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**‘A Hazardous Experiment’: The First World War and Changing  
British Civilian and Military Attitudes to the People of India**

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**PhD**

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**June 2018**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or part to another University for the award of any other degree

Karen Leenders

# **'A Hazardous Experiment': The First World War and Changing British Civilian and Military Attitudes to the People of India**

Karen Leenders

This thesis extends the current scholarship of the social impact of the First World War by analysing the influence of the contribution of the Indian soldiers on the Western Front on civilian and military perceptions of Indian people and how this varied between those who encountered Indian soldiers in person and those who did not. The work sits on the historiographical boundary of the First World War, Empire and the social history of Britain in the post war years and makes use of newspapers, first person accounts and manuscript sources.

The impact upon the civilian population is analysed by examining the manner in which Indian people were represented in the media in the years before the war and comparing this with later representations in the years during and after the war. The work of Porter and Mackenzie and the ongoing debate about the significance of the Empire to the British people is used to ground the argument. The thesis finds that, despite an increased awareness and interest in India and its people during the war, the public soon settled into a pre-war apathy towards its Empire.

The military chapters briefly examine the history of the Indian Army and its time in France and the changes made by the British Army to facilitate the service of the Indian

soldiers in Europe. It discusses the negative view of the Indian Corps which has been perpetuated by historians during the twentieth century and provides contradictory arguments against a number of these assertions.

The thesis concludes that, while the Indian Corps' time in France positively impacted on British civilian and military opinion of Indian people, those who directly encountered them formed the most favourable views.

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## Introduction

At the start of the First World War there were grave concerns in the British military establishment about involving troops from Undivided India in a European war, particularly in the European theatre. Lieutenant-Colonel J.W.B. Merewether, The Chief Record Officer of the Indian Corps, recorded in his memoir that their participation in France was considered to be 'a hazardous experiment.'<sup>1</sup> This thesis will examine how British military opinion shifted from this standpoint to a position of high regard as the war progressed. Alongside this, the civilian population developed its understanding of and formed a new sympathy towards the people of India.

This thesis extends the current scholarship of the social impact of the First World War by analysing the influence of the contribution of the Indian soldiers on the Western Front on British civilian and military perceptions of Indian people and how this varied between those who encountered Indian soldiers in person and those who did not. The work sits on the historiographical boundary of the First World War and the social history of Britain in the post war years and makes use of newspapers, first person accounts and manuscript sources.

The impact upon the civilian population is analysed by examining the manner in which Indian people were represented in the media in the years before the war and comparing this with later representations during and after the war. Those who encountered the Indian soldiers in Britain dwelt principally in those towns on the south coast which hosted wounded men in hospitals. A case study of the public reaction in the town of Brighton will illustrate the positive reception given to the soldiers and demonstrate that British people who encountered the Indian soldiers formed more positive opinions of them than those who did not.

The military chapters examine the history of the Indian Army and its time in France and the formal military changes which were wrought in the aftermath of the war, at least in part as a result of the changed perceptions of the Indian Corps following its success in

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. B. Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France* (London: Murray, 1918), 469

France. It discusses the negative view of the Indian Corps which has been perpetuated by historians during the twentieth century and contrasts this with the highly positive view of contemporary military men of all ranks who held them in high regard.

It will be shown that those who encountered the Indian soldiers, whether from the civilian or military worlds developed far more positive views than those who depended on stereotypical representations, even though the nature of these stereotypical representations also changed over the course of the war. It is these subtleties which this thesis will explore and analyse.

The thesis concludes that the Indian Corps' service in France positively impacted on British public opinion, both within civilian and military circles, and that it was those who directly encountered and interacted with the soldiers who formed the most favourable views. This therefore be used to draw out the changing opinions of the general public and military establishment. The choice to focus on the civilian and military perspective, rather than the political implications, will serve to fill a gap in the narrative of empire, as the juxtaposition of India's First World War service and its effect on British perceptions of empire has not been as well served by historians as the imperial dimension, which historians such as Bernard Porter, Cain and Hopkins and Christopher Bayley cover, alongside the more traditional *Oxford History of the British Empire* and its later companion volumes.<sup>2</sup> As well as illustrating how perceptions changed in the years before, during and after the war, this thesis will seek to explain how the changes in perception came about.

While their service in Europe between October 1914 and December 1915 will be the focus of the study, Indian soldiers also served extensively in India and the Middle East and India provided considerable financial and material assistance to Britain and its allies. The focus of this thesis will be on the Indian soldiers' time on the Western Front as the prospect of Indian soldiers fighting in the white European theatre caused consternation in Britain before the war and only those who served in Europe had the opportunity to

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1995* (Harlow, Pearson Longman, 1976); Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (London, Longman, 2001); Christopher Bayley, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982); William Louis, *Oxford History of the British Empire, Volumes 1-5* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999). For a detailed discussion of the political considerations regarding the deployment of Indian soldiers in Europe, see George Morton-Jack *The Indian Army on the Western Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 51, 134

interact with the British civilian population and vice versa. Although Indian troops had fought for Britain outside India previously, for example during the Boer War in South Africa, they had never been deployed in Europe and certainly never in a war between white European participants.

The Indian Corps arrived in France in the autumn of 1914 and fought consistently until their departure in December 1915. Arguably, Britain was among the least prepared country in Europe for a land war and could certainly not muster armies on the scale of those of the Germans or French, despite its huge Navy. Germany's Schlieffen plan was to sweep through the Low Countries and occupy France before any serious reaction could be mobilised. However, by the autumn of 1914, the German advance had stalled and both sides were starting to dig in. British losses had been very high, especially during the Allied retreat from Mons in mid-September and the Battle of the Marne, which forced both sides to a halt in a position that would remain almost static for the next four years. It did not take long before the British realised that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) would need to be reinforced urgently. The initial decision that had been taken on 25 August was to send the Indian Corps to Egypt, but their plan was quickly modified after some 15,000 BEF men had been lost in the previous five days alone.<sup>3</sup> There were not enough reserves within the British Army and two days later Kitchener ordered the Indian Corps to France. Although the Indian Corps had been expecting a swift departure and mobilisation orders for the Meerut and Lahore divisions had been issued on 7 and 8 August, it was monsoon season and it was not easy to mobilise as many troops were on leave far from their stations. Nevertheless, two convoys set sail from Karachi on 24 August and 21 September and met up to pass through the Suez Canal. On 26 September, the Lahore Division arrived in Marseilles and left for Orleans four days later, arriving at their dispersal position on 3 October.

The final battle of the first autumn of the war and the first to involve the Indian troops was the First Battle of Ypres, part of the Race to the Sea. The Germans were advancing towards the Channel ports of Dunkirk and Calais and the British were largely forced into a defensive stance to protect their supply lines. On 22-23 October, the Ferozepore

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12, 1, 1983, 54

Brigade of the Lahore Division went into action for the first time. On 28 October, the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs of the Jullundur Brigade and the 9<sup>th</sup> Bhopal Infantry of the Ferozepores played a major part in the taking of Neuve Chapelle which, although quickly retaken by the Germans, meant that a long-standing gap in the Allied line was closed, if only for a short while. After this there were no more battles that year due to the weather, which was particularly harsh and did not allow easy movement for either side. It was during this time that the Indian soldiers experienced the first mine attack of the war. On the morning of 20 December 1914, close to Givenchy, ten mines - each subsequently discovered to have detonated 50kg of explosive - exploded from positions tunnelled from saps in the German front-line system. Between 22 December and 2 February 1915, the men were relieved by the British I Corps and had the chance to be away from the line for the first time since they had arrived in early October.

The next time the Indian Corps would be called into action would be early March 1915 in the battle of Neuve Chapelle. The intention of the offensive was that the Indian Corps would make up half of the attacking force and other half would be made up of British soldiers. The plan was to attack the German held hamlet of Neuve Chapelle from the north and south west, capture it and move on to take the higher ground of Aubers Ridge not far beyond via the Bois de Biez. By the following day, it became obvious that the Indian Corps would not be able to take the whole of the wood and fighting was called off.<sup>4</sup> Their next major engagement was the Second Battle of Ypres which had been in Allied hands since the previous autumn and the Germans were anxious to retake the town. On 22 April 1915, the Germans achieved a significant advance although the engagement changed little and is notable only for the introduction of gas. On 9 May 1915, the Dehra Dun Brigade led an attack which was half of a pincer movement to take the Bois du Biez which they had failed to take two months earlier. However, the preceding artillery barrage had failed to destroy the German front line and the men were stranded in no man's land. Subsequently, during the summer of 1915, General James Willcocks, Commander of the Indian Corps, oversaw a large reorganisation of his men, with several battalions sent to Egypt and the Middle East and reinforcements arriving almost weekly. The major change was that all the British members of the Corps were

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<sup>4</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 208

placed into the Lahore Division on the line and all the Indian troops placed in the Meerut Division, to be held in reserve. This reflected the importance to the British of maintaining morale among the Indian soldiers as well as the significant difficulties posed by finding reinforcements for the Indian Corps. No sooner was this completed than Willcocks was summoned to Headquarters and dismissed after difficulties in maintaining a working relationship with Lord Haig and command was passed to the former commander of the Meerut Division, Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Anderson, another long-time soldier of the Indian Army. The Indian Corps' next action, on 25 September 1915 at Loos, was diversionary, aimed at distracting German attention from the main attack immediately south of the Indian position and to tie down any German soldiers which could have been sent south as reinforcements. By the end of the day, all the Indian survivors were back in their original trenches, the battle over for them.

Although no one knew it yet, the Battle of Loos was to be the final significant engagement of the Indian Corps in France, although the Cavalry regiments were to stay for the rest of the war. On 26 December 1915, the last of the Indian infantry troops set sail from Marseilles and the Indian Corps ceased to exist. From France, the Indian soldiers were moved to Mesopotamia (now Iraq), via Egypt. Conditions in Mesopotamia were extremely arduous as summer temperatures soared to 48°C. Before the war, Mesopotamia had been part of the Ottoman Empire, with which Britain had good relations. However, the Ottoman Empire was forging links with Germany and seemed ever more likely to join the war alongside it. The British priority in the occupation of Mesopotamia was to secure the oilfields in the south, for the benefit of the British Navy.<sup>5</sup> However, there was also concern in the India Office that any discontent so close to India would spread, thereby risking British security as well.<sup>6</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> (Poona) Division of the Indian Corps had arrived at Fao in the far south of Mesopotamia on 6 November 1914 and by the 22<sup>nd</sup> had occupied Basra. The decision was taken to press on to Baghdad 280 miles to the north but they were beaten back to Kut-al-Amara and besieged there by the Turks on 7 December 1915. Between then and 22 April 1916, the Indian troops fought no less than six battles to relieve Kut but the garrison surrendered before they could prevail on 29 April. It was almost another year before the Meeruts finally marched

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<sup>5</sup> Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (Faber and Faber, London, 1930), 154

<sup>6</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Pocket Books, London, 2003), 106

into Baghdad in March 1917, under a considerably reorganised force. By the spring of 1918, both divisions were in Palestine, after a short diversion for the Lahores to Egypt.

In Palestine, the Meeruts and Lahores were to complete the final push north towards Damascus, led by Sir Edward Allenby. The Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) had started the war protecting Egypt and had gradually expanded its role to invade Palestine and drive the Ottoman forces back into Turkey. The Indians joined possibly the most mixed Force of the entire war, with four Indian divisions, the Anzac Mounted Division, the West India Regiment, the Jewish Legion, a French and Syrian joint division and an Australian division. What would come to be called the Battle of Megiddo began on 18 September 1918 and progressed almost unhindered. Thus, the Lahores and the Meeruts ended their war. From the earliest days of the war when their mobilisation orders were issued, to France, Mesopotamia and Palestine, they had fought continuously until just days before the Armistice.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPIRE TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC

From the outset of war, vast sums of money and enormous resources were poured into the British war effort from the colonies and dominions.<sup>7</sup> The propaganda value of these contributions was not lost on the British government and, increasingly, the war was promoted as a communal enterprise as Britain and its colonies and dominions worked together, as the postcard image below shows.



British Library – 1915 Propaganda Postcard, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/are-we-afraid-no>

<sup>7</sup> George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 13

Note that although the bulldogs are all similar and all stand upon a Union flag, the dog representing Britain is the most central and considerably larger than those of the other empire nations.

*The Times History of the War*, which commenced publication soon after the declaration of war, commented on the early response of the empire nations, 'Most conspicuous of all was the absolute unanimity of all races within the Empire in support of the Mother Country.'<sup>8</sup> A later edition marked the contribution of the various countries and people of the empire to the war effort in considerable detail over six pages and included the entry: 'one tonne of butter from Mrs. Hindson and family for the use of British soldiers.'<sup>9</sup> While this was apparently an insignificant contribution from an obscure Canadian housewife, it went to illustrate the individual commitment of the people of the empire as well as that of their governments. The theme of unity continued for the whole war, with the various achievements of the soldiers of empire being extensively reported and apparently well received.

The thesis examines the particular attention given to Indian soldiers, but it is important to remember that this was set against a wartime background which saw much more prominent role given to empire in public life. In part, this was a result of increased exposure due to a number of factors: newspapers inevitably reported the military activities of the empire troops, government propaganda efforts also made their way into the national press and organisations such as the British Empire Union promoted the unity of the empire. Inevitably, at the end of the war this prominence decreased and daily or weekly exposure to news about men of empire fighting for Britain ceased.

As this thesis will explore, it was a complex combination of factors, the military contribution of the Indian soldiers of the empire, shifting attitudes to the importance of the empire in the minds of the public and the general feeling towards consensus and co-operation, that made a conceptual space for the British public to view India as country

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<sup>8</sup> Armies of the Dominions, *The Times History of the War*, Vol I, Chapter VII, 1914, 141

<sup>9</sup> The Response of the Dominions, *The Times History of the War*, Vol II, 1915, 271

in its own right. Once this perception was established a new, more positive, vision of India developed.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of the Indian soldiers in Europe falls broadly into three schools. Much recent work investigates the first person Indian experience, both in terms of their time in Europe and by setting this in the context of their lives in India outside their military careers. The second school focusses on criticism of the performance of the Indian Corps and the possible reasons for the difficulties they are alleged to have encountered. The third school has researched the encounters, and the nature thereof, between the Indian soldiers and the people they met during their time in France and how this affected the Indian soldiers' attitudes in the years after the war. It is this aspect which this thesis will build upon to analyse the development of British civilian and military attitudes.

The first and most recent school on the subject of Indian soldiers during the First World War, sits at the juncture of post colonialist theory of subaltern studies and the memory school of First World War studies. The discipline of subaltern studies sought, in the words of Barbara Bush, to 'prioritise the active agency' of former colonial subjects,<sup>10</sup> as illustrated in this context by the work of Gajendra Singh and Vedica Kant. Singh's analysis of the evidence left behind by Indian soldiers in both World Wars looked to draw out the experience of the men and to place that experience in the context of the overall Imperial project. His particular focus included an exposition of the similarities of the Army rules that governed both the British and Indian armies and also discussed the difficulty to date with remembrance in India, given the political emphasis on nationhood in the post-independence years.<sup>11</sup> Vedica Kant's beautifully illustrated *If I die here, who will remember me?* drew out both the experience of the men at war and also the home front in India, with a particular interest in the Muslim experience and the Germans' attempts to exploit religious differences in the Corps.<sup>12</sup> Both writers sought to place the Indian soldier at the forefront and separate his experience from that of the overall picture of the Western Front.

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 55

<sup>11</sup> Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

<sup>12</sup> Vedica Kant, *If I die here, who will remember me? India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2014)



Santanu Das in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* sought to set the Indian soldiers' experience within the work of Pierre Nora and Jay Winter on memory and the First World War.<sup>13</sup> While Nora and Winter's work concentrated on the European perspective, Das expanded the model to include the Indian experience. The central premise of the collection of essays was to illustrate the notion that memory extends far beyond the limited range of Eurocentric myths to which historians such as Dan Todman and Samuel Hynes contend that the First World War has been reduced in order to facilitate popular understanding of the subject.<sup>14</sup> Das's work demonstrated the influence of the subaltern school as did his later *1914-1918: Indians on the Western Front*. By the use of a broad range of photographs he sought to show the men about their daily business as well as using images from India at the time to provide an insight into how an Indian soldier lived at home before and after the war. The thrust of the work was not a military history but firmly placed the soldiers in the international narrative of remembrance and brought the men to life without reducing them to a set of clichés about 'heroes and martyrs'.<sup>15</sup> By extension, Anglo-Nigerian historian David Olusoga's television series and book *The World's War* drew out the global Imperial contribution to the First World War and aimed to 'play a small part in the slow process of historical recovery'.<sup>16</sup>

The second school, which was prevalent during the latter part of the twentieth century, focussed on perceived problems encountered by the Indian Corps. Jeffrey Greenhut's work painted a dark view of the Indian soldiers as rather ineffectual, not particularly courageous and desperately in need of strong British leadership in order to function. His 1981 study argued that the racist attitudes of the British impacted negatively on the Indian soldiers' fighting effectiveness.<sup>17</sup> He contended that the British attempts to keep the Indian men apart from white British and French women was designed to preserve

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<sup>13</sup> Santanu Das, ed, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26, 7-24; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Canto, 1995)

<sup>14</sup> Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon, 2005), xiii, Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), 439

<sup>15</sup> Santanu Das, *1914-1918: Indians on the Western Front* (Gallimard/Ministère de la Défense-DMPA, Mission du centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale, Paris, 2014), 149

<sup>16</sup> David Olusoga, *The World's War* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014), xv

<sup>17</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, no. 2, (1981), 71-74

the perceived Imperial prestige of the white woman but that by keeping the men strictly isolated on their bases and restricting the deployment of white women nurses to treat Indian troops, the British increased discontent among the men and decreased the effectiveness of medical treatment available to them.<sup>18</sup> He further asserted that the inherent British assumption of superiority over the Indian soldiers meant that no Indian was allowed to assume a position of command or authority and thus the myth of their inability to lead themselves was buttressed. In his 1983 paper Greenhut claimed that the Indian Army's time on the Western Front was largely wasted and only of use inasmuch as there were no British troops available, the New Army not having reached France in 1914 and the BEF being severely under resourced.<sup>19</sup> While these points are indeed relevant, his analysis is negative and does not reflect more positive aspects of the Indian experience.

A change of tone can be seen in George Morton-Jack's 2014 primarily military history *The Indian Army on the Western Front* which sought to position the Indian Army's contribution in the context of its previous military endeavours and overall contribution during the First World War.<sup>20</sup> As well as complex discussions of their tactical successes he argued that the Indian troops have not been treated kindly by subsequent military historians and sought to redress the balance. Quoting from a newspaper article in *The Times* in 1914 praising the Indian soldiers, Morton-Jack asserted that 'such acclaim is not misleading; rather, it is due something of a revival.'<sup>21</sup> Morton-Jack was referring to criticism of the Indian troops' time in France which had its roots in the assumptions made by the British military that there would be difficulties in the management of the Indian troops in Europe.

The third area of historical investigation concerned the connections formed between the Indian soldiers in Europe and their British and French hosts.<sup>22</sup> Morton-Jack's 2006

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<sup>18</sup> Greenhut, *Race, Sex and War*, 18

<sup>19</sup> Greenhut, *The Imperial Reserve*, 54-73

<sup>20</sup> George 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)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>22</sup> Separate from the work directly concerning the Indian experience is a relatively small body of work which looks at the European experience, such as Dominiek Dendooven's examination of Belgian civilian experience of living alongside non-white troops and workers, including Indian and West Indian troops and members of the Chinese Labour Corps, 'Living Apart Together: Belgian civilians and non-white troops in wartime Flanders', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das

paper *The Indian Army on the Western Front 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration* placed the Indian soldiers as willingly assisting the British, fully aware of their importance and successful in their task.<sup>23</sup> In his third work on the subject, *Europe Through Indian Eyes*, Omissi explored the soldiers' interactions with British and French civilians. He concluded that exposure to 'ordinary' white people strengthened the relationship between Indians and Europeans as the Indians took the opportunity to learn from their encounters and appreciated the respect shown to them as fighting men<sup>24</sup>. The Indian point of view served as a parallel to the British civilian and military encounters which built new relationships and influenced opinion concerning the Indian soldiers.

Against the point of view given by Omissi, D.C. Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan argued that the respect and affection shown by the French people and the living standards they saw in France gave rise to discontent against the British. The men felt that French civilians treated them better than did British civilians in India and came to see this as a failing of British behaviour. Ellinwood and Pradhan conducted a number of interviews with veterans, many of whom claimed that the British military had 'become polite' but after the war they reverted to their previous behaviour. This, together with the example set by the French, sat badly with the veterans, who became more discontented and inclined to protest against the British.<sup>25</sup> This point was taken up by Budheswar Pati, in his 1996 book *India and the First World War*, who saw the First World War as the 'foundation' for the nationalist independence campaign of Gandhi. He dealt with its effects on the government, British people and the population of India, contending that the military effort brought together all groups, both political and religious, in a 'common platform' from which the movement gained strength when the war was over and the new fight began in earnest.<sup>26</sup>

It is in the context of relations between British and Indian people on both social and military levels that the term Social Darwinism occurs in this thesis. Social Darwinism is a term with a complex historiography of its own. Broadly speaking, it seeks to apply Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to illustrate a range of social hierarchies. In

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<sup>23</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915*, 2006, 3

<sup>24</sup> David Omissi, 'Europe through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers encounter England and France' *English Historical Review*, 122, 496, sp. 371, 2007

<sup>25</sup> DC Ellinwood, and SD Pradhan, *India and World War I* (New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1978)

<sup>26</sup> Budheswar Pati, *India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1996)

the nineteenth century Francis Galton used Darwin's theory to describe class inequalities but it soon came to be used in a racial sense.<sup>27</sup> It was also used in an imperialist context, where it was used to provide a justification for the imperial project. Stephen Howe described this in terms of the superior cultural achievements of European people and the obligation that confers on them to improve the standards of other less advanced countries, thus redefining the empire in terms of an 'educational or civilising influence.'<sup>28</sup> Santanu Das used the term in the context of the Martial Race Theory which the British Army used to select certain racial groups in India for army service, 'Victorian social Darwinism and indigenous caste hierarchy, this theory emphasised that some 'races' ... were inherently more 'many' and warlike than men from other parts of India.'<sup>29</sup> Howe took up this point and extended it to the genderised aspect of Social Darwinism, highlighting the distinction in terms of the 'feminised' Bengalis, rarely recruited, set against 'India's so-called Martial Races ... very clearly identified with stereotypes of masculinity.'<sup>30</sup> It is the imperial context in which the term will be used throughout this thesis.

It is this third school, which investigated the relationships between Indian and European people, which is most relevant to this study as it is these relationships which drove the changes in attitude among British people upon which this thesis is focussed. This school held a mirror to the treatment the men felt they received from British and French civilians. However, whereas the historians cited above studied the reactions of Indian soldiers, this thesis will extend this work by focusing on the changes which took place in the minds of British civilians and the military establishment during the period. It will examine how British people who met Indian soldiers showed a keen interest in them and, how those whose information was derived only from representations differed in their views. The military representations are necessarily more formal but the success of the Indian Corps in France and the later changes wrought in the Indian Army, in terms of permitting Indians to become commissioned officers, demonstrate how regard grew.

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<sup>27</sup> Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Frailty* (London, Macmillan, 1883) <http://galton.org/books/human-faculty/text/human-faculty.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Howe, 'Empire and Ideology', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed Stockwell, S. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 166

<sup>29</sup> Santanu Das, ed, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12

<sup>30</sup> Howe, 'Empire and Ideology', 168

The significance of its empire to the British people remains a hotly debated topic. While it is not the focus of this thesis to rehearse the debate, aspects of it impact directly on the discussion of how the British public reacted to the presence of the Indian soldiers in both Britain and the Western Front. John Mackenzie, who pioneered research in this area, saw the empire as fundamental to the British world view and that it 'came to infuse and be propagated by every organ of British life.'<sup>31</sup> Mackenzie's chosen approach was to deviate from what he considered to be the accepted historiographical norm by using an evidence-based approach to examining British attitudes to its empire.<sup>32</sup> He claimed that the empire was more often than not 'remote from everyday experience, yet apparently crucially influencing it for the better.'<sup>33</sup> His 1984 book *Propaganda and Empire* sought to show that while considerations of the empire as an entity in itself featured little in the lives of British people, they were in fact surrounded by its influences in the form of vehicles such as goods for sale, entertainment, media, education and literature as well as exhibitions and societies which promoted the empire among a more educated and arguably middle-class elite. Mackenzie took this 'assemblage of shards' as evidence of a deep vein of Imperial culture driving the country and transcended class divisions.<sup>34</sup>

Later developments, led by the work of Bernard Porter, argued that, beyond the ruling elite, most people had no real interest in the empire except for patriotic fervour during war time.<sup>35</sup> Porter's case was that Mackenzie's shards argument was an overgeneralisation and that the whole gamut of Imperial 'finds' cannot necessarily be attributed to an overarching Imperial spirit but simply to other 'home grown constructions, based on domestic values and prejudices, which might have been exactly the same if the empire had not existed; and which were then imposed on the Empire, regardless.'<sup>36</sup> Crucially, he argued that the empire had no real need of the majority of British people and, equally, the British people had little real use for the empire. By contrast with Mackenzie's saturation argument, Porter sought to split off the day to day

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<sup>31</sup> John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 2

<sup>32</sup> John Mackenzie, "Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, No. 36, (2008), 661; Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 254

<sup>33</sup> Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 258

<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie, "Comfort' and Conviction', 665

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 164

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 310

artefacts of empire from the larger notion of a society dominated by empire and found that even at its times of greatest influence and size, 'Britain had never been a convincing Imperial society.'<sup>37</sup>

The debate carries on and other scholars have deepened its complexity, such as the work of Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, who asserted, with Porter, that the empire was 'simply there' and not a topic for general consideration.<sup>38</sup> However, there remains general agreement that the presence of empire was felt all about. Mackenzie's examples were certainly apparent to all and Porter agreed with this but did not feel that this necessarily implied that this general awareness had to imply that the population felt that the empire actually affected them, despite its presence. Separately, Hall commented that although by the middle of the nineteenth century, most Britons had seen people of colour, they had rarely interacted with them.<sup>39</sup> It is at this point that the debate and this thesis meet. A key part of the thesis is to examine how interactions between the British public and military and the Indian soldiers affected the way in which the British people viewed the people of India.

## METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses a range of sources to explore the attitudinal changes towards India and its people during the period. Formal military accounts will be used to show how the Indian Corps was viewed during its time in France by those who commanded it. The military accounts of the war lie in the War Diaries, which are minutely detailed hand written daily accounts designed to provide the general staff with information about the activity of any given unit for planning purposes. These will be used together with other documents, such as regimental diaries, Orders of Battle, certain Operational Orders and some personal accounts which form *The Official History of the War*.<sup>40</sup> These documents are a detailed operational account, which provide a comprehensive account of every action in which the Indian Corps was engaged but offer little subjective insight into how they were viewed by the military hierarchy. However, in a section concerning the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 282

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Hall C, and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: being at home with the Empire' in *At Home with the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2

<sup>39</sup> Catherine Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed Stockwell, S. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 200

<sup>40</sup> Brigadier-General Sir J Edmonds, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents: by Direction of the Committee of Imperial Defence: Military Operations France and Belgium v1-4* (London: Macmillan, 1922-1928)

departure of the Indian Corps from France the *Official History* set up some of criticisms which were to follow them through the next century: how they dealt with the French climate; their heavy losses and the difficulties with reinforcements; the loss of British officers and the poor quality of their replacements and those of the reserves in general. It concluded that the Indian Corps 'played its part well and bravely' and left France because the new units arriving in France made its continuing presence unnecessary.<sup>41</sup> A further source of information about how the British military viewed the Indian Corps are Despatches. These accounts were the reports of the Commander in Chief to the War Office and were published in the *London Gazette*. The *Official History* and the Despatches in the *London Gazette* were both public documents and, as such, their contents represent a view that the military establishment were happy that the public should take account of. Parliamentary records such as Hansard can provide insight into British political priorities. For example, the issue of admitting Indian soldiers as officers in the Indian Army was being considered by parliament as early as September 1915, although it was not implemented until after the war.<sup>42</sup> Documents which were not necessarily confidential but were not published for public consumption, such as the 1918 military manual *Our Indian Empire: A short review and some hints for the use of soldiers proceeding to India* provide a valuable insight into the opinions of the British military.<sup>43</sup>

More direct insight into the attitudes of senior military personnel are provided by memoirs of British officers who led Indian soldiers both during the First World War and in the years preceding the war. Two direct first-person accounts by senior British officers in the Indian Army of their time on the Western Front have been extensively drawn upon, those of General J. Willcocks and Lieutenant-Colonel J.W.B. Merewether.<sup>44</sup> General Willcocks had served almost his entire career in the Indian Army and had commanded Indian troops in both Sudan and Burma as well as commanding the West African Frontier Force. On his return to India, his short and ferocious campaigns in the North-West Frontier Province had led to a Punch cartoon entitled 'Willcocks's Weekend War' in 1908.<sup>45</sup> During the First World War he served as a staff officer and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., v4, 404

<sup>42</sup> Hansard, *House of Commons Debate* 22 September 1915 vol 74 cc442-3442

<sup>43</sup> *Our Indian Empire: A short review and some hints for the use of soldiers proceeding to India* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing India, 1918)

<sup>44</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Co, 1920); Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*

<sup>45</sup> Bernard Partridge, "Willcocks's Week-End War." *Punch Historical Archive*, 11 March 1908

was awarded the GCMG.<sup>46</sup> Despite his experience, he was unable to form a working relationship with Kitchener in France and was dismissed in September 1915 and left France immediately. Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether was also a long serving career officer who had followed his father into the Indian Army and had commanded Indian troops in Aden and East Africa in the early part of the century. He served with the General Staff in France, gaining a CIE for his services in 1916.<sup>47</sup> Both men, therefore, were able to claim with confidence that the Indian Corps was able to conduct operations abroad and this is reflected in their memoirs. Both volumes of memoirs deliver conventional military histories of the Indian Corps' time in France which are overlaid with their personal opinions and reflections.

Further insight into changing British attitudes can be gleaned from the letters home from the Indian soldiers. However, seeking the viewpoint of the Indian soldiers presents some difficulties as the only direct source of their thoughts and feelings are their letters, extracts of which were preserved by the censorship process they underwent in France. The focus here is on a very specific set of letters, those from the Indian infantry soldiers on the Western Front up to December 1915, and the fears, tales and opinions in those letters necessarily represent a small proportion of Indian combatants. Some 600 letters from the time the Indian Corps spent on the Western Front have been analysed as part of this thesis from the remaining extracts of letters totalling several thousand, covering the whole period and every theatre of Indian military involvement in the First World War. This represents the most detailed study of the Indian soldiers' letters from France and Britain yet conducted, considerably greater than that of David Omissi in his *Indian Voices of the Great War*, the largest available study of the letters, which samples letters from the whole canon and includes just 206 from this period. While there are difficulties interpreting these letters, they provide an insight into how the soldiers viewed the British in the changed context of warfare on their home continent and to some extent reflect the changes in attitude among the British officers and imperial rulers.

The use of newspapers as evidence for the opinions of their readership is not without difficulty but it does provide a context for those opinions and, to some extent, both

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<sup>46</sup> F. E. Whitton, Rev. James Lunt, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36909>, accessed 17.2.2012

<sup>47</sup> Companion of the Indian Empire, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29423/supplement/79>, accessed 6.5.17



leads and reflects them. Justin Fantauzzo, in his discussion on the war in the Middle East and public opinion, stated that newspaper circulation, 'grew by leaps and bounds. In Britain, the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Sketch* reached around 1 million readers annually ... the *Daily Express*'s circulation almost doubled.'<sup>48</sup>

A Constructionist view of the relationship between the media and the public presents it as a two way dynamic, with the media capable of manipulating the information which it receives with an eye on its target audience, such as the propaganda efforts supplied by the Press Bureau, and a public equally capable of filtering the information it receives according to its own social and political identities, often disregarding information which does not accord with its views.<sup>49</sup> The efficacy of attempts to sway public opinion via mass media, such as the government's positive positioning of the Indian soldiers is generally held to have some effect, subject to the caveats above regarding the target audience and their own particular characteristics. Adrian Bingham cited the example of the press in 1918 which 'worked hard to encourage eligible women to vote' in the first general election after their enfranchisement, although he conceded that the effect of these efforts can never be clearly established.<sup>50</sup> Aaron Reeves and Robert de Vries found that newspaper coverage of the 2011 riots in British cities did influence public opinion, with newspaper readers more likely to regard welfare recipients in a negative light than those not exposed to print media.<sup>51</sup> This would suggest that, in some part at least, the media did have a positive effect on the opinions of British people during the war, although this was most pronounced in those who encountered Indian soldiers, both in the civilian and military populations.

Despite the variety of sources, the correlation between evidentiary material and public opinion is not a necessary one and a debate continues as to how clear any connection may be. Furthermore, 'public opinion' is itself a term fraught with difficulty as the public

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<sup>48</sup> Justin Fantauzzo, 'The Finest Feats of War? The Captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem during the First World War and Public Opinion throughout the British Empire', *War in History*, 24, no.1 (2017), 67

<sup>49</sup> William Gamson, 'The 1987 Distinguished Lecture: A Constructionist Approach to the Mass Media and Public Opinion', *Symbolic Interaction*, 11, no.2, 1988, 165, 170; Aaron Reeves and Robert de Vries, 'Does media coverage influence public attitudes towards welfare recipients: The Impact of the 2011 English Riots', *British Journal of Sociology* 67, no 2, (2016), 299

<sup>50</sup> Adrian Bingham, 'Ignoring the First Draft of History? Media History 18, no. 3/4, (August 2012), 315

<sup>51</sup> Reeves and de Vries, 'Does media coverage influence public attitudes towards welfare recipients: The Impact of the 2011 English Riots', 291

in question is not necessarily a homogenous group, consisting for the purpose of this thesis of the people of Great Britain, separable into numerous subdivisions such as gender, class and in particular racial prejudice or otherwise and their status as civilians or soldiers. D. G. Boyce considered that any subdivision such as those above merely results in 'generic statements' about smaller groups of people, whose individual opinions remain unknowable.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the least applicable to this study are those most commonly used, those of gender and class. The military framework was exclusively male and any opinions, either from formal military sources or individual memoirs are necessarily from a male perspective and a female reading public would be unlikely to have the detailed military knowledge to accept these at anything other than face value. From a military perspective, the range of sources offered is inclusive of those of the very highest rank, staff officers in the field and private soldiers' memoirs, so can be taken to be representative of the spectrum of social class. The class divide among the public who absorbed the impressions given directly or indirectly is less clear to see. Although the literary sources may appear to be appear to be the most susceptible to class influence, readership of novelists such as Kipling as widespread and the type of children's publications used as source material were accessible to the majority of children. The spread of military sources above can be considered to be comprehensive of social classes, although the readership may of course not be. Given that, the war and the thirst for war news was sufficiently widespread and all-consuming that it can be assumed that a representative cross section of social classes were made aware of the contribution of the empire to the war effort. In the case study of the response of the people of Brighton, this is less clear, although the weight of numbers attending events such as the first arrival of Indian troops at the railway station and the curious gaze of the public at the soldiers and the gifts made to them could be seen to be comprehensive of the town's social make up.

There are parallels here with the discussion above concerning the extent to which the British public concerned itself with its empire or otherwise. Neither case is subject to comprehensive proof but the weight of evidence can suggest conclusions. Taken together, these varied sources reveal the changing manner in which Indian people and

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<sup>52</sup> D. G. Boyce, Public Opinion and Historians, *History*, 63, no 208, (1978), 227

soldiers were represented and how they interacted with the British public and military during the period.

## CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The first part of this thesis analyses the British civilian experience of Indian people and soldiers in the years before, during and after the war and examines how attitudes towards Indian people were affected by knowledge of their service in France. The second part concerns the military perspective: the caution with which the deployment of Indian troops in Europe was met, their success as fighting men and the high praise they garnered in the official records of the war. The key conclusion in common between both aspects is the high esteem in which the Indian soldiers came to be held as a result of their war service in France, particularly when more positive media representations were backed up by personal interactions.

Careful analysis of the British domestic viewpoint in the first chapter will illustrate how Indian people were represented before, during and after the war and highlight the changes which occurred. This will provide a context and, to some extent, an explanation for many of the attitudinal changes which were to take place in Britain. The chapter will principally use newspaper sources to illustrate the changing representations of Indians in Britain as the perceptions of Indian people moved from the largely negative before the war, through a position of heroism during the war to a more nuanced view in the years after the war. It will show that this developed from a view of Indian people in Britain which was largely led by clichéd stereotypes. It will be shown that during the war, such images were not seen to be suitable depictions of soldiers fighting for the empire and positive representations in the media became the norm. After the war, the most negative images melted away, although the image of Indian people as 'exotic' remained a hardy stereotype. The work of Rudyard Kipling will be used to illustrate this train of representation throughout the period though the depictions he chose to use.

The second chapter contrasts this view with that of British people who actually met and interacted with Indian soldiers during the war. Necessarily, this is a small group as few Indian soldiers ever visited Britain, with the exception of wounded soldiers who were hospitalised in towns across the south coast. The town of Brighton will be used as a case

study to examine how these encounters took place and the positive, not to say affectionate, attitude which developed towards them. The propaganda value of the success of the hospitals will also be examined. It will be shown that those who met Indians developed more positive views of them than did those who relied solely upon representations in the media for their knowledge.

In Part Two, the third chapter will examine how the Rebellion of 1857 led to dramatic changes in the military establishment and precipitated some of the negative assumptions which were to come to the fore in France. Despite the sixty years since it had occurred, change was slow to follow and the effects of those changes necessarily took still longer to emerge. Particular reference will be made to the Martial Race Theory of recruitment, which was itself the source of a number of difficulties faced by the Indian Corps in France. It will examine the relationships between British and Indian troops and compare the views of the soldiers and senior and staff officers who had most contact with Indians. It will show that, in a similar manner to the civilian population, those who fought alongside the Indian soldiers and knew them tended to form better opinions of them than those who did not, who tended to adhere instead to the fears that preceded their deployment.

The purpose of the fourth chapter is to place the difficulties that the British Army anticipated that the Indian Corps would face within the context of the overall thesis by demonstrating that these 'difficulties' were constructs of the type of prejudicial thinking inherent at this period. In this instance, the Social Darwinist anticipation proved unfounded but, as will be shown, was taken up again later in the twentieth century by historians discussing the Indian contribution on the Western Front. The chapter will examine the concerns that were held about deploying Indian troops in Europe: that they would not be effective without the close leadership of British officers, that they would not be able to cope with the climate of northern France, that they were prone to indiscipline and self-inflicted wounds, and that there was a risk that they would be disloyal to the Raj. It will show that those fears did not manifest themselves on the battlefield and that the conduct of the Indian soldiers was comparable with that of their British counterparts. It will then consider the negative presentation of the Indian soldiers in the later twentieth century historiography, most of which perpetuated the concerns above,

and contrast this with the overwhelmingly positive view of them which was prevalent at the end of the war among those who knew the Corps and their part in the war best.

The final chapter draws together both the civilian and military perspectives to detail British reactions to the Indian Corps' service in France and attitudes to Indian people during the post war period. It finds a public which is more amendable and better informed towards Indian people and which expressed discontent with the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. However, this is contrasted with the Race Riots which broke out in the same years in port cities across the country. It will examine government efforts to propagate a more inclusive view of empire via the British Empire Exhibition and Empire Marketing Board. By comparison, the granting of commissions to Indian soldiers is contrasted with negative, if not prejudicial aspects of the Imperial War Graves Commission's activities.

The thesis will conclude that the British view of India and its people was changed by its involvement in the First World War. The evidence will show that the increased awareness of and interaction with Indian soldiers led not simply to the development of more sophisticated and rounded representations of Indian people by the media and generated widespread respect and support. However, the acclaim should be set against both individual and governmental actions which were prejudiced against Indian people and there is no evidence to suggest a longer-term continuation. Rather, this ambivalence appears to have set the tone for the years ahead.

