

# Deoli Camp: An Oral History of Chinese Indians from 1962 to 1966

by

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## Abstract

China and India claimed two territories along their borders on the Himalayas: Aksai Chin in the west and the North-East Frontier Agency in the east. The border dispute escalated and, on October 20, 1962, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) opened fire on the two fronts and advanced into the disputed territories. One month later, on November 21, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew behind its disputed line of control. In response, the Indian government arrested over 2,000 Chinese living in India and interned them in Deoli, Rajasthan. When the Chinese were released between 1964 and 1966, they found their properties sold off by the Indian government. Many left India and immigrated to Canada. I interviewed four Indian-born Chinese who were interned and who now live in the Greater Toronto Area. I recorded their accounts of life in Deoli Detention Camp in Rajasthan.

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My supervisor, Dr. Guy Allen, steered me from straying into the abstract. He encouraged me to focus on the details I care about. He reminded me of the rule of expressive writing: good writers express their research in "language that belongs to them" and not in "unfamiliar, complicated and ornate language" because I am writing a paper. He guided me in avoiding the academic cliché and to write with clarity, directness and simplicity.

Dr. Gary Knowles took time from his busy schedule and agreed to be the second reader.

Robert, my husband, put up with the clutter. For the past two years, as I pounded on the keyboard at the computer, I often heard a bang and a muffled "damn" from the living room, where piles of books and heaps of papers were laid out on the floor. I knew by the sound and the curse that Robert had stumbled into furniture when he tried to walk around the books and papers.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The Himalayas at the northern area of the Indian subcontinent form a natural barrier between modern day China and India. For the past 3,000 years only traders, religious men and adventurers travelled through the passes, mostly in caravans, carrying goods along the Silk Road. The mountain ranges and high altitude plains presented a desolate and barren landscape, where few cared to live. Small groups ruled by chieftains farmed in the sheltered valleys and nomads migrated to the higher slopes in the summer to graze their livestock.

The European powers jostled for control of Central Asia when the British moved into the Indian subcontinent in the eighteenth century. The British Raj tried to solidify its northern boundaries with China and failed. They passed the problem to India and Pakistan when they gained their independence in 1947. The border dispute intensified when China completed the Sinkiang-Tibet Highway in 1958, grading 204 km through the disputed area in Aksai Chin, at the northwestern area.

On October 20, 1962, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into the disputed territory on the eastern front, at the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), and the western front at Aksai Chin. One month later, on November 21, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew behind its disputed line of control on the eastern and western fronts.

Both governments regard the month-long boundary war as the "1962 Sino-Indian Incident."

After suffering a humiliating defeat, India enacted anti-Chinese laws to ban ethnic Chinese living in India from government jobs, corralled Chinese in the towns and cities where they lived, required Chinese to apply for permits to travel from their towns or cities of residences, and mandated Chinese to report to government agencies for registrations and reclassifications. The Indian government closed Chinese language schools, newspapers and organizations that supported the People's Republic of China (PRC), and deported Chinese whom the Indian government regarded as PRC supporters.

The Indian government arrested over 2,000 Chinese, mostly from towns on the foothills of the Himalayas, and detained them at Deoli, Rajasthan. The last detainees were released in 1967, five years after the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

## Chapter 2

### Historical background

Numerous statements, notes and letters fluttered between the governments of China and India. The statement of October 24, 1962, from the Chinese government stands out: “The Sino-Indian boundary question is a question left over by history.”

Although the statement simplified the dispute somewhat, the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident did fester from the weight of over 100 years of British Raj border strategies, China and the Tibet issues, and the countries’ internal policies.

### Chinese immigration in India

The Chinese immigration to India began in the 1770s. The British allowed only men into British India, and the Chinese population dwindled and blended into the Indian society. In the late 1800s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in India, and this time they came with women and children.

Most of these Chinese immigrants came from Guangdong Province in southern China: Cantonese from the Pearl Delta areas, Toi-san from Sai-yup County, and the Hakka from Moi-Yan County. A small number came from Fubei.

The Cantonese and Toi-sanese immigrants in India settled mainly in or near tea plantations or tea factories in the foothills of the Himalayas. In Makum, a town in northeastern India, the Chinese worked in carpentry shops. They made furniture, skids and boxes for tea exports. The prosperous Chinatown in Makum had a Chinese language school, Chinese restaurants, grocery stores and shoe shops, and a Chinese club with swimming pool.

Most of the immigrants in India were the Hakka, who spoke a dialect closer to Mandarin than Cantonese. In China, they had migrated south from northern China for 500 or 600 years until they reached Guangdong Province. The illiterate Hakka peasants left few records of their wanderings. Some settled on uninhabited land along their migration path and the rest moved on

until they crowded onto the southwestern foothills. Many immigrated to south Asian regions such as Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and India.

The Hakka arrived by boat in Calcutta. They found a niche in the leather industry and most went into leather tanning and shoe making businesses. My Hakka parents immigrated to Calcutta in the 1920s. My father joined his uncle in Calcutta, learned to make men's shoes and started his own shoe making business. My father owned three shoe shops when he died in 1955. In the 1950s, Calcutta had five Chinese language schools, four large Chinese temples and the main street in Chinatown was named after the founder of the Republic of China: Sun Yat-sen. Chinese clubs flourished in the Chinatown of Calcutta, packed with Chinese, many of whom did not speak English or any Indian languages.

In 1949, the People's Republic of China, under Mao Tse-tung, took over China. India recognized Mao's government as the legitimate government of China. The Chinese had immigrated to India on Nationalist passports. The Chinese in India split into two camps. Half the Chinese in India exchanged their Nationalist passports for People's Republic of China passports, and half applied to the Indian government for stateless alien's identity papers.

## The political history of the Sino-Indian border

When the East India Company's rule of the Indian subcontinent officially began in 1757, the other European powers looked towards Central Asia to expand their imperial empires. Tsar Paul I of Russia sent 22,000 Cossacks across unmapped Central Asia towards India in 1801.

In 1858, the British Crown took control of British India.

In 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany came to the throne. He sent in German officers to encourage revolutions in British India and Tsarist Central Asia. His political strategy culminated in WWI.

On August 31, 1907, Britain and Russia signed an agreement at the *Anglo-Russian Convention*. In this agreement, Britain and Russia acknowledged China's suzerainty over Tibet, and that they

would not enter into any negotiations with Tibet except through China. In 1921, Britain and the now Soviet Union jointly repudiated the agreement.

Over the next 40 years, the border dispute narrowed down to two areas: Aksai Chin in the north-west and North-East Frontier Agency in the north-east.

#### The Johnson and Macartney-MacDonald Lines (Western Sector)

Aksai Chin, a sparsely populated, uninhabited and uninhabitable desert the size of Switzerland, has no permanent settlement. Aksai Chin contains 34,000 square km of salt flat and salt lakes, rises 4,800 m to 5,500 m above sea level, receives almost no rainfall, and sits at the intersection of Kashmir (claimed by both India and Pakistan), Sinjiang (China) and Tibet (China). Aksai Chin is rich in jade, gold, soda and minerals. The Chinese had easy access through Sinkiang Province, but the Karakorum Mountains blocked India's access to Aksai Chin.

In 1865, the British surveyor W. H. Johnson created the Johnson Line, a boundary that showed Aksai Chin as British Indian territory.

In 1892, China erected border markers at Karakorum Pass, which put Aksai Chin in Chinese territory. In order to place China as a buffer zone between British India and Russia, Sir George Macartney, the British consulate-general in Kashgar, and Sir Claude Maude MacDonald, proposed a border boundary. This boundary placed Aksai Chin in Chinese territory. China and British India adopted this proposal. The boundary was called the Macartney-MacDonald Line.

In 1918, after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the British Raj resurrected the Johnson Line, and reclaimed Aksai Chin as British Indian territory.

China disagreed.

#### The McMahon Line (Eastern Sector)

The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) nestles on the foothills on the Himalayas. The NEFA borders on northeastern Burma, eastern Bhutan and southern China (Tibet). Monsoon rain drenches the 145,000-square km area, creating a tropical and subtropical climate and heavily forested terrain. Compared to the lowlands of India, the NEFA is sparsely populated, with tribal

groups related to Tibetans, Burmese and Bhutanese. NEFA became a state of India in 1986 and renamed Arunachal Pradesh.

In 1913, the British Raj created the McMahon Line at the Simla Conference, placing Tibet as a buffer zone between China and British India. The conference, held in Simla, India, opened on October 6, 1913, with three main participants: Henry McMahon, the British secretary in India, Lonchen Shatra, the chief minister of the Tibetan government, and Chen I-fan, a diplomat for the Republic of China. Chen I-fan protested the presence of Lonchen Shatra at the conference. China saw Tibet as part of China. McMahon disagreed and drew up a draft treaty calling Tibet an independent state. Chen I-fan withdrew on April 27, 1914. McMahon drew a line, the McMahon Line, on a surveyor's map of northeastern India and Tibet, ceding the NEFA to India. McMahon and Lonchen Shatra signed the agreement on July 3, 1914.

After 1921, the Raj tabled British India's northern boundary issue and China's suzerainty of Tibet until 1933, when the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, died. Tibetans regarded the Dalai Lama, in his successive reincarnations, as Buddhisattva Avalokiteshvara. In Buddhism, buddhisattvas are enlightened beings who are sworn to stay on earth until all human beings are enlightened and have entered Nirvana. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama was found and installed in Lhasa.

In 1937, the Raj revisited British India's northern buffer zone with China. The Foreign Secretary of British India, Olaf Caroe, resurrected the Simla Conference. The Raj then re-established the McMahon Line as the Assam-Himalaya border in 1943. (Hoffmann, 2006; Maxwell, 2003)

In 1947, India and Pakistan gained their independence from Britain.

In 1949, Mao Tse-tung overthrew the Nationalist government in China.

In 1950, the Chinese PLA took over Tibet.

In 1951, India annexed the town and monastery of Twang, north of the McMahon Line.

In 1956, the Chinese Frontier Guards and more than 3,000 civilian workers started the construction of the 1,200-km Sinkiang-Tibet Highway, a road which runs from western China to Tibet. The highway ranged 204 km into Aksai Chin. Both India and China claimed Aksai Chin as their territory.

In 1958, the Chinese government in Beijing sent an invitation to the Indian ambassador to attend an inaugural ceremony to mark the completion of the Chinese Sinjiang-Tibet Highway. The Indian ambassador did not attend.

In the summer of 1958, the Indian government sent two patrols into Aksai Chin to investigate. The Chinese army captured one of the Indian patrols. The second Indian patrol returned and reported that the Chinese road cut 204 km into Aksai Chin.

On October 18, 1958, the Indian government sent a note to the Chinese government, formally claiming the area crossed by the Sinjiang-Tibet Highway in Aksai Chin as Indian territory.

On November 3, 1958, China repudiated India's claim, and complained about the unlawful intrusion of Indian-armed personnel into China's western territory.

On December 14, 1958, Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of India, wrote to Chou En-lai, the premier of China, disputing China's claim on Aksai Chin. He also asked Chou to honour the McMahon Line as the eastern boundary between China and India.

On January 23, 1959, Chou En-lai responded in a letter to Nehru, disagreeing with India's claim on their boundary: Aksai Chin in the west and the McMahon Line in the east.

On March 19, 1959, a Tibetan rebel group attacked the Chinese PLA garrison stationed at Lhasa. The PLA counter-attacked and put down the rebellion in three days. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatos, escaped to India (with the help of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Chinese claimed) and was granted political asylum.

On March 22, 1959, Nehru reinstated India's claims on Aksai Chin and the McMahon Line.

On August 25, 1959, Indian soldiers moved north of the McMahon Line, clashed with the Chinese soldiers, and retreated back to the south of the McMahon Line.

On October, 20, 1959, an Indian patrol in the Aksai Chin clashed with a Chinese patrol.

From 1960-1962, India and China deployed troops into the North-East Frontier Agency region, along the McMahon Line. They also increased their military might in Aksai Chin.

## 1962 Sino-Indian Incident

On October 20, 1962, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into the disputed territory on the eastern front, at the NEFA, and the western front at Aksai Chin.

At NEFA, the PLA garrisoned at Thagla Ridge, across from the Indian army garrison at Tsangdhar Ridge. In the valley below and between the two armies, Rongla, the Indian 7 Brigade Headquarters, spread along the Namka Chu River. At 4:45 a.m. on October 20, 1962, the PLA shelled the Indian positions. By that evening, the PLA had wiped out India's 7 Brigade and captured their commander (Liu, 1959). The Indian soldiers retreated. Lakshman Singh, a junior officer stationed at Rongla headquarters, writes:

*My last look at the till now Bde (Brigade) HQ location, that we were abandoning, was that of a solitary goat bleating loudly, scared to death due to the deafening sounds of the constant bombardment, tied to a tree. It had traveled all the way from Gauhati by air, parachuted at Tsangdhar, brought down to Rongla possibly on some one's shoulders, as meat on hoof for the troops. The poor goat was now being left behind by us to welcome the Chinese.*

(Singh, 2003)

In the Western Sector, the Chinese PLA captured the Indian outposts in Aksai Chin and, by November 15, had advanced 800 km into Aksai Chin.

In the month-long conflict, the Chinese killed 1,383 and captured 3,968 Indian soldiers. The Indian army reported 1,696 soldiers missing. The Indian army had not captured a single Chinese soldier. The Chinese did not release their casualty figures. The Chinese released the captured Indian soldiers by May of 1962. (Liu, 1959)

On November 21, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew behind its disputed line of control on both fronts.

The month-long military conflict became known as the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

As of 2010, China and India still have not settled their border disputes.

## The history of Deoli Camp

In 1855, the East India Company, founded in 1600 by England to pursue trade in the East Indies, had established a military cantonment (residential barracks adjacent to a military camp) in Deoli, Rajasthan, to train Indians for the British Indian Army. The army consisted of British officers and Indian soldiers. The British government took over direct rule of British India in 1858 and expanded the British Indian Army.

When the British Raj arrested 500 Bengali rebels in 1931, the army converted the Deoli camp into a detention centre and incarcerated the rebels there. During WWII, the British interned Japanese, German and Italian prisoners of war there, too. They also interned civilians whose countries were allied with the Japanese. On January 25, 1942, Thailand declared war on Britain. In India, the British arrested Thai nationals in India and detained them at the Deoli camp until the war ended in 1945. (Kusalasaya, 1999)

The British Raj closed Deoli Detention Camp on February 28, 1947. The Indian government reopened Deoli camp on January 1, 1948, to house 10,000 Indians from Pakistan displaced by the partition of India and Pakistan. When the last of these refugees left Deoli, the Indian government returned the camp to military use.

In 1962, the Indian government changed Deoli back to a detention camp and interned over 2,000 Chinese who lived in India.

## Fallout in the Chinese communities in India

After the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident, Indian government publications filled with nationalistic rhetoric:

*From every part of the country, and from all ranks of people, came assurances of the people's will to fight the aggressor...There was not one man or one woman in the country not impelled by this surging desire to serve the motherland...*

*...A seven-year old boy handed over his gold ring to the principal of his school in Delhi with a letter: 'I hear that China-men have attacked our country. I want to defeat the enemy. Please send my ring to the Prime Minister.'*

And,

*...A school teacher in a convent in Kashmir was explaining to her class why this year the Diwali festival should be celebrated in an austere fashion, when a little girl got up to tell her, 'I know. Mother has said that father is fighting at the front. That is why we won't have any lamp burning in our home.' There was a hush in the class. The teacher fought and failed to hold back her tears. The next day she volunteered for front-line nursing.*

*...The heroic reaction of the women of India to the Chinese attack deserves special mention. They had a great part in our struggle for freedom, and they are playing an equal outstanding part in the struggle to retain that freedom.*

(Banerjee, 2007, quoted from GOI, MIBPD 1962: 26-36)

The Indian government cast the Chinese government as the villain and a threat to India's newly-found independence and Indian national security. By extension, the Chinese living in India were portrayed as villains too and not to be trusted. Whipped up by the national furor, mainstream Indians ostracized and sometime brutalized Chinese residents and attacked and destroyed their homes and businesses. The Indian authorities closed Chinese language schools and newspapers and Chinese organizations that leaned towards support for Mao Tse-tung. Schools, clubs and newspapers that favored Chang Kai-shek (Taiwan) were allowed to stay open. These schools and clubs added portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and Indian flags beside Sun Yet-sen and twelve-pointed star Chinese Nationalist flags. (Li, 2006)

The Indian government enacted anti-Chinese laws and sanctioned anti-Chinese actions by mainstream Indians. The laws barred Chinese living in India from Indian government jobs, corralled Chinese in the cities they lived in, and required the Chinese to report and apply for permission to travel from their home cities. They also required the Chinese to report for "registration and classification" and to apply and renew residency permits with the Indian government in order to stay in India. For those Chinese whom the Indian government regarded as

Communist sympathizers, India enacted other laws to deport them, regardless of their citizenship. The Indian government arrested and jailed those Chinese who were served with forced deportation papers but who could not raise travelling expenses. The Indian government also formalized the large-scale detention of over 2,000 Chinese residents at Deoli Detention Camp. (Banerjee, 2007)

Indian soldiers rounded up whole families of Chinese in the Hill Stations, so named because the Raj used these high altitude towns to escape the summer heat. Most Chinese residents lived in towns near the eastern border, such as Makum, Shillong and Darjeeling. The Indian army housed the detained Chinese in temporary detention camps, usually in local jails. In Makum, the Chinese were held in a cowshed.

*“They picked up all the Indian Chinese early one morning in November 1962 and packed us in a cowshed,” reminisces Wang Shing Tung, former Makum schoolmaster Wang Shu Shin’s son, who was then seven years old. “The police said they’d jail us for ‘safety’. No one was allowed to carry any money, food, clothes or ornaments.” Fortunes amassed over four generations — the Chinese had come as tea garden workers but some had become successful businessmen — were decimated in a single day.*

(Chaudhuri, 2010)

Indian soldiers also went into boarding schools in the Hill Stations and gathered students with Chinese family names. In Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay, and in other large cities, Indian officials suspected some Chinese of being Communist sympathizers or spies for the Chinese government. They were either deported or jailed.

In December of 1962, the Indian government gathered the Chinese from all the jails and cowsheds and marched them onto a train to Deoli, Rajasthan.

