Hadtudományi Szemle
18. évfolyam (2025) 2. szám 107–123. • DOI: 10.32563/hsz.2025.2.7

Mukhwinder Kaur[1]

Ethnic Recruitment in the Armed Forces and the Contribution of Indian Soldiers to World War I

A Qualitative Study

Abstract

The author of this article describes how ethnic-based recruitment into the Indian armed forces began during the colonial period. The article is about Indian soldiers deployed in Europe and other parts of the world during World War I. The text examines how the divisions were formed based on ethnic and class divisions.
From warrior castes to recruitment across India, encompassing all castes, the Indian army underwent a significant transformation. The author also discusses the role of religion in the formation of the divisions.

Keywords: ethnic recruitment, Indian Armed Forces, World War I

"These Indian units comprised Gurkhas, Punjabis, Mahomedans, Sikhs, Pathans, Garwhalis, Dogras, Rajputs and Jats. Men of many different races, speaking different languages and holding different religious beliefs, but one and all British and Indian alike, bound together by the tie of loyalty to their King Emperor and determined to uphold the honour and ideals of his Empire."
Sir Charles Anderson: Opening Address The Indian Memorial,
Neuve Chapelle, France 1927

[1] PhD student, Ludovika University of Public Service, Service Doctoral School of Military Sciences.

Introduction

The induction of ethnic recruitment in the Indian armed forces roots back to the time when the British arrived in India. They understood the ethnic demography of the country which was vast to comprehend. From regions to languages, from cultures to food everything was varying. The prevailing caste system then in India has led to the manifestation of regimentation based on castes in the Indian armed forces. After the rebellion in 1857, Indian soldiers were classified by the British on the basis of various martial races, which were further divided into castes, separating the two categorically as the 'martial' caste from the 'non-martial' caste.[2]

This classification was supposedly made because it was believed that a 'martial race' was brave and well-built for fighting, but 'non-martial races' were sedentary and unsuited for fighting.[3] However, it was also believed that the martial races were brave, yet not able to perform leadership and command the military formations, politically docile, intellectually inferior and submissive. The British made their policies of martial Indian recruitment from those who were less educated because they had this vision that they were easier to control, but the fact lies in the Indian cultural method of education. In Indian cultures, people are docile, welcoming and accepting, which gave the British the opportunity to blend in and turn this against them.[4]

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission acknowledged the bravery of these 138,000 Indian soldiers who were sent to Europe throughout World War I. During 1914–15, the majority of these soldiers served in France in the adjacent Neuve Chapelle and the Ypres Salient. A significant number of brave individuals died in the effort to impede the German advance. On 6 August 1914, the Indian Army began its operations on the Western front.[5] That day, the London War Council asked the Viceroy's government to send two divisions of infantry and a cavalry brigade to Egypt. These troops were ordered to Europe on 27 August. The Menin Gate, the largest World War I memorial in continental Europe, in Ypres, Belgium, and the Indian soldiers' memorial at adjacent Neuve Chapelle, France, both honour the incredible sacrifice made by Indian soldiers in Europe. An Indian memorial was built on the lawn south of the Menin Gate in 2002 at the request of the Government of India.[6]

WW1 Victoria Cross recipients in India:

1. Risaldar Badlu Singh: "His valour and initiative were of the highest order"[7]
2. Gobind Singh Rathore: "Succeeded in delivering a message"[8]
3. Sepoy Chatta Singh: "Rescued his Commanding Officer under heavy fire"[9]
4. Naik Darwan Singh Negi: "Retaking and clearing the enemy out of our trenches"[10]

[2] Jarboe 2013.
[3] Rand 2006.
[4] Rand 2006.
[5] Rand 2006.
[6] Puri [s. a.].
[7] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/31034/supplement/14040
[8] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/30471/supplement/725
[9] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29633/supplement/6191
[10] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/28999/supplement/10425

5. Rifleman Gabar Singh Negi: "The first man to go round each traverse, driving back the enemy"[11]
6. Lance-Naik Lala: "Rescued two men through courage and devotion"[12]

WW1 Victoria Cross recipients in Pakistan (then Punjab Province):
1. Sepoy Khudadad Khan: "Remained working his gun"[13]
2. Jemadar Mir Dast: "Carried 8 British and Indian Officers to safety"[14]
3. Naik Shahamad Khan: "For three hours held the gap under heavy fire"[15]

