

THE EMPERESS

ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports the RSC's 2023 production of *The Empress*, directed by Pooja Ghai. The production opened on 7 July at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The activities provided in this pack are specifically designed to support KS3-4 students attending the performance and studying *The Empress* in school but all activities can be adapted for learners of different ages and abilities. The pack incorporates approaches directly from our rehearsal rooms to provide teachers and their students with the tools to explore key knowledge for the text in relation to GCSE English and Drama.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Notes from the production, background info or extracts



ACTIVITY

A practical or open space activity



WRITE

A classroom writing or discussion activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses and research tasks

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Our 2023 production of *The Empress* blends the experiences of Indian ayahs and lascars who worked on the ships carrying trade goods during the 'Golden Era' of the Empire, alongside the first Indian politician to be elected as a Member of Parliament. The play reveals how socially diverse the Asian presence was in nineteenth century Britain.



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurttz © RSC

EXPLORING THE STORY



SYNOPSIS

The Empress follows the story of Rani Das, an ayah (Indian nursemaid) who travels to England with the family she is working for. On the journey she meets a young Lascar called Hari, who she falls for. She tries to teach him to read and is praised for doing so by an Indian politician on the ship, Dadabhai Naoroji. When Rani is abandoned in England by her employers, Hari helps her find refuge at Lascar Sally's, a boarding house, but Rani flees the next morning and Hari, despite a desperate search, can't find her. He is forced to return to the ship and leave England.

Abdul Karim also arrives in England. He has been sent to Queen Victoria as a gift. To the horror of the Queen's court, a deep and unusual friendship develops between the two. Abdul is elevated to the position of Munshi (teacher) and barely leaves Victoria's side.

Alone in an unfamiliar country, Rani tries to find work, and is eventually employed as an ayah for Lord and Lady Oakham. Initially, Rani is overjoyed with the position, until she meets Lord Oakham who takes advantage of her. She falls pregnant with Lord Oakham's child and is thrown out of the house. Fortunately, Lascar Sally finds her and gives her and her baby shelter.

While boarding in a home for ayahs, Rani meets Dadabhai Naoroji again. She now has a child – Asha – and has educated herself. She tells Dadabhai that she wants to support his campaign to be elected to parliament. He employs Rani as his assistant and becomes a mentor to her. In 1892 Dadabhai is elected to be the first Indian member of Parliament representing the constituency of Finsbury. But he becomes disillusioned with English politics and is forced out of parliament after just two years.

Dadabhai decides to return to India and Rani agrees to go with him. Abdul Karim also boards the ship, dismissed and returning home after the death of his royal companion. But before Rani can go, Hari appears. He has spent the last 13 years looking for her, and the pair are finally reunited.

Rani does not board the ship but stays with Hari, and together with Rani's daughter Asha, they wave off the ship and begin their new life in England.



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurtz © RSC



ACTIVITY 1: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

This physical and writing activity allows students to explore the story through the different locations in the play and how these locations might affect the characters. It also uses an object exercise to encourage students to think about the detail of the environments they are exploring. *(It is best suited to a hall. You will need a collection of found objects for the students to use. These can be anything, the more varied the better, preferably each one small enough to hold in one's hand. You will also need Resource A, the location descriptions, and the scene list).*



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurttz © RSC

- Ask students to walk around the space, imagining they are in Queen Victoria's palace. Encourage them to think about how they would walk in this space, what their body language and their pace would be like.
- Now ask them to think about what they would see if they were there. Invite them to write these images down on a piece of paper e.g., a throne, expensive paintings, servants, marble pillars.
- Then ask them to consider what they can hear in the palace and do the same. Follow this with smell and touch, until they have lots of descriptions on the piece of paper.
- Next, divide the students into 4 groups. Each group has one of the following locations: the Ship, Lascar Sally's, the Ayahs' House, Dadabhai's study. For each location, give the group the relevant description, quote and photo.
- Ask each group to repeat the walking exercise, and to write down their descriptions of the location they are in. Using the scene list, discuss with the students where in the play these 5 locations (including the palace) appear (if you wanted to extend this exercise you could also do this for the other locations on the scene list).
 - Which locations are repeated, and which only appear once or twice?
 - What is the purpose of the split scenes, where two locations are shown side by side? What effect might this juxtaposition have on an audience?
 - Which location opens the play, and which ends it? Why might the writer have chosen to do this?
- Finally, ask each student to pick an object that they think might fit in their location. Ask them to write about why they chose that object for that location, considering the following:
 - Who does this object belong to?
 - How did it get there?
 - What does it mean to its owner?

