



Children during prayer. The photograph comes from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.

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The Indian trail of hope

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The evacuation with the Polish Army in 1942 was a great opportunity for the Polish civilians to flee the Soviet hell. But it wasn't the final chapter in their fight for survival. Exhausted and malnourished, the bodies of the escapees, especially the youngest ones, required long recuperation. One of the places where Poles could find much needed rest was India.

In March, 1942, began the first step of the evacuation of the Polish Army led by Gen. Władysław Anders and the civilian population. There were some 18 thousand children among the evacuated. Their initial resting place was Iran, but due to its uncertain situation it was decided to send them to other countries, including

India. Around five thousand orphans and five thousand children with mothers found refuge there.

The first such transport reached Bandra on April 15, 1942. The youngest children's health was terrible. Starving and suffering from avitaminosis and skin disease, they required intensive medical care. They were also reasonably fed. Between July 15-17, 1942, the Polish children were moved from Bandra to Balachadi, near Jamnagar. It was due to the efforts of the Maharaja of the princely state of Nawanagar — Jam Saheba Digvijaysinhji.



Polish children on their way to the Balachadi orphanage. The photograph comes from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.



Children's neighbourhood in Balachadi, near Jamnagar. Children from the Balachadi orphanage. The photograph comes from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the

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In search of a scrap of normality

The neighbourhood which was set up on site, managed by priest Franciszek Pluta, was only built for around a thousand children. The camp consisted of residential and administrative buildings, a dining hall, a kitchen and warehouses. A six-class school with a pre-school division and a first junior high class began operating in September, 1942.

Naturally, there were problems with the lack of qualified teachers, funding and proper classrooms. Moreover, many children suffered from trauma of being forcefully deported deep into the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, a lot of effort was put into creating the best possible conditions for the youngest children's education. In March, 1944, the school at the Polish neighbourhood in Balachadi received public rights.



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Polish children with the Maharaja. The photograph comes from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.

There were also multiple extracurricular activities, including theatre plays, sporting events and school trips (including to Jamnagar), which taught the children local culture and traditions. There was a local library as well. Church holidays and ceremonies connected with the most important events in Polish history weren't forgotten either. Such activities helped maintain the memory of Poland and develop patriotism among the youth. In 1943, a scouting troop was established, counting around 200 children in the beginning of its existence.

Little Polands

With more and more transports arriving to India, more neighbourhoods for young Poles and their guardians were built, such as the temporary camp in Malir and the Valivade camp near the town of Kolhapur, which had working schools for older kids — the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Junior High and High School, the Stanisław Konarski Pedagogical High School and the Karol Marcinkowski Trading Junior High. It also included a church, pre-school, library and a common room.

Additionally, there were several of the so-called transit camps — the Haji Pilgrims Camp and the Country Club Camp in Karachi. Meanwhile, the Bel-Air sanatorium, in the mountainous town of Panchgani, welcomed the sick, mostly suffering from tuberculosis.

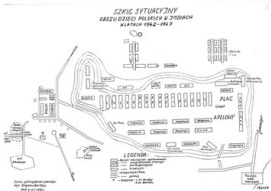
It is worth noting, that the delegation of the Polish Red Cross in Mumbai and consul Eugeniusz Banasiński, with his wife Kira Banasińska, gave substantial help to Poles coming to India.



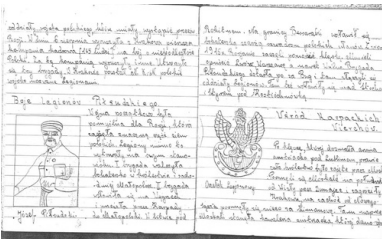
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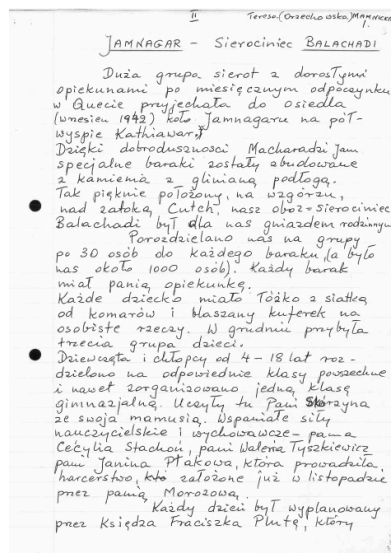
Since 2019, the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance include the materials connected with the activity of the Poles' Club in India. These comprise of unique documents from 1942-1948, including scout chronicles, legal documents and many photographs showing the everyday life of the Valivade camp residents. The Institute's archives also include the health cards of both children and adults treated in the hospital of the Country Club Camp in Karachi.



Blueprint of the children's neighbourhood in Balachadi, from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.



Map showing towns and villages with routes on which Polish children arrived to their camps, from the collection *Poles' Club in India 1942-1948* from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.



Part of Teresa Orzechowska-Mamnicka's journal, from the collection *Poles' Club in India* 1942-1948 from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. She describes the arrival to camps in India, Maharaja's help and the ages of children. She also mentions scouting and priest Franciszek Pluta.

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