

**SIKH PARTICIPATION IN FIRST WORLD WAR:  
A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to the  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
PANJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH  
For the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**2021**

**Ravneet Kaur**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
PANJAB UNIVERSITY  
CHANDIGARH**

*Dedicated to*  
*My Beloved Parents*  
*Mrs. Balbir Gill and Col. HS. Gill*  
*You are forever in my heart.....*



**Department of History  
Panjab University, Chandigarh**

☎ 91-172-2534623

Certified that the Board of Examiners has not suggested any correction in the Ph.D thesis of Ms. Ravneet Kaur entitled “Sikh Participation in First World War: A Socio-Cultural Study”

*Susmit Prasad Pani*  
*12.4.22*

(Prof. Susmit Prasad Pani)  
External Examiner  
Executive Member  
Odisha State Higher Education Council  
Govt. of Odisha

*Anju Suri*  
*12/4/22*

(Prof. Anju Suri)  
Supervisor

*Priyatosh Sharma*

(Dr. Priyatosh Sharma)

Chairperson  
Chairperson  
Department of History  
Panjab University  
Chandigarh-160014

**PANJAB UNIVERSITY CHANDIGARH**  
**STUDENT APPROVAL FORM FOR ELECTRONIC THESIS SUBMISSION**

Thesis Title	SIKH PARTICIPATION IN FIRST WORLD WAR: A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY
Name of the Research Scholar	RAVNEET KAUR
Supervisor / Co-Supervisors	
Department/Centre	FACULTY OF ARTS DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, PUNJAB UNIVERSITY

**STUDENT AGREEMENT**

- I represent that my thesis is my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statements(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to Panjab University Chandigarh.
- I hereby grant to the university and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available for worldwide access.

**REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE**

The thesis mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the program; I/We verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required.

It is certified that electronic copy of thesis is the same as submitted in print form and as per the Shodhganga format.

**EMBARGO AGREEMENT (OPTIONAL)**

Kindly tick the appropriate option:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No Embargo requested       | <input type="checkbox"/> Embargo request for 6 months |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embargo request for 1 Year | <input type="checkbox"/> Embargo request for 2 Year   |

Please specify the reasons for Embargo:

- The student is applying for a patent on an invention or procedure documented in the thesis and does not wish to make the contents public until the patent application has been filed.
- The thesis contains sensitive and/or classified information
- Immediate release of the thesis may impact an existing or potential publishing agreement.
- If any other, please specify:-

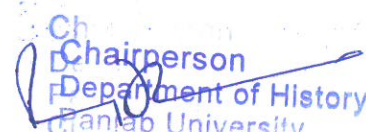
*Note: Research scholars are requested to please fill this form and get it signed from their supervisor/co-supervisors and HOD with proper stamp/seal and save the scanned copy of same in the CD (thesis).*

  
 Signature of the Research Scholar

Supervisor  
Name:

Co-Supervisor  
Name:

Co-Supervisor  
Name:

  
 Head of the Department

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many minds, hearts and hands helped me in the course of undertaking this journey and now it is a pleasant duty incumbent on me for acknowledging and thanking them all.

I feel blessed to have encountered an inspiring, supportive and extremely capable guide and mentor who elicits my deepest regard and respect and is a constant source of motivation. Her impeccable academic and professional accomplishments and achievements are a natural result of the dedication, untiring zeal, deep concern and an amazing willingness to help and support that she incorporates as an intrinsic part of her wondrous personality. My academic journey has been immeasurably enriched by association with a truly enlightened guide who has been a mentor and advisor in the purest sense of the term, not only to me but to the scores of people she interacts with. Exceptional thanks and warmest regards are owed to the most incomparable supervisor that any scholar could have hoped for- Professor Anju Suri, whose debt of scholarly encouragement, deep regard and loving concern for the overall well being and progress of all her students is something we all cherish and owe to her with cheerfulness and can never repay. To my most wonderful research supervisor, I owe my most sincere thanks for making each day of the Ph.D. journey an explorative, positive and empowering one which I will look back upon always with a smile and a prayer in my heart for the person who stood by me every step of the way.

A personal debt which I cheerfully bear and can never ever repay is also owed to me better half Bhupendra Narayan Singh. I say better half as my life partner is my home and heart where I find rest and rejuvenation. If a person could be a home, it is my husband who has been the most beneficent and loving presence in my life, after my father. To him and my two most amazing teenagers PrathamVir Singh and Pariyat Singh, I send all my love and thanks for being the most wonderful family one could ever imagine.

To my two lovely sisters and their beautiful families who have always been vigorous supporters of all my endeavours, to my in-laws who have been uniformly fantastic and always loving and supportive, to my sister in laws and their families and to all my seniors, mentors, teachers, friends, colleagues, students and the countless people who

have contributed in ways remembered and forgotten, acknowledged or not, active or passive, my deepest thanks and regards are owed and conveyed.

Specifically, as the present study is based on primary sources both published and unpublished of the British colonial government and the Punjab government, the various reports of Punjab administration, war effort publications and official sources, I give thanks to the library staff members of all the research archives, libraries, resources and academic avenues I have explored as a part of this research project. A debt of gratitude is owed to the library staff of the various libraries who have been extremely helpful cordial and forthcoming with their suggestions while this researcher was at work in their premises. In addition, a lot of works were also made available online because even as the pandemic imposed restrictions on movement, the internet threw open hitherto unperceived possibilities and opportunities. Academic endeavours continued as many internationally renowned libraries and archives opened up their online portals for the use of researchers. In addition to these, many gazetteers, manuals, Censor and Census records have also been consulted. Contemporary newspapers and their accounts both in India as well as in Europe and other countries have also been taken into account to provide a balanced purview of the war.

Secondary sources which are relatively new material such as the published accounts, official histories, government authorised reports, proceedings, minutes of various committees and meetings have also been consulted. In addition, many books, articles, research papers, press and media accounts and chronicles- both personal and official regarding the myriad aspects of the first world war have been consulted. In addition, since the subject matter of this research project concerns social and cultural history- the folk songs, folk traditions, local idioms, Punjabi sayings, propaganda songs etc have also been taken into account while conducting research for this work.

A very important and hitherto unexplored avenue has been the voice recordings of Punjabi Sikh soldiers which form a part of the archives of the University of Humboldt, Germany. These were accessed by the researcher in Chandigarh. A wealth of gratitude is owed to Colonel Perminder Singh Randhawa and to Mr. Timmy Narang for their invaluable help in procuring the audio tapes of the Sikh soldiers which brought the research work remarkably alive for the researcher and infused a unique and original vein in the project.

Every moment of my life, I give thanks to the Almighty for the blessings that have been bestowed on me and for which I am forever unfailingly and enormously grateful. The omnipresence of my parents who might not be physically present in the world any more, but whose benevolent spirit, cheerful outlook, zealous activity and supportive guidance is a source of eternal motivation. They would have been quietly proud of my academic accomplishments and their indulgent smiling alone would have made it all 'worth it'. To them, I dedicate this endeavour as I dedicate everything in my life...

**Ravneet Kaur**

## **DISCLAIMER**

The views, ideas, opinions, assessments and judgments expressed in this study on the subject of race, colour, caste, military traditions etc. are the views of the historians, authors, officials, army officers, government functionaries and not of the researcher herself.

The currently prevailing views and thoughts on race, caste, colour, creed, regional affiliation and gender are quite at variance with the views, ideas and beliefs that held ground at the time in the early decades of the twentieth century which is the time period of this study. The views on race, gender and caste expressed in this study are not that of the researcher.

**Nov 8, 2021**

**Ravneet Kaur**



## CONTENTS

Chapters No.	Titles	Page No.
	<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>i-iii</b>
	<b>Disclaimer</b>	<b>iv</b>
	<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>vi</b>
	<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	<b>vii-viii</b>
	<b>Glossary</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Chapter - I</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-40</b>
<b>Chapter - II</b>	<b>SELF IDENTITY AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION</b>	<b>41-103</b>
<b>Chapter - III</b>	<b>THE SIKH SOLDIER AT HOME IN THE WORLD</b>	<b>104-154</b>
<b>Chapter - IV</b>	<b>IN HIS OWN VOICE-VOICES HEARD AFTER A CENTURY</b>	<b>155-185</b>
<b>Chapter - V</b>	<b>INSULATED OR INVOLVED- THE SOLDIER AND CIVIL MILIEU</b>	<b>186-243</b>
<b>Chapter - VI</b>	<b>THE UNSUNG HEROES AND HEROINES</b>	<b>244-282</b>
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>283-300</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>301-354</b>
	<b>ANNEXURES</b>	
	<b>List of Research Papers Published and Presented</b>	

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Tables No.</b>	<b>Titles</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>Table 2.1</b>	The Composition of the Army of the Presidencies, 1857	<b>63</b>
<b>Table 2.2</b>	Punjabis in the Imperial British Indian Army, 1911	<b>92</b>
<b>Table 2.3</b>	Recruitment of Martial Races during the First World War (1914-18)	<b>93</b>
<b>Table 3.1</b>	Admissions of Military Insanes to provincial Mental Hospitals in India	<b>149</b>
<b>Table: 5.1</b>	Punjab's Contribution in Cash to the War Funds: 1914- 1918	<b>221</b>
<b>Table 6. 1</b>	Population of Indian provinces according to Census 1911 and 1921	<b>279</b>
<b>Table 6.2</b>	Wheat output in British India (in 000 tons) 1916-1917 to 1918-19	<b>281</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CI	Census of India
CMG	Civil and Military Gazette
Lieut.	Lieutenant
Capt.	Captain
Maj.	Major
Col.	Colonel
Gen.	General
CO	Commanding officer
CoC	Commander In Chief
GOI	Government of India
Govt.	Government
WW1	World War 1
Dept.	Department
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationary Office
IAR	Indian Annual Register
IG	Inspector General
IGI	Imperial Gazetteer of India
INC	Indian National Congress
<i>Ibid.</i>	<i>Ibidem</i>
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum Library

NNRP	Native Newspaper Reports on Punjab
NWPF	North West Frontier Province
<i>Op.Cit.</i>	<i>Opere Citato</i>
PAR	Punjab Administration Reports
POW	Prisoner of War
PWD	Public Works Department
PLC	Punjab Legislative Council
DAV	Dayanand Angle Vedic
Progs.	Proceedings
RCA	Royal Commission on Agriculture
SGPC	Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee
Vol.	Volume

## GLOSSARY

Sirkar/Sarkar	Government
Khalsa Army	Sikh Army under Maharaja Ranjit Singh
Salwar	Wide legged Trousers worn by Punjabi women
Dupatta	Headscarf worn by Punjabi women
Kameez	Long loose Shirt worn by Punjabi women
Izzat	Honour
Angrez	British
Ferangi	British
Darbar Sahab	Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar
Guru Granth Sahab	Adi Granth or Holy book of the Sikhs
Namak	Salt
Ghee	Clarified Butter
Lassi	Buttermilk
Sakkar	Brown Sugar or Molasses
Purbias	High Caste Soldiers from Bihar and Bengal who formed part of the Company Army under the British
Khalsa Sarkar	The Court and Government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh
Saloot	Salute
Biscoot	Biscuit
Chittar	Shoes



**Sikh Soldiers march in the streets of Paris upon arrival from India –October 1914**



**A Frenchwoman gives flowers to the passing soldiers who were seen as ‘exotic saviours from the tropics’.**



# CHAPTER-I

## INTRODUCTION

### **In the footnotes of History- Sikh soldiers of First World War...**

There is a wave sweeping the globe concurrently, which views military history in the broader social, political, economic and cultural context. This 'New Military History' considers armies, soldiers and warfare in the larger social and cultural milieu and attempts to view battles, their participants, their results and the outcomes as events and experiences which emerged from a wide social-cultural-politico subtext and also result in socio-cultural changes in addition to the obvious 'military and political outcomes'. This dynamic and innovative relook and reassessment of the past leads to new insight into events and subsequent consequences, that succeeds in making the narratives richer, multi-layered, contextual and pertinent.

The current study has been undertaken in a similar spirit of exploration. In the light of these researches and perspectives to view soldierly conduct and participation in wars, this study attempts to view the Sikh participation in the First World War in the light of 'new military history.' The humble aim is to contribute to the historical understanding of the various motivations, methods, encounters, incidents and experiences that lead the Sikh soldiers to sign up for the British Indian army, their experiences abroad and their role in the wider social, cultural, economic and political milieu.

Historians such as John Ferling<sup>1</sup> have claimed that religious impulses provide strong motivation for recruitment in the American context (early colonial era) but were replaced by more ideological and political reasons by 1775 in America. F.W. Anderson has shown how colonial New England soldiers fighting against the British were the younger sons of the farmers who had no claim to the hereditary lands and saw the army as a means to etch out a respectable livelihood. Charles Royster has rejected this purely economic reasoning and he contests that for the continental Line soldiers, 'their willingness to fight' was the primary motivation. Many other historians such as Marcus Cunliffe, Richard Buel, Robert Gross, Gregory Stiverson and Mark Lender have also given alternative thesis to try to unearth the main

---

<sup>1</sup> John Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America*. Westport: Greenwood, 1980, p.56.



motivations behind the soldiers' willingness to enlist in armies when the outcomes were very doubtful and the fighting was hard.

The current study has been undertaken in a similar spirit of exploration. In the light of these researches and perspectives to view soldierly conduct and participation in wars, this study attempts to view the Sikh participation in the First World War in the light of 'new military history.' The humble aim is to contribute to the historical understanding of the various motivations, methods, encounters, incidents and experiences that lead the Sikh soldiers to sign up for the British Indian army, their experiences abroad and their role in the wider social, cultural, economic and political milieu.

### **Historiographical Trends about the First World War**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe lay at the centre of the world. It was a small continent whose people nevertheless dominated the other continents and people with effortless ease. At the centre of Europe, though not geographically, lay the islands of 'Great Britain', which controlled an empire of 444 million people and 12.7 million square miles of territory in commercial, industrial, financial, maritime and industrial fields.<sup>2</sup> Alongside, across the English channel lay France, which was heavily industrialised and was making its presence felt in the newly emergent automobile and aviation industry, although its population was stagnant at 39 million residents. The Eastern neighbour of France was a resurgent Germany, whose surging population of 70 million was driving it towards industrialisation, especially in Iron and Steel and other technology-driven chemical and electronic industries. 'The German Emperor relied on his army and officer corps to hold together sprawling realm of more than a hundred different nationalities and ethnic groups'<sup>3</sup>. In this potent mix was also added the 'realist' or scientific doctrines', that applied 'Social Darwinism' and 'Scientific Racialism' and perpetuated a chauvinist and superiority nationalism that was bound to bring the various nations into conflict with each other.<sup>4</sup>

In such a scenario, empire became a prized possession which had to be guarded, exploited, expanded and even traded to perpetuate one nation's superiority.

---

<sup>2</sup>David Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup>J. H. Morrow, *The Imperial War*, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Morrow, 2017, p. 4.

‘Aseamless web linked the mother country to the imperial possessions’, and in fact the British connection with India led many to believe that there were two centres of British wealth and strength.<sup>5</sup> Lord Curzon remarked in 1901, “As long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straight away to a third rate power.”<sup>6</sup>

Popular and scholarly interest in the First World War is multidimensional and this period continues to be the subject of numerous studies. The much studied and written about historiography of this conflict has gone through three phases. From the war’s onset through the commencement of the Second World War, the focus was on military and diplomatic matters and the victors wrote much of the history,<sup>7</sup> underlining their own greatness and imperial strengths and undermining the abilities and ambitions of the defeated. The British Empire at war was a subject used to glorify and decorate the annals of British Imperial scholarship and might, with matters of diplomacy staying the centre.<sup>8</sup>

The development of the Third Reich and the consequent division of Europe into two polarized blocs, shifted the historical agenda away from matters of war origins to war aims, stressing above all the primacy of domestic politics<sup>9</sup>. Fritz Fischer in his pioneering work, *Griffnach der Weltmacht*, argued that Germany deliberately provoked a world war in 1914 in order to secure hegemony in Central Europe<sup>10</sup>. There was a battery of scholars who also took a subaltern look at the impact of war on society from the bottom up. The experiences of soldiers and the home front were delved into at a great length.

---

<sup>5</sup>Morrow, 2017, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Norton, 2014, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, ‘*The World War and the Color Line*’, *The Crisis*, November 1914, pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Charles, Prestwood Lucas, *The Empire at War*, Vol. 5. Oxford University Press, 1926, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; first published as *Griffnach der Weltmacht* in 1961 in Jarboe, Andrew Tait. (2013) *Soldiers of Indian Empire Sepoys in and Beyond the Imperial Metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919*. North-Eastern University, 1967, pp. 35-36.

The much-acclaimed works of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*<sup>11</sup> and John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976)<sup>12</sup> were the harbingers of the third shift-one that focused on the impact of war on society and culture. European wartime experience and their contribution in shaping the culture of collective memory, oral and cultural memories and even individual experiences lead to the exploration of new terrains. New questions and methodologies were introduced and the role of the soldiers who fought in Europe during the First World War was unfortunately lost in the margins and confined to footnotes.

Historians of the past made only passing reference to Indian participation in the First World War. Keegan writes of the landing of the Indian soldiers in France, "Though they included a high proportion of Gurkhas, (they) were scarcely suitable for warfare in a European winter climate against a German Army. Once stalemate set in along the length of the Western Front, they offered nothing more than barbaric flurries of slash and stab."<sup>13</sup>

Even Alistair Horne in his account related to the Battle of Verdun succumbed to rehashing early twentieth century racial stereotypes about colonial soldiers, calling them, "brave to the point of fanaticism on the attack, but strongly subject to temperament and less consistent fighters than the more dogged northerners."<sup>14</sup>

The early 1990s witnessed a shift, however, into a fourth historiographical configuration, that views the Great War in a more comprehensive, egalitarian and global perspective, with works by authors such as Hew Strachan, John H. Morrow, Jr., Michael S. Neiberg, William Kelleher Storey, and Lawrence Sondhaus.<sup>15</sup> *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing* (2011), edited by Santanu Das, examines how

---

<sup>11</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 211.

<sup>12</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982, pp.130, 182.

<sup>14</sup> Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*. Reprint New York: Penguin Books, 1993, pp. 100-101.

<sup>15</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War*. New York: Viking and *The First World War: Volume I: To Arms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 and *The First World War in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; John H. Morrow, Jr. (2004). *The Great War: An Imperial History*. New York: Routledge; Michael S. Neiberg (2006). *Fighting the Great War: A Global History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; William Kelleher Storey (2010). *The First World War: A Concise Global History*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield; and Lawrence Sondhaus (2011). *World War One: The Global Revolution* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 124.

colonial ideologies and ideas about race influenced wartime encounters between colonisers and natives in nearly every theatre of the war. Non-chronological, non-geographical, and non-topical approaches are preferred in these global histories.<sup>16</sup> Andrew Jarboe and Richard Fogarty in their edited work (2013) argue that in order to recapture imperial dimensions that were readily apparent to the war's contemporaries, historians of the conflict must regard the globe as an interconnected, if unequal, whole.<sup>17</sup>

An increasingly growing series of journal papers, edited volumes, and monographs are studying the encounter between Europeans and colonial subjects in Europe. Christian Koller used British, French, and German sources to study the deployment of colonial soldiers. He demonstrates that Europeans on opposite sides of the no-man's-land shared racist beliefs.<sup>18</sup> Philippa Levine has employed both race and gender as categories of historical analysis to show how the deployment of Indian and African men to Britain during the war led to race specific and alarmist policies.<sup>19</sup> This alarm was shared by French authorities across the border as shown by David Omissi who has used the letters of the Indian soldiers themselves (housed at the British Library) to illustrate how they were aware and shrewd observers of the milieu around them<sup>20</sup>. The authorities in Europe, where colonial soldiers were meeting white women, took steps to control the movements of colonial soldiers and working-class white women.

Much was written about the Indians in France right after the culmination of the Great War, but mostly by British Indian Army officers and not qualified historians. The

---

<sup>16</sup>Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, See chapters/articles of Claude Markovits, Ravi Ahuja, and Santanu Das in the book.

<sup>17</sup>Andrew Tait, Jarboe and Richard. S. Fogarty (eds.) *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Christian Koller, Von Wilden, *Aller Rassenniedergemetzelt: die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik, 1914-1930*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001, p. 212. Also see: Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, March/July, 2008, pp. 111-133.

<sup>19</sup>Philippa Levine, 'Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldierly in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998, pp. 104-130.

<sup>20</sup>David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, p. 1. Also see Omissi, 'Europe through Indian eyes: Indian soldiers encounter England and France, 1914-1918', *English Historical Review*. CXXII/496, 2007, pp. 371-396.

officers had a patently clear motive- to glorify Empire, Imperialism, and their role as the protectors and defenders of the Empire; as such the accounts of the battles were written in this vein. The self-serving motives, patent intentions to cover themselves in glory on hindsight as dashing officers who led their hordes from India to victory against the nefarious ‘enemies of civilization’ were quite clear to the discerning reader. The two accounts that amply exemplify this tendency are of General Willcocks<sup>21</sup> and of Lieutenant Colonel J.W. B Merewether and Sir Fredrick Smith.<sup>22</sup>

The next sixty years were spent in silence on the role of the Indians in Europe and in the Great War in general until the cat was let among the pigeons in 1980s by a series of articles by Jeffrey Greenhut<sup>23</sup>. Greenhut opines that the Indian corps in France represented a ‘history of failure’; the Indians were largely unnerved by the methods of warfare and their contribution was minimal. There are three main works in which Greenhut puts forward this contention, couched in different words.<sup>24</sup> Greenhut lends credence to the assumption that the British officer corps were endemic to the performance of the Indian soldiers and the devoted soldiers were ready to follow their officers to assured death, just because of the close bonds, admiration and hero worship which the British officers were able to inspire in their colonial soldiers.

The scholarly reactions to Greenhut’s works have generated a small body of worksparticularly on the role of the Indian soldiers on the European front. Historians such as, Byron Farwell have accepted Greenhut’s hypothesis.<sup>25</sup> Other historians have presented a contrary picture. These include the works of Gordon Corrigan, David

---

<sup>21</sup>James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*. London: Constable and Company Ltd. 1920, pp 221

<sup>22</sup> Lt. Col. J.W.B. Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*. London: John Murray. 1920, p 69

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Greenhut, ‘Race, Sex, and War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914’, *Military Affairs*.45. 2April, 1981, pp. 71-74.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Greenhut, ‘The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History XII*, Oxford: Routledge,1983, pp. 54-73. Jeffrey Greenhut, ‘Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army’, *Military Affairs*.48. 1 Jan., 1984, pp.15-18.

<sup>25</sup> Byron Farwell, *The Gurkhas*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company; 1984, pp 45. Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947*. London: W. W. Norton & Company. 1989, p 37

Morton, Robert McLain, David Morton Jack, David Kenyon, Santanu Das, Kaushik Roy,<sup>26</sup> Gajendra Singh and David Omissi.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, David Omissi and others have established that the British officers were not as venerable and exalted in the eyes of their soldiers from India as imagined; the soldiers themselves were not as insulated and unaware as they are etched and the narrative till now has been biased in the favour of the accounts of the ones that have told the accounts. Many authors have asserted that Indian soldiers were neither better nor worse than the European soldiers, but the expectations from the soldiers were much more.<sup>28</sup> The present work is also an endeavour in this direction, of shedding light on the experiences of the Sikh soldiers as they encountered Europe and beyond.

The four momentous years 1914-1918, when the stormy gusts of the greatest war till then known to history were blowing gale-like across the globe, the Indian soldiers, especially the Sikh soldiers, who were the preferred cannon fodder to be sent across the oceans to the battlefields of the world, seemed to be existing in a vacuum. They seemed oblivious to the radical social, economic and political winds blowing around Punjab at the time, and were ready to sail the seven seas to harken to the call of the British trumpet. In spite of hailing from the province of Punjab, which was amongst the most tumultuous and politically active regions at the time, the Sikh soldier was second to none when it came to loyalty to the British cause. Distant battlefields of Europe, Africa, Asia and beyond witnessed almost 74,000 Indian soldiers who died and 67,000 who were injured,<sup>29</sup> an overwhelming number among these were the Sikhs.

---

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Corrigan (1999). *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15*. Kent: Spellmount Publishers; pp. 59. Robert McLain, 'The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Reconsideration', in Geoffrey Jensen and Andrew Wiest, eds., (2001). *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict*. New York: New York University Press, pp.167-193; and George Morton Jack, 'The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', *War in History* 13. 3, 2006, pp. 329-362. David Kenyon's contribution makes the claim for the Indian cavalry on the Somme in 1916. See 'The Indian Cavalry Divisions in Somme: 1916' in Kaushik Roy, *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 2012, p 98

<sup>26</sup> Amarinder Singh, *Honour and Fidelity: India's Military Contribution to the Great War 1914-1918*. New Delhi: Roli Books, 2015, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great Wars*, 1988, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Charles. Chenevix.Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies, 1900-1947*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Amarinder Singh, *Honour and Fidelity*, 2015, p. 54.

Great Britain declared war on Germany on the intervening night of 4-5 August, 1914 and thus began the First World War. Lord Hardinge was the Viceroy of India and on August 5, he declared that India had joined the war on behalf of Great Britain and mobilisation started on August 8, 1914. By August 24, 1914 the first ships carrying hundreds of Indian soldiers for distant shores to fight on behalf of the British had already left Indian waters from Karachi and Bombay.

### **A Socio-Cultural Approach**

The First World War was significant for Indians on many counts. First, the war was a chance to win the confidence of their imperial masters. Then it became a platform to demonstrate loyalty to 'King and Country', but as conditions worsened and casualties rose alarmingly, it became a struggle sustained by the thought of reward and concessions. Starting with Mahatma Gandhi, almost every Indian expected the British to recognize, reward and recompense India for her overwhelming sacrifices and unstinting contribution. Of course, there was also an expectation from the British government to grant concession for development of self-governing institutions.

The social history of any community and nation is a huge part of its heritage. The participation in the Sikh soldiers in First World War makes the understanding better of policies and programmes of imperialism, colonialism and nationalism. The Sikh soldiers could not help but be touched by the forces that were at full play. Peter Stearnes, in an interview,<sup>30</sup> elaborates on social history and says that it focuses on large collections or groups of people, such as classes, ethnic groups, races etc., and not on elites and leaders or personalities like the conventional history. Social historians also examine a larger variety of variables and aspects of human behaviour, such as consumerism patterns, motivations, leisure, health etc. The focus therefore, is not merely on formal politics, but also on ideas and theories.

Social history is also closely connected to cultural history. Regarding culture, it has been remarked:

---

<sup>30</sup>M. B. Karush&, P. N. Stearns, Five Decades of Social History: An Interview with Peter Stearns. *Journal of Social History*, 51(3), 2018, pp. 488-499.

Culture is, of course, a challenging analytical construct, which can be conceived and utilised in various forms; in the wildest terms, as a way of thinking about how human beings make sense of the world but also in much narrower terms in studies of national, institutional and regimental cultures which are sometimes said to produce specific forms of action and behaviour<sup>31</sup>.

In his work, *Lions of the Punjab*, anthropologist Richard Fox<sup>32</sup> gives a biological analogy for the ‘Singhs’ of the Punjab. Singh, literally translated as lions, is the biological analogy which Fox attributes to the Sikhs of the Punjab to arrive at a better conception of culture. He justifies the use of the analogy of the Lions as a reference to the British orientations and policies and the manner in which they were able to use this identity of the Sikhs to ‘master’ and ‘use’ them.

### **The Jewel in the Crown**

Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India in 1882, remarked in a candid moment that India is “an English barrack in the Oriental Seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them<sup>33</sup>”. He was foreshadowing what happened finally on a tremendous scale in 1914 and continued for four long years of the War.

It was incontestable that Indian trade and Indian army were the two bulwarks that held up the British Empire. Even before 1914, India army comprising of Sikhs was deployed abroad in large numbers, as special local forces in colonies and protectorates of Britain in Asia and Africa. Sikh contingents had been sent even earlier to Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Malay peninsula.<sup>34</sup>

The defence of India was one of the twin pillars of British imperial defence, the other being the time tested naval supremacy of Britain. Keith Jefferys says:

---

<sup>31</sup>Gavin Rand, Kaushik Roy (eds.) *Culture, Conflict and the Military in Colonial South Asia*. Taylor & Francis., 2017, pp 213

<sup>32</sup> R. G. Fox & R. G. T. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*. University of California Press, 1985, pp 26

<sup>33</sup> Sir Charles Lucas (ed.) *The Empire at War* (5 Vols.) Vol 1, London: Publication House, 1921-26, pp. 55-57.

<sup>34</sup> Keith Jeffrey. ‘An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas’ India in the Aftermath of the First World War’. *Modern Asian Studies* , 15, 3, 1981, pp. 369-386.



British administrators consistently asserted the specifically Indian nature of the Indian army and British officers strongly rejected the notion that Indian troops were mere mercenaries. These admirable attitudes were put to the test in 1919-1922.<sup>35</sup>

Just before the War ended in 1918, there were more than a quarter of a million troops from India who were serving in the Mesopotamian Command, that comprised of Mesopotamia, Persia, Caucasus and Trans-Caspian regions of South Russia<sup>36</sup>. Punjab supplied over forty percent of the total combatants enlisted during the war from a population that was a mere 15 percent of the total population of India. Lord Montagu admitted, "Indian soldiers were...to face the matter quite frankly, persuaded with great vigour, in certain places, particularly the Punjab, to join his Majesty's forces during the war."<sup>37</sup>

The Middle East was where India played the most important role in the war. In October 1918, Indian forces made up more than half of the troops in Mesopotamia and more than a third of the troops in Palestine. Throughout the battle, India supplied all supplies and stores needed by the troops in Mesopotamia, both British and Indian. The Mesopotamian campaign also exposed the Indian military machine's serious administrative flaws. While Kitchener's restructuring of the Indian Army a decade or so before the start of the war greatly improved the army's versatility, it lost administrative effectiveness in the process, and this was most apparent in the Mesopotamian command.

### **Representation of the Sikhs in the Official Census Reports**

The Census system that was incorporated by the British in India had profound implications for the country and its socio-cultural and even economic environment in the long run. The many ways in which the Census of India impacted India and left an imprint, or in some cases even regulated certain aspects is being better understood now. The mammoth task of the enumeration and codification of the hugely diverse, immeasurably rich and dense, almost indistinguishable metropolis that was Indian society brought understanding for the British. Understanding was equated to being able to rule and administer better and more efficiently. The disparate culture, religious

---

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey, *An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas*, 1989, pp. 369-86.

<sup>36</sup> Lucas, *The Empire at War*, V, 1926, p.180.

<sup>37</sup> Memo by Montagu, October 15, 1920, PRO CAB. 24/112 C.P 1987.

streams and belief systems that were an indispensable and substantial part of Indian life were also stratified into neat rows in the census<sup>38</sup>. Many were merged, amalgamated or submerged. Many were misrepresented, underrepresented or ignored. The census did serve as a barometre of the Indian way of life and in fact, it will not be remiss to say that even the British had not perhaps anticipated the long term impact it would have on India, Indians and the understanding of India.

Joginder Singh mentions that the British census reports did emerge as the primary sources for information about Punjab and its people in modern times.<sup>39</sup> The Census Report of 1855 did not have any specific mention of the Sikhs because they were simply bracketed together with the Hindus by the British census officials. Since the Sikhs had been the former rulers of Punjab from whom the British had wrested control, this seems more like a deliberate oversight and an attempt to ignore their separate identity. There was also an observation that the “Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity’ were rapidly declining due to the fall of ‘Sikh political ascendancy’ and “followers of Guru Gobind Singh were re-joining the ranks of Hinduism in their thousands’<sup>40</sup>.

The Revolt of 1857 and the sterling role which the Sikhs played in curbing the tide that threatened to engulf the British made them reconsider their indifferent stance towards the Sikhs, who had proved their worth at a critical time for the British. Consequently, the Census Report of 1868 enumerated the Sikhs as one of seven religious categories.<sup>41</sup> They formed a small 6.5 percent of the total population of Punjab but these figures are open to contest as the criteria for the identity and separation of the Sikhs was not made very clear. Interestingly the remarks in the Report also reflected the new found respect and confidence that the British reposed in the Sikhs as “Sikhism which had previously fallen off so much seems to be slightly on the increase. During the last year, the baptismal initiations (*Khande da Pahul*) at the

---

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, *Religious Identity and the Indian Census. The Census in British India* (ed N.G Barrier), Delhi: Manohar Book Depot, 1981, p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> Joginder. Singh, ‘The Sikhs in the British Census Reports, Punjab’. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. Vol. 46, 1985, pp. 502-06.

<sup>40</sup> Sir Richard. Temple’s Statement, Punjab Census Report (1853), 1881, in Joginder Singh, ‘The Sikhs in the British Census Reports, Punjab’, in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46,p. 504.

<sup>41</sup> Joginder Singh. ‘The Sikhs in the British Census Reports’. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1985, pp. 502-06.

temple (Amritsar) have been numerous than during the preceding year. Sikhism is not dominant.”<sup>42</sup>

There was a noticeable jump made by the Sikhs to seven and a half percent of the population of Punjab in the next census report of 1881<sup>43</sup>. In this report, it seems that all those who kept long hair (*kesdhari*) and were non-smoking were recorded as Sikhs<sup>44</sup>, and there was a mention of the martial traits of the Sikhs. “Indeed the freedom and boldness of the Sikhs could be traced to the traditions of the Khalsa”. The Sikhs were more independent, braver, more manly than the Hindus’ and ‘less conceited than the Muslims.’<sup>45</sup> Sikhism has also been described as the ‘religion of warfare and conquest’ and that ‘whenever the warlike spirit revives, Sikhism in this part of the Punjab also revives.’<sup>46</sup>

In 1891, the numbers of the Sikhs had increased to 10.2 percent of the total population of Punjab. Sikhs were defined as ‘those who wear their hair long and abstains from smoking’. This was retained in 1901 census even as the Sikhs who did not keep long hair and were uninitiated (*Sehajdhari*) raised objections to not being counted as Sikhs. In 1901, the numbers of the Sikhs increased to 11.6 percent of the total population as the religion of the women was also entered as per their own statements.

In 1911, there was a clear reflection of the growing organisation and political power of the Sikhs even in the census report. With more and more Sikhs in their thousands gaining education and coming under the influence of the Singh Sabhas and Chief Khalsa Diwan, there was a rising consciousness about the protection of their numbers as the numbers had a direct bearing on the political power, prestige, employment prospects and social clout of the Sikhs.<sup>47</sup> The British also discarded the narrow definition of Sikh as it had been followed hitherto in the census and expanded the

---

<sup>42</sup>Annual Reports on Administration of Punjab And its Dependencies, 1860-1906, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, 1906, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup>Punjab Census Report, 1881, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup>Joginder Singh. ‘The Sikhs in the British Census Reports, Punjab’. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1986, pp. 502-506.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 504.

<sup>45</sup>Punjab Census Report, 1881, p. 103.

<sup>46</sup>Punjab Census Report, 1881, p. 105.

<sup>47</sup>Joginder Singh, ‘Socio-Political Beliefs and Attitudes of the Sikh Elites in the Last Quarter of Nineteenth Century’, *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol. VII, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1983, pp. 1-11.

scope of the definition of a Sikh. The institutional network, resources, community leadership, newspapers and periodicals and organisational strength of the socio-religious organisations such as the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabhas were all employed in increasing the representation of their own communities in the census reports<sup>48</sup>. The British government obliged and the “officials were asked to put down the religion of a person as the one which he claimed to profess”<sup>49</sup>.

In 1911 and 1921 census reports, all sections of the Sikh community were allowed to record themselves as Sikhs and hence there was a rapid increase in the numbers of Sikhs by 37 percent<sup>50</sup>. The 1921-31 census report showed an increase of 31 percent.<sup>51</sup>

Fox apprise the readers of the British belief that the religious community of the Sikhs were separate and unique. As per the anthropological beliefs prevailing at the time, the Sikh’s physical characteristics of being taller in height and stronger in physique, the distinctive region of their living that was climatically suited to produce a hardier and stalwart species of men and women with special behaviours such as impulsive courage and unique appearance owing to turban and uncut beards all made them a different race with martial characteristics.

The colonial mindset about ‘orientalism’ and ‘biological determinism’ instilled the belief among the British that racial superiority and inferiority was a reality, and they tried hard to get the Sikhs to believe that they were a different species and race too. This idea gained currency and became strongly entrenched when the British adopted specific policies and selective processes to force the Sikhs to maintain their ‘racial martial’ traditions. The *Singhs* in turn, internalised this cultural concept and started to believe firmly in this imposed British cultural reconstruction.

The Martial race theory contributed in a large measure to the self-identification of the Sikh soldier and it needs to be looked at carefully. The martial race theory had such a wide acceptance at one time that it dominated the military mind completely, especially in India. One of the chapters in this proposed research work has tried to evaluate the Martial race theory to explain the high degree of motivation and

---

<sup>48</sup>Joginder. Singh, Resurgence in Sikh Journalism’ *Journal of Regional History*, Vol III, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1980, pp. 99-116.

<sup>49</sup> Punjab Census Report, 1911, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup>Joginder Singh, The Sikhs in the British Census Reports. pp. 502-506

<sup>51</sup> Punjab Census Report, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, 1931, p. 304.

willingness to die for the British cause which the soldiers displayed and to seek its reasons and background. It was also one of the overriding factors why the region for recruitment post 1857, for the British Indian Army became primarily the Punjab. Overwhelming recruitment from this region led to what has been termed as the ‘Punjabisation’<sup>52</sup> of the British Indian army.

Punjabisation of the Indian army<sup>53</sup> was a natural result of the supposed martial prowess, valorous disposition and military skills that had been developed by the Punjabis down the ages. Both geographically and climatically, by virtue of the unique geopolitical scenario of Punjab, it had always been the entry point and main target of invaders, marauders and conquerors alike, who had swarmed into the region from beyond the borders of India. By the time the British reached Indian shores, there was already a strong and uninterrupted military tradition in Punjab that had existed for centuries. Hardy, acclimatised to the harsh winters of the Himalayan battlefields as well as the arid areas of the plains, the Punjabi soldier was ideal to wage war against the enemies of the English, especially at a time when the Great Game was already in fervent motion.

Hardly had the Great Game concluded when the business of war became deadly serious and assumed ungainly proportions with the outbreak of the First World War which was the greatest and most widespread armed conflict ever witnessed by the world till then. As India got embroiled in the War right from the start, as a colony of the Britain, the Punjab bore the brunt of supplying the war fronts across the globe with a seemingly endless supply of recruits. Thus began the ordeal of the World, wherein millions of people suffered direct or indirect casualties of a war that quickly became more a battle of willingness to sacrifice and prevail, rather than any military conflict.

The willingness and loyalty of the Sikhs to the British at the time of the Great War provoked wonder then, and still remains a matter of some debate. Kaushik Roy<sup>54</sup> is one of the proponents of the view that the soldiers were nothing less than ‘quasi-

---

<sup>52</sup> Syed Hussain Soherwardi, *Punjabisation in the British Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military rule in Pakistan*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005, p. 198.

<sup>53</sup> Kaushik. Roy, *The Army in British India from Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947*, London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2012, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

mercenaries', with the direct and indirect benefits and incentives that the British offered as the motivation. It is undeniable that a reliable source of income, opportunity to procure land at subsidised or no price, social honour and prestige and official recognition were several incentives that fuelled the Sikh *sipahi's* eagerness to fight for the Union Jack. The question whether Sikh soldiers can be termed as mere mercenaries also begs a deeper exploration. India's contribution in the World War is so underrated and unknown that even now, Indians themselves are hardly aware of India's starring role in the War. In the same survey, undertaken by the British Council, only thirty percent Indians identified Asian involvement in this War, compared to seventy-four percent Indians knowing about Western Europe involvement.

The perception that India's role in the First World War was negligible is deep rooted, not only globally, but also within the Indian people themselves. There is a dire need to highlight the various aspects connected with the Indian participation in the War to do justice to the sacrifice, valour and selfless dedication of the millions of Indians, who directly or indirectly made huge personal and individual sacrifices during the four years, 1914-1918 and beyond. The 'native' army in India was in many ways meant for the maintenance of internal peace and order. However, even before the Great War broke out and made the exodus of a large Indian force to distant shores a necessary expedient; it was being acknowledged that,

The Army of India exists for its own protection and security, but in return, for the British backing that forms its nucleus, is ready, when its own immediate needs are not pressing, to contribute to the general purpose of empire.<sup>55</sup> These sentiments, expressed by MacMunn, amply illustrates how the British were seeing the changing role of the British Indian Army now that their Indian empire was itself secure and well protected from any internal disturbance or external aggression.

The Indian army, which was the largest volunteer army till then known to civilization, comprised mostly the Punjabis. It not only stood in reserve to maintain law and order throughout the Indian sub-continent but was also a bulwark against other imperialist and colonial ambitions in the Middle East and ensured that the Indian Ocean remained

---

<sup>55</sup> George Fletcher, MacMunn & Alfred Crowdy Lovett, *The Armies of India*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911, p. 524.

a British lake.<sup>56</sup> India rose to the challenge of the Great War magnificently, even though it was not her war.<sup>57</sup> India eventually furnished an excellent account of her ‘loyalty and devotion’ to her masters by sending “1,302,394 overseas out of which...74,000 died and 67,000 were severely wounded.”<sup>58</sup> A quarter of a million Punjabis were in the ranks of the British Indian army at the time of the outbreak of the First World War. These 1.38 million men, were divided into seven expeditionary forces and sent to various war fronts across Europe, Mesopotamia, Africa, South-East Asia etc. Indian troops covered themselves in glory, wherever they fought, winning 18 VCs,<sup>59</sup> i.e., Victoria Crosses, Britain’s highest award for gallantry in the presence of the enemy.

It has long been observed that India’s massive contribution to the Great War has not been heralded, acknowledged or even highlighted by researchers and scholars. The emphasis has always been on the Allied war effort, without adequate attention being paid to the Indian narratives, which played out simultaneously and are gripping and significant. Recent historiography trends globally reviewing the First World War are increasingly viewing it as the catalyst that started the process of de-colonialisation in earnest all over the world, particularly in India.<sup>60</sup>

Ignored alike by Western researchers/academicians due to racial hierarchy and Indian Nationalists who preferred not to recall the million and more men who had fought and died for ‘alien masters’ in an ‘imperialistic war’ in ‘god-forsaken lands’, it is high time that these brave and devoted bands, who fought for nothing more than the ‘izzat’ of their regiments and the honour of their forefathers<sup>61</sup>, be given their due. A spotlight must be brought to bear on the lives and deaths of these men to aid our understanding of the world in which we live now and the factors and forces that etched India as we know it. Their contributions and experiences have been vital in shaping India and for

---

<sup>56</sup>Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947*, The Riverdale Company, New Delhi: Maryland, by arrangement with Manohar Publications, 1988, p. 78.

<sup>57</sup>Shashi.Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup>Amarinder Singh, *Honour and Fidelity*, 2015, p. 53.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 54.

<sup>60</sup>Thierry D. Constanzo, *Memory and History of the Great(er) War and India: From a Imperial to a more Global perspective*, misenligne le 15 juin 2017, consulté le 01 mai 2021, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup>Massia.Bibbicoff, ‘*Our Indians at Marseilles*’. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1915, p. 87.

the sake of generations past, present and future, these must be brought out before India and the world.

This present research has endeavoured to explore this blank space that has been largely left unexplored. The Indian soldiers' experience in the course of the First World War is largely undocumented and unknown. This important chapter in social history, which must have impacted thousands of soldiers and their families', is not even known, let alone understood even today. The social history of any community and nation is a huge part of its heritage. The participation in the Sikh soldiers in First World War aids to the understanding of many issues, policies and programmes related to imperialism, colonialism and nationalism. The Sikh soldiers could not help but be touched by the forces that were at full play. Peter Stearns, in his article,<sup>62</sup> elaborates on social history and opines that since it focuses on large collections or groups of people, such as classes, ethnic groups, races etc., and not on elites and leaders or personalities like the conventional history. Social historians also examine a larger variety of variables and aspects of human behaviour, such as consumerism patterns, motivations, leisure, health etc. The focus therefore, is not merely on formal politics, but also on ideas and theories.

### **The British Raj in India**

People do not venture forth to form empires on humanitarian or spiritual grounds. Imperial expansion is always sustained by the love of persons for adventure, financial advancement, pride of religion or race and desire for glory. These are the mainsprings of imperial expansion.<sup>63</sup> The British also came to India in pursuance of a colonial and imperialist policy. In the pursuance of this goal, they relied very heavily on their armed forces which were then considered the best in the world. The active British army (white soldiers) were never more than a quarter of a million at any time in India, but they were able to subjugate and control more than one hundred and fifty million Indians and keep them in a state of occupation for almost two centuries. Lord

---

<sup>62</sup>P. N. Stearns, 'Social history present and future'. *Journal of Social History*, 37(1), 2003, pp. 9-19.

<sup>63</sup>P. J. Griffiths, *The British In India*. Robert Hale Limited, London, 1946, p. 15.



Hardinge<sup>64</sup> had remarked, “If each black man took up a handful of sand and by united effort cast it upon the white-faced intruders, we should be buried alive.”

A miniscule minority constituted of the white soldiers was able to overawe and overpower mighty empires such as the Mughals, The Mysoreans, the Marathas and the Sikhs through military means. The mystique of the white soldiers was such that Indians willingly gave up their country and sovereignty in a handful of battles in which they accepted their defeat by what they perceived as ‘much superior British forces and men’. An astute junior officer in the Bengal Army was able to surmise this as early as 1829<sup>65</sup>, when he opined that, ‘Orators, love to call British India, the ‘empire of opinion’, but it is the ‘empire of sepoys’. This was also evident from the testimony of General Gough to a Commons Select Committee in 1853<sup>66</sup> in which he referred to India as a peculiar country in which any outbreak might occur at any hour and compared the people of India to ‘leeches looking for anything that may occur.’

Historians and observers are united in their opinion that the British Indian Army was the creator of the British Indian empire.<sup>67</sup> The three successor states of the Mughals- Mysore, Marathas and Lahore were defeated by the British army in a little over half a century- between the years 1791- 1849. Those were not easy victories, but were won after hard fought multiple campaigns. The disadvantages were equally abundant- outnumbered, and battling the unfamiliar terrain and vagaries of climate and weather, the British army did not seem to have any obvious edge over its Indian opponents. However, the killer edge to the British fighting machine was provided by its band of intrepid, dashing, gallant, apparently fearless and indomitable officer corps- who seemed to thrive under danger and not only displayed their best under fire, but managed to elicit the same from the men- white and native- which they commanded. It was this dynamic and exceptional leadership, along with the never-say-die attitude and steadfastness in the rank and file, which gave a critical edge to the strength of the British arms in every battle which they fought.

---

<sup>64</sup>E. Ingram, *The Letters of the First Viscount Hardinge of Lahore to Lady Hardinge and Sir Walter and Lady James 1844-1857*. 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 32, London: Camden Society, 1986, p. 221.

<sup>65</sup>H. B. Henderson, *The Bengalee: Or, Sketches of Society and Manners in the East*, London: Smith & Elder, 1829, p. 31.

<sup>66</sup>*British Parliamentary Papers: Indian Territory & Co.*, 13, p.116.

<sup>67</sup>B. Pati, *India and the Great World War*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996, p. 61.

No wonder, the British High Command in India and the powers back home in London believed that white soldiers led with resolution and fortitude by white officers in India would sweep all before them, in complete disregard of the odds, however, great they might be. They were proven right time and time again. Ever since the British troops had come into India, the sight of them marching in formation, or even a small cavalry contingent riding across the countryside was enough to inspire awe, and even terror into the hearts of the local people. A body of mounted Englishmen was enough to overawe a local populace that showed an inclination towards unrest. Clive was himself a perfect example of how the resolution of only one man could turn the tide of battle. Lord Cornwallis considered the British troops that were far fewer than the native element in the army to be the 'pith and essence' of the army. This sentiment was echoed by the adversaries whom the British faced in India; from Tipu Sultan to the Marathas to Maharaja Ranjit Singh- all agreed that the British white soldiers was the quantity that was to be feared and avoided.

Their legendary presence and the impact of their mere appearance had on the foe made them the prized possessions of the native armies too. Tipu Sultan, an adept tactician, had his white European mercenaries carried in litters or palanquins to the battlefield<sup>68</sup>, so as to preserve their vigour and vitality. Even the British armies in India, adopted a similar tactic and brought the white soldiers to the battlefield on the backs of camels or elephants, so as to preserve their strength which was sapped by the extreme hot weather. These soldiers would only alight when the fighting started and would be then placed in the front line or the vanguard. They also got first priority at dressing stations<sup>69</sup> and hospitals.

In fact, an eminent General like Lord Lake asked for immediate reinforcements of the white soldiers when his casualty lists revealed that too many European soldiers had been lost after the siege of Agra in 1803. With the Battle of Laswari looming, he immediately gauged that his army would not be able to deliver the defining coup d grace, without a sufficient number of white soldiers and his assessment was proven

---

<sup>68</sup>V. Blacker, *Memories of the British Army in India During the Mahratta War of 1817, 1818 and 1819*, London: Broughton, 1821, pp. 19-20.

<sup>69</sup> Murray. Field Surgeon JSAHR, LXXII, in A. Bruce, 'A bibliography of British military history'. De Gruyter Saur, 2016.P 40.

correct when the Battle of Laswari was won over by only three brigades of cavalry, who held their ground until the infantry arrived as reinforcements<sup>70</sup>.

The phenomenon of the superiority of the English soldier over his Indian counterpart was felt again during the decisive battle of Kirki which decided the fate of the Maratha nation in November 1817. Against what seem almost unbelievable odds, a British force of a mere 2,800 went into battle with the Maratha army who were believed to comprise about 10,000 infantry and almost 25,000 cavalry. The tone was set by the Bombay European Regiment that marched straight into Maratha fire. The unflinching resolve inspired the entire British force who then displayed almost uncanny courage, led by their jaunty and cool officers who calmly and composedly led their men from the forefront. Blacker, an eyewitness felt that history and legend merged at Khirki and, the day and battle was carried merely by willpower, steadfastness and aggressive steps and effective follow-throughs.

The role played by the generals and the officer ranks was sterling by all standards and a critical factor in any victory that was accomplished on Indian soil. Discipline and perseverance marked the English troops, and gallantry, fearlessness as well as leading from the front were the peculiar strengths of the officer corps to which the body of men whom they commanded responded with all their hearts. The officers set up the best examples and showed the men they led what was expected of them. Hence, the quick thinking, hard driving and tenacious officers displayed coolness under fire and an intrepid and vivacious sense of adventure that made them live up to the standard expected of them.

The English, in common with most European armies relied on their infantry or foot soldiers to carry battles, whereas the cavalry provided the flourish and artillery the critical support. Indian armies, however, relied on the horsemen, which formed the bulk of the armies. Blacker, compared the English to two previous European powers that were empire builders<sup>71</sup>- the Greeks and the Romans. All three nations put their

---

<sup>70</sup>Michael Calvert & Peter Young, *A Dictionary of Battles, 1715-1815*. New York: Mayflower Books, 1979, p. 54.

<sup>71</sup>V. Blacker, *Memories of the British Army in India During the Mahratta War of 1817, 1818 and 1819*, London: Broughton, 1821, pp. 19-20.

faith in the infantrymen, as it was believed that infantry was the best way to tackle people with robust bodies and obstinate minds. Blacker who credits Indians with neither obstinate minds nor robust bodies, opined that Indians preferred the outward trappings of power to its substance and thus, preferred horsemen. He went on to say that Indians “are particularly moved by whatever affects the eye, as are savages, by brilliant colours”<sup>72</sup>. This unfortunate generalisation reduced the conflicts in India and the conquest of the nation by the British into a racial space, and a conflict of racial stereotypes<sup>73</sup>.

The famed ‘regimental spirit’ was also a mystical entity that inflamed the passions of the officers and men alike. It was an indiscriminate amalgam of self-confidence, mutual interdependence, reliance on each other, dedication towards the officers, unremitting training and deeply ingrained discipline. The regimental spirit enabled the officers and men to bond together through thick and thin and carried them through the most hotly contested battles, to emerge victorious against seemingly impossible odds. No power, bond or trust could, however, bridge the yawning chasm that the racial divide formed in India. “Horses, palanquins, lofty houses, ample tents, couches, pleasure and enjoyment, gratification and delight was the portion of the European officer; pain, wind, cold and heat, fatigue and hardship, trouble and pain and the sacrifice of life itself is the portion of the soldier.”<sup>74</sup>

### **The Colonial Context**

The Sikhs have never formed a numerically superior group, not even in the region in which they are primarily concentrated- Eastern Punjab. However, the British never went by the numbers of the Sikhs. Numerous British officers, observers and officials who had dealt with the Sikhs had recorded that the numerical sparseness of the Sikh population did, in no way, indicate their economic, social or political inferiority. Summarising this, Cunningham writes, “The Sikhs do not form a numerical sect, yet

---

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>73</sup>James Lawrence, *Raj*, p. 125.

<sup>74</sup>NLS, Minto, MS 11, 322, in I. F. Beckett, ‘*Women and Patronage in the Late Victorian Army*’. *History*, 85(279), 2000, pp. 463-480.

their strength is not to be estimated by tens of thousands, but by the unity and energy of religious fervour and warlike temperament.”<sup>75</sup>

The proposed work proposes to examine the intricacies of the socio-political and colonial realities through a novel bottom to top approach, which seeks to explore perceptions, paradoxes and perspectives at the micro-level and then use these to form a macro context of the linkages of the period, 1914-18 to the subsequent currents. The war period of 1914-18 was critical in forming the sub-currents of the nationalist movements that ultimately resulted in the formation of Independent India. It is vital that the undercurrents be recognized, reviewed, referenced and placed in their proper context.

In a landmark report, commissioned by the British Council to celebrate the Centennial of the Great War in 2014, ‘Remember the World as well as the War’,<sup>76</sup> extensive surveys were carried out in seven countries affected by the First World War, namely UK, India, Turkey, France, Russia, Egypt and Germany. This report emphasized on the global character of the War, and especially the contribution of India in the War, which formed the largest volunteer army ever mobilized in any conflict in history. The results of the survey were revealing as people in all the seven countries still considered the First World War as being a key global event and a third of the respondents’ survey considered it to be one of the most significant events since the start of the twentieth century to today. More surprising is the fact that seventy-two percent of the respondents feel that their countries are still affected by the war. The report highlights the fact that a better understanding of the different views of the world and perceptions regarding the war still hold relevance and will help people from different countries relate better to their shared history and experiences and contemporary relationships.

---

<sup>75</sup>J. D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs from the origin of the nation to the Battls of the Sutlej*. London: Asian Educational Services, 1994, Reprint by Rupa Paperback 2002, Eleventh Impression 2012, New Delhi, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup>Anne Bostanci & John Dubber, *Report of the British Council on the Centennial of the First World War; Remember the World as well as the War Why the Global Reach and Enduring Legacy of the First World War Still Matter Today*, Exeter: University of Exeter, 2014, pp. 3-17.

## II

### Review of Literature

The existing review of literature related may be arranged and examined under following themes:

#### **Social and Cultural History**

Sumit Sarkar's work, *Writing Social History* (1997) Oxford University Press: Delhi is a collection of eight essays which delves on the impact of various colonial devices, modes and machinations on the Bengali way of life. While taking up themes like the western concept of 'going by the clock', that changed the concept and understanding of time for Bengalis to the ways in which printing impacted it, the essays offer a close examination that enlightens the reader about the various dimensions of social history.

A.L. Basham's *A Cultural History of India* (1975, Reprint 1998) Oxford University Press, Oxford is an important work in the area of social history that contains various essays on almost all cultural aspects. Different cultural dimensions such as literature, language, art, religion, philosophy, social organisation, science and music, international and global influences provide interesting insights into the some of the myriad influences and ingredients that went into the making of Indian heritage and culture. With contributions from such eminent personalities as Das, Burrow, Spear and Radhakrishnan, the book also has a special section that focuses attention on the influence, Indian culture has had on the globe and how the political history of the region has been impacted by the socio-cultural dimensions.

Peter Burke has tried to demystify cultural history for the common man and non-specialist in his *What is Cultural History* (2004), Polity Press. Burke provides a guide to the past, present and even the future of colonial cultural history. The book is immense in scope as it deals with colonial cultural practices not only in the English speaking world, but also in other nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America etc., offering a holistic and well-rounded insight into how culture and society is shaped by political factors. As a recent work, the book also laces colonial cultural influences in the contexts of feminism, post-colonial studies etc., which makes the book a precious resource for anyone seeking to understand the basics of cultural history.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Pantheon Books, is a valuable source in which the author has discussed the western perception of the East and scholarship about the eastern world in candid detail. The concept of Orient and Orientalism, was a unique definition that was accorded to the social practices, cultural beliefs and economic working of the eastern world by western scholars, who had scant understanding of the internal mechanics of these societies which were very different from the western societies. The author has made a convincing case for the idea that the western 'perceptions of orientalism' was a fabricated conception by colonial regimes and imperialist societies. He summarises it as an "exaggeration of difference, presumption of western superiority and application of clichéd models for perceiving the oriental world".

K. M Pannikar's work, '*Culture, Ideology and Hegemony Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*' (1995) is an engrossing exploration of the ways in which Indians were subjected to social and cultural conditioning by the British. The book attempts to understand how and when the cultural acceptance and adaptation to colonial policies and perceptions took place in Indian society. Contrary to popular perception, this process was riven with dissatisfactions, contentions and resistance. Covering a plethora of issues of social and cultural identities, this book overviews the various ideologies of colonial and cultural adaptation, nationalism, cultural hegemony etc. by empirical studies and essays on a wide ranging themes, such as religious beliefs, literature, marriage reform etc.

Richard G Fox's *Lions of the Punjab-Culture in the Making* (1990), Low Price Publications, Delhi, has become a frequent reference in recent times. The author begins by offering the definitions for culture and cultural meanings that construct the ways of living, belief systems, outlooks and attitudes of a people. He has attempted to explain and deconstruct various ways and means in which the Punjabi people reacted to the policies of the British Raj in cultural terms. There is a special attempt to understand how the traditional martial cultural self-identification of the Punjabi people was analysed and utilised by the British which used this martial self-perception to devastating effect by recruiting almost two thirds of the British Indian army from this region. The Anthropological view of culture when juxtaposed with biological

analogies and images as used by the author throughout the book, presents interesting insights into the cultural processes and policies that the British used in the Punjab to tame and master the race of the 'Lions of the Punjab'.

Ian Talbot in *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* (1988), Manohar, New Delhi, has extensively researched the region for his book. The first three chapters of the book, namely 'Punjab and its People', 'Punjab and the Raj', 'The British and their Allies' in addition to the 'Introduction' are of particular relevance for the purpose of the present thesis. In these chapters, the author has contended that the British used local elites in Punjab as a tool for colonial control in Punjab. Various policies and tactics to control, motivate and recruit soldiers which were used in the Punjab by the British are spelled out. The stability and loyalty of the Punjab, so strategically critical for the British and the result of many contributing groups, is traced by the author in his work.

T. E. Winegard's *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (2012), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, presents a cultural and social study of the British dominions and how they were impacted and contributed to the First World War. The author undertakes research across four continents to provide a comprehensive look at how native people were impacted by the inferno that was the First World War. By examining the ways in which the social, economic and political conditions of the indigenous people in Australia, Canada, New Foundland, New Zealand and South Africa were affected by the war, the author presents insights into how their participation and loyalty was demanded and ensured. This presents a relevant surmise that can be applicable to the purposes of the current research.

### **First World War and India**

Budheshwar, Pati in *India and the First World War, 1914-1918* (1996), Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, furthers the understanding of India's role in the Great War. This book looks at India's contribution to the First World War. It also covers various aspects such as the financial contribution, the revolutionary movement and Home Rule League movements and how the Congress responded to the call to arms and the effect of the war on the agitation for constitutional reform in India.



Shrabani Basu (2015) in *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-1918*, Bloomsbury, New Delhi, has taken military studies a step further. Basu explores the experiences of the Indian soldiers on the western front, from their departure, through the long four years of the war to their ultimate return home. Many Chapters of the book provide an in depth look at the various problems and issues which the unprepared Indian soldiers faced in Europe and how they coped with them.

George Morton-Jack in his book published in 2018, *The Indian Empire at War: From Jihad to Victory: The Untold Story of the Indian Army in the First World War*, Little Brown, London, traces the engrossing journey of the Indian combatants who were sent to various war fronts without any preparation and training and traces their experiences in the four years of the war. It offers interesting glimpses into the actual experiences of the soldiers and the difficulties and challenges which they faced unflinchingly, armed only with the conviction that it was their duty to die for the cause which was not even their own.

Rakhshanda Jalil in *The Great War- Indian Writings on the First World War*, Bloomsbury, New Delhi, presents a fascinating collection of writings by eminent Indian writers and freedom fighters such as Rabindra Nath Tagore, Abdullah Hussein, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Mohammad Ali, Mulk Raj Anand etc. The book features excerpts from the *Jangnama Europe* which was written by the Punjabi war veteran Nand Singh, and translated by Raman Singh Chinna.

### **Colonialism and the British Raj**

Thomas R. Metcalf's *Ideologies of the Raj* (1998), Cambridge University Press India Pvt Ltd., Reprint New Delhi, 2005, 2010, constitutes a significant work by a prominent British historian. It is an attempt to understand and contextualise how a people like the British justified their control over a vast region across the globe including the Indian sub-continent. The various justifications offered by the British to explain and legitimise their rule over the Indians, was in stark contrast to the principles of liberalism and nationalism which were strongly entrenched in England at the time, make for interesting reading.

These justifications and changing ideologies underwent a constant revision from the time of the colonial expansion into India that began with the East India Company but culminated with the British Government's formal handing over sovereignty to the representatives of free India in 1947. This book presents the viewpoint that there were two kinds of ideologies in operation simultaneously in India- one that defined common characteristics of the British and Indians and the other that emphasised on the differences between the two peoples. The author explores and explains the workings of the two theories in practice and the principles behind them during the period of the Raj as they were manifested in policies and writings of the officials of the Raj.

The title of the recently published book *Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire- Indian Conquered*(2018), London, by Jon Wilson, Simon and Schuster, is a 'general history' of the British Raj in India. It is a no-holds-barred look at how the British Raj impacted India and how the polity, economy and society of India is still influenced by the legacy. The author argues that the Raj was a bundle of contradictions where the elite and officialdom, in addition to almost everyone involved in the ideology and functioning of the Raj was labouring under a bundle of contradictions and false beliefs that were inculcated and nurtured merely to sustain the idea of the Raj. The book demolishes the long cherished belief that British raj brought a lot of 'modern progress and benefits' to India. On the contrary, the author contends that much of the misery and poverty of India today stems from the period of the British Raj and is its sorry legacy that continues to make the lives of millions of Indians miserable even now.

An Indian perspective on the colonialism and its diverse viewpoints is G. S. Cheema's *Our History, Their History: The Contrasting Historical Narratives of the East and West*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi. The author, a retired civil servant brings his insight into the revenue and administrative systems of India to explore the question of the differences in Indian and European history and institutions. He tries to explain how Indian and European experiences differ fundamentally on the most basic issues which are critical to the political and administrative conceptions. The system of feudalism is used as a reference point to bring forth the differences between the European and Indian systems.

Ram Chandra Pradhan in his book, *Colonialism in India* (2018) published by Shyam Sunder, begins with essays on themes such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, neo colonialism and post colonialism and nationalism. Taking a multi-disciplinary approach, the author discusses the growth, development and nurturing of colonialism in India, as it was practised and perpetuated by the British. The book tries to highlight the various ways in which India suffered as a result and how India's national life continues to deal with the challenges and dilemmas that have been engendered in our society as a result of colonialism.

In his book, *Essays in Colonialism* published in 1999 by Orient Blackswan, the prominent Indian historian Bipin Chandra offers his insights into the idea, nature and experience of Colonialism as practised by the British in India. The eight essays deal with different themes, and trace the development of the three phases of colonialism. The author contends that in each of these phases, the colonial masters used unique strategies to extract surplus and domination and kept the distinct classes of Indians bracketed in different categories so as to prevent their unity from posing a danger to British interests.

### **Indian Army**

A major contribution to the field of military history in India is Seema Alavi's book, *The Sepoys and the Company- Tradition and Transition in North India, 1770-1830* (1995), Oxford University Press, Delhi. Written for her Ph. D. thesis after extensive research of hitherto unexplored sources, Seema Alavi's study of the company's soldiers and the various factors that went into the composition of the British Indian army in the initial years of 1770-1830 has become a significant reading since its publication. The social history that emerges, of the company's army and the emerging north Indian forces, especially during 182-40 presents an absorbing vignette which is brought out through innovative case studies. The genesis and development of distinctive soldier of the British Indian army is traced by examining the states outside the British hegemony such as Farrukhabad, Awadh, Rohilkhand, Tonk where leaders such as Mahadji Scindia, Begum Samru, George Thomas, James Skinner et al and comparing their armies with those of the British. This book is an innovative project that provides interesting perspectives and presents a sterling example of meticulous research.

Rajit K. Mazumder in his book, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (1995), Permanent Black, 2003, New Delhi, which is also his thesis, which Mazumder wrote during his time at the School of African and Asian Studies in London. The author examines how the colonial state maintained a special relationship with Punjab which was the recruiting ground for a major part of the British Indian army. He explores the special relationship which the British inculcated with the Punjab region as it was the primary recruiting ground for most of the soldiers who powered the British Raj. The special concessions, privileges and prestige that was attached to armed military service in this area, and accorded to soldiers made the mutual arrangement very beneficial to both the soldiers and the British. The author argues that the entire superstructure of the administration in Punjab rested on the military foundations and the special role that Punjab played as the army base in the Raj in India.

Tan Tai Yong in his book, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947* (2005), Sage Series in Modern Indian History, Sage India, Delhi, has also contributed to the idea that Punjab under the British Raj was nothing short of a garrison state. This book delves into the special relationship that the Colonial Government in India developed with the people who provided the maximum number of soldiers for its military machinery. The book provides an in depth look at the various factors, motivations and attractions which the colonial government utilised in order to lure the Punjabi's into the army and in order to constantly inspire them with fealty and loyalty towards the government.

Imran Ali has explored the relationship that the British Raj had with Punjab in his *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (1988), Princeton University Press, New York. Pakistani historian, Imran Ali examines the agricultural colonisation of Punjab in the period under study. He studies the relationship that existed between Punjab and the imperial colonial government and how the British allocated the new fertile land that was made feasible for agriculture on account of the extensive network of canals constructed by the British in Punjab. Ali also studies how this land used to reward loyal soldiers who were recruited from the predominant peasants like the Jat Sikhs of Punjab and Punjabi Muslims who formed a majority of the armed forces from this region.

Amarinder Singh *Honour and Fidelity: India's Military Contribution to the Great War, 1914-1918*(2014), Roli Books, New Delhi, is a recent study on the sterling contribution of India in the First World War. As an army veteran himself, and having access to records in several international archives, the author has put together a comprehensive record of India's role. Amarinder Singh mentions in the foreword the reason he was motivated to write this book, as he was pained that in a BBC documentary commemorating the sacrifices of the soldiers from various nations in the First World War, there was hardly a mention of the thousands of Indians who died during the war. The Indians won 11 Victoria Crosses and 1300 gallantry medals but contributions were brushed under the carpet by the British and Indian nationalists alike.

Colonel G. B. Malleson in *The Decisive Battles of India, 1746-1849*(1914),Asian Educational Services, 2007, New Delhi, has also looked at the various battles that decided the fate of Indian ever since the coming of the British. The book is a vivid account of the decisive battles which the British fought in India, right from the time of their arrival to the last great battles of the Anglo- Sikh Wars. As an army man himself, Colonel Malleson gives a riveting and in depth look at the strategies, behind the scenes action and battlefield account of the various battles which the British fought against various regional and European powers in India. The accounts of the Anglo-Sikh Wars are of special interest in the last section of the book.

Denzil Ibbetson's *Panjab Castes*(1916), Government Printing Press, Lahore was perfectly placed to undertake a study of Punjab demography as it existed in the concluding years of the nineteenth century. As a high ranking and influential official in India, Denzil Ibbetson played a great role in shaping the categorisation of the various demographic details in the census of 1881 and subsequently. This book, which was a reprint of the chapter on "Races, Castes and Tribes of the people" in the report on the Census of the Punjab 1883, was republished posthumously in book form. This book has consequently become an important resource material for anyone seeking to understand the British view of the caste and race question in Punjab at the time. A detailed look at the socio-cultural and demographic milieu of the time, this book is a precious primary resource of the way in which Punjabis as a people and the socio denominations amongst them were being viewed by British officialdom.

D. C. Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan's edited book, *Indian and the World War I* is an attempt to highlight the Indian perspective and the role which it played in the War. The essays in this volume cover various aspects of the War and how it was impacted and the manner in which it effected India. The book is especially relevant as it attempts to shine a light on the social and cultural impact of the war on India.

Raja Ram's thesis '*Impact of the First World War on the Punjab*', completed in 1972 was one of the first studies to take a look at the impact of the First World War with particular reference to the Punjab. The research included the study of the various policies of the colonial government that were being constantly adapted to the needs and exigencies of the time and place.

### **Colonialist Perspective of Sikh Identity and Sikh Participation in First World War**

Joginder Singh's *The Sikh Resurgence* (1997), National Book Organisation, New Delhi, deals with the subject of Sikh identity and how it was influenced by the British. The author analyses various aspects of the Sikh resurgence in the context of colonial rule, with extensive usage of the Sikh literature that was created during this period. The literature was a reflection of the contemporary reality and presents a candid and intimate view of the various undercurrents of the Sikh ethos which was being revived and revitalised at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through movements such as the Gurudwara Reform Movement, Singh Sabha, Khalsa Diwan etc. The author worked on not only the socio-religious and political dimensions, but also on the literary aspects. The transformation in the social background of the new leadership that emerged during this period was marked. These leaders hailed from the newly emergent professional classes and religious functionaries.

Demographic changes under the colonial rule had much to do with the shifting of the mainstream Sikh loyalist approach to a pro-nationalistic stance. The literature on which the author has predominantly based his study is both in Punjabi and English.

Daljinder Singh Johal in his paper, 'Punjabi Heroic Poetry', published in Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (ed.) *Pre-colonial and Colonial Punjab Society, Economy, Politics and Culture, essays for Indu Banga*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi talks about folk influences in colonial times. In his paper published as a

chapter in this book, the author compares the Punjabi heroic poetry traditions, as expressed in the form of *Vars*, *Jangnamas* and *Si-harfis* to the Greek and Germanic literature of ancient and medieval times. The Clan Hero who was emblematic of the clan's strength and potency was heralded in song and story alike. Punjabi poets such as Damodar Gulati, Muqbal, Warris Shah, Bulle Shah etc. always eulogised the Punjabi hero as a warrior/lover who was fearless and ready to lay down his life for the cause or his love. The Jats and Rajputs especially, who revelled in their martial traditions maintained a hereditary connection with the roving bards, heraldic singers, minstrels and genealogists, who regaled and delighted their patrons by not only tuneful and masterly renditions of the heroic and martial exploits of their ancestors, but were also the record keepers of their personal and family histories.

Navdeep Mandair in his paper, 'Colonial Formation of Sikhism' in *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* edited by Peshaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, Oxford University Press, 2014, first edition, delves on the colonial impact on the religious aspects of Sikhism as it was practised by the soldiers and the larger public. This book is a collection of scholarly essays on various aspects of Sikh religion, culture, art, culture and ethos. The light shed on various aspects of the Sikh ethos in the entire book are illuminating indeed. In the article, the author has looked at the multifarious ways in which colonialism impacted Sikhs, and the responses which the community took recourse to in order to face the onslaught unleashed by the foreign masters.

Written by a Russian and translated by Leonard Huxley, Massia Bibicoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles* (1915), Smith, Elder & Co., London, is a source for the perceptions and experiences of the Indian soldiers when they arrived in France. A precious primary resource, that is available online in its entirety, this book was originally written in French by a Russian lady who was a personal observer of the Indian contingent of soldiers when they landed on French shores. In this book, the author provides an eye witness account of the experiences of the Indian soldiers while on the frontline and in the trenches in France.

G. Corrigan in his *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914- 1915*, (2006), Spellmount Ltd., Staplehurst, provides a candid view of life in the trenches during the long years of the war. Written by a retired commanding officer of the brigade of Gorkhas in 1998, this book draws on vast unpublished material and

extensive interviews of the descendants of the men who fought in the Great War in India and Nepal to provide a deep insight into their experiences.

S. Das's edited *Race, Empire and the First World War Writing* (2011), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge is a collection of works by different researchers from across the world; this book is an important testament to the experiences of the soldiers from different nationalities. With chapters such as 'voices and experiences', 'perceptions and proximities' and 'nationalism, memory and literature', this book is a cultural and social document that talks about the individual and collective experiences of the diverse soldiers who were fighting in this alien war.

The author, G. Sheffield takes a guts and glory approach to explain how the citizen army of Great Britain was not an 'army of lions led by donkeys' but a lethal fighting force in his 2001 book, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War, Myths and Realities*, London: Headline. Based on twenty years' of research, the book utilises many tools such as personal recollections, archival material and memoirs of participants to highlight the glorious victory of the First World War and the high costs at which it was achieved. The author also opines that the war was not a futile exercise, but an essential battle that had to be won at all costs.

R. Smith has undertaken a socio-cultural study in *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. A cultural study, this book is based on the experiences of the Jamaican soldiers who participated in the First World War on behalf of the British. The chapters discuss everything from the training and deployment of two Caribbean regiments, to explore how the themes of race, masculinity and nationalism were encouraged by the experiences of the men of these regiments.

R. Henig's *Versailles and After 1919-1933* (1995), London: Routledge takes a detailed look at the Peace of Paris and how it shaped the world later. This book attempts to give a long term perspective of the relevance and significance of the Treaty of Versailles. The attitude of the victors, to the rage and humiliation of the defeated peoples, reparations inflicted upon them and the parcelling of the spoils of war that redrew the map of the world after 1918 are discussed in detail.



D. Stevenson in his book published in 2004, with the title, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War*, London: Allen, has taken a historical view of the events of the Great War. In this book, that views the First World War as a global conflict of epic proportions, the international progression and ramifications are elaborated upon in detail. The war that brought four empires to their knees, and resulted in their destruction, and also killed millions of people world-wide is explored in detail to engender better understanding of the manner in which this conflict unfolded and engulfed the entire globe.

W. K. Storey in *The First World War: A Concise Global History* (2009), Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, chronicles the details of the events and phases of the First Great War. In this book, which is a part of the 'Exploring World History' series, the author explores how the First World War profoundly impacted the ways in which people viewed the environments in which they were living and the technology which shaped it. Factors such as weapons, diet, geography, men and materials, which became increasingly precious and scarce as the war progressed, forced the colonial regimes to re-explore and rethink the value of progress, at the cost of others. People all over the globe acquired a keen realisation of the immense cost and unforeseen consequences of war. The War brought home in painful and heartrending ways the cost of modernity in lasting and heart-wrenching fallouts and reparations that went on far beyond the years of the conflict. A generalised view of British Imperialism as it existed in the period immediately preceding the First World War, the book is an interesting perspective on the same.

B. Porter writes an interesting recount of the stages and phases of British Imperialism in *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995*, (2004), 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Harlow: Pearson. Written in an engaging and interesting style, the book delves into the behind the curtains look at the sinews and minds that powered British Imperialism in its glorious heyday. The author presents an alternative look at British Imperialism, not as reflective of the strength of Great Britain, but as the deep malaise that had set into its economic foundations and which had to be addressed through the unabashed exploitation of the colonies.

H. L. Wesseling in a colonial study entitled, *The European Colonial Empires 1815-1919* (2004), Harlow: Pearson, describes the processes of imperialism as it was

practised at the height of colonialism by the European powers, in great detail. After tracing the evolution of imperialism in its general aspects and as it unfurled across Africa and Asia, the seventh chapter of the book is dedicated to the First World War. In this chapter, the author analyses how imperialism had its full blossoming in the manner in which it hurled its attendant colonies into the flames of the global conflict. The book is an attempt at highlighting the adverse effects of European imperialism that has been glorified by western scholars till even recently.

J. M. Winter in book, *The Experience of World War I* (1998), London: Greenwich Editions has given a behind the scenes look at the social and cultural experiences of the public and peoples of different nations who lived through the harrowing years of the Great War. This book incorporates the political, social, military and economic perspectives to look comprehensively at the War in terms of the entirety of its experiences. Going beyond the statistics into the individual, community and national experiences of diverse peoples, the author seeks to summarise the horrors, destructions and deprivations of the war as it unfolded over many years and across regions.

### **Inferences Drawn from Review of Literature and Research Gaps identified**

The aforementioned review of literature provides invaluable information about the various themes that need to be evaluated in order to arrive at some understanding of the questions that drive this research. There have been deeply incisive and well researched works undertaken that are extremely helpful in understanding the various dimensions of the subject under study. Studies on Colonialism, War in general, the World Wars, India under colonial rule, the British Raj, Punjab under the Raj, the Sikhs and the Indian and colonial response to the various factors at play in the first years of the twentieth century help in gaining valuable insights into the state of society and the undercurrents that were meandering towards the events and the time period under review in the proposed research.

However, there is a dearth of studies available on the social and cultural dimensions of the Sikh participation in the First World War. An effort has been made in the present thesis to offer a well-rounded and holistic perspective that will cover different aspects related to the Sikh participation in the War in a historical perspective presenting a total picture which will certainly contribute to enhancing and deepening

one's understanding of this vital but little explored time period in the history of India, and particularly, Punjab.

It is incontestable that the First World War was one of the major and the most important events of the twentieth century, that has left a lasting and profound impression on the political, social and cultural milieu of the entire globe. With such a significant contribution to the efforts of the Allied powers in the course of the First World War, it is only befitting that Sikh participation be better highlighted and understood, referencing not only the political and militaristic aspects, but also in the light of the social and cultural aspects. A sincere endeavour has been made here at presenting a cogent and concise study that will chart the course through intensive and extensive research for further advancing one's understanding of this area, period and region under study.

### **Rationale of the Study**

War as a phenomenon and experience leaves indelible mark on the mind, body, psyche and hearts. At the time when one in every seven Punjabis was being recruited and sent overseas to an almost certain fate- death or at least grievous injury, it is reasonable to assume that almost all would carry the scars of war on their psyches. As to how the soldiers coped with the horrors and deprivations of war and how it impacted the soldiers, non-combatants, families, children and society at large are the issues which need to be examined. Much has been written about the trenches and how the soldiers lived and died, but a very little has been written, said and even thought about the human aspect - cultural, social, religious and familial.

The War created a social churn that sparked off far reaching consequences and results. Such a massive loss of life, property, bereavements, large number of men disabled must have created familial and social upheaval of unimaginable scale. How did the families and the loved ones left behind cope? At the same time, the ardent welcome accorded to the soldiers abroad, the respect they received from Europeans and other whites, the overseas travel, unprecedented exposure to people, realities and experiences abroad could not leave any person untouched.

To present a coherent picture and attempt an incisive understanding of the Sikh soldier of the time, it was imperative to undertake a detailed and nuanced study of the

circumstances, belief systems, social structures, social and economic change, military thinking and beliefs of the time. In order to understand the various multi layered dimensions which affected the thinking, actions, reactions and spurred the responses of the Sikh soldier in the tumultuous and four years of the First World war, it is essential to undertake a thorough study of the subject to gain an insight into it.

The study has been divided into six chapters besides Conclusion according to the central question under review. The first Chapter is the 'Introduction' to the theme, scope, need and value of the research. It lays down the framework of the research work to be undertaken. The colonial contexts, The British Raj in India, The British Indian Army, The First World War and Indian and particularly Sikh participation have been discussed, bolstered by a detailed review of the extant literature in this regard. The chapter also outlines and generally demarcates the organisation of the material and the research work. The significance of the title, its pertinence and review of the existing literature have also been carried out in this chapter.

The second Chapter is titled 'Self Identity and Public Perception' which aims to examine the various aspects that coalesced together to form the identity and self-perception of the Sikh Soldier on multiple levels-

- In his own eyes.
- In the eyes of the Colonial British Raj and its officers and administrators
- In the social, cultural, religious and political milieu of which he was a part
- In the larger world which he was exposed to when he was posted abroad as part of the British Indian forces.

The chapter begins by tracing the Martial Race theory which was a vital tour de force under which the British Raj employed most of the British Indian Army after 1857. The historical justification, colonial assertions, racial contexts and political and economic implications and considerations that operated as the background to the Martial race theory are examined in detail. The Martial race theory remained a powerful determinant and widely accepted explanation for recruiting people from certain races and regions such as the Sikhs in Punjab for almost a century.

It was so strongly entrenched that it was even followed well after independence. However, it was rooted in the colonial mindset. The Martial race theory needs to be examined vigorously, in the light of new researches to understand how it was being utilised by the colonial powers to recruit, motivate and create the self-identities of the soldiers of Punjab, particularly the Sikhs and this has been undertaken in this chapter.

The Sikh historical and religious traditions and their military heritage that formed a vital and inalienable part of the self-identity and public perception of the Sikh Soldier has also been examined in detail. This martial self-identity was effectually encouraged by the British Raj and the ways, means, methods and practises in which this operated on the ground, have been explored. The mettle of the Sikhs who were able to forge an independent empire encompassing the whole of North India following the disintegration of the Mughal empire and were able to challenge the might of the British Empire and give the toughest fight to the English officers has also been discussed and deliberated upon.

Chapter Third titled, 'The Sikh Soldier at Home in the World' traces how the British colonial administration brought the entire force and power of its vast edifice to bear on India and the overarching and multifarious modes and ways in which India was involved in the British war machine at the time of the First World War. This chapter discusses the process of recruitment, wherein every village and hamlet was scrutinised to elicit the best men available to be inducted in the army and sent to the war fronts to serve as cannon fodder. The methods and mechanics of assembling the largest volunteer force ever assembled in history have also been examined in this chapter.

The training and dispatching of the soldiers to the war fronts, which was often a hurried process, in the war years' is covered. The experiences of the soldiers upon landing on foreign shores and their response to the strange environments to which they were exposed for the first time have been evaluated. To men hailing from the Punjabi countryside and rural hinterlands, the cities, modes and manners of the premier cities of Europe appeared curious and amazing. In turn, their arrival and appearance, modes and manners were of strange fascination to the Europeans who reacted to them in different ways. These have all been described in this chapter.

The kaleidoscope of experiences that the soldiers underwent, when they witnessed their comrades being killed by the hundreds at one go, the unceasing arrival of new recruits from India, the varying attitude of the colonial administration and officers to the Indian soldiers, their position vis a vis` the British and other soldiers, hailing from different nationalities, etc are examined in some detail to understand the plethora of his experiences. Another fascinating area wherein there is little known of the experience of the Indian soldier is outside the trenches, when he was either returning to India, or was being treated at a hospital or medical facility abroad, which is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four, 'In his Own Voice' contains a unique and never before discussed treasure trove of information which the researcher accessed. This rare piece of oral history has recently been unearthed at the University of Heidelberg's audio archives that have the recordings of Indian soldiers who were imprisoned at the Half Moon camp as prisoners of war (POW) by the Germans. As the audio technology had recently been invented, there was a sincere attempt at recording national, cultural and social perspectives of the POW's who hailed from all corners of the world.

Amongst the hundreds of recordings of soldiers from different parts of the world, were the recordings of several Sikh soldiers too, who have tried to express themselves and their experiences in guarded and coded language, owing to the strict censorship. These recordings have been analysed, along with other personal correspondence that reflects the state of the mind of the Sikh soldiers, in the form of their letters, recollections and official communications. All these aspects will provide an in-depth and wide focus lens view of the entire experience of the Indian soldiers, and especially the Sikh soldier abroad.

In Chapter Fifth, 'Insulated or Involved' - an attempt has been made to contextualise the experiences of the soldiers and put them in perspective. The role of soldiers on the frontline is critical and wars are fought, won or lost by the soldiers. However, the connections left behind in the form of the families, communities and other linkages of the soldiers also play an equal part. The soldier might be physically present on the field, but a part of him stays behind in his native home and land, with his nears and dears. This aspect, the civilian milieu of the soldiers and how they are connected to

the families, how they deal with separation and loss and vice versa is often ignored or overlooked in the telling of soldier's tales.

Chapter sixth is titled, 'Unsung Heroes and Heroines'. The participation of non-combatants who risked their lives in the War in a non-combative role is also an ignored area, which needs to be explored. This chapter deals with the role of the non-combatants who were on the sidelines, but who were making an important contribution in every way to the war effort. Their contribution and the untold and unrecognised manner in which they contributed to the War effort is highlighted in this chapter. How the families, community and society dealt with the massive loss of men and the problems and adaptations that occurred when the war casualties and wounded returned home has been explored, from the perspective of the civilian and non-combatants side in this chapter.

In the light of the subsequent events that transpired upon the end of the First war in 1918 and return of the soldiers to India, these experiences become increasingly pertinent. The premise that the Indian soldiers and especially the Sikh Soldiers were insulated or involved in the civil milieu and the extent to which they were a part of the larger social, political and nationalistic undercurrents which were in full play at the time, will be evaluated in the light of the vents that transpired later. The growth of the Ghadar movement, Jalianwala Bagh incident, freedom struggle intensification etc which happened in the aftermath of the war are watershed events in Indian history, which need to be re-examined in the light of the Indian soldiers experiences during the critical war years.

In the Conclusion, inferences are drawn and discussed. The profound ways in which society as a whole and the families and communities of thousands of these war hardened and 'foreign travelled' soldiers must have been impacted is presented. It places the four years' of the war in the correct perspective vis a vis the subsequent events.

## CHAPTER-II

### SELF IDENTITY AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

This chapter is oriented towards identifying the various elements that went into the formation of the self-perception of the Sikh soldiers. The origins of the Martial Race theory, which was used very effectively and innovatively by the British to mobilise the Sikhs and induct them into the most vital and visible echelons of the British Indian army, have been traced here. The socio-religious and economic implications that made the Sikhs readily accept and perpetuate the martial race considerations have been explored. The hard pragmatism, realistic evaluation and real-political considerations that intertwined to lend credence and support to the perception of the Sikhs as the premier martial community of India in not only the Army top brass and officers, but also British decision making and opinion forming class and institutions in Britain which have been dwelt on. The chapter looks into the self-perception of the Sikhs and various ways in which they were viewed by the British, both as a community and as soldiers.

Ashis Nandy puts forward the contention that colonial cultures bind the ruler and the ruled into an ‘unbreakable dyadic relationship’. Many Indians unconsciously identified their salvation in emulating the British – in friendship and in enmity. The consciousness of martiality and its connection with race (as embodied in the *Kshatriya* concept and manifested in Rajput chivalry etc.) was very much a part of the Indian discourse on statecraft. The British concept of martiality was hyper masculine, courage driven and rooted in British middle class sexual stereotyping, but it was applied to India by the British and took root because the traditional Indian concept were in alliance with those ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Ashis Nandy also argues that colonial literary giants such as Rudyard Kipling were ‘probably the most creative builders of the political myths which a colonial power needs to sustain its self-esteem’. The positive qualities which historians and representatives of the colonial narrative such as Kipling identified and employed as

---

<sup>1</sup>Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 30.



the 'attributes of good savages', were found in the 'devoted, obedient martial races of India.'<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Amerdeep Singh Panesar<sup>3</sup> in his thesis asserts that 'positioning of Sikhs as a martial race was a multi-faceted negotiation and not simply an imposition from above'. This chapter attempts to ascertain how much truth there is in this assertion. Various factors that went into the evolution of the Sikh martial identity have been discussed below.

### **Role of Sikh Gurus in the Militant Traditions**

The history of Sikh identity in modern times may be traced in relation to the role of Sikh Gurus. Sikhism<sup>4</sup> emerged out of the churn of the various streams of thought and geopolitical realities as a creed of faith. After his father's execution at the hands of the Mughals, the sixth Guru departed from the pacific stream of piety and started the militarisation of the Sikhs.<sup>5</sup> Guru Hargobind "established a tradition which changed the ideology of the Sikhs and Sikhism forever."<sup>6</sup> The execution of his father affected the tenth Guru and his heir Gobind Singh profoundly.<sup>7</sup> The role played by the tenth Sikh Guru and personal embodiment of the Guru is seminal in the development of the Sikhs as a martial community.<sup>8</sup>

The British historian Macauliffe accepted the 'torpor theory' whereby the east was supposed to have lapsed into 'sluggish torpor' while the Aryans in the West had evolved into a master race. However, Macauliffe credited the Sikhs as the exception to this torpor and credited the Sikh Gurus as having shaken off the languor and laziness of centuries in his essay, 'How the Sikhs Became a Militant People' as:

---

<sup>2</sup>P. Brantlinger, 'Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and its afterlives'. *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 50(2), 2007, pp. 172-191. Rudyard Kipling was an imperialist and supporter of colonialism, who was known for endorsing such ideas as 'The Whiteman's burden'.