## **Chapter One - 'The dusky sons of Hindostan/Will by our banner stand' – Representations of Indian people in Britain**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the manner in which Indian people were represented in the media in the years before, during and after the First World War and how the nature of these representations was changed by the participation of Indian troops in the war. Each section will form a comparison based on similar sources of information about Indian people to give an overview of the prevailing trends. In order to give as broad a scope as possible, a variety of sources will be used: newspapers and weekly publications will be used to show how Indian people appeared in public life while literary accounts will present a more idealised view and children's literature will be examined for its 'educational' aspect as a means of forming the opinions of the next generation. While there has been extensive study of representations of empire in the domestic context, there has been far less study of this aspect of the depiction of Indian people during this period, although further information has been sourced from commentators on the history of Britain's South Asian population. The work of Rudyard Kipling, the 'poet of empire', will be used as a case study to illustrate the changes which occurred in the depiction of Indians during the period.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, most British people were unlikely ever to meet or converse with an Indian person in Britain. Although the population of Indians was fairly disparate, they tended to live and work in very specific areas. Rozina Visram estimates the number of Asians in Britain in 1914 at 'several hundred' semi-permanent residents, most of whom were lascars (sailors), ayahs (nannies), princes and royalty as well as anywhere between 700 and 1200 students.<sup>1</sup> The importance of the diversity of the population, not just in background but social class, is emphasised alongside the difficulty of establishing the number of Indian people accurately by Michael Fisher et al.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, most people's impressions of Indian people came from media and cultural representations, for example occasions such as Empire Day celebrations created in 1909 as a national event, primarily for young people, by Reginald Brabazon, Earl of Meath. Jim English argued that, although a festival aimed at schools, it had a cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 years of History* (Pluto Press, London, 2002), 44, 88

<sup>2</sup> Michael Fisher, Shompa Lahiri, Shinder Thandi, *A South Asian History of Britain* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), xix

significance beyond young people and was also celebrated among the adult population.<sup>3</sup> His analysis of memoirs from the early years of the twentieth century shows a widespread awareness of the celebration, with some 200,000 adults joining 40,000 children for its inaugural celebration in Preston in 1909.<sup>4</sup> Three years later, *The Times* reported Empire Day as 'a festival of world-wide importance. Today many millions of his majesty's subjects will take part in it.'<sup>5</sup> Shortly before this report, *The Times* had published a letter from the Earl of Meath asserting that 260 education committees in Britain were endorsing the festival, with some 17,000,000 people celebrating the day across the world.<sup>6</sup> The numbers of people involved demonstrates the high degree of receptiveness to learning about and celebrating the empire during the period, although, as has been seen above, the impact of Empire Day remains disputed among historians.

As will be shown, while the stereotypical manner in which Indian people were represented in the media did not alter as the years passed, the content of the representations changed dramatically. In the absence of any substantial interactions between British and Indian people in Britain, representations continued to form a series of reductionist stereotypes upon which the public had to rely. Santanu Das noted that the use of such stereotypes was not just a British, but pan European, phenomenon, particularly with regard to Indian fighting men.<sup>7</sup> While the content changed and became more positive as time went on, the insubstantial and stereotypical nature of the representations altered little.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIAN PEOPLE IN THE YEARS BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

This section will show that before the war the representations of Indian people fell into a limited number of stereotypes, presenting Indian people in the media as variously helpless victims in need of assistance; exotic; or threatening and even liable to acts of civil disobedience. Each representation achieved notice in its own way, which provides insight into the knowledge and opinions available to British people before the

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<sup>3</sup> Jim English, 'Empire Day in Britain 1904-1958', *The Historical Journal*, v49, II, 248

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 256

<sup>5</sup> 'Empire Day', *The Times*, 24 May 1912

<sup>6</sup> 'Empire Day', letter to *The Times*, 9 May 1912

<sup>7</sup> Santanu Das, Introduction to *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Das S. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18

contribution of the Indian soldiers became better known in the early years of the First World War.

National events always included India and its people and were unfailingly popular. From a cultural point of view, the British public was very receptive to Indian influenced entertainment. At the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908, there was an Indian pavilion in which at least two performances daily played to some 3000 people in a show which featured sword swallowers, acrobats, jugglers, performing elephants and 'seven nautch girls, who are not made to go beyond the limited gyrations to which they are accustomed in real life merely to please onlookers who may not have seen an actual Indian nautch.'<sup>8</sup> This comment reflects an awareness by the reporter, who was presumably himself British, that Indian people and customs were not always accurately represented in Britain.

There are echoes of this lack of authenticity in shows such as the popular revue of 1879, *Indianationality*, which had a successful run at the Oxford Music Hall in London. The show was billed as 'a gorgeous musical Indian sketch. New scenery, dresses, music, attitudinisations [sic], and patriotic songs in which Miss Edmonds and an ensemble of ladies and youths will appear.'<sup>9</sup> The show included a song written for it by G W Hunt called 'New Patriotic Song' which included the lines 'the Indian tiger's awake' and 'The dusky sons of Hindostan/Will by our banner stand.'<sup>10</sup> This rather prophetic lyric shows the confident expectation of Indian military support for the British.

On a less populist level, the 1911 Festival of Empire in its Indian section chose to 'confine the exhibition to the decorative and applied arts of the country, and to models, tableaux, and other articles illustrating the life of the people and the history of the country.'<sup>11</sup> Among the exhibits were the diary of the daughter of Clive of India, 'Mrs Herringham's reproductions of the famous frescoes of the Ajanta Caves', and 'copies of the Scriptures in manifold Indian languages.'<sup>12</sup> Note that these were British representations of India and

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<sup>8</sup> A Nautch is the English word for a traditional Indian dance. The Franco-British Exhibition, *The Times*, 5 June 1908

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 15 February 1879

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 27

<sup>11</sup> 'The Festival of Empire', *The Times*, 13 June 1911

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



showed that the curators were apparently choosing not to display authentic Indian images to the British public, although these would presumably have been reasonably accessible to the curators.

For young people, publications such as *The Boy's Own Paper* were written to provide a steer as to how the empire should be viewed, often with confused results. It is characteristic that these stories often involved colonial people as a foil to the endeavours of doughty British heroes, rather than as personalities in their own right. In 'Gulab Singh: A Story of Peril and Heroism', a story published in *Boy's Own* in 1889, contains a further message, that of the importance of loyalty to Britain, is illustrated. In this scene, Jack and his faithful servant Gulab Singh have been kidnapped by Mohun Lal and are being threatened with execution in the name of Indian independence. As Mohun Lal invites Jack and Gulab to watch their last sunset, the following conversation takes place:

'God bless you Gulab!' said Jack. 'You have been a faithful servant.'  
 'Faithful to his master – a dog of an Englishman – but false to the country of his birth!' interrupted Mohun Lal.  
 'Thou liest, Mohun Lal!' said Gulab, with spirit, 'To my country I am not untrue ... the men of the Punjab know not the King of Delhi, but remain true to the salt of their friends and masters.'<sup>13</sup>

Not only have the rebels imperilled a white person but they are threatening Gulab, an Indian, on exactly the same basis: retribution for the British reaction to the rebellion of 1857. Mohun Lal continues, 'Mutineers, as the English dogs call us ... are blown from the mouths of cannon. We will see how an Englishman looks strapped to cannon's mouth.' Just as the cannon was about to be fired, a group of troops arrived, led by Jack's friend Alick and an Indian fakeer, and rescued Jack and Gulab. Jack reflected on the fakeer's motivation to help him rescue Jack and Gulab, 'the shrewd villagers saw that by returning me to the English, they would be marked as loyal and probably receive a handsome reward; whereas if it had been discovered that they had rescued an English officer, that they would certainly have their village burned by their troublesome neighbours the English.' The story concluded as Jack and Alick nursed Gulab back to health from his wounds and rewarded him for having saved their lives.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'Gulab Singh: A Story of Peril and Heroism', *The Boy's Own Paper*, London 1889; *Ibid.*, n. 556, v. XI, October 1889, 770

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 770; *Ibid.*, n. 557, v. XI, October 1889, 786

This story put forward some interesting concepts for a young English boy: that not all Indian people were loyal to the British and some had the power and resources to capture a young English officer. However, the end of the story was clear on all counts: the rebels' attack was foiled and it was the British ingenuity of Alick who saved the day, leaving Gulab helpless and injured to be carried out of danger by Alick and Jack and 'nursed as if he was a brother', before being returned to his family.<sup>15</sup> The closing message was clear, the British had the power not only to put down rebellions but to take charge of the lives of Indians who required their assistance.

While stories like these were doubtless well received by small boys looking for tales of adventure and excitement, their effect as propaganda was not missed. Anti-Imperialist commentator J. A. Hobson, writing in 1902, claimed that such stories and efforts to influence children through means such as Empire Day celebrations at school were no more than an attempt to 'feed the always overweening pride of race at an age when self-confidence most commonly prevails, and by necessary implication to disparage other nations, so starting children in the world with false measures of value and an unwillingness to learn from foreign sources.'<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, their popularity remained and the generation brought up on stories such as this and the national faith in empire went on to dominate public life in the years during and after the war.

Representations such as these, which are designed to place British people in apposition of superiority over Indian people in various contexts are broadly illustrative of the Social Darwinist thinking prevalent in the years before the war. Social Darwinism was primarily a late nineteenth century concept which attempted to reinterpret Charles Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest to reflect, in this case, the superiority of the British over their colonial Indian subjects. This theme will recur in the thesis in both the context of civilian representations of Indian people and in the assumptions made by the military leaders that the Indian soldiers would not be able to cope with condition on the Western Front.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 787

<sup>16</sup> John Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Porrt & Co, 1902), online edition <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/127>, 127

## THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIAN SOLDIERS

This section will focus on the representations of Indian soldiers during the war, using both first person stories, regional and national daily newspapers and weekly publications and literature for adults and children. These will be used to illustrate how the representation of Indians in this period differed from that in the years before the war. It will examine how literature, as well as the press, contributed to a new view of Indian people now they had entered the public arena as soldiers. The representations promoted by the press were to a large extent determined by content provided by the Press Bureau, which sought to provide propaganda stories to maintain public morale and Indian soldiers were part of that narrative. The motivation for this seems clear: the image of Indian people in the years before the war was not conducive to their presenting a reassuring presence in France and so a new set of representations was required, suggestive of loyalty to the crown and military competence.

New weekly publications about the war started remarkably soon after the declaration of war. *War Illustrated* was published for the first time on 22 August 1914, just 18 days after Britain entered the war. *The Times History and Encyclopaedia of the War* was published weekly from 25 August 1914. Each issue dealt with a specific topic concerning the war and chapters were often written by well-known writers and journalists. A self-appointed role of the press was to provide the British public with information about Indian society. *The Times History* gave detailed introductions to the various ethnic groups which made up the Indian Army and their religions and customs, as well as providing detailed battle analysis. *Punch*, albeit in a light-hearted manner, emphasised their loyalty to the crown and their ferocity in battle, as did numerous other publications. There were plenty of endorsements of their bravery and ability from British privates and officers and even accounts of the Germans' fear of them and admiration of them as adversaries. An interesting strand, bearing in mind that the empire had a marked tendency to view its subjects as naïve children, often prone to over-excitement, was the repeated emphasis on their stoicism and steadfastness under fire. The image that a British reader of newspapers and weeklies would have gleaned of the Indian soldiers was one of a stalwart, brave and formidable army which was devoted to its King Emperor, not so far distant from the image of a British Tommy.

The issue of non-white men fighting in a white European war had been a concern in political and military circles before the war and was tackled head on in the October 1914 edition of the *History*, claiming that, 'the instinct which made us such sticklers for propriety in all our dealings made us feel more reluctant than other nations would feel, to employ coloured troops against a white enemy.' It went on to admit that it would not have been 'possible' or 'wise' to 'refuse' to admit Indians to the European theatre of war. *The Times History* revisited the problem of 'The Employment of "Coloured Troops' in June 1915<sup>17</sup>. Now able to add evidence to its former reassurances, it firmly stated that 'The ignorance which prompted the scruple was one of the first illusions which the war swept away.'<sup>18</sup> The use of quotation marks in the subtitle and the firm tone of its statement show that any issues around a racial bar to fighting in Europe must be considered, by the *Times History* at least, to be closed.

A clear message that racial prejudice towards the Indian soldiers would be unpatriotic came from a Press Bureau Dispatch published in the *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 'Letters ... make it clear that the German military authorities have specially charged their troops with the task of inflecting the severest possible punishment upon forces whose civilisation they deny.'<sup>19</sup> By a simple oppositional move, the public was drawn into accepting the Indian civilisation in the face of German racism, while additionally emphasising that the Germans saw the Indians as a particular threat.

The critical message for the British authorities was to present the Indian soldiers to the public in a reassuring light as competent fighters who would serve Britain effectively in France. This was achieved by a number of stories released by the Press Bureau but also by publications such as *Punch*, which gave light hearted accounts of the Indian Corps. *Punch* served to present the Indian soldiers in an inclusive light, by treating them in the same manner as they would any other topic of interest. This theme of inclusiveness is also seen in letters home from British soldiers which were published in local newspapers as well as in press pictures such as the photograph from *War Illustrated* below. The loyalty

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<sup>17</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 1, issue IX, n.d., c. October 1914, 155

<sup>18</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 2, issue XXII, n.d., c. June 1915, 317

<sup>19</sup> 'Indian Contingent. Observer's notes on their conduct,' *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, 11 November 1914, 5

of the Indian soldiers was also an important message, both to allay public concerns that non-white troops would not serve well in Europe and that India would be safe after the end of the war.

Almost as soon as the Indian soldiers arrived in France, positive stories covering their courage and fighting ability started to emerge in the press. On 2 October 1914, a story appeared in the *Dundee Courier*, which credits *The Times* as its source, which described their arrival in Marseilles:

It is no exaggeration to say that the regiments brought over from the East are composed of noble and majestic specimens of manhood ... first came a detachment of stalwart Sikhs, for the greater part head and shoulders above the spectators. Immediately the police guarding the route were swept aside. The ranks were rushed, men and women shook the laughing soldiers by the hand, and young girls showered flowers upon them, pinning roses in their tunics and in their turbans ... when the sturdy Gurkhas – still smiling, of course ... the crowd considered they could better show their regard by allowing the soldiers the right of the pavement instead of the cobbled streets. Accordingly, men, mountain battery mules, and officers; horses marched along under the awnings of café terrasses, men and women standing on chairs and tables waving hats, sticks, and handkerchiefs and expending every ounce of lung energy shouting 'Vivent les Anglais,' 'Vivent les Indiennes.' Quick witted Indians voiced their gratitude by replying, 'Veeve France,' and by making repeated use of a phrase in Hindustani, the intonation of which was suspiciously reminiscent of the British soldiers' dearly-beloved 'Are we downhearted? No!' Our Indian troops, comparable as they are to any martial force in the world, have only one fear – it is that the war may be over before they get to the Front.<sup>20</sup>

This passage, which almost certainly derives from the Press Bureau, is worth quoting at length as it contains many signals to its readership as to how the Indian soldiers should be viewed. They are considered to be 'noble and majestic specimens of manhood,' Sikhs are noticeably tall and Gurkhas 'sturdy'. Not only were they physically impressive but the crowd was sufficiently moved by their presence to step out of their way through sheer respect and allow them the shade of the pavement, while they stood in the road to watch the men march past. Even in their first moments in France, the report suggested that they had recognised a few words of French and were able to reply in that language, as well as having a grasp of English military slang, illustrating their quick wit and intelligence. Finally, just as for so many Britain recruits, they were deemed to be anxious

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<sup>20</sup> 'Marseilles gives great welcome to Britain's soldiers from the East', *Dundee Courier*, 2 October 1914, 2

to reach the trenches as soon as possible in case the war ended before they could get there. All these prompts worked to create an image for the public of the Indians as eager, fit and intelligent fighting men, whose presence could only be of benefit to Britain.

The June 1915 edition of the *Times History*, entitled 'The Indian Army in the Trenches', reviewed the Indian Army's experience in France from its arrival to December 1914 in considerably more detail than had been available when they arrived in France.<sup>21</sup> It introduced the idea that the Indian men were relatively indifferent to the mayhem around them, 'One of the first regiments to go into action was heavily shelled whilst entrenching. An officer who was present particularly observed the indifference of the men throughout this, which was – to them – a novel experience. It was noticed that after the first few shells they hardly troubled to look round.'<sup>22</sup> This was reinforced further in an account of a wounded man, 'One heard of the Dogra Naik who was very badly hit in the stomach, and who, though dying and in mortal pain, never made a sound, and when carried into the hospital tried to raise on his stretcher and salute. He lingered half an hour and never even moaned all that time.'<sup>23</sup> It seems that the writer was trying to relate their ability to remain calm under fire to the established idea of the stoic British Tommy.

Among other publications to acknowledge the Indian contribution was *Punch*, the weekly satirical magazine, which enjoyed a boost in sales after the declaration of war.<sup>24</sup> As the Indian soldiers were en route from India, *Punch* published the sketch below. Although the role of the cavalry was to be much diminished by the war the message was clear: the Indian soldiers would be patriotic and fierce in their defence of their King Emperor. Later that month, the Indian Corps was clearly positioned by *Punch* as beside and equal to the British Army in an article about the possibility of invasion by the Germans, 'When the Regular Army and the Reserve Army and the new Million Army and the Indian Army and the Overseas Army and the Territorial Army are all entering Berlin together, then the defence of England (we hope) will rest entirely upon us.'<sup>25</sup>

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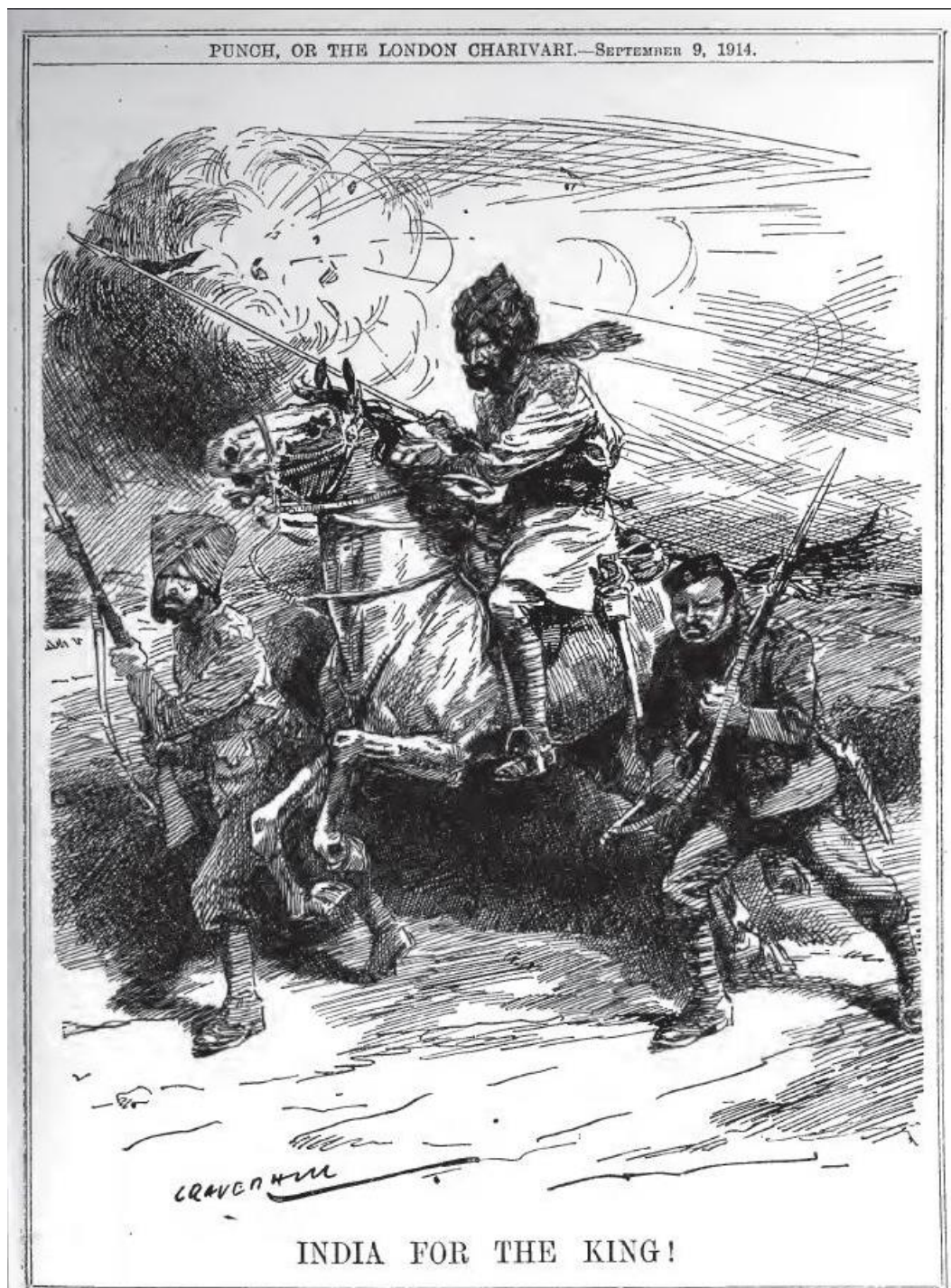
<sup>21</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 2, issue XLII, cJune 1915

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 334

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 346

<sup>24</sup> Sales: 31 December 1913 – 119,000, 31 December 1914 – 144,000. <http://www.punch.co.uk/about/>, accessed 14 November 2015

<sup>25</sup> *Punch*, 30 September 1914, 275



Punch Magazine, 9 September 1914

British readers were also given an insight into the German view of the Indian soldiers as good soldiers. The *Times History* explained that, although the British position in India was secure, it was regarded as a disadvantage by other European powers to have to commit resources and men into defending its Indian borders from attack and claims that 'at the outset of the present conflict the German Press confidently relied upon trouble in India

as a factor on their side.<sup>26</sup> That same month, *The Western Daily Press*, in a news article headed 'Our Indian Troops – Their Great Triumph' quoted from a Press Association report that 'The Germans say that the Indians personally are much stronger and more nimble than German soldiers and it is therefore impossible for the latter to vanquish them in hand-to-hand fighting, unless the Indians are outnumbered.'<sup>27</sup>

Such claims were given further legitimacy in the eyes of the public by the publication of accounts of British soldiers who fought alongside the Indian soldiers. These take the form of letters home which were passed on to the local press by their families. In the spring of 1915 *The Times* published a letter from a British officer in the Indian Army entitled 'The Dash of the Indian Troops – Dodging Jack Johnsons,'<sup>28</sup> which once again emphasised their stoicism and fighting ability. In the letter, an officer of the Indian Army paid tribute to the spirit and endurance of the native troops:

The Indian troops did awfully well. They say their dash was wonderful ... My men have stood 10 days shelling with the utmost indifference. The biggest guns they have ever seen before have been field guns. One day we had 50 Jack Johnsons in an hour falling all about our trenches. They were aimed at some houses behind us, where the artillery observers were concealed, and they absolutely knocked the place to pieces, making holes 8ft to 10ft broad and 4ft or 5ft deep. Luckily none pitched in the trench, although they fell within a foot or two ... The men didn't mind them a bit.<sup>29</sup>

In April 1915, Driver William Barr wrote of his impressions in a letter to his brother,

At night time you could go by an Indian sentry without seeing him, although he soon sees you. They are very smart fellows ... and some can speak English fairly well – acting as clerks and orderlies for officers, etc. They feel the cold very much and say, 'France and trenches no good.' I get on with them all right. Some are very cheeky, others are afraid to speak or come in where you are ... They are pretty smart at drill etc. Their writing is funny, like Chinese. I think this is all about the Indians.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume I, issue IX, cOctober 1914, 153-160

<sup>27</sup> *The Western Daily Press*, 31 October 1914, 3

<sup>28</sup> Jack Johnson – German heavy artillery shell bursting with black smoke. After the boxer Jack Johnson, the first black American world heavyweight champion.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 12 April 1915

<sup>30</sup> With The Indians – Coventry Soldier's Interesting Story, *The Midland Daily*, 14 April 1915



In another first person account, published in November 1914, Captain Taylor, 'remarks they do not call it fighting when bullets are flying round all night and only one man hit. Their officers, he said, "have to jump on them" to keep them in the trenches.'<sup>31</sup> A letter to *The Newcastle Daily Journal* said that, 'The Indians are good soldiers; they have done well since they arrived.'<sup>32</sup>

While not originally written for publication, by virtue of their publication in newspapers these letters acted as propaganda, providing accounts of men encountering peers from a vastly different world, noting their idiosyncrasies as well as their bravery. Often these letters emphasised how the Indian soldiers were unmoved by the carnage they saw around them, which must have given a particular emphasis to the accounts of their bravery. Just as with the official stories, these accounts presented the men in a wholly positive light: as wise, brave soldiers, who are friendly, if sometimes shy, towards the Tommies.

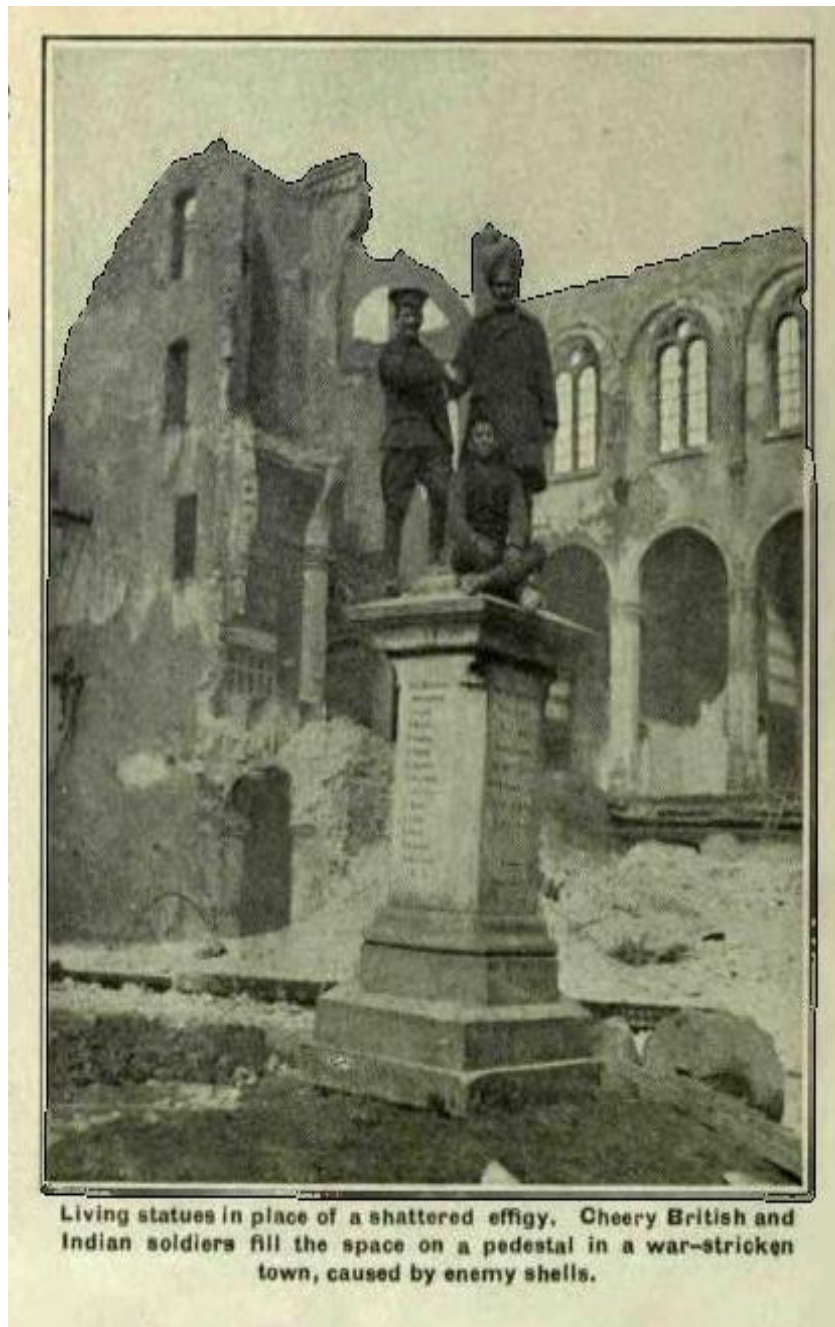
Other newspaper accounts of positive relationships between British and Indian soldiers offered similar propaganda value. A story in *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, attributed to a national newspaper so probably also originating from the Press Bureau, claimed that 'the men are conspicuously good rifle shots and born trackers and hunters. Also, they are very clannish and conservative; but while not readily fraternising with other Indian troops, they quickly become great friends with British soldiers whenever and wherever they meet.'<sup>33</sup> From this the public could glean that not only were they effective fighters, they would work well alongside British troops and were happy to do so. Photographs such as the one below must also have added to the general feeling of acceptance towards the Indian troops among the British public by showing British and Indian soldiers to be relaxed and comfortable in each other's company.

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<sup>31</sup> Doctors at the Front. Capt. L. O. Taylor's Narrow Escapes, *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 13 November 1914, 7

<sup>32</sup> Letters from the Front, *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, 1 December 1914, 3

<sup>33</sup> War Sidelights, *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, 3 October 1914, 4



*War Illustrated*, V3, 42, 1915

As well as the news media, the camaraderie between British and Indian troops was noted for a children's audience. The comic *Picture Fun Weekly* on Boxing Day 1914 published the story 'Cuffy the Colonial' in which Cuffy and his friend 'Sinjin the Sikh' replaced the Kaiser's Christmas pudding with a bomb. As the frame and caption below show, the cartoon is, by today's standards, racist and mocks Sinjin's accent:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 'Cuffy, the Colonial, and Sinjin, the Sikh, pinch the Kaiser's Christmas Pudding', *Picture Fun Weekly*, No 307, 26 December 1914



'Then Cuffy put a bomb on the dish instead of the pudding. "We won't rob the General of his sauce," he chortled, "No, gib him plenty ob dat stuff," grinned Sinjin.'

'Cuffy, the Colonial, and Sinjin, the Sikh, pinch the Kaiser's Christmas Pudding', *Picture Fun Weekly*, No 307, 26 December 1914, frame 4

However, the cartoon cannot simply be read by twenty-first century standards. To a young boy one hundred years ago, it would have seemed far more like a boyish prank carried out by two men acting in cooperation against a common enemy, the Kaiser. In the first frame Cuffy asked Sinjin 'Ever taste Xmas pudding Singy?' whispered Cuffy. 'No! Then we'll have one between us.' The cartoon ended as the bomb exploded and the two men escaped: 'Ha ha' cried Cuffy, 'we've done that very neatly, but we'd better get off; it's time we were out of the picture. Besides we want to sample the Kaiser's pudding.' Sinjin appeared to be happily in cahoots with Cuffy and they worked in partnership to carry out their plot, although Cuffy is clearly in charge of the enterprise.

Images of British and Indian soldiers enjoying each other's company, praise of them in both formal and first person accounts and even children's' cartoons all served to promote the Indian soldiers as competent soldiers equal in ability, if not status, to their British counterparts. A suggestion of inclusiveness and even affection came from *Punch's* treatment of the Indian soldiers. *Punch* treated the Indian soldiers with its customary robust humour, referring to the Indian Corps as the 'Jugglers' Corps',<sup>35</sup> to the Gurkhas as 'Gherkins'<sup>36</sup> and claiming that 'the Indians have an extraordinary way of fighting. They jump up, shoot with wonderful precision, and disappear before one has a chance to notice them properly. Our contemporary has evidently not been studying the pages of

<sup>35</sup> *Punch*, 13 January 1915, 31

<sup>36</sup> *Punch*, 2 December 1914, 466

*Punch*, or it would know that the disappearance is worked by the well-known Indian trick of throwing a rope into the air and climbing up it.<sup>37</sup> While by today's standards this could be seen as offensive, in the context of the standards of the day, this was little more than affectionate teasing and can be read as inclusive of the Indian soldiers in the melee of comic sketches in the magazine, although the humour depends on the depiction of Indians as exotic and thus 'other'.

The loyalty of the Indian troops to the Raj was also a feature of media reports designed to reassure the British public about their reliability. The *Times History's* first mention of the Indian soldiers was in an issue designed to introduce the empire's contribution to the war effort in the last week of October 1914.<sup>38</sup> The issue, titled 'The Native Indian Army' provided an introduction to the Indian Army, with sections describing the different racial groups and attributing various military strengths to each. The following week's issue reported the work of various dominions and parts of the empire, while the second half reported that 'even more striking and not less spontaneous were the expressions of passionate loyalty to the Throne and empire which came from India.' The edition concluded that 'Indian loyalty owed its existence not only to the monarchic instincts of its peoples and its martial pride, but to their gratitude for the benefits of British Government and to their determination to uphold at all costs the empire to which they were so deeply indebted.'<sup>39</sup>

A novel, first published in 1917 in *Adventure Magazine* in America and in 1918 in book form in Britain and America, gave a similar perspective on the British view of the Indian soldiers as loyal fighters. Its author, Talbot Mundy, was a Briton who had lived in India and East Africa before settling in New York. *Hira Singh – when India came to Flanders* was his tribute to the Indian soldiers in France: 'May this tribute to the gallant Indian gentlemen who came to fight our battles serve to remind its readers that they who give their best, and they who take, are one' reads the introduction.<sup>40</sup> In the book a group of Sikh soldiers were captured by the Germans and found themselves in the Half Moon Camp, where the Germans attempted to convince them to defect, believing them to be

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<sup>37</sup> *Punch*, 10 February 1915, 101

<sup>38</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume I, issue IX, n. d., c. October 1914, 153-160

<sup>39</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume I, issue X, n. d., c. November 1914, 161-167

<sup>40</sup> Talbot Mundy, *Hira Singh – when India came to Flanders* (London: Cassell, 1918), Kindle edition, loc 16

Muslims and as such prepared to consider joining with the Ottoman Empire on the side of the Germans. As Sikhs, this did not resonate with them but they played along in order to be sent to Turkey. Once in Turkey, they escaped from the Germans, and by a complicated combination of fighting, guile and trickery made their way to Afghanistan and thus into India, where they were given a heroes' welcome.

Mundy's Indian soldiers were full of intelligence and cunning and also deep loyalty to the Raj. It is in order to keep fighting for the British that they made their escape, rather than to reach India in order to desert. At one point, Ranjoor Singh, their leader, was questioned by his men and replied "'and as to whether I am true or not, it is enough that each should know his own heart. I am for the raj!' ... then I spoke up, for I saw my opportunity. 'So are we for the raj!' said I. 'We too sahib!'"<sup>41</sup> This was enough to unite his men and they carried on and finally crossed into India where the first person to greet them was 'a long-legged English sahib [who] heard our story and said "Shabash!" to Ranjoor Singh, which means "Well done!" They were then invited to take 'the salute of a whole division.' Their final reward was the promise of promotion to commissioned officer for the narrator.<sup>42</sup> Thus the group of independent and resourceful men returned home as heroes to take full advantage of their new status as commissioned officers; commissions granted, of course, by the British.

This was one of a number of literary representations of the Indian troops for various British audiences, all of which reflect the trend towards viewing the men as heroic and loyal soldiers, some of which were written by men who knew the Indian soldiers well. General Willcocks, Commander of the Indian troops, wrote an 18 stanza poem in the Indian style in praise of the Indian soldier which was originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in December 1917. He had already written a military-orientated account of the Indian soldiers' time in France in the July edition. The poem was told from the point of view of Hurnam Singh, who had fought in France, five years after his return home, having lost an arm in combat and told his tale to the 'village yokels' to whom he has returned.<sup>43</sup> The poem recounted the men's journey to France, the places they saw and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Loc 2367

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., loc 3228

<sup>43</sup> James Willcocks, *Hurnam Singh*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, No MCCXXVI, Vol CCII, 799, November 1917, <https://archive.org/stream/blackwoodsmagazi202edinuoft/page/800/mode/2up>, accessed 14 February 2015

fought in and compared the war to the Mahabharata. It emphasised the bravery of the men and specifically mentions Durwan Negi's bravery.<sup>44</sup> Towards the end, he concluded that,

The Jehlum's banks had witnessed oft her banks stained with gore,  
Had heard the tramp of countless feet,  
Had known both triumph and defeat,  
But never had her waters swirled  
A prouder message to the world  
Than Hurnam's story bore.<sup>45</sup>

While he brought the pride of the old soldier back to India and the banks of the river Hurnam sat beside, Willcocks was also clear that Hurnam's loyalty lay with England, 'For India's sons had sealed their oath, according to their laws ... and died in England's cause.'<sup>46</sup> The use of the word 'oath' is reminiscent of the expression of taking the salt, which occurs as an expression of duty and loyalty in a number of Indian soldiers' letters home.

In the months immediately following the Armistice the *Times History* published a series of articles summarising various aspects of the war. Among them was a chapter devoted to the success of the Indian Corps during the war and the competence and even heroism shown by the Indian troops. With regard to their military contribution in Europe, it wrote:

It required ... profound confidence in the essential loyalty of India to denude her without the slightest hesitation of almost all her British garrison as well of her Indian troops and to throw all her military resources into the melting pot in order to fill the gaps in our fighting line in France which ... could not have been filled from any other quarter during the supremely critical period when the Germans, having failed to reach Paris, were making their great effort to break through to Calais and the French channel coast.<sup>47</sup>

This quotation is significant as it not only reflects that Britain had left her most prized asset, India, almost unguarded during the war but also is overt about the impact the arrival of the Indian Corps made. Not only does it recognise that there were gaps in the

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<sup>44</sup> Durwan Negi (also Darwen) won the first Indian Victoria Cross in October 1914

<sup>45</sup> Willcocks, *Hurnam Singh*, verse XVI, 802; The Jehlum is a river in northern India

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, verse XVII, 802

<sup>47</sup> India During the War, *The Times History of the War*, Vol 15 Chapter CCXXV 1918, 118

line during the early months of the war but further states that there was no other source of fighting men to fill those gaps. The unspoken claim is that without the swift arrival of Indian reinforcements, the Germans could have won the Race to the Sea in the autumn of 1914, which would have dramatically altered, if not the outcome of the war, certainly its conduct in its first year. In a similar vein, *The Times* reported on a lecture in March 1919 at the Royal Institution about the Indian military contribution to the war effort. Sir John Fortescue, who had been engaged by the British government to write a popular history of the First World War, claimed in the lecture that there were times when a senior commander 'preferred Indian soldiers to the British' and concluded that the India had shown both 'astonishing gallantry [and] loyalty for which we ought to be devoutly thankful.'<sup>48</sup>

Concluding its account of the first three months of the Indian Army's involvement, the *Times History* aimed 'to give some idea of the various castes, creeds and communities from which it is drawn; to describe the peculiar difficulties that confronted them in a strange land under entirely novel conditions of warfare; and to record the fine spirit with which they surmounted these, upholding their high traditions, and proving, as in their past, their fidelity and devotion to the British Crown.'<sup>49</sup> Once again, the values of bravery and loyalty are stressed, in what was the last issue devoted solely to the Indian troops as they left France some months later. Once again, although designed to be informative, the exotic and separate view of Indians is shown in these attempts to explain their various ethnicities to the public.

However, even as the Indian soldiers were being depicted in a new and heroic light, some clichés endured and they were still sometimes portrayed as childlike or exotic. In the June 1915 issue of the *Times History* there was an interesting note about how the Indians reacted to trench warfare. In the border skirmishes in India, they lived in large camps which they left only to undertake raids on small targets, often by stealth, and almost always involving hand to hand combat, and returned to the safety of the camp after the engagement. As the *Times History* phrased it, 'they like to stalk their men and shoot him. But in this war, mines, barbed-wire entanglement, shells, siege-guns,

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<sup>48</sup> Mr. Fortescue On The Indian Troops, *The Times*, March 3, 1919, 4

<sup>49</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 2, issue XLII, cJune 1915, 354

mitrailleuses<sup>50</sup>, all the machinery of the “higher civilisation,” were most palpable phenomena on the other side ... “Sahib, why did you not teach us these things?” a sepoy said reproachfully to his British officer, unconscious that the same wizardry was being brought into play by his own Sahibs against the enemy.<sup>51</sup> While this seems to draw out the popular view of Indian people as childlike and full of wonder at the modern European world, the truth was that their British officers were barely more experienced in this kind of warfare than the Indian soldiers they led.

The next section is even more revealing:

The Indians who gave themselves to our cause did so at an even greater sacrifice than our own, for the meaning of the struggle did not touch them as nearly as it did us. To them the German was merely a savage with diabolical inspirations, a merely physical menace. The gospel of Treitschke<sup>52</sup> did not trouble their philosophy. Honour – personal, communal and national – was the only reward they looked for. The first advance of the Indians under machine gun fire was a new spiritual triumph for the East.<sup>53</sup>

The idea that Indians were unable to understand the war in terms of political philosophy and could only comprehend it in terms of devilment might seem disingenuous today but sat perfectly comfortably with the British notion of Indians as uneducated and childlike. The point about honour, or *izzat*, rests on a genuinely important concept for the Indian soldiers, and one which the British Army depended upon.

Such clichés persisted despite warnings by newspapers such as *The Times* which cautioned against such representations of Indian soldiers as exotic, in the expectation that this would diminish their reputation as reliable soldiers and asserted firmly, ‘there is no need for lyrics, or for allowing imagination to run riot just because the service of these troops in Europe is more or less of a novelty, and because the races represented, their uniforms, and their customs, appeal to the emotions. The Indian Army is an army of professional soldiers and not picturesque characters in a drama.’<sup>54</sup> *The Midland Daily*

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<sup>50</sup> French word for Rapid Fire Rifles

<sup>51</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 2, issue XLI, cJune 1915, 325

<sup>52</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896). A German historian and political writer who was a proponent of authoritarian power politics and a vociferous herald of the unity of Germany through Prussian might. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/604103/Heinrich-von-Treitschke>

<sup>53</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume 2, issue XLI, cJune 1915, 326

<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, 28 October 1914, 5



*Telegraph* stated that 'A word of caution should be uttered with regard to the amazing adventures and exploits which have been attributed to them; such recommendations are desired neither by officers nor men.'<sup>55</sup> Whether these two reports were both sourced from a single Press Bureau release cannot be shown but it seems likely given that such similar stories occur within a short space of time. Both seem to have given a clear message against viewing the Indian soldiers as exotic or in some way different to the British troops. Given the earlier representations of Indian people as exotic, the aim seems to be to separate the soldiers from any impression that they may be in some way similar to the nautch girls and musical hall diversions of the pre-war years.