*It took seven days for them to reach Deoli in a heavily guarded train that didn’t stop at any station, lest the ‘enemies’ should escape. Half-cooked khichdi (rice, lentil and vegetables simmered in a pot) was served on the way, but some of the*

*elderly Chinese couldn't take the trauma and died before they reached their destination.*

(Chaudhuri, 2010)

Chinese residents not interned faced state-sanctioned harassments and persecutions. Their shops and businesses were boycotted or ransacked, their homes broken in to and their family members harassed or beaten. Many Chinese emigrated from India. From 1962 to 1967, more than 7,000 Chinese left the country that been their home.

The Indian army released the last Chinese from Deoli camp in 1967. When the Chinese returned to their homes they found their houses occupied by Indians, their businesses taken over by Indians and their properties auctioned off by the Indian government. Many of these dispossessed Chinese went to China. Some stayed in their hometown before the forced internment. Those who stayed borrowed from their relatives to start over. In the Hill Stations, the Indian government required the Chinese to report daily to police stations. Those who did not were arrested. Many Chinese left the northern border towns for Calcutta. They feared that if they had stayed, they would be arrested if the border dispute erupted again.

In Calcutta, the anti-Chinese furor petered out after 1968 when a coalition of six Communist parties took power in West Bengal. Mao and Ho Chi Minh became heroes. The U.S. Consulate sprawled Harrington Street. The West Bengal government renamed Harrington Street to Ho Chi Minh Street. Life for the Chinese in Calcutta changed for the better.

Since the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident, many of the Chinese from India have immigrated to North America, Europe, Australia and other parts of Asia. A group of Chinese from India settled in Markham and Scarborough, Ontario, on the northeastern fringe of the Greater Toronto Area.

I am one of them.

## Chapter 3

### Chinese-Indians in Canada

After immigrating to Canada I busied myself with work and studies, and the memory of 1962 Sino-Indian Incident faded until, in 2006, I published *The Palm Leaf Fan*, a book of creative nonfiction about growing up in Calcutta. In the book, I included one story about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. Two years later, the Asia Society Indian Centre in Mumbai invited me to read from *The Palm Leaf Fan* at universities, cultural centers and libraries in Mumbai, Delhi and Calcutta.

I read my story, “Rally at the Ochterlony Monument,” to audiences at universities in Delhi and Calcutta. The story describes the confusion among the Chinese in Calcutta during the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. The story shows how my family and other Chinese coped with our hostile and often violent Indian neighbours. After readings, some members of the audiences asked, “Did these things really happen?” “Was there really a concentration camp?” “I have never heard about this.”

Later that year, I read “Rally at the Ochterlony Monument” to an audience in a crowded room at the Toronto Hakka Conference. Vivienne Poy, an appointed Senator in the Upper House of the Canadian Parliament, sat in the front row.

I explained the plight of the Hakka Chinese in Calcutta. I explained the rivalry between the Cantonese and Hakka. I told them about the morning market at Tiretti Bazaar, where my mother and many widows sold bean sprouts and crepes filled with sugared coconut flakes. I told them about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. I drew the map of India in the air. I painted the places along the border that both India and China claimed. I spread my hands in front of me to show the size of the packs of food and clothing my mother put together for my brother and me, in case we were interned or deported. I hunched my shoulders when I spoke of soldiers who came at midnight to take Chinese families to the detention camp. I told the audience about the Hakka who, when released from the detention camp, found themselves penniless and homeless. I told the audience about how the Indian government had sold Chinese properties and I told the audience of how these Hakka either left India or borrowed from friends and relatives to restart their businesses.

I waited to field questions from the audience.

Senator Poy asked, “Is there documentary proof that the detention of the Chinese people in India really happened?”

One man stood up and yelled, “That land belongs to China, and India was wrong to take it.”  
“Hear, hear!” his friends shouted.

“But...,” I stammered. “It was the Chinese residents in India who suffered. It was the Chinese who were put into concentration camps. It was the Chinese who lost their homes, shops and factories. It was the Chinese who were jailed. Which country owns those lands is not the issue.”

A Hakka man came up to me after the reading. Tsang emigrated from Calcutta 25 years ago. “My family and I were arrested and interned in Deoli,” Tsang said. “It was a really bad time for us. My family lost everything my grandfather and father worked hard for. I am glad you are telling our stories. Nobody in India knows about the Deoli Detention Camp but the Chinese from India and nobody cares. Are you going to write more about the Chinese who were interned in Deoli?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “I will write more about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. I will.”

## Chapter 4

### Oral History

In 2007, seeking a topic for my Master of Arts thesis, I decided to write about the Chinese interned in Deoli Detention Camp after the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident who had immigrated to the Toronto area.

Professor Guy Allen, my thesis supervisor, suggested an oral history approach to my project. “You want to tell stories of those who were interned during the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. Oral history will allow you to do that.”

According to the Canadian Oral History Association (COHA), oral history is defined as: “...recorded interviews with individuals about the past or first-person reminiscences.” Webster’s dictionary defines oral history as: “Historical information that is obtained in interviews with persons who have led significant lives and that is usually tape-recorded.” The best definition comes from Wikipedia: “Contemporary oral history involves recording or transcribing eyewitness accounts of historical events.”

The historian Jan Vansina separates “second-hand, hearsay reports of events” from “first-hand eye-witness reports.” Second-hand reports should be treated as legends, less reliable than first-hand reports. Historically, oral history had been regarded not as an academic research tool, but as oral tradition transmitted from person to person in a culture with no written records. Oral history is often used for biographies of prominent persons. (Vansina, 1965)

In 1946, oral history achieved status as an academic research tool when Dr. David P. Boder, a psychology professor, interviewed Holocaust survivors. In 1967, Harvard University accepted an oral history memoir as a doctoral dissertation. Other researchers followed and, by the 1970s, “Oral History emerged as a discipline.” (Mason and Starr, 1979)

As oral history gained prominence in academia, scholars started to see oral history as a “verbal testimony...made by any one informant concerning a single series of events,” and “the informant who transmits it plays an important role.” (Vansina, 1965) Many of the Chinese Indians who lived through the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident were interned in the Deoli Detention Camp. Oral history can tell their individual stories and their experiences in their voices. The individual

voices can reveal details of everyday life of the Chinese in the camp, details of interactions between detainees and between the detainees and camp guards.

*Oral History will “draw attention toward the small, regular, ritualistic practices of everyday life, the techniques of an oral history interview can dig up messy issues about meaning and personal experience.”*

Basmajian, 2009

Before deciding on oral history for my research project, I asked, “How can I be objective? How will I prevent interpreting the interviewees’ accounts? I lived through the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. I came from the same community in India and I speak the same language, Hakka. How can I not superimpose my experiences, thoughts and interpretations on the interviewees? After all, I am the researcher. I transcribe the interviews, I edit the transcriptions and I decide what to include and what to leave out.” As the researcher Soon Nam Kim points out:

*... an oral history is a written document structured primarily by the researchers’ purposes, offering the researchers’ interpretations, registered in the researchers’ voice in the final product. However hard they try to avoid it, by engaging in an oral history research, they are inevitably implicated in the process of speaking for others and potentially silencing them. (Kim, 2008)*

I thought of Dr. Allen’s advice on oral history: “Respect your participants. Really listen to what they say. Do not judge or evaluate their accounts. Be honest in your paper.”

I decided to use oral history for my master’s thesis.

## Chapter 5

### Looking for Deoli Internees in Toronto

At a family gathering I asked my maternal aunt, Aunty Hsiu, for names of Chinese-Indian Canadians who were interned in Deoli and who now live in the Greater Toronto Area. Aunty Hsiu said, “My friend Aunty Liu, you know Aunty Liu? She used to live near New Market in Calcutta?”

I shook my head.

“Well, Aunty Liu knows someone who knows a lot of Hakka senior citizens in Scarborough. Come, come, meet Aunty Liu.” Aunty Hsiu grabbed my arm and dragged me into the family room.

“Hey, Ah Liu,” Aunty Hsiu said to a grey-haired woman sitting on a couch. Aunty Liu looked up from the television, where a Cantonese sitcom blared. “This is my clever niece. She’s the writer I told you about. She wants to ask you a question.”

“Hello, Aunty Liu,” I smiled. “Sorry to bother you.”

“No problem. No problem. It’s a rerun anyways. So you are the clever one.”

“No, not really,” I shook my head.

“What do you want to know?” Aunty Liu’s eyes darted back to the television screen.

“Aunty Hsiu says you know a lot of people. I want to write about the *Tong* (Chinese) people who were arrested in 1962. The Tong people put in Deoli Detention Camp. I want to talk to someone who was interned in Deoli. Do you know of anyone? Any internee who now lives in Toronto?”

Aunty Liu frowned. “I don’t know of anyone. Oh, yes. My friend, Mrs. Cheung’s grandson, does something for a group of old people from India. I am sure there are many Deoli internees there.” Aunty Liu pushed herself up from the couch. She rushed into the kitchen. I followed.

Aunty Liu handed me over to Aunty Cheung and darted back to the family room. Aunty Cheung sat around the kitchen table with three other Hakka aunties. Plates of chips, BBQ pork buns and roasted sunflower seeds scattered on the table.

“Yes, yes, my grandson, Chris, organized *Hakka Helping Hands*,” Aunty Cheung said. “It’s a mostly Chinese-Indian Canadian senior citizens’ club. The Hakka seniors get together once a month for lunch, to share news and to celebrate birthdays.” Aunty Cheung gave me Chris’ telephone number.

I contacted Chris. Chris invited me to the monthly *Hakka Helping Hands* luncheon and birthday celebration in Scarborough.

At the meeting, I introduced myself to three elderly Hakka men: the president, vice president and treasurer of *Hakka Helping Hands*.

“I am Ah Chu Tai Sau’s daughter,” I said.

“Hmm. I don’t think I know her,” Elder Wong, the president, said.

“She sold bean sprouts in Tiretti Bazaar,” I added.

Elder Wong looked at Elder Chen and Elder Lee. They shook their heads.

“My eldest brother, Li Ping Yuan, owned a shop on Bentinck Street.”

“Oh, yes, you are Li Ping Yuan’s sister?”

“I am the youngest.”

“Yes, yes. I know Ping Yuan. Nice fellow.”

The meeting started. Elder Wong talked about what he had read from the *Sing Tao* Chinese language newspaper. “The government in Taiwan sent a trade delegation to China and some people are against it. Such ignorant people. Taiwan and China are one country, the same people. It is time that they talked.” Elder Wong lifted *Sing Tao* from the table and read the article out loud. Then he introduced me to the audience. “We have a writer from our community. She wrote about the difficulties we had during the China-India war. How we suffered. We are very proud to

have a writer in our community, even though she is a woman. Now, she wants to write more about how we suffered during the war. So anyone here who was arrested and put in the concentration camp should talk to her.”

“We should be careful,” Elder Liu cut in. “We should not tell others about the little things, the things that outsiders should not know.”

Mrs. Lim, who looked after the food, tiptoed in and whispered to Elder Wong, “Ah, the food is here.” Elder Wong beamed. “Before we bring the food in, whose birthday is in June? Now, don’t be shy. We have a big birthday cake.”

Two women by the door raised their hands.

“Good, good. What are your names? Yes, we have two birthdays, Chung tai tai (Mrs. Chung) and Shiu tai tai (Mrs. Shiu). Let’s wish them a happy birthday.”

We sang Happy Birthday in Mandarin.

Mrs. Lim wheeled in a cart. She heaved a large aluminum tray from the cart to the table and peeled back the foil from stir-fried BBQ pork noodles. Her assistants pulled out bags of paper plates and wrapped chopsticks and napkins from three Loblaws shopping bags. Mrs. Lim arranged pan-fried dumplings, stir-fried vegetables and lotus seed buns on both sides of the noodles.

Chairs scraped and seniors surged around the food.

I stood by the food table and talked to people who queued for a slice of birthday cake. A woman told me about the annual meeting of the *1962 Deoli Concentration Camp Survivors and Friends*. “They take up a whole restaurant. The Hakka come from all over Canada and some from the U.S.” She named a woman, Ming, who had lived near me in Chattawalla Gully in Calcutta and gave me Ming’s telephone number.

I ran into Ming 20 years ago at a restaurant in Toronto. We met often for lunch and Ming told me stories about her internment in Deoli Concentration Camp in the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. Ming had a simple storytelling style that drew me in. I had wanted to write a novel about the

Chinese detained in Deoli, based on Ming's narratives. But we lost touch and I had not seen or spoken to Ming in over 10 years. I wanted Ming as one of my interviewees.

I called Ming. We spoke for over an hour. Ming told me more stories about Deoli and I found them as riveting as I remembered from my lunches with her years ago. I told her about my thesis. Ming agreed to take part in the project.

I asked her about others who were interned. She invited me to the annual meeting of the *1962 Deoli Concentration Camp Survivors and Friends* luncheon meeting on June 28, 2009. It was held at the Desi Cheena Chinese Restaurant in Scarborough. Andy Hsieh, the president, spoke of the hardship experienced by the detainees. He spoke of how the memory lingered after all these years, and he spoke of the need for a memorial site for the Chinese internees in the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. He introduced me to the audience. I spoke about my project and asked for volunteers.

The women I spoke with told me they had a terrible experience in the camp, but they refused to participate in my project. One woman said, "It is still too painful to talk about my experience."

I spoke to Chen, a shy, soft-spoken man with salt-and-pepper hair, and he gave me some fascinating details of his three-year internment. I asked him if he would like to take part in my project. He agreed.

By the end of the meeting I had three participants. Two backed out a month later. One said, "My two sisters still live in Calcutta. They were interned back in 1962. If I tell my story and the Indian government hears about it, I will get my sisters and their families into trouble." The other person said, "After thinking about it, I am not sure I want to talk about my experience in Deoli camp after all."

At the first meeting with Chen, I sat across from him at a table furthest from the service counter at Tim Hortons. Chen read the Informed Consent Letter. He looked up and frowned.

"Something in the letter you don't agree with? I can change the wording, if you like," I said in Hakka.

“No, no. It is okay. But, you see, well, I would like to have my two friends here as well. You see, they are older than me, and they speak good English.”

Chen preferred to speak in Hakka. He told me his English was not good.

“I don’t know,” I frowned. “I told my professor I would interview two people.”

Chen folded and unfolded the corner of the Informed Consent Letter. “But you will like them. I really would like them to talk to you. Hua is older than me, you see, and Liu remembers things a lot better than me. And they are involved with the *1962 Deoli Concentration Camp Survivors and Friends*.”

“I would love to have them in my project,” I said.

“I will sign the letter when they are both here,” Chen said. “They are great. You will see.”

So Hua, Ming, Chen and Liu became my subjects for these interviews about the Chinese experience in the Deoli camp.

Hua is Ming’s brother. I had concerns about having two family members in a project with four participants. I had feared Hua might duplicate Ming’s stories. Since I had originally planned to interview two participants, I reasoned that if Hua’s account paralleled closely to Ming’s, I could combine the two accounts.

Ming preferred to meet at her home in Scarborough, and Hua, Chen and Liu chose Tim Hortons on Ellesmere Road in Scarborough. Chen told me he and his friends usually met in that Tim Hortons every Saturday.

## Chapter 6

### The interviews

At the first meeting with Liu, Hua and Chang at Tim Hortons, I asked them to tell their stories one person at a time. When I transcribed this meeting, I found I had interrupted them often, and when Liu or Chang corrected or added to Hua's story, I had stopped them. Liu, Hua and Chang's stories flowed sluggishly, with many pauses as they thought before they spoke. My field notes indicated the three participants were hesitant and uncomfortable.

I remembered Dexter's advice on interviews:

*To reduce interviewing to a set of techniques is, like one person put it, like reducing courtship to a formula... We should truly play it by ear. One of the things we emphasized was to let the interviewee talk. It's his show. (Dexter, 1970)*

At subsequent meetings, I let them talk. Liu, Hua and Chen laughed, argued, gestured and interrupted each other. Hua and Liu chortled and slapped their knees as Chen sang songs from Bollywood movies, the very songs from the movies shown in Deoli camp. Chen elbowed Hua as Liu spoke of girls admiring Hua in his pressed shirts and pants. The three of them constantly corrected and added details to each other's accounts. At one point Chang's hand swept across the table and toppled his cup of coffee onto a pile of paper. I snatched my tape recorder out of the way of the spreading brown pool.

At the beginning of the meeting I tried to aim the tiny mic toward the person speaking but soon gave up, as I found myself concentrating on who spoke instead of what was said. Fidgeting with the tape recorder also distracted the three speakers. So I concentrated on the speakers. The tape on my recorder ran out without my noticing. I reconstructed details of the part of the interview not recorded, from memory and field notes and telephone calls to Hua, Liu and Chen.

At one of the meetings I brought three copies of Rafeeq Ellias' *Chinatown Kolkata* to the meeting. Chang, Hua and Liu turned the pages of the pictorial book on the Chinese in Calcutta, pointed at the pictures, nudged each other and talked all at the same time. "Isn't that old Shen's son?" "My mother sent me to this store to buy something or the other, oh, so many times." "Where is this Chinese restaurant in Chattawalla Gully? I don't remember that." "Tiretti Bazaar!

Remember the Shanghai man's steamed onion and pork buns? I can still taste it." When they closed the book and started their narratives, their eyes often looked down at the book.

Liu tended to interject his friends' narratives with, "The Indians treated us very badly" and "The Indians treat us inhumanely." After one such interruption, Liu leaned towards Chen, his eyes darted towards a table near us and whispered, "Do you think they are listening to us?"

We froze and stared at the two South Asian men at the next table. They were in their 20s and had bagels and coffees in front of them. They wore dark blue police-like uniforms with "Security" on badges attached to the shoulders of their uniforms. They stared back in surprise, one of them with his bagel halfway to his mouth.

I interviewed Ming at her home in Scarborough. When I listened to our first interview I found I had interrupted frequently and cut into Ming's narrative flow. I also prompted Ming unnecessarily. In the next interview, I just listened and was so engaged by Ming's accounts I did not notice the tape on the recorder had run out. That night I typed what I remembered of her narrative. Then I called her and told her about my problem. I read what I had written from memory. Ming added details I had missed.

Of the four interviewees, I found Liu the most reluctant to give details of his experience. He responded to requests for details with, "The Indian government treated us badly." He would not tell me how many siblings he has. He evaded questions about his life.

"What did you do when you came to Canada?"

"I am retired now."

