

The Ibis Chrestomathy

Words! Neel was of the view that words, no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own. Why then were there no astrologers to calculate their kismet and pronounce upon their fate? The thought that he might be the one to take on this task probably came to him at about the time when he was first beginning to earn his livelihood as a linkister – that is to say during his years in southern China. From then on, for years afterwards, he made it his regular practice to jot down his divinations of the fate of certain words. The *Chrestomathy* then, is not so much a key to language as an astrological chart, crafted by a man who was obsessed with the destiny of words. Not all words were of equal interest of course and the *Chrestomathy*, let it be noted, deals only with a favoured few: it is devoted to a select number among the many migrants who have sailed from eastern waters towards the chilly shores of the English language. It is, in other words, a chart of the fortunes of a shipload of girmitiyas: this perhaps is why Neel named it after the *Ibis*.

But let there be no mistake: the *Chrestomathy* deals solely with words that have a claim to naturalization within the English language. Indeed the epiphany out of which it was born was Neel's discovery, in the late 1880s, that a complete and authoritative lexicon of the English language was under preparation: this was of course, the **Oxford English Dictionary** (or the **Oracle**, as it is invariably referred to in the *Chrestomathy*). Neel saw at once that the **Oracle** would provide him with an authoritative almanac against which to judge the accuracy of his predictions. Although he was already then an elderly man, his excitement was such that he immediately began to gather his papers together in preparation for the **Oracle's** publication. He was to be disappointed for decades would pass before the **Oxford English Dictionary** finally made its appearance: all he ever saw of it was a few of the fascicules that appeared in the interim. But the years of waiting were by no means wasted; Neel spent them in collating his notes with other glossaries, lexicons and word-lists. The story goes that in the last years of his life his reading consisted of nothing but dictionaries. When his eyesight began to fail, his grand- and great-grandchildren were made to perform this service for him (thus the family coinage 'to read the dicky', defined by Neel, as 'a gubbrowing of last resort').

On his deathbed, or so family legend has it, Neel told his children and grand-children that so long as the knowledge of his words was kept alive within the family, it would tie them to their past and thus to each other. Inevitably, his warnings were ignored and his papers were locked away and forgotten; they were not to be retrieved till some twenty years later. The family was then in turmoil, with its many branches at odds with each other, and its collective affairs headed towards ruin. It was then that one of Neel's grand-daughters (the grand-mother of the present writer) remembered his words and dug out the old band-box that contained Neel's jottings. Coincidentally, that was the very year the **Oracle** was finally

published – 1928 – and she was able to raise the money, by joint family subscription, to acquire the entire set. Thus began the process of disinterring Neel’s horoscopes and checking them against the **Oracle’s** pronouncements – and miraculously, no sooner did the work start than things began to turn around, so that the family was able to come through the worldwide Depression of the 1930s with its fortunes almost undiminished. After that never again was the *Chrestomathy* allowed to suffer prolonged neglect. By some strange miracle of heredity there was always, in every decade, at least one member of the family who had the time and the interest to serve as wordy-wallah, thus keeping alive this life-giving conversation with the founder of the line.

The *Chrestomathy* is a work that cannot, in principle, ever be considered finished. One reason for this is that new and previously unknown word-chits in Neel’s hand have continued to turn up in places where he once resided – these unearthings have been regular enough, and frequent enough, to confound the idea of ever bringing the work to completion. But the *Chrestomathy* is also, in its very nature, a continuing dialogue, and the idea of bringing it to an end is one that evokes superstitious horror in all of Neel’s descendants. Be it then clearly understood that it was not with any such intention that this compilation was assembled: it was rather the gradual decay of Neel’s papers which gave birth to the proposal that the *Chrestomathy* (or what there was of it) be put into a form that might admit of wider circulation.

It remains only to explain that since the *Chrestomathy* deals exclusively with the English language, Neel included, with very few exceptions, only such words as had already found a place in an English dictionary, lexicon or word-list. This is why its entries are almost always preceded either by the symbol of the **Oracle** (a +) or by the names of other glossaries, dictionaries or lexicons: these are, as it were, their credentials for admittance to the vessel of migration that was the *Chrestomathy*. However the power to grant full citizenship rested, in Neel’s view, solely with the **Oracle** (thus his eagerness to scrutinize its rolls). Once a word had been admitted into the **Oracle’s** cavern, it lost the names of its sponsors and was marked forever with its certificate of residence: the +. “After the **Oracle** has spoken the name of a word, the matter is settled: from then on the expression in question is no longer (or no longer only) Bengali, Arabic, Chinese, Hind.¹, Laskari or anything else – in its English incarnation, it is to be considered a new coinage, with a new persona and a renewed destiny.”

These then are the simple conventions that Neel’s descendants have adhered to, marking a + upon every girmitya that has found a place within the **Oracle’s** tablets. Who exactly made these marks, and at what date, is now impossible to ascertain, so dense is the accretion of markings and jottings upon the margins of Neel’s notes. Previous attempts to untangle these notations caused so much confusion that the present writer was instructed merely to bring the markings up to date, and in such a fashion that any interested party would be able to verify the findings in the most recent edition of the **Oracle**. This he has attempted to do to the best of his ability, although many errors have, no doubt, evaded his scrutiny.

¹ Whether this abbreviation refers to a specific language (Hindi/Urdu/Hindusthani?) or merely to all things Indian, has long been a subject of controversy within the family. Suffice it to say that the matter can never be satisfactorily resolved since Neel only ever used this contracted form.

When the mantle of wordy-major was placed upon the shoulders of the present writer, it came with a warning from his elders: his task, they said, was not to attempt to recreate the *Chrestomathy* as Neel might have written it in his own lifetime; he was merely to provide a summary of a continuing exchange of words between generations. It was with these instructions in mind, that he has laboured to preserve the timbre of Neel's etymological reflections: in the pages that follow whenever quotation marks are used without attribution, Neel must be presumed to be the author of the passage in question.

abihowa/abhowa (* The Glossary ^β) "A finer word for 'climate' was never coined," writes Neel, "joining as it does the wind and the water, in Persian, Arabic and Bengali. Were there to be, in matters of language, such a thing as a papal indulgence then I would surely expend mine in ensuring a place for this fine coinage."

abrawan(* The Glossary): "the name of this finest of muslins comes, as Sir Henry notes, from the Persian for 'flowing water'."

+ **achar:** "There are those who would gloss this as 'pickle'," writes Neel, "although that word is better applied to the definition than the thing defined."

□ It needs here to be explained that the word **Glossary**, whenever it occurs in the *Chrestomathy* is a reference to an authority that was, for Neel's purposes, one of the few to be empowered with the right to award certificates of migration into English: to wit, Sir Henry Yule and A.C.Burnell's **Glossary Of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words And Phrases, And Of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical And Discursive**. Neel appears to have acquired a copy of this famous dictionary when it first began to circulate among a privileged few, in the 1880s, a good while before it came to be known by the name **Hobson-Jobson**. Although his personal copy has never been found, there can be no doubt that the frequent references to 'Sir Henry' in the *Chrestomathy*, are directed always towards Sir Henry Yule - just as '**the Glossary**', in his usage, stands always for the dictionary for which that great lexicographer was chiefly responsible.

agil (*Roebuck ^λ): "Many will raise their eyebrows when they learn that that this was the lascar's equivalent of the English sailor's 'fore' or 'for'ard', just as **peechnil** was his equivalent for 'aft'. Why not, one might ask, *agey* and *peechney* as would seem natural for most speakers of Hind.? Could it be that these essential nautical terms were borrowed from the

□ The name '**Roebuck**' when it occurs in the *Chrestomathy*, is a reference always to Lt. Thomas Roebuck's pioneering work of lexicography: **An English And Hindostanee Naval Dictionary Of Technical Terms And Sea Phrases And Also The Various Words Of Command Given In Working A Ship, &C. with Many Sentences Of Great Use At Sea; To Which Is Prefixed A Short Grammar Of The Hindostanee Language**. First printed in Calcutta, this lexicon was reprinted in London in 1813 by the booksellers to the Hon. East India Company: Black, Parry & Co. of Leadenhall Street. Neel once described it as the most important glossary of the 19th century – because as he put it, "in its lack, the age of sail would have been becalmed in a kalmariya, with sahibs and lascars mouthing incomprehensible nothings at each other." It is certainly true that this modest word-list was to have an influence that probably far exceeded Lt. Roebuck's expectations. Seven decades after its publication it was revised by the Revd. George Small, and reissued by W.H.Allen & Co. under the title: **A Laskari Dictionary Or Anglo-Indian Vocabulary Of Nautical Terms And Phrases In English And Hindustani** (in 1882): this latter edition was available well into the 20th century. The **Laskari Dictionary** was Neel's favourite lexicon and his use of it was so frequent that he appears to have developed a sense of personal familiarity with the author.

languages of Cutch or Sind? Often have I asked but never been satisfactorily answered. But to this I can testify, in corroboration of the good Lieutenant's definition, that it is indisputably true that the Laskari terms are always **agil** and **peecheil**, never *agey-peechey*."

alliballie muslin (* **The Glossary**): "there are those, including Sir Henry, who would consider this a muslin of fine quality, but in the Raskhali wardrobe it was always relegated to one of the lower shelves."

+ **almadia**: an Arab river-boat of a sort that was rarely seen in India: Neel would have found it hard to account for its presence in the **Oracle**.

alzbel (***Roebuck**): "thus does the ever-musical Laskari tongue render the watchman's cry of All's well: how well I remember it..."

arkati (* **The Barney-Book**^δ): this word, widely used by seamen to mean 'ship's pilot', is said to be derived from the erstwhile princely state of Arcot, near Madras, the Nawab of which was reputed to have in his employ all the pilots in the Bay of Bengal. Scholars will no doubt, cavil at Neel's unquestioning acceptance of Barrère and Leland's derivation, but this entry is a good example of how, when forced to choose between a colourful and a reliable etymology, Neel always picked the former.

+ **atta/otta/otter** : Such are the many English spellings for the common Indian word for 'wheat flour'. The first of these variants is the one anointed by the **Oracle**. But the last, which had the blessing of Barrère & Leland, was the one most favoured by Neel, and under his own roof, he would not allow the use of any other. The

□ The phrase '**Barney-Book**' when it occurs in the *Chrestomathy*, is always in reference to Albert Barrère and Charles Leland's **Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant**, which was yet another of Neel's gimit-granting authorities. He possessed a well-worn copy of the edition published by the Ballantyne Press in 1889. His choice of shorthand for this work appears to be a reference to Barrère and Leland's tracing of **barney** to the gypsy word for 'mob' or 'crowd'. This in turn, they adduced to be, in one of those wild leaps of speculation for which they were justly famous, a derivation from the Hind. **bharna**, - 'to fill' or 'increase'.

memory of this was passed along in the family even unto my own generation. Thus was I able recently, to confound a pretentious **pundit** who was trying to persuade an unusually gullible audience that the phrase 'kneading the otter' was once an euphemism of the same sort as 'flaying the ferret' and 'skinning the eel'.

awari (***Roebuck**): "this, says Lt. Roebuck, is the Laskari word for ship's wake. But as so often with the usages of the lascars, it also has the oddly poetical connotation of being cast adrift upon the waves." Legend has it that some members of the family went to the movie *Awara* expecting a tale of shipwreck.

+ **ayah**; Neel was contemptuous of those who identified this word with Indian nursemaids and nurseries. In his home he insisted on using its progenitors, the French 'aide' and the Portuguese 'aia'.

bachaw/bachao: this word should by rights have meant 'help!' being a direct borrowing of the common Hind. term. But Neel insisted that in English the word was only ever used ironically, as an expression of disbelief. For example: "**Puckrowed** a six-foot **cockup**? Oh **bachaw!**"

backsee (***Roebuck**): this was the Laskari substitute for the English, 'aback': "another of the many words in the Indian shipboard lexicon, where a Portuguese term was preferred over the English."

+ **budmash/badmash**: "like **budzat & hurremzad** a term which causes more grief to lexicographers than to anyone to whom it was ever addressed as a term of abuse. What purpose is served by breaking it into its constituent Arabic and Persian elements, when the whole forms a neat equivalent of the English 'rascal'?" Neel was undoubtedly right to choose **budmash** over the now defunct **budzat** as fortune's favourite.

+ **baksheesh/buckshish/buxees etc.**: "curious indeed that for this token of generosity Sir Henry was unable to find any English equivalent ('tip' being dismissed as slang) and could only provide, French, German and Italian synonyms." Neel's optimism about the future of this word was based on the fact of its having few competitors in the English language. He would have been surprised to find that both **baksheesh**

and its South China synonym **cumshaw** had been smiled upon by the **Oracle**.

+ **balty/balti**: on this commonest of Indian household objects – the bucket – Neel penned several lengthy chits. Already, in his time, the use of these containers had become so widespread that the memory of their foreign provenance (the word being a direct borrowing of the Portuguese ‘balde’) had been lost. “This much is certain, that the balde, like so much else, was introduced into our lives by lascars. Yet the object for which they used the term was a ‘ship’s bucket’, a leather container bearing no resemblance to the metal vessels that are now spoken of by that name. But the balde could not have become ubiquitous if it were not replacing some older object that was already in common use. What then was the name of the container that people used for their daily bath, before the lascars gave them their baldes? What did they use for the cleaning of floors, for drawing water from wells, for watering their gardens? What was the object, now forgotten, that once discharged these functions?” Later, on his first trip to London, Neel went to visit a lascar boarding house in the East End. He wrote afterwards: “living twenty to a room, in the vilest conditions, the poor **budmashes** have no other expedient but to cook their food in enormous baldes. Being, like so many lascars, good-hearted, hospitable fellows they invited me to partake of their simple supper and I did not hesitate to accept. The meal consisted of nothing more than **rooties** served with a stew that had long been bubbling in the balde: this was a gruel concocted from chicken-bones and tomatoes, and was served in a single giant **tapori**. It bore no resemblance to anything I had ever eaten in Hind.. Yet it was not without savour and I could not forbear to ask where they had learnt to make it. They explained that it was Portuguese shipboard fare, commonly spoken of as *galinha balde*, which they proceeded to translate as ‘**balti** chicken’. This did much, I must admit, to raise in my estimation, the cuisine of Portugal.”

