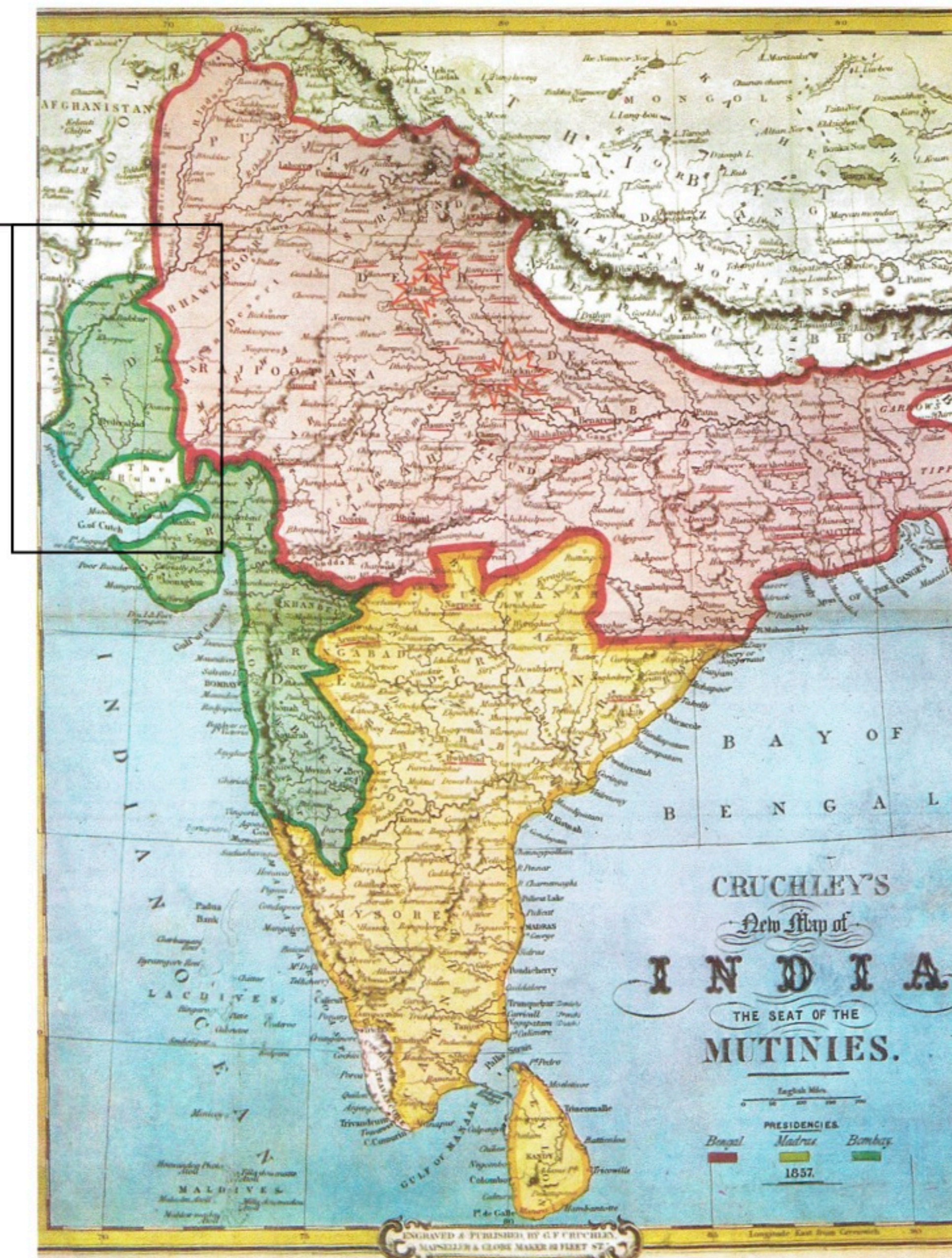


# THE CONQUEST OF SINDH

In 1843, Queen Victoria had been on the throne for six years. India, the colony that would become known as the greatest 'jewel' in her crown, was only partly in her possession. At this time, it was not governed by Westminster but by the East India Company (EIC), a group of British merchants and traders. They claimed territory across the Asian sub-continent through forceful negotiation and military might. In 1842 the EIC appointed Sir Charles Napier, an experienced and ambitious General, to silence discontented local Amirs (leaders) in Sindh province (South Asia) who opposed the EIC's encroachment upon their lands and local culture. Napier sought personal glory by acting decisively and beyond his orders to annex Sindh. Napier, and the battles which secured his "conquest", are commemorated in Chester Cathedral.