"Yes, but what did you do before your retirement?"

"Nothing much. A little this and a little that."

Hua and Chen told me Liu opened a restaurant in London, Ontario, when he immigrated to Canada.

I asked Liu if he wanted to back out of the project. He said he wanted to contribute to Chen and Hua's stories. So Chen and Hua talked and Liu interjected comments or added details to his friends' narratives.

After I transcribed the interviews, I found Liu's reticent account contrasted well with the other three accounts. His narrative added another dimension to the project. I decided to include Liu's account in this thesis.

I changed the names of the four interviewees for the purpose of this project. All four participants have relatives or friends living in India and fear there could be adverse consequences to their relatives and friends if their identities are known.

## Chapter 7

### Transcriptions and translations

The interview tapes from Chen, Liu and Hua took two to three times longer to transcribe than Ming's did. I taped Ming's accounts in her living room. The only background noise was the quiet hum of the fridge. Ming spoke in English and the transcription was straightforward.

I interviewed Liu, Chang and Hua in a busy coffee shop and my tape recorder picked up loud Christmas carols from Tim Hortons' music system, metal chair legs scraping the linoleum floor and voices of other customers. In one part of the recording a woman at another table screeched and her friend's howl of laughter drowned out Liu, Chang and Hua's voices. The narratives of the three participants also overlapped as they argued or interjected. Using my field notes I sorted out the recording.

Since Liu, Chang and Hua spoke in a mixture of Hakka and English, I needed to translate their accounts. I used Boder's method of transcribing:

*...a technique of translation where the original stories were not transcribed on paper. Boder listened to the original tape, dictated his English translation on tape, and typists transcribed the recordings in English.*

*(Boder, 1949)*

I found that my verbal translations sounded stilted and that I translated literally, which made for awkward reading. Even listening to the original tape over and over again, the accounts sounded flat, not the lively interaction I observed between Chang, Liu and Hua. When I translated and transcribed at the same time, the transcription flowed more smoothly. I decided to translate and transcribe simultaneously.

Many Hakka terms cannot be translated literally. Chang used “*chi, chi, pa, pa*” often, literally translated as “seven, seven, eight, eight.” What he meant was, “and so on and so on.” I rewound the tapes and listened to Chang, Liu and Hua. How do I translate and transcribe their interactions, their camaraderie and their competitiveness with each other, as well as their body language which sometimes contradicted their words?

What is a good translation?

The historian Alexander Fraser Tytler describes good translation as:

*...that in which the merit of the original work is completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.*

(quoted in Lefevere, 1992)

Lefevere also writes, “Translation involves much more than the search for the best linguistic equivalent...” and it is absurd to formulate rules for translation. (Lefevere, 1992) So I could not use a formula to apply to my interviews.

It is difficult to translate Chen, Liu and Hua’s accounts from a mix of Hakka and English to English only. For example, some words in Hakka have a positive nuance but a negative one in English. In his account, Chang called one of his friends “Black Skin.” In Hakka, it is a friendly nickname. My third brother’s close friends called him *zhac ku* (Dark Boy). In English, the nickname has a negative connotation, with racial overtones, which is not the case in Hakka in this context. In the context of the narratives, where the interviewees did not convey negativity in Hakka, I eliminated them or used English words that matched the terms and contexts in Hakka.

I also eliminated verbal hesitations such as “eh,” “well,” “uh” and so on. These words tended to break the flow of the narratives. The purpose of this project is to show everyday life in the Deoli Detention Camp and not how the interviewees speak. I changed the sentence construction to improve the readability and clarity of the narratives, and included information from one interviewee but removed duplicate information from the other interviewees, such as the description of the detention camp. The duplication tended to interfere with the narratives.

I edited the narratives substantially. Some interviews ran to 60 pages. I also changed the order. Verbal narratives tend to flow randomly and, with Chen, Hua and Liu, they often talked at the same time to explain some details. In one interview, Chen stopped in the middle of giving details about cooking in a big wok in Deoli camp. “You know the man who got hit by the security

police I told you about? The one who wasn't involved in the riot but got a bloody head? Well, he went to a woman with a baby boy for urine.”

“What urine? Why? When?”

Chen, Hua and Liu all spoke at once to explain the cryptic remarks.

From this raw data I connected the two relevant sections together but left out Chen's sudden change of verbal direction.

Throughout the process of putting the four accounts together, I kept in mind what Dr. Allen had told me at the beginning of this project: “Let the interviewees speak. Let us hear their voices.”

Ming, Hua, Chen and Liu wanted to tell their stories and they wanted their stories heard. I hope this project will give readers a glimpse of their experiences and their thoughts of their time in Deoli Detention Camp—in their own voices.

## Chapter 8

### Ming's account

The 116 Scarborough bus drops me off at Canmore Street and Half Moon Square. Five teenage boys rush down the steps of the bus before me and dash across the road. I turn towards Half Moon Square, an empty street lined by houses hidden behind hedges, shrubs and trees. I walk up the driveway to the front of Ming's house and ring the doorbell.

The day before, I called her to confirm our meeting.

"I am always at home, except when I am at the doctor's or out at aqua class," Ming said. "But some days I am better than others. Call me before you come."

Ming suffers from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and Fibromyalgia<sup>1</sup>. She volunteers in weekly aquatic classes for CFS and Fibromyalgia sufferers. Ming meets with Fibromyalgia support groups regularly.

"I was standing above Hoover Dam in Las Vegas last year," Ming recalls. "I closed my eyes and let the sun warm my face. At that very moment I realized that I wasn't in pain, just for a few seconds." Ming smiles. Her laugh erases pain lines on her forehead.

Ming and I sit across from each other in her living room. Three family portraits in black frames sit on a piano.

"That one," I say, "must have been taken in the studio next door to Wellend Goldsmith on Bowbazaar Street in Calcutta. The one run by the Chinese family." I point at the yellowed picture. "I recognize the background in the picture. My mother had a family picture taken there before I left for Canada. I still have it in my album."

Ming laughs. "Oh, yes, all the Hakka had their family portraits taken by that Studio. I forgot the name of the studio."

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<sup>1</sup> Fibromyalgia is a central nervous system disorder, in which sufferers are in constant pain. A slight touch can cause excruciating pain. The disorder varies from person to person, and in Ming's case, she suffers pain all over her body.

I compare the man in the picture with the woman sitting across from me. They have the same wire-straight hair, the same hooded eyes, the same square jaw, the same stocky build.

Ming laughs again. “Yes, I do look like my father. We all do—my four brothers and my sister. But I think I am the most like him.”

Like most of the Hakka in Calcutta, Ming’s grandfather immigrated from Moi Yen, Guangdong Province, to Calcutta, India. He arrived in Calcutta in the late 1800s and took up shoe making. His opened his first shoe shop in New Market. He then sent for his wife. They had six children and Ming’s father was the third.

I pulled my tape recorder from my purse and turned it on. Ming cleared her throat and began her account.

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My father graduated from a Chinese language school. He then studied in an English language school. When he was 18 or 19 years old, he started helping out in his father’s shoe shop. After a while, my father found that he preferred food preparation to leather working, so he opened a small Chinese restaurant in Calcutta. My dad’s restaurant, Tien Yan, served steamed buns and dim sum stuff.

My grandfather contacted my granduncles and grandaunts in China, and they found a wife for my dad. It was an arranged marriage. My mom came from Moi-Yen, near my grandfather’s village. She arrived in Calcutta in the 1940s. My mom had six kids. I am the youngest, born in 1953, in Calcutta.

One day, my dad met this guy from Digboi. They struck up a conversation and this guy said, “I have a new cinema with a restaurant next door. Why don’t you come and look the restaurant over?” So my dad said, “Okay.” He went to Digboi, looked at the restaurant and signed the contract.

At first my father stayed in Digboi by himself, leaving my mother, my four brothers, my sister and me in Calcutta, living in my grandparents’ house. In Digboi, my dad ran the restaurant and a catering business. Many English and Frenchmen lived in Digboi. They worked in the oil

refineries and the oil fields. Many of them had their families with them. My dad became a popular caterer when these foreigners hosted parties.

In Calcutta my sister, my youngest brother and I studied at Moi Kong Chinese language school, and my three older brothers at an English language boarding school. Six months after my dad started his business in Digboi, my mom pulled us out of Moi Kong and we joined my dad in Digboi. My three elder brothers stayed in the boarding school in Calcutta until my dad transferred them to a school in Shillong much later. Digboi didn't have any elementary English language schools, so we hung around the house while my dad looked for schools for us to attend.

My father hired a tutor for us. Every day the tutor came to the house. Of course I was never there. The back door of the restaurant opened out to the back of the cinema. I used to sneak into the cinema and hide behind the curtains in front of the white canvas screen. Well, I used to hide there until the film started. I could hear the footsteps of the person who started the movie, you see. I waited until he was gone and then came out to watch the movie, for free. My sister and my brother never did that. I was the only one who sneaked into the cinema.

My father found a boarding school for my four brothers in Shillong. My eldest brother wanted to stay in Calcutta. So my dad transferred only my second and third oldest brothers to the boarding school in Shillong. Later, he registered my fourth brother in the same boarding school. My dad then registered my sister and me in St. Mary's Convent in Shillong. I was in St. Mary's for only one year. I transferred to St. Joseph's Day School the next year, in 1961. My father boarded me with a Hakka family nearby when I transferred.

My dad did really well. Everyone wanted to hire him for their parties. He also got the contract to cater the hotel next door to the cinema. I loved Digboi, although I was seldom there. I remember the air was so clean, although there were oil refineries and big structures like that right across the street from the restaurant. After I started school in Shillong, I only visited my parents during the holidays. It was great. My father had many friends. The French and Englishmen who worked in the oil fields and oil refineries had their families with them, and they always asked my dad to cater their parties. I think they became my dad's friends and I got invited to his friends' kids' birthday parties.

In Shillong, I learned Cantonese and the local language, Khasi<sup>2</sup>. Mr. and Mrs. Lin, the family I boarded with, had many Assamese, Cantonese and Hakka friends, and they were always dropping by to visit. I think most of the Assamese originally came from Tibet. I learned Khasi from Mr. and Mrs. Lin's Assamese friends and also from my friends in school.

I don't speak Khasi or Cantonese now. I have forgotten how.

When the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident started, the Assamese shunned us. We became taboo. The Assamese taunted me and all the Chinese, like pulling the corners of their eyes upwards and shouting, "*Cheena, Cheena, Chin, Chin.*" Sometimes they threw stones or rotten vegetables at us and yelled at us to go home. I had to change my route to school. I went through the back alleys and walked really fast. Most of my friends became my tormentors overnight.

Indian soldiers knocked on the door around the middle of November of 1962. It was five in the morning. Someone shook me awake. I opened my eyes and saw Mrs. Lin. "Get up. We have to leave. We have to pack up a few clothes because the cops are here to take us."

The soldiers told us that they were there to evacuate us. They told us that they would protect us and they told us not to bring too much stuff. We will be back in no time, they said.

I was only 9 years old. I didn't know what was happening. I think I just grabbed some clothes. I didn't know I would end up in Deoli for four years.

The soldiers loaded us on a bus, dropped us at the local jail and locked us in. We stayed there for what seemed like months. But I think it was only for two weeks, maybe three.

In the four-story jail, we shared the rooms with people who had mental issues, with murderers and with thieves.

The jail got very crowded. All the Chinese from Shillong were put in this jail. I think there were some from the neighbouring towns, too, but most were from Shillong.

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<sup>2</sup> Khasi belongs to the Astro-Asiatic family of languages, spoken in northern parts of Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh, and parts of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. Khasi has the same family root as Vietnamese.

In the jail, we Chinese stayed by ourselves. The Indians who had mental conditions sang and danced and we, the Chinese children, made fun of them, imitated them. At that age we didn't know better. After what seemed like months, we were all taken to a railway station and we were told we had to get on the trains and that we would be all taken to Rajasthan.

Later we found out the Chinese from other northern towns like Darjeeling and Makum were "evacuated" to the local jails in their areas. The jails were like holding centres, I suppose. Some Chinese from Calcutta were evacuated to the Calcutta jails, we heard. We waited there until the government got all the Chinese they wanted evacuated. The Indian army then transferred us to Deoli Concentration Camp.

The soldiers took all the Chinese from the jail to a train station near Shillong. The train, with over 2,000 Chinese, started on its seven days journey to Deoli, Rajasthan. We got herded on to the train according to where we were evacuated from. My three brothers and I were assigned the same compartment, with the Chinese who lived in Shilling. The nuns hid my sister, so she wasn't evacuated.

My three brothers, you see, were on the foreign registry, so the Indian army knew where to find them. My sister wasn't. When the Indian army guys went to St. Mary's and asked the nuns if there were students with Chinese surnames in the school, the nuns said, "No." So the soldiers went away and my sister stayed in school, hidden, I guess. It was something like the last scene in *The Sound of Music*. I wasn't on the foreign registry but because I was staying with a Chinese family, I was picked up with them.

On the train we had a lot of military people around with guns on their shoulders and gun holsters on their belts. I was in the middle compartment in the long line of the train. Two soldiers guarded each compartment. We travelled all day and only stopped at a station for lunch. At some stations, we had to stay on the train and have all the shutters on the windows of the train turned down. The Indians at the stations pelted us with eggs or with stones and shouted at us.

A military guard stood at each door of the car. The car had two doors. The military people cooked for us. It was always rice and *dal* (lentils), mixed together in a big pot and boiled. The soldiers were terrible cooks. Most times, the food was half-cooked.

When the food was ready we lined up and got the rice and dal. That was our meal for the day. Some people were lucky. They had two plates. They had one plateful of warm rice and dal for lunch and another plateful of cold rice and dal for dinner. My brothers made sure that I had my plate of rice and dal every day.

We only stopped once a day to get our meal. Fortunately for us, the two Indian soldiers in our car guarding us were very nice. At each station, they brought samosas and fed the little kids. I always got one samosa, and sometimes I got two.

My parents were in the last car of the train with the Chinese from Makum. At each station, my dad came out and tried to find my brothers, my sister and me. They worried about us. My mom wasn't feeling well. She had a tonsillectomy two days before she and my dad were evacuated.

Halfway through the journey to Rajasthan my parents found us, but we were not allowed to move to their car. After that, at each station, my brothers and I got off the train and walked towards the end of the train, and my parents walked towards the middle. We checked on each other.

On the train we had three or four families in my car, but they left my brothers and me alone. I guess they figured my three elder brothers would look after me. My second brother, who was 18 years old at that time, made sure that my 16 and 13-year-old brothers and I had enough food to last us for the day. Plus, the soldiers in our car always had enough samosas for us.

Looking back, I guess the older people must have been wondering what was happening and feeling very displaced. I didn't know what was going on, just that we were just going somewhere, and that seemed okay. At 9 years old, you don't know much.

We reached Deoli in the late afternoon, about a week after the Indian army put us on the train. The army guys herded us onto lorries and buses and dropped us at the gate of the camp, with soldiers around us. We stood by the gate and waited for our parents. There was so much confusion and fear. We didn't know what was waiting for us beyond the gate. We, my three brothers and I, wanted to be with our parents. So we told the soldiers we wanted to wait for our parents, and we waited.

I watched the Chinese stumble to a table at the gate. We sat on the train for so long, our legs were not used to walking. I watched the two or three army guys at the table say something to the Chinese and the Chinese answered and the army guys scribbled on some forms. I watched the soldiers separate the men and boys from the women, girls and small children. I watched the two lines, one line of the men and boys and the other of the women, girls and small children, go into tents set up inside the gate, one or two at a time. I watched the Chinese stumble out of the tents, adjusting their clothing. The guards then led them away.

When our parents finally got off the lorry, the army people processed us. I went with my mother to the women's side. A woman guard led us to the tent and told us to remove all our clothes. Everyone was stripped-search, even the kids. They confiscated my mother's money and jewellery, and they supposedly made a record of what we owned.

I walked into the concentration camp with only the clothes I had brought with me.

The Indian Army divided Deoli Detention Camp into five wings, each wing surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Inside the fence, there were four or five barracks and small houses clustered around a compound. A large cement water tank sat in the middle of the compound, with taps built into its four sides. Another barbed wire fence circled the camp, with watchtowers at intervals, and lights outside and around the main fence.

The soldiers assigned us to the barracks in the order of the train compartments. The Chinese from Darjeeling went into the first wing. My parents and the Chinese from Digboi and Makum went into the last two wings.

Some Chinese were lucky. They didn't need to share the living space with other families. The army people assigned them to houses. The houses went early. My family shared a barrack with four or five other families. I think we were all rather big families. There were six of us: my parents, my three brothers and me. My parents set up our space in one corner of the barrack, other families at the other corners, and more families along the middle. Each family had cots for each person. You know the cots where you have jute ropes woven loosely together on bamboo frames? Those were kind of the beds we slept on. We piled blankets on the cots, for the jute ropes were rather rough and scratched the skin. We had no privacy. We could see, hear and smell

everyone. So each family kept to itself. There were quarrels—someone took more space than they should, or someone stepped on someone's belongings. We sorted it all out among ourselves.

I entered the camp in the early evening. When my parents and the grown-ups were busy settling into the barracks, I walked around looking for water to drink. In the compound in the middle of the wing I found a big concrete tank, with taps built into the sides. I thought, 'Good, there must be water in there.' I turned on the tap and red water dribbled out. I don't know why the army people added red dye to the water. The whole camp didn't have any water on the first day.

There were a lot of military guys walking up and down guarding the compound and the barracks. Seven-foot-high barbed wire fence surrounded our wing. A gate connected our wing to the next wing. Soldiers guarded the gate. A roll of barbed wire spiraled along the top of the fence to discourage anyone thinking of climbing over it—just like a prison camp. It was a prison camp.

We didn't get food on the first day. The next day the army sent in people to cook for us, three times a day. The cooks threw potatoes and other vegetables into a pot and added curry spices, and we got something like *baji* (mixed vegetables). They didn't even wash the vegetables or the potatoes.

Three times a day we lined up with our pots and pans, just like you see in the war movies or movies about prisons or like the World Vision documentaries of disaster areas. People with pots and pans lined up to get food.

At first we didn't eat the food as it was so gritty, full of dirt and sand. Then we got really hungry and we ate the food but we complained.