History has vindicated Neel’s optimistic evaluation of this word’s future, but it remains true that he had in no way foreseen that the word’s citizenship in the English language would be based on its culinary prowess; nor would he have imagined that on finding entrance into the **Oracle** this humblest of Portuguese objects would come to be defined as ‘a style of cooking influenced by the cuisine of northern Pakistan’.

balwar (***Roebuck**): “too close in sound to its synonym, ‘barber’, to have any realistic chance of survival.”

bamba: (***Roebuck**): “Why would anyone continue to use this Portuguese-derived term for an object which already has a simple and economical name in English: ‘pump’?”

banchoot/barnshoot/bahenchod/b’henchod etc (***The Glossary**): In his treatment of this expression, Neel decisively parts company with his guru, Sir Henry, who gives this cluster of words short shrift, defining them merely as “terms of abuse which we should hesitate to print if their odious meaning were not obscure ‘to the general.’ If it were known to the Englishmen who sometimes use the words, we believe there are few who would not shrink from such brutality”.

But rare indeed was the European who shrank from mouthing this word: such was its popularity that Neel came to be convinced that “it is one of the many delightful composite terms that have been formed by the pairing of Hind. and English elements. To prove this we need only break the word into its constituent parts: the first syllable **ban/barn** etc, is clearly a contraction of Hind., *bahin* or sister. The second, variously spelled, is, in my opinion, a cognate of the English ‘chute’, with which it shares at least one aspect of its variegated meaning: like many such words it derives, no doubt, from some ancient Indo-European root. It is curious to note that the word **chute** no longer figures as a verb in English, as its cognates do in many Indian languages. But there is some evidence to suggest that it was once so used in English too: an example of this is the word **chowder**, clearly derived from the Hind. *chodo/chodna* etc.. The word is said to be still widely in use in America being employed chiefly as a noun, to refer to a kind of soup or pottage. Although I have not had the good fortune to partake of this dish, I am told that it is produced by a great deal of grinding and pounding, which would certainly be consonant with some aspects of the ancient meaning that is still preserved in the usage of this root in Hind..”

+ **bandanna**: The **coolin** status of this word would have amazed Neel, who gave it little chance of survival. That ‘bandanna’ has a place in the **Oracle** is not, of course, a matter that admits of any doubt - but it is true nonetheless that this was not the fate that Neel had foretold for it. His prediction was that the Hind. word

bandhna would find its way into the English language in its archaic 17th century form, **bandannoe**. Yet it is true also that Neel never doubted this word's destiny, a belief that was founded in part in the resilience and persistence of the ancient Indo-European root from which it is derived - a word that had already, in his lifetime, been Anglicized into: **bando/bundo** ('to tie or fasten'). This beautiful and useful word is, alas, now only used as it pertains to embankments, although it was once widely employed by speakers of English, especially in its imperative form: **bando!** (Neel even made a copy of the quote that Sir Henry used in his note on this term: "'This and probably other Indian words have been naturalized in the docks on the Thames frequented by Lascar crews. I have heard a London lighter-man, in the Victoria Docks, throw a rope ashore to another Londoner, calling out, '**Bandoo!**' – [M.-Gen. Keatinge].")

Neel's faith in **bando/bundo** was no doubt influenced by the root's uncommon fecundity, for he foresaw that it would give birth to a large brood of + annointed derivatives: **bund** ('embankment or dyke' the best known example of which is now in Shanghai, widely considered to be the single most valuable piece of land in the world; **cumberbund** (the fate of which Neel also failed to properly predict, for it never did replace 'belt' as he had thought it would); and finally **bundobast** (lit. 'tying up' in the sense of 'putting into order' or 'making arrangements'). The passing away of this last into the limbo of the almost-dead, Neel could never have foreseen and would have mourned more, perhaps, than any other entry in the *Chrestomathy* (of this too his anonymous descendant might well have written: "Why? Why? Why this meaningless slaughter, this egregious waste, this endless logocide. Who will put an end to it? To whom can we appeal? Does it not call upon every conscience to rise in protest?") For it is true certainly that this is a word, an idea, of which English is sadly in need. Nor did the contributions of **bando/bandh** end there. Neel was persuaded that **band** in the sense of 'head-band' or 'rubber-band' was also a child of the Hind. term. This would mean that **bando/bundo** did indeed achieve the distinction of being raised to the Peerage of the Verb, through such usages as 'to band together'.

But to return to **bandanna**, Neel's own use of this term never came into conformity with its dictionary definition, for he continued, in his lifetime, to apply it to kerchiefs, handkerchiefs, gamchhas, and especially to the **cumberbunds**

and head-cloths that lascars and other working people commonly wore in order to restrain their hair and their **kameezes**. His descendants, as was their custom, were even more conservative, and would vie among themselves to find uses for the originary forms. Well do I remember the response of an elderly uncle, who, when invited to join a family expedition to a well-reputed cowboy movie, cried out: "Arre! You think I'd spend good money to watch a **band** of **budmashes** running around in **dungris** and **bandhnas**?"

bando/bundo (* **The Glossary**): See above.

+ **bandar**: Neel was totally mistakenly in his forecast of how the common Hind. word for monkey would fare in English. One of his pet theories was that migrant words must always be careful to stand apart from each other, in sound and appearance: uprooted homonyms and synonyms, he felt, had little chance of surviving in pairs – in every couple, one would perish. In this instance the beastly sense of **bandar** was, in his view, uncomfortably close in sound to an unrelated nautical term of Persian derivation: **bander/bunder** ('harbour' or 'port'). He was persuaded that of the two it was this latter form that would survive in English – partly because the use of **bunder** in the nautical sense has a very long pedigree in the language, going back to the 17th century; and partly because the root was uncommonly fecund in English derivatives. It was these derivatives, he felt, that were most vulnerable to the possibilities of confusion posed by the zoological sense of **bandar**. True enough that the frequently used term **bander-/bunder-boat**, ('harbour-boat') was in little danger of being mistaken for a simian conveyance, but there remained another word that might well be the cause of misunderstandings and confusion. This was the venerable **sabander/shabander**, ('master of the harbour' or 'harbour-master'), a term which had so long a history in England as almost to be considered Middle English. In Neel's eyes it was thus possessed of a powerful claim to protection from the sort of abuse that might result from compounds like **shah-bandar**. As for the animal, there was another word that would serve it just as well, he felt, and this was **wanderoo** (from 'wanderu', the Sinhala cognate of Hind. 'bandar') which was also in wide circulation at the time, although it was generally used to mean *langur*. It was on **wanderoo** that Neel pinned his hopes while predicting doom for its synonym **bandar**. Little did he know that

both **bandar** and its collective +**log** would be given indefinite prolongations of life by a children's book, while the beautiful **wanderoo** would soon disappear into a pauper's grave. [See also **gadda/gadha**].

+ **bankshall**: Neel would have been saddened by the demise of this beautiful word, once much in use: "How well I remember the great Bankshall of Calcutta, which served as the jetty for the disembarkation of ship's passengers, and where we would go of an evening to gawk at all the **griffins** and new arrivals. It never occurred to us that this edifice ought to have been, by its oracular definition, merely a 'warehouse' or 'shed'. Yet I do not doubt that Sir Henry is right to derive it from the Bengali '*bākashala*'". He would have been surprised to learn that a humbler kind of warehouse, the **godown**, would survive in general usage, at the expense of the now rare **bankshall**.

+ **banian/banyan**: "this is no mere word, but a clan, a sect, a caste – one that has long been settled in the English language. The clue to its understanding lies in the gloss provided by the **Admiral**⁶. "The term is derived from a religious sect in the East, who, believing in metempsychosis, eat of no creature endowed with life'. It derives in other words, from the caste-name 'Bania' or properly, 'Vania' the last syllable of which is sometimes nasalized. This caste, long associated with banking, commerce, money-lending and so on, was of course famously vegetarian and this was why the word served for centuries as an essential part of the English nautical vocabulary, being applied to the one day of the week when sailors were not served meat: **banyan-day**."

But all this being accepted how did this word come to assume its present avatar, in which it represents the humble and ubiquitous undergarment worn by the men of the Indian subcontinent? Neel was of course in an exceptionally good position to observe this mutation, which happened largely within his

⁶ The reference here is to Admiral W.H. Smyth's, **Sailor's Word-Book**. Neel possessed several copies of the edition that was printed in London in 1876 by Blackie. He held this work in a respect that verged on reverence and when the words '**the Admiral**' appears in the **Chrestomathy** the reference is always to Admiral Smyth and his famous lexicon.

lifetime. His tracing of the genealogy of this series of incarnations counts among his most important contributions to the etymologist's art and deserves to be quoted in full. "The word **banyan**'s journey to the wardrobe began no doubt with the establishing of its original sense in English, in which it served merely to evoke an association with India (it was thus I imagine, that it came also to be attached to a tree that became symbolic of the land – our revered *ficus religiosa*, now reincarnated as the **banyan-tree**). It was because of this general association that it came also to be applied to a certain kind of Indian garment. It serves no purpose perhaps to ask what that garment originally was. To anyone who has lived as long as I have, it is evident that the garment in question is not so much an article of clothing as an index of Hind.'s standing in the world. Thus, in the 17th and 18th centuries, when ours was still a land of fabled riches and opulence, the word **banyan/banian** referred to a richly-embroidered dressing gown that fell almost to the floor: it was modelled perhaps on the **choga** or the **caftan/qaftan**." [Here the present writer cannot refrain from interjecting that although this species of robe is extinct in India today, several noteworthy specimens are on permanent display in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London]. "Even in my own childhood the word **banyan** referred always to these sumptuous robes. But at that time of course, none but the most Anglicized Indians used the word in this sense, the potential for harm being very great. Well do I remember the fate of the unfortunate Raja of Mukhpora, who had a habit of peppering his Bengali with English words. On a garment-buying expedition to the bazaar, he was heard to boast in the hearing of all, that he intended to have his **banyans** beaten and washed before they were locked away for the summer. This greatly alarmed the moneylenders who lost no time in calling in their debts: the results were ruinous for the poor Raja, who had to live out his days in an ashram in Brindavan, with nothing but a pair of saffron **chogas** in his wardrobe. Thus did he learn why it's best not to get into a **banyan-fight**."

"From that pinnacle of magnificence, this article of clothing has unflinchingly kept pace with India's fortunes: as the land's inhabitants grew ever poorer and weaker, under the British yoke, the garment to which the word was applied grew ever meaner and more humble. In its next incarnation therefore the **banyan** was reborn as the standard article of wear for the lowliest of

workmen: thus does the **Admiral** describe it as ‘a sailor’s coloured tunic’. In this form too, the garment was still a stranger to India: it was the lascar, undoubtedly, who was responsible for introducing it into his native land. It was he too who was responsible for snipping off the arms it possessed in its European avatar. In clothing, as in language and food, the lascar is thus revealed to be the pioneer in all things ‘Indian’. No morning passes when I do not think of this as I slip my hands through those familiar armholes; nor does the notion fail to bring to my nostrils a faint tang of the sea.”

+ **banyan-/banian-day**. See above.

+ **banyan-fight** (*The Glossary): “‘A tongue-tempest’” as recorded by Sir Henry, ‘that “never rises to blows or bloodshed’ (Ocington, 1690)”’.

+ **banyan-tree**: see **banyan**.

+ **barbican**: “‘A sewer- or water-pipe,’ as Sir Henry correctly notes, ‘that leads back to the Bab-Khana of Kanpur.’”

bargeer (* The Glossary): “‘it is my conviction that this derivative of the Marathi word for ‘soldier’ made its way into the **Glossary** not through the battlefield but the nursery, being employed, as it was in Bengali, to strike terror into the hearts of **budzat butchas**.”

bas! (*Roebuck); the Lieutenant glosses this as the Laskari equivalent of the English ‘avast’, but Neel believed it to be a sibling rather than a synonym, both being derived in his view, from the Arabic **bass**, ‘enough’.

+ **bayadère**: “Those who believe that Portuguese was a language of the decks and had little to contribute to the bedroom, would do well to note that **bayadère** is not of French but of Portuguese derivation (from *bailadera* – ‘dancing girl’).” This was the euphemism that **BeeBees** used to speak of the women their husbands referred to as ‘**buy-em-dears**’ – a motley collection of **cunchunees**, **debbies**, **dashies**, **pootlies**, **rawnees**, **Rum-johnnies** and **nautch-girls**. Curiously the word ‘mistress’ which has a close Hind. cognate (by way of the Portuguese *mestre*) was never used in its English sense, it being considered quite unusual for a man to share his bed with his **mistri**.”

+ **bawhawder/bahaudur/bahadur**: “This once sought-after Mughal title, meaning ‘brave’ took on a derisive undertone in English. Sir Henry is right in noting that it came to ‘denote a haughty or pompous personage, exercising his brief authority with a strong sense of his own importance’. Curiously, no taint of the derisive attached to this term where it would have been most apt – that is, in its application to the East India Company, which was known in Hind. as **Comp’ny Bawhawder**.”

beparee (*The Glossary): Neel believed that this Hind. word for ‘trader’, like **seth**, had found its way into English because the extraordinary proliferation of the meanings of **banyan** had rendered the word unusable in its originary sense.

