SPIRITUAL SOLDIERS AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE BRITISH INDIAN ARMY

by

KATE ALISON IMY

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

Seth Koven and Bonnie Smith

And approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

MAY, 2016
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Spiritual Soldiers and the Politics of Difference in the British Indian Army, 1900-1940

By KATE ALISON IMY

Dissertation Director:
Seth Koven and Bonnie Smith

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the British Indian Army went from being a force to suppress internal dissent and protect the borders of the subcontinent to a highly mobile army stationed around the globe. British needs for additional overseas forces meant combining three distinct regional armies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay into a nominally united “Indian” Army. This single military force hid the recruiting biases and theories of martial difference that signaled the fracture, rather than the unity, of the army and the imperial project. This dissertation examines how the institutional changes of the British Indian Army enabled the social and cultural preconditions for the transition from colonial rule to a “globalized” post-colonial order.

The British Indian Army in the twentieth century prided itself on its central organization as an “Indian” Army, but the men who served as troops hailed from diverse regions of India as well as the modern nation states of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The centrality of a nation-state ideal underpinning the “Indian” army not only figured into debates about anti-colonial nationalism, but in the increasing global mobility of both British and South Asian men. Britons and South Asians migrated to and worked in diverse imperial locales—from Australia to New Zealand, Singapore to Hong
Kong. Yet the differences between men were not only racial and regional. Significant class and caste disparities existed between the upwardly mobile cosmopolitan Indian officers and their low-ranking and uneducated enlisted counterparts. This encouraged further divisions between those able and willing to gain from a post-colonial Indian nation-state and those who would be left behind. Institutional biases also favored certain expressions of faith and devotion, racializing and militarizing the beliefs and practices of British Christians, Nepalese Gurkhas, and Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs.

The British Indian Army’s diversity and international fragmentation signaled that nation states struggled to keep pace with or claim a place for themselves in a new international order. “Globalization” served as an alternative but parallel model to empire. This story is about how diversity was managed—or failed to be managed—in a global and colonial army. The experience of imperial service further unspooled the controlled uniformity that imperial and military life demanded.
Acknowledgements

This work would have not been possible without the tireless efforts of many scholars, archivists, family and friends whom I deeply treasure and admire. I owe immense gratitude to Teresa Delcorso Ellmann and the Rutgers Gradfund office for reading through countless drafts of grant applications to help me secure external funding. Thank you to the Institute of Historical Research, Fulbright Foundation, Critical Language Fellowship, Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, Department of History, and Mellon Foundation for generously supporting this work. I am grateful to Charu Gupta and Margot Finn, who supervised my research in India and the U.K., for their ever-challenging and enlightening conversations and feedback. Thank you to the I.H.R., and to Will Pooley, Eloise Moss, and Emilie Murphy, for being an inspiring and collaborative community of scholars during my time in the U.K. I am grateful to Erica Wald for radically altering my research agenda in India and welcoming me into the academic fold in the U.K.

The work of many archivists around the world contributed immeasurably to this project. In the U.K. I would like to thank to the staff of the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, the National Army Museum, and the Gurkha Museum. While I worked in Delhi, the staff of the Nehru Memorial Library, United Services Institute Library, and National Archives of India provided me with countless invaluable sources which transformed the scope of my project. Squadron Leader Rana Chhina of the U.S.I. and Professor K.C. Yadav of the Haryana Academy of History and Culture in Gurgaon were especially warm and welcoming and brought unique perspectives to my historical research and archival base. I am also very grateful for the assistance of the staff at the

iv
West Bengal State Archives, Maharashtra State Archives, Panjab State Archives, Gurkha
Memorial Museum (Pokhara), Tamil Nadu State Archives, and Uttar Pradesh State
Archives, who helped me to capture the wide geographical impact of the British Indian
Army.

Many thanks to the editors, anonymous reviewers, and staff of Gender & History,
Twentieth Century British History, and the Journal of British Studies, for their thoughtful
feedback and tireless assistance on different incarnations of this work. Selections of the
fifth chapter have been published by Gender & History (Kate Imy, “Queering the Martial
Races: Masculinity, Sex and Circumcision in the Twentieth-Century British Indian
Army” Gender & History 27, 2, (August 2015): 374–396). Different selections of the
same chapter are being considered for publication by Twentieth Century British History.
An article published by the Journal of British Studies shares some themes with this
dissertation (Kate Imy, “Fascist Yogis: Marital Bodies and Imperial Impotence” Journal

Thank you to the many amazing Hindi and Urdu language teachers at Rutgers
University, the American Institutes of Indian Studies in Jaipur and Lucknow, Language
Must, Zabaan Language Institute, King’s College London, and the East West Language
Institute who made possible my immersion in Hindi and Urdu sources. I am especially
grateful to Nida Sajid, Renu Kumar, Zeba Parveen, Ziyaullah Siddiqui, Prem Singh
Rajpurohit, Ahtesham Khan, Mohammad Raza Ali, Pramila Soni, and Shivi Saxena for
their patience and expertise.

During my time at Rutgers many individuals made my studies and research a true
joy. Dawn Ruskai’s tireless efforts did much to not only keep the Department of History
running but also to keep me sane and enrolled during my many semesters abroad.

Courses and advice from leading scholars such as Belinda Davis, Jochen Hellbeck, Carla Yanni, and Judith Surkis rounded out the depth and breadth of a truly unparalleled and remarkable graduate experience. Fellow graduate students, including Courtney Doucette, Sara Black, Christina Chiknas, Danielle Bradley, Jasmin Young, and Jen Wilson, amazed me with their capacity to be both brilliant scholars and great friends. The Rutgers British Studies Center, and the insights of Chris Bischof, Yvette Florio-Lane, and Hilary Buxton, helped make Rutgers a wonderful place to study Britain and the British Empire.

Words cannot fully describe my gratitude and indebtedness to Seth Koven, Bonnie Smith, and Indrani Chatterjee. Indrani’s willingness to wrestle with deep intellectual questions for hours on our first meeting was a leading cause of my journey to Rutgers. This was not only matched but exceeded by her remarkably thorough and expansive guidance in coursework, examinations, and as a committee member. Seth and Bonnie were the ideal co-advisors, rightly described as the “dream team” by some of my fellow students. Their willingness to read through countless drafts of my work, or spend hours on Skype or on the phone with me discussing everything from job prospects to overseas apartment anxieties went above and beyond the call of duty. The fact that they are both such brilliant scholars, always willing and enthusiastic to treat me as a colleague and collaborator, pushed me beyond my own intellectual limitations. I will never cease to treasure everything that they have done for me and for the university that I love.

Most of all I am grateful for the love and support of my family—including but certainly not limited to Suzanne, Tom, Tara, Keith, Brenda, and David. To Kenneth and P.B.T. I can only say thank you. Your love—and willingness to move across the country
and travel the globe—made all of this possible. Writing a dissertation is an all-consuming endeavor that requires the strength, patience, and understanding of many. I am truly honored and grateful to have the support of my friends, family, mentors, and colleagues as I begin the next stage of my life and career.
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**Introduction**

During the colonial period, British officials frequently referred to India as the “jewel” in British crown, as it possessed natural resources, manual labor, and cultural attributes central to the success of the empire. If India was the jewel, then the British Indian Army was like the Tower of London, charged with the safety and security of the empire’s most prized possessions. Yet British ideas of “India”—and the Indian Army—assigned a degree of sameness and unity that eluded the on-the-ground experience of empire. Envisioned as a force to secure borders and suppress internal dissent, the British Indian Army grew from a loose collection of irregular levies in the eighteenth century, to a highly trained and well-disciplined institution of over two million men during the Second World War. A key to its success was its composition of both the “conquered” and the “conquerors”—or put more accurately, a diverse collection of British and South Asian men fighting, at various moments, side by side on behalf of the British Empire. In the first four decades of the twentieth century it expanded its reach—fighting not only on the fringes and frontiers of the subcontinent, but around the globe to put down rebellions, consolidate military power, and help topple three empires during the First World War. It was instrumental in Britain’s rise to the largest empire in world history. By 1942, it was a site of mutiny and rebellion that enabled the rise of the Indian National Army—an anti-colonial military force that sought to overthrow the empire by aligning with Britain’s wartime enemies. Diverse strategies for containing and regulating martial prowess was central to both the rise and fall of the British Indian Army and the British Raj.

This story is not one about strategies, tactics, casualties, or the best-laid plans of the general staff but about the men—British and South Asian—who fought together
during the turbulent first four decades of the twentieth century. Their everyday struggles with themselves and one another worked toward overcoming or making use of difference in both peacetime and war. Conflicts stemming from differences of power, status, race, ethnicity, spiritual belief and practice resulted in paradox and contradiction as diverse soldiers lived in close contact with one another while enmeshed in the complex hierarchies of imperial rule. For this reason, the story of the British Indian Army is neither a straight-forward account of imperial triumph nor a cautionary tale of colonial rebellion. Instead, it embodied the tensions, anxieties, opportunities and innovations of a multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith force. It existed on the front lines of British imperial expansion and the flowering of South Asian nationalism in an increasingly globalized world. Soldiers’ bodies were desirable fixtures of both colonial and anti-colonial visions of the future, and the soldiers themselves had differing ideas about their martial vocation.

As is well known, the British Empire extended from Canada to Australia, the Caribbean to South Africa, and reached its territorial peak just after the First World War (1914-1918). After the war it expanded into colonial territories formerly held by Germany and the Ottoman Empire—from Samoa to Mesopotamia. The overland routes connecting India to the Mediterranean Sea were hotly disputed by contending empires, burgeoning nations, and inhabitants who attempted—with varying levels of success—to play these forces against one another. South Asian anti-colonial activists attempted to join forces with revolutionaries from locales as far afield as Japan, Ireland, and Russia—or collaborate in the borderlands with Afghani and Persian radicals. In this tense climate of conspiracy, collaboration, expansion and destruction, the British Indian Army was
composed of men from across South Asia—including the modern nation states of Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India—who identified as Muslims, Sikhs, “Hindus” and Christians—all with their own ideas about what these terms signified. Faced with South Asian demands for independence, changing political systems, imperial infrastructure it could no longer afford, rapid technological change, and challenges from mass orators and demagogues, the British Indian Army attempted to solidify its control over Britain’s colonies through colonial troops. For soldiers of the British Indian Army, the things they ate, the borders they crossed, the men they listened to, the objects they carried, and the people with whom they formed intimate attachments were all matters of intense military scrutiny.

Among the many ways in which difference was quantified and defined, the concept of “religion” was a central axis around which colonial rule, martial recruitment, and anti-colonial activism functioned. Taking the lead of Edward Said, whose monumental study of “Orientalism” demonstrated that knowledge was a tool of empire, post-colonial scholars such as Talal Asad, Peter van der Veer, and Richard King have questioned the utility of the term “religion” due to its role in undermining all modes of thought not deemed “rational” and “secular” by imperial rule.¹ These scholars suggest that the word “religion” is too often used as a short-hand in ways that reinforce the epistemologies of empire. The very idea of “World Religions,” they argue, takes for granted that “Christianity,” “Islam,” “Hinduism” and “Buddhism” are fixed and self-

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evident categories overdetermined by texts that are separate and distinct from the “secular” world of “politics.” Self-consciously “liberal” and secularly-minded East India Company officials loathed “religious” mores in England and applied the term “religion” to South Asia, making it a tool of violent exclusion. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the systematic condemnation of a wide range of beliefs, practices, and monastic leadership defined as “religious,” dismantling systems of power that did not conform to the goals of empire. By the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, “religion” had gained new political weight as actors questioned and challenged imperial rule through movements self-consciously defined as religious. Several articulations of politicized faith, including pan-Islam, Christian socialism, and Hindu nationalism, questioned imperial rule in unexpected and innovative ways. Yet by focusing on an army—which historians of Europe and Britain tend to regard as a “secular” force of “modernity”—this project reconceptualizes the meaning of modern religion as it functioned at various levels of domestic, imperial, and international politics.

Several innovative works on the British Indian Army and martial cultures of South Asia have made it possible to consider the social and cultural legacies of imperial militarism. Nile Green’s useful study of Islam in the Indian Army and William Pinch’s examinations of “Warrior Ascetics” take seriously the intersection of spiritual beliefs and martial culture, questioning historians’ tendency to examine only secular concerns and imperial perspectives. Seema Alavi and Gajendra Singh have focused more intensely on

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the contested cultural landscape of army life for Indian soldiers, while scholars such as Erica Wald have carefully examined the fraught sexual and medical landscape of Indian service for European troops. Historians such as Purnima Dhavan and Carolyn Steedman have argued that soldiers must be taken seriously as cultural intermediaries. While Dhavan explains that eighteenth century rural Khalsa Sikh soldiers were in constant contact with Mughal Courts, peasant societies, literary culture, and religious institutions, Steedman notes that soldiers of the East India Company could “talk to a wide range of people.” Despite these insights, these studies overlook the influence that British and South Asian soldiers might have had on one another. This project reorients contemporary military scholarship by focusing on both British and South Asian soldiers, rather than reproducing implicitly nationalist narratives of military history that study these groups in isolation from one another.

Viewing the British Indian Army as a site of cross-cultural exchange and encounter offers the opportunity to examine its role in shaping globalization in the turbulent first four decades of the twentieth century. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper’s impressive study, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of*...
*Difference,* argued that empires were central to the making of the modern world through their management and incorporation of difference. Empires, they argue, allowed for not only hierarchy and violence but also expressions of alternative political thought and action to a degree unparalleled in homogenous nation-states. This dissertation suggests that the British Indian Army offers an opportunity to examine an army—so often associated with the rise of the secular “nation” in Europe—in a decidedly imperial space. In so doing, it explores how sameness and difference, hierarchy and equality, were often part of the same conversation and even drew inspiration from the same institutions. While Burbank and Cooper make it tempting to assume that empires excel at managing difference, the British Empire exacerbated and deepened difference and fracture to a degree that hurt—rather than strengthened—the imperial project.

This dissertation borrows from an extensive body of literature which has suggested that imperial mobility and international networks facilitated dramatic cultural, social and political fragmentation—including the “revolutions” so closely associated with nation-states. For example, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have argued that the mobility of slaves, sailors, and indentured workers across vast Atlantic networks created international communities of dissent that shaped the ideas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century age of revolution. Many of these debates focused on struggles for money, autonomy and mobility, shaping the urban mobs, mutinies, agrarian risings, prison riots, and slave revolts of the period.warrior groups in South and Central Asia

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such as Marathas, Sikhs, and Afghans also developed and interacted in opposition to the Mughal court and harem which were the ultimate “effeminate” “other.”

Like the slaves, soldiers, and sailors in the Atlantic, these warrior communities met at the intersection of vastly diverse networks, which included peasants, scribal groups, Persian literary culture, religious institutions, literate men in vernacular settings, Vaishnava bhakti, and the cosmopolitan Mughal court, as well as competing European merchants and armies.

Competing views of hierarchy and martial prowess helped maintain group loyalty, status, wealth and land. Many of these warrior groups encouraged fighting for brotherhoods of arms, rather than for the “master’s glory,” reframing the language of economic privilege and soldiery. Such language of honorable soldiery, just war, and “brotherhood” predated the American, French and Haitian revolutions, and the transition from “subject” to “citizen”—which prized the image of the soldier—in Europe. However, equivalent studies about the rapid motilities, cultural encounters, and dramatic political transformations of the imperial world has not been written for the twentieth century. The rapid mobility facilitated by steamships, railroads, and airplanes made the international journeys of imperial expansion and international anti-colonial networking an explosive political reality.

Histories of the British Indian Army tend to emphasize the differences and hierarchies of imperial rule without necessarily negotiating the broader imperial and nationalist implications of how these differences were mobilized. Classic works such as those by Philip Mason and T.A. Heathcote borrow from regimental-history styles of

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11 Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*, 75.
remembering the British Indian Army, emphasizing the collaboration between “British” and “Indian” social and political organization, and highlighting idealized virtues such as loyalty, courage, and strength. Tracking changes through an overview of major campaigns, this approach is perhaps less well-suited to noticing the fractures and uncertainty behind imperial and military façades. Echoing this trend, Kaushik Roy has called the army the “pillar of Britain’s Indian Empire” while Daniel Marston recently characterized the pre-1939 British Indian Army as the “bedrock of the Raj.” This has created something of a binary thinking about the army in the twentieth century: it was either unquestioning loyal through paternalistic familial feelings between officers and men, or a merely mercenary arrangement between the empire and those without other opportunities for employment. While Heather Streets was interested in digging deeper into questions of how race and gender influenced the construction of the recruiting strategy of “Martial Races,” she has not fully considered how soldiers redefined and used these categories for their own ends. Gajendra Singh’s meditative examination on South Asian soldiers’ process of making testimonies is remarkable contribution to debates about agency and sources, but is, as a result, less interested in the long-term changes and impact of the army in the subcontinent.

From its eighteenth century beginnings in the East India Company’s armies, the British Indian Army was a site of collaboration and contention across cultures, on the frontlines of the transition from the colonial to the “globalized” world. The East India

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14 Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*.
Company army borrowed from existing Mughal martial cultures and warrior communities in South Asia to foster distinct military identities for its South Asian troops. Under Major Stringer Lawrence and Robert Clive they also imitated the French army policy of recruiting South Asians into Company forces. Three distinct armies in Bengal, Madras and Bombay emerged from the Company’s leading ports to protect, expand, and forcibly acquire its economic interests in the subcontinent. Following existing South Asian recruiting patterns, the eighteenth century Bengal Army focused its recruitment efforts on Muslim soldiers and the high caste Hindus from Bihar, Oudh and Agra who had served Mughal rulers.

Among European troops, as Linda Colley suggests, Europe’s fraught history of religious violence underpinned many of the Company’s anxieties as it relied upon an international collection of men seeking renewal and opportunity in imperial spaces. After the Act of Union of 1801 the numbers of Irish soldiers in the East India Company rapidly increased. Irishmen made up forty percent of the Company’s European forces by 1830 and over half on the eve of the Irish famine. Company officials worried that these largely Catholic recruits might be disloyal and switch sides to join French Catholics in the subcontinent. Meanwhile, some British officers were so enthusiastic about the opportunity to “Christianize” India that in 1813 the Bengal Government needed to ban the circulation of scriptures among Indian soldiers. Such trepidation did not survive the

19 Nile Green, Islam and the Army, 72.
rise of Lord William Bentinck as Governor General in 1828, who enabled the Company to be more open to Christianization. This contributed to the ban on sati, or self-immolation by widows in 1829, and an 1834 act that reversed Company authority to prohibit the entry of British civilians. As a result, Christian missionary presence increased rapidly in the 1830s and 1840s. ²⁰

In the 1830s, worldwide threats of revolution and increased attention to the spiritual and moral uplift of the British working classes during the Industrial Revolution inspired military officials to pay attention to imperial soldiers’ physical and spiritual wellbeing. Garrison hospitals, temperance societies, regimental libraries, recreational facilities, army chapels and relatively clean accommodation attempted to improve soldiers’ morality through the conditions of their service. ²¹ Many chaplains and officers saw this institutional support as permission to extend their efforts to South Asian soldiers. ²² Brigadier Colin Mackenzie, whose Christian enthusiasm earned him the nickname “Moollah” from his Afghan captors in Kanpur in the 1840s, incited a rebellion at Bolarum cantonment outside of Hyderabad in 1855 after he refused to allow South Asian soldiers to participate in the festivities surrounding the holy month of Muharram. As a result, three hundred took arms against him. Such events were some among the many incidents of strain, hostility and protest in the years leading up to the famous uprising of 1857, by which time Christian proselytization and soldier rebellion had grown increasingly common. ²³

²¹ Wald, Vice in the Barracks.
²² Green, Islam in the Indian Army, 71.
²³ Ibid., 63.
With the annexation of Punjab in 1849 and Awadh in 1856, British power increased rapidly across the subcontinent. In 1856, the General Service Enlistment Act outlined the mandate that Indian men would need to serve overseas, which in some communities would have led to the loss of caste identity requiring a purification ceremony.\textsuperscript{24} Such military insensitivity toward beliefs and customs was not uncommon, however, as Indian soldiers were often expected to wear leather chin straps or use Enfield muzzle-loading rifles with cartridges soaked in pig and beef grease. When eighty-five men were imprisoned for refusing to handle greased cartridges, the entire regiment mutinied on May 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1857, killing their British commanders during what would be known as the Mutiny at Mirath. When the entire Bengal cavalry mutinied in 1857, most of the remaining infantry and artillerymen either mutinied or disbanded, contributing to a large scale revolt across northern India.\textsuperscript{25} The uprising was most prominent in the cities of Agra and Lucknow, which were the sites of the munazara controversy in the 1830s and 40s. This controversy consisted of several high profile public debates between South Asians and Christian missionaries. Seen in Britain as largely a “religious” mutiny, the 1857 uprising was an epochal turning point in the history of Britons in South Asia.\textsuperscript{26} As a result, the British crown removed the East India Company from its position as rulers and overseers in India and officially integrated India into the British Empire. In 1858 Queen Victoria declared a policy of religious non-interference in the subcontinent, and the army

\textsuperscript{24} Streets, Martial Races, 28.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{26} Avril Powell, Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 272.
intensified their efforts to respect certain beliefs and practices, for example by replacing leather chin straps with pugris.\textsuperscript{27}

The legacies of 1857 were inseparable from debates about the role of “religion” in the empire. Ignoring factors such as recent land seizures, army reform and evangelical incursions in Indian life, British officials focused on the use of animal fat in cartridges as a leading cause of the revolt.\textsuperscript{28} By singling out a religious cause that was likely unsympathetic to most Christian observers, the entire event was more easily undermined as an irrational and emotional response. British accounts of the mutiny focused on the violence of South Asian rebels against white women and children. The event became evidence of Indian brutality, thereby justifying British violence and sidestepping earlier nineteenth century evangelical notions that war was a punishment from God.\textsuperscript{29} Instead, the punishment was the Mutiny itself, which Britons received for their “sinful negligence” in failing to spread the gospel successfully. South Asian interpretations had their own moralistic outlooks, with Urdu accounts glorifying the uprising, and celebrating the role of north Indian anti-missionary ‘ulamas and “warrior ascetics” who helped spread dissent.\textsuperscript{30} The uprising was famously reimagined as the First War of Independence by V.D. Savarkar in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The Uprising of 1857 coincided with a growing sense among many in Britain that the imperial project was a divine right, and that violent colonial spaces, including Jamaica after the Morant Bay Uprising of 1865, necessitated British intervention. The

\textsuperscript{27} Roy, “Construction of Regiments,” 143.
\textsuperscript{28} Vera Nünning, “‘Daß Jeder seine Pflicht thue’. Die Bedeutung der Indian Mutiny für das nationale britische Selbstverständnis” \textit{Archiv für Kulturgeschichte} 78 (1996), 373.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 85-6; Powell, \textit{Muslims and Missionaries}, 272.
moralistic representation of the military “heroes” of 1857 coincided with changing martial cultures and the development of “muscular Christianity” during the second half of the nineteenth century. This prized soldiers and missionaries as robust figures who faced the difficulties of imperial service to strengthen and spread British Christianity. The Crimean and American Civil Wars helped to foster international currents of nationalism and elevated the social position of the soldier, encouraging reforms to the unhealthy and unsanitary conditions of warfare.31 By the 1860s, British soldiers could delight beer-house crowds with exotic escapades in imperial locales such as India, describing the heat, marching, mosquitos, thirst, alongside romantic depictions of the Ganges and comparisons to Arabian Nights.32

Although imperial soldiers’ stories were increasingly popular in Britain, service in India among Britons was unpopular due to the well-known unfavorable conditions of heat and uncomfortable barracks.33 In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, desertions among British and European troops had been common but were lightly punished due to the shortage of European manpower. Many men took advantage of opportunities to “switch sides” for better offers from the various contending South Asian and European armies vying for power. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, British military dominance in the region made it difficult for soldiers to seek alternative employment.34 At the same time, the number of British troops increased dramatically. In 1857 British troops comprised a total of forty thousand men, compared to the 280,000 South Asians

32 Steedman, Radical Soldier’s Tale, 38-9.
34 Colley, Captives; Roy, “Spare the Rod, Spoil the Soldier,” 10-11.
serving the three presidency armies of Madras, Bengal and Bombay. The 1858 Peel Commission recommended doubling the number of British soldiers to 80,000 and aimed to maintain a ratio of one British soldier for every two Indian soldiers.\(^{35}\) Conditions worsened as provisions and barracks struggled to keep up with the surging numbers of men. After the 1859 “white mutiny,” European regiments were restructured and officials paid increasing attention to questions of military discipline. For John Lawrence, Viceroy of India from 1864-1869, the army was far too lenient in its punishments. The prominence of illiteracy, Irish peasant soldiers, and men recruited from urban slums of England and Scotland within the lower ranks often resulted in a lack of sympathy. British privates received far harsher punishments from court martial officials than their officers.\(^{36}\)

By the late nineteenth century, the culture of the army in India shifted as British officers decided that the leading cause of trouble for low-ranking British soldiers was the prevalence of insubordination and drunkenness, which emphasized reforming soldiers rather than punishing them.\(^ {37}\) For General Frederick Roberts, the Commander in Chief in India from 1885 to 1893, almost all crimes were the direct cause of alcoholic beverages, and the best way to improve soldiers’ discipline and morals was through Christianity. In 1887, Roberts approached the Bishop of Calcutta for his assistance in destroying alcoholism among soldiers, and in that year he founded the Army Temperance Association.\(^ {38}\) This Association replaced the Soldiers’ Total Abstinence Association

\(^{35}\) Streets, *Martial Races*, 24, 32.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 13-14, 17-18.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 26.
founded by Reverend J. Gelson Gregson in 1862.\(^{39}\) George White, CIC from 1893-1898, felt similarly, believing that crime among British soldiers was either directly or indirectly caused by alcohol, and he heartily encouraged soldiers to join temperance associations.\(^{40}\)

By 1894, 1/3 of British soldiers were members, and at the turn of the century, Commander-in-Chief Lord Kitchener became one of its most vocal advocates.\(^{41}\)

While late nineteenth century British officers encouraged Christianity and sobriety among British troops, it focused on using “race” to recruit and regulate its South Asian men. As Kaushik Roy argues, caste arrangements had failed to forge appropriate and useful loyalty, so “Esprit de race became the secret of creating battlefield morale.”\(^{42}\)

British perceptions of “race,” as they pertained to the regulation of South Asian bodies, combined a matrix of ethnicity, caste, region and “religion.” For example, despite the similar origins of Sikhs and Jats, their different spiritual convictions made them different “races.” While both Nepalese and north Indian soldiers were “Hindu,” their physical and linguistic differences marked their “racial” distinctions. Familial networks—which enabled men to serve in the same regiment as their fathers or educate their children in garrison schools—also reinforced the “inherited” nature of imperial service to keep South Asian soldiers personally invested in military order.\(^{43}\) Adding to the segregated hierarchies of military order, the Peel Commission (1858) recommended diminishing the presence of high caste Hindus and diversifying the recruitment of soldiers.\(^{44}\) Believing that the most loyal men during the “Mutiny” of 1857 had been the Nepali Gurkhas,

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 130, 146.
\(^{44}\) Powell, Muslims and Missionaries, 283; Streets, Martial Races, 32-33.
Scottish Highlanders, and Punjabi Sikhs recruited by John Lawrence, British discourses represented such men as also the most “manly” and encouraged their recruitment.\(^{45}\) Rather than striving for true diversity, however, by June of 1858, 75,000 of the 80,000 so-called “native” troops in the Bengal army were Punjabis.\(^{46}\)

With the arrival of Lord Lytton in India as Viceroy in 1876, recruitment in the British Indian Army focused more intensely on recruiting men closer to the northwestern borders, and official preferences for the “Martial Races” supported further recruitment in the Punjab.\(^{47}\) The Eden Commission also fell back on assumptions of the “Martial Races” and reported in 1879 that the Punjab was the “home of the most martial races of India” and that it was “the nursery” of the best soldiers.\(^{48}\) In addition to barring men from service thought to be categorically disloyal, the “Martial Races” also encouraged divisions among troops, serving the British “divide and rule” model. Yet the shift toward heavy recruiting in this region also stemmed from the belief that the Northwest frontier was crucial to the security of the empire in India. The scramble for territory and spheres of influence known as the “Great Game” against Russia, which ebbed and flowed since the intense skirmishes in the 1830s and 40s, encouraged military officials to recruit men in areas closer to the border. After the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), the Government of India invested billions of rupees into the construction of railways, roads, and cantonment towns throughout the Punjab province in order to safeguard its northwestern frontier.\(^{49}\)

\(^{46}\) Soherwordi, “Punjabisation,” 12.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 8.
To bridge institutionally-supported animosities between communities, and distract them from the rigors of increasingly difficult frontier service, British officials turned to sporting events that catered to British and South Asian troops alike. Such efforts to create troop solidarity also helped cultivate the “sporting” ideal of masculinity taking shape at the fin de siècle. This emphasis on “race” and strong, masculine bodies in the British Indian Army coincided with and contributed to burgeoning physical cultures in Britain and South Asia. Notions of physical weakness and “effeminacy” plagued both British colonial officials and Indian elites. Many western educated Bengali intellectuals believed that years of colonization had created decline and effeminacy and some, such as Vivekananda, hoped to encourage physical fitness as a way of overcoming it. Rather than being simply a statement about the effectiveness about British propaganda, however, middle class Indian emphasis on effeminacy and degeneration justified a series of politically motivated social reforms which could challenge both British and elite Indian powers. The rise of the Indian National Congress in 1885 added to the ambiguous position of western educated Indian intellectuals within British India—seen by many as “unnatural” and hence dangerous. Middle class Bengali Hindus went from serving as intermediaries between Britons and Indians to being outsiders. Thus, the 1880s and 1890s were critical moments in the renegotiation of masculinity in discussions of nation and empire.

At the turn of the twentieth century, “Muscular Christianity” in Britain and among British troops met its match in “muscular Hinduism” which supported cricket, football,

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and de-sexualized forms of yoga to develop bodies and spirits well-suited to a national project. Most famously, Swami Vivekananda promoted football as a means of growing near to god, and encouraged a program of “Beef, Biceps and Bhagvat Gita.” This interest in health served broader moralistic purposes for those who believed that the struggle against colonialism needed to start with the cultivation of strong bodies. It was a direct challenge to charges by British officials that Indian men, especially “effeminate Bengalis,” were physically incapable of ruling India. It also aimed to undermine the British monopoly over theorizing who could be defined as “martial.”