We sat in the barrack and my parents told my brothers and me what happened to them in Digboi. The Chinese army came within 24 km of Digboi. The government opened the jail doors and told the prisoners to run for their lives, so everyone ran for their lives. It didn't matter what the prisoners did, murder or something, they had free passes and only the Chinese got arrested and put into jail.

"The guards in our train car were rather friendly. One of the guards told me that he cut himself rather badly on the front line," my father said. "He was scared and he didn't want to fight, so he cut himself and got medical leave. This soldier was assigned to guard us on the train."

My parents, like the other Chinese, had to leave everything behind in Digboi. They worried and wondered what happened to us, my three brothers, my sister and me in Shillong, and my eldest brother in Calcutta. My parents hoped that my sister, who studied in St. Mary's Convent in Shillong, was okay, as she wasn't on the train with us.

Much later we found out she was still in school. The nuns in her school lied to the Indian soldiers who looked for Chinese students in boarding schools, so she wasn't evacuated. When my father found out about my sister, he was really worried. He thought my sister might be the only Chinese left in Shillong and, with the Indians so against the Chinese, she might not be safe. So my father wrote to the nuns asking them to take my sister down to my aunt's in Calcutta. My aunt in Calcutta had written to my parents that most of the Chinese had not been arrested and my eldest brother was safe, staying with her.

Anyway, that was six or eight months after the army interned us. I will go back to the first few days when we just arrived in Deoli.

We sat around with nothing to do and lots to complain about. The grown-ups complained about the food, they complained about the camp, and they complained about the food some more. I was really bored. All the kids in the camp were really bored. We had nothing to do, so the boys tried to find things to amuse themselves.

One evening after dark I wandered out of the barrack for a walk around the compound. There were people sitting outside the barracks. I heard the toilet doors swing to and fro. I think it was windy that night. A group of boys loitered nearby. One of them laughed and said, "You know, many Japanese prisoners died here years ago."<sup>3</sup> Their ghosts wander around here. Sometimes you can hear them moaning, sometimes they bang the doors. That noise you hear, it must be one of the ghosts. They are looking for little girls." The boys pulled down the corners of their mouths and moaned.

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<sup>3</sup> The British interned Japanese, German and Italian prisoners of war in Deoli during WWI. Most of the POWs were Japanese. Some died and were buried in the cemetery just outside the camp.

I ran back to the barrack screaming. I had a hard time falling asleep that night. Every time I closed my eyes I saw a Japanese soldier with blood all over him moaning and coming towards me. My mother had to comfort me every time I whimpered and sniffled.

The grown-ups tried to control the boys but the boys kept getting into trouble. Then they really got into trouble—they rioted. My mother kept me indoors when the whole thing started. It started at another wing, so I didn't see what happened but I heard a lot of shouting. The loudest ones were the guards telling the boys to go back to their barracks.

I guess the boys didn't obey, so the guards arrested them and put them in solitary confinement. They didn't get all of them, though. I heard some of them talk about it.

The guards released the boys after a week, and they went back to their families in the different wings. I don't know what the guards fed them when they were in solitary confinement. The boys all had diarrhea. Oh, did they have diarrhea! They never rioted again.

The grown-ups speculated on what started the riot. My mother said it was a fight between Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek supporters.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese communities in India had split between the two Chinese leaders, and the two groups always fought. I think the Deoli camp riot happened because the young people had absolutely nothing to do. So they fought.

It was really funny to see these macho teenage boys running to the toilets. They couldn't strut while they ran for the toilets. Anyway, that was really worrying for the grown-ups, but we girls thought it was funny.

The grown-ups in each wing had a meeting. They discussed the food mainly. Then the Chinese selected a representative in each wing to talk to the camp commander. My dad represented Wing E. The Chinese selected men who spoke English. The representatives asked the commander to let the inmates do their own cooking. "Just bring us the raw food," they said, "and let us cook for ourselves." The commander agreed.

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<sup>4</sup> The Chinese Nationalist government, the Kuomintang (KMT), ruled China from 1911 to 1949. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), under Mao Tse-tung, took over China in 1949. The Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai-shek, retreated to Taiwan. Chiang ruled Taiwan under the Republic of China government, and Mao ruled mainland China under the People's Republic of China government.

So every morning representatives from each wing went to the canteen outside the camp to pick up the day's food supply. They couldn't leave the camp without a guard escort. So every morning my dad went to the gate. The guard would open the gate and a soldier would go with my dad to the canteen.

Each wing set up a schedule where everyone in the wing took turns to get the stove ready, prepare the meat and vegetables, cook and wash up. When the camp commander agreed to let the inmates cook for themselves, the grown-ups gathered bricks left over from the construction of the barracks. They stacked the bricks and mortared them with wet mud and built a stove in the compound, a huge wood-burning stove.

The girls, kids like me, helped out in the morning making *parathas* (flatbread). The teenage boys took turns stirring the food. We had to cook in a huge big wok, and it needed muscle power.

We ran into a major problem: knives. When we first entered the internment camp the army people looked through everything we brought and confiscated anything that looked like a knife or scissors. They took away our butter knives, our pen knives and anything that looked sharp. They even stripped-search us in case we had knives hidden in our clothes. So there we were with a big piece of mutton, a bag of potatoes and baskets of vegetables, and we didn't have anything to cut them up with. One of the inmates from Darjeeling used to work in a metal shop. He taught the men to take down the shelves in the barracks and sharpen the metal pieces. So for the first couple of days everyone, well almost everyone, was happy.

There were again a lot of complaints, complaints that some people got more than their share, complaints that they got less than their share, complaints that some lazy Chinese were not taking their turns in cooking, complaints that food tasted too bland, and complaints that food tasted too spicy. The complaints got so bad that the grown-ups decided to split up the raw food and let each family do its own cooking.

The inmates needed more knives, a knife for every family. The men surrounded the person who was sharpening the metals by the cooking fire, and some men loitered near the gate as lookouts. They talked loudly and generally made a lot of noise to cover the scraping of metal on stones. When a guard wandered by, the lookouts would sing songs, usually in awful voices, to alert the

knife-making crew. But you know what? The guards didn't care. They knew what we were doing and they just ignored us. So we sharpened metals openly after that.

The grown-ups also found another job for the teenage boys: cutting up the firewood. The camp commander gave us huge chunks of firewood that needed breaking up. The boys wedged sharpened metals into cracks in the wood and smashed the wood on the ground. One or more of the metal pieces usually split the cracks wider. After several repeats—the boys competed with each other on who could smash the largest pieces of wood—we had firewood for our stoves.

Shortly after we reached Deoli, the Chinese government sent a lot of stuff, essential stuff for each family to use. They (the Chinese government) heard that the Chinese barely took anything when they were evacuated. Supposedly each family had a big bag of lots of different things. When the stuff came, the camp commander asked all representatives from each wing to help him distribute the stuff. We were very excited, excited because someone in China cared and excited because we were quite short of things. The commander and the guards picked over the things and gave a small package to each family: toothbrush, toothpaste and face towels. My dad was one of the representatives of the wings. He was really disappointed.

The Chinese government also sent blank application forms to Deoli, applications for inmates who wanted to go to China. The camp commander passed around the forms. When the Chinese applied, the Indian government took them by train to boats sent by the Chinese government especially to pick them up. I think there were three boats in total.

My second and third youngest brothers wanted to go to China, but they were underage. My second brother was 17, and my third brother was 15. My parents refused to give permission. My second brother was more obedient, so he gave up the idea. But my third brother forged my father's signature on the form, and he slipped out onto the lorry before my dad noticed his absence. He had a rough time in China. He was sent to Hailungchang, he and a bunch of other Chinese who went to China from other parts of Asia, like Indonesia and Malaysia. Life was pretty bad there—no food and hardly anything. He met his wife there. She was born in Indonesia and went to China, more or less at the same time as my brother. I don't know why she went, as only she went to China and her whole family stayed back in Indonesia.

When those who elected to go to China had left, the camp commander moved everyone into three wings, the wings with smaller barracks. So instead of five or six families in each barrack, we now had three families.

The military people started to build more barracks outside the compound. The soldiers said it was to house the Chinese evacuated from Calcutta. Then the Chinese army retreated. So no more Chinese were evacuated from the cities. It was very funny. One day the soldiers worked day and night, hammering and sawing, keeping us awake. Then they just stopped, with the buildings half finished. At that time we didn't know why. It was only later we found out the Chinese soldiers had retreated.

Life in the camp more or less became routine. The grown-ups set up classes and asked the teenagers to teach the younger ones. We had classes in English, math and Hindi. My dad wrote to my aunt in Calcutta and asked her to send books. My second brother was one of the teachers. My mother was a teacher in Calcutta, teaching Chinese. She sent for Chinese textbooks, and we had Chinese lessons.

We had a wedding in the camp. A Tibetan couple got married. The bride was very pretty. She died in childbirth a year later. A Chinese from Darjeeling became mad in the camp. He walked around muttering to himself. Sometimes he held a large aluminum pot behind his back, covering his behind. We kids used to run behind him. We imitated his walk and mutterings, and we laughed at him. He died not long after his incarceration.

The inmates received mail. The mail was censored by the camp commander and his staff. My dad used to get English language newspapers from Calcutta. Sometimes there were so many cutouts that I held the papers in front of my face and ran around the compound looking out of the holes in the newspaper. My dad used to laugh when he got a letter with lots of blacking out. He sometimes wondered what his letters looked like when he wrote to his parents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters. The Chinese language papers and letters took much longer to be delivered as the camp commander sent them to Delhi to be read by their people who could read Chinese.

During the day the inmates visited their friends in another wing. We had to get through a checkpoint and were questioned by the military guard there. The guards always asked for our names. Most of us said, "*Ah kung*" (honorable grandfather), "*Ah pho*" (honorable grandmother),

or “*ney kung*” (your grandfather) or “*ney pho*” (your grandmother). One of the guards asked my dad, “How come you Chinese all have the same names? Like Ah kung and Ah pho?”

After a while the guards stopped asking for our names and we just breezed through the checkpoint to the other barracks. I think the guards became comfortable with us. I think we were resigned to be there, after a while.

The women in the camp got together and rented a sewing machine. We needed new clothes. The merchant charged a lot for the rental. So the women bought materials beforehand. You could get quite a lot of stuff in the canteen adjacent to the camp. The Indian soldiers would escort us to the canteen. Anyway, the women got together and had a cutting day before renting the sewing machine. When the sewing machine arrived in the camp, the women took turns sewing. Those who couldn’t sew paid someone else to make their clothes. The sewing machine was used every minute of its rental.

The Deoli area was very hard on shoes. The gritty sand and rocky ground destroyed the soles. A man from Shillong set up a shoe repair stall. He made up a very professional sign. The Indians from around Deoli Detention Camp came to him to have their shoes and sandals repaired. He did really well. I think he was sorry to leave the camp when he was released.

Although the winter was warm in the camp—you only needed a cardigan—the air was dry, very dry. Our heels cracked and bled, and so we went to the clinic for Vaseline. The nurse there smeared Vaseline onto a piece of paper. We took it back to the barracks and applied it to the sore or bleeding spots.

The sandstorms were very bad. When the sandstorm came we closed all the doors and windows and covered everything. We had to really clean up after the sandstorms. The sand got into everything, even into the clean clothes folded away. I remember there were lots of sandstorms.

I became a Catholic in Deoli camp. A Catholic priest from the nearby church came every Sunday to say Mass. I talked to the priest a lot. After a couple of months, he baptized me. He also introduced his niece in the United States to me as my pen pal. We corresponded for five years. Then somehow—I don’t remember how and why—we stopped writing. I think it was after my family was released from Deoli and my dad relocated us to Calcutta. I missed four years of

formal schooling because of the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. I returned to school in Calcutta, and I struggled to catch up with the other students. I guess I didn't have time to write to my pen pal.

Everyone in the camp was given a stipend. I think it was three rupees a month. We bought things from the store inside the camp, things like materials to make clothes and also knives for preparing our food. I guess the guards trusted us by then.

My family bought live chickens from the camp store. We had this egg-laying hen and without fail, she laid an egg with a double yoke—every week! My dad loved this hen. So we had eggs once a week, double yoke.

I liked to help with cooking. Many of the younger girls did. We had a competition to see who could make the roundest parathas. I became very good with the rolling pins. At that time the camp commander must have trusted us because those were heavy rolling pins. We could have killed someone with them.

We had mutton a lot, and they usually gave us a big chunk, bone and all, to share among the families in the barracks. I tried to cut up some meat. I held the meat with my left hand, I raised the knife high, and I came down on my finger. My dad rushed me to the clinic. I still have the scar.

I think I got really sick once. I don't remember what I got. My second eldest brother carried me to the clinic. I think the doctor wasn't there. He only came to the clinic in the mornings. Anyway, I was rushed to the hospital. But I think I recovered two days later and I went back to Deoli Detention Camp.

The Chinese in the camp got tired of mutton, chicken and eggs. So one day everyone in our wing pooled their money together and bought a live pig. The men tried to butcher the pig in the compound and, of course, the pig squealed and struggled. The commotion brought the guards. The guards rushed in with guns drawn and ordered everyone to go back to the barracks. They went away after they found out it was a pig.

After two years in the camp, the commander started to release some of the families. I watched my friends leave with their parents. But my family's name stayed off the Release List. I watched the camp gradually empty.

For four years I played in the camp and, occasionally, I asked my parents when we could go home. They didn't know. The International Red Cross came to the camp. They brought things for the inmates. I tasted canned chicken soup for the first time. I asked one of them when we would be released. They didn't know. The Indian prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, visited the camp. I remember I and other children posed for pictures beside him. I asked Shastri when we could go home. He said he would talk to his cabinet when he got back to Delhi. But I guess he forgot about us when he got back.

By the fourth year of internment, there weren't that many Chinese left in the camp—a few families from the Hill Stations and some Chinese from Tangra, Calcutta. The grown-ups speculated the military had arrested these people from Tangra because they were more visible, probably having been seen going to the Chinese embassy, I think. I still wonder why we weren't released.

We were finally released in July or August of 1966, almost the last batch to leave Deoli. My dad wanted to take his favourite hen with us, the hen that lay the two-yoke eggs, but the soldiers said, "No. No chicken, no pets." My dad couldn't and wouldn't use the hen for our last evening meal. So he gave the hen to one of the Chinese families who didn't have their name on the Release List. I think they were Hakka from Tangra. I think we were the last ones out of Deoli. There were others left, but they were Tibetans, and a few single guys. They were not pure Chinese, more like *pan-sien* (half-Chinese).

I don't remember if we took the train or flew back from Deoli, but each of us was given money. I remember we had a lot of mustard greens from our garden plot and we salted them. When we were released we brought cans of cookie tins full of salted mustard greens.

The military people just dropped us off outside our old address in Digboi and drove off. But the restaurant and the house had been taken over by someone else. We just stood there. We didn't know where to go. Luckily the landlord saw us, and he was able to give us a place to stay in his housing complex. The landlord had three houses in the housing complex. He let us stay in an empty house at the back of the complex. The landlord took us to the *godam* (warehouse) where our stuff was kept. My dad found most of our things were picked over. All the good stuff was gone. The soldiers, when they came in 1962 and arrested my parents, confiscated all the money. We never got it back. The soldiers said they would put it in the central bank, but at the time when

we were evacuated my parents did not know the name of the soldier who took the money. In all the confusion they didn't get any receipts, so we didn't get anything back.

The landlord tried to persuade my dad to stay in Digboi. He said he had two cinemas. One of the cinemas had an empty lot beside it. He told my dad, "If you stay, I will build a restaurant and housing for you." But my dad didn't feel comfortable in Digboi any more. He felt there were always people following him everywhere he went. Most of his friends before the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident were foreigners: French, American and English. They had already left, so as far as business prospects went, it wasn't good.

The foreigners owed my dad a lot of money. When they ate at my dad's restaurant or used his catering service, it was all on credit. My dad sent bills to his customers once or twice a month. When the Chinese Army came close to Digboi, the foreigners all left. They left in such a hurry that they didn't settle their bills. The Indian soldiers confiscated all the money anyway, so I guess in the end it didn't matter. The foreigners didn't return to Digboi when things calmed down. So they still owe my dad money.

There are many Chinese from Darjeeling, Shillong and other Hill Stations now living in Scarborough. They have a joke that if you go to visit your house where you used to live before the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident, you take a shovel with you. The Chinese buried their jewellery and money in their backyards just before the Indian soldiers evacuated them. When they were released, they found strangers in their houses. So these Chinese didn't have a chance to dig on their properties.

My father stayed around Digboi for two or three months. He started his catering business again. Since most of his equipment, like woks, had disappeared, he wrote to my aunt to send woks and restaurant stuff.

My father's Anglo-Indian friends also wanted to build a restaurant for him to manage. They even had the plot of land selected. But my dad thought there were always two or three people following him wherever he went. He just wasn't comfortable in Digboi, with people dogging him. He also didn't want to start fresh. He didn't want to lose it all over again. So we left for Calcutta, two or three months after we returned to Digboi.

My dad was an Indian citizen, but I don't know how they classified him as an Indian citizen because if you were born before 1950 you could not be an Indian citizen. The British wouldn't recognize us as British, so we were in no-man's-land. No one recognized us even though we were born in the country.

Three months later, our family returned to Calcutta. My dad rented an apartment in Chattawalla Gully. He went into partnership with his friend and opened a restaurant. Less than two years after we were released, my dad had a heart attack and he passed away. He had the heart attack on Labour Day. You know how the West Bengal government thought Labour Day was sacred? The doctors refused to see my dad. It was a holiday, they said. When he died, the doctors came. Go figure.

My mother got very sick after my dad died. I had to do all the household chores when I got home from school, and then I studied, usually late at night. Somehow I graduated with a Senior Cambridge Certificate. Of the six of us, only my fourth brother, my sister and I finished school.

My eldest brother immigrated to Canada in 1969, and each of us followed. I emigrated in 1975.

I couldn't talk about the internment for a long time. My two sons didn't know about it until recently. During the Iraq War in 2001, we watched the news on the television and "concentration camp" was mentioned. I told my sons I had once been interned in a concentration camp in India.

They said, "Yeah? Oh, hmm."

Recently my eldest said to me, "Mom, you must write down your experience in the camp."

I said, "I am not a writer. But, maybe, one day."

## Chapter 9

### Chen's account

My father immigrated to India in the 1930s. He settled in Shillong and opened a shoe shop. I was born in 1945, eldest of six children. I apprenticed with my uncle in another town while I was studying there. I went to school in the morning and worked in my uncle's shoe shop in the afternoon and evening. I learned to make shoes when I was 9 or 10. I quit school and returned to Shillong when I was 12 years old. My father needed me to help out in the shop.