+ **BeeBee/bibi**: “why this word prevailed over its twin, **begum**, in being applied to the more eminent white wives of Calcutta, remains unexplained. In recent times, it has fallen out of favour, and is now applied ironically to European women of low rank: this happened because there came a time when the great **BeeBees** began to insist on being called **ma’am-sahibs**. Their employees shortened the prefix to **mem-** (and occasionally, in the case of the most **bawhawder** of the tribe, to **man-**).”

+ **begum**: see above

begaree (*Roebuck): “so, according to Lt. Roebuck, were the lascars accustomed to speak of those of their number who had been shanghaiied or impressed into service. Could it be that the word is a curious crossing of the English ‘beggar’ and the Bengali ‘bhikari’ (of the same meaning) and the Hind. ‘bekari’, ‘unemployed’?”

beteechoot: (* The Glossary); for the import of this expression see **banchoot/barnshoot**, but bearing in mind that it substitutes *betee*, daughter, for *bahin*, sister. “Sir Henry illustrates his definition of this term with some extremely apt quotations, among them the following: ‘1638: L’on nous monstra à une demy lieue de la ville un sepulchre, qu’ils apellent **Bety-chuit**, c’est à dire la vergogne de la fille decouverte’ [Mandelsle, Paris, 1659].

bhandari (*Roebuck): ‘this is the name that lascars use for cooks or storekeepers. I imagine that it may well be their word for ‘quartermaster’

as well.’ [This sentence is taken from the most unusual of Neel’s notes – a set of jottings scribbled on the verso side of a few playing-cards. From the tiny handwriting, no less than the liberal splashes of sea-water, it would appear that these notes were compiled in the course of a voyage on which paper was not easily obtained. Within the family these notes are known as the **Jack-Chits**, after the first of the cards to be found (a knave of clubs). Generally speaking the chits are Neel’s earliest attempt to make sense of the shipboard dialect of the lascars: at the time of their writing he does not appear to have known of the existence of the **Laskari Dictionary**, but on acquiring a copy of Roebuck’s lexicon, he immediately acknowledged the superiority of that great lexicographer’s work, and discontinued his own attempts to decode this dialect, which were undeniably, of an unscientific and anecdotal nature. The chits are not wholly without interest however, as for example, this excerpt from the 8 and 9 of spades: “To set sail is to find oneself foundering not just in a new element, but also in an unknown ocean of words. When one listens to the speech of sailors, no matter whether they be speaking English or Hind. one is always at sea: not for nothing is the English argot of sail known as a ‘sea-language’, for it has long slipped its moorings from the English one learns in books. The same could be said of the ties that bind the tongues of Hind. to the jargon of the lascars: why, just the other day, we heard the tindals of our ship racing about on deck, shouting in the greatest agitation – **hathi-soond! hathi-soond!** That an ‘elephant’s trunk’ had been sighted at sea seemed miraculous to all present and we went hurrying up to bear witness to this extraordinary visitation – but only to be disappointed for the excitement of our lascar friends was occasioned by nothing more miraculous than a distant column of water, raised by a whirlwind. Evidently this phenomenon, known in English as a ‘water-spout’, has in their eyes, the appearance of an elephant’s trunk. Nor was this the only time that day that I was to be deceived by the fancifulness of their usages. Later, while taking the air near the stern, I heard a lascar imploring another to **puckrow** his *nar*. I confess I was startled: for although it is no uncommon thing to hear a lascar speaking casually of the appendage of masculinity, it is unusual nonetheless to hear them referring to that organ in such high Sanskritic language. My surprise must have caused me to betray my presence for they looked at me and began to

laugh. Do you know what we are speaking of? one of them said to me. Placed on my mettle, I replied in a fashion that I thought would amply demonstrate my ship-learning. Why indeed I do know what you are speaking of, I said: it is the thing that is known as a ‘jewel-block’ in English. At this they laughed even harder and said, no, a jewel-block was a ‘dastur-hanja’ in Laskari, while the thing they had been speaking of was a rudder-bolt known to the Angrez as a ‘pintle’. I was tempted to inform them that the great William Shakespeare himself had used that word – pintle – in exactly the same sense as our Hind. *nar*. On consideration however, I thought it best to refrain from divulging this piece of information. My **shoke** for the words of the greatest of dramatists had already gained for me the reputation of being an incorrigible ‘Spout-Billy’ and offensive as this sobriquet was, I could not help reflecting that to be known as a ‘Billy-Soond’ would be worse still.”

+ **bheesty/bheestie/beasty/bhishti**: “the **mysterics** of water-carrying, the instrument of which trade was the **mussuck**. In the south, according to Sir Henry, the terms are **tunny-catcher** or **tunnyketchi**.”

bichawna/bichana: (* **The Glossary**); “bedding or bed, from which **bichawnadar**, or ‘bed-maker’, an expression that must be used with some care because of the possibility of innuendo.”

bichawnadar: see above

bilayut (* **The Glossary**); “strange that we should have become accustomed to using a version of the Turkish /Arabic *wilayat*, to refer to ‘England’; even stranger that the English should adapt it to their own use as **blatty**. In its **bilayutec** form it was often attached, as Sir Henry correctly notes, to foreign and exotic things (hence *bilayati-baingan* for ‘tomato’). Sir Henry was however gravely in error on another such compound, namely **bilayutec-pawnee**. Although he correctly glosses this as ‘soda-water’, he is wrong in his contention that the people of Hind. believed **bilayutec-pawnee** could confer great strength to the human body, by reason of its gaseous bubbles. As I remember the matter, our wonder was occasioned not by the power of the bubbles as they were imbibed, but rather by the explosive detonations with which they were expelled.”

biscobra (* **The Glossary**): Neel took issue with Sir Henry's suggestion that this was the name of some kind of venomous lizard. "Here is another example of a beautiful marriage of the eastern and western lexicons. The word 'cobra' comes of course from a Portuguese contraction of a Latin root meaning 'serpent'. 'Bis' on the other hand, is certainly a derivative of the Bengali word for poison, which has been absorbed into English as **bish**, although with the sense of a 'blunder' or 'mistake'. It is impossible that such a term could be applied to a lizard, no matter how vengeful: in my opinion, it is none other than an English colloquialism for the hamadryad or King Cobra."

+ **bish**: see above.

b'longi/blongi (* **The Linkister**⁷): "frequently mistaken as a contraction of the English 'belong', this word is actually an elegant and economical copula, doing duty for the verb 'to be' in all its many forms. Imagine then the embarrassment of the **griffin** who pointed to his wife's dog and said: "doggie **blongi** wife-o massa."

+ **bobachee**: "As a barkentine is to a country boat, a **Kaptan** to a **Nacoda**, a vinthalex to a **dumbpoke**, so in the kitchen, is a **bobachee** to a **consumer**. Each a potentate in his own way, they rule over a vast **lashkar**, consisting of spice grinding **masalchies**, **cabob**-grilling **caleefas**, and others whose titles have mercifully lapsed from use. The **bobachee** however is the only culinary **mystery** to lend his name to the kitchen: **bobachee-connah/bawarchee-khana**: (* **The Glossary**). On this latter term I am at odds with every authority who has given the matter any thought: whereas they derive it from Hind. *khana* 'place' or 'room', it is my intuition that it actually comes from the Bengali element *kona/cona*, meaning corner. This seems self-

⁷ 'The Linkister', when it appears in the *Chrestomathy*, is always in reference to Charles Leland and his **Pidgin English Sing-Song: Or Songs and Stories in the China-English Dialect; with a vocabulary**. Charles Leland was, of course, one of the most prodigious lexicographers of the 19th century and he was another Neel's gimit-granting authorities. But being himself a master of the South China Pidgin, Neel appears to have disapproved, or disagreed, with it in some respects: hence the somewhat disparaging name.

evident to me, for if the meaning of **bobachee-connah** were indeed 'cook-room', then surely the proper locution would be '**bobbachy-camra**'. That this variant does sometimes occur, is to me the exception that proves the rule. Similarly **goozle-coonuh/ goozul-khana** appears to me to be often wrongly rendered as 'bathing-room': when applied to a place where a bathtub is kept, it must surely mean 'bathing-corner'. But so far as other **connah/khana** compounds are concerned, I will concede that it is often used in the sense of room: e.g. **karkhana, jel-khana, bab-khana** and the like."

+ **bobbery/bobbery-bob**: "this word for 'commotion', so much used in Southern China, was nothing but an adaptation of our common **baap-ré-baap**." The **Oracle's** translation of this as 'oh my father!' is surely a rendition rather of the equally common **baap-ré**, for the full expression would be rather: 'father oh father!' An alternative derivation, from the Cantonese *pa-pi*, a noise, is, as the **Barney-Book** rightly observes, extremely doubtful.

bolia/bauleah/baulia: (* **The Glossary**); "one of Bengal's lighter river-craft, usually equipped with a small cabin."

bora: (* **The Glossary**); "a large many-oared boat, commonly used in Bengal for the transportation of cargo."

bowla: (* **The Glossary**); "these were, as I recall, portmanteaux or trunks, which were made to order by a few of our most skilled **moochies**."

bowry/bowly: (* **The Barney-Book**); "in Hind. this generally referred to step-wells known as *baolis*. But after its passage into English it often came to be applied to pavilions that stood upon the banks of waterways large and small. Every **nullah** and **nuddee** could boast of a few. It was sometimes used interchangeably with **chabutra/chabutter**."

boya: (***Roebuck**); "laskari for 'buoy'".

+ **buck**: "a good example of the subtle shifts of meaning that occur when words leap between languages. For in Hind. this expression conveys more a sense of idle chatter than of the boastfulness that attaches to it in English (no doubt because of the purported demeanour of that animal for the name of which it is a homonym). The extended form **buckwash** (from

Hind. *bakwás* – ‘prattle’, ‘idle talk’ or ‘nonsense’) has a sense similar to the cant expression ‘hogwash’.”

budgroom: (* **The Glossary**); “a Portuguese coin of low denomination, the circulation of which is said to be restricted to Goa.”

budzat/badzat: (* **The Glossary**), see **budmash**.

+ **buggalow/bagala:** “a species of Arab dhow that was once a common sight on the Hooghly.”

bulkat: (* **The Glossary**); “as I recall, the name for a certain kind of large boat from the Telegu country.”

bullumteer: (* **The Glossary**); “an adaptation of the English ‘volunteer’, used generally for sepoys who served overseas.”

buncus: (* **The Glossary**), “Malay cheroots that were greatly prized by some.”

+ **bunder/ bandar:** see +**bandar**.

+ **bunder-boat:** see + **bandar**.

+ **bundook/bunduk:** this common Arabic-derived word was much dictionarized even in Neel’s day, usually being glossed as ‘musket’ or ‘rifle’ and it is in this form that it takes its place in the **Oracle**. This belies Neel’s predictions, for this was another instance in which he accepted a questionable derivation from Barrère & Leland, who trace the Arabic original back to the the German name for Venice – ‘Venedig’. The implication is that **bundook** was introduced into Arabic by German mercenaries of the Venetian Republic, and was first used in the sense of ‘crossbow’. Neel was mistaken in his belief that the word would revert to its original sense, and would come to be applied to the fine chandeliers and other articles of Venetian manufacture that were then much in vogue among wealthy Bengalis.

bungal: (***Roebuck**): “This word refers to the nautical ‘speaking-trumpet’ – the instrument of amplification with which permits ships at sea to communicate. Curiously, the usual Laskari pronunciation of it is **byugal** – which would seem to suggest that they discern in this object some mysterious kinship with the ‘bugle’.”

bunow/bunnow/banao: (* **The Glossary**); “this is, as Sir Henry rightly observes, one of the rare Hind. verbs to be adapted into English. But even after it had made the crossing it retained something of its original sense, which was more ‘to build’ than ‘to make’ – for one could certainly never say as above, ‘**bunow** the crossing’.

+ **burkundauze/barkandaz:** “a term that was useful mainly for its imprecision, for it could, when necessary, be applied to any of that great **paltan** of **paiks**, **piyadas**, **latheecals**, **kassidars**, **silahdars** and other armed guards, retainers and sentries who once thronged our streets. The gatekeepers and watchmen whose duties kept them stationary formed a slightly different kind of **paltan**, composed of **chowkidars**, **durwauns** and the like.”

+ **burra/bara:** “I am convinced that this is another word that has entered English through a nautical route, **burra/bara** being the common Laskari term for the tallest of a ship’s masts – the main.” See also **dol**.

Burrampooter: (* **The Glossary**), “This is merely the *anglice*, blessedly short-lived, of ‘Brahmaputra’.”

butcha/bacha (***The Barney Book**): ‘A word for ‘child’ that will undoubtedly migrate through the open windows of the nursery.’ Neel was wrong about this.

+ **bustee/basti:** “in my childhood we used this word only to mean ‘neighbourhood’ or ‘settlement’, with no pejorative implication attached. The English derivative on the other hand, was used to mean ‘Black Town’ or ‘native area’, being applied only to the areas where Bengalis lived. Strange to think that it was in this derogatory guise that it was passed back to Hind. & Bengali, and is now commonly used in the sense of ‘slum’.”

buzz: see **shoke**

buy-em-dear: see **bayadère**

caksen/coxen: (***Roebuck**); “It is puzzling that Roebuck lists this as the Laskari word for ‘coxswain’, since the pronunciation of it is indistinguishable from the English.”

+ **caftan/qaftan:** see **choga**

caleefa/khalifa: (* **The Glossary**); see **bobbachy**.