Colonial-era India, c. 1857  
Reproduced by Kind Permission, Cheshire Military Museum

Memorials dedicated to Sir General Charles James Napier, and to the battles of Meannee and Hyderabad (collectively referred to as the "Conquest of Sindh") can be found to your right, on the South wall of this Transept. Other memorial plaques relating to Napier besides these two are displayed elsewhere in the South Transept, predominantly in the Chapel of St George, also known as the 'Regimental Chapel'.

# THOUGHTS OF WAR

Sindh's position straddling the Indus River with a coastline on the Arabian Sea meant that it was strategically important as a link between India, and West and East Asia. In the nineteenth century, it was ruled by the Talpur clan of Baluch Amirs. Napier was frustrated by their continued opposition to British presence in their territories.

Writing in his journal in October 1842, his frustrations turned to thoughts of war.

“ *Barbaric chiefs must be bullied or they think you are afraid; they do not understand benevolence or magnanimity... I do not want to draw trigger against the Ameers, and we need not: but if we show a wish to avoid doing so they will be at us, and must be thrashed into sense.* ”



General Sir Charles Napier (1782-1853), Unknown artist  
Reproduced by Kind Permission, Cheshire Military Museum.

Napier forced the Amirs to sign a new treaty which further restricted their right to collect taxes and to rule over their territories. Enraged, in February 1843 the Amirs launched an attack on the British Residency. In retaliation, Napier gathered 2,800 troops, drawn from the 22nd Cheshire Regiment and the Bombay Army. This included **sepoys**; Indian soldiers enlisted to fight for the British. They met the Balouch Army at Miani (also referred to as “Meannee” and “Meanee”) a village on the banks of the Indus River, on 17 February 1843.

A **sepoy** was an Indian soldier in the armies of various states and European trading companies in the Indian subcontinent and then, from the second half of the 19th century, in the British Indian Army. Recruited from many different population and religious groups, sepoys came to dominate the British armed forces in the subcontinent, even if they were not permitted to become officers until the 20th century. The term sepoy continues to be used for ordinary infantry in several armies today.

*Definition from World History Encyclopedia*

# BLOODSHED AT MIANI

There are competing accounts of the Battle of Miani. According to Napier, he and his troops fought “gallantly” to secure a swift victory. Paintings, such as English artist George Jones’s *The Battle of Meeanee* (1852) stressed the discipline of Napier’s troops during the heat of the battle. In a private letter to the Napier family, the artist stated his eagerness to “do anything in my power to contribute to the honour and commemoration” of the General.

You can see a copy of George Jones’s *The Battle of Meeanee* (1852) displayed on the easel to the right.

Other contemporary accounts stressed the violence and bloodshed. “Dead men were lying literally around in heaps” wrote Major John Jacob. Commanding Officers such as Lieutenant Fitzgerald recorded in graphic detail how they “put everybody” in a tent belonging to the Amirs “to the sword” because they would not surrender.

A second English artist, Edward Armitage, captured the brutality of the battle in his painting from 1847. When it went on display in Westminster Hall, it was admired by Queen Victoria who purchased it for the Royal Collection. You can see the painting digitally reproduced below.

It is estimated the five thousand Baluchi soldiers were killed during the battle. Unlike the Cheshire Regiment, their names are not listed on the memorial plaques displayed in this Cathedral.



*The Battle of Meeanee, 17 February 1842, Edward Armitage (1847)*  
Courtesy of the Royal Collections Trust

# A SINDHI WRITES

British accounts – although not always in agreement – have dominated written histories of Sindh’s annexation. This is one consequence of **colonialism**. It is far harder to locate Baluchi accounts of the two battles at Miani and Hyderabad which led to Sindh’s downfall. These narratives were generally not considered important by colonial administrators, recordkeepers, or archivists who favoured documents written in English and often by those aligned to the colonists.

One exception was H. T. Lambrick, a colonial civil servant based in Hyderabad, who kept within his papers the translation of a satirical Sindhi poem about the Battle of Hyderabad; the campaign which took place a month after the Amir’s defeat at Miani. The poem describes the bravery of Amir Sher Mohammad and his men, who tried to recapture the Fort at Hyderabad seized by Napier. The poet likened the Baluchi to “mountains” who managed to turn the English camp “upside down” and colour the riverbank “red with blood”. Other Amirs, however, were labelled as cowards for running from battle, or traitors for accepting British bribes to stay away:

*The poets must speak the truth; let them get angry by all means*

*Namely, would that the words of a gentleman may not turn out to  
be untrue*

*We are eschewing the ways of downright dishonesty!*

*Ghulam Mohmed Jayheri sure enough ran to Jhamhala*

*Give him a big frock and a cloth on his head*

*And put bangles in his arms*

*And nose rings in his nose*

*He used to promise much with Amir Nasir but ran away*

*Poet is speaking truth to his Amir [...]*

In this poem, the ‘cowardly’ Amirs were likened to women and mocked as being fit to wear women’s clothes and jewellery.