After the war, in addition to marking the contribution of the Indian soldiers, cultural representations of India recommenced in Britain and there was a return of Indian culture to the London stage. In part, at least, this served to re-establish the stereotype of Indian people as exotic and marked a partial return to the portrayals of the pre-war years. In May 1919, for example, two of Sir Rabindranath Tagore's plays were performed at the Prince of Wales Theatre. The *Daily Mail* was impressed by the sole Indian member of the cast, who was 'so obviously the real thing as a general that it became impossible to take the others at face value.'<sup>56</sup> A translation of an Indian play *Sakuntala* was much praised later that same year starring Sybil Thorndike and was staged by Kedar Nath Das Gupta and the Union of East and West to promote cultural understanding between Britain and India.<sup>57</sup> In 1920 Ali Khan sang classical arias and 'it was considered a new sensation to hear the art of the West interpreted by a son of the East and the audience was very appreciative of a strong and resonant voice (no doubt unconventionally produced) ... which may not have gone to the heart of Mozart and Verdi.'<sup>58</sup> Uday Shankar visited London in 1920, as described by the *Daily Mail*, 'a male musician in gorgeous raiment squatting on the platform.' The concert was well received by the critic but he could not help but notice that when Shankar played the violin 'his bowing wrist was not used in the way that a mere European teacher requires of his pupils.'<sup>59</sup> It is notable that when the Indian musicians played western instruments or music, the critics stressed their lack

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<sup>55</sup> Indians at the Front. Tribute to their Fine Work, *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 1914

<sup>56</sup> Two Indian Plays. *Daily Mail*, May 5, 1920, 5

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/sakuntala-performance-november-1919>, accessed 20.2.17

<sup>58</sup> Indian's London Success. *Daily Mail*, April 23, 1920, 5

<sup>59</sup> Mr. Uday Shankar's Indian Music. *Daily Mail*, September 30, 1920, 5

of European training while appearing to praise the musical content of the evening. Nevertheless, the musicians and actor in the pieces above were performing in their own right, rather than as the decorative objects of productions such as the *Indianationality* musical in the years before the war or Britons cast as Indians. Much as the exoticism of the Indians had been played down during the war years in favour of a more warrior like image and its return marked the end of their depiction in this manner and a reversion to the previous stereotypical representations as exotic and other.

#### RUDYARD KIPLING, THE INDIAN ARMY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The examples of literary representations of Indian soldiers and people that have been explored above demonstrate a general trend amongst a variety of authors, but this section will use of the work of Rudyard Kipling to trace the changing attitudes of a single – influential – individual. His work will be used as a case study to trace the development of changing attitudes towards Indian people in the years before, during and after the war. Kipling's writing clearly illustrated, and to some extent led, the changes in developments described above, from his early depictions of Indian people as obedient recipients of British charity, to heroic soldiers, to his later work, where Indian people feature as respected agents in their own right.

Rudyard Kipling was born in India in 1865 and returned there for seven years after his schooling in England, where he started his writing career before leaving for England again in 1889. By the time of the First World War, Kipling was an established writer whose commentary and fiction about the empire, and India in particular, held tremendous influence over public opinion. His work was later considered by Edward Said to be sufficiently illustrative of the British view of India for him to use the quotation below from *Her Majesty's Servants* in his definitive study of the Imperialist mind set, *Orientalism*, to illustrate the 'monstrous chain of command' perpetuated by the British in India.<sup>60</sup>

Reflecting some of the themes prevalent in British society about Indian people, Kipling's early depictions were similar, often representing Indian people as passive and childlike. In his 1894 *Jungle Book* story, *Her Majesty's Servants*, Kipling described the Imperialist 'order of sovereignty':

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 45

They obey, as the men do. Mule, horse, elephant, or bullock, he obeys his driver, and the driver his sergeant, and the sergeant his lieutenant, and the lieutenant his captain, and the captain his major, and the major his colonel, and the colonel his brigadier commanding three regiments, and the brigadier his general, who obeys the Viceroy, who is the servant of the Empress.<sup>61</sup>

The quotation came from a scene in which an 'old, grizzled, long-haired, central Asian chief' admires the order and precision of a British parade in India, and it was explained to him by a 'native officer' that order is created by the fact that all the animals and men obey their orders as those orders are indirectly given by Queen Victoria herself. This sense of imperialist hierarchy was also present in a scene from *The Story of Muhammad Din*, in which a small Indian boy asked to play with the master's polo ball, 'The polo-ball was an old one, scarred, chipped, and dented. It stood on the mantelpiece among the pipe-stems which Imam Din, khitmatgar<sup>62</sup>, was cleaning for me. "Does the Heaven-born want this ball?" said Imam Din, deferentially. The Heaven-born set no particular store by it; but of what use was a polo-ball to a khitmatgar?'<sup>63</sup> This conversation presented the Indian servant as a humble supplicant and his imperialist master as a benevolent if patronising donor, reflecting the use of the stereotype of Indian people as passive recipients of charity from the British.

Kipling started writing about the Indian soldiers very soon after they arrived in France. In December 1914, he published six articles in the *Daily Telegraph*, concerning various aspects of the war, the fifth of which was entitled 'Indian Troops'.<sup>64</sup> Kipling had visited Indian troops training in the New Forest on 22 November 1914, as noted by his wife Carrie in her diary: 'Rud out to inspect the gun battery and to talk with his Indians.'<sup>65</sup> (Note her use of the word 'his' to indicate Kipling's personal feelings towards the men.) There was a further brief entry in Charles Carrington's notes from Carrie Kipling's diary that on 26 January 1915 'Rud [went] to Brighton to see Indian wounded.'<sup>66</sup> It seemed certain that he used these visits, which illustrate his interest in and commitment to

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<sup>61</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Her Majesty's Servants, The Jungle Book* (London: Macmillan, 1894), Project Gutenberg edition, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/236>, accessed 14.2.17

<sup>62</sup> A male servant or waiter

<sup>63</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Story of Mohammad Din, Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Macmillan, 1888)

<sup>64</sup> Later published together in 1915 as *The New Army in Training*

<sup>65</sup> The Keep, SxMs38/5/3/1, Kipling Papers, The Carrie Kipling Diaries, 65

<sup>66</sup> The Keep, SxMs41/2/8, Kipling Papers, Carrington Papers

supporting the Indian troops, to seek inspiration for both the Indian story in *The New Army in Training* and later in *The Eyes of Asia* alongside his own experiences of living in India in his youth.

It may well have been Kipling's visit to the Indian troops in November which inspired a theme in his 'Indian Troops' article in the *Daily Telegraph* which mentioned a common complaint among Indian soldiers in Europe: the rain. In Kipling's article, a Naik [Corporal] complained that, 'It is not the cold for which we have no liking. It is the wet.'<sup>67</sup> Kipling concluded the article with the words 'truly, this is the war of "Our Raj!"'<sup>68</sup> The article and the details above were very much in tune with the media reports of Indian soldiers in the early stages of the war which tended to present the Indian troops in a highly positive light, highlighting their loyalty to the Raj and placing them in close harmony with the men of the BEF.

In 1916 Kipling was given access to extracts of letters from Indian soldiers in Europe, after he was sent a selection of Censor Reports by Sir Dunlop Smith, a retired member of the Indian Civil Service. It should be noted that the Censor Reports contained extracts from letters; there is no way to tell if they were edited as they were transcribed, how accurate the translation was, or even if the original sense that the correspondent wished to convey was preserved. Kipling used these Censor Reports to form the basis of the four short stories which made up *The Eyes of Asia*, which was published in the USA in 1918 but not in the UK until after Kipling's death.

A theme in the letters which particularly impressed Kipling was the soldiers' observations about the importance of education, especially for girls. Each of the four stories in *The Eyes of Asia* emphasised the soldiers' views on the importance of education in different ways. In 'A Retired Gentleman,' Subedar Major Bishen Singh Saktawut, convalescing in Hampshire, writes that 'our women should be taught.'<sup>69</sup> The patient in *The Fumes of the Heart*, who is himself dependent on his doctor to write for him, also makes the case for female education, 'we have only yoked one buffalo to the plough up

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<sup>67</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The New Army in Training* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 47

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

<sup>69</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'A Retired Gentleman', *Eyes of Asia*, Project Gutenberg edition, 7  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23163/23163-h/23163-h.htm>, accessed 14.2.17

till now. It is now time to yoke up the milch-buffaloes. Tell the village elders this and exercise influence. (*Write that down strongly, Sahib. We who have seen Franceville all know it is true*).<sup>70</sup>

Kipling cast an interesting light on the colonial perspective of the importance of education and the men's expanded horizons in a letter to Dunlop Smith, 'What struck me most ... was their insistence on education – female education too ... What they mean by "education" is, I think, capacity to use and profit by the civilisation they have seen – such as churns, ploughs, washing tubs and so on ... here you have hundreds of thousands of men who have gone abroad and discovered the nakedness of their own land'<sup>71</sup> In fact, the impression given by the stories is that it is education in the scholarly sense that is significant, rather than merely copying European technology. However, Kipling's comments chimed with a well-used trope of Imperialist thought, that Indian people were childlike. In that context, it is easy to imagine that a washing tub or plough can appear to be a symbol of civilisation, despite its obvious exaggeration, and Kipling retained that stereotype.

*The Eyes of Asia*, although Kipling's most substantial tribute to the Indian soldiers, was not his last. His 1919 poem *Epitaphs of the War 1914-1918*, consisted of a number of short verses dedicated to those who served and suffered during the war, and included the couplet *Hindu Sepoy in France*:

This man in his own country prayed we know not to what Powers.  
We pray Them to reward him for his bravery in ours.<sup>72</sup>

Once again, the bravery of the Indian soldiers is honoured, even as Kipling invoked the cliché of exoticism. However, by comparison with the earlier description of the military hierarchy from the *Jungle Book*, it represents a considerable departure.

Perhaps also reflective of Kipling's desire to show public respect for the Indian (and other empire) soldiers' contribution to the war effort was his choice of the phrase 'The

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>71</sup> The Keep SxMs54/3/1/1, Kipling Papers, Tyler Gift, letter dated 10 or 13 July 1916

<sup>72</sup> Rudyard Kipling 'Epitaphs of the War' (1919), Pinney ed, *The Cambridge Edition of the Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, vol II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1141

Glorious Dead' for the temporary Cenotaph built for the Peace Day celebrations in July 1919 which can be read as being deliberately phrased to include men of the empire as well as British troops.

These examples of Kipling's interest in the Indian soldiers in France belong to a wider thread of Kipling's work concerning the relationship between the Indian Army and the empire. The passage from *The Jungle Book*, written in 1894, which took the Indian Army as an image of the imperial hierarchy, was written some twenty years before the outbreak of the First World War. Kipling returned to the theme in *Kim* in 1901, through the minor character of the aged rissaldar whose loyalty to the Raj during the Rebellion had brought him not only financial reward but status: though long retired, he remained 'a person of consequence' upon whom even Deputy Commissioners made social calls.<sup>73</sup> Kipling's earliest First World War writing about the Indian soldiers concluded with the comment that the war is that of 'the whole Raj', once again emphasising the loyalty of the Indian soldiers, by now arrived in Britain for training. Long after the war, in 1932, Kipling wrote the short story *The Debt* which was set in the home of the 'Doctor of the Gaol' somewhere in North India.<sup>74</sup> Its principal character was the convict 'One Three Two', formerly a retired 'non-commissioned officer' of an Indian regiment, 'who had unluckily shot a kinsman on the wrong side of the British frontier'. 'The error in geography came from a head-wound picked up at Festubert' and his death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment after an appeal 'engineered and financed by the Colonel and officers of his former regiment.' 'One Three Two' (whose real name was Zuhan Khan),<sup>75</sup> who now oversees the convicts working in the Doctor's garden, had made himself the 'bodyguard' of the Doctor's little son William, to whom he tells the story.<sup>76</sup> It is important to note that in these stories the loyalty between the British empire and its subjects was mutual: not only did the *rissaldar* and 'One Three Two' show loyalty to the Indian Army, their loyalty was in turn rewarded, even many years later. Further, Kipling chose to refer to the theme of the Indian soldiers' contribution in France during the First World War some fourteen years after its end and to reflect upon the gratitude of the British to the soldiers.

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<sup>73</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin Classics, 1901), 48

<sup>74</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Limits and Renewals* (London: Macmillan, 1932), 207

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 207

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

The connection between Kipling and the Indian soldiers extended beyond the literary. In 1921, he attended the unveiling of the Chattri memorial to the Indian soldiers who died in hospital in the town. His attendance was reported in the local newspaper: 'Around that marble Chattri on the open Brighton Downs, in the presence of men of India as well as men from India, in the presence of Rudyard Kipling, our story-teller of India and the poet of Empire, met the very elements that most accurately symbolised that Empire.'<sup>77</sup> Still later, in 1927, Kipling attended the unveiling of the memorial to the Indian soldiers at Neuve Chapelle in France, alongside the Maharaja of Kapurthala, Marshall Foch, Lord Birkenhead and Indian troops 'representing all castes.'<sup>78</sup> The sculptor Sir Charles Wheeler recalled in his autobiography that at the ceremony 'many of our French hosts asked me to point out Kipling ... [and] became entranced by the words of Rudyard who, though not on the speech list, spoke briefly and movingly about the bravery of the Indian soldiers fighting on European soil.'<sup>79</sup>

This case study of Kipling's work has shown that the changes in the dominant representations of Indian people in the media were reflected even in the attitudes of one prominent individual. From the obedient servants of the Raj in the late nineteenth century, through to the carefully drawn similarity between the Indian soldier and the British Tommy complaining about the rain in France, through to his prayers for their bravery in 1919, the work of Kipling shows that the experience of the First World War caused significant changes in dominant representations of Indian people.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that Indian people and soldiers were represented in a very different style in the years before, during and after the war. Before the war, depictions focused on the Social Darwinist model of Indian people as exotic aliens, rebels and passive recipients of British authority. During the war, however, reporting of the endeavours of the Indian Corps in France showed the Indian soldiers to be resourceful, competent and loyal comrades to the British Tommy. The literary contribution during the war had a similar focus to the news reporting. Cuffy and Sinjin worked together to

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<sup>77</sup> *The Brighton Herald*, 5 February 1921

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 7 October 1927

<sup>79</sup> Charles Wheeler, *High Relief*, quoted in Editor's Notes, *The Kipling Journal*, v 58, no. 229, 1984, 6

trick the Kaiser, and Hira Singh and his comrades in Talbot Mundy's tale managed to escape the Germans and find their way to India, to be praised by the first Englishman they found there. Willcocks, who knew the Indian Army well, noted in his poem the bravery and pride of the Indian soldiers in France. These representations are a far cry from the impoverished ayahs and rebellious students of the news reports before the war began.

However, even as the representations developed into a more positive view, the depictions of Indian people remained one dimensional and fundamentally stereotypical. The stereotype which did not change throughout the whole period of this study is that of Indians, soldiers or otherwise, as exotic, particularly with reference to their appearance and often to the exclusion of any other descriptor. As has been seen, in 1908, the Franco-British exhibition represented India in a show featuring 'jugglers, performing elephants and seven nautch girls,'<sup>80</sup> and accounts and pictures of royal events often featured Indian princes. During the war, similar expressions were used. Soldiers were variously described as 'trackers and hunters,'<sup>81</sup> or 'noble and majestic specimens'<sup>82</sup> and the *Brighton Herald* wondered what magic carpet had brought such picturesque sights to the town.<sup>83</sup> When Uday Shankar played to critical acclaim in London in 1920, comment was passed on his 'gorgeous raiment,' while his playing technique was unfavourably compared with the European style.<sup>84</sup>

It is curious that, even as other stereotypical descriptions were diminishing, this most deeply Orientalist representation continued. It seems to be the case that, even as British representations of Indian people seemed to mature in the years after the war, the most significant descriptor of Indian people, as soldiers or civilians in Britain, remained the emphasis on their difference. However, and despite the persistence of these attitudes, the First World War had changed for the better the portrayal of Indians, and particularly Indian soldiers, in the British media.

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<sup>80</sup> The Franco-British Exhibition, *The Times*, 5 June 1908

<sup>81</sup> War Sidelights, *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, 3.10.1914, 4

<sup>82</sup> Marseilles gives great welcome to Britain's soldiers from the East, *Dundee Courier*, 2 October 1914, 2

<sup>83</sup> Indian soldiers at the Pavilion, *The Brighton Herald*, 5 December 1914, 12

<sup>84</sup> Mr. Uday Shankar's Indian Music. *Daily Mail*, September 30, 1920, 5



## Chapter Two

### **'Crowds and Cheers and Bunting': Changing Attitudes of the British Public<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter will examine the experience of civilians in Britain who encountered Indian soldiers and how these encounters contributed to changing the public mood towards Indian people. By contrast with the previous chapter, this will not rely on depictions of the Indian soldiers at war but on the experiences of those who met them. While the evidence base for this is obviously smaller, as the Indian soldiers inhabited only a small part of the south-east coast of Britain, these encounters were recorded in memoirs and the reports of local newspapers. It will be seen that far fewer stereotypical depictions appear in these accounts and that after the war ended, the commitment to commemorating the Indian soldiers far exceeded their relatively small presence in Britain. While the population of Indian people in Britain was very small in the years before the war, there were some well-known individuals who received coverage in the national and local press. There were also a number of retirees from service in India, some of whom created the Indian Soldiers' Fund to provide comforts for the Indian troops in France and Britain, and the impact of this Fund will be examined. The experience of Brighton will be used as a case study to examine in detail how the public reacted to being exposed to the wounded Indian soldiers in the hospitals in the town. The principal sources for this section will be local newspapers and memoirs, although the existing body of writing on the subject of Brighton and the Indian soldiers will also be used. The historiography of the Indian population of Britain is relatively small, consisting principally of the work of Sumita Mukherjee, Rozina Visram and a series of essays edited by Michael Fisher, Shompa Lahiri and Shinder Thandi, as well as a small number of more specific journal articles.<sup>2</sup> The historiography of Brighton is necessarily yet more limited and tends to focus on specific elements of the Indian wounded soldiers' time in hospital, such as Kate Teltscher's study of two Indians resident in Britain, including Sake Dean Mahomed of Brighton and Samuel Hynes and Alan Lester's

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<sup>1</sup> The Prince's Day At Brighton, *The Times*, 2 February 1921, 10

<sup>2</sup> Sumita Mukherjee, 'The Representation and display of South Asians in Britain (1870-1950)', in Ranasinha, R., *South Asians and the shaping of Britain, 1870-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 years of History* (Pluto Press: London, 2002); Michael Fisher, Shompa Lahiri, Shinder Thandi, *A South Asian History of Britain* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007)

consideration of the propaganda and political implications of Indian wounded on British shores.<sup>3</sup>

#### INDIAN PEOPLE IN BRITAIN BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Although small in number, the Indian population in Britain before the First World War was very diverse and one in which different groups had varying levels of contact with the general population. Among them were Indians at both ends of the social scale, showing that the upper echelons of society were not closed to Indian people, despite some popular prejudice. Visiting princes were the most noticeable Indian presence in Britain. Their frequent attendance at royal functions, especially in the latter years of the nineteenth century as Queen Victoria's enthusiasm for all things Indian was at its height, added 'emblems of the wealth and opulence of the empire.'<sup>4</sup> The relatively high numbers of students were accounted for in the main by ambitious Indians who wanted a career in Indian government. The Indian Civil Service exams had to be studied for and taken in England and only barristers who had trained in Britain could practice in India, thus ensuring a steady stream of students to Britain.<sup>5</sup> When Mahatma Gandhi wrote an open letter to the India Office at the start of the war offering the support of Indians in Britain, among the fifty-three signatories were doctors, barristers, traders and students.<sup>6</sup>

Indians had also made their contribution to the government of Britain. Dadabhai Naoroji was elected as Liberal MP for Central Finsbury in 1892 and Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggee was twice elected as Conservative MP for North-East Bethnal Green in 1895 and 1900. Both were explicit that part of their role was to raise issues concerning India in Parliament as well as serving as constituency MPs and this was reported to be widely appreciated by both the public and the press.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that neither encountered racial prejudice: Naoroji was haunted by the nickname 'Blackman', after a comment by Lord Salisbury in 1888 that the British would never elect a black MP.

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<sup>3</sup> Kate Teltscher, (2000). "The Shampooing Surgeon and the Persian Prince: Two Indians in Early Nineteenth-century Britain". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1469-929X. 2 (3); Samuel Hyson & Alan Lester, "'British India on Trial': British Military Hospitals and the politics of empire in World War I", *Journal of Historical Geography*, no 38 (2012)

<sup>4</sup> Mukherjee, 'The Representation and display of South Asians in Britain (1870-1950)', 209

<sup>5</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 85

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives (henceforth TNA), MSS EUR, F170/8, Letter from M. Gandhi, 14 August 1914

<sup>7</sup> Sumita Mukherjee, "'Narrow-Majority" and "Bow-and-Agree": Public Attitudes towards the Elections of the First Asian MPs in Britain, Dadabhai Naoroji and Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggee, 1885-1906', *Journal of the Oxford University History Society*, 2, Michaelmas 2004, 7

Despite this, Naoroji had sufficient confidence in the British public to realise that he would be done no harm by Salisbury's racism.<sup>8</sup> Less overt but not untypical were the descriptions used about Naoroji in the press: the *St Stephen's Review* referred to him as 'the fire-worshipper from Bombay' and the *Evening News and Post* as having 'the deep eyes of the Hindu' and 'considerable learning in the deep lore of the East.'<sup>9</sup> Sumita Mukherjee concluded that despite the racism that followed both men during their time in Parliament, they nonetheless generated respect and the fact that their support for India was appreciated, as shown by the support shown to them, indicated some degree of popular support for imperial solidarity.<sup>10</sup>

At least two Indian landowners took up residence on country estates in Britain when their estates were annexed by Britain during the nineteenth century. Duleep Singh and Ranjitsinhji both adopted the mores of the country landowner and took advantage of the social cachet this offered.<sup>11</sup> Both, however, eventually tired of the life and left Britain. Duleep Singh, after thirty years in Britain, became once again a Sikh in 1886 and supported the self-rule for India agenda.<sup>12</sup> Ranjitsinhji returned to India to rule Nawangar but never left his British past behind to the extent of fully supporting self-rule.<sup>13</sup> Cornelia Sorabji, a Christian Parsi, became the first woman to study law in Britain, at Somerville College in Oxford. Despite graduating successfully, she was not allowed to practise, not because of her Indian heritage but because no woman was allowed to practice law until after the First World War.<sup>14</sup>

While these people may not have been widely known among the British public in the late nineteenth century, Abdul Karim, Queen Victoria's *munshi*, was much talked of.<sup>15</sup> The Queen's court was extremely prejudiced against Abdul, perhaps because of what it perceived as his undue influence, particularly as an Indian man, and he was swiftly returned to India on her death in 1901. No such controversy attended the Nobel Prize awarded to Rabindranath Tagore. Born into a wealthy Calcutta family, by the outbreak of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4, 8

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, Lahiri, Thandi, *A South Asian History of Britain* 104

<sup>12</sup> Visram, *Asians*, 102

<sup>13</sup> Fisher, Lahiri, Thandi, *A South Asian History of Britain*, 104

<sup>14</sup> Visram, *Asians*, 102

<sup>15</sup> A secretary or personal assistant

war Tagore was already well travelled and had spent two periods in Britain since his education in Brighton. In 1913, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature 'because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West.'<sup>16</sup> Although in his later years he became a thorn in the side of the British establishment in India, at this time he was living among London's intellectual elite and was knighted in 1915.

While these disparate individuals are far from illustrative of the Indian population in Britain in the years before the First World War, they do show that the establishment was not completely closed to Indian people. While prejudice undoubtedly abounded, it was possible for Indians to rise to intellectual heights and to mix with people of influence.

Concerns about disaffection among Indian people were prevalent in Britain and students were considered the most problematic group of Indians in London from the point of view of the British government. Although in the early years of the twentieth century they were a fairly small group, improved travel opportunities meant that it was a growing population and the government was anxious that they did not become a hotbed of radicals. There was some evidence to justify this concern, primarily centred on India House, a hostel for students established in London in 1905 by Shyamji Krishnavarma, himself a believer in independence for India. In 1907 the Lee Warner Committee was set up to investigate the political activity of Indian students in Britain. In the event, after interviewing some 100 witnesses (35 of whom were Indian and 65 British), the report was shelved until after the war as its findings were inconclusive, although there was little doubt that political activity was ongoing. An advisory committee, the Bureau of Information was recommended to further monitor activity.<sup>17</sup>

While there was undoubtedly some activity of this sort, the scale of activity was limited and was not considered a threat until the events of 1 July 1909.<sup>18</sup> At a reception for the National Indian Association at the Imperial Institute in London, Sir Curzon Wyllie, who

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<sup>16</sup> "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1913". *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1913/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1913/), accessed 18.11.2014

<sup>17</sup> Alex Tickell, A., 'Scholarship Terrorists' in Rehana Ahmed, & Sumita Mukherjee, *South Asian Resistances in Britain 1858-1947* (London: Continuum, 2012), 11

<sup>18</sup> See Alex Tickell, *Scholarship Terrorists*; Fisher, Lahriri, & Thandi, *A South Asian History of Britain*

'at the time of his death he held the position of political aide-de-camp to Lord Morley' having formerly held senior office in the Indian Civil Service, was shot and killed along with an Indian, Dr Cawas Lalcaca, who had tried to shield him from the assassin. Although Wyllie had served on the Lee Warner Committee and thus incurred the wrath of Madan Lal Dhingra, his assassin, he had 'devoted himself to associations and charities for the benefit of Indians.'<sup>19</sup> The assassination was immediately widely condemned, both in London and in India where flags flew at half-mast and public offices were closed at the news.<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, in its account of his funeral stated that 'quite an hour before the service began, crowds had assembled about the square to witness the funeral.'<sup>21</sup> In India, the brothers of Madan Lal Dhingra went to Simla and 'expressed the family's extreme shame and horror at the murder ... They begged Lord Minto to convey their sympathy to Lady Wyllie, and their feeling of abhorrence to the British nation.' Additionally, 'his father writes that he did his utmost to rescue him from India House and other malign influences.'<sup>22</sup>

*The Times* was quick to connect the assassination with the political activities of Indian students in Britain, despite the Bureau of Information's efforts to provide 'valuable aid to young Indians.'<sup>23</sup> The Bureau, created as a result of the Lee Warner Committee's work, was rather more than a benevolent organisation and is described by Shompa Lahiri as 'an official framework of control and a means of curtailing seditious influences.'<sup>24</sup> Both the Bureau and the management of possibly seditious Indian students continued to be an issue for government as a debate in the House of Commons in 1910 showed: 'Sir Mark Stewart: Will they be careful as to whom they appoint in charge of these young men in London? Mr. Montagu: Lord Ampthill's committee will consider both educational and moral questions. The whole case will be very carefully dealt with in my statement.'<sup>25</sup> Note the ambiguous wording in this exchange. Lord Montagu was urged to be careful whom he appointed and assured the Tory MP that 'moral considerations' would be taken into account. This is a clear reference to the Bureau's function of surveillance as well as

<sup>19</sup> ONDB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37049>, accessed 15.8.15

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Funeral of Sir Curzon Wyllie, *The Times*, 7 July 1909

<sup>22</sup> The Murder of Sir Curzon Wyllie, *The Times*, 10 July 1909

<sup>23</sup> The Murder of Sir Curzon Wyllie, *The Times*, 3 July 1909

<sup>24</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'From Empire to Decolonialisation, 1901-1947', Lahiri, S., in Fisher, Lahiri, & Thandi, A *South Asian History of Britain*, 130

<sup>25</sup> Hansard, House of Commons Debate 14 July 1910 vol 19 c595595

assistance. By 1912, in a debate in the House of Lords about Indian students in Britain, some five staff were assisting Mr Mallet, the newly created Secretary for Indian Students at the India Office.<sup>26</sup> Despite the official consternation, there were no further incidents involving Indian students in the years before the war, although the dramatic events and the extent and manner in which they were reported must have left an impression on the British public.

Indians in Britain did not live only among social and intellectual elites. At the opposite end of the social spectrum was the ayah. From 1900 the world of the ayah in London (and thus almost all ayahs in Britain) was dominated by the Ayah's Home in Hackney. It was set up and run by the London City Mission, ostensibly to provide accommodation and employment opportunities for ayahs who could not live in the smaller British establishments of their employers or who had been abandoned by their employers once the long journey home was complete but also to attempt to convert them to Christianity. The ayahs rarely attracted government attention as they were by and large able to look after themselves with the help of the Home and did not require state assistance. They did, however, attract the attention of the public, which was fascinated by their exotic dress and jewellery, while regarding them as childlike, a description seen so often of Indian people who caught the eye of the British at home and in India, as found in the previous chapter.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the Ayah's Home, the London City Mission (LCM) sought to work with Lascars, a constant presence in the docks of London. In 1900 the LCM estimated that there were some 20,000 Lascars per year passing through London.<sup>28</sup> Much of their work was carried out through the Stranger's Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders in Limehouse, East London. The Home provided accommodation and a recruitment centre for some 220 Lascars from its opening by Prince Albert in 1856 and was subsidised by central government as well as charitable donations. An unnamed LCM missionary reported in their magazine in 1900 that the admiration of the Lascars for Britain gave them an opportunity to preach to them, although the depth of their conversion was open to interpretation: 'Padri Sahib, when we are in Bombay we are

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<sup>26</sup> Hansard, House of Lords Debate 17 July 1912 vol 12 cc575-7575

<sup>27</sup> Visram, *Asians*, 53

<sup>28</sup> Foreigners in London, *London City Mission Magazine*, 2 July 1900, 170

Muhammedans, but when we come to London, you are our religious teacher, and we do not wish it to be otherwise.<sup>29</sup> By 1914, in the LCM Annual Report, missionaries were finding the Lascars a different prospect, 'these visitors from distant lands meet with much that tends to close their hearts against Christian instruction. If at any time, they encounter scorn, ill-treatment, or injustice from Englishmen, they are not likely to esteem highly the faith of those at whose hands they have suffered.'<sup>30</sup> Despite this, it was claimed that they could be won round with a magic lantern show, where they would 'sit for an hour and a half as quiet as mice.'<sup>31</sup> Both reports mention that the men remembered their encounters in London and corresponded while at sea or sought out the mission on their return to London. The tone of both reports portrays the Lascars as childlike and easily swayed by a magic lantern show, which belies their experiences as international travellers moving from ship to ship and country to country.

Perhaps the most prevalent cliché was that of Indians as exotic products of the mysterious East, which extended even as far as men who had been elected to Parliament, such as Naoroji, the 'the fire-worshipper from Bombay'<sup>32</sup> who struggled to shake off the "Blackman" nickname. By using expressions such as these, their talents were reduced to those of the music hall acts and nautch girls. This served an obvious purpose in ensuring that despite their popular support and generally high esteem, they could never be treated as equal to their British counterparts.

Another theme that runs through popular channels of the day is that of Indian people as subservient and in need of conversion to the Christian faith. Edward Said used the quotation in the previous chapter from Rudyard Kipling, which placed Indian people, as drivers and very occasionally sergeants, at the bottom of nature's natural order to illustrate the intrinsic imbalance of relative strength and weakness between East and West.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the ultimate symbol of weakness is to have to be the recipient of charity, such as the ayahs and lascars of the London City Mission's homes. By reducing the lascars to childlike figures entranced by a magic lantern show, they are shown not as independent people with international careers but reduced to silence as the British

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 171

<sup>30</sup> Annual Report, *London City Mission Magazine*, 1914, 143

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>32</sup> Mukherjee, "Narrow-Majority" and "Bow-and-Agree", 5

<sup>33</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books: London, 1978), 45

missionaries show them the true way to worship. Similarly, the ayahs were depicted as women abandoned and in need of help, rather than as women willing and able to earn their own living and find employment even in a foreign capital.

Yet, despite this, Indian people could be regarded as threatening and rebellious, as shown by the government's desire to monitor the activity of students in London. In the wake of the assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie, *The Times* reported that 'there is a strong feeling in well informed circles that more determined efforts than hitherto should be put forth to suppress the activity of the agents of sedition,' although it is also clear that the crime was as much denounced by Indians living in London as by British people.<sup>34</sup>

Indian people also lived lives of influence and acceptance by Britain's social and intellectual elite, as seen by Duleep Singh and Ranjitsinhji's lives as county landowners, Frederick Akbar Mahomed's celebration by his medical peers in *The Lancet* or Abdul Karim's influential position in the court of Queen Victoria. Perhaps it is significant that the only one of these four examples who enjoyed sustained success in Britain and continued to win acclaim was Frederick Akbar Mahomed, who had been born and bred in England and married an English woman and so must have had a far subtler knowledge of how to fit into society and who had his obvious success in his chosen profession to bolster his standing before his death on 22 November 1884.<sup>35</sup>

For all the success stories, the overarching image of Indian people for the British public remained governed by their Imperial outlook and vision of the inherent superiority of the British nation and its people and, by extension, the inferiority of the Indian race. Although this position had its critics it would go on to present a dilemma for a government which found itself suddenly dependent on the Indian military for assistance in France.

## THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON ATTITUDES TO INDIAN PEOPLE IN BRITAIN

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<sup>34</sup> The Murder of Sir Curzon Wylie, *The Times*, 3 July 1909

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17797>, accessed 5 Sept 2015,  
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/asians/influencingculture/culturalinfluences.html>, accessed 5 September 2015



As discussed in the previous section, in the years before the war there were few opportunities for British people to meet Indians in Britain but the war brought wounded Indian soldiers to hospitals in a small number of towns on the south coast and local people were eager to interact with the patients. In addition, a group of people who had once lived and worked in India created the Indian Soldiers' Fund (ISF) to provide 'comforts' for the troops and support the hospitals in Britain. Both these interactions will be used to illustrate the depth of interest in the Indian soldiers and a case study of the experience of the people of Brighton will illustrate the consequences of interactions between Indian soldiers and the civilian population of Brighton.

#### *Indian soldiers in Brighton*

Unlike the majority of British people, the people of Brighton lived alongside the Indian soldiers from the autumn of 1914 until the end of 1915 during which time the town hosted several hospitals for wounded Indian soldiers. As the principal location for the wounded, there was an unusual amount of interaction between the local people and the soldiers, which provides an insight into how they were seen by British people. Brighton had been chosen to receive war wounded along with a number of towns on the south coast which were easily accessible from France and began to receive Indian soldiers in late November 1914. Local newspapers have been used as source material to describe the extent of public enthusiasm for their visitors and a number of first person accounts describe direct encounters between local residents and the Indian soldiers.

As with the majority of Britons before the First World War, the population of Brighton was unfamiliar with Indian people although there was a well-known Indian family who had lived in the town for three generations in the nineteenth century. Sake Dean Mahomed and his wife were part of the development of Brighton as a place to visit, opening Mahomed's Baths on the seafront in 1814. He was appointed 'shampooing surgeon' to both King George IV and William IV.<sup>36</sup> His son also owned a Turkish bath in Brighton and one of his grandsons was a vicar in Hove in the late nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Frederick Akbar Mahomed was the third generation of his family to live in Brighton. The

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<sup>36</sup> Teltscher, "The Shampooing Surgeon and the Persian Prince: Two Indians in Early Nineteenth-century Britain", 409–23

<sup>37</sup> Humayun Ansari, (2004), *The Infidel Within: The History of Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2004), 58

grandson of Sake Dean Mahomed, he was lauded in an article in *The Lancet* in 1879 for his pioneering research into the causes of high blood pressure. The poet Rabindranath Tagore also found a warm welcome when he arrived to live with his sister-in-law in Brighton in 1878 and attended a local public school. He noted in his memoirs that, 'One thing in the Brighton school seemed very wonderful: the other boys were not at all rude to me. On the contrary, they would often thrust oranges and apples into my pockets and run away. I can only ascribe this uncommon behaviour of theirs to my being a foreigner.'<sup>38</sup> In 1895, the popular cricketer Prince Ranjitsinhji, known as Ranji, moved to Brighton to play for Sussex Cricket Club, staying at the club for the rest of his professional career, which included international matches for the England Team. Visram describes him as something of a celebrity, stating that the number of songs in his honour was second only to those praising the renowned cricketer W.G. Grace.<sup>39</sup>

It had become apparent early in the autumn of 1914 that the hospitals in France would not be able to cope with the number of casualties and sites on the south coast of England were sought. On 21 November 1914 Sir Walter Lawrence, Commissioner for Indian Hospitals, visited Brighton and requested, in the name of the King, the use of the Pavilion and other sites for hospitals for Indian soldiers, to which the mayor Alderman John Otter agreed, stating 'Understanding that the Royal Pavilion at Brighton is specially suited for hospital treatment of Indian troops, the Corporation beg to place it at His Majesty's disposal for that purpose'.<sup>40</sup> It is notable that even at this early stage the Indian-style exterior of the Pavilion was linked to the Indian soldiers and doubtless the images that it would generate were also not lost on Lawrence and his colleagues as material for propaganda.