+ **calico**: “some dictionaries award this word a Malayali lineage, since this kind of cotton cloth was said to be a product of the Malabar coast. This is utter **buckwash** for the word **calico** self-evidently comes from ‘Calicut’, which is a place name introduced by Europeans: were the word derived from the town’s Malayalam name the cloth would be known, surely, as ‘Kozhikodo’?”

calputtee: (***Roebuck**); “the Laskari for ‘caulker’, this was a **mystery** who found little employment on Indian vessels, which were generally rabbeted rather than caulked.”

carcanna/karcanna: (* **The Glossary**); Already in Neel’s lifetime this long-pedigreed English word (from Hind. *kar-khana*, ‘work-place’ or ‘work-shop’) was slowing yielding to the term ‘factory’ – a lexical scandal in Neel’s ears, which were still accustomed to hearing that word used to designate the residence of a ‘factor’ or ‘agent’. But it was not for nostalgic reasons alone that he mourned the passing of **carcanna/karcanna**: he foresaw that its wreckage would also carry into oblivion many of those who had once worked in these places of manufacture – for example the factory-clerks known as **carcoons**. [It was in mourning the fate of this word that the unknown wordy-wallah penned his comments on logocide.]

carcoon: (* **The Glossary** & * **The Barney-Book**), see above.

chabee: (* **The Glossary**); “In an uncharacteristic display of restraint, Neel refused to enter into the controversy over whether the Portuguese word for ‘key’ had set sail for England from Portugal or Hind.”

+ **chabutra/chabutter**: See **bowly/bowry**.

+ **chaprasi/chuprassy**: see **dufter/daftar**.

+ **charpoy**: As noted earlier (see **bandar**) Neel was of the opinion that words, unlike human beings, are less likely to survive the rigors of migration if they travel as couples: in any pair of synonyms one was sure to perish. How then was he to account for the journey of those eminently successful synonyms, **charpoy** and **cot** (both of which, unbeknownst to him, were to receive the

Oracle’s imprimatur)? Neel was clearly annoyed by this anomaly – (“has **Blatty** no words for the comforts of the bed, that it must steal so wilfully from us?”) – but he did not fail to recognize the threat that was posed to his pet theory by these paired words. “English, no less than the languages of Hind., has many reasons to be grateful to the lascars, and the gift of the word **cot** (from Hind. *khât*) is not the least of them. There can be little doubt that this word entered the English language through a nautical route: it is my conviction that *khat* was the first Laskari word for ‘hammock’ and that **jhula/jhoola** only came into use when the original was confiscated by their **malums** (vide the **Admiral’s** definition of **cot** ‘a wooden bed-frame, suspended from the beams of a ship for the officers, between decks’). These **cots** were clearly more comfortable than ordinary hammocks, for they were soon passed down to ships’ infirmaries, for the benefit of the sick and the wounded. This, by extension, is the sense in which the word was swept into the main current of the English language, being adopted first as a name for the swinging cribs of the nursery. We see thus, that contrary to appearances, **cot** and **charpoy** are no more synonyms than are ‘cradle’ and ‘bedstead’. Nor indeed are they synonyms even in Hind. for I am convinced that **charpai** was originally applied to all four-legged piece of furniture (in the precise sense of the Hind. *char-pai* ‘four-legged’) in order to distinguish them from such objects as had only three legs (*tin-pai* or *tipai* – from which, as Sir Henry rightly observes, descended those small tables known as **teapoys** in English). The confusing term **sea-poy** however is merely a variant spelling of **sepoi** and has nothing whatsoever to do with legs or seasickness. The ghost of this peculiar misconception is yet to be laid however, as is evident from a story I was recently told about a young Lieutenant who came to be separated from his troops while boarding a ship. It is said that after crying out in alarm - ‘I’ve lost my **sea-poys!**’ – he was taken further aback at being handed a **balty** and some smelling salts.”

charter: “although the **Oracle** makes no mention of it, I am convinced that this verb was often used in the same sense as the Hind. verb ‘chatna’, from which English received the resplendant **chutney**, ‘lick-worthy’ (not to be confused with **chatty/chatta** which lascars were accustomed to apply to earthen vessels). The cant term **charterhouse** is frequently applied to houses of ill-repute.”

chatty/chatta (*the Admiral, *Roebuck): see **charter**.

+ **chawbuck/chábuk**: “this word, so much more expressive than ‘whip’ was almost as much a weapon as the object it designated. That it should be among the few Hind. words that found a verbal use in English is scarcely a matter of surprise, considering how often it fell from the sahibs’ lips. When so used, the proper form for the past participle is **chawbuck’t**. The derived form **chawbuckswar**, ‘whip-rider’, was considered a great compliment among hard-driving horsemen.”

chawbuckswar: (* The Glossary); see above

+ **cheese**, Neel was no visionary in predicting the eventual incorporation of this derivative of Hind. *chiz*, ‘thing’, into the **Oracle**, for the use of it in such sentences as ‘this cheroot is the real **cheese**’ was common enough in his day. However its role in such locutions as ‘the **Burra Cheese**’ would undoubtedly have come as a surprise.

chownee: (* The Glossary); “A great pity that this fine Hind. word for ‘military encampment’ came to be replaced by the dull Anglo-Saxon ‘cantonment’.”

chicken/chikan: (* The Barney-Book); “the closely-worked embroidery of Oudh; from which, the cant expression, ‘chicken-worked’, frequently used to describe those who had perforce to live with a **bawhawder ma’am-sahib**.”

+ **chin-chin** (*The Barney-Book): “greetings (from which **chin-chin-joss**: ‘worship’).”

Chin-kalan: (* The Glossary); “Strange as it seems today, this was indeed the name by which lascars were accustomed to speak of the port of Canton.”

chin-chin-joss: (* The Glossary); see **chin-chin**.

chingers (*The Barney-Book): “Curious that Barrère & Leland imagine this word to have entered the English language through the gypsy dialect. It was quite commonly used in **bobachee-connahs**, for **choolas** had always to be lit with **chingers** (from Hind. *chingare*). I

have even heard it used in the sentence: the **chingers** flew.”

chints/chinti: (* The Glossary, * The Barney-Book); “this word for ants and insects was doomed by its resemblance to the more common **chintz** (painted **kozhikodoes**)”.

+ **chit/ chitty**: “A most curious word, for despite the fact that it comes from the Hind. *chitthi*, ‘letter’, it was never applied to any missive entrusted to the **dawk**. It had always to be delivered by hand, never by post, and preferably by a **chuprassy**, never by a **dawk-wallah** or **hurkaru**.”

chitchky: (* The Glossary); Neel was convinced that this descendant of the Bengali word *chhechki* had a brilliant future as a migrant, predicting that it would even be ennobled as a verb, since English had no equivalent term for this technique of cooking. Searching vainly for a palatable meal in the East End, he once wrote: “Why do none of these lascars ever think of setting up inns and hostelries where they can serve **chitckied** cabbage with slivered whiting to Londoners? Would they not profit from the great **goll-maul** that would thus be created?” He would have been greatly saddened to see this elegant word replaced by the clumsy locution ‘stir-fried’.

+ **chittack**: a measure of weight, equivalent to 1 oz., 17 pennyweights, 12 grains troy.

+ **chobdar**, “to have one was a great sign of prestige, since a mace-bearer was a rare luxury. I still remember how the poor Raja of Mukhpura, even when facing ruin, could not bear to let his **chobdar** go.”

+ **choga**, (see **banyan**): Neel was pessimistic about the future of this word, which he believed would be overwhelmed by its Turkish rival, **caftan**.

+**chokey/choker/ choakee/ choky/chowki**: “If an exchange of words betokens a joining of experience, then it would appear that prisons are the principal hinge between the people of Hind. and Blatty. For if the English gave us their ‘jail’ in its now ubiquitous forms, *jel, jel-khana, jel-bot* and the like, we for our part have been by no means miserly in our own gifts. Thus as early as the 16th century the Hind. *chowki* was already on its way across the sea, eventually to effect its

entry into English as those very old words **chokey**, **choker**, **choky**, and even sometimes **chowki**. The parent of these words is of course the Hind. *chowk* which refers to a square or open place in the centre of a village or town: this was where cells and other places of confinement were customarily located, being presided over by a **kotwal** and policed by a **paltan** of **darogas** and **chowkidars**. But **chokey** appears to have gained in grimness as it traveled, for its Hind. avatar is not the equal of its English equivalent in the conjuring of dread: a function that devolves rather to *qaid* and *qaidi* – two words which started their travels at almost the same time as **chokey**, and went on to gain admittance under such guises as **quod**, **quoddie**, and **quodded**, the last having the sense of ‘jailed’.”

+ **chokra/chuckeroo**: “Another instance in which Hind. and English usages subtly diverge, for a *chokra* refers to a youth, a lad, a stripling, while **chokra/chuckeroo** points rather to a rung in the ladder of employment, which, no matter whether in a household, a military encampment, or a ship’s crew, usually the lowest, and thus commonly (but by no means always) held by the young. In the Raskhali Rajbari it would have been considered strange indeed to speak of a middle-aged **khidmatgar** as a *chokra*. But such an usage would not appear unusual in English. It is interesting in this regard to compare **chokra/chuckeroo** with its synonyms **launder/launda**, which were never used in mixed company, for reason perhaps, of baring a little too much of their manhood.” See also **lascar**.

+ **choola/chula**: “Another of those words in which the experience of migration has wrought a subtle shift of personality. In **sahiby bobachee-connahs** the word usually referred to an oven, whereas in Hind. it was used for a stove with an open fire (from which, the Laskari **chuldán** for ‘galley’). Often these stoves were portable, the combustibles being loaded into a clay or metal balde. It is this perhaps that has misled some **pundits** into thinking that the Laskari dish, ‘galinha balde’ or *balti chicken* was named after a certain kind of stove. One does not need to have observed the preparation of this dish to know that this is pure **buckwash**, for if it were indeed thus named, then surely its name would have been *choola chicken*.”

choomer (* **The Barney-Book**); “In English the use of the Hind. loan word for ‘kiss’, *chumma*,

was used always in the sense of ‘peck on the cheek’, and was never applied to deeper amatory explorations. The misleading term **kiss-miss** does not refer to the **mystery** of the **choomer**. As many a furtive **classy** has discovered, the whispering of this word in the city’s disreputable gullies will lead not to a **charterhouse**, but to a handful of raisins.”

+ **chop**: “Another word of Hind. origin (from *chhāp*, ‘stamp’ or ‘seal’) that has passed fluently from the English argot of India into the patois of southern China. It is not however related to + **chop-chop**, ‘quick, quickly’, which is of Cantonese derivation (from *k’wái-k’wái*); it is this latter form that yields the ugly vulgarism **chopstick**, none of the blame for which can be pinned on Hind.”

+ **chop-chop**: See above.

+ **chopstick**: see above

chup/choops (* **The Barney-Book**); “Another word that has migrated through the nursery, being one of the few exhortations to silence that can be considered polite.”

+ **chota/chhota/choota**/: Scrawled upon back of the two of Clubs, in Neel’s **Jack-Chits**, are these words: “**chhota** is to **burra** as peg is to mast: hence the common Laskari locution **chota-peg**, often used synonymously with **faltu-dol**.”

+ **chota-hazri**: see above. “How Barrère & Leland have managed to come to the conclusion that a **chota-hazri** corresponds to the ‘auroral mint julep or pre-prandial cocktail of Virginia’ I will never understand, for it usually consists of nothing more than toast and tea.”

chute/choot: “This word’s popularity is largely due to the one notable advantage that it possesses over other more specific anatomical terms: to wit, that it can be applied to all human beings, irrespective of gender, in the full confidence that the subject will be in possession of a few such. This is possibly why it enjoys such widespread use, both in Hind. and English, the difference being that in English it is rarely used in the absence of some other paired element (**ban** +/**betee**+ etc.). One exception is the cant term **chutier**, which is used abusively to imply an excessive endowment in regard to this aspect of the anatomy.” See also **banchoot/barnshoot** etc.

+ **chuddar/chadar**: “In no field of meaning has English relied more heavily on migrants than in referring to the clothing of womens’ heads, shoulders and breasts. Yet, even having absorbed **shawl**, **chuddar/chadar**, **dooputty/dupatta**, it still has no word for that part of the sari that serves the same function, for both **ghungta** and *āchal* remain strangers to the **Oracle**. The **cumbly/kambal** (‘blanket’) can scarcely be offered as a credible alternative.”

chuldān: (***Roebuck**); see **choola/chula**.

chull: (* **The Barney-Book**); “Barrère & Leland reveal their ignorance by giving this the gloss of ‘make haste’, a meaning that belongs more to the imperative **jaw!**. **Chull** has much more the sense of the French *allez* or the Arabic *yalla*. One searches in vain for a good English equivalent, ‘come on’ being far less expressive.”

chupow/chupao: (* **The Glossary**); “Despite its present currency, this emigrant is unlikely to find a permanent seat in the House of Verbs since it serves no function that is not already discharged by the English ‘to hide’”.

cobbily-mash: (* **The Glossary**); “This was of course, not a mash at all, but a preparation of dried fish (being a corruption of the Bengali *shutki-maach*).”

+ **cockup**: This was of course one of many words that perished in the abattoir of Victorian prudery. Being uncommonly fond of the fish to which it referred *lates calcarifer* (bhetki/**beckty**), Neel refused to recognize that this term was greatly endangered: he certainly bears some of the responsibility for its extinction.

+ **compound/kampung**: There was for long a feeling within the family that this word ought not to be included in the *Chrestomathy*, since the fact of its having gained entry into the **Oracle** in both its forms would provide a convincing refutation of Neel’s pet theory (according to which, words could never migrate in pairs - see **bandar**). These anxieties were set at rest when a wordy-wallah pointed out that these words are neither homonyms nor synonyms: they are merely variant spellings of the same word.

+ **conker/kunkur**: “this word has nothing whatever to do with water- or horse- chestnuts. It is a corruption of the Hind *kankar* ‘gravel’ and is used in the same sense.”

+ **consumah/consumer/khansama**: See **bobachee**.

+ **coolin/kulin**: “In no way to be confused with ‘coolie’, this was the word used to refer to the highest rung of certain castes. A contracted form has recently gained some currency in **classy** circles: **cool**.”