The Battle Honours awarded to units of the Indian Army in France and Flanders:[16]
1. France and Flanders, 1914–18
2. France and Flanders, 1914–16
3. France and Flanders, 1914–15
4. France and Flanders, 1915
5. France and Flanders, 1916–17
6. La Bassee, 1914
7. Armentiers, 1914
8. Messines, 1914
9. Ypres, 1914–15
10. Gheluvelt Festubert, 1914
11. Festubert, 1914–15
12. Givenchy, 1914
13. Neuve Chapelle Ypres 1915
14. St Julien Aubers Festubert, 1915
15. Loos Somme, 1916
16. Bazentin Delville Wood Flers-Courcelette Morval Cambrai, 1917

The theory of Martial Races

In November 1885, General Frederick Roberts became the Indian Army's Chief. He expounded and gave shape to the unscientific and unsubstantiated theory of 'Martial Races'.[17]

The pioneer steps to institutionalise the 'theory of Martial Races' came into existence in 1892. A letter signed by the then DAAG, B Dufficesit issuing instructions for recognition of 6 Bengal LI (Light Infantry) of the Bengal Army into a single class regiment of pure JAT Troops has been sent to Lt Col Gravis Commanding officer of 6 Bengal LI (Light Infantry). Out of 18 battalions 16 battalions of the Bengal Army were

[11] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29146/supplement/4143
[12] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29579/supplement/4809
[13] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/28999/supplement/10425
[14] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29210/page/6269
[15] https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29765/supplement/9418
[16] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.]: 23.
[17] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.

converted to pure caste regiments starting from 1892. The concept was designated to certain classes only who would be recruited for combat duties in the infantry. In the next additional step from 1896 onwards, the 'Madras Army Infantry Regiments' began to depopulate the troops from the Madras Presidency and started to induct martial races from the Punjab region.

The experiment which later turned into martial race theory was to ensure the recruitment was primarily made from Northern India and from amongst communities where university education was limited. In areas with higher educated people[18] like Madras (now Chennai), Calcutta (now Kolkatta) and Bombay (now Mumbai) recruitment into combat arms was restricted. It was concluded that higher education could inspire ideas of nationalism, freedom and growth resulting in a challenge to the British Empire.[19]

A number of communities were classified as 'Martial Races' and recruitment was to be restricted to them. Exceptions were made with respect to Maratha, Reddy, Kodava, Bunt and Nair communities from the Deccan and South India. This was cemented further during the reorganisation under Lord Kither (1903–1911) when most of the combat units began to be filled up with troops from North India with one class composition only. The experiment of pure class composition units started in 1892 and was abandoned in 1922, due to a revolt by 5 Inf (LI) a pure Mussalman Rajput class composition unit in 1915 in Singapore. The units in 1922 were mixed into pure company based fixed classes to counterbalance any revolt/upraising by a community or a caste.[20]

Caste and religion-based regiments in India (at present):[21]

1. Punjab Regiment
2. Madras Regiment
3. Maratha Light Infantry
4. Rajputana Rifles
5. Rajput Regiment
6. Jat Regiment
7. Sikh Regiment
8. Sikh Light Infantry
9. Dogra Regiment
10. Garhwal Rifles
11. Kumaon Regiment
12. Assam Regiment
13. Bihar Regiment
14. Jammu & Kashmir Rifles
15. Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry
16. Naga Regiment
17. 1 Gorkha Rifles
18. 3 Gorkha Rifles
19. 4 Gorkha Rifles

[18] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.
[19] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[20] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[21] Javaid 2020.

20. 5 Gorkha Rifles
21. 8 Gorkha Rifles
22. 9 Gorkha Rifles
23. 11 Gorkha Rifles
24. Ladakh Scouts
25. Arunachal Scouts
26. Sikkim Scouts

Indian soldiers served outside the Indian Territory under British Empire[22]

This section will explain the overall distribution of Indian armed forces deployed on foreign land, which is defined under Force A to Force E.

Indian Expeditionary Force 'A'

This force fought in France and Belgium. The Indian Government provided two Cavalry along with two Infantry Divisions for overseas deployment at the onset of the war in Europe. The force was named the Indian Expeditionary Force 'A' (IEFA), along with the British Expeditionary force (BEF) the IEFA was attached creating four divisions within two Army Corps; an Indian Infantry and an Indian Cavalry Corps.[23]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'B'

They were dispatched to Tanganyika and their task was to intrude the German East Africa. The India office specified the duty of handling the British East Africa governor's request for assistance in September 1914 in dealing with the German forces on the German East Africa front. In response, India sent a force at the end of October 1914, named as Indian Expeditionary Force 'B'. Comprising an Imperial Service Infantry Brigade, a Mountain Artillery Battery, engineers, a pioneer battalion, along with the 27th (Bangalore) Brigade from the 9th (Secunderabad) Division. The command of IEFB was placed under Major General Arthur Aitken and landed at Tanga.[24]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'C'

To assist the King's African Rifles, the Indian Expeditionary Force 'C' was primarily utilised to secure the Ugandan railway line and provide communication protection.