In addition to strengthening their bodies to challenge British monopolies over violence and martial recruitment, Indian nationalists invoked symbols of religious warfare to mobilize South Asians in a fight against colonialism. The Bhagavad Gita became a prominent touchstone as it focused on “action” and positioned enemies in war as family—rather than as alien “others.” When Edwin Arnold updated the Gita and made it more accessible to European audiences in his 1885 work The Song Celestial, he opened it up as a work of allegory, rather than what Europeans might regard as a “religious” text. Between the 1880s and 1910, translations of the Gita rapidly increased. Mohandas Gandhi read The Song Celestial in 1889 while engaged with theosophical circles in Britain, and it became one of his leading guides for non-violence. Theosophist and feminist Annie Besant drew parallels between the central battle and the

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52 Quoted in Leela Gandhi, Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship (Durham, N.C. Duke University Press, 2005), 82.
53 Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism” 517.
54 Sinha, Colonial Masculinity, 3
57 Ibid., 299.
Indian Nationalist movement. In addition to acting as a guide for pacifist nationalism, however, the *Gita* also inspired some to see violent action as a spiritual necessity. After the divisive 1905 partition of Bengal, nationalists such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Balgangadhar G. Tilak sought spiritual justifications for political action and fueled violent interpretations of the *Gita*. While Gandhi interpreted the epic battle as a struggle that should take place within individual bodies, Tilak and Savarkar reframed violence in terms of kinship and sacrifice, emphasizing the role of Arjun in recognizing his duty to fight. By renegotiating the terms of what it meant to be a man of action, debates about the *Gita* reframed European discussions of violence, spirituality, and masculinity, bringing “religious” debates about martial duty into the project of anti-colonialism. By the Second World War, Urdu recruiting posters appealed to Brahmins and Rajputs to serve in the conflict by using this story, saying that Lord Krishna had told Arjun that the noblest thing for a warrior to do was fight.

In the midst of renegotiations about who was able to be considered martial, the British military establishment underwent changes of its own. In 1895 the three armies of Madras, Bengal and Bombay were combined to create the Indian Army, headed by a Commander in Chief who oversaw four commands: the Punjab Command, the Bengal Command, the Bombay Command and the Madras Command, each of which had its own Lieutenant General. The former Bengal Army was split between the Punjab and Bengal Commands, and the term “Indian Army” appeared officially in 1903. This institutional

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58 Ibid., 309, 311, 312.
streamlining helped facilitate the increasing use of troops for internal security. While troops were called to quell internal dissent on 46 occasions in the nineteen years between 1860 and 1879, in the years between 1899 and 1901 they were called out 69 times. The removal of five frontier districts to form the North West Frontier Province in 1901, and the separation of Delhi from the province to carve out a new imperial capital city in 1911, reflected the ever-prominent and shifting role of the northwest frontier and Punjab in Twentieth century British India.62

The culture and reorganization of the early twentieth century British Indian Army was shaped in large part by Lord Kitchener, the Commander in Chief, and Lord Curzon, the Viceroy (1899-1905).63 Kitchener was known for his efforts to centralize military authority—eliminating the designations of “Bengal,” “Madras,” and “Bombay” in favor of simply the “Indian Army,” and proposing the abolition of the Military Department, leaving the Commander-in-Chief as the sole military authority in the Government of India.64 Curzon however was a deeply divisive figure who romanticized India and made conscious efforts to “preserve” its “traditional” past. He had a talent for alienating a diverse collection of people—including many Punjabi residents who opposed the creation of the Northwest Frontier province, and the princes who mocked his mandate that they must inform him when they traveled outside of India. Western-educated intellectuals were especially suspicious of his sense of moral duty to spread British “justice” around the world. They also detested his desires to reduce imperial bureaucracy and reform colleges—suspected as efforts to decrease the number of politically engaged graduates in

63 Heathcote, The Military in British India, 180.
64 Ibid., 180-1, 185.
law and the arts. Residential Europeans criticized his efforts to suppress violence of British soldiers and civilians against South Asians.

The reorganization of the British Indian Army occurred at a time when global criticisms about militarism and war were rising across the imperial world. Indian nationalists balked at the discrepancies in pay between Britons and South Asians, especially as taxation on Indians continued to support a swelling force of British soldiers. At the same time, the South African war (1899-1902) intensified many existing criticisms of empire and increased doubts about the martial capabilities of British troops. Continuing anxieties about imperial “self-defense” against Russia on the Northwest Frontier meant a seemingly endless stream of fruitless spending. Famous expeditions lead by military exemplars, such as the Younghusband mission to Tibet, attempted to refortify public school ideals of masculinity. These included imperial prestige, honor and loyalty, as well as strict gentlemanly sobriety. However the Younghusband mission resulted in murder, pillage and the forceful extraction of wealth. Imperial greed and corruption were best embodied in the profitable exhibitions that displayed religious objects, despite imperial promises that monasteries would not be disturbed.

Despite growing criticisms of imperial power, the unification of the British Indian Army facilitated the easier global mobility of this colonial military force. Batta, or extra payment to soldiers for overseas service, was reintroduced for South Asian soldiers in 1878. From 1879 to 1882 there was an increasing number of imperial conflicts, including British annexation of Transvaal, defeat of the Zulu nation, the First Boer War,

and the occupation of Egypt. The relative proximity of the British Indian Army to these international conflicts increased the likelihood that the British Indian Army would need to face combat overseas.⁶⁸ While the Army had initially been used as an internal security force, policing zones of combat that directly influenced Indian interests such as the Northwest Frontier and Burma—the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the deployment of Indian troops to far-off locales such as China and East Africa. Increasing numbers of martial men fought overseas in China during the Boxer Rebellion, or as military police in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and the other Chinese treaty ports.⁶⁹ This global martial mobility coincided with and contributed to the movement of revolutionaries. Tokyo became a central locale for the development of radical international networks of Pan-Asian activism, socialism and anarchism. These movements were especially appealing to Indian students after 1905 when Japanese forces were victorious against Russia and the British partitioned the Bengal province in an effort to stifle revolutionary activity. London also became a center for dissent, where Shyamaji Krishnavarma founded India House in 1905. For a few years it served as the base for the Home Rule Movement until shifting to Paris after 1909.⁷⁰

Against a backdrop of growing mobility and revolutionary networking, Lord Curzon encouraged bolstering “traditional” Indian powers. He facilitated the creation of the “Imperial Cadet Corps” in 1901 which sought to attract allies in the army among the sons of wealthy landowners and princes who hoped to become officers.⁷¹ This opened up

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⁶⁸ Steedman, A Radical Soldiers’ Story, 15.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.
⁷¹ Soherwordi, “Punjabisation,” 22.
the imaginative possibility that Indian soldiers might be able to rise to the position of full officers receiving King’s Commissions, as opposed to the secondary status of “Viceroy’s Commissioned officers” which had its own separate hierarchy exclusively for South Asians. As Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph have argued, the I.C.C. also forced South Asian men to occupy spaces between various cultures, turning on and turning off their everyday performances of self depending on which context they were immersed. Thus, with the new century, the army established institutional precedents for the rising role of South Asians in the “Indian” Army and opened soldiers up to the possibilities—and fragilities—of global travel.

Focusing on the period 1900-1940 highlights the simultaneous extension of the British Indian Army into overseas combat and the rapid expansion of anti-colonialism in South Asia. Both of these transformations were critical to globalization in the early twentieth century. The fact that South Asian soldiers served overseas in the Chinese wars (1900) was a source of considerable tension especially as the international anti-colonial movement swelled after the partition of Bengal province (1905). These events brought the army, and the revolutionary potential of the troops, into sharp focus for both imperial officials and anti-colonial revolutionaries. Just as South Asian troops entered into more diverse and hotly contested imperial spaces before, during, and after the First World War—from France to Persia, Singapore to Mesopotamia—Indian revolutionaries traversed overland and overseas into imperial outposts to form anti-colonial networks. By the Second World War, over two million South Asians served as soldiers for the British

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Empire while the overtly anti-colonial Indian National Army incited mutinies and sought allies among Britain’s wartime enemies.

Each chapter of my dissertation examines particular moments of uncertainty and anxiety when British officials sent a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-faith army overseas into politically fragmented imperial landscapes in the first decades of the twentieth century. These tensions included the ability of British and South Asian soldiers to secure safe and appropriate food as they traveled overseas, social and political anxieties about men’s abilities to cross borders, concerns about which civilian leaders men turned to for social comfort and moral guidance, how communities divided themselves to carve out a political space in India, and the intimate access that upwardly mobile British and South Asian men had to one another’s bodies. Each of these seemingly secular concerns played out in spaces and debates defined by British officials as “religious” and worked at the intersection of anxieties of imperial expansion and anti-colonial protest.

The first and third chapters offer insight into some of the strategies and policies of military service that affected all men recruited into the British Indian Army across community boundaries and recruitment categories. These included groups as diverse as Scottish Presbyterians, Punjabi Muslims, and “Hindustani” Brahmins. “The Government’s Salt” considers why food was both central to the recruitment of martial men and to definitions of difference between communities. “The March to Prayer” examines more closely how enclosed spaces—and spiritual leaders—attempted to Christianize and militarize religious belief and practice.
The second and fourth chapters approach the British Indian Army through the logic of the imperial state—examining two of the most famous “martial” groups—Gurkhas and Sikhs—to interrogate the colonial myths about them. “Pure Bodies, Impure Diplomacy” examines the colonial fantasy that Gurkhas made better soldiers because of their supposed indifference to “caste” regulations. It does so by considering the implementation of the “pani patya” purification ceremony, which became one of the most extensive and logistically challenging “religious” rituals administered by British imperial power. “The Size of the Spiritual Sword” examines the imperial cliché about Sikh soldiers’ supposed “natural” propensity to loyalty, by exploring their roles in several anti-colonial movements before, during, and after the First World War. In both cases, soldiers questioned the organizational logic of the army or used their exceptional status to their own ends, producing unanticipated challenges for military order. By replicating and then interrogating two specific categories of “martial races,” these chapters question and upend the organizing power of theories of martial difference.

The final chapter, “Intimate Islam and Dangerous Desire,” brings together the far-reaching concerns about defining martial difference, purity, and belonging in Britain and South Asia through an examination of intimate encounters between British and South Asian soldiers. This chapter interrogates the military cliché that the British Indian Army created familial unity between Britons and South Asians. It considers the tense boundaries separating the encouragement of patriarchal intimacy and the illegality of (homo) sexual contact between men in the 1920s and 1930s. Examining how and when these boundaries were policed indicates underlying anxieties of imperial rule.
In the British Indian Army, the lines separating imperial expansion and nationalist protest were never clearly defined as actors blurred definitions of these conflicting and collaborating forces. Indian nationalist leaders employed the imagery of battles and warfare and encouraged fitness and military drill, hoping to dispel the supposed “degeneration” caused by colonization. Similar British anxieties about men’s weak and fractured bodies in imperial spaces contributed to moral and spiritual arguments to restore the physical bodies of British soldiers. Britain’s increasing reliance on colonial troops transformed the way that Britons and South Asians viewed and participated in the world. Military officials hoped that carefully regulated “religious” practices would bring stability and control to soldiers’ lives. Instead, military dependence on religion underlined and deepened racial, economic, gender, and political inequalities.
Chapter One

The Government’s Salt

During the Second World War, former British Indian Army officer Francis Yeats-Brown argued that “Greased Cartridges” were “The spark that set fire” to the Indian Uprising of 1857. He believed that the cartridges, which needed to be opened with the mouth, were soaked in grease from many animals. This was objectionable because “the cow was sacred to Hindus and the pig an unclean animal to Muslims.”73 Douglas Sidney Frederick Stacey, who served in India during the Second World War, echoed Yeats-Brown’s reasoning to the Imperial War Museum in 1989. He claimed that these cartridges offended “both religions” by including “a mixture of cow and… pig fat.” Stacey felt that the clear lesson was “one just had to watch that you didn’t offend or upset their religion in any way.”74 The 2005 Indian film Mangal Pandey, starring Aamir Khan, represented the significance of the cartridges in a slightly different way. The film valorized the soldiers of 1857 who mutinied against East India Company rule by highlighting the injustice of the greased cartridges. The story of the cartridges—and more broadly, British insensitivity to South Asian understandings of ethical consumption—represented the evils of the colonial project.

These common accounts of 1857 used the story of greased cartridges to demonstrate either the insensitive nature of the British, or the “irrational” devotion of Indian soldiers. This ubiquitous story overshadowed other equally important causes of unrest. Yet the staying power of the cartridges in British and South Asian imaginations

73 Francis Yeats-Brown, Martial India (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1945), 65.
74 Douglas Sidney Frederick Stacey, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 1989, Imperial War Museum Interview 10633, Reel 1.
speaks to the extreme vitality of debates about food and its relationship to the British Empire. In the early decades of the twentieth century, food was deeply politicized as terms such as fasts and famines carried immense political weight. “The Government’s Salt” therefore considers colonial and anti-colonial narratives of food management in the British Indian army. These debates and anxieties about food revealed deeper uncertainties about the connections between military power and imperial rule.

This chapter will explore British and South Asian understandings of food in the twentieth century as they developed in response to imperial agricultural policies, military opportunities, and shifting cosmopolitan moralities. Every dietary concerns—from “religious prejudice” to “sanitary necessity”—shaped the deeply ritualized practices of military gastronomy. Debates about soldiers’ food, concerning what soldiers did and did not eat, were central to imperial definitions of who was moral and martial.

**Hierarchies of Soldiers’ Diets**

From the early days of the East India Company, food was intimately related to the recruitment and maintenance of a supply of soldiers in the subcontinent. Robert Orme provided the Company with food-based theories of martial difference when he classified wheat-eaters as more robust than their rice-eating counterparts as early as 1750.75 European officers valued high caste men from agricultural backgrounds, echoing their preference for rural English, Irish and Scottish soldiers, seeing them as sturdier and more likely to hold up against the harsh elements of army life.76 Some early nineteenth century physicians, such as James Johnson, recommended that European troops adopt Brahman

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dietary arrangements and temperance which he believed were ideally suited for the climate. In the Bengal army, many Brahmans not only maintained a vegetarian diet, but cooked their own food or had it cooked by a family member, ate alone or while on duty, and carried pre-prepared fried breads and sweetmeats. The potential logistical burden of these arrangements was outweighed by British perceptions that this dietary stringency helped keep soldiers clean and healthy. By 1825, eighty percent of the Bengal army were Rajputs or Brahmans. As a result, high caste ritual and practice dominated British perceptions of Indian soldiers’ diets.

By the 1830s an increasing presence of European evangelical chaplains and medical officials ushered in cultures of “morality,” sobriety and hygiene that were often hostile to the formerly praise-worthy South Asian culinary and cultural practices. The increasing emphasis on European definitions of Christian temperance, hygiene, and sobriety within military barracks eventually clashed with a culture of maintaining and encouraging high caste ritual and practice among South Asian soldiers. Responding to increasingly restrictive and antagonistic military culture, South Asian men used food to help soldiers redefine a sense of community within their martial professions. Early nineteenth century mystics, ascetics, and “faqirs” (Muslim holy men) such as Afzal Shāh held weekly musical gatherings for soldiers accompanied by spicy food which compared favorably to the bland fare served by the army. While such figures provided some

80 Alavi, The Sepoys and the Company, 71.
81 Nile Green, Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57
alternatives, most men found it difficult to have their practices institutionally eroded. Sheikh Hedayat Ali, subedar in the nineteenth century Bengal Army, explained that since at least the 1830s Company forces scaled back on allowing soldiers “the performance of their religious duties” which included forcing them to take food “from the hands of Mahomeds.”

Despite such insensitivity, on the eve of the 1857 Uprising, seventy percent of the Bengal army’s personnel remained individuals from high castes in northern India.

The memoir of Sita Ram Pandey, who served the East India Company from 1812 to 1860, gives a subtle indication of the many ways in which British service broke down soldiers’ connections to their preexisting practices. When he tried to join the army, Sita Ram’s mother warned him that he would surely “be defiled by entering the Company’s service.” After a short time her admonition nearly came true. Apparently, a kind young girl from the “Doom” caste, lower than a sweeper, offered him some water when he was separated from other soldiers and near death. When Sita Ram later retold this story to family and friends, a priest overheard it and declared that Sita Ram had been “defiled.” He was shunned socially and forbidden from entering his father’s house. Eventually Sita Ram paid his entire life savings to participate in “several ceremonies,” fasted, and was finally “declared pak (clean)” and received “a new jenat (Brahmanical cord).”

Sita Ram narrated the perilous proximity of being rescued from physical death and suffering social death within his community. He enunciated the entwined but warring economies of caste.

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84 Lieutenant-Colonel Norgate, trans. From Sepoy to Subadar: Being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army Written and Related by Himself (Calcutta: Printed at the Girish Irish Printing Works, 1922), 2, 35.
and military service. The memoir left no doubt that “Brahmanical” priests were to blame for his misfortunes.

Sita Ram’s story was widely republished in the twentieth century and all but confirmed criticisms of “Brahmanical priests” common among nineteenth and twentieth century British administrators and Indian authors such as Premchand. At the same time, Alison Safadi has raised important questions about the origins of this famous Subedar’s memoir. It appeared in English in 1873 based on a “lost” translated edition from 1863, which was itself based on an untraceable manuscript. In 1910 it was translated into Urdu by Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Craven Phillott and became a best-seller. It was published serially in the army’s Urdu newspaper Fauji Akhbar and used as the Hindustani language examination for British Officers. Whether or not Sita Ram’s story was his own original creation, its circulation within the army created its own reality. British officers who used the memoir as a language examination and those literate Indian officers who read the Fauji Akhbar, most likely read the memoirs as a “true” story from a former soldier. Sita Ram’s story perpetuated the notion that “Brahman” behavior and practice was constant, unchanging, and detrimental to the life of soldiers. It became an interpretive framework and baseline for British officers just arriving in India, and for those upwardly mobile literate Indian officers charged with regulating the daily lives of the soldiers below them.

The attractiveness of circulating Sita Ram’s memoir speaks to British officials’ growing distrust of “Brahman” influence on food particularly after the uprising of 1857. Ignoring factors such as recent land seizures, army reform, and evangelical incursions in

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Indian life, officials focused on the alleged use of animal fat in cartridges, which betrayed both “Hindu” and Muslim religious customs.\(^\text{86}\) Looking to decenter the role of Christian missionaries in inciting animosity toward British rule, the Peel Commission (1858-59) focused on the unsuitability of high caste Hindus for military service.\(^\text{87}\) Believing that the East India Company had pandered to the needs of such men, it recommended diminishing the presence of high caste Hindus and diversifying the recruitment of soldiers.\(^\text{88}\) Institutionally-sanctioned prejudice against “Hindu” men among the “Martial Races” helped separate a loyal base of employable men from those Hindu men coming under an increasing amount of suspicion for anti-colonial sympathy.

Suspictions about Brahmans resulted in many conflicting military accounts of how Brahman soldiers actually behaved. The 1897 *Handbook for the Indian Army* on Brahmans by A.H. Bingley and A. Nicholls asserted that Brahman physiques were either emaciated or bloated and claimed that most Brahman soldiers embezzled funds and filled their pockets at the expense of other men’s stomachs. Growing animosity toward Brahman soldiers resulted in only one Regiment bearing the name “Brahmans” by the First World War.\(^\text{89}\) To justify this exclusion, officials often fell back on assumptions about Brahman soldiers’ diets. The 1915 military handbook on Nepalese “Gurkha” soldiers argued that Gurkhas—who were Hindu—were superior to their Indian Hindu counterparts because of their indifference toward food rituals. To prove this point, the

\(^{86}\text{Vera Nünning, }'\text{Daß Jeder seine Pflicht thue. Die Bedeutung der Indian Mutiny für das nationale britische Selbstve'}' \text{Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 78 (1996), 373.}

\(^{87}\text{Avril Powell, }\text{Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India} \text{(New York: Routledge, 1993), 283;}
\text{Heather Streets, }\text{Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture 1857-1914 (2004), 32.}

\(^{88}\text{Heather Streets, }\text{Martial Races, 33.}

\(^{89}\text{Gajendra Singh, }\text{The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy} \text{(London: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 41.}
handbook quoted East India Company Civil Serviceman Brian Hodgson’s impression from 1832 that Gurkhas “see in foreign service nothing but the prospect of glory and spoil” while Indian Hindus “can discover in it nothing but pollution and peril from unclean men.”

As with Sita Ram’s ubiquitous East India Company “memoir”, the 1915 handbook’s reliance on Hodgson suggests that twentieth century military officials’ view of Hindu diet and practice were over-determined by a particular set of practices carried out in the early nineteenth century, by high-caste men who were previously valued for their conscientious health and sobriety.

**Famine and Moralities of Food**

Central to the military’s shifting understanding of which diets were “martial” was the relationship between British agricultural policies and unequal access to food across the subcontinent. In the eighteenth century, the East India Company’s swelling number of troops and non-combatants relied upon stable access to food. Acquiring sufficient beef, rice and grain to feed European and South Asian soldiers required alliances with local kingdoms, bazaars, and banjaras (nomadic traders), and Beparis (grain traders). While these strategies borrowed from and imitated those of the Mughals, Company and British officials took more extreme measures by placing supervisors in bazaars, buying all available grain from the countryside, and storing it in fortified enclaves during emergencies.

Although these measures stabilized soldiers’ access to food, they made East India Company rule in Bengal dependent on raids and food monopolies that broke power of Indian merchants, contributing to the famine-related deaths of 10 million in 3

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years in 1770. Similar nineteenth century policies resulted in what historian Mike Davis has provocatively named the “Late Victorian Holocausts” made up of famines that plagued India and much of the imperial world. In the 1870s and 1880s, famine relief funds and commissions invested in additional rail and irrigation infrastructure to move foodstuffs ostensibly to places with lack to places of plenty, but did not prevent the deaths of up to fifteen million people, emboldening anti-colonial critiques.

As early as 1870, critics of colonial policy such as Dadabhai Naoroji used official statistics to show how British rule drained India of its wealth, impoverished its people, and subjected them to famines. Romesh Dutt used the Famine Commission Reports of 1880 and 1898 to demonstrate that 22 famines had occurred during 130 years of British rule in India. William Digby argued that those from 1800 to 1900 had accelerated in scale. In the midst of another famine in 1907, Indian independence advocate Henry Hyndman argued that the extent of famine under British rule was unknown to both Hindu and Muslim rulers of India. By the twentieth century, a wave of agrarian reform in the heavily recruited Panjab province revolved around the 1900 Land Alienation Act, the 1906 Colonization Bill and Bari Doab Canal scheme. These efforts increased agricultural output for the export market but hurt the domestic market and diminished emergency

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reserves. The winter of 1907-8 witnessed another devastating famine. In 1896, Rudyard Kipling reflected on the state of affairs with his short story “William the Conqueror.” He described Jimmy Hawkins, a famine commissioner in the Punjab, who sent wheat and millet to the rice-eating inhabitants of Madras, who refused to eat it. Like colonial officials, Kipling shifted the blame from imperial governance to Indian dietary “taboos.”

The devastating famines at the turn of the twentieth century contributed to a resurgence in moral and spiritual arguments about how to best combat the tragic results of imperial rule. As James Vernon has argued, twentieth century nutritionists traversed the globe to save bodies, rather than souls, while organizations such as the Salvation Army took an active role in responding to the human cost of agricultural manipulation.

Increased missionary activity in affected regions ignited the ire of reformists such as Arya Samaj member Sant Ram who complained in 1907 that “many people became Christians for the sake of their stomachs.” The Arya Samaj sought to “purify” “Hinduism” of its “Brahman” influence. It was central to re-shaping ideas about twentieth century “Hinduism” and anti-imperial protest, both of which saw food as an integral point of debate. According to leader Lala Lajpat Rai, the Arya Samaj adopted an aggressive form of Hinduism in order to counter the proselytizing religions of

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98 Ibid., 108
99 “Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence,” 23rd November 1907, Home Department, Political Branch (Dec 1907) 2-9 B, National Archives of India, henceforth NAI.
Christianity and Islam.\textsuperscript{100} At a weekly meeting of the Arya Samaj in Lahore held in September of 1910, Pandit Sant Ram of the \textit{Arya Prabha} argued that Christian Missionaries adopted certain Hindu dietary customs in order to gain the trust of Hindus and convert them to Christianity. In 1910 “Inter-dining” was discussed widely in Arya Samaj newspapers.\textsuperscript{101} For many, concerns about “inter-dining” stemmed from very real anxieties about unfavorable social contact with Christians who sought converts, rather than objections based on ritual or social purity.

While British officials appreciated the Arya Samaj’s rejection of Brahman social status and dietary practice, its role in inspiring dissent among soldiers caused immense concern. The agricultural makeup of the Indian Army made it especially susceptible to early twentieth century agitation. Officials feared sparking another “mutiny,” particularly in the years after the fifty year anniversary of 1857 and the publication of V.D. Savarkar’s revolutionary manifesto which described the event as the “Indian War of Independence.” By 1907, the Government of India was in regular contact with local authorities to track “sedition” among South Asian soldiers. In that year, two Indian officers indicated the growing discontent within the army when they complained that soldiers were too busy fighting on frontiers and overseas in the interest of the empire to cultivate their own land, limiting the opportunities and livelihoods of their families.\textsuperscript{102} The anxieties about imperial rule had reached South Asian soldiers, and intensified as soldiers were uprooted from their families to serve overseas.

\textsuperscript{101} “Weekly Report on the Director of Criminal Intelligence,” October 11, 1910, NAI.
\textsuperscript{102} Superintendent of Police, Jhang “Endeavours of Sikh Sepoys to Spread Sedition” 26 June 1907, Home (Political) ‘A’ Pros(s). 113, August 1907, NAI.
Complicating soldiers’ role in debates about food in the subcontinent was that soldiers were exceptional, and to some degree burdened, by the fact that they were employed men with relatively stable access to food. Recruiting officers noted that new recruits made the best advertisements for future recruiting, owing to their ability to return home and demonstrate “what regular exercise, good pay, free rations and clothing did for them.”

Compared to most Punjabi homes, where meat might be considered an occasional luxury, military officials prided themselves on providing men with a quota of meat every week while on active duty. The meat ration for Indian troops serving in China even increased from eight ounces per week in 1902 to twenty-eight ounces per week in 1906, which was ten ounces more than their British counterparts received. Soldiers serving overseas also received additional payments based on fluctuations in food prices. While food shortages and famines plagued the subcontinent, soldiers gained greater access to food during their overseas services, separating them physically and physiologically from the experience of home. Despite these best laid plans, however, British and South Asian soldiers from a variety of backgrounds complained of the difficulty of finding suitable food.

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Distinguished pensioned soldier Khan Bahadur Risaldar Shahzad Mir Khan described taking painstaking efforts to hunt and cut the throat of his own meat to ensure that it was *halal*, only to accidentally eat unlawful lion’s fat because a servant had mistaken it for ghee.\(^{106}\) Military service placed him at repeated risk of dietary transgression. Similarly, Rajput officer Amar Singh, who prided himself on his own freedom from “prejudice” by having Muslim cooks, nonetheless complained to his diary during a visit to Rawal Pindi in 1901 that “The food arrangements were that I nearly starved myself.” He could find no decent water to drink, the bazaar sold only “dirty sweets” and “the servants had nothing to cook things in.”\(^{107}\) Amar Singh and Mir Khan both suggest that finding proper food was a constant challenge within the army, whether the reason derived from the difficulty of making food *halal*, avoiding misunderstandings with servants, or enjoying that which was clean and sanitary. However, in both cases, these problems stemmed from the unpredictability of military service, rather than the stringency of their particular customs.

Although soldiers such as Risalder Mir Khan suggested that finding or making food *halal* was difficult in the army, military authors were sometimes willing to grant sympathetic rationality to Muslim diets, compared to what they regarded as the “prejudices” of Hindus. The “Hint for Soldiers Proceeding to India,” issued to all British troops, stated that “Most of the outward observances of daily life, as given in the Koran, have a marked resemblance to those of the Jews, and one must admit much sound


common sense in them when the circumstances are considered.” It rationalized that “The flesh of swine is forbidden” because “pigs are filthy feeders all over the east and pork a frequent cause of disease.” Similarly the “yearly fast” of Ramazan made sense because “continuous high living is especially harmful in a hot climate.” Finally, it argued that “The eating of ‘that which dieth of itself’ is unlawful” because “meat rots quickly under a tropical sun.” These arguments about Muslim diet, justified through a lens of British medical rationality, similarly extended to alcohol. The pamphlet noted that celebrated the prophet’s encouragement of complete abstinence from alcohol because “some of his followers’ idea of moderation differed a good deal from his own.” Writing at a time when organizations such as the Royal Army Temperance Association claimed to increase sobriety among soldiers, and shortly after Commander-in-Chief and R.A.T.A. president Lord Kitchener celebrated sobriety among men, the author insisted upon the rationality of Muslim practices in so far as they coincided with his perspective of the necessity of sobriety for British soldiers.

The sober rationality granted to Muslim soldiers’ diets indicated underlying anxieties about seeking clean food and promoting healthy living among European soldiers. In A Common-Sense Health Lecture of 1911, W.F. Raper, a former Colour Sergeant in Royal Scots, recommended avoiding “tainted meat, unripe or overripe fruit, badly cooked vegetables, and messes hawked by natives.” He warned soldiers not to “drink in excess” while also cautioning that while war kills thousands, impure water kills “tens of thousands.” Especially damaging was that “the bazaar milk and minerals usually

109 Ibid.
swarm with enteric germs.” Echoing Sita Ram’s story about the meddling Brahman’s condemnation of the “Dhoom” girl, Raper expressed concerns about who could touch and furnish food and drink to British soldiers. He warned soldiers not to “take water from natives” because “Regimental water carriers (native) are apt to fill their bags at any available source.”  

The *Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* similarly warned British soldiers that “When travelling by train be careful what you eat and drink, and also from where you get it.” It warned against “impure water, dirty milk, bazar minerals and syrups” and “unripe or rotten fruit.” It noted enteric fever was often traceable to “dirty liquids.” Flies were especially pernicious, spreading diseases to water sources. As a preventative measure it suggested boiling liquid. It urged avoiding alcohol to prevent sunstroke. Soldiers who served in the 1930s recalled that when flies got on food it was a “quick way to get diarrhea.” Cookhouses were inspected daily while cooks were expected to wash their hands in “Pinky Parney” [potassium permanganate].

For military officials, certain dietary customs—including those which were justified in the name of health and safety—required extensive ritual and practice. The constant threats of diarrhea, sunstroke and vomiting made soldiers’ bodies highly susceptible to various forms of debilitation and uncleanliness through the proper, or improper, management to food. Although British and South Asian Muslim soldiers sometimes required extensive logistical efforts, they were never placed on par with those

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111 Ibid.
113 Patrick Miles Pennington Hobson, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 17 August 1977, Reel 2, Imperial War Museum Interview 966; Edwin John Watson, 22 March 1977, Reel 1, IWM Interview 903.
“Hindu” habits which were easily dismissed as “prejudices” despite the similar concerns about keeping bodies safe, clean and pure.