When the Chinese in Shillong read in the English newspapers that Chinese soldiers fought with Indian soldiers, we didn't believe it. Some said, "The Indians are fighting with the Communist Chinese in China. It has nothing to do with us. We should be all right."

The local Indians started yelling at the Chinese to go home. They threw stones at Chinese shops and beat up the Chinese. One day a group of students came to the street where many Chinese had their shops. They came to this shoe shop owned by a Hakka. The students shouted anti-Chinese slogans and wanted to drag the Hakka to the street to beat him up. The Indian who owned the shop next door came out and shouted at the students, "Hey, these people were born here in India. They are not from China. They are one of us. They speak better Hindi and Khasi than you and have better manners than the lot of you. Our children fly kites together, go to school together and play together. You leave them alone and go home." The police came and the students left.

The Chinese in Shillong waited for the war between China and India to be over so they didn't have to be afraid—afraid of losing lives, afraid of losing friends and relatives and afraid of losing our properties and businesses.

Then the arrests started. I remember the night the police came. It was one in the morning. I heard shouting. I heard banging on our door and I heard my parents rushing around. They hid money and valuables in little cubbyholes and cracks in the walls. We had half the money sewn into our clothes, and we had pillowcases full of clothes and food ready. My parents woke us. Then they opened the door.

The soldiers lied to us. They said, “You don’t need to take that much with you. You don’t need to take money with you. You will be released in no time. Meanwhile, the government will look after you, food and all. Don’t worry.”

When the Japanese invaded China my mother and her sister escaped to Singapore. Then the Japanese invaded Singapore. They escaped to India just before the Japanese invasion. She met and married my father just before WWII ended. My mother had the experience of concentration camps. She didn’t believe the Indian soldiers. She knew we would be away for a while. I think we were the most prepared Chinese in Shillong. My mother had packed clothes and dried food for each of us.

The soldiers arrested my whole family: my two brothers and sisters, my parents and me. They put us in the local jail with the Chinese they arrested in Shillong. My father didn’t know what happened to our shop. He heard the Indians had looted all the Chinese shops. He heard that the government people went in and took everything. He heard that the government people sold the goods in our shops, and he heard that the government people sold the whole shops to the Indians, goods and all.

There were some Chinese from the Hill Stations in jail with us who were married to native girls. The soldiers arrested the husbands and gave these wives and children a choice, whether to go with their husbands or fathers or stay at home. Most chose to stay. These poor Chinese worried about their shops and restaurants all the time and wondered if their native wives and *pan-sien*<sup>5</sup> children were all right.

We, over 2,000 Tong<sup>6</sup> people, were put on a train. It took us seven days and nights to get to Deoli. We stopped often, you see. We stopped to let the freight trains pass, we stopped to let the army trains pass and we stopped to let the passenger trains pass. We also stopped three times a day, usually at a station, so we could cook food. We carried firewood and food like rice on the train. We also stopped at night, usually by a deserted section of a train station.

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<sup>5</sup> When a Chinese man married a non-Chinese woman and had children, the other full-blooded Chinese called these half-Chinese children *pan-sien*, which literally mean “half-surname.”

<sup>6</sup> The Chinese sometimes call themselves “Thong people” or “Tang people” in Mandarin. Tang derived from the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century, the golden age in Chinese history.

We were quite crowded on the train. We packed onto hard wooden benches, my neighbors' elbows digging into my ribs. The older people really suffered as their backs and bums went numb from sitting on a hard surface for so long.

One night a group of us young people tried to find a spot by the track to lie down, but that was difficult because soldiers patrolled the platforms and the tracks. They carried kerosene lamps and guns. Why do you need guns to guard a group of women, children and mostly old men? Where can we go? What can we do? The soldiers waved the lamps as they walked back and forth on the platforms, which disturbed our sleep, when we could sleep at all. Then there were the mosquitoes. I once just closed my palms gently together and I killed three mosquitoes. They were that thick.

At our meal stops we had to hurry to find bricks or stones to build our cooking fires. Once we had the fire going, the soldiers would get vegetables and sometimes meat for the meal. The funny thing was, the soldiers ate with us. I guess we were good cooks.

One day the train stopped at a station for cooking. I heard shouting, which came closer and closer. I saw about 200 Indians coming towards us. They waved sickles, machetes, sticks, shoes and *chappals* (rawhide sandals). The Indians shouted for us to go home, shouted that India should get rid of us. The soldiers stopped the shouting crowd. They said, "These are Chinese born in India. They are not Chinese soldiers captured at the frontier. If you don't go away, we will shoot."

The crowd went away, still shouting. I heard their voices getting fainter and fainter as they went away.

One day I heard a woman screaming on the train. She went on and on. She was pregnant, you see, and she gave birth to a daughter. This daughter is now in the United States.

When we reached Deoli, the train unit commander handed us over to the army station. We entered a world from the movie setting in *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Barbed wire fences everywhere. Bright lights lit up the barbed wire fences. Armed soldiers watched over the camp from watchtowers, probably afraid the Chinese might escape during the night.

When the war started the Indian government patched up the camp and reinforced barbed wire fences around each wing and one that circled the whole camp. The five wings, named A, B, C, D and E wings, each had a compound with a water tank in the centre, pierced at intervals by taps.

The camp people registered us. We could only take clothes and things we used into the camp. The soldiers took our money, watches, jewellery, knives, scissors and anything sharp and put them in thick paper bags with our family's assigned number on it. Now we were numbers. The soldiers also put down the location of the camp we were assigned. Then they sealed it with a red, Indian government seal and issued us each a receipt. I walked inside the barbed wire fence with only my clothes.

I don't think the Indian soldiers knew what to do with 2,000 Chinese. They assigned us to tents and told us we would have more permanent housing soon. I put down our possessions on the dirt and sand floor of the tent and released my breath. There were beds in the tents. Whatever would happen tomorrow, I could sleep in peace and quiet tonight. For the last couple of weeks the Chinese had slept in dirty and noisy jails, napped on the floor of a lurching train and dozed on hard benches and train station platforms that left welts on bottoms and knots in bones.

I wondered about the holes in the sand and dirt floor, then collapsed on the bed and slept.

In the middle of the night many voices shouted, "Snake! Snake!" The holes were the snakes' dens. I huddled on my cot.

Later shrill screams jarred me awake, followed by the violent rustling of tree branches. I covered my ears and huddled further into my bedding.

Next morning we saw the peacocks pecking on the grass in the compounds. They chased and pecked at each other, screamed the same shrill sound I heard in the night, and then flew to their nests in the trees.

After two weeks the soldiers assigned more permanent quarters to the inmates. We settled in long barracks (previously used by the soldiers). Each barrack was divided into six large rooms and four smaller ones. Depending on the family size, we lived four or five families to each room. There was nothing in the rooms except lots of sand—no toilets, no kitchens, just sand. The men

whose families were not arrested had no privacy at all. They set up their beds against the barrack walls outside on the verandahs with their belongings under their beds.

We washed clothes around big concrete tanks in the middle of the compound. The rule for using the tanks was: those who just wanted to wash their hands had priority.

Each section or wing had five toilets, which wasn't enough. We often shuffled our feet or danced outside the toilets, depending on the urgency of our bowels or bladders. We used to shout for the people inside to hurry up. The young men began to use the backs of the toilet housing for urination. When the rain came, which was not often, the raindrops hit the corrugated iron roof and sounded rather nice. We didn't go to the toilet between noon and four, as it was unbearably hot inside. You would be cooked if you stayed in for even a very short time. We used the tap and the wooden bucket in each toilet stall to clean ourselves after our toilet use. When we first arrived we used newspapers but we soon ran out of newspapers so we used the taps and buckets.

At first the camp commander arranged for the local merchants to cook our meals. We didn't have much of an appetite as the rice was always half-cooked. So the people in the camp got together. We selected representatives from each wing. The representatives went to the camp commander and requested we be allowed to cook our own food. We asked the commander to distribute the food to the representatives and let each wing be responsible for their own cooking. The commander agreed. So every morning the wing representatives picked up rice, cooking oil, vegetables, meat, fish, chicken and eggs.

In our wing our representative, Ken, picked up our daily food supplies. You could mistake him for a Muslim, with his bearded face. When each family cooked its own food, Ken distributed the supplies. He sang as he gave out the food. He sang Hindi songs and Hakka mountain yodelling. He made everyone smile.

The restaurant owner from Shillong, Ying, looked after the cooking. He organized all the food in the cooking area, and then he roped in young men with lots of muscle power to take turns killing and skinning chickens, chopping, stirring the cooking in the big communal wok. When the food was ready we banged on the metal lid of the wok and each family sent someone to pick up their share. My younger brother and I worked in the cooking area. We took food to the old people who had no family members in the camp.

The big wok brought out the flavours of the food. You should have tasted the *atta* bread (whole wheat thin flat bread) we made for breakfast and the fried fish coated with chickpea flour! I don't think I have tasted food that good ever since. Food cooked in a small wok can never compete with the tasty stuff cooked in a big wok.

We had trouble with our firewood for cooking. These were thick as the size of my thigh. The camp commander issued us a hammer and a four-inch-long blade. We filed teeth into the blade, which made the cutting of wood a little bit easier.

We cleaned meat and vegetables on the verandah, where we could hose down the concrete area after every meal preparation, as it was easier to do than anywhere else. The flies swarmed our cooking area, especially when we prepared fish. We had a hard time waving flies off the fish and yet still found the dark green worms that burrowed into the flesh of the fish.

I think the wing representatives tried to be fair in distributing the foodstuffs. But some people were not happy. When the International Red Cross people visited Deoli camp, they talked to the Chinese and wrote down what they said. One guy from Shillong walked up to a Red Cross guy holding a bowl with a large bone in it. He spoke in Mandarin. He said, "I line up every day to get food. I don't like to fight over food, so this is usually what I get. How can I eat this bone?"

We weren't allowed knives when we first arrived in the camp. A few resourceful Hua<sup>7</sup> people who knew a little metal working made knives. We took down the metal shelves in our rooms and sharpened the long pieces. The sharpened metal made excellent knives and the people in charge of food preparation thanked the metal workers every time they used the illegal knives.

When we first started making the knives we surrounded the person filing the metals and posted people to watch for guards. At first we only made a few. After a while we noticed the guards didn't seem to worry about our knife-making activities, so we made knives openly.

A thin wooden board we used for chopping was not suitable for cutting up meat and vegetables. Mr. Chu, a furniture importer from Makum, went to the camp store and spoke to a local merchant who supplied the firewood to the camp. Chu contracted the merchant to cut three-inch-

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<sup>7</sup> The Chinese called themselves Hua people. Another two often-used names are Tang people and Han people.

thick slabs from a thick tree trunk and distribute them to the wings in the camp. This chopping board and the sharpened metals became the “twin treasures” of each wing.

Six months after we were interned, my second brother and I were caught up in a riot and shut in solitary confinement.

There was lots of stone throwing, shouting and people running around. When my brother and I saw the security police come in with guns pointed at us, we ran back into our barrack.

The security police came into our barrack and asked me, “Where did you go?” I said I had been out walking around, just walking around. They said, “Okay, you come out and stand there.” I went out and stood at the side. They selected a lot of people, mostly young teenage men.

The soldiers let the better-dressed people go. Like my friend Hua. He brought an iron with him and he always starched and ironed his clothes. Hua used wastewater from cooking rice as starch. So he looked okay and the security police let him go.

They also let the older people go. But they kept the younger guys. They kept me and my brother and then they took us to solitary confinement.

The security police marched us outside the camp and locked us in four rooms. The rooms were just outside the barbed wire fence. I think they squeezed 10 people in each room. These were small rooms, only about eight-by-eight, I think.

At first we tried to be polite to each other. We tried to give each other some privacy. We were polite and careful. We tried not to touch each other. After a while we were just too tired. We slept on the floor, someone’s dirty feet by my head, my dirty feet by someone else’s head. Our feet were not just dirty, they were sweaty and smelly. You know the Indian weather—always hot, even during the monsoon. There was no monsoon in Rajasthan. But we sweated all the same. My brother and I were very scared. We didn’t know what would happen to us. The security police locked us in solitary confinement for about a week. We weren’t allowed to go out of the room. As the days dragged on we got more and more frightened and so we sweated some more—oh, how we sweated! Most of the time my legs were slick with sweat. We smelled pretty bad, and we farted. The security police fed us rice and dal. Too much lentils made us fart. The farts thundered in the small room, especially at night. We tried not to breath, but....

We begged the security police not to cook lentils. They ignored us. So we waited, getting smellier and smellier, and sweated. We had to do our business in a fired clay pot placed at the corner of the room. It was a large-mouthed pot, like the ones we used to store water. At first we were rather self-conscious about doing our business in public, but after a while, we just went. Oh boy, the smell was just terrible!

There was this guy from Shillong, a very law-abiding guy. At the time of the riot he was in his barrack napping. When he heard the shouting and yelling, he came out to see what was going on. The security police saw him wandering outside his barrack. They hit him with their nightsticks. Blood poured from a cut on his head. The security police took him to the clinic outside the camp, and the clinic people put a dressing on his head. Then the security police threw him into solitary confinement with us. For seven days he had this bandage on his head. The bloodstains got darker and the bandage got dirtier and dirtier.

I was in the room with this guy. Liang, I think his name was. He had lots of facial hair, with his beard growing almost to his navel. We all thought he looked like a Muslim. He was in solitary confinement with us. On the second or third night we heard the guards talking outside. Those guards spoke very loudly. One guard said, “You know, *bhai*,<sup>8</sup> there’s this *Cheena* (Chinese), with a long beard. I have seen him around the camp. He is a troublemaker. I think we should single him out for punishment.”

The other guard seemed to agree. They talked about looking for this bearded *Cheena* later in the day. Liang was frantic. He thought the guards would come into the room to look for him in the daytime. He thought the guards would march him off and shoot him in front of the whole camp.

Liang didn’t have a razor or anything to shave off his beard. None of us did. Liang started plucking his beard, one strand at a time. Oh, man, did he cry while he pulled his beard out. It must have hurt. I was sitting on the floor next to him. He asked me to help him because, he said, he couldn’t do it as it hurt so much, and if the security police found him they would shoot him. He begged me to pull his beard out. I tried to, but he cried so much, and my fingers sweated and his face sweated, and his hair became so slick with sweat that my fingers kept slipping.

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<sup>8</sup> Bhai is brother in Hindi. In the context of the conversation, bhai means fellow soldier.

He kept begging me to pull more of his beard out. He kept this up all night. Anyway, by morning his beard must have been looking rather thin. The security police didn't come in to look for him. I wasn't sure they looked for him at all.

So we stayed in the Black Hole of Deoli<sup>9</sup> for a week. We ate rice and dal, and we sweated and we farted. After a week, the security police released us back to our barrack to our relieved relatives.

Remember I told you about the guy from Shillong? The security police bashed him over the head and he wasn't involved with the riot at all. When we went back to our barrack, a lot of us lined up for baby's urine. You know that a baby boy's urine is like an antibiotic. It kills germs. But it has to be a baby boy's, a baby boy too young for solid food and totally on his mother's milk. A woman in our barrack had given birth to a boy a couple of weeks before she and her family were arrested. There was always a line-up in our barrack for the baby's urine. The guy with the dirty dressing on his head lined up first thing in the morning with his cup. He always drank it right on the spot.

After the riot, many Chinese applied to go to China. I think about one-third of the Chinese went. Many of my friends left. Those of us who remained were resigned to settling in the camp. I often went up to the roof of a building at the edge of the barbed wire fence. From this roof I could see a very big bush some distance away. Deoli is desert-like, brown everywhere. So this large patch of green in a brown landscape looked so beautiful. I think I went up to the roof very often and thought that I would like to get up close and look at the bush. But of course I couldn't because it was on the other side of the fence. I don't think I ever went close to that beautiful green bush out in the brown desert.

Every morning the guards opened the doors connecting the wings but locked the doors at night. The young people cut holes in the wire fences to visit their friends in other wings. Anyway, the young people took bets with each other and went from wing to wing just to show they could. At first the soldiers repaired the fence the very next day, but after a while they didn't bother. Let's

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<sup>9</sup> Chen alludes to the Black Hole of Calcutta. Siraj Ud Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, overran the British settlement, Fort William, in Calcutta, India, on June 20, 1756. He locked 146 Europeans in a 14' by 18' holding cell overnight. Only 21 men survived.

face it. We were innocent people caught up in a war. We were not criminals and we didn't harm anyone.

I made many friends in the camp. When we were more settled we started to have parties. We decorated the canteen, arranged all the benches facing a stage we rigged up, and we had an evening of entertainment. Some of the young Chinese guys were really good singers. They sang Hindi, Nepalese or Khasi songs. We had movie nights. The camp commander brought in Hindi movies, set up a large screen in the compound, and we enjoyed Bollywood movies with all the singing and dancing. Some of the Chinese didn't like movie nights. They said all the noise kept them awake.

Then my father got sick.

The clinic in the camp admitted him to a hospital outside the camp. The camp commander allowed a family member to stay with a sick person. I went to the hospital in the evening and looked after my father. I got back to the camp in the morning. At night, I slept on the floor beside my father's cot. In the hospital, I acted as my father's nurse. I fed, washed, medicated and generally looked after my father. He couldn't do much for himself. The doctors didn't tell my mother or me what was wrong with my father. In those days doctors never told you anything.

My sisters were small so my mother only went to the hospital to look after my father during the day. My mother didn't speak much Hindi, and she wasn't too good with directions. She didn't understand the doctors' instructions, and when anyone said anything to her she just nodded.

My father stayed in the hospital for two or three weeks. I figured my mother now understood the routine, like giving medication to my father, changing his clothing and feeding him, and so she stayed full time in the hospital and looked after him. I stayed in the camp and looked after my brothers and sisters.

On May 6, 1964, my father died. That day I bummed around the camp with my friends. At about four or five in the afternoon one of my father's friends ran up to me and said, "Where have you been? We have looked everywhere for you. Your father has passed away. Your mother's looking for you."

I heard him but I thought he was mistaken. I didn't believe him. He said he had looked for me for quite a while. My mother came back to camp after my father died and looked for me.