<sup>3</sup> Amerdeep Singh.

Panesar, 'Martialing the Sikh Soldier During the First World War. Masters' thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2017, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Hew McLeod, "Sikhs and Muslims in the Punjab". *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. 22 (s1), 1987, pp. 155-165.

<sup>5</sup>H. S. Syan, '*Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century*', IB Tauris, 2000, pp. 48-55.

<sup>6</sup>Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup>Ganda Singh, *Gobind Singh, Guru (1666-1708)*, *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Patiala: Punjabi University Patiala, Archived from the original on 29 July 2017. Retrieved on 7 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Seiple, '*The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*'. Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 96.

In them the East shook off the torpor of ages and unburdened itself of the heavy weight of ultra-conservatism which has paralysed the genius and intelligence of its people. Only those who know India by actual experience, can adequately appreciate the difficulties the Gurus encountered in their efforts to reform and awaken the sleeping nation.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to understand that there was a clear distinction between the Sikhs and Singhs. The Singhs were the militarised Sikhs who had been baptised in the tradition of the Khalsa<sup>10</sup>, and who wore the five emblems of the Khalsa<sup>11</sup> as advocated by Guru Gobind Singh on the fateful Baisakhi Day of 1699.<sup>12</sup> It was only after his death<sup>13</sup>, during the dark days<sup>14</sup> when his followers faced unprecedented persecution at the hands of the Mughals and Afghans did the difference between the Sikhs and Singhs eventually merge<sup>15</sup> and the two terms become interchangeable and synonymous.<sup>16</sup> The brutal death of Banda and his followers at Delhi<sup>17</sup> inaugurated an era of renewed persecution of the Sikhs.<sup>18</sup>

Even at the time of the long drawn out conflict between the Mughals and the Sikhs<sup>19</sup> which continued for almost a century<sup>20</sup>, the Singhs were able to prevail as every Sikh was compelled to take up arms to survive in the extremely virulent climate. This was

---

<sup>9</sup>T. Foley, 'Dining alone in Rawalpindi? Max Arthur Macauliffe: Sikh Scholar, Reformer, and Evangelist', Edinburgh: *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions*, 4 (1) 2017, pp. 7-32.

<sup>10</sup>Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. University of Chicago Press. 1994, pp. 59–62.

<sup>11</sup> W. Owen. Cole, Piara Singh, Sambhi, *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London, Routledge, 1978, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup>John M. Koller, *The Indian Way: An Introduction to the Philosophies & Religions of India*. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 312–313.

<sup>13</sup>P. Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799*. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 45–46.

<sup>14</sup>Prithi Pal. Singh, *The History of Sikh Gurus*. Lotus Press, 15 September 2007, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup>Hardip Singh. Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India*. Tauris. I. B. 2000, pp. 229-234.

<sup>16</sup> J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press, Foundation Books, New Delhi 2002, p. 88.

<sup>17</sup>Ganda. Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur: Based on Contemporary and Original Records*. Sikh History Research Department, 1935, p. 229.

<sup>18</sup>Nahar. Jawandha, *Glimpses of Sikhism*. Sanbun Publishers, 2018, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup>Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume I: 1469–1839*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 121.

<sup>20</sup>Hari Ram Gupta, *A History of the Sikhs from Nadir Shah's Invasion to the Rise of Ranjit Singh (1739–1799)*, Volume I: Evolution of the Sikh Confederacies (1739–1768), Simla, Minerva Book Shop, 1952, p. 10.

when the metaphor used by Bhai Gurdas for the change brought about by the sixth Guru Hargobind was clearly demonstrated. Bhai Gurdas had said that the orchard of the Sikh faith needed a thorny hedge for protection against the predators and looters<sup>21</sup> who were eager to plunder the orchard. This was the time, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh when the hedge and the orchard became as one and the terms Sikhs and Singhs became interchangeable<sup>22</sup>.

Richard Fox, in common with other scholars such as William McLeod<sup>23</sup>, Pashaura Singh<sup>24</sup> and E. Fenech use the label ‘Sikh’ in a far wider sense to denote the diversity of identities and observances, customs and belief systems that were followed by those purporting to be Sikhs. The identity of the “Singh” is reserved for the special warrior-saint-soldier-martyr identity that was first created by Guru Gobind Singh and was then sustained by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He nurtured this identity actively in the form of the special attention he gave to his *Akali* (Eternals) battalions who perpetuated the “Singh” identity as propounded by Guru Gobind Singh most closely. This very same identity was actively fostered by the British when they experienced the mettle of the Singhs in real time combat during the two Anglo-Sikh wars.

Extinction faced the lions of the Punjab in the middle of the nineteenth century- or so thought their British masters. After annexation, the British embarked most judiciously and enthusiastically on the business of administering this hard won territory, which also formed the northern extent of their territorial expansion in India. This was necessitated by the fact that the fertility of the Punjab region permitted the intensive plough based agriculture that formed the bulk of the colonial revenues and made this province one of the most profitable and high revenue yielding states in India.

Post annexation, the Singhs (inheritors and upholders of the soldier-saint-warrior-martyr identity) were in imminent danger of elimination as it lay in the British interests to subsume their martial identity and integrate them into the mass of rural peasantry. The integration of the Singhs’ into the larger peasantry, and the dilution of

---

<sup>21</sup>Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*. Knopf, 2000, p.56.

<sup>22</sup>J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, The New Cambridge History of India, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 80-81.

<sup>23</sup>Hew William McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup>Pashaura Singh, ‘Gurmat: The Teachings of the Gurus,’ *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 225–39.

their martial identity would have destroyed the threat and danger which the Singhs represented to the British. The factors that made the British confident that this dilution of identity was about to be seamlessly accomplished was the special blend of reasonable taxation, approachable and responsive government and forceful assertion of British power administrative that they brought to Punjab. The British surmised that once the chaotic, anarchic, warlord driven and violent environment that had bred these Singhs was removed, the Singhs would also lose their reason d`etre and join the mass of rural peasantry from which they stemmed.

These sentiments were freely expressed at the highest echelons of British administration. Sir Richard Temple, Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, was quite optimistic of this notion becoming reality when he noted, “The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity is going rapidly where the Sikh political ascendancy has already gone...The Sikhs of Nanak... will perhaps cling to the faith of their fathers; but the Sikhs of Gobind, who were more specially styled the Singhs or Lions, and who embraced the faith as being the religion of warfare and conquest, no longer regard the Khalsa now that the prestige has departed from it. These men joined in thousands, and they now depart in equal number. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came”.<sup>25</sup>

### **Singhs as Sikh Soldiers of the British Army**

In his work, *Lions of the Punjab*, anthropologist Richard Fox<sup>26</sup> gives a biological analogy for the Singhs of the Punjab. Singh, literally translated as lions, is the biological analogy which Fox attributes to the Sikhs of the Punjab to arrive at a better conception of culture. He justifies the use of the analogy of the Lions as a reference to the British orientations and policies and the manner in which they were able to use this identity of the Sikhs to ‘master’ and ‘use’ them.

Fox apprises the readers of the British belief that the religious community of the Sikhs were separate and unique. As per the anthropological beliefs prevailing at the time, the Sikh’s physical characteristics of being taller in height and stronger in physique, the distinctive region of their living that was climatically suited to produce a hardier

---

<sup>25</sup>Sir Richard Temple, quoted by Denzil Ibbetson, *Census of India*, 1881, Punjab, Vol. 1, in Government of India, (Timba, Sweden, International Documentation Centre), 1964, p. 211.

<sup>26</sup>Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 112.

and stalwart species of men and women with special behaviours such as impulsive courage and unique appearance owing to turban and uncut beards all made them a different race with martial characteristics. The colonial mindset about ‘orientalism’ and ‘biological determinism’ instilled the belief among the British that racial superiority and inferiority was a reality, and they tried hard to get the Sikhs to believe that they were a different species and race too. This idea gained currency and became strongly entrenched when the British adopted specific policies and selective processes to force the Sikhs to maintain their ‘racial martial’ traditions. The Singhs in turn, internalised this cultural concept and started to believe firmly in this imposed British cultural reconstruction.

### Anglo-Sikh Wars

Ranjit Singh was the son of one of the twelve *misdars* from the Sukerchakia *misl*<sup>27</sup>. The credit for consolidating and establishing the first and only Sikh empire goes to this young Sardar<sup>28</sup>. Amongst his multifarious military and martial achievements, are civil and administrative reforms, modernisation, infrastructural development of roads, fortifications<sup>29</sup>, unification of the cultures and religions under one state and general prosperity.<sup>30</sup> He was the creator of the formidable Khalsa Army whose writ ran from the frontiers of the Khyber to Kashmir to the Sutlej.<sup>31</sup>

It was in the two Anglo-Sikh wars that the British experienced the mettle of the Sikh soldiers at first hand...and were stunned. In the First Anglo-Sikh War, in the Battle of Pherozeshah, the second of the war, in the words of Cunningham, the Political Agent of the East India Company, on the morning of 21 December, 1845, the scene was:<sup>32</sup>

The British had at last got the field they wanted... (but) the resistance met was wholly unexpected... Guns were dismounted, and their ammunition was blown into the air; squadrons were checked in mid career; battalion after battalion was hurled back with

---

<sup>27</sup>Kushwant Singh. "Ranjit Singh (1780–1839)". *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University Patiala. Retrieved 18 August 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Singh, Patwant (2008). *Empire of the Sikhs: The Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Peter Owen. pp. 113–124.

<sup>29</sup> Singh Patwant, *Empire of the Sikhs*, pp. 167-175.

<sup>30</sup>Teja Singh; Sita Ram Kohli (1986). *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. New Delhi. Atlantic Publishers. pp. 65–68.

<sup>31</sup>Jean Marie Lafont (2002). *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Lord of the Five Rivers*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, pp. 15–16.

<sup>32</sup>J. D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, 1848, p. 214.

shattered ranks... the obstinacy of the contest threw the English into confusion; men of all regiments and arms were mixed together; Generals were doubtful of the fact or the extent of their own success, and Colonels knew not what had become of the regiments they commanded or of the army of which they formed a part.

In spite of such determined resistance, fearless valour and staunch fighting on behalf of the rank and file of the Khalsa army, the duplicity of the Brahmin converts commanding the Khalsa Army succeeded. In the words of Sir Henry Havelock, 'India was saved by a miracle.'<sup>33</sup> The British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, told the House of Commons mournfully of the immense loss of men and officers sustained in fighting, "The most warlike men in India."<sup>34</sup>

The Second Anglo-Sikh War in the winter of 1848 also saw four engagements. Battle of Ramnagar was 'a sad affair with distressing results', as described by the governor General Dalhousie himself.<sup>35</sup> It is the Third battle, fought in the village Chillianwala which became one of the darkest chapters in British military history. The British casualties included 2,446 men including 132 officers. A British historian, writing with restraint nevertheless cannot help but recount the bravery of the Sikhs in his account of the battle where he describes that the British infantrymen were 'mowed down by the terrific fire of the Sikh musketry'. The Sikh *Ghorcharras* (Cavalry) were able to consecutively break the lines of the British Cavalry and kill several horsemen. The most harrowing incident was the sudden withdrawal of the British soldiers who were unable to face the onslaughts and 'galloped over their own horse artillery, turning it topsy-turvy leaving their comrades to be slaughtered by the Sikhs.'<sup>36</sup>

The last battle of the Anglo-Sikh wars was at Gujrat where, "never perhaps had the British amassed so many guns and men in any single battle". The preparation was also an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the contest as 56,636 infantry, 11,569 cavalry, 96 field guns and 67 siege guns were amassed, just to face a Sikh force of about 20,000 men. The British victory against such overwhelming odds was still hard won. The Sikhs fought with ferocity and valour, without disregard for life or limb, as

---

<sup>33</sup>Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, New York: Knopf Publishers, 2000, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>35</sup> W Lee Warner, '*The Life of the Marquis of Dalhousie*'. New York: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1904, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup>Warner. *The Life of Dalhousie*, p. 170.

was their custom and after the battle was won by the British the ‘curtain came down on Ranjit Singh’s proud empire’<sup>37</sup>. Many British officers noted that the Sikh soldier was particularly deadly at close quarters, and was skilled and fearless when it came to hand to hand combat<sup>38</sup>.

Qazi Nur Mohammad, the Afghan chronicler who was a scholar and soldier accompanying the Abdali hordes to India, wrote a ‘*Jungnama*’ (War Chronicle) in Persian. He held a lot of animosity against the Sikhs, but as a soldier, the Afghan could not help admiring the Sikhs for their “skill in wielding weapons, their lion hearted fighting spirit, art of rapid manoeuvres and regrouping, sudden surgical shock attacks of great ferocity and indomitable will to fight until they were the winners”<sup>39</sup>. This was how the Sikhs continued to remain undaunted in battle and in peace. These were the warriors which then enabled Maharaja Ranjit Singh to form the invincible Khalsa Army of the Lahore Kingdom.

### **British Perception of the Sikhs as Warriors**

Ever since their first acquaintance with the Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the British had been unanimously impressed with the soldiering abilities of the Sikhs. The Sikhs had first come to the notice of the British towards the end of the eighteenth century. The British gradually spread their tentacles over the Indian sub-continent, and metamorphosed from a ‘community of foreign traders’ to ‘legitimate inheritors of the Mughals’, after conquering Mughal heartlands and even the Mughal successor states such as Awadh, Bengal, Mysore etc.

Cunningham wrote of the Sikhs, that although British writers often gave the credit for the superiority of Ranjit Singh’s army to its training by European officer (Allard for Sikh Cavalry and Ventura for training the Sikh infantry), and other officer such as Court and Avitable. Cunningham felt that Sikhs owed their exemplary soldierly qualities to their ‘hardihood of character, spirit of adaptation and feeling of a common interest and destiny’ implanted in him by the Great Gurus.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, p. 158.

<sup>38</sup>D.S. Saggu, *Battle Tactics and War Manoeuvres of the Sikhs*. New Delhi: Notion Press, 2018, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>40</sup>Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, p.133.

Another British officer, Captain A.H Bingley wrote that in equipment, steadiness and precision of manoeuvres, the Punjab armies seemed equal to the British Army<sup>41</sup>.

The assessment of the Sikh soldier in the words of the Commander of the Indian Corps in France, Sir James Willcocks was quite interesting. He described the Sikhs as a fighting race; the *Khalsa* or the chosen people. Of all the Indian soldiers he knew, he recorded that he deemed the Sikhs the best as he had personally served with Sikhs in every imaginable condition. Although not without faults, Sikhs were nevertheless fine manly soldiers, ready to undergo any trials with genuine good humour, and also good with money. General Willcocks conceded that his own motto with Sikhs is 'to give them all they deserve, and we owe them much, but not to spoil and pamper them'<sup>42</sup>.

In the preface of his 'Handbook on Sikhs for the use of regimental officers', R. W. Falcon describes the Sikhs as being of a 'splendid pattern of a native soldier, simple in his religion, worshipping the one God; broad in his views; free in not observing the prejudices of caste'. The Sikh was 'manly in his warlike creed, in his love of sports and in being a true son of the soil; a buffalo, not quick in understanding, but brave, strong and true'<sup>43</sup>.

The Racial belief prevalent at the time was that the Sikhs were descended from the 'Aryans' who had been established as the invading masters of North western India by the time<sup>44</sup>. Their warrior traditions were also amply established, exemplified, supported and instilled by their faith and these warrior qualities had been amply witnessed by the British ever since the Sikhs had entered their service in 1840s<sup>45</sup>. In 1857, when the British suffered the greatest threat to their presence in India, the Sikhs rallied to their support, a fact that was noticed, valued and amply rewarded subsequently and they became 'essential girders in the British army structure'<sup>46</sup>.

---

<sup>41</sup>S. A. H. Bingley & F. Bremner, *Notes on the Warlike Races of India and Its Frontiers: Compiled by Captain A.H. Bingley, To Accompany Bremner's "Types of the Indian Army"*, London: F. Bremner, c/o Morgan & Kidd, 1897, p. 321.

<sup>42</sup>James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, London: Constable and Co., 1920, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup>R. W. Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of regimental officers*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1897, p. 176.

<sup>44</sup>Heather Streets, *The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 94-95.

<sup>45</sup>J. S. Grewal, *Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 36.

<sup>46</sup>Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974, p. 234.



There is a notion that the ‘character of British recruitment and the preference for martial races in the nineteenth century was swept away by the manpower demands of the World Wars’ but Rob Johnson considers this an erroneous assumption as he feels that the British had always sought the most physically robust, bravest fighters, and most well-knit communities as soldiers. The British continually sought for the most aggressive, reliable, lasting, and accessible troops, aware of the costs of creating and sustaining troops, as well as the necessity for the most successful units to overcome relatively small numbers to confront and destroy much larger armies. True, they gave select troops ‘elite’ status, but this, too, was a valid military need. The Indian army was divided into groups based on necessity, role, and performance.<sup>47</sup>

In 1849, the last bastion of Indian freedom, Punjab, fell to the British after the Second Anglo-Sikh War, and Punjab was finally annexed and made an integral part of the British dominions in India. At that time, fresh from the experience of having tested the mettle of the Sikhs in combat, the British were keen to liquidate the self identity of a martial tour de force that the Khalsa Army considered to be their religious legacy from the tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Gobind Singh.

After the annexation of the Punjab, which under Maharaja Ranjit Singh had served as the formidable bulwark which stood between British India and the dangers beyond (chiefly the Afghans and the Russians), the onerous task of protecting the borders fell to the British<sup>48</sup>. The ‘Board of Administration of Punjab’ was given the power to raise five regiments each of cavalry and infantry. These were to consist of 588 *sowars* (horsemen) and 800 men respectively<sup>49</sup>.

The Sikhs were restricted from being employed initially for ‘political reasons’, as they were perceived to be hostile after the annexation of the Punjab and the disbandment of the Khalsa Army. However, the stated ‘object was to employ natives of the Punjab in these regiments’, but soon, recruitment of Hindustanis was stopped and 100 Sikhs in a Cavalry regiment and 200 in Infantry began to be recruited<sup>50</sup>.

---

<sup>47</sup>R. Johnson, *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup>Major W. Broadfoot, *The Career of Major George Broadfoot. C. B., in Afghanistan and the Punjab*, London: J Murray Publishers, 1888, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup>Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup>Mazumdar quoting PAR 1849-51, in *The Indian Army*, p. 35.

The three horse batteries were formed from the Sikh batteries who had betrayed the Lahore durbar in the Anglo-Sikh wars and Punjabi Recruits, and an Irregular company of gunners was ‘formed from the debris of the *Seikh* Artillery’ (which had proven so deadly effective and accurate during the wars, to have immeasurably impressed the British officers who witnessed it in action) and the renowned Guide Corps raised after the First Anglo Sikh war in 1846. In 3 years, there were three cavalry and six infantry units in it<sup>51</sup>.

The British were aware of the calibre and fine fettle of the Khalsa army that largely comprised of Sikhs, even before it was tested and proved in the two Anglo Sikh wars. ‘The unexpected severe casualties suffered by the (British) troops in the Sikh wars<sup>52</sup>, had given the British a fine taste of Sikh fighting spirit. The newly arrived Governor General in India, Lord Hardinge, described the Sikhs as Britain’s, “Bravest, most warlike and most disruptive enemy in Asia”<sup>53</sup>.

Another factor that might have influenced the large scale recruitment of the Sikhs in the Army at this juncture was the fact that by this time, it was quite evident that the Bengal Sepoys and regiments were not only unwilling but absolutely averse to serving abroad on behalf of the British. In 1840, the British had already faced a problem when an expedition was dispatched to South China under Sir Hugh Gough. In this expedition, the major portion of the troops were from the Madras Army, “for it had become a habit for the Bengal Army not to cross the seas.”<sup>54</sup>

Training of the Khalsa Army on European lines by the French and Italian officers who were veterans of Napoleon’s armies had apprised the hardy, warlike Sikhs of the discipline of drilling and introduced them to the merits of orderly fighting. The Sikhs who were hitherto known for their ‘foolhardy and indomitable courage in the face of the enemy’, were now drilled, disciplined and trained.

---

<sup>51</sup>Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup>G. F. MacMunn & A. C. Lovett, *The Armies of India*, London: A. and C. Black, 1911, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup>James, Lawrence, *Raj- The Making of British India*, London: Abacus, Time Warner Books UK, 1997, p. 106.

<sup>54</sup>MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 117. Crossing the Black Water or the seas was considered against the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures and was believed to be polluting, leading to the loss of caste. Hence, staunch Hindus refused to cross the seas, even on military duty.

Energetic and timely efforts by Henry Lawrence in the Punjab as Chief Commissioner in 1857 were responsible for also mobilising the Phulkian States<sup>55</sup>. The inclusion of the Sikh soldiers from these princely states added to the number of Sikhs serving in the British army and managed to skew the ratio of soldiers in the Bengal Army irrevocably in favour of the Punjabis.

By June 1858, 75,000 of the 80,000 total 'native' troops in the Bengal army were Punjabis and the 'Sikhs alone now numbered 23,000<sup>56</sup>.' The Sikhs conducted themselves with conspicuous gallantry and valour during 1857 and earned the admiration, even the gratitude<sup>57</sup>, of the British Army officers. The Sikhs, inspite of being conquered a mere decade earlier, by gist of their 'combination of loyalty and opportunism<sup>58</sup>', managed to create a climate for a clear shift away from the 'untrustworthy Hindustanis to preference for Sikhs and Punjabis<sup>59</sup>'.

### **The Jats of the Punjab**

Writing in 1911, under the full influence of the martial race theory, Major Macmunn theorizes the enlistment of high castes and yeomen (farmers) in the army by recounting how the British had enlisted men from the lower castes into their armies upon their arrival in India. These lower caste armies had won all the great battles for mainland India, but after 1757 (Plassey), which had brought many lessons, 'it was thought desirable to get (higher castes) into connection with the army...men who were chiefly the yeomen peasants of the country.<sup>60</sup>

One peasantry in India that was considered untouched by the apathy and lack of spirit that was attributed to the peasantry of the south were the Jat peasants of the Punjab region. These Jats were the sword arm. The solid Jat bedrock formed the bulk of the Khalsa Army under the Lahore Durbar, and became the preferred recruits for the British Indian army thereafter. The Jats were not only renowned for their martial

---

<sup>55</sup> Shiv Gajrani, 'The Sikhs: The Revolt of 1857 in Punjab', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 61, Part One: Millennium, 2000-2001, pp. 679-685.

<sup>56</sup> Peel Commission Report, Evidence of Lt Col Durand, Organisation of the Army (Indian) Report, 1859 Appendix 71.

<sup>57</sup> E. Collen, *The Indian Army- A Sketch of its History and Organisation*. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1907, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> MacMunn, *Armies of India*, pp.102-03.

<sup>59</sup> Mason, *Matter of Honour*, pp. 313-14.

<sup>60</sup> MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 209.

proWess, but also were considered yeomen farmers and noble peasants<sup>61</sup>, with a strong socio-cultural identity.

Major Falcon, in the *Handbook of the Sikhs* remarks that the Jats were farmers and landowners of Punjab, and also, the heads of the great agriculturist class, and socially the most superior group in the caste hierarchy in the village or community. In the case of the Jat Sikhs, they are freer and bold than other agricultural classes because of the legacy the Sikh inherited from the religion of the Khalsa<sup>62</sup>.

In 1928, Major A.E Barstow of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 11<sup>th</sup> Sikh Regiment which consisted of Sikhs recorded his opinion about the martial qualities of Jat Sikhs. He surmised the reason for the fighting prowess of the Sikhs to be the superior social and economic position of the Jats as compared to other castes or communities in the Punjab villages. The fact that the Jats were exceptionally good soldiers and also agriculturists was also attributed by Major Barstow (like Major Falcon) to the qualities of love for freedom and courage which were instilled in Jats by the traditions of the Khalsa<sup>63</sup>.

Joseph Davey Cunningham, one of the earliest British officers to have come into close contact with the Sikhs at the zenith of their power<sup>64</sup>, when the Lahore Kingdom was still independent, was completely enthralled by the martial spirit, fearlessness and devil may care attitude of the Sikhs. He identified Jats as belonging to the mid tract in the plains, stretching from the Jhelum to Hissar and Panipat. In this, the Sikhs occupy the area around Lahore, Amritsar, Gujrat and around the rivers Sutluj and Beas. These tracts are called 'Majha' and 'Malwa'<sup>65</sup>.

Cunningham credited the religion of the Sikhs as being a defining quality that inherently made them a militant force. According to him, the ancient religions such as the Hindus, Muslims and Buddhism had lost the spark that lit up the followers

---

<sup>61</sup> Nicola Mooney, 'The Yeoman Jats of Punjab: Time, expertise and the colonial construct of Jat Sikh identity' Published in *Anthropologica*, Vol 55, No. 2(2013) Canadian Anthropology Society, 2013, pp. 277-290.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Wogner Falcon (1896) *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of Regimental Officers*, Allahabad: Penguin Press, pp. 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> A. E. Barstow, 'The Sikhs: An Ethnology', 1928 pp. 153-54.

<sup>64</sup> Cunningham, J. D. (1994). *A History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*. Asian Educational Services, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

initially and filled them with the tremendous fervour to adhere to the beliefs preached. He ascribed the followers of Sikhism to be full of the same spirit of zeal, religious fervour and unshakeable belief that pervaded the followers of these faiths when they were still new<sup>66</sup>.

Amongst the Sikhs recruited in the British army, the Jats formed the bulk, as they had done in the Khalsa Army of the Lahore Darbar. The Jats were not only 'industrious and successful tillers of the soil', but 'hardy yeomen equally ready to take up arms and to follow the plough'<sup>67</sup>. Cunningham called the Jats, "perhaps, the finest rural population in all India"<sup>68</sup>.

The Jat caste was known as noble peasants with imposing stature. In North India, the Jats were considered as a "high" caste by all religions<sup>69</sup>. Other castes were regarded as untrustworthy and troublemakers, such as the 'high' caste Brahmans and the 'low' caste Mazbi. Even in the handbooks, the writers emphasise the importance of hiring a Sikh from a 'healthy' caste<sup>70</sup>. (Falcon, 1896; Bingley, 1899), to the point of checking recruits to ensure they were not lying about their caste. In addition, recruitment was confined to some areas of Punjab. The Manjha district was thought to be the best place to find good soldiers.

In the handbook of the Sikhs, which was for the use of regimental officers as an official reference book', Major Falcon recorded his observations, gleaned from personal observations, research and discussions with fellow officers and other ranks. He called the Jats the 'back bone of the Sikh people'. He described them as being thoroughly independent in character, and assertive, while being very conscious of their personal and individual freedom. He observed that although Jats are ready to fight on occasion, they are not of a cruel or vindictive nature and are most patient and successful cultivators.<sup>71</sup> Falcon writes that the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh were mainly drawn from the lower orders, especially of Jats. The disciples who did not

---

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup>J. D. Cunningham, '*History of the Sikhs*'. First printed 1848, Reprint New Delhi. Rupa Paperback 2002, Eleventh Impression 2012, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>69</sup>NonicaDatt, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup>Falcon, Handbook, p. 207

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62.

acknowledge the authority of Guru Gobind Singh, on account of his innovations, simply called themselves Sikhs, without adding to their names the title of Singh”<sup>72</sup>.

Major Falcon informs us that the members of the Khalsa are considered to be the only true Singhs after being baptised as adults. However, the Jat Sikhs, though not true Singhs regarded themselves in no way inferior to Rajputs or Vaisya and only next to Brahmins by virtue of their courage and merit<sup>73</sup>.

Cunnigham also believed that the enthusiasm and faith that was instilled in the Sikhs by their Gurus was still fresh as ‘an active and living principle’. The Sikhs believed that God himself is present with them and He supports them in all their endeavours<sup>74</sup>. The Sikh nation was finally consolidated into one political entity under the leadership of ‘Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh’<sup>75</sup>, who was himself a Jat. MacMunn describes that the vast cultivating race of the Jats, who form two-thirds of the Sikh faith and who have served the British interests the best in all India, are peasants first whose sayings are ‘all of the plough, and a plough is the first toy of the Sikh’s son’<sup>76</sup>.

This is also borne out by the extensive and important work done by a British official Moconachie who collected and compiled the agricultural proverbs of the Punjab to shed light on the native wisdom, folk lore, beliefs and observations encapsulated in these proverbs and sayings. Moconachie<sup>77</sup> also found that most of the sayings related to the Jats were based on agriculture, the crop cycle, seasons, rainfall, seasonal phenomenon that affect crops, self-cultivation, animal husbandry, bulls relevance in animal husbandry, agricultural economy, rain fall patterns, ill-timed rains, obnoxious weeds etc.

In the context of this study, the mindset of a cultivator is also apparent in the letters that the Jat Sikh soldiers wrote home during their stay abroad. The sayings and the code words used (to dodge the censoring by the army authorities) are mainly agricultural. The Sikh soldiers were extremely observant and interested in the

---

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup>J. S. Grewal, *The Sikh empire (1799–1849)*. The New Cambridge History of India. The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup>G. F. MacMunn, *Armies of India*, London. Adam and Charles Black, 1911, p. 124.

<sup>77</sup>R. Maconachie. R. *Selected Agricultural Proverbs of the Punjab*, Medical Hall Press, Delhi, 1890, pp 233-34

agricultural scenario of France Belgium, Britain, Mesopotamia, and other places where they were posted. Letters are full of the comparative analysis pertaining to the ways of farming, descriptions of farms and farming implements, cultivations, crops, farming practices etc. which the soldiers witnessed abroad.

### **Integrating the Khalsa into the British Indian Army**

After the demise of the Lion of the Punjab who had kept the Khalsa army in strict check and judiciously and adroitly managed this vital resource, the army administration fell into disarray. In the ten years following the demise of Ranjit Singh, the army was called into action twice against the British. The British considered the Sikhs a long standing danger and in the words of Major G.F Macmunn

In the winter of 1845, the most serious trouble that had threatened India for many years came to a head. The Sikhs, who had lost the firm hand of the sagacious Ranjit Singh, and were burning to invade British India, finally crossed the Sutlej in large numbers near Ferozepur. The Sutlej Campaign with its hard fought battles, its vicissitudes is a story in itself...The Sikhs were far the severest foe that had been met in India... bulk of the fighting fell on the European troops, whose casualties were very severe...The losses sustained by the British troops in these two Sikh wars were very severe, far more so than any portion was accustomed to.<sup>78</sup>

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the frontier brigade in the Jullundur doab was moved to the Afghan border. The Punjab irregular Force was formed, which later came to be called the Punjab Frontier Force, recruited largely from the Khalsa Army regiments that had been disbanded<sup>79</sup>. In spite of giving an excellent account of themselves in all the battles of the two wars, the Sikhs suffered sorely from, “being muscle without a brain”<sup>80</sup>.The treachery of the generals and even the regent queen who wanted to have the power of the army broken by the British were additional drawbacks<sup>81</sup>.

---

<sup>78</sup>MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>79</sup>MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p. 90.

<sup>80</sup>Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 107.

<sup>81</sup>Lt. Col. R. G. Burton, *The First and Second Sikh Wars*, Simla: Government Printing Press, 1911, p. 23.

Upon annexation, the Board of Administration was accorded the responsibility to subdue the tempestuous Punjabis and the Board threw themselves with singular devotion to this task. True to his words, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India at the time, wholeheartedly supported this endeavour by making good on his promise to the Lawrence Brothers that he would provide the 'best men in India' to the Board to accomplish the task of controlling the Punjabis. In the process, there developed the distinct style of administration that was later eulogised as the 'Punjab School of Administration'. The approach adopted by the British after annexation of the Punjab emphasised upon mild taxation, reasoned government and prompt action. It was hoped that this approach would temper the turbulence of the warlike and aggressive Punjabis who had already been hard hit by a decade of almost total anarchy after the death of the Sikh sovereign Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839.

In 1853, Sir Richard Temple, The Secretary to the Government of Punjab, openly opined that,

The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity is rapidly going where the Sikh political ascendancy has gone...men who had joined (Sikhism) in thousands, depart now in equal numbers. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came...<sup>82</sup>

The 1881 census strengthened this belief as there was a much smaller Sikh population recorded than had been recorded in the enumeration of 1868. The significant reduction in the number of people who registered as 'Sikhs' in the census of 1881 encouraged Denzil Ibbetson, The Census Commissioner to say, "Sikhism is on the decline".<sup>83</sup> The representation of the Sikhs as it evolved in the Census in each decade has been discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this study. Suffice to say that the British were successful in joining the Sikhs to their common cause. The Raj "enlisted their (Sikhs) courage and loyalty in the defence of the Raj".<sup>84</sup>

### **Classification of Sikh Soldiers on basis of Districts and Regions**

The most favoured recruiting ground of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Punjab was the Manjha tract, that consisted of the districts of Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Kasur and parts

---

<sup>82</sup>Sir Richard Temple, quoted by Denzil Ibbetson, in *Government of India, Census of India, 1881, Punjab*, Vol. 1, (Tumba, Sweden, International Documentation Centre, 1964, microfiche), p.140.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup>Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 48.



of Lahore and Chunian. Later after the British annexed Punjab a new classification was introduced with county north of the Sutluj, Trans-Sutluj being considered Manjha and cisSatluj being considered Malwa<sup>85</sup>.

A smaller tract of country, but the Manjha Sikhs provided 'more men to the service than any other tract and had a reputation in the Punjab for lawlessness and courage, not confined to the Sikhs only<sup>86</sup>. They were considered very hardy, not as physically imposing as Sikhs from Malwa, but more cool and freedom loving than other Sikhs. They were not considered 'as quiet and amenable to discipline as Sikhs from other parts', and were considered to be of a fearless and independent spirit<sup>87</sup>.

The Malwa Sikhs (from the districts of Ferozepur, Patiala, Ludhiana, Nabha, Jind and Malerkotla) were more numerous of any class and were physically bigger and more attractive, who 'surpasses the Manjha in prudence and thrift and is a better cultivator.' Malwa Sikhs were also less orthodox and the supply being abundant, were capable of being inducted into larger numbers into the army.

The Doaba Sikhs (from the districts of Kapurthala, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur) were considered softer, 'and too absorbed in cultivation, as Doaba is exceedingly fertile<sup>88</sup>'. The Doaba Sikhs were considered inferior as 'doaba was malarious and spleen was common' and it was recommended to the recruiting agencies that 'in the northern parts of doaba, recruits should be very carefully elected, as quality is very poor'.<sup>89</sup>

The Sikhs from Rachna Doab and Bari Doab were also not considered very suitable for recruitment. The sub montane tract, running through Ambala, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Sialkot and Gujrat were considered poor country for recruiting soldiers and requiring 'careful and discriminate selection' to qualify as good recruiting material<sup>90</sup>.

### **Caste in the British Indian Army**

Guru Nanak advocated a strictly casteless society when he initiated the faith that came later to be recognised as Sikhism. Even during the time of Guru Nanak, during his 15 years long residence at Kartarpur, he ingrained the principle of equality into his

---

<sup>85</sup>Falcon, *Handbook of the Sikhs*, p. 113.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

followers. Facing untold hardships and a concentrated genocide for several decades, the Sikh community naturally developed into a fighting force, ever ready to wage war against injustice and repression<sup>91</sup>.

During the darkest days of the eighteenth century the Sikhs were being assailed from all sides and practically lived in the saddles. Infantry and artillery were virtually unknown to the Sikhs at this time. Sikh soldiers despised 'footmen' and assigned them the meaner duties. These were the garrison tasks, provisioning and looking after the women and children<sup>92</sup>. The Indian society was a caste-ridden society at the time of the Great war where all social, cultural, religious and economic functions were performed on the basis of caste. The British attempted to preserve this caste hierarchy and structure in the army too.

The caste returns of the British Indian Army on January 1, 1904 recorded the total strength of the army as 152,846 and this included 30,97 Sikhs.<sup>93</sup> The Sikhs constituted about 20% of the total strength, although their proportion in the population was miniscule. In the army, they served in highly exclusive and segregated subunits, where caste purity was preserved. Each company of about 90 men were usually from the same 'class', meaning same religion, caste, clan, locality, language etc. in this way, it was administratively, practically and logistically easier if all men in the same subunit observed the same rituals, ate the same food and spoke the same language etc<sup>94</sup>.

Some writers also opine that the recruitment of the Sikhs in large numbers was made necessary during the Sepoy mutiny of 1857. The British were finding it difficult to recruit men for army from the regions which had fallen under the hands of the mutineers. Every man from Oudh was a suspect<sup>95</sup>. Basham says the Sikhs 'gladly joined the British Army to settle their scores with the hated 'Poorbiah' soldiers and partly for the loot.'<sup>96</sup> The British then started recruiting from amongst the Mazhabi community for their class regiments and these were later merged with Ramdasias

---

<sup>91</sup>Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 59.

<sup>92</sup>Cunnigham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup>David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*. London: Macmillan, 1994, Table 1.4, p. 20.

<sup>94</sup>Streets, H. 'Martial races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture', 1857–1914. Manchester University Press, 2017, p. 39.

<sup>95</sup>A.L. Basham, *The Untouchables: The Maharas and Mazabis*. Delhi: Gautam Book Centre, 2008, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

(Sikhs of Chamar caste) and the title was changed to 'Sikh Light Infantry' as objections were raised by the soldiers themselves because of the inferiority and untouchability stigma associated with the caste identification<sup>97</sup>.

The Mazhabis were from the untouchable caste, but were violent and aggressive by nature. In fact, they were classified as criminal tribes by the British. Maharaja Ranjit Singh tried to harness the fighting prowess of the Mazhabis and recruited them into his armies, but this was not accepted by the other high castes. Consequently, the Mazhabis were separated into companies, who were attached to the high caste battalions. The Dogra Raja Gulab Singh, who was a former minister of the KhalsaDarbar under Ranjit Singh, recruited the Mazhabis into contingents called the Pioneers when he became the Maharaja of Kashmir. The pioneers were engaged for canal, bridge and road construction, but were able to defend themselves and ward off attackers unlike ordinary labourers<sup>98</sup>. Upon the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857, the Mazhabis were absorbed in the same capacity as Pioneers in the British Indian army, to counterbalance the high caste Poorbiah sepoys from Bihar-Bengal who were on the forefront of the revolt.

The Mazhabis who were converts from among the '*Chuhra*' caste of Sikhs were not really preferred for recruitment as soldiers, but were enlisted for auxiliary work such as road construction and other menial jobs. It was on the recommendation of Judicial Commissioner, Montgomery of the Punjab that the Mazhabi Sikhs were recruited as soldiers during the revolt for the first time. "They acquitted themselves commendably as soldiers and have continued to be recruited to the infantry since 1857"<sup>99</sup>.

The Mazhabi Pioneers cemented their reputation at the siege of Delhi where they played a sterling role. The Mazhabis were also utilised as soldiers and sent to various theatres such as China, Africa, Europe and the Middle East during the course of the Great War and even before.

Stephan Cohen in his study of the Caste System and its impact on the Indian Army expounds that political systems draw heavily on low castes for manpower when they are engaged in conflict where manpower is needed in large numbers. When the

---

<sup>97</sup>Basham. *The Untouchables*, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup> A.L. Basham, *The Untouchables: The Maharas and Mazabis*. Delhi: Gautam Book Centre, 2008, p. 45.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

conflict is long drawn out and intense, this need becomes all the more pressing as the men are considered expendable<sup>100</sup>. Later, when the Sikhs were sent overseas during the war, they not only served in three All Sikh class regiments, but also in individual companies or squadrons, that formed a part of other regiments.

In 1914-1918, the Mazhabis were recruited heavily as the paucity of the high caste Jats was felt because the recruitment regions were rendered bare owing to the relentless recruiting. The Mazhabis after being recruited heavily were sent abroad to serve. In a caste-ridden society, becoming a soldier increased one's social standing by giving the glory of fighting for the Government and going abroad to oneself and one's kin and there was no dearth of recruits from the lower castes who were willing to enlist. After the War, there was a sharp decline in the need for the regiments and the Mazhabis were retrenched and absorbed into the Sappers and Miners or retired prematurely.

### **Non-Jat Castes and Martial Identity of Sikhs in General**

The Non-Jat and even the untouchable castes from amongst the Sikhs such as Mazhabi Sikhs had certain distinguishing characteristics. MacMunn further expounds about castes within Sikhism by pointing out that the Khatri who had accepted Sikhism were the business community. The farmers or Jats were always considered a little thick in the head but served the community and village with honour and distinction. The Lobana were another caste from where the menfolk have always done well as soldiers, though they were not very enlisted in great numbers<sup>101</sup>.

The expediency and larger numbers required by the army, especially at the time of the Great War, when casualties were phenomenally high, observation by MacMunn about Sikh castes become even more relevant. MacMunn observed that the harder and more adaptable and vigorous races of the north, as represented by the Jats have made British recruiters also examine the other Sikh castes. Many less swashbuckling and humbler Sikh communities other than the Jats such as *Sainis* or gardeners, *Kumboh* Sikhs, a cultivating race of putative foreign origin, of who some are Sikhs, the artificer classes, have all been swept into the military net. This has been made

---

<sup>100</sup> Stephen. Cohen, '*Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics and the Indian Army*', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 28 (3), 1969, p. 454.

<sup>101</sup> MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 209.

possible only because they were Sikhs and had been reared in the last centuries in the traditions of the Khalsa<sup>102</sup>.

In this regard, the British were particularly appreciative of the contributions of another Sikh community- that of the Mazhabi Sikhs as they were seen to form a faithful portion of the Sikh soldiery<sup>103</sup>. The Mazhabis served as the Sikh pioneer regiments and the term Mazabi means faithful. This was because of the sterling service to Sikhism provided by two men of this caste who were sweepers of outcaste tribe but who brought back the crucified body head of Teg Bahadur from Delhi where he was martyred to Guru Gobind Singh in the Punjab<sup>104</sup>. The descendants of the outcaste tribe, and probably those outcastes whom they converted to Sikhism, also served under Ranjit Singh. They were formed into a pioneer regiment for service before Delhi (in the 1857 siege), since when their courage and general good qualities have made them famous for the work of the military pioneer<sup>105</sup>.

In fact, the over-recruitment, and the intense pressure on recruiting from the small catchment area of the Punjab was being acutely realized even in 1911, when MacMunn's book was published. As he himself frankly admitted that the Sikhs had become 'worldwide adventurers', as they had been enlisted for tours of duty in other nations and had visited countries in Africa, China, or the East, where Sikhs served in the army, military and civilian police and were also found as watchman in many private firms. The Sikhs were not averse to overseas travel in search of economic opportunity or reward, as were other Indian races at the time. Also, the main lure was not far to seek. "High pay is what attracts him, and wealth to spend on his land when he returns home"<sup>106</sup>

Excessive demands of this kind, and the mandatory requirement to recruit from the 'martial races', combined with the bubonic plague of 1896, that had severely depleted the population, had certainly 'made the Sikh recruiting market tight, and there is little doubt that we have, if anything, over recruited from this nationality'<sup>107</sup>.

---

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>103</sup>J. Singh, 'Mazhabi Sikhs in the British Army in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947'. *The Criterion* Vol7, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 59-64.

<sup>104</sup>Kavita Singh, 'A Study of Visual Narratives on the Life of Guru TeghBahadur'. *Gyankosh* Vol III, Dec 2020, pp. 11-28.

<sup>105</sup>MacMunn, *Armies*, p. 330.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 338.

For the Sikhs, turning up for recruitment drives in large numbers and gearing up to meet the challenge posed by the first World War was a natural progression of the martial traditions which were a part of their core belief system. A Sikh is quoted by David Omissi in a letter where he is explaining the reasons why the Sikhs are so sought after as soldiers. The soldier says that they have no fear as lakhs of their numbers have died in the battlefields. Sikhs do not consume tobacco and enlisted boldly and freely to obtain benefits from the *Sirkar* (government)<sup>108</sup>.

### **The Revolt of 1857**

The year, 1857 was a watershed year in the history of the British in India. This was the year in which a large region of North India plunged into sudden and violent rebellion and the British hold over India seemed to be shaken to its foundations.<sup>109</sup> The British Indian Empire trembled in the balance for several tense and desperate months as the British fought frantically to regain control and eliminate the disgruntled sepoys and other elements from central and eastern India who were at the helm of the revolt. The Bengal Army Sepoys proved themselves to be steadfastly committed<sup>110</sup> to the overthrow of the British rule which they had endured for a hundred years since 1757. These were the same sepoys who had been “continuously employed in pursuing the frenzied territorial ambitions of free-trade Britain.”<sup>111</sup>

**Table 2.1- The Composition of the Army of the Presidencies, 1857**

<b>Army</b>	<b>Cavalry Regiments</b>	<b>Infantry Regiments</b>
<b>Bengal</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Madras</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Bombay</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Total “Native” Army</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>211</b>

Source: K.M.L. Saxena, *The Military System of India, 1850-1900* (1974). New Delhi & Jullundur: Sterling Publishers, p. 119.

<sup>108</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 199.

<sup>109</sup>Thomas R. Metcalfe, *Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1970*. Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 210-214.

<sup>110</sup>Irfan. Habib, ‘The Coming of 1857’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-4, Jan- Apr, 1998, pp. 6-15.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

In 1857, the Indian army had a majority of Bengal Army sepoys, who were almost completely recruited from the high caste *purbiyas*. In fact, there had been a regulation issued in 1855, prohibiting the low caste men from enlisting in the Bengal Army<sup>112</sup>. There were only about 30,000 Punjabis (including Sikhs) in the Army. This composition was to change dramatically, immediately following the outbreak of the 1857 revolt, with new units raised rapidly by Henry Lawrence (Chief Commissioner of the Punjab) after May 1857<sup>113</sup>.

Out of the Sikh regiments that played such a critical role in defence of the British cause, “some were raised just before the Mutiny, such as the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> Sikhs, the regiments of Ferozepur and Ludhiana, or the 35<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> (originally a military police corps) are equally famous, as are those regiments that enlist class squadrons and companies of Sikhs, and the regiments of Pioneers.”<sup>114</sup>

It was at this trying time for the British that the Sikhs stepped into the breach caused by the revolt of the bulk of the British Indian army, especially the sepoys from central and eastern India. Henry Lawrence, the British resident in Lucknow had identified the Sikhs as being ‘most loyal *Hindustanees*’<sup>115</sup> and formed a ‘select and faithful army’ consisting of English regiment and artillery and two regiments of Sikhs whose loyalty to the British had been tried and tested<sup>116</sup>. If the Sikhs and Punjab had declared for the revolutionaries at this point, India would certainly have been lost by the British. In this connection, V. D. Savarkar remarks comments in his book on how the Punjab would have been the greatest terror for the British, if the Sikhs had attacked them from their rear as Delhi was doing from the front. The princely states of Jind, Nabha and Patiala rendered immense service by guarding all the highways to the Punjab and thus facilitating the critical supply lines that brought much needed corn, men and ammunition from the Punjab into the English camp<sup>117</sup>.

---

<sup>112</sup>David. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, London: Macmillan, 1994, p. 48.

<sup>113</sup>Mazumdar, *Making of the Indian Army*, p. 11.

<sup>114</sup>MacMunn, *The Armies*, p. 115.

<sup>115</sup>V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*, Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1947, p. 258.

Savarkar, *Indian War*, p. 87.

<sup>116</sup>Savarkar, *Indian War*, p. 87.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

In the siege of the small fort in Arrah in Bihar, which was defended against the rebels by 25 Englishmen and 50 Sikhs, when the rebels cut off the water supply to the Fort, the Sikhs dug a well within 24 hours. “And while this work was going on, they were, at the same time, fighting like demons.”<sup>118</sup>The rebels continually berated the Sikhs as being traitors to their country and exhorted them to join the rebels, but threats, recriminations, appeals or exhortations had no effect. Even in the relief of the siege, the Sikhs were in the forefront under the leadership of Captain Dunbar.

In the recapture of Delhi, there were five thousand Sikhs out of the total force of eleven thousand, and they departed themselves with their usual exceptional bravery and tenacity. In the construction of the battery, The Indians on the English side worked so painstakingly in spite of the artillery fire of Delhi (Rebel Forces), that the British eyewitness Forrest was forced to commend them in his memoirs of the Battle for Delhi, as quoted by Savarkar in his book. Forrest said that the bravery of the natives ( Sikhs) was exceptional and whenever they lost a comrade in the firing, they would stop work for a minute, shed a tear or two, put the body in the line of corpses and begin work again in that terrible place.<sup>119</sup>

Hope, another English officer describes the reaction of the Sikhs to the relentless barrage of grapeshot and artillery fire that was unleashed by the rebels. ‘Not a man moved from his place, except by death. The native cavalymen remained firm. Their valour is unparalleled. When I began to encourage them, they said: Do not be anxious! We will stand this fire as long as you wish!’<sup>120</sup>

In each and every battle of 1857, the rebels faced an implacable enemy in the Sikhs. There is an interesting possible explanation for this given by Foley. Quoting Macauliffe, Foley writes that the words of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur inspired the Sikhs in their assault on Delhi in 1857. The story as narrated by Macauliffe in his book is that Guru Tegh Bahadur was on the top story of his fortified prison, the Emperor Aurangzeb thought he saw him looking towards the south in the direction of the Imperial zenana. He was sent for the next day, and charged with this grave breach of Oriental etiquette and propriety. The Guru replied, ‘Emperor Aurangzeb, I was on the top story of my prison, but I was not looking at thy private apartments or at thy

---

<sup>118</sup>Savarkar, *Indian War*, p. 384.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 385

<sup>120</sup>J. H. Grant, *Incidents in the Sepoy War: 1857-58*. London: Blackwood, 1874, p. 245.



queens. I was looking in the direction of the Europeans who are coming from beyond the seas to tear down thy pardas and destroy thine empire'. Sikh writers state that these words became the battle-cry of the Sikhs in the assault on the mutineers in Digli (Delhi) in 1857, under General John Nicholson, and that thus the prophecy of the ninth Guru was gloriously fulfilled<sup>121</sup>.

In the fight for the relief of Lucknow, the battle for entering the breach in Sikander Bagh was a contest between the Sikhs under Powell, and the Scottish Highlanders, under Ewart. There was a race to enter first and the Sikhs won, even though the first Sikh to enter was instantly shot dead<sup>122</sup>.

It was this forge of the scorching summer of 1857 in which the Sikhs held fast and proved themselves to the British as being the most dependable, courageous and loyal in India. They also proved themselves to be the most suitable for the British purposes amongst all the soldiery found in the Indian military labour market<sup>123</sup>. 1857 was also the eventful year that led to the complete revision or even overhauling of the British systems in India. This included the political (Administration was directly taken over by the British crown from the East Indian Company), economic and military systems. In the military aspect, that holds primacy in regard to this study, the martial race theory was propounded and gained sufficient currency, support and significance to become the basis for all future recruitment in the British Indian Army.

### **The Evolution of the Martial Race Theory**

The Martial Race theory contributed in a large measure to the self-identification of the Sikh soldier and it needs to be looked at carefully. The martial race theory had such a

---

<sup>121</sup>Foley, *Dining alone in Rawalpindi?* pp. 7-32.

<sup>122</sup>Savarkar, *The Indian War*, p. 372.

<sup>123</sup> H. A. Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethno-History of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan 1450-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 162. The work elucidates on a very interesting concept of how by virtue of being a largely rural based, but populous country, India was able to provide a ready and willing military labor market to the Islamic and later the Christian and British colonial conquerors who held political sway in India. These foreign powers were able to make use of the military talent available in India to defeat local forces and maintain and perpetuate their own rule for generations. This military labor market was vital for state formation and played the role of an active and vibrant agent for social change and rural mobility. Although Kolff's research and book centers on the period 1450-1850, but the underlying context is applicable to the situation in Punjab from 1849 onwards too, in relation to the annexation and later incorporation of the rural predominantly Jat peasantry into the British Indian army in huge numbers.

wide acceptance at one time that it dominated the military mind completely, especially in India. In this study, this researcher has tried to evaluate the Martial race theory to explain the high degree of motivation and willingness to die for the British cause which the soldiers displayed and try to seek its reasons and background. The importance of this theory in the time and age under study cannot be over emphasised. It was also one of the overriding factors why Punjab became the main region for recruitment post 1857 for the British Indian Army. Overwhelming recruitment from this region led to what has been termed as the ‘Punjabisation’<sup>124</sup> of the British Indian army.

The British understood early on that in a deeply conservative, strictly hierarchical and moribund society such as India, it was vital that ‘the forging of a martial identity’ should be synchronous with ‘collective solidarity and sense of purpose’,<sup>125</sup> and this would be easier to engender in a body of men who were already united by clan, community, religion and caste. Once this identity was engendered, it had to be fostered and strengthened. This was possible through the maintenance of martial distinction, building up of a distinctive identity, leadership of inspiring officers and regimental and unit glorification to foster pride and close affiliation with the unit.

On the basis of his observations, Robert Orme in 1750 drew up a categorisation of ‘martial races’<sup>126</sup>. He based this on the dietary habits and climatic zones and put forward the claim that people from the colder, wheat eating zones tend to be more aggressive, hardier, active and physically stronger than people from warmer, rice eating zones in the India sub-continent. The East Indian Company, who was then in power, found veracity in this contention and confined the recruitments to villages that fell in the wheat zone and within the regions it had already conquered.

After the Battle of Plassey which it won, the Company started recruiting in Bengal Presidency as it felt that the Nawab of Bengal’s army was sorely lacking in strength and capability but this was not easy, as there was a requirement of recruiting soldiers

---

<sup>124</sup>Syed Hussain Soherwardi, *Punjabisation in the British Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2005, p. 27. Punjabisation refers to a large scale recruitment that happened for the British Indian Army from the Punjab, making it the predominant region where the British Indian Army found its soldiers.

<sup>125</sup>Rob Johnson (ed.) *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup>Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire*. London, Reprint New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1805, reprinted 1974, p. 69.

who were at least 5 feet 7 inches tall and it was difficult to find men who met this standard in Bengal. By the 1770s, recruitment was being done from the North of India, where the men were taller and hardier and their self-perception as being from the ‘warrior races and classes’ was strong. The British inducement of rupees six as pay and pension, which was a huge attraction, made the sturdy peasants flock to fill the recruitment lists.<sup>127</sup>

There was another critical aspect to recruiting these sturdier and potentially troublesome recruits. The Army provided perfect employment for unskilled but robust men who needed an outlet for their energy and could foment disorder if not gainfully employed. This strategy was also used for men in Europe and North America who were recruited by the British in order to prevent them from joining the rebels like the British encountered in the Jacobite uprising of Scotland in 1745. Maintenance of Civil order and the management of populations had acquired great significance for the British and Robert Brooke was made in charge of recruiting a regiment to absorb selected hill raiders and put them to use in the pacification and policing of their own homelands<sup>128</sup>.

This brilliant strategy was very successful for a century and Punjab Frontier Force and the Khyber rifles etc. did sterling work for the British in keeping the turbulent frontier reasonably well managed<sup>129</sup>. It comes as no surprise therefore that ‘much of the Indian Army in the nineteenth century was recruited from more autonomous communities like the Punjab, or mountainous frontier regions because they showed little sympathy with the majority of the population of the subcontinent.’<sup>130</sup>

Sikhs, according to Warren Hastings in 1784, are “eminently fit for the military career” due to their “body frame and habits of life”<sup>131</sup>. The creation of the Khalsa, a religious order established by the tenth Guru of Sikhism Guru Gobind Singh, to protect the religion, is related to the representation of Sikhs as warriors<sup>132</sup>.

---

<sup>127</sup> Bruce Lenman, *Britain's Colonial Wars*. London: Pearson, 2001, p. 100.

<sup>128</sup> Johnson, *The British Indian Army*, p. 156.

<sup>129</sup> Rob Jonson (ed.) (2014). *The British Army: Virtue and Necessity* p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> Amandeep Singh Madra, Parmjit Singh, *Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves: Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606–1809)*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, US, 2004, p. 76.

<sup>132</sup> Jagtar Singh Grewal, *Sikh Identity, the Akalis and Khalistan*, Jagtar Singh Grewal and InduBangaed., *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1998, pp. 65–103.

Importantly, its position was romanticised as a valiant army fighting Mughal oppression and it is this impression that is ingrained in Sikh culture.

According to Purnima Dhavan, the creation of the Khalsa should be viewed as a multifaceted organisation rather than a strictly religious one.<sup>133</sup> Despite the political motivations, the colonial government shared the vision of codifying Sikhism in order to revive the faith. According to Ballantyne,<sup>134</sup> this was due to supposed parallels between Sikhism and the British, which contributed to the identification of Sikhism as rational in comparison to other parts of the Indian population who rebelled in 1857. Both sides obviously desired something from the other: the primacy of Sikhism for the former and the continuity of British rule for the latter. This exemplifies the pacts that form imperial rule. It was profitable on both sides to integrate Sikhs into the British Raj<sup>135</sup>.

‘Sikhs, who from being quiet and peaceable, became at once a war-like tribe, spreading fear and desolation everywhere they went,’ wrote early British writers such as McGregor. This historical military opinion remained constant during British debate on Sikhs. There has been a lot of talk about Sikh military practises. It's important to note, however, that it wasn't just a British mandate. Self-image of the various Indian communities was important for the development of martiality, particularly among Sikhs, as Omissi<sup>136</sup> points out, due to political developments during the time.

### **Circumstances Leading to the development of the Martial Race Theory**

After the revolt of 1857, which had shaken the British Empire in India right down to its very roots, the British administrators were forced to pause and re-evaluate everything concerning their Indian Empire. The decision makers in London, right from the Queen to Parliament and in India, took a hard look at the realities that were revealed by what was termed by the English as a mere ‘sepoy mutiny’. There was the need to evaluate the reasons and causes that had led to the outbreak across many parts of the India and put systems in place which would prevent the reoccurrence of such an

---

<sup>133</sup>Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699–1799*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 40.

<sup>134</sup>Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*. Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 38.

<sup>135</sup>Khushwant. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2, New Jersey: Princeton, 1996, p. 88.

<sup>136</sup>Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 76.

event.<sup>137</sup> Accordingly, there was an intense introspection undertaken at every level and discussions about how to prevent the reoccurrence of a cohesive and powerful outbreak such as the events of the summer of 1857.

The experiences, observations, events and assessments made by the British during the days of the revolt of 1857<sup>138</sup> and the connections of trust formed between the soldiers (British and Indian) in those trying days were carefully cultivated by the British subsequently. The Revolt of 1857 generated public interest hitherto unseen in Britain, and was much more than merely a military crisis, with deep interconnections with the political, administrative, social and economic spheres.<sup>139</sup> It led to a keen reassessment of the cultural, social and structural basis, and this introspection and discourse provided the conditions that precipitated a new set of linkages in circles, of which the military was one of the most critical and central themes.

As Heather Street observes, there were three groups of soldiers who came to be feted above all others as representatives of collective heroism. The Highland Scots, Punjabi Sikhs and Nepali Gurkhas and there were countless stories that celebrated their valour, ferocity and gallantry. On the basis of these and the real need that the British had to cultivate a committed soldiery in India, dedicated to their causes and the upholding of their colonial interests, new connections were articulated between British soldiers and the most loyal Indian soldiers.<sup>140</sup> Military service in the empire, ideal masculinity and racial superiority were all interconnected in this aspect.<sup>141</sup>

Interestingly, Warren Hastings had predicted that local traditions and caste affiliations must be absorbed, upheld and strengthened as they would 'prevent the danger that (Indians) would be united and embodied as an armed nation after the example of the Sikhs... and become too formidable for their rulers.'<sup>142</sup>

Till the revolt of 1857, the special caste privileges and taboos were preserved and maintained in Indian regiments to develop self-esteem and 'elite' status in the soldiers, increase recruitment, separate the soldier from the population, and develop

---

<sup>137</sup>R. Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence, with portraits and maps*. Vol. 2, London: Blackstone, 1883, p. 75.

<sup>138</sup>Streets, *Martial Race*, p. 98.

<sup>139</sup> Michael. Edwardes, *The Necessary Hell: John and Henry Lawrence and the Indian Empire*, London: Cassell, 1958, p. 69.

<sup>140</sup>Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 17.

<sup>141</sup>Streets, *Martial Race*, p. 90.

<sup>142</sup> Jonson (ed.), *The British Army*, p. 5.

loyalty to the Company above the local population.<sup>143</sup> Christian missionaries were prevented from being active as Lord Cornwallis, the Commander-in-Chief, voiced the concern that they “might endanger a government which owes its principal support to a native army composed of men of high caste whose fidelity and affections we have hitherto secured” by observing and preserving their religious proclivities, scruples and superstitions<sup>144</sup>. Consequently, the British succeeded in imbuing the soldiers with a ‘*esprit` de corps* and a professional indifference to outsiders.<sup>145</sup>

The issue was the Russian Empire's expansion, which had landed just 400 miles from Punjab.<sup>146</sup> The threats to India were geographically bound, which explains why position became a factor in martial race thought. The Eden Commission was formed in 1879 to reassess the army in light of the new problems that the Raj was facing. As a result of these emerging challenges, the recruitment priority was moved to North India. Around this time, the idea of enlisting the aid of martial races started to gain momentum. The Bengal army was 44 percent Punjabi before the Commission, in 1875, so this change was already underway.<sup>147</sup>

In 1895, the Indian army was reorganised and the Presidency Armies were dissolved to create a single unified Indian Army with four regional commands. Four or five regiments were now linked to a regimental training centre (45 in total) and a constant and generalised flow of training, garrison duty and operational guidelines were put in place.<sup>148</sup>

Another strong factor that influenced the re-evaluation of the Military Recruitment and formation of the Martial Race Theory was the rise of the continental powers such as Russia, Germany, France, Belgium, Portugal and Netherlands. With the race for colonies started a contest for having the most dependable, strong and effective military machine to support the global expansion aspirations of these major European powers. The composition, recruitment, training and efficacy of the British Army would enable it to favourably compare and compete with the vast conscripted armies

---

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>144</sup>Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 60.

<sup>145</sup>Jonson (ed.).*The British Army*, p.6.

<sup>146</sup>S. Mazumdar, ‘Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States’, *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*, University of California Press, 1984, p. 318.

<sup>147</sup>Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, p. 87.

<sup>148</sup>G. W. Allport, *Dispatches to India and Bengal, 1829. The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*, London: India Office Library, 2005, p. 203.

of Imperialist Russia, Napoleonic France and Unified Germany. India was a coveted colonial region and European threats to wrench India away from the British became imminent. The military administrators in India and London envisaged the British and Indian armies as a combined and complimentary force to defend India against a European enemy.<sup>149</sup>

Hence, the Martial Race Theory was the consequence of several factors at full play, and newly emergent socio-political and ideological realities in the 1870s. The Martial Race Theory as it evolved was largely artificial construction, combined various distinct beliefs and practises as observed by the British in the Indian territories they had conquered. As the area under the British hegemony increased, so did the diversity of races, communities, regional social systems and distinctions that the British had to contend with, in their struggle to not only subjugate, but also later, manage and repress the huge sub-continent under their control.

### **The Ideological Pillars of the Martial Race Theory**

The Martial Race theory rested on the contention that certain races in India were ‘naturally war-like’, and were eminently suited for martial and army recruitment while others were naturally unsuitable. The Russian threat that had emerged in the 1870s to the British Empire in India and had led to the ‘Great game’ also lent credence to their theory.

In this regard, MacMunn made a startling observation that summarises the difference between how soldiery and the Army was perceived in the West and the East. In the East, becoming a soldier is a distinction that is afforded to only a few castes, clans and classes, whereas others are not considered to have the courage or confidence necessary to bear arms. ‘The existence of this condition complicates the question of enlistment in India and renders any form of *levy en masse* impossible.’<sup>150</sup>

MacMunn further went on to explain the races or “people by tribes from whom we take soldiers in India”<sup>151</sup> in which he listed the ancient Aryans (Rajputs, Brahman), Jats and Gujjars, pathans and Moguls of India, Pathans and Afghans outside India and the Gurkhas. These were further divided by religion and also by country. As for the

---

<sup>149</sup>Jonson (ed.). *The British Army*, p. 5.

<sup>150</sup>MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 310.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311.

Sikhs, he described them as that portion of the Jat race from Punjab which embraced the 'Calvinistic reformed Hindu teaching of the Sikh Gurus'. Although, a few pages later in his book, while describing the military classes of the Punjab, MacMunn contradicts himself when he writes that Sikhs are not a race per se, but a 'numerous religious sect, which starting as persecuted sect of reformers, became a powerful sect embracing many of all the Hindu tribes and races of the Punjab'<sup>152</sup>.

Kaushik Roy puts forward the contention that the Martial Races was a flawed concept and was a 'bundle of contradictory ideas' that were innovations in theory that fostered the massive recruitment in the Punjab that took place between 1914-1918, 'with maximum intensifications of recruitment occurring during 1917 and 1918'<sup>153</sup>.

### **General Fredrick Roberts and the Martial Races**

The main and most influential proponent of the Martial Race Theory was General Fredrick Roberts. He actually 'just systemised and publicised the various strands of ideas about the martial races that were already in vogue.'<sup>154</sup> Roberts believed that the 'Wheat eating small peasants and communities inhabiting the cold frontier regions were martial...as the heat of India resulted in the degeneration of the martial capabilities.'<sup>155</sup>

His socio-cultural leanings and fascination with the saviours of 1857- The Sikhs and Gurkhas led him to project his personal convictions into the wider public sphere on the back of privileged access to the Victorian media. His views and opinions were fundamental in bringing change to the British Indian Army as he was the Commander in Chief from 1885-1893, when the danger from Imperialist Russia to the Indian Empire was a very tangible one. General Roberts was a charismatic and influential man who firmly believed that 'fighting Russia in Europe with British troops was quite different to defending India with its untrustworthy inhabitants and native army'<sup>156</sup>.

---

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>153</sup>K. Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880- 1918', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp.1310-1347.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1312.

<sup>155</sup> Field Marshall Lord Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, London, 1897, Reprint New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005, p. 532.

<sup>156</sup>Masson, *Matter of Honour*, p. 335.



The Russians were a trained and war hardened army and the prospect of facing them on Indian soil, with largely Indian sepoy, filled General Roberts with apprehension.<sup>157</sup>

The media (newspapers, journals and coverage of public lectures and private discourses) was an important tool<sup>158</sup> that helped shape public perception and sentiment in Victorian Britain.<sup>159</sup> General Roberts was a long-time proponent of the forward policy in Afghanistan.<sup>160</sup> He had served as the quarter-master general of the Indian army and also looked after the intelligence gathering and operations, during the operations against the Afghans that precipitated the second Afghan war.

The Second Afghan War, as was very soon evident, achieved little beyond adding to the Anglophobia amongst the border tribes and Afghans in general. General Roberts, who was a pro- active member of the ‘forward camp’ still clung to their strong belief that Anglo-Russian war was inevitable. General Roberts also fervently believed that in such a scenario, the Indian Army, composed of predominantly Hindu Bengali and South Indian sepoy, would prove to be no match for the Russian soldiers. The British Indian army had an overriding preponderance of sepoy, and the European soldiers were few and far between.

In 1884, just before being appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, he confessed his forebodings when he wrote, ‘Only a limited number of our native troops could be depended upon to fight against a European enemy, and unless we show a bold front...even these would assuredly question us<sup>161</sup>.’ An estimation of the high regard which General Roberts had of the Sikhs and Gurkhas can be gauged from the fact that in the fourth paragraph of the Preface to the First edition of his book, he praises them by acknowledging that, ‘Delhi could not have been taken without Sikhs and Gurkhas’<sup>162</sup>. Roberts wrote further that although the ‘old native army had been fairly dependable’, it was only so in contests against men of same calibre as themselves. When they came into contact with the Sikhs, the ‘old native army was

---

<sup>157</sup>Roy, *Race and Recruitment*, p.1327.

<sup>158</sup>Ian Talbot, ‘British Rule in the Punjab, 1849-1947: Characteristics and Consequences’, *London Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 19, 1991, No 2, pp. 232-256.

<sup>159</sup>Streets. *Martial Races*, p. 43.

<sup>160</sup>James Lawrence, *Raj - The Making of British India*, London: Abacus, 1997, p. 379.

<sup>161</sup>Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 293.

<sup>162</sup>Roberts, *Forty One Years*, Preface, p. 23.

found wanting and it was clear that they were overmatched, and ‘that they were unable to cope with the hardier races of the north.’<sup>163</sup>

This was the time when the veracity of the martial race recruitment started gaining full clarity and justification in General Roberts’ mind as the only viable alternative if the British Indian empire was to be saved from conquest by the Russians.<sup>164</sup> The Peel Commission’s recommendations advocating the balancing of the three Presidency Armies was also irrelevant by this time in the 1880s as the functions of the Army itself had transformed, in the wake of the European (Russian) threat to India.<sup>165</sup> The British felt confident that now that a revolt and mutiny of the scale and seriousness of 1857 would not be possible any more in India<sup>166</sup> and since the territories under their control had been well consolidated and integrated, the British Indian Army was not needed for merely maintaining internal peace and order, “but the possibility of external complications becoming daily more apparent, circumstances and our requirements were completely altered, and it had become essential to have in the ranks of our native Army men who could confidently be trusted to take their share of fighting against a European foe.”<sup>167</sup>

In the Census report of 1881, Ibbetson comments that in the Punjab, the most marked characteristic of the Hindu was thrift, of the Sikh bravery and of the Muhammadan Pride. Roberts was also a first-hand witness to the loyalty, fealty and courage of the Sikhs and writes of his orderlies in the Kurram Expedition in the most glowing terms. He says that unmindful of their own safety, the Sikhs had too much ‘self-sacrificing courage’ and saved his life on many occasions. He also saw one of the Sikhs standing ‘with his arms stretched out trying to screen me from the enemy, which he could easily do, for he was a grand specimen of a man, a head and shoulders taller than myself.’<sup>168</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>164</sup> Streets. *Martial Races*, p. 27.

<sup>165</sup> Farewell Byron, *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947*, New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1989, p. 49.

<sup>166</sup> Letter of Landsdowne to SOS, in the *Military Dispatch from India*, 14 August 1885, quoted in Saxena, *Military Systems*, p. 135. Viceroy Landsdowne wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State that a military insurrection of the kind that ‘shook the foundations of our power in 1857’ would be ‘almost impossible’ to emulate.

<sup>167</sup> Roberts, *Forty One years*, p. 532.

<sup>168</sup> Roberts, *Forty One Years*, p. 361.

In his scheme for the reorganisation of the British Army in India, Roberts propounded the need to ‘get rid of every sepoy, not required for local purposes, from the Madras Army and to replace them with soldiers of the most warlike races.’<sup>169</sup> He further elaborated this by saying that it was ‘not dictated by question of efficiency, but of courage and physique; in these two essentials, the sepoys of Lower India are wanting.’<sup>170</sup> Roberts believed that there could be no comparison made<sup>171</sup> between the ‘martial values of a regiment recruited amongst the Gurkhas of Nepal or the warlike races of Northern India, and those recruited from the effeminate peoples of the South.’<sup>172</sup>

At first, this opinion of Roberts about the comparative fighting qualities depending on race was not universally accepted. He himself writes of his disbelief when he found that his theories did not have the support he thought inevitable. “How little this was understood, even by those who had spent a great part of their service in India, was a marvel to me... and I was in despair at not being able to get people to see the matter with my eyes.”<sup>173</sup>

In 1857, the Bengal regiments, when they were first “leavened with a considerable number of Muhammadans, and after the Sikh wars with some Sikhs’ did not take kindly to the Sikhs, and they ‘by reason of their wild appearance, were not welcomed, and were only enlisted in deference to stringent order of the Government.’”<sup>174</sup>

MacMunn writes of the reaction of these Sikhs at the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857, when in their initial confusion, and since they were isolated in the Bengal regiments, the Sikhs posted in other areas, ‘joined in the Mutiny in the first instance, while their compatriots flocked to the British standards’.<sup>175</sup>

General Roberts was of the firm opinion that these warlike and brave warriors could be found among the rural communities in certain parts of India, whereas the majority of Indians were pacific and unwarlike by nature, inclination and training.

---

<sup>169</sup>Robson, 1993, p 352; Streets, 2004, pp. 98-100.

<sup>170</sup>Roberts to Stewart (G-I-C 1881-1885), June 30, 1882. MP, p. 258.

<sup>171</sup>Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 17.

<sup>172</sup> Roberts, *Forty One Years*, Vol II, p. 532.

<sup>173</sup>Roberts, *Forty One Years*, Vol II, p. 521

<sup>174</sup>MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 210.

<sup>175</sup>Macmunn, *Armies of India*, p. 215.

Communities of North West Frontier province, Rajputana, Punjab, United Provinces and Nepal were the favoured recruiting grounds.<sup>176</sup>

According to Peter Karston,<sup>177</sup> the process of familiarising recruits with the military more and preparing them for their duty has two dimensions- firstly to impart the goals and policies of the military trainers and secondly the effect that this training has on the trainees. The British had perfected a system whereby they were able to garner, marshal and commandeer the best of the raw recruits from the Sikh villages from the demarcated premier recruiting regions and areas in the Punjab and weld them speedily into a well-integrated and formidable fighting force that was highly committed and disciplined. The various training and recruiting manuals that were prevalent and followed at the time were engineered to attain this very purpose.

For the purpose of recruitment, as per the Handbook of the Sikhs, Major Falcon specified that

1. The value of Sikh recruits and the characteristics they are likely to show themselves possessed of, depends more upon the districts they come from than upon the tribe they belong to.
2. The reason why the recruit's tribe is important is because... he becomes a Sikh by initiation and is not born one, still his value as a military Sikh depends on what stock he came of i.e. his hereditary.
3. The district of recruitment was ranked as being more important than tribe because although a man belonged to a good Sikh tribe, but coming from a non-Sikh (dominant) district (he may not prove to be as good).<sup>178</sup>

The Sikhs were mindful and grateful towards Lord Roberts for their recognition as martial races. In the farewell address by the Sikhs of Lahore to Lord Roberts at his departure from India in 1893, the address of the Sikh leader who spoke spelled this feeling out clearly

---

<sup>176</sup>Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 97.

<sup>177</sup>P. Karsten, 'The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored'. *American Quarterly*, 36(3), 1989, pp. 389-418.

<sup>178</sup>Falcon, *Handbook of the Sikhs*, p. 61.

“The Sikhs, in particular are, more than any other community in India, indebted to your Lordship. We find in Your Excellency a true friend of the Sikh community- a community which is always devoted heart and soul in the service of her Most Gracious Majesty The Empress of India. The Sikhs are said to be born soldiers...unfortunately they do not have the opportunity of fully developing their mental powers, so as to enable them to advance with the spirit of the age... Your Excellency was the first to see the Sikhs refined and educated by establishing a Central College in the Punjab for use of the Sikh people<sup>179</sup>.”

Already by 1914, Punjab contributed about half of the total Armed Forces in India and during the war, it was to be the preferred hunting ground for more recruits<sup>180</sup>. Thomas R. Metcalfe, in his *Ideologies of the Raj*, attempts to explain<sup>181</sup> by elaborating on how the Victorians tried to bring order and classify India’s ‘difference’ in accordance with scientific systems of ‘knowing’, by means of culture, race, region and religion’. On one of the categorizations in which Indians were attempted to be confined was on the basis of ‘race’ and it was in this categorization, that the martial race theory found its strongest advocates and proponents. A perceived sense of martial suitability was assigned to the northern people as contrasted with the rest of India, particularly South India and Bengal. The British Indian army was driven by certain imperatives and ‘inbred martial skill’, was considered a prerequisite<sup>182</sup>. Even a civilian administrator such as Sir Michael O Dwyer, who was the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab during the war years, considered the Sikhs to be prime warriors.

Critics of the Martial Race Theory call it an eclectic collection of unfounded beliefs that were largely untested and often contradictory. PremChowdhry reflects that the martial castes and martial recruitment ‘structurally and ideologically identified with and privileged those trends of existing masculinities in this region which suited their power structure and empire building<sup>183</sup>’. It was a system that was based on the

---

<sup>179</sup>Roberts, *Forty One Years*, Appendix XII- *Address of the Sikhs of Punjab to Lord Roberts on his visit to Lahore before his departure from India*, p. 568.

<sup>180</sup>Mentioned in similar terms in Talbot, 1988, p. 46; Van Koski, 1995, p. 59; Omissi, 1999, p. 356; Tan, 2000, p. 376; Streets, 2004, p. 100.

<sup>181</sup>Thomas R. Metcalfe, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1934, reprinted 2005, 2010, p. 85.

<sup>182</sup>Macmunn, *Armies of India*. P 129

<sup>183</sup>Prem. Chowdhry, ‘Militarized Masculinities: Shaped and Reshaped in Colonial South-East Punjab’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (3), 2013, pp. 713-50.

‘constellation of martial caste status, land ownership, dominant caste syndrome and good bodily physique or physical strength that ideologically came to connect and configure dominant masculinity in colonial Punjab that was fully bolstered by the Army profession.’<sup>184</sup>

The Martial Race Theory enabled the proponents to shift the recruiting base almost entirely to certain areas in the North and North east of India. The language of ‘scientific racism’ was used to fuel the socio-economic, political and strategic discourse both in India and in Britain. What is most notable as well as remarkable is that all the three races that were most strongly considered martial such as the Highlanders, Gurkhas and the Sikhs were ‘identified so strongly with the attributes of ‘martial-ness’ or martiality that alternative constructions of their identities and realities all but disappeared from public discourse<sup>185</sup>’. Streets writes that the martial races in India ‘became the alter ego of the British men- The colonised, simple, violence-prone imperial subjects who would fight Britain’s battles without question’<sup>186</sup>.

The recommendations put forward by the Peel Commission (1859) were followed in the reorganisation of the Army, with regard to the number of British and Indian troops. The Peel Commission recommended that the army should be ‘composed of different nationalities and castes, and as a general rule, mixed promiscuously through each regiment, so that they might less easily unite in rebellion’.<sup>187</sup>

### **Self-Identity of the Sikh Soldier**

When Guru Gobind Singh formed the Khalsa on Baisakhi Day 1699, there was a three-fold objective accomplished<sup>188</sup>

- The redefinition of authority within the community of the Sikhs
- Introduction of a new code of conduct and initiation ceremony
- The provision of a new religious and political vision

---

<sup>184</sup>Chowdhry, *Militarized Masculinities*. P. 718.

<sup>185</sup>Streets. *Martial Races*. p. 6

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., p 7

<sup>187</sup>Saxena, *Military Systems*, footnote 8, p. 89.

<sup>188</sup>S. Jain, *Sikh or Khalsa?*, Montreal: Canadian Ethnic Studies- Etudes Ethniques au Canada, 22(2), 1999, p. 111.

These three dimensions together have formed the basis of the self-identity of the Sikhs, almost all of whom were soldiers and wielded weapons and the will to fight. Patwant Singh, further elucidates the self-identity of the Sikhs and the basis on which it was formed. He writes that the Khalsa Fellowship was not a hierarchical community, but a casteless society of inspired people bound together by their ideals and beliefs.<sup>189</sup>

According to Macauliffe's interpretation, the Punjab is the home of the Aryans. The Punjab, situated in the north, was the first home of the Aryans in India. The Sikhs represented the robust and 'vigorous masculinity of the Aryans' and their 'military prowess and the corresponding muscularity of their religion' rendered them 'physically and spiritually worthy of being collaborators with the British in ruling India'. Though the Sikh religion under the early Gurus was 'a system of quietism'<sup>190</sup>, but the 'meekness and passive submission of the religion of Nanak were changed under Har Gobind into independence and heroic activity'<sup>191</sup>.

For Macauliffe, the supposed modernity of the Sikhs and the pristine purity of their religion made them ideal subjects of empire. The Gurus, he informs us, 'most powerfully and successfully attacked the caste system and the Hindu belief in impurity and defilement in many necessary and harmless acts of domestic life'<sup>192</sup>. Macauliffe writes that to summarise some of the Sikh religion's moral and political virtues, it forbids idolatry, hypocrisy, caste exclusivity, the con-cremation of widows [sati, suttee], the immurement of women, the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco-smoking, infanticide, slander, and Hindu pilgrimages to sacred rivers and tanks; and it instills loyalty, gratitude for all favours received, and philanthropy.<sup>193</sup>

Macauliffe says that Guru Gobind Singh had predicted the coming of the English and that the Sikhs would form an alliance with them to rule the east and the west. He writes that the tenth Guru had predicted that as long as they govern with united councils, the combined forces of the English and Sikhs will be extremely powerful. The British dominion will substantially expand, and they will profit in every manner

---

<sup>189</sup>Patwant Singh (2000) *The Sikhs*. Pp 88 Knopf PP 68 ISBN 0375407286 <https://archive.org/details/TheSikhs/page/n89/mode/2up>

<sup>190</sup>Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, p. 310 .

<sup>191</sup>Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, p. 253.

<sup>192</sup> Foley, *Dining alone in Rawalpindi?* p. 27.

<sup>193</sup>Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, p 353.

possible. They will conquer and bestow thrones on their vassals wherever they take their troops. Then there will be money in every home, religion in every house, learning in every house, and happiness in every house.<sup>194</sup>

Macauliffe also was a staunch proponent of the British supporting the Sikh faith.

In our time one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion has been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh regiments to send Sikh recruits to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh, and endeavour to preserve them in their subsequent career from the contagion of idolatry. The military thus ignoring or despising the restraints imposed by the civil policy of what is called 'religious neutrality', have practically become the main hierophants and guardians of the Sikh religion (Macauliffe 1909, I, xxv)<sup>195</sup>.

### **Role of Religious Institutions in Keeping the Sikh Martial Identity intact**

There were distinct ways in which the British fostered the differentiation in caste, religious and clan feeling within the Army. Service loyalty was constructed by the employment of certain mechanisms. These included stressing on the role of leadership, spirit of corps, ideology, pay and conditions, geography, elite status, the location of depots, training regimes, and eating arrangements. Religious rites were preserved and safeguarded in a considerably more 'pure' form than they were in civilian life. Separation from the civilian life and building of a sense of community and distinctiveness was enhanced through rites and rituals, colours and standards, and even the threads on a uniform.<sup>196</sup>

Sikhism's incorporation into the British colonial machine had a major impact on the Sikh population. Sikhs have been gradually growing in Punjab since the 1880s. Sikhs increased in number from 1,706,165 in 1881<sup>197</sup> to 2,102,896 in 1901<sup>198</sup> and 3,110,060 in 1914<sup>199</sup>. The army's and Sikh war service's positions were crucial in understanding

---

<sup>194</sup>Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, p 354.

<sup>195</sup> Foley, *Dining Alone in Rawalpindi?* pp. 7-32.

<sup>196</sup>Johnson, *The British Indian Army*, p. 17.

<sup>197</sup>C. Chandramouli & R. General, *Census of India. Provisional Population Totals*. New Delhi: Government of India, 2011, p. 211.

<sup>198</sup>E. Gait, *Census of India, 1901*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India. 1902, P 387

Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 65.

<sup>199</sup>Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, p 65.



the rise, since Sikhs who enlisted had to not only identify as Sikhs, but also obey a set of laws<sup>200</sup>. The military became a good source of jobs for Sikhs, and this transition helped everyone in colonial Punjab. The military was seen by Sikh elites as a position where the reformed Sikhism could be implemented, policed, and maintained.

The emphasis on upholding the Sikh faith in its purest form that was placed by the British when recruiting Sikhs made this a unique facet of the Martial race theory. The approach of the British to the Sikh martial race theory was distinct from their approaches to other martial races such as the Punjabi Muslims or Rajputs. In the case of the Sikhs, Being a Sikh alone (*Sehajdhari*) was not enough to join the army because recruits had to adhere to strict orthodoxy and maintain all the outward symbols of Sikhism, and be *Keshdharis*. Only pure Sikhs were recruited and given the opportunity to serve in the British Indian Army<sup>201</sup>.

There is further evidence of a shared development of knowledge when looking at colonial literature on martiality. The Singh Sabha's goals were aligned with the hyper-focus on religious orthodoxy<sup>202</sup>. This can be seen in the conditions imposed on prospective candidates, as they will be expected to undergo *Amrit* (Khalsa baptism).

Only 'pure' Sikhs had the characteristics of fighting and loyalty, according to the Handbooks, because they had accepted their heritage. This is mentioned clearly in R.W Falcon's 1896 Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of Regimental Officers: "Sikhism is a faith, distinct and separate from but with weakling tendencies, which gradually increases toward its parent religion Hinduism." To prove their identity, Sikh soldiers were expected to wear symbols of their religion. Granthis were used by the army to initiate soldiers by conducting Sikh rituals.

British officers were also in charge of maintaining the soldiers' religious discipline. In this way, the military helped to codify a form of Sikhism. As a result, the Sikh martial race theory codified a religious identity as well as a warlike culture<sup>203</sup>. The British embraced the religion as a distinct form of 'pure' Sikhism, giving Sikhs a new sense

---

<sup>200</sup>H. A. Rose, *Census of India*, 1901. Vol. XVII: Punjab, its Feudatories, and the North West Frontier Province. Part I: The Report on the Census. 1902, p. 194.

<sup>201</sup>Falcon. *Handbook*, p. 167.

<sup>202</sup>P. S. Judge, *Politics of Sikh identity and its fundamentalist assertion. Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 3947-3954.

<sup>203</sup>Judge, *Politics of Sikh identity*, p. 3951.

of social identity within the army<sup>204</sup>. The new persona was called the 'Singh' Sikh, which has a different connotation today. In his handbook, Alfred Horsford Bingley<sup>205</sup> (1899) noted that 'Singh Sikhs' were Guru Gobind Singh's followers.

MacMunn also noted that since a Sikh is baptised into his faith rather than being born into it, therefore no one may call himself a Sikh until he has taken the Pahul, or been baptised. Sikhism is an austere faith that requires its members to live a life of simplicity and rigour. This is so true that for many years, young men have preferred to forgo the pahul and grow up as regular Hindus, since Sikhism is an austere religion. However, because the Sikh's worth as simple, loyal warriors is based on his commitment to the basic principles and hard life of his forefathers, no non-baptised Sikh is allowed to join an Indian Army unit. Regiments are so attentive in this regard, and because regiments are so much the home of the old martial and basic Sikh ideals, it has been claimed, not without some reality, that it is the British officer who has maintained Sikhism up to its former standard.<sup>206</sup>

Tony Ballantyne<sup>207</sup> has contended that 'cultural differences in British territories invested religious customs with great importance and changed the European understanding of the meaning of religion. The British certainly employed the institutions, clergy, traditions, and religious injunctions of Sikhism in developing the Sikh as a fighting force who would be as devoted to the Raj as it was to Ranjit Singh or even Banda Singh Bahadur. This was the primary reason why Sikh identity was so stressed from the time to recruitment to training to day-to-day life in barracks and most of all- at War<sup>208</sup>.

An analytical analysis of the writings and views of the earliest British observers of the Sikhs, to 1947, when the British finally departed India, there are certain beliefs and perceptions that remained true and which are not difficult to discern. The perception

---

<sup>204</sup>Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 881.

<sup>205</sup>Alfred Horsford Bingley, *Handbooks for the Indian Army*, Simla: Government Central printing office, 1899, p. 153.

<sup>206</sup>MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 324.

<sup>207</sup>T. Ballantyne, *Systemizing Religion: from Tahiti to the Tat Khalsa*. In: *Orientalism and Race*. London: Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 34.

<sup>208</sup>Indu Banga(ed.), *Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, History and Culture, c 1500-1990*, Essays for J. S. Grewal, Delhi, 1997, p. 54.

of the Sikhs in British eyes rested on certain fundamental beliefs which they had formed on the basis of their observation of the Sikhs<sup>209</sup>.

The creation of this unique identity and its active promotion worked both ways. This fastidious adherence to a Sikh identity was successful in furthering British policy of 'divide and rule' too, in a systematic and organised way within the army, which was one of the primary instruments of power and control in the British colonial Raj<sup>210</sup>. In its 'downward' manifestation, this fostered a sharp 'differentiation' between the Sikh soldiers and their counterparts from other regions and communities in the army, thereby creating marked distinctions that prevented the formation and development of any national consciousness and kept the army divided and segmented, even while India was being swept in the waves of nationalism and national consciousness was developing fast in the urban and rural areas in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The cantonments continued to be pacific harbours of tranquillity, while the civil population of the country underwent rapid nationalistic awakening.