The identity of the Sindhi poet or the translator of the work is unknown.

**Colonialism** can be described as “the control of one country or territory’s people and resources by another, more powerful country”.



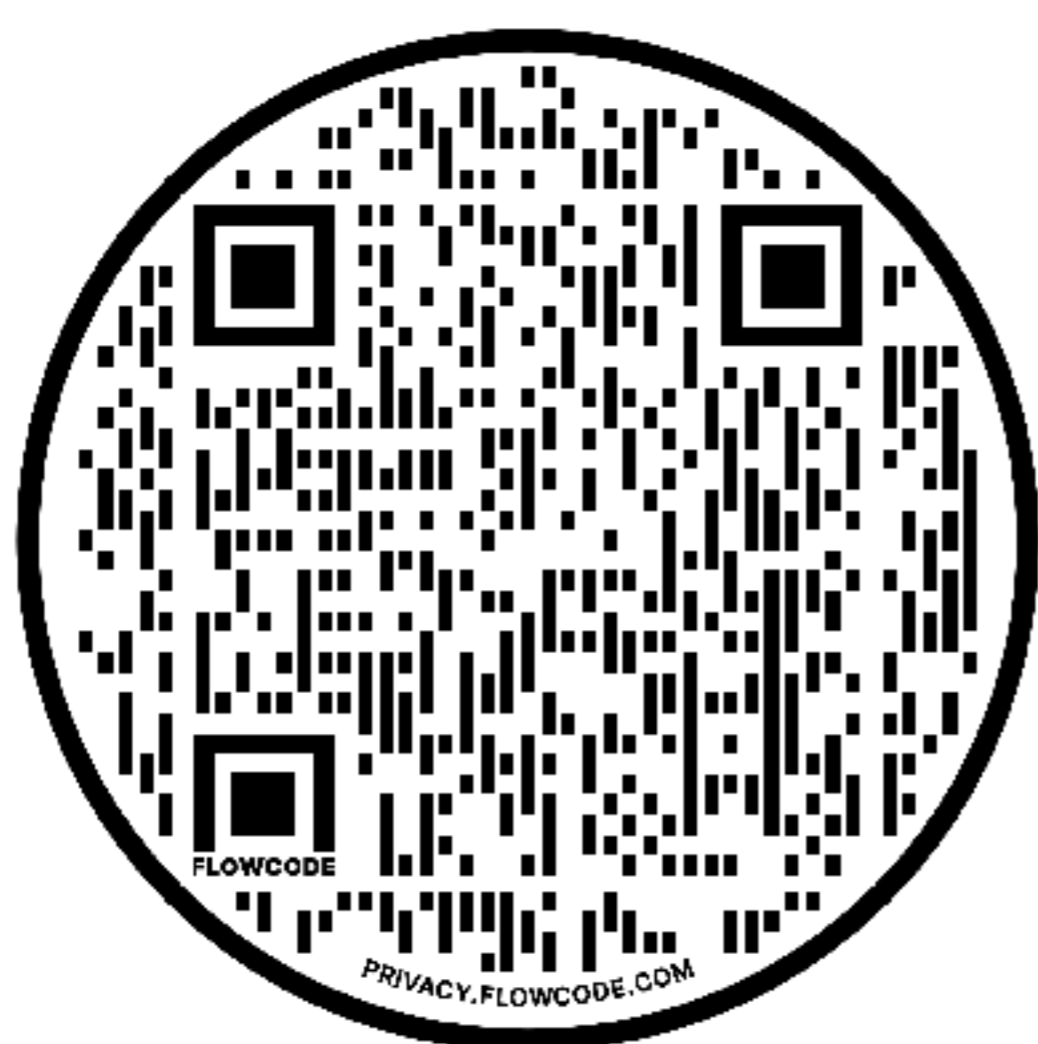
George Jones, *The Battle of Meeanee* (1852). Reproduced by Kind Permission, Cheshire Military Museum

# PAUSE. BREATHE. REFLECT.

How has what you have read and seen so far made you feel?

Have you learnt anything new? Or did you expect the narratives you have read about?

If you have any feelings or thoughts you are willing to share, please scan the QR code below



Support is available both in-person and online if you are struggling with the content of this exhibition.