+ **cot**: see **charpoy**

cotia: (* **The Glossary**); a vessel from the Kerala coast that was only rarely to be sighted on the Hooghly.

cow-chilo (***The Linkister**): “often have I heard this item of the South China patois being used to disparage the Chinese and their regard for women. Yet the expression is merely a badly matched pairing of words, the first being a corruption of the Cantonese *kai*.”

cranny/karani: (* **The Glossary**); see **carcanna**.

+ **cumbly/kambal**: See **chuddar**.

+ **cumra/kamra/camera**: (* **The Glossary**, ***Roebuck**); Neel gave the credit for the introduction of this item of Portuguese nautical usage (*camara*), into the languages of Hind., English included. In its original nautical sense, it was used of course to mean ‘cabin’, but by virtue of conveniently expressing the idea of partitioned space, it has reverted to the sense of its Latin avatar, in which it meant ‘room’ or ‘chamber’. “The curious use of **gol-kamra** (lit. round-room) to mean ‘drawing-room’ is unlikely to survive.”

+ **cumbly/kambal**: see **chuddar**

+ **cumshaw**: see **baksheesh**.

cunchunee/kanchani: (* **The Glossary**); see **bayadère**.

cursy/coorsy/kursi: (* **The Barney-Book**, ***Roebuck**, * **The Glossary**); From the **Jack-Chits**: “This Laskari word is not derived from the common Hind. word for ‘chair’ (*kursi*) as many suppose: it is, in my opinion, a corruption of the English nautical term ‘cross-trees’, for it too refers to the perch that is formed by the junction of a yard and a mast. But the

resemblance is not accidental, for it is in this seat that the lascar enjoys the few moments of leisure that fall to his lot.”

+ **cushy/khush/khushi**: “In Laskari this was the equivalent of the English nautical usage ‘cheerily’. To the lascar then goes the credit for inventing the English meaning of this word, which was carried onshore by sailors.”

dabusa: (***Roebuck**); “Roebuck avers that any cabin may be so designated, but it is a truism that every vessel is a world unto itself, with its own tongues and dialects – and on the *Ibis* this term was applied, always and exclusively, to the ‘tween-deck, which should properly have been the ‘beech-ka-tootuk’.”

+ **dacoit**: “this word” writes Neel, “although universally known, is frequently misused, for the term applies, by law, only to miscreants who belong to a gang of *at least* five persons.”

dadu: (* **The Barney-Book**); “strange that this English gypsy word for father, should be the same as the Bengali for ‘grandfather’; no less strange that the Eng. gypsy for mother, **dai/dye**, should be the same as the common Hind./Urdu for midwife”.

dai/dye (* **The Barney-Book**); see above.

+ **dak/dawk**: Neel believed that this word would eventually yield to the English ‘post’ even in India. But he was convinced also that it would find its way into the **Oracle**, not on its own steam, but because of its innumerable compounds – **dawk-bungalow**, **dawk-dubber/dubba** (‘post-box’) etc.

+ **dam/daam**: (* **The Glossary**); “Sad indeed that India’s currency took its name from *rupya* (Skt. ‘silver’) rather than the more accurate Hind. *dam*, ‘price’. I well remember a time when an **adhelah** was half, a **paulah** a quarter and a **damri** an eighth of a **dam**. A tragedy indeed that the word, like the coin, was driven to beggary by a counterfeit – in this instance, by the misinterpreting of the Duke of Wellington’s comment of dismissal (‘I don’t give a **dam**’). What the Duke had meant to say of course, was something in the order of ‘I don’t care a tu’penny’ (**dam**), but instead he bears the guilt of having put into circulation the damnable ‘damn’. At this remove we can only speculate on how different the fate of the word would have been,

had he said, instead, ‘I don’t give a **damri**.’” On the margins of this note an anonymous descendant has scribbled: “At least Uncle Jeetu wouldn’t have ruined the last scene in **Gone with the Wind** by shouting at Rhett Butler: “A **dam** is what you don’t give, you idiot – not a ‘damn’...”

+ **doll/dal**; Neel would have been glad, I think to learn that the **Oracular** form for this commonest of Indian foods is **dal**, rather than either **doll** (not to be confused with **pootty**) or the mysterious **dhal**, which is of course the Hind./Bengali word for ‘shield’. In one of his jottings he speculates that it is often thus spelled in English because it refers to a popular battlefield dish ‘lentils cooked in a shield.’

dubbah/dubber (***The Admiral**): Neel took exception to the the **Admiral’s** definition of this term: ‘a coarse leathern vessel for holding liquids in India.’ “Almost never in Hind. is this common term for container applied to a recaptacle that holds liquids. Such a usage is clearly exceptional, even among those who occasionally apply it to certain objects that are necessary for the proper conduct of **stool-pijjin**.” See also **dawk**.

+ **dufter/daftar**: This was another word which had already, in Neel’s lifetime, yielded to an ungainly rival, ‘office’. This too carried down with it, a **lashkar** of fine English words that were used for its staff: the clerks known as **crannies**, the **mootsuddies** who laboured over the accounts, the **shroffs** who were responsible for money-changing, the **khazana-dars** who watched over their treasuries, the **hurkarus** and **peons** who delivered messages, and of course, the innumerable **moonshies**, **dubashes** and **druggermen** who laboured over the translation of every document. It was the passing of the last three, all concerned with the work of translation, that most troubled Neel: those were the words he would cite when Englishmen boasted to him of the absorptive power of their language: “Beware, my friends: your tongues were flexible when you were still supplicants at the world’s **khazanas**: now that you have the whole world in a stranglehold, your tongues are hardening, growing stiffer. Do you ever count the words you lose every year? Beware! Victory is but the harbinger of decay and decline.”

+ **daroga**: See **chokey**.

dashy: (* **The Barney-Book**); see **bayadère**. “This word is said to be derived from *devadasi* (temple dancer), hence the frequent pairing **debbies** and **dashies**.”

+ **dastoor/ dastur**: Because Neel always gave precedence to nautical usages he assumed that this word would come into the **Oracle** because of the Laskari usage, in which it was the equivalent of ‘stu’nsail/studdingsail’ (see also **dol**). He allowed, as a long shot, that its homonym, which designated a Parsi religious functionary, might also stand a good chance of inclusion. He was wrong on both counts: The **Oracle** unaccountably has chosen to gloss it as ‘custom’ or ‘commission’, from which usage it derives **dastoori**, **destoory** etc. These last Neel ruled out, because their meaning was so close to **bucksheesh**.

+ **dawk**: See **chit**.

+ **dekko**, **dikk**, **deck**, **dekho**: Neel took bitter exception to all attempts to attribute this word to English Gypsy slang, insisting that it was a direct and recent borrowing of the Hind. *dekho* ‘to see’.

+ **devi**, **debi**, **debbie**: “In English usage, the Hind. word for ‘goddess’ acquired a wholly different connotation (for which see **bayadère**). The Laskari **devi** on the other hand, was a corruption of the English ‘davit’.”

+ **dhobi**: “the **mystery** of laundering.”

digh: (***Roebuck**): Neel was firmly of the opinion that this Laskari equivalent of the nautical sense of the word ‘point’, as in ‘points of sailing’ or ‘headings in relation to the wind’ came from the Bengali word for ‘direction’.

+ **dinghy**: From time to time, Neel would inscribe a question mark against words which had been rewarded, in his view, beyond their just desserts. Neel’s interrogation of **dinghy** was scored with an especially heavy hand, for of all the Bengali words for river-craft this one seemed to him the least likely to be raised to **coolinhood**, the *dingi* being the meanest of boats.

dol (***Roebuck**): Several of Neel’s **Jack-Chits** are devoted to the lascars’ words for the architecture of a sailing vessel. “**Dol** is what they call a mast, and for sail they use a borrowing from the English **serh** (though I have sometimes

heard them employ the good Bengali word *pâl*). To these are attached many other terms, of greater specificity: thus **trikat** (often mispronounced ‘tirkat’) is ‘fore- when attached to either **dol** or **serh**; **bara** is ‘main-’; **kilmi** is ‘mizzen-, and **sabar** is t’gallant. A jury mast goes by the apt name **phaltu-dol**. As for the other sails: a **sawai** is a staysail; a **gavi** is a topsail; a **tabar** is a royal; a **gabbar** is a sky-scraper; a **dastur** is a stu’nsail; and a spanker is a **drawal**. By combining these elements they are able to point to the most insignificant scraps of canvas – in their speech, the fore-t’gallant-stu’nsail is the **trikat-sabar-dastur**, and they have no need even to attach the word **serh** for their intention to be perfectly understood. The most curious words are reserved however for the tangle of tackle that projects **agil** from the vessel’s head: the jib for example, is a **jib**, which **malums** imagine merely to be a Laskari mispronunciation of the English word, little knowing that it means ‘tongue’ in Hind.; their word for flying jib, **fulana-jib**, might be similarly mistaken, by those who did not know that it might also mean ‘anything’s tongue’; but most curious of all is the word for the very tip of this spar, which is called the **shaitan-jib**. Could it be because to work there is indeed to feel the terror of sitting upon the Devil’s tongue?”

doasta: “This is one spiritous liquor about which the good **Admiral Smyth** is right; he describes it as: ‘an inferior spirit often drugged or doctored for unwary sailors in the pestiferous dens of filthy Calcutta and other sea-ports in india’”.

+ **doolally/doolally-tap**: “an illness once greatly prevalent among sahibs and mems, being the English equivalent of the Malay ‘amok’. It derived its name from Deolali, where there was a well-known asylum. I believe it to have been one of the side-effects of laudanum, which would account for its present desuetude.”

+ **dosooti/dosootie**: (* **The Glossary**); lit. ‘two yarn’, coarse cotton cloth; “I was astonished to learn from Mr. Reid, that in America Dosootie is considered the highest quality of shirt fabric.”

drawal: (***Roebuck**); spanker; see **dol**.

druggerman: (***The Glossary**) “like **moonshies**, **dubashes** and **linkisters**, a **mystery** of language – an interpreter whose title derives from the Arabic-Persian *tarjuman*.”

+ **dubba/dubber**; This word owes its presence in the *Chrestomathy* to lascars, who made the Hind. word for ‘box’ or ‘container’ a common article of nautical usage.

durwauza-bund: (* **The Glossary**): “These were the words which **khidmutgars** would use to turn away unwanted visitors: in a **BeeBee**’s mind the use of the Hind. for ‘closed door’ was more acceptable than an outright lie. The **Oracle** is sure to welcome it, for the sheer cunning of its reasoning.”

+ **dupatta/dooputty**: see **chuddar/chadar**.

+ **duffadar/dafadar**: one of those many ranks of lower officialdom that found an after-life in the **Oracle**. “The magnitude of the part these men once played in our lives can be easily judged by looking at any kalkatiya migrant’s certificate of emigration, on the back of which is almost always noted the name of the **duffadar** who was responsible for the recruitment (and usually in the scribbled Bengali script of some harried **cranny**).”

dumbcow/dumcao: (* **The Glossary**): “The popularity of this word and its steady advance towards the Peerage of the Verb, is due no doubt to its bilingual expressiveness, a **dumbcowing** being a harangue intended to cow – or better still **gubbrow** – its victim into dumbness.”

+ **dumbpoke**; Kitchens which served ‘casseroles’ never failed to ignite Neel’s ire, for he believed that word to be an insufferable piece of pretension, especially when the **dumbpoke** was at hand and ready to use. The recent resurrection of the Hind. original *dumpukht* would in no wise have consoled him, since it is now used in a strictly Hind. sense.

+ **dungaree/dungri**: “what **dinghy** was to boats, the Hind. *dungri* was to cloth – a coarse cotton fabric unworthy of survival, far less **coolindom**.”

+ **durzee**: “the **mystery** of tailoring”.

Faghfūr of Maha Chin; (* **The Glossary**) “Such was the Laskari phrase for the ‘Emperor of China’, and if you asked to whom it referred, they would tell you, almost always, that the personage in question was the Raja of **Chin-kalan**, which was but their name for Canton.”

faltu- or **phaltu-dol**: (***Roebuck**); “this is, strictly speaking, the Laskari term for ‘jury-mast’, and it is in that sense that it often finds employment in shipboard **girlery** being understood to refer to a foreshortened, unreliable or deficient organ of increase.”

faltu/phaltu-tanni: (***Roebuck**); see **turnee**

+ **fanqui**: “the *anglice* of *fan-kwei*, which the ***The Linkister** defines incorrectly as ‘foreign devil’. The term may easily, and less offensively, be translated as ‘unfamiliar spirit’.”

+ **foozle/foozilow**: “almost certainly from the Hind. *phuslana*, ‘to make a fool of’, which is said to have been further transformed in America, to **foozle** and even **comfoozle**”]

+ **free**: Neel was much in love with this word and would have been glad to know that the **Oracle** had fully acknowledged it to be a derivation from the common Sanskrit and Hind. root *priya* (‘dear’ or ‘beloved’). “As for the truth of ‘freedom’ it will remain forever elusive until such time as it is wrested free of English; not till then will the fuller meaning of *priya* be restored to it.”

fulana-jib: (***Roebuck**); flying-jib; see **dol**

fuleeta-pup: (* **The Glossary**); “a **consummer**’s mishearing of ‘fritter-puff’ that found its way into the lexicon against all odds.”

gabar: (***Roebuck**); sky-scraper or skysail; see **dol**.

gadda/gudda/gadha/gudder (* **The Glossary**): “Why is it that when the **sahib** borrows a Hind. zoological term, it is only for the purposes of abuse? It is of course, impossible to deny that *gadha* is often used in Hind. to mean ‘fool’, but it is true also that the ass is the familiar of the Lord of **Mysteries**, Vishwakarma. **Ooloo/ullu** similarly, may well sometimes be used to mean ‘fool’, but who can forget that the owl is also the familiar of the goddess Lakshmi? As for **bandar**, in Hind. it has none of the abusive implications of its English usage, being employed rather as term of affection or endearment, in the sense of ‘mischievous’.”

galee/girley/gali (* **The Glossary**) “oaths, obscenities; from which **girlery**, the equivalent of the Bengali *gali-gola* – pertaining to abuse’.