The second and 'upward' manifestation of this differentiation succeeded because it created a marked differentiation between the colonial soldier and his British officers<sup>211</sup>. This differentiation, along with inculcating an acceptance of the inherent superiority of the British born soldier, even though he might be of the same rank, in the Sikh soldier, also provided a vague explanation for the difference in pay and service conditions<sup>212</sup>. This differentiation was manipulated right from the beginning of the First World War in justifying the stark difference between the treatment of the British soldiers and their allies vis a vis the Indian soldiers. So, even though the Sikhs and other Indian soldiers of the British Indian army had arrived from a tropical climate into the middle of the harsh European winter, there was no sense of urgency in providing them with the required clothing and kit<sup>213</sup>.

---

<sup>209</sup>Jagtar Singh Grewal, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.31.

<sup>210</sup>Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 259.

<sup>211</sup>J. Burbank & F. Cooper, *Empires in world history: Power and the politics of difference*, New York: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 211.

<sup>212</sup>M. Barrett, 'Subalterns at war: First World War colonial forces and the politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission', *Interventions*, 9(3), Edinburgh, 2007, pp. 451-474.

<sup>213</sup>P. Leese, *Shell shock: traumatic neurosis and the British soldiers of the First World War*, New York: Springer. 2002, p. 172.



**Marching into Marseilles, France, the Sikh soldiers were subjects of wonder and fascination.**



**Trench warfare was extremely tough to bear in the harsh winter of 1914-1915.**



## Preservation and Upholding of the ‘Sikh Identity’

British understanding of the Indian social and political systems, their perceptions of the Martial races and Jat Sikhs being the preferred caste in the Sikhs to be recruited had to give way to the exigencies of wartime in 1914<sup>214</sup>. As recruitment in excess of the norm continued for a long time of years, the traditional recruiting areas and communities dried up, but the war machine needed new recruits constantly. This was when the recruiting opportunities were considerably enlarged. This was due to the fact that regiments went from requiring 75 new recruits per year during peacetime to 100 per month during wartime<sup>215</sup>. Seventy-five ‘new’ populations that had never seen service before were recruited to expand recruitment. According to Stephan Cohen<sup>216</sup>, widening the recruiting pool offered opportunities to even the lowest castes<sup>217</sup>. These reforms had a strong impact on Sikh martial beliefs. Jatt Sikhs were the ideal caste before the battle. The Mazabhis seized the opportunity presented by the need for more recruits (low-caste Sikhs). Other ‘non-martial’ Sikh castes were recruited, including the Khatri, Mahtam, and Barua Sikhs<sup>218</sup>.

Cohen believes the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Michael O’Dwyer used this extension to the benefit of the state. He achieved this by delivering a series of speeches in which he challenged the Jats to assert their dominance over the low-caste Mazabhis. The war’s demands reshaped British views regarding martiality.

The 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs and the 15<sup>th</sup> Ludhiana Sikhs (raised after the First Angle Sikh war in 1846) were considered crack corps in Indian army<sup>219</sup> and were one of the first to be sent into action abroad. These two battalions had Jat Sikhs prominently divided into 8 companies. The 34<sup>th</sup> Sikh Pioneers comprised of Mazhabi and Ramdasias Sikhs. All of them, particularly 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs saw some of the most dangerous action in the initial battles of the Great War and suffered heavy casualties in the process<sup>220</sup>.

---

<sup>214</sup>O’ Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p. 243.

<sup>215</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 32.

<sup>216</sup>S. Cohen, ‘The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 28(3), New Delhi, 1969, pp. 453-468.

<sup>217</sup>Cohen, *The Untouchable Soldier*, p. 457.

<sup>218</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 28.

<sup>219</sup>Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, p. 63.

<sup>220</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 55.

It was believed by the British that the Sikhs were 'fighting men' whose 'best qualities could emerge only in the army, which is his 'natural profession'. These particular qualities which made the Sikhs the ideal colonial soldier were, his hardiness, bravery, intelligence, which however, was not very sharp as the Sikhs failed to perceive when they were beaten and continued to fight. Obedience, proclivity to accept discipline, attachment and affection for the British officers and non adherence to rigid caste or class prohibitions were additional qualities which made the Sikh soldier an exemplary asset in the field or the cantonment. In fact, the temperament of the Sikhs was quite dependable as noted by Falcon who says Sikhs were never changing in their attitudes, ever genial, good tempered and uncomplaining and they remained unperturbed and steady under fire and was equally eager to charge.<sup>221</sup>

A vital ingredient in the suitability of a race to continue being recognised as a martial race was also the physical features, physiology and personal adaptability and vigour of a race in the British estimation. The Sikhs were from the hardier and stronger North Indian stock, exposed to the dry and hot summers and the equally harsh and unforgiving winters. They were powerful and strong, tall and well knit. On parade, as on the march, a company of Sikhs looked forbidding as well as attractive. These qualities made them different from the South Indian or the Eastern Indian soldier. From appearance to religious and caste affiliations, to general outlook and characteristics to natural strength and adaptability, on each count, the North Indians, and especially the Pathans, Punjabi Mussalmans, Dogras and most notably, The Sikhs, were supposed to be better than the Indians hailing from other parts of India.

Doaba, Punjab, was regarded as the worst location for recruitment (Bingley, 1899). The quality of recruits in each zone, down to the micro level of villages, was graded from "very poor" to "very good." Sikhs' physical appearance was a deciding factor, with drawings of orthodox Sikhs with beards and turbans being used to assist recruiting officers<sup>222</sup>. *Izzat* was a common term among the martial races, and it was a distinctly Indian sense of honour. In British parlance, it meant that the soldiers had reaped the benefits of military service and would repay the Raj with exemplary service in exchange<sup>223</sup>.

---

<sup>221</sup>Falcon, *Handbook*, p 65-66

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*, p 112-113

<sup>223</sup>P. Levine, Battle colors: Race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I. *Journal of Women's History*, 9(4), 1998, pp. 104-130.

The British official's strong belief in the martial delineation and special edge which the North Indians, especially the Sikhs, had over the other castes, races and regions in India rested on the observations made by the British army officers who had personally dealt with the Sikhs. At the time of the dispatch of the soldiers for overseas, the COC of the Indian army selected Gurkhas and Sikhs dominated divisions to be the first to be sent abroad<sup>224</sup>. Opinion swung between the Sikhs and Gurkhas as being the best soldiers as the Sikhs were seen as the 'most important class in the Indian soldiery'<sup>225</sup>.

Macauliffe can be credited with disseminating the Tat Khalsa ideology and interpretation of the Sikh faith in the western understanding of the Sikhs then and now. Hew McLeod explains it by saying that as The Tat Khalsa was the radical component within the Singh Sabha movement, the reformist group succeeded in instilling a new spirit and interpretation to the Panth<sup>226</sup>. Macauliffe had a special relationship with members of the Tat Khalsa, and had 25 years of experience with them<sup>227</sup>. Naturally, his memory was held in high regard by his successors<sup>228</sup>.

The Sikhs themselves were acutely aware and sensible to this active fostering of the 'Sikh identity' by the British. In the Farewell Address to Lord Roberts on the eve of his departure from India in 1893, the Sikhs of Punjab comprehensively allude to this factor in their address, and the benefits and consequences quite cogently when they thanked Lord Roberts effusively, as mentioned earlier. The Sikhs expressed gratitude that military authorities recognised the necessity of baptism or *Pahul* and insisted on the same. This practise was hailed as the essential that made the Sikhs more true and faithful, and preserved the existence of a 'very useful community'<sup>229</sup>.

When the Sikhs were sent to France as a part of the Brigade A, it was decision fraught with uncertainty as for the first time, Indians were being sent to fight against a white

---

<sup>224</sup>According to David Omissi, Punjabi Muslims were in fact the most recruited soldiers by the British in both the World Wars. Omissi, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>225</sup>David Omissi, Sikh Soldiers in Europe during the First World War, 1914–18, *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, 2012, pp. 36-50.

<sup>226</sup>H. McLeod, 'The Order for Khālsā Initiation' in *Religions of India in Practice*, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 165.

<sup>227</sup>Foley, *Dining alone in Rawalpindi*, p. 20.

<sup>228</sup>Foley, *Dining alone in Rawalpindi*, p. 21.

<sup>229</sup>Roberts, *Forty One years*, Appendix VI



enemy<sup>230</sup>. Many of the British were sceptical about sending the Indians to fight against Europeans in their own lands, and white prestige in India was at stake if Indians had intimate relations with white women while serving abroad<sup>231</sup>.

Lord Hardinge was the viceroy of India when the war broke out, and he favoured the dispatch of the Indian troops to fight in the war in Europe as he thought it was the right step to appease the political opinion in India<sup>232</sup>. He was supported by the King Emperor King George V, who took a keen interest in his role as Emperor of India and had visited India in 1911-12 for his coronation Durbar in Delhi<sup>233</sup>. In accordance with the wishes of these highest authorities, two Indian divisions were sent from Egypt to France in August 1914. When the Commander in Chief of India, Sir Beauchamp Duff was asked to handpick and send his best soldiers for service overseas, he selected the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lahore and 7<sup>th</sup> Meerut Divisions, and both these units comprised of a considerable number of Sikhs and Gurkhas, admittedly the best soldiers in India according to the Martial Race Theory<sup>234</sup>. A multi-pronged approach was employed by the British in securing the allegiance and the active support of the Sikhs and in harnessing their considerable energy and vitality in the service of the empire.

### **Sikh Recruitment During the War Years (1914-1918)**

The British ensured the loyalty of the Sikhs and also wielded control over them by keeping the spiritual leaders and the temple functionaries under their control. The keys to the holiest shrine in Sikhism, the Harimandir Sahib or Golden Temple also were with the British District Commissioner of Amritsar. These were finally wrested from British hands by the Sikhs after a prolonged period of agitation that was carried out in the form of the Gurudwara Reform Movement in which many Sikhs had to sacrifice their lives in the early 1920's<sup>235</sup>.

---

<sup>230</sup>R. Visram, 'The first world war and the Indian soldiers', *Indo-British Review*, 16(2), 1989, pp. 17-26.

*Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>231</sup>R. Visram, 'The first world war and the Indian soldiers'. *Indo-British Review*, 16(2), 1989, pp.17-26.

<sup>232</sup>C. Hardinge, *My Indian Years, 1910-1916. The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst [With Plates, Including Portraits]*. John Murray, 1948, p. 99.

<sup>233</sup>Roberts, *Forty One years*, Appendix VI.

<sup>234</sup>J. Greenhut, 'The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914-15', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 1983, pp. 54-73.

<sup>235</sup> See, J.S.Grewal, *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011; Harish K. Puri and Paramjit S. Judge (eds.) *Social and Political Movements: Readings on Punjab*, Jaipur: Rawat Publishers, 2000.

The second method employed to recruit the loyal, dependable and relatively cost effective Sikh peasantry as soldiers in the service of the colonial empire in India was to promote the Sikh religion and its institutions and give them official recognition, respect and even patronage. This was done by making it mandatory for Sikhs to adhere to the strict code of conduct followed by *Sahajdari* Sikhs and also strictly observe the Sikh identity and outward appearance for the purpose of being recruited and even induction into the army<sup>236</sup>. This was a prerequisite. It was accepted unquestionably that there were basic differences between the East and the West, (Asia and Europe).

In the East, ‘only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior’<sup>237</sup>. This belief becomes significant when contrasted with the general admission and acceptance that, “In Europe, every able bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort’ capable of becoming a soldier in case of war.”<sup>238</sup> This was amply demonstrated when conscription was made mandatory in the time of the Great War in many nations in Europe, whereas in India, soldiers continued to be recruited overwhelmingly from the ‘martial races’, even when the traditional recruiting regions and clans were severely depleted<sup>239</sup>.

In fact, the British had even refined this martial race characteristic to its minutiae. They recognised that there were certain areas and communities even within Punjab that produced military specimens that were not up to the mark. The explanation was again sought and found in the biological beliefs. When Capt R. W Falcon authored the definitive army recruitment manual that recorded the prime army recruiting areas in Punjab, he gave them certain grades, that ranged from very bad to very good. This rating was revised in 1900 by Alfred Bingley.

---

<sup>236</sup>. Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 76.

<sup>237</sup>Macmunn, *The Armies of India*. p. 127

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>239</sup>K. Roy, ‘Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918’. *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp. 1310-1347.

It was observed that certain young men adopted Sikh identity with the sole purpose of finding secure and prestigious army employment. In order to deter these elements, which were increasing constantly, it was found necessary to insure the religious conformity to Sikh tradition officially. Hence, the baptism ceremony was performed in the presence of the British officers themselves at the time of recruitment itself.

The religious ceremony that was conducted under the official aegis was thus, a unique amalgam of British colonialism and Sikh religious beliefs. Roy Edgardo Parry, who served in the Indian army in the first decades of the twentieth century, has described the ritual enactment of this ceremony itself in his book<sup>240</sup>. The ceremony and its conduct was accorded great significance. The British required every new recruit into their exclusively Sikh battalions and companies to adhere to the British understanding of the Sikh cultural and religio-ritualistic meanings, while the recruit himself was also required to believe in, uphold and adhere to, the martial traditions and code of conduct as ascribed to the Sikhs by the British themselves<sup>241</sup>.

Each Pahul ceremony was conducted after fifty recruits had been gathered by the recruiting party as it traversed the Punjab on a recruiting drive. The ceremony itself deviated from traditions in certain ways. The traditional *Kirpan* (short dagger) worn by the Sikhs at the time of the ceremony as replaced by the British issued bayonet. The main altar was flanked by two soldiers, who were members of the recruiting party. The emphasis on the Sikh symbols and codes was not confined to the initial ceremony, but was strictly enforced by the British officers throughout the duration of the long service of the Sikh soldiers.<sup>242</sup> The *Amrit* ceremony was carried out before official recruitment<sup>243</sup>. The British Officers commanding the Sikh regiment strictly enforced the formal baptism ceremony (*khande da Pahul*) by requiring that all enlisted Sikhs should undergo baptism.<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup>R. E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Patiala: Languages Department, 1970, p. 151.

<sup>241</sup>G. Shani, *Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 59.

<sup>242</sup>J. Singh, 'Formative Phase of National Movement Among the Sikhs', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 54, 1993, pp. 423-427.

<sup>243</sup>G. S. Komma, 'The Sikh Situation in the Punjab (1907-1922)', in *Panjab Past and Present*, 12 (1923) reprint, 1978, p. 426.

<sup>244</sup>Macmunn, *The Armies of India*, p. 135.

This careful indoctrination in the martial code, and ingraining of the martial code as symbolised by the Sikh religious emblems and identity was carefully managed. David Petrie, an official with the Criminal Intelligence Department, observed that Sikhs in the Indian army were carefully ‘nationalised’ or encouraged to regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation.<sup>245</sup>

Extensive observation and careful perusal of the Sikhs religious beliefs and practises had convinced the British that the symbols of Sikh identity, along with their soldier-saint connotations, had to be rigorously adhered to in order to efficiently and effectively control them<sup>246</sup>. In fact, the baptisms as a result of intensive recruitment explain the sharp increase in the number of Sikhs in the 1901 census<sup>247</sup>, especially in several native states<sup>248</sup>.

### **Punjabisation of the British Indian Army**

Punjabisation of the Indian army<sup>249</sup> was a natural result of the supposed martial prowess, valorous disposition and military skills that had been developed by Punjabis down the ages. Both geographically and climatically, by virtue of the unique geopolitical scenario of Punjab, it had always been the entry point and main target of invaders, marauders and conquerors alike, who had swarmed into the region from beyond the borders of India. By the time the British reached Indian shores, there was already a strong and uninterrupted military tradition in Punjab that had existed for centuries. Hardy, acclimatised to the harsh winters of the Himalayan battlefields as well as the arid areas of the plains, the Punjabi soldier was ideal to wage war against the enemies of the English, especially at a time when the Great Game was already in fervent motion.

Hardly had the Great Game concluded that the business of war became deadly serious and assumed ungainly proportions with the outbreak of the First World War which

---

<sup>245</sup>David Petrie, ‘*Recent Developments in Sikh Politics, 1900-1911, A Report*’, Amritsar: Chief Khalsa Diwan, 1911, p.11.

<sup>246</sup>K. Qureshi, ‘Diasporic citizenship and militarization: Punjabi soldiers in the world wars’, *Citizenship Studies*, 17(3-4), 2013, pp.400-413.

<sup>247</sup>G. Shani, *Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age*. London: Routledge, 2007, p. 76.

<sup>248</sup>E. A. Gait, *Census of India*, 1911. Vol. I: India. Part II: Tables, 913, p. 46.

<sup>249</sup>Kaushik Das, *The Army in British India from Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947*, Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2020, p. 73.

was the greatest and most widespread armed conflict ever witnessed by the world till then. As India got embroiled in the War right from the start, as a colony of the Britain, the Punjab bore the brunt of supplying the war fronts across the globe with a seemingly endless supply of recruits. Thus began the ordeal of the World, wherein millions of people suffered direct or indirect casualties of a war that quickly became more a battle of willingness to sacrifice and prevail, rather than any military conflict.

The willingness and loyalty of the Sikhs to the British at the time of the Great War provoked wonder then, and still remains a matter of some debate. Kaushik Roy<sup>250</sup> is one of the proponents of the view that the soldiers were nothing less than ‘quasi-mercenaries’, with the direct and indirect benefits and incentives that the British offered as the motivation. It is undeniable that a reliable source of income, opportunity to procure land at subsidised or no price, social honour and prestige and official recognition were several incentives that fuelled the Sikh soldiers’ eagerness to fight for the Union Jack. The question whether Sikh soldiers can be termed as mere mercenaries also begs a deeper exploration. India’s contribution in the world War is so underrated and unknown that even now, Indians themselves are hardly aware of India’s starring role in the War. In the same survey, undertaken by the British Council, only thirty per cent Indians identified Asian involvement in this War, compared to seventy-four per cent Indians knowing about Western Europe involvement.

**Table 2.2- Punjabis in the Imperial British Indian Army, 1911**

<b>Total Number of Punjabis in the Imperial Army</b>	<b>65,299</b>
<b>Total Number of the Imperial Service Troops</b>	<b>9,375</b>
<b>Total Men in Service in Punjab</b>	<b>42,791</b>
<b>(British)</b>	<b>17,318</b>
<b>(Punjabis)</b>	<b>23,310</b>
<b>Punjabis serving elsewhere in India</b>	<b>69,173</b>
<b>Punjabis serving outside India</b>	<b>2,218</b>
<b>Total Number of Punjabis in Army</b>	<b>94,701</b>

Source: Leigh, Punjab, p. 7.

<sup>250</sup>Roy, *The Army in British India*, p. 56.

The figure of Punjabi representation in 1911 stood at 94,701 which gave it a 54 percent majority in the total British Indian Imperial army. Sikhs in the Army represented 12% in 1919, although they were a mere 2% of the population. Punjab's population was less than 10 percent of British India. Over half the entire Indian army came from this population is revelatory of the obvious dominance of the province in military recruitment.<sup>251</sup>

In the four years of the First World War, the recruitment of Sikhs in the British Indian Army was disproportionately large compared to the population. The following table shows the representation of various communities in the British Indian Army during the course of the First World War.

**Table 2.3-Recruitment of Martial Races during the First World War (1914-18)**

<b>Races</b>	<b>From 28 July 1914 to 31 July 1915</b>	<b>From July 1915 to 31 July 1916</b>	<b>From 1916 to 31 July 1917</b>	<b>From July 1917 to 31 July 1918</b>	<b>From 1 Aug to 30 Nov. 1918</b>	<b>Total From July 1914 to 30 Nov. 1918</b>
<b>Punjabi</b>	15,597	33,302	23,938	54,460	19,229	136,126
<b>Muslims</b>						
<b>Sikhs</b>	12,293	14,973	16,231	31,265	14,160	88,925
<b>Rajputs</b>	6,248	7,676	9,313	25,266	13,687	62,190
<b>Gurkhas</b>	10,430	17,418	12,040	13,208	2,493	55,589
<b>Jats</b>	6,307	9,449	11,591	18,018	9,874	55,239
<b>Hindustani</b>	1,777	3,435	7,372	15,826	7,943	36,353
<b>Muslims</b>						
<b>Pathans</b>	3,699	5,958	4,647	8,412	3,128	27,857
<b>Dogras</b>	3,699	3,954	5,391	7,836	2,611	23,491
<b>Garhwalis</b>	1,139	1,165	1,231	2,761	871	7,167

**Source:** Roy, *Race and Recruitment*, 2013, p.1317<sup>252</sup>

As the above table shows, the proportion of the Sikhs in the army was quite large, considering their miniscule population. Amongst the Sikhs too, the proportion of the

<sup>251</sup>Mazumdar, *Making of the Indian Army*, p. 19.

<sup>252</sup>Kaushik.Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp. 1310-1347.

Jats has been given separately as the Sikhs soldiers in the British Indian Army during the First World War also belonged to other communities within the Sikh faith such as the *Mazhabis* etc who comprised a large part too and were formed in their own separate regiments.

### **Sikh Soldier Identity in the Eyes of the British**

The Sikhs were a critical ingredient in the Imperial Army mix and as the New Military Historian Rob Johnson observes. The British, as pragmatic rulers made use of cultural factors within South Asian society to create a fighting force able to maintain internal security, ensure border integrity and serve as a standing army at minimum cost and maximum effectiveness. The British wanted distinction, unquestioning loyalty and also greatest efficiency and professionalism<sup>253</sup>.

The British could well have maintained a 'White' army comprising of British men from the British Isles as the army of colonial expansion and instrument of continuation of British power in India, but they were constrained by the laws of economic and their motive of extracting the maximum from the 'jewel in their colonial crown', that was India.

The British were forced to use an indigenous army to uphold their power in India and maintain their rule. Indian soldiers were far more cost effective than the British men in equal number would have been.

The various changes made in the Indian Army throughout its history reflected developments not only in technology or strategic threat, but reactions to failure and setback, attempts to incorporate diverse cultural expectations and the need to inculcate a specific military ethos. Above all, change was through both necessity and a prescient recognition of changing tasks and roles<sup>254</sup>.

Indian soldiers had demonstrated their hostility and unreliability most violently and effectively in the Revolt of 1857, when they rose overwhelmingly against the British and made a strong play to divest India of British presence. The depth, scale and willingness to participate in the revolt by 'trusted soldiers' and their promptitude and

---

<sup>253</sup>Jonson, *The British Indian Army*, p. 18.

<sup>254</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 17.

efficiency in wresting control over almost the whole of North India from British hands was an eye opening event for the majority of the British in India.

The British Indian officers who had implicit faith in the loyalty and even love of the Indian soldiers in their regiments and battalions and tended to regard them as their 'Black Children' quoted, were rudely shaken out of their misplaced assumptions and this reverie when the soldiers attempted to uproot the British root and branch from India in 1857.

The British could barely manage to retain India, and their Indian colonial possessions swayed in the balance for many months during the summer of 1857, while the cornered and vastly outnumbered British strove and fought to regain control over a turbulent native populace, lead by the soldiers who had been trained and equipped by the British themselves.

This experience lost of economics when it came to the crunch. Even after being so rudely divested of their fond beliefs in the 'loyalty, reliability and amenability' quote of the Indian soldier, the British were compelled by economics to continue to employ Indians in ever growing numbers to control their vast Indian empire. It was only economics that dictated that "The soldiers of colonialism should come from the villages of the colonised"<sup>255</sup>.

### **Socio-cultural, Religio-politico building blocks of Sikh Soldier Identity**

Sir John Lawrence as the Head of the Board of Control and founding father of the Punjab School of Administration, along with his brother Henry Lawrence, emphasised on the personal rapport and authority of the British administrators posted in the district, and who was expected to rule as a true patriarch, who governed by combining firmness with fairness and meted out exemplary punishment wherever required<sup>256</sup>.

The summer of 1907 was a long hot one of the British in India. Punjab, the province from where the bulk of the Indian army was recruited was in the grip of widespread disturbances. Lord Kitchener, the Commander in Chief had ordered an enquiry as to the effect of the 1907 agitation that had fired the Punjabi's on the loyalty and morale of the Punjabi soldiers. The situation was dire enough for Kitchener to communicate

---

<sup>255</sup> Mason. *A Matter of Honour*, p. 64.

<sup>256</sup> Lawrence. James, *Raj: The Making of British India*. Abacus: London, 1997, p. 425.



immediately to Minto the criticality of the issue at hand. The loyalty, morale and dependability of the Punjabi soldiers was being swayed in what was the recruiting area for a third of the British Indian Army. Lord Minto was enjoined to immediately veto the legislation which was causing the, “alienation of the political support of the agrarian population in central Punjab.”<sup>257</sup> The necessary quashing was effected on May 26, 1907, to the unmitigated joy of the Punjabis, both civil and military, who felt that the British government responded with sympathy and justness to their valid concerns.

The resolution of the Punjabi unrest in 1907 was effective, but the disturbances had revealed that the ‘greatest success story’ of the Raj was on shaky grounds. This was both in terms of the quality of the local administration as embodied by the ‘Punjab school of administration’, and the steadfastness and fealty of the Punjabis<sup>258</sup>. The lesson was clear- the Punjab was no longer to be assumed to be the imperial and colonial stronghold it was widely believed to be in the British circles. The passive agreement of the Punjabis could not be taken for granted as it was possible that even their allegiance and loyalty could be swayed by agitators<sup>259</sup>. The inertia of the masses of India and particularly, the vigorous and vibrant people of Punjab could not be taken at face value.

In his work, *Lions of the Punjab*, anthropologist Richard Fox gives a biological analogy for the Singhs of the Punjab. Singh, literally translated as lions, is the biological analogy which Fox attributes to the Sikhs of the Punjab to arrive at a better conception of culture. He justifies the use of the analogy of the Lions as a reference to the British orientations and policies and the manner in which they were able to use this identity of the Sikhs to ‘master’ and ‘use’ them. (page no 2- in the introduction )

Fox contends that the British believed the religious community of the Sikhs were separate and special. As per the anthropological beliefs prevailing at the time, the Sikh’s physical characteristics (taller and stronger) a distinctive region that was climatically suited to produce a hardier and stalwart species of men and women with special behaviours ( impulsive courage) and unique appearance (turban and uncut

---

<sup>257</sup>N. Barrier, ‘The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 1(4), New Delhi, 1967, pp. 353-383.

<sup>258</sup> Lawrence, *The Making of British India*, p.425.

<sup>259</sup> Lawrence, *The Making of British India*, p. 426.

beards) all made them a different race with martial characteristics. The colonial mindset about 'orientalism' and 'biological determinism' instilled the belief among the British that racial superiority and inferiority was a reality, and they tried hard to get the Sikhs to believe that they were a different species and race too.

This idea gained currency and became strongly entrenched when the British adopted specific policies and selective processes to force the Sikhs to maintain their 'racial martial' traditions. The Singhs in turn, internalised this cultural concept and started to believe firmly in this imposed British cultural reconstruction.

Prominent thinkers, scholars and anthropologists of the nineteenth century, influenced by Darwin's 'biological determinism' such as Edward Said also attributed many cultural meanings to 'Oriental people and Orientalism'<sup>260</sup>. Claude Levi Strauss<sup>261</sup> took the concept further when he propounded that different castes in India perceive of themselves as separate species<sup>262</sup>. McKim Marriot<sup>263</sup> and Ronald Inden<sup>264</sup> deepened the cultural analysis on the basis of 'Orientalism' when they opined that each caste has a 'coded substance' that is unique and different from all others. Richard Fox say "Because the British believed that the Singhs were a separate race or species, of me, they tried to bring the Singhs to believe it too."<sup>265</sup>

### **Criticism of the Martial Race Theory**

Many writers in the recent past have been highly critical of the martial race theory. It has been called an inherently flawed and artificial construct that was fabricated by the British to serve their own purposes. Writers such as Kaushik Roy, Santanu Das have criticized by citing the incomplete codification of the Martial Races Theory. British

---

<sup>260</sup>E. W. Said, & S. Jhally, *Edward said on orientalism*, Vol. 40. Northampton, Massachusetts: Media Education Foundation, 2002, p. 74.

<sup>261</sup>C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 68(270), 1955, pp. 428-444.

<sup>262</sup>M. Hénaff, *Claude Levi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 93.

<sup>263</sup>M. Marriot, 'Caste Ranking and Community Structure in Five Regions of India and Pakistan', *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 17(902-2016-67552), Mumbai, 1962, pp. 92-93.

<sup>264</sup>R. Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20(3), Cambridge, 1986, pp. 401-446.

<sup>265</sup> Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, p. 95.

had well established race based military recruitment and operating policies and naturally carried this bias into their colonies too. The Peel Commission Report 1859, the Eden Commission report 1879 and other letters, reports and papers that were allied with the military situation in India attest that a martial race theory was taken into consideration while recruiting the army.

The First World War was timed very strategically. It was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has been perhaps the most turbulent and momentous where a world was wrecked havoc with the entire planet and caused and accelerated many social, political and economic upheavals and changes. The soldiers from India were welcomed fervently by the various people where ever they were posted, as ‘saviors and protectors’. The Sikhs because of their distinctive appearance and outgoing personalities attracted more attention, as they looked picturesque, exotic and markedly different.

In the larger world which he was exposed to when he was posted abroad as part of the British Indian forces is discussed in detail in the next chapter which is devoted to an examination of how the Sikh soldiers fared overseas. His perceptions and experiences abroad and the reaction of the people he met in various countries while serving the British empire form the content of the next chapter ‘At home in the world’.

What might have become as a recruiting tool born out of expedience on the part of the British, became a way of life and a primary identity for the Sikh soldiers who relied on the ‘identity’ not only for social respect and spiritual identity, but in economic and political rewards too. The martial Race theory became intrinsic to Sikh soldiers’ identity and as Heather Streets says, the Sikh soldiers also co-opted for the same as they recognized the advantages it bestowed upon them<sup>266</sup>. A soldier’s income turned around collective joint family’s fortunes, elevated the social standing of the entire family in the clan and village and became a socially sought after and highly respected avenue of ‘earning a good living’.

Since the British military system helped actively in the evolution and development of this identity, the Sikhs developed a close bond, heartfelt connection as well as a mutually beneficial relationship based on mutual need and understanding, interpreted

---

<sup>266</sup>Streets, *Martial Race*, p. 69.

as loyalty by the Sikhs and reliability by the British. Martial ideas persisted during the battle, as evidenced by letters written by Sikh soldiers<sup>267</sup>, 'We will do our utmost to maintain the family values and prestige of our tribe,' wrote a Sikh in a letter written in 1914, which is symbolic of service<sup>268</sup>. The constructed characteristics of the 'martial' Sikh are supported by the notion of 'upholding prestige.' During the First World War, no letter better represented martial ideas than one written by a wounded Sikh:

Chur Singh has suffered martyrdom in the war. The 47th Sikhs were charging. [The] Sahib said 'Chur Singh, you are not a Sikh of Guru Govind Singh, [you] who sit in fear inside the trench!' Chur Singh was very angry. Chur Singh gave [the] order to his company to charge. He drew his sword and went forward. A bullet came from the enemy and hit him in the mouth. So did brother Chur Singh become a martyr. No other man was like Jemadar Chur Singh<sup>269</sup>.

This letter makes it abundantly clear that the imagery and language used by the British officers in the Sikh regiments allied closely with the religious identity of the Sikhs. They were reminded of the ideals of the Sikh religion and the bravery and exploits of their forefathers at every juncture. The British officers who commanded these Sikh soldiers were well versed with the religion, folklore, village setups, families and communities of the soldiers and employed all these identities to foster a commonality and strongly religious connection. This was how the martial race theory was put into action, backed and fostered by a strong religious impulse and impetus.

Morton Jack offers an explanation as to why more British soldiers faced Court Martial than Indians in the months between October 1914 and February 1915. With the Great War beginning, the massacres on the front in France drove more British soldiers to desertion and cowardice than Indians and Morton Jack contends the 'battle will' of the Indians was the reason Indians stood their ground in the face of overwhelming odds, wherein the British troops in France succumbed.

The source of this "battle will" of the Indians, "stemmed from the persistence of their pre-war attitudes of honour, shame, and loyalty, and hence their allegiance to the king

---

<sup>267</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 305.

<sup>268</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119.

and his chiefs.<sup>270</sup>" This emphasizes the strong connection between martial race ideas and Sikh war service in France. The British Raj decided to keep these ideas alive. Carlton House Terrace in London, which served as a hospital for wounded Indian soldiers during the war, included arrangements for wounded Sikhs<sup>271</sup>

The British completely understood the value of religious symbolism in keeping morale alive on the front manned by Sikh soldiers. For Sikhs, 2,000 religious symbols were specially commissioned to replace those lost during the war. In a letter written by a Sikh cavalryman, it is also clear that facilitating religion was an important part of military life: 'the *Granth* (holy book), which is carried in procession through the entire village, and is shown to all the Sikhs in the cavalry... our *Sirkar* (Government) gives us every opportunity for keeping them.'<sup>272</sup> It becomes apparent that Sikhism and martiality were still part of the service even during the war. This was meaningful to the troops, who respected the religious accommodations made by the government during the war<sup>273</sup>.

The 'pressure to perform'- honorably, courageously and without fail was put on the Sikh soldiers not only from the British officers, but also their families, elder, the Sikh community lead by the Sikh elites and the wider social milieu. The letters that flowed to the front from the Punjab were full of exhortation to excel on the battlefield. Turning back or failing to rise upto the demands, regardless of the difficulties was not an option. This was because the honour of the family, his clan, his village and even the entire Sikh community rested o the soldiers of each Sikh who manned the trenches or rode a horse in the cavalry posted overseas. To 'let the side down' was not even an option, it was beyond consideration'. The prestige or '*izzat*' was the banner that had to be held aloft at every and any cost and this sentiment is conveyed in a letter which reached a Sikh soldier from his father in Punjab while he was serving at the front in France:

*The Sikh roars like a lion on the field of battle,  
And yields up his life as a sacrifice*

---

<sup>270</sup>George Morton Jack, 'The Indian Army on the western front, 1914-1915: A portrait of collaboration', *War in History*, 13(3), Cambridge,2006, pp. 329-362.

<sup>271</sup>SantanuBasu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, p. 54.

<sup>272</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 358.

<sup>273</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119.

*Whoever is fortunate enough to be born a Rajput  
Never fears the foe in battle;  
He gives up all thought of worldly pleasure  
And dreams only of the battle field;  
He who dies on the field of battle,  
His name never dies, but lives in history;  
He who fronts the foe boldly in battle has God for his protection;  
Once a Sikh takes the sword in hand He has only one aim-victory<sup>274</sup>.*

According to the British imperial view, Sikhism was a source of power that made Sikhs 'theoretically' stronger at fighting than the rest of India's population. This idea was also challenged by the horrific conditions that the soldiers faced on the front. Mayer<sup>275</sup> (2011) argues that when the idealised vision of war collapsed, the icons of being heroic, such as uniform and headgear, failed for British soldiers. In the case of the Sikhs, it was the collapsing martial race military system for Sikh soldiers as confessed in a letter by a Sikh in France, when he claimed having suicidal thoughts<sup>276</sup>. Some soldiers began to relinquish their warrior rank, accepting that war had rendered them useless<sup>277</sup>. Sikhs were aware of the 'unrealistic' demands put on them. 'It being the religion of the Sikhs to die facing the foe - anything you say is valid, but if only you were here, you will see for yourself<sup>278</sup>.

These letters reflect two points that run like a common vein through them. They show the Sikhs' beliefs and martial ideas while highlighting how constructions of martiality become more difficult to sustain. At different points during the war, the reasons why martial race concepts were strained can be seen. The death toll was the most notable cause. The Indian regiments had suffered 9,578 losses in France by December 1914. The 47th Sikh battalion suffered a large number of casualties, 444 just on one day on April 26, 1915. By the time the regiment left France, it was decimated- only 28 of the original men who had come out were alive and not absent for more than ten days and could set sail for Mesopotamia<sup>279</sup>.

---

<sup>274</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>275</sup>V. Mayer, *Below the Line*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 67.

<sup>276</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 146.

<sup>277</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>278</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>279</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

These deaths "shattered the romanticized version of war, put forward by writers such as Kipling and the 'stalwart Indian sepoy'" and was "replaced it with an unflattering portrayal of the Indian troops as panicked and vulnerable to self-inflicted wounds," according to the paper<sup>280</sup>.

The soldiers' voluntary departure from martial identity was unconscious and spontaneous, and was a reaction to the tremendous pressures, poor equipment and kit and unimagined horrors of modern warfare that involved air strikes and poisonous gas, that was unlike anything the soldiers from Indian had ever foreseen or imagined. The unprecedented circumstances in which the soldiers found themselves shook their beliefs of self identity to the core and 'self preservation' emerged supreme.

The Indian soldiers, the Sikhs amongst them left France under a cloud in late 1915 when they were moved to Mesopotamia. One of the reasons, kept secret but nevertheless well-known unofficially was that the Indian soldiers had been found wanting in the European battle arenas. The soldiers were also accused of self-inflicting wounds to get out of the active fighting, which for many meant certain death. Greenhut has gone so far as to claim that 57 percent of all wounds in 1914 were self-inflicted and this percentage was much higher as compared to British soldiers<sup>281</sup>. Self-inflicted wounds were a widespread problem in Indian regiments, not just among Sikhs<sup>282</sup>. Greenhut's point is supported by Omissi's suggestion that there are reports of soldiers' letters relating to self-inflicted wounds<sup>283</sup>. During the war, an investigation was set up to examine these allegations, but no proof was found to support them.

Their legendary bravery and fearlessness in battle, ability to hold their own and never give in with an obstinacy based on religious convictions and their socio-cultural milieu had been witnessed on the first hand by the British themselves in both the

---

<sup>280</sup>McLain, R. 'Frontline Masculinity: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–1915'. *Gender and Violence in British India* (2014). Palgrave Macmillan: New York, pp. 61-88.

<sup>281</sup>Greenhut, J. 'Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army'. *The Journal of Military History*, 48(1), 1984, p. 15.

<sup>282</sup>R. McLain, *Frontline Masculinity*, p. 36. The author points out in *Frontline Masculinity* points out that it is difficult to tell if the wounds were self-inflicted. This would only be possible if further evidence from letters stating that they did self-inflict wounds could be found. Historians are in fact, deducing these hypotheses by reading data or decoding letters.

<sup>283</sup>Omissi, *Letters*, p. 19.

Anglo Sikh wars. In these wars too, the British were on the verge of unconditional surrender for the first and only time in the history of their stay in India. Several times, during these wars, the British were awed and overcome by the sheer unconcern the Sikhs had for death and their stubborn resolve in the face of overwhelming odds. The English were routed by them in several the Battle of Chillianwala and others to the extent that 'Remember Chillianwala' became an oft repeated rallying cry and famous refrain in Britain.

When the British chose the Sikhs as bulwarks and breakwaters in the tumult of the Indian sub- continent, they did so on sound and severely tested grounds. The loyalty and dedication of the Sikhs, and their commitment to a cause which they forswore to protect was tested for mettle in the forge of the sweltering days of the summer of 1857, and the Sikhs proved themselves to be steadfast and absolutely dependable even in the four unprecedentedly fearsome, ferocious and unrelenting years of 1914-1918 when the First World War raged across the entire globe.



## **CHAPTER-III**

### **THE SIKH SOLDIER AT HOME IN THE WORLD**

This chapter aims to take forward the experiential and contextual understanding of the Sikh soldiers in the war years from 1914-1918. The chapter traces as to how the British colonial administration imposed its force and power on the province of Punjab and took away the flower of the Sikh population to wage war in the outer reaches of the Empire in places such as Mesopotamia, Iraq, Iran, Africa and Europe. The methods and mechanics of assembling the largest volunteer force from the interiors of rural Punjab and taking them abroad to serve to strange lands is a fact which needs attention and enquiry.

The kaleidoscope of experiences that the soldiers underwent, when they witnessed their comrades being killed by the hundreds at one go, the unceasing arrival of new recruits from India, the varying attitude of the colonial administration and officers to the Indian soldiers<sup>1</sup> (some were nice, many belligerent, some dismissive, most acted resigned to commanding an Indian force), their position vis a vis` the British and other soldiers, hailing from different nationalities, etc. have been examined in some detail to understand the plethora of soldiers' experiences. Another fascinating area wherein there is little known of the experience of the Indian soldier is outside the trenches, when he was either returning to India, or was being treated at a hospital or medical facility abroad.

Cross-culturisation of the kind that was experienced by the Indian soldiers, and Sikhs in particular in France, always lead to comparisons, reflective analysis and cultural ferment which is borne out of the exposure to new ways of thinking, doing and living. There is no doubt that the Sikh soldiers were also very much affected by their experiences abroad in the four years' of the war. Cultural introspection is rampant in the letters of the soldiers and reflects how they were observing, internalising and manifesting the results of all that they were seeing in their sojourns. These are some of the questions which have been addressed in this chapter.

---

<sup>1</sup>G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the trenches: officer-man relations, morale and discipline in the British army in the era of the First World War*, New York: Springer, 2000, p. 69.

## First World War

On August 4, 1914 Great Britain declared war against Germany with the message from the King Emperor which regretted the fact that Britain was drawn into the war but pressed upon the necessity of it<sup>2</sup>. In India, Viceroy Hardinge lost no time in announcing that India has joined the war effort on the behalf of the British Empire<sup>3</sup>. The Indian response was quite encouraging as almost all the major political parties such as the All India Muslim League, Indian National Congress, Punjab Muslim League, Citizens of all major cities such as Calcutta, Delhi, Lahore, Madras, Rangoon, Hindus of the Punjab, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Parsi Community of Bombay etc voiced support for the war effort<sup>4</sup>.

The reaction of the Indian press was similarly accommodative and the major newspaper of the time 'The Bengalee' printed columns to the effect that one of the finest armies in the world is backed by the multitudes of India ready to co-operate with the government in the defence of the Empire. Another newspaper 'The Indian Patriot' expressed the feeling that the entire continent of India was united by one feeling of concern loyalty and devotion and was ready to extend every support to the government. The 'Biharee' wrote articles to the effect that India's fortunes were linked to the British Empire and India was ready to don armour in defence of Empire to defend India and if need be to go to any part of the world at The call of the motherland.

These declarations of loyalty and support were backed by solid provisions of men money and material. India was immediately ready to send to complete divisions of infantry and one division of cavalry to France on the instructions of the Home Government. By September 1914, these divisions were already on the way to France. Mixed Indian Divisions were sent to Africa too and in October and November a division of infantry and a brigade of cavalry made their way to Egypt. Another regiment of Indian infantry went to China to help the Japanese against the Germans. In November a large force was dispatched against Turkey from India which was later reinforced to the strength of a division.

---

<sup>2</sup> B. L. Hart, *A history of the first world war*, London: Pan Macmillan, 2014, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> B. Pati, *India and the First World War*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1996, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> G. Morton-Jack, *The Indian empire at war: From jihad to victory, the untold story of the Indian Army in the First World War*. UK: Hachette, 2018, p. 56.

As Lord Hardinge announced with pride, within six months of the outbreak of the war, 7 divisions of infantry and two divisions and brigades of cavalry were sent from India overseas. In addition to these, more than 20 batteries of artillery and 32 batteries of British infantry 1,000 strong and more was sent to England<sup>5</sup>. 70 million rounds of small arm ammunition, 60,000 rifles and 550 guns of the most modern make were also supplied along with the enormous quantities of cloth, metals and other war materials. Right from the start of the war, the Punjab distinguished itself by its brilliant record in the provision of men, money and materials to the war effort<sup>6</sup>. At the start of the war there were only about 80000 British officers and men in India. British Indian army also had 230000 Indian ranks which were soldiers and non combatants. Over 8 lakh combatants and 4 lakh non combatants were recruited from all over India during the four years of the First World War. In all 1.3 million Indian men fought for Britain. Punjab took the lead for recruitment and Michael O'Dwyer, the Governor of Punjab, pulled out all the stops in helping the British Empire recruit, train, equip and dispatch fighting men from the Punjab for service abroad<sup>7</sup>. Punjab started the war with about 100 thousand men of all ranks in the British Indian Army and this number only increased over the years the War continued. At the end of the war in 1918, half a million men from Punjab had served with the colours and roughly 360,000 men which was more than half the total number raised in India were from Punjab.

The Duke of Connaught acknowledged the achievements of Punjab as remarkable in the war. He wrote that even before the war the Punjab was a familiar name in the military annals of the Empire. However, during the course of the First World War, Punjab became a household name across the British Empire because of the number of men who joined the colours and also because of the tremendous fighting abilities which were displayed by the men from Punjab<sup>8</sup>. General James Willcocks, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Corps in France expressed his opinion that the Sikhs were the best among all the Indian soldiers and they formed the backbone of the British military prestige in the East<sup>9</sup>. Throughout the course of the war as more and

---

<sup>5</sup> Lord Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, London: J. Murray, 1948, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> B. Pati, *India and the First World War*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1996, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> M. O' Dwyer, M. J. S. Warich, *India as I knew it*. New Delhi: Unistar Books, 2016, p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> K. Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War: 1914–18*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, London: Constable, 1920, p. 928.

more men and material was needed and money was required for the war effort India and the Punjab continued to make Sterling contributions.

India's position and contribution to the war effort became critical because at this juncture India was directly threatened by Russia<sup>10</sup>. When England issued an urgent appeal to India for more fighting Men, many fighting fit men rallied to the cause. After the organisation of the all India war conference which was held in Delhi from 27th April to 29th April 1918 it was decided to send half a million more competent recruits from June 1918 to join the war effort overseas. Special Central and local recruiting organisations were already up and running by the time the armistice was declared. 200 thousand combatants had already been recruited and three hundred thousand recruits were ready to be sent abroad. Even more power required would have been obtained effortlessly if the war had continued.

As far as the course of participation of the Indian combatants is concerned, the first Indian expeditionary force first reached France. The soldiers made a mark and played an important role in various battles including the Battle of Ypres, Battle of Nueve Chapell. General Willcocks, the Commander in Chief of the Indian Corp in France observed that the short line that links these battlefields holds more Indians than the whole of the rest of the frontline combined<sup>11</sup>. Following the departure of the Indian infantry divisions from France, the Indian cavalry stayed in France for over three years, while the infantry was sent to other battlefields in the Middle East<sup>12</sup>. Many Sikh battalions were among the Indian cavalry units remaining in France, and they distinguished themselves in conflicts like as the Cambre wars. When the cavalry divisions left France in February 1918, numerous Indian labour regiments stayed and provided essential services in France.

The four major expeditionary forces that were sent out from India have been credited by saving the British Empire by Mereweather and Smith<sup>13</sup>. The historians commented that the empire was saved by an alternative of shifts and experience each of which

---

<sup>10</sup> G. Morton-Jack, *The Indian army on the western front: India's expeditionary force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War*, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> Pati, *India and the First World War*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> C. Koller, 'The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War'. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26(1-2), 2008, pp.111-133.

was just successful because of the deathless valour and devotion of human beings who form the part of the expeditionary force the Indian core the territorial divisions and the overseas in Kitchener armies<sup>14</sup>.

There was enough glory and sacrifice for all and the Indians out did each other in reaching out for the elusive acknowledgement of valour in battle and in making the ultimate sacrifice. The Indians were sent to the eastern theatre, where the central forces were facing the brunt of the conflict. On November 4, 1914, Turkey joined the war on Germany's side, and the Indian military forces were moved from Europe to fight this new threat closer to home. The Suez Canal was the British empire's key artery in the Middle East, and it had to be safeguarded at all costs. Thousands of Indian lives were sacrificed in different endeavours to protect this goal, including the 2nd, 10th, and 92nd Punjabis, as well as the 2nd Rajput. Gallipoli was another conflict in which the Indian army performed admirably<sup>15</sup>. Under the command of General Allenby, Indian troops in Palestine won several battles while facing formidable odds and suffered tremendous losses. In the spring of 1918, Germany launched an extended attack, prompting the British High Command to withdraw all British forces from the east and replace them with Indian troops<sup>16</sup>.

Mesopotamia, however, proved to be the most difficult of all the theatres, taking a heavy toll on Indian troops' lives. The military debacle in Mesopotamia sapped morale and moved vast resources away from India to fill the void. Only with the fall of Baghdad on March 11, 1917, was India finally able to reclaim the respect that had been lost during the Mesopotamia catastrophe. Other operations in which Indian soldiers played a significant part were East Africa, South Africa, British Uganda, and others. With the announcement of the armistice, which reached the powers in the east on November 1, 1918, the campaign in the east came to a conclusion.

### **The Question of Race**

The concept of race is rooted in the cultural, historical, ethnic and institutional understanding of the Europeans, mainly Victorians. They were swept along in the new racial and ethonographic waves that swept Europe in the wake of Darwinism and the

---

<sup>14</sup> C. Koller, 'The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia, pp.111-133.

<sup>15</sup> G. M. Jack, *The Indian Army on the western front, 1914-1915: A portrait of collaboration*, *War in History*, 13(3), 2006, pp 329-362

<sup>16</sup> Pati, *India and the First World War*, p. 63.

new evolutionary theories. When the Europeans ventured all over the globe as Colonisers, it was this same brand of racial perception that they carried with them when they encountered new people and new cultures<sup>17</sup>. The colonisers were aided in this task by the other agents of colonialism including imperialistic officialdom, mercantile classes, missionaries, settlers and traders<sup>18</sup>.

The theory of 'scientific racism' was the critical bedrock on which the Europeans built the superstructure of colonialism<sup>19</sup> and justified their presence in diverse parts of the world, where they were not invited, needed or even welcome. In order to legitimise and perpetuate imperialist and colonial structures, scientific racism was applied and justified as a 'the creation and employment of a body of legitimately scientific and patently pseudo-scientific data as rationales for the preservation of poverty, inequality of opportunity for upward mobility and related regressive social arrangements'<sup>20</sup>.

The full flowering of the concept of scientific racism happened in England, although there were important contributions made in the initial stages by the German scientists, Joseph Gall and Gasper who pioneered the science of Phrenology<sup>21</sup> (a pseudoscience involving the measurement of the skull to determine a person's or races intellectual and psychological attributes). The cephalic index<sup>22</sup>, which was invented by Swede Anders Retzius, was further elaborated upon by Parisian Paul Broca<sup>23</sup>. Herbert Risley, a colonial ethnographer<sup>24</sup>, was then successful in etching elaborate racial typologies to

---

<sup>17</sup>Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Construction of colonial power: Structure, Discourse, hegemony', *Occasional Papers on History and Society*, Second Series, XXXV, Centre for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, 1991, p. 19. (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

<sup>18</sup>K. Mohan, 'The Colonial Ethnography: Imperial Pursuit of Knowledge for Hegemony in British India (late 19<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002, pp.827-836.

<sup>19</sup>A. D. Barder, 'Scientific racism, race war and the global racial imaginary', *Third World Quarterly*, 40(2), 2019, pp.207-223.

<sup>20</sup>K. Mohan, 'The Colonial Ethnography', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, January 2012, p.831.

<sup>21</sup>P. Flourens, *Phrenology examined*, London: Hogan & Thompson, 1846, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>I. A. Ziogas, & L.C. Triarhou, 'Anders Retzius and his gyri', *Neurological Sciences*, 37(11), 1904, pp.1861-1866.

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Clower & S. Finger, 'Discovering trepanation: the contribution of Paul Broca', *Neurosurgery*, 49(6), 2001, pp.1417-1426.

<sup>24</sup>H. Risley, & W. Crooke, *The people of India*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999, p. 81.

classify Indian people using nasal and cephalic indices<sup>25</sup>. When Herbert Spencer hit upon the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’<sup>26</sup>, the colonials had a ready-made seemingly scientific, rational, moral, and spiritual bio cultural theory in the shape of ‘Social Darwinism’ to serve as justification for unabashed colonialism<sup>27</sup>.

In the background of this colonial rationalisation of control, conquest and cultural domination of the Indian people, British ethnographers such as Herbert Risley, Dr Caldwell, Alfred Lyall<sup>28</sup> and L.S.S.O Malley ranked the ‘various racial segments of the Indian society on the basis of their inherent attributes’<sup>29</sup>. The supremacy and dominance of the ‘Martial Races’ of the Sikhs, Rajputs and Gurkhas was attributed to right of blood, ancestry and special martial qualities. The Eden Commission that presented a comprehensive report on the British Indian Army in 1879 had also identified the Punjab as the “home of the most martial races of India” and the ‘nursery of the best soldiers in India’<sup>30</sup>.

In her study of the four war memorials of the four nations from the British Dominions and Empires who participated in the First World War at - Villers-Bretonneux (Australian), Vimy (Canadian), Delville Wood (South African), and Neuve Chapelle (Indian), Hanna Smythe has attempted to “examine how identity and memory were expressed, distinguished, and elided along multiple axes”<sup>31</sup>. Even today, the memories and identities of the soldiers from India who served in the First World War are shrouded in the mists of time.

The greatest apprehensions and the strongest misgivings in official circles and in the public emerged about sending the Indian soldiers to fight in Europe as it was a two faceted problem. The racial superiority that was preserved through distinction and

---

<sup>25</sup>Claude Alvaraez, ‘Science, colonialism and violence - Luddite view’ in AshisNandy (ed.) *Science, hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for modernity*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup>J. Offer, *Herbert Spencer and social theory*, Delhi: Springer, 2012, p. 76

<sup>27</sup>S. Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, p.70

<sup>28</sup>A. C. Lyall, *Asiatic studies- Religious and Social*, J. Murray, 1882, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup>Mohan, ‘The Colonial Ethnography’, p. 832.

<sup>30</sup>S. H. S. Soherwordi, ‘Punjabisation’ in the British Indian Army, 1857–1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan’, *Edinburgh Papers*, in *South Asian Studies*, 24, Edinburgh, 2010, pp.1-32.

<sup>31</sup>Hanna Smythe, *War and Memorials: The age of Nationalism and the Great War*. New York: Brill Schoningh, 2019, p. 28.

racial exclusivity was in danger of being lost because the colonial soldiers would be fighting a white enemy. There was also the danger of admixture and intermingling with white women. In the four years of war, the Sikhs from a total population of two and a half millions, less than 1 percent of British India-furnished no less than ninety thousand combatant recruits, or one eighth of India's total<sup>32</sup>.

Ultimately an "Army, like any other human society, is an organism, whose well being depends on the interplay of human relationships<sup>33</sup>". Tony Ashworth has also recorded in his studies of military history that the military unit becomes a community, a substitute family for a soldier. Even in Britain, there was a lot of social, educational, economic and class difference between soldiers and officers. G. Sheffield observes that the ranks of the British Army in the Edwardian era, were filled with ill educated men of indifferent health, from poor, urban backgrounds<sup>34</sup>. J.F. Fuller has also succulently put the composition of the British army in context when he says that "Recruited from the bottom of society, it was led from the top."<sup>35</sup>

This was the picture in the British Isles with the British army. In the British Indian army, Indians formed the bulk of the recruited men. Only the officers were British and here also there were two classes- One was the British Indian Army officers with the Viceroy's Commission and they were not as highly regarded as the Officers with the King's Commission. The Sikh men who were recruited to the regiments were basically from a very similar background. As discussed in the previous chapter of this study, they were preferably from the high recruitment districts of Central Punjab such as the Majha and Malwa and drawn from the Jat Sikh caste who all hailed from a more or less common community, religious, socio-cultural and agriculture based milieu.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the outlook of the officer was changing and inducing this change were the senior officers in the Army themselves who were training and shaping the newer recruits in the officer ranks to imbibe 'noblesse oblige'- the principle that the men in their units and commands were under their

---

<sup>32</sup>Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I knew it*. New Delhi. Unistar Books, reprinted 1998, p. 207.

<sup>33</sup>G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the trenches*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup>M.F. C. Fuller, *The Late Victorian Army: 1868-1914, Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, Oxford: Chandler and Beckett, 1920, pp. 199-203.



paternal care and they must look after them as children and see to their well-being and welfare. They were to be treated as children also because it was accepted that the men needed to have their lives closely supervised, or else they would not be able to fare well as they were untrustworthy and would fall apart if not disciplined and trained rigorously<sup>36</sup>.

### **Motives and Motivations of the Sikh Soldiers**

There are some extremely valid queries and questions that assail the mind immediately, concerning the motives and the various motivations which took this disparate but staunchly loyal body of men from the same community, led by officers who were not from their own race, country or religion, to strange lands to fight for an alien king and country.

Were the Sikh Soldiers, who had stepped on foreign soil for the first time, in an unforgiving, long drawn out war that was totally unlike anything the Indians had ever seen or even imagined, at home when sent abroad? Were they exposed to physical, mental and psychological stresses that proved to be so great that they threatened to unravel the preconceived notions of the 'model soldiers' of the 'martial races'?

How did the Sikh soldiers themselves perceive the sights, sounds, experiences and emotions of the new lands and peoples they found themselves intermingling with? How did the people of the foreign lands perceive the Sikh soldiers who were sent to fight for their causes from the exotic mysterious India that lay across the seas but suddenly did not seem so distant and remote?

### **The Call to Arms**

The recruiting, organisation and strategy of the Indian Army was strictly on the lines of the Martial Race theory in 1914<sup>37</sup>. The Indian army, on the eve of the outbreak of the Great War, comprised 39 cavalry regiments, 20 battalions of Gurkha Rifles, 118 battalions of Infantry and had 159,134 Indian soldiers and 2,333 British officers<sup>38</sup>. To these were added the 70,000 troops consisting of the Garrison, this was the sum of the

---

<sup>36</sup>Sheffield, *Leadership in the trenches*: p 54.

<sup>37</sup>F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth armies: Manpower and organisation in two world wars*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, pp.85-86.

<sup>38</sup>C. Hardinge, *My Indian Years, 1910-1916. The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst [With Plates, Including Portraits]*, London: John Murray, 1948, p. 65.

‘Army in India’. Maintenance of internal law and order and security, defence of India and provision of an Imperial force for duty outside India were the three primary functions of the Army of India<sup>39</sup>.

The recruiting posters were one of the biggest draws that the Government had to pull the best of the Punjabi talent to the recruiting centres. The recruiting posters showed the potential recruits how a life in the army would give them a “Good life, Good pay, good food and Good treatment<sup>40</sup>”. There was another recruitment poster which asked a direct and rather succulent question- the question mark is literally the face of the soldier in full uniform who is shown standing tall and there is question in Urdu that asks “Who will take this *bandook* (rifle), *rupaiya* (money) and *Wardi* (uniform). The answer was just below, shown with a cupped pair of hands holding a shower of coins- He who enlists in the army immediately”.

There were also recruitment songs, limericks set to catchy tunes which became popular songs sung by youngsters across Punjab. One of the songs was *Bharti ho jave* (Get enlisted)

*Bharti ho ja ve* (get Enlisted)

*Aithe milange toote chittar, Othe milenge boot* (here you will get broken slippers, there you will get boots)

*Aithe milenge paatechithre, uthe milange suit* (You will get rags here and suits there)

*Aithe milangiyan sookhiya rotiyan, Uther milenge Biskoot* (You will get dry roti here, there biscuits)

*Aithe reh ke mat marenga, uthe milange saloot* (Here you will struggle and there you will get salutes)<sup>41</sup>

As the above song illustrates, there was an appeal straight to the worldly and practical advantages that the recruits would acquire as an armyman. There was no reference to

---

<sup>39</sup>I. J. Kerr, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947*, 2006; Tan, Tai Yong: New Delhi: Sage, May 2005, p. 333.

<sup>40</sup> Santanu Das, *British Army recruited half a million people from Punjab*, New Delhi: Quartz India, 2018, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Santanu Das, *British Army recruited half a million people from Punjab*, New Delhi: Quartz India, 2018, p. 73

honour, *izzat* or *iqbaal*. This amply demonstrates how the British recruiting machinery and the raw villagers who were their target audience, both agreed without any qualms that money, food, a steady income and social status were the primary attractions that pulled Sikh youth to the army ranks.

As military expenditure was the largest single item of expenditure in the British Indian governmental, it was a substantial chunk of economic inflow into Punjab when 10 percent of the entire government budget went to soldiers in 1912. In addition to this great inflow of cash and incomes which fuelled all segments of the local economies across Punjab, the recruits got uniforms made of soft cotton as opposed to the rough Khaddar that they wore at home. The diet improved considerably as there was a profusion of vegetables and grains of many kinds<sup>42</sup>. This was quite true as is evident from the great changes in diet and habits which the Sikh soldiers and other Punjabi recruits brought back from the warfront. These have been discussed at greater length and detail in Chapter V of this study.

The economic factor was one of the biggest lure which attracted the Sikhs. They hailed mostly from the Jat Sikh caste which has a predominantly rural and agrarian base. The prime attraction and chief ambition in every Jat's life is to own as much land as possible. Knowing this weakness of the greatest section of the Punjabi recruits, the British government had already set aside for distribution and redistribution 180,000 of most valuable, sought after, newly developed, canal irrigated and valuable land<sup>43</sup>. This was the carrot that was dangled in front of the noses of the Sikh recruits, both officers and men who would serve with distinction in the war which would go on for many years. In the lure of this irresistible inducement, Sikh men were more than willing to recruit and prove their valour in battle just so they would win the prize of the land. Another 15,000 acres was also set aside to be distributed as reward grants to the notables, elites and big landlords who would render the most help in Punjab to the war effort.

As an additional incentive, repeatedly and across all platforms and in all forums, everyone from the highest to the most local authority, most notably the Governor of

---

<sup>42</sup>Santanu Das, *India, Empire and the First World War Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup>Amarjit Chandan, *How They Suffered: World War I and Its Impact upon the Punjabis*, <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> (Retrieved 12 May, 2021).

Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer himself, declared the war as a personal affront and called the Sikhs to enlist as a matter of redeeming their honour or *izzat*<sup>44</sup>. No wonder then, that the effervescent Sikhs were the first to answer the call to arms and be dispatched to Europe as a part of the First fleet of soldiers.

### **The First to Leave for the Front**

The training and dispatching of the soldiers to the war fronts, which was often a hurried process, in the war years' was a logistical exercise that needed immaculate handling and execution. It was often a voyage of a month, although the Suez Canal had shortened the distance considerably. The experience of the soldiers upon landing on foreign shores was quite pleasant as they were met with jubilant welcome as discussed below. They were unused to the winter conditions and strange environments to which they were exposed for the first time. To men hailing from the Punjabi countryside and rural hinterlands, the cities, modes and manners of the premier cities of Europe appeared curious and amazing. In turn, their arrival and appearance, modes and manners were of strange fascination to the Europeans who reacted to them in different ways.

Two Infantry Divisions and one cavalry brigade was the first to depart for France from India. The Lahore Division in late September 1914 and the Meerut division in Early October 1914 were the first ones to reach France and disembarked in Marseilles<sup>45</sup>. They were rushed near the Belgian city of Ypres, where the German Army were hard pressed to outflank the Allied Armies to the 'race to the Sea'<sup>46</sup>. Not fully equipped, under-clothed for the severe European winter just starting and unprepared, the Sikhs were thrust into the gaps in the Allied line into the wet muddy trenches<sup>47</sup>. The 57<sup>th</sup> Rifles were the first Indians engaged and The 15<sup>th</sup> Sikh and 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs were immediately behind<sup>48</sup>. The Indian cavalry had to dismount and fight as

---

<sup>44</sup>O'Dwyer- *India as I knew It*. P. 241

<sup>45</sup>J. Greenhut, 'Race, sex, and war: The impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914', *The Journal of Military History*, 45(2), 1981, p. 71 (India War Public Record Office, London, 1914).

<sup>46</sup>Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>H. Furber, *Penshurst: 'My Indian Years, 1910-1916'*, *Middle East Journal*, 3, Edinburgh, 1949, p.99.

<sup>48</sup>I. F. Beckett, *A nation in arms*. London: Pen and Sword, 2004, p. 27.

regular infantry, as the situation was so desperate and the Allied forces so thinly stretched<sup>49</sup>.

As evident from the media reports at the time, the Indian soldiers' arrival was celebrated and hailed in various media like the British and French newspapers and on public platforms. In fact, there was overwhelming public support for them as they were hailed as the liberators of Europe and the upholders of liberty. For the colonial soldier, who was used to being considered little more than inanimate war material by his colonial masters, this must have been his maiden exposure to such respect and even adulation. The effect these experiences had on the psyche and mental landscape of the soldiers is worth exploring and an attempt has been made to do this in the course of this study.

This adulation was in stark contrast to the unbearable reality of the trenches where the Indian soldiers invariably found themselves within a few hours of their arrival on foreign shores. For the Indian soldier, newly arrived from a tropical climate, ill equipped and ill kitted, the frozen trenches were nothing less than nightmares. Barely able to grasp the various physical, psychological and physiological demands of the trench warfare, mired in deep mud or under the constant fire of enemy guns, the soldiers must have been deeply affected at the most fundamental level. All these aspects have been brought to light by the researcher here using various mediums like the newspaper reports, pictures, documentary evidence, colonial and official reports, official and personal correspondence etc.

Sikhs fought with their customary bravery and general disregard for life<sup>50</sup>, but the heavy casualties and slaughter disconcerted them, used as they were completely unprepared for trench warfare, with the enemy using air power and poison gas. Despite being at such an acute disadvantage due to the adverse weather and unfamiliar ways, the Sikhs fought well and their casualties were very severe<sup>51</sup>. By April of 1915, the losses that the brigades bore were incredible. A case in point is April 26, 1915, a day on which the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs had sent 11 British and 10 Indian

---

<sup>49</sup>Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup>Hardinge of Penshurst, *My Indian Years*, p. 100.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p 101

officers and 423 other ranks into action. The next morning, only 4 officers and 92 men were left standing which is a loss of 80% just on one day<sup>52</sup>.

### **The First Indians in Europe**

The presence of Indians in Britain was not new. Numerous families brought their ayahs (nannies) and other servants with them to Britain when they moved back to the mother country. British shipping employed Indians, many of whom settled in Britain<sup>53</sup>. Indians had been seen in Europe before the arrival of thousands of soldiers, but in smaller numbers and limited capacities. Indians had served aboard the British merchant ships and were familiar as labour and sailors around the British shores. Queen Victoria also employed some Indians, most notably her Muslim servant Abdul Karim<sup>54</sup>. There were also some elite students who were centered around Cambridge, Oxford and London and belonged to rich influential families<sup>55</sup>. The scions of ruling houses in India had customarily travelled abroad since the mid 1800's and their lavish spending, flamboyant presence and razzle dazzle had always attracted attention<sup>56</sup>.

### **Sikh Soldiers Abroad**

The Sikhs were no strangers to service overseas. At a time when the majority of the other races in India were reluctant to venture to unknown lands abroad, the Sikhs were game for the adventure and extra perks that service outside entitled them to. For the Sikhs, soldiering was a profession that not only brought social honour, money and social recognition, but also brought many unforeseen and unseen opportunities in its wake. Not only did the Sikhs see service in the armed forces as an important means to better their lot, decrease the load on the land, bring forth an extra source of regular income, provide avenues of employment to sons and brothers but also life in the

---

<sup>52</sup>Merewether and Smith, 1917, pp. 304-05; David Omissi, *Sikh Soldiers in Europe during the First World War, 1914–18*, *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, 2012, pp. 36-50.

<sup>53</sup>R. Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, Routledge, 2015, p. 91.

<sup>54</sup>S. Mathur, *An Indian Encounter: Portraits for Queen Victoria*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 64.

<sup>55</sup>David Omissi, 'Europe Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918', *The English Historical Review*, Volume CXXII, Issue 496, April 2007, pp. 371–396.

<sup>56</sup>S. Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo Indian encounters, race and Identity, 1880-1930*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 49.

Army with its discipline, exposure to new ways of living and better living conditions bring about quiet social and community change in diet, habits, spending, social mores and religious outlook.

The Sikhs had no religious injunction that debarred them from going abroad, like the Hindus did at this time<sup>57</sup>. The Sikhs were happy to leave the comfort and familiarity of their homes and serve in strange places. Right from the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when the Sikhs had ventured for the first time beyond the frontiers of the Punjab into regions such as Kashmir, Peshawar, Kabul and Ladakh, to name a few, their appetite for travel and adventure ensured that they were willing to serve overseas even under the British.

Under the British, as a part of the British Indian Army, the Sikhs had served in places such as Malaya, Singapore, Mediterranean, African protectorates and colonies of the British. During the course of the Great War of course, the Sikhs were at the forefront in places ranging from Europe to the Far East to Africa and the Middle East. This was very beneficial to the British as most of the Hindu races of India were forbidden to travel overseas as they were not allowed to go over the black waters and where the Munja grass does not grow, as per ancient religious injunctions in the *Shastras*. The Sikhs had no such compunctions and were quite willing to go abroad in pursuit of better pay and extra benefits. The Sikhs have been described as sturdy men, politically ignorant, of the peasant type, and many as old soldiers who went abroad to better their lot through their industry and risk taking ability<sup>58</sup>.

Right from the time that they were recruited in the British Indian Army in 1846, after the First Anglo-Sikh war, the Sikhs proved to be formidable allies for the English. In 1853-54, the Sikh soldiers were used to stamp out the Santhal rebellion in the United Provinces. In 1860, after the loyalty of the Sikhs had been tried and tested in the burning inferno of the Mutiny of 1857, the Loodhiaah (Ludhiana) Sikh Regiment was sent to Chinato conquer Peking and Hong Kong. From suppressing the revolts of the Pathans in the North Western frontier, who they had already defeated many times under Maharaja Ranjit Singh to fighting in campaigns overseas in 1867 (Abyssinia), 1885 (Burma), 1878-1880 (Afghanistan), 1891-1898 (East and Central Africa), 1882-

---

<sup>57</sup>S. Colpani, *Beyond the black waters: A memoir of Sir SathiNarain*, editorrips@ usp. ac. Fj, 1996, p. 49.

<sup>58</sup>O' Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p.190.

1885 (Malaya and Egypt, the Sikhs had always been in the forefront of the military campaigns of the British army abroad.

The hardiness of the Sikh soldier and his ability to adapt to any conditions was also a big advantage. One remarkable factor that evoked the wonder of the various people amongst which the Sikhs served, was the awe inspiring hardiness and resilience of the Sikhs. They appeared to be as immune to the tropical diseases of Mesopotamia or Egypt as they were sturdy and active in the depth of the snowbound European winters. A possible explanation of this strength against disease and deprivation might be provided by someone who had spent many decades in Punjab during the people and which follows below in the words of British observers.

The Sikh soldier was not only physically very distinctive and imposing but also behaviourally quite striking<sup>59</sup>. To the British public, Sikhs were instantly recognisable and tall, turbaned and bearded, they were probably “the best known to Englishmen of all the fighting men of India, with the possible exception of the Gurkhas<sup>60</sup>, according to Sir James Willcocks. In fact, the image of the Gurkhas and the Sikhs as Indian soldiers was so well entrenched in the British public imagination, that the public thought they were the *only* soldiers in India.

### **The Press Reaction to Indian Soldiers in Europe**

When the Indians arrived at France and Belgium in the beginning of the war, it was to a delirious welcome. They were lauded as “Our Saviours”, and headlines such as “Indian troops in action”, “Dash of the India troops” and “valour of the Indians” was extolled fulsomely.

Even a newspaper as The Times went into raptures:

When the inimitable resources of the British Empire, our grand fleet, our unconquerable army, the flower of the manhood, our heroic kinsmen from overseas, our chivalrous India troops, are all placed in the scale in this mighty struggle from which we will never flinch nor falter<sup>61</sup>.

---

<sup>59</sup>C. Koller, The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26(1-2), 2008, pp. 111-133.

<sup>60</sup>Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup>A.T. Jarboe, *Indian Soldiers in World War I: Race and Representation in an Imperial War, Nebraska*: U of Nebraska Press, 2021, p. 37.



The reaction of the press on the arrival of the Indian soldiers in England was most welcoming and encouraging. On October 2, 1914, upon the arrival of the Indian soldiers in France, a correspondent of venerable newspaper, *The Times* gushed,

Today it has been my great good fortune to assist in the making of history. I have seen the troops of one of the world's most ancient civilisations set foot for the first time on the shores of Europe. I have seen the proud princes of India ride at the head of thousands of soldiers, princes and men alike fired with the ardour of the east, determined to help win their emperor's battles or die<sup>62</sup>.

The welcome that was extended to the Indians was more effusive and warmer than the other colonial visitors were afforded.

Marseilles streets have echoed to the tread of a remarkable medley of soldiers from the picturesque Zouaves and Turcos from Algeria to Swarthy Moors from Morocco and Coal black negroes from Senegal. Though all have been received with heartiness, the welcome the high spirited Marseilles extended to the Indians transcended all others in spontaneity and warmth'. Every road within a mile of the docks was a mass of excited Latins and every second storey window and every roof within a like area was a coveted vantage seat<sup>63</sup>.

The Indian soldiers reciprocated the warmth of the welcome, as the reporter goes on to explain

As for the Indian soldiers, happier fighting men never landed in a country where death or glory was to be their goal<sup>64</sup>

Apparently the only fear that our admirable soldiers had, according to the correspondent was, "that the war may be over before they get to the front".

Local newspapers from Brighton and even the national newspapers carried favourable reports about the Indians soldiers. At Bournemouth and in Brighton, 'everything Indian... is loved by the people'. Souvenirs from the soldiers, such as buttons were sought for by the women and worn as brooches or pendants, after 'rewarding' the

---

<sup>62</sup>'The Indian Troops at Marseilles', *The Times*, October 2, 1914, The Times online Archives, Accessed on May 19, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*,

soldiers. The common soldiers came in for greater attention than the officers, who were approached less often, as the class system was still very much in force in England at the time. A sub Assistant surgeon says, he was left alone by the women, only because they mistook him for an officer<sup>65</sup>.

The soldiers also took every opportunity to visit different places and ‘see’ London, and Cook Tours even organised excursions to the city<sup>66</sup>. The soldiers had much to admire in England and as Havildar Surjan Singh of the Guides Infantry while recovering from a wound in a hospital in England, wrote to his friend Jimman Singh in Gurmukhi (Punjabi)

They were impressed by Britain’s wealth, and they praised the cleanliness of the people and their houses, the high level of public scrutiny and the apparent lack of caste distinctions in British society<sup>67</sup>.

The grievance that caused much heartburn in the hearts of various soldiers as apparent from their letters was the apparent strictness of the authorities in the hospitals, which made it seem as if the soldiers were living in jail<sup>68</sup>. The eulogies of the newspapers and press notwithstanding, the reality was far from rosy. The newspaper reports were more for the continued high morale of the British public and just ploys and propaganda to appease the British people and fire them up with war rhetoric. The headlines fuelled the imagination of the people. The reports were descriptive and kept the romance of the war alive to a public that was screened from the real death and destruction that was happening on the fronts. Newspapers were also sources of Empire building and reinforced the idea that “Our Indian soldiers” were fighting on the behalf of the British and were protecting assets, lives and liberties of those who were their masters and their rulers.

---

<sup>65</sup> J. H. Godbole, Indian General Hospital, Bournemouth, to S. N. Godbole, *Dapoli, Rutnagari* (Marathi), 23 July 1915, L/MIL/5/825/4/637.

<sup>66</sup> David Omissi, ‘Europe Through Indian Eyes’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXII, Issue 496, April 2007, pp. 371–396.

<sup>67</sup> David Omissi, ‘Europe Through Indian Eyes’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXII, Issue 496, April 2007, pp. 371–396.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*,

## **Sikh Soldiers in Europe**

However, the very first time that Europe and Britain saw Indian presence in thousands was at the time of the First World War when Indian soldiers arrived suddenly in their thousands<sup>69</sup>. Immediately after the declaration of war against Germany, The War Council recommended the sending of Indian divisions to Europe, and despite the misgivings earlier, that white prestige would be damaged if Indians were to fight against white enemy but Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, who was the Viceroy of India, was eager to placate Indian ‘advanced’ opinion and readily agreed to send the Lahore and Meerut Infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade to France<sup>70</sup>.

Massia Bibbikoff, a Russian woman witnessed the arrival of the Indian Expeditionary Force at Marseilles in October, 1914, and describes the scene

The city was decked with flags as if it were one of the great national holidays...a sea of billowing, with a crowd of many colours, all in holiday attire, with little flags of the Allies in buttonhole or dress, shouting welcome to the gallant, bronze faced soldiers who marched by with swinging gait, and smiled with a flash of dazzling teeth when people threw them flowers and children gave them flags. It was a delirious scene<sup>71</sup>.

Arriving in France in September 1914, the Indian divisions fought in the Battle of Ypres, where they had their first shocking encounter with trench warfare, a front stretching across miles, air bombardment and even poison gas attacks, all while being garbed in garb that was woefully inadequate in one of the coldest winters the region had ever recorded. By early 1915, four divisions were fighting on the Western front, 2 each of infantry and cavalry. By the end of 1915, the two infantry divisions were withdrawn and sent to Mesopotamia, while the cavalry division stayed on till March 1918 (almost 3. 9 years) and were then sent to Palestine to fight against the Turks<sup>72</sup>.

The Sikhs became much admired figures immediately as they were right away distinguishable by virtue of their height, bearing, turbans and general confidence. In a rare book “Our Indians at Marseilles” written and illustrated by Massia Bibbikoff,

---

<sup>69</sup>David Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918*, The English Historical Review, Volume CXXII, Issue 496, April 2007, Pages 371–396,

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>71</sup>Maasia Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, Paris: De L’Academie Francaise, 1915, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 387.

there is an invaluable first hand eye witness account of the Indian army when they first landed in France. In the introduction to this marvellous book, Maurice Barre`s<sup>73</sup> describes seeing a detachment of Sikh cavalry for the first time.

I was given the opportunity of seeing the cavalry march by Sikhs from the Punjab, tall and strong, dignified in feature, mounted on fine horses. Man and beast alike were in resplendent health...the Sikhs never cut their beard or hair. Their beard is rolled up curiously around their cheeks; their hair is twisted up and hidden under their high turbans. Here we see regular features, faces of a long oval and clear and golden colouring. Hail to our Aryan brothers in the garb of Magian kings!

The Frenchman then muses to himself that, “these strangers from a distant land who astound us by standing shoulder to shoulder with us in the defence of French soil, are very closely akin to ourselves. They like to be with our peasants and talk to them by signs. I have seen a child teaching them French<sup>74</sup>”.

The Franco-Russian artist and author MassiaBibikoff who herself spent some time with the Sikh soldiers in their camp at Parc Borely where she sketched the soldiers engaged in various activities at camp. Of the Sikhs, she writes

Seldom, save for the Cossacks, have I seen such fine men. There was not one less than five feet eleven in height. Slender, beautifully proportioned, while many are of real beauty. Their expression is gentle and remarkably sympathetic, especially when, as so often happens, a kindly smile lights up their bronze faces...I look closely and see their beards carefully twisted up and held in place by a thin string of black silk which they fasten behind their ears.

Her curiosity about the Sikhs was repaid in kind as they were equally frank in their appraisal of the white girl who was in their midst by special permission to draw them

From the moment of my appearance in their camp, a great man of them stopped work and crowded round, looking at me like a strange animal. What good, honest faces there were on every side! How amused and happy and indeed proud they were to be sketched! How merrily eager they were to pose before me, stiff, motionless, their arms glued to their sides. My models insisted on signing their names.

---

<sup>73</sup>Maasia Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup>Maasia Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, p. 63.

One main source of direct knowledge about the personal experiences of the Sikh soldiers at this time are the letters which they sent home to their families and friends. The officers wrote more often than the ranks and this could be due to the fact that Indian Non-Commissioned officers were better educated than the ranks. Many soldiers were unlettered and relied on their comrades or even paid scribes to write the letters on their behalf, upon their dictation. At the time of the Battle of Nueve Chappelle in March 1915, Indian soldiers in France and in Belgium wrote more than twenty thousand letters home in a week<sup>75</sup>. The letters were censored, in two places—first at the regimental level, when they were read and passed by an officer and then at the central censor.

The letters have survived as transcripts of the Censor office that was operational at Boulogne, right from the start of the war to scrutinise and censor Indian letters to maintain morale and operational secrecy. Initially the Central censor at Boulogne had the task to prevent seditious literature and propaganda to reach the soldiers through letters who were convalescing in various hospitals, but later the censorship was extended to cover ‘outward bound’ mail too<sup>76</sup>. The soldiers had surmised that their letters were being read, and were cautious in expressing their true sentiments<sup>77</sup>.

### **Letters: Tenuous Link with a Faraway Home**

Caught in a warzone that was like nothing they had ever imagined, let alone experienced, the Sikh soldiers were out of their depths and bewildered at the extreme destruction and death that surrounded them. When the military established a postal service, whereby Indians could send letters home free of charge, many Sikhs eagerly took up letter writing. Only 10.6% of Sikhs were literate, according to the 1911 census, but they wrote home by employing scribes and even bypassed the censor in innovative ways<sup>78</sup>.

Their letters home reflected their sense of awe and despair at the scale of the conflict in which they were participating. ‘It is the end of the world, it is not war!’<sup>79</sup>, wrote

---

<sup>75</sup>Jarboe, *Indian Soldiers in World War I*, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 387.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>78</sup>J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, Foundation Books, 2002, p. 89.

<sup>79</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 388.

one sepoy. Another sepoy writing home also opined, ‘the whole world is being brought to destruction’. Yet another wrote in a letter, “The Lahore Division.... Is finished”<sup>80</sup>. One Sikh soldier recorded his anguish in a letter, “ Corpses grow as thick as straw in watered wheat. If I wrote all day, I could not tell you what I have seen”<sup>81</sup>.

However, by the middle of 1915, the Sikh soldiers had started recognising that they were being literally used as cannon fodder and sent into the thickest zones, to save the lives of the British and other white soldiers, as the Indian casualties were disproportionately large<sup>82</sup>. Several of the soldiers, wary of being caught by the Army censor, used code language to convey their fears in letters but many write that “black pepper was being used to save red pepper which was not a coincidence”<sup>83</sup>.

This was a very dangerous supposition and the British did everything they could to prevent the spread of this notion. Writing to the Viceroy, Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of India said,

“... it is very important to combat the idea that the Indian soldiers have been sacrificed to save white men. This is not the case and many a British battalion would show heavier losses than theirs”<sup>84</sup>.

Within the Indian divisions, soldiers hailing from the Gurkhas, Sikhs and British units were sent to the fronts interchangeably and all three sections sustained more or less equal casualties<sup>85</sup>.

Bir Singh, a part of the Sikh cavalry in France, could not do without his opium, but since it was prohibited, he wrote home asking for the sender to send the opium, but write sweets outside the parcel to mislead the checking authorities. He also reassured his sender saying, “have no fear... parcels are not opened on the way and cannot be lost. Keep sending the stuff”<sup>86</sup>. The martial traditions on which the soldiers had been reared since childhood and which had been carefully fostered by the British

---

<sup>80</sup>David Omissi(ed.) *Indian voices of the Great War: Soldiers' letters, 1914–18*. London: Springer, 2016, p. 73.

<sup>81</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p. 42.

<sup>82</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p. 42.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>86</sup>S. VanKoski, ‘Letters home, 1915–16: Punjabi soldiers reflect on war and life in Europe and their meanings for home and self’, *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2(1), 43-63, 1995, pp.49-50.

government policies and army institutions and regulations ensured that the soldiers were invariably strongly motivated. This is evident from the letters of the soldiers which they wrote home. In September 1915, Havildar Hiram Singh wrote, 'If I die, I go to paradise. It is a fine thing to die in battle'<sup>87</sup>.

The homesickness of the soldiers is evident in their written words, as well as the spoken words, which will be described in detail in the next chapter. The imagery they used in their letters was largely agricultural. They had a deep interest in the rural landscapes wherein they were stationed and keenly observed the ways of life of the local inhabitants.

Their warrior traditions and religious grounding was also a wellspring of support and succour. Numerous references to the Sikhs Gurus, Sikh warrior traditions and tales of valour of famed Sikh warriors fill these letters. It is quite possible that religious, cultural and community status were critical elements that motivated the Sikh soldiers in combat<sup>88</sup>. The martial traditions on which the soldiers had been reared since childhood and which had been carefully fostered by the British government policies and army institutions and regulations ensured that the soldiers were invariably strongly motivated. This is evident from the letters of the soldiers which they wrote home. In September 1915, Havildar Hiram Singh wrote, 'If I die, I go to paradise. It is a fine thing to die in battle'<sup>89</sup>.

Kartar Singh also exemplifies the cultural and religious rootedness with bravery in battle when he writes in a letter.

"It was my very good fortune to be engaged in this war. We shall never get such a chance to exalt the name of race, country, ancestors, parents, village and brothers and to prove our loyalty to the government. I hope we shall renew our Sikh chronicles. Do not be distressed... such hardships come upon great men... I pray to God to give us a chance to meet the foe face to face... to die in battle is a noble fate"<sup>90</sup>.

---

<sup>87</sup>James Lawrence, *Raj: The Making of British India*, London: Abacus, 1997, p. 441.

<sup>88</sup>VanKoski, *Letters Home*, p. 46.

<sup>89</sup>Lawrence, *Raj: The Making of British India*, p. 441.

<sup>90</sup>Signaller Kartar Singh to Kunar Khan, Ludhiana District, Punjab, January 22, 1916, in Omissi 1999, doc 226, p. 44.

In a letter to the parents of a young Sikh soldier killed in battle, Ressaldar Jowan Singh, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lancers in France writes on December 10, 1917...

“The Guru has forcibly taken Kartar Singh from me.... Your son is a hero who has given his life for his king. He is not dead, he lives forever. He has gone straight to paradise... he has in fact achieved in an instant that which saints can only hope to secure after many years of trial”<sup>91</sup>.

The British officers were aware of this tendency of the Sikhs to applaud death on the battle field and consider it a direct ticket to paradise and they used these beliefs to further motivate the Sikhs soldiers and fire them with the zeal to acquit themselves without a shred of fear in battle. When describing the death of an Indian Sikh officer Chur Singh of the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs, his friend describes how the British officer taunted Chur Singh saying that he was not a Sikh of Guru Govind Singh as he was sitting in the trench out of fear. Chur Singh was very angry at this, drew his sword and charged and was killed with a bullet from the enemy which hit him in the mouth<sup>92</sup>.

Some sepoy who wrote home, broke into poetry and also started penning verses to cope with the scale and destruction around them. Captain Evelyn Howell, the Indian Civil Services Officer who headed the censorship department was not pleased with this development. In January 1915, he thought of ‘the tendency to break into poetry which I am inclined to regard as a rather ominous sign of mental disquietitude’.

The Punjabis sepoy, like the other Indian soldiers were full of praises for the Army’s Medical and Welfare Services. The regular visits by the sovereign King George V and Queen Mary were appreciated heartily by the Indian soldiers convalescing and being treated at the luxurious and beautifully situated Brighton Pavilion which had been converted into the Indian Convalescent Hospital and also at the Netley Hospital.

Isar Singh writing home in may 1915 from the Indian General Hospital in Brighton to a friend in the 59<sup>th</sup> Punjabis is quite optimistic and says...

Do not be anxious about me. We are very well looked after... Our hospital is in a place where the King used to have his throne... men in hospital are tended like flowers, and the King and Queen sometimes come to visit them<sup>93</sup>.

---

<sup>91</sup>Omissi, Letters, p. 43.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.* A sepoy of 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs recovering in Brighton, to a friend in India, December 14, 1915

<sup>93</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p.44.



A gurudwara was constructed for the Sikhs in the grounds of the hospital. The caste feeling were kept well preserved as Bir Singh mentions in a letter home that “ food arrangements are very good and men are selected from the regiments to look after the food and every man is served by his own caste fellows”.

The King Emperor George V was very circumspect about the welfare of his Indian soldiers<sup>94</sup>. A Sikh officer who was invited to London to receive two decorations from the King was overcome and wrote home that the King did him great honour.

“I am treated with great respect in London. I am always given a motor car in which I go to see the famous palaces... And I was only a poor Jat!”<sup>95</sup>

The Indian soldiers soon coined a code for white women who were willing to sample the exotics of the tropics. The soldiers called them ‘fruit’. One soldier reported that the Brighton girls were not better than the ones at his native ‘Adda Bazaar of Indore’. The highest compliment that could be given by the Punjabis to the women they met in Europe was comparison to the legendary and accomplished courtesans of the Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore.