Reflection Point

Following on from the above activity, consider the following discussion points:

- When walking around these imaginary spaces, how were you affected by the environment you were pretending to be in? How did it change your physicality?
- What effect might different environments have on the characters in the play?
- Have you ever walked into a building or location that has significantly changed how you are feeling? What buildings can you think of that are designed to have an effect on the people inside them?



ACTIVITY 2: ONE-MINUTE STORIES

This writing and speaking activity will help students work out what they think is important to the story and explore how storyteller bias can shape the narrative (*You will need some small pieces of paper. This exercise can be done anywhere*).

- Divide the class into five groups. Ask them to tell the story of the play from memory in their groups, taking a turn each. Give them five minutes planning time. Ask them to consider, *what are the main plot points they need to include and what are the essential parts of the story to tell?*
- Mix up the groups and get the students into groups of three. Ask them to decide in each group who will be A, B and C. A goes first, and tells the story to their group in 3 minutes.
 - Have a quick debrief in the group. Any questions? Any major omissions?
- B then tells the story in exactly 2 minutes. C then tells the story in exactly 1 minute.
- Ask students to discuss in their group what distilling the story like this tells us about what is important in it.
- Based on C's version, ask each group to write a one-sentence summary of the story.
- Each group then passes their one-sentence summary to a different group. This group has to come up with a quote from the play that could accompany the sentence.

Reflection Point

Compare this exercise to newspaper headlines from the day. Where possible use headlines from two different papers both covering the same story.

- What is the purpose of capturing a story like this?
- What do we leave out?
- What bias about the story comes into the headline?

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS



ACTIVITY 3: SO WELL I LOVE THEE

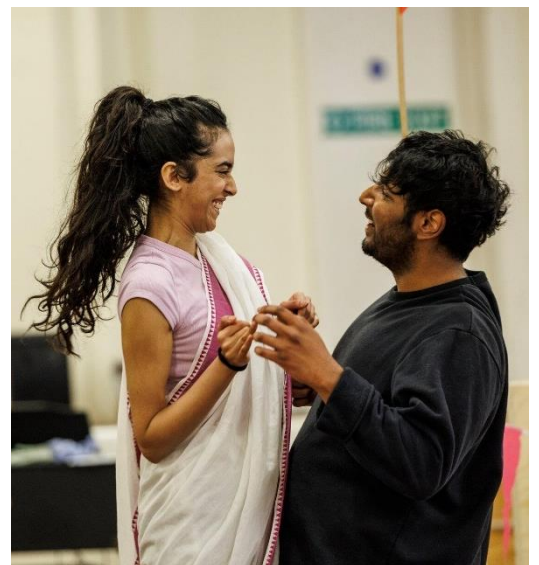
This activity provides practical ways of exploring how the writer uses the text to show us the relationship between Hari and Rani. The same activities could be used for any scene between any of the characters in the play (*It's best suited to a hall but can be done in a classroom, and students can stay seated if necessary. You will need Resource B, the edit from Act 1 Scene 2*).