IEFC was assembled to support service in the British East Africa. The force comprised the Punjabi men from the Indian Army's 29th Punjabis, and half battalions from Princely states of the Rampur, Kapurthala, Jind, Bharatpur, as well as a volunteer

[22] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[23] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[24] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].

15-pounder artillery battery, a volunteer Maxim gun battery, the 22nd (Derajat) mountain battery (Frontier Force), along with a field ambulance. IEFC was formed to be a defensive one, unlike IEFB and IEFA.[25]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'D'

Holding the city of Kut under siege by Ottoman forces was the mission assigned to Indian Expeditionary Force 'D'. The IEFD was the largest Indian Army force that served overseas in Mesopotamia. The first formation was sent in November 1914 and it was the 6th (Poona) Division. More than 11,012 people died during this participation, 3,985 passed away from wounds, 12,679 died from disease, whereas 13,492 went missing or were taken prisoners (that include 9,000 prisoners from the Kut).[26]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'E'

Indian Expeditionary Force 'E' defended the Suez Canal. The IEFE consisted of the 10th and 11th of the Indian Divisions which had been sent to Egypt in October 1914 to protect the Suez Canal. This force sustained the same nomenclature throughout the war, although its composition had seen a number of changes.[27]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'F' (Supplementary Forces to Force D and E)

The IEFF was constructed to further supply troops of the original IEF 'E' meant for Egypt and IEF 'D' which is Mesopotamia. From the original IEF 'D,' the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut) Divisions was moved from Mesopotamia. In July 1918, two Indian cavalry divisions, the 4th and the 5th Cavalry Division were moved to this IEF from France to serve in Palestine.[28] The 15th Imperial Service Cavalry brigade, which was comprised of numerous supplementary troops and three regiments of Lancers from Princely States of the Hyderabad, Jodhpur (Rajasthan), as well as Mysore, joined them.[29]

Indian Expeditionary Force 'G' to reinforce the Gallipoli Campaign

In the year 1915 (April), IEFG was raised consisting of the 29th Brigade operating far from its parent division which was the 10th Indian Division. IEFG consisted of one Sikh battalion along with three Gurkha battalions, two powerful martial races from the northeast and north. After leaving Egypt, the brigade joined the British 29th Division and was kept in reserve for the Second Battle of Krithia.[30]

[25] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[26] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.].
[27] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.]; Prime 2018.
[28] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.]; Prime 2018.
[29] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.]; Prime 2018.
[30] Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.]; Prime 2018.

The Indian Army's IEFs were also deployed in Tsingtao (in China), Persia, Gulf of Aden, Macedonia, Merv (in Russian Turkmenistan), Afghanistan, Baluchistan and what was called the North-West Frontier throughout the war.

During the war, labour recruitment affected Indian martial races asymmetrically, especially the Punjabis. From August 1914 to November 1918 during entire war, about 60% of the combat troops came from the state of Punjab. This plan was followed by a race-based recruitment strategy known as the 'martial race doctrine', which was implemented during the war. Noticeably: "It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West, with certain exceptions, only some certain clans and classes [in India] can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior."[31] Only a few groups were designated for military service by the Indian army and its recruiters: Sikhs, Muslims, Punjabi Dogras and Hindu Jats, Pathans from the North-West Frontier, along with Gurkhas from Nepal.[32]

It was specifically forbidden for the massive majority of the Indian troops to serve in the military. By 1918, less than one percent of the population of British India, the Punjabi Sikhs, had sent 90,000 soldiers, or one-eighth of the 621,224 combatants sent overseas as a result of racial policy. After the war, Bengal, which had about 23 million men, only had one combat unit at the front.[33] In contrast to the British Isles, in which men from the Wales, England, along with Scotland enrolled at similar rates (a remarkable exclusion was Ireland), India had a very different wartime experience.[34]

Indian soldiers participated in World War I in the following divisions:[35]

CAVALRY:
Mhow Division:
2nd Lancers
Meerut Division:
MEERUT BRIGADE:
3rd Horse
16th Cavalry
18th Tiwan Lancers
DIVISIONAL CAVALRY:
4th Cavalry
11th Lancers
Lahore Division:
FEROZEPORE BRIGADE:
7th Lancers
JULLUNDUR BRIGADE:
15th Lancers
DIVISIONAL CAVALRY:
23rd Cavalry (F.F)

[31] MacMunn 1911: 129–130; Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.
[32] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.
[33] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021; O'Dwyer 1925: 223.
[34] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.
[35] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].