The soldiers had access to raunchy postcards and these were sent to their comrades back home in India, but few made it past the censor department, headed by Captain Evelyn Howell. It was thought that the depiction of white girls in such a manner would prove detrimental to the prestige of the British empire in India. Possible sexual liaisons that could crop up between the soldiers and European women created untold headaches for the concerned authorities, both in India and Europe. When the Brighton Hospital was closed at the end of 1915, there was a booklet issued to all the Indians, which tellingly showed a Sikh soldier standing in the foreground and the royal pavilion in the background<sup>96</sup>.

There is evidence of many British officers who raised strong objections to Indian soldiers being invalided at Brighton and Netley and also to them being tended by

---

<sup>94</sup>M. L.S. Sorensen, & D. Viejo-Rose, (eds.), *War and cultural heritage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 34.

<sup>95</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, Subedar Major Sundar. Singh Bahadur, 89<sup>th</sup> Punjabis, Brighton to Havildar Basant Singh, 1<sup>st</sup> sappers and Miners, France, Oct 19, 1915, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p.44.

British nurses. General Sir James Willcocks, commander of the Indian portion of the army and Sir John French who was the commander of the British Expeditionary Force, both admitted to it privately. There was a quiet uproar, although not made publically, when the newspaper *Daily Mail* published a photograph of an English nurse and an Indian soldier<sup>97</sup>.

By the time the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs was transferred out of Europe, there were only 28 who were alive, and able to discharge their duties<sup>98</sup>. The entire Indian Corps (including the British units) had suffered 34, 252 casualties which were more than the average in the frontlines<sup>99</sup> by November 1915, when the Infantry regiments left for the Middle East.

One of the objectives of this study is also to analyze how the Sikh soldiers were affected culturally and socially by their exposure to the western world in particular and the wider world in general. The Sikhs who were part of the cavalry regiments in France from the beginning of the war to March 1918 when they were transferred out to the Middle East, spent almost three years in France<sup>100</sup>. They were bound to be affected by this long stay and this is reflected in their letters home.

The cavalry had limited dashing charges to make and most of their time was spent in relative comfort behind the lines, as mentioned by Hazura Singh in a letter to a friend Harnam Singh of the 11<sup>th</sup> Lancers, Delhi on February 7, 1916<sup>101</sup>.

People tell me that last year the cold was intense, but now it is no worse than the Punjab. We had a few days snow, but it ceased... We have at present nothing to do. We are better off than in containments. Matches are fixed to take place between the regiments, at tug of war, wrestling, football and running. We are the winners in football in our division and are to play the second division of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Hodson's Horse). I will let you know who wins...

Another Sikh cavalryman Natha Singh is of a similar opinion and calls France exceedingly pleasant. In it India is forgotten. I do not wish the war to end soon. I

---

<sup>97</sup>G. Martin, 'The Influence of Racial Attitudes in British Policy towards India during the First World War', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14, London, 1986, p. 34.

<sup>98</sup>Lt. Col J.W.B. Merewether & Sir F. Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, Reprint of 2nd edition, 1918, Naval & Military Press 1996, p. 92.

<sup>99</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p. 324.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, Doc 240.

<sup>101</sup>VanKoski, 1995, p. 56

should like to die in this country and I have no intention of returning to India... may the holy Guru save me from India<sup>102</sup>.

The Sikhs found France and the French people to be admirable. The natural beauty of the French countryside, even though it was defaced by trenches and the ravages of war and the French architecture, even in the robust brick houses was much admired. The general air of plenty and even wealth and ingenuity of the agriculture was noticed and remarked upon by the soldiers. They linked the wealth and beauty to greater happiness. Education was thought by the majority to be the reason for this plentiful happy life<sup>103</sup>. At a time when 94% of the Indian population was illiterate<sup>104</sup>, everyone in France seemed able to read and write.

They also thought very highly of the people who were considered “high minded and truthful”, as mentioned in the letter of a Sikh Cavalry officer.

They are very kind and helpful towards each other. And what is the root of it all? Knowledge and learning. And why are our people defective? Because of our ignorance<sup>105</sup>.

As with other Indian soldiers from India, the main area of concern for the Sikhs was also the preservation of their religious codes, which for the Sikhs in the main part centered on their dress, diet, drink, articles of faith and artifacts<sup>106</sup>. Many Sikhs were writing home asking for advice on how to cope with the spiritual aspects, as they lacked access to the Holy Book and one wrote home saying their religion was being destroyed in France, as there were no religious symbols and artifacts and some soldiers were drinking water from the same source as sweepers<sup>107</sup>. When the steel helmets were introduced as protective gear in 1916, they became an issue with the Sikh soldiers as they were not willing to sacrifice wearing their turbans, as the turbans were sanctioned by the Sikh faith and was a symbol of their cultural identity<sup>108</sup>.

---

<sup>102</sup>D. Omissi, ‘Europe through Indian eyes: Indian soldiers encounter England and France, 1914–1918’. *The English Historical Review*, 122(496), 2007, pp. 371-396.

<sup>103</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p. 321

<sup>104</sup>Census, Government of India, 1913, p 292

<sup>105</sup>Omissi, 1999, pg 122

<sup>106</sup>T. A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India: The Development of British Land Forces in South Asia*. 1600–1947. Casemate Publishers, 2013, p. 233.

<sup>107</sup>Omissi, Letters, p. 386.

<sup>108</sup> D. Omissi, ‘Europe through Indian eyes’, *The English Historical Review*, 122(496), 2007, pp. 371-396. Eventually the helmets were accepted but by a minority, and those Sikhs who

## Sikh Soldiers in Belgium and France

France was where the soldiers from India initially disembarked when they left for Europe in April 1914 and they cavalry divisions left France in march 1918, so the maximum amount of time that the Sikh soldiers spent abroad in on country during the First World War was in France. Leave to India was opened in 1916, but most could not have made the journey home and back, which means that Sikh soldiers had their most intense, uninterrupted and close cultural encounter with the French.

In the initial months, the huge loss of men and the scenes of privation, destruction and the rigours of the trenches that stretched for miles were very difficult for the men. In the latter years of the war, the cavalry divisions that were left in France had a relatively relaxed time and were not under intense pressure. They saw action in the Battle of the Somme (summer 1916) and fought in the Cambrai campaign in 1917<sup>109</sup>.

As people hailing from a mainly rural and pastoral background, the Sikhs tended to notice the farming and animal husbandry practises most minutely. Hence, a Sikh Sepoy from the 57<sup>th</sup> Rifles wrote to his friend in the 55<sup>th</sup> Rifles in India in March 1915 in urdu

The people here keep horses, cows, pigs and dogs. Their cows give more milk than ours. Their horses are used where we use cows, and their dogs where we use horses. The horses are as big as camels, and have hands and feet the same size as camels. I myself have seen dogs pulling carts. This is true<sup>110</sup>.

The Sikhs were also impressed with the fertility of the land and the apparent abundance of produce. The Picard dialect in particular and French in general seems to have been learnt by almost everyone, and this is an important indication of the willingness to engage with the local French people. Keeping in vie that any of the soldiers were barely literate, the initiative to learn French points to their keen sense of curiosity and excitement at being in France. The Indian Soldiers Fund had distributed about 30,000 basic Hindustani- French phrase books which in combination of on-ground interaction, must have lead many Indians to pick up basic French. After being

---

shaved off their beards, cut their hair and wore helmets were called 'mechanized Sikhs' after the Indian army began to be modernized in the 1930s.

<sup>109</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 387.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*



**Sikh Soldiers in full kit in Mesopotamia.**



**Wherever the regiments marched, they were preceded by the Holy Guru Granth Sahib.**



resident in France for two years, a cavalry man claimed, “all of us can now talk French<sup>111</sup>”.

As defenders of France, the soldiers were hailed as allies and comrades in arms and the soldiers have recorded how they were treated with extreme hospitality, warmth, kindness and generosity. A Sikh soldier wrote home to say that they were treated better in France than mothers treat their children in India. In turn, the soldiers were most well behaved and the censor also reported that the ‘amiability and good manners of the Indians’ had won them many friends. This was in contrast to relations between the British and French soldiers which were tainted with the traditional hostility and misgivings of the shared history of the neighbours.

A Sikh soldier Bakshish Singh of the Sialkot cavalry Brigade, while serving in France while writing to his friend<sup>112</sup> Sher Singh in Ferozepur District on February 27, 1916 describes France thus...

Here, no one drinks water. When they desire to drink... they drink the juice of apples. So many apples are produced that the people press the juices and store it in barrels which they drink throughout the year...If I return alive, I will tell you all about this country. You shall be staggered at all I shall tell you. It is a real heaven...It is the golden age”.

Another Sikh soldier Gaula Singh was so enamoured of the charms of the French countryside and people that he wrote, “France surpasses all the countries of the world in beauty. I never even think of India in my dreams’.

A cavalryman Santa Singh who spent years in France, wrote in a letter what seems to be the overwhelming opinion of many of his comrades,

Other people see paradise after death, and then only if their fate is good; but we, through the favour of God, have seen paradise with our living eyes ... . The Millennium of Truth is already in this country. [The French] always speak the truth. There is neither treachery, nor theft, nor deceit, nor backbiting, nor slander amongst them. In short, we have never seen man, woman or child at strife with each other, nor

---

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup>Omissi, ‘Sikh Soldiers in Europe’, *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, 2012, pp. 36-50.

have we seen anyone weeping. In fact I have neither got the words nor the pen adequately to praise these people<sup>113</sup>.

The letter written by another Sikh soldier Sant Singh to his wife back in Punjab on September 18, 1915 is in quite a different vein...

Our life is a living death. For what great sin are we being punished? Kill us, Oh God! But free us from the pain! We move in agony, but never rest... the bullets fall on us like rain..So we have spent a full year<sup>114</sup>...

Drawing generalisations about the Sikh soldiers experiences in the war is quite impossible, as their reactions to the conditions, opinions and observations differed greatly<sup>115</sup>. The 'loss of religion' was a great fear that many Sikh soldiers were grappling with, and many wrote home for advice. Lance Dafadar Mohal Singh of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry wrote to his friend Pertab Singh who was in Mesopotamia that many Sikhs were cutting their hair. A letter from a Sikh which said that the Sikh religion was under threat of 'being destroyed' in France was withheld by the censor because soldiers were drinking from the same source as sweepers and because of a shortage of religious artifacts. Lance Nayak Waryam Singh feared that he had lost his religion and wrote home to say that he would 'need to be initiated afresh, when he got home'.

Gender roles and the difference thereof, also were noticed and commented upon by the Sikh soldiers. The departure of the younger men for the French front after being drafted had left the women and old men in charge of the home fires. David Omissi calls this the 'feminisation of the French home front'<sup>116</sup>. The primary engagement of the Indian soldiers must have been with the females and seeing the Frenchwomen discharging all duties that men otherwise did, must have been a novel experience for the Indians. The Sikhs were impressed by the sturdiness, hardiness, and physical and mental fortitude of the Frenchwomen. 'They toiled in the fields all day long'. The Frenchwoman had also taken to driving in the absence of the menfolk, which was another novelty.

However, the Sikhs would not have been as amazed at the independence, visibility and multifarious roles played by the women in wartime, as Sikh history in itself is

---

<sup>113</sup> Omissi, *The Sikh Soldiers in Europe*, p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>115</sup> VanKoski, *Letters home*, p. 45.

<sup>116</sup> Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 387.



replete with the examples of women accompanying men in battle and also holding the fort while the men were out at war. Moreover, the Sikh women are not as strictly veiled, house bound and segregated as women in other communities in India. For the Sikh soldiers, seeing Frenchwomen discharge multiple roles would just have affirmed the words of the First Sikh Guru Nanak Dev who had said:

*Ta kyonmanda Akhiye* (why should we call her unworthy)

*Jinjamme Rajaan* (She who had given birth to kings)

In the words of a Sikh soldier, Lance Naik Nanak Singh in a letter to India, ‘there was such immorality in Marseilles, which I could not describe even if I wrote for a year<sup>117</sup>’. There is some evidence of intimate liaisons between Frenchwomen and Sikh sepoys. After spending the winter of 1914-15, when the Cavalry divisions were moved to another region, the letters from Frenchwomen who followed the departed soldiers were ‘of a violently amatory nature’<sup>118</sup>.

There was a strong reason for this. The strongly entrenched colour discrimination, gender role reversal and innate ‘feminisation of the French wartime civilian life’ had occurred as millions of Frenchmen were drafted into the army, leaving only women and the elderly or minors behind. French authorities only drafted men from the non-white nations or the colonies, and not coloured women. What resulted was a profusion of French women in the public and work places as they had to do the world which was traditionally done by the men-folk, now departed for the war front. The men of colour who were brought in for combat and non-combat roles reversed in the colonial racial relations of race and gender. As Tyler Stovall says,

...bringing together large numbers of white women and men of colour in the absence of white men and non white women... Government authorities thus managed to create the colonialist’s worst nightmare on French soil<sup>119</sup>.

The ‘clad in modesty and chastity’ women of India also are mentioned in the letters as the soldiers were reminded anew of the traditions of the Indian women who were

---

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup>T. Stovall, ‘The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War’, *The American Historical Review*, 103(3), 1998, pp. 737-769.

<sup>119</sup>Stovall, *The Color Line behind the Lines*, p.759.

markedly different from the ‘shameless’ Europeans. The spiritual richness of India was remembered as was the food and festivals.

The French sojourn certainly gave the opportunity to the Sikh soldiers to reflect upon their own home, traditions, civilian life and milieu in a different and broad based light. This light was a result of the exposure, travel and education which was a result of the travel. Jit Singh of the 6<sup>th</sup> cavalry lamented being born in India to a friend Harwant Singh in Ludhiana, so impressed was he by the wealth, beauty, freedom and prosperity of France.

If you were to see the general conditions of life here, you would be astounded. The man who God wishes to punish is born in India<sup>120</sup>.

The Sikhs were also eager to share the agricultural knowledge they had gleaned from France with their friends and family in Punjab. The simplicity and less expense of marriages and other life rituals in France also affected the Sikhs and all Indians. Charan Singh of the 6<sup>th</sup> cavalry wrote to Natha Singh in Hoshiarpur, when told about a big wedding in his family, “ this is one of the many reasons which keep our caste in poverty... in Europe... they think all this fuss and expenditure to be merest folly’.

The family back in India also must have read between the lines, or even the sentiments that were plain to see that the soldiers were deeply affected by the experiences and exposure of the west and many letters from the family urge the menfolk to remember their motherland and the people they had left behind. The soldiers themselves did face intense bouts of homesickness and missed the home comforts.

### **Sikhs as soldiers Aboard**

What about religious observance, the eating of poultry, pork, beef, beer, cigarettes, and medicines, all of which are extremely important to Indians<sup>121</sup>? The British Army did all it could to fulfil the demands of its Asian troops, as it did not want to make the errors that led to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Commander Willcocks, in the middle of

---

<sup>120</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 376.

<sup>121</sup> Thierry Di Costanzo, *Memory and history of the Great(er) War and India: from a national-imperial to a more global perspective*, *E-rea* [Enlign], 14.2 | 2017, mis enlign le 15 juin 2017, p. 98.

a new Indian rebellion in 1920, was willing to highlight the caution taken by high officials during the war to prevent the errors made in 1857:

The rations consisted of meat for those who ate it, several days in the week according to the circumstances of the time; for non meat-eaters extra gur (sugar), dall (lentils), ghee (clarified butter), potatoes, tea, atta (flour), and five kinds of tasty ingredients; in addition dried fruits such as raisins, etc., and various kinds of vegetables as procurable. But this did not end their rations, for mixed sweetmeats were frequently supplied by friends and retired British officers; cigarettes in abundance for such classes as smoked them; European and Indian tobacco and chillums (native clay pipes) were sent by some of the Indian Princes. Rum was issued to those who were not prohibited from taking alcohol and extra tea to those who could not indulge in the former. Goats were purchased from Southern Europe in large numbers; slaughtered at fixed stations on the line of communications by men of the various units; labelled with distinctive tapes and conveyed to destination by men of the different denominations. (Willcocks)

There was the other element as well, of racial hostility and aggression, which was seen more in the case of the soldiers and workers who had arrived in large numbers from China and Africa to work in France during the War. France witnessed racial violence during the four years of the war that was a result of the ‘cultural and material conditions of life in interaction with each other<sup>122</sup>’. In recent years, there have been many studies on the influence of race on France in the years of the First World War. Tyler Stovall argues that ‘one must view the French racial conflict in conjunction with the crisis of wartime morale that overtook the nation in 1917 and 1918<sup>123</sup>’.

The ‘colonial or exotic workers’ as the non- whites were called, were different from the ‘immigrant workers’, who were from various white European nations. This classification transpired as the coloured people ‘came to symbolise both the war in general and its deleterious impact on the French working class in particular’. Chinese workers in particular and other colonial workers were targeted and subjected to violence as an ‘outlet for the frustrations about the ongoing conflict<sup>124</sup>’. The soldiers or combatants by and large had a ‘pleasant’ experience that was quite at variance with

---

<sup>122</sup>Stovall, *The Color Line behind the Lines*, p.756.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, p.760.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p.765.

the experience of the labour or non-combatants as they had to face much racial prejudice, as discussed in Chapter 6 of this study.

### **Sikh Soldiers in Hospitals**

From December 1914 itself, the Indians wounded in the Ypres campaign started to arrive at the in Southampton hospitals. The Royal Pavilion and dome at Brighton was then converted to a 722 bed hospital<sup>125</sup> and other establishments such as the Brighton Workhouse and Schools in York Place and Pelham Street were then also converted into hospitals. Milford-at-Sea, Barton, Brockenhurst in Hampshire, Forest Park Hotel etc were all towns that had hospitals for Indians. The notable feature of these separate facilities for Indians was that they kept the caste and religious affiliations of the soldiers in mind and arrangements were made accordingly. The soldiers who were wounded had the opportunity to meet British men and women in more civilian contexts, in the hospitals, and on picnics, outings, cinemas, shops and parks where they were allowed to go<sup>126</sup>.

These soldiers had the leisure to record their expressions and the informal and extensive nature of their contacts with the normal populace gave them a much more enlarged view of life in Europe and the opportunity to also record these experiences and impressions in their letters home. Most soldiers were very satisfied, and even shocked and flattered at the 'excellence of the arrangements' made for their comfortable stay at the hospitals. The Sikh soldiers had a Gurdwara constructed and their holy book- The Guru Granth Sahib provided at the 1948 bed Kitchener Indian Hospital (converted from the Brighton Workhouse)<sup>127</sup>. When Lord Roberts the former commander-in-chief of the Indian Army (and chief proponent of the Martial races theory) died in November 1914, while visiting the Indian soldiers fighting in France, the Indian Soldiers fund supplied 8,67,000 sheets of writing paper with his image to the soldiers<sup>128</sup>.

The soldiers who walked in the streets or ventured out from the premises of the hospitals as they were allowed to later, attracted a lot of attention and were intense

---

<sup>125</sup> J. Collins, *Dr Brighton's Indian Patients: December 1914 – January 1916*, Brighton: Brighton Printing Press, 1997, pp.6-9.

<sup>126</sup> Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 376.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* - Balwant Singh, KIH, to Jemadar Ishar Singh, 21st Punjabis, Peshawar (Gurmukhi), 11 Aug. 1915, L/MIL/5/825/5/721

<sup>128</sup> Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 376. Second Report of the Indian Soldier's Fund, 1 Apr. to 20 Nov. 1915, Mss. Eur. F.120/7, 24.

subjects of scrutiny. Even earlier, the few Indians who were seen in Britain were ‘as keenly observed as they were observing’<sup>129</sup>. All Indian travellers who wrote about their experiences in Britain while visiting Britain, recorded that they were made to feel conspicuous because of their brown skin and peculiar dress, while visiting England and the English were uniformly and universally curious about them. Jhinda Ram, a traveller from Lahore to the great Exhibition in 1886 had also recorded in his book that ‘everybody’s eyes was turned on me, as I looked like a stranger, being dressed in my turban and enveloped in my big Multan overcoat’<sup>130</sup>.

Most of the Indians seen in England were men, and even before the arrival of the soldiers, Indian men had mentioned specifically that they seemed to be a magnet for strangers, especially women. Many Indians mentioned being ‘solicited by English women for drinks, and presumably intimate relations. Even a much married M.K. Gandhi, in London in 1880s recorded the ‘evidence of sexual temptations of metropolitan streets’.<sup>131</sup>

In the case of the soldiers in 1914 and in the following years, the curiosity was certainly tinged with approbation and admiration. The soldiers from India were seen as ‘saviours of the empire’. A medical subordinate records, “On the day we arrived a large crowd was assembled at the station”.<sup>132</sup>

### **Sikh Soldiers in Mesopotamia and Persia**

Service in the Middle East- Mesopotamia and Persia was less popular than the one in France or Europe. The reason was the difficult living conditions and lack of amenities in the Middle East. Although the Soldiers suffered acutely from inadequate winter clothing, trench warfare and other problems in Europe initially, the conditions in the Asian countries were more severe, and the fighting less successful. The extremes of climate (heat and cold) were difficult to bear, as was the suffering caused by the ‘deficiency diseases’, which resulted from poor diets. The supply system in the Middle east was scanty and severely hard pressed, military results were unsatisfactory

---

<sup>129</sup>A. Burton, Making a spectacle of Empire: Indian travellers in Fin-de-Siècle London. *History Workshop Journal*, 42(1), 2016, 126-146. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/1996.42.127>

<sup>130</sup>Jhinda Ram, *My trip to Europe*, Lahore: Singh printing Press, 1893, p. 12.

<sup>131</sup>A. Burton, ‘Making a spectacle of Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 42(1), 2016, 126-146

<sup>132</sup>Omissi, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, p. 377- A Hindu medical subordinate to a friend in India (Urdu), 31 Jan. 1915, L/MIL/5/825/1/57

and this led to poor morale overall. The Muslims were also plagued by the issue of religion politics as they were fighting their co-religionists the Turks.

In September 1915, the two Indian divisions were transferred out of Europe to the Middle East after the Meerut Division took part in the battle of Loos against the Germans which was a major engagement. At the beginning of November 1915, the Indians departed the shores of Europe for Asian shores.

The reasons behind the decision to shift the Indian Divisions are intriguing. Some reports and accounts have not hesitated to brand the sacrifices made and heavy casualties endured which the Indian divisions accepted unflinchingly as 'a history of failure'<sup>133</sup>. A point of view is that failing morale and fears of another European winter being too hard on the Indians were the primary reason for the decision to transfer the Indians into warmer climes.

The Divisions were transferred also because there were fears that the Indians would have not been able to stand another European winter.

The Sikhs faced a deluge of problems even in Mesopotamia where they were posted next. On June 4, 1915, the 14<sup>th</sup> Sikhs were almost annihilated in Gallipoli by a huge Turkish contingent. This debacle came as a Godsend as in Sir Michael O Dwyer's words in his book,

...was one of the most powerful factors in securing the loyalty of the martial races. The fighting Sikhs on hearing the news raised their heads again (many of them had been sullen or dejected during the Ghadr campaign) proudly conscious, for the Sikh is never reticent as to his great deeds, that they had vindicated their reputation for loyalty and courage. After that the rush to the colours in the Sikh districts was extraordinary. In fact so enthusiastic was their response, so gallant were their deeds, and so generous the rewards and appreciation, that many of them have not the idea into their heads that 'we won the war'.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup>J. Greenhut, 'The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914-15', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 1983, p. 68.

<sup>134</sup>O' Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, p. 207.

## **The Reality of war**

There were many problems which the colonial soldiers faced which were not there for the white troops. Racial prejudice and racial stereotyping, prejudice on the basis of skin colour and the recruiting practises of the British Indian army that only recruited soldiers from the ‘martial races’ meant that regions such as the Punjab were over recruited and over represented. The Sikh families who had sent soldiers to the fronts were anxious and eager for any news, and the soldiers serving on the front were the most reliable source of information about the realities of the war. However, right from the very beginning of the war, The British had imposed censoring on the letters to and from India.

There were many problems that the Sikh soldiers faced just by virtue of their race. The racist assumptions and disregard for the lives of the colonial soldiers lead to many ill conceived and badly executed campaigns that resulted in the deaths of thousands of India soldiers in the Middle east. The soldiers had to find innovative ways to resist certain death and death that could be avoided and they adopted unique ploys. Some malingered, some faked injuries in order to be sent to hospital, some self-inflicted wounds to escape being sent to their certain deaths on the front and some even escaped and crossed over to Germany in hopes of being able to make their way back home to India.

Medical and convalescing leave, home leave, canteen facilities and mental health care and even lifesaving care was denied to the Indians. Many wrote letters home in code, asking their family and friends to run away from the recruiting and not to get recruited under any circumstance. In the absence of any kind of collective voice or redressal and grievance forums, this was a kind of self-help, quite resistance, self-preservation and amounted to literally the difference between a soldiers’ life and untimely and unnecessary death<sup>135</sup>.

## **The Mental Landscape of the War**

The entire theory of the ‘Martial Races’ in the perspective of Indian soldiers also rested on the grounds that soldiers who belonged to the martial races were

---

<sup>135</sup>Jarboe, *Indian Soldiers in World War I*, p. 31.

predisposed to warfare and were able to successfully face and overcome the various stresses and strains, both mental and physical, that warfare exposed them to.

A very less discussed area of the four years of war are is the psychological stress, mental strains and emotional toll it extracted on the soldiers and other personal. There has long been a conspiracy of silence about the ‘existence of shell shock among the Indian troops’<sup>136</sup>. There was ‘very little insanity’ in the Indian army and many of the cases of insanity uncovered were attributed to ‘dishonest malingering.’<sup>137</sup> The facts on the other hand, tell another story. There were large number of troops from the subcontinent admitted to British and Indian institutions with psychological symptoms during the war, to the extent that the well-known Brighton Hospital for Indian casualties in Europe, was compelled to set up a two-ward asylum by 1915. There were facilities for treating mental health problems in India as well, but these were also over-crowded and inadequate.

The problems with identifying, even acknowledging and then treating mental health issues were multifaceted.

The challenges of providing mental health care for one of the world’s most ethnically racially and religiously diverse labour forces, the combined British Army were Non white troops...these presented a challenge to the imperial bureaucracy at the same time as it challenged the tenets of imperial power<sup>138</sup>.

The legacy of ‘shell shock’ has become one of the most enduring legacies of the war, but in the context of the white soldier. The shocks sustained by the colonial soldiers, though no less severe, were never acknowledged, or accepted or even noticed with the same concern. War traumas that resulted in mental troubles, permanent or temporary, for the Indian soldiers were never granted the same attention, sensitivity or concern that was extended to white soldiers.

There have been several books that have explored the mental aspects of warfare by authors such as Bruce Catton’s *The Hallowed Ground* (1962) Cornelius Ryan’s *The Longest Day* (1956) and S.LA Marshall’s *Pork Chop Hill* (1956) that have tried to

---

<sup>136</sup>Hilary Buxton, ‘Imperial Amnesia: Race, Trauma and Indian Troops in the First World War’, *Past & Present*, Volume 241, Issue 1, Oxford, November 2018, p. 243.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.* Buxton, , ‘Imperial Amnesia, p. 246.



explore the nature of combat and how it affects the physiological and mental makeup of the soldier. There is no doubt that the combatants are made up of individuals who each respond to danger, fighting, death, injury and fear in different ways. It is recognised that there are many kinds of combatants and they each respond to various fears, danger and situations in starkly different ways. Peter Karston has mentioned that

Some uncertain, others shocked by the killing, many confused by the fog of battle, frightened, unable to relate what they had been told about combat with what was happening. Perhaps intense, close range combat requiring group cooperation (as with crew-fed weapons) overcomes some of the soldiers' sense of terror.<sup>139</sup>

The documented after effects of close range combat on the psyche of the soldiers are severe and may include 'survivor guilt, a propensity for violence and post-traumatic stress disorder.'<sup>140</sup>

The facts on the other hand, tell another story. There were large numbers of troops from the subcontinent admitted to British and Indian institutions<sup>141</sup> with psychological symptoms during the war, to the extent that the well-known Brighton Hospital for Indian casualties in Europe, was compelled to set up a two-ward asylum by 1915.

### **Mental Health and Sikh Soldiers**

The war theatre of the First World War was unprecedented in more ways than one. The sheer scale of the slaughter, the multiple fronts of engagement, the nationalities and races involved, the global scope and scale and the casualties, resources, men and material that were being fed into keeping the conflagrations of war ablaze the world over, had never before been seen, heard or imagined by anyone.

The Sikh soldiers who went to various theatres of the Great War overseas had no time to come to grips with an unimagined reality- of violence, mass killings and weapons of mass destruction unheard of till then. The soldiers out of rural Punjabi were totally

---

<sup>139</sup> P. Karsten, 'The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored', *American Quarterly*, 36(3), 1984, pp.389-418.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p 412.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345 - Mental facilities and hospitals such as the Yeravda and Naupada admitted over 570 'military insanes' in the years 1915-22, with many being from the Indian contingent sent to Mesopotamia. Hospitals with mental health wards and asylums from across India complained of overcrowding and strained resources because of influx of patients. Also see Buxton, , 'Imperial Amnesia, p. 256.

unprepared for bullets which were dispersed out of aeroplanes and poison gas that vitiated the very air which was breathed. In such a calamitous atmosphere, living in the damp, extreme constantly under the stress of impending death, it was no wonder that soldiers were impacted in unforeseen ways.

In recent times, there have been a lot of studies by scholars such as Waltraud Ernst, Sloan Mahone, Hillary Buxton and Megan Vaughan on emergence of Psychiatry as a branch of medicine in the colonial context<sup>142</sup> and also the psychological traumas experienced by the non-white soldiers during the Great War. In the colonial context, there is always an overweighing consideration adjoined to the questions of mental health- how far is it culturally contextual? War neuroses is treated as both a medical and cultural phenomenon, as class, race and ethnicity had a undeniable impact on the diagnosis and treatment of soldiers<sup>143</sup>. Hillary Buxton has even claimed that there is, “amnesia around non-white shell shock in particular pervaded inter-war psychiatry”.

There is little point in denying that the soldiers of colour which came from the colonies of the European nations to fight on their behalf in the war, which includes Indian soldiers, suffered from psychological trauma, mental imbalances caused by the conditions, experiences and stresses of the war and even racial biases which inevitably crept in the identification, acknowledgement, acceptance and eventual treatment of mental stress brought on by the war.

Were they exposed to physical, mental and psychological stresses that proved to be so great that they threatened to unravel the preconceived notions of the ‘model soldiers’ of the ‘martial races’?

In recent times, there has been a spotlight trained on the mental vagaries which the soldiers went through in the years of the First World War and how it affected their mental health. The emotional and mental trauma of the war was recognized even in the earliest days, when the soldiers started showing unmistakable symptoms of

---

<sup>142</sup>On studies of colonial psychiatry beyond India, see Warwick Anderson, Deborah Jenson and Richard C. Keller (eds.), *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties* (Durham, NC, 2011); Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (eds.), *Psychiatry and Empire* (Basingstoke, 2007); Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley, 1999); Henrice Altink, ‘Modernity, Race and Mental Health Care in Jamaica, c.1918–1944’, *Journal of the Department of Behavioural Sciences*, ii, 1 (2012).

<sup>143</sup>Buxton, *Imperial Amnesia*, p. 237.

trauma, shock and emotional turbulence<sup>144</sup>. However, these mental stresses were recognized and acknowledged in the white soldiers<sup>145</sup>, than in the Colonial contingents. Here too, the racial sub contexts crept in, and soldiers of colour were not really thought to have symptoms that would affect them psychologically.

There were multiple manifestations and connotations for the reasons behind this blindsiding of mental issues of colonial soldiers on the part of the colonizers. Several factors made the Colonial government reluctant to acknowledge and recognize mental traumas amongst soldiers from the colonies. Perhaps, their emotional and mental health was not perceived to be sensitive enough to buckle under the pressures and emotional trauma of the war.

This was the time when Psychiatry as a science and Psychological study was in the early stages of development and psychological problems caused by various factors such as stress and conditions of war was not fully understood. The Great War aided immensely to the recognition, study, assessment and treatment of psychological stresses of war and this is the time when PTSD (Post traumatic Stress Disorder) was actually recognized as a malaise that was brought on by various factors<sup>146</sup>.

As a newly emergent medical issue on a admittedly large scale, as psychological problems developed as a direct result of war stresses on the soldiers on the front and in the trenches in the years 1914-1918, the scale and dimension of the problem was an additional drain in the medical facilities and resources available. There were different medical institutions and facilities that were required for taking care of the soldiers suffering from mental derangement and imbalance brought on by the war

---

<sup>144</sup>Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War*, London: Basingstoke, 2002, p. 32; *Shell-Shock*, special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxv, 1 (2000); Jay Winter, 'Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War'; Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914–30* (London, 2010); Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven, 2004).

<sup>145</sup> Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930*, NY: Ithaca, 2003, p. 65. - German soldiers were also treated for mental stress and PTSD and for this, see Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914–1994*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 71.

<sup>146</sup> Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914–1994*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 71.

conditions<sup>147</sup>. Hence, there was also a huge resource crunch that was experienced by the authorities and there was very little that could be allocated and non-white soldiers represented just an additional drain.

“Officials and colonial physicians, British and South Asian alike, responded to non-white servicemen’s mental health crises in diverse ways. Some refused to acknowledge them; others attended closely to their understanding of soldiers’ culturally specific needs. Their assumptions had profound and enduring implications for the diagnosis, care, treatment and aftercare of soldiers in Britain and South Asia. Examples of blatant racism among both officials and doctors abound. On the other hand, I have also found stories of doctors and officials demonstrating solidarity with, and sensitivity towards, non-white troops as they struggled to meet the challenges of providing mental health care for one of the world’s most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse labour forces, the combined British Army.<sup>148</sup>

There were also the cultural and racial dimensions and narratives that had been built up in connection with race and the traditional heritage of various communities and peoples that made the acknowledgement of mental health and psychological issues a difficult proposition to handle for both the colonised and the colonizers<sup>149</sup>.

In the context of India, there were also various additional dimensions to the issue which linked directly with the perceptions of the soldiers about themselves, their role in the war, their cultural contexts and their outward image in their own communities, families and the larger society. As most soldiers who were sent abroad to serve were from the ‘Martial Races’, there was a stigma attached to becoming so upset in the middle of the war, as to lose one’s mental balance. Mental trauma was perceived to be an indication of even ‘cowardice’ which was anathema to the colonial soldier whose very self-identity was inextricably linked to the concept of ‘bravery in battle’.

The Wartime ambience put pressure on the Army’s well-established characterization of the so called ‘martial races’ of North India, from their stoicism to their blind

---

<sup>147</sup> Tracey Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Psychological Medicine in First World War Britain, Social History of Medicine*, xxii, 1, 2009, p. 34.

<sup>148</sup> Buxton, *Imperial Amnesia*, p. 63.

<sup>149</sup> Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800–58*, London: Basingstoke, 1991; Ernst, *Colonialism and Transnational Psychiatry*; James H. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism: The ‘Native-Only’ Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900*. London: Basingstoke, 2000, p. 49.

obedience... The cultural amnesia surrounding Indian war trauma served both colonizer and colonized alike, albeit for quite different reasons. For British officials, it preserved the imperial order by maintaining ideals of colonial difference — between white and non-white and between different ethnicities that made up the Indian Army. For some of the colonized — Indian soldiers, officers and clinicians — it silenced fears that the stigma of mental illness might damage the prestige and standing of the army and, in some cases, their own anti-colonial, nationalist cause<sup>150</sup>.

In this context too, the censor of the non-white soldiers' letters was the first and critical point where the task of monitoring the mental health of the soldiers was undertaken. As even the unlettered soldiers enlisted the help of scribes, friends or comrades in arms to write missives home, the letters emerged as a crucial indication of not only the mood, motivation and morale, but also the mental health of the soldiers<sup>151</sup>.

Wounded soldiers who were sent to British hospitals usually found themselves living under close supervision in fortified compounds, which were more like jails than hospitals, as it was thought that wounded soldiers would be able to meet English women outside and this inappropriate contact had to be prevented at all costs<sup>152</sup>.

Sohan Singh, a sowar in 9<sup>th</sup> Hodson's Horse, convalescing after being grievously injured in the Kitchener Indian Hospital at Brighton, wrote in a letter home on July 10, 1915<sup>153</sup>, "There is fire all around, and you can imagine it as a dry forest on a windy day in the hottest weather, with abundant grass and straw. No one can put out this fire except God himself... Man is helpless. What more can I write?"

In this frank admission, Sohan Singh admits to being unable to describe the horrors or nature of the war that was still to continue for many years and was only in its first year at the time. Conditions were going to get much worse, before they got better. The

---

<sup>150</sup>Buxton, *Imperial Amnesia*, p. 234.

<sup>151</sup>The Indian Mails Censor Office was established in November 1914. It was first based in Rouen and later shifted to Boulogne. It was headed by Evelyn Berkeley Howell, an experienced officer in the Indian Civil Service.

<sup>152</sup>A. Bagchi, *Indian Economy and Society during World War One*, *Social Scientist*, 42(7/8), 2014, pp 5-27 Retrieved May 11, 2021.

<sup>153</sup>*Censor of Indian Mails 1914–1918* (henceforth *CIM*), India Office Record and Library (IOR), L/MIL/5/825/4, 571, British Library, London. The term 'Sowar' ['one who rides'] means 'cavalryman'.

Buxton, *Imperial Amnesia*, p. 234.

mostly unlettered soldiers, recruited from the rural peasantry, could not find the words, expressions and wordplay to adequately express what their experiences were in the various war theatres outside India, where they were fighting on behalf of their British masters.

Evelyn Berkeley Howell, who was the officer in charge of the Indian Mail censor Office understood the psychological stresses of the war in addition to the physical hardships and wrote that the “letters from France were an interesting psychological study and throw light on the morale of the troops”<sup>154</sup>. Racial categories and characteristics were applied to describe the mood and morale of the soldiers from India, which included estimations of their ‘soldierly conduct and ability’.

The weekly reports which were dispatched by Howell to the India office, which had sought them, were indeterminate, as the symptoms of ‘despair’, ‘despondence’, ‘melancholic’, ‘devious’, ‘soldierly and ‘least affected’ could not be used to describe soldiers from one community as the moods and morale kept on changing from week to week. While the Pathans were described by Howell as being ‘least affected, as might have been anticipated’ on the week ending January 23, 1915, three of the Garhwalis were ‘soldierly’ and one ‘despondent on February 12, 1915. It was not possible to categorize one individual group in a specific category, as the “Sikhs were the most downcast group” on April 24, 1915<sup>155</sup>.

Sant Singh complained to his wife in September 1915 that We perish in the desert: you wash yourself and lie in bed. We are trapped in a net of woe, while you go free. Our life is a living death... We are slaves of masters who can show no mercy. The bullets fall on us like rain, but dry are our bodies<sup>156</sup>.

However, there is one dimension of the psychological stress that gained a lot of traction during the war years itself. This was the feeling among the British authorities that Indian soldiers who buckled under the stress were ‘faking’ or ‘malingering’. Soldiers from the colonies who displayed symptoms of mental illness, Stress or trauma were thought to be ‘devious’ and ‘cowards’ and ‘displays of weakness,

---

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.

anxiety or unwillingness to go into battle as malingering, rather than as legitimate conditions for treatment.”<sup>157</sup>

These signs were interpreted as the reinforcement of stereotypes of disloyalty and deception, weakness and avoidance of battle. There was a rather strong contingent of Sikhs admitted to hospital in March 1915 and Howell recorded that ‘The Sikh either grows sulky or tries to malingere’. There were cases of self inflicted wounds and there were official statements to the effect that Indians were likely to commit these acts<sup>158</sup>.

Sir Michael O Dwyer describes how the Sikhs were habituated to taking opium in small doses as a preventive precaution in the malarial season<sup>159</sup>. This apparently bolstered their immunity as according to O’Dwyer, the Sikhs were able to withstand the devastating epidemics as the one that happened in 1894 much better than the Hindus or the Muslims. They were immune to the infections and stayed active, and vigorous, even as the other communities who did not take opium were laid very low by the epidemics.

The Sikhs who were habituated to opium also sought it from home when fighting in the Great war. Bir Singh wrote home in January 1916 to send opium in a parcel, but to label it as ‘sweets’ or ‘dainties’, otherwise it would be confiscated<sup>160</sup>. The Sikhs continued to seek remedies, prayers, counsel, encouragement and advice from home, rather than relying on modern European medicine alone.

Aspersions cast on the reliability of the Indian soldiers and their ability to fight against a European enemy lead to the bulk of the Indian army being sent to other war fronts such as Mesopotamia and the Middle east at the end of 1916. Many were sent back home, and in such large numbers that the psychiatric facilities at Bombay were swamped by the waves of mentally ill soldiers being shipped back from various war fronts.

War neuroses meant also grappling with the problem of treating and returning the soldiers to their home provinces. The Surgeon-general of Bombay R.W.S Lyons had

---

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 241; quoting Sant Singh to his wife, September 18, 1915; BL, IOR, L/MIL//826/1

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 237; A study was started by the IMS on self mutilation in the Indian army.

<sup>159</sup>O’ Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p.69.

<sup>160</sup> Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914*, London: Basingstoke, 2014, p.182.

to request transfer of the patients to asylums elsewhere as overcrowding had made it impossible to accommodate more patients<sup>161</sup>. The annual reports of the Mental asylums at Bombay between the years 1916-1919 prove that number of patients dropped off drastically after 1920 when the War needed.

**Table 3.1- Admissions of Military Insanes to provincial Mental Hospitals in India**

Year	Punjab	Bombay	Bengal	Assam	Agra and Oudh
1914	—	15	—	—	—
1915	—	35	—	—	—
1916	—	115	—	—	13
1917	—	224	55	3	76
1918	135	65	74	18	143
1919	50	92	18	3	55
1920	45	34	17	2	44
1921	25	8	2	—	28
1922	—	2	—	—	5

Source: Hillary Buxton- Data compiled from the annual and triennial reports on mental hospitals in the following provinces, for the years 1914–33: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Allahabad); government of Bombay (Bombay); Punjab (Lahore); Assam (Shillong); Bengal (Calcutta)

Most patients were found to be ‘rapidly recovering’ after they were brought home from the warfront. Mental Stress was attributed as the chief cause and exhaustion psychosis and acute dementia from patients ‘suffering from aberrations due to shell shock and similar causes’. Colonel H Hendley, Inspector General of Civil Hospitals in Punjab, in April 1918 in a report recorded that there was an ‘influx of military patients from various expeditionary forces who were mildly affected by shell shock’.

Homesickness was also a factor and soldiers who were despondent and morose often recovered immediately upon their return home, whereas it was observed in June 1915 that, “the further the Sepoy gets from his regiment, the more he longs for his native home”. How the families, community and society at large reacted to the Soldiers who

<sup>161</sup>W. Monie to Home Department, 22 July 1916, New Delhi, Government of India, Home (Medical) Department Proceedings, Oct. 1916, no. 16 (National Archives of India).



were grappling with the mental traumas brought on by the war is undocumented. The treatment of mental illnesses was still a nascent branch of medicine even in the west.

The Sikh soldiers, like their brethren of other faiths, must have turned to spiritualism or ayurvedic remedies to seek remedies for their mental breakdowns. It is clear that not many would have openly admitted to the mental traumas caused by War since it was considered a mark of cowardice and weakness, and many must have chosen silence over asking for help.

Sir Michael O Dwyer recalls the Jat Sikhs as being the sturdy plodding race of hereditary agriculturists, whose hard work has built up the rural Punjab prosperity and who were as handy with the sword and bayonet as they were with the water lift and plough<sup>162</sup>.

### **The War Years, 1914-1918**

As evident from the media reports, the Indian soldiers' arrival was celebrated and hailed in various media like the newspapers and from public platforms. In fact, there was overwhelming public support for them as they were hailed as the liberators of Europe and the upholders of liberty. For the colonial soldier, who was used to being considered little more than inanimate war material by his colonial masters, this must have been his maiden exposure to such respect and even adulation. The effect these experiences had on the psyche and mental landscape of the soldiers will be explored in detail.

This adulation was in stark contrast to the unbearable reality of the trenches where the Indian soldiers invariably found themselves within a few hours of their arrival on foreign shores. For the Indian soldier, newly arrived from a tropical climate, ill equipped and ill kitted, the frozen trenches were nothing less than nightmares. Barely able to grasp the various physical, psychological and physiological demands of the trench warfare, mired in deep mud or under the constant fire of enemy guns, the soldiers must have been deeply affected at the most fundamental level.

Lt Col. Grinker and Capt. Spiegel established that the reaction of the soldiers to similar situations of terror, fear, impending danger and fear of dying or killing is

---

<sup>162</sup>O' Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p.52.

similar. These studies showed that the very same symptoms of 'shell shock' that were seen in First World War trenches were also seen at the time of the Second World War but were only referred to by another term- 'Combat fatigue'<sup>163</sup>. In various battles around the world at various times, including the two World Wars, the Vietnam Conflict etc, the prolonged exposure to the din of battle, fear of death, noise, smoke, sight of dying comrades and fear resulted in the symptoms of 'the shakes' and other signs of mental collapse in soldiers from various countries and cultures<sup>164</sup>.

A direct consequence of the Sikhs serving overseas in the First World War and even before was that they became much more exposed to opportunities available outside Punjab. They Sikhs were among the first to be ready to move abroad after they had served in the army. As the service in the army was usually short term, and they were granted retirement fairly early (in their late thirties), they still had the motivation to seek their fortunes in new places. Economic development in Punjab owing to measures such as army incomes, the development of the canal colonies, and service abroad gave the Sikhs a chance and a way out which was voluntary and a choice.

Most of the Indians who were sent out at this time by the British to other parts of the Empire were sent as 'indentured' labour or as forced workers. The Sikhs were not a part of this migration as they were not indentured and not a part of the penal forced migration. It is interesting to note here that if the Sikhs did venture as labour, then the local dignitaries were quite unwelcoming as the Sikhs were quite un-labourlike, not docile and not easily controllable like the other men sent out from India. In the West Indies, the British Governor declared them 'unfit for labour' as they were 'soldiers or something of that sort'<sup>165</sup>. Another administrator in North Africa also had similar reaction as 'soldiers belonging to martial races were willing to put up a fight for their rights', and thus were unsuitable to be employed as labourers.

Ancient martial instincts were as sound as ever in the heart and mind of the Indian soldier<sup>166</sup>. There was little doubt that to the soldier on the front, even the unimaginable hardships that he faced were made endurable by the fact that glittering

---

<sup>163</sup>Karsten, 'The "New" American Military History', p. 389.

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>165</sup>D. S. Tatla, 'Sikh free and military migration during the colonial period', *The Cambridge survey of world migration*, Cambridge, 1995, pp.69-73.

<sup>166</sup>James Lawrence, *Raj: The Making of British India*, p. 441.

prizes and even paradise lay beyond. The hope that the loyalty, courage and sacrifice of the Indian soldiers would be richly rewarded sustained the soldiers and the seemingly endless dark and grim days of the unending conflict. The martial traditions on which the soldiers had been reared since childhood and which had been carefully fostered by the British government policies and army institutions and regulations ensured that the soldiers were invariably strongly motivated<sup>167</sup>. This is evident from the letters of the soldiers which they wrote home. In September 1915, Havildar Hiram Singh wrote, 'If I die, I go to paradise. It is a fine thing to die in battle'<sup>168</sup>.

Some sepoys who wrote home, broke into poetry and also started penning verses to cope with the scale and destruction around them. Captain Evelyn Howell, the Indian Civil Services Officer who headed the censorship department was not pleased with this development. In January 1915, he thought of 'the tendency to break into poetry which I am inclined to regard as a rather ominous sign of mental disquietude.'<sup>169</sup>

'The Indian army's fighting record during the war has been coloured almost entirely by the experiences of Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' sent to Mesopotamia in 1914,' Kitchen summarises the significance of the Indian contribution beyond the Western Front<sup>170</sup>. The Siege of Kut-al-Amara, which lasted from 3 December 1915 to 29 April 1916, was the most famous battle in which IEF D took part. The 6th Indian Division, led by Charles Townshend, garrisoned the Ottoman-besieged town of Kut until the Ottomans surrendered<sup>171</sup>. The loss was seen as an embarrassment because the British had lost to a much inferior opponent (Gardner, 2015)

Stories of the Sikhs' legendary valour and determination, such as those depicted at Saragarhi, where 21 Sikhs fought thousands of Afghans, were published in contemporary martial race newspapers, reinforcing ideas of Sikh invincibility and martial identity<sup>172</sup>. This is exemplified by the following quote from a British soldier: 'The Sikhs are born soldiers,' says Richard Empson. They can outsmart our army in every way imaginable, including weapons, signalling, and deception<sup>173</sup>.' Despite the

---

<sup>167</sup>J. Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy', *The Journal of Military History*, 48(1), 1984, p.15.

<sup>168</sup>Lawrence, *Raj: The Making of British India*, p.441.

<sup>169</sup> IOL, L.Mil 5/825, 1, 19, 54, also 70,204, 458.

<sup>170</sup>Kitchen, 2014, p.183.

<sup>171</sup>Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p. 76

<sup>172</sup> MacMunn, *Armies of India*, p. 233.

<sup>173</sup> Richard. Empson, *Private papers*, Documents 3077(Imperial War Museum).

fact that he was not a member of an Indian regiment, he believed Sikh soldiers possessed these skills. While the Indian soldiers at Kut were not all Sikh, their defeat tarnished the prestige of the 'martial race' soldiers.

It may be inferred from the discussion above that the "Indian soldiers fought, above all, to gain or preserve *izzat*- Their honour, standing, reputation or prestige",<sup>174</sup> states David Omissi in the introduction of his book on the letters of the soldiers. Whereas there is a lot of truth in this contention, there are also many other factors that went into the motivational mix that compelled the millions of soldiers from India and especially the Sikhs to fight an alien war.

There were a host of other considerations, 'both tangible and intangible'<sup>175</sup> that went into making sons of the soil, sons of the best landowning families, sons of rural functionaries, sons of landed gentry and sons of every hue and background-but of the Sikh faith to serve in the army during the First World War. The reasons varied from agricultural indebtedness to community pressure to social engineering to religious injunctions to family traditions, lure of promotions and pensions, livelihood, the last crop's profit and even family tradition. Socio-cultural factors were at full play during the process of enlistment. Families hailing from the martial castes, who had a long tradition and family tradition of being associated with the army of the Gurus and the Khalsa and then the British army were almost under a compulsion to prove their martial attributes and vindicate their family name and honour in the battlefield. Masculinity and the desire to prove their manhood was certainly an aspect that cannot be glossed over when seeking the motivations for the enlistment of millions of men to fight under the British banner.

By 1914, there were many villages, families, tribes and castes which had been consistently recruited by the British and there were several generations from a close knit community who has already served in the army. For the youth from these regions, communities and families, it was almost unthinkable to refuse to be recruited, even when it was clear that there were unheard of fatalities and casualties happening on

---

<sup>174</sup> Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p 82.

<sup>175</sup> Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War*, p 84.

Santanu. Das, 'Why half a million people from Punjab enlisted to fight for Britain in World War I', *Quartz India*, Oct 19, 2018 <https://qz.com/india/1425486/british-indian-army-recruited-half-a-million-from-punjab-in-ww1/>

distant shores during the most ruthless fighting the world had ever seen. Social convention, family prestige and name and reputation in the community have always been given top priority in India and it was no different during the war years. These were the conditions which enabled the British to enlist the largest volunteer army in India ever assembled and use it to win the First World War.

## CHAPTER-IV

### IN HIS OWN VOICE- VOICES HEARD AFTER A CENTURY

#### **Understanding Intellectual History**

A little known chapter in the history of the Indian combatants and non-combatants who travelled to various war theatres such as Europe, Persia, Middle East, Mesopotamia, East Africa to fight on the behalf of Britain was that they were taken Prisoners of War (PoW) in large numbers<sup>1</sup>. There was a lot of variation between the conditions and experiences they underwent as PoWs in different camps and detention centres.

This differentiation was in terms of the housing, food, disciplinary conditions and rules and regulations, as also their access to medical help, religious, social and cultural facilities. Men were segregated on the basis of their ethnic, religious and social criteria, and not according to the ranking. This was in line with the then prevailing opinion of racism<sup>2</sup>. Colonialists laid more emphasis on natural factors such as race and ethnicity rather than the artificially produced and acquired factors such as education, rank and position<sup>3</sup>.

As social and cultural aspects have become the focal point of new emergent research about the role and participation and consequent effects of non-European participation and experiences in the Great War, this chapter aims to examine the voices of Sikh soldiers who were taken prisoners of War in Germany. The audio recordings (discussed in detail later in the chapter) become important in this regard as they provide the perspective of the Sikh soldiers who were captured in their very own words. While examining the audio recordings, which were made of soldiers' hailing from many different ethnicities, nations and cultures, it is vital to first set the context.

---

<sup>1</sup>Santanu Das, (ed.) *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Heike Liebau, 'Prisoners of War (India) in 1914-1918', online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08

<sup>3</sup>Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, p. 56.

## **Sikh Prisoners of War**

There were about 4,80,000 Punjabis who served in the First World War and out of these, 90,000 combatants were Sikhs. Out of a total population of just 2.5 million, this meant that one Sikh out of every 28 was recruited. The corresponding figure was one in one hundred and fifty for the rest of India. The total numbers of Sikh casualties were 61,041 and the wounded numbered 67,771<sup>4</sup>. Punjab also gave Rs 2 crores to war funds and extended a further Rs 10 crores as war loans to the Government of India.

The examination of the personal and individual experiences of the soldiers, especially from the colonies has become much emphasized upon in recent times. This is because of the personalized window it provides to a global event like the First World War<sup>5</sup>. This approach is also in line with the trend in 'New Military History' which is now prevalent.

## **Historiography of Prisoners of War**

Several streams have been seen even in this segment of historiography. Captured soldiers have been viewed as social actors and prisoners of war (PoW) camps have been viewed as social spaces with hierarchies and disputes. There are encounters and exchanges between people from various regional, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. There has also been focus on prisoners who were used as propaganda targets or as bargaining chips in diplomatic deals between warring nations<sup>7</sup>. Scholars have also investigated social experiences in prison, such as survival strategies and insubordination<sup>8</sup>.

However, due to the non-availability of archival source material, and lack of literature about PoWs at the time, especially from the colonies, there is a dark hole in the

---

<sup>4</sup> Amarjit Chandan, *How They Suffered: World War I and Its Impact Upon the Punjabis*, Apna Org.com, <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> (Retrieved 2 Jan, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Heike Liebau, 'Prisoners of War' (India) in 1914-1918', online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08

<sup>6</sup> Radhika Singha, *Front Lines and Status Lines: Sepoy and 'Menial' in the Great War 1916-1920*, Liebau et al: *The World in World Wars*, 2010, pp. 55-106.

<sup>7</sup> Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War. Britain, France and Germany 1914-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 29-69.

<sup>8</sup> Santanu Das, 'Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914-1918: Towards an intimate history', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011, pp. 70-89.

research. There has been no appreciable research conducted on Indian POWs in Europe or in Mesopotamia, despite the fact that a majority of the Sepoys fought in the latter<sup>9</sup>.

Historians have made use of a variety of sources to learn about the lives and experiences of Indian detainees<sup>10</sup>. These include mostly German records for those captured on the Western Front and mostly British sources for those captured in Mesopotamia. Official military and political documents, camp reports from the International Red Cross or other institutions, camp journals, and camp accounts are other source documents for this analysis<sup>11</sup>. Research by historians such as David Omissi, Kaushik Roy and Gajendra Singh on a small number of censored and extracted Sepoy letters, mainly from those fighting in Europe<sup>12</sup>, has brought new insights into the Sepoys' own experiences and perceptions<sup>13</sup>. In this chapter, for the purposes and scope of this study, attention has been focused on Sikh soldiers who were held in German PoW camps.

### **Sikh Soldiers Landing in German camp as PoWs?**

The first Indian expeditionary force which was sent to France from India had almost 90000 soldiers. Subsequently almost 50,000 non-combatants or camp followers were also sent to France. During the initial days of the war, there was significant percentage of these soldiers who were reported missing in action or were possible deserters or crossed over to German trenches by mistake in the dark and were captured. 3148 Indian other ranks and 50 officers were reported missing from among the Indian Corps in France till November 1915<sup>14</sup>.

Many of these were captured by German soldiers and made prisoners of war. German records reveal that almost 1,000 Indian soldiers and a similar number of civilians were

---

<sup>9</sup>David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918*, London: Houndsmill et al. 1999, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup>Claude Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the rear of the front' in *The world in world wars*, London: Brill, 2010, pp. 27-53.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. Markovits, *Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Omissi, *Europe through the eyes*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Markovits, *Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>R. Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison: reverberations of Indian wartime experiences in German prison camps (1915–1919)' in *The world in world wars*, London: Brill, 2010, p.145.



held in German prison camps. The civilians were forcibly made to work in various factories such as arms factory, potash mine and road and railway works in various parts of Germany<sup>15</sup>.

The situation of the military prisoners was different. The first soldiers from India were captured by the Germans in Ypres in November and December 1914. These were debriefed by a German missionary called Paul Walter who could speak Hindi and Urdu as he had lived in India for many years. He questioned the soldiers and prepared material for propaganda activities. The soldiers were then transferred to military hospitals and camps in various parts of Germany and particularly to Wittenberg<sup>16</sup>.

### **The Half Moon Camp**

Towards the end of December 1914, the first Indian prisoners found themselves at the newly opened Half Moon Camp (*Halbmondlager*) in Zossen- Wunsdorf near Berlin. This camp was established specifically as a propaganda camp for captured Muslim soldiers of the British, French and Russian armies. Regardless of whether they were Sikhs, Muslims or Hindus, the Indian prisoners began to be sent to the Half Moon camp.

In order to separate the Indian prisoners of war from the Muslims from other regions who had been also captured, an *Interlager* or exclusive Indian camp was established within the camp. The population of this *Inderlagan* at any given time was not more than 650. In 1916 there were 569 Indian prisoners out of which 300 were Gurkhas, 106 were Muslims, 100 were Sikhs and 63 were Thakurs or Rajputs<sup>17</sup>.

The soldiers who proved to be difficult or openly Pro British and who resisted the attempts of the Germans to convert them to their way of thinking were isolated from the other prisoners and sent to other camps. German military authorities looked after the administration of the camp, but the political and propagandistic efforts were coordinated by an Inter departmental unit. This unit consisted of officials from the German Foreign Service and General Staff for the Orient<sup>18</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p.147.

*Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.148-49.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.148-49.

Max Von Oppenheim who was the founder of this unit was a prominent German diplomat and orientalist. This department had two main objectives. One was to prepare the Muslims, hailing from India or other regions of the world, to join Germany in the defence of the Ottoman Empire and thus fight against the British and their allies. The second objective of the unit was to form a contingent of Indian soldiers who would be prepared to fight from the German side and invade Afghanistan. This Indian contingent was to be deployed in Afghanistan and sent to India to fight the British.

### **Indian Nationalists and PoW's**

Many prominent Indian nationalists and revolutionaries who were present during that time in Germany such as Virendranath Chattopadhyay, Bhupendranath Dutta, Mohammad Barkatullah, Taraknath Das and Har Dayal, were regular visitors to the camp. These Indian revolutionaries had formed the Indian Independence Committee which was stationed in Germany for this purpose. They were the most influential members of the Committee and viewed the captured Indian soldiers as important potential instruments for spreading revolution and anarchy in India against the British.

Indian Independence Committee was one of several national exile committees in Berlin that collaborated with the NFO. Several members of the committee were actively involved in propoganda among the South Asian POWs in German camps, in addition to propoganda related to Indian troops in various theatres of the war. The special propoganda camps of Zossen (Weinberglager) and Wünsdorf (Halbmondlager), which were established at the end of 1914, received a lot of attention. From the turn of the twentieth century, this area to the south of Berlin had been a huge military complex. It now became a hub of activity for the Indian expatriates who were stationed in Germany for the express purpose of spreading disaffection against the British and sabotaging the British war effort. The Indian nationalists in Germany were doing all they could to bring over the captured Indian soldiers to their side.

Some journals such as the '*Hindostan*' were started on the request of the Indian Independence Committee. Eighty-three or more issues of this journal were published till July 1918 but this journal failed to motivate or even find support among the

prisoners of war from India<sup>19</sup>. There was no contribution in terms of any article, song, poem, story, opinion or write up from the prisoners of war to any of these journals, even though they were literate and if they wanted, could have contributed to the journal that was being printed and produced for them.

Other forms of propaganda were also brought into use in order to influence the soldiers from India. Regular lectures and discussions were held by missionary and old India hands such as Paul Walter and also prominent Indians such as Dr Mansoor Ahmed, Bhupendranath Dutta, Har Dayal and other nationalists. An Ottoman style mosque was also constructed and inaugurated in July 1915 at the Half Moon Camp<sup>20</sup>. The Indian soldiers were allowed to celebrate festivals such as Holi and Eid. Soldiers were also allowed to carry on with their actions and rituals which were linked to religion or caste. Distribution of cigarettes was one of the most effective means of propaganda and prisoners were provided with facilities for slaughtering of goats and sheep in the various religious ways of *halal* (Muslim way of slaughter) and *jhatka* (Sikh way of slaughter). They were provided with goats, sheep and chicken to slaughter themselves as per their religious injunctions. They were allowed to cook for themselves according to their religious injunctions. The Germans even provided Indians belonging to different religions and communities with food stuff such as course ground wheat flour *atta*, butter, *ghee* and spices<sup>21</sup>.

The prisoners of war were even taken to excursions to Berlin that were meant to impress upon them the notion of German order, power and energy. Excellent medical care was provided to the soldiers who required medical attention. They were also given adequate food and clothing. The general good treatment which the soldiers received at the hands of the Germans was reported to their British officers upon their return.

---

<sup>19</sup> Heike Liebau, *Hindustan* (newspaper), 'Prisoners of War (India) in 1914-1918', online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08

<sup>20</sup> Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> B. Lange, *South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, Linguistic and Musicological Field Studies in Prison Camps*. Ravi Ahuja, Heike Liebau u. Franziska Roy (Hg.), *When the war began, we heard of several kings. 'South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi, 2011, pp.149-184.

## **Reaction of PoW's**

The reaction of the Indian prisoners of war to these plans was sorely lacking in enthusiasm. It is beyond doubt that the utmost efforts were undertaken by the Germans with the help of the Indian revolutionary elements and the Indian Independence League were also not effective in making the Indian soldiers cross over to the German side. Most of the soldiers, Sikhs and of other faiths, who were imprisoned in the Half Moon Camp remained staunchly loyal to the British despite various kinds of inducements which were offered by the Germans. This fact does lend credence to the belief that the Sikh soldiers and Indians in general were total loyalists and genuinely believed in the British Raj and were loathed to rebel against the British in any form whatsoever, inspite of being removed from their influence. Even in Germany, amidst reassurances, inducements and threats, Indian soldiers in general and Sikhs remained immune to any allure or threat.

However good the treatment and the amenities provided, the ice-cold response of the Indian PoWs made the German authorities and the members of the Indian Independence League realise the futility of continuing with these journals and there was a print run of only 200 copies and the distribution was limited to the Half Moon camp only<sup>22</sup>. The German prisoner of war camp was not a salubrious place to stay, even though the treatment might have been quite good owing to the efforts of the Germans to woo the Indians. Life in the camp was also fraught with risk. There was a very high mortality rate despite the medical care which was provided by the Germans. Deaths were common and exponentially high. Disease, cold and lack of proper diet and exercise were causing many deaths. Almost a quarter of the military prisoners had died in the three years that they were kept imprisoned<sup>23</sup>.

After the end of hostilities many of these military and civilian prisoners of war who had survived were repatriated to India via London or Egypt. They were treated as suspects and subjected to strict and close integrations. Those suspected of having changed sides during their internment in German camps were kept segregated. They were later transported and even jailed in India by the British. Many of these soldiers fearing reprisals deserted and were not traced.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', 9 Official Note, September 26, 1915, PAAA, R21250, f. 282, p.149.

<sup>23</sup> Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', p.152.

## **A day in the life of a Indian Prisoner of War**

The number of people of colour, from non-European countries who fought in the Great War is staggering. Around 1.4 million South Asians, both combatants and non-combatants, fought in the First World War not only in countries such as Mesopotamia, France, and Belgium, but also in East Africa, Gallipoli, Egypt, and Palestine. Around 140,000 South Asians were sent to Europe as part of the war effort, including 90,000 soldiers and 50,000 labourers<sup>24</sup>.

With the exception of the cavalry, who remained on the Western front, most South Asians were sent to Mesopotamia by the end of 1915, where they participated in several major battles, including the battle of Kut al-Amara in January 1916. In Mesopotamia, about 600,000 South Asians served and there were many Sikhs amongst them. A large number of Indians were taken prisoners during the war. Around 1,000 Indian military POWs and an equal number of civilian South Asians (students, traders, passengers, or seamen) were detained in German camps<sup>25</sup>.

Indian soldiers captured by Germany on the Western Front were first sent to numerous POW camps in Germany. They were then concentrated mainly in the *Halbmondlager* at Wünsdorf, one of two major "propaganda camps" for Muslim prisoners<sup>26</sup>. The other was the *Weinberglager* near Berlin, which opened in 1915. A so-called Inderlager (Indian camp) was constructed inside the *Halbmondlager* to distinguish the South Asian prisoners from the rest of the prisoners, who were mainly French colonial soldiers from North Africa. The South Asian POWs, along with others, were transferred to a camp in Morile-Marculesti, Romania, in occupied southern Romania, in spring 1917, from where they were repatriated after the war<sup>27</sup>.

Apart from other colonial soldiers captured on the Western Front, Indian civilians in Germany were interned during the war, in many places including Havelberg, Ruhleben, and Wittenberg. Despite the fact that the combatants had agreed to abide by, the 1907 Hague Convention on the Laws and Customs of War on Land, the real conditions on the ground were far from ideal. British and Indian soldiers were held

---

<sup>24</sup>Liebau, 'Prisoners of War', p. 209.

<sup>25</sup>Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', pp. 146-148.

<sup>26</sup>S. Jones, *Imperial Captivities*, in Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup>Liebau, 'Prisoners of War', p.211.

prisoners together in Ottoman-controlled Mesopotamia, while Indian and British officers were handled separately in Germany<sup>28</sup>.

Prisoners of war in Germany during World War I were often made to work both within and outside the camps<sup>29</sup>. At a time when local men were off fighting in the war, the prisoners became a significant labour base and economic factor. By 1916, a majority of POWs in Germany had been forced to work in some capacity or the other. Prisoners worked in a number of sectors, including agriculture, mining, and small businesses, as well as major companies. For example, Indian POWs from the Großenbaum camp near Duisburg worked for the Hahn Company (Hahnsche Werke), which later merged with the Mannesmann Company<sup>30</sup>.

Initially, most military POWs had to serve, with civilians only in extraordinary circumstances, but as the war progressed, the situation changed due to an increasing labour shortage. Thousands of men were housed, fed, and dressed in several prisoner of war camps over the course of many years. Hunger and cold were rampant among the inmates, and tuberculosis, typhoid, and respiratory diseases were common<sup>31</sup>. In Germany, the mortality rate among South Asian POWs was relatively high. Inside the limited camp space, a strict daily routine was arranged for thousands of men from different racial, social, and religious backgrounds. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians were all confined together, as were Gurkhas, Rajputs, Punjabis, and Pashtuns<sup>32</sup>. South Asians and French colonial soldiers of North African descent were held together in the Wünsdorf camp. A library with books in a number of languages was available at the camp. Propaganda seminars were held on a regular basis<sup>33</sup>. The PoWs were given better living conditions and more facilities because this was a propaganda camp and was visited by a number of officials, press people, army top brass and politicians.

---

<sup>28</sup>Jones, *Imperial Captivities*, p. 53.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>31</sup>Heike Liebau, 'The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts among the "Sepoys"', in: Roy/ Liebau/ Ahuja (eds.), *When the war began we heard of several kings*, Cambridge: Cambridge printing press, 2011, pp. 96-129.

<sup>32</sup> Liebau, *The German Foreign Office*, pp. 122-125.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-102.

## German Propaganda

During First World War, German troops were trained and dispatched from Wünsdorf railway station to the Western Front. A special newspaper created under the control of the NfO for the prisoners in Wünsdorf and Zossen was one of the most effective means of propaganda among the POWs. The NfO intended to print the newspaper, *El-Jihad* in several languages, including Arabic, Russian, Turko-Tatarian, Georgian, Hindi, and Urdu. *Hindustan* was added to the title for Indian languages<sup>34</sup>. War news, pro-German and anti-British propaganda, nationalist ideas, and (in the Urdu edition) pan-Islamic thoughts were all included in *Hindustan*, which was produced under the control of the NfO with the aid of South Asian propagandist intellectuals. The establishment of an "Indian Legion" for Afghanistan was a particular goal of propaganda among the South Asian POWs.

Indian prisoners, like those from other nations, were subjected to massive propaganda campaigns. These actions were part of a more holistic "Orient" strategy. This was done to provoke anti-colonial uprisings in order to undermine Britain's, France's, and Russia's imperial influence. The German propaganda strategy regarding Indians was focused on a nationalistic strand of argumentation to strengthen the particular agenda of the Germans. Propaganda was used to convince Muslims to abandon Britain and pursue Jihad, which was announced by the Sultan of Turkey and backed by Germany.

Prisoners were to be convinced to agree to be sent to Constantinople to join the Ottoman army and battle the Entente armies, according to Max von Oppenheim's (1860-1946) plan of "revolutionising" Germany's war enemies' Islamic territories. Von Oppenheim formed a special bureau within the Foreign Office, the Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient, to manage these propaganda activities (NfO, Information Centre for the Orient). The following duties were assigned to the NfO in relation to troops on the front lines or prisoners of war to develop "Oriental" language leaflets for use at the front or in the "Orient"<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 96-129.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, Prisoners of War (India), in 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08, 2014, p. 87.

- to work as a newspaper editor for Muslim POWs in Germany.
- offer books to "Oriental" nation's captives, arrange seminars, etc., accommodate their religious needs while keeping in mind their diverse backgrounds
- to track and manage the Muslim prisoners' correspondence

The NfO formed contacts with politically active intellectuals and revolutionaries from India, Egypt, Georgia, Ireland, and Iran in order to carry out these steps and to work with Germany to spread anti-colonial propaganda. Some South Asian exiles from various political and religious backgrounds saw their cooperation with Germany as an opportunity to fight for an independent future for their country, relying on German political and economic power as well as deep-seated German interest in India<sup>36</sup>.

Their goal was to persuade the Amir of Afghanistan to enable the launch of an Indian battalion that would march into India from his country. Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh (1886-1979), an Indian nobleman and diplomat, led an expedition that included six Afridi POWs. The mission was a failure because the Amir of Afghanistan refused to allow a force to attack India from his country<sup>37</sup>.

### **The PoW Camps as Human Laboratories**

The presence of men from all over the world in the POW camps, including from North Africa, Central and South Asia, drew a lot of interest from German academics during the war. Anthropologists and linguists saw the camps as laboratories and conducted studies there with the approval of political and military authorities.

POWs' languages, dialects, and traditional music were registered by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission, which was created in October 1915 by Wilhelm Doegen. A total of 2,672 audio recordings were made between December 1915 and December 1918. Nearly three hundred of them were in South Asian languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Garhwali, Baluchi, Nepali, and Gurung<sup>38</sup>. In the case of the South Asian POWs, German scholars such as Indologist Helmuth von Glasenapp and Islamic studies' specialist Josef Horowitz played a dual role in terms of study and political consultation.

---

<sup>36</sup>Liebau, *The German Foreign Office*, pp.100-102.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 89

<sup>38</sup>K. Mahrenholz, 'Recordings of South Asian Languages', pp. 108, 117.



## Scientific Activities at Half Moon Camp

The prisoners of war in the German camps elicited a lot of curiosity from the German public. The Indian prisoners were painted by photographers and painters and a commercial film company was allowed to use the Indian prisoners during the filming of a colonial silent picture. The Half Moon camp was also an ideal place for field studies. Anthropologists conducted cranial logical measurements and other studies on the prisoners. These were opposed vehemently but without success by members of the Indian Independence Committee. These trials were opposed on the grounds that such measurements are associated by Indians with criminals and the Sikhs would resent them in particular. The German Army officials were warned that the laudable scientific curiosity of German professors would invite very unpleasant consequences.

The linguist Wilhelm Bajan received funding for a large-scale linguistic study among prisoners of war from various European and colonial backgrounds. He was overjoyed to find people speaking so many different tongues, dialects and speech patterns at one place and carried out systematic sound recordings in various languages. Standard text was used for the recording in various European languages and dialects for the Europeans. Other nations, particularly the Indians were asked to tell a story, sing a song, or even talk about their experiences in their native language.

The relatively small group of Indian soldiers present at the Half Moon Camp, which had about a hundred Sikhs, was able to attract a lot of attention from multiple levels of the German High command, German public, military authorities and even the civilian administration. The British military establishment as well as civil and authorities from secret service to Indian revolutionary nationalists to diplomats and also people from the arts like painters, photographers and film studios, as also missionaries and German academics, actors and army officials were inordinately interested in the happenings of the Half Moon camp. The various reports, recordings, propaganda, material interviews conducted and transcripts of sound recordings in Punjabi, Urdu Hindi, Nepali and Bengali provide a comprehensive picture of the experiences of the Indian prisoners of war in the German camps.

Lasenapp was a leading figure in the production of the camp newspaper, *Hindostan*, and he selected books and journals for the camp library at the Halbmondlager. Von Glasenapp accompanied Raja Mahendra Pratap during his stay in Berlin in the spring



**Halal Meat was provided for the Muslim soldiers, and Sikhs and Hindus had Jhatka meat.**



**Emaciated Sikh Prisoners of War (POW) in Germany in 1917.**



of 1915. As a scholar with excellent knowledge of and interest in Indian languages and as a member of the Phonographic Commission, von Glasenapp carried out linguistic research and recording of sound samples in the camps. Josef Horovitz backed von Oppenheim's pan-Islamic agitation policy among the Indian Sepoys<sup>39</sup>. According to him, it was critical to organise propaganda among the Indian prisoners that included pan-Islamic ideas. When their alleged sympathies for the Ottoman Sultan's Caliphate were also taken into account, it was a promising prospect. Horovitz worked as a member of the Phonographic Commission in the prisoner of war camps, making recordings of the prisoners from India in Punjabi, Hindustani and Baluchi<sup>40</sup>.

During the war, anthropological research was performed in POW camps in addition to linguistic research. Felix von Luschan, also a Phonographic Commission member, and his doctoral candidate Egon von Eickstedt travelled through POW camps in Germany and Austria-Hungary with other anthropologists to take body measurements and plaster casts of faces. Von Eickstedt performed body measurements among South Asian prisoners in Wünsdorf in December 1916. Eickstedt continued his measurements in Romania after the bulk of them were moved there.

As a result, according to Andrew Evans, POW camps in Germany and Austria became "veritable laboratories for the study of race." These scientific endeavours during WWI must be placed in the light of Germany's growth of racial theory, which later became a pillar of national socialist ideology.

### **The written word and oral traditions**

In official terms, the British kept up the image of the loyal Indian soldier as an extremely loyal, almost childlike, trusting and simple person, whose heart beat only for the service of the empire. This was especially true of the Sikhs. Through the works of Rudyard Kipling<sup>41</sup>, the myth of a powerful, invincible masculine warrior was fostered and embodied. The letters, memoirs, oral histories and official statements that are now being explored and studied with new perspectives and outlook are opening new windows of understanding. The worlds of the soldiers, when described and

---

<sup>39</sup>Liebau, 'Prisoners of War', p. 129.

<sup>40</sup>Mahrenholz, Recordings of South Asian Languages, in: Roy/ Liebau/ Ahuja (eds.), "When the war began we heard of several kings" 2011, pp. 198-200; Liebau: The German Foreign Office, pp. 108, 117.

<sup>41</sup> Kipling, R. (1897). *Barrack-room ballads and other verses*. Methuen.

narrated in their own voices and words, provides a rare and intriguing peek into the soldier's minds. As such, a new outlook on male experience has arisen, one that involves apprehension, weakness, encouragement, and physical tenderness<sup>42</sup>. Between Indian martial groups or imperial races, there was competition and war<sup>43</sup>.

The anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards has called these oral, personal and narrative traditions that are increasingly shedding light on the rich and hitherto little explored lodestone of the colonial experiences in the Great war as 'raw histories'<sup>44</sup>. The materials such as the audio testimonies of the soldiers acquire even deeper significance as the majority of the colonial soldiers were not literate and not literary. They have not left behind a large resource material such as pictures, diaries, notebooks, letters, poems, journals etc. These material- oral, visual and audio memoirs- are what we must rely on to reproduce the particular experience which can evoke what the colonial or Sikh soldier passed through in his journey in the four years of the war.

### **Audio Testimonies of Sikh Soldiers recorded at Half Moon Camp**

In recent years, a new extraordinary source has emerged that sheds new light on the history of Indian POWs: voices of POWs in the true sense of the term can be heard from a series of sound recordings created by the Royal Prussian Phonograph Commission in German POW camps between 1915 and 1918<sup>45</sup>. There was a special postal control system in place, for example, at the *Halbmondlager* (Halfmoon camp) in Wünsdorf, where a majority of the Indian PoWs, captured by Germany from the Western Front were housed. Suspicious letters were translated and commented on by the Seminar for Oriental languages (*Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen, SOS*) in

---

<sup>42</sup> P. Levine, 'Battle colors: Race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, 9(4), 1999, pp. 104-130.

<sup>43</sup> P. Higate, 'Martial races and enforcement masculinities of the global south: Weaponising Fijian, Chilean, and Salvadoran postcoloniality in the mercenary sector', *Globalizations*, 9(1), 35-52, 2012, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford: Berg, 2011, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Roy, Franziska/Liebau, Heike/Ahuja, Ravi (eds.) *When the war began we heard of several kings. South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi: 2011, pp. 187-206 - Recordings of South Asian Margot. Kahleyss, *Indian Prisoners of War in World War I, Photographs as Source Material*, in Roy/Liebau/Ahuja 'When the war began', 2011, pp. 207-230- Languages and Music in the Lautarchiv of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2011, p. 49.

Berlin. So far, there have been no special content-related studies on POWs' letters published in South Asian languages in Berlin. Former prisoners' experiences can also be traced through wartime interviews or interrogations of ex-prisoners in England.

The recordings are housed in the *Lautarchiv* of Berlin's Humboldt University and contain prescribed texts, personal statements, songs, and stories that prisoners were forced to read. Visual sources documenting prison life, such as Otto Stiehl's (1860-1940) photograph collections in Berlin's Museum *Europäischer Kulturen*, have opened up new avenues for the study of Indian POWs<sup>46</sup>.

The voice of the soldiers who were actually living through the 'experience of war' are vital testimonies to what is the 'cultural' and 'intellectual' and 'human' context of war. In the tremulous voices of soldiers who had been recorded for the first time in their lives, we hear the echoes of an ocean of emotions, fears and hopes. These voices tell us, more tangibly and clearly than anything else, written or pictured, how it was to be fighting in a war which almost all the soldiers recognised as not their own war. They referred to it as 'The *Angrez di jung*' (The Englishman's war) or the '*Europe ki jung*' (The European War).

### **Jangnama Europe**

Jangnama, a historical poetry writing form that chronicles the events of a battle, arrived in Punjab in the sixteenth century as a literary response to Persian epics. Maulvi Rukundin, Hamid, and Shahjahan Muqbal, all Punjabi Muslim poets, polished their art by recalling the seventh-century Islamic conflicts of Karbala, Badr, and Uhud.

Invasion by Afghans, the fall of the Mughal Empire, and the emergence of Sikh dominance in Punjab resulted in a time of immense upheaval and conquest. As a result, the Punjabi poet became aware of war as a physical event, and jangnama literature moved from religious allegorical style to a historically factual lyrical portrayal of battle, as observed by current poets<sup>47</sup>.

---

<sup>46</sup>Kahleyss, Margot, *Indian Prisoners of War in World War I. Photographs as Source Material*, in: Roy/Liebaw/Ahuja (2011) "When the war began...", pp. 207-230.

<sup>47</sup> C. Chatterjee, 'War for Independence: The Khalsa against the Company Raj, 1845–46 and 1848–49', *Indian Historical Review*, 39(2), 2012, pp. 317-336.

The first Punjabi jangnama on the First World War appears to be Hakim Ishaar Singh Kooner of Riyasat, Patiala's *Germany Jung* or *The German War*. Published in 1914, it covered the early phases of the war. As Kooner was not a soldier, his story is not that of an eye witness; but an imaginative take on the ongoing European conflict.

*Jungnama Europe* by Nand Singh, a Sikh soldier witnessed the war as an insider<sup>48</sup>. His perspective was that of an aware and engaged participant. Nand Singh, witnessed the First World War while fighting under the British in Aden. The poem opens with the assassination of the *shehzada* (prince) of the Austria- Hungary empire. His poem then goes on to discuss the circumstances that led to Germany's invasion of Belgium, as well as how the humane and sympathetic British Government supported Belgium and France against arrogant Germany who breached all agreements. The remarkable element in Nand Singh's writing is his rational and balanced tone. Nand Singh's tone is not flattering, unlike most other jangnamas of the time; for example, he only uses the term *sahib* once, for Lord Kitchener<sup>49</sup>.

However, he frequently emphasizes *namak halali* ( Loyalty), whether as a virtue for new recruits to preserve or as a tribute to the 14th Sikh Regiment, which fought practically to their last man at Gallipoli. As a result, his work gives a balanced perspective on the conflict as well as an understanding of what regimental honour and devotion meant to the local troops. Nand Singh's work, as well as other jangnamas from the British period in Punjab, are valuable literary and historical narratives that provide rare subaltern perspectives on colonial wars and conflicts.

### **The Audio Experiment**

There were more than 2, 677 audio recordings made by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Mission in the days between December 29, 1915 and December 19, 1918. In almost exactly three years, the Germans recorded hundreds of testimonies of Prisoners of War (PoW) of different nationalities who were being held in the Half Moon Camp<sup>50</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup> R. Jalil, *The Great War: Indian Writings on the First World War*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> R. Chhina. Singh, *Nand Singh and Jangnamah Europe: Subaltern insights on the wars of Empire*. London: *South Asia@ LSE*, 2018, p.17.

<sup>50</sup>B. Lange, 'Archival Silences as Historical Sources. Reconsidering Sound Recordings of Prisoners of War (1915-1918) from the Berlin Lautarchiv', Humbolt University,

Precious recordings made at the Half Moon Camp near Berlin, more than hundred years ago in 1915, have finally been declassified and accessed by this researcher. These recordings are now in Guru Granth Sahib Bhavan in Sector 28, Chandigarh, India. They are lodged currently in the safe custody of Retired Lieutenant Colonel Perminder Singh Randhawa<sup>51</sup>. Jochen Hennig, the Central Collection Commissioner at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, has shared the audio recordings as a part of the project to commemorate hundred years of the First World War. Under Wilhelm Doegen, who headed the recordings, again 1650 recordings were made in which the soldiers were encouraged to speak in the native languages and narrate a story or a moral tale which they knew from their own culture.

Colonel Perminder Singh Randhawa (Retd.) of the Guru Nanak Society has been chosen to be the recipient of the audio recordings for many reasons. There was a general feeling in Germany that recordings should be analysed by experts who hail from the same country, community, language and socio-cultural milieu as the Sikh soldiers who spoke into the microphones a century ago. Consequently, from among thousands of voice recordings in different languages which are present at the Humboldt University Sound Archive in Berlin, seventy recordings of soldiers from the Punjab have been handed over to Colonel Randhawa. These include the recordings of the Sikh Prisoners of War. The Sikh soldiers who were captured by the Germans belonged to the British Indian regiments such as 15th Ludhiana Sikhs, 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs and 4<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles amongst some others.

The technical innovation that allowed the recordings to happen was the invention of the wax cylinder phonograph by Thomas Alva Edison during the time of the First World War<sup>52</sup>. Forty scientists formed the team for the project. The extensive team comprised of experts from the fields of anthropology musicology and linguistics

---

*SoundEffects-An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience*, 7(3), 2017, pp.46-60.

<sup>51</sup> Sarika. Sharma, '100 years later, voices from WW1', *The Tribune*, May 20, 2018, Chandigarh, p. 8. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/features/100-years-later-voices-from-wwi-591837>

Lange, 'Archival Silences as Historical Sources', pp.46-60.

<sup>52</sup>B. Lange, 'Poste restante, and messages in bottles: sound recordings of Indian prisoners in the First World War', London, *Social Dynamics*, 41(1), 2015, pp.84-100.



among other disciplines<sup>53</sup>. The project was deemed scientifically quite significant as the scientists had the opportunity to study humans from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, who had been interned at one place as PoWs in Germany.

The German authorities were particularly interested in finding out more about the turban wearing, tall and physically imposing Sikh soldiers who had such a formidable martial reputation. Ever since their arrival in France at the beginning of the War, the battle progress of the Sikhs and the stories about their valour had become legendary in the German rank-and-file. In fact, during the first stage of the War, when the Sikh soldiers initially landed in France and faced the Germans across the trenches, the German soldiers were told many tales about the bloodthirsty nature and cannibalism of Sikh soldiers<sup>54</sup>. These myths were spread by their own officers who wanted the German soldiers to fight with more ferocity out of the fear of being eaten by the Sikhs.

This propaganda had the desired effect and Sikh soldiers were highly dreaded by the German soldiers<sup>55</sup>. When some Sikh soldiers were finally made prisoners of war and transported to Berlin, the German authorities considered it an ideal opportunity to unravel the mystery surrounding them. They also wanted to demolish the false image which had been attributed to the Sikhs and which was affecting the performance of German soldiers when faced with Sikh soldiers in battle<sup>56</sup>.

Now that the situations were reversed and the Sikh soldiers were at the mercy of their German captors, they felt fearful and uncertain of the future. Just like the British officials were monitoring and censoring the letters which the Indians sent back home, the Sikh soldiers in the German camps were also aware that their words could be held against them. Although they had been asked to narrate stories from their culture, moral tales, songs etc, the soldiers were smart enough to use these as veiled references and coded messages. Through these stories and cultural references, the soldiers very

---

<sup>53</sup>E. Robertson, 'Norman Lindsay and the 'Asianisation' of the German soldier in Australia during the First World War', Perth, *The Round Table*, 103(2), 2014, pp.211-231.

<sup>54</sup>J. H. Morrow Jr., 'Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers' Stories', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 632(1), 2011, pp.12-25.

<sup>55</sup>Morrow Jr, J. H. (2010). Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers' Stories. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 632(1), 12-25.

<sup>56</sup>Robertson, 'Asianisation' of the German soldier in Australia during the First World War, p. 237.

masterfully were able to convey many messages, shrouded in commonplace and seemingly harmless and straightforward simple tales and references. For this reason alone, a person has to be from the same socio-cultural context to be able to decipher the connotations of the various fables, religious tales, songs, folktales, fairy tales and legends which were recounted by the soldiers during these recordings. The soldiers were able to convey much more than the message appeared to say by cultural coding, veiled references and use of colloquial and slang language which only people from their own cultural backgrounds would be able to reference and decode. In this case as the Sikh soldiers were from Punjab and they made their recordings in the Punjabi language, Colonel Randhawa was considered the perfect person who would be able to analyse not only the linguistic intricacies but also the conceptual, cultural, societal, and religious connotations which were conveyed by the Sikh soldiers a hundred years ago.

Meticulous record keepers, the Germans maintained detailed records of the information regarding the name, regiment, nationality, age, place of birth, date of birth, village and other important information about each of the soldiers who were being recorded. A transcript of the recording was prepared as also a page on personal information of every soldier, thus preserving in a detail, various aspects connected with the soldiers who provided the voices and thoughts for these recordings.

### **Transcripts of the Audio Tapes**

There were at least a hundred Sikh soldiers at the Half Moon Camp. They were feared and also the subjects of intriguing interest for the Germans as the martial reputation of the Sikhs had preceded them. The German soldiers who had fought the Sikhs were full of admiration for them. Hence, the Sikhs were one of the most observed inmates of the Half Moon Camp and were selected to record their voices. Seventy of these recordings have been provided now to be analysed in Chandigarh.