+ **ganta/ghanta**: “bell, from which Hind. ‘hour’.
“But to ‘ring your ganta’ is considered **girlery**.”

gavi: (***Roebuck**); topsail; see **dol**.

ghungta: see **dooputty/dupatta**.

girlery: see **galee**

girmitiya: “the genius of the Bhojpuri language,” writes Neel, “ derives this memorable term from the root **girmit**, which is a corruption of Eng. ‘agreement’ [or indenture]”.

+ **godown**: see **bankshall**

gol-cumra (***The Glossary**): see ‘cumra’

+ **gomusta/gomushta**: “For this **mystery** of the **daftar** there can be no simple definition, for he is to be seen discharging as many functions as can be said to exist in such a place: he writes accounts, he **dumbcows**, he **gubbrows**, he serves as a **druggerman** when needed. All that can be said of him with any certainty is that the title could not come to him until he had gained the **Burra Sahib’s** ear.”

goolmaul/gollmaul: (* **The Glossary**); Neel took issue with Sir Henry’s definition of this word as ‘mix-up’: “it is patently evident that this word was once merely Hind. slang for ‘zero’ (literally ‘circular thing’). In this sense it referred originally to a conundrum or puzzle. It was only by extension that it came to mean ‘mix-up’, but of late it has been so overburdened by this connotation that it is now generally used to signify an uproar, or a great fuss.” (See also **tamasha**).

goozle-coonuh/goozul-khana: (* **The Glossary**); see **bobachee**.

gordower: (* **The Glossary**); “a type of Bengal boat as ugly as its name”.

grag: (***Roebuck**); grog, from which the term by which taverns were affectionately known: **grag-ghars**

griblee: (***Roebuck**); graplin, der. eng.

+ **griffin/griff**, see **pucka**

gubber: (* **The Glossary**); “that this **bandooki** coin bore a resemblance to the Hind. for ‘cow-dung’, gave it many added uses in the **dufter**. For the cranny could not be **dumbcowed** for saying to a **Burra Sahib**: ‘Sir, may your pockets be weighed down with **gubbers**.”

gubbrow/ghabrao:(* **The Glossary**); see **dumbcow**

+ **gup**: “talk, gossip; but never in English, **gup-shup**, which is so much the better expression.”

+ **halalcor/halalcore**: “In English this, like **harry-maid** and **muttrancee**, was one of many titles for the **mysteries** of toiletry.”

hathee-soond: (***Roebuck**); see **bhandari**

hazree/hazri: (***Roebuck**); muster (‘from which’, adds Neel, ‘we have **chotee hazree**, which wakes the sahib in time for the daily mustering’).

harry-maid: (* **The Glossary**); see **halalcore**.

hoga: (* **The Barney-Book**); “This word is a fine illustration of the changes that occur when an expression crosses from Hind. to English. The Hind. original *ho-ga* is usually employed to mean ‘will happen’ or ‘will do’. In English on the other hand, the word is almost always used in conjunction with a negative participle, to imply strong disapproval. Thus was a notoriously starchy **BeeBee** heard to exclaim, on finding her husband in the arms of a **Rum-johnny**: “Not in my **bichawna** dear; just won’t **hoga**.”

+ **hong**: “in southern China this word was applied indifferently, in English, to a certain kind of trading establishments, a company of merchants, a set of buildings, and even to certain boats kept by merchants: **hong-boat**”.

+ **hookum**: “The Laskari word for ‘command’”.

hubes!/habes!: (***Roebuck**): this was the Laskari equivalent of the English nautical **hookum** ‘heave’, and Neel was so struck by Roebuck’s notes on this term that he copied them down verbatim: “[when issuing this command] sometimes a little abuse is necessary; as for instance ‘*Habes sálá!*’ ‘*Bahin chod habes!*’ or ‘*Habes harámzuda!*’”

hurremzad/huramzuda/harámzáda etc.: (* **The Glossary**); see **badmash**.

+ **hurkaru/harcara**: see **dufter/daftar & chit/chitty**

istoop/istup: (***Roebuck**); “I can still feel it between my fingers, that vile oakum, endlessly picking, picking, picking...” from the Portuguese *estopa*.

+ **jadoo/jadu**: magic, conjuring [“wherefrom the common usage, **jadoo-ghar** for Freemason’s Lodge”].

+ **jammah/jama**: “The only reason why this word may fail to achieve the same eminence as the compound, **pyjama** (lit, ‘leg-clothing’) is that it is too general, being applied to all clothing.” See also, **kameeze**.

+ **jasoos**: Neel was intrigued by the English spellings of words related to this common Hind. term for ‘spy’ – **jasoosy** (spying) and **jasooses** (spies).

jaw/jao: (* **The Barney-Book**); See **chull**.

jawaub: (* **The Glossary**, ***The Barney Book**); “this borrowing of the Hind. for ‘answer’ was never a persuasive migrant, its function in English being limited to a single sense, which Barrère & Leland describe thus: “If a gentleman proposes to a lady and is refused he is said to have been **juwaubed**.”

jalebi/jellybee: see **laddu**

+ **jemadar**: “In my youth, as I remember, this word designated the second highest rank for a **sepo**y, following upon **subedar/soubadar**. But of late the usage has changed somewhat, and is often applied to **bhistis**, and also to some of the **myster**ies of toiletry.”

+ **jildi/jeldy/jaldi**; The **Oracle**’s recognition of this word appears to have been a cause of much jubilation, for one of my predecessors has noted the definition in full: “Haste, as in phrases *on the jildi*, in a hurry, and to *do or move a-jildi*”.

jillmill: (* **The Glossary**); “**bandooki** shutterwork”.

+ **joss**: “It was in Macao that I learnt the correct etymology of this term, which derives not from a Cantonese root, as I had imagined, but from the Portuguese *Dios*. Hence its use in all matters pertaining to worship: **joss-stick**, **joss-house**, **joss-candle**, and of course **joss-pijjin** meaning ‘religion’ (from which derives the usage **joss-pijjin-man** to mean ‘priest’.”

kalmariya: (***Roebuck**); “a sail-emptying calm, the word being derived, or so Roebuck tells us, from the Portuguese *calmaria*.”

+**kameez/kameeze**: This word’s entry into the caverns of the **Oracle** would have amazed Neel, who believed that it was doomed to a pauper’s grave. “My reasoning rests on two pillars, the first of which is that the tunics that are known by this name could just as well be designated by a near-synonym, **kurta**. There are those who will point out that a **kameeze** is a longer and more elaborate garment - but should it not then be described by the more euphonious term *angarkha*? The second reason why the word **kameeze** is unlikely to survive is because of the grave challenge posed by its near cognate, the English ‘chemise’. There are those who will object, no doubt, that **kameeze** derives from the Arabic *qamis*, while the English ‘chemise’ (like the Portuguese *camiz*) is descended from the Latin *camisia*. No credence can be accorded to this argument however, for the good reason that the Arabic *qamis* may itself be descended from the Latin. In any event there can be no doubt that **kameez** and ‘chemise’ are close kin; nor can it be doubted that the latter is so rapidly usurping the territory of the former that the phrase ‘pyjama-chemise’ may soon come to replace the name of the ensemble that is now known as the **sulwaur-kameeze**. Such a change is wholly to be welcomed: might not the notoriously pugnacious Afghan, for instance, undergo a beneficial change of temperament if he could be persuaded to abandon his prickly **kameez** in favour of the cooler and more flattering ‘chemise’?”

karibat: The discovery of this word in * **The Barney-Book** gave Neel the greatest pleasure for it had become, by the last years of his life, so obscured with disuse as almost to be archaic. It is clear from his notes that he remembered a time when this word, which joins the Tamil *kari* with the Bengali *bhat* ‘rice’, was commonly used in English, to mean ‘an Indian meal’. In that sense it stood, not just for ‘curry-rice’ as some might

think, but was rather an English equivalent of such phrases as ‘have you had your rice?’ the meaning of which can best be expressed as ‘have you eaten?’ Although unable to recall with absolute certainty, he had a vague memory of even having heard people say, in this sense: ‘have you **karibatted**?’

+ **kassidar/khasadar** see **burkundaz**

ket: (***Roebuck**); cat o’ nine tails (but Neel notes, that he often heard this most dreaded of **chawbucks** referred to as a *koordum*, which usage Roebuck corroborates, adding that it derives from the Portuguese *cordão*).

+ **khalasi/classy**: Although usually spelled as **classy**, this Bengali word for ‘boatman’ was generally used in a derogatory sense, to mean ‘a low kind of person’. Neel would have been astonished to learn of its entry into the chambers of the **Oracle**.

khwancha: (***Roebuck**): see **tapori**

+ **khidmutgar/ kitmutgar/ kistmutgar/kismatgar etc.**; “The variety of English spellings for this word is truly astonishing and has led to many misconceptions. Among the many speculations about its origins the most febrile are those that attach to the variant **kismat+gar**. Some have suggested that the term originally referred to astrologers, a great number of whom were once employed by every household. It was even suggested to me once that proper meaning of the word is ‘one who follows his master’s **kismat**’ (‘surely sir,’ I could not help retorting, ‘such a person would be a *budkismatgar*?’). In fact the term is the literal equivalent of the English ‘servant’ in the sense of ‘provider of service’.”

kilmi: (***Roebuck**); ‘mizzen-‘; see **dol**.

+ **kismet/kismat**: “Great reams of **buckwash** have been written about the superstitious implications of this word. In fact it derives from the Arabic root *q-s-m*, ‘to divide’ or ‘apportion’, so it means nothing more than ‘portion’ or ‘lot’.”

+ **kotwal**: See **chokey**.

khubber/kubber/khabar (* **The Glossary**): “Only the naïve would take this word to mean ‘news’ in the sense signified by that term in English. For if that were so then its its derivate,

kubberdaur/khabardar, would mean ‘bearer of news’ instead of ‘beware!’”

kubberdaur/khabardar: see above

+ **khud**: “Once, in an argument, a self-styled **pundit** cited this as an instance of a loanword that remained unchanged in meaning after traveling between languages. ‘But if that were so,’ I said, ‘then surely **khud** in Hind. would possess the same connotations as the English ‘chasm’ or ‘gap’, would it not?’ ‘Why so it does,’ he said. ‘So then tell me sir,’ I asked, ‘how often have you heard anyone say in Hind. that there lay a great **khud** between them and their fellow men?’”

+ **khus-khus**, see **tatty**.

+ **kurta**: see **kameez**.

kussab: (***Roebuck**); see **lascar**.

kuzzana/cuzzaner: (* **The Glossary**); Neel felt that the administrative use of this word to refer to district treasuries, was unduly restrictive. “Why, as Sir Henry has shown, English travelers were using this word as early as 1683, hence that famous passage of Hedges Diary, in which he reports a demand for 8000 Rupees to be paid into ‘ye King’s Cuzzana’.

+ **laddu**; there has been much familial dissension over whether Neel’s expectations for this word were fulfilled. He imagined that it would find its way into the **Oracle** in its Laskari sense, in which it referred to the top (or cap) of the mast. But instead, this word, like **jalebi/jellybee** has been anointed only in its incarnation as a sweetmeat. Yet it is a fact that the sweetmeat, like the cap of the mast, took its name from the roundedness of its shape, hence Neel’s intuition was not wholly at fault.

larkin: “what a mademoiselle is to a madame, so was a **larkin** to a **BeeBee**, being nothing other than the corruption of Hind. *larki*, ‘girl’.”

lall-shraub/loll-shrub/lál-sharáb: (* **The Glossary**, * **The Barney-Book**); “this phrase was so commonly used that to say ‘red wine’ was considered pretentious”. See also **sharab/xarave** etc.

+ **langooty/langoot/langot**: “Well was it said of this most abbreviated version of the dhoti that it

substituted a ‘pocket-handkerchief for a fig-leaf.’”

lantea:(* **The Glossary**); “Curious that the **Oracle** overlooked this common Chinese boat while anointing the rarer Malay **lanchara**.”

larn-pijjin: see **pijjin**

lás/purwan-ka-lás: (***Roebuck**); “a lazy shortening”, Neel notes, “for the Portuguese word for yardarm: *laiz*.”

+ **lascar**: “Almost to a man the lascars will say that their name comes from the Persian *lashkar*, meaning ‘militia’ or ‘member of a militia’, and thus by extension ‘mercenary’ or ‘hired hand’. That there is some connection between these words is beyond question, but I am convinced that the strictly nautical usage of the term is a purely European introduction, dating back perhaps to the Portuguese. In Hind. of course, the term is applied to foot-soldiers, not sailors, and almost always denotes a plurality (so that it would be absurd to say in Bengali, as one well might in English, ‘a *lashkar* of lascars’). Even today a lascar will rarely use this term to describe himself, preferring instead such words as *jahazi* or *khalasi* (the anglice of which is the curious **classy**); or else he will use a title of rank, whereby the seniormost is a **serang**, followed by **tindal** and **seacunny**. Nor does this exhaust all the gradations of lascar ranks, for there are others such as **kussab** and **topas**, whose functions are somewhat obscure (although the latter seem usually to serve as a ship’s sweeper). It is not perhaps surprising that there is no special Laskari word for the lowest in the ladder of rankings: as with the English ‘ship’s boy’, this unfortunate worthy is so often mocked, taunted and kicked that he is more butt than boy, and to speak the name of his rank is almost offensive (and the terms by which he is generally known does indeed serve as something of an insult: *launda* and *chhokra* - the *anglice* of which are **launder** and **chuckeroo**). Thus it happens that a lascar’s most frequent use of the term ‘lascar’ corresponds more closely to its Hind. or Persian usage than to the English, for he generally employs it as a collective noun, to mean ‘crew’ (**lashkar**). The strangest part of the curious odyssey of the word **lascar** is that it has now re-entered some Hind. languages (notably Bengali), in which it is used in the European sense, to mean ‘sailor’! I am persuaded however, that where this is the case, the word is a recent

intruder, introduced through the nautical dialects of Portuguese or English.”