AMBALA BRIGADE:
30th Lancers
Poona Division:
LUCKNOW BRIGADE:
29th Lancers
1st Indian Cavalry Division:
6th King Edward's Own Cavalry
9th Hodson's Horse (3rd Ambala Cavalry Brigade)
INFANTRY:
Lahore Division:
FEROZEPORE BRIGADE:
129th Baluchis
57th (Wilde's) Rifles (F.F.)
89th Punjabis
9th Bhopal Infantry
JULLUNDUR BRIGADE:
15th Ludhiana Sikhs
40th Pathans
47th Sikhs
59th (Scinde) Rifles (F.F.)
SIRHIND BRIGADE:
1/1st Gurkha Rifles
1/4th Gurkha Rifles
27th Punjabis
125th (Napier's) Rifles
DIVISIONAL TROOPS:
15th Lancers
23rd Sikh Pioneers
34th Sikh Pioneers
20th and 21st Field Companies,
3rd (Bombay) Sappers and Miners
Indian Field Ambulance
Meerut Division
DEHRA DUN BRIGADE:
1/9th Gurkha Rifles
2/2nd Gurkha Rifles
6th Jat Light Infantry
28th Punjabis
GARHWAL BRIGADE:
2/3rd Gurkha Rifles
1/39th Garhwal Rifles
2/39th Garhwal Rifles
BAREILLY BRIGADE:
41st Dogras
33rd Punjabis

58th (Vaughan's) Rifles (F.F.)
69th Punjabis
2/8th Gurkha Rifles
DIVISIONAL TROOPS:
4th Cavalry
107th Pioneers
2nd and 3rd Field Company,
Sappers and Miners
4th and 5th Field Companies, 3rd
(Bengal) Sappers and Miners
Indian Field Ambulance
Support Services: Supply and
Transport Corps, Indian Hospital
Corps, Indian Labour Corps
IMPERIAL SERVICE TROOPS:
CAVALRY:
Alwar Lancers
1st Gwalior Lancers
Indore Mounted Escort
1st Jodhpur Lancers
SAPPERS:
Maler Kotla Sappers
Tehri-Garhwal Sappers
TRANSPORT:
Bharatpur Transport Corps
Gwalior Transport Corps
Indore Transport Corps

The Peel Commission

In order to understand the Indian religions, social structures and various castes, the British established a commission whose sole task was to identify the martial races, communities and various regions for the purpose of recruiting loyal and obedient soldiers. Since the revolt against them was from South Indian states like Bengal and the Eastern region of India, the British government refrained from inducting soldiers from these regions. The North of India had Sikhs, Jats, Gharwalis, Dogras, which were under the classification of brave ones, therefore, the recruitment centre was shifted to the Northern part of India. The country kept the caste system and divisions organised on a regional basis even after gaining independence for historical reasons and due to the social mindset.[36] Nowadays, new regiments are based on all castes and all religions.[37]

[36] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.
[37] Fogarty–Jarboe 2021.

Philip Mason suggests the martial race's ancient origins in pre-British India along with the usefulness of this notion to the British Raj. Individuals' categorisation into 'martial' as well as 'non-martial' was not a British[38] innovation. It was the comprehension of a feature already inherent in the Indian social order, which conveniently facilitated a victory.[39]

Serving their own convenience, the British recognised the prevailing religions and castes as part of the soldiers customs, which helped British officers blend in with their soldiers. Also, they studied their regional language and performed their religious traditions to offer a sense of belonging to themselves and their troops. This approach has been followed to date in the Indian Army, for instance, if an officer is from a South Indian state generally will be fluent in their local language, English and Hindi. However, if he/she is appointed as an officer in a Punjab regiment he/she will have to learn Punjabi, the regional language, their customs so that the troops can connect efficiently with their superior.[40]

The 1st and 3rd (Gaur) Brahman Infantry were established in 1903 as a caste-based unit and disbanded following World War I.[41] The martial races' very existence may depend on religion, and even in cases where it was only a contributing factor, religion nonetheless played a significant role along with advantages from official support and acceptance. Pre-World War I British thinking was characterised by views on recruitment and the importance of preserving the religious customs of the recruited martial races.[42]

The role of these races was immense, not only in the wars fought by India but in the wars fought by Indians in Europe as well. World War I by far is an elaborate case to study and understand how the people from these groups were detailed and portrayed in society.[43]

Battles fought by Indian armed forces on foreign lands

The First Battle of Ypres

In the late 1914, the Indian soldiers, or else Sepoys, were sent to Europe (France) by the British to stop the Germans from attacking them and to save their rule over the territory. The Sepoys (Soldiers) were from the Lahore along with Meerut Divisions and were transferred to France's trenches outside Ypres in late October 1914.[44]