Although access to safe and clean food was a constant challenge in the army, twentieth century military officials continued to portray Brahman and Hindu diets as a source of irrationality and mockery. The Hints for Soldier Proceeding to India argued in 1912 that to some Hindu soldiers “the mere glance of a man of inferior caste makes a meal uneatable; if his shadow fall upon the cooking vessels the contents have to be thrown away”\(^{114}\) Major S.H.E Nicholas, 95th Russell’s Infantry, argued that the Ahir men of his regiment were martially fit because “it does not matter if your shadow falls” on their food “as certain classes would have you believe.” The only exception was that “if a Brahman or Rajput acquaintance were sitting by…they might feel compelled to play up to religious prejudice and treat the food as polluted.”\(^{115}\) Nicholas’s insistence that lurking “Brahmans” and “Rajputs” created an uncommon stringency among Ahir men singled out those men who were blamed for the Uprising by the Peel Commission. Military understandings of Indian diets frequently harkened back to misremembered tales of 1857, regardless of how Brahman and Rajput soldiers actually behaved.

Captain C. Watson Smyth of the 1st Brahman was one of the few officers to have direct contact with Brahman soldiers; he produced a substantial account—and counter-programing—about their value as martial men. Smyth maintained that “The writer personally has never seen a Brahman throw away his food because the shadow of a man of another caste had fallen on it, and he has often walked between the chaukas when

\(^{114}\) Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India (London: Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office, n.d., c.1912), 58.

the men have been cooking in camp.” Despite the frequency with which British officers invoked Brahman dietary peculiarity to highlight the martial superiority of non-Brahmans, those who served with Brahmans “never” encountered these peculiarities. He argued further that “caste prejudices sound formal when put down in cold print, but in reality they are very elastic.” As far as he saw it, the main differences between Brahman regiments was between “Kanoujiya” and “Sarwariya” soldiers who preferred different types of fried breads as emergency rations but were made of the same materials. In contrast to the elaborate ritual described by Hodgson in the 1830s and republished in the 1915 Gurkha Handbook, Smyth argued that while Brahmans were officially obliged to bathe and change into a dhoti or loin cloth before cooking and eating, “in practice he has no objection, when it is cold, to cooking and eating with clothes on.” On service, Brahmans even “give up the purifying bath.” Thus, one of the main criticisms about Brahman soldiers—that they were inefficient on active service—bore little similarity to the reality experienced by actively serving Brahmans.

Even though Brahman soldiers exhibited dietary flexibility conducive to military service, the army took considerable efforts to ensure that the Brahman men that they recruited would not cause any logistical trouble in the regiment. Smyth explained that “the strict rule is that no Brahman must eat meat.” However, before a man is enlisted into a regiment, he must promise to eat meat, and then on a monthly basis, “eats meat in the presence of a native officer.” By insisting that Brahman soldiers eat meat, Smyth described a situation far removed from the anxieties over greased cartridges in 1857.

117 Ibid., 209.
While Brahman soldiers required some strict and logistically challenging methods of securing food, their routines were never fully rigid and were often ignored while on active service. They were certainly no more or less elaborate than the avoidance of alcohol, flies, water from dhobis, or the use of chemicals such as “pinky parney” among British troops. This did not prevent military officials from insisting repeatedly into the 1920s that it was necessary to ensure the strict segregation between “classes” of enlisted men to protect the most “martial” soldiers of the British Indian Army from “the contagion of Hinduism.”

**The Government’s Salt**

Despite the endlessly repeated anecdotes about unruly shadows and lurking Brahmans, the real threat to the order and discipline in the army was anti-colonial rebellion. In particular, activists, reformers, and revolutionaries attempted to appeal to soldiers by undermining a frequently deployed justification for military service which was known as “Namak halal.” Being Namak halal literally meant lawful or righteous salt. It derived from the Arabic phrase and practice of serving a guest who, once accepting bread and salt, consents to a bond of mutual protection. This concept expanded into South Asia under Mughal political economy which used honors and gifts to maintain alliances. “Salt”—or namak—represented the pay that a soldier received for loyal

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118 See for example Barstow, *Handbooks for the Indian Army, Sikhs*, 19-20; Revised by Captain F.M. Wardle, *The Sepoy Officer’s Manual: A Book of Reference for Infantry Officers of the Indian Army* (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1922), 233-34; Wikeley, *Hand Books for the Indian Army: Punjabi Musalmans*, 23. Wikeley states that any Muslim dietary trepidation stems from “the caste prejudices of his Hindu ancestors.” *The Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* reported similarly in 1912 that Dogras “In common with all high caste Hindus, they are very particular about matters connected with food and drink.” *The Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* (1912), 33.

service. Rajputs emphasized the concept of namak halali, or loyalty to an employer, which obliged soldiers to fight to the death for his employer, whose salt he had eaten. By the twentieth century, concerns about the future of India and the corruption of British imperial rule made the “government’s salt” an especially potent symbol.

In 1907, one Sawan Singh, who claimed to be a former Lance Duffadar of the 25th Punjab Cavalry, appeared at the Stranger’s Home for Asiatics in London with an Urdu pamphlet that condemned the British government through arguments about food. The author declared that, compared to British soldiers, who got three meals per day, the Indian soldiers relied on “Eating dal & chapatis” which make their faces “the colour of the Earth” and earned them the designation as “black men” by the English. The author argued that “If you too had food like the English, you would not be so black and worn-out. For you & the English are both from the same original stock—you are both Aryans.” Thus, the pamphlet combined Aryan race theory with an environmental determinism based on the access to food. Identifying South Asians as Aryans, the author suggests that it was inferior food that makes South Asians marked as inferior with “black” skin. In addition to pointing to food as a source of South Asian “racial” inferiority, the author hoped to use food to undermine soldiers’ sense of duty. He insisted that soldiers would say that they were “loyal to the British” because they had “eaten their salt.” However, he argued that soldiers were “so blinded that you cannot even comprehend where it is that the English got the salt which they give you to eat.” He insisted that “they have got the


122 “Minute Paper” (8 March 1907), IOR/L/PJ/6/798 file 453.
salt by taking you—by taking away your rupees, all of which not one hundred-thousand part comes back to you! With all this you silently suffer their injustice, and call yourselves [sic] the eaters of their salt! O my thoughtless brother! It is the English who are eating your salt.”

This pamphlet—likely connected with the early advocates who would stir the Ghadar—or “mutiny”—movement, recognized that the long history of British manipulation of South Asian food was a means of questioning soldiers’ need to serve the government.

These early twentieth century criticisms about “eating the salt” of the government speak to its popularity as a rationale for loyal military service to the British Empire. In 1903, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army Lord Kitchener gave a speech declaring his hope that soldiers would always “follow the injunction, ‘to fight for him whose salt thou has eaten.’”

Major RTI Ridgway of the 5th Battalion Pathans stated that one of the most common reasons Pathan soldiers gave for supporting Britain during the First World War was “the fact that they were nimak-halal—[namak halal] had eaten the salt of the Sirkar.” In fact, many men from a variety of regional and community backgrounds used this phrase during the war. One Punjabi Muslim soldier felt a genuine obligation to his family’s martial heritage, writing to his comrades that “you know that for three or four generations we have been eating the salt of the British Government. So that if we

125 Major RTI Ridgway, 40th Pathans, Late Recruiting Staff Officer for Pathans, Handbooks for the Indian Army, Pathans (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1910), 116.
fulfill the obligations of this salt what shame is there in that.” A Sikh soldier even composed a melancholy song beseeching that “Perchance the Guru may save us, but what will be will be! We have eaten the salt of the Sirkar, before, when times were good: Let us fight like valiant soldiers and pay the debt with our blood.” Subedar Mir Dast of the 55th Rifles, who earned a Victoria Cross, encouraged men to “Show great zeal in your duty and be faithful and eat the salt of the government with loyalty.” Sepoy Chutar Singh reminded Sowar Rajan Singh that “You should always remember to be loyal to him whose salt and water you have eaten.”

Despite the arguments of activists who hoped to make material arguments for undermining the concept of “namak halal,” soldiers’ understanding of their duty to the “salt” of the government extended far beyond a material exchange of goods for services. For many men it related to a sense of shared heritage with ancestors and martial communities. Those men of the past who had similarly fought, and endured, in the service of the British, viewed the government’s salt as something that had sustained their families. Up until the First World War, loyal service to the British Empire was inseparable from the access to food that such service offered.

**Fasting the Government’s Salt**

When Great Britain declared war on Germany in August of 1914, one issue of immediate concern was not what soldiers were eating, but that they were not. Many

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Indian Muslim soldiers—a cornerstone of the widely recruited “Martial Races”—were observing the Roza, or the fast, of Ramzan. As one of the five pillars of Islam, the fast requires participants to not eat or drink anything—including water—from sunrise to sunset for the month-long fasting period. After sunset, individuals may break the fast with light snacks, and then wake up just prior to sunrise to eat again. At the end of Ramazan, communities celebrate Eid-al-Fitr with great merriment and feasting. In recruiting manuals, British officers such as Lt.-Col. J.M. Wikeley worried that this cycle of fasting and feasting was bad for potential soldiers’ health and was a logistical challenge because in addition to the month-long fasting period, soldiers required three weeks to recover.\(^\text{130}\) When confronted with the choice between allowing Muslim soldiers to complete the fast or encourage them to prepare their bodies for war, the British Indian Army was confronted with another point of contention between “food” and “religion.” Not unlike 1857, their decisions had mutinous consequences.

During the war, South Asian Muslim soldiers judged one another harshly for failing to maintain the fast overseas. Badshah Khan told soldier Torai Khan from the Meerut Stationary Hospital that “I am praying for you and beseeching the welfare of all Muslims. I have seen some who did not even keep the fast. The Punjabis do not keep it at all. They are dishonest rogues.”\(^\text{131}\) Pir Dil Khan, a soldier serving at the front with the 129th Baluchis, worried that “a letter has come to our people from Mecca or Medina in

\(^{130}\) *Handbooks for the Indian Army, Punjabi Musalmans*, 98.

\(^{131}\) Letter from Badshah Khan (Afridi) to Torai Khan (57th Rifles, France) dated 26th July 1915, Meerut Stationary Hospital. Originally written in Urdu. Quoted in David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914-18* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), letter number 104, page 81. Badshah Khan’s assertions that “the Punjabis” were especially undevout in their fast likely related to the fact that Punjabi Muslims formed largest proportion of combatants recruited during the First World War, totaling 136,126 out of 657,739, while 13% or 86,552 combatants out of 657,739 were Muslims from provinces outside of Punjab. Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, 127, 129.
which it says that all Musalmans have turned infidel through lust of this world, and the
times are evil. They eat the fast [sic] and do not pray.”132 When considering such
responses to the fast, scholars tend to emphasize the place of Muslims soldiers within the
global conflict of the First World War, focusing on whether Muslim troops were
unwilling to fight against Muslim troops subject to the Ottoman Empire, or in Muslim
holy lands. Muslim soldiers could not help but be influenced by aggressive German and
Ottoman propaganda efforts, rumored and real desertions among certain Muslim troops,
and mutinies allegedly stirred by so-called religious concerns, which will be discussed at
greater length in the fifth chapter. Even though these factors gave the fast of Ramzan
additional political and military importance, soldiers’ understanding of the fast was also
intimately related to the longer relationship between food and martial devotion.

Soldiers’ dedication to the fast of Ramzan during the war indicates that men felt
that they had a great deal to gain or lose depending on their devotion. European observers
differed in opinion about the steadfastness with which Indian Muslims participated in
Ramzan, shaping the wartime response to the practice. Reverend Alban Butler argued
that “None is excused fasting, neither Women, Soldiers, Travellers, Labourers, nor
Artificers; neither poor nor rich; the Sultan himself fasts like others.” 133 John Murdoch
observed in 1904 that “Some Muslims when sick would not break the fast to save their
lives.”134 Others, such as Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, the English wife of an Indian Muslim,
believed that there were important exceptions to this stringent piety. In “Observations on

132 From Pir Dil Khan, 129th Baluchis, serving at the front to Naik Mir Gul Khan, Secunderabad Hospital,
France (Urdu, 2/9/15), letter number 828/9 IOR/L/MIL/5/825.
133 Reverend Alban Butler, The Moveable Feasts and Fasts and Annual Observances of the Catholic
Church (Dublin: James Duffy, 1839), 155.
134 John Murdoch, Hindu and Mohammadan Festivals (Christian Literature Society of India, 1904), 77.
the Mussulmauns of India,” written in 1832 and republished in 1917, she noted that “the sick, the aged, women giving nourishment to infants… and very young children… are all commanded not to fast.” She added that “There is a latitude granted to travellers also; but many a weary pilgrim whose heart is bent heavenward will be found taking his rank amongst the Rozedhaars [fasters].”\textsuperscript{135} In 1914, recruiting officer Major W. Fitz G. Bourne borrowed heavily from Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali’s interpretation, stating that the sick, the aged, pregnant and nursing women, young children and travellers were “exempt” from fasting.\textsuperscript{136} By 1915, after the immense impact of Muslim soldiers serving overseas became more apparent, updated recruitment manuals adjusted the list in a slight but significant way, adding that “Soldiers on service and travellers are also exempt.”\textsuperscript{137} By including soldiers among the ranks of non-fasters, military officials were unwittingly associating the proud, robust, young male soldiers, recruited for their virility and strength, with groups—such as the aged and sick—granted exemption for their weakness. While travelers might have a choice of whether they wanted to continue their fast or not, men in the army who were subject to military order and discipline could easily be denied the choice to show their strength, stamina, piety, and masculinity.

In addition to incurring social embarrassment for failing to participate in the fast, doing so could also become a financial burden. According to Ja’far Sharif, a language teacher to officers of the Madras government, those who were unable to fast during \textit{Ramazan} were required to free a slave, feed sixty beggars, or fast independently for sixty

\textsuperscript{135} Ali, \textit{Observations on the Mussulmauns of India}, 104.
days. Each of these options represented a serious financial burden, and would have no doubt filled low-ranking soldiers with considerable anxiety. Many soldiers joined military service in part for the promise of a reliable income and sent money home to support their families. Having to pay for absolution for not participating in the fast would have negated the financial value of military service.

Ramzan also played an important role in debates about physical morality taking shape in this period. Most famously, Mohandas Gandhi believed that fasting had “biomoral” value which used the power of emptiness to shed light on the world’s violence and injustice. Gandhi acknowledged that Muslim colleagues found it easy to take up “fasting as a means of self-restraint” due to their experience with Ramzan.139 Gandhi’s arguments also echoed those put forth by Muslim reformer Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, whose Christian-inspired teachings entered without censorship into military ranks before and during the First World War. He taught that “Fasting is necessary for the perfect purity of the soul…The fact is that the suffering of hunger and reducing the quantity of food which one generally takes in an essential step in the spiritual progress of man.”140

With concerns about incurring financial burdens, family shame, or demonstrating a lack of piety and virility, Muslim soldiers often took it upon themselves to find ways to continue fasting during the war. Driver Lal Din wrote to Manlair Karim Baksh requesting information about “the orders about keeping fasts over here” because he found it difficult

138 Ja’far Sharif, Islam in India or The Qanun-i-Islam, translated by G.A. Herklots (Oxford University Press, 1921), 112.
to maintain in a land “destitute of religion.””\textsuperscript{141} Zabu Shah suggested that soldiers made decisions as a group, writing to his mother from the trenches that “Today we are keeping the fast. We had to give it up for a fortnight, but today we have begun again.”\textsuperscript{142} Nur Mohamed, a Pathan of the 38\textsuperscript{th} Central India Horse, suggested that this could often be a hard-won dialog due to increasing wartime cynicism. After the men in his regiment had been fasting for 25 days, one Abdul Khalik Khan had told him that “Your people gain no credit by keeping the fast, since God has dispensed with us all.” Nur Mohamed replied that “The life which we are now leading is one which God would not inflict even on a dog, as it is a time of unspeakable hardship with death always at hand, and perhaps by the grace of God we may gain heaven by reason of our self-denial in having kept the fast.”\textsuperscript{143} Nur Mohamed therefore suggests Muslim soldiers found it difficult to feel that they had control over their lives and used the self-denial of fasting as a means of finding some purpose amidst the apparent meaninglessness of wartime service.

The passionate wartime debates about Ramzan during the First World War carried extra political weight owing to the fact that the 5\textsuperscript{th} Light Infantry, which mutinied in Singapore in February 1915, had wrestled with whether they should fast during the war. When news of the war reached the regiment during Ramzan in August 1914, the British officers of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Light Infantry asked the Indian officers whether the men would be willing to quit fasting, even though the regiment was not immediately given orders to

\textsuperscript{141} From Driver Lal Din (Punjabi Muslim) to Manlair Karim Bakhsh (Sialkot District, India) U Battery RHA, 1\textsuperscript{st} Indian Cavalry Division France, 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1916, letter number 353, quoted in Omissi, \textit{Indian Voices of the Great War}, pg 206-7.
\textsuperscript{142} From Zabu Shah (Hindustani Muslim) to his mother (Farrukhabad District, UP) 6\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry, France (17\textsuperscript{th} July 1917), quoted in Omissi, \textit{Indian Voices of the Great War}, letter 547, pages 303-4.
\textsuperscript{143} From Nur Mohamed, Pathan, 38 Central India Horse, France, to Sultan Mohamed Khan, Turangazai, Peshawar, NWFP, India, 26 July 1916; CIM 1915-1916, Part 6, quoted in Gajendra Singh, \textit{The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers}, 133.
mobilize. Subadar Major Khan Mohammad Khan, the highest ranking Indian officer, conferred with the regimental maulvi, an appointed Muslim “religious teacher,” and decided that the men would be willing to give up fasting. However, one soldier, Sepoy Fazal Rahman, felt strongly that the men should not give up their fast and developed “a great following in the regiment.” Fazal Rahman was discharged from the regiment for being, as the Subedar Major alleged, “much too religious.”

Fazal Rahman’s protests about giving up the fast of Ramzan did not simply represent an excess of “religious” feeling, as the Subedar Major suggested, but was part of a more general pattern of physical hardship and struggles for power centering on the bodies of Muslim soldiers in Singapore. For example, when the British medical officer gave a bill of good health to the men of the regiment, he offered a single caveat, stating that “The Subadar Major has shown a marked tendency to obesity.” This stood in marked contrast to the men in the regiment, whom the Subadar Major referred to as “thinner and weaker but nevertheless did their work properly.” Despite this discrepancy in stature, the British officers of the 5th Light Infantry relied on the “obese”—and higher paid—Subadar Major to act as the voice of Indian soldiers regarding matters such as rations and fasts. He routinely ignored soldiers’ complaints that the vegetables were of bad quality, and that rather than receiving goat meat, as was customary, they were issued live chickens at the same weight, including feathers. While in India, men could purchase their own milk and fresh meat as well as curry, but in Singapore, the price of meat and milk was “prohibitive

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to the ordinary sepoy”, and it was difficult to find familiar spices and flavors.\textsuperscript{145} Shortly before the mutiny, a number of men even fell out of a parade, citing physical weakness. The commanding officer, Lt-Colonel EV Martin, brought “sepoy” Yusaf Khan before the other British military and medical officers, as well as the Subedar Major, and ordered him to strip in order to prove that the men were undernourished and should not be subject to excessive physical duties.\textsuperscript{146} Thus, not only were they debarred from the fast of Ramzan—and faced dismissal for refusing to comply—but they were also inadequately fed and unable to supplement their diets. This did not help the already existing challenges of exhausting physical labor of military service far from home, nor did the humiliation of having their bodies put on display for the scrutiny of high ranking officials. This overwhelming sense of powerlessness and humiliation hinged upon the fact that soldiers did not control their own bodies. Being unable to make choices about what they ate—or did not eat—intensified some of the unfavorable aspects of military service.

The role of food and fasting in the Singapore mutiny suggests that the fast of Ramzan had immense political potential. Fasting could be an opportunity to step back temporarily from soldiers’ dependence on the government’s salt. While soldiers’ bodies grew strong through government support, and perhaps their families had sustained themselves on government service for generations, men’s bodies were also subject to divine authority. Having control over eating or not eating the salt of the government gave Muslim men the power to make what they consumed, and how they served, divine. Being deprived of the opportunity to do so, however, might raise uncomfortable questions about

\textsuperscript{145} Singapore Mutiny Report, 194, 292, 378.
\textsuperscript{146} Statement by Lt-Colonel E.V. Martin, Singapore Mutiny Report, 294.
whether South Asian soldiers really were just mercenaries, devoting life and limb for the sake of their stomachs.

**Fasting and Loyalty**

In addition to the “biomoral” value of the fast of Ramzan, it also represented an opportunity to feel connected to a home community while serving overseas. Compared to the daily food-related anxieties of army life, the fast of Ramzan allowed Muslim soldiers to enjoy special treats when they broke the fast each evening, as well as a culminating celebration of extravagant feasting during Eid. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali argued that Eid was “one of the greatest heart-rejoicing days” and “hailed with delight as the season of merriment and good living—a sort of reward for their month's severe abstinence.”

Abdul Ali Khan recalled that during one wartime Eid 1500 men gathered together for food and tea. He exclaimed that “After that we had sports and such a display of joy that I cannot describe it. All the Sahibs thanked us for what we had done.” For Fazl Ali Khan, the importance of Ramzan was not merely in the fast itself, but in the joy and celebration that followed. Deprived of the opportunity to fast, soldiers likely felt that they also would have been deprived of their chance to celebrate, providing much needed comfort and recreation far from home.

In addition to providing men with a sense of belonging and celebration, military acceptance of Ramzan provided officials with the opportunity to encourage loyalty. Abdul Ali Khan stated that at one celebration they offered prayers “for the victory of our

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148 From Abdul Ali Khan (Hindustani Muslim) to Fazl Ali Khan (33rd Cavalry, Multan, Punjab) Urdu, 22 July 1917, 6th Cavalry, France
Similarly, Havaldar Ahdurehman Khan wrote from France to the newspaper *Akbar-i-Jung*, that in preparation for Ramzan, the Jemadar Nawab Khan approached the commanding officer about having a temporary mosque erected. When sanctioning the request, the commanding officer asked that they “don’t forget your Sirkar [government] in your prayers.” When the fast ended, 700 Muslim men gathered to celebrate the Eid, while the Havaldar offered prayers for victory of their King-Emperor, destructive defeat to the Germans and a safe and victorious return of Indian soldiers to India. The *Nottingham Evening Post* reported similarly that at the 1915 celebration of Eid in Woking, Maulvie Sadr-ud-din spoke directly to the fifty South Asian Muslim soldiers assembled there and “addressing them in Hindustani” emphasized “the righteousness of the cause in which they were engaged.” By assisting men in their celebrations, military officials utilized a potential logistical difficulty and made it into an advantageous ritual of military belonging.

In addition to using celebrations to cultivate loyalty, military officials allowed the fast of *Ramzan* to shape the movement of troops, which further encouraged gratitude among soldiers. Major R.S. Waters of the 40th Pathans recalled that in 1915, the regiment planned to be relieved from French trenches at a time that coincided with the fast. During a celebration at a musical gathering after their hard fought period of active service, the men of the regiment declined the refreshing lemonade offered by the local French Mayor in order to maintain their steadfastness. By 1915 in France, the fast carried enough

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political weight to reorganize military logistical patterns. Soldiers’ own willingness to forgo refreshment after a lengthy period of difficult fighting, suggests that they were appropriating their own wartime suffering and using it to divine ends: they voluntarily abstained from military luxuries to find comfort in their wartime experience. By rejecting the temporary refreshment, they were committed to longer periods of physical pain, and using strength and solidarity to fight through their communal suffering.

Military efforts to accommodate soldiers during Ramzan inspired an unprecedented level of gratitude and loyalty. Havildar Ghufran Khan, writing from the Pavilion Hospital in Brighton to Subedar Zaman Khan, called the arrangements for Ramazan “excellent” because fasting men were given their own ward.\(^\text{152}\) In separate letters to the Akbar-i-Jang, Havildar Mohamad Sofid and Savar Abdul-Rahman enthusiastically reported that the hospitals in Brighton provided wounded and sick soldiers with such luxuries as “two bananas, one pound of milk, sugar, one orange and other fruits” for breaking the fast in the evening, as well as a supper of meat, bread and rice and a light meal before daybreak that included milk and sugar.\(^\text{153}\) Compared to the field of battle, and even prewar military stations, where soldiers’ difficulty in accessing appropriate and diverse food led to a system of both self-policing and harsh judgment between men, special arrangements for Ramzan and Eid enabled soldiers to enjoy exciting diets and more diverse foods from home. By writing about their gratitude for such arrangements in military periodicals and letters home, they reproduced and


disseminated their gratitude, making arrangements for Ramzan a useful investment in Muslim loyalty.

Military engagement with the fast of Ramzan deepened the contract of namak halal. The fast of Ramzan was not simply a devotional act prescribed within religious texts, or a logistical challenge to be overcome by British officials. More often than becoming a source of mutiny, the fast, and Eid, were opportunities to cultivate positive support for the war. While overseas, ceremonies, feasts, and festivals provided soldiers with rare opportunities to unite in rigorous shared suffering or remember home with familiar food. While dramatic events such as the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry were not directly caused by the cancelation of the fast, such acts had a profound influence on shaking the sense of comfort and stability for men overseas. Soldiers’ passionate concerns about Ramzan related to several specific pains and hungers—for military solidarity, religious devotion, the comfort of home, and food. By denying soldiers the ability to carry out the fast of Ramzan, military officials also denied them the ability to make their military service religiously-sanctioned and devout. By making careful and thoughtful arrangements for the fast of Ramzan, however, military officials helped cultivate a corps of steadfast martial Muslim men heading into the turbulent postwar world.

Catering to the “Martial Races”

As the examples of the fast of Ramzan indicate, British military officials were often willing and able to cater to the needs of its “Martial Races” when their “religious” dietary needs were politically useful. The result was that arrangements for soldiers’ food, and military willingness to embrace “religious” needs during the war was remarkably
unequal from one group to another. For example, although the army repeatedly condemned “the contagion of Hinduism” among its Indian soldiers, it proved remarkably willing to take extensive efforts to facilitate appropriate diets for its Nepalese “Gurkha” troops. Gurkhas played an important role in the negotiation of power between British India and the Nepalese state. Institutionally, this often meant a degree of unwillingness to regard Gurkhas as “Hindu”—or to characterize their “Hindu” devotion as less particular than their Indian counterparts. Regarding Gurkha diets, *The Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* noted that while “Gurkha” soldiers were Hindus they were “broad-minded” and “freer from prejudice than most followers of that creed.”

Despite these assertions, British and Nepalese authorities coordinated extensive logistical efforts to manage Gurkha soldiers’ food.

Before and during the First World War, the growing presence of Gurkha troops in international fields of battle resulted in large-scale logistical and bureaucratic innovations. In 1913, the Officer Commanding the 2-9th Gurkhas explained that “Rations are taken from India for the whole period of absence and batmen are specially sent to cook food for such representatives as are sent to England.”

During the First World War, Lt-Colonel R.A. Lloyd of the Indian Medical Service reported that for Gurkhas “Food is cooked by good caste Hindus in a Hindu cook-house, and distributed by good caste Hindus and Gurkha convalescents. No Mohamedan is allowed in the Hindu kitchen.” Aluminum dishes were provided for Gurkhas and dishes were cleaned “by a

\[154\] *Hints for Soldiers* (1912), 36, expresses that they are freer from prejudice, while the 1932 edition chooses the words “broad-minded.” *Hints for Soldiers* (1932), 64.

\[155\] From the Officer Commanding, 2-9th Gurkha Rifles to the Brigadier-Major, Dehra Dun Brigade dated 30 May 1913 (received under General Officer Commanding, Dehra Dun Brigade, dated 4 June 1913), Army Department (Nov 1913) Part B, File 1466-1468, NAI.
Hindu waterman.” All meat for the Indian forces involved collecting live animals from France, Spain, Switzerland, and Corsica, sending them to railhead and having a representative from each regiment slaughtering goats “in the manner required by their religion.” The meat was then most carefully labeled and marked so as to ensure the regiment receiving that which has been specially killed for them.” Gurkhas also slaughtered their own meat “in a Hindu slaughter-house.” Despite Gurkha soldiers’ enjoyment of a prominent reputation for their indifference towards “caste prejudices,” the Government of India, the Prime Minister of Nepal, and military authorities took considerable logistical efforts to monitor their dietary practices. This extreme logistical effort did not make Gurkhas ineligible for service or earn them the distinction of being bad for military discipline. While individual Gurkha soldiers were not necessarily any more or less particular in their dietary needs than any other British or South Asian soldiers, the attention toward Gurkhas suggests that military officials could and did make considerable efforts to monitor, facilitate and regulate dietary practices for South Asian soldiers, without resulting in a loss of martial status for those soldiers involved.

In addition to aiding Gurkhas’ extensive dietary requirements, military officials went above and beyond the call of duty to absolve Gurkha soldiers from blame for these dietary prescriptions. H. Wilkonson argued that the stringency regarding food encouraged by the Nepalese Prime Minister stemmed the “instigation of a Brahman Private

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156 From Lt-Colonel R.A. Lloyd, IMS, Commanding Meerut Indian General Hospital to the Assistant Director of Medical Services, Indian Medical Establishments (6 April 1915), Army: War, File 21459-673, Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

157 Memorandum from the General Officer Commanding, Indian Army Corps to the Deputy Adjutant-General 3rd Echelon, Indian Section (12 March 1915), Army: War, 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

158 From Lloyd to Assistant Director, (6 April 1915), NAI.
Secretary” named Marichman Singh.\textsuperscript{159} The officer commanding the 1-2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkha Rifles defended his men by stating that they “do not hold sympathy with the Brahmanical views apparently held by the Nepal Darbar.”\textsuperscript{160} Lt-Col H.L. Showers, the Resident in Nepal, quickly came to Marichman Singh’s defense, explaining that “He is not a bigoted Hindu but a Newar and therefore more a Buddhist than anything else.”\textsuperscript{161} By absolving Gurkha soldiers from holding “Brahmanical views,” and rushing to blame a “Brahman” before defending the accused by explaining that he was not a “bigoted Hindu,” the military correspondence on Gurkha’s dietary arrangements suggests just how deeply efforts to minimize the complicity of “Martial Races” at the expense of “bigoted Hindus” ran within the army.

Despite military assurances that they went above and beyond the call of duty to accommodate Gurkha soldiers’ wartime food, Colonel Allanson, serving with a Gurkha Regiment at Gallipoli in 1916, complained about “The food difficulty.” The problem was not Gurkha or “Hindu” oversensitivity, but in the failures of British logistical management. Allanson complained that food was cooked two miles away which meant that it was “thoroughly messed about by orderlies” to the point that it was “almost uneatable” especially early in the morning. It made him feel that “One would give one’s soul for a little porridge for breakfast, a little cake for tea.”\textsuperscript{162} Lt Col. WRB Williams of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion 7\textsuperscript{th} Gurkhas similarly recalled that it took months for food from India to

\textsuperscript{159} Note by H. Wilkinson (31 May 1913), Foreign and Political, External. Dec 1914, 1-15 A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{160} From The Officer Commanding, 1-2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkha Rifles, to the Brigade-Major, Dehra Dun Brigade (received under General Officer Commanding, Dehra Dun Brigade on 4 June) dated 26 May 1913, Army (November 1913), 1466-1468 Part B, NAI.
\textsuperscript{161} From Lt-Col HL Showers, CSI, CIE, Resident in Nepal, Demi-Official, (Dated the Residency, Nepal, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} (received 7\textsuperscript{th}) July 1913), Army Department (November 1913) File 1466-1468 Part B, NAI.
\textsuperscript{162} Copy of Lt. Col Allanson’s Diary, pg 13, 6GR/302, The Gurkha Museum (Winchester, UK), henceforth TGM.
make it to the battlefields of the Mesopotamia campaign. After the siege of Kut, the
rations supplied by Turks consisted of only hard-baked coarse barley biscuits which
included husks and straw with “disastrous” effects on the stomach.163 After the war, the
men of the 1/7th Gurkhas who served during operations in Kurdistan in 1919 faced
frequent diarrhea and dysentery after eating ripe and unripe fruit.164 For both the British
and Gurkha troops, therefore, the hardships of war meant a degree of difficulty with
regards to food. Military efforts to provide properly “Hindu” food for Gurkhas, and clean
and healthy food for British soldiers, routinely fell short, to the anguish of all.