While undertaking an analysis of the recordings, it is pertinent to keep in mind the fact that the Sikh soldiers were PoWs in Germany who were constrained by many factors, and they could not really speak their minds. They were under strict observance while the recordings were being done. The primary factor which one must not forget is that the prisoners of war were completely at the mercy of the German soldiers and military authorities. If they said anything that went against the gain or

was likely to anger or irritate or even arouse suspicions in their captors, then it could mean even death for the soldiers. As such, they could not reveal any information or say anything which could be held against them as it would have endangered their lives.

At the same time the Sikh soldiers also realised that this audio recording project was a perfect opportunity and a godsend. They could use this opportunity which the soldiers would be able to broadcast and communicate their dilemma, problems, homesickness and loyalty to the people back home and also the British authorities. The socio-cultural aspects of the stories, fables, moral tales, religious tales and other observations which were made by the Sikh soldiers in these recordings can only be deciphered in the proper socio-cultural context. The perfect example of this is proved by the case of Sundar Singh who asked for the *Rumala Sahib* or vestment for the Guru Granth Sahib on behalf of the entire Sikh PoW contingent. He was successful in getting his demand met by the Maharaja of Patiala, with the approval of the British and German authorities.

### **Sundar Singh**

A thirty-eight-year-old Sikh soldier, Sundar Singh, from village Ghalab in Ludhiana recorded his statement in the Half Moon Camp on 5 January 1917<sup>57</sup>. The Sikh soldier had requested the authorities for a *Rumala* or *Vaster* (Garment) for their Adi Granth, the holy scripture of the Sikhs. Sundar Singh recounted in his recording that if the soldiers had been in India and their holy scripture had been without *Rumala* or *Vaster* (Garment) they would have refused to eat. However, in the German camp they would die if they refused to eat as they had been rendered very weak due to the lack of Indian food. The Sikh also makes apparent his real feeling towards the Germans and the British and admitted his preference for the British as he was familiar with the ways of the British and they were sympathetic towards the Sikhs as they knew and understood the Sikh faith and practices.

The Sikh soldier also wonders about the meaning of the English sending a Guru Granth Sahib to the Germans to give to the Sikhs, without the *vaster*? He says that we are happy when we see the inhabitants of Germany, yet we do believe that the

---

<sup>57</sup>Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', p.164.

Germans think of us the way we think of them; if the Germans did think that way they would honour the home of our Guru. This incident is revealing of the fact that the Sikh soldiers definitely credited the British authorities and officials of being better able to understand their religious injunctions. This idea was strengthened when the British Government of Punjab permitted the Maharaja of Patiala to send the garments for dressing the Guru Granth Sahib to the Sikh prisoners in Germany.

<b>Line</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Translation</b>
<b>1</b>	Ekādmisi ... je makhankhāndāsiHindustānmein	There was a man who would have butter back in India
<b>2</b>	Do ser dūdh, pīndāsī	He would also have two sers of milk
<b>3</b>	UsneAngrejānkīnaukrīkī	He served for the British
<b>4</b>	O ādmī Europe kiladāī'chāgayā	He joined the European War
<b>5</b>	Us ādmīnū Germany ne qaid karleyā	He was captured by the Germans
<b>6</b>	Us nu India jānāchāhtāhai	He wants to go back to India
<b>7</b>	Je oh Hindustānjaūgā to usnu oh khānāmīlegā	If he goes back to India then he will get that same food
<b>8</b>	Ohādmī nu tīnbaras ho gayehain	Three years have already passed
<b>9</b>	Khabar nahinkabsulahhovegā	There's no news as to when there will be peace
<b>10</b>	Je Hindustānmein oh ādmījāyegāuskokhānā oh milūgā	Only if he goes back to India will he get that food
<b>11</b>	Je do sāl oh ādmīetthehor reh gayātā oh ādmī mar jaūgā	If he stays here for two more years then he will die
<b>12</b>	Mahārājkrīpākaretā eh chhetisulahkarleinteassichalejāiye	By God's grace, if they declare peace then we'll go back

## **Mall Singh**

This is the testimony of Mall Singh, who was a prisoner of war of the Germans, being held in the Half Moon Camp, just outside Berlin. The recording was done on December 11, 1916, and he must have been made to speak into a phonograph machine that was held by his German captors. Unused to the phonograph, scared, tongue tied and nervous, Mall Singh still spoke about all that he held dear. In his brief rendering of 12 lines, he managed to distil a world of meaning into the few words.

He spoke in the language of his forefathers- Punjabi, as he was most comfortable in that, but in a concession to the alien world he found himself in, and perhaps to make himself widely understood, he interspersed it with Hindustani or Hindi. Describing himself in the Third person (*Ek Aadmi Si*), he recounted his own story as one tells a tale or *Dastaan* (story). Just like the traditional fairy tales begin with ‘Once upon a time’, so did Mall Singh begin his recording with *ek aadmi si...*and immediately he describes his past life

*‘Je makhan khanda si Hindustan mein...Do ser doodh pita si...’*

One can almost hear the ‘Alas!’ in his voice when he says

Usneangrejankinaukriki...( he entered the service of the Angrez or British)

O aaadmi Eurpoekiladaichagaya ( that man came to the war of Europe)

It is very interesting to note here that Mall Singh calls the War ‘*Europe ki Ladai*’ (Europe’s war), not *Angreza ki ladai* (White Man’s war) or even *Us aadmi ki ladai* (That Person’s war). This basically means that the Sikh soldiers essentially saw the War as the ‘War in Europe’ or the ‘War of the Europeans’. By calling it the War of Europe, Mall Singh immediately disassociates himself from the war as an alien or outsider.

*Us aadmi nu Germany ne qaid karleya*

That man was captured by Germany.

*Us nu India Jana Chahtahai, Je Oh Hindustan jayega to usnu oh khanamilega*

Mall Singh then explains the ardent wish of ‘that man’-himself. That man wants to go to India, because if he goes back to India, only then he will get that food (*Makhan* (butter) and two ser milk). The dairy products are a metaphor for home, as Punjabi food was largely dairy based in which milk and butter featured prominently.

Mall Singh goes on to lament how three years have already passed, although this was unlikely as the recording was done in December 1916 and the first ship carrying Indian soldiers had sailed only on August 28, 1914. Mall Singh expresses his distress at not knowing when *sulah* (truce) will take place. He does not refer to *fateh* or victory, but *sulah* or truce. This alludes to the fact that the soldiers at this point were not seeking victory but were hankering for peace so that they could go back to their homeland, the mythical and actual ‘land of milk and butter’.

He again reiterates how only when he returns to India, he will get that same food. However, if that man stays here for two more years, then that man will die.

*Maharaj Kripa Kare ta eh chettisulahkarleinteassichalejaiye*

A typical Sikh prayer of ‘May *Maharaj* (God) do benevolence (Lit), Instead of ‘be benevolent’ and they soon make truce and we go back.

The yearning to return to the homeland in Punjab in the rendition is very clear. The war weariness is also coming across clearly. The PoW’s were as eager for the truce to be declared as anyone, as they just wanted to return home, if not as victors then certainly as survivors of the most destructive, extensive and long drawn out war known to man till then.

### **Sib Singh**

Sib Singh, the son of a Sikh farmer in village Chhota Bhagava in Amritsar district, in the recording of his voice recounts how he learnt to read and write Gurmukhi in his regimental school. 26 years old at the time of his internment in Half Moon camp when his voice was recorded on December 9, 1916, Sib Singh narrated the tale of a king and his four daughters in Punjabi. After the account, he adds the following observations which are extremely revealing. The sentences at the end of the recording show that the Sikh soldiers were not ignorant simpletons from villages who were childlike and resigned to their fate. These soldiers had not crossed the black oceans on the behalf of

the British simply because they were told to do that but they did so as they were intelligent, aware and reflective men in their own right. Sib Singh says in chaste Punjabi:

The German Badshah emperor is very wise. He wages war with all the Badshahs and a lot will be printed when the war is over. The Angrez Englishman is Badshah in India and we did not know there were other badshahs when the war began. We heard of several Badshahs. One flaw in India is that people are without knowledge they *be-ilm* (illiterate) and they don't know anything.

These lines are quite oblique, but these give rise to several questions. Definitely, Sib Singh is has the new realisation that although the British were the *Badshahs* (emperors) in India, they were not unchallenged outside. The Indians were not aware that the British had enemies or rivals in other European Nations also. Sib Singh's allusion to the fact that a lot will be printed shows that the soldiers were acutely aware of the propaganda devices and printed material that was being extensively used. They knew that even falsehoods and exaggerations were made for propaganda purposes by the European nations<sup>58</sup>. While he is talking generally, his astute observations reveal that he and other soldiers often paid more attention to the events around them that they were given credit for.

The soldiers had more respect and credence for the written word but knew that propaganda used written vehicles most for swaying the minds of people. A very significant reference also talks about knowledge as being the source of power. Sib Singh clearly states that the Indians suffer from the flaw of being without knowledge which renders them powerless. This sentence, right from the mouth of a Sikh soldier is incontestable proof that Sikh Soldiers when they went abroad, discovered that the British were not the one and only power or Emperors in the world as they had been considered till then in India. The Sikh soldiers knew that in Europe there were many rival powers that were equally powerful like the Germans.

The soldiers were quite discriminating. They could see the fact that they were treated better in the German camps then even by their own British officers. However, the Sikhs were not fooled and were aware that the Germans were good to them for a

---

<sup>58</sup>Lange, 'Poste restante, and messages in bottles', p. 94.

purpose. When they heard the abusive language used by The Eurasian sentries in the Half Moon camp, their reaction was guarded. The soldiers said that they want us to believe they are good but they are no better than the English. This observation confirms the fact that the soldiers were not childish or innocent or unintelligent as is often portrayed in the annals of the British army related memoirs and books of the time.

### **Nidhan Singh**

The 28-year-old Sikh soldier called Nidhan Singh of a village in Ludhiana district in his sound recording says they love Hindustan because it is their home country. Even if they are tempted by milk, good lunch and dinner, they still love Hindustan. Nidhan Singh had recorded the statement as *dusri kahani* (second story), and followed it directly afterwards, with a moral announcement on the importance of hard work. This might have been the loyal soldier and his way of asserting his patriotism and loyalty for the British even in a German prisoner of war camp. Nidhan Singh, like the majority of the Sikh soldiers was taking the opportunity provided by the recordings to again declare his uprightness and steadfastness. He was reiterating his love for his country and his determination to resist all temptations to which he must have been subjected as a part of the propaganda activities of the Germans.

### **Intellectual History and the Sound Recordings**

The pioneering work done by James Harvey Robinson in the United States has refined ‘intellectual History’ as a branch of history with a viable degree of autonomy<sup>59</sup> to be used as an integrative tool. This branch of history attempts to demonstrate the interdependent character of intellectual activities and how changes in one domain can lead to realignment and changes in other intellectual domain too.

In the context of the present study, this raises important questions such as to what degree and depth were the Sikh soldiers, non-combatants affected by the experiences and exposure they received in various countries while serving abroad? How were they affected vis a vis their attitudes towards ideas such as education, liberty, gender roles,

---

<sup>59</sup> K.M.Pannikar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony Intellectuals and Social consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1995, p. 65.



perception of the British and their policies and the institutions of colonialism. In turn, how did the soldiers influence changes in their larger family circles and communities?

It may be summarised that the article contributes to ongoing research, understanding, and debates about the First World War as a "global" and "total" war, particularly from the perspective of social and cultural history, by focusing on the conditions and experiences of South Asian Sepoys in captivity during the First World War. Scholars have begun to look at questions of imprisonment on a comparative and broader scale, but only a few publications have addressed non-European inmates' perspectives.

Even when it comes to the captivity of South Asian POWs during WWI, there is still a significant gap in our knowledge of the war's various theatres. While the condition of South Asian POWs in Germany is well-documented and investigated, Mesopotamia and East Africa have received less attention. More case studies are needed to compare the experiences of captives in different regions, as had been done recently in a published research paper in 2020 by A. A. Chudal.<sup>60</sup> The author has focused on the song sung by a Gurkha soldier Jas Bahadur Rai, who was also a PoW at the Half Moon Camp and explored if the song was a self-referential piece of self-expression that was pragmatically penned by the soldier to express many emotions, hopes and reactions.

### **Freedom of Agency**

Freedom of agency refers to the ability of a person to decide for himself. For the purposes of this study, the third approach to freedom of agency as defined by P. Philip in his recently published paper<sup>61</sup> has been taken into account. In this, the third approach is defined by Petit as follows, "Freedom is a function of how far the person can live and choose beyond the arbitrary power of others", in order words, choose while being free from domination<sup>62</sup>. Freedom of Agency at a prisoner of war camp is extremely limited and domination is almost absolute.

---

<sup>60</sup>A.A. Chudal, 'What Can a Song Do to You? A life story of a Gurkha prisoner in World War I', New Delhi: South Asia: *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43(3), 2020, pp.392-406.

<sup>61</sup>Pettit, Philip, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom', *Journal of Theoretical Politics - J Theor Polit.* 15. 2013, pp. 387-403.

<sup>62</sup>Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.26; Also see Q. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 48.

However, in the context of the sound recordings and all that they have managed to convey, retain and communicate across the years, many interesting observations emerge. When seen in the context of freedom of agency, the sound recordings of the Half Moon Camp pose many intriguing and thought-provoking issues. During the recording process which began with the preliminary stage where the person selected to record his voice was called and asked to prepare a script, remember and prepare a song, tale, narration etc. and put it down on paper. This was then copied by the Germans and a transcript was made. During the recording itself the man was required to read from this transcript<sup>63</sup>.

The subject matter which the person would be speaking was chosen by the man himself, albeit under certain conditions and provisions. The content should not be too controversial, too loyalist to the British, too critical of the Germans or reveal any important information. Within this frame of reference, the PoW was free to make his own evaluation and decide the content he would be speaking and write it accordingly. Many a time the prisoner was allowed to think about what he would be talking about for days before the day of actual recording. During this time the prisoner consulted his friends, peers and colleagues in the Half Moon camp and also drew upon his most redolent memories of home in order to prepare his script.

There have been examples as illustrated in several research papers that PoWs did make effective use of the sound recordings for their purposes. Like the Sikh soldiers which are going to be discussed subsequently, the research on Jus Bahadur Rai undertaken by Chudal also reveals interesting parallels. Rai composed the song he sang in the Nepali language during his recording. He retained the first few lines of a traditional song, but included references to Germany, Belgium, France and India in the song which could not have been there in the original song. He talks about his homesickness, the river Teesta, his sweetheart and even about his hopes and aspirations of getting back to India very soon. He seems to be talking not only on his own behalf, but also on the behalf of his comrades, the other Gurkha prisoners of war who were interned with him<sup>64</sup>.

---

<sup>63</sup>Chudal, *What Can a Song Do to You?*, p. 396.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 402.

## **Freedom of Agency and the Sikh PoWs**

This seems to be the case with the Sikh soldiers also. When talking about the freedom of agency which was enjoyed by the soldiers, one cannot help but remember the case of Sundar Singh from Ludhiana who had asked for *Rumala Sahib* for the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They could be no greater example of how the soldiers had been able to turn the tables on the Germans and actually utilise the resources provided to gain advantages and work for their own benefit. This not only displays a keen sense of initiative but also intelligence, daring, resourcefulness, courage and ability to rise above the conditions to identify the possible advantages which they had.

In the case of Mall Singh also there seems to be insightful understanding of exactly what the sound recording meant and the opportunities it presented. He begins with the narration of the series of events which had landed him in his predicament as a PoW in a German Half Moon camp. Mall Singh then goes on to present his identification as a British soldier who came to Europe and was captured by the Germans. He then proceeds to put on record his homesickness and ardent aspiration to return to India in as many words. He describes that it has been three years that has been in the prisoner of war and he has not received any news about the future. Poignantly, in the last two lines of his rendition, he expresses his fear that if he is forced to stay in the German camp for some more time, he would not survive. His recording ends with a fervent prayer to the Almighty in chaste Punjabi that there should be peace soon so that all the prisoners of war return to their lands.

The erudite and logical way in which the recording with the transcript of the script is thought out and rendered with precise, short and crisp lines defining the narration aptly not only describes his state of mind but also the problem of starvation or bad weather which the prisoners face in the camp. Along with his own state of mind and aspirations, He also gives voice to the innermost fears, prayers and hopes of the thousands of prisoners who were there in the camp that peace would prevail soon and they would all be returning home. Even in the limited frame of the freedom of agency which Mall Singh had, he managed to convey very succulently and effectively what he wanted to. His testimony definitely points to the fact that the Sikh soldiers were able to effectively identify the opportunity and utilize them to the maximum extent possible.

Another Sikh soldier Sib Singh in his testimony also reveals many credible facets. He attempts to assuage the German captors by calling the German emperor very wise. Sib Singh displays an amazing insight into propaganda when he says that after the war a lot will be printed about it. The exposure of coming to Europe did make the soldiers aware of a lot of political, social, military and economic factors which they were screened from back home in. Sib Singh refers to the fact that they were not aware that they were other *badshahs* (emperors) in the world besides the British emperor when the war began. Ever since their arrival in Europe, the soldiers became aware that there were many political contenders in Europe besides the British. Sib Singh displays keen understanding of the problems of India when he says that the illiteracy and naive nature of the people of India is the root cause of the problems. Sib Singh's message again is a validation of freedom of agency in which he is able to clearly concisely and successfully convey his message.

The people associated with the recordings, be it the Germans, British or the soldiers themselves did give a lot of importance to the recordings. However, even in their wildest dreams they would not have been able to anticipate that the weight of the words, thoughts, feelings, emotions and assertions would drift through the years and be heard by researchers across the mist of centuries. As such, the sound recordings have thus become very powerful expressions of the soldiers themselves, their captors and their masters back home and the First World War itself.

### **Inferences from the oral and audio traditions**

During their experience abroad, Sikhs and other Indian soldiers were exposed to the fact that the British were not the be all and end all of power in Europe. They came to know there were other powerful contenders to global supremacy<sup>65</sup>. They also were exposed to the various weaknesses and lacunae in the British systems, army and administration. Seeing British power being challenged so openly and masterfully, affectively apprised the soldiers with the fact that the British were not omnipotent and all powerful, as they had been lead to believe by the British officers.

---

<sup>65</sup> Roy, Franziska/Liebau, Heike/Ahuja, Ravi (eds.) "When the war began we heard of several kings". South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany because the soldiers recorded that as Prisoners of War in Germany, they realised that the British King was not the only or the most powerful King in Europe or the World. The soldiers realized that the German Kaiser was threatening the supremacy of the British King.

In precise terms, many of the Sikh soldiers became aware that their weapons, ammunition mechanisation and guns were not of the same standard as the Germans. They were able to compare the technology of the British with the Germans and found the British technology wanting. This has been recorded by Amar Singh, the aristocratic Rajput officer and diarist who has noted many such observations on many subjects during his time at Flanders in France<sup>66</sup>. German planes dropped propaganda leaflets over the trenches of Indian soldiers serving on the Western front with photographs of laughing Sikh prisoners who were exercising and laughing with clubs swinging. These pictures were meant to show the Indian soldiers that they had nothing to fear from the Germans and they could easily desert to the Germans. Even if they were captured, the Germans wanted the Indians to know that they would be well treated.

Indian soldiers were acutely aware of the distinctions that were made between them and the soldiers from Britain. Nidhan Singh, a Sikh soldier was reported to have replied to any English officer who was interrogating him that the German did not allow anyone to make progress and that is why he had returned from France. When the British officer contended that the Indians were not fighting wholeheartedly, Nidhan Singh's reply was so disturbing that he was imprisoned for three years for answering. He told the English officer that Indian soldiers received only Eleven Rupees as pay whereas the British soldiers received Forty Rupees. He told the officer that the Indian soldier was fighting according to his pay<sup>67</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

It would be thus safe to assume that the Sikh soldiers were fully aware of the importance of the sound recordings. They knew that the recordings could find their way into British hands and would be important assertions of their loyalty. As such the soldiers treated the sound recordings with extreme caution, thought and considered the words and phrases carefully which they would use during their recordings. No doubt the Sikh soldiers were able to convey their messages by making full use of the freedom of agency which they had been provided with. They were able to convey not

---

<sup>66</sup> R.Ahuja,(2010). 'The corrosiveness of comparison' in *The world in world wars*, pp. 131-166. Brill-From the Diary of Thakur Amar Singh of Jaipur, Lanham and Oxford: 2005<sup>66</sup>

<sup>67</sup>Ahuja, 'The corrosiveness of comparison', p.165.

only crisply, succulently, effectively, boldly and successfully, their feelings but also their political aspirations and other emotional and physical demands through these recordings.

The next chapter 'Insulated or Involved', discusses the fallout and impact of all the propaganda and nationalist aspirations on the common Sikh soldier before, during and after the First World War. The chapters aims to shed light upon whether the Sikh soldiers were insulated against or involved in the socio-economic and political currents and under currents which were swirling round them and the impact these currents had on the soldiers psyche, outlook and actions.

## CHAPTER-V

### INSULATED OR INVOLVED- THE SOLDIER AND CIVIL MILIEU

‘The colonial soldier is and was ordinarily distanced from civilian life’, says Samuel P. Huntington in his seminal work, *The Soldier and the State*.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Huntington in *Soldier and the State* analysed the civil-military relations in 1957. This perception is echoed by the Israeli diplomat Amos Perlmutter<sup>2</sup> and Samuel Finer<sup>3</sup>, with minor qualifications. Huntington explored the extent to which the military security of any society is increased or detracted as a result of the civil-military relations in that society. The crux of Huntington’s solution for ensuring military stability and civic cohesion is the professionalization of the officer corps. This simple expedient, according to him, leads to a stable relationship between the two power centres, which are the civil and military, in any society.

The Israeli politician Amos Perlmutter in his years of studying the politico-military-civil relationship expounded more or less the same idea in several books. Chief among these are presented in his book ‘Political Roles and Military Rulers’, published in 1981. In his books, He clearly outlined his ideas and inferences, culled through years of observation of the military systems of the Middle East such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt. The author has tried to analyse the causes and effects of military intervention in politics.

Samuel Finer, *Man on Horseback: The Role of Military in Politics* also outlined the multifarious ways in which the military interacts with civil society and uses its niche to influence the political and economic landscape. These three writers agree that the soldier has a larger role to play in socio-political milieu and has a deeper involvement than is evident on the surface<sup>4</sup>. This is a generalist view, but can it be applied to the

---

<sup>1</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Amos Perlmutter, *Political Roles and Military Rulers*, N.J: Totowa, 1981, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Finer, *Man on Horseback: The Role of Military in Politics*, London: Routledge, 1962, reprinted 2002, p. 37

<sup>4</sup> Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus*, London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1998, p. 31. - In the Indian context, Apurba Kundu opines in this book that the Indian military, political and civilian elites have always worked in conjunction with each other and there has been a clear manifestation of the supremacy of the civilian

Sikh *Sipahi* of the First World War? This is one of the questions that the researcher aims to explore in the course of the research.

Huntington and others mentioned above had based their contention on the view that the officer corps is isolated from society and this isolation helped the officer corps to develop professionalism and innovation which helped them become better professional and career soldiers. John Gates re-examined this assertion and reviewed the same evidence to demonstrate that instead of being isolated, the officer corps was actually fully immersed in the social mainstream<sup>5</sup>.

The Paris correspondent of an avowed Liberal English weekly 'The Nation' in August 1919 in an article entitled 'Is there a danger of revolution' made the candid observation Five years of continuous military service have bred deep discontent throughout the ranks and frequent incidents illustrate the revolutionary trend of the returning soldier.<sup>6</sup>

It was accepted in the intellectual, social and even political circles in Britain and other European nations affected by the war that the returning soldiers could pose a socio-cultural, civilian and political upheaval. In the Punjab, which welcomed thousands of sons back from the horrors of war in distant lands, it is natural to assume that the same fears must have held true. There was bound to be physical, moral, mental and emotional wear and tear and the cultural history of the war years was dominated for many years by this trend and exploration.

Ramsay MacDonald, who became the first British Prime Minister from the Labour Party in 1924, wrote speculatively<sup>7</sup>

---

elites. This is in stark contrast to neighbouring Pakistan, which is also co-inheritor of a common colonial legacy but has seen numerous military coups and dictatorships based on military might. See also, Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its contributions to the development of a nation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 42. Cohen also explored the civil-military relationships in India in the backdrop of the colonial legacy. See also, S.P. Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and its armies*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> John M. Gates, *The Alleged Isolation of U. S. Army officers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, New Jersey: Parameters, 10, 1982, pp.10, 32-45.

<sup>6</sup> D. Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History*, 1(3), 300-318. 1994, p. 209. Retrieved May 1, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26004374>

<sup>7</sup> J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism after the War*, Manchester and London: National Labour Press, 1918, p. 58.



The authorities cannot for three or four years upset all out ordinary ways, suppress our liberties and rule with a high hand, and in the end expect us to go back like the sow to our wallowing in the mire. Millions of men cannot live for years in the riotous lawlessness of war, killing, destroying, smashing their way along, and then suddenly on the blast of a bugle and the issue of a proclamation, return to the methodical ways of civil life. The revolutionary mind is handed over by war to peace.

In India, and specially in the Punjab, the British preoccupation and special regard for 'Public Opinion' did make an impact during and after the First World War. This was the time when European nations- on both sides of the trenches were transforming intelligence gathering, public monitoring and national security and gathering information on the outlooks, beliefs, attitudes, reactions and opinions of suspect and unreliable citizens.

The industrialised mass warfare which the world was experiencing for the first time at an unprecedented scale that sought the involvement and full commitment of the entire apparatus of not only the state and its political leadership and army but also the civilian populace and society. The major nations such as Britain, France, Germany and Russia developed elaborate and detailed information gathering and intelligence systems that helped them keep their fingers on the pulse of the ever changing but critical public opinion and mood. The Germans adopted the *Monats-Berichte* (Secret Monthly Reports) which were prepared by their police but gauged and recorded a realistic and sensitive record of the mood of the public<sup>8</sup>.

The French had their system of Police Prefectorial records and detailed departmental records that meticulously recorded their social, martial, cultural and political experiences during the war years. In Britain, the Head of the Special Branch Sir Basil Thomson presided over the collection and preparation of the wartime centralised records that recorded the war emergency measures and the results, regular reports on industrial unrest, revolutionary intent, spread of socialistic ideas, the activities and engagements of the members of the Labour Unions and Labour party<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jurgen Kocka, *Facing Total War: German Society 1914-1918*, Berg: Leamington Spa, 1984, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> D. Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity' *War in History*, 1(3), 300-318 1994, Retrieved May 1, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26004374>

The major areas under which the involvement or insulation of the Sikh soldiers can be explored at the time immediately preceding, during and after the war is political/nationalist, economic and social. The soldiers were plying a dual role- as functionaries of the war machinery of the British and also as ordinary citizens of the civilian milieu of the country. As such, their dual identity was quite contradictory and the manner in which the soldiers traversed the dual role in the normal course of their every-day life makes for an interesting study in itself. Their degree of involvement with the events at home, and in the world bears close examination during the years of the war as it was one of acute crisis and imminent peril for the British, not only in India, but elsewhere in the wider world too.

### **Europe on the eve of the outbreak of War**

Sending 'native' troops from India to fight in a white man's war on European soil was not an easy decision for the British. There was a rift between the proponents within the Raj itself, considering the question of sending Indians to Europe. Some were not at all in favour of Indians mixing socially with British women, and many more dismissed this idea. Since the Indian women were not allowed the freedom to mix socially with the Europeans in the same capacity, many of the nay-sayers amongst the British also felt that allowing Indians the right to mix with European women would be counter-productive on several fronts<sup>10</sup>. There was a widespread fear that the familiarity and intimate contacts would dispel the aura of exclusivity and dilute the social division and hence hamper British prestige<sup>11</sup>. The advocates of the social mixing forwarded the view that greater contact between the genders and the Indians and British would improve relations between them.

In 1914, there was a feeling that, 'all the tangible blessings that British rule has ever conferred on India are as dust when weighed against the fact that we are not of their blood'<sup>12</sup>. On the eve of the outbreak of the First World War it was felt that the British Raj was on quite precarious grounds. The idea that the British would have to leave India was not beyond the realm of belief and most conceded that the days of the

---

<sup>10</sup> C. Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the rear of the front', *The world in world wars*, Brill, 2010, pp. 27-53.

<sup>11</sup> A. T. Jarboe, 'Soldiers of empire-Indian sepoys in and beyond the imperial metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919', Doctoral dissertation: Northeastern University, 2013, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Anon, 'Unrest in India', *Quarterly Review*, 1998, p.209.

British Raj in India might be numbered<sup>13</sup>. This acceptance of the fate of the Raj and its loss was made more feasible by the fact that Britain was being besieged on several fronts during this time.

The rapid industrialisation and development that the other European powers such as Germany, France and Italy had seen and their colonial expansion had ensured that the undisputed lead in these fields that the British had enjoyed for several decades was now lost. The naval supremacy that was the backbone to the strength of Great Britain was being challenged by Germany<sup>14</sup>. A stagnant economy, a climate of social and political unease in the British Isles and fierce competition in the race for markets and colonies meant that the global British supremacy seemed certainly on the wane. In such a scenario, the importance of India as the cornerstone of the British Empire could not be over emphasised. It was not difficult to surmise that the imminent loss of India meant the demise of British domination and hegemony all over the world<sup>15</sup>.

In this backdrop, the outbreak of the First World War seemed almost a blessing in disguise. Old tensions and the widening gulf between the Indians and British were temporarily bridged and representatives of every race, colour and region in India were vociferous in proclaiming their loyalty to the King and Country. The People of Punjab were in the forefront in expressing loyalty and offering their all. There was a palpable spirit of active loyalty that inspired the whole province<sup>16</sup>. The nationalists and even the Extremists in the Congress and across the emerging political spectrum in India unhesitatingly came forward in the support of the British in this hour of peril<sup>17</sup>. No one knew then, that the war would continue for four long years and be so transformational in nature for the world, and also Punjab.

### **Punjab—A Garrison State?**

Harold Lasswell, the American Political Scientist coined the term ‘Garrison State’ to refer to a state which has a predominant role of the military within a polity. This

---

<sup>13</sup> Jarboe, ‘Soldiers of empire’, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> D.G. Herrmann, *The arming of Europe and the making of the First World War*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> C. Nicolson, *Longman Companion to the First World War: Europe 1914-1918*, Routledge, 2014, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Michael O’ Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, London: Constable and Co., p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> H. Fischer-Tiné, ‘Indian Nationalism and the ‘world forces’: transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War’, *Journal of Global History*, 2(3), Edinburgh, 2007, p.325.

concept was further elaborated by the Military-Fiscal model of John Brewer, which can be applied to the Garrison State hypothesis. C Bayly and Douglas Peers used this hybrid model to the reality of the military polity as it existed in colonial India under the British Raj. The genesis of this approach of the British began as they consolidated themselves in the first half of the eighteenth century in the Indian subcontinent. Finally Tan Tai Yong likened the British Indian Empire to the Garrison State, particularly in the most important and strategic Punjab region<sup>18</sup>.

In fact, Tan Tai Yong was not the first to recognise the connection between the provision of land to soldiers in Punjab in lieu of services to the army. As Punjab increasingly became the 'sword arm' of the British Raj, a unique relationship with the British Raj developed as a matter of course. Land had always been given to military men in India and the practise was not new by any means. Throughout Indian history, soldiers had always been rewarded by the grant of lands and the British followed this time honoured custom, as it was also prevalent in their own nation.

“The British shepherded a great flock of Punjab cultivators into the Indian army. At the outbreak of First World War, about 100,000 of the slightly more 152,000 Indian combat troops, or more than 65% came for the Punjab. By 1917, Punjab enlistments accounted for over 117,000 of the total 254,000 men recruited in India, or almost 50%.<sup>19</sup>

“The most secure and productive agriculture obtained in the central districts, and British colonialism therefore paid these lands the earliest attention. The central Punjab had been ruled by Singhs, had been defended by armies of Singhs (along with Muslim and Hindu warriors), and was inhabited by many persons who denominated themselves as Sikhs.”

Military service was a much more coveted and economically profitable and sustaining activity in the rural economy of central Punjab than it was in the other major regions from which the British recruited soldiers in Punjab. Soon after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the British started giving land to the ex-Khalsa army soldiers and

---

<sup>18</sup> Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> C. Ellingwood Dewitt Jr. *A historical study of the Punjabi soldier in world war I*, essays in honour of Dr Ganda Singh, ed. by Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1998, pp. 340-341

servicemen on a preferential basis in the newly forming Canal colonies which the British had themselves established. This proved to be a sound incentive to a war-like people who had been agriculturists since time immemorial to join the army<sup>20</sup>, and also take to the plough. As the British had already identified the Sikhs as a powerful back bone for their army as a ‘Martial Race’ and a strategic ally, this move to grant agricultural lands also served to pacify them and integrate them in the Sikhs into the larger body politic of the British Raj in India.

Thus, it was this courageous, long suffering and committed soldiery that formed the bulk (39.6%) of the British Indian Army when the First World War broke out in 1914.<sup>21</sup> The figures are telling. The proportional representation of Sikhs soldiers in the army of the Raj was three times over the proportion of the Sikhs in Punjab’s population. This proportion was 20 times the proportion of the Sikhs in the Indian population.

The reasons behind the Sikh soldiers serving in the army were multifarious. Many of the British officers and even administrators felt that the martial races such as the Sikhs ‘loved fighting and the excitement of war’<sup>22</sup>. Service in the British Indian army also came to be linked with social prestige<sup>23</sup> as the soldiers lived and worked in close proximity with the British officers and civilians. The soldiers also underwent disciplinary training and got greater exposure and experience of living in regimented, clean and disciplined manner that made them seem different from their brethren who did not have access to these advantages.

In 1913, the Indian soldiers serving in the Indian army were eligible for a pension after 21 years of service. Most however, continued to serve for 32 years as that entitled them to the maximum pension that was possible. Philip Mason observed that *Izzat* (honour), absolute loyalty to the King Emperor and the regular and good wages were the primary reasons that Indians joined the army<sup>24</sup>. Two members of the Army committee of 1912 under the president ship of Field Marshall Lord Nicholson

---

<sup>20</sup> Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, Knopk, 2013, pp. 179. [https://archive.org/details/ TheSikhs/ page/n209/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/TheSikhs/page/n209/mode/2up) Retrieved June 13, 2020

<sup>21</sup> M. S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1922, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Robson ed., *Roberts in India, The Military Papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts, 1876-1893*, Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, UK, USA, 1993, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Ellinwood. D.C. Jn., *A historical study of the Punjabi soldier in world war I*, pp. 340-341.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Mason, *A matter of Honour: An account of the Indian Army, its officers and Men*, Dehra Dun, reprint EBD Publishers 1988, pp. 405-453.

accepted that the *sepoys* and *sowars* (Infantry and cavalry) were basically mercenaries<sup>25</sup>.

### **Ideological moorings of the Sikh Soldier**

The key questions to be considered when attempting to understand the psyche of the Sikh soldiers and whether they really were insulated or involved are many. Why did the *sepoys* consciously or passively consent to battle for four years as obedient colonial subjects who were ready to die at the whims of their colonial masters?

Is the mere confidence and belief that they were fighting for a just cause, protecting British imperial hegemony and the King against his opponents, and honouring the now well-established martial tradition of Indian expeditionary forces intervening overseas enough to inspire such willingness for mass slaughter? Were social rewards so significant and monetary rewards so substantial that Sikhs were willing to enlist and sail for foreign shores with the odds stacked against their return to their motherlands?

Did notions of *esprit d'corps*, martial pride, religious fervour and deep enduring cultural and social camaraderie – factors that worked as bulwarks of collective and individual honour and extreme avoidance of embarrassment, play a significant role in inspiring the soldiers? This factor could well explain the relatively low proportion of deserters or insurgents in their ranks. The deserters were forever taboo-declared, considered and condemned as outcasts in Indian martial groups, their clans and communities in the regiment and back home in the villages.

Some explanations and answers to these questions certainly suggest that Sikh soldiers did truly have a singular war ethos and unassailable mindset. They felt true loyalty for the King of England whom they considered to be their supreme leader. They had only contempt for the King's enemies, the German troops who they had been told were to be eliminated at all costs by their British officers. In the simple homespun minds of the loyal Sikhs, poised on the fine knife edge of community pride, religious injunction to be brave and true, Khalsa sentiments and an unwavering communal adherence to the upholding of their martial prestige and pride, these reasons warranted not only the

---

<sup>25</sup> Kaushik Roy, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 1310-1347. Retrieved March 24, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24494199>

giving up and sacrifice of their own life and limbs, but also the ruthless extermination of the Germans.

German troops were allegedly terrorised by sepoy snipers— who were deadly accurate and inexhaustible. In media such as British ‘trench newspapers,’ German propaganda made allegations that Indian and African soldiers were engaged in violence in the battle, such as chopping off fingers, heads, and hands of their victims as “trophies.” Sikh warriors were enthusiastically sponsored by certain colonial officers like Haig or Indian scholars like Lord Sinha and loyalist Princes like Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.

For the next decade, WWI was seen as ushering in a new wave of brutality against and among Indian civilians. Colonial troops could have been among the first to witness the Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians in 1915 while fighting in Mesopotamia, and that significant incident may be seen as a foreshadowing of the Partition massacres.

As a result, the Great War may have opened the way for greater bloodshed in India, with the deaths of thousands in the war acting as a kind of dress rehearsal and prelude to the millions of deaths that happened during the Bengal famine in 1943 and partition in 1947. The effect of WWI was felt by hundreds of millions of colonial Indian subjects, as the war brought not only an unofficial conscription (at least in Punjab), but inflation and economic difficulties, as well as new prospects such as dismantling cultural, social, and caste hegemony and promoting aspirations for Home Rule and overseas migration<sup>26</sup>. However, wartime promises were a huge failure, causing a generation of uncertainty which continued to cast a cloud over British-Indian political relations for many years.

Individuals like General Reginald Dyer, the so-called Butcher of Amritsar, who had served in the war, give credence to the claims that Indians were considered not more than cheap cannon fodder when he announced publicly a day after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre:

---

<sup>26</sup> Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadr movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British Empire*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, p. 52.

“You people know well that I am a sepoy and soldier... The battlefields of France and Amritsar are both the same to me”<sup>27</sup>.

Such utterings gave rise to meanings that turn out to be somewhat dubious and derisive of the good intentions which were generally attributed to British Army Officers serving in India. The British officers were generally assumed to be highly incorruptible, paternistic and concerned about the well being of their Indian soldiers, and General Dyer also was a part of this milieu. To begin with, showing that a vital juncture was crossed in 1914 is challenging. In terms of scale, revolt and mutiny in the martial terms, the Indian Uprising or Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, a colonial military campaign of appalling cruelty, had already used violent modern tactics on a wide scale<sup>28</sup>.

### **Religious and cultural contexts**

The rise of the Sikh religion happened at the same time as the Reformation in Europe, and just like Protestantism<sup>29</sup>, it was a revolt against the existing, dominant religion and advocated a return to simplicity and militant spirit as its mainstays. The Sikh faith is simple, shorn of all elaborate ceremony and martial in spirit. A fighting people, the Sikhs are enjoined by their religion to carry a sword wherever he goes- if necessary, a miniature one, but it must be worn<sup>30</sup>.

There has been for long almost a conspiracy of silence on the role and outcomes of the massive contributions made by the Punjabi soldiers to the British cause in First World War. They fought as a part of the British army and admittedly, for an alien cause, their sheer overwhelming numbers make them worthy of mention, acknowledgement and credit. Over a million Indians went to the various theatres of war where almost 74,187 lost their lives and 67,000 were wounded, the silence, lack of information, awareness, let alone discussion and acknowledgement about their role and significance is distressing.

---

<sup>27</sup> Thierry Di Constanzo, *Memory and history of the Great(er) War and India: from a national-imperial to a more global perspective*, E-rea [Enligne], 14.2 | 2017, mis en ligne le 15 juin 2017, consulté le 01 avril 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/5844>

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

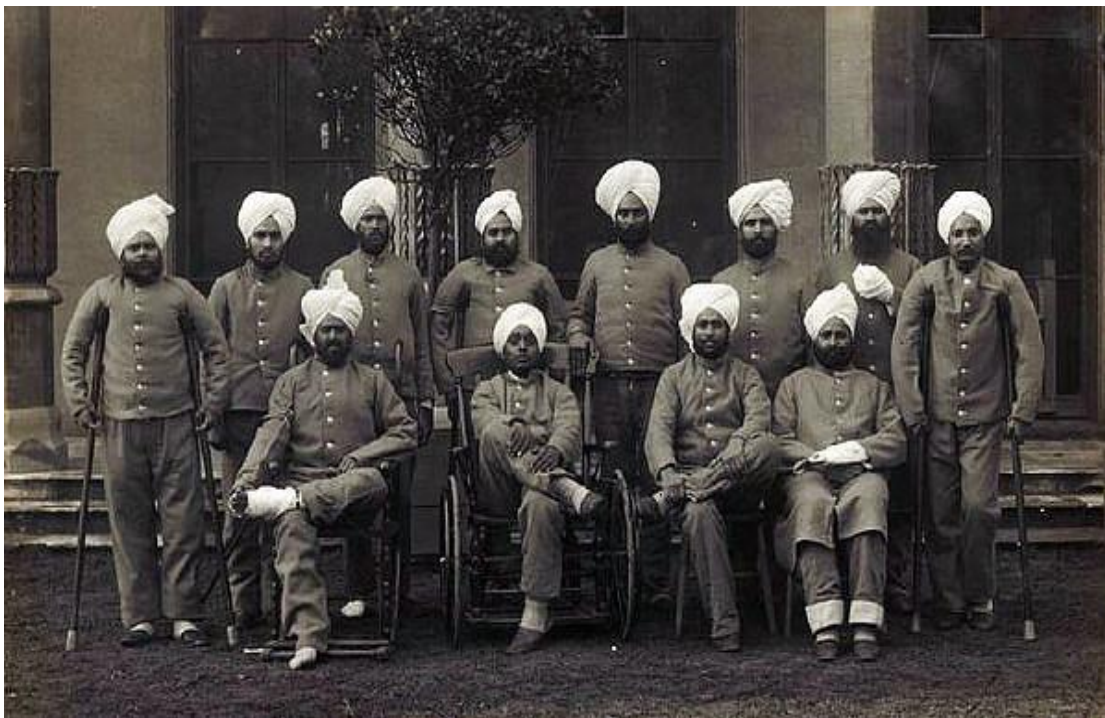
<sup>29</sup> P. J. Griffiths, *The British in India*, London: Robert Hale Limited, 1946, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.





**The British Raj was careful to nurture the Sikh identity.**



**Wounded Sikh soldiers recuperating at the Brighton Hospital in July 1915.**



What are the reasons for this conspiracy of silence? So many lives, which formed important linkages in the social, political, economic, religious and regional milieu, cannot be glossed over with such uncaring impunity. It is time to explore fully the various affects and outcomes that emerged in the socio-cultural context of the war time experiences of these men who were distinguished from their British counterparts in a most significant aspect. “The English soldier does not always come to the ranks because it is the most honourable career he knows. The Indian soldier does.”<sup>31</sup>

There were other reasons too. No contract alone takes the native of the plains to serve the British *Sarkar* in the snows of the Afghan hills, and to tramp the burning desert, or down to the swamps and the fever of the eastern frontier. Some love of service, some power of the white man for attracting faithful service and admiration must be the motive power that brings Sikhs (and various other races) to serve an alien ruler and an alien race, to serve for small guerdon and smaller pension. The men served for honour, no doubt, and hereditary love of the sword which the men of martial races and clans are naturally prone to. There is more than this, and it would seem that as long as the “British are worthy of it...the soldier races of the east shall serve the *Sarkar*”<sup>32</sup>.

The multifarious and profound ways in which society as a whole and the families and communities of thousands of these war hardened and ‘foreign travelled’ soldiers must have been impacted is a subject worthy of further investigation and research. The engrossing journey of these colonial soldiers, who were fighting for an alien cause and were willing to sacrifice their lives and more for it, invites closer scrutiny. The various stages of this journey, from the initial recruitment, to their experiences during the war, to the loss of thousands on the war fronts, to the return, rehabilitation and reintegration of the fortunate ones who made it back to their homeland after undergoing the life changing experiences of this world-changing event presents intriguing arena for research<sup>33</sup>.

### **The contexts of the Sikh soldier on the battlefield**

The valour, fidelity, sacrifice, dedication, steadfastness and loyalty that made such a profound difference not only in the war but also at the home-front –the hearth, home,

---

<sup>31</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p. 344.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.515-516.

<sup>33</sup> Constanzo, *Memory and history of the Great(er) War and India*, p. 23.

village and town they left and the loved ones who endured their going, awaited their return and mourned their passing alone amidst the ominous silence of an insensitive world. There is a need to move forward from the question of the presence of these soldiers and the role they played during the war to the larger fundamental question of the impact and effects upon their return. There is a yawning chasm in this particular aspect of Sikh military history.

World War One (WWI) has been given renewed relevance in Indian culture, as well as its significance for India's global position<sup>34</sup>. It is customary to see WWI as the start of India's decolonization period, the real start of a peaceful thirty-year liberation process (1918- 1947). In this way, the debates on WWI and India are about whether the war should be seen as the "matrix" of subsequent trends in interwar India, such as intensified violence within nationalist politics, colonial policies such as the "British atrocities" in Amritsar or the Moplah massacre, or also within Communalism and exclusive religious or caste nationalism<sup>35</sup>.

As Mazumdar explains in his book...“The armed forces under any political organisation- ancient and medieval kingdoms, imperial states, modern democracies- are deeply rooted in civilian society. The troops that form the fighting corps are members of that society. Soldiers are social, economic and political units, both individually and as a group. The army and military personnel influence society and politics despite being specifically excluded from the civilian sphere<sup>36</sup>.”

Even the Army Recruitment handbooks on each of the Martial races were written and published in the 1890's, with the view to propagate and underline the utilisation of their fighting qualities and potential. The recruits were also consciously influenced to identify their religious, ethnic and community consciousness with the regiments, thus strengthening their bond and sense of affiliation to the regiments.

In his book, Rob Johnson says in the foreword itself that the ‘organisational or bureaucratic approach to the recruitment and management of the army’, prior to 1857 had let the casteism clan and religious prejudices of the soldiers impair the military

---

<sup>34</sup> M. S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Rajit K. Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 2.

efficiency. The British overcame this problem after 1857 in a more well thought out manner by incorporating three elements:

The welfare system which provided incentives for enlistment and long service; regimental organisation, which absorbed the clan and caste ethos of various communities and created new identities; and the courts martial system which imposed a moderate system of coercion to assist with the cohesion and integrity of the individual units<sup>37</sup>.

When war was declared, the Legislative Council of the Punjab unanimously passed a resolution assuring the King Emperor of the devotion of the people of the province and of their determination to serve his majesty, in every form in which their help may be required, against the enemies of his Empire<sup>38</sup>.

And thus began the massive war effort from the Punjab, “with its hardy and martial rural population of peasant proprietors’, been rightly regarded as the ‘sword arm’, ‘Shield’ and ‘spearhead’ of India<sup>39</sup>.

A singular explanation which clearly reflects the predominant thinking of the time, couched in the words of a white British Indian Army Officer to another European, explaining why the Sikhs and the Gurkhas were fighting in France in 1915 is found on page 23 of “Our Indians at Marseilles”. In the introduction, Maurice Barre’s asks an English officer who is supervising the march of a Sikh cavalry battalion why the Sikhs fight? The answer of the English Sahib is

They are fighting because it is the order of the Raj, and as a Believer obeys God, they obey the Government, the Raj which is their earthly Providence, the corner stone, the one central point beyond dispute. Just as God has said, “Thou shalt not steal”, the Raj has said, “Thou shalt fight”<sup>40</sup>.

In further conversation, the English officer demonstrated his deep understanding of the Sikh soldiers psyche when he explained Yes, in old days these Sikhs were a caste of warriors. They equipped themselves at their own expense and had no occupation beyond fighting. But today, in India, everywhere the sword is yielding to the pen and

---

<sup>37</sup> Rob Johnson, *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, p. 213.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, p. 23

the plough. These fine horsemen send their pay to their families to buy land which they will cultivate when they go home<sup>41</sup>.

These remarks of the officer in France, commanding the Sikhs in 1915 to a Frenchman reveals that English officers were acutely aware that the lure of rewards, land and pensions that were clearly communicated to the Sikhs were acting as huge inducements and factors of motivation for their fighting to the best of their considerable ability in the war. They also were very confident of the fact that their word was law and the soldiers were bound to risk life and limb at one command of the English officer. The officer seems to be boasting of the power he had on the men under his command in his conversation with the Frenchman.

### **Economic consequences of the Punjabisisation of the Army**

H. S Soherwordi in his study of the Punjabisisation of the Indian Army states that the relationship between the British and the Punjabis was certainly two sided, where each side benefitted the other<sup>42</sup>. The British needed the men to arm the forces, while the Punjabis needed the economic benefits which the British enlistment brought to their land and the people.

The personal economy of the peasantry contributed greatly to military recruitment from the Punjab. The availability of man power, but no jobs, was an imbalanced equation in the region's economy...it was an agrarian land, but due to the shortage of water, soil, fertility, erratic rainfall and shortage of personal finances, the common peasant as facing acute poverty<sup>43</sup>.

For the peasants, joining the army was the most economically profitable, honourable, status enhancing and prestigious line of work that was available to him. It was the one source of respectable steady income to a family which was agriculture dependant and had to depend on the last harvest for determining the fortunes of the entire family.

It would not be far from the truth to say that the British Indian Army was quite dependant on Punjab. The greatest expenditure of the Government exchequer was on

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> S. H. Soherwordi, 'Punjabisisation' in the British Indian Army 1857–1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan', *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies*, 24, Edinburgh 2010, pp. 1-32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

the army, and as the bulk of the army was drawn from the Punjab, the majority of the salaries, allowances, pensions etc also flowed into the Punjab, vitalizing the Punjabi economy just like the waters of the five rivers enriched its soils.

The Punjabisisation of the British Indian Army (as explained in Chapter 2) refers to the fact that major recruiting for the Army was carried out in the Punjab in pursuance of the martial race Theory. Punjab was also a frontier state that was of extreme strategic importance. As the recruitment to the army was done from a comparatively small catchment area of Punjab, the resultant financial benefits were also confined to this small area.

“Military expenditure was the largest component of the colonial budget and regimental pay was the highest segment within this expenditure, that such a large proportion of soldiers came from Punjab implies a hugely disproportionate share of military expenditure to a very restricted area, for Punjab was less than ten per cent of British India in population and in area”<sup>44</sup>.

‘Regimental pay, Allowance and Charges’ (the wage bill) and ‘Supply and Transport’ (the Commissariat expenses) together formed nearly 70% of the total military expenditure. Not only were Punjabis dominant in the Army, but 43,000 were also serving in the Punjab, thus the Punjab benefitted both ways- in terms of large percentage of serving troops enlisted from there, and also military expenditure being spent and invested in the area, generating more economic linkages.

In terms of lifestyle and living conditions, definite changes were noticed after military service exposed large numbers of Sikhs to the better conditions prevalent in the army. Army rules made it mandatory for the native officers and families and rank and file to be provided accommodation that had to be clean, sanitary and airy, with adequate ventilation and specified building materials, with planting and watering of trees also made compulsory<sup>45</sup>. The exposure and lifestyle conditions in the army translated into the soldiers implementing changes for the better in their own homes in their villages. Darling, the famous administrator noted in his various tours all over Punjab that every retired armyman wanted ‘*hawadaar*’ (airy and ventilated) house and noticed that several Sikh Army men had *pucca* (permanent) well built houses in the Kharar *tahsil*

---

<sup>44</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

of Ambala District<sup>46</sup>. Jullundar district, where the Doab Sikhs dwelled, had one of the highest number of pucca houses in the entire Punjab<sup>47</sup>.

In other arenas too, the economic income from the military resulted in improved educational and civic amenities. In Thikranwala in Lyallpur district (a canal colony where Jat Sikhs from Ludhiana had migrated and settled), the community was prosperous enough to enlarge their Gurudwara, add a room for a Girl's School and another for a *Dharamshala* or room for guests<sup>48</sup>.

Even the Sikhs in the Lyallpur town of Manawala had 'built lordly houses' following the 'too prosperous days that followed the war<sup>49</sup>'. The increased prosperity as a result of army incomes was also spent in expanding and beautifying places of worship and other communal spaces such as village guesthouses or *dharamshalas*. 'The import of construction material such as chalk and lime, marble and stone etc into Punjab increased almost six times, from six lakh mounds in 1890 to 36 lakh mounds in 1920<sup>50</sup>'.

According to Soherwordi, "Training, discipline and professionalism were the primary requirements for Indian soldiers. Intensive training with an emphasis on discipline and efficiency and their separation from the fragmented Indian society turned the Indian soldiers into a professional, united and autonomous fighting force<sup>51</sup>."

Their loyalty was to their 'homogenous military units' for which they served 'full time, 'long time' and were rewarded with a secure pay and pension system<sup>52</sup>. Hence the living conditions and lifestyle of Sikhs in the central districts especially saw dramatic improvements which raised the bar of the living standard in the entire province of Punjab.

---

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, London: Oxford University Press, 1925, p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. - Darling was in fact so impressed by a cement floor in one of the houses that he referred to it as 'better than any floor that I have ever had in a bungalow in Lahore'. Many Sikh houses in this town had fans (*punkhas*), peg racks and chiks which indicated a much higher standard of living than the norm.

<sup>49</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> Soherwordi, 'Punjabisation' in the British Indian Army', p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen P. Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and its Armies*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, pp.173-77.



## Canal lands

Sir Michael O' Dwyer writes in his autobiography about the preparations for the war effort which he had made as the head of the government in Punjab in capacity as the Lieutenant Governor. Finally, and this was the most effective of all inducements to the Punjab Peasant, directly war broke out, I put at the disposal of the commander-in-Chief one hundred and eighty thousand acres of valuable canal-irrigated land for allotment later to Indian officers and men who had served with special distinction in the field. I also set aside some fifteen thousand acres for reward grants to those who gave most effective help in raising recruits<sup>53</sup>.

In the Indian Army and the making of Punjab, Mazumdar says...“The imperial masters of this native force had to ensure that the army remained loyal. This imperative forced the colonial state to pursue a relatively benevolent policy when dealing with militarized men, and within militarised regions. Government initiatives were aimed to protect the interest of recruited groups and enhance their local standing. Moreover, the British government had to tread very cautiously when dealing with mass agitations in regions of high recruitment”<sup>54</sup>.

This naturally implies that there was a huge inflow of pay and pensions into the Punjab, especially in the military districts<sup>55</sup>. Rajit K Mazumdar has undertaken a study to prove that economic benefits from the Army outweighed other economic pre conditions and considerations in determining the general state of economic empowerment in any region. In the districts of Amritsar (High Recruitment), he examined three *tahsils* (the districts were divided into administrative units called *tahsils*) of Taran Taran, Ajnala and Amritsar over a period of 70 years.

The analysis revealed that economic benefits of military incomes enabled Taran Taran where the recruitment in the Army was the highest to score on the top in terms of ownership patterns, sales and mortgages of land, land value and land alienations, average size of land holdings, indebtedness, cultivating occupancy etc, in spite of Amritsar *tahsil* being more fertile. The *tahsil* of Ajnala had fewer recruits and was

---

<sup>53</sup> O' Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p. 216.

<sup>54</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Tan TaiYong, 'An imperial home-front: Punjab and the First World War', *The Journal of Military History*, 64(2), 2000, p. 371.

comparatively poorer in agricultural conditions such as cultivation, land fertility etc and fared worse out of the three<sup>56</sup>.

The premise that the Punjabis benefitted from their large scale recruitments to the most lucrative profession or 'service' of the time (from which the Martial race policy debarred vast swathes of the Indian subcontinent populace) and acquired greater significance for the colonial state is a premise that needs a closer examination to be fully established<sup>57</sup>.

### **Army Service as an agent of change**

The Sikhs who were associated with the army in any way, indeed all the other Punjabis who were serving in the army were exposed to a new lifestyle, better standards of living and a more heterogeneous, diverse and enriched way of life. They returned to their native villages and disseminated this knowledge, exposure and enlightened world view in a hundred different ways<sup>58</sup>. Right from the construction of pacca houses, with regular floors and chimneys and sanitary arrangements, to changes in diet in favour of more balanced meals with adequate scope for vegetables and other varieties of grains to improvements in the clothing, deportment and general outlook.

Unlike the armies of Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, Burma or China, which failed to transform successfully, the Indian Army was equipped and guided through its evolution under European control<sup>59</sup>.

More importantly these army men brought back enlightened views of social, economic and community issues ranging from women's education to water and sanitary management, water resource management, banking and new agricultural

---

<sup>56</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 16. - It is the humble submission of the researcher that incidents such as the acute repression unleashed before, during and after the Jallianwala massacre, the refusal to concede ground on the Land Alienation Act for a critical few months till the whole Punjab became restive and up in arms, the long drawn out Gurudwara agitation, in which hundreds of Sikhs had to lose their lives, before the British Indian Government conceded their rightful demand are just a few incidents that indicate that the British Raj was not unduly temperate or considerate in its treatment of its primary army recruiting grounds.

<sup>58</sup> M. Levine-Clark, 'The politics of preference: masculinity, marital status and unemployment relief in post-First World War Britain', *Cultural and social history*, 7(2), 2010, pp.233-252.

<sup>59</sup> Rob Johnson, *The British Indian Army 2010*, p. 76.

methods<sup>60</sup>. They acted as harbingers of progress and change in their villages and became major vehicles for rural progress, motivating people and setting personal examples in many diverse fields. They were the first to adopt modern farming methods, new agricultural implements, new crops and seeds and new ways of tilling and farm management, with animal husbandry and other subsidiary projects such as dairy and poultry farming too.

Travelling across the Punjab in the 1930 and 1940's, -Malcolm Lyall Darling, a British Administrative official, recorded his various observational studies of Punjabi life in form of diaries which provide an invaluable glimpse into the nuances of village life and rural progress in Punjab in the colonial era. In books such as 'Wisdom and Waste in the Punjabi village' and 'The Punjabi Peasant in Prosperity and Debt', Darling took care to observe and mentions most copiously the effects of Army life on the villagers. His observant and explanatory style of writing provides a detailed and credible source of information about the everyday life, variations, regional differences, cuisine, crops, interpersonal relationships, modes, manners, traditions and surroundings of the villages across Punjab.

...Almost every zamindar family has a man or two in the army and the effects are the same as with emigration in Jalandhar. The villages are full of new houses...the inner rooms were spotless...the display of possessions was amazing...in one room, I counted 300 articles hanging on the walls, like Plates, bottles, pictures, brushes, looking glasses etc<sup>61</sup>.

When the Sikh soldiers went abroad, they were exposed to a wartime Europe which was certainly not at its best, or caught in its most splendid hour, as immortalised by Sir Percival Spear 'Village India saw Europe in its sordid wartime clothes and was not impressed<sup>62</sup>.' However, even before a very large part of the Sikh soldiery had travelled abroad as a result of the First World War, they had been exposed to life in the army in cantonments all over India during many campaigns. As such, the soldiers had already assimilated much of the culture they had been inducted into while serving

---

<sup>60</sup> J. Greenhut, 'Race, sex, and war: The impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914'. *The Journal of Military History*, 45(2), 2010, p. 271.

<sup>61</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, p. 154.

<sup>62</sup> Percival Spear, *A History of India*, London: Routledge, 1970, pp.183-84.

in the army, and their lives had already been changed. Consequently, when they came home on leave, or when they retired, they brought the same lifestyle, discipline and patterns of food and thought which they had absorbed from the army, back home to their families.

### **Changes in diet and food**

Change is a gradual process. It is well known that there is always a process of change that is triggered by a catalyst, but which then grows on its own accord and sets the motion of change which manifests itself over time. Change is never immediate and cannot be gauged till well after the trigger has been experienced. The effects of change take time to manifest and become apparent in the normal run of life.

The diet and food habits of the people also underwent a change as a result of exposure to conditions in the army and later service abroad during the First World War. The Sikhs traditionally ate a largely dairy based diet with a lot of preponderance of milk and milk products such as ghee, curd, cottage cheese and buttermilk. With service in the army, came more exposure to eating non vegetarian fare and greater percentage of vegetables and fruits. The military incomes allowed access to more resources and many army men continued these food patterns when on leaves home, or even after retirement.

The British were very careful to remember the lessons which they had learnt during the Revolt of 1857. They took extreme care that the religious injunctions and dietary patterns of the various communities which they had enlisted as soldiers were well looked after during the campaigns. The commanders of the British army were very particular in mentioning the care that had been taken about the dietary requirements and particular needs of the Indian communities even on the waterfront (during transit) and the warfront. The British Army did all it could to meet the demands of its Asian troops, as it did not want to make the errors that led to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Commander Willcocks, in the middle of a new Indian rebellion in 1920, was keen to emphasise the caution taken by high officials during the war to prevent the errors made in 1857. General Willcocks describes the rationing arrangements for the Indian soldiers<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Gen. Sir James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, London: Constable and Company, 1920, p. 65.

The rations consisted of meat for those who ate it, several days in the week according to the circumstances of the time; for non meat-eaters extra *gur* (sugar), dall (lentils), ghee (clarified butter), potatoes, tea, *atta* (flour), and five kinds of tasty ingredients; in addition dried fruits such as raisins, etc., and various kinds of vegetables as procurable. But this did not end their rations, for mixed sweetmeats were frequently supplied by friends and retired British officers; cigarettes in abundance for such classes as smoked them; European and Indian tobacco and chillums (native clay pipes) were sent by some of the Indian Princes. Rum was issued to those who were not prohibited from taking alcohol and extra tea to those who could not indulge in the former. Goats were purchased from Southern Europe in large numbers; slaughtered at fixed stations on the line of communications by men of the various units; labelled with distinctive tapes and conveyed to destination by men of the different denominations.

Even after the war, there were permanent changes in the diet and food habits of Sikhs which were observed. Formerly, Sikhs did eat Greens (*Saag*) regularly during the winters, when it became the staple diet for the winter months, along with Corn instead of wheat rotis. Other vegetables were consumed in very less quantities or not at all. However, after army service exposed the Sikhs to a more varied and balanced diet and the soldiers witnessed the ways in which vegetables were consumed, along with meat as standard fare in countries where they served during the war, a variety of vegetables entered the staple diet in Punjab. 'Formerly people ate only Greens and turnips, but now cauliflowers and radishes have also come in<sup>64</sup>'. This observation in the *Una tahsil* of Hoshiarpur District was made by Malcolm Darling during his travels through Punjab. He also observed that potatoes, radishes and sweet potatoes were being grown and sold in nearby villages in the area.

A tangible change that had come in Punjab villages and can be directly attributed to serving in the army in general and serving abroad during the great War was that the "diet is more varied and more tasty, the former because (the farmer) eats more

---

<sup>64</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, p. 158.

<sup>64</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, p. 289.

Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 18. quoting Censor of Indian mails, 1915-16, part 7, p. 31, no. 17.

vegetables, the latter because he flavours his food with more spices and ghi. Some, too, think that he drinks more milk<sup>65</sup>

There were acres devoted to vegetable farming that Darling found in various tahsils<sup>66</sup>, including the Garhshankar Tahsil of Hoshiarpur. When asked what was the biggest change? in the last 30 years, a Sikh woman of the Nili Baar Colony told Darling that it was the enriching diet<sup>67</sup>.

Darling found that a Jat Sikh cavalry officer at Thikranwala was cultivating cauliflowers and another Jat Sikh was growing potatoes, illustrating the fact that vegetables had become a commercially viable crop too. Earlier, there was a “general prejudice against growing vegetables”, which was weakening, as noticed in the Tarn Taran Tahsil of Amritsar (a highly recruited area). When expounding on the fact that many villagers had taken to the cultivation of vegetables in their fields, a former army man credited it straight to his time in France during the First World War. This was directly relatable to the experiences of the Sikh soldiers in Europe as a war veteran of the First World War explained to Darling, “We saw very good men growing them in France... and the thought came to us, why is it a shame to grow them here?”

In this case, vegetables were also grown in the village middle school, clearly illustrating how the practise of growing and eating vegetables had become widespread, accepted and a part of the dietary culture of Punjab.

Another Sikh, who was recuperating from a wound in England wrote to his relatives in Jind on January 18, 1915, “I get good food and plenty of milk... the people here grow great quantities of vegetables”<sup>68</sup>

Earlier, molasses and gur were the only commonly available and consumed sweet elements in the diet, as these were extracted from the limited sugarcane that was planted across the Punjab province. With exposure to life abroad during the Great War, came also the development of sweet tooth in many Sikh soldiers, who returned from stints abroad, especially in Europe. Even before the Great War, sugar had started

---

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>66</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, p. 163.

<sup>68</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 18. quoting Censor of Indian mails, 1915-16, part 7, p. 31, no. 17.

to be consumed in greater quantities as life in the Army exposed soldiers to sugar consumption. Punjab was importing a sizeable increase of 45,21,000 mounds of sugar in 1910 from the 17,80,000 mounds that was imported in 1890<sup>69</sup>. In twenty years, fruits and vegetables imports also grew four times, from 1.12 lakh maunds to 5 lakh mounds<sup>70</sup>, as demand for these products skyrocketed in the province.

Tea drinking was another consumption habit that became a cultural phenomenon in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century across Punjab, as a result of the soldier's exposure to tea. "Tea drinking is confined to mainly Hindus and Sikhs, many of whom took to it while serving during the war." To the tea was added gur or sugar and milk<sup>71</sup>. From 11,000 mounds in 1890, the import of tea doubled to 21,000 mounds in 1920<sup>72</sup>. Double roti, or bread also started to be consumed as a complimentary dietary addition to the tea. Little piles of white loaves, three or four inches square (later called Pao) started appearing in bazaar shops<sup>73</sup>.

Meat eating was never the preferred diet of Indians, including Sikhs. Meat was expensive and Jat Sikhs of Thikranwala, as Darling found, did consume it, 'but not more than once or twice a month as it was difficult to afford.'<sup>74</sup> However, Darling still found evidence that South of the Ravi, where the general feeling was very much against poultry farming, there was change afoot. Poultry farming was considered derogatory earlier, but now around eight Risaldars who had retired from the Army had started keeping poultry.

In Punjab villages too, the change which transpired in almost every aspect of cultural, social and economic life as a result of the four years of war and as a consequence of the events in the Punjab even after the declaration of the Peace of Paris is remarkable. The trigger for the change in the Punjabi Sikh village post First World War was two-fold. On one hand were the large number of Sikh soldiers who had returned from overseas duties and brought back many experiences, insights and opinions which are

---

<sup>69</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army*, p. 32. - quoting Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India, Vol IV, Superintendent of Government printing, India, Calcutta, 1914, pp. 316-17.

<sup>70</sup> Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

the natural result of spending extended periods of time in situations of extreme stress, isolation from home and uncertainty about even life and death.

On the other hand was the gradual dissemination of practises which the civilians had imbibed from the soldiers in their midst. Since Punjab had a very high percentage of young men in the army, it was natural that this sizeable chunk of population could return to their villages on leave or post retirement and continue the habits, spread the learning and indulge the tastes which they had developed during service, thus spreading the same to the general populace too.

### **Clothing**

For the Punjabi rural populace, clothing was a means to cover one's modesty and never anything more. The Punjab villagers approach to clothes was very casual and most owned just one set, which was washed and re-worn, and not even mended<sup>75</sup>. Festivals such as Baisakhi and Diwali were the time when new clothes were bought for the year and the fabric was mostly homespun or *khadi*. When the Sikhs enlisted in the Army, they were exposed to newer connotations of dress and clothing in the form of uniforms. There were separate kits for seasons and also functions, such as Physical training, off duty, Mufti or casual etc. in addition to different types of uniforms for different occasions and seasons. The British Indian army regulations were strict on matters of uniform<sup>76</sup> and a great deal of emphasis was put on the right dress for the right occasion. 'Indian soldiers were required to wear pantaloons, shirts and combination suits<sup>77</sup>.'

A major change that did come in the clothing preferences of the Sikhs after their stints in the army and overseas in their tours of duty during the First World War was the preference for mill made cloth over *khadi* or homespun. There were other factors at play for bringing about this change too as Britain had prepared India as a ready-made market for its post industrial revolution boom in mill made clothing. The economic

---

<sup>75</sup> \*Lice in the clothing as a result was a consequence that was quite common even at the time of the partition, and especially amongst the economically and socially weaker sections.

<sup>76</sup> \*General Roberts recounts an incident in his Forty One years in India which happened in 1853 at Peshawar. It was the only flogging that Roberts ever attended in which two men were sentenced to fifty lashes each and imprisonment for some time for selling their uniform kit, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> Vocabulary of clothing and Necessaries (India), 1936, Appendix 1, p. 93.



indicators prove this new found preference for mill made cloth as the import of European pieces.

Various Sikh districts surveyed by Malcolm Darling in the 1930's reported that there was a marked improvement in dress, both in quality and variety over the years since the Great War. This was also evident in the sharp rise in the demand for cheaper variety of Japanese silks. In Rawalpindi, where the army influence was great was conspicuous. Thick coarse material *Salwars* continued to be norm there, but now, the mill made material was half, and the finesse and fashionable element increased considerably. The sleeves shortened to elbow length from wrist length and even some high heels were seen in the area<sup>78</sup>. The very words like 'fashion' and 'suit' started being used commonly and entered the Punjabi lexicon. Many women started favouring trousers, shirt and veil (*duppatta*) of the same colour, which is a recent refinement. Silks began to be worn everyday by the newly-wed bride, where once there were only one or two silk garments presented at weddings.

In another respect, there was a notable change which can be attributed directly to the Great War. This was the attitude of the soldier towards his wife undertaking the more tedious and backbreaking menial jobs around the house such as sweeping the courtyard, preparing the dung cakes for fuel or cutting the bushes and brushwood for fuel. Darling quotes a soldier explaining, "Since the war we have been trying to give them less to do". This is reflective of the experience of the soldiers in France and other European area where they saw wife and husband working side by side on smaller holdings and also more prosperous peasant folk employing house-help<sup>79</sup>. In fact there was a palpable rise in the standard of living, which was noticed in Punjab villages after the War, which could be due to the enlightened soldiery now returning, with exposure to better standards of living, or to the rise of education, or even to the use of more machines and mechanisation for cutting fodder, drawing water, grinding grains etc.

Another interesting phenomenon which took place after the war was the addition to the array of household articles which were not there before. Influenced by their time overseas, and no doubt bringing back the ideas, Sikh soldiers communicated to their

---

<sup>78</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste*, p. 289.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

women folk the concepts of such embroidered beauties as table clothes, pillowcases, handkerchiefs, bedspreads etc.

Seeing the wife work beside her husband as a companion, confidante and collaborator in Europe and other countries around the world, The Sikh soldiers brought home similar aspirations. In most traditional households, the wife was thought of more as a house manager and “the village woman, in regard to man, plays every part from queen to slave, but rarely that of comrade and companion<sup>80</sup>”.

After the war, a mix of long separation, the fear of loss, a deep seated homesickness and a fervent desire to reconnect on a deeper level made the returning soldiers much more considerate and caring towards their wives, as evidenced by their desire to reduce their housework and chores, and also to treating their wives much more considerately than before. “Wife is not so ruthlessly handled as before<sup>81</sup>”. This change could also be due to the fact that in Europe, the women were treated with much more delicacy, regard and respect than in India. Wife beating reduced significantly. A Sikh even writes that “Stick and Shoe stand buried” and the woman’s stock is rising in the village. The Sikhs lead the Punjabi communities in this aspect, as the women in the Sikh faith have always been accorded a position of great respect and freedom. Sikh women have always been at the forefront and stood shoulder to shoulder with the men folk in all aspects from war to socio-cultural, religious and community events.

### **Long term changes in thinking and outlook**

There was ample time for self reflection, mulling over the social and cultural scenario at home, which although coloured with the hues of homesickness was nevertheless, gave them the distance and perspective to view the rituals, traditions, expenditure patterns, outlook and attitudes back home with a reflective mind and dispassionate eyes. They were exposed to new mores, modes and ways of living and the exposure inevitably brought insights and perspective about what was important and what was not.

In situations of life and death, when one is faced with enemy bullets, after getting away with one’s life from certain death and seeing comrades dying all around, questions of social status, ranking and showing off become immaterial.

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

This was what happened in Punjab after the First World War was concluded with the Armistice declared on November 11, 1918. When the Sikh soldiers returned to Punjab after spending long years in situations of extreme stress and deprivation, they found themselves changed as well as the world changed around them. There were many political movements that had gained ground during the time the soldiers were at war.

### **Attitude towards Women**

It was unlikely that a soldier returning from a theatre of intense war after years would be much worried about taking a loan with exorbitant interest just to spend beyond his means and show off in his village and community on the occasion of a wedding or funeral. A soldier is also not likely to encourage his wife, daughter or sister to spend too much on jewellery which is a dead investment just to show off before their friends etc. A soldier back from a bloody ruthless war is far more likely to focus on the basics and essentials such as education, good strong houses, water management, diet and steady supply of essentials, and leading a debt free and stress free life. This was exactly the case after the Sikhs returned from war.

Some of the Sikh soldiers from the cavalry spent almost 3 to 4 years in France. The overall impact of the war was also felt on life events such as childbirth, marriage and death ceremonies etc. Darling recounts that in Moga Tehsil near Ludhiana where he was travelling in January 1931, expenditure of an ordinary Jat Sikh on the marriage celebrations were Rs 800-1000<sup>82</sup>. After the war, high prices resulted in almost doubling of these prices, even though the soldiers who had returned from Europe, had realised the folly of this expenditure beyond one's means. The returning soldiers had advocated a cut-down of the expenditure of marriage.

The Sikh cavalry had been stationed in France since the beginning of the war in 1914 as they had been members of the first expeditionary force which sailed from India and landed in France. These soldiers had practically lived without a family for long years as they were not allowed to go home. The majority of the French men had already been inducted into the army and most of the French villagers in the countryside where the soldiers were stationed had only women, children and older populations<sup>83</sup>.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>83</sup> Greenhut, *Race, sex, and war*, p.71.

In such circumstances it was very natural for the soldiers to develop liaisons with French women. Some of them had set up domestic arrangements and even married and had children with women abroad. In the letters which the soldiers wrote back home, many of the soldiers frequently mention the low morality, sexual promiscuity and loose character of the white foreign women they encountered while on their duty overseas<sup>84</sup>. The censor also had to work overtime to edit such mentions out of the letters.

However many letters survive which have open allusions to these 'relationships' and 'liaisons' and are recorded for posterity. In the European cities amongst civilian populations amongst whom the soldiers moved, in countries like France, Belgium and in Britain when they were hospitalized, Sikh soldiers came into contact with civilian population and women for whom they were subjects of fascination and exotic soldiers from a strange and wonderful land<sup>85</sup>. In a letter one soldier mentions, "the ladies here are very nice and bestow their favours upon us most freely and generously. They don't do this thing the way we do it in India". The exposure and experience of living in Europe made the soldiers reconsider, embrace and value their own traditions much more upon their return.

### **Cross culturalisation and after effects on Sikh Soldiers**

After returning from service overseas, the Sikh soldiers who went to their villages were well travelled, with exposure to the most developed nations in the world and had spent considerable time in the regions such as France, Britain, Germany, Belgium, Middle East and other theatres of war. They had become more reflective and culturally conscious.

There is certainly an element of interaction that transpires between the returning soldiers and veterans who are coming back to their homes after long periods of service abroad. Even in Europe, in all the countries, the overriding view that prevailed was that subversion and dissatisfaction of the soldiers who returned from the fronts had a profound impact on civil society upon their return. This is illustrated by studies such as the one by Jean Jacques Becker's<sup>86</sup> wherein he discovered that army

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, p. 124.

<sup>86</sup> Jean Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*. Learning ton Spa: Berg Publishers. 1985, p. 116.

personnel played a large part in shaping, affecting and determining the general mood of the masses and public opinion. In Britain too, it was found that the soldiers who were in their hometowns on furlough played a large role in determining the mood of the populace<sup>87</sup>.

In the case of the returning Sikh soldiers, there was one striking distinction from their counterparts in Europe- German or British. Whereas these nations had conscripted or made army recruitment incumbent on the young and fit to serve part of the population, In Punjab, service in the army was a profession in itself. Hence, the returning soldiers did not go back to tending to their fields or factories or performing other roles in civil life, but they returned to their regiments and barracks stationed away from home.

In contrast, the majority of the soldiers in Europe were decidedly more civilian in their inclinations and outlook, as noticed by most observers. At a time when Labour unrest and agitation was emerging as perhaps the biggest threat to the socio-economic- politico scenario in Europe, the soldiers of the various nations at war were also ignited by the same zeal as their civilian countrymen and women.

Be it France, Britain, Belgium or Germany, to name just a few, most soldiers thought as civilians and identified themselves more with the predominantly sympathetic civilian point of view towards Labour unrest and agitation. This factor becomes evident most prominently by the examination of the reports by the army officers themselves to their commanders<sup>88</sup>.

The vast majority of servicemen regard themselves as temporary soldiers, and look at most questions from the point of view of a civilian; the attitude with regard to Labour unrest therefore tends to be sympathetic.

This may well be the critical determinant why the Punjabi soldier and Sikhs too, were a little more insulated from the civilian milieu than the soldiers who emerged from, and returned to civilian life in the Mother country- Britain and other European nations.

---

<sup>87</sup> David Englander, 'Troops and Trade Unions in 1919', *History Today*, XXXVII, 1989, pp. 8-13.

<sup>88</sup> Englander, *Troops and Trade Unions in 1919*, p.316.

Unlike the European nations, where fighting roles were intertwined with support roles and employment of soldiers in other occupations, there was no ‘toing and froing between field, factory and front-line’ in the case of the Sikh soldiers’<sup>89</sup>. Soldier workers did not wholly return to industry, the trades, the farms, services and professions such as dentistry or teaching, and factories, but the Sikh soldiers returned to their barracks, where they were comparatively remote from the everyday hustle and bustle of civilian life<sup>90</sup>.

They interacted with their friends, family and communities, but only when on brief interludes of leave and through scanty correspondence otherwise. In this way, the military-civilian socialisation process of the Sikh soldiers upon their return from overseas duties was very different from the experience of the European soldiers upon his reintegration into normal civilian life.

David Englander makes an extremely insightful observation when he states as a matter of considered fact<sup>91</sup>

Conflicts existed between servicemen and society, but the outcome of such antagonisms depended less upon any alleged cultural transformations or personality changes among servicemen and more upon the degree of economic disruption, social dislocation and political disturbance in the former combatant states...there was criticism, but no rejection of civilian society.

He further goes on to add that...income and employment, scarcity and want, thus remained dominant preoccupations...prewar class and gender relations, if bruised and battered, were substantially intact. Political ideologies and patterns of postwar community life too, were recognizably what they were before 1914. In short, the circumstances of returning soldiers had not changed, and neither had they.

Sublimating this observation to the Punjabi and the Sikh context, one cannot help but reflect the parallels and similarities. This was true of the situation in Punjab at the end of the war. The British government of the day was totally dedicated and focused on the cause of reintegrating the returning soldiers as unobtrusively, speedily and smoothly into the pre-war scenario as possible.

---

<sup>89</sup> Englander, ‘Soldiering and Identity’, pp.300-318.

<sup>90</sup> Tai Yong, ‘An imperial home-front’, p. 371.

<sup>91</sup> Englander, ‘Soldiering and Identity’, p. 317.

The government and the Punjab administration were doing all they could to prevent the ripples caused by the post war inflationary pressures to reach the soldiers by the continuation of various allowances and land grants as rewards for meritorious services. They were also scrupulously and assiduously protecting them from being thumped by the waves which were emanating from the religious, social and political movements such as the Ghadr, Gurudwara Reform movement, Jalianwala Bagh massacre, Amritsar incidents, Punjab unrest, political malcontent, involvement in the national movement which was gaining ground and formation of SGPC.

There was much that the Punjab government had to fight against and it is no coincidence that in the days of the war, and immediately afterwards, there was an unprecedented spike in policing, CID reporting, informant network and rapid crackdowns on mere suspicions of misconduct<sup>92</sup>. The soldiers were under constant watch and as they were the targets of much of the agenda undertaken by many of the reactionary and revolutionary movements that were aground and underground such as the Ghadr, the SGPC, Singh Sabhas, Nationalists, Extremists etc. Upholding and ensuring the loyalty, confidence and upstanding services of the Sikhs was a top priority for the military top brass and civil administration alike.

However, one interesting aspect that comes to light is the fact that these soldiers were not impacted by the nationalist ideology of the day about the economic drain of India to benefit Britain or any other European power. The soldiers attributed the prosperity and abundance of France and England to other causes. The soldiers did not consider 'colonial loot' as the reason for the prosperity of Europe, they considered the basic traits and advantages of the people to be responsible for their good fortunes. The Indians were more likely to apportion the blame on their own countrymen for their plight, rather than the colonial administration.

The attitude of the men and women in France was admired by the Indians after their initial amazement. Young men belonging to privileged backgrounds also worked, unlike in India where manual labour was looked down upon. Hardworking nature of

---

<sup>92</sup> Tai Yong, 'An imperial home-front', p. 371.

the French people was thought to be the primary factor in their being 'well and happy'. "The 'evil disposition' of the people in India was thought to result in natural calamities such as lack of rainfall. Whatever the French people sow in the field comes to fruition, unlike the failed crops in India<sup>93</sup>".

Sikhs, being agriculturists themselves, were amazed to see the fertility of the land. The industriousness of the people, in combination with the advanced techniques of agriculture, mechanisation and farming expertise shown by the French in particular was greatly appreciated by the Indians and these were considered the reasons for the prosperity and not any 'drain of wealth' from the colonies.

The soldiers also attributed education as playing a great role in the advancement which they witnessed in the European nations. Sikh soldier Khidmat Singh of the 36<sup>th</sup> Jacob's Horse wrote to his father asking him to send a boy of the family to school as, "after seeing France, I am satisfied that anyone who is without education is no better than an animal". The fact that all children in France went to school was noticed by the soldiers and to this universal education was linked the general prosperity of the country.

A Sikh Budh Singh wrote to his friend in Rawalpindi (probably using a scribe), "owing to my ignorance and want of knowledge, I am in a pretty plight"<sup>94</sup>. The value of education was brought home to the Punjabis in a way that left lasting impressions. The illiterate Sikhs certainly felt at a huge disadvantage when they saw how education had brought prosperity to the people of Europe. The Sikhs wrote home often urging their family members to send the children to schools.

The emotional restraint and stoicism of the French in the face of loss and the brave front they maintained even in the midst of suffering was another trait that was admired by the Sikhs, who were used to the public display of grief and other emotions in India. A Sikh officer Wardi Major Jiven Singh of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancers wrote a letter replying to his wife in Gurdaspur, Punjab, who was distraught with worry about him.

---

<sup>93</sup> Omissi, *Letters*, p. 199.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



He wrote that the Frenchwomen lose their husbands, but still continue to work hard and Punjabi women and particularly his wife should emulate them. It does one's heart good to see the restraint of the Frenchwoman when faced with loss and grief<sup>95</sup>.

Indians largely admired European civilisation, culture, ways of living and the civilizational traits of the people<sup>96</sup>. There is little evidence to suggest that he experiences overseas made the soldiers more prone to joining the nationalistic movement or made them averse to imperial ideology. On the other hand, it seems safe to suggest that the generous treatment, appreciation and approbation which the soldiers received from the general populace with which they came into contact while being resident abroad gratified them to a large extent<sup>97</sup>.

### **Small comforts-Denied to the Sikh soldiers**

The Trench newspapers also have increasingly become invaluable chronicles of the normal day to day lives, experiences and struggles and triumphs of the soldiers in the trenches. The trench newspapers were most prolific in the English and French units where young subalterns and Non commissioned officers who were just out of school or college turned their already sharpened in school and college journalism pen to journaling in humorous, candid and frank manner the experiences of the soldiers in the trenches<sup>98</sup>.

The Indian soldiers had no such comforts, no such direct linkage to homes across the oceans, no such tenuous but precious method to collectively memorise and reproduce fragments of their daily privations and emotional insecurities and no such way to 'adjust to their environment without loss of dignity- perhaps the most remarkable achievement of all'<sup>99</sup>.

---

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> TaiYong, 'An imperial home-front', p. 371.

<sup>97</sup> S. C. VanKoski, 'The Indian Ex-Soldier from the Eve of the First World War to Independence and Partition', Ph.D. thesis, University of Columbia, 1996, p. 39.

<sup>98</sup> J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 69.

<sup>99</sup> Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity', p. 318.

The Postal Service was another precious purveyor of the comforts and luxuries of home for the British trooper. In fact, “the weight of cakes and comestibles and items of general consumption directed at the men in the trenches was almost as great as the flow of enemy projectiles”<sup>100</sup>. The German high command was of the opinion that “Their marching and fighting powers were diminished by the surfeit of balaclava helmets and woollen mittens that were sent to the front”<sup>101</sup>.

No such treats and home comforts were forthcoming for the Indian soldiers, except perhaps the occasional letter from the family or a friend, most often in the Armed forces himself. All this naturally lead to a deeper anxiety and alienation. This feeling is also called ‘soldier separatism’, or the ‘Liminal man’ as Eric Leed called it in his study of the personality and identity of the soldier on the front<sup>102</sup>. This sense of deep alienation refers to the non communicability of the experience of war- the feeling that ‘those without first-hand knowledge can never understand’<sup>103</sup>.

The emotional and social deprivations which all the colonial, Indian and for the purpose of this study- the Sikh soldiers faced were not borne by their British or European counterparts who were fighting in the vicinity of their homes, as compared to the Sikh soldiers who were fighting across the oceans from hearth and home. However, one common denominator which the colonial soldiers also enjoyed almost on parity with the British nationals was the economic benefits and special considerations that came with wartime. As David Englander explains<sup>104</sup>

Social payments to serviceman’s families, introduced by all combatant states, acknowledged the fact that, however good his commanders, the welfare of his family remained essential to the fighting efficiency of the man in uniform.... Privations at home had an adverse affect on troop morale.

---

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>101</sup> Englander, ‘Soldiering and identity’, pp. 300-318.

<sup>102</sup> E. J. Leed, *No man's land: combat and identity in World War 1*. London: CUP Archive, 1979, p. 41.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1980, p. 39.

<sup>104</sup> Englander, ‘Soldiering and Identity’, p. 312.

In India too, especially in the Punjab, disability pensions, allotment of lands, waiver of loans, rent restrictions, deferral of debt payments, overseas allowance, special allowances, moratoria on mortgages, disability pensions and other benefits were granted liberally to the soldiers and their families. The financial benefits of joining the army was one of the major factors which made every Punjabi family keen to have at least one son in the army, so the whole family could benefit from the windfall of economic rewards that service in the army brought<sup>105</sup>.

### **Long term social and economic Impact of the War**

The First World War was more than a war- it was a fight to the finish in which the colonial powers mobilised all the possible resources at their disposal to ensure victory. The war was not fought with weapons that killed and maimed, but also with psychological warfare.

In such a struggle, morale came to be recognised as a significant military factor and propaganda began to emerge as the principal instrument of control over public opinion and an essential weapon in the national armoury<sup>106</sup>.

There is more or less consensus among observers, academics and administrators alike that the Great war made public opinion a predominant instrument of state policy<sup>107</sup>. There was the rapid and uncontrollable profusion of acute interest, opinion formation, involvement and participation in state policy in the public, that public opinion became one of the most crucial determinants of state policy. This could be traced directly to the broadening of the political power through the Reform Act 1867 in Britain and the widespread literacy that followed the Elementary Education Act of 1870, 1888, 1891 and 1902<sup>108</sup> meant that newspapers became the powerful Vox Populi or voice of the people as well as the bridge between the people and their leaders.

---

<sup>105</sup> TaiYong, 'An imperial home-front', p. 368.

<sup>106</sup> Micheal L. Sander, Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18*, London: MacMilan International Higher Education, 1982, p. 32.

<sup>107</sup> Tan TaiYong, 'An imperial home-front: Punjab and the First World War', *The Journal of Military History*, 64(2), 2000, p.371.

<sup>108</sup> TaiYong, *Garrison State*, p. 62.