Europe was a strange as well as an unfamiliar place to the Indians. The language was unfamiliar to them, and the culture was totally different. The French – or else Belgians – and Indians were puzzled by one another. Yet, the French population

[38] Robinson 2015.
[39] Mason 1974.
[40] BBC 2015.
[41] Javaid 2020.
[42] Jack 2006.
[43] Javaid 2020.
[44] Puri [s. a.].

welcomed the Indians mainly at the beginning of war. They went north via Orleans from Marseille.[45]

During World War I, Sikhs served in Germany, Belgium, Greece, France, Malta, Italy and Romania. Some Sikh pilots' and injured soldiers' graves may also be found in the United Kingdom.[46] Soldiers from Lahore Division were Sikhs and Muslims, the soldiers from Meerut division were Hindu kshatriyas (name of a martial race). They were transferred to France without knowing their language, culture or religion. They fought for a bigger cause that was 'honour'.[47] To this day, the Indian Armed Forces carry out their tasks with respect, honour and pride for their unit and their country. It was the basic principle of all martial races that they could sacrifice their lives, but not their honour.[48] The British interpreted and executed this in various ways, keeping their own interests in mind.[49]

In October 1914 and 14 months later, 20,748 British soldiers and 89,335 Indian riflement, or Indian sepoys, along with 49,273 Indian labourers, served in the Indian Corps at the battles of Ypres, Givenchy, Festubert, Second Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, as well as Loos, where they suffered about 34,252 casualties.[50]

Only one Indian cavalry division remained in France when the Indian Corps left the front lines in late November 1915 and sent its soldiers to the front lines in the Middle East in December. The Indian army had been severely diminished by the conflict on the Western Front, and commanders feared that another winter in trenches could incite a mutiny among the sepoys. Since Indians were not suited to harsh weather conditions, they suffered the most. The British took the glory, and Indian soldiers quietly left the European theatre of war because there were no applauding crowds or protests like there had been when they arrived fourteen months earlier. Their pride was intact and they fought for their honour throughout the war. They received a message from the King-Emperor George V, who gave them the following assurance, conveyed by the Prince of Wales: "In a warfare waged under new conditions and in particularly trying circumstances, you have worthily upheld the honour of the Empire and the great traditions of My Army in India."[51]

The Second Battle of Ypres

The Germans had a fresh plan in place for breaking through the allied defences at Ypres in the first few months of 1915. A chemical attack (chlorine gas) was devised in honour of Fritz Haber, the chemistry Nobel laureate. At 5 p.m. on 22 April 1915, the first successful chemical attack occurred during the Second Battle of Ypres.[52] Approximately two thousand French soldiers were killed by the new weapon throughout that evening and night. Since their superiors were dubious about the supposed

[45] Puri [s. a.].
[46] Singh 2014.
[47] Thomas 2021.
[48] Thomas 2021.
[49] Puri [s. a.].
[50] Jack 2006; Merewether–Smith 1917: 459.
[51] Merewether–Smith 1917: 463; Jarboe 2013.
[52] Puri [s. a.].

success of the gas attack and viewed it more as an experiment, the breakthrough the Germans were expecting never came through.[53] As a result, the initial plan that included enough reserve forces to gather and take advantage of a potential breakthrough was abandoned. Due to the lack of defending allied forces, the German front had already advanced a few kilometres closer to Ypres.[54]

During the second war of Ypres, there was an exceptionally high number of casualties. Indian sepoys had to participate, and the 47th Sikh division's sepoys who attacked in the first line lost 348 of their 444 soldiers or 78% of the regiment.[55] The attack resulted in a total loss of approximately 2,000 personnel for the two brigades. A pivotal role was played by Punjabi soldiers in preventing the German juggernaut. The delay would be detrimental to Berlin's war ambitions, since it provided essential time for the British and French forces to reinforce their defences. The Punjabi recruits distinguished themselves once more in the battle at Neuve Chapelle.[56] After suffering significant casualties on both sides, the British-led onslaught at Chapelle was eventually stopped after breaking through the German lines. More than 1,000 Punjabi men[57] were killed in the ill-planned assault, which aimed to capture Gallipoli.[58]

The Battle of Aubers Ridge

Conceived in April 1915, the Rue du Bois attack, also known as the 9th May 1915 in the Indian Corps, was delayed by the Second Battle of Ypres. A two-pronged onslaught on both sides of the Neuve Chapelle was the strategy. The German forces in the Neuve Chapelle – Aubers – Fauquissart triangle had to be cut off when the two attacking forces, separated by 6,000 yards, broke through the lines, advanced concentrically and met on the Aubers ridge. In opposition to both 'prongs,' the Germans were deeply entrenched; they had made a significant effort to fortify their lines following the shock of Neuve Chapelle.[59]