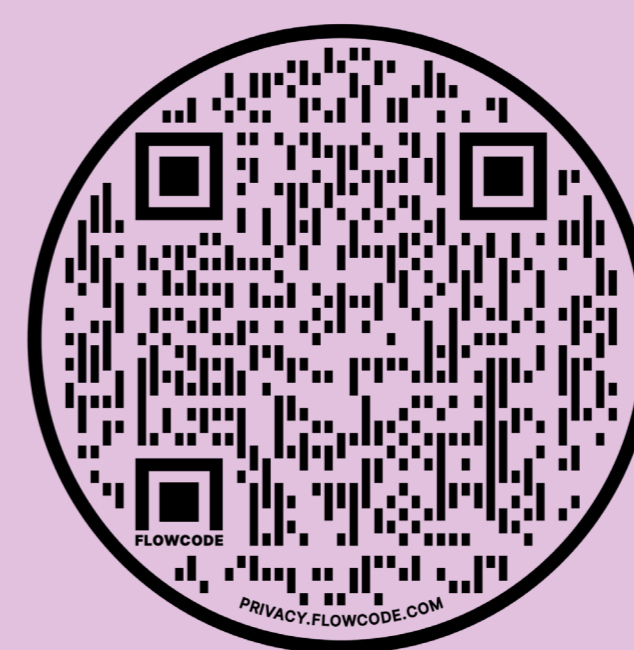
#### In-person

- Head to the Admissions Desk to speak to a member of staff
- Use the quiet spaces in chapels around the building to pause and reflect

#### Online

- Black Minds Matter and Mind are fantastic charities providing therapy, resources, and space for individuals to learn about their own and others' mental health

Or, if you are interested in learning more, you can find a list of resources available to download here:



# PECCA VI

There were mixed reactions in Britain to the news that Sindh had been annexed by Napier. The Prime Minister Robert Peel and the whole of his cabinet angrily opposed the annexation, arguing that Napier had overstepped the mark. Yet as William Gladstone, then Minister for Trade remarked, “the Ministry were powerless, inasmuch as the mischief of retaining [Sindh] was less than the mischief of abandoning it [once annexed]”.

Others, such as Lieutenant Colonel James Outram, who had served as the East India Company’s political agent in Sindh, were extremely critical of Napier. Writing publicly in the press and, later, in a published three hundred-page commentary, Outram accused Napier of manipulating the Amirs and provoking them into armed resistance:

“ To appreciate the provocation which the Ameers of Scinde experienced at [Napier’s] hands, it is necessary, in the outset, to bear in mind that they were independent sovereigns, receiving from their own subjects the homage due to royalty, and, up to the moment of Sir Charles Napier’s arrival, continuing to be addressed by all British functionaries in the respectful tone suited to their exalted position, and in that conventional language of respect and compliment which Oriental custom has established, which Oriental feelings demand, which sound judgement forbids to be discontinued, and which, in fact, had been specially enjoined by the supreme authority in India. ”

A level of anti-colonial feeling arose in Britain as a consequence of the annexation.

Some, however, also sought to make light of the affair. A report in *Punch*, the popular British satirical magazine, claimed that, following his victory at Miani, Napier sent a dispatch containing one word “Peccavi”. This is Latin for “I have sinned” – a pun referring both to the annexation and to the widespread condemnation of it.

Napier was not, in fact, the author of this clever play on words. Catherine Winkworth (later a hymn writer and educator) is thought to have written to *Punch* with the suggestion.

# AFTERMATH

The consequences of annexation were severe for the people of Sindh. All Amirs – regardless of the level of their involvement in resistance to the British – were captured as political prisoners and exiled to Calcutta until 1855. At least one Amir died in exile. Many articles of wealth were seized from their palaces and, in some cases, brought back to Britain to be displayed as the spoils of war.



*Surrender of the Armeers, Contemporary sketch from a letter. Reproduced by Kind Permission, Cheshire Military Museum*

The Sindhi people fell under direct colonial rule which only ceased with Indian Independence in 1947.

The loss of life at Miani was marked locally by the creation of a cemetery near the battlefield. Some local people mark the anniversary of the battle by visiting the tomb of Jan Muhammad Talpur, one of the Amirs who was celebrated for his bravery.

The Battle of Miani or “Meeanee” (the name given to the conflict by the British) is known locally by several different names: “Sheedian Wari Larree” and “Khanani Talpurn Wari Jang” (Battle of Khanani Talpurs). The Battle of Hyderabad is generally referred to as “Mir Sher Muhammad Ji Jang” (Mir Sher Muhammad’s Battle) by people in Sindh.

The Province of Sindh became part of the newly formed country of Pakistan in 1947.