Although dietary accommodation for the “Martial Races” often fell short, British officials
extensively publicized their efforts through the Commemorative Pamphlet for the Brighton
Pavilion Hospital. The Government of India received twenty thousand copies of this document,
distributed ten thousand to the troops and sent the rest to “schools, libraries and other institutions
likely to be interested in the publication.”165 Written with English, Urdu and Gurmukhi (Punjabi)
sections, the pamphlet encouraged soldiers to take these pamphlets home with them and discuss
them with their families. It described in extensive detail the arrangements made for soldiers’
food in the hospital including the construction of “no less than nine kitchens” to accommodate
“each of the different castes” with “Indian methods of cooking.” The hospital also created
“Special arrangements for the killing and storing of meat for separate castes.” It advertised “three
different kinds of kitchens attached to the Hospital—one for Mohammedans, another for meat-

163 Account by Lt Col. WRB Williams of the Fall of Kut, 7GR/207, TGM.
164 Account of Operations Kurdistan July-Oct 1919 includes “Resume of the Medical aspect of the
Operation of Nightengale’s Column from 31st July ’19 to 15th Oct,” 7GR/326, TGM.
165 From the Honorable Mr. H. Wheeler, CSI, CIE, Secretary to the Government of India, Home
Department to the Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab, “Distribution of the Illustrated Record
Published in English, Gurmukhi and Urdu Languages by the Brighton Corporation of a Year’s Work at the
Pavilion Hospital for Indian Soldiers.” (Delhi, 15 November 1915), Home Department Proceedings,
December 1915, Medical and Sanitary, File No. 82, Panjab State Archives, henceforth PSA.
eating Hindus, and a third for vegetarians” and included photographs of several kitchens. While the English section of the pamphlet included ethnographic descriptions of the differences between “Hindu” and “Muslim” diet, it also included condescending assertions: for example, Indian cooks “had to be taught to cook standing up” and had “never heard of gas, far less seen it.” The Urdu section, by contrast, was more specific in assuring its readers about the expertise of the British and Indian staff overseeing the procedures, giving lists of their names, ranks, and length of service in India. Both versions stressed that “The food of the Hindus is handed out from the store to the different head cooks by a high caste Brahman.” They both also reiterated that men of different “castes” were kept completely separate with distinct washing areas and personal space for washing one’s own utensils. It even asserted that when the King and Queen came to visit the hospital “a high caste Brahman testified to the excellence of the food and the arrangements regarding it.”

In addition to the commemorative pamphlets, Indian hospitals proved to be useful spaces for encouraging positive interpretations of the army’s arrangements for food through soldiers’ letters. In one letter, Saïd Ahmad Khan of the 26th Punjabis Tank praised the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton for providing “Food and drink is of the best” quality. Maratha soldier G. Lowan stated of the Kitchener Hospital that the arrangements were “perfect” and just as good as “if we were at home.” Of course, it was no coincidence that soldiers in hospitals were so enthusiastic about the food. The Urdu section of the commemorative pamphlet for the Brighton Pavilion Hospital revealed

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166 Indian Military Hospital, Royal Pavilion, Brighton, A Short History in English, Gurmukhi and Urdu of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, and a Description of it as a Hospital for Indian Soldiers [illustrated], Mss Eur F143/94 : 1915: 6-8, 15.
167 From Said Ahmad Khan, KIH, Brighton, to Sahib Nur, 26th Punjabis Tank, India, Urdu (3 September 1915), letter number 831/12, IOR/L/MIL/5/825.
168 Letter from G. Lowan, Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, to Tukaram Chowan, Big Saraffa, Indore City (Marathi, 25/8/15) letter number 815/42, IOR/L/MIL/5/825.
that soldiers received assistance in writing letters home during their free time, of which they had plenty, owing to their inability to leave the hospital grounds. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy: those soldiers with ample free time and letter-writing assistance from British officers were expected to write favorably about their accommodations, while also having unique access to meticulously planned diets not available to soldiers subject to the inconsistent supply lines of the First World War.

“Hindus” and Wartime Food

Military efforts to secure “high caste” dishwashers and cooks for Gurkhas suggest that, even as “Brahmans” and “Hindus” were condemned for their dietary stringency, Brahmans were crucial to military efforts to stabilize and regulate military diets during the war. In 1915, the War Office sought Brahmans to serve as hospital cooks and active duty body burners to carry out the rites, ceremonies and proper procedures for Hindu soldiers, despite the fact that such rituals were often carried out by lower-caste men.169 The Urdu edition of the commemorative pamphlet on the hospital at the Brighton Pavilion proudly declared that all food items were brought into Hindu kitchens by a “high caste Brahman,” hoping to alleviate the fears of family members and communities worried about the welfare of their soldiers overseas.170 The Sepoy Officer’s Manual argued that “All classes of Hindus should be provided with Brahman cooks, if possible, as by so doing all prejudices are disposed of.” Captain F.M. Wardle expressed similarly that among Gurkhas “Superior castes will not eat dal and rice with inferior ones, but inferior castes can partake of such food if cooked by Brahmans, so that the difficulty can

169 From Lloyd to the Assistant Director (6 April 1915); From BB Cubitt, esq., Secretary, War Office, London to the Under Secretary of State for India, Military Department, India Office, Whitehall, SW (6 April 1915) Army: War 1914-1915. 21459-673, Appx. Part B, NAI.
170 Royal Pavilion, Brighton, A Short History, 17.
always be got over by having Brahman cooks.” 171 Officers noted that Dogras preferred Brahman cooks “when they can afford them.” 172 Brahmans existed, therefore, as both a symbolic “problem” and reluctant “solution” of military order. By assigning Brahmans relatively menial tasks separate from the duties of fighting, however, the British Indian Army continued a cycle of effeminizing Brahman soldiers who, though useful, were not quite martial or manly enough to be soldiers.

In addition to the service that Brahmans played in solving, rather than creating, dietary problems in the army as cooks and laborers, several diverse Hindu men demonstrated their willingness to modify their diets in order to serve the war effort. Ratan Lal, an Army Clerk at the Post Office in Basra, encouraged other men to serve in the army, using his status to assuage fears of overseas service. He wrote to the Urdu periodical Jat Gazette that people warned him that by leaving India he would not be able to keep his “religion” intact. He assured readers, however, that many people in the Mesopotamia campaign do not eat meat and received vegetables, sugar, milk, flour and condiments that suit them. There was even one “Brahman cook” for every fifteen men. As a result of such policies Ratan Lal urged men to take up military service without reservation. 173 Despite this optimistic view, other Hindu men made important sacrifices when the conditions of war were not ideal for maintaining their convictions. Francis Yeats-Brown recalled that one “Hindu officer” was a prisoner of war in Turkey and “set

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172 Lt.-Col. W.B. Cunningham, Handbooks for the Indian Army, Dogras (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1932), 91.
an example to his men by eating beef, in order that they should not starve.”\textsuperscript{174} Under less
dramatic circumstances, Gugan Singh of the 20th Deccan Horse wrote to Mular Singh, theeditor of the \textit{Jat Gazette}, that the Lt.-Governor of the Central Provinces visited his
regiment and asked one Dalip Singh “whether he removed his boots when he took his
meals.” Dalip Singh responded that they “had given up all that sort of thing in the war,
and had no objection to eating and drinking with [the] French and English.” To this the
Lt.-Governor reportedly responded “Bravo! that is as it should be.”\textsuperscript{175} Forgoing dietary
restrictions and preferences as soldiers, or facilitating the successful dietary management
of the “Martial Races” was one of the few ways that “Hindu” soldiers as a group could be
openly praised for their specific contributions to the war effort.

While celebrated by British officials, wartime flexibility sometimes left soldiers
to answer to their families and friends back home. M.L. Tilhet wrote to Pyari Lal Tilhet
from an Indian Convalescent home that “In Egypt not only I but numbers of other
Hindus—some of whom would, formerly, have rejected their food if only the shadow of a
passer-by had fallen on it—have eaten from the hands of sweepers. Had we not done so
there would have been no alternative but starvation.” In addition, men went “openly to
hotels.” By evoking the well-worn cliché about those certain “other” Hindu men who
rejected food passed over by a shadow, and representing his choices as a matter of life
and death, Tilhet borrowed from familiar justifications of modifying Hindu diets in times
of war. Yet he went further, suggesting that one “Doctor Lieutenant, by caste a Brahman”

\textsuperscript{174} Francis Yeats-Brown, \textit{Martial India}, 18.
\textsuperscript{175} Gugan Singh retells the story of Dalip Singh. From Gugan Singh (Jat) 20th Deccan Horse France to
Mular Singh (Editor, \textit{Jat Gazette}, Rohtak, Punjab) Urdu, (8 April 1917), in Omissi, \textit{Indian Voices}, letter
504, 284.
apparently “abstains from nothing” and advised others against doing so. Historian David Omissi suggests that Tilhet likely refers to hunger and the Brahman doctor in an effort to diminish his transgressions. However, this interpretation does not consider the possibility that Brahman men were not as systematically stringent in their practices as British authorities often assumed. In fact, Tilhet’s discussion of the Brahman doctor undermined military expectations that Brahmans were likely to be the enforcers of strict practices, rather than encourage men to give them up. While overseas, however, Tilhet suggests that there had been some sort of unspoken understanding among men so that they could “go openly to hotels”. While Tilhet may have mentioned the transgressions of others to distance himself from wrongdoing, his nonchalance about men collectively forgoing custom suggests that Hindu men were willing to overlook certain rules while on military service.

Rather than being a “contagion” hindering military order and discipline, “Hindu” beliefs could actually become a method of rationalizing martial actions and a wartime diets. Rajput officer Amar Singh recalled meeting boats of sick and wounded soldiers, some of whom had been prisoners of war in Kut. Despite Amar Singh’s observation that “there was hardly any flesh on them” the men were reluctant to eat the mule provided for them. However, Amar Singh told them that “their various Maharajas had sanctioned their eating it and so they did in the end. I assured them that they were quite right in doing so and that if I had been with them I would have done the same.” As a man with a social position and military rank superior to the majority of men he encountered, Amar Singh’s endorsement of their behavior carried additional political weight. Yet he went further,

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176 From M.L. Tilhet (Hindustani Hindu) to Pyari Lal Tilhet (Muzaffarnagar, UP) Indian Convalescent Home New Milton Urdu (21 Feb 1916) in Omissi, *India Voices*, letter no 251, Pg 155.
granting them sanction from the heroes of the past by explaining that “our people” had “eaten animals in the old days when they were in a siege and that in a great famine even our own greatest Rishi [holy man] [Veswamitra] Jee had not only eaten dog’s meat but had offered it to the Gods as this was written in our Puranas [Hindu sacred texts]…I assured them that when they got back to their own home people would look upon them as heroes who have performed great deeds and no one would ever dare to say anything at all against them.”177 While these men policed themselves and their fellow captives, the spiritual and secular authorities offered by Amar Singh, “various Maharajas” and the heroes of the Puranas, redefined acceptable wartime behavior. These “Hindu” soldiers and “Hindu” beliefs widened the possibilities of mobility and martial service for South Asian men, despite the institutional condemnation surrounding them.

Even though Hindu soldiers demonstrated their willingness to adapt their diets to wartime needs, scholars tend to maintain the assumptions of British officials regarding Hindu, and especially Brahman, soldiers’ diets. In a recent study on Indian soldiers on the Western Front, George Morton-Jack assessed the 9th Bhopal Infantry and their disappointing results in battle, finding it worth mentioning that they “had a company of Brahmans.” According to Morton-Jack, British officers “had crept so carefully around their caste standards that in Flanders they never stopped complaining about how active service interfered with these, down to the last detail: they rejected food that a European shadow had crossed.”178 The officers had such distaste for these men that they called them “of no use” and celebrated the fact that many were captured at First Ypres. The

177 Quoted in Ellinwood, Between two Worlds, 438-439.
open disgust for these men, however, reveals merely that these officers lacked tolerance and concern for the men serving below them. They even demonstrated a callous indifference to their being captured. Yet Morton-Jack reinforces the officers’ perspective by replicating the generic story about the rejection of food because of an impure “European” shadow, without providing specific details about this incident. Additionally, he does not consider that a less than distinguished group of officers, who had open disdain for their soldiers, might in fact invite the ire of their men, who may in turn have rejected their food as an act of rebellion against their systematic ill-treatment.

H.V. Cox’s report on the conduct of the 3rd Brahman Regiment in Mesopotamia suggested that the Brahman men who objected to dietary arrangements did so for reasons far more complex than “religious prejudice.” Cox maintained that the men did so in a deliberate effort “to get the regt. passed as unfit to remain at the front owing to caste prejudices.” This was spearheaded by two Havildars [non-commissioned Indian officers] who attempted to prevent the introduction of group messing into the regiment and thereby to have the regiment declared unfit for service. This exceptional case, cited by historians as evidence of Brahman particularity and unsuitability for wartime service, in fact indicates that the problem was not “prejudice” but rather soldiers self-consciously deploying military perceptions to influence where and how they served in battle. They played into military stereotypes about Brahman unsuitability for service in order to set the terms for their service. Despite scholarly and institutional skepticism, the plan...

179 H.V. Cox, Military Department note (28 May 1917) Subject: Conduct of the 3rd Brahman Regiment in Mesopotamia, IOR/L/MIL/7/7277.
worked, and the regiment was transferred.\textsuperscript{180} Yet institutional prejudice ensured that the final regiment bearing the name “Brahman” was partially disbanded by 1917.\textsuperscript{181}

\section*{Diets of Indianization}

After the war’s conclusion, soldiers’ willingness to modify their dietary behavior during the war shaped peacetime army strategies. Many military men actively praised the role of the war in forcing men to alter their diets. Lt.-Colonel W.B. Cunningham argued that many Dogra soldiers would not touch onions or carrots but they grew “accustomed to these excellent vegetables during the Great War” so that “practically all Dogras will eat them now, and that the prejudice against them is dying out.”\textsuperscript{182} One distinguished subadar major even introduced “cultivation of the carrot into his own village” as a result.

Cunningham therefore admitted that during wartime, the much vaunted and publicized “respect” for “prejudices” gave way, likely in large part through the availability of rations, to an insistence that soldiers eat certain types of food or go hungry. Yet the influence of wartime necessity also played a role in breaking down dietary practices in villages touched by military service. Military recognition of the flexibility—rather than stringency—of South Asian soldiers would shape both British and South Asian strategies for the “Indianization” of the Indian army and the redefinition of martial prowess after the war.

Like their British counterparts, some South Asian soldiers celebrated the alteration of diets as a result of wartime necessity. Jemadar Tek Chand wrote a letter to Chhotu Ram in Rohtak, published in the Urdu periodical the \textit{Jat Gazette} in 1918, stating

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{180} Copy of Telegram from Viceroy Army Department (24 May 1917), IOR/L/MIL/7/7277.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Gajendra Singh, \textit{The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers}, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Cunningham, \textit{Handbooks for the Indian Army, Dogras}, 91-2.
\end{itemize}
that since the army had been in foreign lands, about one quarter had given up exclusive
dietary practices. He described how men of different castes dined together, and even
encouraged this to continue after the war ended. Tellingly, he felt that this integration
should happen first among “Hindu castes”—including Sikhs, Jats, Brahmans, Rajputs and
Dogras—so that eventually Hindus and Muslims could do the same. S.M. Jafri, an
Indian Y.M.C.A. worker, recalled that one Indian cavalry officer encouraged his fellow
soldiers in France to “forget our absurd prejudices of castes and religions. There is no
such thing as caste. I myself come of a family which is proud of its high caste.”
Therefore, both British and South Asian military men recognized that the war had
fundamentally altered debates about South Asian diets, despite military insistence that
“prejudices” and “customs” required “tip-toeing.” Among those loyal military men,
cosmopolitanism, first facilitated by war, was a desirable goal for India’s future which
could bring unity to the subcontinent.

With a growing recognition of the war’s ability to facilitate changes in dietary
policy, one of the major projects of postwar “Indianization” in the Indian Army was to
retrain South Asian men to fully embrace British military culture. Post-war nationalist
demands for “Indianization” criticized the size and expense of maintaining an “Indian”
Army that had few true leadership opportunities for South Asian men and deeply
entrenched inequalities in pay and rank. India’s significant contribution to the successful
expansion of the British Empire during and after the war—particularly in the contested
former regions of the Ottoman Empire—made it difficult to justify the continued racial

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183 From Jemadar Tek Chand from the Battlefield in France to Chhotu Ram, Rohtak, published in Urdu in
the Jat Gazette (4 June 1918): 8. Thanks to Professor K.C. Yadav of Haryana Academy of History and
Culture in Gurgaon, India for assisting me in locating and translating this document.
184 S.M. Jafri, “In One of the Largest Camps in France,” undated, IOR/L/MIL/7/18577.
hierarchies and inequalities of the army. This resulted in demands to open up the officer corps to South Asian soldiers on the same level as their British counterparts. Some British officials maintained that there were not enough suitably educated—or rather, suitably loyal, educated, and militarily inclined—South Asian men to fill officer ranks. As a result, the Prince of Wales’ Royal Indian Military College in Dehra Dun, inaugurated in 1922, was an English-language public school style of education for boys recruited from the “Martial Races.” Upon graduation, boys from the military college could apply for a position at a Military Academy in the hopes of becoming an officer.

Central to the project of the military college was “to eliminate gradually as many class prejudices as possible without wounding religious susceptibilities.” The chief means of doing so was through “a common mess in which English meals are served to all alike.” Within the first year officials noted the “a great improvement” of cadets “both at meals and elsewhere.” This was achieved by having the boys all sit together by sections so that “a Sikh may be next to a Pathan or a Pathan next to a Dogra.”185 They found the strongest evidence of the success of these endeavors when a Brahman cadet invited Muslim cadets and the staff to celebrate Id-ul-fitr with “dinner in the mess.”186 In the cadet colleges of Indianization, therefore, Hindu bodies were to be purified of their “Brahmanical” influence: a complete reversal of British official’s early admiration for using Brahman diets to combat the impurities and difficulties of service in India. While British troops had once used “Brahman” diets to acclimate to service in India, South Asians needed to “Anglicize” themselves to continue serving in the subcontinent.

For those Indian men who attended the Royal Indian Military Academy at Sandhurst the problem was not “taboos” but in finding food that was flavorful and familiar. As Pradeep Barua has argued, those “Anglicized Hindus” who attended Sandhurst, such as Joyanto Nath Chaudhuri and K.S. Thimayya, had realigned their dietary habits long before arriving at Sandhurst because they attended exclusive boarding schools. They sought out Indian restaurants in London in the mid-1920s simply to have some familiar and flavorful tastes from home. While Barua argued that Sandhurst avoided hurting religious sensibilities by serving Indian cadets “mutton and eggs,” officials were in fact more adament about their unwillingness to cater to specific Indian diets. The letter congratulating young Indian men on admission to Sandhurst, received by S.P.P. Thorat in December 1924, reminded applicants explicitly that “They will, while at the Royal Military College, belong to the ordinary College Mess and no special messing arrangements can be made on their behalf.” Despite the fact that most of the men who attended such institutions were more familiar with Westernized diet, men were told explicitly that their accepting a highly coveted appointment to Sandhurst meant that they must allow the army, rather than their families or communities, to define their diets. When Stanley Menezes attended Officer Training School at Lahore and Bangalore and requested vegetarian food, he ended up receiving “potato cutlets at breakfast, potato cutlets at lunch, and potato cutlets for dinner” because “the cooks had not been trained to

188 From the Secretary to the Government of India, Army Dept to Rao Bahadur Pandurang Chimnaji Patil, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Poona (12 December 1924), papers of Lt. Gen S.P.P. Throat, R.R. 375, S. No 6 Miscellaneous files, Nehru Memorial Library.
do anything vegetarian.” While possibly attempting to reduce or sidestep the implications his own non-vegetarian dietary choices, Menezes also suggests that dietary diversity was just as important as avoiding “taboos.” Thus, the problem for most men was less about stringent dietary “prejudices” than in finding a diverse and flavorful array of options within the army.

**British Food Prejudice**

Military efforts to create a polished corps of Indian officers free of “prejudices” did not mitigate British prejudices about Indian food. S.P.P. Thorat recalled that soon after arriving at his permanent posting to the 1st Battalion 14th Punjab Regiment in 1927, “We were forbidden to bring Indian food or play Indian music even in our own rooms.” These bans often extended to officers’ clubs as well, with commanding officers making it clear that Indian food and Indian music had no place in the “Indian” Army. Jagjit Singh Aurora recalled that Indian meals were limited to two lunches per week; all remaining meals were British food. When he tried to suggest to the cooks at Singapore that they fry rather than boil some of the vegetables, he was transferred from his post as messing member. In J.N. Chaudhuri’s unit, Indian food was only served at Sunday lunch, but after a long struggle the sister Indianized unit, the 16th Light Cavalry, managed to introduce a “mildly curried” vegetable dish at every meal. Some men found alternative food arrangements by congregating around the married quarters and relying on the culinary skills of married soldiers’ wives, or meeting at the tent of the temporarily

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189 Patrick Miles Pennington Hobson, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 17 August 1977, Reel 2, Imperial War Museum Interview 966 Stanley Menezes, interviewed by Peter M. Hart, September 2003, Reel 2 IWM Interview 25448.

190 Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj*, 70.

attached Indian medical officer, who was not subject to dietary restrictions, to devour
curry secretly.\textsuperscript{192} Sikh instructor and musketry training teacher Subedar Dalip Singh even
took it upon himself to give “excellent Indian food” to those soldiers and officer cadets
who might otherwise miss culinary diversity.\textsuperscript{193}

The animosity and discomfort exhibited by British men toward Indian food was
built into official military understandings of Indian soldiers. The 1932 \textit{Hints for Soldiers}
Proceeding to India warned soldiers that “All men of the Indian Army are strict in the
observance of their religion, and are often debarred by it from accepting eatables or even
water from one who is not of the right creed or caste. If you offer them anything and your
offer is declined, do not take offence. The reason is almost certain to be that religious
prejudices forbid the acceptance.”\textsuperscript{194} William Homer, who served with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion
Royal Fusiliers in India in 1934 fell back on this reasoning when explaining his own
limited contact with Indian soldiers, noting that “we were always a little be apprehensive:
could you offer them a cigarette? Wait a minute, are they the sort that smoke or are they
the sort that don’t smoke? Uh, What about a drink? Some of them won’t drink this, some
of them won’t drink that, some of them won’t accept food. So, I feel that that the Indians
didn’t make enough—they were prevented by their own culture—from becoming friends
with us. I think. Yes.”\textsuperscript{195} Rather than engaging with Indian soldiers, many British men
were reluctant to even attempt contact, owing to institutionally reinforced notions that
Indian men would be unwilling to engage socially with them. For those British officers

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{192} Barua, \textit{Gentlemen of the Raj}, 70-1.  \\
\textsuperscript{193} Singh, \textit{Three Decades of Indian Army Life}, 28.  \\
\textsuperscript{194} The \textit{Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India} (1932), 62.  \\
\textsuperscript{195} William Homer, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 4 August 1976, Imperial War Museum Interview 792, Reel 10. \\
\end{tabular}
who did make efforts to welcome Indian officers, there was still a tendency to fall back on misconceptions. General Thimayya recalled that when he was attached to the Highland Light Infantry in Bangalore they stated their unease about treating him properly, noting that “Headquarters said we had to handle you tactfully.” This included “We mustn’t be snide about Indians in front of you. Mustn’t give you beef.”\footnote{Quoted in Barua, \textit{Gentlemen of the Raj}, 70.} This careful treatment, a mixture of condescension and apprehensive anxiety, made those Indian officers who sought careers within the British military establishment feel that they were unshakably different and could never fully belong, in large part owing to British perceptions of Indian food.

\textit{Martial Hindu Diets}

Even though “Brahmans” were all but barred from military service after the First World War, alternative visions of martial masculinity opened up opportunities for Brahmans to, once again, have their diets represent a source of praise rather than condemnation. Groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha aimed to improve Hindu physiques and martial spirit by attempting to popularize the Kshatriya (warrior) dharma through volunteer corps and military schools as well as akharas (gymnasiums) that offered wrestling, body-building and stick fighting.\footnote{Charu Gupta, “Anxious Hindu Masculinity in Colonial North India: Shuddhi and Sangathan Movements,” \textit{Cross Currents} 61 (December 2011), pp. 441–54, here p.446.} Rather than blaming “Hindu” diets for the unsuitability of Hindus for military service, these men chose the implicitly criticize the Empire using arguments of “degeneration,” caused by years of colonialism and being debarred from military service. Gandhi’s salt march at Dandi in 1930 placed food front and center, espousing the view that Indians would refuse to pay salt tax to a foreign

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\textsuperscript{196} Quoted in Barua, \textit{Gentlemen of the Raj}, 70.
government and had the right to make their own from the sea, protesting British monopolies over the trade and production of Indian foodstuffs. Hard economic times exacerbated the inequalities of imperial rule, with questions of food, and who had access to it, at the heart of the debate.

As part of the renewal of the Non-cooperation movement, the Congress Working Committee issued a special appeal to police and soldiers serving the British government to step down. They reasoned “You may be doing these things thinking that you were doing your duty to those whose food you eat, but the result is that you take sacrifices of your country-men, you drag the country into slavery and you drag yourself into more misery than at present.” Another appeal in the Police Patrika demanded that men stop cooperating “with the sinful administration” because rather than being obliged to the government, “You eat the salt of Mother India.” This shifted the narrative of obligation and loyalty from employee/employer—which was criticized in the years leading up to the First World War—to soldier/country. The men of the 2/18th Garhwal Rifles answered this call and faced mutiny charges for failing to take positions against an open crowd during the Civil Disobedience campaign of 1930. Through the salt march and the “mutiny” of the Garhwal Rifles, anti-colonial nationalism upended many of the assumptions about the power of the British Empire over food and militancy. Soldiers increasingly felt that they owed the loyalty of their “salt” not to the government, but to India itself.

198 Kaushik Roy, Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare, 220.
199 “An Appeal to Police Brethren” (translation, 1930), Home Department Branch, Home Special, File 748—B, Maharashtra State Archives, henceforth MSA.
200 Excerpt from Kushalbhai Madhubhai Patel, ed. Police Patrika 1, 1 (Surat, 6 August 1930), MSA.
201 Times of India (1 July 1930), collection 159/17 Court martial of men Of Garhwal Regiment in connection with disturbances at Peshawar on 23 April 1930, IOR/L/MIL/7/7282 : 1930-1937.
The redrawing of political lines and forms of political protest in the 1930s contributed to redefining martial participation outside of the British Indian Army. Hindu Mahasabha leader Dr. B.S. Moonje argued in 1935 that Military Training was essential if Hindus wanted to “live as men.” Following the Shivaji Military School in Pune which had opened to middling success in 1932, he decided to build his own military school aimed explicitly at “Hindus,” which gained financial support from former Commander-in-Chief Sir Philip Chetwode. The primary goal of the school was “to bring about Military regeneration of the Hindus.” One of the major points of contention about the school was how its cadets would be fed. Mr. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Karnatak leader and Congress Working Committee member, charged Moonje with advocating non-vegetarian diets “including beef for Hindus,” much like prominent late nineteenth century martial and physical culture advocate Swami Vivekananda. When it came time to open the school, Moonje assured his critics that he hoped “to infuse British virtues in them, without Anglicizing them.” This included keeping “The general kitchen… strictly and entirely vegetarian.” He assured The Mahratta that students would eat three meals per day consisting of rice and wheat in the morning and evening, as well as a mixture of rice, dal, chapatis, vegetables and ghee, as well as milk and tea. While military officials associated the importance of food with “dietary taboos,” Indian authors and leaders recognized the political and social importance of food in everyday life—those

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202 Notes in Poona (5 July 1935) on Dr. B.S. Munje’s lecture on the “Necessity of a Military Training,” Home (Special), Sr. 989, File 812-A H.D. 1935, MSA.
203 Commander-in-Chief’s Message (Nagpur, 24 November 1935); Times of India (26 November 1935), Reprint from the Mahratta (14 May 1937), Home (Special), Sr. 989, File 812-A H.D. 1935, MSA.
204 Excerpt from Bombay Chronicle: “Charge-Sheet Against Moonje,” Bombay Chronicle 3 September 1935, Home (Special), Sr. 989, File 812-A H.D. 1935, MSA.
205 Times of India (19 August 1935); Pamphlet Entitled “The General Scheme of The Bhonsala Military School,” Reprint from the Mahratta (21 May 1937), Home (Special), Sr. 989, File 812-A H.D. 1935, MSA.
206 Reprint from the Mahratta—(14 May 1937).
with improper or unstable access to food might be more likely to join the military. By reclaiming the use of food as a recruiting tool, and redefining vegetarian diets as martial—such institutions destabilized the power of the military, and the Empire, to assign martial value to South Asian bodies.

The careful redefinition of Hindus as martial by groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and individuals such as Moonje resonated for both Britons and South Asians. By the 1930s, some British men, such as Civil Serviceman M.L. Darling, were even willing to concede, as East India Company officials had done, that vegetarian diets could produce martial men. He argued that “the Hindu Jat is a strict vegetarian and will not touch even eggs. In spite of this—he would say because of it—in courage, endurance, and grit he is the equal of any meat-loving Muslim, and I doubt whether in the whole world could be found a better advertisement for vegetarianism. He derives his great strength almost entirely from the sacred cow, and in listening to the details of his daily diet one understood why the cow was sacred.”

Compared to pre-war arguments, which regarded Hindu diets as “prejudices,” Darling demonstrates that anti-colonial nationalists, such as Mohandas Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, and Moonje, used diet to produce an alternative vision of masculine virility. When discussing “caste prejudices” in the Army, yoga enthusiast Francis Yeats-Brown even concluded that “the Hindu system is based on realities; the thoroughbred is a good horse, and the Rajput is a good soldier for reasons that have been tested and proved through centuries.” For Yeats-Brown, who was an advocate of training the bowels through yoga, it was the careful conditioning of bodies through diet that made Rajputs strong warriors. Darling and Yeats-Brown’s admiration

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for Brahman warriors was *because of*, rather than despite, their exclusivity and strict practices. Therefore, at a time when Hindu “prejudices” were being stamped out to create a secularized Indian officer corps within the army, British authors and soldiers were able to see its value and rationality, which would contribute to the “rediscovery” of Brahmans and their heavy recruitment during the Second World War.  