The Pavilion estate was converted in just fourteen days to provide 724 hospital beds across the site by December 1914.<sup>41</sup> Particular attention was paid to respecting the religious requirements of its patients, as described by Joyce Collins,

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.online-literature.com/tagore-rabindranath/my-reminiscences/25/>, accessed 7 March 2017

<sup>39</sup> Visram, *Asians*, 98

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.black-history.org.uk/20th-century/1914-1918-wounded-indian-troops-at-the-brighton-pavilion>, accessed 26 March 2017

<sup>41</sup> Joyce Collins, *Dr Brighton's Indian Patients December 1914 – January 1916* (Brighton: Brighton Books, 1997), 7

There were to be nine kitchens serving the Pavilion/Dome complex ... These would cater specifically for Muslims or for either meat-eating or vegetarian Hindus. Special arrangements were made for the ritual killing of animals and the storing of meat. There were separate places for washing up, for bath-houses and latrines ... since wards were to be mixed, there would be two taps in each, one for Hindus and one for Muslims ... notices were prepared in Urdu, Hindi and Gurmukhi ... a Sikh temple (known as a Gurdwara) was erected on Pavilion Lawns and space was set aside on a grass plot in front of the Dome where the Muslims could pray facing Mecca.<sup>42</sup>

The news that the Indian soldiers were soon to arrive was widely reported and on 30 November *The Argus* reported that 'thousands' of people had gathered outside the station to greet the wounded Indians.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately they were disappointed as the arrivals were British. That the crowd gathered at all illustrates the level of interest in the Indian wounded. In the event they arrived almost unnoticed during the night.<sup>44</sup> As time went on, some local people did peek through the fence to see 'some exceedingly picturesque sights – sights so thoroughly Oriental that one is tempted to rub one's eyes and wonder what magic carpet has carried one so suddenly from the prosaic commonplaces of North-street to the romantic colour and strange groups of the distant East.'<sup>45</sup> The soldiers were often happy to entertain the onlookers. *The Herald* reported on a group of Indian soldiers playing with a British soldier and exchanging his cap for a turban and noted that, 'what added to their joy was the joy of the onlookers standing upon the dwarf wall and peering as best they could through the fence and bushes.'<sup>46</sup> *The Herald* also claimed that its coverage of the preparations for and arrival of the Indian soldiers had given it its largest ever daily sales, some 3500 more copies than its previous biggest selling edition.<sup>47</sup>

D.R. Thapar, an Indian medical officer, described escorting patients on walks in Brighton, 'we were photographed at almost every step and when we halted for 5 minutes every half hour, we were surrounded by a crowd offering sweets and cigarettes. Elegant ladies in their expensive furs and gentlemen in top hats used to alight from their big long cars wanting to shake hands with these stalwart wounded heroes.'<sup>48</sup> He also described having

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>43</sup> More wounded reach Brighton, *The Argus*, 30 November 1914

<sup>44</sup> Indian soldiers at the Pavilion, *The Brighton Herald*, 5 December 1914, 12

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>46</sup> Indians at Play, *The Brighton Herald*, 5 December 1915, 12

<sup>47</sup> Notes of the Week, Our Pavilion Pictures, *The Brighton Herald*, 5 December 1914

<sup>48</sup> D. R. Thapar, *The Morale Builders* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 10

to make shortlists of local people who would have the soldiers to tea, such was the demand for their company.<sup>49</sup>

Local children were just as interested in the soldiers: schoolboy Albert Paul told of being taken on a school trip to visit the Pavilion Hospital and receiving a 'great welcome' from the soldiers and being given 'chu-pattie' [chapattis], which they were 'very proud' to receive.<sup>50</sup> Another local child described talking to the soldiers 'through the railings with nods and smiles.'<sup>51</sup> *The Brighton Herald* reported parents giving the soldiers their babies to cuddle and queuing to shake hands with the soldiers and declared, 'what stories there will be to tell these babies when they grow up, - how they had been fondled by wounded Indian soldiers who had come over to fight for England in the great European War.'<sup>52</sup> Albert Paul remembered that 'it became a familiar sight to see a crutch flung over the high fence and then another crutch followed by an Indian soldier with one leg scrambling down the fence.' He went on to say that any publican caught serving alcohol to Indian soldiers would be 'heavily fined and also be liable to have their licences taken away.'<sup>53</sup>

*The Herald* listed some of the gifts donated to the wounded soldiers by local people, 'a load of 270 great coats, sent by a donor who heard that the Indians were cold. A quantity of dressing jackets. A gorgeously striped turban cloth, sent by a lady with the express provision that it was to be given to a Pathan. A large consignment of apples, with a note to this effect: "These apples were picked with paper round the finger so that those who eat them can be assured that they have not been spoiled by European touch."<sup>54</sup> This last shows that the local people clearly tried to send gifts appropriate to their impression of an Indian soldier's needs and religious beliefs. An Indian Gift House was established at the Pavilion Hospital by local resident Mrs Brailey, which accepted and distributed gifts for soldiers in Brighton and had sufficient to send some to hospitals further afield.<sup>55</sup> *The Pavilion Blues*, the magazine for patients in the Pavilion Hospital after the Indian soldiers left, reported that The Gift House was maintained after the Indian soldiers by the Ladies'

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>50</sup> Albert Paul, A., *Poverty – hardship but happiness*, (Brighton: Queenspark Books, 1974), 43

<sup>51</sup> *Blighty Brighton* (Brighton: Queenspark Books, 1991), 16

<sup>52</sup> An Indian Comedy, *The Brighton Herald*, 16 January 1915

<sup>53</sup> Paul, *Poverty – hardship but happiness*, 42

<sup>54</sup> A present for a Pathan, *The Brighton Herald*, 19 December 1914, 20

<sup>55</sup> Hyson & Lester, "'British India on Trial': British Military Hospitals and the politics of empire in World War I", 24

Committee of the Pavilion Military Hospital, although, 'we don't deal in hair oil, turbans or toothcanes any more.'<sup>56</sup>

The attentions of the people of Brighton did not go unnoticed by the wounded Indians, who wrote home to tell of their good treatment. Havildar Ghufuran Khan wrote from the Pavilion Hospital to praise the provision made for Muslim troops to keep Ramadan.<sup>57</sup> Another was delighted with his hospital, presumably the Royal Pavilion, 'I cannot sufficiently praise the building, it is a very splendid building.'<sup>58</sup> Sub-Assistant Surgeon Abdulla Isar Singh, in a letter dated 23 April 1915, reported his joy at a visit from the King-Emperor, the sight of whom 'delighted the hearts of all.'<sup>59</sup> In a letter from a wounded soldier to a friend still in India, the writer suggested that he do his best to stay away from the front, even by feigning sickness, as conditions were so terrible. Even so, he praised his time at the Pavilion hospital, saying in the next paragraph that 'we are very well looked after ... our hospital is in the place where the King used to have his throne. Every man is washed once in hot water ... men in hospital are treated like flowers, and the King and Queen sometimes come to visit them.'<sup>60</sup>

An unnamed Subedar-Major of the 6<sup>th</sup> Jats wrote in early January 1915 that, 'the inhabitants are very amiable and are very kind to us, so much so that our own people could not be as much so.'<sup>61</sup> A medical subordinate (an Indian civilian member of the support staff), claimed that 'Everyone seeks every opportunity of becoming fast friends with us and of serving us in any way in their power.'<sup>62</sup> This letter is interesting as he would have not been in military uniform or showing a wound, yet the people still appear to have been happy to meet and interact with him. Also, he referred to the people seeking to serve him, a critical word bearing in mind the power dynamic between the British civilians and the Indian men. *The Pavilion Blues* claimed that, 'Jack Sepoy, to give him his familiar title' was convinced in an unknowing echo of Brighton's reputation as a

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<sup>56</sup> Pavilion Blues, v1, n1, June 1916, 6

<sup>57</sup> The National Archives (henceforth TNA), MSS EUR, F143/84, letter dated 4 August 1915

<sup>58</sup> The British Library (henceforth BL), IOR/L/MIL/5/825/3, letter dated 13 April 1915

<sup>59</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/84, letter dated 23 August 1915

<sup>60</sup> TNA, MSS EUR, F143/83, letter dated 1 May 1915

<sup>61</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated early January 1915

<sup>62</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 27 January 1915

place to take the water that, 'the rapidity with which their wounds healed was in great measure due to the ... excellent air and water.'<sup>63</sup>

Particularly appreciated were the visits paid by members of the royal family to the Pavilion. As well as the King and Queen, the men were visited by Queen Alexandra, the Queen Mother, as described in a tourist guide to the town written in 1926, 'against the bright light of that scene, where a Queen of England stood weeping, holding the hands of a poor dying soldier from a far-off Indian village, those antics of Regency days, told so often in hackneyed repetitions, fade into their proper perspective.'<sup>64</sup> This sentence summarises much about the Indian patients' stay in Brighton: the memory that formed part of the townspeople's own view of their town; the human tragedies playing out and the conscious connection with royalty which served not just to lift the spirits of the men but to send a message to India about their importance to the Raj, to which end the visits of the King and Queen were widely reported in the local and national press.

The Chief Constable of Brighton wrote to the Indian Soldiers' Fund on February 1915 to report that, 'convalescents had been allowed to patrol any part of the town, to their great enjoyment and that though they had been there for some weeks, not a single unpleasant incident of any kind had occurred, nor had any complaint been made concerning the conduct of any of them.'<sup>65</sup> The *Brighton Herald*, registered some indignation about the security provision for the soldiers after a fence was erected around the Pavilion grounds: 'one can of course understand that the authorities do not want idle throngs massing here in the very heart of the town and repeating some of the scenes that at first were witnessed at the Dyke-road Hospital; but most of us feel that the town deserves a little more spectacle for its money.'<sup>66</sup>

However, as time went on, restrictions were imposed on the soldiers. The restrictions on the soldiers' movements outside the Pavilion grounds were deeply resented by the men and Samuel Hyson asserted that conditions in Brighton were the strictest of all the Indian hospitals.<sup>67</sup> The men's letters reflect their anger at the restrictions imposed upon

<sup>63</sup> Pavilion Blues, v1, n1, June 1916, 5

<sup>64</sup> George Aitchison, *Unknown Brighton* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1926), 44

<sup>65</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/1, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, 3 February 1915

<sup>66</sup> Indian Soldiers at the Pavilion, *The Brighton Herald*, 12

<sup>67</sup> Hyson & Lester, *British India on Trial*, 27

them, as in this letter from Bhan Singh, who complained that 'they do not allow us to go out of the hospital. There are guards of British soldiers set round the hospital and the place is enclosed with wire too.'<sup>68</sup> A further example was quoted by Rozina Visram, 'If you ask me the truth, I can say that I have never experienced such hardship in all my life. True, we are well fed, and are given plenty of clothing; but the essential thing – freedom – is denied.'<sup>69</sup> The subject appears to have been much discussed among the men, as is reflected in the use of the expression 'treated like prisoners' which occurs in three letters written by Lance -Nail Sayed Khan, Hashmat Khan and Malik Khuda Baksh Khan at the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton within a few days of each other.<sup>70</sup>

A significant reason for the restrictions imposed upon the wounded soldiers was concern about interaction between the Indian men and the women of Brighton. Jeffrey Greenhut pointed out that in India, white women kept strictly apart from Indian men, as the general feeling was that any relations between the two could lower British prestige.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, it was impractical not to use female nurses at all in the hospitals and women were employed at all the British hospitals in various capacities. A number of magic lantern slides showed British women apparently nursing Indian soldiers at the Pavilion Hospital in Brighton, two of which showed a nurse on a ward standing beside a trolley with a washing jug and basin, apparently actively treating patients.<sup>72</sup> However, this was not to last as on 29 May 1915, the *Daily Mail* published a similar photograph of a British nurse and the War Office immediately insisted that all British nurses be withdrawn. This was acceded to in Brighton but not at the Lady Hardinge Hospital in the New Forest, which was owned and run by the Indian Soldiers' Fund. Its Chairman, Sir John Hewitt, protested and a war of words ensued that finally had to be settled by the Secretary of State for India, Austin Chamberlain, who allowed the nurses to stay. In his account of this, Jeffrey Greenhut made much of Chamberlain's statement that, 'it is not apparent from the correspondence what are the reasons that have led to the proposal to withdraw lady nurses from the Hospitals for Indian troops', claiming that this showed a racist bias on the part of the British Government bearing in mind that there were only

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<sup>68</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/84, Letter dated 9 July 1915

<sup>69</sup> Visram, *Asians*, 190

<sup>70</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/83, letters dated 9 June 1915, 8 June 1915 and 6 June 1915

<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Greenhut, 'Race, Sex & War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914' *Military Affairs*, 45, no. 2, 1981, 71

<sup>72</sup> Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton, image id 683, 684, 685, 688

some twenty nurses involved and that British women nursed British soldiers in large numbers.<sup>73</sup>

Censor of the Indian Mails Captain Wallinger commented on the annoyance of the Indian soldiers in the various hospitals in England about the restrictions on their movements, 'the troops in hospitals (vide [letters] Nos 1 & 27) rather resent their close surveillance, but it is obviously better to keep a tight hand on them than allow them to conceive a wrong idea of the "izzat" of English women, a sentiment which if not properly held in check would be most detrimental to the prestige and spirit of European rule in India.'<sup>74</sup> In his report, he took up the same point, '[letter] 81 is indicative of the crude ideas of orientals about European women, they cannot understand the freedom with which the sexes mingle. Hence, when they are allowed unlimited freedom from hospitals as to go where they please, they are liable to gain many wrong ideas and impressions which might be difficult afterwards to eliminate.'<sup>75</sup> The offending letter, from Surjan Singh read, 'every evening the youths one and all go to the town where women meet them. The women have no modesty but walk with the men who please them most. Marriage is by choice. Already there are five women, and after the war is it expected that there will be ten women for every man.'<sup>76</sup> It is hard to reconcile Mr Singh's letter with Captain Wallinger's report as Mr Singh appeared to be disapproving of the morals of Brighton women rather than representing a threat to them. Thus, it seems that Captain Wallinger's main concern was not so much the reputation of the women of Brighton but the overall authority of the British in India and the implication of a loss of authority for British rule, although there were letters from Indian soldiers which suggested an interest in the women of Brighton such as this from an anonymous Sikh, 'Here are many pears of the sort you have in your garden. They encounter our people on our walks and we sit down and enjoy them. Then we are put in jail.'<sup>77</sup> Perhaps his reference to being thrown in jail was an exaggeration but it is interesting to note that he felt it worthwhile to try to disguise the subject of his correspondence from the censors.

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<sup>73</sup> Greenhut, *Race, Sex & War*, 73

<sup>74</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/83, Censor's Report dated 19 June 1915

<sup>75</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/83, Censor's Report dated 26 June 1915

<sup>76</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/84, Letter dated 18 July 1915

<sup>77</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/83, letter dated 7 June 1915



Note, too, that these protestations occurred in the same place and time as the debate above regarding female nurses. Regardless of the behaviour of the women in question, be they treating Indians in hospital or behaving in an 'ill-advised' manner in the town, it was clear that it is less the individuals whose interests were at stake than the overall prestige of white women in the Raj. It seems likely that some level of security was required for the men, prone as young men are to seeking adventure, but whether the level of restriction had found the correct balance is harder to judge.

In March 1915 Sir Walter Lawrence reported that, '... when Brighton was selected as a centre for Indian hospitals I was attacked for running into the danger arising from women. You will be glad to hear that there have been no scandals in Brighton.'<sup>78</sup> Note that Lawrence considered here that the risk was posed by the women of Brighton, rather than the Indian patients. Colonel Seton, in charge of the hospitals, was concerned that the 'ill-advised conduct of the women of the town' could provoke a scandal and the soldiers were escorted when out in Brighton.<sup>79</sup>

If the arrival of the Indian troops caused disquiet in some quarters, for some the issue was simpler, as the local economy benefited from the soldiers' presence. An enterprising butcher in St James' Street close to the Pavilion set his shop up as a 'Mohammedan and Hindu' butchery, presumably having learned how to butcher halal meat. When the Indian soldiers finally left, in February 1916, the Pavilion Hospital was opened to the public and, in one week over 10,000 people paid to visit the hospital and many bought souvenir postcards or pamphlets.<sup>80</sup> The official commemoration of Brighton's role was *A Short History in English, Gurmukhi and Urdu of the Royal Pavilion Brighton and a Description of it as a Hospital for Indian Soldiers*, published in 1915 by the Corporation of Brighton under the supervision of The Commander of the Pavilion Hospital Colonel J. Macleod.<sup>81</sup> The book was a highly positive account, making much of the royal visits and the history of the building as a royal residence but did not mentioning any of the complaints put forward

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, WO 32/5110\_Letter Sir Walter Lawrence to Secretary of State for War, 8 March 1916 enclosing report 'Arrangements made for Indian Sick and Wounded in England and France, I

<sup>79</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/82 'Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton', 1916

<sup>80</sup> Collins, *Dr Brighton's Indian Patients*, 28

<sup>81</sup> *A Short History in English, Gurmukhi & Urdu of the Royal Pavilion Brighton and a description of it as a Hospital for Indian Soldiers* (Brighton: Corporation of Brighton, 1915)

by the patients about restrictions on their movements. Copies were given to all the departing patients and sold for a shilling to the people of Brighton.

Although the Indian soldiers had left Brighton by early 1916, popular enthusiasm was as strong as ever some five years later when official ceremonies took place to remember the town's time as 'Doctor Brighton'. In February 1921, the Chattri memorial to the Sikh and Hindu Indian soldiers who died in Brighton was unveiled by the Prince of Wales. In his speech he referred to 'our Indian comrades [who] came when our need was greatest ... from this Chattri a wave of sympathy and good will pass to India.' The paper claimed that crowds of tens of thousands lined the six-mile route to the Chattri on the downs outside Brighton.<sup>82</sup> *The Times* reported that along the route 'there were crowds and cheers and bunting and the ringing of church bells all the way.'<sup>83</sup> The *Daily Mirror* devoted its front page to a montage of photographs of the day, again repeating that 'thousands lined the route.'<sup>84</sup>

Later that year, the Indian Memorial Gateway was unveiled by the Maharajah of Patiala. The Gateway was a gift from India to thank the people of Brighton for the help they had given to the wounded men. Once again, a large crowd turned out: 'it extended practically the whole way down Queen's-road and North-street to the Pavilion. The route was decorated very effectively with flags and the Maharajah seemed much impressed by the very cordial welcome he received.'<sup>85</sup> To mark the occasion, a six-course lunch was given for the Maharajah with boiled turbot, lamb cutlets and maraschino jelly on the menu.<sup>86</sup>

It is notable that among all these stories of interactions between the Indian soldiers and the people of Brighton, there are very few mentions of the Indians as fighting men. The dominant pre-war stereotype of Indian people as exotic remains prevalent and there seems to be no inhibition in instigating contact with the soldiers, just as the soldiers were keen to interact with the local people. The impression of the interactions and the reports in the newspapers give the impression of a relaxed and informal dialogue, not

<sup>82</sup> Men True to their Salt, *Daily Mail*, 2 February, 1921, 8

<sup>83</sup> The Prince's Day At Brighton, *The Times*, 2 February 1921, 10

<sup>84</sup> The Prince of Wales' Tribute to Indian Heroes, *The Daily Mirror*, 2 February 1921, 1

<sup>85</sup> Indian Memorial Gateway. The Unveiling Ceremony at Brighton, *The Argus*, 26 October 1921

<sup>86</sup> Menu for Luncheon at the Royal Pavilion on Wednesday October 26<sup>th</sup> to Major-Gen His Highness The Maharajah of Patiala, GCSI, GCIE, GBE on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Indian Memorial Gateway, Royal Pavilion, Brighton, Brighton and Hove Pavilion and Museums, BHBox28/22

dissimilar to the accounts of interactions between the British soldiers and their Indian counterparts, which will be explored later in this thesis. While curiosity and novelty can in part explain the onlookers at the railway station and those peering over the fence into the Pavilion grounds, this does not account for the 'tens of thousands' who lined the route to the Chattri for its opening ceremony three years after the war ended.<sup>87</sup> References to holding babies and the people's willingness to 'serve' the Indian soldiers seem to suggest an intimacy between the two groups which perhaps would have not been predictable from the pre-war representations of Indian people. Likewise, the soldiers' letters suggest a degree of affection not present in the newspaper accounts.

The importance of Brighton's hospitality was not just of significance to those directly involved. Both civilian and military authorities never lost sight of the political importance of their actions. Although the issue of the level of freedom offered to the men in Brighton is an example of how the British at no time lost their sense of Indian troops as a risk to the stature of the white British woman, both within and outside the hospitals, there is unstinting praise for the hospitals themselves in the men's letters. Vedica Kant suggested that it was inevitable that placing Indian people in Britain would raise complex ideological issues and the playing out of a power dynamic, however imaginary, between Indian men and the women of Brighton is a perfect example of that.<sup>88</sup>

Just as British authorities were aware of the risks of placing wounded Indian soldiers in Britain, so too were they aware of the possible advantages. The obvious attraction of the Pavilion as accommodation was acknowledged even before the soldiers arrived and, in the words of Sir Walter Lawrence, 'I will never lose an opportunity if impressing upon all those who are working in the hospitals that great political issues are involved in making the stay of the Indians in England as agreeable as possible.'<sup>89</sup> This proved to be the case as positive stories abounded in the local and national press accompanied by photographs. Although these efforts were appreciated in Britain and especially among the people of Brighton, they were also designed for an Indian audience. Lawrence wrote to Lord Kitchener 'that, 'it was of the highest 'political' importance that the soldiers

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<sup>87</sup> Men True to their Salt, *Daily Mail*, 2 February, 1921, 8

<sup>88</sup> Vedica Kant, *If I die here, who will remember me? India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2014), 120

<sup>89</sup> TNA, MSS EUR, F143/65, letter to Lord Kitchener dated 5 December 1915.

return to Indian happy and not dejected.'<sup>90</sup> As Vedica Kant noted, the importance in India of proving the British to be 'just and fair' was as important a goal for the hospitals as the recovery of the men from their wounds.'<sup>91</sup>

By the time the Indian wounded left Brighton the aim had been achieved. The men were overwhelmingly satisfied with their experience, despite the restrictions imposed upon them, the media had reported their stay in a highly positive way and the people of Brighton had been delighted by their presence. Lawrence concluded to Kitchener that, 'from a political point of view, the decision to bring the Indian to English hospitals has done more good than harm.'<sup>92</sup> More reflective of the attitude of the people of Brighton is a letter home from Subedar Hamud Khan, 'the people here are exceedingly kind and sympathetic.'<sup>93</sup>

#### THE INDIAN SOLDIERS' FUND

While the experience of the people of Brighton was exceptional, The Indian Soldiers' Fund (ISF) will be used as an example of how the community of retired and often wealthy and influential former servants of the Raj came together and used their knowledge of India and its people to provide not just medical care but 'comforts' as well.<sup>94</sup> The Indian Soldiers' Fund was established on 1 October 1914 under the auspices of the St John Ambulance Association. Lt-Colonel Merewether, in an appendix devoted to the Fund, listed its aims, '(1) To maintain the Lady Hardinge Hospital at Brockenhurst Park. (2) To supply comforts of all kinds to all hospitals in Great Britain and France in which Indian wounded were treated. (3) To supplement the clothing and comforts supplied by Government to Indian Troops on service.'<sup>95</sup> The Fund's membership was varied, as General Willcocks explained: 'many ladies and gentlemen connected with India became members, and Lord Curzon of Kedleston [former Viceroy of India] very kindly lent his London residence as a Headquarters.'<sup>96</sup> However, it was not just old India hands who donated to the Fund. Merewether explained, 'Amongst those were invalids, a society of

<sup>90</sup> TNA, MSS EUR, F143/65, letter dated 27 April 1915

<sup>91</sup> Kant, *If I die here, who will remember me?*, 111

<sup>92</sup> TNA, MSS EUR, F143/65, letter dated 8 March 1916

<sup>93</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/4, letter dated 10 November 1915

<sup>94</sup> The Indian Soldiers' Fund, *British Medical Journal*, 14 November 1914, 849

<sup>95</sup> Lt Colonel J. W. B., Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France* (London: Murray, 1918), 500

<sup>96</sup> James Willcocks, J., *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Co, 1920), 101

blind girls, old-age pensioners, lonely people in remote cottages, and large, well-equipped working parties in cities under the leadership of the Mayoress.'<sup>97</sup>

The inaugural committee meeting minutes of the Fund acknowledged that it was most likely to be people and organisations with a connection to India which were likely to donate and proposed to target these groups: 'appeals should be made to all clubs frequented by Anglo-Indians in all towns in which they chiefly congregate.'<sup>98</sup> The Fund raised a considerable amount of money: *The Times* reported that by 19 November 1914, it had already raised £88,853.<sup>99</sup> By the close of the Fund in 1919, a total of £255,511 17s 5d had been raised.<sup>100</sup> It is worth noting by comparison that the same *Times* report showed that the Prince of Wales's National Relief Fund, which was devoted to the care of families of British servicemen serving in France, had raised £3,859,000 in the same period.<sup>101</sup> Given the relatively small number of people in Britain with connections to India the difference between the two sums does not appear so great and further illustrates the British public commitment to the Indian soldiers.

The list of clothing and comforts provided is as diverse as it is extensive and shows the value of the connection between the Fund and the Indian Army. The General Committee minutes show several references to the necessity of providing particular treats for the Indian soldier, 'The native Indian prefers his own sweets to any others.'<sup>102</sup> The provision of Indian tobacco caused much consternation, 'hookhas and chillums are not easy to procure in Europe, and very many of those sent from India have got broken en route.'<sup>103</sup> There was an amusing request in the report of Sir Trevredyn Wynne, Lord Norreys and Mr McLeod on their tour of inspection to France in July 1915, requesting black hair dye for the Indian officers' beards, 'this latter item is really of some importance, the older Indian officers suffering considerably in appearance by the dyes they used in India having

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<sup>97</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 501

<sup>98</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/1, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, 1 October 1914

<sup>99</sup> 'A Last Appeal for the Troops', *The Times*, 19 November 1914, p.11, The equivalent of £3,826,000 in 2005, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency>, accessed 28.7.16

<sup>100</sup> The equivalent of £11,002,341 in 2005, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency>, accessed 28.7.16

<sup>101</sup> The equivalent of £166,168,540 in 2005, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency>, accessed 28.7.16

<sup>102</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/7, Report to the General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund, December 1915

<sup>103</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/1, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, April 1915

faded and there being nothing in its place.'<sup>104</sup> However, on the next reported visit, that of Sir John Hewett, the Chairman, Willcocks refused to sanction sending hair dye.<sup>105</sup> As well as recreational comforts, the Fund was critical in providing religious objects. In the second half year report of the Fund, it was reported that, 'His religion is very close to the heart of the Oriental and the ISF has always borne this fact in mind.'<sup>106</sup> Gordon Corrigan described how the Fund found a contractor in Sheffield to manufacture Sikh artefacts, which often got lost during fighting and are a religious requirement.<sup>107</sup> The report of the first six months' work by the Fund told of 'a very large, and indeed almost embarrassing supply' of Korans being sent.<sup>108</sup> Sir John Hewett visited the Stationary Hospital in Boulogne and noted the troops' appreciation of the tombstones that the Fund had paid for and the provision of both a Gurdwara and a Mosque at the Secunderabad Hospital in Hardelet in France.<sup>109</sup> The Fund also supplied the hospitals, sending over extra clothing for the wounded as well as entirely financing the Lady Hardinge Hospital in Brockenhurst.

Appreciation for the work of the Fund was widespread among the men of the Indian Corps, of all ranks. A letter was read to the Committee from Sapper Anokh Singh, who was convalescing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital,

Dear Sir, I was very thankful to have received your package that you sent to me and am glad to say that I am in England and hoping to go to Brighton. I do not want you to sent [sic] any more parcel as my bad times is all over. I will now close with the best of luck, I remain, yours sincerely.<sup>110</sup>

A report written after a tour of inspection in France by the ISF stated that, 'It satisfied them to know that there was a "Kommittee" [sic] of Sahibs and Memsahibs who knew the Indian well and who were showing their goodwill to the Indian soldiers and followers in a practical manner.'<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/6, Report to the General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund, July 1915

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/2, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, November 1915

<sup>107</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches – The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915*, (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 202

<sup>108</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/1, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, April 1915

<sup>109</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/6, Report to the General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund, July 1915

<sup>110</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/2, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, November 1915

<sup>111</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 120/6, Report to the General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund, July 1915

Both Willcocks and Merewether, commanders who were well placed to see the effects of the work of the Committee, devoted time to it in their memoirs of the war. Willcocks described the reach of the Fund when he writes that,

little that could at that time be done was left undone. In the trenches, the billets, the hospitals, the India-bound hospital ships and lastly the homes of the brave men who had come to share in the toils and glory of the Great War, there could be but one opinion, viz. that the Fund so generously contributed and so sympathetically administered would long be remembered with gratitude.<sup>112</sup>

Merewether was typically less effusive but equally grateful, 'The writers can testify that it was impossible to visit the trenches, billets or hospital without meeting at every turn evidence of the solicitude with which the comfort and well-being of the Indian soldier were considered in every detail.'<sup>113</sup> The Fund finally closed on 18 July 1919, having improved the health and wellbeing of almost every Indian soldier who served in France, with a closing statement which paid tribute to the 'gallant Indian soldiers who have fought in the Great War for their King, Emperor and their Empire.'<sup>114</sup>

The discussion above shows that the British made a great deal of effort to treat the troops in their service with respect. Certainly, the success of the Indian Soldiers' Fund shows that the public were well disposed towards the Indian troops and were prepared to support them with donations of money and equipment as does the enthusiasm of the British public, demonstrated in Brighton during the soldiers' stay there. The experience in Brighton was paralleled by the people of Barton-on-Sea in Hampshire where a convalescent unit was established for former patients of the Brighton and Lady Hardinge hospitals. A granite obelisk was erected by public subscription in July 1917 to commemorate the 7500 men who stayed at the depot with inscriptions in Urdu and English.<sup>115</sup> The critical difference in examples such as these, which involved people who had encountered the Indian soldiers was the comparative absence of clichéd representations of the soldiers and a sense that they were to be treated with the same level of respect as the British soldiers. For example, the memorial in Barton-on-Sea,

<sup>112</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 101

<sup>113</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 504

<sup>114</sup> MSS EUR 120/1, General Committee of the Indian Soldiers' Fund Minutes, July 1919

<sup>115</sup> M.A. Edgington, *Bournemouth and the First World War* (Bournemouth: Bournemouth Local Studies Publication, 1985), 23

where the greatest impact of the war for the small town had been the presence of the Indian soldiers was paid for by subscription. This is also demonstrated by the gifts from the people of Brighton to the Indian soldiers and the crowds who flocked to the unveilings of the Chattri and India Gate in Brighton, just as other British people had paid for memorials and attended the unveilings of local memorials across the country.

## CONCLUSION

There remained opportunities for people to interact with the people of India in the years after the war, although not necessarily in person, as has been seen in the Brighton case study, when large crowds attended official ceremonies. An example of this was the Peace Day celebrations in London. After the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, the Peace Celebrations Committee, which was working towards a date in early August for the festivities, had to bring the date forward to 17 July. The most formal part of the day was to be a Victory Parade through London, including contingents from the various empire countries which had contributed towards the war effort.

With just three weeks' notice, bringing troops from India was impossible but Brigadier-General E.W. Costello V.C of the 12<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to bring a representative contingent from Egypt to parade alongside the Australian, New Zealand and South African troops. In the event, however, they did not arrive in London until 6pm on Peace Day, too late for the parade. In order to 'mitigate their natural disappointment for the unavoidable non-participation in the historic pageant, and to give the public opportunities of honouring them', a programme of events for the Indian soldiers alone was arranged for the men who finally arrived from India to join their comrades from Egypt.<sup>116</sup> A reception for 500 British and Indian officers was held at the India Office on 30 July and some 1800 soldiers of the Indian Army held their own Triumphal March through London on 2 August culminating in a Royal Salute at Buckingham Palace before 'a great crowd.'<sup>117</sup> The King gave a speech of thanks to the troops, which was afterwards translated for them,

I heartily thank all my Indian soldiers for their loyal devotion to me and to my Empire, for their sufferings cheerfully borne in the various campaigns in which

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<sup>116</sup> *The Times*, 25 July 1919, 6

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 4 August 1919, 9



they have served in lands and climates so different from their own. At times, their hearts must have been sad at the long separation from their homes; but they have fought and died bravely. They have rivalled the deeds of their ancestors; they have established new and glorious traditions which they can hand on to their children for ever.<sup>118</sup>

As has been seen with previous royal speeches to the Indian troops as they arrived in and left France, the King chose his words carefully to chime with the Indian values of courage and *izzat*.

*The Times* chose to make particular mention of the Cenotaph, past which the men paraded, giving their salute and described it as 'the memorial to the glorious dead – raised irrespective of colour, caste or clime, and in memory equally of the brave Sahib and the loyal Sepoy,' and the inscription 'The Glorious Dead' indeed allows for the presence of all the troops of the empire.<sup>119</sup> *The Daily Mail* printed a detailed itinerary of the day's events under the headline 'Indians' Own March' and reported that the march would be 'accompanied by the bands and fifes of two Guards' battalions.'<sup>120</sup> On the Monday following the march, it described the parade,

their elaborate turbans blended into bright splashes of colour in the sunshine. The Sikhs, great fellows with black beards and long hair, received the cheers of the crown with perfectly impassive faces. The Gurkhas, sturdy little fellows wearing the celebrated *kukri* (or knife) were loudly cheered ... the troops had a great reception, being cheered by the crowd all along the line of the march. Here and there flowers were thrown into the ranks and caught by the soldiers.<sup>121</sup>

*The Daily Mirror* gave a full page spread of photographs of 'their special festival' under the banner headline 'Eastern Pageant in London: The March of the Indians.' There were two photographs of the King inspecting the troops, a picture of the men saluting the Cenotaph as they marched past and a small photograph of two Indian women in Indian clothing squatting at the front of the crowd to watch the men pass by, reproduced below.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 August 1919, 3

<sup>121</sup> *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1919, 3



Indian women as spectators.

Daily Mirror, 4 August 1919, 14

The lengths to which the British government went to publicly acknowledge the contribution of the Indian troops seems to speak to both genuine gratitude and respect for their sacrifice and worth. The audience for the march was almost exclusively British and, beyond the British administration, was unlikely to have made much, if any, impact in India. On the day London's streets were described as 'seething with people but few among them, beyond invited dignitaries, had any formal connection with India.<sup>122</sup> It is also unlikely that many people in India were able to see accounts of the Parade, particularly bearing in mind that the majority of the men were from pre-literate, rural parts of India. Although the parade and subsequent travels in Britain must have made an enormous impression on the men involved and the public certainly appreciated a chance to give their thanks to the Indian soldiers, the main purpose of the second parade can be seen as a show of imperial strength by the British government, although the size of the crowds illustrated the commitment of the British public to marking the Indian troops' contribution during the war.

This chapter has shown that the nature of the opinions of British people who actually encountered Indian troops were not dissimilar to the media representations which were

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

available to the majority of British people. While the quality of the representations changed in tone and became considerably more positive, as seen in the previous chapter, the reaction of people who met the Indian soldiers was one of genuine enthusiasm.

Initially, Indian people were known primarily in Britain in terms of imperialist stereotypical representations but by the war's end, public enthusiasm, if not affection, was demonstrated by reaction of the people of Brighton: gifts were abundant, more visits to people's homes were offered than could be accommodated and, even three years after the end of the war, crowds gathered to commemorate the men. The creation and work of the Indian Soldiers' Fund further illustrates the affection and respect shown by those who had known Indian people during their working lives in India and the large amount of money raised and considerable efforts to distribute their resources also speak to a genuine regard.

Although the formal commemorations do not appear to be an obvious example, consider the newspaper accounts of the Peace Day celebrations. There was almost no possibility that any of the troops, apart from a select few, would hear or read any account of the celebrations, yet the decision was taken to rerun the original parade for the exclusive benefit of the Indian soldiers. The function of both the positive accounts of their time in Britain and the extensive reporting of their Peace Day Parade was also, of course, a means of signalling to the world that the power and extent of the British empire should not be forgotten.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **'Tenacity, Courage and Endurance'<sup>1</sup>: British Military attitudes to the Indian Corps during the First World War**

This chapter will examine the development of the attitude of the British military establishment towards the Indian Corps in France. To set the context for the origins of these attitudes it will examine the history, recruitment and framework of the Indian Army and will show that the history of the Army, particularly with regard to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 which formed the background for its practice and structure as well as its attitudes, influenced the treatment of the Indian soldiers in France nearly sixty years later.

The chapter also serves as a comparison between the civilian experience analysed in the previous chapters and the military experience of the Indian Corps' participation in the war. Just as with the civilian population, the military experienced a combination of representations of the Indian soldiers and personal encounters. It will show that, just as the public reacted positively to the participation of Indian troops in the war, so did British soldiers and a level of parity between the British and Indian soldiers became apparent. A combination of first person accounts of encounters between British and Indian soldiers of all ranks and official military documents such as despatches and orders will be used to illustrate how military practice was influenced by a combination of encounters with Indian soldiers and attitudes derived from the British experience of the Indian Army during the nineteenth century. This also highlights the difference in attitude between soldiers of all ranks who met Indian soldiers and senior staff officers who relied on the reports of others to form their opinions. It will show that, as with the civilian population, those who directly encountered Indian soldiers formed more positive views than those who did not, who were instead more likely to adhere to traditional views of Indian soldiers formed in the nineteenth century context.

The chapter will examine the practical provision by the British military for the religious requirements of the men, their medical care in England and how these contributed to the morale of the men and, as Susan VanKosi observed, helped maintain their

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<sup>1</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Co, 1920), 235

cohesiveness during their time in France.<sup>2</sup> It will analyse the reasons behind the attentions paid by the British to these requirements to demonstrate that the British authorities could not ignore the effect that the war could have had in India. The self-rule movement in India was in its infancy but some worried that if the Indian soldiers had reported poor treatment this, combined with the grievous losses, could have caused difficulties for British rule in India. Particular attention to the opinions of those in India was shown in the English hospitals, where it was, of course, far simpler to control the men's environment but also because it presented a highly unusual opportunity for Indian men to study the behaviour and attitudes of the British on their home soil. As will be seen, every effort was made to accommodate the men comfortably and with respect to their religious requirements and the medical treatment was highly praised and appreciated, although problems with security at the hospitals, as has been seen earlier, did cause discontent.

#### THE INDIAN ARMY BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The primary function of the Indian Army was to protect British interests in Undivided India and the army was structured and equipped on this basis. It would have been prohibitively expensive to depend on British soldiers alone for the defence of India as 'white manpower was both too scarce and expensive'.<sup>3</sup> In the context of the early history of the Indian Army the words 'India' and 'Indian' are somewhat misleading. Rather than identify themselves by nationality, most of the people of India identified themselves by their racial group, religion or locality and the significance of this will appear in the later discussion on recruitment and how the Corps was structured. Furthermore, not all the troops of the Indian Army came under the governance of the British empire; the Gurkhas of Nepal, for example, had never been under British rule but had joined forces with the East India Company and, having remained loyal during the Rebellion of 1857, expanded their influence. Likewise, the Pathans of far northern India and Afghanistan lived in tribal territories and even occasionally found themselves in action against the Raj while at

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<sup>2</sup> Susan VanKosi, 'Letters Home, 1915-1916: Punjabi Soldiers Reflect on War and Life in Europe and their Meanings for Home and Self', *International Journal of Punjabi Studies*, 2, no. 1, (1995), 57

<sup>3</sup> George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration*, *War In History*, 2006, 13, no. 13, 333

home on leave. There was however an unwritten rule that no man would be called upon to fight his own regiment.<sup>4</sup>

British military involvement in India dated from the earliest days of its interest in the country. Broadly speaking, it divides into two periods: before and after the Rebellion of 1857. British soldiers arrived in 1668 and had transferred their allegiance from the King to the East India Company (EIC), then the prevailing influence, and were not to return their allegiance until 1858.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1753 that there was any measure of organisation to the military in India. Until this time Indian, British and French influences all competed for control over relatively small areas. It was not until Robert Clive and Governor of Madras Thomas Saunders defeated the French at Arcot in 1751 that the British achieved some sort of European military supremacy in India. Over the next hundred years, there were local problems to be resolved between the East India Company and local rulers and, until the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, between the British and the French, but no significant military campaigns.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the East India Company's army was stretched thin and this began to show in increasing unrest among its soldiers. Philip Mason listed a number of incidents in the run up to the Indian Rebellion which fuelled the grievances against their British rulers among the Indian soldiers. The loss of the First Afghan War; the annexation of Sind in 1844 and the near rebellion when men were not allowed the 'batta' or foreign service allowance they had received for fighting in Afghanistan for their work in Sind and the Sikh wars of annexation of the Punjab in the 1840s, when the same decision regarding the foreign service allowance led to a minor rebellion, all served to make the East India Company appear less powerful and increased the division between the British and the men.<sup>6</sup> Outside military life, the annexation of Oudh in 1856 and increasing unease about British attempts to convert Indians to Christianity also contributed to the problems. Missionaries were causing particular distress and there was a widespread popular belief that the East India Company was promoting the activities of organisations such as the Church Missionary Society, whose Chancellor, the Bishop of

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches – The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 6

<sup>5</sup> Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army and its Officers and Men* (London: Cape, 1974), 31

<sup>6</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 219-246

Oxford, said in 1857, 'We have these colonies and dependencies, from which as centres of light, from which as garrisons of faith, there ought to go forth on behalf of England and on behalf of England's church a message of salvation, and the ministry of the word converting the heathen to the Word of Christ.'<sup>7</sup> In fact, the East India Company had consistently cautioned against attempts to interfere with religious practice in India. During the early years of British involvement in India, missionaries were explicitly barred from practising and in some cases from entering the country. The EIC, then in control of India, felt that any attempt to convert the population, or interfere with their religious practices would upset the status quo and would be 'bad for business.'<sup>8</sup> When the EIC's charter came up for renewal in 1813, a sustained campaign began to allow missionaries to enter and practice in India, including various petitions with nearly half a million signatories in a highly coordinated effort by a number of church groups.<sup>9</sup> The eventual East India Act, passed that year, allowed missionaries to practice but they soon found that they were largely unwelcome. The incoming Governor-General in 1813, the Earl of Moira, told the London Missionary Society that, 'procedures calculated to alarm and revolt those who can be won only by prudent and patient conciliation would defeat your object no less surely than it would hazard those interests which I am sent to maintain.'<sup>10</sup> It was a clear statement that any damage to the political and economic status quo would not be tolerated and set the tone for the remainder of the century.

Among the soldiers of the Indian Army these issues came to a head with the introduction of the new Lee Enfield rifle in 1857, which used a cartridge that required lubrication to ram home. As the grease was meant to be made of wax and vegetable fat, there were no objections to this.<sup>11</sup> However, rumour started that the grease contained beef fat which was offensive to Hindus and pork fat which was offensive to Muslims. In February, a group of sepoys refused to train with the cartridges. Even though these were in fact of the old type, the British backed down and the incident was defused but many took this as an admission of guilt and the unrest continued to spread. By April another group of soldiers had refused to use the cartridges and were stripped of their uniforms and

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<sup>7</sup> The Bishop of Oxford on Church Missions and the Indian Empire, *The Times*, 23 November 1857, 7

<sup>8</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World* (Penguin: London, 2003), 137

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

<sup>10</sup> Laurence Kitzen, 'The London Missionary Society and the problem of Authority in India', *Church History*, Vol 40, No. 4, 465

<sup>11</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 264

marched to a civilian jail. Their comrades, who went on to march on Delhi in mutinous protest, liberated them. The Rebellion continued to spread across military and civilian India and was not contained until the British broke the siege of Lucknow, the capital of Oudh, in March 1858. Many thousands died on both sides and the ramifications continued for many years as the British attempted to regain control.

As a result of the Rebellion the East India Company was stripped of its ruling powers and governorship transferred back to Queen Victoria, who was declared Empress of India in 1876, with Governor-General Canning installed as Vice-Roy. The crown's rule was more liberal than that of the EIC and many of the EIC's attempts to westernise India and subdue its religions were reversed. The Indian Civil Service included Indians for the first time in the administration of their country, albeit on a small scale in the early stages. The Army was forced to restructure in 1858 and as part of the reorganisation recruitment practices were altered to more closely reflect the caste structure and religious and regional populations of India. Mason described how this brought a new ethos to the Army as the Commanding Officer took full command of each regiment which brought the seat of power closer to the soldiers than previously and commanders were instructed to treat their Indian officers in an entirely new way, 'you should show all the men that you respect and regard them as *men*; you should get them to respect themselves and feel proud of themselves.'<sup>12</sup> These changes and their effects can be traced forward directly to the practices which will be described below and underpinned the relationship between the British and Indian soldiers of all ranks during the First World War.