- Divide the group into pairs and ask them to read the edit of Hari and Rani's conversation.
- Ask the students to read the scene again. This time, whenever they come to a pronoun, ask them to point at whatever they are referring to.
 - Who did the two characters point at? What might that tell us about their relationship? Were there any compound pronouns?
- Next, ask students to stand facing their partner. For each line they can either take a step towards their partner, or a step away, or they can turn away from their partner, or towards, or they can stand still.
 - What was the movement between the two characters? What might that tell us about their relationship?
- Finally, ask the students to read the scene again, but this time to high-five their partner whenever their character says a word (apart from a pronoun) that has been said before in the scene.
 - Was there a lot of repetition? What might it tell us about the relationship between Hari and Rani if they repeat each other's words?

Reflection Point

The playwright uses pronouns and repetition to show there is a connection between these two characters. As actors, we can also show this through the staging of the scene. Ask students to discuss in their pairs other ways – in a play or in real life – that you could tell that two people are in love.

Extension: Repeat the above exercises for the exchange between Benedick and Beatrice in Act 1 Scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Were there any similarities? Any differences?



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurtz © RSC



ACTIVITY 4: ROUGH GUIDE TO INDIA



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurtz © RSC

The Empress features two couples, Queen Victoria and Abdul Karim; and Rani Das and Hari. Abdul Karim was employed as a Munshi (or teacher) to the Queen and much to the annoyance of the Queen's family and household, became a cherished friend. This writing activity explores Abdul Karim and his relationship with Queen Victoria in more detail. (You will need Resource C – Abdul Karim's speech)

- Ask students to stand in a circle and read a line each of Abdul Karim's speech describing the Taj Mahal in India.
- Ask students to choose one word from the line they read that they like, or which they think has something interesting about it. Go around the circle with each student shouting out their word and the rest of the group shouting it back to them as a call and response.
- Students then create an action or gesture for their word. Go around the circle again, this time with each student doing the action and saying their word, and the rest of the group repeating the action and word back.
- Repeat this one final time, but this time, ask students to freeze after their word and action, to create a frozen statue journey through the speech.
- Ask students to write about this speech answering some of the following questions:
 - Based on these words and gestures, what is the speech about?
 - How does Abdul want Queen Victoria to see India?
 - What effect might this speech have on the audience?
 - How would you describe the relationship between Abdul Karim and Queen Victoria?
 - This is the first depiction of a place in India in the play. Why would the writer choose for this to be the first way we hear a part of India being described?
- Repeat the exercise for Hari's speech using Resource D.
- Ask students to compare and contrast these speeches, answering some of the following questions:
 - Based on the words and gestures, what are the differences between the two speeches?
 - What is the writer saying about the differences between India and England in these speeches?
 - Abdul is talking to Queen Victoria, and Hari to Rani. What effects are these two speakers trying to have on the person they are talking to?

Reflection Point

Following on from the above activity, consider the following discussion points:

- Abdul's description of Agra is very romanticized, for Queen Victoria's benefit. Can you think of any modern instances where people have romanticized a country, possibly to help deliver a personal or political message?
- Shakespeare often uses this technique of comparing and contrasting two different environments. Can you think of any plays where he does this?

This technique can be used with any speech, to distill the essence of the speech, and to interrogate why the character is using this particular type of language.

EXPLORING THE THEMES



ACTIVITY 5: POWER AND TACTICS

This practical activity looks at power and the different tactics characters use when making an argument or putting forward a particular point of view (*It is best suited to a hall but could easily be done in a classroom. You will need Resource E, the edit from Act 2 Scene 4*).

- In pairs, read the exchange between Abdul Karim and Lady Sarah in Act 2 Scene 4.
- Ask all the Abdul's to make one group, and the Lady Sarah's another. In their two groups, encourage students to discuss what their character's argument is, and to rewrite it as though they are presenting it as a policy decision to Queen Victoria.
- Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson, who then presents their group's argument to the class.
- Return students to their pairs. Explain that we will use four actions – accuse, celebrate, block, and soothe. Give them a physical action for each of these.
- Ask them to read the scene again, this time doing one of these actions to their partner for each line their character speaks. They can repeat the actions, use all four, or just use one or two.
- Watch one pair do their actions, then discuss as a group:
 - What actions did Abdul Karim use and what actions did Lady Sarah use, and why?
 - Did these actions help or hinder them in getting across the point they were trying to make?