**Interfaith Dining**

The Indian men who were being carefully groomed by the British Indian Army as officers had their own interpretations of how food should shape India and the British Empire. Lieutenant General S.K. Sinha, a Kayastha Indian officer during the Second World War, recalled opportunities for solidarity with the men of his predominantly Punjabi Muslim company. He explained that “I recall observing Ramzan with my men but I confess it was difficult to do without water during the day and sometimes I used to help myself to drinking water on the quiet.” Sinha suggests that “Hindu” officers could take bodily practices as opportunities to bridge religious differences between themselves and the men whom they commanded, although his devotion did not exactly match the strict adherence to the fast of his fellow soldiers. General Mohan Singh, leader of the anti-colonial Indian National Army, recalled a similar story of inter-faith dietary solidarity in contrast to British segregation. He argued that “During those days, the evil of untouchability was still rampant. There used to be and probably there are still separate kitchens in the Army for Hindus and Mohammedans. For a Hindu or a Sikh to eat with a

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210 Sinha explains that at the turn of the twentieth century, one court of law declared that Kayasthas were Shudras, the lowest caste, while another held that they were Kshatriyas, the warrior class. His grandfather adopted the name Sinha, meaning lion, to claim affinity with the warrior tradition, and SK Sinha explained that his own career as an army officer fulfilled this familial heritage.
Mohammedan was considered sacrilege, something unimaginable and unpardonable.” He claimed that he sidestepped this segregation by enjoying tea, sweets and conversation with a Pathan Havildar. However, “The Hindu and Sikh N.C.O.’s living in the next barrack had watched me taking tea with them. This greatly displeased them.” As punishment for his transgression, “everyone avoided me as if I was an untouchable” and the cook told him to stay away from the kitchen. From then on he took his meals in the Muslim kitchen which “completely smashed any chance of rapprochement with the other N.C.O.’s of my community (Hindus and Sikhs) and they completely boycotted me.” He recalled however this incident “was to be the main-spring of a great and noble action a decade later. For, when I raised the Indian National Army in 1941-42, the first good thing I did was to introduce common kitchens for one and all.”

212 Indian National Army commander Subhas Chandra Bose similarly encouraged “Hindu, Muslim and Sikh soldiers” to “dine together in the INA barracks.”

Inter-dining was crucial to re-imagining an alternative post-colonial militancy in the fading days of empire, encouraged most strongly by those upwardly mobile, well-educated pioneers of Indianization. These memories of empire, told through the lens of post-colonial and post-partition Indian army officers, suggests that the narrative of British dietary segregation versus Indian integration was a critical way of understanding how post-colonial “India” was defined by elite twentieth century martial men. Although most of these men had experienced “integrated” dining spaces in the institutions meant to build and train officers, the Indian Army itself lagged behind the times, maintaining strict

213 Photograph on display at the home of S.C. Bose in Kolkata as of October 2014.
segregation between its enlisted men. The cosmopolitan outlook, which had been
encouraged by South Asian men during the First World War, was only extended to a
privileged elite among martial men deemed “worthy” of the opportunities of the colonial
state. This made them incapable of fully belonging in the Indian Army—either among the
British officers who suspected them of harboring secret “prejudices”, or the enlisted men
for whom segregation was part and parcel with service in the British Indian Army.

**Conclusions**

The “government’s salt” was an object of constant negotiation that indicated
anxieties about the military and British rule in India. The deeply ritualized process of
categorizing and quantifying food for soldiers—based on military definitions of who ate
what, or of what quantities of food were most appropriate for fighting men—consistently
fell short of the lived reality of military life. Soldiers were constantly faced with food
shortages or forced to consume things that were unsanitary, unhealthy, or bland. This was
despite the fact that military forces—and British imperial rule more generally—had the
most consistent, and often corrupt, access to the natural resources of the subcontinent.
Individual soldiers’ willingness or unwillingness to consume the government’s salt
through fasts or simple rejection indicated shifting understandings of the utility of food to
stabilize the military manpower of the subcontinent. South Asian men’s abilities to
reclaim food as a tool of recruitment—and to define for themselves what diets were most
conducive to fostering “martial” spirit—was an unintended consequence of military
dependence on food. It revealed the centrality of food for redefining power in South Asia.

Military narratives about the “contagion of Hinduism” hid the fact that that *both*
British and Indian bodies were unstable entities that required strict maintenance and
monitoring. Frequently susceptible to illness and improper access to food, the real “contagion” was the unpredictability, insecurity and dangers of army life. It was a profession that debilitated those who participated in it while plaguing the agricultural supply of the subcontinent. Despite the continued vitality of narratives about “Hindu prejudices” after the First World War, most Indian Hindus in the army had proven that they were willing and able to alter their diets—by wearing boots while they ate, dining with Muslims, or consuming meat—to serve the British Empire. The efforts taken to accommodate Hindu diets were hardly exceptional compared to the extensive efforts in providing “sanitary” arrangements for Britons, “halal” food for Muslims, or “pure” food and drink for Gurkhas. The continued anxiety, rather, stemmed from a feeling of lack of control over Hindu bodies—that “Brahman” sensibilities—be they “religious” caste criticisms or anti-colonial protests about access to food—were detrimental to the Empire itself and limited British control over consumption. It signaled that while soldiers were willing to fight in order to justify the “Salt” that they had eaten, they would not blindly swallow everything that the government served.

By the 1930s, both imperial and anti-colonial understandings of Hindu diets—at the military academies filled with “Westernized” cadets, the “Hindu” military school of Moonje, and the overtly anti-colonial Indian National Army—attempted to set the terms of diet through understandings of who belonged in the “nation.” While the I.N.A. dreamed of a free non-partitioned India and deployed the cosmopolitan ideals of imperial military life to fight against the empire, Moonje’s school explicitly defined the nation as “Hindu” with a removal of all “caste” distinctions extending solely to martial Hindus. The British Indian Army widely publicized its efforts to segregate dining spaces while
officially celebrating the broadening of dietary preference. Controlling food within Indian Military Schools for Hindus, however, was an effort to suggest that the Government would not always be in control of the “salt” of India. Debates about the “government’s salt” and “the contagion of Hinduism” dealt with who had the right to manage South Asian bodies—a privilege demanded by both colonial and anti-colonial forces.

Debates about bodily purity, and who had the right to define what was “moral” and “martial” carried additional political valence when exercised outside of formally “colonial” spaces. The following chapter examines how Gurkha purity was debated by British, Indian, Nepalese, monastic, military and civilian officials, bringing the issue of purity and belonging not only to soldiers’ food, but to their mobility. Crossing seas and borders indicated that non-colonial soldiers were mobile, global citizens tethered to competing national, martial, and spiritual definitions of difference and belonging shaped by the imperial world.
Chapter Two

Pure Bodies, Impure Diplomacy

Gurkha soldiers—recruited for the British Indian Army from the mountainous nation of Nepal on India’s northern Himalayan border—played a central role in redefining the scope and reach of Britain’s imperial ambitions. Like the British, Muslim, and Indian “Hindu” soldiers discussed previously, Gurkhas were at the heart of debates about social and community belonging in an increasingly global world. Unlike their Indian and British counterparts, however, they were not official subjects of the British Empire. As they traversed the globe for imperial military service—from China in 1900 to Europe in 1914, and from Burma to Mesopotamia in the years after they First World War—they returned not to British jurisdiction, but to a nominally independent nation. There they encountered conflicting loyalties and ambivalent views of providing military service to a bordering imperial power. Anxiety and animosity about the right of Gurkhas to reclaim a place for themselves socially when they returned from military service manifested in their perceived “impurity” for doing so—a transgression known as crossing the “black waters” (kala pani). Just as debates about food were informed by anxieties and insecurities about the military and the empire rather than strictly “religious” concerns, the social and political backlash soldiers faced for crossing the kala pani was not a simple or straightforward “religious” objection. Just as often, it was a carefully deployed means of checking the flow of Nepalese migrant labor across the border into British Indian service. Animosity toward these crossings reflected particular moments of tension between British India and Nepal. A range of British, Indian, Nepalese, spiritual, secular, and
military authorities attempted to demarcate the limits of belonging at the borders of empire between 1900 and 1920, with Nepalese soldiers caught in the crosshairs.

Sumit Guha has argued that rules of purity and propriety mark difference between communities, genders, priests and laypersons and define community boundaries. While South Asian markers of purity can be elaborate, Guha argues that “it is a mistake to focus on the markers of social boundaries and ignore the powers that enforced them.” This chapter examines a moment when dueling British and Nepalese powers sought to enforce a particular marker of social distance: namely, the pani patya or purification ceremony, administered to Gurkha troops who crossed the seas. The contagion of crossing the “black water” (kala pani) was most commonly associated with Brahman ritual and practice, which associated seafaring with pollutants that damage communally-sanctioned purity through physical bodies. The extent and scale of soldiers’ international journeys dramatically expanded during the First World War. The increasing number of voyages brought with it a heightened level of social suspicion for the men who returned home from overseas.

Unstable power relationships—between the India Office, the Government of India, British military officers, the Nepalese government, and Nepalese ecclesiastical authorities—manifested in the dramatic regulation of soldiers’ physical bodies. Official efforts to bring rationality to the unpredictable realities of mobile military life created additional social and physical instability for soldiers. British and Nepalese powers viewed soldiers’ bodies as little more than, as Mary Des Chene has argued, “diplomatic

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currency.” Yet this exchange of bodies and diplomatic favors had profound political, social and cultural implications for soldiers and civilians. By defining and mandating a “religious” policy for all soldiers, British and Nepalese officials used armies and bureaucracy to entrench a dogma of ritual belonging. It represented a moment of collaboration between British and Nepalese authorities to subsume “religious” power within the secular authority of international relations.

Making “Gurkha” Soldiers in Anglo-Nepalese Relations

The military relationship between Britain and Nepal was fraught with controversy and collaboration from the earliest days of British involvement in South Asia. As the East India Company gained power in Bengal, the raja of the small hill state of Gorkha, in present-day central Nepal, began a campaign of territorial conquest. The Gorkhalis struggled for power with Chinese and Khalsa (Sikh) forces before battling the EIC army which sought trade routes through Tibet and China. When the Gorkha state expanded into the Nepal valley in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it brought Kshatriyas (warriors) and Brahmans (priests) into contact and dispute, which was resolved through the creation of the Rajguru who mediated between their interests. While Kshatriyas gained administrative power, Brahmans gained social and legal concessions, enabling cooperation between Brahman priesthood and the Gurkha state. The Rajguru generated income from government lands and from fines inflicted on those who broke caste rules, including soldiers and kings. As Gorkha rule, and the movement of Gurkha

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216 Ibid., 3.
217 Ibid., 24.
soldiers, expanded, so did the “religious” authority of the Rajguru, who would become the primary authority on crossing the “kala pani.”

During the Anglo-Nepalese war from 1814-16, the East India Company began incorporating Nepalese troops into its forces by organizing deserters and POWs into irregular levies, drawn largely from groups who lost political and military power with the expansion of the Gorkhas. After the Anglo-Nepalese war, William Fraser, political agent to Nepal, organized the 7,000 irregular levies into four “Gurkha” battalions—(mis)named for the former expansionist state. Company officials used Gurkhas as police forces and as garrison troops in the Himalayas and by the 1840s, Dehra Dun became a military colony for Gurkhas within India. Until the 1840s, Kshatriya prime Minister Bhim Singh Thapa expanded Nepal’s peacetime strength in the hopes of protecting its borders. Yet the state trained more men than it could employ, making service to the East India Company more attractive. The Nepalese Government made it nearly impossible to join the Company’s army by barring Nepali movement across borders. When the Company faced fiscal cuts and preoccupation with the Afghan War in 1839, it pursued a policy of non-interference with so-called “native states” from 1839-1856, and shelved Gurkha recruitment. Jang Bahadur, Nepal’s prime minister, increased the strength of his army to 26,000. Until 1857, EIC officers were reluctant to recruit Nepalese soldiers out of fear of provoking another war with Gorkhalis.

During the 1857 mutiny of the Bengal Army, the Company feared that Nepal might attempt to regain territory by joining forces with the leaders of northeastern Oudh.

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219 Des Chene, “Relics of Empire,” 1, 3; Alavi, *Sepoys and the Company*, 275, 277, 280.
so they preemptively requested military aid. The Prime Minister of Nepal led 10,000 Nepalese troops into battle in exchange for territory that had been ceded in 1816. Nepalese authorities continued to place bars on the movement of Nepalese soldiers into India and even up to 1870s. When the Nepalese Durbar agreed to send recruits, they tended to be men unfit for service. Bir Shamsher Rana’s rise to power in a coup conveniently coincided with army reform spear-headed by “Martial Races” proponent Commander-in-Chief Lord Roberts in the 1880s. The new Nepalese Prime Minister earned British support and weapons in exchange for permitting Gurkha recruitment. Gurkhas became an internal security police in late nineteenth and early twentieth century British India. Despite these diplomatic concessions, British recruiters continued to meet resistance.

In order to neutralize institutional and on-the-ground resistance to Nepalese recruitment, British officials initiated the policy of issuing recruiting handbooks, a strategy which later spread to defining the appropriate recruits for other “martial” groups. District recruiting officer Eden Vansittart’s 1890 volume, Notes on Goorkhas, drew on pre-existing ethnographic research to mark the differences between “genuine” Gurkhas and those appearing or put forth erroneously, making it more difficult for non-cooperating Nepalese recruiters to bring forth men unfit for service. His ethnography borrowed from both British and Nepalese assumptions about what men made the best soldiers. Prithvi Narayan Shah had favored the recruitment of four jat (“caste” or

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221 Des Chene, “Relics of Empire,” 143.
223 Caplan, Warrior Gentlemen, 29; Des Chene, “Relics of Empire,” 1, 3, 146.
“tribe”)—Thakuris, Khas (Chhetris), Gurungs, and Magars—and excluded Brahman and untouchable soldiers. Company officials recruited men from the hills including Kumaonis, Garhwalis and Sirmouris who were most affected by Gorkha expansion.\textsuperscript{225} British Resident in Nepal Brian H. Hodgson encouraged the recruitment of “Gurkha” soldiers in the 1820s and 1830s following a string of mutinies among Hindustani soldiers. Hodgson’s affiliation with the Residency from 1820 to 1843 ushered in a new level of ethnographic interest in Nepal, but the Commander-in-Chief was skeptical that Gurkhas could serve on the Indian plains. Meanwhile, Jang Bahadur strengthened his army on the Kshatriya model, creating a united military identity for hill “tribes” through “Hindu” symbols, western discipline, and social customs of Kshatriyas on the plains. This “military Hinduism” created social distance between soldiers and wider Nepalese society. Military men maintained strict dietary habits and regarded non-soldiers as living in a filthy state of Buddhism.\textsuperscript{226} This perception lingered as a dominant characteristic of Gurkha soldiers in British minds. Officers of the 3rd Gurkha Rifles continued to maintain in 1907 that “The Gurkha has…few caste prejudices, and none which interfere with his efficiency as a soldier.”\textsuperscript{227} While British officers were institutionally bound to see their soldiers as fit and brave, Gurkha soldiers could embrace these definitions to prove their martial and masculine prowess and justify their service.

In the twentieth century, British and Nepalese goals were complementary enough to enable further recruitment of Nepalese men into the British Indian Army. Britain desired military manpower, an ally on India’s northern border, and influence over

\textsuperscript{225} Caplan, \textit{Warrior Gentlemen}, 119, 123.
\textsuperscript{226} Alavi, \textit{The Sepoys and the Company}, 266, 268-69, 282, 291.
\textsuperscript{227} —\textit{A Short History of the 3rd Queens Own Gurkha Rifles} (London: Hugh Rees Lt, 1907), 12; See also Rand and Wagner, “Recruiting the ‘Martial Races,’” 236.
Nepal’s foreign policy. The Nepalese government hoped for political sovereignty, British recognition of Nepal as an independent state, and the right to import or manufacture arms. Yet British officials tended to regard Nepal along the lines of the “Native States” of India, limiting the reciprocity of the arrangement.228

**China**

British recruitment of Nepalese troops became a matter of considerable anxiety when British India contemplated sending units from the Indian Army to crush the so-called “Boxer” rebellion in China. The Chinese “Boxers” repudiated Christianity, foreign influence, railroads and paper money as antithetical to Chinese culture and authority, and strengthened their bodies by boxing. In June 1900, the “Boxers” entered Beijing. Forces comprised of British, German, Japanese, Russian, French, American, Italian, and Austrian leadership relieved Beijing and began peace negotiations in October. The largely powerless dowager empress, Tz’u-his, signed the Peking Protocol, agreeing to pay an annual indemnity to the “Great Powers” and permitting the presence of foreign troops in China.229 Yet the Nepalese Prime Minister felt the pressure of being situated geographically and politically between British India and China—two nations with which Nepal shared borders and diplomatic relations and from whom he desired recognition of his independent state. In this environment, a debate about the “pani patya” ceremony, and the ability of Nepalese troops to cross the seas in the service of the British Empire intensified. Rather than fighting over the number or quality of recruits, “pani patya” took center stage. It was a battle waged over Gurkha soldiers’ abilities to enter into the

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international stage on behalf of the British Empire, and to reclaim their place in the Nepalese nation when they returned home.

Nepalese concerns about sending troops to China stemmed in part from their defeat by China in 1792 in the Sino-Nepalese War. This defeat had obliged Nepal to send diplomatic missions and lavish gifts to the Chinese emperor. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Government of India viewed China a potentially powerful ally against the perceived looming Russian threat in the region. In 1889, however, China demanded that the state of Sikkim give a “payment of homage” to the secular Government of Tibet, rather than its Buddhist authorities, inspiring British fears of further incursions from China into the Himalayan states. As a result, they objected to Nepal’s tributary missions to China and sent arms and ammunition to Nepal.230 When Britain sought South Asian assistance for its involvement in China after the Boxer rebellion, Nepal felt the strain between conflicting empires.

In 1900, Nepal’s Prime Minister Sir Bir Shamsher worried about popular opposition to sending Gurkha soldiers to China. British officials including Lieutenant Colonel D.C.F. MacIntyre, W.J. Cuningham, and Lord Curzon suspected that the main issue underpinning his hesitation was Nepal’s relationship with China.231 The Agent to the Governor-General in Central India who had served in Nepal at the end of the nineteenth century believed that sending Nepalese troops to China would have been unpopular and hurt recruiting, in part because Bir Shamsher Jang was eager to get

231 From the Resident in Nepal (6 July 1900), Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI; From Lieutenant Colonel D.C.F. MacIntyre, OC 1-4th Gurkhas, to Resident in Nepal, undated, c. 1906, Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
approval of China after the Revolution. However, the Maharaja denied that Nepalese objections were political, stating that the country’s connections with China were merely commercial. Lieutenant Colonel W. Loch, Resident in Nepal, took the opportunity to remind Sir Bir Shamsher and General Chandra that “all our native soldiers on attestation declared their readiness to serve Her Majesty in whatever country they might be called on to go to.”

Facing accusations that he was reluctant to send Gurkhas to China because of his political ties to the country, Nepalese Prime Minister Sir Bir Shamsher stated that his fears stemmed from the fact that soldiers would be “put out of caste for crossing the sea.” General Chandra Shamsher agreed that if the Gurkhas crossed the “kala pani” they would be outcasted on their return, and cited several precedents for this being the case. From the perspective of British officials, however, it was difficult to comprehend that Gurkhas would be “outcasted” for proceeding to China. A.P. Palmer argued that Gurkha troops went to Malta in 1878 during the Russo-Turkish War without any problems and frequently took ships to Burma. Lieutenant Colonel D.C.F. MacIntyre, the officer commanding the 1-4th Gurkhas, confirmed that the 2nd Gurkhas experienced no difficulty when they went to Malta, nor did the 1st Gurkhas going to Perak, the Gurkhas who went

232 Telegram from agent to the Governor-General in Central India, Indore, to the Foreign Secretary, Simla (30 June 1900), Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
233 From the Resident in Nepal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department. (25 June 1900), Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
234 From Lt. Col. W. Loch, Resident in Nepal, To Sir William Cuningham, KCSI, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department (6 July 1900), Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
235 From the Resident in Nepal (25 June 1900), Foreign Department. Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
236 A.P. Palmer, Note, (1 July 1900), Foreign Department. Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
to the Jubilee or served as the King’s orderlies in England.\textsuperscript{237} The Officer Commanding, 1-7\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles maintained that in his 16 years of service he never heard of any men being outcasted for traveling overseas. He argued that since 1887, “thousands” of men had crossed the seas, including one battalion (the 1-7\textsuperscript{th}, formerly 2-10\textsuperscript{th}) which crossed and cooked daily in 1905. Half of the 1-10\textsuperscript{th} crossed in 1908 and the Military Police Battalions cross yearly, cooking and eating on board steamers.\textsuperscript{238}

A.R. Martin of the Army Department acknowledged that while men were sometimes outcasted for their journeys overseas, normal army policy was to allow individual men to sort the matter of restoring their caste themselves, without military intervention. He gave as examples “Several men” of his old battalion who journeyed to England and Europe including two who guided Sir Conway over the Alps, during which time “Hindu rites could hardly be adhered to.” Their transgressions were absolved with “A little judgment and propitiation of the priesthood.”\textsuperscript{239} Major J. Manners-Smith, the Resident in Nepal, stated that this usually cost between 2 and 4 annas.\textsuperscript{240} Curzon, who opposed sending Gurkhas at all, was confused by the controversy, stating that a diverse collection of “Hindu” soldiers had crossed the seas without incident, including Dogras, Rajputs and Brahmans who served in Abyssinia, Mauritius, and Egypt. British official categorizations of “Martial Races” regarded Gurkhas as less particular about “caste” requirements than their Indian counterparts, yet it was Gurkhas who developed

\textsuperscript{237} From Lieutenant Colonel D.C.F. MacIntyre, OC 1-4\textsuperscript{th} Gurkhas, to Resident in Nepal, undated, c. 1906, Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
\textsuperscript{238} From Officer Commanding, 1-7\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles to the Brigade-Major 1\textsuperscript{st} Quetta Infantry Brigade, (4 June 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
\textsuperscript{239} A.R. Martin, Note, (3 July 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
\textsuperscript{240} From Major J. Manners-Smith, VC, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to Sir L.W. Dane, CSI, KCIE, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, (18 April 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
reservations about going overseas.\textsuperscript{241} He maintained that when Dogra troops journeyed to Egypt, Gurkha troops resented being left out of the campaign. \textsuperscript{242}

Despite British officials’ impressions that there had been no precedent for outcasting soldiers for serving overseas, the Prime Minister of Nepal alleged that this was quite common. He argued that when the regiments went to Malta, those who crossed the seas without the authorization of the priesthood were not only outcasted by the Government and their relatives but even forbidden entrance into their villages. One Colonel Run Jung was outcasted after visiting England, deprived of his wife, and excommunicated to Calcutta. Chandra Shamsher was under the impression that none of the British Gurkha soldiers who crossed the “kala pani” were ever taken back to caste.\textsuperscript{243}

There are many reasons why British and Nepalese authorities reported vastly different narratives of whether or not Gurkha soldiers in the nineteenth century faced social criticism and isolation for proceeding overseas. One was inherent in military policy: men were usually left to arrange the matter themselves, with no military intervention. If men felt that they had no institutional backing, they would have been unlikely to report back to their officers if or when they had difficulty. At the same time, British officers admitted that the matter was really about paying-off “the priesthood,” so if Gurkha soldiers did seek regimental support, officers would have simply paid the necessary penalties from regimental funds and nipped the matter in the bud before it proceeded up the chain of command. According to the officer commanding the 1-7\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{241} Lord Curzon, Note, (1 July 1900), Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
\textsuperscript{242} Palmer, Note, (1 July 1900).
\textsuperscript{243} From His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, GCSI, Prime Minister of Nepal, to Major J. Manners-Smith, VC, CIE, Officiating Resident in Nepal Dated Camp (11 February 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
Gurkha Rifles, soldiers returning to Eastern Nepal spoke to their village headman and gave an account of where he had been and whether he had done anything to break his caste. After replying “no,” the soldier gave the headman four annas which allowed the man to “takes his usual place in the village.”²⁴⁴ Soldiers’ “purification” was handled regimentally or locally and thus failed to provide a consistent paper trail that could inform higher officials’ decisions and policies about who traveled overseas and when.

In order to circumvent the tension regarding soldiers’ ability to maintain their “caste” on their overseas journeys, Bir Shamsher proposed sending a guru to inspect the water tank on the British transport steamer meant for Gurkha troops proceeding to China. The British Resident of Nepal believed having a guru sign off on the water supply would eliminate protests and objections because the matter had been handled by a respected authority.²⁴⁵ Lord Curzon objected again, stating that he was firmly opposed to establishing a precedent for “gurus turning up from all sorts of unsuspected quarters.”²⁴⁶ Nonetheless, British officials had the ships inspected, and Gurkha troops set sail for China. Despite efforts to have the ship’s water tank inspected to ensure Gurkha soldiers’ purity, military discipline often had its own ideas. While en route to China, one Subadar Gumbirsing Pun of the 6th Gurkha Rifles forced his men to drink salt water from the ocean when they complained that they had to use the fresh drinking water on board

²⁴⁴ From Officer Commanding, 1-7th Gurkha Rifles to the Brigade-Major, (4 June 1913).
²⁴⁵ From the Resident in Nepal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, (25 June 1900).
²⁴⁶ Lord Curzon, Note (30 June 1900) Foreign Department, Secret—E. August 1900, file number 208-215, NAI.
sparingly. The result was a successful display of military discipline, with no reported effects on the men’s purity.

**Impurity and Institutional Change**

Despite having ships inspected by a “Guru” in 1900, by 1906, British authorities learned from Lieutenant-Colonel Macintyre that some soldiers of the 1-4th Gurkhas faced social ostracism when they returned to Nepal from China. This was unusual because students who had just returned from Japan reentered social life without difficulty. Clearly, it was not simply the impurity of crossing the seas. According to Macintyre, soldiers of the 1-4th had attempted to receive the pani patya ceremony and pay the necessary fines when they returned from China but the ceremony was refused to them. The men maintained that the arrangements for food and drink were “strictly in accordance with Hindu rights and customs.” As opposed to previous military policy, which held that men should deal with the matter on their own, this incident produced a documented case of outcasting that came to the attention of both the Prime Minister of Nepal and the Government of India. As a result, the solution ended up being far more complex and politically tumultuous.

By 1906, the failure to prevent the “outcasting” of Gurkha soldiers caused tension between British and Nepalese authorities. The Prime Minister demanded to know what, if any, “pure and orthodox arrangements” were made while the men were in China.

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248 From Manners-Smith to Dane (18 April 1906).

249 From Major J. Manners-Smith, VC, CIE, Officiating Resident in Neapl, to His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, GCSI, Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal (7 April 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.

250 H.M., Note, (10 April 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
Manners-Smith, the Resident in Nepal, demanded a written verification from all soldiers of the 4th Gurkhas attesting to the purity of their food and drink arrangements. The Prime Minister gave an impassioned speech in Nepal declaring that, as a small and poor country, overseas employment was crucial to the future development of the community. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of welcoming the men back into the community, since having strong, well-trained soldiers was a necessity for the strength of the nation. He concluded his speech with passages from the “Mahabharata” exalting the past heroes who had journeyed overseas.

Facing secular and religious criticism in Nepal, British officials debated how best to deal with Gurkha’s social difficulties returning home. C.W.G. Richardson proposed keeping the same procedures of the past and avoid setting up “an awkward precedent.” A.R. Martin blamed the whole incident on Lieutenant-Colonel Macintyre—not for his role in making soldiers “impure” but by reporting the matter to the Prime Minister of Nepal, creating an unnecessarily over-blown situation. Once Macintyre presented the issue to the Prime Minister, it made it impossible to avoid “undue importance and mischievous interference.” Since the Prime Minister had a tenuous relationship with the priesthood, and was now tasked with intervening officially into a delicate matter, the situation, to Martin, would only deteriorate. Because the matter had escalated beyond the army, it could no longer be settled regimentally. The speed and efficiency of modern

251 From Manners-Smith to the Foreign Department, (18 April 1906).
252 Translation of a speech made by His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, G.C.S.I., Prime Minister of Nepal, Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
253 C.W.G. Richardson, Note, (8 June 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
254 A.R. Martin, Note, (3 July 1906), Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
communication, which made it all too easy for information to spread up the chain of command, was creating major institutional uncertainty.

The debate about how to deal with “outcasted” Gurkha soldiers unable to receive pani patya continued to escalate and was reported to the Foreign Office. Their official recommendation, supported by the Nepalese Prime Minister, was to “send an Agent of the Bara Gurugi [sic] to give ‘patya’ (restore caste) at one and the same time to all men requiring it on each occasion, and to commence this practice now in the case of the 1-4th Gurkhas.” Martin called this “an entirely new and bigoted procedure.” Thus, he acknowledged that it was army policy, rather than “Hindu” practice, that was bigoted. Since the Prime Minister proposed this solution to satisfy the priesthood, however, Martin believed that it would settle the matter if handled properly. He recommended that the agent be sent to Bakloh to perform the ceremony but emphasized that this should be arranged and paid for by the Regiment, rather than the Foreign Office or Army Headquarters, so as to maintain some degree of continuity with the past and prevent full-scale institutional changes.255

Eventually, the Nepal State Council agreed to grant pani patya to the men of the 1-4th Gurkhas who went to China. The Prime Minister sent an agent of the “Bada Gurugi” (Rajguru) to administer pani patya and to agree to do so whenever necessary. Resident in Nepal Major J. Manners-Smith worried that the regimental authorities would not support or appreciate this decision since it would result in “a certain amount of priestly

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interference” during every subsequent international campaign. The Guru and Prime Minister agreed that the men of the 1-4th Gurkha Rifles should receive the ceremony together as a batch as soon as they returned from any international journeys to avoid confusion and complication. They also conceded that, even in cases where, during the hardships of battle, soldiers could not maintain rigorous dietary control, they should still be eligible for pani patya when they returned home. Significantly, this policy only extended to the men of the 1-4th Gurkhas, despite the fact that other Gurkha regiments also sent troops to China. Thus, as of 1906, the men of the 1-4th had a standardized method for permitting their travel overseas, coordinated through the Prime Minister of Nepal. The following year, the Nepalese Prime Minister, Sir Chandra Shamsher Jung, became an Honorary Colonel of the 4th Gurkhas, and an Honorary Major-General in the British Army.