The early hours of 9 May were clear and pleasant. Assault forces gathered in the trenches, supports advanced to the assembly trenches, as well as the communication trenches were packed with troops ready to advance, making it a busy night for the British and Indians.[60] Along with other meticulous preparations for the attack, bridges were erected to span the broad ditch among the lines and equipment dumps had been placed near the front lines. The slaughter started at 5:40 a.m., as soon as the attack started. Similar experiences were had by the invading battalions, who were immediately destroyed by German machine guns upon crossing the parapet. When the offensive was formally stopped in the evening, the trenches were in the same location as when the combat had started. However, the Meerut Division constituted 24 Indian officers, 69 British officers, 1,055 British, along with 823 Indian other ranks

[53] Dendooven [s. a.].
[54] Dendooven [s. a.].
[55] Thomas 2021.
[56] Puri [s. a.].
[57] Malik 2021.
[58] Puri [s. a.].
[59] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].
[60] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].

killed. 122 members of every rank in the Lahore Division may be added to these, for a total of 2,093.[61]

The Battle of Festubert

The British government's objective for the Indian military was to march southeast into La Bassée town from 15 May to 25 May, in the year 1915; 5,000 yards from the left to the right, the Meerut Division, along with the British 2nd and 7th Divisions, on convergent lines. Three trench lines made up the German defence in this region. It involved both Indian divisions. The attack was executed for the Meerut Division. Lahore Division was supposed to maintain its position while providing artillery and small-arms fire support to the advancing soldiers. The assault commenced from the trenches south of the Rue du Bois around 11:30 p.m. on the night of 15 May. The men were immediately exposed to heavy artillery and machine gun fire, as well as German searchlights, flares and fire grenades, which lit the night as they emerged from their trenches. At midnight, it was evident that there was no chance of success; yet, Brigade headquarters ordered a new attack to be launched at three in the morning.[62] The 2/3rd Gurkhas were supposed to lead this charge, but they were seriously outnumbered as soon as they went over the parapet due to a deadly barrage of rifles, machine guns, along with artillery fire. The German trenches were once again bombarded on the morning of 16 May. It was agreed at this point that the Indian troops must strike by the opening next to them, which was occupied by the 2nd Division since the defences in front of the Indian Corps were extremely strong to allow for a breakthrough. The only option was a portion of the captured trench that was occupied by the 15th Sikhs. Here, the only thing between the two sides was a barricade. On the morning of the 18 May, the 15th Sikhs resisted intense bombing attacks. They had run out of bombs by the early afternoon. Lieutenant J. G. Smyth of the 15th Sikhs was given the order at 3:30 p.m. to transport two bomb boxes and a bombing party from the old front line to the seized trench, which was 250 yards over open ground. Out of the several volunteers, he chose 10 Indian bombers: 2 from the 45th Sikhs, 4 from the 19th Punjabis, as well as 4 from the 15th Sikhs. When Smyth reached a shell hole within 30 yards of their target, he was carrying one of the two bomb boxes with just one guy remaining; the others had been dead or injured. They eventually arrived at the captured trench while under cover fire. All of the soldiers in Smyth's party received decorations for their valour, and Smyth received the Victoria Cross. The Battle of Festubert had a mixed overall outcome. It was mentioned by Sir John French that "ground was won on a front of four miles to an average depth of 600 yards"[63] and highlighted the major losses of the enemy. The attacking forces, that included the Indian Army, must be admitted to having incurred significant casualties and mostly failing to accomplish their goals.[64]

[61] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].
[62] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].
[63] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].
[64] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].

The Battle of Loos

It was decided to split up the Indian Corps and use its regiments on the other fronts after Loos, who had participated in 10 significant battles or operations and had experienced a year of continuous trench battling on the Western Front. All the infantry returned to Marseilles by the end of 1915. In early 1918, however, two cavalry divisions were still in France. About 33,000 Indian Corps members were killed, wounded or missing in France and Flanders (of whom about 9,000 died), while another 18,000 were ill. The dead were buried in Belgium and France, commemorated primarily on the Indian Memorial at the Neuve Chapelle, and few on the Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium. Furthermore, 170 individuals died on hospital ships while on their way to England or on English territory. Three men, who were probably Christians, were buried in the cemetery of Brockenhurst parish church, 49 Muslims were buried in Woking (they were eventually reburied in Brookwood Cemetery along with the Brookwood Military Cemetery), and the remaining, who were Sikhs and Hindus, were cremated.[65]