In addition, during the period there was increasing alarm in Britain about the possibility of an invasion of India. The Russian Army had been expanding its borders further and further until in 1885 there was a small attack on the Indian border in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). In the years leading up to the First World War, after the reorganisations following the Rebellion, the Indian Army was constantly engaged, winning battle honours in China, the NWFP, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Burma, British East Africa and Tibet. The principal concern was the NWFP, where three campaigns were fought between 1895 and 1898 alone. This series of engagements meant that the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 321



Indian Army by the time of the First World War was an experienced force with considerable confidence in its own abilities.

### THE MARTIAL RACE THEORY

The Martial Race Theory (MRT) was the method by which the army identified those potential recruits assumed to be most warrior-like men of India. The notion that some groups were more martial than others was one that was already well accepted. Consider the British Army's long-standing preference for Scottish highlanders and Irish soldiers, both considered to be warlike, or the assumption that, 'Prussians were better soldiers than the Italians, the French better than the Spanish and the Swedes better than the Sardinians.'<sup>13</sup>

Within India, a division was made by the Army between southern Indians, who were 'unwarlike because of years of peace and exposure to the hot plains' and men from the more mountainous north 'which in winter is cold [and] the men comparatively manly and active.'<sup>14</sup> Note here the link to the Social Darwinist genderisation imposed on the men of India referred to in the Introduction. The Madras Army of southern India had a reputation for poor soldiering and lack of motivation, although they had rarely been tested in battle, as southern India was under no threat of invasion. The geography of India was by no means a reliable guide as a particularly well regarded group was the Jats of the eastern Punjab, which is neither cold nor mountainous. Equally, the Kashmiris, who did come from a cold and mountainous region, were considered to be insufficiently martial.<sup>15</sup> This preference sat ill with the later assumption made during the First World War that the Indian soldiers struggled to perform well in France because of the inclement weather.

Another characteristic much favoured by the British was so-called Aryan descent. George MacMunn, in his 1933 book, *The Martial Races of India*, claimed that, 'The martial races, as explained, are largely the products of the original white races.' Examples given of such races were Jats, Rajputs, Sikhs, Punjabi Mussalmans, Dogras and Pathans, although

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<sup>13</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 24; Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 3

<sup>14</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 333

<sup>15</sup> Kaushik Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, No. 4 (2013), 1312

there was much crossover between the groups.<sup>16</sup> These men lived in the highlands of the NWFP, so as well as their greater height and lighter skin than southern Indians they were inured to harsher climate conditions. One characteristic all martial races seemed to share was that they had little or no education and came from rural communities. This was no coincidence: such men were much less likely to be attracted to political activism and thoughts of rebellion.<sup>17</sup> To each group were attributed certain characteristics, which were considered with the utmost seriousness by both the British and, to a lesser extent, the men themselves. Note here the linear racial hierarchy that was at least in part determined by Social Darwinist theory which was prevalent in Britain during the nineteenth century.

Given that the martial races derived primarily from the north of India, further division became more complex. Following the Victorian penchant for taxonomy, the administration set about further classifying these groups. A series of guides to the various races were written, starting in 1890 with Vansittart's *Goorkhas* and, following volumes on Sikhs, Pathans, the handbook for whom ran to 200 pages,<sup>18</sup> Rajputs, Jats, Brahmins and Garhwalis, a definitive *Handbook of the Fighting Races of India* was published in 1899.<sup>19</sup> The Indian Army was organised according to these classifications from the 1890s through to the aftermath of the First World War, when a wholesale reorganisation took place. However carefully each group was categorised, the real population was far more complex, as census data showed. Households which were nominally Pathan for example, could include 'low class Muhammadan servants of Pathan families ... descendants of Pathans and low class women, as well as by [sic] many Hindi converts.'<sup>20</sup> This meant that the exact martial status of a village or group of men was only ever an approximation.

MRT was never a particularly robust concept. It didn't account for its own circularities: the NWFP was the most vulnerable part of British India to invasion; therefore, the men of the province had the most to lose by invasion; therefore, they joined the army and fought the hardest in the greatest numbers and gained the greatest fighting experience.

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<sup>16</sup> George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, c1933), 9

<sup>17</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 45; Roy, *Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army*, 1345

<sup>18</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 247

<sup>19</sup> Gavin Rand, & Kim Wagner, *Recruiting the 'Martial Races': identities and military service in colonial India*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46, no. 3-4, (2012), 246

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 247

Equally, from the British point of view, as long as the army acquitted itself well in the NWFP, as indeed it did, then the army's selection procedures (MRT) must be valid. The concept lasted until 1917 when losses among the Indian Corps in France meant that recruitment had to be widened to cover all of India and a central recruiting board was set up, although the men of the north dominated the Corps until 1918. The war was the final death knell for MRT, not just because the recruiting net had to be widened but because it was a primary cause of the problem of obtaining replacement officers in France. MRT provided soldiers who were, by and large, semi-literate and therefore, it was assumed, could not be promoted or enlisted as officers. As British officer numbers declined substantially during the war the assumption that only a British officer could perform that role led directly to one of the most significant problems faced by the Indian Corps during their time in France, that of recruitment of fresh officers.

#### MOTIVATION TO JOIN THE INDIAN ARMY

There were as many reasons for Indian men to join the Indian Army as there ever are to enter military service. The monthly salary was 11 rupees per month in 1915 and, although the soldier had to pay for his own uniform, this was a respectable amount and he could retire on a pension after 21 years or if he had been wounded and discharged because of his wounds.<sup>21</sup> The convention that he could retire on a pension after being wounded was to cause problems after the Corps moved to the Western Front, as this practice was controversially suspended.

For many the concept of personal honour or *izzat* was the strongest reason to enlist. David Omissi translated *izzat* as 'honour, reputation, credit and prestige.'<sup>22</sup> Mason translated it as 'glory, honour, reputation.'<sup>23</sup> The word described reputation in the eyes of the world as well as the individual's own community and family. Often, this took on a religious dimension for the troops as they anticipated their feats being reflected in an afterlife as in this letter from an anonymous Gurkha soldier, 'If you die, you will make a name up to seven forefathers and will go straight to Paradise. You will become as famous as the sun. Bravo! Bravo!'<sup>24</sup> This phrase illustrates the complexity of *izzat* for the troops,

<sup>21</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 335

<sup>22</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 79

<sup>23</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 127

<sup>24</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/825/1, letter dated 7 February 1915

acknowledging the soldier's success before his family, ancestors, and contemporaries. Bringing together all these strands was extremely powerful, especially for men whose life experience outside of the Army was often limited to a small geographical area and circle of acquaintance. Major Alexander of the Indian Mule Corps illustrated the limit of their experience, 'practically none of them had ever before seen a building larger than an ordinary cantonment bungalow.'<sup>25</sup>

A strong sense of military identity also drew men to the Army. This was especially important to the Indian Army because of the diverse groups of men who enlisted. Early models of the Army mixed different religions, castes, languages and regional backgrounds together but this was felt to be rather too effective in building cohesion and the British were concerned that the men could band together and cause discipline problems.<sup>26</sup> From this the system of 'class companies' and regiments was developed, which maintained the social and ethnic groupings of the troops, either within a regiment or as an entire regiment and naming regiments to reflect their regional or religious make up reinforced this. Both regional significance and the importance of *izzat* are reflected in the Martial Race Theory as they represented the values which the British were trying to exploit in their use of MRT for recruitment standards. Susan VanKosi, in her study of the letters home from Indian soldiers, asserted that MRT 'managed to tether regimental *esprit de corps* to the most sacred values of the Punjabi peasantry ... In the case of Sikhs ... also echoed the requirements of the Khalsa identity.'<sup>27</sup>

The loyalty of India to the King Emperor was also a motivational factor, especially after the call to arms in 1914. This is reflected in many letters, for example, 'it is a noble fate for us to be able to sacrifice our bodies for our King,'<sup>28</sup> or, 'keep your thoughts fixed on the Almighty and show your loyalty to the Government and to King George V.'<sup>29</sup>

## BRITISH MILITARY ATTITUDES TO THE INDIAN CORPS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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<sup>25</sup> Major Heber Maitland Alexander, *On Two Fronts – Being the Adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France and Gallipoli* (Delhi, Heinemann, 1917), Kindle edition, loc 155

<sup>26</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 87

<sup>27</sup> VanKosi, *Letters Home*, 57

<sup>28</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/825/1, letter dated 15 March 1915

<sup>29</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/825/1, letter dated early January 1915

This section will explore reactions to the Indian soldiers among British soldiers and officers and uncover themes which run through the reactions. Some sources were private, such as letters home from Indian and British soldiers, and some were written as a public account of the work of the Indian Corps, such as the memoirs of Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether, the Corps' Record Officer and General Willcocks, Commander of the Indian Corps. However, all shared the same positive view, which is echoed in formal military accounts such as the despatches of Field-Marshal Sir John French, Commander in Chief of the BEF.

To some extent such attitudes were determined by the same Imperial representations and stereotypes which influenced the civilian population, such as this exposition of Indian soldiers by Willcocks who described in some detail the men he worked with during his career in the Indian Army:

the soldier from Nepal has a big heart in a small body; he has the dogged characteristic of the Britisher ...the Dogras are quiet, steady, clean soldiers, of refined appearance ... the Sikh can be troublesome when it is most inconvenient for him to be so, but he is a fine manly soldier ... the Jats are strapping big men as a rule. They always impressed me as stubborn fighters ... the Pathans have quicker wits than other races. Their élan is their chief asset.<sup>30</sup>

Separate from the old stereotypes, there were also direct references to the Indian Corps in the field. Sir John French, in a cable giving his account of the battle of Neuve Chapelle to the Viceroy of India, stated that, 'the fighting was very severe and the losses heavy, but nothing daunted them; their tenacity, courage, and endurance were admirable and worthy of the best traditions of the soldiers in India.'<sup>31</sup> This stoicism was also reflected in the men's letters home. A.S.R.'s letter from the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton gave an elegant account of the Neuve Chapelle offensive but did not mention the wound that had brought him to hospital in England:

Now that the rain ceased a little from the 10<sup>th</sup> March we began to attack them but as we advanced we lost a lot of men. So we went on but no one could endure the firing of bullets and shells which fell thicker than drops of rain ... when we reached their trenches we used the bayonet and the kukri to such an extent that we were all covered in blood but I did not fall. On the 11<sup>th</sup> the battle was a little

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<sup>30</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 56-57

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 235

less and the bullets came as usual then on the 12<sup>th</sup> about 8 in the morning the Germans attacked us but we fired so much with rifles and machine guns that we won and all of them were killed; the ground was covered so thickly with them that you could not put your foot down without going over the corpses.<sup>32</sup>

There were no references to any of his comrades, many of whom he would have seen fall during the attacks or his own injury. Even allowing for the censorship process inhibiting the men, this is typically characteristic of the understatement of the men's letters.

Many of the adjectives used by the British about the Indian soldiers are remarkably similar across all the sources, for example, gallantry, duty, dignity and courage.<sup>33</sup> This is to some extent predictable as less favourable accounts would not have been used, particularly in public accounts such as Despatches but it does present a consistent acknowledgement of men who conducted themselves as a professional army of the highest quality. A notable comment comes from Sir John French's Fourth Despatch, which concerned the First Battle of Ypres in late November 1914, 'Since their arrival in this country, and their occupation of the line allotted to them, I have been much impressed by the initiative and resource displayed by the Indian troops. Some of the ruses they have employed to deceive the enemy have been attended with the best results, and have doubtless kept superior forces in front of them at bay.'<sup>34</sup> This was one of the earliest engagements for the Indian troops and an opportunity to show the British military command skills and ingenuity they may not have assumed the men to have, such as improvising trench mortars from lead piping or fashioning searchlights from car headlights rigged up to work using electricity.<sup>35</sup>

While these words of praise are to some extent generic, there are some expressions which would have had particular meaning for the Indian soldiers, imbued as they were

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<sup>32</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/2, letter dated 19 March 1915

<sup>33</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 236, cable from the Viceroy of India to Willcocks; Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 463, message from the King read by the Prince of Wales to the Indian troops, November 1915; Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 469, Merewether's own comments; Watson, W.H.L., *Adventures of a Motorcycle Despatch Rider During the First World War*, (London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1915), Kindle edition, location 2033; Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 461, message from the King read by the Prince of Wales to the Indian troops, November 1915 and Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 235, cable from Sir John French to the Viceroy of India

<sup>34</sup> [www.1914-1918.net/french\\_fourth\\_despatch.html](http://www.1914-1918.net/french_fourth_despatch.html), accessed 27 December 2011

<sup>35</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 93

with a sense of *izzat*. This was made explicit in the King's message to the troops on their departure from India, 'I look to all my Indian soldiers to uphold the *Izzat* of the British Raj ... shoulder to shoulder with their comrades from all parts of the Empire.'<sup>36</sup> It was also echoed in the words of the Prince of Wales, speaking in his father's stead on their departure from France, 'you have worthily upheld the honour of the empire.'<sup>37</sup> In the context of men brought up with this concept and then trained by the military in exactly this ethos such words would have had a special meaning, particularly from Sir John French, 'The Indian Corps ... have not only upheld, but added to, the good name of the Army which they represent.'<sup>38</sup> These references to the honour of the military and the Raj were all carefully designed to appeal to the Indian sense of *izzat*. The King's use of the words 'shoulder to shoulder' implied parity between the Indian and British armies and his use of the personal pronoun was designed to strengthen the already robust loyalty of the Indian troops to their King Emperor.

The formal military accounts served, at least to some extent, a propaganda purpose and some reflected the tropes prevalent in civilian representations as British soldiers interacted with the Indian troops. Further accounts brought forward images of parity between British and Indian troops. In May 1915, the Indian Corps took part in an unsuccessful series of battles in the Festubert and Aubers Ridge area close to Neuve Chapelle. Merewether summed up the failure soberly, 'the Indian Corps failed to attain its objective through no fault of its own, but owing entirely to the misfortune of being faced by an extraordinarily strong position, an experience shared by the British 4<sup>th</sup> Corps operating on its left. Had success been possible under the circumstances, it would have been attained by the troops, British and Indian, who had so recently covered themselves with glory at the battles of Neuve Chapelle and Ypres.'<sup>39</sup> The emphasis on the shared experience of British and Indian troops and the parallels between the British and Indian experience of failure is interesting here as Merewether was categorical that British soldiers could not have taken the position either and thus assumed the British and Indian capabilities to be equal.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>37</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 463

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 461

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 374

The theme of mutual respect and equality occurred among British other ranks as well as senior officers. In a letter from Private D. Thomson of the Army Service Corps, written during the autumn of 1915, he wrote that 'I am very much afraid that we are about to be separated from the Indians a fact which needless to say we all greatly regret for we got on so well with them and were treated with the utmost respect, so it was a pleasure to work with them.'<sup>40</sup> Private Thomson may have noted the respect shown to himself and his colleagues because he expected to be treated in this manner by colonial soldiers but the letter reads as if he is contrasting this with his experience of working with British troops, who may not have had such a co-operative attitude to the Service Corps. The phrase 'work with them' also implies that he considered himself to be working alongside his Indian counterparts, rather than as their superior by virtue of British imperial sovereignty. In a similar vein, Merewether noted the cooperation between British and Indian men, 'the camaraderie existing between the British and Indian soldiers was very marked during the battle. Cigarettes were freely exchanged as well as friendly greetings, the latter evidently unintelligible, but apparently satisfactory to both parties. Often when a detachment of [Indian] Sappers was returning from work, the British would give them cigarettes and insist on their warming themselves at their fire buckets.'<sup>41</sup>

A similar sense of parity, at least in the sense of military endeavour, occurred between Indian and German troops. The following two comments, both from anonymous Punjabi men who had been wounded and sent to England to recover in February 1915, show that they considered themselves to be at least equal to the German troops. One claimed that, 'One man of our double company was equal to 150 Germans,'<sup>42</sup> while his compatriot stated that, 'The Germans were very strong, but as soon as the Indian troops arrived their strength was broken.'<sup>43</sup> While this pride might be expected, a Sikh who had also been invalided to England put his praise into the mouths of the Germans themselves, claiming that 'The German says in letters and newspapers "If any king had German shells & French guns & the Indian Army he could rule the world."' "<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Indian soldiers

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<sup>40</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL 825/8, undated letter

<sup>41</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 241

<sup>42</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL 825/1, letter dated 6 February 1915

<sup>43</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL 825/1, letter dated 3 February 1915

<sup>44</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL 825/1, letter dated 29 January 1915



often seemed to respect the Germans for a perceived sense of chivalry, illustrated here by an anonymous Punjabi Muslim who was a medic in England,

So God knows whether the Germans picked him up and took him away or not. No one knows. But there is rather (ground for) hope (than fear), since they carry off the wounded when they see. If a man be wounded then the enemy when they see him take him away into their own country & give him the best of medical treatment. We do the same by their wounded. This is because it is a war of kings.<sup>45</sup>

A German account appeared to show reciprocal respect for the Indian soldiers. Ernst Jünger described coming across a small group of wounded Indians,

in answer to my question "Quelle nation?" one replied: "Pauvre Rajput!" So these were Indians we confronted, who had travelled thousands of miles across the sea, only to give themselves a bloody nose on this god-forsaken piece of earth against the Hanoverian Rifles ... we picked them up and dragged them towards our lines ... one died along the way, but he was still taken along, because there was a reward for every prisoner taken, whether alive or dead.<sup>46</sup>

When Jünger brought his prisoners in they were 'much gawped at. Here I was able to set the minds of our captives at rest – they seemed to have been told the direst things about us. They thawed a little, and told me their names; one of them was Amar Singh. Their outfit was the First Haryana Lancers, a good regiment I am told. Then I retired with Kius, who took half a dozen photographs.'<sup>47</sup> Jünger seemed to have enjoyed his experience of meeting the Indian soldiers and, while they were enough of a novelty to have drawn a crowd and to have had their photographs taken, his attitude was respectful and he was sufficiently intrigued to find out about Singh's regiment. Jünger's opinions were not dissimilar to the pre-war British civilian representations of Indian people as exotic, to be 'gawped at' and photographed, as was the British civilian experience in the years before the war when encounters between British and Indian people were much rarer.

There was also sympathy and fellow feeling for the plight of the Indian soldiers fighting alongside the British in France. Captain Roly Grimshaw, an officer with the Indian Cavalry

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<sup>45</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL 825/1, letter dated 3 March 1915

<sup>46</sup> Ernest Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (London: Penguin, 1920), 150

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

Corps, wrote sympathetically of the Indian troops he encountered in France. It is also notable that he included British and Indian soldiers equally in the miserable scene he described,

The state of the wounded beggars all description. Little Gurkhas slopping through the freezing mud ... Tommies with no caps and plastered in blood and mud from head to foot; Sikhs with their hair all down ... Pathans more dirty and untidy than usual; all limping or reeling along like drunken men, some helping an almost foundered comrade. In most cases misery depicted in their faces. Stretchers with groaning wounded and limping stretcher bearers.<sup>48</sup>

However, among British troops negative, even racist, opinions existed alongside the praise. The Chief Censor, who also censored the letters of British troops attached to the Indian divisions, presumably selected the letters below for inclusion in his fortnightly reports because he wanted to monitor relations between the British and Indian troops. An unnamed English sergeant of the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> London Regiment wrote that, 'We get on fine with them. They are a decent lot, the ones that are with us, but some of the regiments are not up to much – refuse to go over the top in a charge. The ones we have got here are Garhwalis and Gurkhas. They are the chaps. As long as a white soldier is going to be there, they fight like tigers.'<sup>49</sup> He seems to distinguish between Indian soldiers with whom he has actually fought and clearly admires and then generalise from second hand information about other Indian regiments which he has not encountered.

In the same batch of letters, the Chief Censor came across some very direct references to perceived cowardice by Indian soldiers and noted, 'Several men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Black Watch, whether rightly or wrongly, ascribe the misadventures which their regiment experienced during the recent attack, to the behaviour of the Indian troops who were co-operating with them. Expressions such as "At this point the n-----s began to run" were found in one or two letters (and of course deleted).'<sup>50</sup> These letters in all probability refer to the Battle of Loos, in September 1915, in which the Black Watch fought alongside the Indian soldiers, to which they had been attached since their arrival in France. While it is possible that there were instances of Indian soldiers fleeing the battlefield, their overall part in the battle was deemed a success by Sir Douglas Haig,

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<sup>48</sup> Roly Grimshaw, *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-1915*, (Tunbridge Wells: Costello, 1986), 55

<sup>49</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/86, letter dated 22 October 1915

<sup>50</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/86, Censor Report dated 13 October 1915

Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps of the BEF, 'the G.O.C is very pleased with the manner in which the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and Indian Corps carried out the role assigned to them of retaining the enemy on their front.'<sup>51</sup> From this albeit small sample, it is clear that the British and Indian soldiers got along well on an individual level and the British men respected their abilities but were quick to adopt views they had heard from others about cowardice in battle and their dependence on white soldiers to motivate them to fight which their personal experiences did not necessarily reflect. This distinction echoes the differences in interpretation between both civilians and soldiers who had encountered the Indian soldiers and those whose opinions were formed by representations and assumptions.

General Willcocks himself seemed to feel that the Indian Corps was not always given the respect it deserved by staff officers. He had clashed with General Haig on a number of occasions and had anticipated that his services would be dispensed with. In his memoirs, he clearly linked his abrupt departure to his command of the Indian Corps, 'Even had I been totally deficient in "initiative and tactical skill," there are ways of doing things. I had during my thirty-seven years' soldiering served in fourteen campaigns; had received the Freedom of the City of London and a sword of honour, and the unique distinction of being mentioned by name in King Edward's first Speech from the Throne. Had I not the right to expect ordinary courtesy? - but I belonged to the Indian Corps! - that explains much.'<sup>52</sup>

Despite Willcocks' anger and the relatively small number of complaints about Indian troops from their British counterparts, the number of decorations received during their fifteen months and five major engagements in France is strongly indicative of their success and, perhaps more significantly, the British willingness to publicly acknowledge it. The Victoria Cross is the highest military honour in any part of the British Army. It is given exclusively for valour under fire and was only made available to the Indian Army in 1911. Of the 115 Victoria Crosses awarded on the Western Front during 1914 and 1915, eight were to soldiers of the Indian Corps. Of these, five were to Indian other ranks and three to British officers. In addition to the Victoria Crosses awarded during

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<sup>51</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 449

<sup>52</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 323

their stay in France, the British and Indian officers and men of the Indian Corps were also awarded 44 Distinguished Service Orders and 81 Military Crosses, the second and third highest decorations in the British Army respectively.<sup>53</sup> The system of medals in the Indian Army was slightly different but held to be of equivalent worth. After the Victoria Cross, the second highest decoration in the Indian Corps was the Indian Order of Merit (IOM), which was both a military and civilian award. 49 second class IOMs were awarded and two first class. The Indian Distinguished Service Medal was the equivalent of the Military Cross in the British Army and 137 were awarded to Indian soldiers in France.

The themes identified above all demonstrate that the Indian Corps was well received by the British military at all levels. The public words of Sir John French: 'their tenacity, courage and endurance' and the private regret of Private Thomson as the Indian men 'it had been a pleasure to work with' moved on indicate a strong regard for the Indian troops not simply as a product of empire but as efficient soldiers working alongside peers in whose company they were respected. The British soldiers who expressed negative and racist views represent a small minority in the sources and certainly not the official view as propagated by the King Emperor, whose carefully tailored speeches were designed to raise the public profile of the men as much as to motivate them and raise their morale. This shows that, in a similar manner to the civilian population, when British soldiers encountered Indian troops they formed positive opinions of them and considered them to be peers.

#### WELFARE PROVISION FOR THE INDIAN CORPS IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND

The purpose of this section is to analyse two aspects of the special provision made for the Indian soldiers in France: the attempt to meet their religious needs and the provision of medical care for the wounded. Such provision was inevitably separate from that necessary for the BEF or their Dominion counterparts, although charitable provision of 'comforts' was widespread across nationalities. These attentions were to make a positive impact on the morale of the Indian Corps and thus strengthen and maintain its fighting capability. In addition to political concerns about sending Indian troops to Europe, it was not known how they would fare from a military perspective and every effort was made

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 347

to maintain morale in order to guard against the possibility of the men's unique position in France further undermining their morale and thus efficiency. The section demonstrates both the importance of this provision to the soldiers themselves but also the necessity in the minds of senior staff officers of making sure that only positive reports of the Indian soldiers' treatment by the British authorities reached India.

The religious provision, to be discussed first, was an extension of the existing measures in place in India, which were adapted and implemented in France and England. The second topic, that of medical care, concerns the provision of specialist hospitals for Indian soldiers in England. While there was already a thriving Indian Medical Service, it was not equal to the number and complexity of wounds encountered in France and its provision was extended under the auspices of the military and the Indian Soldiers' Fund. The extent and quality of hospital care in England was, of necessity, of a high standard not least because the shortage of men in France meant that it was imperative to return wounded men to the front in the shortest possible time.

Religion had long been a sensitive issue for the British in India for both military and political rulers, influenced by the memory of 1857. By the end of the century religious tolerance was accepted practice in the Army. David Omissi quoted from an 1893 memo from Field Marshall Lord Roberts of Kandahar regarding the importance of religious respect being shown to the Indian soldiers, 'Everything should be done to secure the contentment and loyalty of the Native Army by a scrupulous regard for their customs and religion.'<sup>54</sup> In France there were of course far greater challenges than in India where it was possible to keep religious festivals and involve local religious leaders in the life of the regiment. This meant that what could be done took on extra significance. Great care was taken by the authorities in Britain not to cause offence to the Indian troops in France. Mason gives the example of a censor who forbade the use of donated YMCA notepaper by Indian troops because the letter heading contained the word 'Christian'.<sup>55</sup> In a letter to *The Times* former Indian Army Commander in Chief, O'M Creagh, asserted that, 'the Government of India and its officers are most careful to see that [nothing is] done by them which could in any way adversely affect caste rules or religious principles.'

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<sup>54</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 99

<sup>55</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 423

He continued by requesting that newspaper editors refrain from commenting on such matters in order to protect Britain's interests.<sup>56</sup>

Several letters from Indian soldiers sought guidance on religious practice in the trenches and requested religious material and advice. An anonymous Pathan wrote home, 'Make every effort to get me a Holy Qu'ran. Never mind the price: I will pay it,' as did Sepoy Ashraf Khan.<sup>57</sup> More complex religious questions show how seriously the men attempted to take their practice in the trenches, a mark of its importance to them. Hayat Ali Khan wrote to Lance Naik Maulavi Talib Khan, both of whom were in France, 'The arrangements for prayers here are good. But there are two opinions here. Some say that the Qsar [short service] should be read: others that the service should be performed at length. They are always quarrelling about this, as to how the Command of God may be ... and what is the order about Friday prayers? Can we read them or not? We have agreed to act as our Maulavi Sahib shall direct.'<sup>58</sup> It is not clear what role Maulavi Talib Khan played as he held a soldier's rank but the mention of the men 'always quarrelling' about the matter gives an insight into the importance of religious matters to the men.

An important feature of the British commitment to the men's religious practice was to ensure that their food met religious requirements. This meant meeting the requirements of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim men, which differ substantially. With typical gusto, Willcocks described early efforts in Marseilles:

The Indian troops, as is well known, have their own peculiar customs. Their religious scruples and their feeding have to be arranged for on lines entirely different to British soldiers. All these details might reasonably be expected to cause considerable difficulties, but we had been preceded by Staff Officers conversant with all the requirements and General Headquarters gave such a free hand in these matters ... that in a very few days things were working more smoothly than in India itself.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The Indian Troops, *The Times*, 5 December 1914, 9

<sup>57</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/7, letter dated 31 October 1915; TNA, MSS EUR F143/86, letter dated 10 October 1915

<sup>58</sup> TNA, MSS EUR, F143/86, letter dated 23 October 1915

<sup>59</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 27

The standard menu for the Indian troops met all religious demands: rice or chapattis, dhal and vegetables with tea.<sup>60</sup> Difficulties, however, arose when meat was provided, in accordance with the orders of commanders anxious to keep up the men's strength. While chicken, goat and mutton were acceptable to all, Hindus cannot eat beef and Muslims cannot eat pork and both require meat to be slaughtered in a prescribed manner. Herds of animals were kept close to the front and each company sent men to oversee the slaughter according to their requirements. An anonymous correspondent for *The Times* found sights and sounds at this camp that reminded him of India, 'there was nothing in that yard hooded with fog to remind him or me that we were not at Jullundur still on a thick November morning.' However, he was amused to hear a Gurkha saying that his men would only accept frozen mutton that one of them had seen frozen to death themselves.<sup>61</sup>

The soldiers appreciated the consideration shown to them in religious matters, but perhaps more especially the care taken to provide them with suitable food in France. Willcocks wrote that the soldiers understood that in battle conditions their exact dietary requirements could not be met but 'the Indians are the easiest soldiers in the world to feed when they understand that it is part of the game.'<sup>62</sup> Bir Singh, writing from hospital in England, whose regiment had been told, presumably in France, that *atta*, (flour) was not available, simply declared that, 'where there are inhabitants, there *atta* must be obtainable. Besides there are plenty of mills.' His regiment got their flat bread and did not have to eat British ration biscuits.<sup>63</sup> This complaint provides an insight into how little the Indian men knew of the world outside their villages: it did not occur to him that there were different types of flour; he simply thought that where there were mills to grind flour and people to eat bread, that it must be *atta*. Willcocks said that, 'Indian officers and men have said to me over and over again, "The British Government is wonderful; here in the midst of the Mahabharata (great war) they even label our meat. Truly the Badshah (King) is a Rustan and a Hatim (a hero and a just man).'<sup>64</sup> While the British motivation in their attempts to preserve the special religious requirements of the

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<sup>60</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 47

<sup>61</sup> 'Pictures of Camp Life', *The Times*, 16 November 1914, 7

<sup>62</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 98

<sup>63</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/84, letter dated 17 July 1915

<sup>64</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 98

Indian soldiers may have been as much a reflection of their pragmatism as of any genuine religious respect, the effect was the same.

It is unarguable that the medical care for the Indian Army was a high point in the relationship between the British high command and the Indian troops. The Indian Corps organised itself well from the moment it landed in France and this extended to medical provision for both wounded and sick troops. In November 1914, the conditions at Rouen for Indian convalescents were 'strikingly better' than the British provision and 'all the tents had bottom boards, trestle-beds and braziers,' while the British facility was overcrowded and men had to sleep on the floor.<sup>65</sup>

The quality of care, from stretcher-bearer to convalescence, was of an extremely high standard and was a source of great pride to both the British military authorities and the Indian troops. Treatments were often pioneering, such as the use of X-rays to locate embedded shrapnel.<sup>66</sup> The *British Medical Journal* followed events closely and provided information about treatments including an analysis of the seven stages of treatment from the first field dressing to general hospital in England entitled *The Way Home of the Wounded Man*. The process was a long and arduous one, from the first field dressing to the regimental aid post in the front line, by field ambulance to a dressing station behind the lines, then to a clearing hospital for further treatment and assessment, then by train to a base hospital on the coast and a hospital ship to England and finally a train journey to their final hospital.<sup>67</sup> Given this, it is hardly surprising that the death toll in the hospitals was low, because the most severely wounded did not survive the perilous journey from trench to England.<sup>68</sup> While this applied to all the men on the Western Front, it was the specialist provision for Indian soldiers to which considerable resources were assigned. In England, the principal hospitals were in Brighton and Brockenhurst, with various smaller convalescent facilities nearby such as Barton on Sea on Hampshire. Once again, enormous care was taken to ensure religious requirements were met, such as in the Pavilion hospital in Brighton which was converted in just fourteen days to provide 724

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<sup>65</sup> Public Record Office (henceforth PRO), WO159/16, letter Arthur Lee MP to Kitchener, 28 November 1914

<sup>66</sup> Janet Gooch, *A History of Brighton General Hospital* (London: Phillimore, 1980), 109

<sup>67</sup> 'The Way Home of the Wounded Man' *British Medical Journal*, 14 November 1914, 850

<sup>68</sup> Joyce Collins, *Dr Brighton's Indian Patients: December 1914 – January 1916* (Brighton: Brighton Books, 1997), 21



beds across the site by December 1914.<sup>69</sup> Merewether quoted the Victoria Cross holder, Subadar Mir Dast, who told the *Times of India* that, 'Even in hospital our religious feelings are strictly guarded, and we have full liberty and every facility in respect of observing the prayer times etc. In respect of this, so far as the Pavilion Hospital is concerned, we are thankful.'<sup>70</sup>

The care and respect extended to funeral arrangements. Although open-air cremation had been illegal in England since the 1902 Cremation Act, the government chose to turn a blind eye and a pyre was built on the Downs outside Brighton and the deceased's ashes were scattered at sea.<sup>71</sup> Muslim dead were buried at the cemetery of the Shah Jehan mosque in Woking. A Hindu medical student in Edinburgh who had joined the RAMC and volunteered for special duties with the Indian wounded in the Indian Medical Service, D. R. Thapar, was the quartermaster who escorted a number of bodies to Woking. He described a cortege of hearse, car and 'a couple of lorries to carry 40 or 50 mourners.'<sup>72</sup>

It was in part a result of their medical care that despite early concerns, the soldiers sickened little. This was a source of pride for Merewether, who claimed a 4% sickness rate for the Indian troops against an 11% rate among the British in the Indian Army. He gave various reasons for this: the wellbeing of British soldiers of the Indian Corps had been drained by their long stay in India; the positive effects of the 'extra comforts' provided by the Indian Soldiers' Fund; and the Indians' 'sound working knowledge of the important questions of sanitation and conservancy.'<sup>73</sup> In other words, those men who had been brought up in the hot Indian climate were accustomed to taking more care with their hygiene, further acknowledgement of the competence and self-sufficiency of the Indian soldiers in the eyes of their British senior officers.

The mental health of the Indian soldiers also held up well. Mason wrote that the censors' reports showed that the men in the English hospitals were no more depressed than can be accounted for by being wounded and far from home.<sup>74</sup> Colonel Seton, who was in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>70</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 498

<sup>71</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 358

<sup>72</sup> D. R. Thapar, *The Morale Builders* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 8

<sup>73</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 106

<sup>74</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 423

charge of the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton, broke down the diagnoses of those admitted for psychiatric problems, listing 14 men as suffering from mania, 4 of whom were melancholic, 2 hysterics, 1 idiot, 1 sufferer from Chronic Delusional Insanity, 2 with dementia and 2 undiagnosed cases among the 24 soldiers sent to the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton.<sup>75</sup> The Kitchener was the only Indian hospital dealing with psychiatric cases, so the number is almost certainly representative of the wounded in England.<sup>76</sup> Coroners' records of the period reveal one suicide among the Indian wounded. Lackman Rai, who was admitted to the York Place Hospital with 'tuberculous glands' on 1 October 1915, cut his throat on 23 October. The Coroner, presumably cautious of raising the issue of the mental health of the men, stated that, 'as to what was his state of mind when he committed the act there is no evidence to show.'<sup>77</sup>

A final insight into British military opinion about Indian soldiers comes from a 1918 military manual: *Our Indian Empire: A short review and some hints for the use of soldiers proceeding to India*. This offers a view of what the British Army considered to be the most significant information for officers and men departing for India. Much was made of how to address the men with whom they would come into contact. Advice was given as to how to address an Indian soldier: 'Do not use any fancy terms of your own. We have heard an Englishman shout out "Hi, you cooly" to a passing sepoy, who naturally felt considerably hurt at the insult.'<sup>78</sup> When advising against using an even more offensive term of address, the guide continued, 'After all, when one thinks over it, it is rather insulting and most of us in his shoes would get our backs up too.'<sup>79</sup> It was also considered to be important to learn the appropriate local Indian language, or if not at least 'don't lose your temper with a man because he cannot understand what you are talking about.'<sup>80</sup> The book also emphasised that it was unacceptable to beat Indians, not necessarily because it was wrong per se but because they may be seriously hurt and the case would end up in court if the victim did not accept money or the imposition of a military punishment. The authorities would not support an errant British soldier who

<sup>75</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/82, Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton

<sup>76</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 178

<sup>77</sup> East Sussex Records Office, COR/3/2/1915/192 23.10.1915, Coroner's Report, February 1915

<sup>78</sup> *Our Indian Empire: A short review and some hints for the use of soldiers proceeding to India* (Superintendent Government Printing India: Calcutta, 1918), 30

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

assaulted an Indian, at least not in court: 'though you may have only meant to administer a mild hiding, there can be no doubt that you are responsible for the damage done and you will have to suffer in consequence.'<sup>81</sup>

A particularly curious aspect of the book was its attempt to convey an impression of how Indian people viewed British people. On managing their financial affairs, the book claimed that 'to most Indians we have little individuality; we are all the *gara-log*, the pale faces.'<sup>82</sup> Not only that but 'most natives of this country think we are very rich folk and all know that we throw our money about rather recklessly ...many people who have seen very little of us think we are most unreasonable people, who will demand all sorts of impossible things and lose our tempers if we do not get them.' However, it was not all bad news for the new arrival: 'many years of experience have taught the natives that we, as a race, are just and honest. They hold our word as good as our bond, and they know that we always try to play the game fairly. They admire British pluck and coolness in danger.'<sup>83</sup>

While the advice appears sensible by the standards of the day, in terms of encouraging newly arrived British soldiers to treat Indian people considerately, to try to learn their language and not to swear at or assault them; the 'Necessary Phrases' section at the back of the book suggests a less enlightened approach. The first phrases on the list of Hindustani translations were 'come here', 'come quickly', 'go away' and 'who are you'. Although the Guide was written after the Indian soldiers had left France, it did not acknowledge their experience either in terms of their military achievements or to build on the sense of camaraderie noted in some of the interactions between Indian and British soldiers. The tone of the guide did not suggest that the British men were to be in charge of experienced and battle hardened soldiers, despite their widely acclaimed contribution to the war.

## CONCLUSION

In large measure, the structure and attitudes of the Indian Army had been formed by the Rebellion of 1857 which had not only forced the British authorities to question the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 85

loyalty of the men but compelled them to account for the men's religious commitments as well as restructuring the army on a much more local basis, which reinforced the sense of loyalty among the men who did not rebel which continued into the war years. British use of the Martial Race Theory had brought together men with a strong sense of identity and commitment to the Army who had gained experience in numerous local engagements and, in a similar manner to the British 'Pals' battalions, felt a strong sense of loyalty to the men around them as well as the Indian Army and Britain.

Attention to the men's religious requirements had continued in France as it had done in India and was acknowledged and appreciated by the men. Willcocks' comment about how easy Indian soldiers are 'to feed when they understand that it is part of the game' illustrates a level of cooperation between the men and their leaders.<sup>84</sup> This respect and sense of parity between the Indian Corps and British soldiers recurs throughout the narrative, from the words of the King, through French's comments, to the relations between British and Indian other ranks and reflects the developing relationship between British and Indian soldiers as well as more senior staff officers.

Willcocks summed up the Indian military contribution thus, 'it was their good fortune to arrive just at the moment when they were most needed; just when our troops were using their very last reserves and fighting against terrible odds ... and even if they had never done another day's fighting their advent would have more than justified their having been sent, for they helped in some degree to save the Army in the hour of its great trial.'<sup>85</sup> Morton-Jack took up the point, quoting General Keary, Commander of the Lahore Division, writing that the Indian Corps was 'kicked out of France ... a squeezed orange sucked dry and chucked away.'<sup>86</sup> Whether or not their intervention saved the BEF remains a matter for debate but it is clear that they served successfully in France and, as Keary claimed, at a dreadfully high cost to the Corps, as summarised by Merewether:

about twenty-four thousand men formed the two divisions that landed at Marseilles. In less than a year more than thirty thousand drafts were sent from India to replace casualties. In other words, *in about eight months six thousand more*

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<sup>84</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 98

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>86</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 350

*troops were dispatched for the single purpose of replacing the killed, the wounded and the sick than the force contained when it landed. And the Corps, the original personnel of which had been so completely wiped out, was afterwards sent to Mesopotamia, where it added, if possible, to its glory, and made further and bitter sacrifices in health and life.*<sup>87</sup>

The official narrative in the speeches of the King and despatches of Sir John French gave an overwhelmingly positive view of the Indian Corps' contribution in France. While this is to some extent predictable, as any public comment was unlikely to have criticised any aspect of the war effort, it should not be forgotten that the initial response to the idea of Indian troops serving in Europe was to consider it to be a 'hazardous experiment'.<sup>88</sup> In French's despatch of 22 November 1915 to mark the departure of the Indian Corps from France, he stated:

I wish to send a message of thanks to all officers, non-commissioned officers and men for the work you have done for the Empire. From the time you reached France you were constantly engaged with the enemy until the end of last year. After a few weeks' rest you returned to the trenches, and since then you have continually held some portion of the front line ... The Indian Corps have also shown most praiseworthy courage under novel and trying conditions, both of climate and of fighting, and have not only upheld, but added to, the good name of the Army which they represent.<sup>89</sup>

The chapter has reflected on the relationships which formed between the soldiers of Britain and India on an individual level. These accounts show that British soldiers were accepting and respectful of their new Indian colleagues and when working together seemed to hold them in high regard. Given this, it is interesting to note accounts which praise the soldiers they have themselves met but criticise the performance of men of whom they have heard from other British soldiers. This key distinction has also been seen in the reaction of the British civilian population to the Indian soldiers. Just as with the population in Britain, it was men, regardless of rank, who had encountered Indians and formed relationships, however perfunctory, who were their strongest advocates. Despite the misgivings of senior military figures before the Indians arrived in France, the chapter has shown that the Indian soldiers were eventually lauded not just by those

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<sup>87</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps in France*, 479 (Author's emphasis)

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 469

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 461

senior officers who knew them, such as Willcocks and Merewether but also by senior staff figures such as Sir John French and General Haig.

