major remarked that 'he did not know what had come over the regiment'.⁸⁶ Adjutant Baugh thought the change in the *sepoys* could be traced back to December and January, when the order arrived for the formation of new rifle depots and the introduction of the new cartridges.⁸⁷ During the inquiry, the failed attempt to seize Fort

William in January and more details of the nightly meetings in the lines also came to light, and Colonel Wheler spoke of a 'smothered feeling in the regiment unknown to myself and the European officers'.⁸⁸ The most damning finding of the inquiry was the officers' complete lack of faith in the Hindu *sepoys* of the regiment, as opposed to the trust extended to the Sikhs and Muslims, who were considered not to have been affected by the rumours of the cartridges.⁸⁹ Asked whether his lack of trust applied to all castes, one captain replied: 'No; it extends to the Brahmins only. I think the men of other castes are inclined to be good and true, but nearly all the native influence in the regiment is in the hands of the Brahmins, who have also a numerical superiority'.⁹⁰ What eventually determined the fate of the 34th BNI, however, was the fact that several hundred of its *sepoys* had watched as two of their officers had been wounded by Mangal Pandey. On 6 May 1857, just over a month after the 19th BNI had been disbanded at Barrackpore, seven companies of the 34th BNI were also disbanded, with the exception of Shaik Pultoo and three companies that had not been present at the station on 29 March.⁹¹ The disbandment proceeded without any trouble, but had severe repercussions for the commanding officers of the two regiments; both Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell and Colonel Wheler were declared unfit to command new regiments in place of the 19th and 34th BNI.⁹² Part of the blame for the mutiny at Berhampore and the Mangal Pandey incident was thus placed on the respective officers.

At the time of their dismissal, further evidence of the seditious activities of the 34th BNI also came to light. A *sepoys* of the 37th BNI, who was on leave at Benares, took a letter, supposedly from a native officer of the 34th BNI, to the Raja of Rewa 'offering the support of 2,000 men if the Raja would rise against the English'.⁹³ The Raja, however, seized the *sepoys* and sent him to the army station at Nagode where the hapless conspirator pretended to be mad. The officer of the 34th BNI was promptly arrested at Barrackpore, and it was reported in the newspapers that the Government 'has made a discovery of some papers belonging to the Subedar-Major of the 34th NI. They consist of a correspondence with, it is said, all or nearly all the native regiments in Bengal, and the contents disclose a general conspiracy to rise at an appointed time, and murder all the Europeans. The *chupattae* and other mysteries of the same kind are now said to be cleared up'.⁹⁴ This illicit correspondence served to spread discontent further amongst the *sepoys* at distant stations as well as mobilising solidarity and establishing networks of resistance. 'By degrees it became known in native society which regiments were disaffected,'

according to Mainodin, 'and it began to be inculcated as a creed that every Purbeah must withdraw his friendship from the foreigner; must ignore his authority, and overthrow his rule. Although these sentiments had become national, the methods to be employed in carrying them into action were but indistinctly known'⁹⁵ Initially limited to the *sepoys* stationed in the vicinity of Calcutta, the disaffection had now spread far and wide,⁹⁶ and from Bengal to Punjab, trouble was stirring amongst the native troops.

As a reward for his assistance to the officers during the struggle, Shaik Pultoo had been promoted to *havildar*, a rank equal to sergeant, and Major-General Hearsey personally recommended him for the Order of Merit.⁹⁷ The distinction was conferred upon Shaik Pultoo the day after Mangal Pandey was executed, but the good fortune of the new *Havildar* was not to last. Shaik Pultoo's promotion and distinction were a direct taunt to the disbanded *sepoys* of the 34th BNI, who were not prepared to be so dismissed while a loyal *sepo*y reaped the benefits of siding with the British. Days before the 34th BNI was disbanded, Shaik Pultoo was lured to an isolated spot in the cantonment at Barrackpore and murdered by his former comrades.⁹⁸