The Battle of Passchendaele

The Third Battle of Ypres was a military campaign that commenced on 31 July 1917 and concluded on 10 November 1917. Due to the name of the village as well as the ridge where the campaign came to an end, it is commonly called the Battle of Passchendaele.[66] The goal of the campaign was to free the Belgian coast from German rule, but it turned out to be a series of assaults that gradually weakened the German defences and forced the soldiers to withdraw.[67]

The Autumn of 1914 witnessed the arrival of the Indian Army to France to support the BEF.[68] A significant portion of the British troops serving on the Western Front were supplied by the Indian Army Corps, which included two infantries along with cavalry divisions with both British and Indian personnel. They participated in some of the most famous battles, suffered corresponding losses, and won multiple decorations. By early 1915, their numbers had been reduced by half, and by the end of the year, they had received 2,300 decorations, 11 of which were Victoria Crosses.[69] About 140,000 Indian soldiers had served in Europe by the end of 1915, either on the front lines or in auxiliary capacities, before the majority were redeployed to Egypt or Mesopotamia.[70] The Indian cavalry divisions, on the other hand, did not redeploy until the Spring of 1918 after having served as infantry.[71]

In the letters of Indian soldiers, religion, faith and devotion to God appeared in various ways: numerous comparisons were made to the supreme sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, to how ordinary soldiers became fearless and showed bravery in the face of their opponents, and to the right of Punjabis to the community names

[65] Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.].
[66] Government of Canada 2020.
[67] Malik 2021.
[68] Macpherson 1923.
[69] Macpherson 1923.
[70] Hyson–Lester 2012.
[71] Hyson–Lester 2012.

'Singh' (lion) and 'Kaur' (lioness and princess).[72] The Mahabharata's titanic struggle of the Pandavas and Kauravas regarding its difficult scale along with post impact was portrayed by the Indian soldiers in the letters, too.[73] Another analogy, this one from the Muslim history, had been intended to emphasise the war's severity and the potential for imminent martyrdom, particularly the battle of Karbala, in which Husayn ibn Ali died in a tragedy that laid the groundwork for Shi'ite Islam.

Conclusion

> "Those who dwelled on God's Name, shared their honest earnings with others, wielded sword in battlefield, distributed food in companionship, offered their heads at the altar of Dharma, were cut up limb by limb, skinned alive, boiled or sawn alive, but did not utter a sigh nor faltered in their faith, kept the sanctity of their hair until their last breath, sacrificed their lives for the sanctity of Gurdwaras; remember their glorious deeds and utter O Khalsa Ji, Waheguru!"[74]

(This above is a prayer of Sikhs, in which they have talked about the bravery of their ancestors and ask the community to stay proud of the sacrifices made, also to uphold the bravery in the coming generations.)

What has made the braves keep fighting for the people who were not theirs? The ideology of Naam (name), Namak (salt), Nishaan (the imprints) lives on in the ethos of the Indian armed forces to this day. To fight for the name of your country, your unit and your family with complete loyalty (Namak) and lastly to leave your imprint in this world where they all know that you existed once and shower the glory on you is all what these soldiers were concerned about. The caste system in India is not a new concept, as it has been there for centuries, since the reigns of the kings. The population was divided to form a systematic culture for the functioning of society. If not castes, then every country had a way of categorising people. That is how societies worked. The martial races were raised on the concept of honour, and they were ready to lose everything but their pride, which is a part and parcel of a religion, too. In the modern Indian armed forces, there is no caste-based recruitment anymore and the new raising are of all caste and all religion based. The harmony they have is impeccable. With time the societies transform and are raised to an improved level.

"Veer Bhogyah Vasundhara" – the motto of another regiment based on a martial race, the Rajputana Rifles which means "Only the brave inherit the earth", i.e. only those who are brave, powerful, persistent, risk-taking have the right to enjoy life on this earth.

[72] Omissi 1999.
[73] Omissi 1999.
[74] Sanskriti Magazine [s. a.].

References

BBC (2015): Why the Indian Soldiers of WWI Were Forgotten. *BBC,* 2 July 2015. Online: https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33317368

Chari, Mridula (2014): Rare Images of Sikh Soldiers Who Fought in World War I. *Scroll.in,* 22 July 2014. Online: https://scroll.in/article/671238/rare-images-of-sikh-soldiers-who-fought-in-world-war-i

Dendooven, Dominiek [s. a.]: Indians in the Ypres Salient 1914–1918. Online: https://www.academia.edu/18325541/Indians_in_the_Ypres_Salient_1914_1918

Fogarty, Richard – Jarboe, Andrew Tait (2021): Non-European Soldiers. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War,* 29 April 2021. Online: https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/non-european-soldiers/

Goodenough, William H. – Dalton, James C. (1893): *The army book for the British empire. A record of the development and present composition of the military forces and their duties in peace and war*? Forgotten Books, 448, 467.