As critics such as Martin recognized, the full-scale permission for the 1-4th Gurkha Rifles to receive pani patya represented a significant shift in British policy regarding the “religious” practices of soldiers. Formerly, officers preferred for men to manage these issues on their own, providing institutional support at the regimental level only when necessary. Granting pani-patya to all the men of the 1-4th Gurkhas suggested that, by the early twentieth century, British authorities were more inclined to make a

256 From Major J. Manners-Smith VC, CIE, Officiating Resident in Nepal, to Sir L.W. Dane, CSI, KCIE, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department (12 May 1906) Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
257 Abstract translation of a Yaddasht from His Excellency the PM and Marshal of Nepal to the Resident in Nepal, (dated 15th Baisak Samvat/ 27 April 1906), Foreign Department (12 May 1906) Foreign and Political Extl., (October 1906) file number 51-53, NAI.
258 From Manners-Smith to Dane, (12 May 1906).
259 “Appointment of the Prime Minister of Nepal, Sir Chandra Shamsher Jung, as Honorary Colonel of the 4th Gurkhas, and grant to him of the Honorary rank of Major-General in the British Army. Visit of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief to Nepal,” Foreign and Political External—A. May 1907, file 54-72 pg. 87, NAI.
catch-all solution than have to worry about making similar, smaller-scale efforts again. In so doing, this response ignored other underlying reasons that may have facilitated soldiers’ social isolation. After all, they had been away from home for a long period of time, worked outside of their communities, supported their families and their lives overseas, and entered into battle against China, which had historic ties to Nepal. In their efforts to streamline the administration of pani patya into a matter of bureaucratic efficiency, rather than continue to treat it on an unpredictable case-by-case basis, British authorities spent a considerable amount of time, energy, and funds, to try and “rationalize” and institutionalize a practice that generally confounded most British officials.

_Purification and the King_

Unsurprisingly, the issue of whether soldiers could be granted pani patya returned as a point of discussion in 1913. In years since the absolution of the 1-4<sup>th</sup> Gurkhas, British authorities took an even more active role in influencing Nepal’s foreign policy. Lord Curzon viewed Nepal as a de facto British protectorate.<sup>260</sup> The number of Gurkha Rifles regiments rose from five to ten in 1908, increasing the likelihood Nepalese men would be required to serve overseas.<sup>261</sup> In the 1-2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles alone, thirty men traveled overseas between 1901 and 1911 to partake in campaigns or ceremonies in China, Somaliland, or England.<sup>262</sup> Others journeyed as far as Australia.<sup>263</sup> Yet the travels

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<sup>260</sup> Labh, “China as a Factor in the Policy of British India toward Nepal,” 186.
<sup>261</sup> Caplan, _Warrior Gentlemen_, 30-1.
<sup>262</sup> From The Officer Commanding, 1-2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles, to the Brigade-Major, Dehra Dun Brigade (26 May 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
<sup>263</sup> From The Officer Commanding, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The 1<sup>st</sup> KGO, Gurkha Rifles to the Staff Captain, Jullundur Brigade, (30 May 1913) Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI; The Officer Commanding, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The 1<sup>st</sup> KGO Gurkha Rifles, to the Staff Captain, Jullundur Brigade (3 June 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
that garnered the most attention—and most severe backlash—were those connected to providing services to the King. Just as there were conflicting interpretations about whether Nepalese authorities in 1906 had a specific political opposition to sending soldiers to China specifically, it was politically uncomfortable that protests arose over Gurkha soldiers’ participation in ceremonies—such as the coronation—connected to Britain’s King-Emperor. The direct service to the King raised important questions about the “unofficial duties” that, for some, exceeded the appropriate boundaries between Nepal and the British Empire.

By 1913, a few well-known cases intensified criticisms about Nepalese soldiers who traveled overseas. Rifleman Durgu Mal (Thakur) of the 1st Battalion 2nd (King Edward’s Own) Gurkha Rifles had gone to England with the Indian Coronation Contingent in 1902. Upon returning, he was forced to live as an outcaste in Nepal for two years. He petitioned Lieutenant Saunders, Adjutant, 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles, arguing that as soon as he wore “the King’s Coronation medal” presented to him by “the Sirkar Bahadur in England” he was “condemned from my caste, nation and country for ever.”

Similarly, Honorary Captain Santbir Gurung, Indian Order of Merit, Sirdar Bahadur, late Subadar Major of the 2-2nd Gurkha regiment, reported being outcasted for having gone to England in 1910 as Orderly Officer to His Majesty the King-Emperor. It did not take long for British Gurkha officers to recognize that a medal that was once a mark of distinction became a token of shame and deliberate disrespect against the

264 Translation of a petition from discharged Rifleman Durga Mal, late 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles, to Lieutenant Saunders, Adjutant, 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles (6 August 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.

265 Letter from Lieutenant Colonel H.L. Showers, CSI, CIE, Officiating Resident in Nepal, to the Honorable Lieutenant Colonel Sir A.H. McMahon, GCVO, KCIE, CSI, Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, Simla (4 April 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
empire. Yet since these trips were neither “active duty” nor directly tied to their paid military service, British and Nepalese authorities disagreed about whether they were worthy of absolution in the form of “pani patya.”

While A.R. Martin in 1906 had complained that the matter of pani patya had been given undue importance by being turned over to the Foreign and Political Department and Army Headquarters, in 1913, it was brought to the attention of the King. Major C. Wigram, the king’s Equerry, received a private letter detailing the case of Subadar-Major Santbir Gurang and believed that other pensioned Gurkha officers who visited England faced a similar fate. Wigram informed the King because “the King is Colonel-in-Chief of the 2nd Gurkhas” and takes a great interest in the regiment. Wigram initially blamed Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher, but officials in British India convinced him that it was only with the Prime Minister’s interference in 1906 that the matter reached any resolution at all. Thus, while Martin in 1906 blamed officers for making an undue fuss, by 1913 officials believed that Gurkha “purity” was serious enough to merit intervention from the highest levels of government. DuBoulay believed that with the King’s involvement the issue would be brought to an amicable conclusion.

One reason that officials shifted from seeing government intervention from a hindrance to a necessity was growing anxiety about “Brahman” and “priestly” influence in South Asia. The British Raj witnessed considerable backlash against the 1905 partition of Bengal, agrarian activism in Panjab, and the growing prominence and institutional

266 From The Officer Commanding, 1-2nd Gurkha Rifles, to the Brigade-Major (26 May 1913).
267 From Major C. Wigram, Equerry to His Majesty the King, to Sir James DuBoulay, Private Secretary to His Excellency the Viceroy, (15 May 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
268 From Sir James DuBoulay, Private Secretary to His Excellency the Viceroy, to Major C. Wigram, Equerry to his Majesty the King (12 June 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
suspicions of “Hindu” reformist organizations such as the Arya Samaj. The commanding officer of the 1-2nd Gurkhas defended his men by stating that they had no trepidation about traveling overseas nor did they hold “Brahminical views.” 269 Reflecting these concerns, Wigram’s initial suspicion about Nepalese anxieties about the “kala pani” was that Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher was “very susceptible to Brahminical influence.” 270 Sir James DuBoulay, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, reassured Wigram by noting that while “Nepal seems to be a priest-ridden country,” the Prime Minister was sympathetic to Britain’s secular diplomacy. 271 The Nepalese Prime Minister confirmed these impressions by blaming the “conservatism of priests and people of Nepal in matters of this nature.” 272

Attempting to take advantage of or test the Prime Minister’s “secular” proclivities, the Resident of Nepal in October 1913 requested that the Prime Minister make a general sanction covering all Gurkhas who “may be required in future to proceed overseas in pursuance of their duty or any other service.” He assured the Prime Minister that the Government of India would “be scrupulously careful to arrange, as far as possible, that the men may observe inviolate their caste rules regarding food and drink if they choose to do so.” He reminded the Prime Minister that Indian soldiers faced no difficulties for crossing the seas, despite being “as orthodox in the matter of the Hindu religion and caste observances as your Gurkha subjects.” 273 In fact, rather than facing social difficulties, the men of the 2nd Rajputs who went to China had their prestige

269 From The Officer Commanding, 1-2nd Gurka Rifles, to the Brigade-Major (26 May 1913).
270 From Wigram to DuBoulay, (15 May 1913).
271 From DuBoulay to Wigram, (12 June 1913).
272 Telegram from the Resident in Nepal, to The Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department (10 November 1913), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
273 From Lt-Col J. Manners-Smith VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal (30 October 1913), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
increase, rather than diminish.\textsuperscript{274} This struck a tenuous balance between assuring officials that the Government of India was steadfast in maintaining Gurkha purity, but also hoping that Gurkhas would be less “orthodox” than their Indian counterparts. By mentioning the lack of difficulty experienced by Indian “Hindus,” he also played with military perceptions that Gurkhas despised “Indian” caste peculiarity, and were currently being compared unfavorably to them.

By November 1913 the Prime Minister of Nepal was caught between the need to appear amenable to military demands to send Gurkhas overseas and be respectful to Nepalese ecclesiastical authorities without appearing “prejudiced.” He did so by arguing that “whatever my personal views may be I must conform to the opinion of the priesthood and the people.” He reminded the British Resident that before the matter of the 1\textsuperscript{st}-4\textsuperscript{th} Gurkhas was settled in 1906, a meeting consisting of the priesthood, nobles and the civil and military officers was convened. Their case was only approved because they had been on active duty, whereas the recent debates about Durga Mal and Santbir Gurung were held to the standard of other unauthorized travelers. He reminded them that one Subadar-Major Hasta Bir Gharti was never admitted into caste and was under the ban of ex-communication for the rest of his life. He worried that British eagerness to blame Brahmans and demand a sweeping exemption for all soldiers meant that “the British authorities concerned did not think it worth their while to give due consideration to such an important matter” resulting in “serious consequences to the unfortunate sufferers.”\textsuperscript{275}

\textsuperscript{274} From the Officer Commanding, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, 4\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles, to the Staff Captain, Jullundur Brigade (30 May 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.

\textsuperscript{275} From Major-General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumshere [sic] Jung Bahadur Rana, Prime Minster and Marshal of Nepal to the Resident in Nepal, (6 November 1913), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
Thus, while the Prime Minister similarly focused on the culpability of the “priesthood,” he called attention to British authorities’ flippancy in considering it a trivial matter that could be easily solved.

By January 1914, the Prime Minister acquiesced to British officials’ requests and approached the priesthood about authorizing the grant of pani patya to soldiers who proceeded overseas. However, it caused institutional concern when the priests demanded a list of names for those who required it.\(^{276}\) The Foreign Secretary recommended sending a list of names of all men who had been sent overseas, but L.W. Reynolds worried that doing so mean that men would “be punished more severely.” Since the majority of men had not been outcasted, “it would appear better to let well alone.”\(^{277}\) British officials worried that a bureaucratic tool of keeping track of soldiers’ participation in battle and movement could be used as a method of persecuting soldiers for “religious” transgressions. The Prime Minister was stuck between the demands of British military officials, Nepalese soldiers and civilians, and ecclesiastical authorities. British officials worried about losing power over its bureaucratic infrastructure by handing over a list of its soldiers to a “religious” authority. At the same time, word was spreading that people could extract money from returning Gurkha soldiers, and the rate charged to men increased from a few annas to as much as Rs. 7.\(^{278}\) Many officers, including the OC, 1-4\(^{th}\) Gurkha Rifles was strongly of the opinion that pani patya was “a form of blackmail.”\(^{279}\)

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\(^{276}\) Letter from the Resident in Nepal (14 January 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.

\(^{277}\) L.W. Reynolds, Note (19 November 13), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.

\(^{278}\) From the General Officer Commanding Burma Division to the Adjutant General in India, Simla (12 June 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI; F.J. Aylmer, Note (2 August 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.

\(^{279}\) From The Officer Commanding, 1st Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles, To The Staff Captain, Jullundur Brigade. Dated 30 May 1913.
Some officers speculated that heart of the issue was that the “outcasted” men had refused to pay off ecclesiastical and community authorities when they returned. Commander-in-Chief Beauchamp Duff assumed that Captain Santbir Gurung “deliberately set himself to flaunt his journey to England in the faces of the priests” who “know their advantage and will cling to it.” This “direct challenge” could not be overlooked if the priesthood wished “to maintain their hold on the people at large.” The officer Commanding the 1-2nd Gurkha Rifles similarly suspected that Rifleman Durga Mal of the 1-2nd Gurkha Rifles, and Captain Santbir Gurung of the 2-2nd Gurkha Rifles did not see why they should pay after going to England, and were likely outcasted as a result. These officers felt, therefore, that Gurkha men were becoming more confident in challenging the ecclesiastical fines on their service overseas. The growing number of overseas journeys and the wider participation of Gurkha men in the British Indian Army no doubt exposed men to a number of former soldiers who faced no difficulties whatsoever. At the same time, working overseas in a military climate that condemned “priestly” and “Brahman” influence shaped men’s feelings about the need—or lack thereof—to subject themselves to the fines and social restrictions of local authorities.

Paradoxically, most British officers in Gurkha regiments reported that their soldiers faced no social difficulties for traveling overseas, but they nonetheless recommended that the government devise a wide-scale solution to the problem. Most favored a full-scale exemption for all soldiers traveling overseas, while others suggested

280 B. Duff, Note, (17 May 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
281 From the Officer Commanding, 2-7th Gurkha Rifles, to The Brigade Major, 1st Quetta Infantry Brigade (23 May 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
282 From The Officer Commanding, 1st Battalion, the 1st KGO, Gurkha Rifles to the Staff Captain, Jullundur (30 May 1913); The Officer Commanding, 2nd Battalion, the 1st KGO Gurkha Rifles, to The Staff Captain, Jullundur Brigade (3 June 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
that the Nepalese Prime Minister make soldiers exempt from “paying these sums to the Brahmins” because it would help increase the prestige of the profession. Others felt that the only way forward was to extend the process established in 1906 for the 1-4th battalion to all Gurkha soldiers serving in the army. By early 1914, British officials made plans to follow this line of thinking, proposing to collect all of the men who had served overseas since 1902 and send them to a central location to receive pani patya. The Nepal Resident acted as an intermediary between the Nepal Durbar and the Gurkha regiments to arrange for “an Agent of the Guruji to visit the regiments and perform the necessary act of Patya to men who require it.” To facilitate this process, they were not opposed to stretching the truth, insisting that men “stick to an approved and uniform narrative of the careful conditions under which the Government of India arranged for the preservation of their caste rules during their absence from India,” because otherwise there would be “too many inconvenient questions.” Thus, men’s individual experiences and impression of the journey were to be erased beneath a standardized script, virtually removing all actual value and validity from the ceremony itself for those who truly believed that it was a social and spiritual necessity. A localized ceremony of community

283 From The Officer Commanding, 2-7th Gurkha Rifles, to The Brigade Major (23 May 1913).
284 From Lieutenant Colonel J. Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to A.H. Grant, Esq, CIE, Officating Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, (26 February 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI; From the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, to Lt-Col J. Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal, Katmandu (5 March 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
285 A.H.P. Harrison, Note of (10 October 1913), Army Department, file number 1466-1468 Part B (November 1913), NAI.
286 From Lieutenant Colonel J. Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to A.H. Grant, Esq, CIE, Officating Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department Dated (26 February 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.
belonging was to become a deeply institutionalized fixture of secular military and diplomatic power.

In June 1914 the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India reported on the final measures taken to “solve” the matter of pani patya for soldiers who traveled overseas for reasons other than active duty since 1902. First, the government collected evidence to ensure that arrangements for men on over-seas duties did not violate caste and “certificates to this effect” were given in each case. Second, the Commanding Officers of Gurkha Regiments supplied a list of those men willing to appear before a tribunal at Kathmandu to obtain Panipatya so that they could be absolved of all fines inflicted on them. The Government of Nepal agreed to pay “such indemnities.” However, soldiers would be instructed that these arrangements were made regimentally so that only Commanding Officers would be tasked with issuing this compensation. Third, all men willing to appear before the tribunal were to report to the Resident at Kathmandu. On 18 September 1914 Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, sanctioned the measures proposed. In total, about eighty four men were slated to journey to Katmandu, with the state paying for their travel, leave, and fees to participate in the ceremony.

**Pani Patya for the Sick and Wounded**

In October 1914, the discussion of pani patya for took a dramatic turn, after nearly a year and a half of intense debate. R.A. Cassels said it was difficult to manage the matter because, of 17 Gurkha battalions affected, “8 are now on service or about to proceed on

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287 From The Foreign Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department to Lieutenant Colonel J. Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal (26 June 1914), Foreign and Political, External, (December 1914), file 1-15 A, NAI.

288 Lord Crewe, Military Department, India Office, (18 September 1914), IOR/L/MIL/7/5867 : 1914-1922.

289 From the Army Department Simla to The Most Honourable the Marquess of Crewe, KG, Secretary of State for India (23 July 1914), IOR/L/MIL/7/5867: 1914-1922.
J.M. Walter hoped that because of the First World War, the Nepalese authorities might “reconsider their decision as regards general absolution and to let bygones be bygones.” F.J. Aylmer argued more explicitly that “The case should be dropped till the War is over.” For British officials, therefore, the war necessitated a rapid change in policy and a loosening of peacetime restrictions, granting full-scale exemption for men’s perceived peacetime transgressions. The Nepalese authorities disagreed.

When war broke out in 1914, 18,000 Gurkhas were already serving in the British Indian Army. An additional 65,000 to 200,000 Gurkhas served by the end of the First World War. True to form and indicative of the longer pattern of recruitment of Nepalese soldiers for the British Indian Army, recruiters in Nepal were paid handsomely during the conflict, adding to a base of not-quite volunteer soldiers that included prisoners who frequently deserted. Meanwhile, the Nepalese government received a promise of Rs. 10 lakhs annually for its donation of soldiers. While British officials hoped that the outbreak of war could allow the matter of pani patya to be “dropped” until after its conclusion, or to encourage the Prime Minister of Nepal to “let bygones be bygones,” the war resulted in the dramatic expansion of the pani patya ceremony for Gurkha troops. By January 1915, the debate was reintroduced in a dramatic fashion due to...
to the large number of Gurkhas fighting overseas, and the arrival in India of wounded
Gurkha soldiers back from the front.

As with the spread out and somewhat hard-to-track nature of the soldiers during
the 1913 debate, the flow of sick and wounded men was hardly conducive to a standard
policy. Resident in Nepal Manners-Smith explained that the Prime Minister of Nepal was
anxious that “Pani Patya” be given to Gurkhas in India before they return to Nepal. This
was an abrupt reversal from the Prime Minister’s assurances that panipatya could only be
granted in Nepal itself the previous year. Pulling from the pre-war debates, Manners-
Smith suggested collecting men in batches at fixed centers such as their own regimental
stations and then having the Durbar send a priest. He also recommended that soldiers be
issued written verifications of their immunity from “further trouble or interference in
Nepal.” Thus, he proposed issuing “certificates” that combined the function of a passport
and a medical document to signify a man’s purity—as well as his ability to freely cross
the Indian border into Nepal. He added that, since wounded soldiers were already being
sent to civil hospitals and depots straight from Bombay, it might make sense to send them
all to the hospital at Dehra Dun. Priests could then be deputed there periodically, as
necessity arises, or permanently for the duration of the war. F.J. Aylmer stressed the
importance of stopping “any Gurkhas who have returned from overseas going into Nepal
before they have received ‘Pani Patya.’”

In a dramatic reversal from the long, drawn out debate of 1913 and 1914, it took
just over a week for Aylmer to issue instructions to the Commanding officers of the 2nd
(Rawal Pindi) Division, 3rd (Lahore) Divisional Area, 4th (Quetta) Division, 6th (Poona)

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295 Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, to the Secretary to the Government of India, (20 January 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
and 7th (Meerut) Divisional Areas and 8th (Lucknow) and Burma Divisions that “no invalided Gurkhas returning from service overseas” should return to Nepal until further orders. He proposed that men at Takdah (Darjeeling) and Shillong be taken to one priest, those at Lucknow Civil Hospital, Almora and Lansdowne be taken to a second priest, and, most importantly, that “All other cases to proceed to Nepal via Dehra Dun in order to receive ‘Pani Patya’ at the hands of a third priest, who will remain permanently at that place as along [sic] as he is required.”

Manners-Smith responded that the Prime Minister would have no difficulty sending priests to the proposed places. Thus, the policy initiated a somewhat flexible policy of sending a priest to convenient locations where Gurkha troops were already located, but would ensure standard uniformity in sending all subsequent Gurkha troops on a long journey from Bombay to Dehra Dun, regardless of their final destinations. The Prime Minister was insistent that men should receive pani patya as soon as they come back to India from overseas and “before they are allowed to intermingle with the other men of their community.”

By February 1915, the General Officer Commanding, Bombay, received orders for all Gurkhas to be sent to Dehra Dun. In March, the same orders were conferred to medical authorities across India. The Viceroy confirmed importance of the issue,
repeating that “until they have been granted ‘Pani Patya,’ the Prime Minister does not want any men to return to Nepal.”

In March, RA Cassels confirmed that all Gurkhas in all Indian hospitals were sent to Dehra Dun. The priest arrived a few weeks later to begin his work. By April, over 120 men had received pani patya from seventeen Gurkha Rifles battalions, exceeding the number of men who needed pani patya for the entire period of 1902-1912. In a moment of massive military ideological upheaval, pani patya was prioritized above soldiers’ medical concerns, making their “religious” needs, as defined by British and Nepalese authorities, more important than their “physical.”

As military officials rushed to institute the policy for pani patya, the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief noted that the “religious authorities” in Nepal continued to demand assurances that the men had not broken their caste. In addition to arranging long-distance train journeys for all Gurkhas so that they could receive pani patya according to the Prime Minister’s wishes, officials debated whether it was necessary to issue certificates to the men to protect them against subsequent challenges to their purity.

Aylmer argued that it “raises a very difficult question” because “there is certainly no one person who can certify that a man has not broken his caste during his absence from India.” He felt that it would require statements from the Quartermaster General, Base

Secunderbad (3rd March 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

300 Telegram from the Army Department, Delhi to the Secretary of State for India, London (2 March 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

301 Walter, Quartermaster-General’s Branch (28 Feb 1915); From Major-General F.J. Aylmer, VC, CB, Adjutant-General in India to General Baber Shumsher [sic] Jung, Bahadur Rana “Northbank,” (16 July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI; From Adjutant General in India, to the General Officer Commanding, 7th Meerut Divisional Area, Meerut No. 21481 Dated Delhi, (4 March 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

302 From Brigadier-General N. Woodyatt, Commanding Dehra Dun Brigade, to the Adjutant General in India (7 April 1915) Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.

303 Telegram from the Viceroy Army Department, Delhi to the Secretary of State for India, London (2 March 1915).
authorities in France, the Officer Commanding Army Corps or Force, the Secretary of State regarding hospitals in England, and transport authorities in England certifying that “they have taken every precaution to ensure that all Gurkhas have had arrangements made for them, so that they need not break their castes.” He worried that it was impossible for any single authority to affirm that men had not broken their caste. Nonetheless, by June 1915, military officials were issuing certificates, signed by the Adjutant General, which acknowledged that Gurkha soldiers had received pani patya. By month’s end, 624 men had done so under these arrangements. In July, officials ensured that the same policy was in place for the Imperial Service troops as those in existence for the Indian Army.

By July 1915, the seemingly straight-forward policy of administering pani patya resulted in unanticipated challenges. The Nepalese “priest” sent to Dehra Dun was being housed in the lines of the 2-2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkhas, but observed wearily that he had “no money.” He had incurred a bill of over 47 Rs. from March to June but authorities could not decide whether the Government of India, the Dehra Dun Depot, or the Nepalese government were responsible. C.A.F. Hocken suggested that the priest be treated like a regular regimental religious teacher and be paid Rs. 15 per month. Major-General F.J. Aylmer,

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304 FJ Aylmer, Note, (18 Feb 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
305 For arrangements about certificates see for example Letter from the General Officer Commanding, Dehra Dun Brigade, No. 6-62—S.S., (29 June 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
306 Telegram from the Resident in Nepal, (15 July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI; From the Adjutant-General in India to The General Officer Commanding, 7\textsuperscript{th} Meerut Divisional Area (23 July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
307 From Officer Commanding, Dehra Dun Brigade to Deputy Assistant Adjutant General 7\textsuperscript{th} Meerut Divisional Area, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
308 C.A.F. Hocken, Note (15 July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
VC, CB, Adjutant-General in India, suggested to General Baber Shamsher Jung that the priest was doing far more important work than regular religious teachers and “should receive some reward from the Government of India for his excellent services.”\textsuperscript{309} Thus, Aylmer acknowledged that while this was, in some ways, a “religious” concern, it also had diplomatic, military, and political value as it dealt with soldiers’ abilities to cross borders and seas. General Baber Shamsher, Jung Bahadur Rana, noted that priests should not get any money from the Indian Government because he was paid by the Nepalese authorities.\textsuperscript{310} British and Nepalese authorities therefore battled over who was most responsible to Gurkha soldiers, with the Nepalese government indicating that this “religious” concern should be their duty.

General Baber Shamsher argued that the financial conditions of Gurkha soldiers was of the utmost concern to the Nepalese state. He believed that the Prime Minister did not want “ill and wounded” soldiers returning from war to bear “any great expense to get back their caste.” He arranged for them to pay a nominal fee of 2 pice per head and receive full compensation from the Nepalese government.” Since the pandit in Dehra Dun was a representative of “His Holiness the High Priest,” he received allowances from both the High Priest and the Nepalese Government to cover his expenses in India, making it unnecessary for the Government of India to give him additional payments.\textsuperscript{311} The institutional concerns in 1913 that pani patya was a form of “blackmail” resulted in a widening of the policy across all troops, giving pandits far greater access to soldiers and

\textsuperscript{309} From Aylmer, to General Baber Shumsher Jung, [sic] (16 July 1915).
\textsuperscript{310} From the Adjutant General in India to the General Officer Commanding 7\textsuperscript{th} Meerut Divisional Area (20\textsuperscript{th} July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
\textsuperscript{311} From General Baber Shumshere [sic] Jung, Bahadur Rana To Major-General F.J. Aylmer, VC, CB, Adjutant-General in India (17 July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
the monetary means of exercising control over them. Meanwhile, the Nepalese government was making a financial investment that would result in their greater authority over matters overseen by the “High Priest,” centralizing “religious” authority and taking the livelihood from individual community priests.

*Defining Gurkha “Purity” During the War*

The decision to issue pani patya to returning sick and wounded Gurkha soldiers raised questions about how soldiers were being accommodated while they served overseas and what could be considered strict adherence to Gurkha’s obligations for social purity. As discussed in the previous chapter, one priority was the arrangement of Gurkha soldiers’ food. Hospitals assembled boards of enquiry to ensure that Gurkhas’ methods of cooking food, killing sheep, supplying water, finding accommodations in hospitals, and journeying to England across the seas were all socially appropriate. Yet many official accounts of the arrangements for Gurkha troops in ships and hospitals were incredibly vague. One official claimed simply that “The trip to England is likely to give the Gurkhas a little trouble to go back into their caste” but if it did “there is a penance for every sin committed against caste rules, and this also can be atoned for.”

British authorities remained eager to prove that they had done everything in their power to maintain “caste,” but fell back on the assumption that the soldiers themselves did not complain, or that any “sins” could be “atoned.” Built into military policy was the assumption that on-the-

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312 S.G. Ranaday, Proceedings of the Board assembled to enquire into the matter of Gurkha’s arrangements overseas, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI; From BB Cubitt, Secretary, War Office, London to the Under Secretary of State for India, Military Department, India Office, Whitehall, SW (6 April 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
ground arrangements did not matter as much as the diplomatic manipulation and social justification of these practices once soldiers returned home.

To appease British and Nepalese officials, several hospitals assembled their own boards to enquire into the methods of accommodating Gurkha soldiers. In March 1915, the board at the Meerut General Hospital led by Captain G. Hacknett, I.M.S., described meticulous arrangements for gathering water, washing, cutting hair, and burning bodies. The Board assembled at the Lady Hardinge Hospital stated merely that they were “fully satisfied with existing arrangements” because food was “prepared by competent Hindu cooks and water given to them by Hindu water-carriers.” A Board of Officers assembled at Barton-on-Sea, merely noted that “The Gurkhe [sic] officers on the Board are of opinion that everything that could possibly have [sic] been done, has been done to safeguard their caste in that they have no complaints to make either about the feeding arrangements, rations, drinks, smoking, religious observances or quarters.” As far as “religious observances” were concerned: “no complaints to make. They realise that they are on service.” They kept Gurkha soldiers strictly segregated under their own section commanders and did not mix them with Sikhs, other Hindus, or Mahomedans, “as their ignorance of other dialects is very apt to lead to misunderstanding.”

Thus, in English hospitals, officials were much more inclined simply to state that men had “no complaints” whereas the Indian hospitals were more rigorous in their specific

313 Captain G. Hacknett, “Proceedings of a Board Assembled at Meerut, Indian General Hospital, on the 22nd March 1915, by order of Officer Commanding, Meerut Indian General Hospital, for the purpose of reporting as to the measures necessary to safeguard in every way possible the caste of Gurkhas,” Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
314 Board assembled on 24th March 1915 at Lady Hardinge Hospital, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
315 Proceedings of a Board of Officers assembled at Barton-on-Sea, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
accommodations. At the same time, the objection to being accommodated alongside other communities did not stem from “caste” concerns, but merely linguistic misunderstanding.

The Board assembled at Milford-on-sea noted that Gurkhas and Garhwalis were lodged in two separate houses. Two sweepers and three bhistis were housed in the same buildings but in separate rooms from the men. In each house there was a cook-house set apart solely for the use of the men of Gurkha and Garhwal regiments; no men of other units or followers were allowed to use them. The latrines could only be used by men from Gurkha and Garhwali units. Captain E.H. Lynch, 2-8th Gurkha Rifles had been in charge of the Gurkha and Garhwali group at the Indian Military Depot since January 1st and during that time received “no complaints of any kind whatsoever” regarding “the caste customs of the men in my charge.” He stated that he asked a Gurkha officer who was at the depot before his departure to rejoin his regiment for suggestions as to furthering the comfort of the men of Gurkha regiments who passed through the depot and was assured that “all arrangements made were excellent and could not be improved on.”

These reports indicate that official accounts of how men were treated, and whether or not they had any complaints, relied upon the interpretation of a British officer who would most likely be punished or condemned for a failure to provide for the men appropriately.

Notably, only arrangements in England or France were preserved in the historical record of the debate, leaving an institutional gap in the accommodations made in some of the least supervised, haphazard and difficult battlefields, including Egypt and Gallipoli. In fact, Lieutenant Colonel F.S.. Poynder of the 9th Gurkha Rifles argued that soldiers in all fields of battle experienced extreme dietary hardships which included eating “tinned

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316 Proceedings of a Board assembled at Milford-on-sea, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
meat or biscuit” or the “ration bread given to the British troops”. Cooks were not included in the follower establishment then so men were detailed to be cooks.317 Therefore, military policy and diplomatic negotiations based its decisions about whether soldiers had maintained their “purity” overseas on the ideal arrangements in hospitals, or in better supervised locations such as the railhead in France. The reality of war service, however, indicated that soldiers’ purity—defined as religious or medical—was extremely difficult to maintain. Nepalese and British efforts to erase this fact through a standardized and mandatory pani patya could not eliminate men’s actual experiences of difficulty and discomfort at home or abroad.