+ **lashkar**: (***Roebuck**): see above

+ **lattee/lathee/lathi**: “There are those who claim that this is merely a ‘stick’. To them I say: Well why do you not try the sound of fiddle-**lattees** and see how well it serves? The word is actually a part-synonym for ‘baton’ since it is applied only to that incarnation of the stick in which it is both an instrument of chastisement and a symbol of imperial authority. By this token, it is the Englishman’s version of Hind. *danda*, which derives of course from *dand*, meaning rule or authority.”

Elsewhere Neel notes that a **lathee** was never to be mistaken for the kind of walking stick that went by the name of **penang-lawyer**, “‘with which’, as the **Admiral** so aptly remarks, “the administration of justice was wont to be settled at Pulo Penang”.

latteal/lathial: (* **The Glossary**); see **burkundaz**.

launder/launda: See **lascar**.

+ **linkister**: Neel would have taken issue with the **Oracle**’s derivation of this word as a corruption of ‘linguister’. He believed it to be rather, a colloquial extension of the word ‘link’ – one that came to be applied to translators because it so perfectly fitted their function.

loochee: (* **The Glossary**): “The ease with which this derivative of the Hind. *luchha* has come into English has much to do with its resemblance to its synonym ‘lecher’: but this too is the reason why it will, in all likelihood, soon lapse from use.”

+ **loot**: “I am persuaded that this is another word that English owes to Laskari, for this derivative of the Hind. *lút* probably first found employment on the Company **Bawhawder**’s Ships when applied to captured French vessels (in the sense of ‘prize’ or ‘plunder’).

+ **lorcha**: “whether this is a ship of Portuguese make, or a Chinese copy of an European design is a vexed issue: suffice it to say that these vessels are often seen off the coast of southern China.”

luckerbaug: (* **The Glossary**); “over this English word, speakers of Hind. and Bengali have been known to come to blows, the former contending that it derives from their *lakkarbagga*, ‘hyena’, and the latter claiming it to be a corruption of *nekrebagh*, ‘wolf’. The matter is impossible to decide for I have heard it being applied to both these creatures, and the jackal to boot.”

lugow/lagao: (* **The Glossary**); “A fine example of a humble word which, having ‘entered through the hawse-holes’, as the saying goes, has now ascended to the Peerage of the Verb. In its correct Laskari usage, it is the exact nautical counterpart of ‘to bind’ or ‘to fasten’. Given the English lexicon’s general enthusiasm for terms related to binding, tying, beating, pulling and so on, there would seem to be nothing remarkable about its steady rise through the ranks. Its passage into civilian use might well have been occasioned by the phrase ‘**lugowing** a line’ (i.e. ‘fastening hawse’, ‘binding a rope’ etc.). This expression has gained such widespread currency that it may well be the ancestor of the verb ‘to **lug**’.”

loondboond/lundbund: (***Roebuck**); this cognate of **launder** was the curious Laskari word for ‘dismasted’. Speculating on its origins, Roebuck writes, ‘perhaps from *nunga moonunga* stark naked,’ which in turn prompted Neel to observe: “how plain the English and how vivid the Laskari, which should be translated, surely, as ‘dismembered’? Could it be that Roebuck knew neither of lunds nor bunds, and nor possibly, of their relation to each other?”

+ **mali/malley/mauly/molley/mallee** “the **mysterics** of the garden.”

+ **malum**: “Some dictionaries persist in misspelling this word as **malem** even though its correct form has been a part of the English language since the 17th century. this Laskari word for ‘ships’s officer’ or ‘mate’ is of course, derived from the Arabic *mu’allim*, ‘knowledgeable’.”

+ **mandir**: see **sammyhouse**

masalchie; (* **The Glossary**); see **bobachee**.

+ **maistry/mistri/mystery**: Few words aroused Neel’s passions as much as these. A recent

discovery among his notes is the draft of a letter to a well-known Calcutta newspaper.

“Dear Sir: As one of the foremost English journals in the Indian subcontinent, you are rightly regarded as something of an oracle on the subject of that language. It is therefore with the greatest regret that we have noted of late, a creeping misuse of the word **mistri** on your pages. More than once has it been suggested that this is a Hindustanee word that refers indifferently to plumbers, fitters, masons and repairmen. Now the truth is sir, that the word **mistri** along with its variants, **maistry** and **mystery**, are, after **balti**, the commonest Portuguese-derived words in the languages of India (by way of *mestre*). Like **balti** they may well have travelled by a nautical route, for the original meaning of **maistry** was similar to its English cognate ‘master’ (both being derived from the Latin *magister*), and was probably first used in the sense of ‘ship’s master’. It is in a similar sense that the term **maistry** is still employed, being applied mainly to overseers, and preserving fully the connotations of authority that are implicit in its English cousin ‘master’. It is interesting to note that in India as in the Europe, the connotations of this fecund term have developed along parallel paths. Thus just as the French *maître* and Italian *maestro* imply also the mastery of a trade or craft, so similarly is the word **mistri** applied in Hindustanee to artisans and master-craftsmen: it is in this latter form that it is now applied to repairmen, workmen and the like. On this subject sir, might it also be suggested that you would do well to adopt the variant spelling, **mystery**, which possesses the great advantage of making evident the word’s direct connubium with the Latin *ministerium* (from which we get such usages as ‘The Mystery Plays’, so called because they were produced by workmen who practised a *mistry*, or *ministerium*)? Would this not also deepen our sense of awe when we refer to the ‘Fashioner of All Things’ as the ‘Divine **Mystery**’?”

This letter was never posted, but in keeping with his tenets, Neel always used the variant **mystery**.

maski: “In no way is this curious expression connected with ‘musk’ or ‘masks’. In the **zubben** of the South China Coast, it figures rather as something that would be described in Hind. as a *takiya-kalám*— that is to say an expression that is used not for its meaning (of which it possesses none) but merely out of habit, so that it becomes, through constant repetition, as familiar and as unremarkable as a pillow or **tuckier**.”

+ **mochi/moochy:** “the **mystery** of leather.”

+ **mootsuddy/mutsaddi;** see **dufter**

+ **munshi/monshee:** see **dufter**

mura: (***Roebuck**); “for a long time, I had no idea what the lascars meant when they spoke of the **jamna mura** and the **dawa mura**. Only later was I to learn that this was their word for ‘tack’, a rare borrowing from the Italian.”

+ **mussuck:** “strange indeed is this name for the leather water-bag carried by **bhistis**, for it is but the Arabic for **puckrow**.”

muttrancee;(* **The Glossary**); see **halalcore**

+ **nainsook/nayansukh;** “‘pleasing to the eye’ was the name of this fine cloth in Hind. The same cannot be said, however, of the English corruption of our word.”

nuddee (***The Admiral**): “this was as much a river as a **nullah** is a ditch, so why one should be universally used and the other not is beyond my reckoning.”

+ **nullah:** see above.

ooloo/ullu: see **gadda/gadha/gudder**.

oolta-poolta/oolter-poolter: (* **The Glossary**), “While it is by no means incorrect to gloss this expression as having the sense of ‘upside down’, it ought to be noted that in Laskari it had a strictly nautical usage, being applied to vessels that had been tipped over on their beam ends.”

poggie/porgly/poggly: (* **The Glossary**, * **The Barney-Book**): On this word Neel quotes with disapproval Barrère and Leland’s borrowing of Sir Henry’s observations: “‘a madman, an idiot, a dolt. [from] Hindu *págal*... A friend used ...to

adduce a macaronic adage which we fear the non-Indian will fail to appreciate ‘*Pogal et pecunia jaldi separantur*’, i.e. a fool and his money are soon parted’.” To this Neel adds: “If such were indeed the case then none would be more deserving of pauperdom than these **pundits**, for a **poggie** may be out of his mind, but he is no fool.”

+ **pani/pawnee/parny:** Neel hotly disputed the notion that the Hind. word for water had entered the English language through its use in such compounds as **brandy-pawnee** and **blatty-pawnee**. This was another instance in which he gave full credence to Barrère & Leland’s derivation of it from the gypsy word for water. (See also **bilayuti**).

paik: (* **The Glossary**); see **burkundaz**.

+ **parcheesi/parcheezi:** Neel was outraged to find that the familiar pastime of his childhood, *pachcheesi*, was being packaged and sold as ‘Ludo’, **Parcheesi** etc. “Would that we could copyright and patent all things of value in our patrimony, before they are claimed and stolen by these greed-mongers, who think nothing of making our children pay for the innocent diversions that have been handed, even to them poorest of them, as a free bequest from the past.” No shop-bought version of this game was ever allowed to cross his threshold, and he made sure that his children played it as he had, on a square of embroidered cloth, with the brightest of Seychelles cowries.

+ **penang-lawyer,** see **lathi**

+ **pijjin/pidgin:** “Numerous indeed are the speculations on the origins of this much-used expression, for people are loathe to accept that it is merely a way of pronouncing that commonest of English words: ‘business’. But such indeed is the case, which is why a novice or **griffin** is commonly spoken of as a **learn-** or **larn-pijjin**. I have recently been informed of another interesting compound **stool-pijjin**, which is used, I believe, to describe the business of answering Nature’s call.”

+ **pollock-saug/palong-shák:** (* **The Glossary**); “Sir Henry has never been so wrong as in his gloss of this most glorious of greens: ‘A poor vegetable, called also ‘country spinach’”.”

pootly/putli (*The Glossary): “Sir Henry, ever the innocent, glosses **pootly-nautch** as if it were mere Hind. for ‘doll-’ or ‘puppet-dance’! But one can scarcely doubt that he knew full well what the words meant in English, (for which see **bayadère**).”

puckrow/puckerow/pakrao (*The Glossary): “It is easy to be misled into thinking that this is merely the Hind. for ‘hold’ or ‘grasp’ and was borrowed as such by the English soldier. But the word was quite commonly used also to mean ‘grapple’. When used by **pootlies** and **dashies** in this sense its implications were by no means soldierly.”

+ **pucka/pucca**: Neel believed that the English meaning of this word came not from the Hind. ‘ripe’, as was often said, but rather the alternative denotation – ‘cooked’, or ‘baked’ – in which sense it was applied to ‘baked-’ or ‘burnt-’ bricks. “A **pucka sahib** is thus the hardest and most brickish of his kind. Curiously the locution ‘kutchah sahib’ is never used, the word **griffin** serving as its equivalent.”

+ **pultan/paltan**: “an interesting instance of a word which, after having been borrowed by Hind. (for its military application ‘platoon’) is reabsorbed into English with the slightly altered sense of ‘multitude’.”

pee-chil: (*Roebuck); See **agil**.

+ **punch**: “Strange indeed that the beverage of this name has lost all memory of its parent: Hind. *panj* (‘five’). In my time we scorned this mixture as an unpalatable economy.”

+ **pundit**: Neel was not persuaded of the validity of the usual etymology of this word, whereby it is held to derive from a common Hind. term for ‘learned man’ or ‘scholar’. “A hint as to its true origin is to be seen in the 18th century French spelling of it, *pandect*. Does this not clearly indicate that the word is a compound of ‘pan’ + ‘edict’ – meaning ‘one who pronounces on all matters’? Surely this is a closer approximation of its somewhat satirical English connotations than our respectful Hind. *pundit*?”

+ **punkah-wallah/-wala**: “The **mystery** of the fan.”

purwan: (*Roebuck); yard (spar from which sail is set); here Neel has underlined carefully his

tutor’s footnote: “*Purwan*, I think is compounded of *Pur* a wing, or feather, and *Wan*, a ship, which last word is much used by the lascars from Durat (properly Soorut) etc. so that *Purwan*, the yards of the ship, might also be translated the wings upon which the ship flies”.

+ **pyjama/pajama**: “There must surely be some significance to the fact that the Hind. for ‘leg’ (*pao*) has received a much warmer welcome into the English language than the word for head (*sir*). While variants of *pao* figure in many compounds, including **char+poy**, **tea+poy**, and **py+jama**, *sir* has to its credit only **turban** (*sirbandh*) and **seersucker** (*sirsukh*).”

+ **quod/qaid**: see **chokey**

+ **rawnee/rani**: “although this Hind. word did indeed mean queen, in English usage it had another connotation (for which see **bayadère**).”

+ **rankin/rinkin**:(* **The Barney-Book**); “A fine piece of English gypsy-slang, from our own *rangin* – colourful.”

+ **roti/rooty/rootie**, “it is my suspicion that the **Oracle** will absorb this as the Hind. *roti*, but it could just as well, as the **Barneymen** rightly observe, make its travels in the latter two forms, which are taken from the Bengali – these are after all, the words that English soldiers commonly use in describing the bread that is served in their **chownees**. It is no mystery that English soldier does not trouble to distinguish between leavened and unleavened bread since the latter is a quantity unknown to his tongue: thus what a **rootie** is to him, would be to a **sepo**, a *pao-roti*. I am told that it is not merely the presence of yeast, but also of this prefix, *pao*, that prevents many **sepoys** from eating English bread: they believe that yeasted dough is kneaded with the feet (*pao*) and is therefore unclean. If only it were to be explained to them that the *pao* of *pao-roti* is merely a Hind. adaptation of *pão*, the Portuguese for bread! Imagine, if on some arduous march a starving soldier were to deny himself succour due to a grievous misconception: a simple word of explanation would spare him his cries of **bachaw! bachaw!** This, if anything, is a perfect illustration of why etymology is essential to man’s survival.”