- What tactics did students use when presenting their group arguments to Queen Victoria? Did they feel their version of the argument was more or less convincing than their character's version in the scene? Why?



ACTIVITY 6: LASCAR LIFE

This writing and performing activity explores verses of a song in the same way that we might explore Shakespeare's verse. (*It is best suited to a hall. You will need Resource F, the edit from Act 1 Scene 1 and three large pieces of paper*).

- Ask students to stand in a circle and read aloud a line each of the Lascar song in Act 1 Scene 1.
- Ask them to read around again, but this time to just shout out the last word or words of the line (in bold).
 - What do these words on their own tell us about life on board the ship for the Lascars?
- Divide the class into groups based on which stanza their lines came from: one group will all have spoken words from the first stanza; the next group from the second stanza; and the last group from the third. Ask them to write the last words that they shouted out on a piece of paper, to create a word cloud.
- Give each group 5 minutes to create a moving tableau of life on the ship, based on the words on their piece of paper.
- Watch each of these tableaux. After each one, ask the students watching:
 - What activities did we see taking place?
 - What was the body language of the Lascar's like?
 - Based on that body-language, how do you think they are feeling on the boat?
- Using these tableaux as inspiration, ask each student to write about life on the ship from the point of view of a lascar.

Reflection Point

Following on from this exercise, you could create similar word clouds for different characters or different themes. Students can then create tableaux of these clouds, and write about what body language or feelings came out of that theme.



Rehearsal Photo by Ellie Kurttz © RSC



ACTIVITY 7: WHAT'S YOUR STATUS?

This practical activity looks at the power dynamic between two characters, and explores how actors could show that on a stage (*It is best suited to a hall but could easily be done in a classroom. You will need Resource G, the edit from Act 2 Scene 13*).

- Ask the students to walk around the room. Inform them that they're going to consider different ways of walking that reflect status. They will use a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest status and 1 the lowest. Guide them to walk around the room as they would "normally". This is called "Neutral" and represents status number 3.
- Ask the group to consider how they would walk if they were feeling extremely high status, number 5. *How would this manifest itself in their physicality and facial expressions?* They can be as subtle or exaggerated as each person feels comfortable with. Next ask everyone to consider how they would walk if they were of extremely low status, number 1. *Again, how does this manifest itself?*
- Put the group into pairs and ask them to create a frozen picture for two people, one of high status and one of low status. *What did you do with your bodies to convey these different levels of status? What might be happening in one of these pictures? Which characters might this be from The Empress?*
- In the same pairs, ask the group to read Resource G out loud. *What is happening in this scene? What does Queen Victoria want? What does Abdul Karim want?*
- Read the scene again. This time, whenever you think your status gets higher, take a step towards your partner. Whenever you think your status gets lower, take a step away from your partner. Only move on your lines. *What do you notice about Queen Victoria's status? What do you notice about Abdul's status? When does their status change and why?*

Reflection Point

Following on from this exercise, discuss the role of status in society, using the following discussion points:

- Who do we think of as high-status in our society? Who do we think of as low-status?
- Can status change? What makes it change?
- Is status something that is given to us, or is it something internal?



ACTIVITY 8: EMPRESS TOP TRUMPS

This writing activity encourages students to make different claims for who has the most power in the play, and what threatens that power. (*This exercise can work anywhere. You will need three large pieces of paper*).