## Chapter Four

### **'Those who take up the pen to criticise': British Military assumptions about tactical problems in the Indian Corps<sup>1</sup>**

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the prejudicial views of the British military establishment in the period leading up to the Indian Corps' deployment in France were comparable with the stereotypical depictions of Indian people which were prevalent in Britain before the war. This chapter will consider how the British military made a number of assumptions about the potential pitfalls of deploying Indian soldiers in Europe before their arrival in France. It will examine each of these in turn and consider how these assumptions developed over time and how the attitudes of the British military changed as these assumptions proved to be unfounded. The assertions will be compiled from both contemporary sources and later commentators and set against British accounts and the letters home by Indian soldiers. Later twentieth century commentary will be of especial significance as the assertions will be largely found not to be proven and the reasons why the various assertions that the Indian experience in France was a negative one are discussed.

The majority of the later twentieth century commentators on the Indian Corps' time in France presented a negative perspective. Jeffrey Greenhut, for example, gave four reasons why he considered that the Indian Army failed: 1. the battalions became dispersed as the war went on, 2. there were problems getting reinforcements, 3. replacement British officers struggled to get to know and work with their Indian troops, 4. the state of the troops 'deteriorated' during their time in France.<sup>2</sup> In David Omissi's opinion the major issues facing the soldiers were that the Indian troops were inadequate soldiers and that their morale was very low.<sup>3</sup> Gordon Corrigan concluded that that the weather and the troops' morale explained their poor performance,<sup>4</sup> and in Charles Chevenix Trench's opinion, the Indian Army on the Western Front faced three principal difficulties: the climate, the loss of the British officers and the problem of

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<sup>1</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Co, 1920), 24

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12, no. 1, 1983, 68

<sup>3</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 238

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches – The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 1999), xi

reinforcements.<sup>5</sup> All these concerns were used by their authors to explain the Indian soldiers' departure from France in December 1915. On the same theme, Rob Johnson asserted that they were withdrawn from France because of unsustainable losses, particularly of officers<sup>6</sup> and Hyson and Lester ascribed their redeployment to poor morale, concerns regarding the upcoming winter weather and, in part, the sexual anxieties related to wounded Indian soldiers' continued presence in Brighton.<sup>7</sup> George Morton-Jack, in his 2006 article for *War in History* offered a revisionist perspective as he sought to reposition the Indian Army against accusations of failure. He found four slightly different areas of concern: 1. the weather; 2. the morale of the troops, 3. that the Indian troops were simply inadequate soldiers, 4. the British generals did not treat the Indian Army fairly.<sup>8</sup> He found that, although the Indian Corps inevitably faced problems in France, these in no way diminished its overall effectiveness.

It is difficult to trace the origin of these concerns. Some clearly derive from tactical difficulties in the field, such as the dispersal of the battalions and the difficulty regarding reinforcements. Some were of British strategic making: the lack of available officers would not have occurred to the same extent had Indians been appointed to officer rank but the British policy of using the Martial Race Theory as a recruitment tool disallowed this. However, claims that the men could not cope with the climate, that their morale was low and that they were 'inadequate' and that their condition 'deteriorated' do not appear in any contemporary accounts.

As with the earlier discussion regarding how Indian people were represented in Britain before the war, these assumptions can be considered in the context of Social Darwinism. Despite their extensive previous fighting experience, which was often far greater than that of their British counterparts, assumptions were made about the Indian soldiers which were not made about British soldiers, for example, that they would be unable to

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Chevenix Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies 1900-1947* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 43

<sup>6</sup> Rob Johnson, "I shall die Arms in Hand, Wearing the Warriors' Clothes": Mobilisation and Initial Operations of the Indian Army in France and Flanders', *British Journal for Military History*, 2, no 2, February 2016, 107-119;

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Hyson & Alan Lester, "'British India on Trial': British Military Hospitals and the politics of empire in World War I", *Journal of Historical Geography*, no 38 (2012), 18-34

<sup>8</sup> George Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', *War in History*, 13, (2006), 329



fight effectively in the absence of officers to lead them and that their discipline would falter under pressure. This can be related to the hierarchical assumptions of the Social Darwinist school that British people, and thus its soldiers, were naturally and culturally superior to their Indian counterparts.

The two principal contemporary sources, General Willcocks, Commander of the Indian Corps in France, and Lt-Colonel Merewether, the Corps' Record Officer, both senior officers in the Indian Army during its time in France, differed from later historians on the subject. Willcocks concluded his 1920 memoir of the First World War by claiming that the British officer was irreplaceable in the Indian Army, although he also bemoaned the lack of suitable reinforcements.<sup>9</sup> Merewether also stressed the importance of British officers and the problems of replacing them as they were killed or wounded.<sup>10</sup> Both, however, considered that the Indian Corps' time in France was a success. It will be shown that the criticisms of later historians were not supported by contemporaries of the Indian soldiers such as Willcocks and Merewether. The chapter will make it apparent that among contemporary sources, those who knew the Indian soldiers, such as Willcocks and Merewether, showed much less concern about their deployment than commentators who did not have a relationship with the Indian Corps. The chapter will account for this difference by showing that these fears proved unfounded and that in all likelihood, they were not considered significant by the Indian Corps' senior officers because of their prior knowledge of the Indian soldiers and their capabilities.

This chapter will consider how the loss of British officers was expected to affect both the morale and military effectiveness of the Indian troops and the effects of the climate in France, particularly the severe winter of 1914-1915. It will also analyse rates of courts martial, self-inflicted wounds and malingering to assess their morale in general and the risk of sedition among the Indian troops, a particular concern for the British. Finally, it will discuss a tactical problem not anticipated by the British but considered by the Indian soldiers to be the most important of all: the practice of returning men who had recovered from their wounds to France.

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<sup>9</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 344, 184

<sup>10</sup> J. W. B. Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France* (London: Murray, 1918), 473

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BRITISH OFFICERS TO THE INDIAN SOLDIERS

A key assumption made by later historians was that the Indian soldiers could not cope without their British officer and this section will examine the view of contemporaries on the subject. General Willcocks concluded his memoir of life with the Indian Army by saying, 'no argument decked in rhetoric will alter the fact, that you can NEVER replace the British officer in the Indian Army.'<sup>11</sup> This attitude, which prevailed for many years until the end of the war, was to cause substantial problems for the Indian Corps in France. Greenhut asserted that it had simply not occurred to the British that officers would be lost in large numbers and so did not have contingency plans for this eventuality.<sup>12</sup> Given that the Indian Army had hitherto fought 'small wars' with far lower casualty rates than on the Western Front and that there had never been an expectation that it would fight in a major war, this is perhaps not unreasonable. However, the issue became a central topic of discussions about the Indian Army's performance in France for the next hundred years.

The British officer in the Indian Army was in a unique position. Alexander Watson, in his consideration of morale in the First World War, considered leadership to be a vital component of high morale. Watson quoted the contemporary psychologist Charles Bird, 'the leaders determine the morale of the troops who instinctively are imitators and who regard their officers as symbols of duty, discipline and the nation. At times, the loss of an officer may terrorise a company and cause disaster to a regiment.'<sup>13</sup> Roly Grimshaw, a Cavalry Officer in the Indian Army, understood this well; when a fellow officer was wounded and another refused to leave him and his men in danger, 'personally I was not sorry as I felt that with De Pass gone, even a partially alive 'Sahib' was an encouragement to the men and any moment one of us might be knocked out. I know the men were greatly encouraged when I told them that Alderson was all right and would stay till the finish.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 344

<sup>12</sup> 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, no. 1 (1984), 15-17

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 108

<sup>14</sup> Roly Grimshaw, eds Wakefield & Weippert, *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-1915* (Kent: Costello, 1986), 46

All the officers of the Indian Army were British and between them and the other ranks stood a unique group of Viceroy Commissioned Officers (VCO). VCOs were Indian troops who had risen through the ranks and filled a similar role to a NCO in the British army. Jeffrey Greenhut explained why British officers chose to join the Indian Army over the British Army: the pay was better, promotion more likely, responsibility came quicker and the cost of living and mess charges in India were much lower than in Britain. In 1913, every one of the top 10 Sandhurst graduates requested Indian military service, a sign of the prestige it held.<sup>15</sup> Joining the Indian Army was not an easy option: in addition to officer training at Sandhurst, Indian Army officers were required to pass exams in Hindustani and any other language prevalent in their particular regiment as well as learn its religious and cultural norms.<sup>16</sup>

A combination of the isolated life of a military officer and the insular nature of regimental life in Indian cantonments meant that the relationship between a British officer and his Indian men was unusually strong. Nevertheless, according to Greenhut, the relationship had an added dimension in the Indian Army, 'A British officer might love, even admire, his men, but he never forgot, nor was he allowed to forget by the tight circle of the mess, that he was innately better than his men.'<sup>17</sup> Morton-Jack agreed that this was certainly true of the officers of the British Army, who often held highly racist views against Indian soldiers but that this was not necessarily the case for British officers of the Indian Army. He cited General Willcocks as an example of an officer who knew his men well and respected them and their customs.<sup>18</sup> Accounts by British officers seem to belie the stance that they saw themselves as 'innately superior' to their men. Lieutenant-General Eric Goddard, who served with the Indian Expeditionary Force during the First World War, although not in France, remembered, 'one of the great differences between the British and Indian soldier ... was that the latter welcomed close contact with his officers off duty ... there developed between officers and men in peace that mutual confidence that is the foundation of good discipline in war ... none of them felt, or indeed were unequal.'<sup>19</sup> Two accounts from Charles Allen's collection of memoirs of the

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<sup>15</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, 15

<sup>16</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 9

<sup>17</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, 15

<sup>18</sup> George 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), 35

<sup>19</sup> Eric Goddard, 'The Indian Army – Company and Raj,' *Asian Affairs* 7, no. 3, (2007), 265

Raj seemed to confirm this. General Auchinleck recorded that 'there was no question of ordering them about'<sup>20</sup> and Brigadier Dillon described the relationship thus, 'you knew all about him, where he came from, what his family [trade] was. You probably visited his village and knew his parents.'<sup>21</sup> While British officers in the main certainly did have relationships with their men which were closer than those between officers and men of the British Army, neither did they lose sight of their superior rank, both in the military sense and in the sense that as Britons they were the rulers of India. This presented the officer with a difficult balance to strike: his daily work, especially when at war, demanded that he treat the Indian soldiers as being as competent in their roles as he was in his, yet as soon as he was among his peers, he must often reverse this opinion in order to maintain those equally important bonds.

The complexity of the relationships between the officers and men was illustrated by Captain Roly Grimshaw in his diary as he defended an Indian soldier against a fellow British officer. 'I nearly had a row with the R.A.M.C. major in charge as he wanted to turn my Indian officers out of a first class carriage for his warrant officers. Typical of the attitude towards Indians.'<sup>22</sup> Just weeks later, Grimshaw, at great risk to himself, tried to save one of his men and when he died, 'I had him carefully put to one side where he would not be flung about or trodden on, till I had time to bury him. I moved him myself.'<sup>23</sup> Yet, despite his willingness to challenge a more senior officer over his treatment of Indian men and the care he took over the body of one of his men, he disagreed with a fellow officer's decision to send a British officer to collect a wounded Indian soldier, 'A British officer is worth more than a wounded Sepoy.'<sup>24</sup> While Grimshaw went on to state that this was a simple matter of tactical priorities, the language he used remains dependent not just on the distinction of rank but their respective races.

In France, British officers of the Indian Army were being lost at an alarming rate. Given that the complement of officers per battalion was only twelve, including the medical officer, when they arrived in France, it was not long before the situation became critical.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj* (London: Andre Deutsch-Penguin, 1975), 239

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 240

<sup>22</sup> Grimshaw, *Indian Cavalry Officer*, 21

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

In fact, Merewether reported that German snipers were deliberately targeting British officers, which further depleted their numbers. The officers took to dressing in similar kit to the men to attempt to reduce casualties, which proved effective.<sup>26</sup> Major Alexander, of the Indian Mule Corps, referred to this in his memoir, 'the chances of the British officer of the Indian Infantry are not great: there are only fourteen to each battalion, and they cannot help being conspicuous, although their uniform is exactly the same as the men.'<sup>27</sup> It is not known whether the German policy in this case was one of killing officers in general, which was an established tactic, or whether they also perceived that these officers had particular worth. Mason made a direct link between the loss of the officers and the bravery of their men, 'in some battalions none survived with the regiment ... in others only one or two were left ... yet the men fought like heroes.'<sup>28</sup>

Unlike later historians, contemporaries such as Willcocks, writing in 1920 about the loss of officers, did not link this to criticism of the Indian troops' performance, claiming only that 'those who take up the pen to criticise should first put themselves in the place of these men, who had crossed the seas to fight for England, without any personal cause in the quarrel, and inspired alone by the duty they owed their King-Emperor because they had eaten his salt,' by which he meant that they had benefited from serving in the Army by earning a salary.<sup>29</sup> Merewether's 1918 account similarly mentioned the loss of British officers, calling it 'the one calamity ... which could in any degree shake the morale of the Indian soldier, was the loss of his beloved British officers.'<sup>30</sup> However, he did not go on to criticise the troops or relate this to their performance but sympathised with the loss of their final link to home and familiarity.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the loss of so many British officers must have been traumatic for Indian men already in an unfamiliar situation and with so few familiar points of reference. Major Alexander described the effect of the death of his officer upon one of the men, 'one Sepoy told how he had seen poor Mango Browne charging at the head of his men with his broken arm dangling in its sleeve. When a comrade told him that this

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<sup>26</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 89

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, Major Heber Maitland, *On Two Fronts – Being the Adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France and Gallipoli* (Delhi, Heinemann, 1917), Kindle edition, loc 533

<sup>28</sup> Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army and its Officers and Men* (London, Cape, 1974), 413

<sup>29</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 24-25

<sup>30</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 110

officer had afterwards been killed, the Sepoy burst into tears.'<sup>31</sup> Replacement officers, however competent, could not have the shared history, experiences, values and language that the British officers had laboriously acquired and, given this, it seems likely that trust and communication deteriorated. Given the lack of suitably trained British officers to replace the lost men, there was very little that could be done to improve the situation. To promote Indian soldiers was considered to be out of the question, with a very few exceptions. This solution had been precluded by the British high command long before the war even started. By making the Martial Race Theory the centrepiece of their recruitment strategy, the British had effectively excluded any Indians who may have been potential officers from joining the army as those who fitted the martial characteristics required were almost all uneducated and thus considered unsuitable for officer training. Greenhut concluded that the racist assumptions about Indian troops being unable to fight without British officers were a smokescreen for the incompetent construction of the Indian Army,<sup>32</sup> and further illustrated the bias towards recruiting poorly educated men for their martial qualities and the consequences of this, 'Indians who were intelligent and educated were defined as cowards, while those defined as brave were uneducated and backward. Therefore, only British gentlemen combined both the intelligence and courage necessary for a man to become an officer.'<sup>33</sup> The opportunities missed by this assumption in the years before the war can be argued separately, but once the war began and British officers began to perish, the disadvantage became clear: there were no Indian men in a position to step up and lead.

Given that the replacement officers were unfamiliar with their men and that this was a more significant problem in the Indian than British army, it seems plausible that the men's performance could have diminished. However, the argument that this loss rendered the Indians incompetent or even cowardly, as Greenhut suggested, does not occur in contemporary accounts.<sup>34</sup> The effect, assuming that there was an effect at all, could equally have come from communication difficulties between the new officers and their men, the new officers' general unfamiliarity with their surroundings and lack of experience. Despite its many problems, the Indian Corps fought bravely and effectively

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, loc 1304

<sup>32</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, 18

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

for many months after the officer losses started to mount. It is also worth noting that there are very few references to their officers in the soldiers' letters: of the 600 letters studied for this thesis, fewer than a dozen directly mention British officers. Nevertheless, whatever the quality of the relationships between the British officers and their Indian men, the assumption that they could not fight without a British officer present became widespread during the latter half of the twentieth century. Greenhut quoted General Charteris, Sir Douglas Haig's Chief of Intelligence, writing in November 1914 of the Indians, 'They were splendid in the trenches as long as their officers were there but afterwards did not know what to do.'<sup>35</sup> Morton-Jack claimed that the attitude dated from the Peel Commission of 1859, which concluded that 'deprived of their European officers, native troops are a mere armed rabble.'<sup>36</sup> Omissi also used the same quotation, adding Lord Roberts' view that, 'British leaders are essential to the success of Native soldiery.'<sup>37</sup> However, these quotations derive from men who were not familiar with the Indian soldiers and certainly were not in contact with them during their time in France.

There is some evidence in the official records of the war to suggest that the men were well able to cope without officers in the heat of battle. Jemadar Mir Dast's Victoria Cross citation read, 'he led his platoon with great gallantry during the attack, and afterwards collected various parties of the regiment (when no British Officers were left) and kept them under his command until the retirement was ordered.'<sup>38</sup> On 25 September 1915, Rifleman Kulbir Thapa made three trips into no-man's land to rescue four men, despite his own injuries and with no officer present.<sup>39</sup> Merewether told of Sepoy Ghulam Hussein who won his Indian Distinguished Service Medal when, after his senior officer had been gassed, 'collected a number of men and set them to work at a trench to form a rallying point' after he had rescued his officer.<sup>40</sup> While these are acts of extreme bravery and as such exceptional, they do give formal acknowledgment to the Indian soldiers as competent men who were able to adapt to a fast moving situation without

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>36</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front 1914-1915*, 2006, 352

<sup>37</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 103

<sup>38</sup> *London Gazette*, no. 29210, 6269, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29210/page/6269>, accessed 16.8.2016

<sup>39</sup> *London Gazette* no. 29371, 11450, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/29371/supplement/11450>, accessed 16.8.2016

<sup>40</sup> Merewether, *With the Indians*, 306

the guidance of a British officer. This would be entirely consistent with the style of fighting they had been used to in India, which involved small units fighting independently.

There are two arguments at work regarding the Indian soldiers' perceived inability to fight without officers, firstly that British officers were held in high esteem by their men and their influence was irreplaceable, and secondly that the loss of those officers rendered the Indian troops worthless. While it is certain that the Indian soldiers held their British officers in high regard, the assertion that their loss rendered the men incompetent is not obvious. Later commentators such as Greenhut are certain that the allegation of incompetence without British leadership is a given, 'as the months progressed, the view that Indians could not fight without British officers was buttressed by events,' 'without British officers ... the fighting capabilities of Indian battalions deteriorated seriously and rapidly.'<sup>41</sup> This section has shown that this is not consistent with the attitudes of contemporary commentators such as Willcocks and Merewether, who had worked alongside the Indian soldiers and who considered that they were capable of not just fighting on without their officers but in taking the initiative and in doing so showing not just their independence but also their ability to lead as official accounts such as the medal citations demonstrate.

Despite this, in no way did contemporary officers view the Indian soldiers as equals. This is borne out in the paternalistic manner in which the British officers viewed the men. In paying tribute to the officers of the Indian Corps, Merewether reinforced this message,

the degree of dependence upon the officer is on the whole greater ... and side by side with that dependence, there has grown up on the part of the British officer, however young he may be, the habit and frame of mind of a father, and sometimes, when the occasion requires it, even more the habit and frame of mind of a mother.<sup>42</sup>

Earlier chapters have discussed the prevailing view of British people of Indians as subordinate and childlike and this seems to be played out in the military attitude to the men as well. From this, it seems reasonable to argue that the significance of the loss of British officers lies not in the perceived exposure of the Indian soldiers' cowardice and

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<sup>41</sup> Greenhut, *Sahib and Sepoy*, 16-17

<sup>42</sup> Merewether, *With the Indians*, 481



incompetence but to a lack of the camaraderie and support they felt as the officers they had spent time with and known, who knew them as people with cultural and personal histories and who spoke their language disappeared. Mason acknowledged the complexity of requirements for replacement officers, 'it would have to find officers who spoke Pashtu or Punjabi or Marathi as well as Hindustani, who understood the peculiar traditions of regiments of the most diverse origins.'<sup>43</sup>

This section has shown that among contemporary commentators, particularly those who were familiar with the Indian soldiers, the view that they were unable to fight without their British officers was not held. The opinion developed among later historians and appears to be based at least in part on concerns about the Indian army which were prevalent among those who knew the soldiers least before their participation in the war.

#### THE FRENCH CLIMATE

The question of the climate of northern France and how suited the Indian troops were to it was another issue which has drawn attention from commentators on the war. Of the later commentators, Morton-Jack, Trench and Corrigan all considered it to have been a major problem for the troops.<sup>44</sup> The climate of the Punjab, where the majority of the Indian soldiers came from, is milder and drier than that of northern France and the long weeks of rain and temperatures several degrees below zero were particularly severe during the winter of 1914- 1915 and certainly lower than the men would have been used to but it was the persistent rain which caused the most annoyance. Writer Alan Clarke said of the weather during the winter of 1914 that, 'from the 25<sup>th</sup> October until the 25<sup>th</sup> March there were only eighteen dry days, and on eleven of these the temperature was below freezing.'<sup>45</sup> Contemporaries such as Arthur Conan Doyle, the novelist, set out the problem as he and many others saw it, 'our Indian troops were nonetheless the children of the sun, dependent on warmth for their vitality and numbed by the cold wet life of the trenches.'<sup>46</sup> This suggests that he associated the soldiers with the hotter southern parts of India, rather than the more temperate north where the

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<sup>43</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 341

<sup>44</sup> George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front, 2006*, 329; Charles Chevenix Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies 1900-1947* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988); Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, xi

<sup>45</sup> Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Pimlico, 1961), 39

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders, 1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 329-333

vast majority lived. This section will show that, despite these concerns, the weather troubled the Indian soldiers relatively little, as is reflected in comments by Indian soldiers and those who worked alongside them.

It was certainly the case that the rain, in particular, was a shock to some of the Indian troops. Havildar Ganda Singh compared the French winter with that of Kashmir in the far northwest of India, 'the water was up to the waist in January and February, with cold like that of Kashmir and rain constantly falling.'<sup>47</sup> The combination of the constant rain and the high water table in the area occupied by the Indian troops at this time meant that the trenches were more often than not waterlogged and the men had their feet in cold water for most of the day. An Afridi soldier wrote, 'It rains every day. So far I have not seen the sun. There is deep water in the trenches and the men all stand in the water'.<sup>48</sup>

However, in the main, the soldiers' letters were relatively quiet on the subject of the weather. While there are some complaints, they tend to mention it in passing. A couple mentioned the famous mud and a Muslim from southern India, who was presumably much less familiar with the cold, complained that 'the cold is so great that it cannot be described. Snow falls day and night and covers the ground to a depth of two feet.'<sup>49</sup> Roly Grimshaw mentioned in his diary on 6 November 1914 the 'damp, moist, poisonous weather.' Two weeks later, on 21 November, he reports 'twenty degrees of frost'.<sup>50</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1915, Sir John French reported that 'the operations of the Army under my command have been subject almost entirely to the limitations of weather.'<sup>51</sup>

Willcocks, who was born in India and spent his entire military career with the Indian Army, was not especially concerned about the weather.<sup>52</sup> In his memoir he discussed the weather in November 1914, 'All ranks felt the bitter cold ... but taken all round the

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives (henceforth TNA), MSS EUR F143/83, letter dated 19 April 1915

<sup>48</sup> British Library (henceforth BL), IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 1 March 1915

<sup>49</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 14 January 1915, TNA MSS EUR F143/83, letter dated 19 May 1915; BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 9 February 1915

<sup>50</sup> Grimshaw, *Indian Cavalry Officer*, 33, 37

<sup>51</sup> Sir John French, Sixth Dispatch, [www.1914-1918.net/french\\_sixth\\_despatch.html](http://www.1914-1918.net/french_sixth_despatch.html), accessed 27 December 2011

<sup>52</sup> F. E. Whitton, "Willcocks, Sir James (1857–1926)," rev. James Lunt, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine, October 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36909> (accessed August 17, 2016).

Indian troops stood it far better than I had ever believed possible.'<sup>53</sup> He went on that part of that resilience might be to do with the provision of winter kit and braziers.<sup>54</sup> However, this was not well understood in London and 'people in England believed that the Indians could not stand the severe climate.'<sup>55</sup> It seems that the issue lay not so much with the Indian soldiers as with the assumptions made by those who had not encountered them, although this was a particularly harsh season even by northern European standards. Those who were most connected with the Indian soldiers such as Willcocks were far less concerned with their reaction to the weather. Merewether also discussed the weather and felt that the 'evil effects of the unaccustomed climate of Northern France in winter' were nullified by the food, medical supplies and clothing provided by the Indian Soldiers' Fund.<sup>56</sup>

### DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS AMONG THE INDIAN TROOPS

This chapter so far has illustrated the difference between later historical criticisms of the Indian Corps and contemporary opinion. Senior staff officers did have concerns about their deployment in France and one of these was how discipline among the men would hold up. This section will examine the Indian Corps' disciplinary record in France to show that, despite these concerns, their record was not dissimilar to that of the British troops. Courts martial, rates of self-inflicted wounds and accusations of malingering will be used to illustrate the point that the Indian soldiers acquitted themselves in a very similar manner to their British peers in the field. The Indian Army was subject to an adapted version of British military law and historically there tended to be few disciplinary problems among the troops. The 1911 Manual of Indian Military Law provided for the public flogging of soldiers instead of the death penalty but as corporal punishment was not permitted in the British Army, Willcocks ordered it to be used only sparingly and in private.<sup>57</sup>

George Morton-Jack calculated that between October 1914 and February 1915, arguably the most challenging time for the Indian Army, courts martial convicted just 0.3% of Indian troops against a British rate of 2.7%. In March 1915, the statistics were 0.3% of

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<sup>53</sup> Willcocks, *With the Indians in France*, 115

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 117

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 194

<sup>56</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, 107

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

Indian troops against 0.5% of British and in September of that year, 0.08% of Indian troops were convicted at a court martial and 0.3 % of British soldiers.<sup>58</sup> This seems to show that all troops, British and Indian, took some time to adapt to trench life and implies that there was no major crisis of discipline among the Indian soldiers, nor by comparison with their British counterparts. This is reflected in those letters from Indian soldiers which refer to courts martial, most of which simply mention courts martial as news but Gokul Singh Rawat takes a highly critical stance: 'as for the men who have in cowardly fashion returned to India, they are no doubt safely in Rupiman slapping their chests and saying "we are the real Chattris" [warriors] ... this is not a marketplace for cattle and goats as Rupiman is.'<sup>59</sup> Certainly, courts martial rates indicate that indiscipline was not a major problem among the Indian Corps.

Desertion was a marginal issue for the Indian Corps, if only for geographical reasons as India was almost impossible for the men to reach from France. Different accounts give different numbers of deserters but all agree that the largest number were Pathans from what is now the Afghanistan/Pakistan border which was beyond the reach of the Raj so they were unlikely to face any disciplinary action when they arrived home.<sup>60</sup> Jemadar Mir Mast, whose brother Mir Dast was awarded his Victoria Cross while at the Pavilion Hospital in Brighton, deserted during the night of 2-3 March 1915. With German assistance, he reached Tirah in the Pathan district and, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Strachey at the India Office, had reached Kabul by late November.<sup>61</sup> Strachey's correspondent, Chief Censor EB Howell, seemed to be mildly amused by the episode and noted in his reply, 'Did you know that Jemadar Mir Mast the deserter is the brother of Subedar Mir Dast VC? Truly truth is stranger than fiction.'<sup>62</sup> There was an unverified story that Mir Mast was awarded the Iron Cross by the Kaiser, presumably for his efforts to outwit the British and possibly even as a mocking reference to his brother's Victoria Cross.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 361

<sup>59</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F183/86, letter dated 17 October 1915

<sup>60</sup> Corrigan stated that there were 38 deserters and Morton-Jack stated that there were 50 during the Indian Corps' 15 months in France. Both quoted from BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/5/2403, 'Secret Roll of Indian Prisoners of War Suspected of Having Deserted to the Enemy, or of Having Given Information to or Otherwise Assisted the Enemy after Capture.'

<sup>61</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/828/1, letter dated 8 December 1915

<sup>62</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/828/1, letter dated 2 December 1915

<sup>63</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 96 and Das, Santanu, ed., *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1

Much has been made by later commentators of the notion that Indian troops were prone to self-inflicted wounds. Jeffrey Greenhut made the allegation that the prevalence of hand wounds among Indian troops should have shown that the notion of the Indian soldier as 'totally obedient, loyal and devoted was seriously out of touch with reality.'<sup>64</sup> This idea, with the statistic that 57% of all wounds requiring hospital admission were hand wounds, was repeated by Omissi twice, George Morton-Jack and accepted by Bernard Waites.<sup>65</sup> However, once again, commentators of the day such as Willcocks and Merewether did not consider self-inflicted wounds significant enough to refer to at all, although both considered morale in general terms.

The statistic that 57% of all hospital admissions were due to self-inflicted wounds appears to derive from a sample taken from a single entry in the Medical Services section of the Indian Corps War Diary.<sup>66</sup> The entry, by an unknown author, dated 4 November 1914, contains a table:

	No Admissions	Hand Wounds	
No 2 Clearing IP	Nil	Nil	
No 15 Lahore Cl. IP	1343	828	
No 20 Meerut Cl. IP	474	220	
No 6 Clearing IP	<u>21</u>	<u>1</u>	
	<u>1838</u>	<u>1049</u>	57%

*Result of enquiry as to number of hand wounds in native army, from date the Indian troops came into action up to evening of Nov 3<sup>67</sup>*

By 4 November 1914, Indian soldiers had been involved in two major actions, at Ypres and Neuve Chapelle, just weeks after their arrival at Marseilles and journey to the front. It seems likely that at this time the men were at their most traumatised, being unrested and thrown straight into battle. Morton-Jack noted that rates did appear to rise in the

<sup>64</sup> Greenhut, *The Imperial Reserve*, 58

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 57; Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 119; Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2014, 340; B Waites, 'Peoples of the Underdeveloped World' in Hugh Cecil & Peter Liddle eds: *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, (London: Leo Cooper/Pen and Sword, 1996), 600

<sup>66</sup> TNA, WO95/1093 Deputy Director Medical Services. War Office: First World War and Army of Occupation War Diaries. Part I: France, Belgium and Germany. Indian Corps, 4 November 1914

<sup>67</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 341

autumn of 1914 and the spring of 1915, both times of heavy engagement, but argued that both these times reflect the arrival of fresh troops and could be seen as one off reactions to the conditions endured by the Indian troops. He quoted Willcocks as seeming to agree with this analysis in a letter on 11 November 1914, 'I had to shoot two men and I hope no more ... by these means a stop will be put to this idiotic and dangerous thing.'<sup>68</sup> During the winter of 1914-1915, Willcocks had five men shot for cowardice, although this was not necessarily for self-infliction of wounds.

Nevertheless, it was a matter of concern and on 10 November the same medical officer toured three of the four clearing stations shown in the table above and 'carefully went into details and statistics of left hand wounds.'<sup>69</sup> He made no further note, so presumably found nothing of concern. There are only two further references to hand wounds in this part of the War Diary, one the following day and one in June 1915. The entry for 11 November, by a different officer, compared Indian hand wound rates with those of British soldiers, who were presumably fighting nearby and thus admitted to the same clearing stations. He concluded 'no. of hand wounds among Indians now 18.5%. British is 17.7%.'<sup>70</sup> This suggests that, albeit among a small sample, rates of hand wounds between Indian and British soldiers were similar. Greenhut's comparison of Indian and British hand wound rates to 14 August 1915 by contrast, gave a ratio of 1808 Indian soldiers to 140 British.<sup>71</sup> This may be partly explained by Corrigan's assertion that British soldiers tended to inflict wounds to their feet, not hands. He suggested that this tendency may have been due to better public transport in Britain, and it seems plausible that a higher percentage of Indian troops would have felt that they would require full mobility after the war living as they did an agricultural lifestyle.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, it is a significantly higher ratio than that recorded by the medical officer nine months earlier. It also suggests a sharp drop off in the number of hand wounds among Indian soldiers, which by November 1914 totalled 1049 and in August 1915 was 1808, suggesting the relatively small number of 759 incidences in nine months when compared to 1049 in less than two months. This would support Morton-Jack's theory that the rates peaked as

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<sup>68</sup> TNA, WO95/1093 Deputy Director Medical Services. War Office: First World War and Army of Occupation War Diaries Part 1: France, Belgium and Germany. Indian Corps. 10 November 1914, 341

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 11 November 1914

<sup>71</sup> Greenhut, *The Imperial Reserve*, 57

<sup>72</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 181

new arrivals faced battle but that they soon acclimatised and hand wound rates settled. In addition, the fighting diminished considerably during the cold winter months which could explain why the rates dropped during that period as the fighting lessened and thus the men felt safer and less inclined to attempt to escape the trenches by self-inflicted wounds. Large numbers of Indian troops were also rested from the front line during the winter of 1914-1915.

However, some British personnel remained convinced that the Indian soldiers were inviting self-inflicted wounds. Royal Army Medical Corps officer Captain Maberly Esler was in charge of a hut of 30 wounded Sikhs in 1915, 'they all had hand wounds, all through the palm of their hand. The conclusion was pretty obvious that they had been putting their hands up to be shot at.'<sup>73</sup> Medical staff had some influence as to whether or not a wound was deemed to be self-inflicted as Baghi Singh indignantly reported from the Kitchener Military Hospital in Brighton, 'here there is great tyranny on the part of the doctor. Anyone whose hand is wounded ... is branded with a hot iron.'<sup>74</sup> While this is almost certainly metaphorical, a doctor did have the power to report a suspected self-inflicted wound. An anonymous Indian correspondent wrote that a friend had recently been arrested on the word of a doctor and only released when another soldier vouched for how he came by his injury. Nevertheless, medical staff were often reluctant to involve themselves in disciplinary matters. A medical officer wrote of a meeting concerning self-inflicted wounds wherein he asserted that 'it was agreed that a M.O. could only give an opinion as to the range of the bullet causing the wound. The stopping of this class of wound must be a matter of regimental discipline.'<sup>75</sup> However, the distinction between a bullet wound from a distance and one from point blank range does not wholly solve the problem as a bullet from a distant gun could have hit the soldier as he deliberately held his hand above the parapet of his trench.

Colonel Sir Bruce Seton, Commander of the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton, made a detailed study of the first thousand cases to be brought into the hospital, which opened in early 1915, in order to determine the extent of hand wounds and their causes. Seton

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Maberly Squire Esler, 1974, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000377>, accessed 17.8.16

<sup>74</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143-83, letter dated 31 May 1915

<sup>75</sup> BL, WO95/1093 letter dated 27 June 1915

found that of 280 hand wounds, 162 could have been self-inflicted, 78 to the right hand and 84 to the left. Assuming that self-inflicted wounds would be exclusively to the left hand, as Indians who were left-handed were raised to use their right hand, Seton concluded that the enemy caused 78 of the 84 left hand wounds so at most the remaining six were self-inflicted, a rate of 0.6% of all 1000 injuries.<sup>76</sup> Although Seton's sample was of a relatively small group, all of whose injuries were severe enough to merit transfer to England and obviously does not cover those who were well enough to be treated in casualty clearing stations or in hospital in Boulogne, his rate of 0.6% seems improbably low. Nevertheless, the 57% rate at the casualty clearing stations quoted above also does not bear weight, as Seton also showed that not all hand wounds should be admissible as self-inflicted.

Although many of the military records of the British army were destroyed in the Blitz during Second World War, two ledgers containing details of self-inflicted wounds seen at the 39<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station between May 1916 and April 1917 still exist. The 39<sup>th</sup> moved three times during this year but was never far from the Somme area. The two books contain details of 1050 self-inflicted wounds during the year among British soldiers of various ranks.<sup>77</sup> Of the first 100 cases between May and October 1916, 42 are wounds to the leg or foot and 53 are to the arm or hand with a smattering of wounds to the face, throat, shoulder and chest and some have more than one wound. It is almost impossible to make a meaningful comparison between the 1050 British cases in one year and the 1808 Indian cases in the first nine months of the war but it is worth noting that the British figure represents patients at just one casualty clearing station, while the Indian number represents all the Indian soldiers deployed in France at the time, a far larger number.

It was no less of a stigma for a British soldier to fall under suspicion of wounding himself. Private George Coppard enlisted in August 1914 at 16 years of age. On 17 October 1916, he was accidentally shot in the foot by a friend. On arrival at the 39<sup>th</sup> Casualty

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<sup>76</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/82, Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton, 75-80

<sup>77</sup> TNA, MH 106/809, Self-inflicted wounds. War Office: First World War Representative Medical Records of Servicemen. Hospital Admission and discharge Registers. No.39 Casualty Clearing Station and TNA, MH 106/808 British other ranks, self-inflicted wounds. War Office: First World War Representative Medical Records of Servicemen. Hospital Admission and discharge Registers Hospital Admission and discharge Registers. No.39 Casualty Clearing Station



Clearing Station, he found the atmosphere hostile, 'Next morning I discovered that there was something queer about the place which filled me with misgivings. None of the nursing staff appeared friendly, and the matron looked, and was, a positive battle-axe. I made anxious inquiries, and quickly learned that I was classed as a suspected self-inflicted wound case. Unknown to me, the letters SIW with a query mark added had been written on the label attached to my chest.'<sup>78</sup>

A method of 'malinger' unique to the Indian troops which received more attention in the letters from the troops was the use of *bhalwar*, which was noted by the censor as, 'the use of the marking nut causes the body to swell and pimples etc. to appear,'<sup>79</sup> The nut is a type of cashew and can cause allergic reactions, particularly skin rashes. One letter from a correspondent in India, apparently replying to a request for advice, suggested its use to cause an inflammation or to pretend to have sciatica, although he did not think his correspondent would get away with it.<sup>80</sup> Another, an explicit request for 'something which will make the doctors declare me unfit for service' was deleted by the censor.<sup>81</sup> As late as September 1915, troops were still writing to request supplies, although the censor let no references through.<sup>82</sup>

It seems most likely that, although a small number of men did wound themselves to escape battle, especially soon after they had arrived in France, there was not a serious problem of self-inflicted wounds or malingering among the Indian troops. It was also difficult, as Seton's 1915 report showed, to reliably conclude whether or not certain wounds were self-inflicted. On 27 December 1915, Sir Walter Lawrence, the Commissioner for Indian Sick and Wounded, wrote to Lord Kitchener of Seton's report that, 'there is no evidence of self-infliction of wounds which could be supported by statistical examination. It was an unfortunate thing that persons should have jumped to the conclusion that self-infliction of wounds was a common practice, and I know that the Sepoys felt this'.<sup>83</sup> It seems that this is another example of, as Lawrence implied, Indian soldiers being pre-judged. Through the twentieth century, however, this

<sup>78</sup> George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (London: Cassell, 1999), 103

<sup>79</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/84, letter dated 17 July 1915

<sup>80</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/84, letter dated 6 June 1915

<sup>81</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/85, letter dated September 1915

<sup>82</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/86, letter dated 7 October 1915

<sup>83</sup> BL, WO 32/5110, letter dated 27 December 1915

inaccuracy continued to be perpetuated and, by its very repetition, gained acceptance. This was despite the assurances of contemporary commentators such as Lawrence that there was nothing to support these assumptions.

#### SEDITION AND CENSORSHIP

A major concern for the British authorities before the Indian soldiers arrived in France was that they would be influenced by seditious material being sent to them and that this would lead to indiscipline or even desertion. On 15 October 1914, the India Office obtained a warrant 'to enable the letters written by the rank and file of Indian native regiments, who were lying wounded or sick in hospital in Brighton, to be censored ... It was in effect a field censorship and was to prevent leakage of information and the spreading of reports in India which would alarm the native population and discourage recruiting.'<sup>84</sup> The British authorities had good reason to be concerned about seditious material reaching the Indian troops in France. The major source of concern at the time were the activities of the Ghadr Party which was founded in America and Canada in 1913 by Har Dayal and Sohan Singh Bhakha initially in reaction to the increasing hostility towards Indian immigrants to America and Canada during the early part of the twentieth century.