+ **ruffugar/ruffoogar/rafugar**: (* **The Glossary**); “In philological circles a cautionary

tale is told of a **griffin** who, having been set upon by a scruffy **budmash**, berated his assailant with the cry: “Unhand me, vile **ruffoogar!**” The speaker was mistaken in believing this to be Hind. for ‘ruffian’, for a **ruffoogar** is merely a clothes-repairer.”

Rum-Johnny: (* **The Barney-Book**); “Taken from Hind. *Rámjani*, this word had a wholly different connotation in English (for which see **bayadère**).”

+ **rye/rai**: Neel was right in predicting that this common Hind. word for ‘gentleman’ would appear in the **Oracle** in its English-gypsy variant **rye**, rather than in the usual Indian form.

sabar: (***Roebuck**); topgallant or t’gallant; see **dol**.

+ **sahib**: this word was a source of bafflement to Neel: “How did it happen that the Arabic for ‘friend’ became, in Hind. and English, a word meaning ‘master’?” The question was answered by a grandson who had visited the Soviet Union; on the margins of Neel’s note he scribbled: ‘‘Sahib’ was to the Raj what ‘comrade’ is to Communists – a mask for mastery.’ [See also **Beebee**].

+ **salwar/shalwar/shulwaur**: see **kameez**

+ **sammy**: (* **The Barney-Book**); “the *anglice* of Hind. *swami*, from which **sammy-house** to mean **mandir**: whether this is preferable to ‘pagoda’ is a matter of debate.”

sammy-house: see above

sawai: (***Roebuck**); staysail; see **dol**.

+ **seacunny/seaconny**: On this word, meaning ‘helmsman’, Neel penned a note that covers the verso of the 4 of Hearts: “It is not uncommon to hear it said that the term **seacunny/seaconny** is derived from an old English word meaning ‘rabbit’ – to wit: ‘cony’ or ‘coney’ (**sea-cunny** thus being interpreted to mean ‘sea-rabbit’). Beware anyone who tells you this for he is having a quiet laugh at your expense: he probably knows full well that ‘coney’ has a secret, but far more common, use (as when a London **buy-em-dear** says to a prospective customer ‘no money, no coney’). This is why the more **pucka ma’amsahibs** will not allow the word **seacunny** to pass their lips, preferring to

use the absurd expression **sea-bunny**. (‘Well then madam,’ I was once tempted to say, ‘if we are thus to describe a helmsman, should we not also speak of the Great **Sea-bunny** in the Sky?’) If only one could find the words to explain to these ladies that no rabbit need fear the conning of **seacunnies**: the term is utterly harmless and derives merely from the Arabic *sukkán* meaning rudder, from which we get *sukkáni* and thus **seacunny**.” See also **lascar**.

+ **seersucker**: Neel objected vehemently to the notion that the name of this cotton material was derived (as the **Oracle** was later to contend) from the Persian *shir-o-shakkar* or ‘milk and sugar’. “By what stretch of the imagination could anyone imagine that a sweet, milky syrup would be pleasant to wear on the skin?” Instead, following Sir Henry, he derived the word from *sir-sukh* ‘joy of/to the head’, on the analogy of **turban** (which he thought to be derived from Hind. *sir-bandh* – ‘head-band’). He took the view that the terms were aptly paired since the latter was sometimes made of the former. As supplemental evidence he cited a maxim which he claimed to be common among lascars: *sirbandh me sirsukh* – ‘a turban is happiness for the head’.

+ **sepo/seapoy**: “The variant spelling, **sea-poy**, has caused much confusion over the ages (see **charpoy**). One ill-informed wordy-**pundit** has even espoused the theory that this term is a mispronunciation of ‘sea-boy’ and was thus originally a synonym for **lascar**. This is of course an elementary misunderstanding and could be easily corrected if the English spelling of **sepo** were to be altered to **sepo**. This would have the dual advantage of advertising this word’s descent from the Persian/Turkish *sipáhi*, while also making evident its kinship to the French *spahi*, which refers similarly, to a certain kind of colonial mercenary.”

+ **serang**: see **lascar**.

serh: (***Roebuck**); see **dol**.

+ **seth**, see **beparee**. Neel was aware of the raging controversy that surrounds the question of whether the term **seth** is related to such words *chetty*, *chettiar* and *shetty*. But lacking any expertise in the languages of southern India, he was unable to reach any conclusion on the subject.

+ **shabash/shahbash**: “‘Bravo!’ to Sir Henry.”

+ **shampoo**: “Is it not a commentary on the relationship of England and India that most of the Hind. candidates for the Peerage of the English Verb pertain to grappling, grasping, binding, tying and whipping? Yet, of all the pretenders who have had their start in this domain - **puckrow, bundo, lagow, chawbuck** etc. – only one has risen to the rank of a true grandee of the Upper House; only one has claimed a dukedom for itself. This is, strangely enough, that humblest of terms *chāpo/chāpna*, in its corrupted form, **shampoo**. The reason for this, surely, is that the notion of *chāpo*-ing embodies some of the more pleasureable aspects of grappling, grasping and so on – that is to say, of kneading, pressing, touching, massaging. Those who would seek to reduce this word to the rank of noun, would do well to note that it will not meekly relinquish its active form, clinging to its animate energies even when forced into the Lower House (a case to point being the French *le shampooing*).

+ **shamshoo/samschoo**: “**The Admiral**, who seems never to have tasted any **shrob** not made in Europe, described this Chinese wine as ‘fiery, fetid and very injurious to european health’. But this was true only of the varieties sold on Hog Lane; elsewhere there were many very fine bottlings, no less precious than the finest French **sharaabs**.”

shoe-goose: (* **The Barney-Book**); “Not being a bird at all, but rather a kind of cat” [in fact a lynx] “this word is unlikely to enter the annals of ornithology.” In the margins, a note: ‘From Persian *syagosh*’.

+**shrob/shrab/shrub/sorbet /sorbetto/sherbert/ syrup/sirop/ xarave/sharaab**; Neel loved to collect derivatives of the Arabic root for ‘drink’ *sh-r-b*.

+ **shikar**, see below

+ **shikaree**: “The **mystery** of the hunt (**shikar**)”.

shoke/shauq: (* **The Glossary**); “in its English incarnation this Arabic word means ‘whim’, ‘hobby’ or ‘penchant’. In Hind. the existence of a **shoke** is often indicated by the addition of the suffix *báz* (sometimes Anglicized to **buzz**). The proper English translation of Hind. *addá-báz* is therefore **buck-buzz**. (The term **launder-** or

laund’ry-buzz is a cant exception and does not always refer to the whims of **dhobis**). When misused, this particle can cause some curious misunderstandings. Thus for instance a self-styled **pundit** was once heard to speculate that **buzz** when added to **bawhawder** was a reference to a well-known **shoke** of Alexander the Great’s (sometimes described as his taste for youthful **bawhawder**). So wedded was the **pundit** to this view, that I was hard put to persuade him that he had got the matter completely **oolter-poolter**: **Buzz Bawhawder** was a medieval king of Malwa, famous for his **shoke** for the beautiful **Rawnee**, Ropmuttee. As for the matter he was speaking of, the correct **zubben** expression is of course **udlee-budlee**.”

+ **shroff**: “the **mystery** of money-changing”, from which **shroffage**, which the **Oracle** defines as a commission charged for **shroffing**, or the examining of coin.

+ **sicca rupee**; “in my childhood, as I remember, this was already an antique kind of coinage.” The **Oracle** confirms this, adding that these coins were issued in 1793.

+ **silahdar/silladar**: “this word, lit. ‘arms-bearer’ was one of many that was applied to mercenaries and soldiers of fortune”. See **burkandaz**

silboot: (* **The Glossary**); “like **sirdrar**, which is but the Hind. corruption of the undergarment known as a ‘short drawer’, this word for ‘slipper’ has re-entered English usage in an altered form.”

silmagoor: From the **Jack-Chits**: “Could this be a lascar’s way of saying ‘sail-maker’?” A marginal note, written long afterwards, confirms his guess with a triumphant ! : ‘Roebuck leaves no doubt of it.’

sirdrar: (* **The Glossary**); see **silboot**

soor: (* **The Barney-Book**); “pig, hence **soor-ka-butcha-** son of a pig”.

tabar: (***Roebuck**); ‘royal’ as applied to a ship’s rigging; see **dol**.

+ **tael**: “another name for a Chinese liang or ounce”, but a note in the margins specifies: ‘According to the **Oracle** this weight equals 1 1/3 oz avoirdupois.’

+ **talipot**: Neel was mistaken in thinking this to be the English word for ‘toddy-palm’. The **Oracle** pronounces it to be a ‘South Indian fan palm *Corypha umbraculifera*.’”

taliyamar (***Roebuck**); Neel mistook this word to mean ‘bow-wave’ but was glad to be corrected: “Roebuck explains that this is the Laskari for ‘cut-water’ derived from the Portuguese *talhamar*. I remember having always heard the word spoken by lascars who were looking down from the bowsprit. Hence my error: I mistook the effect for the object.”

tamancha: “Roebuck confirms that this was, as I remember, the common Laskari word for a lesser firearm.”

tapori: From the **Jack-Chits**: “this was the lascar’s word for the wooden bowl out of which he ate – the equivalent of the English seaman’s ‘kid’. These were made of the plainest hollowed wood, and were bought in great numbers from bumboats. Apart from this there was also the metal **khwancha** – a large tray on which they ate together.”

+ **tatty**: (* **The Glossary**) “Such was the term for a screen made of khus-khus grass. Although the word is perfectly respectable, being derived from the tamil *vettiveru* (from which **vetiver**), its resemblance to a common Hind. word for a certain bodily product tended to create misunderstandings. A story is told, of a formidable **BeeBee** who issued a peremptory **hookum** to a timid **chuckeroo**: ‘Boy! Drop a **tatty!** **Jildee!**’ The unfortunate lad was **gubbrowed** half out of his wits and complied with such celerity that the **BeeBee** was put utterly to rout.

To further complicate matters, those who were responsible for the maintenance of these screens were known, in certain households, as **tattygars**. Unfortunate indeed was the **kismet** of the **khidmatgars** who were thus designated and it was no easy matter to fill these positions. It was because of such misunderstandings perhaps that this word is gradually yielding to its Hind. synonym **khus-khus**.”

+ **teapoy**: See **charpoy**

teek: (* **The Barney-Book**); “According to the **Barneymen** the Hind. *thik*, became in its English avatar ‘exact, close, precise.’”

tickyaw boys/tickytock boys: (* **The Glossary**); “These ghastly attempts at onomatopoeia were once the terms of reference for players of the tabla.”

+ **tiff, to**: “Ironic indeed that India should be the last refuge of this fine North Country English word, meaning to take refreshments (from which **tiffin**, lunch etc)”.

+ **tiffin**: see above.

+ **tindal**: see **lascar**.

+ **topas/topass**: Neel would have been astonished by the **Oracle**’s gloss of this word: “A person of mixed Black and Portuguese descent; often applied to a soldier, or a ship’s scavenger or bath-attendant, who is of this class.” See **lascar**.

trikat (***Roebuck**); see **dol**.

tuckiah/tuckier: (* **The Glossary**); “Sir Henry claims that this common Hind. word for ‘pillow’ or ‘bolster’ is often used in the same sense as *ashram*. I am baffled by this, I must confess.”

+**tumasher/tamasha/tomashaw/tomascia**: Being a contrarian, Neel had a particular fondness for the 17th century English usage of this word, in which it was spelled **tomashaw** or even **tomascia**, and had the sense of ‘spectacle’ or ‘show’, being sometimes thus applied also to rituals. He deplored the gradual debasement of the word, whereby it “can now scarcely be told apart from a petty **goll-maul**.”

tumlet: (* **The Glossary**); “Is it possible that this Hind. corruption of ‘tumbler’ will re-enter the English language and, like the notorious cuckoo, eject its parent from its nest? Would that it could be so!”

tuncaw: (* **The Glossary**), “The mystery of English turned this Hind. for ‘salary’, *tankha*, into an almost derogatory term, used mainly for servant’s wages.”

+ **turban**, see **seersucker**.

turnee: (* **Roebuck**); “this (as also **arni**, and **tanni**), were the lascars abbreviations of the word ‘attorney’, and it was applied always to English supercargoes. **Phaltu-tanni**, however

was their word for the Flemish horse, a very curious element of a ship's tackle."

+ **tical**: silver coin equal to a rupee.

udlee-budlee: see **shoke**

upper-roger: (* **The Glossary**, * **The Barney-Book**); "A corruption of Skt. *yuva-rajā*, 'young king', says Sir Henry, to which the Barney men add, apropos nothing that the Nawab Siraj-ud-dowlah was similarly known to British wordy-wallahs as Sir Roger Dowler."

+ **vakeel**: lawyer, pleader. "One of the oldest **mysterics** of the courtroom, reputed to be a denizen of the English language since the early 17th century."

+ **vetiver**: see **tatty**.

+ **wanderoo**, see **bandar**. In the margins of this a nameless relative has written: 'In the jungles of English, only a little less antique than **vakeel**, dating back to the 1680s, according to **Oracle**.'

woolock: (* **The Glossary**); "boats of this name were often to be seen on the Hooghly, but I recall neither their size nor any details of their construction."

wordy-wallah: (* **The Glossary**) This phrase, from Hind. *vardi-wala*, was used in English to mean 'wearer of a uniform'. Those especially elevated in this regard were known as **wordy-majors** (or **woordy-majors**). Neel's usage of these terms bore no resemblance to their proper definition.

zubben/zuban: "of this word," writes Neel, "I can find no evidence in any of my dictionaries. But I know I have heard it often used, and if it does not exist, it should, for no other expression could so accurately describe the subject of the *Chrestomathy*."