- Divide the group in two and put the students into two lines. Decide as a class on three gestures, one to represent Queen Victoria, one to represent Abdul Karim, and one to represent Lady Sarah.
- One student from each line steps forward to compete against the other. On the count of three they choose which gesture to do. Queen Victoria has power over Lady Sarah, so she 'beats' her; Abdul Karim has power over Queen Victoria so he 'beats' her; Lady Sarah has power over Abdul Karim so she 'beats' him. The winner scores a point.
- Keep going until everyone has played and you have a winning team.
- Then divide the class into three and ask each group to write about one of the characters. Ask them to make an argument for why they think their character has the most power in the play, when in the play they are at their most powerful, and any obstacles there may be to that power. They should capture their thoughts on one large piece of paper per group.
- Then ask each group to swap their paper with another group, so each group has a new character.
- Ask students to then write down thoughts on the following questions:
 - *For the Queen Victoria group:* Does she feel secure in her power? Apart from the rest of the royal household, what other groups in Britain could take power away from her?
 - *For the Abdul Karim group:* Is his intention always to gain power in the royal household, or might there be other motivations for him?
 - *For the Lady Sarah group:* Why does Lady Sarah (and the British establishment) feel threatened by Abdul? What tactics do they ultimately use to get rid of him?

Reflection Point

Following on from this exercise, discuss the role of the monarchy, using the following discussion points:

- *The Empress* is set between 1887 and 1901 when Britain was described as an 'empire' that ruled over many countries. The people who lived in these countries were often treated poorly by the British who used their resources and left them in poverty. Can you think of any similar circumstances, relating to power, happening in the world today?
- How has the status of the monarchy changed from Queen Victoria's time to today?
- Who might be the modern equivalent of Abdul Karim?
- Who might be the modern equivalent of Lady Sarah?
- How does the description of the jubilee celebrations in the play compare to King Charles's coronation?

RESOURCES

Resource A: **LOCATION DESCRIPTIONS AND SCENE LIST**

Location Descriptions

THE SHIP – A 'clan boat' with Asian Lascars and English Sailors, and Indian and European passengers.

'She's down by the head, she's listing to port'.



LASCAR SALLY'S – A boarding house run by Sally and full of Lascars.

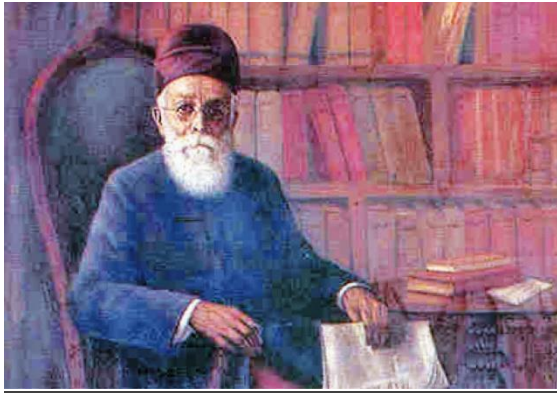
'The scene is one of debauchery, rowdiness and poverty'.

THE AYAH'S HOME – A Christian refuge for Ayahs, in Aldgate, London.

'You have a roof over your head, a decent bed with a soft mattress and coverlets...And most importantly – clean wash-rooms'.



IN THE AYAHS' HOME (HACKNEY).



DADABHAI'S STUDY – A drawing room, Indian in décor, with a desk, chairs and papers.

'I expect hard workers and quick minds'.

Scene List

Act 1

Scene 1 and 2	The Ship
Scene 3	Windsor Castle
Scene 4	Tilbury Docks
Scene 5	Windsor Castle
Scene 6 and 7	Lascar Sally's
Scene 8	Tilbury Docks
Scene 9	Windsor Castle
Scene 10	Tilbury Docks
Scene 11 and 12	Lord Oakham's House
Scene 13	Windsor Castle
Scene 14	The Ship
Scene 15	Osborne House
Scene 16	Lord Oakham's House
Scene 17	Split Scene
	Windsor Castle and Tilbury Docks

Act 2

Scene 1	Tilbury Docks
Scene 2	The Ship
Scene 3	Home for Ayahs
Scene 4	Osborne House
Scene 5	Split Scene
	The Ship and Dadabhai's Study
Scene 6	Lascar Sally's
Scene 7	Dadabhai's Study
Scene 8	Osborne House
Scene 9	A Park
Scene 10	Jubilee Parade
Scene 11	Split Scene
	Windsor Castle and Houses of Parliament
Scene 13	Windsor Castle
Scene 14	Osborne House
Scene 15	Tilbury Docks

Resource B: **HARI AND RANI, ACT 1 SCENE 2**

Scene 2

Ship's deck

It is night-time. We are on the moonlit deck of the boat and RANI is sat with HARI reading by the light of a hurricane lamp. The stars are out, and the sea is calm.