The Ghadr movement's ultimate aim was to oust the British from India by violence if necessary. It published a newspaper called *The Ghadr* which was read across north America and also distributed in India. After the war, a government commission was formed to investigate all rebellious activity in India during the war and it noted the inception of the newspaper on 1 November 1913. The report briefly summarises the tone of the newspaper from the British perspective,

The paper is frankly seditious and it urges preparations for mutiny and the freedom of India by expelling the English. 'This is the time to prepare yourselves for mutiny while this war is raging in Europe. Oh, brave people! Hurry up and stop all these taxes by mutinying. Wanted: - Brave soldiers to stir up Ghadr in India. Pay - death; prize - martyrdom; pension - liberty; field of battle - India. Get up, and open your eyes. Accumulate bags of money for the Ghadr and proceed to India. Sacrifice your lives to obtain liberty. 'The issue presses everyone to return to India for Ghadr to free the country from British rule. The theme of all

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Wells, *Mailshot: A History of the Forces Postal Service* (Chatham, Kent: Defence Postal and Courier Services, Royal Engineers, 1987), 187

these issues is the same, namely, to go to India and stir up Ghadr to defeat the English and take the government of the country from them.<sup>85</sup>

Their fears were vividly illustrated by an undated letter from Bande Matarasent during this period from Vancouver in Canada to a man of the 15<sup>th</sup> Sikhs in India, which was written 'in an educated hand',

I pray to all my brothers, Hindu and Mussalman, to join together & break the English lock. There is no withstanding Germany. Germany breaks up all who come (against her). Let no army come from India. Soon there will be mutiny in India. Let all men join & put an end to the English. Very soon the whole world will come under the German sway. India will come next year. On one side you have Germany, Austria, Turkey, Chine [sic] & Holland, these five. Germany is a giant in strength and religion. On the other side are England France, Russia, Japan, Serbia, Belgium, these six. But giant Germany is utterly destroying the whole six. She has captured & imprisoned lakhs of their men ... hail Germany hail. Tear off the veil and listen. Verily my words are true.<sup>86</sup>

At the outbreak of war, the Party decided to make the most of the opportunity and approached the German authorities in both America and Germany for support. The Germans were happy to contribute and 'a special fund amounting to several million marks was provided by the Imperial Government and emissaries were sent to India to promote sedition.'<sup>87</sup> By October 1914, many revolutionaries had returned to India, led by Sohan Singh Bhakha, to spread the word and try to recruit members for the Party as well as plan attacks on the government. In the event, there were a number of attacks with varying levels of success and the Indian Government was moved to pass the Defence of India (Criminal Law Amendment) Act in the spring of 1915 in order to allow them greater intelligence gathering measures. There were several trials of failed conspirators during the coming years and the Ghadr Party never achieved its aims and its influence quickly waned in the face of repeated failure and legislation. The censors reported that the men did not appear to be overly affected by reports of unrest: one noted that, 'number 22 refers to the recent outbreak of lawlessness in the Southern Punjab, and shows unmistakeably that in the last resort the sympathies of the ordinary

<sup>85</sup> Sedition Committee 1918 Report (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Publishing, 1918)

<sup>86</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/8, undated letter; a lakh is a unit of ten thousand

<sup>87</sup> Budheswar Pati, *India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996)

decent man are on the side of law and order. This attitude is undoubtedly the main prop on which the British Raj in India rests.'<sup>88</sup>

Despite these early concerns, there were almost no political expressions or even the mildest of seditious material or references in the soldiers' letters. One of the few such references is a passing comment from Ram Jewan Singh, a civilian storekeeper at the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton, in a letter to his father as to how he expects England to show her gratitude to India after the war:

the public at large are really very sympathetic towards India and the Indian people as a whole on account of the war and the services – the invaluable services – India is rendering at present. But I do not know what they will do for India after the war, at least there is a deep feeling of gratefulness and love for Indian people in the hearts of the public and they are thinking to give something substantial to the Indian nation in the Imperial Parliament of England.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, on 31 July 1915, Chief Censor Howell was able to report that he had found and withheld seditious material, *The Hamdard* newspaper,<sup>90</sup> about which he said 'if I am not mistaken, has recently been attracting the unfavourable notice of government. Their tone was rather offensive, and the package containing them was withheld.'<sup>91</sup> In mid-October 1915, Howell reported that 'it seems clear that if any Pan-Islamic or Anti-British propaganda had been making serious headway in India some reflection of it would appear in the letters from that country. The information from Hindu sources is not so complete and is very much more colourless, but here too very little that is actually bad has so far come to light.'<sup>92</sup>

Howell referred to the collection of letters as holding up a mirror to the views of the men and their correspondents,<sup>93</sup> but the selection process by which some letters survive today also held up a mirror to the concerns of the British authorities. It is interesting that one of the primary concerns of the censorship team, unrest and rebellion in India

<sup>88</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/3, Censor Report dated 1 May 1915

<sup>89</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/85, letter dated 30 September 1915

<sup>90</sup> The Hamdard was a Muslim version of The Comrade newspaper produced in Delhi from 1913. Its founder, Maula Mohammed Ali, was arrested in 1915 for anti-British writings. [http://www.dpcc.co.in/inc/history/presidents/maulaTNA\\_mohammad\\_ali.php](http://www.dpcc.co.in/inc/history/presidents/maulaTNA_mohammad_ali.php), accessed 19.9.2012

<sup>91</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/84, Censor's Report dated 31 July 1915

<sup>92</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/86, Censor's Report dated 16 October 1915

<sup>93</sup> TNA, MSS EUR 143/84, Report on 12 Months' Working of the Indian Mail Censorship, 5

and the receipt of seditious material in general, coincides very little with the actual content of the letters. This is despite the efforts of the Ghadr campaigners and others to incite rebellion among the men. While some seditious thinking was uncovered, it tended to be mild and the men were far more occupied in writing about their present situation and the war. The scale of the censorship operation suggests the level of British concern and distrust towards its Indian troops among those who knew them least well. The circulation list for the weekly reports of the censors included '(War Office, India Office, Foreign Office), to Buckingham Palace, and to the commanders of the Indian divisions,' among others.<sup>94</sup> As with the examples above, their concerns eventually proved to be unfounded.

### THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

A difficulty which was not anticipated by British senior officers but caused significant distress among the Indian troops was the practice of sending recovered wounded troops back to the front line, 'as grain that is flung a second time into the oven, and life does not come out of it.'<sup>95</sup> The problems with finding reserves for the Indian units meant that troops whose wounds were not permanently disabling were sent back to the trenches against the pre-war policy of retiring them from the army.<sup>96</sup> There were more complaints about this than any other topic in the soldiers' letters, although exactly the same conditions applied to British troops, albeit that it had always been the case for them. An anonymous Punjabi soldier wrote home of a comrade that, 'he is getting on all right. It is difficult for him to return to India, because his wound is getting quite well.'<sup>97</sup>

Senior British officers agreed with their men. Mason quoted Sir Walter Lawrence who, as chief of the Indian hospitals, spoke to many wounded men and was told that they found the British decision to be *zulm* or treacherous.<sup>98</sup> Willcocks, while still Commander in Chief of the Indian troops, and the Adjutant-General both agreed that the troops should not be sent back into battle and by the spring of 1915 they were often sent to Marseilles, where Willcocks felt that they did more harm than good, 'it was folly to mix

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<sup>94</sup> Claude Markovits, *Indian Soldiers' Experiences during World War i: See Europe from the Rear of the Front* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 7

<sup>95</sup> TNA, MSS EUR F143/83, letter dated 17 March 1915

<sup>96</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 2006, 358

<sup>97</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 3 February 1915

<sup>98</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 425

them up with fresh drafts, who were not cheered on first arrival by meeting a lot of bandaged men. The Indian is not built that way.'<sup>99</sup> Towards the end of his command he set up a working battalion to accommodate them at the front but out of the trenches. Many soldiers complained bitterly in their letters home about being sent back to the trenches after being wounded, '[Only] the man who has lost a leg or an arm returns to India,'<sup>100</sup> wrote a soldier who was also in hospital in England. Another soldier who had reached an English hospital in February 1915 sought to explain why, 'The Government has only a few men. Therefore, they send wounded men a second time to fight.'<sup>101</sup>

Mir Dast, who won a Victoria Cross, was granted permission to make an application to the King during his visit to the Kitchener Hospital in Brighton on 15 August 1915 to present him with his decoration. He stated that, 'when a man has once been wounded, it is not well to take him back again to the trenches. For no good work will be done by his hand, but he will spoil others' also.'<sup>102</sup> Dast, who was recovering from a gas attack and bullet wounds, must have felt extremely strongly to have made such a request in such intimidating circumstances. In his case, his bravery was rewarded and he was returned to India when he had recovered sufficiently to travel.<sup>103</sup>

Morton-Jack considered that the main problem for troops returning to the front, apart from a sense of injustice, was not that they were particularly reluctant to fight but that by the time they had recovered from their wounds and travelled back to France, their unit was likely to be unrecognisable because of new recruits and, even more importantly, reconstructed not along the original lines and without any men with whom they were familiar. Omissi agreed and claimed that the kinship ties that had made the units so strong initially were now '[impeding] the strategies of the military elite' because of the resistance of troops to rejoining their now so altered units and the time it took them to adjust to new officers and comrades when they did return.<sup>104</sup> This certainly chimes with the opinion of the censor,

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<sup>99</sup> Willcocks, *the Indians in France*, 311

<sup>100</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 20 February 1915

<sup>101</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/1, letter dated 17 February 1915

<sup>102</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/3, letter dated 24 May 1915

<sup>103</sup> David Omissi, 'Mir Dast (1874–1945)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/96985>, accessed 18 Aug 2016]

<sup>104</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 118

in fact, it would be not far from the truth to say that instead of being a regiment at all it has become an agglomeration of men. Those who are aware how much the efficiency of the Indian Army depends upon the regimental spirit must be surprised as well as gratified at the cohesion and gallantry which these sorely tried units continue to display.<sup>105</sup>

Of course, this also applied to the British troops as their original units were disbanded and reformed but they did at least have the advantage of sharing a common language, religion and culture with their new comrades. Although the Indian troops found it unjust that they were sent back to the front and the British commanders were well aware of this, there was no other option. Casualty rates were extremely high and replacement troops so scarce that there was little choice but to send men back. The debate went backwards and forwards through the spring and summer of 1915 but was not resolved until the men left France and the relative proximity of Mesopotamia meant that wounded men could return to India.

Although it cannot be doubted that this did have an effect on the morale of Indian soldiers, it is worth noting the censor's comment that the units were managing to hold together despite the many problems faced by returning troops. There is also no evidence to suggest that there was an increased rate of disciplinary problems, self-inflicted wounds or malingering among the men who had been returned to the front after their wounds had healed.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed at the start of this chapter, it has been alleged by several historians that the Indian Army left France for Mesopotamia because of some of the perceived problems discussed in this chapter. In fact, as has been shown above, this was not the case. The decision was a purely practical one, based upon a variety of factors: the extreme difficulties the Indian Corps faced in obtaining reinforcements; the increase in action on other fronts in the Middle East, Gallipoli and Africa; the arrival of both the first Canadian troops and Kitchener's New Army, the first two battalions of which had fought at Loos in the late summer of 1915.<sup>106</sup> However, of more relevance is the finding that these

<sup>105</sup> BL, IOR/L/MIL/5/825/3, Censor Report dated 1 May 1915

<sup>106</sup> Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, 237

negative views were not shared among contemporary commentators. Not only was it not the case that the Indian Corps left France under a cloud, but these negative views were not shared by those who interacted most with the Indian soldiers. In fact, Merewether contended that the Indian Corps had 'saved the Empire.'<sup>107</sup>

The later contention that Indian troops could not fight without their British officers present does not bear scrutiny. The relationship between officers of the Indian Army and their men was more intense and reverential than equivalent relationships in the British Army and shows a degree of personal contact and even affection not present in the British Army. It is also certain that the rate of losses among the British officers of the Indian Corps was extremely high compared to the British army and the relatively low numbers of British officers available both initially and as reinforcements only exacerbated the problem. The replacement officers often did not have the close relationship that the original officers had and this clearly had an effect on morale but it is not clear that this was a direct cause of poor performance.

The second example given was the common accusation that the Indian soldiers could not cope with the climate of northern France, especially during the winter. It is true that the winter of 1914-1915 was especially harsh but the Indian Soldiers' Fund had provided equipment which lessened the problem, although much of this did not arrive until later in the winter. Also, the soldiers came, in the main, from northern India, where the climate is not dissimilar to that of France. There is little evidence that, apart from some routine grumbles, the climate affected their performance and certainly not to a greater extent than it affected any other troops. The issue appears to derive from a mistaken belief that all India is equally hot, which is not the case, especially in regard to the north where the majority of the men came from. The third example, the issue of discipline can be traced in part through examining rates of courts martial and the levels of self-inflicted wounds and malingering among the troops, which reflect discontent. Courts martial rates were low among the Indian troops by comparison to the British Army and do not appear to reflect any major discontent or imply any serious loss of effectiveness. There were instances of self-inflicted wounds and malingering but it is difficult to make accurate comparisons of their rate against that of British troops, although they are not

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<sup>107</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, xvii



dramatically higher. Certainly, although occurrences of self-inflicted wounds peaked twice and the reasons for this are not completely clear, this does not appear to have been an ongoing problem and was of far less concern to contemporary military leaders than to later historians.

However, to contemporaries in the British Army, perhaps the most dangerous of all the perceived tactical risks to the British eye was that the troops would become infected by the seditious material sent to them in the trenches. A mutiny or outbreak of indiscipline would have had serious consequences for an army already under pressure. The Indian Army had never fought on European soil before or against a white European enemy and the British were cautious as to how they would react. In the light of the self-rule movement gaining momentum and the Ghadr party's intention of exploiting the war to forward its aims, the concerns were genuinely felt. However, the movement never really gained ground in India and the troops in France showed only the most cursory interest in the Indian political situation as was recognised by the censors of the time. This recognition is critical as the censors perhaps had the most intimate knowledge of the thoughts and feelings of the Indian soldiers and certainly more insight than those in London who had expressed concerns about the Indian soldiers' loyalty.

The decision to send wounded troops who had recovered back to the Front was the single most significant issue for the troops. This had not been pre-war practice and many felt extremely resentful, especially as the units they returned to were unrecognisable. This caused a great deal of discontent among the troops who were returned and also fear among those not yet wounded that they would suffer the same fate. Whether this disaffection was significant enough to reflect in their combat performance remains moot but there is no direct evidence to support this. The most curious aspect of this issue is that the British did not anticipate it. Even if they had, it seems unlikely that, given the practical problems, wounded troops would have been returned home despite the misgivings of several of their senior officers. Whether or not the problem would have worsened over time cannot be known as the practice was stopped when the men moved to the Middle East.

As this chapter has shown, the assumption of Indian military failings by senior British officers proved unfounded and the 'natural inferiority' propounded by the Social Darwinist perspective was shown to be illusory, even to the extent that, in the years after the war, Indian soldiers were granted commissions and thus were permitted to command British junior ranks.

Despite this, the myth of the ineffectiveness of the Indian Corps was perpetuated through the twentieth century. As was shown at the start of the chapter, there has been a constant stream of criticism by historians and commentators which, under analysis, is not borne out. Morton-Jack wrote in the introduction to his 2014 book that he felt that it was time for a revival of acclaim for the Indian Corps and this comment reflects the negative nature of historical writing about them during the hundred years since the end of the war which has become part of the narrative of the Indian Corps' service in Europe.<sup>108</sup> His defence of the Indian Corps was from a purely military perspective and attempted to rebut this. It remains notable, however, that this perspective has persisted, despite the almost universal praise for the Indian Corps from influential senior officers of the time such as Willcocks and Merewether and the endorsement of senior royal and military figures. Contemporaries who knew the Indian Corps and its men intimately, such as Willcocks and Merewether, despite being bound in the imperial hierarchy, were overwhelmingly positive about the Indian soldiers, as illustrated in the introduction Lord Curzon, former Viceroy of India, wrote for Merewether's 1918 memoir:

They came to a country where the climate, the language, the people, the customs, were entirely different from any of which they had knowledge ... confronted by the most powerful and pitiless military machine that the world has ever seen. They were consoled by none of the amenities or alleviations, or even the associations, of home. They were not fighting for their own country or people. They were not even engaged in a quarrel of their own making. They were plunged in surroundings which must have been intensely depressing to the spirit of man. Almost from the start, they suffered shattering losses.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army*, 2014, 27

<sup>109</sup> Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France*, xi

## **Chapter Five – The Immediate Post-War Period: British Society and Indian Soldiers**

This chapter will analyse the impact in Britain of the Indian soldiers' service in France in the years after the First World War. Three sections will examine the public, political and military reactions. It will be shown that while there were clear positive changes in how each group viewed and reacted although the changes found were highly complex and in many ways contradictory. It will show that the British political aim was to preserve the status across the world of its empire, even if this was at the cost of, for example, India, which saw wartime political restrictions extended after the war. The public appeared to embrace the Indian soldiers, either those with whom they had encounters, such as in Brighton or by large attendances at the Peace Day parade for Indian soldiers. However there remained an undercurrent of racism and Indians in Britain faced legislation which denied many their right to live in Britain and of those who retained that right, local prejudice such as difficulty finding landlords who would let them property. The military experience is perhaps the most straightforward: the war had exposed the difficulty of replacing British officers lost in combat and the army implemented the obvious solution of permitting Indians to obtain commissions. Although this was a clear step forward in terms of the view of Indian soldiers of the Indian Army, full implementation was delayed until the Second World War once again forced the point.

### **THE BRITISH CIVILIAN POPULATION**

This section will examine the public attitude to Indian people in the years after the war. Reactions were deeply contrasting: even as the Peace Day parade for Indian soldiers in 1919 was attended by huge crowds and widely reported in the press in glowing terms, race riots were taking place in port cities elsewhere in the country. When military action in India killed hundreds of people, the British public and their MPs were outraged, yet Indian people resident in Britain struggled to find landlords prepared to rent property to them.

#### *Race Riots In 1919*

Despite the apparent support for India after the war, in many ways the Indian experience in Britain remained that of 'aliens'. During 1919, as demobilised men returned to Britain

from the war and jobs were scarce, there was resentment towards the small number of foreign sailors who had taken work in Britain's docks during the war. In the years before the war, tensions had developed as they undercut the wages and food allowances paid to English sailors and thus easily gained employment. During the war, many 'deserted' their ships to earn higher wages in British factories as the men went to war. It was not until the British troops returned from the war to reclaim their jobs that this became a problem and the Board of Trade lost no time in setting up a repatriation scheme in February 1919. The scheme was designed to prosecute employers who had hired Lascars who had seaman's contracts elsewhere and to prevent the men claiming unemployment benefits when they lost their factory jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The combination of 'alien' labour taking British jobs and housing resulted in a series of race riots in the major seaports in the first half of 1919, until the repatriation plan lowered the numbers and the issue calmed. *The Times* reported that in London 'a large body of police were employed until a late hour quelling disturbances' outside the Strangers' Home for Asiatic Seamen and that the residents had to be escorted indoors and the door to the home barred.<sup>2</sup> Just over a month later, an incident which took place during the riot came to trial and was reported in *The Times*. The defendant was a black sailor who was accused of shooting a white sailor while 'flourishing' a revolver. The police officer attending said that the crowd would have killed the defendant if he had not run into the lodging-house and that the riot carried on for the rest of the week after the incident occurred on Tuesday 27 May. The defendant, who was on 28 days' leave from the Navy and who had no gun and had himself been attacked by the crowd, was acquitted. The prosecutor said that the men who lived in the lodging-house were sailors who had been demobilised and stated, 'whether they undersold the white sailors or not he (counsel) did not know but whatever the cause the ill-feeling was very great. If there was one thing more than another that white seamen resented it was black sailors associating with white women.' This view was confirmed by a police inspector who gave evidence that, 'the trouble started through black men speaking to white girls. The whites wanted to clear the blacks out of Limehouse. The police had received numerous

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 156

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 30 May 1919, 9

complaints.<sup>3</sup> It is notable that the economic explanation, that black sailors were taking British jobs, quickly gave way in the face of the simple racist objection to black men speaking to white women, which was apparently the root issue. This echoes the provisions made for the 'protection' of white women in Brighton during the time the Indian soldiers were in hospital there and derived from the perceived necessity of maintaining white women's status in the imperial hierarchy.

The episode illustrates the undercurrent of racism in Britain during the years after the First World War. In the particular case of Indians, this was intimately linked to the British view of its inherent superiority as rulers of India. Jaqueline Jenkinson contended that the British colonial process, with its inbuilt set of prejudices, influenced British feelings against the Indian minorities it encountered.<sup>4</sup> A similar point is made by May and Cohen in their discussion of the Liverpool Race Riots. They argued that the racial theories about colonial subjects that were used to justify the rule of the empire were fed back to the British population as broad stereotypes which reinforced Anglo-Saxon superiority.<sup>5</sup> Although Indians in Britain were struggling to find work and support themselves, and despite the widespread reporting of the Indian military achievements during the war and the increased opportunities for personal contact between Britons and Indians during the war years, when times were hard for the British a racist and aggressive tendency emerged. Jenkinson asserted that this was reinforced by the behaviour of the authorities: during the war by the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914, which focussed on the repatriation of enemy aliens and thus marked them out as different and undesirable, followed by the policy of internment as the war went on and secondly by 'rewarding' the rioters by repatriation schemes such as those above.<sup>6</sup> However, none of this should imply that the riots were accepted without challenge. The press in Liverpool were sharply critical of the riots. In June 1919 the *Liverpool Daily Post* called for the 'generous treatment of the black races' and the Bishop of Liverpool exhorted the city to 'deal fairly and humanely with our fellow subjects.'<sup>7</sup> Eventually the Lascars drifted back to employment at sea prompted by the repatriation measures but it nevertheless illustrated a racism towards

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<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 1 July 1919, 4

<sup>4</sup> Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 5

<sup>5</sup> Roy May & Robin Cohen 'The Interaction between Race and Colonialism: A Case Study of the Liverpool Race Riots of 1919' in *Race and Class*, VXI, 2, 1974, 112

<sup>6</sup> Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 57

<sup>7</sup> May & Cohen, *Interaction*, 122

the Indian population on an individual level at odds with the local and national celebration of the military contribution during the war. It is also notable that this happened at the same time as Indian soldiers were being feted at the Peace Day Parade in London.

#### *Indians In Post War Britain*

In the years after the war the Indian population in Britain developed gradually. In addition to the existing population a group of Punjabi pedlars grew up outside the big cities largely consisting of demobbed soldiers who chose to stay, according to Shompa Lahiri, although this is disputable. They were soon joined by Sikh immigrant pedlars.<sup>8</sup> The relatively inexpensive cost of setting up as a pedlar and the ease with which licences were issued made it an attractive and lucrative business.<sup>9</sup> However, during the decade after the war, the Indian population became much more middle class, numbering in 1932 'students, doctors, merchants, civil servants and aristocrats.'<sup>10</sup> Perhaps because, as professionals and thus working principally among British people, they tended more quickly towards becoming 'integrated and Anglicised.'<sup>11</sup> Many, too, experienced a great deal of support and friendship from their British neighbours and Rozina Visram contends that 'the many examples of mixed marriages provide another indication of the absence of prejudice.' This is not to suggest that this acceptance was universal, and many experienced difficulty, particularly in renting accommodation, and both Visram and Lahiri give a number of examples of this.<sup>12</sup> On balance, however, the Indian population in Britain thrived in the years after the war, although the demographic groups represented as the years went by were far removed from the soldiers of the Indian Corps and the Punjabi pedlars who followed them.

#### *The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre<sup>13</sup>*

The British public's apparent newfound respect for India was put to the test by the news of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 when many took the part of the Indian victims. The Government of India Act received Royal Assent in December 1919 and provided

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<sup>8</sup> Shompa Lahiri, 'From Empire to Decolonisation, 1901-1947', Lahiri, S., in Fisher, Lahiri, & Thandi, A *South Asian History of Britain*, 134

<sup>9</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 years of History* (Pluto Press, London, 2002), 260

<sup>10</sup> Lahiri, 'From Empire to Decolonisation', 147

<sup>11</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 297

<sup>12</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 277; Lahiri, 'From Empire to Decolonisation', 142

<sup>13</sup> Previously referred to as the Amritsar Massacre

for extended influence of Indian people in government and established dual control of large areas of the country. However, its positive measures were set against the Rowlatt Act of March 1919, which extended the government's power of control of those suspected of committing acts of sedition originally set out in the wartime Defence of India Act. A month after the Rowlatt Act came into force, Mahatma Gandhi organised a *hartal*, or day of purification, in support of the self-rule movement and which the British interpreted as a general strike, according to Niall Ferguson.<sup>14</sup> Violence developed over a number of days, culminating in General Dyer's decision to open fire on protestors on 13 April, killing 379 people. *The Times* reported on the emerging problems, stating that three British bank managers had been attacked and burnt to death in Jallianwala Bagh and other disturbances had occurred in Bombay and Lahore and described the *hartal* as 'a widespread day of humiliation [arranged] as a protest against the passing of the Rowlatt Act.'<sup>15</sup> Note the absence of references to Indian deaths.

The continuing historiography of the massacre is complex and divided and swings between assertions that the massacre was an inevitable consequence of British abuse of power, an opinion still propounded in India,<sup>16</sup> or that it was an aberration by a single individual.<sup>17</sup> This confusion reflects British public opinion of the time. The official enquiry, the Hunter Commission, which reported in March 1920, was divided into two parts to reflect the opinions of the British and Indian members of the committee. While both halves of the report are critical of General Dyer's actions, that written by the Indian members is considerably more so, in the opinion of Derek Sayer.<sup>18</sup> There was a long delay in substantial information reaching the British public via early reports from Lord Hunter's investigative committee, which added to public dismay. It was not until December 1919 that *The Times*, noting the delay in detailed information reaching Britain, reported that, 'it was vaguely known that very severe measures were taken at Jallianwalla Bagh ... that troops dispersed the rioters with very heavy casualties. It was certainly not known that an unarmed gathering which had met, in defiance of a military proclamation, in an enclosed space at Jallianwalla Bagh, had been fired upon without any immediate

<sup>14</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the modern World* (London: Penguin, 2003), 326

<sup>15</sup> The Outbreak in India, *The Times*, 15 April 1919, 13

<sup>16</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Hurst and Co), 2017, 172

<sup>17</sup> Derek Sayer, 'British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', *Past and Present*, 131, May 1991, 132-134;

<sup>18</sup> Sayer, *British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre*, 146

warning, and that 400 had been killed.<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister Lloyd George made a furious speech to the House of Commons on 22 December 1919 in which he gave a graphic description of the events at Jallianwalla Bagh, taken from evidence given by General Dyer, and said, 'This is what is done in 1919 in British India ... Think what this means. There has never been anything like this before in English history, and not in the whole of our relations with India has there been anything of this magnitude before.'<sup>20</sup> In 1920, at the recommendation of the Hunter Commission, General Dyer was relieved of his command and the CBE which he was due to be awarded was cancelled.

Newspaper reports of the Commons debate reveal the extent of political and public disquiet. The *Globe* commented, 'how profoundly public opinion has been stirred by the extraordinary evidence ... is shown by the bombardment of questions to which Mr Montague was subjected.'<sup>21</sup> In a letter to *The Times*, a Mr Beechey, who claimed to have been present at the scene, declared the events to be 'disgraceful' and questioned the account of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and referred to the people of the Punjab as being in a 'state of tranquillity' which belied the need to prevent them from gathering in protest, let alone shoot civilians.<sup>22</sup>

However, there was also widespread support for General Dyer. A benefit fund was set up for him by the *Morning Post* which raised some £26,000.<sup>23</sup> This included £10 from Rudyard Kipling, given to acknowledge that Dyer 'did his duty as, he saw it.'<sup>24</sup> The *Daily Mail* interviewed General Dyer as soon as he reached Southampton and reported Dyer to have described the incident as 'my horrible, dirty duty' but, 'I have yet to find an Englishman who knows India who condemns me for my action.'<sup>25</sup> Indeed, a letter to the *Times* claimed that General Dyer saved the lives of the British in India, who were 'at the

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<sup>19</sup> The Amritsar Disclosures, *The Times*, 16 December 1919, 15

<sup>20</sup> Hansard, Amritsar Disturbances. HC Debate 22 December 1919 vol 123 cc1230-3, [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1919/dec/22/amritsar-disturbances-I#S5CV0123P0\\_19191222\\_HOC\\_688](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1919/dec/22/amritsar-disturbances-I#S5CV0123P0_19191222_HOC_688), accessed 3.6.17

<sup>21</sup> Amritsar, *Globe*, 17 December 1919, 4

<sup>22</sup> Letter to *The Times*, 24 February 1920, 12

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World*, 327; In 2005 currency, this was worth £551,460, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>, accessed 3.6.17

<sup>24</sup> Sayer, *British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre*, 158

<sup>25</sup> General Dyer, *The Daily Mail*, 4 May 1920, 8



mercy of the seething millions of the Punjab, of the murderers of bank managers, of the would be murderers of Miss Sherwood.’<sup>26</sup>

That the massacre was debated at length in both the House of Commons and House of Lords, reflected the disquiet in the country about the massacre. The significance, it seems, is that there was a debate at all. In earlier years, the fact that a rebellion was violently put down by British troops would not have been subject to question in the manner in which this was. It seemed that the memory of the recent cohesion of the empire set against an act of extreme violence did not sit well with a British people already moving in the direction of ‘progressive humanitarian imperialism’.<sup>27</sup> This reflects what Brad Beaven described as ‘a distaste for jingoism in the post war aftermath’ inasmuch as the public appeared to consider Indian people in a more generous light, despite the difficulties they still faced in Britain.<sup>28</sup>

Such was the contradictory and rather confused picture in the period following the First World War. The public was broadly supportive in the abstract, such as attending parades and bemoaning the treatment of Indian people at the hands of the army but in daily life, the picture became one of prejudice when Indian people sought work and accommodation in Britain.

## THE POLITICAL STAGE

This will examine how the British Empire Exhibition and the Empire Marketing Board were used as propaganda vehicles to promote the new vision of empire as a trading collective and contrast this against less positive measures such as the manner in which the Imperial War Graves Commission chose to commemorate Indian soldiers in very different ways in Europe and further afield. There will be a brief discussion about how the war service of other Colonial countries and the Dominions brought about change in their nations, while their treatment by the British government barely changed at all. As with the reactions of the public in the years following the war, the government position can appear to be contradictory, although its actions prioritised the status of the British

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<sup>26</sup> Letter to *The Times*, 9 January 1920, 6

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 149

<sup>28</sup> Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 201

empire as a source of power and influence both at home and abroad, a position that was consistently maintained.

*The British Empire Exhibition and The Empire Marketing Board*

In Chapter Two, representations of Indian people as exotic and, by extension, alien in the major exhibitions and festivals of the pre-war years was discussed. However, the first great national exhibition after the war presented a very different picture of India. The British Empire Exhibition of 1924-25 was a considerably less colourful spectacle than the earlier extravaganzas, although the sheer number of visitors, some 24 million, illustrates the British public's continued interest in imperial matters. Its focus, rather than a straightforward display of imperial power, was to emphasise the empire as a commonwealth of trading partnerships, with India presented as a swiftly modernising trading partner. It required much behind the scenes negotiation in India to secure the participation of all the provinces in the face of opposition from nationalist protestors. However, the Indian Pavilion proved highly successful, featuring 'illustrations of carpet making, of the tea, cotton, timber and other leading industries ... and much else that shows the enormous growth in the industrial and commercial importance of the Indian Empire.'<sup>29</sup> A newspaper advertisement stated that 'to catalogue the contents of the Indian Pavilion would be as difficult as to estimate the importance of India to the Empire.'<sup>30</sup> According to *The Times*, the lesson of the Exhibition was one 'of development ... the seed is in the hearts of all, as the deeds of all in the Great War showed.'<sup>31</sup> Note the reference here to India's war service and the inclusive tone of the statement. The exhibition continued in 1925 but, as its Indian administrator refused to participate without subsidy from Britain, it did not include India.<sup>32</sup> By comparison with the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908 or the Festival of Empire in 1911, India in 1924 was represented by its economic contribution rather than in terms of stereotypical nautch girls and performing elephants and had sufficient confidence not to feature at all in its second season.

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<sup>29</sup> Advertisement for Indian Pavilion, *The Times*, 30 September 1924

<sup>30</sup> Advertisement, India, *The Times*, 23 April 1924, vii

<sup>31</sup> The Lesson Of Wembley, *The Times*, 23 April 1924, 15

<sup>32</sup> Anne Clendinning, "On The British Empire Exhibition, 1924-25." *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. [Accessed 3.1.16], 7

Nevertheless, the Exhibition fulfilled a propaganda role for the government in promoting the empire in Britain and abroad, albeit in a rather different light than in previous years, and was described by Bernard Porter as 'the imperialists' greatest propaganda coup.'<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it seems likely to have had an effect on public awareness of empire in general, if not India specifically, as half the population saw the exhibition.<sup>34</sup> This propaganda effort was part of a larger endeavour by the British government to reposition the empire as a trading partner rather than a subjugated colony, which of course it remained. Various groups had been set up to this end during and after the war and eventually, in 1926, the Empire Marketing Board was formed to promote trading links.<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to imagine such an organisation being created before the war, designed as it was to present the public with an inclusive message, via lectures, pamphlets and educational materials for schools, under slogans such as 'Keep Trade in the Family.'<sup>36</sup> It was not the empire itself that was being promoted as it remained a dominant presence in Britain in the forms of goods, media and the other 'shards' which made up its representation in John Mackenzie's view, it was the notion of the empire as a family member and trading partner that the public was required to grasp. By extension, this also implies a degree of parity not previously seen. This, said Stephen Constantine, was the ideological message which was being implanted in the minds of the British people.<sup>37</sup>

The very language used to describe the empire changed in the years after the First World War. Less obvious was Government representation of empire as exotic, alien or in need of assistance from the mother country. Instead developed what Bernard Porter referred to as depictions of empire as 'community, co-operation, tolerance, freedom and even love.'<sup>38</sup> John Mackenzie was less ebullient, acknowledging the changed attitudes in terms of the necessity for Britain to stress the economic importance of the empire and the 'international trust involved in [the] relationship ... to give the enterprise international

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society & Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 261

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed Stockwell, S. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 202

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Constantine, 'Bringing the Empire Alive' The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-33,' in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed Stockwell, S. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 193

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 217

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 224

<sup>38</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society & Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 276

respectability' in the face of the new status accorded to Indian and the Dominion nations by their membership of the League of Nations and presence on the international stage.<sup>39</sup> This is clearly demonstrated in the positioning of India in the Empire Exhibition as a trading partner and slogans referring to keeping trace in the Family. Barbara Bush considered that a central aim of this new attitude to the empire and India was to maintain the strength of the empire in the unstable years after the war when 'the empire 'family' had stood together ... fostering 'empire intimacy' a new domestic motif of empire.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite all the positive propaganda and new relationship that the British government promoted with its empire, the legal framework under which Indian people lived in Britain in the post war years was a difficult one. The repatriation schemes of 1919 referred to above were specifically designed to deal with a particular group of people, foreign born seamen who had found work in Britain during the war. These men, often Lascars from India, were not required to carry passports, as citizens of the empire, whereas other foreign seamen were able to use evidence of their employment as identification so tended not to obtain passports either. For these reasons neither group were immediately affected by the 1919 Aliens Registration Act which was an extension of the wartime Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 or the extension to the Act, the Aliens Order of 1920, which further required all aliens to register with the police. Rozina Visram described the difficulty of obtaining a passport which was a process that involved obtaining a birth certificate and other information from India and took 11 months to organise.<sup>41</sup> However, the exemptions for Lascars and other seamen meant that, while numbers decreased from the wartime peak, there still remained pressure on the labour market and in 1925 the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, produced in part at the request of the National Sailor and Fireman's Union among others, demanded that all but white sailors should produce passports. As the difficulty in obtaining passports for Indian people, particularly sailors, had been well known since the introduction of the 1919 Act, this can only be seen as a deliberately hostile move towards sailors of the empire. Visram stated that 'thousands of seamen born in India, Malaya, Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East were reclassified as aliens, their British

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<sup>39</sup> John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 256

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 148

<sup>41</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 210

nationality and their rights of domicile snatched away.<sup>42</sup> It is also worth noting that the process would have been considerably simpler for middle class Indians seeking to live in Britain, such as the doctors and merchants referred to above, to obtain a passport, if only because they were already resident in India and more easily able to obtain the correct documentation.

### *The Domestic Political Stage*

As with the Dominion countries, internationally, India was starting to gain recognition after the war as reflected in its participation in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and subsequent membership of the League of Nations. Despite the reluctance of the USA, which felt it would have its influence diminished by a large number of Indian and Dominion delegates, India attended as part of a British delegation of 75.<sup>43</sup> The departure of the Indian delegation in Paris was reported in the *Daily Mail* with the same emphasis on exoticism as before the war, describing ‘their fine olive faces and lustrous black eyes, and a young man whose noble features were framed in a light brown turban, had a great success. “They say he is the son of a king,” said a working woman with respect.’<sup>44</sup>

However, in addition to the continued representations of Indians as exotic, they were now also portrayed as people of influence and the *Daily Mirror* showed a picture of Sir Satyendra Sinha and the Maharaja Bikaner in a montage of pictures of influential delegates leaving for Paris under the headline ‘British Peacemakers’ Departure for Paris.’<sup>45</sup> Sir Satyendra Sinha attended the Conference in his capacity as newly appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India, a position he had attained alongside his baronetcy as Baron Sinha of Raipur. The appointment reflected Sinha’s contribution as a member of the war cabinet and provided him with the necessary status to influence events not only at the Peace Conference but also in bringing the Government of India Act to the House of Lords in 1919.<sup>46</sup> His appointment to the House of Lords was

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 210

<sup>43</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Vol XXI, 1919, 122, 323

<sup>44</sup> Trifles Heard in the Crowd, *Daily Mail*, 20 January 1919, 6

<sup>45</sup> British Peacemakers departure for Paris, *Daily Mirror*, 20 January 1919

<sup>46</sup> S. V. FitzGerald, “Sinha, Satyendra Prasanno, first Baron Sinha (1863–1928).” Rev. Tapan Raychaudhuri. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36112> (accessed December 19, 2015).

announced in the *Daily Mirror* as being among the 'more interesting appointments'<sup>47</sup> which was presumably a reference to his being the first Indian peer in the House of Lords. The *Times History* also highlighted the appointment, stating, 'His appointment at this stage was a peculiarly significant step. It was clearly intended to be an earnest [sic] of the determination of the Imperial Government to build a permanent structure of Indian Constitutional Reform upon the proposals of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report.'<sup>48</sup> Sinha made his maiden speech in March 1919 and was given a warm welcome by his peers. He was introduced by Lord Islington who described his years of work of 'the highest distinction' and, with reference to the complexity of the Indian political establishment, asked for the 'support of your Lordships during the time he is in office.'<sup>49</sup>



Sir James Guthrie, *Statesmen of World War One*, National Portrait Gallery, NPG2463

To commemorate the war, the National Portrait Gallery commissioned a series of paintings. One of these was a group portrait of the 'Statesmen of World War One', shown above.<sup>50</sup> Alongside the Prime Minister and senior military figures is the Maharaja of Bikaner, representing India, as well as other leaders from the empire and Dominions. Although the Maharaja is to the far left of the portrait, the fact that a representative of

<sup>47</sup> Some Interesting Appointments in the New Government which is to assist Mr Lloyd George, *Daily Mirror*, 11 January 1919, 1

<sup>48</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Volume IXX, 396

<sup>49</sup> Hansard, 4 March 1919, India, Vol 33, para 461

[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1919/mar/04/india#column\\_461](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1919/mar/04/india#column_461) accessed 2.1.2016

<sup>50</sup> Sir James Guthrie, 'Statesmen of World War One', National Portrait Gallery, NPG2463

India was chosen as a 'statesman' at all is a significant development and reflects the legacy of India's participation in the war.

*The Imperial War Graves Commission*

Although the government and military permitted Indians to become officers in the Indian Army, in part in recognition of its service during the First World War, this inclusive spirit was not universal. An example of this is in the complexities of the built memorials to the Indian soldiers across the world. Although these memorials were superficially similar to those for British troops, a critical difference lay in how individual men were commemorated. Commemoration of the First World War is a complex subject in its own right and the focus here will be on how the British imperial commitments overshadowed the memorialisation of the Indian troops. From London to Delhi the trail of built memorials demonstrated not just the sacrifice of the men but the power of the British empire which brought them to the fighting fronts in its defence. Michèle Barrett argued that the need to project imperial power overrode in some instances the impetus to mark the fallen and on the memorials in Mesopotamia the names of the Indian men who died are not listed while those of white officers were recorded despite to the founding principle of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.<sup>51</sup> Jenny Macleod noted that there was no single English national war memorial; whereas the Scottish, Welsh and Irish all built their own memorials, London's memorials are Imperial efforts.<sup>52</sup> Macleod was clear that the memorials served as much to project British authority across the empire as to commemorate its dead. The story of the various Indian war memorials sheds some light on how the British chose to project that message.