**Authority and Purity**

As the procedure for pani patya continued, small, on-the-ground cracks appeared in the seemingly streamlined arrangements for soldiers. One problem was that some men had been sent to hospitals across India before the orders to send them to Dehra Dun had been issued. General Officer Commanding, 6th Poona Divisional Area, reported that in early 1915, Gurkha troops returning from overseas had already been distributed to various stations and hospitals, including twenty-eight transferred to Hospital in Meerut, fifteen to Lansdowne, eighty to Dehra Dun, five to Quetta, and six who remained in hospital in Bombay.318 Getting them back to Dehra Dun required considerable mobility from men who were sick and injured and had already endured long overseas journeys. Subadar-Major Jaman Sing [sic] Gurung, 1-6th Gurkha Rifles, Abbottabad “was too ill to proceed to Dehra, so he was given all instructions for ‘Pani Patya’ by the priest and has

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318 From General Officer Commanding, 6th Poona Divisional Area, To the Adjutant General in India, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
been sent a certificate by him.” Shortly after taking part in the ceremony, Rifleman Sukraj Thapa has lost his “Pani-Patya” certificate and requested another. One Rifleman, Nandbir Lama of the 2nd Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles, was sent to Takdah instead of Dehra Dun due to a mistake by the volunteer assisting the Railway Medical Transport officer. Despite military officials’ efforts, the everyday lived realities of the management of men’s bodies failed to reflect the polished plans of diplomatic purity.

The on-the-ground breakdown of pani patya indicated that British officials did not have complete control over soldiers’ mobility. Satu Khatri was a Naick of the 2nd Kashmir Imperial Service Troops and returned home on sick leave from the fighting in German East Africa without performing the ceremony in accordance with the Bada Guruji. The Prime Minister worried that he would incur heavy penalties since he crossed the kala pani and came into contact with his home community without first receiving pani patya. To correct the matter, Satu Khatri was sent back to Dehra Dun to have the ceremony performed. By August 1915 the Prime Minister requested a list of twenty two men of the 3rd Kashmir Imperial Service Rifles who had already returned to Nepal so that he could arrange to give them pani patya before they suffered social difficulties for not obtaining pani patya. Lieutenant Colonel A. Wilson, Commanding 1-8th Gurkha

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319 From Brigadier-General N. Woodyatt, Commanding Dehra Dun Brigade, to the Adjutant General in India (7 April 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
320 From the Officer Commanding, Dehra Dun Brigade, to Lt Col CAF Hocken, Assistant Adjutant-General (6 September 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
321 From Adjutant General in India to General Officer Commanding 8th Lucknow Division (15 September 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
322 From His Excellency the Prime Minister in Nepal to the Resident in Nepal dated 12 July 1915, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
323 From Lt Col J. Manners Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department (30 July 1915) Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
324 From Major-General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumshere [sic] Jung, Bahadur Rana, GCB, GCSI, GCVO, DCVO, DCL, PM and Marshal of Nepal, to Lt-Col J. Manners Smith, VC, CVO, CIE, Resident in Nepal (5 August 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-
Rifles, brought to light the similar case of soldiers who had already returned to their units without receiving pani patya and who did not want to proceed to Dehra Dun to undergo it. He wondered if such men needed to be “ordered to proceed there.” He stated that some men did not want to go because even though they received assurances that everything would be reimbursed, they were certain that “it would cost them a good lot.” They preferred to stick to longer-held military policy of doing it “in their own country.”\textsuperscript{325} The Adjutant General in India decided ultimately that all Gurkhas needed to proceed to Dehra Dun to receive “Pani Patya” no matter where they were or what they desired.\textsuperscript{326} Thus, soldiers’ own wishes to remain at home, to renounce the importance of the ceremony, or to continue living in their community without having faced any penalty for doing so, were overruled by military bureaucracy and fears of backlash from the Prime Minister of Nepal, who acted, ostensibly, in the best interest of soldiers.

While military officials expressed a degree of indifference for individual soldiers’ wishes and desires regarding their movement and their need to undergo pani patya, some British officers took it upon themselves to attempt alternative arrangements more convenient for Gurkha men. In August 1915, the Officer Commanding, Depot, 2-10\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles reported that Rifleman Nandbir Lama disembarked at Bombay from France and was sent directly to the depot without stopping at Dehra Dun. The man was

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\item \textsuperscript{325} From Lieutenant Colonel A. Wilson, Commanding 1-8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles, to Adjutant General in India, (9 August 1915) Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
\item \textsuperscript{326} From The Adjutant General in India to The Officer Commanding, 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, 8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles, (14 August 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
\end{itemize}
currently in the hospital and “to avoid any unpleasantness” the officer forwarded a letter to Dehra Dun enclosing the necessary fee and asking for “the Patia Parji [sic].”

In May 1915 the Commanding, War Hospital, Meerut, reported that a man who was “a Darjeeling type of Gurkha classed as a Limbu” and therefore not a “Gurkha who undergoes the ‘Pani Patya’ ceremony,” arrived ill and expressed his desire not to be sent to Dehra Dun. Instead, the patient was “very anxious to reach his home in Takdah.” The Commanding, War Hospital, Meerut, argued that this was a “particular case” because “the patient made a request not to be sent to Dehra Dun owing to his extreme weakness on account of his ill-health [sic] he desired to be sent as soon as possible to his depot.” The man wished “to see his relative before he died” and so the Commanding War Hospital sent him to his depot because of his own statement about not requiring the ceremony. However, in response to the incident, the Officer Commanding Depot, 2nd Battalion, 10th Gurkha Rifles overruled the soldiers’ self-identification, noting that “I would respectfully point out that the man was a Gurkha, his father living in Dankhuts. ‘The Darjeeling type of Gurkha classed as a Limbu’ is not understood. He had no relative at the depot.” The officer commanding the War Hospital informed other officials that the man would arrive at Ghoom for Takdah on the 28th May, despite his not having been first to Dehra Dun. When the man arrived he was nearly unconscious and died “early on the morning of 30th May in hospital.” By July, the Brigadier-General G.M.R. Thackwell, Commanding 7th Meerut Divisional Area, defended the officer’s decision to send the soldier to Takdah without stopping first at Dehra Dun because it was “in accordance with

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327 From Major General ES May, Commanding, 8th Lucknow Division, to Adjutant General in India (10 August 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
328 From the Officer Commanding Depot, to the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master General, Presidency Brigade, nd., Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
the best of his judgment and discretion.” The Officer Commanding, Indian Troops War Hospital, Meerut, further validated his actions, saying that he would continue to send all Limbu Gurkhas to Dehra Dun but did not do so in this case because “he himself made special request not to be sent. The man was extremely ill with Phthisis and his one wish was to get home.” Thus, this institutional bureaucratic handling of pani patya resulted in tragic difficulties for the real Gurkha men undergoing the procedure. Some attempted to denounce their status as “Gurkhas” in an attempt to forgo the ceremony and visit family, dying in the process. Some British officers did their best to accommodate the men when they had the power and opportunity to do so, but bureaucratic rigidity made it increasingly difficult. When soldiers took matters into their own hands, higher officials criticized their actions by deciding which medical or military authority had the right to define men as “Gurkhas”—without paying attention to the declarations made by men themselves.

Over the years, soldiers and officials pushed back against the sweeping and generalized arrangements for pani patya, proposing alternatives of how the ceremony could be carried out in a manner that was more sympathetic to the needs of the men. Some from Kashmir and Jammu proposed making their own arrangements for the ceremony closer to home. They even received support from a Panchayat [local council

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329 From Brigadier-General G.M.R. Thackwel, Commanding 7th Meerut Divisional Area to The Adjutant General in India, nd., c. July 1915, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
330 From the Officer Commanding, Indian Troops War Hospital, Meerut, to the Assistant Director, Medical Service, 7th (Meerut) Divisional Area (12th July 1915), Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
331 From CAF Hocken, GOC, 7th Meerut Divisional Area (11 January 1916), Foreign and Political—Internal “B,” February 1916, file 317-320, NAI.
of five] which recommended local arrangements for the ceremony.\footnote{Copy of letter from Captain RJ Macbrayne, Inspecting Officer, Kashmir Imperial Service Infantry to the Bde Major, Dehra Dun, (4 December 1915) (8 December 1915), Foreign and Political—Internal “B,” February 1916, file 317-320, NAI.} This “Gorkha [sic] Panchait” argued that the Kashmir State was a “Hindu State” with “many learned pandits” and contained “several sacred places.” As a result, they believed that it was “quite sufficient from the religious point of view, if the Gorkhas in the service of the State be required to undergo pani patya ceremony here as is done in Dehra Dun.” The “learned pandits” would stick to the strict proscriptions found in “the Dharm Shastras (Hindu sacred books).” They suggested that this would “save the State from unnecessary expenditure.” They hoped first to receive sanctions from the Nepalese Prime Minister who had given directions for “praschit rites” to the Gurkhas at Dehra Dun.\footnote{Translation of the proceedings of a Gorkha [sic] Panchait held on the 9th Maghar 19172 (24th November 1915), Foreign and Political—Internal “B,” February 1916, file 317-320, NAI.} However, the Prime Minister flatly denied the ability of priests not deputed by the Bada Guru to administer the ceremony stating that “The authority in religious matters in this country is vested in His Holiness the Bada Guruji and as the acknowledged spiritual head it is only he who can grant the necessary ‘Patia’ to the Nepalese.” As a result, pani patya received from any other source not approved by the Prime Minister of Nepal was not considered sufficient or valid. These men needed to “go to Dehra Dun as the other Gurkhas do and receive their ‘Patia’ through the authorised Agent of the Bada Guruji.” Chandra Shamsher added, with a degree of threat and intimidation “I hope you will kindly see it done to avoid future troubles.”\footnote{Copy of a letter from Lt General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamshere [sic] Jung Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal to Lt-Col J. Manners-Smith, Resident in Nepal (7 February1916), Foreign and Political—Internal “B,” February 1916, file 317-320, NAI.} Centralized Nepalese authorities therefore cracked down on the right of localized civil (panchayat) and “religious” (pandits) authority to
carry out their own procedures for allowing men to regain status in the community. All of these concerns would be coordinated, and sanctioned, by the secular Nepalese government, acting on behalf of and in cooperation with, the “Bada Guruji.”

The institutionalization of pani patya during the war resulted in a power shift between Nepalese authorities. Aylmer reported “it has been arranged with the Baba Guruji that the right of granting Patyas shall in future be regulated by the State.” Thus, the military intervention into pani patya extended the influence of the Nepalese government over “religious” matters. The Prime Minister reiterated that “the men who have been, or will be, granted ‘Patya’ by the Baba Guruji’s representative in Dehra Dun will not be required to take any fresh ‘Patya’ on the same account on their arrival in Nepal.” They were to prove their absolution of this by producing their “‘Patya Purji’” certificates, issued by the Bada Guruji, to Nepalese authorities. Any other attempt to get money from men would face political consequences, eliminating a source of livelihood and upending localized systems of power.

Uniform Ceremony for Global War

By 1916, entire battalions, rather than periodic bursts of the sick or injured Gurkha soldiers, returned to India. This meant that institutional organization needed to sufficiently handle men who had served in harsh and diverse locales including Egypt and Mesopotamia. The result was recognizing that sending men to Dehra Dun en masse and without exception could not be a realistic long-term solution.

335 From Major General FJ Aylmer, VC, CB, Adjutant General in India to the General Officers Commanding, 2nd, 4th, 8th and Burma Divisions, 3rd Lahore, 6th Poona and 7th Meerut Divisional Areas, and Dehra Dun Brigade, Army Department: War, file number 21459-673, Appx. Part B. 1914-1915, NAI.
In February 1916, the 2/8th 1st/5th, 1st/6th, 1st/4th and 2nd/2nd Gurkha Rifles all planned to return from overseas, departing from Egypt mid-February. C.A.F. Hocken suggested having the Prime Minister commission a priest to visit each of the stations where the battalions were scheduled to arrive, rather than overwhelming the priest currently at Dehra Dun and delaying ceremonies for the invalided men currently waiting at Dehra Dun. By the end of February the nine hundred men of the 2/2nd Gurkhas were set to arrive at Dehra Dun, the 1st/4th at Bakloh, the 1st/5th at Peshawar, 1st/6th at Peshawar and the seven hundred men of the 2nd/8th at Lansdowne. C.W.G. Richardson noted that while the 2/2nd could receive Pani Patya from the priest already at Dehra Dun, it would be impracticable for the other battalions to go there. He suggested sending two priests from Nepal: one to go to the 1st/5th and 1st/6th Gurkhas at Peshawar and the other for the 1st/4th at Bakloh and the 2/8th at Lansdowne. A few weeks later, the Resident in Nepal reported that Pandit Yagya Prasad Upadia, agent of Bada Guruji, headed to Hasan Abdal and awaited instructions for proceeding to Peshawar and Bakloh. Pandit Vishwa Natha, agent of Bada Guruji at Dehra Dun, was the preferred candidate to take up duties at Lansdowne. In order to participate in the ceremony, all of the men had to present certificates issued in accordance with the Adjutant General which stated that they “have

337 Hocken, Note, (2 February 1916).
340 Telegram from the Resident in Nepal, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, Delhi (21 February 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI; Copy of a letter from Lieutenant General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumshere [sic] Jung Bahadur Ran, GCB, GCsl, GCVO, DCL, Prime Minister and Maeshal [sic] of Nepal to Lt-Col J. Manners-Smith, VC, CVO, IE, Resident in Nepal (16 February 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI.
kept inviolate their caste whilst serving overseas."

In just the first week of March 1916 the Adjutant General supplied over 1700 certificates to the men of the 1-6th, 2-8th and 1-5th Gurkha Rifles. The next week he supplied an additional 700 for the 2-2nd Gurkha Rifles. Gurkha soldiers remained under strict instructions not to return to Nepal before they had participated in the pani patya ceremony. This included the married men of the 1st Peshawar Division who requested leave to visit their families in Abbottabad and the men of the 1/6th who were held in “segregation” at Karachi until they received their certificates.

By August 1916, the 2/10th, the 1/9th, and, the 1/1st Gurkha Rifles were set to return to India from their attachment to the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. The 1/9th Gurkhas headed to their old station, Dehra Dun, and the 1/1st Gurkhas to Dharamsala. The 2/10th Gurkhas were due to arrive at Rangoon, en route to Maymyo. They had a pundit serving as a “religious teacher,” but it was unclear whether he was qualified to administer pani patya.

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341 From Adjutant General in India to the General Officer Commanding, 1st Peshawar Division, to General Officer Commanding, 3rd Lahore Divisional Area and General Officer Commanding, 7th Meerut Divisional Area (24 February 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI.

342 From The Adjutant-General in India, To The Officer Commanding, 1-5th Gurkha Rifles, Peshawar (3 March 1916); From Adjutant-General in India to the Officer Commanding, 2-8th Gurkha Rifles (2 March 1916); From Adjutant-General in India, To Officer Commanding, 1-6th Gurkha Rifles, Peshawar (6 March 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI.

343 From Adjutant General in India to Officer Commanding, 2-2nd Gurkha Rifles, Dehra Dun, (10 March 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI.

344 From Adjutant General in India to The General Officer Commanding, 1st Peshawar Division, to General Officer Commanding, 3rd Lahore Divisional Area and General Officer Commanding, 7th Meerut Divisional Area (24 February 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI; From General Officer Commanding 1st Peshawar Division (6 March 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI; From Adjutant-General in India, Delhi, to General Officer Commanding, 1st Peshawar Division (6 March 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI; Telegram from General Officer Commanding, 1st Peshawar Division, to Adjutant General in India, Delhi (9 March 1916), War: 1916-17 B, file 13094-13149, NAI.

When the men of the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles went to Maymyo, Burma, they caused additional institutional anxiety because the priest had to cross the sea in order to get there. 346 While Gurkha soldiers heading to Burma were not obliged to receive pani patya because—as far as the military was concerned—Burma was considered part of India, it was a different matter for the priest who might be unable to grant absolution to others after making the journey. It ultimately took almost a full month for the priest to arrive, which made the men in Burma anxious because they hoped to participate in Dassehra celebrations at the end of September. 347 The government ultimately sanctioned Pandit Durga Nidhi Lohini Upadhyaya to make the journey and the Government of India rushed to have a cabin secured for him on a steamer before the end of September. 348 The difficulty stemmed from the fact that the representative was required to carry his own supply of water from the Ganges River which he was to use until the end of the voyage. The water was to remain in his cabin with him and could not be touched by others. He needed a separate cabin for himself and his servant that could not be entered by any other person. He would take fresh fruits with him from Calcutta which would be replenished anywhere during the voyage. He required facilities for storing fruits and water. Such arrangements were necessary on both the departing and return voyage. Without these “perfect arrangements” the priest could not go. 349 While the priest would pay for the arrangements himself, they needed to be coordinated by the Government of India in advance with the steamship company. By September 21st, the Government of India was

346 Ibid.
348 From the Residency Nepal, to Mr. J.B. Wood, CSI, CIE, Political Secretary to the Government of India, (13 September 1916), Foreign and Political—Internal “B” October 1916, file 303-14 B, NAI.
349 Memorandum forwarded by the Residency Nepal (13 September 1916), Foreign and Political—Internal “B” October 1916, file 303-14 B, NAI.
able to coordinate with the government of Bengal and have the necessary arrangements made when the steamer set sail.\textsuperscript{350}

Although in 1916 officials were prepared to send priests as far afield as Burma to have pani patya administered to returning Gurkha troops, by 1918 a degree of stringency returned to the importance of administering pani patya at Dehra Dun. The O.C. 1/6\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles had to answer for making arrangements for pani patya at Kakool under plans made by the G.O.C. 1\textsuperscript{st} Nepalese Contingent.\textsuperscript{351} The G.O.C. Abbottabad Brigade maintained that he had received permission from Nepal’s Prime Minister to administer pani patya at Kakul and requested permission to continue arranging for troops to receive it there.\textsuperscript{352} R.E. Holland confirmed that the Prime Minister of Nepal sanctioned the administration of pani patya for men of the 1-8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles to take place in Kakool rather than Dehra Dun because traveling to the latter took 12 days out of a total of 6 weeks leave.\textsuperscript{353} In response to the news that some men had proceeded home without receiving pani patya, some officials suggested arrest, while the Prime Minister of Nepal preferred allowing them to proceed home and then making enquiries after the fact. He suggested setting up additional locations for the ceremony at Calcutta and acknowledged those at Abbottabad which supplemented the Dehra Dun arrangements.\textsuperscript{354}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{350} See various telegrams dated September 1916 between the Government of India in Simla and the Nepal Residency, Foreign and Political—Internal “B” October 1916, file 303-14 B, NAI.
\textsuperscript{351} Adjutant General’s Branch, unsigned and undated, Foreign and Political Internal Part B, August 1918 file numbers 351-353, NAI.
\textsuperscript{352} From GOC Abbottabad Brigade, (15 June 1918), Foreign and Political Internal Part B, August 1918 file numbers 351-353, NAI.
\textsuperscript{353} R.E. Holland, Note, (17 July 1918), Foreign and Political Internal Part B, August 1918 file numbers 351-353, NAI.
\textsuperscript{354} From Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Bayley, Resident in Nepal, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, Simla (31 May 1918), Foreign and Political Internal Part B, August 1918 file numbers 351-353, NAI.
\end{footnotesize}
Despite the frequently elaborate arrangements—including sending entire battalions to Dehra Dun, and having priests sent to stations around India and Burma, there was still some resistance about whether these arrangements were completely satisfactory, creating unanticipated challenges to military order and discipline. By November 1916, the Resident in Nepal stated that the Prime Minister had failed to overcome “the scruples of the Bara Guruji and the Brahmin community in regard to the readmission to full caste privileges of members of the Upadhya Brahmins who have returned from active service” with Gurkha regiments.\footnote{Letter from the Resident in Nepal dated (13 November 1916), Foreign and Political—Internal “B” October 1916, file 303-14 B, NAI.} A.H.P. Harrison expressed confusion about this because “Instructions were issued some time ago to effect that no Upadhya Brahmans were to be sent overseas.”\footnote{A.H.P. Harrison, Note, (1 December 1916) Foreign and Political—Internal B. (December 1916) file 20-1 B, NAI.} Nonetheless, within Nepal, the extensive coordination between British, Nepalese, civil, ecclesiastical, and military authorities had not alleviated local criticisms about men’s purity.

Complicating matters was that as early as 1916, accounts of desertions from Dehra Dun—the center of Gurkha “purity”—became increasingly common. Two men, Krishna Bahadur Rana and Loke Bahadur Adhikari, disappeared from the lines. They reached out to the Havildar of their regiment stating that they had been led away by a “coolie” recruiter who planned to send them as laborers to Mesopotamia. Khadga Singh Gurung, another deserter of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Company of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Rifles, was found at the war Hospital at Dehra Dun after he had deserted from his regiment, gone to the Cantonment of the 1/2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkhas, re-enlisted, spent 2.5 months in training and gone to Turkey.\footnote{Copy of a letter from Lt General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumshere [sic] Jang Bahadur Rana, GCB, GCSI, GCVO, DCL, PM and Marshal of Nepal, to Lt-Col SF Bayley, Resident in Nepal (29 November 1916) Foreign and Political Intl Part B (February 1917), file 24-5, NAI.} For
these men, the concentration of Gurkhas in one place made it easy to get “lost in the crowd” and rejoin another regiment. Indian revolutionaries were also aware of the concentration of Gurkhas at Dehra Dun and reached out to them directly.\textsuperscript{358} The O.C. 3/8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles reported that disaffection has been excited at Gorakhpur and at the “Panipatia Institute” at Dehra Dun, making this site of “religious purification” into a threat of political contagion.\textsuperscript{359}

In the last years of the war, two letters attributed to Gurkha soldiers came to the attention of the Foreign and Political Department, which purported to reflect the discontented state of Gurkha soldiers. One letter addressed to Commanding in Chief Baber Shamsher Jung Rana Bahadur argued that Gurkha soldiers were upset because their leave had been stopped when they arrived at Dehra Dun. The letter went further, declaring that “The subjects of our Gurkha Government are exhausted” and maintaining that “We have got no justice by being enlisted in the British Army. Let fair justice be done to us, we beseech you with folded hands on your feet.”\textsuperscript{360} In another letter attributed to the men of the 3/5\textsuperscript{th} Gurkhas the author complained that they “have been done up” and were nothing more than “earth and dust.”\textsuperscript{361} Sir Baber Shamsher discussed the letters with the Prime Minister and the Adjutant General in India and all were convinced that the letters did not come from the Nepal contingent.\textsuperscript{362} However, the O.C. Depot 2/8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha

\textsuperscript{358} Copy of confidential letter from his Excellency the Prime Minister of Nepal, to the Resident in Nepal (16 October 1917), Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
\textsuperscript{359} Copy of letter from the G.O.C. Meerut Division to the Adjutant General in India, Army H.Q., Delhi (29 January 1918), Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
\textsuperscript{360} English translation of anonymous letter, nd., Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
\textsuperscript{361} English translation of anonymous letter—I, nd., Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
\textsuperscript{362} To Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Bayley Resident in Nepal, (20 February 1918), Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI; Copy of letter from Lt-Gen Maharaja Sir Chandra
Rifles suspected that the first letter was certainly written by a “malcontent who has abetted irregularities by Gurkha soldiers, particularly in cases of leave.” The Senior Medical Officer attributed these feelings to Gurkha soldiers who had served on the Frontier. Although officials were skeptical that Gurkhas were responsible for these grievances, they considered granting Gurkhas additional leave. Gurkha soldiers, who were prized for their exceptional qualities as fighting men, which included their indifference to “caste” requirements were institutional bound to endure lengthy journeys across India to regain their “purity.” Many had already endured long journeys from their homes in Nepal, and still others had been recruited through less than voluntary means. By being forcibly sent to the Dehra Dun station, Gurkha soldiers had yet another reminder that they had sacrificed their mobility and freedom by joining British military service.

The concentration of fatigued Gurkha soldiers at Dehra Dun led to yet another institutional shift in the policy of pani patya. In 1918, a priest was deputed, under the sanction of the Prime Minister, to administer Pani Patya in Manmad, Maharashtra. Officials hoped that a similar procedure could be adopted since moving entire regiments through Dehra Dun was impractical. The priority remained giving men the ceremony as soon as possible so that “they should not be allowed to contaminate other men of their community in India.”

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363 From the G.O.C. Meerut Division to the Adjutant General in India, Army HQ, Delhi dated (29 January 1918), Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
364 From A.H. Bingley, Major-General, Secretary to the Government of India to the Resident of Nepal (4 November 1918), Foreign and Political International Part B (April 1918), file 106-109, NAI.
365 By March 1919 the Prime Minister confirmed that it would be
possible to send agents from Nepal to administer pani patya to troops at their stations after they arrived in India.\textsuperscript{367} Only one priest was present in India at the time, but the Resident in Nepal suggested that the demand could be met with one or two additional priests moving from station to station.\textsuperscript{368} The 1\textsuperscript{st} Gurkhas marched to Charri Camp in February 1920 to perform Pani Patya en route to Dharmsala.\textsuperscript{369} Although the Indian Convalescent Section, Dehra Dun, was closed 1\textsuperscript{st} August 1920, the India Office and the Government of India coordinated to keep open a camp at Dehra Dun to continue to grant pani patya until 1922.\textsuperscript{370}

In the years following the war, several British officers of Gurkha regiments described the arrangements for pani patya, offering insight into how it was perceived regimentally. Major General Nigel Woodyatt highlighted the strict penalties for men who did not have the procedure performed, including “excommunication of the severest type.” This included having family members refuse “to eat, drink, or smoke with him. This is described by our men as \textit{huqqa pani band} (lit. smoking and water stopped).” Writing shortly after the war, Woodyatt described Nepal’s Prime Minister favorably, arguing that his influence allowed the “priesthood” to grant dispensation to all men serving overseas. Of course, men needed to prove that their service orders were approved by the Nepal government, that they did not stay abroad longer than necessary, and possessed proof,

\textsuperscript{367} Letter from Lieutenant General His Excellency Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumshere [sic] Jang Bahadur Rana, GCB, GCSI, GCVO, DCL, Prime Minister & Marshal of Nepal, to Lt-Col WF O’Connor, CIE, Resident in Nepal (16 March 1919), Foreign and Political Department Internal ‘B’ Pros (June 1919), file number 242-244, NAI.

\textsuperscript{368} Copy of Telegram) from Lt Col WF O’Connor, CIE, Resident in Nepal, to Adjutant General in India, Simla (21 March 1919, Foreign and Political Department Internal ‘B’ Pros (June 1919), file number 242-244, NAI.

\textsuperscript{369} F. Loraine Petre, \textit{The 1\textsuperscript{st} King George’s Own Gurkha Rifles: The Malaun Regiment} (London: Royal United Services Institute), 180.

\textsuperscript{370} From Army Department Simla to Secretary, Military Department, India Office Staff and Establishments for the Pani Patya Camp, Dehra Dun (21 September 1922), IOR/L/MIL/7/5867 : 1914-1922.
signed by an officer, that they had “upheld the prescribed caste observances throughout.” He also praised the prime Minister’s efforts in persuading “the spiritual head in Nepal” to send a representative to Dehra Dun, and to grant families of soldiers who died overseas special dispensation for “after-death ceremonies.” Of course, this military tendency to see the secular Nepalese authority as circumventing “religious” proscriptions did not adequately acknowledge that the Prime Minister had widened and hardened the stringency of the pani patya ceremony. Although relatively few men prior to war had complained about long-term social difficulties, the Prime Minister’s actions during the war ensured that localized solutions would be rejected, and that individual soldiers’ decisions, self-identification, and participation, would be completely irrelevant in this militarily sanctioned performances of duty.

Compared to Woodyatt, Colonel L.W. Shakespear was far more critical of the procedure for pani patya. He described the matter as a “trouble” regarding “the religious aspect of Goorkhas crossing the sea” which began with the 1913 scandal over Subadar-Major Santbir Gurung. At that time, the Prime Minister objected to “regimental procedure for regaining caste.” He denigrated the wartime procedure stating that “it would have been far less expensive to Government had the Pandit been directed to visit all Goorkha Regiments” instead of “sending large numbers of men from port to Dehra first, and then having to pay all their rail fares back to distant stations like Quetta or Myitkyina in Upper Burma.” For Shakespear, pani patya was a nonsensical waste of

funds and resources that created undue hardship for soldiers and could have been more effectively carried out regimentally.

Despite a degree of cynicism after the First World War, by 1944, H.R.K. Gibbs described the pani patya ceremony as having been expertly streamlined. The ceremonies were carried out at Regimental Training Centres and each man paid two annas and was granted a certificate. A similar ceremony, Bhor Patiya, was performed to readmit men who had “unwittingly broken caste rules.” Men who failed to do so faced imprisonment, heavy fines, and outcasting. Despite these arrangements, Gibbs was quick to note that “While the Gurkha is certainly not given to making an undue fuss over his food requirements it must be remembered that the Laws of Nepal are founded on very orthodox Hindu caste laws and are strictly enforced in Nepal under pain of loss of caste.” The perceived stringency of “Hindu caste laws” and the Nepalese government’s “orthodox” interpretation, allowed British officers to continue to regard Gurkhas as exceptional soldiers, praiseworthy for their lack of social stringency. These impressions failed to reconcile the massive resources and diplomatic effort required to carry out the pani patya ceremony. Even if Gurkha soldiers themselves were not devout to “caste laws,” their presence in the British Indian Army resulted in “religious” accommodations unparalleled by any other group of soldiers in the Army.

Conclusions

The rare, individual cases of Gurkha soldiers who faced social difficulties when they returned home from crossing the seas resulted in a massive institutional policy that changed the relationship between the military, diplomacy, and “religion.” It would have

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been far easier for British and Nepalese authorities to bail out or come to the assistance of
the rare cases of outcasting rather than mobilizing considerable effort and resources
across almost the entire distance of South Asia. They moved thousands of men from
Bombay to Dehra Dun, Burma to Kathmandu so that “religious” needs, as defined by
British and Nepalese authorities, could be granted institutional rationality. By taking
control of pani patya and making it a mandatory rite for all Gurkha soldiers during the
First World War, military authorities turned a limited and localized practice into a de
facto process of military quarantine, granting British military authorities and the
government of Nepal unprecedented access over the bodies and beliefs of Gurkha
soldiers. Pani patya for Gurkhas separated them physically from Indian “Hindus” and
attempted to use strict medical precision to protect soldiers from the contagions of mobile
military life—which included social and political backlash. Yet this procedure signaled
the limitations and instability of that control—soldiers died begging to be returned to
Nepal or deserted the ranks in the chaos of Dehra Dun.