HARI	English is very hard.
RANI	If you learnt your letters, you could get a job as a clerk.
HARI	I'm stupid with letters.
RANI	It's never too late and I can teach you.
HARI	You have a kind heart.
RANI	If you come to where I work every day, even for half an hour, we can sit outside and read together.
HARI	And then in the winter, where will we sit?
RANI	How cold is it in the winter?
HARI	(Laughs) You have no idea, do you? I'm a sailor Rani. How would I earn money to eat?
RANI	You can find work somewhere... it's a big city.
HARI	You want me to stay near you? You like me that much?
RANI	When I've finished with you, you will be able to read the newspapers.
HARI	If I was a wealthy man we could be married, and you wouldn't need to work as a servant for English families.
RANI	Who said I want to marry you? And I like working!
HARI	Don't laugh at me. I know I have nothing to offer you. But I could make you very happy.
RANI	We're friends Hari.
HARI	We could be much more than friends.

Resource C: **ABDUL'S SPEECH, ACT 1 SCENE 9**

ABDUL KARIM

As if Allah himself was watching over us.

Filling the air with love

and reminding us why we are put on this earth

almost *not* a building of stone and marble,

more a dream floating enticingly, perfectly in one's line of vision.

...

The best time of day to see it, at its most alluring, is in the quiet of the morning,

shrouded in mists that rise from the river Yamuna

and bathed with a soft red glow from the sunrise.

The marble changes colour from grey to yellow, to pink, to pearly cream

and then to dazzling white in the moonlight.

It is a play on light.

Symbolising the presence of Allah in all his forms.

...

It was more extraordinary than it is now.

I'm afraid your soldiers Ma'am and officials have chiselled out the precious stones so now...

Resource D: **HARI'S SPEECH, ACT 1 SCENE 2**

HARI

Absolutely freezing.

...

You'll need a thick coat because it rains a lot.

Whole place is covered in thick, thick fog

which leaves a nasty taste in your mouth.

The buildings are big and very grand, like the ones in Calcutta.

And the people are very snooty.

They like to look down at us from a great height.

Sometimes they can't even see us.

Resource E: **ABDUL AND LADY SARAH, ACT 2 SCENE 4**

Scene 4

OSBORNE HOUSE 1891

VICTORIA is seated at a desk, writing, whilst ABDUL is standing to one side in a pose. He is particularly well dressed in a flamboyantly tied turban. A portrait painter is painting him. LADY SARAH is standing by VICTORIA'S side handing her papers to sign or read.

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ABDUL | As a teacher, I cannot help but question things I notice. |
| LADY SARAH | As a servant of the Queen, you should know your boundaries – something which you have entirely forgotten. You are an impertinent, arrogant man Mr Karim. And an absolute bore! |
| ABDUL | And you are most disrespectful to me, Lady Sarah. |
| LADY SARAH | Your opinions are irrelevant and presumptuous. |
| ABDUL [to QUEEN VICTORIA] | Every day, as we speak, in Africa your subjects are gaining more land in your name. True, the Africans are not enslaved anymore but how can your power as a monarch be kept just and fair? |
| LADY SARAH | Slavery has been abolished. The African people are free subjects of the British Crown. We are not gaining land through war, we are making treaties with the tribal leaders of those countries. |
| ABDUL | Whether you call it war or making treaties, the result is the same. Many thousands of people are being killed |
| LADY SARAH: | Her Majesty's duty is to bring light into darkness, the very essence of our country's destiny is to bring civilisation to the world. |

Resource F: **LASCAR SONG, ACT 1 SCENE 1**

Scene 1

A ragged group of Asian sailors (Lascars) busily scrub the deck with soap and water. The Lascars are from all different corners of the Asian sub-continent – Chinese, Indian and some black Africans too. All of them are barefooted and look undernourished and dirty. They sing as they scrub the deck.