The memorials were almost completely inaccessible to the families of the men of the Indian Corps except for a relatively small number of wealthy individuals, often Muslims on *hajj*, who did make the journey. There would have been no possibility of a Cook's Tour after the war to view the places their family member fought and where he was buried or commemorated, such as became popular with British families in the years after

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<sup>51</sup> Michèle Barrett, *Subalterns at War, Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 9:3 451-474, 2007, 464

<sup>52</sup> Jenny Macleod, *Britishness and Commemoration: National Memorials to the First World War in Britain and Ireland, Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 647

the war. For many from the North West Frontier Province even the official memorial in India, the India Gate in Delhi, would have been almost as inaccessible as the European memorials. Indian relatives of the dead would have no grave to visit but also no public monument to their dead son or brother in the way that the small local memorials which sprung up across Britain served the bereaved British.

In Belgium, at Ypres, the Indian soldiers are commemorated at the Menin Gate, which was built in 1927 and lists the names of all the men who have no known grave who fought in and around Ypres. In France, the Indian soldiers are commemorated at the Neuve Chapelle Memorial, which was built in 1927 and gives the names of 4843 men who fell in battle in the area. The Basra Memorial, built in 1929, commemorates the forty thousand soldiers who died without graves in Mesopotamia, now Iraq. 206 Indians are also buried in Germany at Zehrendorf Indian Cemetery, close by the Zossen Prisoner of War camp in which they were held. During the Cold War, the cemetery was not maintained and their names were added to a panel at the Neuve Chapelle Memorial in 1967. Although the Indian soldiers played a relatively small part in the war, the memorials were often unveiled by royalty and people of high standing, such as the Governor-General in Delhi in 1931, the Prince of Wales at the Chattri in Brighton in 1921 and the Maharajah of Patiala at the India Gate in Brighton the same year. These unveilings were always substantial events and extensively reported which created a public impression of the value of the memorials and the men they commemorated. *The Times* focussed in its report on the unveiling of the Neuve Chapelle memorial on the military success of the Indian soldiers, describing those at the ceremony as 'ablaze with medals.'<sup>53</sup> This is an example of the continuation of the earlier propaganda about the Indian soldiers as heroic and loyal which also served to emphasise the power and reach of the British empire.

The graves and memorials were managed by the IWCG, which was established in 1917 with the support of the Prince of Wales. The IWGC chose at an early stage to adopt the most egalitarian possible approach to commemorating the fallen; gravestones were of a standard size and of a shape which was non-religious and officers and men were

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<sup>53</sup> 'The Indians in France', *The Times*, 8 October 1927



accorded identical gravestones. Its founding principles included the provision that 'there should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed'<sup>54</sup> The IWGC's charter of Incorporation of May 1917 includes the Principal Secretary of State for India as a founding member of the board and explicitly stated that 'the word "cemetery" may or shall include a Hindu or other non-Christian cremation ground.'<sup>55</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederick Kenyon was appointed as advisor and was explicit as to the importance of commemorating the Indian soldiers:

The religious requirements of the different castes and creeds must be scrupulously respected ... the Commission will no doubt desire that no less honour should be paid to the last resting place of Indian and other non-Christian members of the Empire than to those of our British soldiers.<sup>56</sup>

Kenyon set up a sub-committee to deal specifically with the Indian dead which met for the first time on 20 March 1918 and consisted of Lord Islington, Under Secretary of State for India, W.P. Schreiner, High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmed Khan to represent Muslim interests and Sir Prakashankar D. Pantani to represent Hindus.<sup>57</sup> The meeting made four recommendations: that existing Muslim graves should, where possible, be left undisturbed, that any Hindus who had been buried should be exhumed and cremated, that a separate Muslim cemetery should be constructed and that at the respective cemeteries a mosque or temple should be built.<sup>58</sup> Designs for both a temple and a mosque were later taken to India for approval<sup>59</sup> but these plans were later watered down, partly because Sikhs and Gurkhas were by then also requesting separate memorials which would have proved prohibitively costly, so a memorial to all the Indian dead in France was decided upon.<sup>60</sup>

The various IWGC memorials differ in one important respect. The Menin Gate and Neuve Chapelle memorials both listed the names of the fallen but the Basra Memorial,

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/about-us/our-organisation.aspx>, accessed 29.2.15

<sup>55</sup> The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (henceforth CWGC), *Charter of Incorporation dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1917 and Supplemental Charter dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1964*, 2 & 8

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>58</sup> CWGC SDC86, *Minutes of a Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee*, 20 March 1918

<sup>59</sup> CWGC, WG909, Letter from Under Secretary of State for India to IWGC, 30 September 1918

<sup>60</sup> CWGC, WG909/9, enclosure to letter from India Office to IWGC, 8 July 1920

which was also under the auspices of the IWGC, did not list names but recorded them on a register in the UK. Michèle Barrett noted that this was a clear policy decision on the part of the then IWGC, and quoted the Principal Assistant Secretary's 1924 statement:

bearing in mind that the memorials themselves will in all probability not be seen by any of the relatives of the rank and file, the memorials in question outside Europe will contain only the names of the regiments concerned ... in Europe, where the memorials will be seen by many visitors, and where the numbers of Indian names are not so great, the British and Indian officers and the Indian rank and file will be commemorated by name.<sup>61</sup>

The distinction seems to be based on the assumption that Indian relatives were not likely to be able to visit a memorial in Basra. Barrett further noted a phrase from the briefing notes for the unveiling of the Basra Memorial by Sir Gilbert Clayton, the British High Commissioner to Iraq, that 'the white officers and men are recorded by name on the memorial, but the names of the Indian soldiers did not appear on it.'<sup>62</sup> Here, in a slightly less formal document, not intended for publication, was an explicit distinction between white and Indian soldiers, laid out both in writing and implicitly on the memorial itself: white names were recorded but Indian ones were not. Apart from the obvious explanation of a clear racist separation of the men, another factor was at play in Mesopotamia. Here the Indian troops vastly outnumbered the British. Barrett recorded that 33,887 Indian officers and men are mentioned by name at Basra and a total of 8,000 British officers and men are listed by name.<sup>63</sup> The memorial to the Indian soldiers at Neuve Chapelle in France, by contrast, listed all 4843 names of the Indian dead. The main inscription, in English and French, but no Indian language, read 'To the honour of the Army of India which fought in France and Belgium, 1914-1918, and in perpetual remembrance of those of their dead whose names are here recorded and who have no known grave.'

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<sup>61</sup> Barrett, *Subalterns*, 464

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 465

<sup>63</sup> Michèle Barrett, Afterword: Death and the Afterlife, in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 310

The comparison of these two memorials demonstrates that the IWGC treated the commemoration of the Indian soldiers differently inside and outside of Europe. Given that the Indian government paid for all the building work so cost was not an issue for the British, the contrast between the Basra and Neuve Chapelle memorials remains open to interpretation. Barrett asserted of the IWGC's actions that 'subaltern colonial troops were not commemorated equally, but the history of these decisions has not been fully acknowledged. In this way, a further silencing of the subaltern takes place: not only are these lives not commemorated, the acts of exclusion are themselves erased.'<sup>64</sup>

It is fair to assume that the IWGC intended to treat all the fallen equally, so it is worth asking why it could be that those in Basra were not acknowledged as were those in Europe. One explanation could be that on the Belgian and French memorials, the Indian names are lost in a sea of European names but in Mesopotamia the reverse would have applied. The impression sought by the inclusion of Indian names on the Western Front of Britain as a powerful imperial nation would have appeared in Mesopotamia as a small number of British names among many thousands of Indian names. While that was certainly the true picture, it would not have given the impression of power sought by the British administration in the newly formed Iraq and the wider region. It seems likely that the IWGC must have had an eye to the British and international audience, of whom many thousands did visit the far more accessible memorials on the Western Front. By creating memorials to Indian as well as other empire troops, Britain could send a clear message that it did not fight alone but was part of a vast empire which extended far beyond Europe.

#### *Empire and Dominion Troops During and After the First World War*

Although in 1914 the British empire was the largest and mightiest in the world and could thus produce the most men and resources for the war effort, the French and Germans also had colonial holdings which needed to be factored into military planning. At the start of World War One, the French empire was as far reaching, if not as large, as that of the British and spread from South America to Antarctica.<sup>65</sup> The German empire,

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<sup>64</sup> Barratt, *Subalterns*, 472

<sup>65</sup> In modern country equivalents: French West Africa – Ivory Coast, Benin, Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Gambia; French North Africa – Morocco (majority of), Algeria, Tunisia, Libya; French Equatorial Africa – Chad, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Gabon, Cameroon

outside Europe, consisted of German East Africa, German West Africa, German South-West Africa, Samoa and a number of Pacific Islands.<sup>66</sup> The German African colonies provided no men for the European war and their forces did not leave Africa during the war. Although covering enormous amounts of land, these colonies were economically and strategically of little importance to Germany and thus were only lightly defended.<sup>67</sup> The German military kept the smallest possible military force, known as the *Schutztruppen*, of just 6,500 men, which was never integrated into the main German army.<sup>68</sup> When the war broke out in Europe, the orders from Germany were to take no aggressive action in West Africa and to merely defend the colonies against any incursions by the allies.

The French system was very different from that of the Germans because the French African colonies were less stable and the French had expansionist aims in Africa right up to the start of the war. In 1857 (coincidentally the year of the Indian Mutiny, after which the British recognised the need for an organised army), the Governor-General of French West Africa, Louis Faidherbe, founded the *Tirailleurs*<sup>69</sup> to protect and expand the West African holdings.<sup>70</sup> By 1914, there were 14,000 *Tirailleurs*, mostly serving in French West Africa, and a further 15,000 in Morocco. In the autumn of 1914, six battalions (approximately 6,000 men and officers) of *Tirailleurs* left for France, while the remainder, with other French African colonial units, were left to continue fighting in Morocco. France's keenest concern was its defence against Germany, not its colonies, so the *Tirailleurs* remained in the thick of the fighting until the end of the war, usually in mixed units of African and white soldiers. By 1918 215,000 French colonial troops had served in France and the Dardanelles, including *Tirailleurs* as well as the *Spahis* and the *Zoaves* of French North Africa.

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(majority of); French East Africa – Madagascar, Somalia; Asia - Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam (together as the French Indochinese Union), parts of India and China, Lebanon, Syria.

<sup>66</sup> In modern country equivalents: German East Africa – Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi; German West Africa – Togo, Ghana, Cameroon; German South-West Africa – Namibia, Botswana.

<sup>67</sup> David Killingray, & David Omissi, Eds, *Guardians of Empire*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), 5

<sup>68</sup> Killingray and Omissi, *Guardians of Empire*, 91

<sup>69</sup> Marksman or skirmisher

<sup>70</sup> Also often referred to as *Tirailleurs Senegalais*, despite being recruited from across French West Africa)

The Dominion countries were necessarily at war from the moment of the British declaration and former Canadian Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier declared that 'It is our duty to let Great Britain know and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart and that all Canadians are behind the Mother Country.'<sup>71</sup> The battle which is forever linked with the Canadians is the fight for Vimy Ridge on 9-12 April 1917 in which 3,598 men died and a further 7,000 were injured to take the Ridge.<sup>72</sup> The Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Brigade, Brigadier-General A. E. Ross said of the battle 'In those few moments I witnessed the birth of a nation.'

Many Australians regarded themselves as 'Australasian Britons' and were content with their junior partnership in the empire.<sup>73</sup> The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), spent the winter of 1914 in Egypt training and preparing for their assault at Gallipoli in April of 1915. The Australians in particular ended the war with little respect for the British high command, and to a lesser extent, the British private. After numerous failures from Gallipoli onwards, they saw the British as hidebound by rules and regulations, to the detriment of their fighting ability. 'Searching for explanations, they fell back on the archetype of the Australian bushman' wrote Peter Stanley, who credited Australian writer Charles Bean as the man who propagated this view and did much to promote Australia's own identity in the years following the war:

He idealised the virtues of the bushman. On Gallipoli he virtually created what has become known as the 'Anzac legend', the celebration of the archetypal virtues of the Australian soldier... Anzacs were almost defined by their differences with Britain. Many qualities - independence, casual proficiency, and a disregard of rank for its own sake - specifically contrasted with the qualities of the British regular.<sup>74</sup>

The troops of the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) served in France from 1916 to 1918, having been formed in Seaford, Sussex on 26 October 1915. Although the West

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/history/firstwar/canada/Canada3>

<sup>72</sup> Cook, T., The Battle of Vimy Ridge, [http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/vimy/index\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/vimy/index_e.shtml)

<sup>73</sup> Peter Stanley, *Australia in World War One, I*, [www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/australia\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/australia_01.shtml), accessed 30 December 2012

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 3

Indies Regiment had existed for many years, large numbers of West Indian men set sail for Britain to volunteer for European service in the British Army at the start of the war. At first the British Government was uncomfortable with the idea of black soldiers serving alongside white British troops but pressure from the West Indies and Allied losses led to the formation of the BWIR. Eventually 15,204 men and 397 officers served in the BWIR, of whom 10,280 were Jamaican.<sup>75</sup> While the structure of the British Army gave some protection from overt racism to the men of the BWIR, this was by no means the whole picture. BWIR men were often used to fill the roles of Labour Units, to their disgust. A Trinidadian soldier complained in 1918 that 'instead of being drawn closer to the Church and Empire, we are driven away from it.'<sup>76</sup> This dissatisfaction reached its height after the Armistice, when the BWIR was moved to Italy to await repatriation. Due to labour shortages, the regiment was used to load and unload cargo ships arriving at Taranto and on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1918, the men mutinied and the 9<sup>th</sup> BWIR was disbanded. News of this soon reached the West Indies and fed into an existing campaign to gain greater independence. The news, and the already prevalent discontent in the West Indies, followed by the arrival home of the soldiers from September 1919, fuelled the nationalist movements in the West Indies which carried on through to the 1930s and eventual independence.

The situation in Ireland was the most complex. At the outbreak of war Unionists were keen to join up and support Britain and large numbers of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) went to war. Separately, the Nationalists committed themselves to the war, nominally in defence of smaller countries such as Belgium and Serbia, with whom they identified.<sup>77</sup> Within three months 40,000 Irish soldiers, regulars and reservists hauled in to fill the gaps left by casualties, would be involved in the fighting on the Western Front.<sup>78</sup> The primarily Nationalist New Army divisions saw action in Gallipoli in the summer of 1915 and the Unionists were active in France during the Battle of the Somme in July

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<sup>75</sup> Howe, G. D., *A White Man's War? World War One and the West Indies*, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/west\\_indies\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/west_indies_01.shtml), accessed 11.4.18, 2

<sup>76</sup> Ferguson, N., *Empire*, p. 304

<sup>77</sup> Keith Jeffrey, K., *Ireland and World War One*, 1 [www.bbc.co.uk/history/britain/wwone\\_html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/britain/wwone_html), accessed 1 January 2013

<sup>78</sup> Myles Dungan, *Irish Voices from the Great War* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1995),

1916. As the 1<sup>st</sup> of July is the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, it came to be particularly identified with their cause.<sup>79</sup>

In Ireland some Nationalist groups were planning a rebellion against the British rule which culminated in the Easter Uprising of 1916. As this was considered to be an act of treason, the British hit back hard and some 500 people were killed and the ringleaders executed. The reaction to the uprising left Unionists marginalised and Irish soldiers in the British Army facing trouble, even in France. Private Arthur Baxter, writing of the time of the Battle of the Somme, described the plight of an Irish gunner, Mick Flemmand, 'Poor old boy, he could neither read nor write. He'd come from Ireland and I used to read his letters for him. He come from Southern Ireland, they had a terrible job there in 1916 didn't they? When he had his leave from France, he daren't go home, you know. There was a place in London where the likes of him went. He told us he'd be killed if he went home, bring in the British Army, you see.'<sup>80</sup> On their return after the Armistice, neither Unionist nor Nationalist troops met with a warm welcome. Nationalist feeling had hardened against Unionists after the Uprising and the Nationalist Divisions had been broken up by the British Army in an act many saw as a further insult. In 1919, Joe Devlin, MP for West Belfast, speaking at a rally for former Nationalist soldiers said, 'unfortunately, the close of the war brought to Ireland no peace and freedom, but strife and repression.'<sup>81</sup> The post war situation in Ireland was, if anything, exacerbated by its involvement in the war. Its men returned, especially in the Nationalist areas, not as heroes but as unwelcome reminders of Ireland's uncertain future. Tom Kettle, a Nationalist who had served on the Somme said of his return, 'These men [the 1916 leaders] ... will go down in history as heroes and martyrs; and I will go down – if I go down at all – as a bloody British officer.'<sup>82</sup>

After the war in the Caribbean the achievements of its men in the war was used to fuel demands for greater independence, although here the soldiers were given a heroes' welcome and made a significant contribution to the struggle in the years after the war. The post war experience of the Dominion countries was different again. Before the war,

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<sup>79</sup> Jeffrey, *Ireland and World War One*, 2

<sup>80</sup> Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, (Ebury Press, London, 2002), 162

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey, *Ireland and World War One*, 4

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

these countries had no British military presence and only relatively small armed forces of their own. This meant that the cost of raising men to join the war was largely met from their own economies. Their motivation, at both an individual and governmental level, was a complex combination of obligation and loyalty. The most significant change for the Dominions after the war was that they were made signatories of the Treaty of Versailles and included in the League of Nations, formed as part of the Treaty.<sup>83</sup> They had entered the war merely as adjuncts to the British empire and ended it as internationally recognised countries. While this made no difference to their dominion status, this was a breakthrough in the self-image of these countries. The war had left an impression from which there could be no return: that the Dominions were viable nations with their own identities and now a formalised place in the world order. Perhaps more significantly, they now saw themselves as emerging nations with clear identities separate from that of their connection to the British empire.

This section has shown that, despite the positive propaganda and language demonstrated by the government in the post war years and the improved status of India and the other colonial nations on the international stage as a result of their participation in the League of Nations, the government view changed very little. Overall, despite minor, and largely cosmetic, gestures the British continued to view its empire citizens as subjects. Its main aim continued to be to promote the British empire at home and abroad as a dominant and influential world force.

## THE MILITARY PERSPECTIVE

### *The Indianisation Of the Indian Army*

The British military had, by and large, treated its Indian soldiers who fought in Europe respectfully and maintained good relationships with the men throughout the war, which continued in its aftermath. However, the deep inequality produced by the rule that Indians may not become officers remained a sticking point and the British government and military sought to rectify the issue. The government had been made aware of the difficulty of replacing British officers during the war and the absence of Indian soldiers or potential recruits who would be able to step into the role and had been petitioned

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<sup>83</sup> Peace Treaty of Versailles, Articles I - 30 and Annex: The Covenant of the League of Nations,



extensively on the subject by the Government of India, as this extract shows: 'from the day that the Indian regiments valiantly passed through their baptism of fire on European battlefields, they have seen how quickly their small band of British officers can be swept away ... and they must ask themselves why to Indians alone this privilege should be denied.'<sup>84</sup> A meeting of the War Cabinet acknowledged the point in a fiercely argued debate, in which Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Curzon, the former Governor-General of India, argued that it was causing recruitment difficulties and that Indian soldiers, through their gallantry in France, had won the right to become officers. Their argument carried the day and the decision was taken 'to sanction an announcement that they accepted in principle the appointment of Indians to commissioned rank in His Majesty's Army in August 1917.'<sup>85</sup>

By the 1918 it had been decided that a number of substantive and honorary commissions would be given to men who had distinguished themselves in the war and cadetships would be set up at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for 'ten Indian gentlemen.'<sup>86</sup> This development broadly matched the civil and governmental processes of increased Indian influence under the Government of India Act. Initially, eight battalions would be 'Indianised,' which meant that they would be formed of Indian soldiers only, and Indian officers commissioned during and after the war would be transferred to these battalions, along with newly trained officers from Sandhurst. The process of promotion would eventually mean that these battalions were staffed only with Indian men of all ranks. Indian Sandhurst graduates had to serve for a year in a British battalion in India before taking command of an Indianised battalion, as did British officer recruits. The intention was to ensure that as far as possible Indian men did not command British troops. However, when one of the first ten Indian Sandhurst cadets refused to leave the all-British 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Lancers which he had trained in and the regiment refused to let him go he was quietly allowed to stay with the Lancers. As time went on the issue of segregated units became more and more contentious as its basic premise became increasingly obvious. Early explanations for the necessity of Indianised units such as the justification that the new Indian officer class must be tested without British officers to shore up any

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<sup>84</sup> TNA, CAB/23/3, Extract from Despatch of Government of India dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 1916

<sup>85</sup> TNA, CAB/23/3, Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet on 2 August 1917

<sup>86</sup> Hansard, Commons Sitting 22 July 1918 HC Debate 22 July 1918 vol 108, cc 1429-31

failings was only sustainable as long as the Indian officers were in the training system. Once they had passed out of Sandhurst and completed their introductory year, they had exactly the same training, experience and status as a junior British officer.<sup>87</sup>

The problem of the new Indian officers' social status had been considered in a dispatch from the Indian Government in August 1917, referring to the importance of their training at Sandhurst, rather than establishing an Indian cadet school, as 'the best guarantee for the elimination of racial prejudice on the part of British officers and men ... is to give them such a training as will enable them to start on their regimental careers with the manners and ideas of an English gentleman.'<sup>88</sup> The aim was presumably to reduce prejudice by making the Indian soldiers appear more British, because British soldiers would be more willing to treat Indians as peers or superior officers if they behaved in a suitably British manner. Philip Mason asserted that even the Indian soldiers and public largely agreed with this, 'feeling that on this kind of thing the British really did know best and that their kind of officer was the best kind to have.'<sup>89</sup> The incipient racism within this policy is drawn out in a comment by Major Alexander who described Captain Singh, who was entitled to hold officer rank by virtue of being a doctor and who gained a Military Cross in October 1914: 'Singh was educated in England, and was as white a man as ever lived.' Whether this was intended as a simple reference to his education and, after a British education, presumably his manner, the remark defines the standard upon which men should be judged as the 'whiteness' of their conduct. One positive consequence of a British demeanour for Indian officers was that it went some way to addressing the religious and ethnic differences between the Indians soldiers, as illustrated by Lord Rawlinson's question, 'will we ever get a young educated Indian to lead a charge of veteran Sikhs against a *sangar* held by Mahsuds, and, if he did, would the Sikhs follow him?'<sup>90</sup>

The process of becoming more British at Sandhurst, to walk the 'narrow tight-rope between being offensively bumptious and insignificantly dull', according to Mason, was

<sup>87</sup> Andrew Sharpe, *The Indianisation of the Indian Army*, *History Today* 36:3, March 1986, 48

<sup>88</sup> TNA, CAB/24/49, Extract from Despatch from the Government of India, Army Department, Number 57, dated 3 August 1917

<sup>89</sup> Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army and its Officers and Men* (London: Cape, 1974), 460

<sup>90</sup> Sharpe, *The Indianisation of the Indian Army*, 50

not a simple one for a middle class Indian boy; not only did he have to learn a complex dress code, such as never wearing brown shoes with a dark suit, he had to do without servants, polish his own kit, live without his parents and manage his money carefully, as his parents would almost certainly not have provided him with enough money to furnish him in the style of his British peers.<sup>91</sup> Once he had mastered all that, as well as his military training, he must serve with a British battalion in India, commanding a platoon of British soldiers of his own. The social aspect of the Sandhurst training came in useful once the officer was commissioned as for the first time as in the years immediately after the war Indians were invited to join the many clubs across India from which they had previously been excluded. However, some clubs seemed to need more encouragement than others to uphold this and the Peshawar Club only agreed when its local colonel stated that unless all his officers could join, none would and he would therefore have no reason to lend his cavalry horses to the Club for hunts.<sup>92</sup> This is an example of changing attitudes among British military figures: the Colonel had clearly not previously objected to the lack of Indian members of the Club, yet when civilians failed to recognise the new status of his officers, he threatened with withdraw his cooperation from the Club.

Given the unique difficulties faced by Indian cadets, the relatively low success rate at Sandhurst is perhaps not surprising. Of the first batch of five candidates, who joined in January 1919, just two were commissioned and of the second, from September 1919, four of five cadets were commissioned. It is notable that four of these officers were from outside the traditional recruiting areas of the North West Frontier Province and the Punjab and all were middle class and educated. Although their subsequent careers varied, several were illustrious. The very first graduate, Syeed Iskander Ali Meerza, left the Army four years after he was commissioned and ended his career as the first President of Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> Kumar Shri Rajendrasinhji was commissioned in June 1921 and became the first Indian officer to be awarded the DSO in 1941 and served as Chief of Staff of the Indian Army between 1953 and 1955.<sup>94</sup> By the time of the Second World

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<sup>91</sup> Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 461

<sup>92</sup> Charles Chevenix Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies 1900-1947* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 117

<sup>93</sup> H. Hussain, *Panorama of Officers in Indian and Pakistan Army*  
[http://pdefence.pk/threads/panorama\\_of\\_officers\\_in\\_indian\\_and\\_pakistan\\_army.219149](http://pdefence.pk/threads/panorama_of_officers_in_indian_and_pakistan_army.219149), accessed 19.12.13

<sup>94</sup> [www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Personnel/Chiefs](http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Personnel/Chiefs), accessed 18.12.13

War, 165 cadets had been through Sandhurst, of whom 143 had been commissioned.<sup>95</sup> A smaller number had also been through the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich and the Indian Military Academy, which opened in 1932. Just as the Indianisation of the Indian Army was precipitated by the First World War, it was hurriedly completed during the Second for the same reason, as once again demand for officers exceeded supply. In June 1940, all units of the Indian Army were 'thrown open' to Indians and by the end of the war there were some 8,300 serving Indian officers.<sup>96</sup>

By beginning the process of allowing Indian soldiers to become officers while the men were still in France, the British government had tacitly acknowledged its responsibility for one of the most intransigent problems the Indian Corps had faced, as well as contributing to the improved status of Indian people and, at least in part, helping to maintain the support of the Indian soldiers of the Indian Army for the Raj. This was precipitated directly by the participation of the Indian soldiers in the war, which highlighted both the structural problems with the system of allowing only British officers and also the men's collective bravery and achievements. It is notable, however, that full implementation of Indianisation did not happen until the problem of a shortage of officers recurred in the Second World War.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this section has been its illustration of how inconsistent and even contradictory the attitudes and actions of the British people and government were towards both India and its soldiers who had served in Europe.

The controversy surrounding the events of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre is illustrative of changed British public attitudes towards Indian people after the war. While General Dyer enjoyed support for his actions in many quarters, the parliamentary debates demonstrated a new distaste for the use of extreme violence to maintain British rule in India. Even as these events were taking place, race riots broke out in port cities in the summer of 1919. The fact of the protests is less informative than the swift degeneration

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<sup>95</sup> *A Nominal Roll of Indian Gentlemen Cadets attending the Royal Military College at Sandhurst between 1 January 1919 and 31 December 1939*

<sup>96</sup> Sharpe, *The Indianisation of the Indian Army*, 52

into racism seen in the crowd. Events such as the Peace Day Parade in London and local events such as the unveiling of the Chattri in Brighton celebrated the Indian soldiers in the abstract but when called upon to interact with Indians in Britain, this tolerant attitude ceased and gave way to aggression and more passive acts such as the refusal of landlords let to Indian tenants.

The Government of India Act did indicate willingness on the part of the British government to consider greater influence for the people of India but its positive effects were diminished by the restrictions of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. Among other troops of the empire which served during the war, very little changed in their status as far as the British government was concerned, although alongside the Dominion countries, their sense of value and desire for independence did grow. The British government continued to see India as a subject nation, despite small concessions and the growing public demand in Indian for self-rule. The most significant impact of the Indian war service appeared to be the decision of the government and army to permit Indian soldiers to train as officers and to lead British soldiers. Nevertheless, this did not occur in significant numbers until the Second World War some twenty years later. The refusal of the IWGC to publish the names of Indian soldiers on its memorials in Mesopotamia, where the numbers of Indian names would have far exceeded those of British ones, and to some extent even the Peace Day parade and British Empire Exhibition can be seen as statements of the power and reach of the British empire across the globe, even as the government was promoting a new language of family and shared endeavour towards its empire.

Taken together, these changes reflect an ambivalence on the part of British people and their government to India after the war. While undoubtedly prepared to celebrate its efforts with events which were attended in large numbers and to consider the empire in generally less jingoistic and more humanitarian manner<sup>97</sup> as a trading partner and family member, overall this did not bring forth enduring change and the relationship between Britain and India did not substantially change for another generation.

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<sup>97</sup> Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, 201; Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 149

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined how the ‘hazardous experiment’ of deploying Indian troops in France came to influence the opinions of both civilian and military Britons towards Indian people. It has shown that both groups were indeed influenced by the presence of Indian soldiers serving the British in France, although the extent to which this lasted beyond the end of the war is less clear.

A key aim of this thesis has been to explore civilian reactions to the Indian soldiers’ service in France and how this affected attitudes towards Indian people. In the pre-war years, the manner in which Indian people were represented in the press, literature and entertainment such as festivals and music halls was one dimensional and focussed on depicting Indian people as subordinates in a variety of ways: as rebellious students, passive recipients of charity or exotic aliens. Charitable institutions such as the London City Mission set up homes for ayahs and Lascars without means or accommodation in Britain, fostering the image of Indian people as unable to help themselves as referred to in Chapter Two; students were seen as rebellious and even dangerous following the assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie and the activities of the Lee Warner Committee and yet others lived among the establishment as Members of Parliament and landowners. These representations changed during the war to a new emphasis on the Indian troops as stoic, valiant and loyal, characteristics they shared with the British Tommy in France. This change was necessitated by the need for the government to project the men in a positive light to reassure the public that they were competent and effective fighters, as was seen in the Press Bureau stories in Chapter One. In the years after the war, the focus of representations changed again and India and the empire in general were now presented as trading partners and family members.

The picture for British people who encountered Indians was initially just as positive. The population of Indian people in Britain before the war was both very small and very diverse and somewhat detached from the British people. For this reason, as in the case study of Brighton, which hosted the largest number of wounded Indian soldiers in its hospitals, the war provided a first encounter for many with Indian people, as discussed in Chapter Two. By the war’s end, public enthusiasm, if not affection, was demonstrated by the reaction of the people of Brighton: gifts were abundant, more visits to people’s

homes were offered than could be accommodated and, even three years after the end of the war, crowds gathered in large numbers to commemorate the men. The creation and work of the Indian Soldiers' Fund further illustrated the affection and respect shown by those who had known Indian people during their working lives in India and the large amount of money raised and considerable efforts to distribute their resources also speak to a more general regard.

The post war period proved an inconsistent and contradictory time for Britain's relationship with India and its people, both those in India and those who were residents in Britain. On the one hand, in 1919, a portion of the British public condemned the events that took place at Jallianwalla Bagh at the same time as others were rioting against the presence of Lascars in port cities. In March of the same year, the Rowlatt Act extended the British government's power of control of those suspected of committing acts of sedition originally set out in the wartime Defence of India Act and in December 1919 the Government of India Act received Royal Assent provided for extended influence of Indian people in government and established dual control of large areas of the country. While there was still prejudice and it was beyond question that the Social Darwinist norm prevailed and Britain still ruled its empire with a rod of iron at times, the thrust was towards a more cooperative relationship with its colonies. This progression above was demonstrated in the case study of Rudyard Kipling's writing on India in Chapter One which showed the development of representations of Indian people from humble servants to soldiers complaining about the weather in France to men for whom prayers of gratitude are to be offered.<sup>1</sup>

The second principal aim of the thesis was to analyse the changes which took place from a military perspective. At the start of the war, and even during its course, the Indian Army was seen as something of a backwater. As Willcocks claimed when writing about his summary dismissal from France, his thirty-seven years of service counted for little as, 'I belonged to the Indian Corps! – that explains much.'<sup>2</sup> As was shown in Chapter Three,

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<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Story of Mohammad Din, Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Macmillan, 1888); *The New Army in Training* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 47; 'Epitaphs of the War' (1919), Pinney ed, *The Cambridge Edition of the Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, vol II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1141

<sup>2</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Co 1920), 322

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there were considerable concerns in the military establishment about deploying Indian soldiers in Europe and they were only sent to France after considerable losses in the BEF put the British contribution in jeopardy. Their task was to hold an eight-mile section of the line until such time as reinforcements could be sent. In the event, this took fourteen months until the early drafts of Kitchener's Army and the Canadian troops were ready to deploy. Despite enormous losses, equivalent to greater than the original number of men who arrived in France, the Indian Corps succeeded in their task. There was no German breakthrough to the channel ports in the autumn of 1914 and the line was held until the men left in November 1915.

Hard lessons had been learned by the British military after the experience of the Rebellion of 1857 and these continued to inform policy even in France. Care and attention was paid to ensuring the religious requirements of the men were met and that their medical treatment was seen to be as good, if not better, than that of British troops. This served two purposes. Firstly, the men's morale held up well and this made them an effective fighting force and they justifiably garnered much praise. The second purpose was to maintain the prestige of the Raj in India and the rest of the world. As has been seen, this was made explicit in the case of the hospitals in Britain, where the commanders were keen that the troops fared well and had no complaints about the conditions which could have brought about discontent in India.

The fourth chapter dealt with the problems that the British military assumed would be faced by the Indian troops in France. The purpose of this discussion was to illustrate how this prejudice fitted in with Social Darwinist perceptions concerning Indian people and soldiers as well as to illustrate that these problems proved spurious in the event. Just as the civilian population was forced to re-evaluate their opinion of Indian competency and agency, so was the military. No longer could it be assumed that Indian soldiers could only function if they were carefully led by British officers. While the loss of British officers certainly had an impact on the men, the impact was in terms of their morale, not their ability to fight. It was this re-evaluation that ultimately resulted by the 1920s in Indian officers commanding not just Indian but British soldiers, a vast attitudinal change from the 'hazardous experiment' undertaken less than ten years earlier. While this shift was undoubtedly significant, it should be borne in mind that in no small part it



was a result of sheer necessity as the very small number of British officers available to the Indian Army was soon exhausted and replacing them proved to be more difficult than had been anticipated. While the process was rather hesitant and the numbers low in the first few years, the shift this represents cannot be underestimated, although numbers of Indian officers remained relatively low until the same considerations became apparent in the Second World War. Likewise, the assumptions that the Indian soldiers would not be able to cope with the climate in France and that they would be subject to disciplinary problems and seditious behaviour were shown to be untrue. Set against this was the IWGC's decision not to commemorate Indian and British soldiers equally at the memorial in Basra, a choice which reflected the hierarchical norms of the British empire.

Praise for the Indian Corps during the war was widespread, not just by those senior officers who knew them, such as General Willcocks and Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether, both of whom had long careers with the Indian Army behind them, but also by senior staff figures such as Sir John French and General Haig, neither of whom were familiar with the Indian Corps before the war and had relatively little direct contact with them during their time in France. Similarly, as was shown in Chapter Three, British troops who fought alongside the Indian soldiers formed largely positive opinions of them and praised their courage and military skills. In Britain as well, there were endorsements of the Indian Corps in the highest circles, for example in the speech made by the Prince of Wales on the Indian Corps' departure from France or his attendance at the unveiling of the Chattri in Brighton in 1921 and the visits of the King George V, Queen Mary and Queen Alexandra the Queen Mother to the wounded soldiers in Brighton hospitals.

This thesis offers a contribution to the historical literature in two ways. Firstly, it contributes to the revival of interest in the Indian soldiers of the First World War. In recent years, interest in the subaltern view of the Indian Corps has become a live topic, with current research in India potentially uncovering new aspects of the Indian First World War experience such as the upcoming publication by Santanu Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture: Literature, Images and Songs*.<sup>3</sup> Britain's former empire and the

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<sup>3</sup> Santanu Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture: Literature, Images and Songs* (Cambridge University Press, due August 2018); Santanu Das, *1914-1918: Indians on the Western Front* (Gallimard/Ministère de la Défense-DMPA, Mission du centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale, Paris, 2014); David Olusoga, *The World's War* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014); Vedica Kant, *If I die here, who will remember me? India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2014)

domestic aspects of this continues to be researched and it is at the intersection of these subjects that this thesis offers both new evidence and a new perspective by analysing how the Indian Corps' contribution came to affect British attitudes to Indian and its people. Alongside this, the thesis has re-examined the negative conclusions drawn by historians and commentators during the twentieth century and found their criticism to be largely illusory.

The work of Jeffrey Greenhut, David Omissi et al took up the problems anticipated by the British military before the Indian Corps was deployed to France and perpetuated them. However, as George Morton-Jack asserted, these claims do not bear further analysis from the viewpoint of a military historian and he wrote in the introduction to his 2014 book that he felt that it was time for a revival of acclaim for the Indian Corps.<sup>4</sup> This reflected the negative nature of historical writing about it during the hundred years since the end of the war which has become central to the narrative of the Indian Corps' service in Europe. It is notable that this perspective has persisted, despite the almost universal praise for the Indian Corps from influential senior officers of the time, such as Willcocks and Merewether and, despite being bound up in the imperial hierarchy, were overwhelmingly positive about the Indian soldiers.

The thesis further contributes a new perspective on the long-standing debate about the British public's interest in its empire which began with the work of John Mackenzie and Bernard Porter. The heightened interest in the Indian soldiers and the improved representations of Indian people in the years after the war seem to support Bernard Porter's view that British people had little interest in their empire. If the empire was a constant presence, as claimed by John Mackenzie, the novelty felt by people who encountered Indian people would surely not have been so pronounced. Even given this, the interest shown in the Indian soldiers does not appear to have gone beyond the novel and the evidence does not show that any privileged treatment derived from it. In fact, the increasing Indian population in Britain suffered prejudice both on individual and legislative levels in the years after the war, as was shown on Chapter Five. This further supports Porter's view that Britain had but little interest in its empire after the war and

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<sup>4</sup> George 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), 27

that, while people were happy to acknowledge its collective service, that too was soon forgotten and the empire faded once again into the background.

Bernard Porter noted the change in the language used towards the empire, attributing this to the creation of a new myth of 'uniquely gentle' imperialism, designed to move away from a militaristic model to one of co-operation.<sup>5</sup> The work of historians such as Barbara Bush and Brad Beaven also refer to the developing 'family motif' which reflected the new found 'distaste for jingoism' that was being promoted concerning Britain's relationship with its empire.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that the British view of India changed completely and John Mackenzie found jingoism alive and well in the new media such as cinema and, for him 'Social Darwinism and imperial developmental concepts underlay all the expedition, documentary and newsreel material of the time.'<sup>7</sup> Despite this, Porter contended that 'popular ignorance of and apathy towards the empire can be pretty well established for these interwar years' and added that, although British people certainly benefited from the empire materially, the relationship was one of apathetic tolerance.<sup>8</sup> John Mackenzie does not consider that the war made a considerable difference to Britons' commitment to the empire but does acknowledge the change in focus towards a 'beneficent, idealistic imperialism' which he considered to be an attempt to justify the existence of empire at home and abroad in the face of the growing independence of the Dominion countries and the importance of the changing economic relationship between Britain and its empire.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he remained certain that Britain was dominated by its imperial culture far beyond the post-war years.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis has shown that British interest in its empire before the war took the shape of a bell curve: at one end small numbers of people held it as being critical to the British self-image and at the other equally small numbers disregarded it entirely and in between sat the majority, whose level of interest sat between the two extremes. It seems that

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society & Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 273

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 148; Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 201

<sup>7</sup> John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 255

<sup>8</sup> Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 276

<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 256

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 258; John Mackenzie, 'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36, no. 4, (2008), 666

during and immediately after the war, the curve tipped towards regarding the empire as being of critical importance as it fought alongside British soldiers and positive reports flooded the media and a few people met Indians for the first time, but in the end all this faded away and the old curve re-established itself.

It is the contention of this thesis that encounters between individual soldiers and civilians, as well as changed representations of Indian people due to the Indian soldiers' time in France gave the British public a clearer and more positive opinion of Indian people. It is apparent that the military contribution of India, in combination with personal encounters, gave the British public an insight into India and its people that they were not previously aware of and from this grew a sincere appreciation. At least in part this informed attitudes to India and the empire and the development of a more progressive view of empire and an increasing but by no means complete sense of parity between Britain and its empire. Despite this, hierarchical and racist attitudes were by no means eliminated and in the medium and longer-term picture these attitudes did not fade from view and the old Social Darwinist hierarchy prevailed for another generation.

Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether summed up the Indian experience in France and illustrated once again that those who knew the Indian soldiers best had never doubted them and their abilities:

No man could be bold enough to predict the result of flinging Oriental troops into these horrible scenes, in a pitiless climate, to lose life and limb in a quarrel remote from their own experiences, uninspired by fears on behalf of their own peoples, or even of their own property ... those who knew the Indian soldier best were confident, however sudden his immersion into the Great War would be, that his traditions, his loyalty and his sense of duty would carry him through. And they did.<sup>11</sup>

At least for him, the 'hazardous experiment' had been an overwhelming success.

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<sup>11</sup> J. W. B. Merewether, *The Indian Corps In France* (London: Murray, 1918), 469

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