I needed permission from the camp commander to go to the morgue. I applied and went to the morgue with my second brother. The morgue was outside the camp adjacent to the hospital.

It was the next day or the day after my father died when my second brother and I got to the morgue. It was hot, very hot, I think over 40 degrees, and the morgue smelled worse than the toilets.

My daddy lay on a wooden bench. His chest and stomach area had been cut open and sewn up. The lines of nylon stitches spread all over his body like a spider web. The side of his arms also had stitches all the way to his armpits. I don't know why they cut him open and sewed him up like that.

I didn't ask why they did that. I didn't know to ask. I don't think I said much. I didn't think we had the right to say anything as we were in a camp surrounded by barbed wires. We didn't have any rights in the camp.

I was 19 years old, and my father died.

The people at the morgue said we had to buy a coffin. We didn't have much money, only the money that was given to us by the Indian government, like five rupees a month per person. So we got this plain wooden box.

My second brother and I buried my father in the cemetery just outside the camp, a cemetery with the graves of Japanese soldiers. The cemetery also had some German and Italian soldiers buried there. The ground in the cemetery had more stones than dirt. My brother and I tried to dig our father's grave. I was numb yet my palms hurt. The handle of the shovel dug into my palms. They were bloody when we finally lowered the wooden box with my father's body into the hole we had dug.

My family was released in June of 1965, the first or second group to leave. We wanted to take my father's bones back with us to Shillong. We wanted to bury him in the Chinese cemetery in the clan plot. When we dug him up, we saw there was still flesh on the bones and we could see

hair as well. I guess it was so dry in Rajasthan the flesh just dried up on the bones. So we cremated my father's body. The next day we went and picked over the ashes. We selected bits of bones, the bigger pieces, and put them in a jar. We took the jar with us back to Shillong and buried it in a Chinese cemetery.<sup>10</sup>

Two other families also had someone die while interned in Deoli. One of them was the sister of the person next door to us in Shillong, the Hous. When they heard what we did with my father's body, Mr. Hous also dug up and cremated his sister's body and took the bones back to Shillong. Two other Chinese families did the same.

When we returned to Shillong, we went to our shop right away. Like all the Chinese in India, we had our living quarters at the back of the shop. It wasn't our shop and our home any more. All our things were gone—the shoes, the shoe making equipment, all gone. The landlord had leased the shop out to someone else, an Indian. The Indian told us to go away. It was now his shop.

My mother said, "I want to look inside. Just to take a look. Then we will go away."

The Indian reluctantly let us inside the shop. My mother had hidden money in cracks on the walls and in little holes here and there. You know what? Someone had gone through all the cracks and holes in the shop. All the cracks and holes were gone.

So there we were back in Shillong—no money, no home, and staying with relatives. I needed to start making and selling shoes again. I needed to make some money to rent somewhere for us to stay. I needed money to buy food to feed my mother, brothers and sisters.

The landlord came and talked to us.

The landlord said, "I put all the stuff in the shop in a *godam* (warehouse) for safekeeping. You owe me 2,000 rupees for rent on the storage."

I told him, "The shoes in storage aren't worth even half of that. The shoes are over three years out of style. We probably can't sell them at all."

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<sup>10</sup> Hakka mortuary custom: upon death, the deceased is buried in a temporary grave in the cemetery. After five to seven years, the body is exhumed; the skeleton is placed in a burial urn, arranged in a fetal position and sits upright. The urn is then buried in a permanent tomb. (Howard, 1991)

I needed the shoe making tools in the godam. I could have gone to Calcutta to get the new tools for much less than 2,000 rupees, but the Indian government had new laws that said that we couldn't leave Shillong. We needed 2,000 rupees, but we only had 700 rupees, and I didn't know what to do. I had just turned 20, but I was the head of the household with my mother and five younger brothers and sisters to look after. It was a good thing that a relative lent us the money. So we got our stuff back.

When I checked over the things in storage, I found many pairs of used Wellington boots and shoes, all scuffed up and worn. People must have sneaked into the godam, tried on the shoes and walked out with the new shoes that fit, leaving their worn ones behind. Anyway, we got our tools back.

Then I looked for a shop. One guy told me he had a site for rent in a part of Shillong I didn't know that well and he would build a shop there for me. I went to look at the site. You wouldn't believe it! The landlord must have rented the site out as a garbage dump. Garbage spilled out onto the street. The smell told me that the garbage had been there for a long time. The landlord said, "I will get rid of the stuff and rent it to you for 500 rupees a month."

We didn't have much money, and the rent was cheap. The location was good, too. A couple of Chinese had opened their shoe shops nearby. So I signed the lease. The truck rented by the landlord had to make four or five trips to get rid of the garbage. Then he sent carpenters to build the shop. He must have sent dwarves because when I took over the door was so low I bumped my head on it every time I entered. The doorway was less than five feet tall. The customers had to duck their heads to enter the shop. It's funny thinking about it now.

The whole family worked hard at the shop, especially my mother. She did the cutting of the thick leather for the bottoms of shoes. She cut the uppers, and she sewed the pieces together. She worked really hard. We all worked really hard.

When we returned to Shillong, the Indian government had a new law. The law said the Chinese had to report to the police station every day. We didn't have to on Saturdays and Sundays because the police closed the station on weekends.

So you can imagine me, trying to get my business going, and I had to go to the police station every day, in all weather, to report to the police. During the monsoon I squished into the police

station dripping wet from the chest down. Umbrellas can't protect you from the downpour during the monsoon.

A Chinese man got fed up going to the police station every day. He told the police, "I am not coming in to report to you every day. Put me back in Deoli. There I had food, I don't have to lift a finger, I don't have to report to anybody, and I don't have to make a living. Just put me back in Deoli."

The police didn't do anything to this man. They just let him be. But if you wanted to go into business, then the police could create a lot of trouble for you. So I kept on reporting to the police for, oh, quite a while.

Many of my friends immigrated to Canada from 1969 to the 1980s. My mother visited Toronto in 1975 or '76. She came back and told me, "Life in Canada is not that good. The people there work so hard, and you couldn't get together with friends so easily. Better stay here, bring up your children. Maybe later."

I got married. I had three daughters and two sons. My mother passed away a couple of years ago. I and my family immigrated to Canada in 1991. Four of my children are in Canada and two of them finished university. My eldest daughter lives with her husband and two children in Nagaland, northeastern India. Life is much easier here. I am retired now and financially secure. I miss the life in India. You know, in India you just opened the Chinese newspaper and you could read whose sons or daughters were getting married, who died, and who had a son or daughter. Here in Canada, you don't know what's happening to your friends.

In India, we had connections with other Chinese. No matter where you were, we knew what our friends were doing. If something happened to a Chinese in Bombay, his friend in Calcutta would know. The connection was strong and always there. In Canada, we don't have this connection. Maybe because we don't need the connection to survive in Canada, but you need it in India.

Here in Canada, I don't have to be afraid that a policeman will come to the door to throw me out of the country. So I guess I am happy, sort of.

## Chapter 10

### Hua's account

My grandfather came from China in the late 1800s. He settled in Calcutta and opened a shoe shop in the New Market area. He specialized in women's shoes. My grandmother came to Calcutta a couple of years later, and they had six kids. My grandfather also started a cane furniture business, selling mainly to the British. The British were very fond of cane furniture. My grandfather became well known for his higher-end cane furniture.

My father was born in 1920 or '21. Like most of the Chinese in India at that time, Grandfather wanted his children to grow up Chinese so he sent all his children to study at a Chinese language school. When they graduated, he sent them to study English. My father graduated from *Kam Chau* (Cambridge).<sup>11</sup> So my papa was fluent in Chinese and English.

When my father was 20 years old, Grandfather wrote to relatives in Moi Yen and asked them to find a wife for my father. So my mother came to Calcutta and married my father. My elder brother was born two years before me. I was born in 1944, the second child.

When my father graduated, he went to work in a restaurant in Calcutta. He liked working in the restaurant. He didn't like working in the shoe shop. After a few years he had his own restaurant, a small one, selling Chinese snacks like dim sum things.

When I was four or five years old, my grandmother took my elder brother, my younger brother and me to Moi Yen, China. Most of the Chinese in Calcutta wanted their children to grow up Chinese.

I don't remember much of my life in Moi Yen. I think my grandmother couldn't get used to life in China again. She had got used to the life in India. Mao took over China just when we got to the home village, but I don't think there was much change in Moi Yen. My grandmother took my two brothers and me back to Calcutta in 1955.

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<sup>11</sup> The British set up a curriculum and examination system for the English language schools in the British colonies, administered by Cambridge University in conjunction with the Local Examinations Syndicate. The Senior Cambridge Certificate was equivalent to the Ordinary Level Certificate in Britain, or the modern day High School Certificate.

When I returned to Calcutta, my father sent me to study at Moi Kong Chinese School. I graduated, and he sent me and my two brothers to an English language school near Calcutta.

My father opened a restaurant in Digboi, a petroleum town in the Himalayas. He did really well. My mother joined him in Digboi with my youngest brother and two sisters.

Then my father transferred me and my two younger brothers to a boarding school in Shillong, a town with many English language schools in the foothills of the Himalayas.

When the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident flared up, the Indian government sent soldiers to collect all the students with Chinese last names from the boarding schools in Shillong. Some students hid and weren't arrested. But my brothers and I were on the *yoeu kueo* (foreigners' registry). You know what *yoeu kueo* is, eh? Well, I was a foreign student there, you understand? So we were all caught.

Yes, yes, I was born in India. But my brothers and I went to China with my grandmother, so we were on the foreigners' registry. It really didn't matter. Even if you were an Indian citizen, but ethnically Chinese, you were arrested in the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

The *koi chong* (principal), a Catholic priest, said, "Why are you arresting these children?"

The Indian soldiers said, "We are protecting them, to keep them safe."

The principal said, "These are students. Young people. We will protect them. The school will protect them. Let them be."

The soldiers said, "No, no. The *khap ka* (country) will protect these Chinese students. It is the law. Tell the Chinese students not to bring too much. They should be back in no time."

The principal—we called him Reverend Father—told us to pack. I asked, "What should we take with us?"

The Reverend Father said, "Take everything. I don't know how long you will be away."

I packed everything I had at the school: clothes, books, even an iron. You know one of those big cast iron ones? You flipped open a flap on top of the iron, under the handle, and you put hot coal

in. That's why the handle was all wrapped up in cloth. To keep it cooler so you wouldn't burn your hand.

So we were put in a jail in Shillong, with criminals. We stayed there for a couple of days. I was 18 years old. We waited in jail for we don't know what. When the jail filled up, the soldiers collected all the *hua chau* (overseas Chinese) from the jail and crammed us onto a train. I was on the train with the *hua chau* from Shillong and we headed for *Sip Chung Yan* (concentration camp).

The soldiers put my two brothers and my sister into the same car on the train with other Chinese from Shillong. My sister didn't bring much stuff. She boarded with my parents' friends in Shillong. When the soldiers came to pick the family up, they picked up my sister as well. She was nine years old. The soldiers told everyone not to bring too much stuff and that they would be released soon. Most of us believed them. We wanted to believe them.

We were on the train for seven days. Every day, we got one meal only. We stopped outside a station, and the soldiers cooked our meal. We ate and the train would pull out of the station. We usually stopped for two or three hours.

The soldiers cooked lentils and rice, all mixed up in a big pot, with a bit of salt. That's it, nothing much. It was very boring food.

At the stations the local Indians came out to check us over. I don't think they had seen a Chinese before. We passed through places where there were no Chinese, so when the local Indians saw us, they thought we looked strange. The local Indians thought we were Chinese soldiers that the *jawans* (the Indian soldiers) had caught at the border. They thought we were prisoners of war. They didn't know that most of us were born in India. We were just kids.

When we got to the camp the soldiers registered us at the gate, and then we were strip-searched before we entered the camp. Our things had to be registered as well. Our things were okay. They didn't take anything. We got all of it back when we left the camp four years later.

The next day, the guards brought bread for us to eat. We—that is, the younger people—just couldn't eat it. We played with the bread by throwing the pieces against the wall. The bread bounced off the wall just like stones. The older people got hungry so they soaked the bread and

ate it. They soaked it in very weak tea the soldiers served us. The younger people fussed about with the food. Although we got a lot hungrier than the older people, most times we didn't eat the stuff. Then the soldiers hired local people to cook for us.

We couldn't get used to the food cooked by the Indians.

The funny thing is, in the camp all our rice came from the U.S., long grain rice. We got the bag the rice came in, and it was from the U.S. The local people didn't know how to cook the rice. They poured water in and turned the rice into *congee* (porridge), or sometimes it was half-cooked. It was much better when we cooked for ourselves.

My brothers, my sister and I met up with my parents in the camp. I think we set up our living quarters with four or five other families in a big dormitory, on Wing 4 or 5 I think. There were five wings in the camp segregated by a barbed wire fence with a gate between the wings. Another barbed wired fence ringed the whole camp. You could visit your friends in the other wings during the daytime.

On the journey from Shillong to Deoli, the soldiers put my parents in the car with the Chinese from Darjeeling and Makum and put my brothers, my sister and me in the car with the Chinese from Shillong. The train stopped for meals, and I came to know that my parents were in the last few cars.

You know, the Indian government had no experience. The soldiers followed what the English did in the war. It was very chaotic in the camp. They just didn't have the experience. They didn't set up schools or anything for us. I also don't think the government in New Delhi gave clear instructions to the camp commander on how long we had to stay in the camp or what to do with us in Deoli.

The young people said we wanted to have a school, so the camp commander gave us permission but he didn't hire teachers. He left it to the Chinese in the camp to work it out. So we had classes. The adults assigned the older kids to teach the younger ones. Yes, the older kids and I, we were in classes, but we were the teachers. We really had no idea how to teach.

For us, the older kids, we had absolutely nothing to do in the camp. The idleness and uncertainty disoriented us. Every day we sat outside the barracks with our friends. I knew almost everyone in

the camp, like my buddies who studied with me in Moi Kong. I also made new friends. There were a few young people I didn't know before. So we hung out together. That's it. Some of my friends wanted to go to China. They applied to the camp commander. The International Red Cross people came. Some of the Chinese told the Red Cross people they wanted to go back to China. The Red Cross people must have talked to the Chinese government. At that time I didn't know if the two governments talked at all. So many Chinese from Deoli Concentration Camp left for China. I think the Chinese government must have sent a big boat to pick up the Chinese. I think there were many Chinese all over India who wanted to go to China. I think they filled a couple of boats. The boats came to Madras to pick up the people, and those who wanted to go to China were taken to the train station and the train took them to Madras.

There were Hakka, Cantonese, Sai-yup and Fubei in the camp. Most of the people who went to China were the Cantonese, Sai-yup and Fubei, not that many Hakka. Most of the Hakka stayed.

My family stayed. My third younger brother, who was underage at that time, forged my father's signature on an application form. He said he wanted to go to school, and he figured he could go to school in China. My third brother left with his friends before my father found out.

The Chinese who left for China freed up about two wings. Those who remained waited to find out what would happen to them.

Life went on in the camp. I think quite a few young people fell in love. No one got married. We didn't know what our future was going to be, so nobody got married.

We had nothing to do, just visit someone here, visit someone there, just lazing around. We mostly stayed indoors with friends and passed the time.

The gate between the wings closed down around nine or ten at night. We younger people couldn't sleep so early, and there wasn't any entertainment, so we sneaked out, cut the barbed wire, squeezed through and visited our friends in other wings.

When we first arrived at the camp, food was prepared by the camp people. It was terrible. We protested. So later we cooked for ourselves. The Chinese complained again. The older people couldn't eat the *yut* (hot) food, with lots of masala. The adults in the camp decided that each

family would cook for themselves. We got the ration from the soldiers, cut the meat into pieces and gave it to each family with rice, beans and vegetables. Each family made their own meals.

In my family, my father cooked. I didn't do any cooking. Sometimes my mother cooked. But we helped. We had to help. Some Chinese needed help. So we, the young people, took turns helping.

In the dormitory we slept on rope beds. Not all of us had our own beds. At first, the little children had to sleep with their parents. We the bigger kids had our own beds.

There were single men. They slept on the verandahs.

There was this Chinese, Lau. He dressed rather fashionably. He came from Bangalore. Lau arranged parties for the young people, like dances and all that. We usually had English music, songs by Doris Day, Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley. Lau showed us how to make moon cakes and sponge cakes. All this happened much later, not in 1962, but in 1963 or 1964, when the camp commander relaxed the rules and we could do things that we were once not allowed.

The riot was a different story. It happened, I think, six months after the Indian government locked us up in Deoli Concentration Camp.

The security police came. I think they already got the order to shoot if the fighting, yelling and stone-throwing continued. It started at the first wing and spread to the second or third wing. The security police came with guns pointed at us and shouted for us to go back to our barracks or they would shoot. Most of the people ran back to their barracks, but some didn't. These people ran towards the security police and shouted, "We didn't do anything." The security police pulled out their nightsticks and started hitting left and right. I saw blood dripping down faces.

The police grabbed people anyhow. There were people who just came out to see what was happening, and the police just grabbed them. They grabbed people standing outside the barracks whether they were rioting or not.

I think the security police arrested about 40 people. I wasn't arrested. The security police questioned me, but they let me go. My friends said it was because I ironed my clothes and looked respectable. The security police locked the arrested Chinese young men in solitary confinement. The Chinese in the camp cooked for the young people who were locked up. We delivered the

food to the soldiers, and the soldiers took the food into the rooms where our friends were confined. The security police kept the 40 people in solitary confinement for about a week.

I think it was after the riot that many people applied to go to China. Some because of the riot, and some who didn't want to go to China, changed their minds. Many *pan-sien* (half-Chinese), who couldn't speak Chinese, decided to go to China. They said, "Since the Indian government did not recognize us as Indians, even though we spoke nothing but Indian dialects and they treated us as criminals, we may as well go to China." So they did. So many half-Chinese left the camp for China.

Many stayed behind. Like my family. We hoped to resume the lives that we had before the Indian government put us in a concentration camp. Once the two governments sorted out the mess, that is. We had shops, we had homes, and we had factories. We wanted to go back to the lives the Indian government forced us to leave behind. So we tried to settle down and wait for the day when the government would release us. At the same time, the Chinese who remained were worried. The Indian government could give the "Quit India" order and send us to China. We didn't want to go. We were born in India. We were Indians.