**Table: 5.1- Punjab's Contribution in Cash to the War Funds: 1914- 1918**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Punjab Airplane Funds</b>	<b>Imperial Indian Relief Fund</b>	<b>Hospital and Ambulance Funds Red Cross</b>	<b>Total Contributions</b>
<b>Ambala Division</b>	127,781	304,865	366,735	799,381
<b>Jullundur Division</b>	1,49,318	3,37,422	4,16,566	903,306
<b>Lahore Division</b>	2,10,810	3,59,561	3,83,695	954,066
<b>Rawalpindi Division</b>	2,77,850	176470	4,74,866	929,186
<b>Multan Division</b>	1,34,595	3,35,273	3,51,696	821,564
<b>Total</b>	9,00,354	15,13,591	19,93,558	4,407,503

Source: Punjab District Gazetteer, 1936

The Punjab contributed not only men but also materials to the War effort that was disproportionately large. The materials and economic contribution of Punjab to the war effort was in multiple forms and comprised of contributions in the form of airplanes, relief Funds, hospitals, ambulances and donations to the Red Cross and other economic contributions. In fact, even after the War ended in 1918, Punjab continued to pay a high economic price for the war effort and the drain on the provincial economy rendered it unstable for decades afterwards. The brunt of the economic strain and pressure was borne by the common people and the economic fallout of the war was responsible for a lot of hardship and scarcities that the people of Punjab had to bear for years after the culmination of the War.

### **The Home front in Punjab**

There were great cultural and socio-political forces at play in the Punjabi homeland which the soldiers had already been exposed to before their recruitment for the war efforts began. Ever since the start of the twentieth century, there was a lot of political and socio-religious churn that was taking place and affecting the soldiers in their home front too.

The Sikh horseman was the soldier of the Khalsa were fired by the mystic ideals of Gobind and he had no politics. He was also a soldier of the *Panth* (community) out to destroy the enemies of the faith in all religious fervour and patriotism<sup>109</sup>.

### **Socio Religious Movements of the Sikhs**

Right after the annexation of the Sikh State into the British Empire in India, there were two movements that attempted to remind the Sikhs of the simplicity and rational moorings of the Sikh faith. One such was initiated by Baba Dayal who emphasised the ‘*Nirankari*’ (Formless) aspect. The Nirankari movement was moderately successful in Punjab. Its message of restoring self regulation, rejection of ostentatious displays of wealth and selflessness among Sikhs was popular in some areas and brought followers to its folds.

In the 1870’s the Kukas, who were a sect within Sikhism, started a reformation movement to bring back those religious movements that had been put on the back burner by the pomp and show of the monarch of Ranjeet Singh and his descendants, who had abrogated the powers of the *Sarbat Khalsa* or the Sikh Commonwealth which had taken all decisions prior to the elevation of Ranjeet Singh as Maharajah of the Punjab<sup>110</sup>. Baba Ram Singh was a former soldier who had fought in the Battle of Mudki in the First Anglo Sikh war and experienced the fall from grace of the Sikh nation against the British at first hand. He organised the reformatory tendencies of the movement started by his predecessor Bhai Balak Singh on a better scale, which raised the ire of the British as it was anti-British in nature.

Baba Ram Singh advocated the rejection of British government service, English education, English judicial institutions, imported goods and mill made cloths. He propagated the use of homespun Khadi was a precursor of non-cooperation and economic rejection of British economic dominance that was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi later. In June 1870, small bands of Kukas unleashed violence against cow slaughter in Amritsar, Ludhiana and Malerkotla. When the Kukas attacked a government treasury in Malerkotla, and seven policemen and an Officer were killed, the British response was swift and brutal. Fifty Kukas were blown apart by cannons

---

<sup>109</sup> Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh: A saga of benevolent despotism*, Hoshiarpur: V.V Research Institute Book Agency, 1977, p.311.

<sup>110</sup> Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, p. 88.

without trial on order of the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana on his orders and sixteen more executed two days later. Baba Ram Singh was deported to Rangoon in Burma, where he died in 1885.

The larger Sikh body politic was left unaffected by these movements. When the Khalsa army was disbanded after the annexation of Punjab, demilitarisation of Punjab was the first item on the agenda of the new British administrators. Sikhs had to publicly surrender their arms and Sikh army liquidated, thereby making the soldiers return to their villages to pursue agriculture. The landed aristocracy who held revenue free lands were allowed to decline since they were seen as rebels since they had participated as leaders in the two Anglo Sikh wars<sup>111</sup>. The British also sought to control the Gurdwaras. This was done by promoting pro-British Sikh aristocrats with noted lineages and ‘Mahants’ who had gained control of many gurdwaras during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries<sup>112</sup>. These loyalists were also inserted into the most important Sikh shrines<sup>113</sup> to be able to control the Sikhs socio-religiously. The attempts by various organised movements to bring Sikhs into the fold of other religions<sup>114</sup> was greatly resented by the Sikhs<sup>115</sup>.

These movements had emerged as a counter to the aggressive pro-Christian propaganda against Indian religions that was being advocated by the missionaries. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had all started reform movements in reaction against the missionaries in the last three decades of the nineteenth century in Punjab. These movements were primarily aimed at promoting the religions against the propaganda of the Christian missionaries who had won many converts in India including the Punjab. Patwant Singh writes in ‘The Sikhs’<sup>116</sup>

“The Singh Sabha Movement was another cultural counter-offensive against missionary arrogance that viewed all faiths other than Christianity as either backward or barbaric. Western education, ‘representative’ politics, colonial compulsions and

---

<sup>111</sup> ArvindPal Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Bloomsburg Academic. 2013, pp. 78–86.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>113</sup> Surjit Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist. 1993, p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 322–326.

<sup>115</sup> Mandair, *Sikhism*, p. 83.

<sup>116</sup> Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, p. 184.

census pressures also convinced the Sikh thinkers and community leaders of the need to redefine Sikh identity- especially as census in some areas of Punjab had classified Sikhs as a sect of Hindus”.

Within 20 years of the founding of the First Singh Sabha in 1873 in Amritsar<sup>117</sup>, there were 117 Singh Sabhas<sup>118</sup> in various parts of Punjab<sup>119</sup>. The issue of Sikh identity became a major factor that was under assault from different directions<sup>120</sup>- The militant Arya Samajists took recourse to ‘Shudhi’ ceremonies which were their ingenious development aimed at taking outcaste or lower caste Hindus, disgruntled Muslims, converted Christians and Sikhs into the Hindu fold<sup>121</sup>. Finally, Kahn Singh Nabha’s tract *Hum Hindu Nahin* which underlined the different and distinct identity of the Sikhs<sup>122</sup>.

In the 1890’s, towns and cities across the Punjab were dotted with Khalsa Diwans where Sikh Sabhas were formed by rural groups. The main agenda of these Sikh bodies was to prevent the conversion of Sikh youth into Christians<sup>123</sup>, to close ranks against the political-socio-religious onslaughts of the Arya Samaj and other organisations<sup>124</sup>. The conversions of Maharaja Duleep Singh and Kanwar Harnam Singh Ahluwalia were also viewed with great concern by these Sikh bodies<sup>125</sup>. However, in the early years of the twentieth century, there were many internal disagreements in the Khalsa Dewans which led to a gradual decline of its power<sup>126</sup>. The passing of the Anand Marriage Act in 1909 also served to distinguish the Sikhs and marked their marriage rites as being different. The Sikhs were able to establish a different and distinct socio-religious identity under the British Raj.

---

<sup>117</sup> G. N. Barrier & Nazer Singh & Harbans Singh (ed.), *Singh Sabha Movement in Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Volume IV (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Patiala: Punjabi University, 2002, p. 204.

<sup>118</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 382–383.

<sup>119</sup> Patwant Singh, *The Sikhs*, p. 184.

<sup>120</sup> Harnik Deol, ‘Religion and Nationalism in India: The case of the Punjab’, New York, Routledge, *Studies in the Modern History of Asia* (1st ed.) 2000, pp. 65–78.

<sup>121</sup> J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 156-176.

<sup>122</sup> Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The case of the Punjab*, p. 69.

<sup>123</sup> Mandair, *Sikhism*, p. 79.

<sup>124</sup> Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 159.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>126</sup> Mandair, *Sikhism*, p. 81.

## Civil disturbances

Sir Michael O Dwyer, who was the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab from 1913-1919, ascribes the legislation undertaken by the British government such as the Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900 as one of the key factors that kept the peasantry and landowning gentry happy and enabled them to contribute heartily to the war effort as a result. In his book, *India as I knew it*, Sir Dwyer calls the Punjabi landowners ‘the finest peasantry in the east’ and commends them for contributing three hundred and sixty thousand fighting men, out of which one fourth were Sikhs<sup>127</sup>.

There was little doubt that to the soldier on the front, even the unimaginable hardships that he faced were made endurable by the fact that glittering prizes and even paradise that lay beyond. The hope that the loyalty, courage and sacrifice of the Indian soldiers would be richly rewarded sustained the soldiers and the seemingly endless dark and grim days of the unending conflict.

The view held by the majority of Englishmen was articulated by O Dwyer, when he credits the Punjab Alienation of Land Act 1901, as being responsible for the loyalty of the Punjabis who regard it as their ‘Magna Carta’<sup>128</sup>. The value of the land in Punjab trebled, instead of declining as was predicted, and the majority of the peasantry, who were rescued from being ‘largely a landless, discontented proletariat’<sup>129</sup>, became staunch loyalists of the British cause during the War.

There is little doubt that the reactions of the British regime in Punjab were tempered, if not wholly dictated by their dependence on Punjab as the primary recruiting ground from which nearly half the total ‘native’ (British Indian) army was enlisted<sup>130</sup>. There is credence in the contention that “the paradox of foreign power maintained by locals in uniform influenced state policy, particularly in the recruiting grounds”<sup>131</sup>.

---

<sup>127</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, p. 39.

<sup>128</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, p. 39.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>130</sup> Rajit K. Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 36.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64. - This became especially true after the Punjab became one of the most fiery and reactive grounds for the nationalist movement in the years following the First World War. In the years running up to the partition of the country and independence, Punjab remained a hotbed of nationalism, even to the extent that of all men and women who lost their lives in the freedom struggle, Punjabis were the maximum in number.



Hence, the British government often followed softer, more considerate towards the general mood and even paternistic policies when it came to Punjab, although they cannot be termed “benevolent”<sup>132</sup>. Even the mass agitations that took place in many parts of Punjab as a protest against the policies or legislations of the British government were handled with tact and it is true that “on occasion, extant government policy on the issues causing grievance was altered, even reversed<sup>133</sup>”.

The soldiers, Sikhs and indeed all Punjabis had already been exposed to the socio-historical churn that was taking place in the Punjab. While Mohandas K Gandhi was making recruitment speeches to encourage more and more young men of India to sign up for the British war effort, there were other nationalist leaders who were equally vocal in other arena. There were widespread, heated and animated discussions going on in street corners, colleges, village squares, the printed newspapers and drawing rooms about the implications of India participating in the world war on the side of the British. What could be the results of the India supporting Britain in the hour of need and what could be the possible results if India withdrew, decreased or withheld her support? What was the political future which India might face after the culmination of the war if Britain won or if the Axis powers won, were hot topics of the day under debate at every gathering of people.

An Army Commission in 1912 was set up which tabled the Minority Report. The President of the commission was Field Marshall Lord Nicholson and the Report gives credence to the view that the Martial race theory was a construct by the British to prevent the formation of a common national consciousness and keep the various communities divided. This report noted that ‘there was not much racial difference between the Jaats (Hindu cultivators of present day Haryana) and Jat Sikhs. These two communities should always be organised in different regiments in order to prevent them from conspiring together against the Raj<sup>134</sup>’.

---

<sup>132</sup>. *Ibid.*,p. 65.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 69. (as in the case of the Gurudwara Reform Movement) but this volte face transpired only after long drawn out and intense protests by the Punjabis and many lives were lost

<sup>134</sup> ROY K. Roy, ‘Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880– 1918’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp. 1310-1347.

<sup>134</sup> Richard N. Ellis, ‘The Utilitarian Generals’, *Western Historical Quarterly* (3), 1998, pp. 170-78; William Skelton, ‘Army officers Attitudes towards Indians 1830-1860’, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1976, pp. 113-124.

## **Role in other political agitations**

There have been many authors and historians who have worked on the ‘cosmopolitanizing<sup>135</sup>’ effects of experiencing war and serving in other countries in a more or less equal capacity with the soldiers from their imperial masters. There has been a dearth of studies on the after effects of such exposure on Indian soldiers who served overseas in the two World Wars. William Benton, E. Wayne Carp<sup>136</sup> and Edwin Burrows have conducted studies<sup>137</sup> on the changes in the political perspectives of soldiers from under-privileged or politically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the context of the United States War for Independence, officers from Pennsylvania and New York, who served in states outside their own, developed more liberal and cosmopolitan positions after the war. Even the intra individual bonds grew stronger in soldiers who saw combat together and experienced various hardships and privations. It was also noticed that ‘some artisans and labourers, who were deferential in 1774, became politically independent beings by 1783 as a consequence of their treatment at military hands’. Similar developments in attitude of independence and self awareness were found in black soldiers who served in World War 1 by Arthur Barbeau<sup>138</sup>.

The main factor that contributed to this ‘cosmopolotization’ and political awakening was the ability to communicate in English for the non-english speakers who saw service in English speaking areas<sup>139</sup>. In the case of the soldiers who served in France, the Sikh cavalrymen who stayed for years there, some from 1914-1918, all claimed to have learnt French.

David Omissi mentions how many soldiers wrote home to say that ‘all the *sowars* (cavalrymen) could understand French and could also speak it<sup>140</sup>. By early 1917, soldiers were writing home to say that ‘all of us can now talk French’ and this seems

---

<sup>135</sup> Wayne Carp, *Supplying the Revolution: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783*, Dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 1981, p. 61.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Poe, M., & Burrows, E. (2008). Edwin Burrows interview, "Forgotten Patriots: The Untold Story of American Prisoners During the Revolutionary War".

<sup>138</sup> Barbeau, A. E. “*The Black American Soldier in World War I*”. University of Pittsburgh, 1970, p. 35

<sup>139</sup> Karsten, *The "New" American Military History*, pp.389-418.

<sup>140</sup> Omissi, *Europe through the eyes*, p.384.

plausible as they had been resident for two years in France then<sup>141</sup>. Since the main cultural encounters of the Sikh soldiers happened with the French when they behind lines and on rest (once the infantry left France, most of the cavalry remaining spent maximum time at rest). The soldiers were sometimes billeted with French families and had ‘intimate contact with French domestic life’. They could interact with and observe white Europeans at close quarters and from a position of equality<sup>142</sup>.

Sir Michael O’Dwyer, in his book ‘India as I knew it’, puts the necessity of keeping Punjab insulated from the brewing nationalistic unrest by admitting<sup>143</sup>,

A violent agitation against the existing form of government would have produced disastrous results in a province which was home to the best fighting races, and was supplying more fighting men to the army than the rest of India

The influx of thousands of Sikh immigrants back to Punjab began from October 1914. The method in which the British Government dealt with these returning Punjabis has been described by the man who headed the Punjab Government then- the Lieutenant Governor Sir Michael O Dwyer himself in his book. The Ingress Ordinance empowered the authorities to keep the men under watch right from the time of their landing and they had to report to the Central Enquiry office at Ludhiana, where dossiers of detailed information on each were compiled by experienced British and Indian police detectives.

The returning Sikh was then either jailed, confined to his village on the guarantee of a dependable relative or the village headman or discharged with a warning if considered not dangerous<sup>144</sup>. As a result of this policy, out of the eight thousand Sikh immigrants who returned, five thousand were warned and let off, whereas four hundred were jailed on mere suspicion and two thousand and five hundred were confined to their native villages and refused permission to travel out of their villages<sup>145</sup>. Some returning immigrants nevertheless, succeeded in evading the police net and slipped through.

---

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>143</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, pp.12-13.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

These immigrants not sprang into action and soon, secret meetings and bodies of Sikhs who joined the movement started being organised in the Sikh districts. Sikh troops, students and normal villagers were contacted by the emissaries of the revolutionary *Ghadr* movement<sup>146</sup>.

There was no doubt that the situation was grave. Not only was the British government in a state of war, but most of the British troops had already been dispatched to France upon the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. The major cause for worry in the English officialdom and what made the scenario 'sinister'<sup>147</sup> was the fact that many of the most virulent and committed revolutionaries who had returned from abroad to Punjab and were inciting their countrymen were old soldiers<sup>148</sup>.

### **Ghadar and Other threats**

External threats to the Sikh war effort faced additional challenges. The Ghadar Party was a political organisation established outside of India with the aim of obtaining India's independence. During the First World War, the Ghadr Party made the Sikh troops their prime propaganda target. The most interesting aspects is that Ghadr party leaders called '*Ghadri babas*' in the local Punjabi dialects wanted the Sikh soldiers to join their ranks and fight against the British.

The incidents, martial identity symbols, language and inducements which the Ghadr propaganda pamphlets, radio telecasts and newspapers made were absolutely similar to the martial identity symbolism which the British had made to recruit Sikhs to the army since the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. Now, these same tools, religious injunctions, language, symbols and techniques were trained on the Sikh troops but from the side of the anti imperialist, anti colonial Punjabi nationalists. Their propaganda was mostly directed at the Sikh soldiers, and they tried to infiltrate the Sikh regiments, as the bulk of their efforts aimed at inciting Sikhs to revolt.

Similar themes from the martial race debate were used to elicit unrest. They used the "revolution inside Sikh and Punjabi religious and literary tales of masculinity, martyrdom, and self-sacrifice" as an example<sup>149</sup>. This is reflected in an excerpt from a

---

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*,p.197.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 198.

<sup>149</sup> Singh, G. Jodh Singh, "*The Ghadar Movement and the Anti-Colonial Deviant in the Anglo-American Imagination*". *Past & Present*, 2019, 245(1), pp. 187-219.

Ghadar leaflet: ‘You sons of the Guru are Singhs, and there is much injustice. What happened to your lion-like characteristics<sup>150</sup>?’

In their letters home, even while serving abroad, the Sikh soldiers revealed a keen understanding of the manner in which they were sought to be manipulated. One soldier even exclaimed that the Ghadr movement had tainted the image of the Sikhs in the eyes of the British<sup>151</sup>. However, the Ghadr episode proved that the martial self identification, symbolism and tools were also capable of being utilised against the Imperial alien race who had fostered the same in the Sikhs for their own advantage.

The best person to quote for the official British reaction to the challenge posed by the Ghadr on the Sikh loyalty is Sir Micheal O Dwyer himself, who was the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in the crucial war years and the man on the spot who was handling the scenario on ground Zero. In his own words in his book *India As I Knew it*, Sir O’Dwyer notes the deftness and skill with which he employed the self identity and community image of the Sikhs to make them turn away from their own brethren who were inducing them to rebel.

The Sikh community as a body had throughout helped us in the struggle with this body of denationalised Sikhs (for the Ghadr adherents in America had renounced many of the essential Sikh practises) who were bringing disgrace on the Sikh name...<sup>152</sup>

Sir O’Dwyer then goes onto describe how he recruited the help of the Sikh elites of the Province in his mission to crush the Ghadrites. He enjoined on the Sikh leaders that “Moreover, the movement was bringing the Sikhs as a whole into discredit, and their interests as well as their honour were involved”<sup>153</sup>.

In no uncertain terms, the statements of Sir O’ Dwyer make it clear that the self image and identity of the Sikhs was being employed even by the civilian administration in keeping them in line with the Imperial vision. The tools employed to keep the Sikhs

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Omissi, “*Europe through Indian eyes*”, p. 132.

<sup>152</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p.204.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 207.

‘loyal’ were the same as were employed in the Army- Martial identity, loyalty, Sikh ideals and proven track record of ‘loyalty to the British Sarkar’.

The danger of the Ghadr movement was manifold as it was a multi-ethnic, multi-national, multi religious and international movement<sup>154</sup> which had a solid ideological base and was able to strike the relevant chords in both the hearts and minds of the people. The anti-imperialist outlook of the Ghadr movement was a direct threat to British interests and it is for this reason, among several others, why it was repressed with extreme ruthlessness by the British Government in Punjab<sup>155</sup>.

### **Impact of the War on Punjab**

Many Scholars opine that the Indian situation has changed for the British at the very beginning of the twentieth century in India and particularly Punjab. The social and political change that was cemented by the First World War had its precursor in 1911 itself. The Delhi Durbar had brought a lot of prestige through its imperial grandeur, spectacle and pomp but the imagery thus created had been decimated by the time of the rollback of the Bengal partition under Lord Curzon in 1911.

Soon after, millions of Indian subjects were enlisted and sent to various theatres of war during the First World War<sup>156</sup>. Such a momentous contribution to a war which was not even a direct concern of India, however, brought untold misery, deprivation, death and suffering to the Indian people and strengthened their determination to gain political, social and economic rights which had been wrested from them by the colonial master race.

India was extremely affected by the First World War in socio cultural political economic ways. The recruitment of soldiers was akin to conscription and the large scale economic impact which was felt by the entire length and breadth of India. As a consequence of food grains being drained to the theatres of war, shortages resulted in the province which was the bread basket of India. At the time of mobilization, the Indian factories were manufacturing only goods which were required by for the war

---

<sup>154</sup> M. Levine-Clark, ‘The politics of preference: masculinity, marital status and unemployment relief in post-First World War Britain’ *Cultural and social history*, 7(2), 2010, pp.233-252.

<sup>155</sup> A. Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society during World War One’, *Social Scientist*, 42(7/8), 5-27, 2014, p. 177.

<sup>156</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, p.15.

effort. The economic consequences of various wars lead to economic deprivations, inflation, unaccounted price rise, shortages and scarcities was felt by people all across India especially in the Punjab.

In Punjab legitimacy and strength of the imperial control of the British was severely tested during the four years of the war. The iron control which the Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer kept on Punjab was responsible for maintaining the law and order situation for the duration of the war effort. The iron control was also responsible for foiling the designs of all the political agitators and even planned movements such as Gadar. The government was also successful in controlling the ramifications of incidents such as the Komagata Maru incident and the subsequent arrival of the Punjabis from the Calcutta port of Budge Budge to Punjab. However, the unquestioning loyalty, political legitimacy, uncontested control and supreme superiority of the British were shaken forever in the Punjab because of the incidents that took place during the years of the First World War.

When the soldiers from Punjab who formed nearly 20% of the total forces of the Britain involved in the war returned home after seeing the British at their worst in the various campaigns, they were bound to reconsider their allegiances and beliefs. The Sikhs had seen the strength and supremacy of the British challenged abroad. The fragility of the British Raj was exposed in the eyes of the Indian soldiers specially the Punjabi soldiers<sup>157</sup>.

### **The civil scenario in Punjab when the Sikh soldiers returned**

The soldiers returned to a Punjab which was on the boil and which had been on the boil for many years. They returned to a land which was swept by shortages, scarcities, economic hardships, political agitations, religious upheavals and general imbalance. The soldiers came back from service overseas with a realisation that the British power was not unquestioned and supreme. They had witnessed the British soldiers, British army and Government and the British authority being dismantled and challenged across the world by other European powers<sup>158</sup>. They were not ready to accept the superiority of the British unquestioningly as they had before the start of the war.

---

<sup>157</sup> Levine-Clark, *The politics of preference*, p. 243.

<sup>158</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, p.18.

The war had definitely brought about a sea change in the attitudes of the Punjabi soldiers. Upon their return to the Punjab, the soldiers found that the press had been muzzled and the newspapers were not reporting the reality, experiences and extreme hardships which they had endured as part of the British Army. Their exploits and wartime heroics and tribulations were not known to the people because the news had been repressed. The returning soldiers realised that they alone had not been suffering. They had endured untold miseries on the battlefields, but even their families back home whom they had thought were secure and safe and for whom they were fighting had been forced to face many hardships.

Indians, such as Bhupendranath Basu, a former member of India's Imperial Legislative Council, were not resistant to deep loyalist feelings, and were "prepared to lay down their lives on the ground, so that the old order of things may pass away and a new order be ushered in"<sup>159</sup>. Indian Nationalists such as M.K Gandhi supported the British in sending soldiers from India and earned himself the honorific of 'Recruiting sergeant for the British' during the war. Gandhi continued to address large crowds after the fighting, saying, "Voluntary recruitment is a gateway to Swaraj and will give us honour and manhood"<sup>160</sup>.

During the battle, there were several reports of the Indian army's position in Western Europe or elsewhere. Authors, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was also a war correspondent has produced detailed histories of the First World War and the Boer War in Africa. Doyle has given detailed, heroic, and optimistic accounts of the fighting prowess of Indians. From many accounts, it becomes clear that the soldiers from India and the other British colonies were not given their due and were often subjected to racial profiling and condemnation. The official stance was that the soldiers from the colonies were the special children of the empire<sup>161</sup>.

The soldiers were scarcely treated as mature and prudent children of the Empire, and their often obsolete ideals subjected them to needless accidents and risks. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was an influential voice that rose above the usual racially tinged din<sup>162</sup>.

---

<sup>159</sup> S. Das, *Imperialism, Nationalism and the First World War in Indian Finding Common Ground*, London: Brill, 2011, p. 75.

<sup>160</sup> Das, *Imperialism, Nationalism*, p. 78.

<sup>161</sup> Santanu Das, (ed). *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, p. 87.

<sup>162</sup> K. Wilson, 'Fiction and Empire: The Case of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle', *Victorian Review*, 19(1), 1993, pp.22-42.



Doyle was one of the few who truly believed in the notion of an ever-adaptable Indian soldier and explained what was termed as their ‘foolhardy and stupid’ courage in sympathetic terms. He writes that the gallant Indians were new to this warfare of unknown enemies and massive fires, but they quickly adjusted and moderated their imprudent gallantry, which had subjected them to needless loss at first. In 1914, General James Willcocks, the commander of the Indian Corps in France, has only appreciation for the obedient colonial soldier subjects.

This position changed after the War, as circumstances dictated differently. The public debate and press coverage stopped immediately as the guns became silent. Soldiers and their role in the just concluded war were completely wiped off the public mind as political, economic and social struggles in the immediate aftermath of the war pushed all other agendas to the fringes. Memories of the war, as well as glorious life accounts of Indian soldiers or princely officers who served in remote war zones, vanished soon after WWI<sup>163</sup>. The soldiers who died, or returned from the War were pretty much relegated to the sidelines by both the British Army and officialdom, and the nationalists themselves. The experiences of the Sikh soldiers themselves, were also sidelined, and went unrecorded, though not un-recollected by the soldiers themselves whose lives had been changed irredeemably by their experiences abroad.

The various political and national movements which were afoot were also not known to the soldiers. They did not realize that so much had changed on the home front during their absence. They had departed as war heroes but their return even after victory was not hailed as they had expected. Both the British government and the Indian nationalists were downplaying the contribution of the Indian and Punjabi soldiers and were not ready to recognize their heroism.

The Indians, and especially the Punjabis, were not apathetic and inert as the officials of the Raj had imagined. They were not listless and accepting of any measure which they thought imperilled their own interests. The wave of protests that had greeted the imposition of the legislation in 1907, proved beyond doubt that Punjabi’s were prepared to stand up for themselves. There was no disputing the fact that the India of 1914 had become much more politically active and aware than ever before. The readiness of the people to accept all the dictates of the Raj was not to be taken for

---

<sup>163</sup> S. C. VanKoski, ‘The Indian ex-soldier from the eve of the First World War to independence and partition: a study of provisions for ex-soldiers and ex-soldiers’ role in Indian national life’, Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1996, p. 59.

granted<sup>164</sup>. More and more, the uneasy realisation was dawning on the Raj that the ‘docile Indian’ was a mythical creature, who could not be invoked at will.

### **Insulated or involved?**

The Indians were not under the influence of the nationalism that drove the Europeans to take up weapons against each other. The Indians participated in the ‘Whiteman’s War’ only because they felt they had no alternative. They demonstrated their loyalty to King and Country (British Empire) by literally spilling their blood on unknown and unfamiliar Battlefields in counties they had not even heard of, such as France, Mesopotamia and Belgium. Even the moderates of the Moderates who were the majority voice on the Indian national scene and the Indian National Congress condemned the ‘conscription’ of certain races of Indian people and their forcible recruitment through press-gang methods<sup>165</sup>.

Upon their return, the European soldiers were seamlessly reintegrated into the civilian life, of which they had been a part before their enlistment into the armies of their nations. They returned to their jobs and pre-war attitudes and outlooks as they had never been severed from their homes and people back home, in the way the colonial soldiers were, as they were fighting thousands of miles away from their homes for extended periods of time.

The European soldiers were in touch with the civil aspect through a constant barrage of letters, parcels, communiqués, trench newspapers, traditional media, journals and leaves which they could avail of for visits back home. The majority of the Sikh soldiers who were serving on the front overseas did not have the privileges of letters or visits home as both were logistically much more difficult.

The fragile links which the Sikh soldiers had with their homes were through the occasional letters which were considerably curtailed by the simple facts of literacy on part of both the letter writer and the intended recipient. Leave and visits home were almost impossible unless the soldier was grievously injured.

---

<sup>164</sup> Lawrence, *Raj The Making of British India*, p.433.

<sup>165</sup> H. Fischer-Tiné, ‘*Indian Nationalism and the ‘world forces’: transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War*’, *Journal of Global History*, 2(3), 2007, p.325.

In this backdrop, for the European soldiers<sup>166</sup>, Cultural continuities had been sustained partly through the self sufficient nature of military organization, with its provision of rest, entertainment and refreshment, partly through language difficulties and partly through leave arrangements and the Army postal service... men taken from the factories and fields in consequence never lost contact with the folks left behind.

Marriages, divorces, and repudiations existed, and for those soldiers who were not permitted to go home on leave for many years, family life was non-existent. Soldiers from India travelled, went on vacation, and discovered cities and civilian people in Europe<sup>167</sup>. They were missing fathers or had children with the locals: despite researchers' best efforts, sources on colonial troops are not always available. Soldiers' sexuality and their widespread use of prostitution<sup>168</sup> are themes that sometimes appear in mail and autobiographical texts<sup>169</sup>. Soldiers' letters admired the French ladies with whom they had sexual relationships and learnt new modes and morals.

For the colonial soldiers like the Sikhs, the transition from war to peace was not as smooth and seamless as for the Europeans, for whom “no cultural or psychological rupture had taken place as a result of the previous four years”<sup>170</sup>. The returning Sikh soldiers were far more likely to suffer a mild shock upon their return to the safety and familiarity of their homes and cities than their colleagues in arms from Europe who had not ventured as further afield as the Sikhs and other colonial soldiers.

The tenacious and consistent fighting attitude of the Sikhs towards the enemy was therefore not dependent on success/loyalist consent<sup>171</sup> or failure/barbaric hate<sup>172</sup>. The debate between military and social history has generated fruitful results, raising

---

<sup>166</sup> Englander, *Soldiers*, p.318.

<sup>167</sup> D. Omissi, ‘Europe through Indian eyes: Indian soldiers encounter England and France, 1914–1918’, *The English Historical Review*, 122(496), 2007, pp.371-396.

<sup>168</sup> P. Levine, ‘Battle colors: Race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I’, *Journal of Women's History*, 9(4), 1998, pp.104-130.

<sup>169</sup> J. Greenhut, ‘Race, sex, and war: The impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914’, *The Journal of Military History*, 45(2), 1981, p. 71.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, *The imperial reserve*, p. 65.

<sup>171</sup> Greenhut, *Race, sex, and war*, p. 83.

<sup>172</sup> M. Abbott, ‘Colonial Army, European War: Martial Races Theory and the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915’, *Helix*, 9(4), 2021, p.71.

concerns about a variety of ideas, sources, and practices. The new studies that are emerging focus on massive datasets. These raise awareness of previously overlooked groups such as 'soldiers on leave'<sup>173</sup>, 'mutineers'<sup>174</sup>, 'camp-followers'<sup>175</sup>, 'Anglo-Indian police,' and 'Non-Commissioned Officers,' such as lances, naiks, and havildars<sup>176</sup>.

The fact that many India leaders advocated the recruitment of Indians and even helped actively in the recruitment did not escape notice. The misconception that the war was being fought not for 'protecting smaller independent states', but for the 'acquisition and consolidation of more colonies' by the European powers came as a rude shock to many who were not able to see through the designs of the British<sup>177</sup>. The intentions of the officialdom of the British Empire only became apparent upon Montagu's 'August Declaration of 1917', that was a source of only disappointment. It was finally understood in no uncertain terms that, 'Britain's necessity was not India's opportunity'.

Peace and stability were far from established in the Punjab, to the constant worry, concern and consternation of the British Government in India and in Britain. The threat from the side of Afghanistan had assumed dangerous proportions and the Afghans had attacked areas near Peshawar after making inroads into British Indian territory on April 11, 1919.

Punjab was highly disturbed and the government had imposed an information and media clampdown, with people being kept in dark about the real situation. This was adding to the problems and many newspapers in Punjab as well as the entire country were very anxiously and tersely assuring the British of Indian loyalty while also asking them to share information about the situation in Punjab.

The Kaiser-i-Hind newspaper in the edition dated May 11, 1919 had the following report as mentioned in the weekly report that was prepared by the British Government on the media reportage and opinions.

---

<sup>173</sup> Markovits, *Making Sense of the War (India)*, p. 47.

<sup>174</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, p. 87.

<sup>175</sup> R. Singha, *Front Lines and Status Lines: Sepoy And 'Menial' in The Great War 1916–1920*, in *The World in World Wars* (pp. 55-106). Brill, 2010, p. 88.

<sup>176</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, p. 87.

<sup>177</sup> B. Rajarajan, 'Indian Army and the First World War- A Study if Indian Army's participation in France and Flanders', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1985, pp. 650-655.

The Kaiser-i-Hind exhorts the people to respond heartily to the appeal issued by the Viceroy and asks Mr. Gandhi to suspend his *Satyagraha* movement till the cessation of hostilities with Afghanistan<sup>178</sup>.

In the same week, Sayaji Vijaya (May 11, 1919) expressed the hope that the British Government would appoint a mixed commission comprising both Indians and British officials to enquire into the happenings in Punjab.

Jam-e-Jamshed (May 14, 1919) expressed concern that the British government was not telling the people of India the reality of what was happening in the Punjab. There was military rule enforced and the newspapers also opined that even though "The Sikhs may be dissatisfied with the administration of Sir Michael O' Dwyer but it is ridiculous to suppose that they will be prepared to accept the authority of the Amanullah Khan".

The Hindustan (May 14, 1919) expressed the desire that: "Since the outbreak of the European War, the people of India have been urging the government to give military training to their youth but nothing substantial has come out of it."

That the Punjab had been sitting on a mass of combustible material, which had only been held in check by bursting into flames by the masterly and repressive hand of the Governor Sir Michael O' Dwyer was expressed in strongly illustrative language by Mr B.C Pal in the Home Ruler dated May 10, 1919 in the following words:

The experience of the Punjab ought to be an eye opener for Lord Chelmsford (Governor General of India) and his advisors. ...There was not a whisper of discontent from the province; no inconvenient agitation, not even a single Home Rule organization such as had threatened to disturb the peace and placidity of all other provinces....a friend examining the Indian papers of the Punjab of the last five or six years was paying a singular compliment to Sir O' Dwyer for the way in which he managed to silence all the voice of criticism of his administration all these years<sup>179</sup>."

Mazumdar reflects that "Military policy is, after all, state policy, and steps that affect military men are part of government policy. On the other hand, soldiers are conscious

---

<sup>178</sup> Report on Native Papers, India Office Library and Records, 1919, retrieved on May 23, 2021, from <https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/saoa.crl.25637117>

<sup>179</sup> Markovits, *Making Sense of the War (India)*, p. 38.

of their special position as members of a critical institution of the state. They realise the many advantages of soldiering and are ware that these can be withdrawn. Therefore, they respond to specific issues in terms of their affiliation to a corporate body, and not as individuals”<sup>180</sup>.

The contention, “Punjab’s recruited peasantry profited from military service in socio-economic terms, and this affected their subsequent political outlook and actions”, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt<sup>181</sup>. This is because the beneficiaries of the war were not the people of Punjab. The Sikhs lost thousands of the best men and even the remotest hamlet in an interior village was not free from the deprivations and destruction of war. The Punjab paid a very high price of war, which is a fact often overlooked.

### **Aftermath of Return**

The Sikh soldiers returned from service abroad to a social and political climate which was completely changed from the one they had left in 1914. The majority of the soldiers serving overseas in various places had not been allowed to return during the entire duration of the war. Returning home after many years, the soldiers found that the dynamics in their village their communities and even their families had greatly changed. Many returned to find their lands had been taken over by their relatives or brothers or other male members of the family. Many found that their social and family responsibilities had been neglected in the years of their absence<sup>182</sup>. The daughters or the sisters who had to be married were still unmarried as there was no one left in their absence to carry out the responsibilities. This fact of life was pertinent in the case of the Sikh soldiers as also the Gurkhas, Pathans, Punjabi Muslims, Rajput and other martial races who had been recruited in large numbers and sent for service abroad.

In the case of the Gurkhas, it was found that almost 1100 failed to report back to their regiments after the expiry of their leave from Egypt or Mesopotamia in 1918. A British officer wrote in the report to his commanding officer that this was going to be inevitable as they had visited their home in Nepal after several years. The soldiers

---

<sup>180</sup> Rajit K. Mazumdar, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 83.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>182</sup> R. Ahuja, ‘The corrosiveness of comparison: reverberations of Indian wartime experiences in German prison camps (1915–1919)’, *The world in world wars*, Brill, 2010, p. 139.

found that their land had been left uncultivated or it had been taken over by their relatives, their houses were dilapidated and in poor condition and the family obligations has not been carried out. When their families prevailed upon them to stay back in the village and not return to their regiment, the soldiers relented<sup>183</sup>.

Being sensible to and aware of this general feeling of resentment, time loss, and isolation which had developed in the minds of the soldiers over the long years that they had served in the front without any home leave, the colonial authorities exerted themselves to suppress any dissent or any open expression of these feelings. Sikh soldiers were overwhelmingly drawn from the rural milieu and they were peasants as well as soldiers. They also had an obligation towards their family, community and village. Their social responsibilities and familial obligations cannot be overlooked. The soldiers returned to a political atmosphere in the countryside which was quite contrary to the official impression which they had got from the British administration and army authorities.

The desertion statistics for Punjabi recruits tell their own story. 11.4% of all recruits deserted between August 1914 and May 1918. Surprisingly 44.3 percent of these deserters were reported to be at large which meant that they had not been traced they had not returned to their homes and there was still running amok all over the countryside just to evade arrest by the British authorities<sup>184</sup>. During the later years of the war when recruitment areas had been overdrawn and there were limited number of recruits available, the colonial authorities found that it had become increasingly difficult to get voluntary recruits<sup>185</sup>.

There was an unadvertised and discrete option which was compulsory conscription in the martial areas going on. Through their letters, the Sikh soldiers on the front had also clearly been able to communicate to their families back home that the situation and the conditions of war were truly fearsome. In scores of letters which have been recorded by historians such as David Omissi and Claude Markowitz, it is revealed that

---

<sup>183</sup> Incident quoted, *ibid*.

<sup>184</sup> Government of Punjab to Adjutant-General in India for Information. Desertion statistics up to March/May 1918', NAI, Home Department, War, February 1919, 42–52, part B

<sup>185</sup> Amarjit Chandan, *How they Suffered. World War One and its Impact on Punjabis* (paper for the Across the Black Waters), One-Day Symposium at the Imperial War Museum, London, November 7, 1998), <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> (accessed January 22, 2009)

the Sikh soldiers had managed to accurately communicate the deplorable conditions under which they were labouring on the war-front. It is easy to imagine how difficult it was for the colonial authorities to monitor and control the public opinion and the recruitment districts which had turned radically against recruitment of the young man. Consequently in 1917, the number of desertions in Punjab had risen to 26,702 or 25% of the recruits and 9364 of them could not be traced.

The political disturbances and other movements which swept Punjab in the immediate aftermath of the war did have some consequences for the Punjabi soldier also. The press was muzzled and the British authorities kept strict check over the coverage of news pertaining to the soldiers. However, official reports reveal the fact that there were many incidents in the 1919 Punjab disturbances where former Sikh soldiers figured prominently. One of these incidents was the attack on the Wagah railway station in which a former Hawaldar in a Sikh regiment selection Singh was the principal perpetrator and leader. The Hawaldar, Sulakhan Singh had an impeccable record of exemplary conduct for the 14 years of his service and this made the judge award him a life sentence instead of a death sentence when he was finally brought to trial for his role in the Wagah railway station attack<sup>186</sup>.

The British authorities also realised that beyond a doubt the 90,000 Indian soldiers and 50,000 followers or non-combatants who had been sent from India to France in the First instance and the thousands of others had been sent to various war fronts did bring back with them many social and political currents that affected the situation in the Punjab after the war years. Many former soldiers of the Sikh community engaged in and even lead the Akali Movement, Gurudwara agitations and the land and tenant agitations which made the British authorities take serious note. The proportion of Sikhs in the army was thus reduced to 30 percent in 1930 from 20 percent in 1914<sup>187</sup>.

---

<sup>186</sup> Memorandum on the Disturbances in the Punjab, April 1919, Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1920, reprinted: Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1997, p. 49.

<sup>187</sup> S. C. VanKoski, 'The Indian ex-soldier from the eve of the First World War to independence and partition: a study of provisions for ex-soldiers and ex-soldiers' role in Indian national life', Doctoral dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 1996, p. 322.



## Conclusion

It can safely be surmised that the army was a top priority for the British in India. They kept it free at all costs of any political overtones. Instead, they favoured the latter in the event of a conflict between the country's politics and stability<sup>188</sup>. The army was accorded the top priority in any contest between Politics or the threat to ensuring the loyalty and devotion of the army. Right from the days of the Revolt of 1857, the British had learnt the hard lesson that it was practically impossible for them to hold onto India, until they had the unstinted support of the soldiers that manned the armed forces.

In numerous instances, from the scrapping of the land Alienation Act 1907 to the British withdrawal in the Keys Affair to the various economic and material concessions that were accorded by the British to the Punjab which they considered 'the nursery of its army' in India, it is incontestable that the British had a special consideration for the Punjab.

As Sikhs formed a bulk of the army, it was not surprising that they were given special notice and attention by the British who tried to ensure as far as possible that the Sikhs were appeased, feted and their interest of every shape and form protected and promoted. In this manner, the mutually beneficial and synergetic relationship which the British had with the Sikhs was maintained. The British were very careful in keeping the soldiers separate and removed from any political or socio-religious influence that could deter them from the path of loyalty to the British Sarkar. In the case of the Ghadr Movement, the Amritsar Disturbances, the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy, the British government proved again and again that keeping the soldiers on their side and the province of Punjab quiet and orderly was the number one priority above all else.

British Indian Army was prevented from having a strong impact on Indian affairs as it was strongly felt in the decision making circles that defence has little to do with the country's affairs. As a result, the British-Indian Army established itself as a separate entity. Their organisational ties and loyalty to the British authority were strengthened by their training (discipline and professionalism) and separation from society. The

---

<sup>188</sup> D. French, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916 (RLE First World War)*. Routledge, 2014, p. 39.

Army possessed administrative and professional powers that were concentrated in its hands.

The Esher Committee (1919-20) stated that the Indian Army government was inextricably linked to the empire's entire military forces. Many political actions put the army to the test, but army officers stayed true to their ethical ethos and supported the British government. Since its incorporation into the Empire, the Punjab had been known as India's "Shield," "Spearhead," and "Sword-hand," with its hardy and martial rural populace of peasant proprietors. 'It received such illustrious titles as a result of its long connection with the British Army and assistance it rendered to the British war effort in any Eastern war from the time of the Mutiny to the present'.

Sikh soldiers while on the frontlines of the war in strange lands overseas, stayed committed to their work, even as they formed friendships with the locals, interacted with the civil populations and soldiers from other nations who fought besides them, and formed liaisons and even married European women. They also were homesick and lonely and wrote heartbreaking letters home<sup>189</sup>. They took brief leaves to forget about the everyday experience of battle in the cold and rainy weather of northern French trenches by going across the canal or further south to Marseilles<sup>190</sup>. They could not risk disobeying orders or starting a mutiny in a non-Indian context, so refusing to take part in the war was difficult for them<sup>191</sup>. Refusal to fight or showing reluctance due to any reason was not even an option. However, there is nothing to indicate that the sojourn abroad lead to any large scale attitudinal shift or major change in the thinking and perceptions of the Sikh soldiers. Most historians who also have the benefit of hindsight opine that the Sikh soldiers' sojourns abroad during the First World War consist of an uncertain legacy.

The next chapter 'Unsung Heroes and Heroines' takes a look at the non combatants who were at the sidelines in the conflict, but whose role is as critical and courageous as that of the soldiers.

---

<sup>189</sup> C. Koller & S. Das, *Representing Otherness: African, Indian, and European soldiers' letters and memoirs*, 2011, p. 64.

<sup>190</sup> Omissi, *Europe through Indian eyes*, p. 387.

<sup>191</sup> T. Stovall, 'National identity and shifting imperial frontiers: whiteness and the exclusion of colonial labor after World War I', *Representations*, 84(1), 2003, p. 58.

## CHAPTER-VI

### THE UNSUNG HEROES AND HEROINES

This chapter aims to shed light on the thousands of unsung heroes and heroines who contributed directly and indirectly to the successful culmination of the First World War. As Bernard Cohen candidly admits, “the colonial gaze” was so all pervasive that it prevented the recognition, let alone the contribution of these people<sup>1</sup>. Their sagas and their sacrifices have gone unnoticed to the extent that it seems that they have been dehumanized and reduced to just numbers and their contribution has been belied and ignored completely. This chapter aims to explore some of the facets of the unrecognized non combatant soldiers, families and other stakeholders whose part in the Great War has gone unnoticed and unremembered.

This chapter aims to address the role of the various non combatants who were not a part of the frontline duty or action, but were directly impacted by the same. The various constituencies of the non combatants such as the sappers, miners, cooks, syces, grass cutters, camel, ass and cart drivers, massalchis, servers, batmen, etc were very critical elements in keeping the war machine well oiled and running in the war. They also played an important role in the war effort, which cannot be ignored, although it is rarely mentioned or even acknowledged.

“South Asian historians of all stripes are more interested in people who defied the colonial force than those who allied with it,” writes journalist Srinath Raghavan in a book review published on November 22, 2014, blaming not only Indian historians “having no interest in military history,” but also the Indian population, which sees soldiers as mere mercenaries. The French and British forces proved to be seriously outnumbered and outgunned by the Germans in France and Belgium<sup>2</sup>, with heavy casualties at the beginning of the war in 1914. With so many casualties in the first few months of the war, there was widespread frustration among the Indian British Expeditionary Forces<sup>3</sup>. The two Indian divisions that fought in France were made up

---

<sup>1</sup> S. B Cohen, *Geopolitics of the world system*, London: Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> George. Morton Jack, *The Indian Army of the western front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>J. Greenhut, ‘The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914–15’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 1983, pp.54-73.

of around 24,000 men and had received about 30,000 replacements from India – in other words, they had suffered 100% losses<sup>4</sup>.

Raghavan goes on to say that since the soldiers did not die for India, there is no need to remember them<sup>5</sup>. Just regiments commemorate the centennial, and it is a private matter<sup>6</sup>. When Britain declared war in August 1914 to when the Peace was established in December 1919, there were 877,068 non-combatants recruited and enlisted from India alone<sup>7</sup>.

It is enlightening to enquire into the mind of the man of the moment who was running the show at the time in Punjab which was the fount out of which the torrent of men and materials flew to the various theatres of war. Sir Michael O Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab at the time of the outbreak of the war has described the situation in the province in his own words in his memoir 'India as I knew it'.

It was therefore natural that when the demand for manpower became urgent, the military authorities should look primarily to the Punjab...The Punjab was found ready and willing<sup>8</sup>.

In his own words, and on his own authority, Sir O' Dwyer goes on to put on record that Punjab had a hundred thousand men in the army in 1914, but by the end of 1918 when the war ended, there were half a million men who had served in the war. 360,000 men had been recruited from Punjab during the war and a vast majority of these had been Sikhs<sup>9</sup>.

There were another 563,369 non-combatants, who brought the total of the men recruited from India to fight on various war fronts to a staggering 1,440,437<sup>10</sup>. This total was added a further 239,561 Indians who were already in the British Indian army

---

<sup>4</sup> M. Abbott, 'Colonial Army, European War: Martial Races Theory and the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915', *Helix*, 9(4), 2021, p.71.

<sup>5</sup> S. Raghavan, 'Liberal thought and colonial military institutions', in *India's Grand Strategy*, Delhi: Routledge India, 2014, pp. 100-124.

<sup>6</sup> Thierry Di Costanzo, *Memory and history of the Great(er) War and India: from a national-imperial to a more global perspective*, *E-rea* [Enligne], 14.2 | 2017, mis enligne le 15 June 2017, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> G. M. Jack, 'The Indian Army on the western front, 1914-1915: A portrait of collaboration', *War in History*, 13(3), 2006, pp.329-362.

<sup>8</sup> Michael O' Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> S. Das, *Imperialism, Nationalism and the First World War in Indian Finding Common Ground*, London: Brill, 2011, p. 155.

at the start of the war, bringing it to 1,096,013 Indians approximately who served abroad in various theatres of war such as France, Mesopotamia, Flanders, Gallipoli, East Africa, Egypt and Palestine, Aden, Persia, Salonika, Central Asia and Britain. There were almost 621,224 combatants and 474, 789 non combatants, out of which between 50,000 to 70,000 never returned home and were killed on foreign shores<sup>11</sup>.

Chronologically speaking, there were 155,423 combatants and 45,600 non combatants on August 1, 1914 in the Indian army. Up till December 31, 1918, this number had risen to 877,068 combatants and 563,369 non- combatants out of which a total of 1,381, 050 were sent to serve abroad<sup>12</sup>.

### **Historical Background of Non Combatant role in British Indian Army**

The decline of the Mughal Empire and the consequent emergence of autonomous states resulting in the absence of a strong political and military power over large parts of the country provided a golden opportunity to freebooters. These adventurers, both European and Indian, plundered and ravaged the countryside in many areas. This scenario changed completely with the establishment of the British colonial government in India. Their rule that lasted almost 200 years, ushered India into the modern age, and brought out sweeping economic, political and social changes. As the colonial mindset constantly adapted and changed to respond to the emerging needs as the empire expanded in India and new territories were won for the Union Jack, intellectual theorizing provided the weight and heft to it. English ideals such as modern economic development, building up of infrastructure, Parliamentary democracy, Civil Liberties and were held up as the benefits of British presence in India<sup>13</sup>.

The non combatants were always accorded a very significant place in battle and in peace time. They were accorded the respect they earned as people who did all the necessary but unpleasant work that made life tolerable for the fighting wings of the army. Whether on the march, or at war, in battles or in peace, the non combatants

---

<sup>11</sup> *India's Contribution* lists the figures of Indian casualties as 'Dead from all causes – 53,486; Wounded – 64,350; missing and POWs – 3762, as on 31 December 1919. Repatriated prisoners are not shown (176).

<sup>12</sup> A. Bagchi, 'Indian Economy and Society during World War One', *Social Scientist*, 42(7/8), 2014, pp. 5-27. Retrieved on May 11, 2021

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

played a vital role. Although not accorded the adulation and recognition that came to the fighting wings, nevertheless, the non-combatants were considered vital. General Fredrick Roberts mentions the attachment he had for his various servants and attendants, from the time of the Mutiny (1857).

In his memoirs, he notes how well his servants behaved. The *Khidmatgar* (Table attendant) never failed to bring him food even when the battle was at its most fierce, and the *saices* (grooms) were always there with horses whenever they were needed, seemingly unconcerned about the dangers they frequently faced. Furthermore, they developed such a warlike attitude that when General Roberts was taken ill and confined to his bed in April 1858, four of them enrolled in a Bengal Cavalry unit. The *khidmatgar* died soon after the Mutiny, but his two brothers who joined Roberts, served with Roberts during the Lushai expedition and the Afghan War. They never left his side for more than twenty years and finally said Goodbye at Bombay on board the P. and O. Steamer in which General Roberts finally departed from India in April, 1893<sup>14</sup>.

General Roberts, the main proponent of the 'martial Race theory, had high regard and praise for the non combatants. He recounts a telling instance that refers to the importance and bravery that was displayed more often than not by the non-combatant element of the army. He says that not only the servants, but the followers belonging to the European Regiments, such as cook-boys, saices and bhisties (water carriers), as a rule, behaved in the most praiseworthy manner. In his memoir, he calls them faithful and brave to a degree. An example was that when the troopers of the 9<sup>th</sup> lancers were called upon to name the man they considered most worthy of the Victoria Cross, and honours which Sir Colin Campbell purposed to confer upon the regiment to mark his appreciation of the gallantry displayed by all ranks during the campaign (Revolt of 1857), they unanimously chose the Head *Bhistie!*"<sup>15</sup>

In the same vein, General Roberts recalls the contribution by the medical Officers and staff also during the Delhi siege of 1857. He says that the Delhi Force was fortunate in its medical officers. Some of the best in the army were attached to it, and all that was possible to be done for the sick and wounded under the circumstances was done

---

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, E. F. S. R, "*Forty-one Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-chief*" (Vol. 1). London: Macmillan; New York: Macmillan Company, 1898, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 104

by them, at the cost of their own well being. He goes on to say that the medical officers though, had a very rough time in terms of accommodation and medical supplies.”<sup>16</sup>

The non combatants formed an indispensable, though often unseen and unremembered part of the army. It seemed very clear to everyone that the First World War was a struggle in which the entire future of the British Empire, consisting of all its colonies, was at stake. Britain could not remain neutral as doing so would imperil its imperial interests. As the European crisis of July 1914 unfolded rapidly, Britain was also swept away into the war, along with all its colonies and dependencies. A German victory would shift the balance of naval power, on which the entire British supremacy and colonial regime depended in favour of German, and this was not at all to be condoned by either the British people, or the government. The prospect of losing any of the colonies in Asia and Africa, as would be inevitable if Germany won, was not palatable and neither was the prospect of a rift with the other European powers that were in alliance with Britain, such as France and Russia. Britain was left with no choice except join the fray along with the members of the other members of the Triple Alliance. German invasion of Belgium, which was neutral, gave the British government a legitimate excuse to enter the conflict and that too in the defence of a moral cause, that ensured support both at home, and around the globe.

The Indian participation in the war was on all fronts. The non combatants who consisted of the helpers of the soldiers such as the barbers, *dhobis* ( washermen), *Langri*'s (cooks), horse grooms, cleaners, sweepers etc were as much a part of the war effort as the soldiers. Almost 40,000 non combatants also left Indian shores for the front. Their tribulations and trials were not less than the soldiers on active duty and these non combatants spared no sacrifice and made every effort to forward the war effort to the best of their capacity.

The Indian nationalists encouraged the participation of the Indians wholeheartedly, with even an extremist like Bal Gangadhar Tilak declaring publicly in 1917, 'If you want Home rule, be prepared to defend your home. Had it not been for my age, I

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid , pg 105

would have been the first to volunteer. You cannot say that the ruling will be done by you and the fighting for you<sup>17</sup>.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who still had to become the Mahatma in July 1918, just before the German offensive in France said, ‘An empire that has been defending India and of which India aspires to be the equal partner is in great peril, and it ill befits India to stand aloof at the hour of its destiny...India would be nowhere without Englishmen’<sup>18</sup>.

### **Punjab and the Great War**

Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British, the army became a fully disciplined and professional army. All extra fluff was prohibited from the war train, but the essential followers were still required and these were made part of the army, albeit in non-combatant roles<sup>19</sup>. Blacksmiths, cobblers, water carriers, cooks, sweepers, valets, and orderlies for officers were all a part of the army. Grass cutters for the thousands of animals that accompanied the army, veterinary personnel, grooms, postal workers, scribes, skilled and unskilled labour that worked on the railway lines, water works, pipelines and other commissariat requirements in the Middle East, Palestine and Mesopotamia<sup>20</sup>.

General prosperity in rural Punjab had increased considerably by the time the Great War broke out. As Sir Michael O Dwyer recounts the normal peasant was living a better life than ever before. The area under cultivation had increased significantly as a result of the canal irrigation and produce price had doubled, cash crops such as cotton, wheat and sugar cane were being planted and farmers kept more cattle, built finer brick houses and their women wore more ornaments than had ever been possible under the days of the Sikh rulers. They were earning good money in the army but were under mortgage and debt only because of their love for litigation, drink and over expenditure on marriages<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> S.L.Menezes, ‘Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty First Century’, *Contemporary South Asia*- Abingdon, 12(1) 1993, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi: 82 Vol., XIV, p.484.

<sup>19</sup> K. Roy, *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> O’ Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, pp.54-55.



The Punjab supplied both combatants and non-combatants in great numbers throughout the war. However, the paucity of available and willing men in such huge numbers was being felt in the early days too. When Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, admitted in March 1915, barely a year into the war that, 'Our military resources have been reduced to bedrock'<sup>22</sup>, it was an honest confession of the overwhelming inadequacy of the Indian army to sustain in the face of the great demands that were being put on it<sup>23</sup>.

The Indian army had a dearth of trained and experienced signallers, who could operate the wirelesses, telephones and telegraphic equipment with speed, efficiency and speed. In the initial days, the Indian signallers were slow at transmitting and receiving messages, but they picked up admirably as the war progressed, if they survived as the casualty rate of the signallers and operators was as high as the sepoys.

In order to recruit both combatants and non combatants, the British administration took help of the local leaders, whether they were Muslim, Sikh or Hindu. Sir Michael O'Dwyer reminisces in his book how he had called upon the influential Tiwana clan to provide non combatants to the war effort. Nawab Sir Khuda Baksh Khan, who was a Tiwana Mallik, and a minister in Bahawalpur State was recalled to his native Punjab in 1916, to help urgently with the pressing need to provide non combatant recruits. The Tiwana leader was able to raise in a matter of weeks, six thousand camel and mule drivers for Mesopotamia in and around his native district of Shahpur<sup>24</sup>.

When the Indian army initially went to France, Indian non-combatants in a supporting role for the infantry and cavalry, belonged to the Indian army administrative units. They served many functions and performed various roles such as in animal transport including mule packs. Others were attached to the medical units, field ambulances, stretcher bearer companies and mobile hospitals<sup>25</sup>. One of the staff officers who was in charge of the non combatants writes that although in the mule transport the non combatants and their officers knew that the role was modest one and very limited but

---

<sup>22</sup> PRO, WO 32/5198, Nos. 158/668, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> S. Raghavan, *Liberal thought and colonial military institutions*. London: Routledge, In India's Grand Strategy, pp. 100-124.

<sup>24</sup> O' Dwyer, *India as I knew it*, pp 40-41

<sup>25</sup> H. Alexander, *On Two Fronts, Being the adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France and Gallipoli*. New York: Dutton, 1917, pp.29, 33.

they were prepared to play to the full and do all in their humble power to for the good cause<sup>26</sup>.

There were no nurses available to tend to the wounded in Mesopotamia until 1916. The wounded Indians were discouraged from being sent back to India as it was clear that wounded men who made it to India preferred to desert rather than return to fight in the intolerable theatre of Mesopotamia<sup>27</sup>.

The position of the ‘untouchables’ or the lower classes in India has always been lamentable, as they were denied basic human rights. The system of untouchability at its worst depended upon the unquestioned superiority of the Brahmin<sup>28</sup>, before which even the law had to bend even in the days of the British Raj in India. However, on the ground, their position varied quite radically from region to region. In Punjab the low classes were recruited in supporting roles such as in the medical staff and hospital orderlies etc<sup>29</sup>.

### **Non combatants in Action Abroad**

The non-combatants were also called ‘Departmental Followers’ as their main task was to accompany the combatants and make life easier for them by providing logistical and other support. The medical, ordinance, transport, cooking, washing, public and private regimental followers used to follow the army on the march as per tradition in India. In India, the camp followers would even include unwarlike professions such as perfumers, flower-sellers, prostitutes etc used to accompany the army to furnish every possible need. Non-combatants were sent to Europe and other parts over three phases. The fighting formations and non combatants of the Indian administrative units had to operate on multiple levels and in various places spread all over France<sup>30</sup>.

The First phase was dispatch of the non combatants along with the fighting army to Flanders from India. In this phase, the force had to be recruited and mobilized,

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p 51

<sup>27</sup> W. G. MacPherson, W. H. Horrocks and W. W. O. Beveridge, *Medical Services of the Great War*, Vol. I, 1923, pp.152-53.

<sup>28</sup> P. J. Griffiths, *The British in India*, London: Robert Hale Limited, 1946, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 52-58.

<sup>30</sup> G. Morton-Jack, *The Indian army on the western front: India's expeditionary force to France and Belgium in the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 10.

equipped, moved to Indian port cities, dispatched via ships and transported via Egypt to Marseilles and then to Flanders.

The second phase comprised of the active part in the First few campaigns in France and Belgium of the war from 23rd October to 5th November 1914. The Indian Army and the Secunderabad cavalry brigade attached to it was divided into smaller parts and sent all over Flanders to defend the front trenches. The job of the non-combatants was to keep up with the fighting units and provide them with the support needed. This task was easier said than done as one of the staff officers attached writes that the synchronisation of the British and Indian systems of supply and transport was quite complicated<sup>31</sup>. This writer who was the British captain of one Indian mule pack unit says that the home army or the Indian army officers on the staff knew little of the methods of the British counterparts and the British army did not understand the Indian system and the language. The British officers commanding the Indian units were less aware of the British ways and lines of communication and confusions and mis-communication often resulted.

The third phase was from mid November 1914 to February 1918 which was the bulk of the war when the Indian infantry fighting arms duties were normally defensive. Initially in France the Indian infantry was deployed in various positions but then it was moved to Middle East and Mesopotamia in the early months of 1915. The administrative units comprising of the non combatants also accompanied the fighting units to these places<sup>32</sup>. In the New year 1915, the Indian corps were conjoined to Douglas Haig's new first army at the battle of Neuve Chapelle (10-12 March 1915) Aubors Ridge (9 May), Festubert (15- 25 May) and Loos ( 25-September to mid October), the Lahore and Meerut divisions were then transferred to Egypt. They had sailed by Boxing Day. The Indian Infantry Corps as such has stopped existing in France.

As is well known the Indian cavalry Corps was in France from the winter of 1914 to the spring of 1916. It was then disbanded and dispatched to various locations. The non combatants such as mule driver syces, grooms, grass cutters and other horse carers

---

<sup>31</sup> Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> C. Robinson, 'Indian soldiers on the Western Front: the role of religion in the Indian army in the Great War', *Religions of South Asia*, 9(1), 2015, pp.43-63.

who were in charge of the Cavalry Corps horses continued to be deployed in France. In fact when the cavalry units were disbanded in spring of 1916, the non-combatant continued to serve in France in various positions<sup>33</sup>. The routine jobs or support which was provided by the non combatants was varied but essential. The mule packs on the first line of transport were used to link the supply depot near railheads in the trenches where the supplies were needed and the mules carried the supplies over the short distances between the transport and rail heads and the trenches. The administrative Service of the British army and of India also relied on the cooperation and support of the administrative services to perform many other routine jobs.

In matters of clothing too, the 'Followers' or non combatants were sanctioned the same summer and winter kits as the soldiers. According to the Vocabulary of clothing and Necessaries (India), 1936, Appendix 1, p 93 refers to the following items of field service clothing that was issued to soldiers and their followers in 1900.

Summer Scale- 1 country blanket; 1 pair shoes, country or ammunition boots; 2 pairs worsted socks<sup>34</sup>.

Winter Scale- 2 country blankets; 1 jersey; 1 pair mittens; 1 balaclava cap; 1 pair warm pyjamas; 'warm coats, British troops pattern; 1 pair shoes, country or ammunition boots; 2 pairs worsted socks; 1 waterproof sheet.

Caste barriers were never far from the minds of the Punjabi's, even on the war front. The YMCA tried to obtain better treatment for the 'untouchable' sweepers and servants from the lower classes in 'behind-the-lines rest camps in France'<sup>35</sup>. In France, most notably, the workers and labour came in for racial prejudice and even violence. The French were themselves a colonial power and development of racial categorisation where the workers of colour were called 'colonial and exotic workers' whereas the European white workers were called 'immigrant workers'<sup>36</sup>.

This itself illustrates how the non-white workers were seen as being different and even inferior only on the basis of the difference in skin colour and by their being non-European.

---

<sup>33</sup> G. Morton-Jack, *The Indian army on the western front*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Punjab Command Orders, 1900, Command Order 687, p. 278.

<sup>35</sup> James, *Raj - The Making of British India*, p. 450.

<sup>36</sup> T. Stovall, *Love, Labor and Race: Colonial Men and White Women in France, French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*, 2003, pp.109, 297.

French labour unions, labour classes (who perceived the non white labourers as contenders for their jobs and competition also), employers, administrators and even the French Government objected to non French and non white workers from the various nations on grounds of ‘laziness, lack of skill or intelligence, physical weakness and moral corruption<sup>37</sup>’. As the wartime shortage of labour and manpower dictated that non French workers or labour force from the colonies be employed, French authorities tried to grapple with this inevitable need for non French labour by subjecting workers of colour to a system of regimentation (*encadrement*) that consisted of segregation and isolation<sup>38</sup>. This was done to prevent racial conflict and various reasons were cited such as lack of available translators, need to extract maximum benefit or work from the labour, prevent the ‘corruption of colonial subjects by the temptations of French society<sup>39</sup>’.

The gender reversal that had happened with the French men leaving for the front, leaving French women to do the world of men, resulted in the Frenchwomen being in the same predicament as the workers from the colonies. Just like the labour from the colonies, Frenchwomen too, were treated as aliens and undesirables<sup>40</sup>. The two groups came as neophytes to the world of heavy industry, were paid less than French men, and were often assigned the least skilled and desired tasks to perform<sup>41</sup>.

Imagine the shock of the non whites when they saw women doing the heavy job of men in factories<sup>42</sup>. A Malagasy worker stationed in Toulouse wrote to a friend what can easily be ascribed to any colonial worker, as the sentiments expressed are applicable. “Would you believe that white women, who at home love to have us serve them, work as much as men here. They are very numerous in the workshops and labour with the same ardour as men<sup>43</sup>”.

### **Departmental Followers to ‘Coolie Corps’ to Indian Labour Corps**

India's contribution to the First World War has been largely determined in terms of the contribution of the combatants and soldiers who participated from India. After the

---

<sup>37</sup> Stovall, T. “ The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War”. *The American Historical Review*, 103(3), 1998, pp. 737-769. doi:10.2307/2650570

<sup>38</sup> Stovall, *The Color Line behind the Lines*, pp.737-769.

<sup>39</sup> Levine, ‘Battle colors’, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Stovall, *The Color Line behind the Lines*, p. 765.

<sup>41</sup> Levine, ‘Battle colors’, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> Stovall, *The Color Line behind the Lines*, p. 754.

<sup>43</sup> Levine, ‘Battle colors’, p. 127.

infantry divisions were shifted out of France and Belgium to Mesopotamia in December 1915, there was another kind of Indian contribution which was rushed in to fill in the gap left by the departure of these soldiers<sup>44</sup>. However, these new entrants were not combatants but members of the Indian Labour Corps who landed in France in June of 1917 and continued to stay there until after the war.

The last mentioned workers- technical and unskilled who worked as labour for building various bridges, roads, laying railways lines were called the ‘coolie corps’, and had been sent for duty before also to Abyssinia (1868) and China in 1900 and Somaliland in Africa in 1902-1904<sup>45</sup>. In the First World War, they began to be called the Indian Labour Corps (ILC), which was more dignified and they were properly enlisted under the Indian Porter Corps (IPC) and as followers under the Indian Army Act<sup>46</sup>.

It is a little known fact, just recently brought to light, that after the departure of the Sikhs and other Indian combatants from France in the middle of 1915, there was a dearth of manpower in that country. Almost 50000 non combatants were sent in a steady flow starting from June of 1917. On March 24th 1917, the British War Office stated that 18,286 horse and mule drivers were needed in France as the British personnel had left for Mesopotamia, thus creating a big gap which needed to be filled up quickly<sup>47</sup>. As late as August 1919, when the war had ended, there were 680 Indian labourers who were left in Northern France and another 14,441 artillery drivers, grooms, accounts and postal employees who had been left over in France and were still waiting for their return home to India.

It is just another example of the kind of discrimination that was faced by the Indian Labour Corps in France that they were not classified as combatants. The British personnel working for the British labour battalions were classified as combatants. The combatant rank gave them not only social prestige but also entitled them to the

---

<sup>44</sup> R. Singha, ‘The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (87), 2015, pp. 27-62.

<sup>45</sup> George Buchanan, *The Tragedy of Mesopotamia*, Edinburgh:1930, p. 90, Retrieved 28 May 2021.[http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b746003](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b746003)

<sup>46</sup> Radhika Singha, ‘The Great War and a “Proper” Passport for the Colony. Border-Crossing in British India, c. 1882-1922’, *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 50,2009, pp. 289-315.

<sup>47</sup> A. L. Conklin, ‘Colonialism and human rights, a contradiction in terms? The case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914’, *The American Historical Review*, 103(2), 2018, pp.419-442.

salaries and allowances, medical facilities, leave entitlements, diet, kit and other facilities which were given to the normal combatants. The labour advisor to the ISC Kamal Lord Amphill pressed for the identification of the Indian Labour Corps (ILC) members as combatants but this was not considered, therefore highlighting the discrimination which was given out to the Indian labourers when compared to the British counterparts<sup>48</sup>.

2 ILC were recruited from Punjab and 1 from Madras and were sent to Mesopotamia as there was extreme logistical urgency there<sup>49</sup>. The Port of Basra was to be reconstructed, its walls and harbour fortified and roads and railways lines laid as men and material had to be speedily conveyed inland and the port of Basra became the all important entry point into Mesopotamia<sup>50</sup>. Canals had to be dug deeper, water works laid and pipelines for oil and water were to be constructed.

Even Indian jails were recruiting centers for these labour and the prisoners were allowed to join the ILC and IPC under a remission scheme. 16,000 prisoners were drafted into 7 Jail Porter and Labour Corps and Jail Garner Corps. 348,735 labour corps were sent to Mesopotamia alone by 1919. The demand for the labour continued beyond the war and labour continued to be recruited and sent abroad by the British to various outposts of the empire.

The lure of the recruitment was, 'Young men get to see the world on a good pay'<sup>51</sup>

Here too, the recruiting and transit of the IPC and ILC were adroitly handled. The stigma attached to indentured labour for the sugar plantations overseas was already quite deep rooted. There was a lot of political agitation by various nationalist bodies against the sending of Indian labour abroad<sup>52</sup>. That is why in order to avoid the stigma and the political complication, the British Indian government sidestepped the various

---

<sup>48</sup> A. Koller, 'The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26(1-2), 2008, pp.111-133.

<sup>49</sup> Radhika Singha, 'Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq. The Jail Porter and Labor Corps, 1916-1920', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49/2, 2007, pp. 412-445

<sup>50</sup> Radhika Singha, 'The Recruiter's Eye on "the Primitive"'. To France - and Back - in the Indian Labour Corps, 1917-18', in Kitchen, James E./Miller, Alisia/Rowe, Laura (eds.), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts. Competing Histories of the First World War*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, pp. 199-224.

<sup>51</sup> Circular, 14 May 1917, IOR/L/Mil/2/5132, India Office Records, British Library (IOR).

<sup>52</sup> SugataBose, *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Cambridge: 2008, pp. 54-57.

acts and laws that were synonymous with indentured labour. The Indian Emigration Act was put aside and the labour were recruited as non-combatants<sup>53</sup> and were sent abroad as part of the Indian Army. However, they were not accorded the formal rank of combatants due to the ideological implications and fiscal considerations.

### **Recruitment of Labour Corps**

As Punjab was the chief recruiting ground for the combatants, the rest of India was looked at for the Labour requirements. Labour from Orissa and Bihar had habitually gone overseas as part of the indentured labour, but the government could not overdraw on these states<sup>54</sup>. The factories, docks, shipyards, mines, fields and ports across India had to be kept operating at optimum level and for this the already established labour supply lines could not be overstretched.

The Punjab was vulnerable as with the bulk of the Jat Sikh male population, 1 in 28 were sent overseas, the harvest still had to be brought in and agricultural labour was needed in the province. There could be extreme dissatisfaction if the price of agricultural labour, which was already high in Punjab, rose further<sup>55</sup>.

These labour battalions were usually drawn from Bihar, Orissa, The hills of Chhattisgarh, Assam, Burma Ranges and other tribal areas. In the rest of India too, mere incentives and cash rewards were not enough for contractors, overseers and regimental networks to supply adequate numbers of 'good quality' labour. For this reason, for the recruitment of the labour for the Indian Army, the Indian Army Act was brought into play, which saved the recruiting from unwanted public and press scrutiny and attention and it was classified as 'important war work'<sup>56</sup>. By August 1916, both combatant and non-combatant recruiting became the responsibility of the Adjutant General. Quotas were fixed for particular territories and labour had to be brought in for those territories as per the numbers prescribed. For the purposes of

---

<sup>53</sup> George Buchanan, *The Tragedy of Mesopotamia*, London: Routledge, 1938, p. 91. Retrieved on 28 May 2021, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b746003](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b746003)

<sup>54</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections. India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*, Berkeley: California University Press, 2008, p. 98.

<sup>55</sup> Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Stefan Tetzlaff, 'The Turn of the Gulf Tide. Empire, Nationalism, and South Asian Labor Migration to Iraq, c. 1900-1935', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 2011, pp. 7-27.



recruitment community leaders, religious leaders, revenue officials, headman of the villages and all respected men were brought into play. Recruiting agents were deployed and various awards and rewards were given to them to get the specified number of recruits from their areas.

In terms of the recruitment, all the British officials desired that some element of pay be withheld so that the labour could be kept under better and strict control. This was not found to be possible as advance payment was the norm in the case of migrating labourers. Also the recruiting areas had been somewhat dampened by the lack of news about the labour which had already left for Mesopotamia. Finally in order to be able to recruit the appropriate number of people which were to be acquired from places such as Chhota Nagpur, Bihar, Orissa, the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh, Burma ranges, Assam and other recruitment and catchment areas for labour, the British government agreed to give 3 months advance payment to the family before the labour agreed to board ship bound for work abroad.

Towards the end of the war in 1918-19, there was a sharp rise in prices and a series of bad harvests which made it easier to recruit men as labour. The monthly wages of the IPC and the ILC were quite good and comparable to the soldiers pay. The non-combatants also got 15 rupees for IPC and 20 rupees for ILC<sup>57</sup>. However the non-combatants were not entitled to the same allowances, cash awards, recognitions, medical care and injury pensions as they combatants. A labourer who died in service did not receive any pension for his family, but a one-time gratuity payment. Low caste, economically weaker and tribal sections of Indians were recruited as labour and sent abroad. They desired to earn good money and see the world but many were not prepared for the actual harshness of the living conditions which they encountered overseas.

The Indian Labour Corps and the Indian Porter Corps were recruited from the United provinces of Bihar and Orissa, Bengal, Assam and Burma. Punjab was not a favoured area of recruitment for the reasons mentioned above. Most labour was engaged for a year and most companies refused to accept any extension of their contract because of

---

<sup>57</sup> Singha, Radhika (2011) *The Recruiter's Eye on "the Primitive". To France - and Back - in the Indian Labour Corps, 1917-18*, in: Kitchen, James E./Miller, Alisia/Rowe, Laura (eds.): *Other Combatants, Other Fronts. Competing Histories of the First World War*, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 199-224.

the problems involved. In Mesopotamia, nevertheless there was a longer presence and more dangerous element for the labour and they had to work in almost conditions like indentured labour. The work was relentless in these areas on a war footing for the duration of the war. The non combatants also, like the combatants could not leave their areas of work and were recruited for the duration of the war<sup>58</sup>.

An interesting element of the ideals and the IPC working overseas was that the government of India could not supply the three British commissioned officers which were required for every labour or having 2000 labour that it's sent to France therefore civilians were added as supervisors over companies of 500 the supervisors were drawn from various educated Indians durations and Europeans full stop head men and community leaders who had assisted in the recruitment of the labour were also sent with them as supervisors sometimes. In Mesopotamia the IPC had about 800 men and the IRC had about thousand to 1250 man the shortage of British officers was always a problem with these labour code and various methods like better pay scales home leave better medical care extra was extended to the labour to keep them working efficiently during the duration of the war<sup>59</sup>.

The problems faced by the ILC and IPC were the same as that of the combatants but they were never given priority or the care which was given to the combatants. They were always considered second class and expendable and they had to suffer extremely harsh working and living conditions<sup>60</sup>. Their medical needs were ignored, their diet and sanitation and living quarters were poor, they were given long and back breaking duties and they had to suffer the brunt of shortages which were quite common. Harsh climatic conditions such as extreme cold in France or the sweltering sun in Middle East made many die while working. They were not even entitled to a pension and their families received a one- time gratuity payment after their death.

---

<sup>58</sup> Stefan. Tetzlaff, *The Turn of the Gulf Tide, Empire, Nationalism, and South Asian Labor Migration to Iraq, c. 1900-1935*, International Labor and Working-Class History. 2008, pp. 7-27

<sup>59</sup> Singha, *Labour (India) in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 2016-02-19, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10836.

<sup>60</sup> Tetzlaff, *The Turn of the Gulf Tide*, pp 7-27

Labour from India was preferred by the British army in Mesopotamia, Middle East, Persia, Africa, and other theatres of war because they did not have to rely on the local contractors. The local contractors like the Arabs in Mesopotamia could not overcharge the British army for supplying labour<sup>61</sup>. That supply of labour was also consistent and reliable from India and the British Army could force the labour to work for as long and in any conditions as they desired<sup>62</sup>.

As the war work was critical and the railway lines had to be laid, the roads made, the canals deepened, the ports and docks constructed, and water and Oil lines laid, the British army just could not face the prospect of delays owing to labour shortages<sup>63</sup>. The very fate of the military campaigns depended upon the work which was carried out by these non-combatants and labourers in the Middle East, France, Africa, Mesopotamia etc. The working hours for the labour in Mesopotamia were very long, frequently adding up to 10 hours in a day, with the additional time of travelling to and fro from the work site. The labour in Middle East was not given any time off and was made to work under any conditions as their work was vital to the success of the British army in Mesopotamia.

There were some strikes and frequent protests where as the labour refused to work under the harsh conditions that were prevailing. In order to maintain discipline and keep the work flow consistent, the British army had given a lot of flexibility to the commandants of the labour Corps to keep the labour 'on-the-job'. Measures such as flogging, caning, getting extra work, working in chains or fetters and such punishments were handed out to the labour.

Both in France and Mesopotamia where most of the labour had been sent during the course of the war, military authorities often extended the contracts or interpreted the end of the war very flexibly in order to make the labour work for longer. It was very difficult to send the labour back to India or to get more labour out from India and that is why the labour which was already present on the job site was sought to be kept there for long stretches of time. This naturally created a lot of resentment in the minds

---

<sup>61</sup> Tetzlaff, *The Turn of the Gulf Tide*, pp. 7-27.

<sup>62</sup> Singha, *Labour (India) in 1914-1918*, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Singha, 'The Great War and a "Proper" Passport for the Colony. Border-Crossing in British India, c. 1882-1922', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 50, 2019, pp. 289-315.

of the labour who were made to work for less pay and given more work than they had bargained for in harsher conditions than they had envisaged.

The letters which have become such an evocative store-house of information about the experiences of the soldiers in their own words, chronicle of their thoughts, grievances and personal experiences have not yielded much to account for the experience of the labour from India who served in France. The few letters which have survived have not been of much use to the historian owing to the reason the censor himself writes in the report. The bulk of the labour code letters were in languages which were unknown to the censors and thus could not be translated and recorded. 'The few in Hindi and Urdu which could be read did not contain anything of the slightest interest'<sup>64</sup>. Even the offices and the commanders of the Indian labour corps have not left much in the way of record because of the feeling of inferiority which they probably felt due to the fact that they commanded a labour unit as opposed to a combatant one.

At the end of the war, the labour force was made to return to India, but many were compelled to stay back. After their return too, the labour created a lot of dissent and discontent among the returning military personnel as well as the public. The labour that returned was not at all happy or satisfied with the conditions in which they were released from their army work. They did not have access to the benefits which the combatants had such as family pensions in case of death, land grants, revenue grants, remission of land revenue, bank loans at reduced rates of interest, awards or titles and other benefits.

### **Sikh response to the declaration of the First World War**

The immediate reaction of the Sikh bodies to the declaration of the war by the British government was in tandem with the overall reaction of the Indians. There was an immediate lull in the state of mild animosity which had developed between the Sikhs and their colonial masters. The political agitations were suspended, so as not to embarrass the government<sup>65</sup>.

---

<sup>64</sup> R. Singha, 'The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (87), 2015, pp 27-62. Retrieved on June 2, 2021 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43957055>

<sup>65</sup> *The Bengalee*, August 13, 1914, p. 2.



**Life was extremely hard and casualty rates high in the trenches in Europe.**



**An artist's representation of the Sikh Soldiers in action in the First World War.**



In a flurry of activity, the Sikh organisations made vocal affirmations of loyalty through messages and meetings. On August 10, 1914 at a public meeting for the Sikhs held at Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar, under the stewardship of Sardar Arur Singh, the Manager of Darbar Sahib. It was resolved to hold continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib (*Akhand Path*) which was completed two days later, with fervent prayers for the success of the British<sup>66</sup>. The Amritsar Temperance Society also sprang into action and started a 'Temperance First Aid Brigade' to help the British government and Indian people<sup>67</sup>.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar shot off a message to the Viceroy at Shimla<sup>68</sup>, declaring the fealty of the Sikhs to the British at home and on the battlefields. Shri Guru Singh Sabha at Lahore wired a letter of support to the government, expressing their loyalty.<sup>69</sup> There was a public meeting called on August 9, 1914 at Bawli Sahib, which was well attended. In his rousing speech, the President of the meeting, Sardar Sewa Ram Singh called upon the Sikhs to volunteer en masse` in defence and honour of the British flag and help the British in their hour of need<sup>70</sup>. Within a few days, the towns and countryside of Punjab seemed to be enveloped in a whirl of support and sympathy for the British cause.

The Sikhs seemed to have forgotten the grievances they had against the British government. These centred around the Komagatamaru Incident where the ship was denied permission to dock and passengers to disembark at Canada. Two other Sikh issues of a religious nature were the destruction of the boundary wall of the Rikabganj Gurudwara in Delhi and the Sikhs grievance that the government was not taking strict action against the people who had made blasphemous allegations against the Sikh Gurus in the pamphlet "Khalsa Panth Ki Haqiqat".

Writing in 1943, when the British Empire was faced with another total war- the Second World War, Lieutenant- General G. N Molesworth remarked During the Great War, by various methods amounting ultimately to desperation, we managed to get

---

<sup>66</sup> *The Tribune* August 16, 1914, p. 4

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19, 1914, p.5

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, August 16, 1914, p.4

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, August 15, 1914. P. 4

about 850,000 good fighting men over 4 years. We did not spread our net very much wider than the 'martial classes', but we drained those to the last drop<sup>71</sup>.

Martial Race ideology, which appeared in full bloom and percolated in four the regional armies (the Madras Army, the Bombay Army, the Bengal Army and the Punjab Frontier Force) when Field Marshal Lord Roberts became the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in 1885. 11 Roberts and his followers who were Major G.F. MacMunn, Colonel L.W. Shakespear, the commandant of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles just before the First World War, two Royal Artillery officers Lieutenant General W.H. Goodenough and Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Dalton, added some more criteria like climate and frontier but the basic paradigm remained same. Only the groups and regions which were approved of experienced change over time. The Sikhs and Muslims of Punjab replaced the Purbiyas of north India.

Over a fourteen-month period beginning in October 1914, the nearly 20,748 British soldiers and 89,335 Indian sepoy were augmented by 49,273 Indian labourers. At the battles of Ypres, Festubert, Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle, Second Ypres, and Loos, these non-combatants followed the Indian Corps<sup>72</sup>. In addition to these people who were directly involved in the war effort, are the women, children, men and elderly who were a part of the families of the soldiers. The fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, wives, sons and daughters, uncles, cousins, grandparents and other extended family were also stakeholders in the war effort.

Their lives were impacted irrevocably by the four years of the war in emotional, economic, social, political and familial terms. The patches of memories or references that are available in the official reports, letters, correspondence or press of the time give us a mere glimpse of how these family members of the soldiers weathered the storm that raged for four years unabated. An attempt has been made in this chapter to also shine a light in the dark corners of the hearths and homes which were plunged in

---

<sup>71</sup> Roy, *Race and recruitment in India*, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> George Morton Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration*, *War in History*, 13.3 (2006): 329; Lt-Colonel. J.W.B. Merewether and Lt. Colonel Sir Frederick Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, London: John Murray, 1918, p. 459.



stress, pain of separation, constant anxiety, rigorous of separation and uncertainty as a result of the Great War in which the menfolk of their families were engaged.

### **Recruitment of Non Combatants**

In the initial days of the war, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for recruitment as war time demand brought greater opportunity. The rise in prices of commodities such as wheat and sugar in the years just preceding the First World War also made the sons of peasants with small land holdings to prefer military service as a second source of regular income. There was so much initial enthusiasm for joining the service when the war was announced that even the authorities were surprised. Many thought that they were being enlisted for a short imperial campaign that was special. Kaushik Roy quotes Algernon Rumbold<sup>73</sup>

A wave of enthusiastic loyalty spread through the ranks of articulate Indians and this surprised the authorities. The feeling was based on an acceptance of the rightness of Britain's decision to fight in defence of Belgium with the hazy idea that a German victory would harm India. The prospect that Indian soldiers would fight beside the British generated a sense of pride amongst certain sections of the Indians and they believed that India's contribution in the defence of the British Empire would be rewarded by the Sahibs later<sup>74</sup>,

When the news of the heavy casualties and the carnage on the western front reached India, there was a lull in the recruitment. When the German machine guns and heavy artillery was encountered by the Indians in woefully inadequate clothing in the frostbitten, damp, perpetually frozen trenches, the tremendous destruction caused by modern weapons seemed all the more interminable and lethal<sup>75</sup>. Potential recruits in India got wind of this fact from the letters which were written by the soldiers from the Western front<sup>76</sup>.

In 1918, it had become imperative that more and more soldiers be sent out from India to serve in the war. For this purpose, a secret telegram was sent from the British Prime

---

<sup>73</sup> Sir Algernon Rumbold, *A watershed in India: 1914-1922*, London: Athlone Press, 1979, p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> K. Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880- 1918', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp 1310-1347, Retrieved on March 24, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24494199>

<sup>75</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian army on the western front*, p. 165.

<sup>76</sup> David Omissi, *Indian voices from the Great war, Soldiers Letters 1914-1918*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, p. 27.

Minister to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford where he instructed the Viceroy to “do everything in your power to increase Indian establishment for war, not only in troops but in railway materials and military equipments of all kinds”<sup>77</sup>.

In this regard, immediate action started in India. The Viceroy called a war conference in Delhi on 27-28 April, 1918 in which Indian leaders such as M. K Gandhi, and Nawabs and princes were also invited. This conference was followed by provincial meetings with the governors, and 500,000 more men were decided to be recruited within a year.

### **Stress, separation and loss among the Non-Combatants**

In response to the question, "How do the sepoy's take so much?" Military experience has an answer: The sepoys' mental fortitude is reflected in the rhetoric of their war culture, which explains their continued participation in the fighting<sup>78</sup>. The notion of a long and sustained war has been forced on conventional military historians who dwell on defeats by censorship and misinformation. The military propagandists, for example, were well aware of the influence of folk music. Popular songs from the period were effectively used as army propaganda pieces, performed at village fairs and recruiting meetings to entice Indian men to join the war effort in exchange for rewards such as better food and clothes (Singh, 2003).

The Non combatants also suffered from the extreme stress of the Great War and many of them were even treated for it- albeit with less empathy than the soldiers, even the non-white ones. The Non –combatants or men from the Indian labour Corps were more likely to be labelled as ‘defective’ or feeble-minded’, as these categories were already recognised in the mental deficiency Act, 1913<sup>79</sup>. W.D Chambers, who was a nerve Specialist in the French city of Boulogne, studied the patients in his hospital’s mental wards and labelled the ‘defectives’ who were members of the Labour Corps as having ‘infantile characters and stigmata of degeneration’. They were considered to

---

<sup>77</sup> Bagchi, *Indian Economy and Society during World War One*. p. 16

<sup>78</sup> **Thierry Di Costanzo**, *Memory and history of the Great(er) War and India: from a national-imperial to a more global perspective*, *E-rea* [Enligne], 14.2 | 2017, mis en ligne le 15 Juin 2017, consulté le 01 avril 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/5844> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.5844>

<sup>79</sup> Mark. Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, Manchester: Plural Publishers, 2000, p. 49.

be already prone to mental disorders owing to their 'feeble mindedness' which was attributed to their hereditary, race and environment<sup>80</sup>. There have been a school of psychologists and psychiatrists who have argued that 'the distress that non combatant veterans or veterans of moderate combat suffered could be attributed to personality traits that existed before military service'<sup>81</sup>.