LASCARS:

SONG

There's a Clan boat just leaving **Bombay**,
Bound for old Blighty's **shore**;
Heavily loaded with bum **engineers**,
Bound for the land they **abhor**.
She's down by the head, she's listing to **port**,
She's making three knots with the **tide**;
But you'll get no enjoyment from Clan Line **employment**,
So come on, me lads, **bless 'em all!**

Bless 'em all, **bless 'em all**;
The Tindal, the Kasab and **all**;
Bless all the "Sparkies", they're all round the **twist**;
Bless all the pursers, and their tight **fists!**
If the engineers can get us **home**,
The "Kali Pani" no more will I **roam**;
'Cause you'll get no promotion, this side of the **ocean**,
So cheer up, me lads, **bless 'em all!**

There is the "Old Man", he's counting the **days**
'Til they will let him **retire**;
There stands the Chief; he's gnashing his **teeth**
All the coal that he's bought just won't **fire**.
But there's many a 'prentice just starting his **time**,
There's many a fool's just **begun** -
That's signed with "Scots Navy" for four years of **slavery**,
Out here on the **Hooghli run**.

Resource G: **QUEEN VICTORIA AND ABDUL, ACT 1 SCENE 13**

Scene 13

Windsor Castle

VICTORIA is sat on a chair, dressed for a royal occasion. (Party noises in the back/g. Chamber music). She is holding court to a party but looks very tired and worn. ABDUL KARIM is stood next to her holding a tray with a glass on it. VICTORIA intermittently takes a drink and replaces the glass on the tray. She waves her hand around towards the audience to indicate the guests. LADY SARAH is also there, though standing at some distance.

VICTORIA All our subjects from all the corners of our Empire, come to see their Queen and Sovereign.

ABDUL looks into the crowd obviously amazed

ABDUL Ma'am, you are the most powerful and respected monarch in the world.
Might I ask, when will you make it official?

VICTORIA You are too impatient Abdul.

ABDUL I have been extremely patient.
There is whispering and gossip at Court that
Your Majesty treats me as one would an exotic pet.

VICTORIA Ahh... but a beloved pet.

VICTORIA laughs

ABDUL Your Majesty enjoys my discomfort at these words?

VICTORIA We enjoy having you by our side.

ABDUL I am your loyal Servant but there are those out there who do not trust me. If you were to make the appointment official, I would not have to suffer the indignities of being ridiculed, Ma'am.

VICTORIA Come, come Abdul. There are procedures we must adhere to.

ABDUL You gave me your word.

VICTORIA Are you questioning our word Abdul?

ABDUL No Ma'am, I apologise. I am simply eager to serve you to the best of my abilities.

VICTORIA Bertie asked us if you were trustworthy.

ABDUL: Maam?

VICTORIA If you have any connections with Indian agitators?

VICTORIA looks at ABDUL

VICTORIA Well? Have you? Any connections that is?

ABDUL *(Affronted)* With all due respect to His Royal Highness I find that questioning of my character, extremely...insulting...

VICTORIA laughs. ABDUL looks even more affronted

VICTORIA There are people out there who have tried to assassinate us you know.

ABDUL Ma'am... I am so sorry for the suffering that has caused you...but to think...that I would attempt to hurt or conspire against your Majesty in any way... pains me to the core of my heart...

VICTORIA We have told Bertie you are harmless.

ABDUL If your Majesty wishes to dismiss me from her service, or if Your Majesty feels that I am unworthy of such office, close to your royal person...

VICTORIA waves ABDUL'S concerns away

VICTORIA Abdul – please.

ABDUL I am sorry to press the point but when will you...?

VICTORIA smiles at ABDUL coquettishly

VICTORIA It is already done.

ABDUL looks confused.

VICTORIA We have arranged it and it is official.