You asked how we spent the time in the camp. The talented young people gathered together and sang, something like karaoke. They sang in Napalese, Hindi, English and Chinese. We, the ones with no talent, sat and listened. There were about 200 young people in the camp. The Chinese from Darjeeling sang in Napalese. Many Chinese didn't even speak Chinese. Sometimes we had a bonfire. We sat and clapped. I guess we were happy listening to songs. This is the way we passed the time.

We tried kung fu at one time. A Chinese from Makum knew kung fu and he tried to teach the teenagers. He started the class really early in the morning. A lot of the young people didn't want to get up that early. The first two or three classes were quite full. After that a lot of us preferred to sleep in, so we didn't have that many people. Then there was the General, who tried to give exercise classes. He had been an officer or something in the Chinese army. The British or the Americans used to fly Chinese soldiers in from China to India during WWII. I think they trained them somewhere in Bihar and flew them back to China to fight the Japanese. Anyway, the General visited Calcutta when he was being trained in Bihar. He hid in Chinatown and never went back to China. He was picked up by the Indian army in 1962 and interned in Deoli with us.

The General lined us up in three rows. We all had sticks in our hands, pretending they were guns. The first row lay on their stomachs on the ground. The second row knelt behind the first row. The third row stood behind the second row. We pointed our sticks and pretended to fire. The General would shout an order. We would jump up and run forward screaming, “Kill your enemy,” or something like that. I forgot what we shouted. It was fun. We would flop on the ground when he shouted another order. The camp commander got worried. He stopped the exercise. I guess he thought we would learn to fight like a soldier.

In 1964, when the three batches of Chinese had left for China, Shastri visited Deoli Concentration Camp. He wasn't the prime minister then. He was the home minister. I talked to him. I said, “You know, I am supposed to be in high school, and now I am here, no school. I am here now for a couple of years. I want to study outside this camp. I want to be able to go outside for classes and come back in the evening.”

Shastri thought about it for a bit and said, “When I go back to New Delhi, we will have a meeting, and I will see what I can do.” He went back to New Delhi, and nothing happened. Shastri later became the Prime Minister of India, for a short time, and then he died.

The International Red Cross came. They distributed shirts to everyone, really big shirts. The material of the shirts was very good. But we had to take in the sides. The Chinese government sent things to us through the International Red Cross. We had canned fish, candies, *luk-sek* (Chinese herbal remedy), toothbrushes and toothpaste. We had a big towel and facecloth and stuff that we Chinese could use. The big shirts came from the people in the Western countries. The soldiers didn't take anything. Maybe they kept what was left over.

After the International Red Cross people came and so many Chinese went to China, our life got a lot better. I think because there were fewer people, the camp commander became more flexible. It was around the end of 1964 or the beginning of 1965. The camp commander let us go on day trips. There used to be lots of rajas in Rajasthan so we got to see lots of palaces. The most famous one was Jaipur, and I went there. We left early in the morning, played tourists and came back to be locked up in the concentration camp.

My family was released in 1966. We went to our restaurant in Digboi. Everything was gone. Everything.

While we were locked away, my grandfather had passed away in Calcutta. My grandmother returned to China, and she died soon after.

My father died two years after we left Deoli. I never went back to school. I worked in a restaurant and then immigrated to Canada in 1969.

Now I am retired. I am financially secure in Canada. I know there is no “Quit Canada” law here that will hit me unexpectedly. But the experience of the camp stayed with me. I guess you don’t forget things like that, ever. Sometimes I wonder if my father would still be alive if we hadn’t lost everything when we were interned. He died when he was only 48 years old. I wonder.

## Chapter 11

### Liu's account

I am the oldest of six children, born in 1946. My father had a restaurant, a shoe shop and a hotel in Darjeeling. Actually all my brothers and sisters have emigrated, except for one brother, who is still in Darjeeling, looking after the family businesses.

I was picked up at boarding school in Shillong. I don't remember much about being picked up or the train journey.

The Indian government had no experience with a concentration camp. They copied the British. The British interned Japanese soldiers as prisoners of war in Deoli. So the Indian government interned us in Deoli because India was at war with China.

I think the Indian government wanted to show Indians that they were doing something about the Chinese soldiers at their borders, so they arrested the Chinese living within India. They treated us like prisoners of war, but we were not prisoners of war. Most of us were born in India. We were civilians, we had jobs, we had shops and a lot of us were kids, still in school. We never lifted a gun to fight the Indians. But we were locked up all the same.

It was so frustrating. We lost everything, got shipped off and locked up in a hot, dry place. You can understand why we rioted, as everyone worried about their future, and everyone had a short temper.

Actually, the Tibetans started the riot. The Tibetans are Chinese, too. So they were picked up just like us. The soldiers picked up most of the Tibetans in Darjeeling.

There were about 200 Tibetans in Deoli, in Wing 1. The Tibetans said, "You are the majority, you did this to us."

The Tibetans hated us. They said that it was because of us they were in the camp. We kept telling them, "No, we are not from China, we are from Shillong or Darjeeling or Makum, just like you." But they wouldn't listen. They tried to make trouble. They shouted at us, they hit us and they threw stones at us. So we shouted back and we threw stones at them.

The Tibetans wanted us to leave for China. Let me tell you, most of the Chinese didn't want to go to China. They wanted to stay in India. Why would they want to go to China? Have you been to Moi Yen? When? 2004? It's much better in 2004. I was born in India. My mother took me and my two younger brothers to China in the 1950s. I don't remember when. Most Chinese in India sent their children to China, to "Chinese-ize" us. The older Chinese feared that we would become more Indian than Chinese. I was in China for four years. My mother couldn't get used to the Moi Yen way of life again. It was hard in those days, not like now. You didn't have very much in China. It got too much for my mother, so she took my brothers and me back to India.

I will go back to the riot in Deoli. The camp commander distributed application forms for those who wanted to go to China. Many Chinese thought it was a good idea and they signed the forms. The Chinese government sent boats to a port in Madras—I don't remember which port—to pick up the Chinese who wanted to go to China.

The Tibetans in Deoli thought that if they created trouble, the Indian government would get rid of the Chinese in Deoli Concentration Camp by sending us back to China. Then, the Tibetans thought, they would be able to leave the camp and go home. The Chinese from Makum, some from Bombay and Shillong, were mostly Cantonese. They wanted to leave for China. I think the Indian army had assigned them to Wing 5. Anyway, the Cantonese from Wing 5 told the Tibetans to sit back and not make trouble. The Cantonese thought that conflict in the camp might delay their departure to China.

The Cantonese and the Tibetans argued. The arguments got louder. Then stones, punches and kicks flew.

The Tibetans attacked the Cantonese and the Cantonese fought back. Somehow, the fighting spread to the other wings. Soon, the whole camp seemed to be shouting and people were running around. The security police came. They said, "If you don't stop, we will shoot." They already got the order to shoot if the fighting continued. The fighting didn't stop, even with the security police's guns pointed at them. Then the security police started hitting people, even those who weren't involved.

The Indian security police at the camp treated us really badly. They shouted at the women to go back to their rooms, otherwise they would shoot. I think they pushed the women. There were

people who just came out to see what was happening and the police just grabbed them. They grabbed people standing outside the barracks, whether they were guilty or not, and they hit everyone with their nightsticks.

When I saw the security police grabbing people, I edged my way back to my barrack and pretended to sleep. So I wasn't arrested.

Many of my friends were arrested and locked up in solitary confinement. Their treatment was very inhumane.

Our lives got better after the International Red Cross' visit. The Red Cross gave us lots of stuff. The Chinese government sent a lot of things through the Red Cross. At that time, the Chinese government was very poor. The Chinese in mainland China didn't have enough food to eat. Yet they sent things to us. There were dried mushrooms and other foods, all other good stuff. Some families didn't want them so they sold the Chinese dried goods to others. Some men gambled with the dried goods. Most gambled for cigarettes.

Our life in the camp was quite interesting. We spent a lot of time doing something about food. Did you know that the older people grew vegetables? They wrote to their relatives in Calcutta for seeds and most of the older people, who used to farm in China, grew beautiful Chinese vegetables, like pak-choi and mustard greens, and we had lots of Chinese vegetables in our meals.

One day my friends and I talked about how we missed watermelon. I said, "I think the family in my barrack has some watermelon seeds. I can get some from them. Let's grow some watermelon."

Everyone thought it was a good idea. We looked for a spot to plant our watermelon seeds. We decided on an empty lot by the ravine. We thought we would not have far to go to get water for our plants as the ravine had a trickle of water all the time. Actually, people threw garbage into the ravine, not raw sewage, just garbage, like plastic bags and broken crockery.

Rajasthan is not a good place to grow plants. The plot was large but quite rocky, not much soil. Anyway, I don't know if it was the unclean water or the bad soil, but the watermelon plant didn't look too healthy and we got only one tiny melon.

Almost every family in the camp kept chickens, mostly for eggs, but also for meat. One night, a bobcat came to the camp. He must have smelled the chicken and thought it would like to have a chicken dinner that night. Somehow the bobcat wandered into one of the barracks. Chen's mother happened to be the only one inside the barrack that evening. We don't know what she was thinking. She closed the door, picked up a big stick and beat the bobcat to death. There was a lot of noise as she chased the bobcat around inside the barrack. Chen, of course, missed all the fun. He doesn't even remember his mother killing a bobcat.

The bobcat was big, as big as a medium-size dog. It looked like a cat, though, with brownish fur. Everyone at Deoli camp talked about Chen's mother killing the bobcat. I think even the security police heard about it.

The next morning other Chinese came and asked for a piece of the bobcat meat. That cat was gone in a short time. I don't remember what the meat tasted like.

The young people in the camp walked around with homemade slings. We made slings out of bits of leather and used stones to fling at birds. Sometimes, we baked clay pellets in the ashes of the cooking fire and used the hardened pellets as ammunition. I think round stones or round pellets were the best for hitting our targets.

I don't know if we had good aim or that there were just so many of us. We hardly missed. It was easy to bring down birds. We got scraps of meat left over from cooking and used them as bait. Eagles couldn't resist these meats. We killed quite a few eagles. We just flung stones at the eagles when they landed on the ground eating the bait. We also caught parrots and bats. We usually cooked the meats in Indian spices. I think they made a change from mutton. The camp commander gave us mutton very often. We were rather tired of mutton so eagles, bats and parrots were rather interesting changes.

The Indian government released my family and me in 1965. We went to Calcutta and opened a shoe shop in Lal Bazaar. I never went back to school.

I immigrated to Canada in 1976. I opened a restaurant in London, Ontario. Now I am retired. I enjoy my life here. Do I miss the life in India? Oh, maybe a little.

## Chapter 12

### Reflections

My parents left Moi Yen, China, in the 1920s and immigrated to Calcutta, the city with the largest concentration of Chinese immigrants in India. My father learned the craft of shoe making. He opened three shoe shops and prospered.

We lived in the Chinatown of Calcutta. My family and I were not interned in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. But we lived through this period when our Indian neighbours turned against us. The Indian government published anti-Chinese nationalistic rhetoric that depicted the Chinese as enemies, and Bollywood movies showed Chinese men as moustache-twirling villains and Chinese women as prostitutes. The rhetoric stirred up mainstream Indians, who invaded and destroyed Chinese properties, attacked Chinese in their homes or on the streets and in general tormented Chinese Indians.



Figure 1. Chenko Board of Directors, teachers and graduates – December 31, 1963

The Indian government deported many Chinese families from Calcutta. In 1962, I was in grade five attending Chenko Chinese language school. I had over 25 classmates. In the graduation photograph of December 1963, I count 12 graduates. Of the Chinese families who left India for China, the Indian government had deported half, the rest went voluntarily.

The Indian government passed a law that made government jobs off limits to the Chinese. Many Chinese worked in the docks and shipyards of Calcutta and lost their jobs. Chinese carpenters who worked in private tea or furniture factories also lost their jobs because of the anti-Chinese atmosphere. Others left Calcutta when their businesses declined due to the mainstream Indian boycott, or after their properties were destroyed.

The majority of the Chinese who lived in India emigrated. This continues even today.

I left Calcutta for Toronto in 1972. In Canada, as I busied myself in studies, work and making new friends, my memories of Calcutta Chinatown in the aftermath of 1962 Sino-Indian Incident receded to the back of my mind, behind a closed door, until one day the door opened.

I browsed the DVD section of the Mississauga Central Library. I came across Deepak Mehta's 2002 *Bollywood/Hollywood*, a movie about a young, handsome rich Indian, played by Rahul Khanna, who lives in Toronto and mistakes an Indian woman, played by Lisa Rai, for a Spanish call girl. Khanna hires Lisa to pretend to be his fiancée.

I checked out the DVD.

I laughed at the Bollywood clichés. The hero, heroine and supporting dancers prance around in an apartment, with Toronto's downtown skyline framed by the windows and screen doors to the balcony. Truths come out and tears flow. The movie winds into the predictable happy ending, and the whole cast smiles and dances around the happy couple. A transvestite dressed in a Chinese-style gown, with a vaguely Chinese-like hairdo, minces and waves a Chinese fan and sings.

Mehta reuses an old song from a 1958 Bollywood movie, *Howrah Bridge*. In that film the dancer also wears a similar Chinese dress, her face made up to look like a Chinese with upward-slanting eyes. She waves a Chinese fan at male dancers who dress in vaguely Western sailor outfits, and coos, "*Mera naam hai Ching Ching Chu, Ching Ching Chu Chu, Ching Ching Chu....*" "Hallo, mister, how do you do?" she asks. The setting is a cliché of a club where prostitutes pick up sailors with that line.

The song sent me back to Chattawalla Gully in 1962 and 1963, where I and my friends sprinted for home as Indian boys ran after us and mocked, “*Mera naam hai Ching Ching Chu, Ching Ching Chu, Ching Ching Chu...*”<sup>12</sup> (My name is Ching Ching Chu) and threw stones at us.

I remember Mr. Ma, the principal of our Chinese school language school, cancelling all extracurricular sports like basketball and table tennis, so that we could go home before dark. I recall my mother finding a knife on my brother, Fu, and taking it from him. Chinese boys had decided to carry knives after a group of Indian youths had beaten several of them.

I remember my mother and her friends huddled behind locked doors, recounting which Chinese shops had been broken in to, who in the Chinese community had been beaten up that day, and listing the names of Chinese families who had been sent to Deoli Detention Camp. (Li, 2006)

At family and social gatherings, the Chinese speculated on why the Indian government deported one Chinese family but not their neighbours. We wondered why the Indian government arrested and jailed one Chinese family, and interned another. The members of the Chinese community in Calcutta believed that the Indian Secret Service spied on Chinese Indians. I remember the whispers around the *mahjong* (gaming) table:

“Chen and his family received the deportation order today. Ahya, I told old Chen not to go to the Chinese consulate. He didn’t listen.”

“I heard loud banging on the Tsang family’s door last night. The soldiers came and took them. I bet the secret service police saw Old Tsang talking to Old Wong, who went to the Chinese consulate. The secret police are everywhere and they watch you all the time.”

“The Liang family is going back to China. Mrs. Liang told me that Mr. Liang is certain that someone follows him everywhere. He thinks the Indian Secret Police spies on him. Mr. Liang went to the Chinese consulate’s Chinese New Year celebration every year. He said he liked the food there. Mr. Liang thinks that anytime now, the soldiers will come to arrest him. So he’s decided to go back to China next month. Everyday someone is arrested or deported or just leave. Soon we won’t have enough people to fill the *mahjong* tables in the club house.”

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<sup>12</sup> “Ching, Ching Chu...” is a parody of Chinese speech.



Figure 2. Pearl and me. 1959

I pulled out the photo albums I had brought to Canada almost 40 years before. The albums are a photo gallery of Chinese who lived in Calcutta in the 1960s, and who are now scattered in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia.

I look at a picture of Pearl—my best friend—and me. Pearl’s father, a government employee, lost his job as a maintenance man at the docks because the Indian government barred Chinese from working in government jobs. Pearl’s father opted to return to China.



Figure 3. Chen

I look at a picture of Chen, my classmate in Chenko Chinese School. Her father worked in a furniture factory owned by an Indian. Chen’s family received deportation orders. In the picture, Chen posed with a neighbour’s baby. She was fond of the baby and wanted a picture to remember him by. Pearl, Chen and I promised to write, but the Chinese and Indian governments suspended postal service between the two countries after the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

My friends’ parents did not own properties, but many Chinese in India did. Under the Defence of India Rule of 1962, the Indian central government declared 80 properties owned by the deported or emigrated Chinese as “enemy property” and seized them. Fifteen of the confiscated properties belonged to Chinese who lived in Tangra (Mohan, 2010)



Figure 4. From left: Daisy, me and Susan

In the album, I look at a picture of Daisy, Susan and me, taken three months before I left for Canada. Daisy immigrated to San Francisco and Susan to Canada. I look at a picture of Sun-Yun, who left for Taiwan a month after I immigrated to Canada, and I look at a photo of Mi, who now lives in Vancouver. I look at other faces in my photo album, faces of people who I remember but don’t know where they emigrated to and don’t know where they are today.



Figure 5. Sun-Yun

The 1962 Sino-Indian Incident, with its aftermath of Indian government-sanctioned harassment and assaults upon Chinese residents, fundamentally changed the Chinese communities in India. Most Chinese in the 1950s and early 1960s wanted their children to graduate from Chinese language schools, marry someone from the Chinese community and work in Chinese businesses. After the Sino-Indian Incident, most Chinese parents sent their children to English language schools so that upon graduation, their children would be able to immigrate to Europe, North America, Australia and other parts of Asia.

My mother initially planned for me to graduate from Chenko, a Chinese language elementary school, and then attend Moi Kong, a Chinese language high school. But in the wake of the Sino-Indian Incident, my mother enrolled me in an English language school when I graduated from Chenko. She planned for me to emigrate.

Forty-eight years later, of my parents' 7 children and 21 grandchildren who were born in India and who are still alive in 2010, seven remain in India. The rest have scattered all over the globe: to Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Of the 5,000 Chinese remaining in Calcutta today, every single one has friends or relatives who have emigrated.