Asylum reports state that the non-combatants (labourers, *Bhistis* or water carriers, grooms, cooks) and soldiers alike, who were declared 'military insanes' in the war years due to trauma were from two provinces that also contributed the maximum number of combatants to the war- Punjab (51.19% ) and The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (23.94%). Many non combatants must have struggled with the delayed effects of experiencing the trauma of warfare, but they did not receive as much attention, or were considered valuable enough to be given adequate treatment. The 9<sup>th</sup> Bhopal Rifles earned a lot of discredit when they revolted. Their objections seem to be based primarily on religion as they were Brahmins, who objected to the lack of religiosity and rations. They tried to instigate the other soldiers also to revolt, but were not very successful.

The Indians also were not treated at par with the British soldiers and this was made apparent in almost all respects, be it the pay and allowances, which in the case of the colonial soldiers was three to four times less than that of an Englishman serving in the same capacity. No officer who was Indian crossed the rank of a Lieutenant till the end of the war and the Indian officers were not allowed to command the British troops<sup>82</sup>.

The Indian combatants and non combatants also faced many other troubles<sup>83</sup> which they had not even imagined. The mortality rate was also accelerated due to the deadly diseases and ailments which the Indians suffered from such as frost bite, chilblains etc. There were about thirty five diseases which were detected in the Indians<sup>84</sup> and

---

<sup>80</sup> W. D. Chambers, 'Mental Wards with the British Expeditionary Force: A Review of Ten Months' Experience', *Journal of Mental Science*, lxxv, 1919, p.270.

<sup>81</sup> P. Karsten, 'The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored', *American Quarterly*, 36(3), 1984, pp. 389-418.

<sup>82</sup> B. Rajarajan, 'Indian Army and the First World War- A Study if Indian Army's participation in France and Flanders', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1995, pp. 650-655.

<sup>83</sup> Lord Hardinge, *My Indian Years 1910-1916*, London: Cambridge University Press, p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> Letter dispatch dated 16 Dec., 1914 from the Deputy Adjutant General Indian Section General HQ Rouen to the War Section Army HQ Delhi, New Delhi, IEF A Volume VI Part 1, HSMD, p. 677

these were primarily attributed to the bad sanitation, poor drainage, exposure to extreme climatic conditions and inadequate clothing. In sufficient medical facilities and faulty transportation facilities were also a huge problem for the troops serving on the vast frontline that stretched for hundreds of miles.<sup>85</sup>

The princely states were in charge of maintaining horses as per the Siladaar System. The Indian government also supplied the majority of the needs of the Indian troops, be it the transport material, horses, mules, wagons etc. the syces, grooms, grass cutters etc were also sent by the India government.

### **The Womenfolk back home**

The Sikh women of Punjab who were left at home while an overwhelming majority of their men served abroad in a prolonged alien war is a subject of keen study. The wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of these men played a large role in not only their life, but also in their memories of 'home', while they served overseas. What was their reaction to the war and the part that their men were playing in it? How did they manage to support their men while they were far away from home, hearth and fields? How did they cope with the absence of the men? What was their reaction when the war weary veterans and battle hardened soldiers returned home after years, perhaps lacking a limb and most certainly carrying scars, both mental and physical from their time at the warfront in Europe, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, Central Asia, Belgium, Egypt and Palestine et al.

“The best indicator to the progress of a nation is the treatment of its women<sup>86</sup>”. In the context of Sikh women, there were invariably much in their orientation, reactions and basic outlook that made them well suited to the vagaries and trials of enduring long separations from their men in situations of extreme stress. Historically, Sikh women have enjoyed a much greater freedom, equality and exalted status in the community and society compared to other castes and communities in India. Starting from the time of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, women were accorded respect, equality and a degree of personal and social freedom which is quite unique by the standards of

---

<sup>85</sup> Philip Mason, *Matter of Honour: An account of the Indian Army, its officers and Men*, 1975, p. 415.

<sup>86</sup> A. R. Wani, Role and Status of Women in Sikh Religion through Sri Guru Nanak Perspectives. *Electronic Research Journal of Literature*, 1, 2019, p. 91.

a time when Pardah, sati, female infanticide etc were common across India<sup>87</sup>. Even during the days of the later Gurus, Sikh women continued to enjoy a status that was not discriminatory and joined the men in every shade of hardship, including warfare or martyrdom<sup>88</sup>, in addition to accompanying the menfolk in times of danger and war. In the dark and dangerous days after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikh traditions are full of the heroic tales of Sikh women exhorting their menfolk to die in the battlefield or get martyred and the women themselves leading Sikhs into battle as in the case of Mai Bhago<sup>89</sup> etc.

The mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and other female relations of the soldiers knew that it was vital to keep up the morale of the men fighting far from home. The strains of the martial blood ran deep indeed. Martial identity was a way of life for the whole caste, clan and family who identified themselves perfectly with the martial traditions on which they were reared since childhood. The martial identity was so deeply embedded in the psyche and hearts of the men and women folk alike that it was a deeply cherished part of their social and cultural identity and family heritage.

The women had always been encouraged to believe that their family prestige and individual honour was inextricably linked with the courage and fighting prowess of the men. Thus, a sister of three brothers fighting in the Egyptian theatre were reminded by her at the end of 1914 in a letter, ‘War is the task of young men, to sport with death upon the field of battle, to be as a tiger and to draw the sword of honour and daring<sup>90</sup>’.

The role of the Sikh women in upholding, propagating and strengthening military traditions is indisputable. If the Sikhs were willing to die for their faith and their freedom, the women have never been less willing. The martial traditions of Sikhism were upheld by the women while their men harassed the Afghan, lead the Mughal on

---

<sup>87</sup> R. S. Chillana, ‘Condition of women as depicted’, *Punjab Past and Present*, 7(1), Apr 1973, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp.110–18.

<sup>88</sup> S. K. Luthra, ‘Out of the ashes: Sikh American institution building and the promise of equality for Sikh women’, *Sikh Formations*, 13(4), 2017, pp.308-332.

<sup>89</sup> B. Bertolani, ‘Women and Sikhism in Theory and Practice: Normative Discourses, Seva Performances, and Agency in the Case Study of Some Young Sikh Women in Northern Italy’, *Religions*, 11(2), 2020, p.91.

<sup>90</sup> A. T. Jarboe, ‘Soldiers of empire Indian sepoys in and beyond the imperial metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919’, Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University, 2013, p. 126.

wild goose chases and cheerfully climbed the steps to martyrdom in the dark days of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The women sent their men to battle when they fought the wild tribes men of the frontier, won Kashmir and Ladakh and even entered Kabul as a part of the Khalsa Army under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of the Sikh soldiers of the British Indian Army hailed from the same stock. They were the ones who literally held the fort back home, kept the fires burning and the fields tilled while the men were out on campaigns. M.K Gandhi, who was one of the most vocal recruiting enthusiasts for the British Government in India realised fully the power of the women in inducing the men to fight when he said in a speech delivered on June 26, 1918

Sisters, you should encourage your husbands and brothers and sons and not to worry them with your objections. If you want them to be true men, send them to the army with your blessings. Don't be anxious about what may happen to them on the battlefield<sup>91</sup>.

Their contribution to the morale, courage and mental strength of their men went far beyond what was conceived by most British writers of the time. Even Major Falcon, the renowned author of the Handbook of Sikhs, summarised the role of the women in very cursory and surface terms by saying that the Women's main jobs are to cook meals and provide it to the men at work, as well as to spin cotton, pick cotton, and harvest maize and millet heads. They don't perform any more difficult tasks. They take great care of the milch cows. They also clean up the houses and yards every morning and turn livestock manure into fuel cakes<sup>92</sup>.

Malcolm Darling, who made an intricate and sensitive study of the conditions of life, in its many different forms in the Punjab villages, better understood the position of the Sikh women as he witnessed them at close quarters and even interacted with several. He writes that the Sikh lady enjoys a better status than any other in central Punjab. A Sikh wife goes to the Gurudwara with her husband, and both men and women worship there equally and quite often, women take the lead in the collective prayers.

---

<sup>91</sup>M.K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ahmedabad: India Press, XIV, 1965, p. 454.

<sup>92</sup> Falcon, *Handbook of Sikhs*, p. 45.

Outside the Gurdwara, too, discrimination is far less pronounced than it is in other places, and there is no disparity between how a boy and a girl are treated<sup>93</sup>.

Flora Annie Steel, writing in 1929, discussed the practise of female infanticide that was still practised in Punjab. She wrote that she herself had told the Western police officials in the Punjab that she had heard Punjabi women describing their habit of leaving their new born daughters outside the village, for the jackals to carry off. This act was committed by the women because it was believed that if the jackals carried away the infant daughter, the mother would then have a son<sup>94</sup>. Sons were doubtlessly more coveted than daughters because they meant less expense and more hands to work the fields in a society which was predominantly patriarchal. When the men went missing in large numbers for long periods of time, as they did during the war, the women took on the role of men, and in the doing, helped the process of their own liberalisation and improvement in status<sup>95</sup>.

Punjabi women are described by Flora Annie Steel as being tall and physically fit. She further describes how women played a valuable role in cultivation to the extent that a father married off his daughter before puberty, but keep them from their husband's houses as long as possible. Years would often elapse before the bridegroom could get possession of the bride and quite often, he had to sue for his wife in the courts. Another observation of the English observer regarding the women of Punjab is that the peasant women of the villages, were on the whole, free from the obsession with sexuality, unlike the town bred women<sup>96</sup>.

The social impact of the experiences of the men at the front in the war years definitely reflected in their changed attitudes towards women education and empowerment back home. The men were increasingly in favour of education in general and this recognition of the value of education also extended to women's education. According to Annie Besant, as early as 1917, a great wave of change could be seen passing over Indian womanhood... The change is partly due to English influences reacting upon

---

<sup>93</sup> M. Darling, *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, Oxford: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. Sutcliffe, 'Feminizing the professional: The government reports of Flora Annie Steel', *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 7(2), 1992, pp.153-173.

<sup>95</sup> M. Darling, *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt*, Oxford: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1947, pp.93-110.

<sup>96</sup> Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity*, London: A. &C. Black Ltd., 1929, pp. 37.

them through their husbands; partly due to contact with Englishwomen...<sup>97</sup> The Sikh people were also very enlightened when it came to the education of the girl child as Darling writes that it was typical of the Jat that he is almost as eager for the education of his daughter as of his son, for the double reason that she may be able to read the Granth Sahib and be an economical housewife<sup>98</sup>.”

There was also an endorsement given by an old Sikh gentleman who told Darling that looking back over 70 years (In 1931), he can say that education has made Sikh women more independent and more intelligent. The Sikh women were even financially independent, with some indulging in money lending on the same terms as men, but mainly against jewellery.

No matter how brave a front the women put up in the absence of the men who frequently did not return alive from the war, it is indisputable that the Sikh women faced a very difficult time in their absence. Santanu Das, in his paper calls the women of the War “poor, illiterate and disfranchised” somewhat misleadingly. Although their voices might not be recorded for history, it does not necessarily mean that the women were voiceless. In his book, scrawled on a postcard, without a break in the letters, but quite legible in Gurmukhi is a letter from a young girl Kishan Devi to her father Havildar Sewa Singh of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sikh Pioneers. The picture of unflinching stoic resignation and passivity which is often attributed to the women is shaken by this small testament as it eloquently and heart wrenchingly describes, in a few words, the agony and strain of the women left behind. Both the daughter who writes and the mother who hovers anxiously and agonising in the background are clearly visible through this brief missive.

Dear Father, Ek onkarsatguru Prasad “There is One God by the grace of the True Guru”] This is Kishan Devi. I am writing to inform that I am alright over here. We received your letter...We came to know about you. We were really scared after receiving your letter. Mother says that you can write to us about what goes on in your heart. Father, I shall read all your letters. I do not fight with anyone. My heart is yours. You are everything to me, and I worry about you. I am like a living dead

---

<sup>97</sup>Annie Besant, *Girls' Education, The birth of New India; A Collection of Writings and Speeches on Indian Affairs*, Madras: Theosophical Publications Society, 1929, p. 53.

<sup>98</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and Waste*, p.112.



without you. ... Dear father please take leave and come to meet us. Please do come. We repeat again and again. My mother bows her head to you to pay respect. We do not have any more envelopes. ... Father, please take a leave and come and meet us. Please do come. Please do reply to our letter.... Reply to our letter soon<sup>99</sup>.

There is much that this letter says-explicitly and implicitly. The daughter Kishan Devi was a pre-teen, but she was already able to write to her father, implying that she was literate. Maybe her education was prompted by a desire to be able to write to her father who was serving far away in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt during the war and not rely on the post master or a scribe to either write her letter or read her father's reply. She was also talking in the letter on her mother's behalf, imploring her father to write to them whatever was there in his heart, and also telling him that his letters will be read by his daughter and not some village post clerk, so that he can be candid. The women are aware of the mental turmoil that the soldier might be facing, as in the letter they not only reassure him about their well being, but also motivate him by telling him they are well and concerned only about his well being. They implore him to take leave and come back for some time and also to reply to the letter, again and again. In a few lines, the mother and daughter are able to condense a world of emotions and longing into their letter.

Scattered incidents give a glimpse into the state of mind of the women and their diverse reactions to the loss of their men. A letter which has been saved for posterity as it was intercepted by the censors and transcribed in records is from an anguished wife to her husband serving abroad and it says, "Why do you not return? Your mother has gone out of her mind... The winter nights are ahead, and how can I, a lone woman, stay by myself<sup>100</sup>?"

The reference to the loss of mind by the mothers of the men is repeated in another reference by Santanu Das who remembers an interview with the Punjabi novelist and Jat Sikh Mohan Kahlon in Kolkatta. The author lost two uncles in Mesopotamia and the loss drove his grandmother out of her mind. Their house became known as the

---

<sup>99</sup> S. Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 289.

<sup>100</sup> S. Das, 'Reframing life/war 'writing': objects, letters and songs of Indian soldiers, 1914–1918', *Textual Practice*, 29(7), 2015, pp.1265-1287.

*pagalkhana* (madhouse) in the village, becoming an indelible reminder of the loss which the family suffered in the war.

The peasant women from rural Punjab, who were more often illiterate and unlettered, had no formal and structured instrument such as correspondence or poems to vent their anguish, uncertainty, worry and concern for their men. They did however, have a constantly available and time tested outlet- folk songs. In rural Punjab, especially in the Sikh traditions, there has been a culture of *Bolis* (limericks) which are sung by a woman and the refrain taken up by the rest and accompanied by dancing of the *Giddha* (traditional dance) and clapping of hands, which sets the rhythm and the tone for the dance and song. The *bolis* cover almost every range of relationships, from that to mother in law to that with the elder brother of the husband, to the younger brother to her parents et al and provide a socially acceptable and natural emotional outlet for the women. These *bolis* are sung on every social occasion and even sometimes, without occasion, when women meet.

The *Bolis* from that time, and also the folk songs preserve a wealth of information about the real state of the Sikh woman's emotions while their men were away at war for years together. Amarjit Chandan, eminent Punjabi poet has recovered many of these songs and translated them<sup>101</sup>. Interestingly, just like the recruitment posters that were displayed across Punjab in both Urdu and Punjabi versions, these songs are also in both Urdu and Punjabi languages, reflective of the fact that the fate of the Muslim women from the North of Punjab and the Sikh women was quite similar as Punjabi Mussalmans were also considered martial race and were recruited in large numbers for the First World War. The songs of these women are filled with raw emotions such as angst, grief, passion, anger, cajoling, mourning, desolation, coaxing and dismay.

May you never be enlisted...

You who leaves me at my father's house

Even before we have lived together....

The famous song that was sung in the Hindi film Rockstar called 'Kateya Karoon' is a Punjabi folk song from the time of the First World War in which the woman says that

---

<sup>101</sup> Amarjit Chandan, *How They Suffered: World War I and Its Impact upon the Punjabis*, 206, <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> Retrieved on 29 June 2020.

she will spin cotton and sit at her spinning wheel all night while waiting for her husband to return from war.

Another song as per the translation by Amarjit Chandan talks of the train going to Basra, which is carrying away the husband and the wife left behind is asking the train to go slowly with the precious human cargo.

A change that was mentioned in the context of Sikh women, especially since the First World War which Darling mentions as 'striking' is that women wear much less jewellery now as Sikhs now 'boycotted' jewellery, influenced by the example of Europe and also the Akalis who preached against jewellery and drinking.

An important consequence of the Sikh men serving abroad was that there was even further strengthening of the woman's position in the family and community as the returning veterans of the war carried back a new found appreciation and regard for the women folk which had been missing before. The women, especially the wife began to be consulted in all matters, her food and dress became better, she was given precedence in ceremonies and family, her well being and comfort was considered and she could count on her husband's support in most matters<sup>102</sup>.

The wives had been managing the fields and the home affairs when the husbands went to war. This had brought a greater sense of freedom and also made it acceptable for the wives to be seen in the fields. They usually arranged for the cotton to be picked and arranged the fields to be harvested and the grains properly stored in the store room at home, or taken to market. In household matters too, the wife began to be given greater independence and she was in charge of what was to be bought and sold from the diary and grain supplies and the rations and stores.

In all the matters of society or ceremony such as weddings, betrothal or childbirth etc, women decided what presents were to be given or gifts exchanged. "The wives became the 'manager, cashier and disbursing officer' of the home"<sup>103</sup>. There was the introduction of new practices, better inter personal relationships between men and their womenfolk, attempts to improve standards and ways of living and augment their

---

<sup>102</sup> Darling, *Wisdom and waste*, p.295.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.331.

quality of life. In the words of Malcolm Darling, “This was something of real value which balanced the loss (of the thousands of men in the war)”<sup>104</sup>.

### **The Punjabi Press during the War years**

The Indian newspapers, and particularly the Punjab papers at this time were facing severe censoring and repression as the British Indian government sought to hide the harsh reality from the people of Punjab from which the bulk of the army was recruited. They were still recruiting and sending thousands of Punjabis abroad and did not want to spread malcontent and give too much information about the hardships of the battles. There were many newspapers in English as well as vernacular languages which were operating in the major urban centres of Punjab such as Lahore, Amrtisar, Rawalpindi, Ludhiana and Jullandhar. There were more than seventy newspapers being published from Lahore alone, including The Tribune in English which had a print run of 2000 copies. The Zamindar in Urdu had a print run of 15,000 and was the most influential and popular newspaper at the time.

The people of Punjab were very news hungry as there was hardly a home which was not connected to a family from where a son had gone to fight in the war. The people relied on newspapers for the news from the front, but the government kept a very strict check on the press as they were fearful of the very real danger of debacles and huge losses of life in the Middle East from becoming common knowledge. The recruiting centres across Punjab were working overtime to get enough recruits and any disruptive news that threatened this supply was sought to be repressed or avoided.

At the same time, in the war years, there was also a strong nationalist wave running in the masses. The Home Rule Movement, the land Acts, The Gurudwara Reform Movements, the various agitations, rising prices, economic depression, scarcity and other news was also of a very volatile nature and had to be monitored by the government.

One key aspect that caused a lot of sleepless nights in official quarters was the movements which were specifically targeting the Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army. The Ghadr party and the events that followed the Komagataru incident had profound implications for the recruitment and ensured loyalty and steadfastness of the

---

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.332.

Sikh soldiers. Hence, every effort was made by the Government of the Punjab under Sir Michael O'Dwyer to shield the soldiers from being touched in any way by the sparks that were flying their way by way of the Ghadr Party.

The Criminal Investigative Department of the Government of Punjab kept a very strict and watchful eye on the press in Punjab. They prepared a comprehensive weekly report that carried excerpts of the papers and also the general tone of the press. This was submitted to the Governor himself. The Government of India had already armed itself with the Defence of India Act in 1915, whereby no news that was detrimental to the interest of the war, recruitment or was disloyal to the King Emperor could be published. Any news which could serve as information for the enemies was also prohibited from being published. Sir Micheal O' Dwyer forced the closure of any newspaper or press that violated any of these norms or even the ones that were too critical of the Government or the war policies. Zafar Ali, editor of the top selling urdu newspaper *Zamindar* was under house arrest for the better part of the war years, with the paper being stopped and allowed to publish as per the tone of the paper and the mood of the Governor at any given time<sup>105</sup>.

Indian newspapers in general, and also Punjab based newspapers were united in asking for reform in the recruitment policies of the government, reforms in the army, army training to be given to Indians so that they could defend India if the need arose, political rights and home rule etc. the newspapers were quite supportive in the beginning, with one Punjabi newspaper's reaction to the news from the Western Front being, " their casualties might be heavy but the price will be rich"<sup>106</sup>. The newspapers, like the Indian political leadership harboured the fond hope that Indian aspirations for home rule and political rights would be granted if the soldiers performed well. "The soldiers will win for India the honour she deserves among the nations of the world", was the prevailing opinion.

Thus, the public opinion in India, and particularly Punjab, was kept under control by the careful repression of the free press while at the same time, loyalist and favourable press and newspapers were allowed to flourish and even provided encouragement.

---

<sup>105</sup> Jarboe, *Indian Soldiers in World War*, p. 187.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

## **Economic impact of the War**

In the four years of the war when all the resources of India were employed and deployed in the service of the protection of the British Empire, at home and overseas, it is not surprising that the economic consequences that India had to bear have been either downplayed or ignored completely. India's impoverished and underdeveloped economy was pushed to dire straits by the unremitting demands of an unending war where the British mercilessly diverted all available resources, men and material to service its own cause.

In purely economic terms too, a war economy is certainly in disequilibrium as the increase in demand is mismatched to scarce resources and supply of goods and services<sup>107</sup>. The two biggest exports of India- Jute and Cotton were both severely impacted, leading to instant industrial squeezes. Punjab was a considerable exporter of cotton, but as Japan and Germany- two of the biggest importers of cotton were both engaged in war, the outlook was greatly affected and "Japan emerged as a serious competition for both Indian and British cotton mills"<sup>108</sup>.

Saini has calculated that India made a "direct cash contribution of 229 million Pounds and sent material worth 250 million pounds during the war years". The loans that were given by the Indian government to the British for war purposes took this estimate to 367 million Pounds<sup>109</sup>. Every kind of material from leather to cotton to ammunition to railway tracks, rolling stock etc was a part of this huge consignment. India even sent 175,000 animals overseas for war purposes<sup>110</sup>.

At a time when the Indian economy was completely subordinated to the needs of the Empire and Britain, it was not surprising that even the non combatants found service overseas to be a attractive proposition than to be jobless and hungry in Punjab. In this regard, the service conditions and salary offered were very minimal, but as the Chief recruitment Officer for Bihar wrote to M.K Gandhi ( who was actively involved in recruiting Indians for the British Army) in December 1917, when the majority of the

---

<sup>107</sup> A. Bagchi, 'Indian Economy and Society during World War One', *Social Scientist*, 42(7/8), 2014, p.12.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>110</sup> A. Ganachari, 'First World War: Purchasing Indian Loyalties: Imperial Policy of Recruitment and Rewards', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, pp.779-88.

Indian soldiers were deployed in the Middle East and had already encountered untold deprivation, death and destruction,...

We need men for Mesopotamia for the Railway Training Depots at Gaya and Puri... from where they will be dispatched to Basra. We give an advance of Rs 30. The men get Rs 15 per month while in India, Rs 20 overseas. Rs 3 capitation fee for each man brought in<sup>111</sup>.

The prospective recruit for a combatant or non combatant role was aware of the dire situation in the theatres of war in the Middle East, where starvation and death were common and well known occurrence. This was well known in the Punjab by the middle of 1917 as soldiers had been managing to bypass the censor and still get the message across to their families and friends back home that they should not enlist. The lure of land allocation in the new but fertile Canal colonies in the Western Punjab and other economic benefits such as pensions, disability pensions and allowances, retirement benefits, privileged access to irrigation, rewards and recognitions were used to entice the Punjabi young man to sign up as a combatant or in the non combatant role.

By now, the British were not curtailing their recruitment drives to just the traditional Sikh recruiting districts in the Punjab, but were trawling the entire rural countryside in order for eligible men to recruit for service abroad. In fact, the British administration was engaged in the act of getting men to sign up for service and the higher he was in the hierarchy, the more men the officer (civil and military) was expected to procure<sup>112</sup>. Officials could lose their posts if they failed to deliver on the quota specified for them and the carrot and stick policy also ensured their promotions if they were able to come good on their required quota of men for the army. Needless to say, officials left no stone unturned to ensure that they got the required number of men to enlist. The rural Punjabi Gentry and even the religious heads such as *Pirs* were also enlisted to the cause of recruiting the young men under their influence<sup>113</sup>. They were given monetary benefits and honorific titles and large land grants<sup>114</sup>.

---

<sup>111</sup> Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: Military, Governance and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*, New Delhi: Sage, 2005, p. 79.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>114</sup> Bagchi, 'Indian Economy and Society', p. 25.

## Railways and Transport

Gigantic transport requirements of the First World War were a natural fallout of the massive outflows of men and material that were being ferried across India and then to destinations overseas. Shipping had already been severely impeded as the threat to shipping all over the world was made real by the presence of submarines and bombing. With travel by Air not a viable possibility like today, it was left to the Railways to literally carry the majority of the weight of the enormous logistical loads- literally and figuratively. When the British government started huge agricultural and railway development work in Mesopotamia, the drain on Indian resources and the Railways workloads increased manifold. The raw material for the laying of new railway tracks and the entire infra structure was also sent out from India for this great exercise, causing increased outflows which India could ill afford.

“No department was more closely allied, or rendered more cooperation and service to the British war effort than the Indian Railways Department”<sup>115</sup>.

**Table 6. 1-Population of Indian provinces according to Census 1911 and 1921**

Province	Population in 000s in 1911	Population in 000s in 1921
<b>Punjab (including Delhi)</b>	<b>19,975</b>	<b>20,193</b>
<b>Bengal</b>	<b>45,483</b>	<b>46,696</b>
<b>Bombay (including Sindh)</b>	<b>19,621</b>	<b>19,331</b>
<b>Bihar and Orissa</b>	<b>34,490</b>	<b>34,002</b>
<b>United Provinces of Agra and Oudh</b>	<b>47,182</b>	<b>45,376</b>
<b>Madras Presidency</b>	<b>41,405</b>	<b>42,319</b>

Source: Bagchi, A. (2014). Indian Economy and Society during World War One. *Social Scientist*, 42(7/8), 5-27. Retrieved May 11, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24372918>

---

<sup>115</sup>Aravind. Ganachari, 'First World War: Purchasing Indian Loyalties: Imperial Policy of Recruitment and Rewards', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(8), 2005, pp.779-788.  
M. Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War (RLE The First World War)*, London: Routledge, 2014, p.121.



## Food Shortages

Barnett mentions in her book that British leaders such as Lord Selborne who was the President of the Board of Agriculture had admitted that Britain was able to tide over the food shortage in Britain and supply her army overseas only on the strength of the wheat exports which had arrived from India<sup>116</sup>. However, no scholar or appropriate authority has expounded upon how the export of her wheat had affected India<sup>117</sup>. As Punjab was the primary wheat producing province, it can be well imagined that the retrenchment of the food supplies to the mother nation must have put the Colonial province under extreme shortage.

A major part of the food supply to Britain, including material like wheat, cereals, grams, pulses, dairy, poultry, meat products such as beef and pork etc were exported from India. In the war years, as food supply was threatened and routes closed, India was again forcibly brought to the rescue. “The price of wheat was not negotiated but fixed by a cartel of nine European firms who were exclusively authorised by the Government of India to buy wheat<sup>118</sup>.” In 1918, when Wheat supplies from India became vital for Britain again, historians have failed to mention the costs in human lives that extraction was paid for by in India as the resultant food shortages lead to the death of millions. The wheat and other food gains were also accompanied by a tribute in money that further accelerated the decline of India into death, want and poverty. In fact, there is some evidence that the Iranian economy was given an adrenaline boost by injecting it with men, money and resources from India as expounded in the article by P. Satia<sup>119</sup>.

In the last stages of the war, Canadians refused to send any wheat to Britain until they were given assured down payments. Wheat was simply exported to Britain from India, without asking the Indians at all, “with the payment being a part of colonial tribute, without any nonsense about consulting the Indians<sup>120</sup>”. While many writers and historians have conceded that the victory in the Great War of Britain and her

---

<sup>116</sup> Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society’, p. 32.

<sup>117</sup> Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society’, p. 21.

<sup>118</sup> Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society’, p. 26.

<sup>119</sup> P. Satia, ‘Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the redemption of empire and technology in the First World War’, *Past and Present*, 197(1), 2007, pp.211-255.

<sup>120</sup> Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society’, p. 25.

Allies can be attributed to the fact that they had a huge hinterland, that comprised of their far flung Empire, which was brought into the full fledged support of the war effort, the role of non-white regions and colonies is not even acknowledged by the majority of historians such as Avner Offer<sup>121</sup>.

**Table 6.2-Wheat output in British India (in 000 tons) 1916-1917 to 1918-19**

<b>Province</b>	<b>1916-1917</b>	<b>1917-1918</b>	<b>1918-1919</b>
<b>British India</b>	8401	8276	6469
<b>Greater Punjab (inc. Delhi and NWFP)</b>	2881	3334	2840
<b>United Provinces</b>	3061	2889	2304
<b>Bombay-Sind</b>	680	748	259
<b>Central Provinces</b>	1125	763	677

Source: Blyn (1966) as shown in Bagchi, A. (2014). Indian Economy and Society during World War One

History is again silent on the issue of the immensely destructive Influenza epidemic<sup>122</sup> that assailed India in 1918-19 in the wake of the First World War. The exceptionally high Mortality rate of the epidemic which resulted in the decrease in population in many areas of India, cannot be attributed to the disease alone. It was an amalgamation of several factors such as the infiltration of the Influenza epidemic, exhaustion of wheat stocks, shortage of food supplies, which was due to food drain from India to Britain and also the short crops of 1917-18 and the next year.

The refusal of the authorities to declare a famine and the forcible export of food and mismanagement of the famine conditions resulted in high fatalities for the Indians and millions perished. It is not mentioned by historians that the deaths of millions of Indians which were caused by this epidemic were made more inevitable by the food shortages that were rampant in India at the time. Official Reports also attributed the decrease in population in the census reports of 1921, as compared to the census

<sup>121</sup> A. Offer, *The First World War: An agrarian interpretation*, OUP Catalogue. Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 60.

<sup>122</sup> Ian Mills, 'Influenza in India during 1918-19' in Dyson, *India's Historical Demography*, 1989, pp. 222-60.

reports of 1911 to the “unusual calamities” such as a new disease plague and exceptionally severe Malaria epidemic<sup>123</sup>. They omitted to mention that bodies that have been weakened by malnutrition and hunger are always ore likely to fall prey to diseases.

### **Medical Shortages**

Doctors, nurses, medical staff, engineers and other technically qualified personnel were all dispatched to serve outside India. Indian society which was already sorely lacking in these essential but qualified services, that required long years of education and training were badly impacted and deprived by their departure<sup>124</sup>. All infrastructural development in India practically ground to a halt and the entire economy stagnated. The process of development that had been initiated in the Punjab in the fields of education, medicine, industrial development and technical know-how was sublimated to the task of satisfying the colonial masters.

### **Conclusion**

The contribution of the Indian Labour Corps and the Indian Porters to the war effort from India during the First World War is indeed exceptional. It would not be wrong to say that it was difficult to win the war for the British except for the effort selfless exertion, disciplined working in deplorable conditions and shortages and even starvation conditions, which was put in by the labour which was sent out from India.

Even while they were being recruited, the recruitment posters mentioned that ‘they will get a chance to see the world in a safe job on good pay’ pointing to the fact that adventure was involved in the job profile. This promise was more than redeemed when the returning labour and porters found that they not only enhanced their social status, but also were able to benefit from the exposure that travel and work abroad had brought them.

---

<sup>123</sup> Bagchi, ‘Indian Economy and Society’,p. 75.

<sup>124</sup> Roy, *War and society in colonial India*,p. 18.



**The Indian Labour Corps (ILC) laying railways tracks in the Middle East.**



**The soldiers had to undertake long, hard and arduous marches that lasted several days.**



## CONCLUSION

The great poet and nationalist Rabindranath Tagore had himself dismissed the contributions of his countrymen in the First World War when he observed, “We, the famished, ragged ragamuffins of the east are to win freedom for all humanity? We don’t even have a word for nation in our language<sup>1</sup>”.

India's recollection of the war is remote, and it is predictably buried beneath the weight of the anti-colonial movement and the non-alignment stance of the post-independence years. There are very few personal stories and anecdotes as few have been recorded for posterity. While other nations, especially the ones who were on the winning side in the Great War celebrate the men and women who won them the war, we in India are strangely silent. This silence stems from the ignorance of the contribution of our people because of the total lack of historiography or recorded history about the First World War. It is also a result of the deliberate attempt by the British and Indian nationalists alike to pull attention away from a war in which the Indian soldiers were little more than cannon fodder, according to both these views that have prevailed till now. However, there lies a slender margin between these two divergent views; a slim space of truth and fact- that has long been ignored, or rejected, or ignored and avoided.

It is this slight space which this study has made a humble attempt to explore and shed some light upon from a social and cultural perspective. This study attempts to record and evaluate not only the views of the Sikh soldiers who actually fought in the war, but also the perspective of the British officers who recruited and commanded them. This study has also cast a much needed closer look at the condition and experiences of the non-combatants who played a silent and even more ignored role in the First World War. Their stories are seldom even recalled, let alone extolled and retold. Another very notable but unknown segment of stakeholders of the war effort who are always relegated to the sidelines and have become the silent and ignored minority, are

---

<sup>1</sup>Chakraborti. Poulami (2019) The Notion of a Nation: Tagore’s Idea of Nationalism, Spirituality and Indian Society International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science (IJELS) Vol-4, Issue-4, Jul – Aug 2019 quoting Letter 12, ‘Tagore’s reflections on non-cooperation and cooperation’, addressed to C.F. Andrews, London, 1928, compiled in The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941, edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

families of the soldiers wherein women formed a large part. While most of the attention is always on the war front, people frequently forget that there was also a home front where loved ones of the soldiers on the front were constantly battling stress, uncertainty, pain of parting and fear and helplessness about the fate of their men on the front.

This study attempted to understand the experience and agony of the families of the soldiers who watched their men depart for an extremely dangerous war where the mortality rate was the highest recorded since then, in a foreign land. There was no news or updates on the welfare and well being of the soldiers, frequently for the long years of the duration of the war. It is hard to even imagine the state of constant anxiety and stress under which the families of the soldiers must have existed until either the soldier returned at the end of the long years of war, or the news of his being wounded or worse and much more common- the news of his demise- finally reached his family.

The Sikhs, along with the Gurkhas and the Punjabi Mussalmans, supplied the bulk of the fighting force that made up British Indian Army. The half-million army soldiers from Punjab alone, who fought for the British in regions across the globe, lived, fought and mostly died unseen and unremembered. Finally, after more than a hundred years after the calamitous event of the Great War, these men and the women they left behind are being sought out from the pages of history and their stories are being explored and retold.

Just before their departure from India when the question of the partition of India loomed large on the collective conscious, and tugged at the heart strings of everyone concerned with India, there was a strong realisation amongst the British official and intellectual quarters. India's overwhelming participation in the First World War had been critical and rendered with an unprecedented zeal and generosity. Even after the War, whether acknowledged or not, there is no doubt that the contribution of Indians had been sterling. It was incontestable then and proven now that the contributions of India to the global effort against the Axis powers had been immense in both the First and Second World Wars.

Writing in 1946, P. J Griffiths, admitted in his book *The British in India*, that the impact of the war on India was monumental. In the first place, it induced in the Allies,

an exaggerated belief in the virtue of American and British institutions and the 'remarkable contribution made by India to the war effort was rightly held to entitle India's voice to be heard'<sup>2</sup>. A bit late though it might be, but the historians, officialdom, people and press of the world is recognising the sacrifice and valour of the colonial people, including the thousands of India which made the world safe for democracy, not once, but twice.

Rekindled curiosity in the war has been found in other former colonies and other Commonwealth nations too. These nations who also forgot the men and women who fought a Great War long ago, have started pulling back the dusty veil of time and space to discover and uncover the events and experiences of these brave people. The anniversaries of the various battles, such as Gallipoli, Ypres, Festubert, Baghdad are landmark dates which provide a platform for further exploration and understanding of the First World War experience for more peoples. Gallipoli, Neuve Chapelle, Ypres and Festubert are only some instances which provide 'successful birth certificate of the newly-formed national identity in at least two of the so-called former "White Dominions," Australia and New Zealand'<sup>3</sup>.

Across the seven seas from India, in Britain also, the First World War is being increasingly remembered and recollected like never before. In 2018, a centennial edition of Mulk Raj Anand's work of English literature is reuniting the Indian diaspora with Indian WWI heroes. *Across the Black Waters* follows a young soldier and his comrades as they arrive in Marseilles by ship from India in September 1914, with the aim of reaching the front lines in Flanders in October. In 2018, the Hackney Empire staged a play based on the book. Vijay Singh, a Paris-based Indian filmmaker, scriptwriter, and novelist, made a film called *Farewell My Indian Soldier/ Mademoiselle France Pleure* about the sons and daughters of Indian soldiers who met their loved ones in France. A graphic novel tells the intimate storey of a soldiers fighting death in the trenches of the Western Front<sup>4</sup>. There are several radio or television programs, as well as the recent publication of many long monographs on the Indian presence in WWI which were telecast during the four years of the war

---

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, P.J. (1946) *The British In India*. Robert Hale Limited, London pg 180

<sup>3</sup> Bouchard, C. (2012). Regionalism, Federalism and Internationalism in First World War France. In *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France* (pp. 198-214). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Cowsill. illustrated by Lalit Kumar Sharma (2014) *First World War*. Campfire Graphic Novels



centenary 2014-2018 across the British Isles, Belgium, France, Germany and other nations.

For the Indian diaspora in Britain, commemorating WWI is a separate thing. With the erection of the Memorial Gates in 2002, there continues to be no shortage of involvement in disputes involving colonial troops in official circles. The collective memory of the Great War can add justification to the Indian Diaspora and presence in the various European nations such as United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany etc and the deep ties that have bound many generations of South Asians to their newly adopted country<sup>5</sup>. British Asians are resurrecting this forgotten heritage and highlighting the crucial role played by colonised Indians.

Till very recently, the contribution of the Indian soldiers to the final victory of the Allies was largely unacknowledged. In recent years, it has begun to be accepted that the Indian soldiers not only died in great numbers, but were also wounded and scarred for life in their thousands. It is being recognized and acknowledged that Indian soldiers contributed in real terms to the Allied war effort.

The Sikhs were an overwhelming part of all these engagements. In 1914 and 1915, as part of the Infantry and Cavalry battalions on the western front in France and Belgium, they provided critical support right at the beginning of the war. In the periphery of the Indian Ocean, the Indian soldiers secured and protected British holdings such as the Suez Canal and Persian oil fields against any intruders. The Indian troops, many of whom were Sikhs, were pushed willy-nilly into an ill organized, badly managed and unplanned campaign in the Middle East in which thousands of lives were needlessly lost. Right at the end of the war, when the Ottoman Empire was decisively defeated, the Indian contingents, with Sikhs in abundance, were the ones which played a major role in the Fall of Baghdad action which ultimately lead to the end of the First World War<sup>6</sup>.

No one really asked the Sikhs why they became the staunchest supporters of the hated British in 1857. Except for the tenacious and spirited support of the Sikh regiments and Sikh princely states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind etc, India might well have been

---

<sup>5</sup> Visram, R. (2015). *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*. London, Routledge. P 321

<sup>6</sup> Jarboe, A. T. (2021). *Indian Soldiers in World War I: Race and Representation in an Imperial War*. U of Nebraska Press.

lost forever and the British rule pulled out root and branch. After 10 years of being ready to die for the preservation of the Lahore Darbar and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's legacy as part of the Khalsa army, when the Sikhs endured hard fought and crushing defeats and the humiliation of being forced to surrender their arms and being disbanded- Why did the Sikhs choose to fight against all odds for the very same 'Goras' and 'feringhees' at whose hands they had faced such debacles? Even the British were taken aback, though heartily grateful for the help rendered by the Sikhs in their crucial hour of need, when the Sikhs could easily have proved the final nail in the coffin of British ambitions in India.

MacMunn mulls over the question of why the Sikhs and the Punjab stayed resolute and loyal to the British cause in 1857, and analyses that the motives that brought the Punjab to British aid, were no doubt mixed ones. The British though a combination of contentment with the British administration, after many decades of chaos, liking for English ways seen at their best in the cold of the Northern winters, memories of the hard hitting of Sabraon, Chillianwalla and Gujrat, a dislike of the *Poorbeah* (Indian soldier in the British army) all contributed to the Sikhs supporting the British at their critical time in 1857. MacMunn summarizes that, "probably first, among the motives of those that enlisted in the new corps was the wealth of Hindustan<sup>7</sup>."

Economic factor was in no doubt a huge incentive for the Sikhs, as was proved when the Punjab benefitted immensely from the military incomes that came to all the homes which had a man or men in the British Indian army. Informed guesses given above as to the reasons the Sikhs took to service in the British army after being conquered, throw up other most likely answers.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had himself always publicly and privately admitted to his awe and fear of the British red spreading all over India and considered it more or less inevitable and avoided the conflict for as long as he was alive. As he was the greatest and most revered military general and strategic thinker of the Sikhs of his times, his concession and acknowledgement of the might of the British must have meant a lot to the rank and file of the Khalsa army, that formed the bulk of the British Sikh recruitments in 1857.

---

<sup>7</sup> MacMunn , Armies of India, pg 252

The Sikhs developed deep feelings of respect for the enemy which had vanquished them so decisively. Even though their own generals were to blame for the crushing defeats at most of the engagements with the British during the Anglo Sikh wars, but the tactical acumen, courage and grudging admiration was mutual on both sides. The British and the Sikhs each respected the other as a worthy foe and this respect changed into loyalty and almost veneration for the British officers on the part of the Sikhs soldiers. Even the British officers and men had feelings of primacy, consideration and respect based on the recognition of the military mettle and valour of the Sikhs, which they openly admitted gave them the most bitterly fought contests and hard snatched victories of all the peoples they had fought on the Indian subcontinent.

The Punjab experience after annexation was quite different from that of Bengal or other regions. In stark contrast to the officially endorsed and condoned excesses, merciless drain of wealth and economic exploitation that the British undertook after annexation of conquest in other states, this was not done in Punjab, which was the last major territory to be merged in the British Indian Empire. In fact, the British sent the pick of their talent and seasoned administrators such as Sir Henry and John Lawrence etc to Punjab after annexation. Right from the Chief Commissioner downwards, the British officials exerted themselves with a tireless will to bring peace, security, law and order and economic prosperity to a province which had been ravaged by warfare and abysmal administration and total collapse of law and order and security for decades.

Working day and night, the British officialdom made sure the beneficial and benevolent effects of the '*Angrezi Sarkar*' shone in stark contrast to the shoddy administration of the Lahore Darbar after 1839, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh died. In 1857, it had been 10 years that the Punjab had witnessed and prospered under the meticulous but nurturing hand of the Punjab School of Administration. For the Sikhs therefore, it must have been clear that their bread was buttered on the side of the British and in 1857, they choose to side with the British who had conquered them.

Once the Sikhs had proved themselves in every test of loyalty and valour which the events of 1857 had automatically subjected them to, it was clear that the incorporation of the Sikhs into the British Indian Army was not only highly desirable but critical. These feelings were given further legitimacy by General Roberts when he propounded

and implemented the 'Martial Races Theory in India. The Martial Race Theory was responsible in a very large part for the favoured position that was given to the Sikhs by the British as long as India was a part of the British Empire.

This was recognized at the highest levels and under the theory of the Martial Races propounded by General Roberts, Sikhs were recruited en masse in the Army. The decision proved to be highly beneficial to the British since their chief contest in India in martial terms remained only with the tribes such as the Balochs, Pashtuns, Pathans and Afghans of the North West. The Sikhs had already conquered a large part of these inaccessible areas and defeated the turbulent tribes under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his legendary generals such as Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. They proved more than equal to the challenging task of not only holding their own, but also defeating the agile and mobile foe. Even in sieges, the Sikhs had proven at Saragarhi in 1894 that 21 Sikhs against ten thousand tribesmen was a feasible contest.

In this backdrop, when the British Empire faced their most deadly challenge from the German Reich under the Kaiser for global supremacy, they looked to the Punjab to provide the men and material that were required for the massive contest. Punjab delivered unstintingly on all fronts and vindicated the belief that the British Government had in the Sikhs and their military prowess.

The British Indian Army was never created as an independent and strong force, it was rather conceptualised as an auxiliary force to the British Army. "Small wars" was what the Indian Army was created to fight in the subcontinent itself, against the Frontier tribesmen such as the Pashtun or Baloch, or participate in the colonial expeditions to conquer new territory or repress revolts. The British Indian Army's total strength was a mere 152,000 in 1914 while the British Army was disproportionately large compared to the size of the British Isles and numbered 250,000. The Indian Army had no heavy artillery and was trained to fight in open terrain against a moving enemy who indulged in Guerrilla warfare (and did not have artillery), as was the wont of the frontier tribesmen or even the small princely states armies that were the adversaries to the Indian army on the Indian sub continent.

The Indian soldiers were not aware of, let alone trained to fight trench warfare with an enemy that was not only a numerous host, but also expert at deploying artillery and airpower on a front that changed continually and stretched for several hundreds of

miles. However necessity forced the British government to call upon the Indian Army as it was the only available imperial Force. Hence The Meerut and Lahore Infantry divisions and the Ambala and Secunderabad Cavalry brigades were coalesced to form the Indian Expeditionary Force, under the command of General James Willcocks that contained 28,500 Indian and 16,500 British soldiers and was dispatched to Marseilles<sup>8</sup>.

In the second chapter of this study, the self identify of the Sikh soldier, as it developed and evolved due to religious, historical, cultural and social factors is explored at length. The identity of the Sikh soldier was not based on his self perception alone, but also included the image that he had in the eyes of the British officers, officialdom and fellow soldiers who served with him. At the time of the First World War, when the Sikhs were among the first soldiers to land on Belgian and French soil as members of the First Expeditionary Force, the French, British and Belgian public, Press and other soldiers perceptions also had an impact on the self identity as it developed for the Sikh soldier fighting on a foreign front.

The Colonial British Raj's perspective of Sikhs and the reasons why they were portrayed as martial races and how the Sikh troops were seen by the social, cultural, religious, and political context in which they served has been studied in the second chapter of this study. The reactions of the citizens of many nations to the presence of Sikhs in their midst while the Sikhs served overseas during WWI have been documented. The perceptions of Sikh troops by the people they came into contact with on many continents have been studied.

The Indian Expeditionary Force A that was sent to Europe (France and Belgium) in September 1914 and which stayed put on the frontline till October 1915 had a preponderance of Sikhs. The dispatch of Indian soldiers to theatres abroad during the war was also a breach of British Strategic Doctrine. The British policy was not to use coloured soldiers against white soldiers in any contest as it would undermine the prestige of the 'White master race' in India. At the time of the First World War, not only was this policy brushed aside, but the coloured soldiers were in fact sent to Europe to fight against the white enemy in their own lands. There was even a protest

---

<sup>8</sup> Markovits, Claude: Indian Expeditionary Force , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2018-06-26. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11057.

by the Germans that the British were using a savage' colonial force in a war that was between 'civilised' European countries. However, the British were unfazed for the reasons discussed below.

The British followed a far reaching policy with respect to the Martial Theory as they actively fostered and inculcated this feeling of racial separation and distinction amongst the races they deemed as 'Martial'. The impact of these measures and exclusivity was evident time and again. The martial races were at the forefront of the British effort in the First World Wars. Even after the World War, these martial races, including the Sikhs, remained essentially loyal and continued to support the British even during the stormy days after the First World War. Indian Nationalism witnessed rapid ascent post First World war India and the Punjab was particularly restless, with incidents such as agitations against the Rowlatt Act, Ghadr aftermath, Jalianwala Bagh and other events collectively termed as the Punjab Disturbances. Even in the days of Gandhian movements and insurrections like the Ghadar and the Gurudwara Reform Movement and the Akali movements, the Sikhs in the British army continued to render faithful service and were not swayed greatly by the strong currents that were swamping civilian and nationalistic India at the time.

The distinctions created on the basis of the Martial Races imbued the soldiers with a sharp sense of delineation. They were perceived to be, and they perceived themselves to be, different from the common man. Even when the entire nation was burning in the inferno of subversive activities or engulfed in the general flames of other nationalistic outpourings, be it in the form of the movement for Self Rule, Civil disobedience, Quit India, etc, the army tended to remain disconnected and separate from these developments. Undeniably, smart operation of economics also contributed to the insulated state of the army which remained loyal to the British in the face of civilian unrest in Punjab.

Indian defence expenditure constituted fifty percent of the central budget before the Great War, which was a huge part of the total outlay. The great emphasis placed on defence, and the bulk of the emoluments which went to the Punjab as Punjabi's formed the backbone and the bulk of the army, ensured that Punjab was one of the most developed and prosperous provinces in India. In fact, the majority of the British administrators and politicians definitely were of the opinion that India was profiting

enormously as a colony. Sir Michael O' Dwyer, perhaps the most important figure in Punjab in the war years has put on record in his memoirs that British standards of assessment of revenue were extra ordinarily mild. This was especially true in the Punjab when compared to previous native rulers, including the Sikhs and the Mughals. The British land revenue charges were even less than the ones prevailing concurrently in the native princely states<sup>9</sup>.

The success of the economic strategy was proved during the tough years of the war. The combination of the economic rewards and loyalty factor proved to be stronger than even religion, in the majority of cases. The Germans tried every strategy to make the soldiers transfer their loyalties. They called upon the Sikh, Hindus and Muslims soldiers to desert and used religion, the promise of promotions and wealth and various other lures. It is to the credit of the Indian soldiers that out a force of 90,000 troops, only 90 responded to the German call and these too were mostly Trans-frontier Pashtuns whose territories were not a part of the British Indian Administration.

The controls and checks which were put on the soldiers from India were never before imposed anywhere in the British dominions or Empire. Censoring of soldiers' letters was an unprecedented and remarkable step, never before done in the British army. This invasion of the soldier's privacy proved to be an important indicator of the mood of the men, particularly the Colonial armies and enabled the authorities to keep their finger on the pulse of the soldiers. These letters and censorship records have also become the most important source for historians in order to piece together the untold and unknown story of the soldiers who served on various frontiers in defence of the British Empire in the critical years 1914-18. As the extracts of these letters were meticulously compiled and circulated to various dignitaries and offices, right from the King Emperor to the Viceroy of India to the War office in London to the India Office and Army Command, the letters formed a basis of which crucial decisions and estimations were made by the official in power.

These letters also survive as insightful and indelible glimpses of the emotions of the soldiers such as their apprehensions, fears, worries, hopes, aspirations and reactions to the new sight, sounds, experiences and actions which they witnessed as part of the British Indian Army serving abroad in various nations of the British Empire.

---

<sup>9</sup> Michael O Dwyer, *India as I Knew It*. Constable and Co London 1925. Pg 56

In essence, the Indian army was a reflection of the high ideals and ideology that the British intellectual and intelligentsia used to imbue in both the British and Indian general public. The ideology of 'The Raj' as a great institution was used to allay, array and ally the public opinion at home and in India in support of Empire and the War when it started. In a sense, the British Indian Army was the highest achievement and a reiteration of the ideals which the British propagated and nurtured in India and with which they claimed to rule India- for its own good and development and betterment of the common people.

The British claims of having conquered, pacified and kept in relative peace an entire continent, rested on their successful recruitment, training and deployment of the army. The British themselves regarded their army in India as the 'epitome of a disciplined, professional and loyal force... that was a moniker for the entire British Imperial project'<sup>10</sup>.

Indian soldiers were remembered by politicians like David Lloyd George and authors like Rudyard Kipling who helped establish government propaganda. The military races, on the other hand, created some outstanding troops in India who displayed their valour and endurance on every front and received a slew of official distinctions and awards, including many Victoria Crosses (V.C.s.). Hindustan's main achievement was in the southern theatres, such as Palestine, Mesopotamia, and East Africa, where Indian legions performed admirably, as acknowledged by the British PM Lloyd George in the British Parliament. However, until conscription was well-established in the United Kingdom, the British government formed a paternalistic stance toward the under-equipped Indian soldiers as they were desperately needed to bolster the British forces.

For Indian nationalists, the consequences of cooperation were, understandably, a deception. Far from opposing those obedient or hard-line imperialists, on the outbreak of the war, and throughout the duration, nationalists in India supported the British war effort whole heartedly.

In Chapter 3 are discussed the memories and experiences that the Sikh soldiers carried with them from the stints abroad which were not so easy to wipe off. There is little

---

<sup>10</sup> Rob Jonson (ed) 2014 The British Army: Virtue and Necessity pg 13



doubt that the Sikh soldiers were full of the sense of awe, wonder, admiration and also a strange sense of unity and affiliation with the different peoples and nations they visited during the four years of wartime. They displayed a very lively curiosity and keen awareness of all that they were exposed to in terms of lifestyle, modern technology, farming updates and difference in ways of thinking and living. In the letters, it is revealed that the soldiers were drawing parallels and commenting on variations between their life in the Punjab and the different nations where they visited and making extremely deep and insightful remarks and observances. These observations and reflective remarks indicate that the soldiers were deeply influenced by all that they were witnessing in foreign countries. They were constantly comparing, drawing similarities and seeing the variations in the lives they lead and the lives of people in the places they visited and stayed in during the war.

However, there is little evidence that the Sikh troops' trip overseas resulted in a large-scale attitudinal adjustment or substantial alteration in their thinking and perspectives. Most historians, with the advantage of hindsight, believe that the Sikh troops' sojourns overseas during WWI left an ambiguous legacy that is difficult to identify.

Even though they developed connections with the locals, mingled with civilians and troops from other nations who fought alongside them, they were different. Sikh soldiers formed liaisons and even married European women, but on the frontlines of the war in foreign locations overseas they still remained devoted to their mission. Soldiers who were homesick and lonely penned sad letters home. They took short trips across the English Channel or farther south to Marseilles to forget the daily experience of warfare in the cold and rainy weather of northern French trenches. They couldn't risk defying instructions or inciting a mutiny in a non-Indian setting, thus refusing to fight was tough for them. It was not even an option to refuse to fight or to express hesitation for whatever reason as being shot for treason and cowardice was an established practice.

In chapter 4 are described the experiences of the Sikh Prisoners of War. The War took a turn for the worse for around 1000 soldiers (out of whom many were Sikhs) who were also taken captive by the enemy. They were treated as Prisoners of War by the Germans and kept confined to the Half Moon camp in Wunsdorf near Berlin. Various studies including a cultural and linguistic study, involving the newly developed audio

equipment and audio tapes were recorded, giving them a chance to express their cultural views. In spite of being exhorted and motivated to cross over to the German side, and even after the fight against the British was declared a Jihad (religious war) by the Ottoman proclamation of Jihad, the soldiers of War (mostly muslims) preferred to return home, rather than join the Turkish army in defense of the Caliph, to fight against the British.

In Chapter 5 are described the civil and military connotations of the Sikh involvement in the war. Till now in India, World War I has sparked just a smattering of curiosity in the intellectual and public domain. India's recollection of the war is remote, and it is understandably suffocated by the anti-colonial movement and non-alignment stance of the post-independence years. Rekindled enthusiasm in the war has been found in other Commonwealth nations, and Gallipoli is the successful birth certificate of the newly-formed national identity in at least two of the so-called "White Dominions," Australia and New Zealand.

Of course, what Indian or colonial scholars wrote in their notebooks or what is written on war memorials cannot be interpreted as voicing a typical soldiers opinion or attitude toward the conflict. Rather, the soldiers' attitude toward the war was composed of resignation (they were sent back to the front more than the regular trooper), patriotism (they had long-time friends and families in the army), and camaraderie toward fellow-soldiers, according to the social historians – behaviour comparable to any other wartime army. In the trenches and hospitals, the soldiers showed affection, camaraderie, and intimacy by touching, sentiment, and intimacy. The myth of a powerful, invincible masculine warrior popularised by Rudyard Kipling's works and expressed by General Haig was deconstructed. In its position, a new perspective on male experience emerged, one that included anxiety, weakness, support, and physical tenderness. Between Indian martial groups or imperial races, there was rivalry and war.

The British policy of using force to rule India was continued, not changed or modified, even after WWI. As a result, the beginnings of the conflict should be seen as part of a larger timeline that includes the culmination of long-standing, but now completely overlapping, imperialisms inside contemporary states. Many academics feel that veterans of the wars were made "brutal" as a result of their service and

experiences abroad serving during such a ruthless and destructive war. This 'brutality' continued even after they returned from the front, and entered civilian life. Some are of the view that they were able to revert to this brutality during nationalist movements when they were ready to unleash it on the British themselves.

In the Chapter 5 of this study, this question has been reviewed at length. Documenting the most violent episodes in Indian history after WWI in metropolitan or rural centres, it becomes immediately apparent that the soldiers were in fact, not prone to show 'brutality', aggression or even resentment against the British. The Sikh soldiers especially, were largely insulated from the chaos of the nationalist movement. Even though Punjab was one of the most nationalistic states where the currents of the freedom movement were very strong, and deep, the soldiers were not affected. The soldiers were not politicized to the extent that they participated en masse or even individually in any special capacity towards the nationalist or any other religio-political movement. In the Gurudwara Reform movement, the retired soldiers played a role, but the entire movement was largely non violent and especially notable for the discipline, consistency and organized format.

These factors certainly defy the contention that the soldiers were made 'brutal' due to their exposure to the war. The observations of Mr Darling in post War Punjab<sup>11</sup> during his extensive tours all over the province only attest to the fact that the war experiences of the Sikh soldiers abroad had enriched them significantly. These experiences not only made them more conscious and aware of new developments, but also more broad minded and progressive. The soldiers were leaders in the rural countryside who lead by example, inspired and innovated and brought improvement and development to agriculture, animal husbandry, Dairy farming, crop rotations, culinary habits, dressing, rural health and hygiene and much else besides. Retired and serving Sikh soldiers became the leaders of the community and helped raise the bar for education, awareness, health and socio-cultural advancement. Hence, the 'brutality' aspect of the soldiers is completely repudiated.

Nationalists from the Home Rule League requested Dominion status in 1916. India's membership in the League of Nations was identified by David Hunter Miller as "an

---

<sup>11</sup> Darling, M. (1934). Northwards. *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, 1-76.

anomaly of anomalies... a striking paradox almost without parallel"<sup>12</sup>. As the war came to a close, Gandhi and Congress were well aware of the uncertain status established by Versailles, noting that "India possessed, in principle at least, the sovereign privileges of dominions, despite the fact that she had not yet achieved a state of full sovereignty even in internal affairs". The League's mandate scheme placed novel duties and restrictions on Britain, hastening its colonial downfall and eventually contributing to its dissolution.

India disputed colonial authority after the First World War, and Egypt unilaterally achieved nominal independence in 1922. Within the Empire, white dominions were still better off than the darker races. By 1918, almost 1.5 million Indian troops had been sent to the front lines. They made up almost 20% of the British armies in the war, more than the so-called White Dominions, or the joint participation of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. It is ironic that the very nature of empire warfare culminated in the weakening of the world's greatest empire, the British Empire.

The Indian insurrection of the late 1910s and early 1920s generated new anti-colonial politics that included both tactical – well-disciplined unarmed satyagraha resistance – and religious – non-violent ahimsa – fights. The desire to re-establish total British colonial control over India was pitted against cutting-edge, extremely effective methods on a scale never seen before. Following World War I, the Greek-Turkish population served as a model for ethnic cleansing in Europe and India. Following the fall of the Ottoman and Russian empires, a highly contested territory on India's western and northern borders came into existence that put a constant strain on the British nerves.

The British followed a far reaching policy with respect to the Martial Theory as they actively fostered and inculcated this feeling of racial separation and distinction amongst the races they deemed as 'Martial'. The impact of these measures and exclusivity was evident time and again. The martial races were at the forefront of the British effort in the First World Wars. Even after the World War, these martial races, including the Sikhs, remained essentially loyal and continued to support the British even during the stormy days after the First World War. Indian Nationalism witnessed rapid ascent post First World war India and the Punjab was particularly restless, with

---

<sup>12</sup> Miller, D. H. (1928). *The drafting of the Covenant* (Vol. 2). GP Putnam's sons. P 493

incidents such as agitations against the Rowlatt Act, Ghadr aftermath, Jalianwala Bagh and other events collectively termed as the Punjab Disturbances. Even in the days of Gandhian movements and insurrections like the Ghadar and the Gurudwara Reform Movement and the Akali movements, the Sikhs in the British army continued to render faithful service and were not swayed greatly by the strong currents that were swamping civilian and nationalistic India at the time.

In Chapter 6, the Non-combatants, or the followers, or the Indian labour Corps or the Indian Porters Corps are not mentioned in glowing terms in any memoir, book or paper. Their contribution has largely gone unnoticed and unremembered. However, without their unremitting efforts during the war victory would not have been possible and for this reason they remain unsung heroes. Whatever be the experience of the labourers overseas, where they were not treated at all well, when they returned from service abroad one thing was certain. They returned with exposure experiences, and insights which made them “more prosperous and *samajhdar* (intelligent) and capable beings<sup>13</sup>. The women who were left behind while the men went to war are also important but unnoticed segments of the war. The impact and experience of the women folk has been discussed in detail in this chapter.

The distinctions that were created on the basis of the Martial Races, imbued the soldiers with a sharp sense of delineation. They were perceived to be, and they perceived themselves to be, different from the common man. Even though the entire nation could be burning in the inferno of subversive activities or engulfed in the general flames of other nationalistic outpourings, be it in the form of the movement for Self Rule, Civil disobedience, Quit India, etc, the army tended to remain disconnected and separate from these developments.

The narrative of the Great War in India is dominated by either the embarrassment felt by Indian nationalist backers, the weight of the independence struggle or the horrific events of Partition. The struggle against the British colonial regime, followed by the tragic events of the British Empire's so-called decolonization period in India, shaped

---

<sup>13</sup> Singha, R. (2015). The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (87), 27-62. Retrieved June 2, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43957055>

the Indian subcontinent's consciousness more than any other occurrence. In this respect, historians' disagreements are still the most vehement.

### **Scope for further research**

As a result of this study, there are many other avenues which have presented fair prospects for further studies. Notably, the current emphasis on 'human experiences of the war' have opened up doors for study into what is known as "war experience" of the "Post-Colonial"<sup>14</sup> kind, or how the war can be viewed more personally on individual levels and how individual stories give a more coherent and cogent feel of the war experience than data sets or mere numbers ever can. Skilled scholars have been able to recreate unique social bonds established in order to endure the difficulties of the war thanks to the words in the personal letters left by soldiers and also declassified armed forces records. Light has begun to shine on the murky edges of many questions regarding the navigation of the profound personal and collective journeys that the soldiers undertook in the years before, during and after the war. How they were able to keep their bearings, negotiate the difficult tightrope between not displeasing the German captors and yet remaining loyal to the British in word, thought, deed and intent and how they readjusted in the post war period is becoming clearer.

The Post Colonial School of historiography considers the wider social significance of gendered or sexual roles in warfare. What effect does war have on manhood, on the masculine bravery paradigm are intriguing questions that merit further exploration. What was the mentality toward homosexuality in the Gurkha and Pathan regiments, and under what circumstances were homosexuals court-martialed in the British Indian army<sup>15</sup> are all questions that need to be researched further. The diverse ways and motives under which captivity was used in war propaganda and the formation of racial politics are other fields of studies that can deepen the understanding of the human war experience and engender the formation of a more sympathetic and clearer

---

<sup>14</sup> Shohat, E. (2006). Notes on the "Post-Colonial". In *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (pp. 233-249). Duke University Press.

<sup>15</sup> , J. (1983). The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914–15. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 54-73.

perspective of the same. In addition, the life of POWs after the war and their involvement in India remain an important yet understudied topic that needs more study.

In final summary, one can say that for the Sikh soldiers and other colonial soldiers, the awards and rewards after the war were inadequate to make up for the humungous loss of life and limb which had been incurred by large percentages of the Populations of whole regions and communities. Titles of honour such as Nawab, Jung Bahadur, Khan Sahib, Sardar Sahib, Raja and Rai Sahib etc were liberally handed out. The soldiers were rewarded with grants of land, pensions, disability pensions, robes and swords of honour, guns, revolvers, complimentary sanads or land deeds and also government grants of rent free land and even cash awards. There were wholesale remission of taxes for whole areas and communities who had lost too many men and 420,000 acres of land was distributed in Punjab<sup>16</sup>. There were also the special concessions such as the *Jangi inam* (War Prize) where two pensions were provided for one life- one to the pensioner and one to his next generation.

In conclusion, the most long standing domestic result of the war is the new found regard and respect which the returning soldiers brought back for their wives as a result of serving abroad. The war killed a lot of good Sikh men, but the ones who survived and returned from the trial by fire came back with enlightened attitudes, broader minds and a keener appreciation of what they had back home- both in terms of gratitude and scope for improvement.

The Sikhs served faithfully, along with the other races in India till 1947, as long as they too believed

*Khalk-i-Khuda* (Mankind belongs to God)

*Mulk-i-Sirkar* (The Land belongs to the Government)

*Hukm-i-Sahiban Alishan* ( And power to the Magnificent Sahibs)<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Chandan, Amarjit., 'How They Suffered: World War I and Its Impact Upon the Punjabis', <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> (Retrieved 20 May, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Mankind belongs to God, The land to the Government, And power to the powerful Sahibs. See George F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1911), p.220

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Official Publications

Census Reports, Government of India, Government Press, New Delhi 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921

Census Reports, Government of Punjab, Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921

Customary Law Manuals Beadon, H.C. Customary Law of the Delhi District, Vol. XXII, Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette, 1911

Dunnett, J.M. Customary Law of the Ludhiana District, Revised Edition, Vol V, Lahore, Punjab Govt. Press, 1911

Humphreys, R. Customary Law of the Hoshiyarpur District, Vol XXVII, Lahore, Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1914.

Joseph, E., Customary Law of the Rohtak District, 1910, Lahore, Govt. Printing 1914.

Kensington, A., Customary Law of the Ambala District, Vol X, Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette, 1893

Townsend, C.A.H. Customary Law of the Hissar District (except the Sirsa Tehsil), Vol XXV, Lahore, Punjab Govt. Printing Press 1913

Tupper, C.L. the Punjab Customary Law, Vol 1 and Vol II, Calcutta, Superintendent, Govt Printing Press, 1881

Walker. G.C, Customary Law of the Main Tribes in the Lahore District, Vol XIII, Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette 1894

Walker. T, Gordan, Customary Law of the Ludhiana District, Vol I, Calcutta, Central Press Co, 1885

*War Speeches of His Honour Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab* (Lahore: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1918), pp. 17–18.



## **Punjab Administration Reports**

Annual Reports on Administration of Punjab And its Dependencies, 1860-1906,  
Punjab Government Press, Lahore, 1906, p. 157.

Annual Reports on Administration of Punjab-1903-04, 1908-09, 1914-1915, 1919-  
1920, 1920-1921

*Proceedings of the Army in India Committee, 1912* (Simla: Government Central  
ranch Press, 1913), vol. 1-A, *Minority Report*, pp. 1, 157.

Punjab Census Report, 1881, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, p. 104.

Punjab Command Orders, 1900, Command Order 687, p. 278.

## **Punjab District Gazetteers**

Punjab District Gazetteers- Amritsar district 1892-93, 1914

Punjab District Gazetteers- Delhi District: 1912

Punjab District Gazetteers- Ferozepur District- 1889, 1915

Punjab District Gazetteers- Gujrat District- 1921

Punjab District Gazetteers- Gurdaspur District- 1914

Punjab District Gazetteers- Gurgaon District- 1910

Punjab District Gazetteers- Hissar District- 1904, 1915

Punjab District Gazetteers- Hoshiarpur District- 1904

Punjab District Gazetteers- Jullundar District- 1904

Punjab District Gazetteers- Karnal District- 1892-93, 1918

Punjab District Gazetteers- Lahore District- 1893-94

Punjab District Gazetteers- Ludhiana District- 1904

Punjab District Gazetteers- Mianwali District- 1915

Punjab District Gazetteers- Montgomery District- 1899-1900, 1933

Punjab District Gazetteers- Rohtak District- 1910

Punjab District Gazetteers- Sialkot District- 1883-84, 1921

Punjab District Gazetteers- Faridkot State- 1907

Punjab District Gazetteers- Kapurthala State- 1904

Punjab District Gazetteers- Malerkotla State - 1904

Punjab District Gazetteers- Phulkian States– 1904

Reports on the Progress of Education

Report on Public Instruction in the Punjab and its Dependencies, 1894-1906

Reports on the Progress of Education, 1926-27

Home Department Files of Punjab (1849-1947)

- Agriculture
- Irrigation
- Post and Telegraphs
- Public Health and Medicine
- PWD
- Railways
- Sanitary Measures

### **Settlement Reports**

Dane, Lewis. W. *Final Report of the Revised Settlement of Gurdaspur District (1892)*,  
*Lahore 1892*

Dunlop-Smith, J.R. *Final Report of the Revised Settlement of Sialkot District in  
Punjab (1892), 1888-95, Lahore 1895*

Gibson, B.T. Final report of the third regular Settlement of the Gurgaon District,  
1903-09, Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette 1910

Grant, J.A. *Final Report of the Revised Settlement of Amritsar District 1888-93, Civil  
and military Gazette Press, Lahore 1893*

Walker, G.C. Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Lahore District 1893,  
Lahore, 1894

## Miscellaneous Reports and Related Publications

*British Parliamentary Papers: Indian Territory & Co.*, 13, p.116.

*Censor of Indian Mails 1914–1918* (henceforth *CIM*), India Office Record and Library (IOR),

Circular, 14 May 1917, IOR/L/Mil/2/5132, India Office Records, British Library (IOR).

Government of Punjab to Adjutant-General in India for Information. Desertion statistics up to March/May 1918', NAI, Home Department, War, February 1919, 42–52, part B

Ibbetson, Denzil. *Punjab Castes* (First Published 1883), Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 (Reprint)

*Indian Law Reports*, Lahore Series, 1920-1947, Lahore, Superintendent, Govt. Printing,

Kitchener to Brodrick, 3 December 1901, Y/5, Brodrick to Kitchener, 9 June 1904, Y/51, Reel no. 1, Kitchener Papers.

Maconachie, R. Ed, *Selected Agricultural Proverbs of the Punjab*, Delhi: Imperial Medical Hall Press, 1890

Memo by Montagu, October 15, 1920, PRO CAB. 24/112 C.P 1987.

*Minority Report*, pp. 120–121, 123–124, 130, 215; *Proceedings of the Army in India Committee, 1912* (Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1913), vol. 3, Minutes of Evidence, p. 538.

Peel Commission Report, Evidence of Lt Col Durand, Organisation of the Army (Indian) Report, 1859 Appendix 71.

Punjab Record or Reference Book for Civil Officers, Published annually by the Civil and Military Gazette press, Lahore

Rattigan, W.H. *A Digest of Civil Laws for the Punjab*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, The Civil and Military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1929

Report on Native Papers, India Office Library and Records, 1919, retrieved on May 23, 2021, from <https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/saoa.crl.25637117>

Reports on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Punjab and its Dependencies.

Statistical Abstract of Information regarding the Armies at Home and Abroad, 1914–20, p. 785, L/MIL/17/5/2382, IOR, BL

**Audio Tapes of The Recordings of Indian Soldiers Archived at Hamburg University** (Available with Col Randhawa, Guru Granth Sahib Bhavan, Sector 28, Chandigarh)

### **Memoirs of English Officials**

Bibicoff, Massia. (1915) *Our Indians at Marseilles*, Translated by Leonard Huxley. Smith, Elder & Co, London

Court. Maj Henry. (Tr) *History of the Sikhs*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1979 (Reprint- First published 1888)

Eden. Emily. *Up the Country*, 2 Vols. Richard Benteley. London, 1866 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)

Grey. C (1929) *Europeans Adventurers of Northern India 1785-1849*, Superintendent Government Printing, Lahore

Osborne, W. G., *The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh, with an introductory Sketch of the Origin and Rise of the Sikh State*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (Reprint- First Published 1840)

Prinsep, Henry. T. *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja*

*Ranjit Singh with an account of the present condition, religion, laws and Customs of the Sikhs*. Punjab Languages Department, Patiala (1971- Reprint- First Published 1834)

Richard. Empson, *Private papers*, Documents 3077 (Imperial War Museum).

Robert McLain, 'The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Reconsideration', in Geoffrey Jensen and Andrew Wiest, eds., (2001). *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict*. New York: New York University Press, pp.167-193

Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire*. London, Reprint New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1805, reprinted 1974, p. 69.

Robert Wogner Falcon (1896) *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of Regimental Officers*, Allahabad: Penguin Press, pp. 28-29.

Trevelyan, Ernest J. *India and the War*. London: n.p., 1914. Pamphlet.

V. Blacker, *Memories of the British Army in India During the Mahratta War of 1817, 1818 and 1819*, London: Broughton, 1821, pp. 19-20.

W. G. MacPherson, W. H. Horrocks and W.W. O. Beveridge, *Medical Services of the Great War*, Vol. I, 1923, pp.152-53.

W. Monie to Home Department, 22 July 1916, New Delhi, Government of India, Home (Medical) Department Proceedings, Oct. 1916, no. 16 (National Archives of India).

Wilson, Lt. Col. W.E. Johnston. *An account of the operations of the 18th (Indian) Division in Mesopotamia, December 1917 to December 1918*. London: Finden, Brown & Co Ltd, 1920.

### **Newspapers, Periodicals and Contemporary Media**

The Tribune (English)

Sarika. Sharma, '100 years later, voices from WW1', *The Tribune*, May 20, 2018, Chandigarh, p. 8. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/features/100-years-later-voices-from-wwi-591837>

*The Tribune* August 16, 1914, p. 1

*The Tribune* August 17, 1914, p. 1

*The Tribune* August 26, 1914, p. 3

*The Tribune* August 16, 1914, p. 5

*The Tribune* August 16, 1914, p. 4

*The Tribune* November 2, 1915, p.4

*The Tribune* November 2, 1915, p.4

*The Tribune* September 12, 1916, p.4

*The Tribune* July 2, 1917, p.4

*The Tribune* June 16, 1917, p. 3

*The Tribune* January 5, 1918

*The Tribune* February 11, 1918

*The Tribune* May 13, 1918

*The Tribune* June 18, 1918

*The Tribune* November 8, 1918

The Khalsa Advocate (English)

Khalsa Akhbar (Punjabi)

The Times (English)

The Indian Troops at Marseilles', *The Times*, October 2, 1914, The Times online Archives, Accessed on May 19, 2020.

Manchester Guardian (English)

Daily Mail (English)

Daily Express (English)

*The Bengalee*, August 13, 1914, p. 2.

The Biharee, June 12, 1914

The Indian Patriot

Anand Bazaar Patrika

“Like Another Mahabharata: Indian Soldiers in the Great War.” By Mukti Jane Campion. *Omnibus*. BBC World Service. BBC, London, 2000. Radio.

Raghavan, Srinath. “Book review: Honour and Fidelity – India’s Military Contribution to the Great War, 1914-18.” *The Indian Express*. The Indian Express, 22 Nov. 2014. 26 Feb. 2017.

*Salt of the Sarkar*. Multimedia project by Dominic Rai and Caroline Goffin. Dir. Dominic Rai. Man Mela Theatre Company, 2016. Play.

Stewart, Iain. "Indian Army Victoria Cross Holders awarded during the First World War 1914-18 and between WWI and WWII." *The Victoria Cross, Britain's Highest Award for Gallantry*. victoriacross.org.uk, 14 Jan. 2015. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

### Secondary Sources

Habib, Irfan. 'The Coming of 1857', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-4, Jan- Apr, 1998, pp. 6-15.

Ahuja, R. (2010). 'The corrosiveness of comparison' in *The world in world wars*, pp. 131-166. Brill-From the Diary of Thakur Amar Singh of Jaipur, Lanham and Oxford: 2005<sup>1</sup>

Ahuja, R. 'The corrosiveness of comparison: reverberations of Indian wartime experiences in German prison camps (1915–1919)' in *The world in world wars*, London: Brill, 2010, p.145.<sup>1</sup>, p.147.

Ahuja, Ravi, Heike Liebau, and Franziska Roy. *When the war began we heard of several kings: South Asian prisoners in World War I Germany*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011. Print.

Alam, M.1986. *The Crises of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707-48*. Delhi, Oxford University Press.

Alam, Muzaffar, (1986) *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi

Alavi Seema. 1995. *The Sepoys and the Company : Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830*. Delhi; Oxford University Press.

Alexander, H. M. *On two fronts: being the adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France & Gallipoli*. New York: EP Dutton & Company, 1917. Print.

Alexander, H. *On Two Fronts, Being the adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France and Gallipoli*. New York: Dutton, 1917, pp.29, 33.

- Alfred Horsford Bingley, Handbooks for the Indian Army*, Simla: Government Central printing office, 1899, p. 153.
- Ali Imran, 1989. *The Punjab Under Imperialism: 1885 – 1947*, Delhi.
- Allport, G. W. *Dispatches to India and Bengal, 1829. The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*, London: India Office Library, 2005, p. 203.
- Amitav. Ghosh, “Archive for the ‘At Home and the World in Mesopotamia’ Category.” *Amitav Ghosh*, 6 Aug. 2012. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Anand. Mulk Raj. *Across the Black Waters*. Delhi: Orient Paperback, 1940. Print.
- Andelman, DA. (2008) *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley
- Anderson, Capt. Edward. *With the 33rd Q V O Light Cavalry in Mesopotamia*. Ed. John Sambrooke. Poona: The Scottish Mission Industries, 1915 (2014). Print.
- Anderson, Clare, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2004), p. 57.
- Bagchi. A , *Indian Economy and Society during World War One*, Social
- Bajaj, S K. *Historians on Maharaja Ranjit Singh: A study of their approaches*. Ibid, Vol XV-1, N0.29, April 1981, 1-12
- Bajwa, Fauja Singh. 1964. *The Military Systems of the Sikhs*, Delhi.
- Bal, S. S *Character of Ranjit Singh’s kingdom as seen by the British. The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol XXII-I, No. 43, April 1988, 1-8
- Balandier, G. (1951) *The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach in Social Change: The Colonial Situation*. Immanuel Wallerstein Ed. (1966) John Wiley and Sons, pg 34-61
- Ballantyne, T. *Systemizing Religion: from Tahiti to the Tat Khalsa. In: Orientalism and Race*. London: Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 34.



- Ballantyne, Tony. *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*. Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 38.
- Balwant Singh, KIH, to Jemadar Ishar Singh, 21st Punjabis, Peshawar (Gurmukhi), 11 Aug. 1915, L/MIL/5/825/5/721
- Banga, Indu. (Ed), *Five Punjabi centuries: Polity, economy, history and culture c 1500-1990*. Essays for J S Grewal, Delhi, 1978
- Banga, Indu. (1978) *The Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*, Manohar, Delhi
- Bannerjee, Himadri. (1982) *Agrarian Society of Punjab 1849-1901*, New Delhi, Manohar,
- Barrett, Michèle. "Death and the afterlife: Britain's colonies and Dominions." *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*. Ed. Santanu Das. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 301-320. Print.
- Barrier, N. Gerald. (1970) *The Sikhs and their Literature*, Delhi, Manohar.
- Barstow, A.E. 1898. *Recruiting Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs*, Calcutta.
- Basham, A.L. *The Untouchables: The Maharas and Mazabis*. Delhi: Gautam Book Centre, 2008, p. 45.
- Basingstoke, 1991; Ernst, *Colonialism and Transnational Psychiatry*; James H. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism: The 'Native-Only' Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900*. London:
- Basu, Bhupendranath. *Why India is heart and soul with Great Britain*. London: MacMillan, 1914. Print.
- Basu, Santanu. *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, p. 54.
- Bates, Crispin, 'Race, Caste, and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry', in Robb, Peter (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 224.

- Bayly, Susan. (1999) *The New Cambridge History of India, IV, 3, Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge
- Bayly, Susan, 'Caste and "Race" in the Colonial Ethnography of India', in Robb, (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, 1998, pp. 167–168
- Bertolani, B. 'Women and Sikhism in Theory and Practice: Normative Discourses, Seva Performances, and Agency in the Case Study of Some Young Sikh Women in Northern Italy', *Religions*, 11(2), 2020,
- Besant, Annie. *Girls' Education, The birth of New India; A Collection of Writings and Speeches on Indian Affairs*, Madras: Theosophical Publications Society, 1929, p. 53.
- Bhargava, M.B.L. *India's services in the War*. Allahabad: Standard Press, 1919. Print.
- Bhatia, Shyamala. *Social Change and politics in the Punjab 1898-1910*, New Delhi. Enkay Publishers Pvt Ltd. 1987
- Bhownagree, M. M. *The verdict of India*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916. Print.
- Bibicoff, Massia. (1915) *Our Indians at Marseilles*, Translated by Leonard Huxley. Smith, Elder & Co, London
- Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Life and Times of Ranjit Singh: A saga of benevolent despotism*, Hoshiarpur: V.V Research Institute Book Agency, 1977, p.311.
- Bosworth R. Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence, with portraits and maps*. Vol. 2, London: Blackstone, 1883, p. 75.
- Bouchard, C. (2012). Regionalism, Federalism and Internationalism in First World War France.
- Bouchard, Gérard. *The making of the nations and cultures of the New World: an essay in comparative history*. Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. Print.
- Brantlinger, P. 'Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and its afterlives'. *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 50(2), 2007, pp. 172-191.

- Brar, Sandip Singh, curator. *Doctor Brighton's Pavilion*. SikhMuseum.com, 2012. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Brian Robson ed., *Roberts in India, The Military Papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts, 1876-1893*, Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, UK, USA, 1993, p. 134.
- Buchanan, George. *The Tragedy of Mesopotamia*, London: Routledge, 1938, p. 91. Retrieved on 28 May 2021, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b746003](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b746003)
- Burbank, J & F. Cooper, *Empires in world history: Power and the politics of difference*, New York: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 211.
- Byron Farwell , *The Gurkhas*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company; 1984, pp 45. Byron
- Byron, Farewell,. *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947*, New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1989, p. 49.
- Calvert Michael & Peter Young, *A Dictionary of Battles, 1715-1815*. New York: Mayflower Books, 1979, p. 54.
- Candler, Edmund, *The Sepoy* (London: John Murray, 1919), p. 22.
- Carman, W.Y. 1969. *Indian Army Uniforms: Under the British from Eighteenth to 1947*, Artillery, Engineers and Infantry, Morgan-Grampan, London.
- Chakravorty, Upendra. *Indian nationalism and the First World War, 1914-1918*. Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1997. Print.
- Chandra, Bipan. *The writings of Bipan Chandra: the making of modern India: from Marx to Gandhi*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2012. 3-99. Print.
- Chandramouli, C & R. General, *Census of India. Provisional Population Totals*. New Delhi: Government of India, 2011, p. 211.
- Chenevix. Charles. Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies, 1900-1947*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 43.

- Chhabra, G.S. *Social and Economic History of the Punjab (1849-1901)*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers, 1962
- Chhina. R. Singh, *Nand Singh and Jangnamah Europe: Subaltern insights on the wars of Empire*. London: South Asia@ LSE, 2018, p.17.
- Clark, G Kitson. *Guide for Research Students working on Historical Subjects*. Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1968 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)
- Clarke, Robert. “WW1 Indian Army Ranks.” *Researching the Lives and Service Records of World War One Soldiers*. 2017. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Claude Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the rear of the front’ in *The world in world wars*, London: Brill, 2010, pp. 27-53.
- Cohen Stephen P., 1971. *The Indian Army: Its Contributions to the Development of a Nation*.
- Cohen, Stephen . *The Indian Amy: Its contributions to the development of a nation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 42.
- Collen, E. ‘*The Indian Army- A Sketch of its History and Organisation*’. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1907, p. 19.
- Collett, Nigel. *The butcher of Amritsar*. London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005. 270. Print.
- Collins, J. (1997) *Dr Brighton’s Indian patients: December 1914- January 1916*. Brighton: Brighton Books
- Collins, J. *Dr Brighton’s Indian Patients: December 1914 – January 1916*, Brighton: Brighton Printing Press, 1997, pp.6-9.
- Corrigan, J (1997) *Sepoys in the trenches: the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915*, Staplehurst: Spellmount.
- Cowsill, Alan, and Lalit Kumar Sharma. *World War One 1914-18*. Graphic novel. Campfire, 20 May 2014. Paper.

- Cunningham, J. D. *History of the Sikhs from the origin of the nation to the Battls of the Sutlej*. London: Asian Educational Services, 1994, Reprint by Rupa Paperback 2002, Eleventh Impression 2012, New Delhi, p. 14.
- Cunningham, J.D. '*History of the Sikhs*'. First printed 1848, Reprint New Delhi. Rupa Paperback 2002, Eleventh Impression 2012, p. 14.
- Cunningham, Joseph Davey (1966- Reprint- first published 1849) *A History of the Sikhs*. S Chand & Co, Delhi
- Darling, Malcolm Lyall (1934) *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village*. Oxford University Press, London
- Darling, Malcolm Lyall. *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, First edition 1925. Reprint, Delhi. South Asia Books 1978
- Das Santanu. (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, See chapters/articles of Claude Markovits, Ravi Ahuja, and Santanu Das in the book.
- Das, S. *Imperialism, Nationalism and the First World War in Indian Finding Common Ground*, London: Brill, 2011, p. 155.
- Das, Santanu . *British Army recruited half a million people from Punjab*, New Delhi: Quartz India, 2018, p. 72.
- Das, Santanu. *India, Empire and the First World War Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 53.
- Das, S. *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 289.
- Datta, Nonica (1999) *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Dendooven, Dominiek. "Living apart together: Belgian civilians and non-white troops and workers in wartime Flanders." *Race Empire and First World War Writing*. Ed. Santanu Das. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 143-157. Print.

- Deol, Harnik. 'Religion and Nationalism in India: The case of the Punjab', New York, Routledge, *Studies in the Modern History of Asia* (1st ed.) 2000, pp. 65–78.
- Dhavan, Purnima .*When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699–1799*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 40.
- Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethno-History of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan 1450-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 162.
- Doyle, Conan. *The British campaign in France and Flanders*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916. Ch.7, "The 'La Bassée-Armentières' operations from October 11 to 31 October 1914." Print.
- Dwyer, M. O' M. J. S. Warich, *India as I knew it*. New Delhi: Unistar Books, 2016, p. 213.
- Edwards, Elizabeth .*Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford: Berg, 2011, p. 58.
- Ellingwood Dewitt Jn. *A historical study of the Punjabi soldier in world war I*, essays in honour of Dr Ganda Singh, ed. by Harbans Singh and N.
- Ellinwood, C. D and Pradhan, S.D (1978) *Indians and the World War I*, New Delhi: Manohar.
- Ellinwood, DeWitt C., and Satyendra Dev Pradhan. *India and World War I*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1978. Print.
- Ethne K. Marengo, 1990. *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, New Delhi, Heritage Publishers.
- Falcon, R. W. *Handbook on Sikhs for the use of regimental officers*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1897, p. 176.
- Farewell, Byron (1989) *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947*, W.W Norton & Company: New York.