Government of Canada (2020): *Ypres 1917, 31 July to 10 November.* Online: https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/casualty-identification-military/ypres-1917.html

Hyson, Samuel – Lester, Alan (2012): 'British India on trial': Brighton Military Hospitals and the Politics of Empire in World War I.' *Journal of Historical Geography,* 38(1), 18–34. Online: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2011.09.002

Infantry Research Centre & Museum [s. a.]: *1858 to WWI Room.* Online: https://infantrymuseummhow.com/project/1858-to-wwi-room/

Jack, George M. (2006): 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration. *War in History,* 13(3), 329–362. Online: https://doi.org/10.1191/0968344506wh344oa

Jarboe, Andrew Tait (2013): *Soldiers of Empire: Indian Sepoys in and Beyond the Imperial Metropole during the First World War, 1914–1919.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University. Online: https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/Soldiers%20of%20empire-%20Indian%20sepoys%20in%20and%20beyond%20the%20imperial%20metr.pdf

Javaid, Afra (2020): History of Caste-Based Regiments in the Indian Army: Here's All you Need to Know. *Jagran Josh,* 15 June 2020. Online: https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/history-of-caste-based-regiment-in-the-indian-army-1592216143-1

MacMunn, George F. (1911): *The Armies of India.* London: C. and C. Black.

Macpherson, William Grant (1923): *Medical Services, General History Vol. II. The Medical Services on the Western Front, and During the Operations in France and Belgium in 1914 and 1915.* London: H.M.S.O.

Malik, Ammad (2021): The Forgotten Service of Punjabi Soldiers During World War I. *The Express Tribune,* 1 December 2021. Online: https://tribune.com.pk/article/97509/the-forgotten-service-of-punjabi-soldiers-during-world-war-i

Mason, Philip (1974): *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Merewether, J.W.B. – Smith, Frederick (1917): *The Indian Corps in France.* London: John Murray.
Ministry of External Affairs [s. a.]: *India and the Great War. France and Flanders.* Online: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/France_Flanders_eng.pdf
Gorkha Rifles, The Sirmoor Rifles, Aldershot, 1912, 29, 37.
O'Dwyer, Michael (1925): *India as I Knew it, 1885–1925.* London: Constable.
Omissi, David (1999): *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914–18.* Basingstoke–London: Palgrave Macmillan. Online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27283-9
Prime, Adam J. (2018): *The Indian Army's British Officer Corps, 1861–1921.* University of Leicester. Online: https://leicester.figshare.com/ndownloader/files/18486344
Puri, Manjeev Singh [s. a.]: *Indian Army in the Ypres Salient World War I (1914–1918).* Indian Embassy Brussels. Online: https://indianembassybrussels.gov.in/pdf/Indian_Army_Ypres.pdf
Rand, Gavin (2006): Martial Races and Imperial Subjects: Violence and Governance in Colonial India 1857–1914. "*European Review of History,* 13(1). 1–20. Online: https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480600586726
Roberts to Stewart, 21 July 1882, in Robson, *Roberts in India,* 264.
Roberts to Stewart, 21 July 1882, in Robson, *Roberts in India,* 266.
Roberts to Stewart, 30 June 1882, 21 July 1882, in Robson, *Roberts in India,* 257–258, 265–266.
Roberts, *Forty One Years,* 499, 532.
Roberts, *Forty One Years,* 499, 530, 532, 534.
Robinson, Catherine (2015): Indian Soldiers on the Western Front: The Role of Religion in the Indian Army in the Great War. *Religions of South Asia,* 9(1), 43–63. Online: https://doi.org/10.1558/rosa.v9i1.23964
Sanskriti Magazine [s. a.]: *Ardas – The Sikh Prayer Explained.* Online: https://www.sanskritimagazine.com/ardas-the-sikh-prayer-explained/
Singh, Bhupinder (2014): Role of Sikhs in World War I – A Brief Summary. Book Launch. *SikhNet,* 9 September 2014. Online: https://www.sikhnet.com/news/role-sikhs-world-war-i-brief-summary-book-launch
The Gazette [s. a.]: *The Indian Army in WWI: Magnificent Bearing and Indomitable Courage.* Online: https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/332
Thomas, Edward (2021): The Indian Army Arrives on the Western Front. *Roads to the Great War,* 9 June 2021. Online: https://roadstothegreatwar-ww1.blogspot.com/2021/06/the-indian-army-arrives-on-western-front.html