Strife has marked the past 70 years of the Indian subcontinent. The two-day "Great Killings" in Calcutta in August of 1946 killed 6,000 and injured 20,000.<sup>13</sup> The 1947 India-Pakistan partition

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<sup>13</sup> On August 16, 1946, Muslims and Hindus in Calcutta clashed. Muslims rampaged through Hindu shops and houses, destroyed properties, and raped and killed Hindus. The Hindus rampaged through Muslim shops and houses, destroyed properties, and raped and killed Muslims.

displaced 12.5 million and killed 1 million.<sup>14</sup> The Indian-Pakistani wars of 1965<sup>15</sup> and 1971<sup>16</sup> had a total estimated casualty of 3 million.

The magnitude of these losses has overshadowed the displacement of 35,000 Chinese residents in 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

Not much has been published about the Chinese residents in India during the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. Rita Chowdhry's *Makum*, written in Assamese<sup>17</sup> and published in 2010, is an exception; Payel Bannerjee's 2007 article "Chinese Indians in fire: Refractions of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and citizenship in post-colonial India's memories of the Sino-Indian war," is another.

My eight-page short story about living through the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident in *The Last Dragon Dance* attracted attention; Rafeeq Ellias' book of photographs, *Chinatown Kolkata*, and his documentary, *The Legend of Fat Mama*, touch on the Sino-Indian Incident. Zang Xing's article, which explores the identity of Chinese Indians, will be published in December 2010 or early 2011. One section of Zhang's article looks at the lives of a group of Chinese who were deported or voluntarily went to China in the wake of the 1962 conflict.

The Chinese Indians in Toronto identify their ethnic heritage geographically based on where they used to live in India In a recent get-together in Scarborough, I sat at a table with a group of

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<sup>14</sup> After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Hindus in Pakistan migrated to India and Muslims in India left for Pakistan.

<sup>15</sup> India and Pakistan fought over disputed territories in Kashmir. The war started on August 5, 1965, and stalemated a month later. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on September 20, 1965, that called for a ceasefire. India accepted the resolution on September 21. Pakistan accepted it on September 22.

<sup>16</sup> India and Pakistan clashed on December 6, 1971, on the eastern and western fronts. The war ended 11 days later when the Pakistani military forces in East Pakistan surrendered and Pakistan ceded East Pakistan as an independent Bangladesh.

<sup>17</sup> Assamese is the official language of the state of Assam, India.

immigrants from Calcutta Chinatown. A man from across the room came up and spoke to my cousin: “Are you from *Ka San* (Calcutta City)?”

My cousin nodded. “Yes. I am from the Dhamtala area, near New Market. You?”

“I am from the Bara Bazaar area. I am Yung Lin-Kong’s son.”

“You must be from Sun Yat Sen Street,” I interjected.

Yung shook his head. “No, no. I used to live near the Cantonese carpentry shop, on Black Burn Lane.”

“Oh. You must know my second brother, Li Ping-chen. He used to live on Black Burn Lane, on the second floor across from a carpentry shop,” I said.

“Yes, yes. I know Ping-chen.” He peered at me. “You are his sister?”

“Yes. You must also know my eldest brother, Ping-Yun. He used to work in the family shoe shop on Bentinck Street.”

“I immigrated to Calcutta in 1951. I was a kid at that time. My son sponsored me to Toronto two years ago. You could say I lived most of my life in Calcutta.”

“You must remember the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident,” I said. “I remember many Chinese were deported or interned in Deoli. Was your family interned?”

“No. We were not interned.” His eyes glazed. “We don’t usually talk about 1962 incident. Anyway, I don’t remember much about that time. I was really young.”

Yung was 17 years old in 1962.

This is a typical response when I ask Chinese Indians to tell me about their experiences of the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident, especially the Deoli internees.

I understand their reluctance as I had the same uneasiness in talking about my experience.

For example, I had wanted to exclude “Rally at the Ochterlony Monument” from my manuscript *The Palm Leaf Fan* when I submitted it to a publisher. “Rally at the Ochterlony Monument” is the only story about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident in the book.

I had a vague fear that something might happen if I talked about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident. This subconscious fear persisted when I was asked to read from the book. I would read “Rally at the Ochterlony Monument” when asked, and then quickly change to another story in my book—one not related to the 1962 incident.

Even now, I react instinctively and want to avoid talking about the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident because of this subconscious fear.

It happened at Tim Hortons when I sat down with Liu, Hua and Chen for our interview. We froze when we saw two South Asian men in uniform at the next table—they turned out to be security guards. Seeing the uniforms as we discussed the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident triggered our fear of Indian soldiers and the anti-Chinese mob: the Indian soldiers who knocked on our doors at midnight to arrest and intern many of us; the Indian soldiers who knocked on our doors to hand out deportation orders; the Indians who taunted “*Mera naam hai Ching Ching Chu...*” as we ran for home; and the Indian mob who shouted “*Dirty Cheena, go home...*” before destroying our properties and turning their clubs on us.

A fear that never really goes away.

## Chapter 13

### Epilogue

I put this question to Ming, Hua, Chen and Liu to wrap up our interviews: “Would you have immigrated to Canada if the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident had not happened and you were not interned in Deoli?”

#### Ming

I would not have left India if my family and I had not been interned. My dad was doing so well in Digboi. Imagine putting five kids in expensive schools! He visited us often. At that time, I don't think the transportation system between Digboi and Shillong was very developed. I think my dad took an airplane when visiting us. My dad loved managing his catering and restaurant businesses. He lost everything when the Indian government interned us in Deoli Detention Camp.

When we returned to Digboi after our release, my family lost confidence in the Indian government. We had a rough time when my dad died. We emigrated as soon as we were able. To go back to your question: no. Our family would not have left India if we had not been interned and had not lost everything we worked hard for.

#### Hua

I would not have left India if I had not been interned. The internment robbed me of the chance to finish my education. Without a good education, there was nothing for me in India. I couldn't work in my father's business because the Indian government destroyed the business when he was arrested and interned my family and me. I couldn't get a good job in India. I needed a good education for that. So I emigrated. At least in Canada I got a job that gave me a good standard of living and also my children got a good education here.

#### Chen

I would have left India regardless. My father worked hard and we had a reasonably good living. I left school when I was 12 years old to work in my father's shop. But in the end, my family was

left with nothing when my father died in Deoli Detention Camp. All his hard work in the shop came to nothing. I worked really hard after my family and I were released from Deoli, and I made an okay living, but, well, in India, I would not have had the opportunity to travel. In India, I would not have earned enough to travel. The rupee is so weak compared to other currencies. My wife and I are going to China for a month. I am not sure I could have done this if my family and I were still living in India. Besides, most of my brothers and sisters are in Canada now. My second youngest sister emigrated in the 1980s and married a Chinese here in Scarborough. Then we followed. I definitely would have left India.

### Liu

I would not have left India. Our family earned a very good living in Darjeeling. We had the hotel, the restaurant and the shops—more than enough work for the whole family. The government finished our businesses off when it put the whole family in the detention camp. When our family was released, the Indian government would not allow us to return to Darjeeling. It was a sensitive area. We were released in Calcutta. The government returned our properties in Darjeeling to us, but there was no way for us to operate our businesses there. We were now living in Calcutta.

The government had leased our businesses in Darjeeling to a couple of Indians. We had no way of checking on our businesses or collecting rent or collecting money owed to us. Chinese people could not leave the town or city spelled out in their residency permits. When we were released, we were officially living in Calcutta. My father could not get a permit to visit Darjeeling, so we did not know what was happening to our businesses. I think my father eventually got permission to go to Darjeeling for a week at a time. Then later he was allowed to visit for a longer period. It was hard. My older brother now owns a hotel and restaurant in Darjeeling.

Sure, I would have stayed in India. India was better than a lot of places at that time. In India, it was so easy to start a business, like a hairdressing salon, restaurant or shoe shop. You did not need all that much money to start your own business. It was good for the Chinese in India. The 1962 Sino-Indian Incident and the Indian government's response really wrecked us. The new laws restricted us from doing our business.

I had many Cantonese friends. Like me, they were third- or fourth-generation Chinese. My Cantonese friends' families were mostly in woodworking businesses, tea plantations, tea and furniture factories and the shipyards. Most of these places were supposed to be government-owned businesses. As the Indian government passed laws that banned Chinese from government jobs, my friends' fathers lost their jobs. So they went to China. Some of my Cantonese friends owned their properties. These properties were taken over by the Indian government. I don't know why the Cantonese went to China, as most of them did not look like Chinese, dressed like Chinese or speak Chinese. When my Cantonese friends left for China, the Indian government confiscated their businesses, businesses that were started by their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. It was just so sad.

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Liu's Cantonese friends may yet get their properties back. Under the 1962 Defence of India Rule, the Indian government confiscated 80 properties belonging to Chinese residents who were deported or immigrated to China after 1962. The Indian government also seized 2,068 properties in the 1965 India-Pakistan War from Muslims who left for Pakistan. The Indian government had declared these Chinese and Muslim properties as "enemy property" and managed it under the Custodian of Enemy Property law enacted in 1968.

On July 9, 2010, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh put forward a bill in parliament to amend the 1968 Enemy Property Act. If passed, the bill will release the "enemy property" to their legal heirs "when certain conditions are met."

The bill caused a furore. The opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — Indian People's Party, opposed the amendment. The BJP traditionally supports Indian nationalism and "...believes properties of people who had migrated to Pakistan should not be handed to any heirs." (Mohan, 2010)

A BJP Member of Parliament argued that "Pakistan has had a similar law (controlling the properties of Indians who had returned to India) and no property was ever returned to anyone in that country." (De, 2010)

On October 20, 2010, Prime Minister Singh and his cabinet approved the amendment and the bill will be introduced in the Parliament's 2010 winter session. When that happens, the BJP may

oppose the amendment again. In the current tense climate between India and Pakistan, the bill may not pass. Since the properties seized from the Chinese are lumped in with the properties seized from the Muslims, the Chinese may not get their properties back.

“Returning the properties will be a first step,” said Andy Hsieh, president of the *Association of India Deoli Chinese Internees 1962* (AIDCI), whose organization supports the bill. “It’s about time.”

The AIDCI was previously known as the *1962 Deoli Concentration Camp Survivors and Friends Association*. It changed its name in 2010 and is registered as a charitable organization in Ontario.

“We sent a registered letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in August 2010. The association would like to erect a monument in Deoli Camp, a simple monument with a plaque to tell people of what happened in 1962 to the Chinese who were interned,” Andy said.

“The association has collected over \$3,000 from Chinese Indians in Toronto, mostly from those who were interned. I don’t expect to hear from the prime minister for a while, if we hear from him at all. But I hope he will respond positively.”

Andy believes all Chinese Indians need to tell their stories of what happened to them during the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

“Rita Chowdhry’s book, *Makum*, has highlighted the plight of the Chinese Indians. I believe the book will be translated into English, which will be good for our cause,” he said. “I hope so. I also hope that the other Chinese who were interned will join together and tell their stories. We are all getting old.”

I feel there are many more stories to be told. What happened to the Chinese who were deported or voluntarily went to China? Why did a third- or fourth-generation Indian-born Chinese, who had never been to China, voluntarily go to China? How were Indian-looking Chinese, who did not speak any Chinese dialect, treated in China? Did the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident shadow the lives of the Chinese who remained in India—and if so, how?

I hope to continue my research and to add to my understanding of how the lives of all Chinese Indians were affected by the 1962 Sino-Indian Incident.

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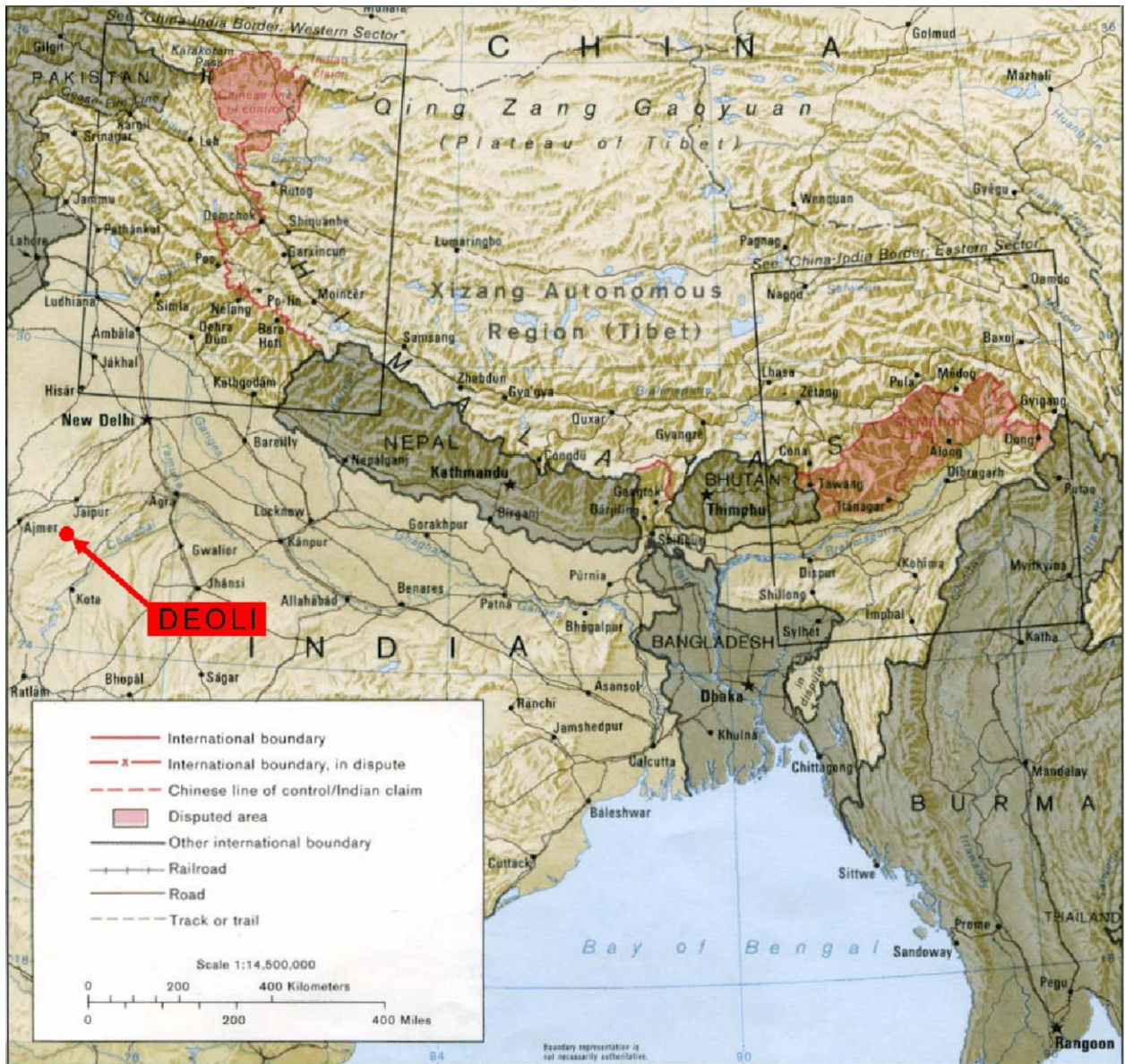
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# Plate 1



Source: Reprinted from Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, University of Texas Library Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, University of Texas Library online.  
Retrieved from: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/china\\_india\\_border\\_88.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_india_border_88.jpg)

Plate 1: Map locating north-west and north-east areas of dispute (highlighted in pink) and Deoli Detention Camp (in red).

## Plate 2



Source: Photograph reprinted with the permission of photographer Steve Chiu.

Plate 2: Aerial photograph showing the five wings of the Deoli Detention Camp.

## Plate 3



Source: Photograph reprinted with the permission of photographer Steve Chiu.

Plate 3: One of the barracks in the Deoli Detention Camp.

## Plate 4



Source: Photograph reprinted with the permission of photographer Steve Chiu.

Plate 4: An onsite information plaque at the Deoli Detention Camp.

### Transcription of information plaque:

#### History of Deoli Campus

The district of Kekari, Jaipur and Mewar were often ravaged by the plunders, for this reason an auxiliary force under the name of Kota Contingent was raised in the year around 1844.

In 1852 the Deoli Cantonment was established by Major Thom. Captain J D MacDonald was sent here from Ajmer in the year 1857 and raised a Meena Battalion, since the old Kota Contingent mutinied in 1857.

In 1858, this force was sent on a Kota expedition and distinguished themselves in the siege and capture of Kota. The Tonk-Haraoti Agency was established at Deoli in 1859 upto 1934. In 1903, the “Deoli Irregular Force” now distinguished as 42<sup>nd</sup> Deoli Regiment of Kota Contingent, commonly known as Meena Battalion stationed at Deoli.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Regiment participated in the Great War of 1914 and went on active service. Subsequently, another 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was also raised in June 1917 and sent on active service. Both the battalions distinguished themselves by acts of bravery in 1919. But as a whole failed to reach Amalgamation of 1922, all being disbanded on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1921.

In 1922, Col. A.G.M. Hogg formed the Meena Corps Deoli. And again in 1931 the Regiment stands disband and replaced by Royal Garhwal Rifle in 1932, who were deployed here to look after the security duty of the detention camp, in which number of Bengali leaders of Chittagong Armoury Case were detained during that period of freedom movement.

When the Quit India movement started, the camp was reopened again in the year 1940, then the ex-president of Pakistan General Ayub Khan was the Commandant during the period for the soldiers of Royal Garhwal Rifles Contingent.

In 1942, CRP known as Crown Representative Police was called from Neemuch for the guard duties for the detained leaders, namely Shri Rahul Sankritnam, Shri S. S Battlewala, Shri Jayprakash Narayan, Shri S.K. Dange, Shri Sudhir Bose, Shri Keshav Dev Malviya, Shri Harish Dev Malviya etc. at Deoli camp.

In 1942, war prisoners of Germany, Japan and Italy were also kept here. In 1948 this camp was reopened and named as Sindhi Refugees Camp, where large numbers of refugees from Karachi were sheltered here during the partition. In 1957, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of CRPF was stationed here. In 1962, this was made into Chinese detention camp, where detainees were kept. Later, in 1967 the Pakistani prisoners of war were brought here and detained upto October 1968. In 1969, the refugees of Bangladesh were again sheltered at this camp during Bangladesh liberation struggle.

From 1977 to 1979, 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion of CRPF was stationed here and used the campus for training. In 1980 CRPF handed over the charge of this campus to CISF. The 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion of CISF was stationed here from 1980, which was subsequently shifted to Barwaha, consequent upon the establishment of recruit training school on 1.8.1984, which is now named as “CISF Regional Training Centre”, Deoli.