- Fell, Alison S. "Nursing the other: the representation of colonial troops in French and British First World War nursing memoirs." *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*. Ed. Santanu Das. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 158-174. Print.
- Ferling, John A. *Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America*. Westport: Greenwood, 1980, p.56.
- Field Marshall Lord Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, London, 1897, Reprint New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005, p. 532.
- Finer, Samuel. *Man on Horseback: The Role of Military in Politics*, London: Routledge, 1962, reprinted 2002, p. 37
- Fletcher, George, MacMunn & Alfred Crowdy Lovett, *The Armies of India*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911, p. 524.
- Flourens, P. *Phrenology examined*, London: Hogan & Thompson, 1846, p. 37.
- Fox, Richard G. *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- French, D. *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916 (RLE First World War)*. Routledge, 2014, p. 39.
- Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; first published as *Griff nach der Weltmacht* in 1961 in Jarboe, Andrew Tait. (2013) *Soldiers of Indian Empire Sepoys in and Beyond the Imperial Metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919*. North-Eastern University, 1967, pp. 35-36.
- Fuller, J. G. *Troop Morale and Popular culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-191*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 69.
- Fuller, M.F. C. *The Late Victorian Army: 1868–1914, Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, Oxford: Chandler and Beckett, 1920, pp. 199–203.

- Furber, H. *Penshurst: 'My Indian Years, 1910-1916'*, *Middle East Journal*, 3, Edinburgh, 1949, p.99.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 211
- Gait, E. A. . *Census of India*, 1911. Vol. I: India. Part II: Tables, 913, p. 46.
- Gait, E. *Census of India, 1901*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India. 1902, P 387
- Ganachari, Aravind. "First World War purchasing Indian loyalties: Imperial policy of recruitment and rewards." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40.8 (2005): 779-88. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Gandhi Serve Foundation. "Speech at Ras, June 26 1918." *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (e-book)*. New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999. Vol. 17. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Gandhi, M. K. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi: 82 Vol., XIV, p.484.
- Gardiner, Juliet. *What is History Today...?* London, Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988
- Gates, John M. *The Alleged Isolation of U. S Army officers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, New Jersey: Parameters, 10, 1982, pp.10, 32-45.
- Gavin Rand, Kaushik Roy (eds.) *Culture, Conflict and the Military in Colonial South Asia*. Taylor & Francis., 2017, pp 213
- Gaylor, John, *Sons of John Company: The Indian and Pakistan Armies, 1903–91* (1992, reprint, New Delhi: Lancer, 1993), p. 9.
- Gen. Sir James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, London: Constable and Company, 1920, p. 65.
- Gerwarth, Robert, and Erez Manela. "The Great War as a global war: Imperial conflict and the reconfiguration of world order, 1911-1923." *Diplomatic History* 38.4 (2014): 786-800. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.



- Godbole, J. H Indian General Hospital, Bournemouth, to S. N. Godbole, *Dapoli, Rutnagari* (Marathi), 23 July 1915, L/MIL/5/825/4/637.
- Gordon Corrigan (1999). *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15*. Kent: Spellmount Publishers; pp. 59.
- Gottschalk, Louis. (1950) *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, New York. Alfred A Knopf and Co, London
- Government of India. *India's contribution to the Great War*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923. Print.
- Grant, J. H. *Incidents in the Sepoy War: 1857-58*. London: Blackwood, 1874, p. 245.
- Greenhut, J (1983) The Imperial reserve: the Indian corps on the western front, 1914-1915 *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12, (1), 54-73
- Greenhut, J. 'Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army'. *The Journal of Military History*, 48(1), 1984, p. 15.
- Greenhut, J. 'The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914-15', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 1983, pp. 54-73.
- Greenhut, Jeffrey. "Race, Sex, and War: the impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914." *Military Affairs* 45.2 (1981): 71-74. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Grewal J.S. 1990. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge, pp.99-115.
- Grewal, J S (2009) *Sikhism and Gender*. In J. S Grewal Ed., *The Ideology, Institutions and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp206-225
- Grewal, J S. (1996) *New Cambridge History of the Sikh community: Five essays*. Oxford 1976, Delhi
- Grewal, J. S and Indu Banga. *Early eighteenth Century Punjab: From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i-Panjab*. Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1975

- Grewal, J.S (1972) *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Essays in Sikh History*. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
- Grewal, J.S (2007) *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjeet Singh*, New Delhi, Manohar
- Grewal, J.S (2011) *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Grewal, J.S (First Published 1990) *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge University Press New Delhi, 2002 (2nd edition)
- Grewal, Jagtar Singh. 'Sikh Identity, the Akalis and Khalistan', Jagtar Singh Grewal and Indu Banga ed., *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1998, pp. 65–103.
- Grewal, Jagtar Singh. *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.31.
- Grewal, Reeta, Pall, Sheena, Banga, Indu (Eds) *Five centuries of Sikh tradition. Ideology, Society, politics and culture*. Manohar Publishers and distributors, New Delhi 2005
- Grewal. Reeta, (2009) *Colonialism and Urbanisation in India: The Punjab Region*, Manohar, New Delhi
- Griffin, Sir Lepel. ( Reprint 1957) *Ranjit Singh*, S Chand & Co, Delhi
- Griffiths, P. J. *The British in India*, London: Robert Hale Limited, 1946, p. 112.
- Guha, S. *Environment and Ethnicity in India from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, p.70
- Guha, Ranajit (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 4, *Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 1–25
- Gupta, Hari Ram . 'A History of the Sikhs from Nadir Shah's Invasion to the Rise of Ranjit Singh (1739–1799)', Volume I: *Evolution of the Sikh Confederacies (1739–1768)*, Simla, Minerva Book Shop, 1952, p. 10.

- Gupta, Partha Sarathi, and Anirudh Deshpande. *The British Raj and its Indian armed forces, 1857-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.
- Habib, Irfan. (2005) *Jatts in Medieval Punjab' Pre-colonial and Colonial Punjab Society, Economy, Polity and Culture* Ed by Reeta Grewal & Sheena Pall, Manohar Publishers and Distributors
- Hack, Karl and Rettig, Tobias, 'Imperial Systems of Power, Colonial Forces and the makings of Modern Southeast Asia', in Hack, and Rettig, (eds), *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 11–12.
- Hanna Smythe, *War and Memorials: The age of Nationalism and the Great War*. New York: Brill Schoningh, 2019, p. 28.
- Hardinge, C. *My Indian Years, 1910-1916. The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Peshurst[With Plates, Including Portraits]*. John Murray, 1948, p. 99.
- Harish K. Puri and Paramjit S. Judge (eds.) *Social and Political Movements: Readings on Punjab*, Jaipur: Rawat Publishers, 2000.
- Harrison, M. *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 52-58.
- Harrison, Mark. "Disease, discipline and dissent: the Indian Army in France and England 1914-1915." *Medicine and modern warfare*. Ed. Roger Cooter. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. 185-205. Print.
- Hart, B. L. *A history of the first world war*, London: Pan Macmillan, 2014, p. 21.
- Hasrat, Bikramjit (1968) *Anglo Sikh Relations(1799-1849)* Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur
- Heathcote, T. A. '*The Military in British India: The Development of British Land Forces in South Asia*'. 1600–1947. Casemate Publishers, 2013, p. 233.
- Heathcote, T.A (1974) *the Indian Army: The Garrison of British Imperial India, 1822-1922*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles.

- Heike Liebau, 'Prisoners of War (India) in 1914-1918', online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08.
- Heike Liebau, *Hindustan* (newspaper), 'Prisoners of War (India) in 1914-1918', online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel,
- Hénaff, M. *Claude Levi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 93.
- Henderson, H. B. *The Bengalee: Or, Sketches of Society and Manners in the East*, London: Smith & Elder, 1829, p. 31.
- Herrmann, D.G. *The arming of Europe and the making of the First World War*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 59.
- Hew William McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 112.
- Higate, P. 'Martial races and enforcement masculinities of the global south: Weaponising Fijian, Chilean, and Salvadoran postcoloniality in the mercenary sector', *Globalizations*, 9(1), 35-52, 2012, p. 45.
- Hira, Bachan Singh. (1996) *Social Change in the Upper Bari Doab (1849-*
- Hodder, Reginald. *Famous fights of Indian native regiments*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914. Print.
- Holland, R. (1999) The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918. in Brown, JM and Louis, WR (eds) *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century*. Vol 4. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horne, Alstair. *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*. Reprint New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 12.

- Imperialism, nationalism and the First World War in India.” *Finding common ground new directions in First World War studies*. Ed. Jennifer D. Keene and Michael Scott Neiberg. Leiden: Brill, 2011a. 67-86. Print.
- Ingram, E. *The Letters of the First Viscount Hardinge of Lahore to Lady Hardinge and Sir Walter and Lady James 1844-1857*. 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 32, London: Camden Society, 1986, p. 221.
- Jack, George Morton ‘The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration’, *War in History* 13. 3, 2006, pp. 329-362. David Kenyon’s contribution makes the claim for the Indian cavalry on the Somme in 1916.
- Jack, George Morton. “The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration.” *War in History* 13.3 (2006): 329-62. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Jain, S. *Sikh or Khalsa?*, Montreal: Canadian Ethnic Studies- Etudes Ethniques au Canada, 22(2), 1999, p. 111.
- Jalil, R. *The Great War: Indian Writings on the First World War*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p. 25.
- Jarboe, A. T. (2015). The Long Road Home: Britain, Germany and the Repatriation of Indian Prisoners of War after the First World War. In *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945* (pp. 152-170). Routledge.
- Jarboe, A. T. (2021). *Indian Soldiers in World War I: Race and Representation in an Imperial War*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Jarboe, A.T. *Indian Soldiers in World War I: Race and Representation in an Imperial War, Nebraska*: U of Nebraska Press, 2021, p. 37.
- Jarboe, Andrew Tait, and Richard. S. Fogarty (eds.) *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, p. 34.
- Jarboe, Andrew Tait. “Soldiers of Empire: Indian sepoy in and beyond the Imperial metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919.” Thesis. Northeastern University, 2014 a. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Digital Repository Service, Apr. 2013. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

- Johal, Daljinder Singh “ Literary evidence on Social Structure in the Punjab (1750-1850) in *Journal of Regional History*, Vol 1, 1980, pg 51-69
- Johnson, R. *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 17.
- Jones, Heather. *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War. Britain, France and Germany 1914-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 29-69.
- Jones, Heather. “Imperial captivities: colonial prisoners of war in Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918”. *Race Empire and First World War Writing*. Ed. Santanu Das. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 175-193. Print.
- Jones, Kenneth W, (1994) *Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.
- Jones, Kenneth W. *Religious Identity and the Indian Census. The Census in British India* (ed N.G Barrier), Delhi: Manohar Book Depot, 1981, p 233.
- Jones, S. *Imperial Captivities*, in Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 36.
- Judge, P. S. *Politics of Sikh identity and its fundamentalist assertion. Economic and Political Weekly*,
- Judge, Paramjit Singh and Gurpreet Bal Ed. *Reconstructing Identities: Society through Literature*, Jaipur. Rawat Publishers 2008
- K. Qureshi, ‘Diasporic citizenship and militarization: Punjabi soldiers in the world wars’, *Citizenship Studies*, 17(3-4), 2013, pp.400-413.
- Kant Vedica, (2014) *If I die here, Who will remember me? India and the First World War*’ Lustre, 2014 Edition
- Karsten, P. ‘The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored’. *American Quarterly*, 36(3), 1989, pp. 389-418.
- Kaushik . Das, *The Army in British India from Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947*, Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2020, p. 73.

- Keegan , John. *The Face of Battle*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 23.
- Keegan, John . *The First World War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982, pp.130, 182.
- Keene, Jennifer. Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08
- Kerr, I. J. *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947*, 2006; Tan, Tai Yong: New Delhi: Sage, May 2005, p. 333.
- Kessinger. Tom. G. *Vilayatpur 1848-1968- Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*, Berkeley. University of California Press, 1947
- Khurana, G. ‘ J.D. Cunningham’s Report on the Sikh Kingdom, History and ideology: The Khalsa over 300 years (Ed by J.S Grewal and Indu Banga, Indian History congress, Tulika, New Delhi 1999, pg 88-93
- Killingray, David, and David E. Omissi, eds. *Guardians of Empire: the armed forces of the colonial powers c. 1700-1964*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. Print.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *The Eyes of Asia*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918. Print.
- Kocka, Jurgen. *Facing Total War: German Society 1914-1918*, Berg: Leamington Spa, 1984,
- Koller, C. & S. Das, *Representing Otherness: African, Indian, and European soldiers’ letters and memoirs*, 2011, p. 64.
- Koller, C. ‘The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War’. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26(1-2), 2008, pp.111-133.
- Koller, Christian Von Wilden, *AllerRassenniedergemetzelt: die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik, 1914-1930*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001, p. 212.

- Koller, John M. *'The Indian Way: An Introduction to the Philosophies & Religions of India'*. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 312–313.
- Kramer, Alan. *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 86.
- Kundu, Apurba. *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus*, London: Tauras Academic Studies, 1998, p. 31.
- Lafont Jean Marie. (2002). *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Lord of the Five Rivers*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, pp. 15–16.
- Lahiri, S. *Indians in Britain: Anglo Indian encounters, race and Identity, 1880-1930*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 49.
- Lange, B. 'Archival Silences as Historical Sources. Reconsidering Sound Recordings of Prisoners of War (1915-1918) from the Berlin
- Lange, B. 'Poste restante, and messages in bottles: sound recordings of Indian prisoners in the First World War', London, *Social Dynamics*, 41(1), 2015, pp.84-100.
- Lange, B. *South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, Linguistic and Musicological Field Studies in Prison Camps*. Ravi Ahuja, Heike Liebau u. Franziska Roy (Hg.), *When the war began, we heard of several kings*. 'South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany, New Delhi, 2011, pp.149-184.
- Latif, Syed Mohammad. (Reprint- 1964) *History of the Panjab from the remotest Antiquity to the Present time*, Eurasia Publishing House, New Delhi
- Lawrence Sondhaus (2011). *World War One: The Global Revolution* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 124.
- Lawrence. James, *Raj: The Making of British India*. Abacus: London, 1997, p. 425.
- Leed, E. J.. *No man's land: combat and identity in World War I*. London: CUP Archive, 1979,
- Leese, P. *Shell shock: traumatic neurosis and the British soldiers of the First World War*, New York: Springer. 2002, p. 172.



- Leigh, M. S. *The Punjab and the War*, Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1922, p. 44.
- Leitner, G.W. *History of Indigenous education in the Punjab since Annexation and 1882*, Patiala: Punjabi Languages department, 1971 (reprint)
- Lenman, Bruce. *Britain's Colonial Wars*. London: Pearson, 2001, p. 100.
- Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914*, London: Basingstoke, 2014, p.182.
- Lerner, Paul. *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930*, NY: Ithaca, 2003, p. 65. –
- Levine, Philippa. 'Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldierly in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998, pp. 104-130.
- Levine, Philippa, ed. *Gender and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
- Lloyd George, David. *War memoirs of David Lloyd George, 1918*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1937. Print.
- Loughran, Tracey. 'Shell-Shock and Psychological Medicine in First World War Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, xxii, 1, 2009, p. 34.
- Lt. Col J.W.B. Merewether & Sir F. Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, Reprint of 2nd edition, 1918, Naval & Military Press 1996, p. 92.
- Lt. Col. J.W.B. Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith , *The Indian Corps in France*. London: John Murray. 1920, p 69
- Lt. Col. R. G. Burton, *The First and Second Sikh Wars*, Simla: Government Printing Press, 1911, p. 23.
- Lüdke, Tilman. *Jihad made in Germany: Ottoman and German propaganda and intelligence operations in the First World War*. Münster: Lit, 2005. Print.

- Maasia Bibbikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, Paris: De L'Academie Francaise, 1915, p. 58.
- MacDonald, Ramsay J. *Socialism after the War*, Manchester and London: National Labour Press, 1918, p. 58.
- Macmilan, M (2001) *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and its attempt to end war*, London: John Murray
- MacMunn , G. F. & A. C. Lovett, *The Armies of India*, London: A. and C. Black, 1911, p. 215.
- MacMunn, G. F. '*Armies of India*', London. Adam and Charles Black, 1911, p. 124.
- Maconachie. R. '*Selected Agricultural Proverbs of the Punjab*', Medical Hall Press, Delhi, 1890, pp 233-34
- Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadr movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British Empire*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, p. 52.
- Maia. Ramnath, *Haj to utopia: how the Ghadar movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. Print.
- Major W. Broadfoot, *The Career of Major George Broadfoot. C. B., in Afghanistan and the Punjab*, London: J Murray Publishers, 1888, p. 43.
- Mandair, Arvind Pal Singh. *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Bloomsburg Academic. 2013, pp. 78–86.
- Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Marenco, Ethne K. *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, New Delhi. Heritage publishers, 1976

- Mark. Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, Manchester: Plural Publishers, 2000, p. 49.
- Markovits, Claude. "Indian soldiers' experiences in France during World War I: seeing Europe from the rear of the Front." *The world in world wars: experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia*. Ed. Liebau, Heike, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamza, and Ravi Ahuja. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Print.
- Mason, Philip *A matter of Honour: An account of the Indian Army, its officers and Men*, Dehra Dun, reprint EBD Publishers 1988, pp. 405-453.
- Mathur, S. *An Indian Encounter: Portraits for Queen Victoria*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 64.
- Mazumdar, Rajit K. *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 2.
- Mazumdar, S. 'Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States', *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*, University of California Press, 1984, p. 318.
- Mazumder, Rajit K. *The Indian Army and the making of Punjab*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. Print.
- McKale, Donald M. *War by revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the era of World War I*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008. Print.
- McLain, R. 'Frontline Masculinity: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–1915'. *Gender and Violence in British India* (2014). Palgrave Macmillan: New York, pp. 61-88.
- McLain, Robert, 'The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Reconsideration', in Jensen, Geoffrey and Wiest, Andrew (eds), *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 167–193.

- McLeod, H. 'The Order for Khālsā Initiation' in *Religions of India in Practice*, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 165.
- McLeod, W H *Sikhism?* New Delhi: Penguin Books 1977
- McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin-Baghdad express: the Ottoman Empire and Germany's bid for world power*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2012. Print.
- Menezes, S.L. 'Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty
- Menezes, S.L (1993) *Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century*, Roli Books: New Delhi
- Merewether and Smith, 1917, pp. 304-05; David Omissi, *Sikh Soldiers in Europe during the First World War, 1914–18, Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, 2012, pp. 36-50.
- Merewether, Lt Col. J.W.B., and Lt Col. Sir Frederick Smith. *The Indian Corps in France*, London: John Murray, 1918. Print.
- Metcalf, Thomas R. *Imperial Connections. India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*, Berkeley: California University Press, 2008, p. 98.
- Metcalf, Thomas R. 'Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1970'. Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 210-214.
- Metcalf, Thomas R. *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1934, reprinted 2005, 2010, p. 85.
- Miller, David Hunter. *The drafting of the covenant*. New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1928. Print.
- Mills, Ian. 'Influenza in India during 1918-19' in Dyson, *India's Historical Demography*, 1989, pp. 222-60.
- Mittal S. C. *Freedom Movement in the Punjab (1905-29)*, New Delhi Concept Publishing Company 1977

- Mohammed. Rafiullah, *Gwalior's part in the war*. London: Hazell Watson & Viney, 1920. Print.
- Morrow Jr, J. H. (2010). Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers' Stories. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 632(1), 12-25.
- Morrow, J. H. Jr., 'Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers' Stories', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 632(1), 2011, pp.12-25.
- Morrow, John H. Jr. (2004). *The Great War: An Imperial History*. New York: Routledge
- Mukerje, Asoke, ed. *Indian War Memorials of the First World War*. New York: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Murray. Field Surgeon JSAHR, LXXII, in A. Bruce, 'A bibliography of British military history'. De Gruyter Saur, 2016. P 40.
- Nagra, Daljit. "The last post: letters home to India during the First World War." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Ltd., 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Nahar. Jawandha, '*Glimpses of Sikhism*'. Sanbun Publishers, 2018, p. 89.
- Nair. Janaki. *Women and Law in Colonial India: A social History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996
- Nandy, Ashis . *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 30.
- Nandy, Ashis. (ed.) *Science, hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for modernity*,
- Neiberg Michael S. (2006). *Fighting the Great War: A Global History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Neiberg, Michael S. *Fighting the Great War: a global history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. Print.

- Nicolson, C., *Longman Companion to the First World War: Europe 1914-1918*, Routledge, 2014, p. 27.
- NLS, Minto, MS 11, 322, in I. F. Beckett, 'Women and Patronage in the Late Victorian Army'. *History*, 85(279), 2000, pp. 463-480.
- Nonica Datt, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 59.
- O'Dwyer, Michael. *India as I knew it, 1885-1925*. London: Constable, 1926. Print.
- Oberoi, Harjot. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 322–326.
- Oberoi, *The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 76.
- Omissi, David . Sikh Soldiers in Europe during the First World War, 1914–18, *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, 2012, pp. 36-50.
- Omissi, David *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, p. 1.
- Omissi, David. *The Sepoy and the Raj*. London: Macmillan, 1994, Table 1.4, p. 20.
- Omissi, David. (1994) *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940*, Macmilan: London
- Palit, D. K. *Saga of an Indian I.M.S. officer: the life and times of Lieutenant Colonel Anath Nath Palit, OBE 1883-1972*. New Delhi: Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, United Service Institution of India, 2006. Print.
- Pannikar, K. M. *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony Intellectuals and Social consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1995, p. 65.
- Parekh, Lord Bhikhu. "India's contribution to the Great War." *Asia House*. Asia House Bagri Foundation Literature Festival, 21 May 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

- Parry, R. E. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Patiala: Languages Department, 1970, p. 151.
- Pati, B. *India and the First World War*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1996, p. 35.
- Pennell, C. (2012) *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland*. Oxford University Press
- Perlmutter, Amos *Political Roles and Military Rulers*, N.J: Totowa, 1981, p. 16.
- Perry, F. W. *The Commonwealth armies: Manpower and organisation in two world wars*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, pp.85-86.
- Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven, 2004).
- Pettit, Philip *Republicanism: A theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.26; Also see Q. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
- Petrie, David. 'Recent Developments in Sikh Politics, 1900-1911, A Report', Amritsar: Chief Khalsa Diwan, 1911, p.11.
- Poe, M., & Burrows, E. (2008). Edwin Burrows interview," *Forgotten Patriots: The Untold Story of American Prisoners During the Revolutionary War*".
- Porter, B (2004) *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition Harlow: Pearson
- Puri, Harish K and Paramjit S Judge eds *Social and Political Movements: Readings on Punjab*, Jaipur Rawat Publishers 2000
- Puri, Harish, 2004 *Dalits: in Regional Context*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- Puri, Nina. *Political elite and society in the Punjab*, New Delhi, Vikas 1985
- Putkowski, Julian and Julian Sykes. *Shot at dawn: executions in World War One by authority of the British Army Act*. Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999. Print.
- Raghavan, S. *Liberal thought and colonial military institutions*. London: Routledge, In *India's Grand Strategy*, pp. 100-124.

- Raghavan, S. 'Liberal thought and colonial military institutions', in *India's Grand Strategy*, Delhi: Routledge India, 2014, pp. 100-124.
- Ram, Jhinda. *My trip to Europe*, Lahore: Singh printing Press, 1893, p. 12.
- Rana, Chhina . *The Indian Distinguished Service Medal*. New Delhi: InvictaIndia, 2001. Print.
- Ray, Sangeela. (2000) *En-Gendering India: Women and Nation in Colonial and Post colonial Narratives*, U.S.A Duke University Press
- Reynolds, David .*The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Norton, 2014, p. 22.
- Risley, H. &W. Crooke, *The people of India*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999, p. 81.
- Robertson, E. 'Norman Lindsay and the 'Asianisation' of the German soldier in Australia during the First World War', Perth, *The Round Table*, 103(2), 2014, pp.211-231.
- Robinson, C. 'Indian soldiers on the Western Front: the role of religion in the Indian army in the Great War', *Religions of South Asia*, 9(1), 2015, pp.43-63.
- Rose, H. A. *Census of India*, 1901. Vol. XVII: Punjab, its Feudatories, and the North West Frontier Province. Part I: The Report on the Census. 1902, p. 194.H.
- Rosen, S.P. *Societies and Military Power: India and its armies*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 38.
- Roy, K. *Indian Army and the First World War: 1914–18*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 92.
- Roy, K.. 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880– 1918', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013,
- Roy, Kaushik *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 2012, p 98



- Roy, Kaushik. 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(4), 2013, pp. 1310-1347.
- Roy, Kaushik. *The Army in British India from Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947*, London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2012, p. 48.
- Sadowsky, Jonathan . *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley, 1999)
- Saggu, D.S. *Battle Tactics and War Manoeuvres of the Sikhs*. New Delhi: Notion Press, 2018, p. 36.
- Said, E. W. & S. Jhally, *Edward said on orientalism*, Vol. 40. Northampton, Massachusetts: Media Education Foundation, 2002, p. 74.
- Saini, B. S. *The Social and Economic History of the Punjab: 1901-1939*, Delhi, Ess Ess Publications. 1975
- Sander, Micheal L. Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18*, London: MacMilan International Higher Education, 1982, p. 32.
- Santanu Das, (2018) *India, Empire and First World War Culture*. Writings, Images and Songs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Santanu, Das, ed. *Race, empire and First World War writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011c.
- Satia, P. 'Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the redemption of empire and technology in the First World p.91.
- Savarkar, V. D. *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*, Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1947, p. 258.
- Seiple, Chris. 'The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security'. Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 96.
- Sen, Indrani (2002) *Women and Empire: Representations in the writings of British India, 1858-1900*. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

- Shakespear, Colonel L. W., *History of the 2nd King Edward's Own Goorkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1912), p. 29.
- Shani, G. *Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 59.
- Sharma, Harish. C. *The Artisans of Punjab: A study of Social change in historical Perspective, 1849-1947*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1996
- Sharma, Radha. (2000) *Peasantry and the State: Early Nineteenth century Punjab*, K. K Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi
- Sharma, S. R. *Punjab in Ferment*, New Delhi. S Chand and Company 1971
- Shashi. Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016, p. 162.
- Sheffield, G (2001) *Forgotten Victory: The First World War, Myths and realities*. London: Headline
- Sheffield, G. *Leadership in the trenches: officer-man relations, morale and discipline in the British army in the era of the First World War*, New York: Springer, 2000, p. 69.
- Shephard, Ben *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914–1994*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 71.
- Shultz, Friar Brown. *Empires in World War I: shifting frontiers and imperial dynamics in a global conflict*. London: Tauris, 2014b. Print.
- Singh , Ganda. *Gobind Singh, Guru (1666-1708), Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Patiala: Punjabi University Patiala, Archived from the original on 29 July 2017. Retrieved on 7 March 2019.
- Singh Pashaura and Louis E. Fenech. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 225–39.
- Singh Teja and Singh Ganda (Ed) *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: First death Centenary Memorial Volume*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala Reprinted 1970, First Published 1939

- Singh, Joginder. 'The Sikhs in the British Census Reports, Punjab'. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1986, pp. 502-506.
- Singh, Amandeep and Madra, Parmjit Singh, '*Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves: Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606–1809)*', New York: Palgrave Macmillan, US, 2004, p. 76.
- Singh, Amarinder. *Honour and Fidelity: India's Military Contribution to the Great War 1914-1918*. New Delhi: Roli Books, 2015, p. 92.
- Singh, Chetan. (1991) *Region and empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Singh, Fauja (1964) *Military System of the Sikhs (1799-1849)*. Motilala Banarasi Das, Delhi
- Singh, Gajendra. *The testimonies of Indian soldiers and the two World Wars: between self and sepo*y. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Print.
- Singh, Ganda.' *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur: Based on Contemporary and Original Records*'. Sikh History Research Department, 1935, p. 229.
- Singh, J. 'Formative Phase of National Movement Among the Sikhs', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 54, 1993, pp. 423-427.
- Singh, J. '*Mazhabi Sikhs in the British Army in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947*'. The Criterion Vol7, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 59-64.
- Singh, Joginder (1997) *The Sikh Resurgence*, National Book Organisation, New Delhi ISBN- 81-85135-87-8
- Singh, Joginder. 'Socio-Political Beliefs and Attitudes of the Sikh Elites in the Last Quarter of Nineteenth Century', *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol. VII, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1983,
- Singh, Joginder. Resurgence in Sikh Journalism' *Journal of Regional History*, Vol III, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1980, pp. 99-116.
- Singh, Kavita 'A Study of Visual Narratives on the Life of Guru Tegh Bahadur'. Gyankosh Vol III, Dec 2020, pp. 11-28.

- Singh, Khushwant. (1962) *Ranjit Singh: Maharajah of the Punjab*, George Allen & Unwin, London.
- Singh, Khushwant. 'A History of the Sikhs, Volume I: 1469–1839', Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 121.
- Singh, Pashaura 'Gurmat: The Teachings of the Gurus,' *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. edited by
- Singh, Patwant (2008). *Empire of the Sikhs: The Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Peter Owen. pp. 113–124.
- Singh, Patwant *The Sikhs*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, p. 42.
- Singh, Prithi Pal. 'The History of Sikh Gurus'. Lotus Press, 15 September 2007, p. 158.
- Singh, Kushwant. "Ranjit Singh (1780–1839)". *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*. Punjabi University Patiala. Retrieved 18 August 2015.
- Singh. Hardip. Syan, 'Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India'. Tauris. I. B. 2000, pp. 229-234.
- Singh; Teja. Sita Ram Kohli (1986). *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. New Delhi. Atlantic Publishers. pp. 65–68.
- Sir Charles Lucas (ed.) *The Empire at War* (5 Vols.) Vol 1, London: Publication House, 1921-26,
- Sir Charles, Prestwood Lucas, *The Empire at War*, Vol. 5. Oxford University Press, 1926, p. 54.
- Sir Griffiths, Percival, *To Guard my People: The History of the Indian Police* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1971)
- Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (eds.), *Psychiatry and Empire* (Basingstoke, 2007)
- Smith, R (2004) *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race,*

- Soherwardi, Syed Hussain. *Punjabisation in the British Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military rule in Pakistan*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005, p. 198.
- Soherwardi, Syed Hussain. *Punjabisation in the British Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military Rule*
- Sondhaus, Lawrence. *World War One: the global revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.
- Sonhaus, L (2011) *World War One: The Global Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Sorensen, M. L.S. & D. Viejo-Rose, (eds.), *War and cultural heritage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 34.
- Spear, Percival. *A History of India*, London: Routledge, 1970, pp.183-84.
- Steel, Flora Annie. *The Garden of Fidelity*, London: A. &C. Black Ltd., 1929, pp. 37.
- Storey, William Kelleher. *The First World War: a concise global history*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. Print.
- Storey, WK (2009) *The First World War: A Concise Global History*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
- Strachan, H. (2004), *Martial Races: The Military, race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Strachen, H (2010) ‘*The First World War as a Global War*’ in *First World War Studies*. (1) p 3-14
- Streets, H. ‘*Martial races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture*’, 1857–1914. Manchester University Press, 2017, p. 39.
- Streets, Heather. *The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 94-95.
- Surjit Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurudwaras Legislation*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist. 1993, p. 12.

- Syan, H. S. '*Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century*', IB Tauris, 2000, pp. 48–55.
- Talbot, Ian (1988) *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, The Riverdale Company Maryland, by arrangement with Manohar Publications, New Delhi
- Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: Military, Governance and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*, New Delhi: Sage, 2005, p. 79.
- Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015, p. 45.
- Tatla, D. S. 'Sikh free and military migration during the colonial period', *The Cambridge survey of world migration*, Cambridge, 1995, pp.69-73.
- Tharoor, Shashi (2016) *An Era of darkness; The British Empire in India*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi
- Trench, Charles Chenevix. *The Indian army and the king's enemies 1900-1947*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988. Print.
- VanKoski, S. 'Letters home, 1915–16: Punjabi soldiers reflect on war and life in Europe and their meanings for home and self', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2(1), 43-63, 1995, pp.49-50.
- Visram, R. (2015). *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*. London, Routledge. P 321
- Visram, Rozina. *Asians in Britain: 400 years of history*. London: Virginia Pluto Press, 2002. Print.
- W Lee Warner, '*The Life of the Marquis of Dalhousie*'. New York: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1904, p. 59.
- W.E.B. DuBois, '*The World War and the Color Line*', *The Crisis*, November 1914, pp. 28-29.
- Waheeduddin, Fakir Syed. (1965, 4<sup>th</sup> edition) *The Real Ranjit Singh*. Lion Art Press, Karachi

- Wakefield, Col. J., and Lt. Col. J.M. Weippart, eds. *Indian cavalry officer Captain Roly Grimshaw*. Tunbridge Wells: Costello, 1986. Print.
- Walia, Amrit. (2005) *Development of Education and Socio-Political Change in the Punjab 1882-194*, ABS Publications, Jalandhar
- Walsh Judith E. (2004). *Domesticity in India- What Women learned when Men gave them advice*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, USA
- Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800–58*, London:
- Wikeley, J. M., *Punjabi Musalmans* (1915, reprint, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), List of Authorities Consulted.
- Willcocks, Gen. Sir James. *With the Indians in France*. London: Constable and Company, 1920. Print
- William Kelleher Storey (2010). *The First World War: A Concise Global History*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield
- William Skelton, ‘Army officers Attitudes towards Indians 1830-1860’, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1976, pp. 113-124.
- Winegard, TE (2012) *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winter, Jay. ‘Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War’; Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914–30* (London, 2010)
- Winter, JM (1998) *The Experience of World War I*. London: Greenwich Editions
- Wohl, Robert. *The Generation of 1914*, London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1980, p. 39.
- Ziogas, I.O &L.C. Triarhou, ‘Anders Retzius and his gyri’, *Neurological Sciences*, 37(11), 1904.

## Research Articles

- A. Burton, Making a spectacle of Empire: Indian travellers in Fin-de-Siècle London. *History Workshop Journal*, 42(1), 2016, 126-146. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/1996.42.127>
- A. C. Lyall, *Asiatic studies- Religious and Social*, J. Murray, 1882, p. 48.
- A. D. Barder, 'Scientific racism, race war and the global racial imaginary', *Third World Quarterly*, 40(2), 2019, pp.207-223.
- A. Ganachari, 'First World War: Purchasing Indian Loyalties: Imperial Policy of Recruitment and Rewards', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, pp.779-88.
- A. Koller, 'The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26(1-2), 2008, pp.111-133.
- A. L. Conklin, 'Colonialism and human rights, a contradiction in terms? The case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914', *The American Historical Review*, 103(2), 2018, pp.419-442.
- Anand, Mulk Raj. (1975) *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography of Ideas*, Delhi: Arnold- Hienemann, (First published in 1946)
- Anglo-Indian Army Slang." CWGC. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- B. Rajarajan, 'Indian Army and the First World War- A Study if Indian Army's participation in France and Flanders', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 46, 1985, pp. 650-655.
- Beckett, Ian. "The Singapore Mutiny of February 1915". *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* LXII (1984): 132-153. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- C. Chatterjee, 'War for Independence: The Khalsa against the Company Raj, 1845–46 and 1848–49', *Indian Historical Review*, 39(2), 2012, pp. 317-336.
- C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 68(270), 1955,



- Chakraborti, Poulami (2019) The Notion of a Nation: Tagore's Idea of Nationalism, Spirituality and Indian Society International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science (IJELS) Vol-4, Issue-4, Jul
- Chaudhuri, Nirad C., 'The Martial Races of India, Part III', *Modern Review*, Vol. XLIX, No. 289 (1931), p. 69.
- Chene, Mary Des, 'Military Ethnology in British India', *South Asia Research*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1999), pp. 121–122.
- Chudal, A. A. (2020). What Can a Song Do to You? A life story of a Gurkha prisoner in World War I. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43(3), 392-406.
- Constable, Philip, 'The Marginalization of a Dalit Martial Race in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Western India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (2001), p. 443.
- D. Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History*, 1(3), 300-318. 1994, p. 209. Retrieved May 1, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26004374>
- D.A Low, 'Pakistan and India: Political Legacies from the Colonial Past', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 25 (2), 2003, p.262.
- Das, Santanu. "Ardour and anxiety: politics and literature in the Indian Homefront." *The world in world wars: experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia*. Ed. Heike Liebau. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 341-368. Print.
- Europe through Indian eyes: Indian soldiers encounter England and France, 1914-1918." *The English Historical Review* CXXII.496 (2007): 371-96. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Finding labor from India for the war in Iraq: the jail porter and Labor Corps, 1916-1920." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49.02 (2007): 412-445. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

- Fischer-Tiné, Harald. "Indian nationalism and the 'world forces': transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War." *Journal of Global History* 2.03 (2007): 325-344. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- French army to march down Rajpath on Indian Republic Day 2016." *indiatoday* 11 Jan. 2016: Education. *India Today*. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- G. Martin, 'The Influence of Racial Attitudes in British Policy towards India during the First World War', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14, London, 1986, p. 34.
- G. S. Komma, 'The Sikh Situation in the Punjab (1907-1922)', in *Panjab Past and Present*, 12 (1923) reprint, 1978, p. 426.
- Gardner, Nikolas. "Morale and discipline in a multi-ethnic army: The Indian Army in Mesopotamia (1914–1917)." *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 4.1 (2013): 1-20. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Grewal, J.S. (1990) *Christian Presence and Cultural Reorientation: The case of the Colonial Punjab*, in Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 51<sup>st</sup> session, Calcutta.
- Health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914', *The Journal of Military History*, 45(2), 1981, p. 71 (India War Public Record Office, London, 1914).
- Henrice Altink, 'Modernity, Race and Mental Health Care in Jamaica, c.1918–1944', *Journal of the Department of Behavioural Sciences*, ii, 1 (2012).
- Hershman, Paul. *Punjabi Kinship and Marriage*. Delhi. Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1981
- Hew McLeod, "Sikhs and Muslims in the Punjab". *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. 22 (s1),1987, pp. 155–165.
- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*. New York: Viking and *The First World War: Volume 1: To Arms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 and *The First World War in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004

- Hilary Buxton, 'Imperial Amnesia: Race, Trauma and Indian Troops in the First World War', *Past & Present*, Volume 241, Issue 1, Oxford, November 2018, p. 243.
- Ian Talbot, 'British Rule in the Punjab, 1849-1947: Characteristics and Consequences', *London Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 19, 1991, No 2, pp. 232-256.
- Jain, Anurag. "Rudyard Kipling and the 'Eyes of Asia': recruiting the voices of Indian soldiers for WWI Propaganda." The 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Society for First World War Studies. Washington. 18-20 Oct. 2007. Reading.
- Jeffery, Keith. "'An English barrack in the oriental seas'? India in the aftermath of the First World War." *Modern Asian Studies* 15.03 (1981): 369-386. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Jeffrey Greenhut, 'Race, Sex, and War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914', *Military Affairs*.45. 2April, 1981, pp. 71-74.
- Jeffrey Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army', *Military Affairs*.48. 1 Jan., 1984, pp.15-18.
- Jeffrey Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History XII*, Oxford: Routledge,1983, pp. 54-73.
- K. Mohan, 'The Colonial Ethnography', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, January 2012, p.831.
- K. Mohan, 'The Colonial Ethnography: Imperial Pursuit of Knowledge for Hegemony in British India (late 19<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 63, 2002, pp.827-836.
- Keith Jeffrey. 'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas' India in the Aftermath of the First World War'. *Modern Asian Studies* , 15, 3, 1981, pp. 369-386.

- Kelly, Saul. “‘Crazy in the Extreme’? The Silk Letters Conspiracy.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 49.2 (2013): 162-78. Web. 26 Feb. 2017. DOI : [10.1080/00263206.2012.759106](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2012.759106)
- Koller, ‘The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their Deployment in Europe during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, March/July,2008, pp. 111-133.
- Koller, C (2008) *The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War*. *Immigrants & Minorities*. 26 (1/2) p. 111-33
- Koller, Christian. “Representing otherness: African, Indian and European soldiers’ letters and memoirs.” *Race Empire and First World War Writing*. Ed. Santanu Das. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 127-142. Print.
- Lautarchiv’, Humbolt University, *Sound Effects-An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience*, 7(3), 2017, pp.46-60.
- Levine, Philippa. “Battle colors: Race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I.” *Journal of Women’s History* 9.4 (1998): 104-30. Web. 26 Feb. 2017. DOI : [10.1353/jowh.2010.0213](https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0213)
- Liebau, Heike, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamza, and Ravi Ahuja, eds. *The world in world wars: experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Print.
- M. B. Karush &, P. N. Stearns, Five Decades of Social History: An Interview with Peter Stearns. *Journal of Social History*, 51(3), 2018, pp. 488-499.
- M. Barrett, ‘Subalterns at war: First World War colonial forces and the politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission’, *Interventions*, 9(3), Edinburgh, 2007, pp. 451-474.
- M. Marriot, ‘Caste Ranking and Community Structure in Five Regions of India and Pakistan’, *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 17(902-2016-67552), Mumbai, 1962, pp. 92-93.

- MacMunn, George. "The Romance of the martial races." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 80.1 (1932): 41-28. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Mahajan, Sucheta. "Towards freedom: the making of a history". *Decolonization and the Struggle for National Liberation in India (1909-1971): historical, political, economic, religious and architectural aspects*. Ed. Di Costanzo, Thierry and Guillaume Ducoeur. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, Peter Frankfurt, 2014. 185-199. Print.
- Mahrenholz, Recordings of South Asian Languages, in: Roy/ Liebau/ Ahuja (eds.), "When the war began we heard of several kings" 2011, pp. 198-200; Liebau: The German Foreign Office, pp. 108, 117.
- Malhotra, Anshu. 'The Moral Woman and Punjabi Society of the late Nineteenth Century', *Social Scientist*. Vol 20, Nos 5-6. May-June 1992 pg 34-63
- Martin, G. (1986). The influence of racial attitudes on British policy towards India during the First World War. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14(2), 91-113.
- Martin, Gregory. "The influence of racial attitudes on British policy towards India during the First World War." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14.2 (1986): 91-113. Web. 26 Feb. 2017. DOI : [10.1080/03086538608582713](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086538608582713)
- N. Barrier, 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1(4), New Delhi, 1967, pp. 353-383.
- Nicola Mooney, 'The Yeoman Jats of Punjab: Time, expertise and the colonial construct of Jat Sikh identity' Published in *Anthropologica*, Vol 55, No. 2(2013) Canadian Anthropology Society, 2013, pp. 277-290.
- P. Levine, Battle colors: Race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I. *Journal of Women's History*, 9(4), 1998, pp. 104-130.
- P. N. Stearns, 'Social history present and future'. *Journal of Social History*, 37(1), 2003, pp. 9-19.

- Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War*, London: Basingstoke, 2002, p. 32; *Shell-Shock*, special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxv, 1 (2000)
- Pettit, Philip, 'Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* - J Theor Polit. 15. 2013, pp. 387-403.
- Prem. Chowdhry, 'Militarized Masculinities: Shaped and Reshaped in Colonial South-East Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (3), 2013, pp. 713-50.
- R. Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20(3), Cambridge, 1986,
- R. J. Sutcliffe, 'Feminizing the professional: The government reports of Flora Annie Steel', *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 7(2), 1992, pp.153-173.
- R. S. Chillana, 'Condition of women as depicted', *Punjab Past and Present*, 7(1), Apr 1973, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp.110–18.
- R. Singha, 'The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (87), 2015, pp. 27-62.
- R. Visram, 'The first world war and the Indian soldiers', *Indo-British Review*, 16(2), 1989, pp. 17-26.
- Radhika Singha, 'Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq. The Jail Porter and Labor Corps, 1916-1920', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49/2, 2007, pp. 412-445
- Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a "Proper" Passport for the Colony. Border-Crossing in British India, c. 1882-1922', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 50,2009, pp. 289-315.
- Radhika Singha, 'The Recruiter's Eye on "the Primitive". To France - and Back - in the Indian Labour Corps, 1917-18', in Kitchen, James E./Miller, Alisia/Rowe, Laura (eds.), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts. Competing Histories of the First World War*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, pp. 199-224.

- Rand, Gavin, ““Martial Races” and “Imperial Subjects”: Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857–1914’, *European Review of History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006), p. 8.
- Richard N. Ellis, ‘The Utilitarian Generals’, *Western Historical Quarterly* (3), 1998, pp. 170-78;
- Rob Johnson (ed.) *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p. 3.
- Roberts, E. F. S. R., “*Forty-one Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-chief*” (Vol. 1). London: Macmillan; New York: Macmillan Company, 1898, p. 128.
- Roberts, *Forty One Years*, Appendix XII- *Address of the Sikhs of Punjab to Lord Roberts on his visit to Lahore before his departure from India*, p. 568.
- Robinson, Catherine. “Neither East nor West: some aspects of religion and ritual in the Indian army of the Raj.” *Religion* 26.1 (1996): 37-47. Web. 26 Feb. 2017. DOI : [10.1006/reli.1996.0003](https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.1996.0003)
- Robson, B. (1993), *Roberts in India: The Military Papers of Field Marshall Roberts, 1876-1893*, Stroud: Alan Sutton
- Roy, Franziska/Liebau, Heike/Ahuja, Ravi (eds.) *When the war began we heard of several kings. South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi: 2011, pp. 187-206 - \
- Roy, Kaushik (2012) *The Army in British India From Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947*, Bloomsbury Academic Press
- Roy, Kaushik. *War and society in colonial India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Rumbold, A. (1979), *Watershed in India, 1914-1922*. London: Athlone Press
- S. A. H. Bingley & F. Bremner, *Notes on the Warlike Races of India and Its Frontiers: Compiled by Captain A.H.Bingley, To Accompany Bremner's "Types of the Indian Army"*, London: F. Bremner, c/o Morgan & Kidd, 1897, p. 321.

- S. B Cohen, *Geopolitics of the world system*, London: Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 43.
- S. Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 28(3), New Delhi, 1969, pp. 453-468.
- S. Colpani, *Beyond the black waters: A memoir of Sir Sathi Narain*, editorrips@ usp. ac. Fj, 1996, p. 49.
- S. K. Luthra, 'Out of the ashes: Sikh American institution building and the promise of equality for Sikh women', *Sikh Formations*, 13(4), 2017, pp.308-332.
- Sahib and sepoy: an inquiry into the relationship between the British officers and native soldiers of the British Indian Army." *Military Affairs* 48.1 (1984): 15. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Sepoys and the siege of Kut-al-Amara, December 1915 - April 1916." *War in History* 11.3 (2004): 307-26. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Shiv Gajrani, 'The Sikhs: The Revolt of 1857 in Punjab', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 61, Part One: Millennium, 2000-2001, pp. 679-685.
- Shohat, E. (2006). Notes on the "Post-Colonial". In *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (pp. 233-249). Duke University Press.
- Silbey, David. "Over the dirty waters: the Experience of British Indians in World War I." *Personal perspectives: World War I*. Ed. Timothy C. Dowling. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2006. Print.
- Singh, G. Jodh Singh, "The Ghadar Movement and the Anti-Colonial Deviant in the Anglo-American Imagination". *Past & Present*, 2019, 245(1), pp. 187-219.
- Singh, Karan Deep. "In India's folk songs, echoes of WWI." *Wall Street Journal blogs*. Wall Street Journal, 31 Dec. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Singh, Sukhwant (2005) The Peasants response to Colonial Environment, *Pre-colonial and Colonial Punjab Society, Economy, Polity and Culture* Ed by Reeta Grewal & Sheena Pall, Manohar Publishers and Distributors



Singha, *Labour (India)in:1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 2016-02-19, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10836.

Singha, Radhika (2011) The Recruiter's Eye on "the Primitive". To France - and Back - in the Indian Labour Corps, 1917-18, in: Kitchen, James E./Miller, Alisia/Rowe, Laura (eds.): *Other Combatants, Other Fronts. Competing Histories of the First World War*, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 199-224.

Singha, Radhika. "Front lines and status lines: sepoy and 'menial' in the Great War, 1916-1920." *The World in World Wars: Experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia*. Ed. Liebau et al. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 55-106. Print.

Soherwardi, Syed Hussain. 'Punjabisation' in the British Indian Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan, University of Edinburgh, [www.csas.ed.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/48674/WP24\\_Shaheed\\_Hussain.pdf](http://www.csas.ed.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/48674/WP24_Shaheed_Hussain.pdf) (accessed on Sep 19, 2019)

Soldiers of the Empire". By Santanu Das. *BBC Radio 4*. BBC. Broadcasting House, London, 15-22 Oct. 2014. Radio.

Speech at Gujarati political conference (Godhra), November 3 1917." *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (e-book)*. Vol. 16. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

Stefan Tetzlaff, 'The Turn of the Gulf Tide. Empire, Nationalism, and South Asian Labor Migration to Iraq, c. 1900-1935', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 2011, pp. 7-27.

Stefan. Tetzlaff, *The Turn of the Gulf Tide, Empire, Nationalism, and South Asian Labor Migration to Iraq, c. 1900-1935*, *International Labor and Working-Class History*. 2008, pp. 7-27

Stein, Burton (2003). *Eighteenth Century India: Another view. In Marshall, P. J (Ed) Eighteenth Century in Indian History*. Oxford India Readings, New Delhi. Oxford University Press.

- Stephen. Cohen, 'Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics and the Indian Army', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 28 (3), 1969, p. 454.
- Stevenson, D (2004) 1914-1918: *The History of the First World War*. London: Allen
- Subalterns at war: First World War colonial forces and the politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 9.3 (2007): 451-474. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Construction of colonial power: Structure, Discourse, hegemony', *Occasional Papers on History and Society*, Second Series, XXXV, Centre for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, 1991,
- T. Foley, 'Dining alone in Rawalpindi? Max Arthur Macauliffe: Sikh Scholar, Reformer, and Evangelist', Edinburgh: *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions*, 4 (1) 2017, pp. 7-32.
- T. Stovall, 'The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War', *The American Historical Review*, 103(3), 1998, pp. 737-769.
- Tan Tai Yong, 'An imperial home-front: Punjab and the First World War', *The Journal of Military History*, 64(2), 2000, p.371.
- The Imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western front, 1914–15." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12.1 (1983): 54-73. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.
- The recruitment of colonial troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War." *Immigrants & Minorities* 26.1-2 (2008): 111-33. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- The relationship between Ford, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Wells and British propaganda of the First World War." Thesis. Queen Mary University of London, 2009. London: Queen Mary Research Online, 2009. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- Thierry D. Constanzo, *Memory and History of the Great(er) War and India: From a Imperial to a more Global perspective*, misenligne le 15 juin 2017, consulté le 01 mai 2021, p 28

- V. Mayer, *Below the Line*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 67.
- VanKoski, S. (1995), "Letters home, 1915-16: Punjabi Soldiers reflect on war and Life in Europe and their meanings for home and self". *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2 (1), 43-63
- Vankoski, Susan. "The Indian ex-soldier from the eve of the First World War to Partition: a study of provisions for ex-soldiers and ex-soldiers' role in national life." Dissertation. Columbia University, 1996. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- W. D. Chambers, 'Mental Wards with the British Expeditionary Force: A Review of Ten Months' Experience', *Journal of Mental Science*, lxxv, 1919, p.270.
- W. Owen. Cole, Piara Singh, Sambhi, '*The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*'. London, Routledge, 1978, p. 37.
- W. T. Clower & S. Finger, 'Discovering trepanation: the contribution of Paul Broca', *Neurosurgery*, 49(6), 2001, pp.1417-1426.
- Warwick Anderson, Deborah Jenson and Richard C. Keller (eds.), *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties* (Durham, NC, 2011)
- Wayne Carp, *Supplying the Revolution: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783*, Dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 1981, p. 61.
- Wesseling, HL (2004) *The European Colonial Empires 1815- 1919* Harlow: Pearson
- Yadav, Kirpal Chandra (1976) *British Policy towards Sikhs 1849- 1947*. In *Punjab Past and Present. Essays on honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* Ed by Harbans Singh and Gerald Barrier, Punjabi University Press, Patiala

### **Research Journals**

Journal of Punjab Studies, California

Journal of Regional History, Amritsar

The Indian and Economic and Social History Review, New Delhi

The Indian Historical Review, New Delhi

The Punjab Past and Present, Patiala

Proceedings of the Punjab History Congress, Patiala

Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, New Delhi

War in History

Media, War & Conflict

### **Theses and Dissertations**

A. T. Jarboe, 'Soldiers of empire Indian sepoy in and beyond the imperial metropole during the First World War, 1914-1919', Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University, 2013, p. 126.

Gilmartin, David Paul, (1979) 'Tribe, Land and Religion in the Punjab: Muslim politics and the making of Pakistan', P.hD Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley

Grewal. Reeta (1983) Polity, Economy and Urbanisation: Early Nineteenth Century Punjab. M. Phil dissertation, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Kaur, Anurupita, (2010) 'Social Transformation in the Panjab: A study of the Sikhs under British rule 1849-1919,' P.h D Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Kumar, Raj (2016) 'Empire the Punjab and the First World War', Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Malhotra, Karamjit, (2009) 'Social and Cultural life of the Sikhs in the Punjab during the Eighteenth century,' P.h D Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Panesar, Amerdeep Singh, 'Martialing the Sikh Soldier During the First World War'. Master's Thesis, University of Huddersfield

Ram Raja (1972) '*Impact of the First World War on the Punjab*', unpublished Ph'D, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Ram, Chhaju. (2009) Western Education and its social impact on the Punjab: 1849-1904. Ph. D Thesis, Panjabi University, Patiala

Singh, Bhupinder (2017), *British India in the World Wars: A historical analysis of the military perspective of Punjab*, Centre for South and Central Asian Studies, Central University of Punjab, Bhathinda

Singh, Gajendra, (2009) 'Between Self and the Soldier- Indian *Sipahis* and their testimony during the two world wars,' P.h D Thesis, University of Edinburgh

Surekha. Punjabi Society in the Early Nineteenth Century. Ph.D Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2009

### **Annals of The First World War**

Aldrich, R and Hilliard, C( 2010) *The French and British Empires'*. In Horne, J (ed) *A Companion to World War I*. Oxford; Blackwell.

Bostanci, Anne and Dubber, John (2014) *Report of the British Council on the Centennial of the First World War; Remember the World as well as the War Why the global reach and enduring legacy of the First World War still matter Today*, University of Exeter

John Gramh Royde-Smith, Dennis E Showalter (2018) *Encaeclopedia Britannica*, Revised Edition

Nicolson, C. (2001) *The Longman Companion to the First World War, Europe 1914-1918*. Harlow: Pearson

Prisoners of War (India), in 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08, 2014, p. 87.

USI-MEA. "India and the Great War: A Joint USI-MEA Centenary Commemoration Project". The United Service Institution of India, 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

Williamson Jr, SN (1998) *The Origins of the War in Strachen*, H (ed) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford: University Press

**SIKH PARTICIPATION IN FIRST WORLD WAR:  
A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to the  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
PANJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH  
For the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**2021**

**Ravneet Kaur**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
PANJAB UNIVERSITY  
CHANDIGARH**

*Dedicated to*  
*My Beloved Parents*  
*Mrs. Balbir Gill and Col. HS. Gill*  
*You are forever in my heart.....*



**The Indian Labour Corps (ILC) laying railways tracks in the Middle East.**



**The soldiers had to undertake long, hard and arduous marches that lasted several days.**





## CONCLUSION

The great poet and nationalist Rabindranath Tagore had himself dismissed the contributions of his countrymen in the First World War when he observed, “We, the famished, ragged ragamuffins of the east are to win freedom for all humanity? We don’t even have a word for nation in our language<sup>1</sup>”.

India's recollection of the war is remote, and it is predictably buried beneath the weight of the anti-colonial movement and the non-alignment stance of the post-independence years. There are very few personal stories and anecdotes as few have been recorded for posterity. While other nations, especially the ones who were on the winning side in the Great War celebrate the men and women who won them the war, we in India are strangely silent. This silence stems from the ignorance of the contribution of our people because of the total lack of historiography or recorded history about the First World War. It is also a result of the deliberate attempt by the British and Indian nationalists alike to pull attention away from a war in which the Indian soldiers were little more than cannon fodder, according to both these views that have prevailed till now. However, there lies a slender margin between these two divergent views; a slim space of truth and fact- that has long been ignored, or rejected, or ignored and avoided.

It is this slight space which this study has made a humble attempt to explore and shed some light upon from a social and cultural perspective. This study attempts to record and evaluate not only the views of the Sikh soldiers who actually fought in the war, but also the perspective of the British officers who recruited and commanded them. This study has also cast a much needed closer look at the condition and experiences of the non-combatants who played a silent and even more ignored role in the First World War. Their stories are seldom even recalled, let alone extolled and retold. Another very notable but unknown segment of stakeholders of the war effort who are always relegated to the sidelines and have become the silent and ignored minority, are

---

<sup>1</sup>Chakraborti. Poulami (2019) The Notion of a Nation: Tagore’s Idea of Nationalism, Spirituality and Indian Society International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science (IJELS) Vol-4, Issue-4, Jul – Aug 2019 quoting Letter 12, ‘Tagore’s reflections on non-cooperation and cooperation’, addressed to C.F. Andrews, London, 1928, compiled in The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941, edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

families of the soldiers wherein women formed a large part. While most of the attention is always on the war front, people frequently forget that there was also a home front where loved ones of the soldiers on the front were constantly battling stress, uncertainty, pain of parting and fear and helplessness about the fate of their men on the front.

This study attempted to understand the experience and agony of the families of the soldiers who watched their men depart for an extremely dangerous war where the mortality rate was the highest recorded since then, in a foreign land. There was no news or updates on the welfare and well being of the soldiers, frequently for the long years of the duration of the war. It is hard to even imagine the state of constant anxiety and stress under which the families of the soldiers must have existed until either the soldier returned at the end of the long years of war, or the news of his being wounded or worse and much more common- the news of his demise- finally reached his family.

The Sikhs, along with the Gurkhas and the Punjabi Mussalmans, supplied the bulk of the fighting force that made up British Indian Army. The half-million army soldiers from Punjab alone, who fought for the British in regions across the globe, lived, fought and mostly died unseen and unremembered. Finally, after more than a hundred years after the calamitous event of the Great War, these men and the women they left behind are being sought out from the pages of history and their stories are being explored and retold.

Just before their departure from India when the question of the partition of India loomed large on the collective conscious, and tugged at the heart strings of everyone concerned with India, there was a strong realisation amongst the British official and intellectual quarters. India's overwhelming participation in the First World War had been critical and rendered with an unprecedented zeal and generosity. Even after the War, whether acknowledged or not, there is no doubt that the contribution of Indians had been sterling. It was incontestable then and proven now that the contributions of India to the global effort against the Axis powers had been immense in both the First and Second World Wars.

Writing in 1946, P. J Griffiths, admitted in his book *The British in India*, that the impact of the war on India was monumental. In the first place, it induced in the Allies,

an exaggerated belief in the virtue of American and British institutions and the 'remarkable contribution made by India to the war effort was rightly held to entitle India's voice to be heard'<sup>2</sup>. A bit late though it might be, but the historians, officialdom, people and press of the world is recognising the sacrifice and valour of the colonial people, including the thousands of India which made the world safe for democracy, not once, but twice.

Rekindled curiosity in the war has been found in other former colonies and other Commonwealth nations too. These nations who also forgot the men and women who fought a Great War long ago, have started pulling back the dusty veil of time and space to discover and uncover the events and experiences of these brave people. The anniversaries of the various battles, such as Gallipoli, Ypres, Festubert, Baghdad are landmark dates which provide a platform for further exploration and understanding of the First World War experience for more peoples. Gallipoli, Neuve Chapelle, Ypres and Festubert are only some instances which provide 'successful birth certificate of the newly-formed national identity in at least two of the so-called former "White Dominions," Australia and New Zealand'<sup>3</sup>.

Across the seven seas from India, in Britain also, the First World War is being increasingly remembered and recollected like never before. In 2018, a centennial edition of Mulk Raj Anand's work of English literature is reuniting the Indian diaspora with Indian WWI heroes. *Across the Black Waters* follows a young soldier and his comrades as they arrive in Marseilles by ship from India in September 1914, with the aim of reaching the front lines in Flanders in October. In 2018, the Hackney Empire staged a play based on the book. Vijay Singh, a Paris-based Indian filmmaker, scriptwriter, and novelist, made a film called *Farewell My Indian Soldier/ Mademoiselle France Pleure* about the sons and daughters of Indian soldiers who met their loved ones in France. A graphic novel tells the intimate storey of a soldiers fighting death in the trenches of the Western Front<sup>4</sup>. There are several radio or television programs, as well as the recent publication of many long monographs on the Indian presence in WWI which were telecast during the four years of the war

---

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, P.J. (1946) *The British In India*. Robert Hale Limited, London pg 180

<sup>3</sup> Bouchard, C. (2012). Regionalism, Federalism and Internationalism in First World War France. In *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France* (pp. 198-214). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Cowsill. illustrated by Lalit Kumar Sharma (2014) *First World War*. Campfire Graphic Novels

centenary 2014-2018 across the British Isles, Belgium, France, Germany and other nations.

For the Indian diaspora in Britain, commemorating WWI is a separate thing. With the erection of the Memorial Gates in 2002, there continues to be no shortage of involvement in disputes involving colonial troops in official circles. The collective memory of the Great War can add justification to the Indian Diaspora and presence in the various European nations such as United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany etc and the deep ties that have bound many generations of South Asians to their newly adopted country<sup>5</sup>. British Asians are resurrecting this forgotten heritage and highlighting the crucial role played by colonised Indians.

Till very recently, the contribution of the Indian soldiers to the final victory of the Allies was largely unacknowledged. In recent years, it has begun to be accepted that the Indian soldiers not only died in great numbers, but were also wounded and scarred for life in their thousands. It is being recognized and acknowledged that Indian soldiers contributed in real terms to the Allied war effort.

The Sikhs were an overwhelming part of all these engagements. In 1914 and 1915, as part of the Infantry and Cavalry battalions on the western front in France and Belgium, they provided critical support right at the beginning of the war. In the periphery of the Indian Ocean, the Indian soldiers secured and protected British holdings such as the Suez Canal and Persian oil fields against any intruders. The Indian troops, many of whom were Sikhs, were pushed willy-nilly into an ill organized, badly managed and unplanned campaign in the Middle East in which thousands of lives were needlessly lost. Right at the end of the war, when the Ottoman Empire was decisively defeated, the Indian contingents, with Sikhs in abundance, were the ones which played a major role in the Fall of Baghdad action which ultimately lead to the end of the First World War<sup>6</sup>.

No one really asked the Sikhs why they became the staunchest supporters of the hated British in 1857. Except for the tenacious and spirited support of the Sikh regiments and Sikh princely states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind etc, India might well have been

---

<sup>5</sup> Visram, R. (2015). *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*. London, Routledge. P 321

<sup>6</sup> Jarboe, A. T. (2021). *Indian Soldiers in World War I: Race and Representation in an Imperial War*. U of Nebraska Press.

lost forever and the British rule pulled out root and branch. After 10 years of being ready to die for the preservation of the Lahore Darbar and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's legacy as part of the Khalsa army, when the Sikhs endured hard fought and crushing defeats and the humiliation of being forced to surrender their arms and being disbanded- Why did the Sikhs choose to fight against all odds for the very same 'Goras' and 'feringhees' at whose hands they had faced such debacles? Even the British were taken aback, though heartily grateful for the help rendered by the Sikhs in their crucial hour of need, when the Sikhs could easily have proved the final nail in the coffin of British ambitions in India.

MacMunn mulls over the question of why the Sikhs and the Punjab stayed resolute and loyal to the British cause in 1857, and analyses that the motives that brought the Punjab to British aid, were no doubt mixed ones. The British though a combination of contentment with the British administration, after many decades of chaos, liking for English ways seen at their best in the cold of the Northern winters, memories of the hard hitting of Sabraon, Chillianwalla and Gujrat, a dislike of the *Poorbeah* (Indian soldier in the British army) all contributed to the Sikhs supporting the British at their critical time in 1857. MacMunn summarizes that, "probably first, among the motives of those that enlisted in the new corps was the wealth of Hindustan<sup>7</sup>."

Economic factor was in no doubt a huge incentive for the Sikhs, as was proved when the Punjab benefitted immensely from the military incomes that came to all the homes which had a man or men in the British Indian army. Informed guesses given above as to the reasons the Sikhs took to service in the British army after being conquered, throw up other most likely answers.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had himself always publicly and privately admitted to his awe and fear of the British red spreading all over India and considered it more or less inevitable and avoided the conflict for as long as he was alive. As he was the greatest and most revered military general and strategic thinker of the Sikhs of his times, his concession and acknowledgement of the might of the British must have meant a lot to the rank and file of the Khalsa army, that formed the bulk of the British Sikh recruitments in 1857.

---

<sup>7</sup> MacMunn , Armies of India, pg 252

The Sikhs developed deep feelings of respect for the enemy which had vanquished them so decisively. Even though their own generals were to blame for the crushing defeats at most of the engagements with the British during the Anglo Sikh wars, but the tactical acumen, courage and grudging admiration was mutual on both sides. The British and the Sikhs each respected the other as a worthy foe and this respect changed into loyalty and almost veneration for the British officers on the part of the Sikhs soldiers. Even the British officers and men had feelings of primacy, consideration and respect based on the recognition of the military mettle and valour of the Sikhs, which they openly admitted gave them the most bitterly fought contests and hard snatched victories of all the peoples they had fought on the Indian subcontinent.

The Punjab experience after annexation was quite different from that of Bengal or other regions. In stark contrast to the officially endorsed and condoned excesses, merciless drain of wealth and economic exploitation that the British undertook after annexation of conquest in other states, this was not done in Punjab, which was the last major territory to be merged in the British Indian Empire. In fact, the British sent the pick of their talent and seasoned administrators such as Sir Henry and John Lawrence etc to Punjab after annexation. Right from the Chief Commissioner downwards, the British officials exerted themselves with a tireless will to bring peace, security, law and order and economic prosperity to a province which had been ravaged by warfare and abysmal administration and total collapse of law and order and security for decades.

Working day and night, the British officialdom made sure the beneficial and benevolent effects of the '*Angrezi Sarkar*' shone in stark contrast to the shoddy administration of the Lahore Darbar after 1839, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh died. In 1857, it had been 10 years that the Punjab had witnessed and prospered under the meticulous but nurturing hand of the Punjab School of Administration. For the Sikhs therefore, it must have been clear that their bread was buttered on the side of the British and in 1857, they choose to side with the British who had conquered them.

Once the Sikhs had proved themselves in every test of loyalty and valour which the events of 1857 had automatically subjected them to, it was clear that the incorporation of the Sikhs into the British Indian Army was not only highly desirable but critical. These feelings were given further legitimacy by General Roberts when he propounded

and implemented the 'Martial Races Theory in India. The Martial Race Theory was responsible in a very large part for the favoured position that was given to the Sikhs by the British as long as India was a part of the British Empire.

This was recognized at the highest levels and under the theory of the Martial Races propounded by General Roberts, Sikhs were recruited en masse in the Army. The decision proved to be highly beneficial to the British since their chief contest in India in martial terms remained only with the tribes such as the Balochs, Pashtuns, Pathans and Afghans of the North West. The Sikhs had already conquered a large part of these inaccessible areas and defeated the turbulent tribes under Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his legendary generals such as Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. They proved more than equal to the challenging task of not only holding their own, but also defeating the agile and mobile foe. Even in sieges, the Sikhs had proven at Saragarhi in 1894 that 21 Sikhs against ten thousand tribesmen was a feasible contest.

In this backdrop, when the British Empire faced their most deadly challenge from the German Reich under the Kaiser for global supremacy, they looked to the Punjab to provide the men and material that were required for the massive contest. Punjab delivered unstintingly on all fronts and vindicated the belief that the British Government had in the Sikhs and their military prowess.

The British Indian Army was never created as an independent and strong force, it was rather conceptualised as an auxiliary force to the British Army. "Small wars" was what the Indian Army was created to fight in the subcontinent itself, against the Frontier tribesmen such as the Pashtun or Baloch, or participate in the colonial expeditions to conquer new territory or repress revolts. The British Indian Army's total strength was a mere 152,000 in 1914 while the British Army was disproportionately large compared to the size of the British Isles and numbered 250,000. The Indian Army had no heavy artillery and was trained to fight in open terrain against a moving enemy who indulged in Guerrilla warfare (and did not have artillery), as was the wont of the frontier tribesmen or even the small princely states armies that were the adversaries to the Indian army on the Indian sub continent.

The Indian soldiers were not aware of, let alone trained to fight trench warfare with an enemy that was not only a numerous host, but also expert at deploying artillery and airpower on a front that changed continually and stretched for several hundreds of



miles. However necessity forced the British government to call upon the Indian Army as it was the only available imperial Force. Hence The Meerut and Lahore Infantry divisions and the Ambala and Secunderabad Cavalry brigades were coalesced to form the Indian Expeditionary Force, under the command of General James Willcocks that contained 28,500 Indian and 16,500 British soldiers and was dispatched to Marseilles<sup>8</sup>.

In the second chapter of this study, the self identify of the Sikh soldier, as it developed and evolved due to religious, historical, cultural and social factors is explored at length. The identity of the Sikh soldier was not based on his self perception alone, but also included the image that he had in the eyes of the British officers, officialdom and fellow soldiers who served with him. At the time of the First World War, when the Sikhs were among the first soldiers to land on Belgian and French soil as members of the First Expeditionary Force, the French, British and Belgian public, Press and other soldiers perceptions also had an impact on the self identity as it developed for the Sikh soldier fighting on a foreign front.

The Colonial British Raj's perspective of Sikhs and the reasons why they were portrayed as martial races and how the Sikh troops were seen by the social, cultural, religious, and political context in which they served has been studied in the second chapter of this study. The reactions of the citizens of many nations to the presence of Sikhs in their midst while the Sikhs served overseas during WWI have been documented. The perceptions of Sikh troops by the people they came into contact with on many continents have been studied.

The Indian Expeditionary Force A that was sent to Europe (France and Belgium) in September 1914 and which stayed put on the frontline till October 1915 had a preponderance of Sikhs. The dispatch of Indian soldiers to theatres abroad during the war was also a breach of British Strategic Doctrine. The British policy was not to use coloured soldiers against white soldiers in any contest as it would undermine the prestige of the 'White master race' in India. At the time of the First World War, not only was this policy brushed aside, but the coloured soldiers were in fact sent to Europe to fight against the white enemy in their own lands. There was even a protest

---

<sup>8</sup> Markovits, Claude: Indian Expeditionary Force , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2018-06-26. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11057.

by the Germans that the British were using a savage' colonial force in a war that was between 'civilised' European countries. However, the British were unfazed for the reasons discussed below.

The British followed a far reaching policy with respect to the Martial Theory as they actively fostered and inculcated this feeling of racial separation and distinction amongst the races they deemed as 'Martial'. The impact of these measures and exclusivity was evident time and again. The martial races were at the forefront of the British effort in the First World Wars. Even after the World War, these martial races, including the Sikhs, remained essentially loyal and continued to support the British even during the stormy days after the First World War. Indian Nationalism witnessed rapid ascent post First World war India and the Punjab was particularly restless, with incidents such as agitations against the Rowlatt Act, Ghadr aftermath, Jalianwala Bagh and other events collectively termed as the Punjab Disturbances. Even in the days of Gandhian movements and insurrections like the Ghadar and the Gurudwara Reform Movement and the Akali movements, the Sikhs in the British army continued to render faithful service and were not swayed greatly by the strong currents that were swamping civilian and nationalistic India at the time.

The distinctions created on the basis of the Martial Races imbued the soldiers with a sharp sense of delineation. They were perceived to be, and they perceived themselves to be, different from the common man. Even when the entire nation was burning in the inferno of subversive activities or engulfed in the general flames of other nationalistic outpourings, be it in the form of the movement for Self Rule, Civil disobedience, Quit India, etc, the army tended to remain disconnected and separate from these developments. Undeniably, smart operation of economics also contributed to the insulated state of the army which remained loyal to the British in the face of civilian unrest in Punjab.

Indian defence expenditure constituted fifty percent of the central budget before the Great War, which was a huge part of the total outlay. The great emphasis placed on defence, and the bulk of the emoluments which went to the Punjab as Punjabi's formed the backbone and the bulk of the army, ensured that Punjab was one of the most developed and prosperous provinces in India. In fact, the majority of the British administrators and politicians definitely were of the opinion that India was profiting

enormously as a colony. Sir Michael O' Dwyer, perhaps the most important figure in Punjab in the war years has put on record in his memoirs that British standards of assessment of revenue were extra ordinarily mild. This was especially true in the Punjab when compared to previous native rulers, including the Sikhs and the Mughals. The British land revenue charges were even less than the ones prevailing concurrently in the native princely states<sup>9</sup>.

The success of the economic strategy was proved during the tough years of the war. The combination of the economic rewards and loyalty factor proved to be stronger than even religion, in the majority of cases. The Germans tried every strategy to make the soldiers transfer their loyalties. They called upon the Sikh, Hindus and Muslims soldiers to desert and used religion, the promise of promotions and wealth and various other lures. It is to the credit of the Indian soldiers that out a force of 90,000 troops, only 90 responded to the German call and these too were mostly Trans-frontier Pashtuns whose territories were not a part of the British Indian Administration.

The controls and checks which were put on the soldiers from India were never before imposed anywhere in the British dominions or Empire. Censoring of soldiers' letters was an unprecedented and remarkable step, never before done in the British army. This invasion of the soldier's privacy proved to be an important indicator of the mood of the men, particularly the Colonial armies and enabled the authorities to keep their finger on the pulse of the soldiers. These letters and censorship records have also become the most important source for historians in order to piece together the untold and unknown story of the soldiers who served on various frontiers in defence of the British Empire in the critical years 1914-18. As the extracts of these letters were meticulously compiled and circulated to various dignitaries and offices, right from the King Emperor to the Viceroy of India to the War office in London to the India Office and Army Command, the letters formed a basis of which crucial decisions and estimations were made by the official in power.

These letters also survive as insightful and indelible glimpses of the emotions of the soldiers such as their apprehensions, fears, worries, hopes, aspirations and reactions to the new sight, sounds, experiences and actions which they witnessed as part of the British Indian Army serving abroad in various nations of the British Empire.

---

<sup>9</sup> Michael O Dwyer, *India as I Knew It*. Constable and Co London 1925. Pg 56

In essence, the Indian army was a reflection of the high ideals and ideology that the British intellectual and intelligentsia used to imbue in both the British and Indian general public. The ideology of 'The Raj' as a great institution was used to allay, array and ally the public opinion at home and in India in support of Empire and the War when it started. In a sense, the British Indian Army was the highest achievement and a reiteration of the ideals which the British propagated and nurtured in India and with which they claimed to rule India- for its own good and development and betterment of the common people.

The British claims of having conquered, pacified and kept in relative peace an entire continent, rested on their successful recruitment, training and deployment of the army. The British themselves regarded their army in India as the 'epitome of a disciplined, professional and loyal force... that was a moniker for the entire British Imperial project'<sup>10</sup>.

Indian soldiers were remembered by politicians like David Lloyd George and authors like Rudyard Kipling who helped establish government propaganda. The military races, on the other hand, created some outstanding troops in India who displayed their valour and endurance on every front and received a slew of official distinctions and awards, including many Victoria Crosses (V.C.s.). Hindustan's main achievement was in the southern theatres, such as Palestine, Mesopotamia, and East Africa, where Indian legions performed admirably, as acknowledged by the British PM Lloyd George in the British Parliament. However, until conscription was well-established in the United Kingdom, the British government formed a paternalistic stance toward the under-equipped Indian soldiers as they were desperately needed to bolster the British forces.

For Indian nationalists, the consequences of cooperation were, understandably, a deception. Far from opposing those obedient or hard-line imperialists, on the outbreak of the war, and throughout the duration, nationalists in India supported the British war effort whole heartedly.

In Chapter 3 are discussed the memories and experiences that the Sikh soldiers carried with them from the stints abroad which were not so easy to wipe off. There is little

---

<sup>10</sup> Rob Jonson (ed) 2014 The British Army: Virtue and Necessity pg 13

doubt that the Sikh soldiers were full of the sense of awe, wonder, admiration and also a strange sense of unity and affiliation with the different peoples and nations they visited during the four years of wartime. They displayed a very lively curiosity and keen awareness of all that they were exposed to in terms of lifestyle, modern technology, farming updates and difference in ways of thinking and living. In the letters, it is revealed that the soldiers were drawing parallels and commenting on variations between their life in the Punjab and the different nations where they visited and making extremely deep and insightful remarks and observances. These observations and reflective remarks indicate that the soldiers were deeply influenced by all that they were witnessing in foreign countries. They were constantly comparing, drawing similarities and seeing the variations in the lives they lead and the lives of people in the places they visited and stayed in during the war.

However, there is little evidence that the Sikh troops' trip overseas resulted in a large-scale attitudinal adjustment or substantial alteration in their thinking and perspectives. Most historians, with the advantage of hindsight, believe that the Sikh troops' sojourns overseas during WWI left an ambiguous legacy that is difficult to identify.

Even though they developed connections with the locals, mingled with civilians and troops from other nations who fought alongside them, they were different. Sikh soldiers formed liaisons and even married European women, but on the frontlines of the war in foreign locations overseas they still remained devoted to their mission. Soldiers who were homesick and lonely penned sad letters home. They took short trips across the English Channel or farther south to Marseilles to forget the daily experience of warfare in the cold and rainy weather of northern French trenches. They couldn't risk defying instructions or inciting a mutiny in a non-Indian setting, thus refusing to fight was tough for them. It was not even an option to refuse to fight or to express hesitation for whatever reason as being shot for treason and cowardice was an established practice.

In chapter 4 are described the experiences of the Sikh Prisoners of War. The War took a turn for the worse for around 1000 soldiers (out of whom many were Sikhs) who were also taken captive by the enemy. They were treated as Prisoners of War by the Germans and kept confined to the Half Moon camp in Wunsdorf near Berlin. Various studies including a cultural and linguistic study, involving the newly developed audio

equipment and audio tapes were recorded, giving them a chance to express their cultural views. In spite of being exhorted and motivated to cross over to the German side, and even after the fight against the British was declared a Jihad (religious war) by the Ottoman proclamation of Jihad, the soldiers of War (mostly Muslims) preferred to return home, rather than join the Turkish army in defense of the Caliph, to fight against the British.

In Chapter 5 are described the civil and military connotations of the Sikh involvement in the war. Till now in India, World War I has sparked just a smattering of curiosity in the intellectual and public domain. India's recollection of the war is remote, and it is understandably suffocated by the anti-colonial movement and non-alignment stance of the post-independence years. Rekindled enthusiasm in the war has been found in other Commonwealth nations, and Gallipoli is the successful birth certificate of the newly-formed national identity in at least two of the so-called "White Dominions," Australia and New Zealand.

Of course, what Indian or colonial scholars wrote in their notebooks or what is written on war memorials cannot be interpreted as voicing a typical soldier's opinion or attitude toward the conflict. Rather, the soldiers' attitude toward the war was composed of resignation (they were sent back to the front more than the regular trooper), patriotism (they had long-time friends and families in the army), and camaraderie toward fellow-soldiers, according to the social historians – behaviour comparable to any other wartime army. In the trenches and hospitals, the soldiers showed affection, camaraderie, and intimacy by touching, sentiment, and intimacy. The myth of a powerful, invincible masculine warrior popularised by Rudyard Kipling's works and expressed by General Haig was deconstructed. In its position, a new perspective on male experience emerged, one that included anxiety, weakness, support, and physical tenderness. Between Indian martial groups or imperial races, there was rivalry and war.

The British policy of using force to rule India was continued, not changed or modified, even after WWI. As a result, the beginnings of the conflict should be seen as part of a larger timeline that includes the culmination of long-standing, but now completely overlapping, imperialisms inside contemporary states. Many academics feel that veterans of the wars were made "brutal" as a result of their service and

experiences abroad serving during such a ruthless and destructive war. This 'brutality' continued even after they returned from the front, and entered civilian life. Some are of the view that they were able to revert to this brutality during nationalist movements when they were ready to unleash it on the British themselves.

In the Chapter 5 of this study, this question has been reviewed at length. Documenting the most violent episodes in Indian history after WWI in metropolitan or rural centres, it becomes immediately apparent that the soldiers were in fact, not prone to show 'brutality', aggression or even resentment against the British. The Sikh soldiers especially, were largely insulated from the chaos of the nationalist movement. Even though Punjab was one of the most nationalistic states where the currents of the freedom movement were very strong, and deep, the soldiers were not affected. The soldiers were not politicized to the extent that they participated en masse or even individually in any special capacity towards the nationalist or any other religio-political movement. In the Gurudwara Reform movement, the retired soldiers played a role, but the entire movement was largely non violent and especially notable for the discipline, consistency and organized format.

These factors certainly defy the contention that the soldiers were made 'brutal' due to their exposure to the war. The observations of Mr Darling in post War Punjab<sup>11</sup> during his extensive tours all over the province only attest to the fact that the war experiences of the Sikh soldiers abroad had enriched them significantly. These experiences not only made them more conscious and aware of new developments, but also more broad minded and progressive. The soldiers were leaders in the rural countryside who lead by example, inspired and innovated and brought improvement and development to agriculture, animal husbandry, Dairy farming, crop rotations, culinary habits, dressing, rural health and hygiene and much else besides. Retired and serving Sikh soldiers became the leaders of the community and helped raise the bar for education, awareness, health and socio-cultural advancement. Hence, the 'brutality' aspect of the soldiers is completely repudiated.

Nationalists from the Home Rule League requested Dominion status in 1916. India's membership in the League of Nations was identified by David Hunter Miller as "an

---

<sup>11</sup> Darling, M. (1934). Northwards. *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*, 1-76.

anomaly of anomalies... a striking paradox almost without parallel"<sup>12</sup>. As the war came to a close, Gandhi and Congress were well aware of the uncertain status established by Versailles, noting that "India possessed, in principle at least, the sovereign privileges of dominions, despite the fact that she had not yet achieved a state of full sovereignty even in internal affairs". The League's mandate scheme placed novel duties and restrictions on Britain, hastening its colonial downfall and eventually contributing to its dissolution.

India disputed colonial authority after the First World War, and Egypt unilaterally achieved nominal independence in 1922. Within the Empire, white dominions were still better off than the darker races. By 1918, almost 1.5 million Indian troops had been sent to the front lines. They made up almost 20% of the British armies in the war, more than the so-called White Dominions, or the joint participation of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. It is ironic that the very nature of empire warfare culminated in the weakening of the world's greatest empire, the British Empire.

The Indian insurrection of the late 1910s and early 1920s generated new anti-colonial politics that included both tactical – well-disciplined unarmed satyagraha resistance – and religious – non-violent ahimsa – fights. The desire to re-establish total British colonial control over India was pitted against cutting-edge, extremely effective methods on a scale never seen before. Following World War I, the Greek-Turkish population served as a model for ethnic cleansing in Europe and India. Following the fall of the Ottoman and Russian empires, a highly contested territory on India's western and northern borders came into existence that put a constant strain on the British nerves.

The British followed a far reaching policy with respect to the Martial Theory as they actively fostered and inculcated this feeling of racial separation and distinction amongst the races they deemed as 'Martial'. The impact of these measures and exclusivity was evident time and again. The martial races were at the forefront of the British effort in the First World Wars. Even after the World War, these martial races, including the Sikhs, remained essentially loyal and continued to support the British even during the stormy days after the First World War. Indian Nationalism witnessed rapid ascent post First World war India and the Punjab was particularly restless, with

---

<sup>12</sup> Miller, D. H. (1928). *The drafting of the Covenant* (Vol. 2). GP Putnam's sons. P 493



incidents such as agitations against the Rowlatt Act, Ghadr aftermath, Jalianwala Bagh and other events collectively termed as the Punjab Disturbances. Even in the days of Gandhian movements and insurrections like the Ghadar and the Gurudwara Reform Movement and the Akali movements, the Sikhs in the British army continued to render faithful service and were not swayed greatly by the strong currents that were swamping civilian and nationalistic India at the time.

In Chapter 6, the Non-combatants, or the followers, or the Indian labour Corps or the Indian Porters Corps are not mentioned in glowing terms in any memoir, book or paper. Their contribution has largely gone unnoticed and unremembered. However, without their unremitting efforts during the war victory would not have been possible and for this reason they remain unsung heroes. Whatever be the experience of the labourers overseas, where they were not treated at all well, when they returned from service abroad one thing was certain. They returned with exposure experiences, and insights which made them “more prosperous and *samajhdar* (intelligent) and capable beings<sup>13</sup>. The women who were left behind while the men went to war are also important but unnoticed segments of the war. The impact and experience of the women folk has been discussed in detail in this chapter.

The distinctions that were created on the basis of the Martial Races, imbued the soldiers with a sharp sense of delineation. They were perceived to be, and they perceived themselves to be, different from the common man. Even though the entire nation could be burning in the inferno of subversive activities or engulfed in the general flames of other nationalistic outpourings, be it in the form of the movement for Self Rule, Civil disobedience, Quit India, etc, the army tended to remain disconnected and separate from these developments.

The narrative of the Great War in India is dominated by either the embarrassment felt by Indian nationalist backers, the weight of the independence struggle or the horrific events of Partition. The struggle against the British colonial regime, followed by the tragic events of the British Empire's so-called decolonization period in India, shaped

---

<sup>13</sup> Singha, R. (2015). The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (87), 27-62. Retrieved June 2, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43957055>

the Indian subcontinent's consciousness more than any other occurrence. In this respect, historians' disagreements are still the most vehement.

### **Scope for further research**

As a result of this study, there are many other avenues which have presented fair prospects for further studies. Notably, the current emphasis on 'human experiences of the war' have opened up doors for study into what is known as "war experience" of the "Post-Colonial"<sup>14</sup> kind, or how the war can be viewed more personally on individual levels and how individual stories give a more coherent and cogent feel of the war experience than data sets or mere numbers ever can. Skilled scholars have been able to recreate unique social bonds established in order to endure the difficulties of the war thanks to the words in the personal letters left by soldiers and also declassified armed forces records. Light has begun to shine on the murky edges of many questions regarding the navigation of the profound personal and collective journeys that the soldiers undertook in the years before, during and after the war. How they were able to keep their bearings, negotiate the difficult tightrope between not displeasing the German captors and yet remaining loyal to the British in word, thought, deed and intent and how they readjusted in the post war period is becoming clearer.

The Post Colonial School of historiography considers the wider social significance of gendered or sexual roles in warfare. What effect does war have on manhood, on the masculine bravery paradigm are intriguing questions that merit further exploration. What was the mentality toward homosexuality in the Gurkha and Pathan regiments, and under what circumstances were homosexuals court-martialed in the British Indian army<sup>15</sup> are all questions that need to be researched further. The diverse ways and motives under which captivity was used in war propaganda and the formation of racial politics are other fields of studies that can deepen the understanding of the human war experience and engender the formation of a more sympathetic and clearer

---

<sup>14</sup> Shohat, E. (2006). Notes on the "Post-Colonial". In *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (pp. 233-249). Duke University Press.

<sup>15</sup> , J. (1983). The imperial reserve: The Indian Corps on the western front, 1914–15. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12(1), 54-73.

perspective of the same. In addition, the life of POWs after the war and their involvement in India remain an important yet understudied topic that needs more study.

In final summary, one can say that for the Sikh soldiers and other colonial soldiers, the awards and rewards after the war were inadequate to make up for the humungous loss of life and limb which had been incurred by large percentages of the Populations of whole regions and communities. Titles of honour such as Nawab, Jung Bahadur, Khan Sahib, Sardar Sahib, Raja and Rai Sahib etc were liberally handed out. The soldiers were rewarded with grants of land, pensions, disability pensions, robes and swords of honour, guns, revolvers, complimentary sanads or land deeds and also government grants of rent free land and even cash awards. There were wholesale remission of taxes for whole areas and communities who had lost too many men and 420,000 acres of land was distributed in Punjab<sup>16</sup>. There were also the special concessions such as the *Jangi inam* (War Prize) where two pensions were provided for one life- one to the pensioner and one to his next generation.

In conclusion, the most long standing domestic result of the war is the new found regard and respect which the returning soldiers brought back for their wives as a result of serving abroad. The war killed a lot of good Sikh men, but the ones who survived and returned from the trial by fire came back with enlightened attitudes, broader minds and a keener appreciation of what they had back home- both in terms of gratitude and scope for improvement.

The Sikhs served faithfully, along with the other races in India till 1947, as long as they too believed

*Khalk-i-Khuda* (Mankind belongs to God)

*Mulk-i-Sirkar* (The Land belongs to the Government)

*Hukm-i-Sahiban Alishan* ( And power to the Magnificent Sahibs)<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Chandan, Amarjit., 'How They Suffered: World War I and Its Impact Upon the Punjabis', <http://apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit/wwi/> (Retrieved 20 May, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Mankind belongs to God, The land to the Government, And power to the powerful Sahibs. See George F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1911), p.220