While the mandatory pani patya ceremony emerged from the unexpected political
backlash of sending Gurkha troops into China in the first decade of the twentieth century,
military officials came face to face with the unexpected difficulties of massive global
mobilization of its troops, and were optimistic, if also short-sighted, in believing that
institutional ceremonial control would bring discipline and rationality to localized
ceremonial observances. It became the ultimate colonial fantasy: British military
discipline bringing order to South Asian “religion.” Yet this strategy would make one of
the “martial races,” praised for their lack of adherence to “Hindu” customs, institutionally
bound to one of the most extensive “religious” ceremonies supported by military
bureaucracy. It would mark worthy Gurkha men as those who were willing to submit
themselves to the “religious” demands of the British and Nepalese states. Paradoxically,
it was military service that placed soldiers at risk, and military order that was offered as a
solution.

Official representations of Gurkhas stressed that they were “hard fighters,” loyal
soldiers, and similar to Europeans in their thoughts and sensibilities. Yet their value as
soldiers was in their position between empires—as bargaining chips between state
authorities. Methods of resisting state incursion into social, economic and cultural life
through pani patya became an experimental laboratory for negotiating diplomatic power
across nations. Thus, soldiers’ bodies, and the resistance to these bodies being sent
overseas, became a way for the Nepalese government to solidify its authority over Nepal
and carve out a spot for itself in the international order. This represented an effort of
British and Nepalese authorities—in the international and transcendent space of
diplomatic and bureaucratic communication—to dictate how men served and moved
across borders, and how they were to participate in and be accepted by their home
communities.

British recruitment of Gurkha soldiers during the First World War enabled a new
“treaty of friendship” between Nepal and British India in 1923. Yet a formal agreement
for Britain to recruit Gurkha soldiers only occurred in 1947, when the British were
leaving India.\textsuperscript{374} The continuing relationship between Nepal and Britain meant the
endurance of the pani patya ceremony, which remained a “religious” link between the
secular concerns of military participation and international diplomacy. When General

\textsuperscript{374} Des Chene, “Relics of Empire,” 141, 152.
Surndra Bikram, quartermaster general of the Nepalese Forces, passed through the headquarters of British Gurkhas in Barrackpore, West Bengal in 1960 he noted that it seemed strange that pani patya was still an official policy for British Gurkha soldiers. He said that Nepalese officials and Army officers rarely go through with the ceremony on return from overseas “and wondered why British Gurkhas still bothered to do it.”

When Colonel Proud visited Katmandu he confirmed what General Surendra had said. Officers noted that “Religious prejudices are generally fading into the background in modern Nepal” and those who go overseas are “less particular.” Many Gurkha officers even noted that “in these enlightened times” pani patya should be halted or at least left to the discretion of individuals. Although the Nepalese government had stated publicly that pani patiya was unnecessary, British officials were reluctant to remove the policy or make it voluntary unless there was an explicit ruling from the Nepalese government.

Thus, the British Empire, which consistently condemned the “prejudice” and stringency of “religious” authorities, was perhaps the most lasting proponent of the pani patya ceremony. Even in the 1960s, when Nepalese forces in Nepal had deemed the procedure all but irrelevant, the British Empire still maintained that it had political value. The empire, more than the “religious” forces it condemned, was the most institutionally bound, and politically inflexible, to “religious” practice.

Soldiers’ mobility in the twentieth century revealed the anxieties about their positions as transnational actors with abilities to bridge and foment international tensions. Concerns about Gurkha soldiers’ position between empires, and ability to cross seas and

375 From HQ British Gurkhas India, Barrackpore, West Bengal, to HQ Brigade of Gurkhas Rasah Camp Malaya 14 (April 1960), BG/67, The Gurkha Museum (Winchester, UK), henceforth TGM.
376 Brigadier, Commander, HQ 48 Gurkha Brigade, (15 June 1960), BG/67, TGM.
377 1/6TH QEO Gurkha Rifles, Kluang, Johore, Malaya, (29 June 1960), BG/67, TGM.
borders and still have place in their home communities, reflected broader trends to accommodate, regulate, and define what role soldiers should play as members of non-military communities. As the next chapter will explore, varied concerns about international currents of “Catholic,” pan-Islamic, and broadly anti-colonial revolution—which crossed borders and relied on the mobility of imperial networks—widened the scope of military intervention into the beliefs and practices of soldiers. They also became avenues which soldiers could explore to redefine their participation in the imperial world.
Chapter Three

The March to Prayer

The increasing institutional control over Gurkha soldiers’ pani patya “purification” ceremony reflected a wider trend among military officials to standardize and regulate the bodies and beliefs of British and South Asian soldiers. British and Nepalese concerns about Gurkha mobility stemmed from their increasing presence in conflicts overseas—from China to the Western Front. Meanwhile, definitions of food demarcated the “loyal” from the disloyal—those willing to consume the Government’s Salt and those who were not. Yet army officials also viewed European chaplains and South Asian “religious teachers” as critical for combatting boredom, sedition and “vice.” Maintaining bodily strength and purity in harsh imperial climates and encouraging clean living and sobriety would preserve the expensive investment of white soldiers’ bodies through exercise and the avoidance of alcohol and venereal disease. Among South Asian soldiers, army officials worried about protecting South Asian soldiers’ minds from “religiously” motivated “sedition.” These differing goals: the former of protecting British bodies and the latter of preserving South Asian minds, resulted in alternative strategies for defining the role of “religious” leaders in the army. By 1912 the army decided to standardize the recruitment and payment of South Asian “religious teachers” in ways that mirrored the use of chaplains among British troops. Yet officials pressed for interdenominational unity among British soldiers while hardening distinctions among South Asian beliefs and practices, shaping how “religion” was understood, defined, and deployed in Britain and South Asia.
Several scholars have argued that the word “religion” was a tool of governance.\textsuperscript{378} This was especially the case in the British Indian Army, where the recruitment and regulation of soldiers’ bodies, beliefs, and practices hinged upon strict definitions of “religious” difference. The regimentation and bureaucracy inherent in the running of the British Indian Army and the recruitment of its soldiers according to strict definitions of “religion” encouraged rigidity in terminology to maintain power over its soldiers. Both British and South Asian soldiers serving the army, therefore, lived their daily lives in conversation with and negotiating the boundaries of “religion.” By institutionalizing “religious teachers” to combat real and imagined “sedition,” the army delegitimized those personal, familial and regional practices that deviated from centralized authority, ossifying definitions of “religion” in a martial context. Yet soldiers could also use the narrow definition of “religion” to further their own personal, social or familial goals. In so doing, this chapter suggests that “religious” concerns were not the sole purview of South Asian soldiers, but existed in dialog with British methods of controlling troops through “religion.”

\textit{Interdenominational Fractures among British Soldiers}

“Religious” anxieties about the disorderly and mutinous potential of soldiers in India had existed since the early days of the East India Company. As a result, army officials in India attempted to make “religious” spaces as clean and comfortable as possible to keep soldiers away from more “sinful” recreational spaces. The Army

Regulations gave precise instructions for the distribution of bibles, prayer books, and furniture and even accounted for the Indian laborers present during church services who served as prayer room attendants and punkah pullers.\textsuperscript{379} J.H.H. McNeill, senior chaplain for the Church of Scotland in Madras, stressed that such comforts were critical to the spiritual well-being of the troops, so that soldiers would see places of worship as comfortable spaces rather than sources of unease.\textsuperscript{380} Organizations such as the Royal Army Temperance Association, the Salvation Army, the Sandes Soldiers’ Homes and the Young Men’s Christian Association lead the charge of providing clean and comfortable spaces.\textsuperscript{381} These organizations also combined secular sobriety and moral piety to promote a self-consciously non-denominational Christian brotherhood conducive to men of arms. These arrangements bolstered the idea of “muscular Christianity” which had gained strength throughout the late nineteenth century, idealizing strong, sober men of empire, such as soldiers and missionaries, who served God and country.\textsuperscript{382} Yet these interdenominational ideals and best-laid plans for providing comfortable spaces often fell short due to institutional inequalities and shortages in military funding.

\textsuperscript{379} Government of India, Military Department \textit{Army Regulations, India, Volume XII: Barracks} (Calcutta: Government of India Central Printing Office, 1900), 174, 177, IOR/L/MIL/17/5/633.

\textsuperscript{380} J.H.H. McNeill, senior chaplain for the Church of Scotland in Madras, insisted on the importance of “lighting, punkahs or fans, the provision of lanterns and slides” for the spiritual welfare of the troops. From the Reverend J.H.H. McNeill, MBE, BD, Acting Presidency Senior Chaplain, Church of Scotland, Madras to the Secretary to the Government of India (12 January 1920), Army Department (May 1921), file 197-239, NAI; Letter from the Presidency Senior Chaplain, Church of Scotland, Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department (16 January 1920) Army Department (May 1921), file 197-239, NAI.

\textsuperscript{381} \textit{Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India} (London: Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office, n.d., c.1912), 104; The Royal Army Temperance Association, “Annual Report for the Official year 1909-1910,” (Simla: Royal Army Temperance Association Press, Simla), 55, IOR/L/MIL/7/9993.

According to the Army Regulations, the spiritual management of British soldiers appeared straightforward. Hiring of chaplains fell under the discretion of military leadership, and British soldiers were marched to church on Sunday.\(^{383}\) Once in the army, it was a bureaucratic impossibility that British soldiers be anything other than Christian; “Jewish” was included in the long list of possible “denominations.”\(^{384}\) Despite the apparently clear-cut nature of army religious policy, the diversity of its soldiers often revealed its limitations. For example, Company officials worried that Irish soldiers, who made up forty percent of the “British” troops in India during the 1830s, might be more inclined to mutiny because the majority were Catholic.\(^{385}\) There also remained an important gulf between the often Catholic Irish recruits and their regularly protestant Anglo-Irish officers. Officers often viewed Catholic chaplains with trepidation, believing that they would spread seditious thought.\(^{386}\)

Concerns about the mutinous potential of religious minorities inspired the army to accommodate and control its religious diversity, if not with absolute equality. The original plan for non-Anglican denominations traced back to at least 1856 when East India Company officials agreed to set aside funds for the construction of “a plain

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\(^{384}\) As the King’s Regulations expressed: “A soldier’s religious denomination will be classified, for all purposes, in accordance with his own declaration on the subject, under one of the following denominations:- Church of England; Presbyterian (including Church of Scotland, United Free Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland, Presbyterian Church of England, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church); Roman Catholic; Wesleyan; Baptist; Congregationalist; Primitive Methodist; United Methodist; Jewish; or other denomination as stated by the soldier.” Quoted in: The Metropolitan’s Chaplain, Bishop’s House, Calcutta, *The Chaplain’s Handbook India. A Guide to the Military, Civil and Ecclesiastical Rules in Force in India* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1926), 8. This section is from “The King’s Regulations,” Section XII: General Duties. 1268. Religious Denominations.


building” for Roman Catholic soldiers which could be supplemented with “ornamental contributions” from the congregation. Over time, cantonment plans generally accounted for one “protestant” and one Catholic church per station, without defining the scope of “protestant.” The 1860 regulations stated that consecrated Anglican churches could be used to accommodate non-Anglican Christian denominations but local governments complained that requests for Presbyterian troops to use Church of England churches for their Sunday services were denied. Military leadership could only offer the use of “unconsecrated buildings” to non-Anglican Christian denominations because Church of England chaplains and bishops had the ultimate authority over consecrated churches. This meant that religious officials, rather than military authorities, set the terms for when and how non-Anglican denominations used church space in India, even in military cantonments ministering to soldiers. Gradually, the Government of India funded the construction of separate Presbyterian churches in several major stations. Yet even into the twentieth century, Wesleyans, for example, had their weekly parade service in the prayer room rather than in a formal church setting. Many soldiers and chaplains did not fail to notice their secondary status.

While soldiers had unequal access to church spaces, their access to chaplains was similarly irregular. From 1897 to 1921, religious minorities made up less than thirty

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387 R. Nathan, Under Secretary, Home Department, Government of India, Memorandum, (21 October 1899), IOR/L/PJ/6/536, File 679.
388 Letter from the Government of India (Home Department) to the Secretary of State for India, (23 June 1898), IOR/L/PJ/6/536, File 679.
389 From J.P. Hewett, CIE, Secretary to the Government of India (Home Department) to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Calcutta (25 March 1898), IOR/L/PJ/6/536, File 679; See also G.M. Davies, A Chaplain in India London and Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd, c. 1933).
390 Letter from GOI [Home (Ecclesiastical) Department] [sic—with brackets] to the Secretary of State for India.
391 Davies, A Chaplain in India, 221.
percent of the British forces in India. Roman Catholics were between fifteen and twenty percent, followed by Presbyterians at eight percent, and Wesleyans who made up about four to five percent. \footnote{Denominational census of British troops in India taken January 1897, March 1910, and December 1921 included in Army Department to the Right Honorable Viscount Peel, P.C., GBE, His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India. (12 July 1923), IOR/L/MIL/7/3123.}

Presbyterian and Anglican chaplains were usually officially appointed by the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, but Roman Catholic priests were appointed, transferred or removed at the discretion of their own ecclesiastical superiors. Their pay was supplemented by the Government of India when they ministered to the troops. \footnote{Army Department to the Right Honorable Viscount, (12 July 1923).}

United Board clergymen were only formally recognized in 1910 and were only paid Rs. 1 per soldier. \footnote{Army Department, Despatch to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (9 October 1924), IOR/L/MIL/7/3123.} As a result, Catholic and non-Anglican denomination chaplains routinely earned less than half that of Anglican and Presbyterian chaplains. \footnote{Father Emilian, a Catholic Chaplain in Lahore, even wrote to the Catholic Bishop of Lahore in 1915, stating that his allowance was fixed at Rs. 150 per mensem, as compared to the minimum allowance for Catholic priests ministering to troops in India which is 200 Rs, despite the fact that he had nine years of military service to his record. Application of the Roman Catholic Chaplain, Lahore, for an Increase in his Present Allowance, Government of Punjab, Home Department, file 22 (March 1915), Panjab State Archives, henceforth PSA. In the same year, the Government of Punjab revised regulations for the appointment of Anglican and Presbyterian chaplain, granting junior chaplains an annual salary of Rs. 6,360 per annum for their first five years and then 8,160, and for senior chaplains Rs. 10,200 per annum for the first five years of their service, and then 12,000 per annum. Government of Punjab, Revised Regulations for the Appointment of Anglican and Presbyterian Chaplains, file number 12 (January 1915), 27, PSA. In 1920, the rate of pay for Catholic priests was significantly lower than that for Anglican chaplains—with the former earning between Rs. 200-375 per mensem, based on length of service. Meanwhile, Anglican and Scottish chaplains on the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment received Rs. 600 in their very first year of service.}
Despite the higher rate of pay for Anglican chaplains, the Reverend chaplain J. Bell of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment complained in 1923 that his pay was “inadequate for a European” and made it difficult for him to live “in accordance with a standard compatible with my position.” As Bell suggests, chaplains were expected to live and work with the same social influence as a British officer, exerting a presumed class-based moral superiority. He estimated his necessary expenditures in accordance with this position amounted to approximately 807 Rs. per mensem, far exceeding his monthly salary of Rs. 675. This meant that “if I had not private means I could not live in India as a chaplain ought to live, and as he is expected to live.” Unfortunately, as officer cadet Maurice Boxall observed in Quetta, this low salary often attracted men with lower social status than many officers. Boxall, whose father was an Anglican priest, complained to his parents that one Canon Brooks at Quetta gave sermons that were “appalling” and, more damningly, Brooks had “a very Cockney accent & my candid opinion of him is that he is a fool.” While it is unclear whether he found was Brooks’ cockney accent or uninspiring sermons more offensive, Boxall suggests that it was rare to find well-qualified men who were willing to spend several years in India on what was considered by many to be an insufficient salary. This did not necessarily inspire the cultivation of men who were well-educated, rousing lecturers, or well-versed on the intricacies of doctrine, and were therefore less able to impress the scrutiny of religiously-minded army men.

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397 Maurice Boxall, letter to parents, undated (sent while in attendance at Cadet College, Quetta, c. 1916), Private Papers of Captain M.W.J. Boxall, Documents 11286, Imperial War Museum, henceforth IWM.
While Anglican chaplains complained of their low salary and congregants worried about the social background of such men, the situation was even more difficult for chaplains to non-Anglican denominations who received payment between one half and one third of Anglican salaries. The result was, as the Army Department noted, that most Roman Catholic priests were “foreigners who are content with a humble standard of living.” William Keatinge, the principal Roman Catholic chaplain to the troops, felt that this incursion of largely continental European Catholic chaplains was an undesirable trend because “a British priest” is “immeasurably superior to a foreigner” because “The foreigner never really understands the British soldier and the British soldier has very little use for him.” This also made it difficult for such men to live in accordance with the social status of British army officers, and made them unlikely to be “looked up to” by men as was intended. The “foreign” nature of many Catholic priests thus created a linguistic and cultural distance between Catholic troops and their clergy, giving Catholic soldiers a more difficult time of confiding in their chaplains and seeing them as legitimate sources of comfort, uplift, and guidance.

Just as the pay scale attracted the “wrong” sort of men to be chaplains for various Christian denominations, men of all denominations faced unique challenges for actually

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398 Government of India, Finance Department, *Army Regulations, India, Volume I. Pay and Allowances and Non-Effective Pay* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India 1912), IOR/L/MIL/17/5/541. A chaplain of Church of Scotland who entered the service before 29 July 1906 and is attached to a Scottish regiment is paid from Army Estimates at rate of Rs 450 chaplain on probation, Rs 500 for junior chaplain, Rs. 650 after five years’ service, Rs. 800 for Senior chaplains and Rs. 1000 after 5 years’ service in that grade. For those entering after 29 July 1906 the rates are 480/530/680/850/1000.

399 Army Department, Despatch to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (25 February 1926), IOR/L/MIL/7/3123; The 1920 Esher committee had recommended hiring British priests instead of foreign priests: “Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the administration and organisation of the Army in India,” Chairman: Lord Esher. Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty. (London: Printed and Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office. 1920), 100.

400 William Keatinge, Bishop, Principal Chaplain to the Forces (Roman Catholic), Enclosure to the Secretary, War Office (23 October 1923), IOR/L/MIL/7/3123.
gaining access to them.\footnote{Minute Paper Financial Department. Referred to Military Secretary, IOR/L/MIL/7/3123. After the First World War the Financial Department estimated that there were 14 salaried posts for Wesleyan chaplains ministering to 2516 soldier-adherents, five United Board chaplains ministering to 1,479 adherents and 76 Roman Catholic priests for between seven and nine thousand Roman Catholic soldiers, 166 chaplaincies for over forty thousand Anglican troops, and 18 chaplains for approximately 5,000 Presbyterian troops. For Catholics, the number had not decreased despite there being over twice as many Catholic soldiers in the prior century; See also from India Office to His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor General of India in Council (7 February 1924), IOR/L/MIL/7/3123. Provisions per head for Presbyterians is 28.2 Rs [1,41,000 total]; 22.9 Rs for Roman Catholics [1,47,000 total]; 43.2 Rs. for Wesleyans [1,08,000 Rs total]; and 2 Rs. per head for United Board.} For example, there were only five stations in all of India where Catholic priests were expected to conduct mass for over 200 soldiers, whereas Anglican chaplains routinely ministered to over a thousand congregants.\footnote{Army Department to the Right Honorable Viscount Peel, (12 July 1923).} This gave Catholic troops greater access to their priests while Anglicans competed for attention with their fellow adherents. Among the United Board and Wesleyan denominations, priests were responsible for groups of stations, rather than attached to one in particular location as was the case for Anglican chaplains. This meant that priests had to spend more time and money traveling across India. While this may have contributed to greater interpersonal interaction at stations where there may have been ten or fewer men of a particular denomination, the “visiting” nature of these chaplains removed soldiers from the possibility of having lasting, daily encounters with their chaplains.\footnote{Army Department Despatch to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (9\textsuperscript{th} October 1924).} Church of Scotland chaplains perhaps had the most intimate attachment to their men, as they were assigned to Scottish regiments from the time that they set sail for India and stayed with them for the duration of their service.\footnote{Nathan, Memorandum, (21 October 1899).} Chaplains were often swamped with work or busy traveling to various stations, making them almost useless to most men. If they were able to track down their chaplain for personal communication, they were disappointed by their low-class status, “foreign” nature, or “appalling” understanding of doctrine.
The disappointing nature of chaplains and difficulty accessing church space meant that many soldiers saw denominational distinctions as little more than bureaucratic convenience. According to Anglican Chaplain G.M. Davies, some men changed their spiritual affiliation to escape the influence of chaplains. Davies recalled that in Kasauli a soldier in a military hospital “hurriedly drew my attention to his chart sheet and religious persuasion card, saying, ‘They have changed my disease and my religion, sir, since you were here last!’” Davies noted that in addition to the doctor reassessing the diagnosis, “the patient quite on his own had changed his religion, deciding that ‘W.’ [Wesleyan] would suit him better than ‘C. of E.’ [Church of England] since there was no resident Wesleyan Chaplain, and consequently there would be less frequent visits to his bedside!”

Arthur William Ford remembered that there was a chaplain on board his ship to India who spoke to every soldier who had not been confirmed in the church. The chaplain took it upon himself to designate such men as Church of England without asking. Ford eventually changed this denomination himself because “Wesleyans always landed Sunday morning that was a chance to get ashore, you know what I mean.” In this way, “religious” designations could be a way for soldiers to use military bureaucracy to their own ends—sidestepping the unwanted incursions of bedside visits from chaplains or as a means to gaining additional recreation.

The inconsistencies and instabilities of having chaplains in India—based on unequal access to pay, linguistic diversity, lack of doctrinal training made it difficult for British soldiers to place a lot of faith in their chaplains—seeing them mostly as “fools.”

405 Davies, A Chaplain in India, 118.
interlopers, or a means to an end. Yet army concerns about soldiers’ bodies and souls necessitated moral guidance for British soldiers, even as soldiers themselves regarded such religious intervention with a degree of distrust and indifference.

**Interdenominational Unity and Military Space**

The religious diversity of British soldiers increased the utility of interdenominational strategies. While hiring chaplains and building churches resulted in seemingly limitless expenditure without producing concrete results, the British Indian Army favored interdenominational spaces and leaders who could encourage unity, rather than fractures, among army men. This resulted in some innovative strategies for chaplains and military leaders, as well as the reconceptualization of British military men from embodying “religious” difference into prizing their “racial” belonging.

Many civilian and military organizations encouraged Christian unity to protect soldiers’ bodies from the rigors of imperial military service and to give soldiers a sense of community and comfort outside of their occupations. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Sandes Homes, envisioned by the Irish evangelical Christian Elise Sandes, gave soldiers alternative spaces of comfort and leisure across the British Empire, pulling them from bazaars, brothels and opium dens. The Royal Army Temperance Association similarly offered places in which men could socialize comfortably and soberly. Men could find comforts such as food, tea, coffee, and light and airy surroundings which military and religious leaders believed went a long way in redirecting men’s desires to commit “sins.” The R.A.T.A. maintained that it was “undenominational” and encouraged “Chaplains of the several persuasions” to “work amongst the men in the way they think best.”

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407 Frederick Roberts, Temperance Speech at Meerut 3rd March 1888, IOR/L/MIL/7/9998.
Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Forces Frederick Roberts stressed that the association saw “religion as its surest basis” for encouraging temperance and sobriety but favored “no particular form of it,” echoing “all other Army institutions.”  

In addition to forging interdenominational unity, Army Chaplain G.M. Davies appealed to soldiers’ bodily comforts to distract them from the rigidity of their military Christian worship. Davies remembered that after attending “tent-worship” at an Indian Christian Mela at Chupra, he found the “Sunday morning assemblage at Barrackpore” quite “formal and lacking in fervour in comparison.” Inverting the missionary pattern in India, he imitated Indian Christians, using a local theater for a less formal setting and hosting an “Evangelistic Service” with songs and lectures in the theater at night. The soldiers themselves, who might skip formal voluntary services in the church, instead “packed the place,” relieved to have the opportunity to worship in the theater, free from the “tight tunics and belts” that were mandatory on Sundays, and instead wear “undress uniform.” Like Davies, J.H.H. McNeill, Madras senior Chaplain for the Church of Scotland, favored using regimental theaters because it was a religiously neutral space that allowed men of all congregations to worship. Davies remembered that at the theater service a soldier exclaimed “That’s what I call religion, when the Church of England, the Presbyterian and the Wesleyan Ministers all unite in giving us chaps a helping hand.”

Part of clergymen’s growing willingness to pursue interdenominational unity was through the international community that congregated in India for missionary and charitable purposes. Davies found most of his social and spiritual companionship from

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408 Frederick Roberts, Army Temperance Speech at Simla, 9 September 1890, IOR/L/MIL/7/9998.
409 Davies, A Chaplain in India, 126, 161.
410 McNeill to the Secretary to the Government of India (12 January 1920).
411 Davies, A Chaplain in India, 149.
the diverse collection of Scottish, American, Canadian, German, and Indian priests and missionaries circulating in various stations in India. This sense of a shared calling and communal association encouraged him to work with the Presbyterian chaplain and plan an “open air service” at Dharampur and a “Week of universal Prayer” organized by the Evangelical Alliance in Mhow. \textsuperscript{412} Two of the evenings they held services in the Presbyterian and Wesleyan churches and then he invited the “Nonconformist Ministers and their communicant members” to a service of Holy Communion in the Station Church. J.H.H. McNeill similarly encouraged reaching men through a semi-religious weekly meetings and a service on Sunday evenings, where the various ministers took turns speaking “irrespective of denomination.” \textsuperscript{413} These interdenominational ceremonies reflected a more general institutional trend toward Christian solidarity consistent with the unity fostered between soldiers in the British Indian Army.

As Davies and McNeill suggest, the twentieth-century army found it important to hire chaplains who could foster a clean and sober interdenominational environment for soldiers in India. The questionnaire given to those recommending prospective chaplains asked “Is he a loyal churchman, but tolerant and broad-minded in respect of unessential matters of doctrine and ritual?” The most important qualifications for a chaplain in India were not educational or doctrinal, but matters of character and lifestyle. The first question about the candidate asked “Is he a man of irreproachable moral character and strictly temperate habits?” Similarly, Recommenders had to affirm that that while they knew a candidate “he lived piously, soberly and honestly.” \textsuperscript{414} Thus, the Indian Ecclesiastical

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{413} McNeill to the Secretary to the Government of India (12 January 1920).
\textsuperscript{414} Form of Testimonial to the Right Reverent Arthur Foley (20 June 1914), IOR/L/PJ/6/1324 File 3533.
Establishment clearly prioritized the cultivation of clean and sober men who, above all, could set a good social example without squabbling over denominational differences. Military officials saw Christianity and chaplains as a means of encouraging clean living and interdenominational unity, bringing soldiers’ together in body and spirit.

For some chaplains, such as G.M. Davies, visions of Christian unity extended to South Asians. He argued somewhat unsurprisingly that wide-scale Indian conversion to Christianity would solve the tensions of imperial rule, and celebrated Christian services for bringing British and Indian men together in prayer rather than conflict. However, Indian Christians themselves were a rarity in the Indian Army—making up less than one percent of recruited men. Many more joined the Labour Corps or worked as followers, giving them a second class status compared to the venerated “Martial Races.” Many Indian Christians were even institutionally categorized as “pariahs”—or outcaste Hindus—and were not granted their own chaplains. So in theory, some chaplains believed that Christian brotherhood should include South Asians. In practice, interdenominational solidarity met its limits with racial difference. Unity was possible for Europeans and Americans who felt isolated in India and surrounded by “non-believers.” This spiritual segregation was a de facto racial segregation that prized “European” Christian social harmony as a path to salvation in India.

The institutional awkwardness of having a multi-denominational military meant that religious leaders became more creative in finding alternative spaces for reaching

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416 About chaplains for Indian Christians: Question by Mr. M. Ruthnaswamy, extract from Official Report of the Legislative Assembly Debates (21 March 1927), page 2450, IOR/L/MIL/17/5/541; About pariahs see “A Grave Injustice to Indian Christians,” Army Part B (July 1918), file 40-42, NAI.
soldiers and encouraging interdenominational unity compatible with army discipline and solidarity. These interdenominational thrusts within religious institutions recognized that the army was most compatible with forms of belief and practice that kept white, British Christian soldiers united during their time in India, carefully separate from South Asians.

“Religious” Sedition

In addition to hierarchies of racial difference perpetuated in the nineteenth century and fully infused into colonial practice by the twentieth, the long history of religious interaction, sedition and conversion between South Asian and European troops encouraged racial segregation. In the seventeenth century, East India Company officials had encouraged contact and marriage between European soldiers and South Asian women because they saw Catholic Portuguese and later French Catholic unions as more politically dangerous than ties with Muslim and “Hindu” communities.417 Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, many British captives and religious converts in Mysore switched sides and actively fought against East India Company Forces.418 Famous nineteenth century cases, such as one white military officer Muslim convert rechristened as Muhammed Sadauk joined a reformist contingent marching to Sindh on the frontier.419 Another British N.C.O. in Delhi converted to Islam, was given the name Sheikh Abdullah Beg and directed artillery fire against the British forces.420 However, the 1857 “mutiny” and other mid-century rebellions across the empire did much to forge a racialized sense

418 Colley, Captives, 277.
of unity among men, along with interdenominational British Christianity. While this alleviated some fears of interracial collaboration and conversion, military anxieties about the influence of “religion” among South Asian troops intensified after the 1857 revolt. By the twentieth century, the increasing presence of South Asian troops outside the subcontinent encouraged military officials to control the spaces in which soldiers traveled and the men whom they could encounter for “spiritual” comfort.

Early nineteenth century “religious” reformers were well-known for using “religion” to undermine the East India Company and target South Asian soldiers. The political machinations of Muslim reformist and “cosmopolitan” Mubarazdaula, whose followers came to be known as “Wahabis” after Abd-al Wahab of Nejd in Arabia, deliberately targeted Muslim sepoys to defect from the Company Army. He even sent devoted reformers into cantonments in search of followers. This inspired I.S. Fraser, the British resident at Haiderabad, to remove from cantonments “the faqueers, moulvees, and others” who attempted “to seduce the Sepoys to wahabeeism and conjointly with it in all probability to sedition.” Yet, as Seema Alavi argues, the “fanaticism” that British officials condemned in these men was their “disloyal” and “seditious” feelings, rather than their “religious” impulses. The munazara controversy, consisting of “religious” debates between Christian missionaries and Muslims centering around the cities of Lucknow and Agra in the 1830s and 40s, contributed to “religious” criticism about Company rule. During the 1857 uprising, “warrior ascetics” and “fakirs” circulated

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422 Quoted in Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism*, 49-50, 72.
information and helped mutineers carry out successful attacks against European forces, increasing military animosity and apprehension about such figures.\textsuperscript{423}

After 1857, many Muslim reformers retreated to frontiers, Persia, or the Ottoman Empire while continuing to press for Muslim unity and the overthrow of British India, fueling the instability and military engagements on the South Asian borderlands.\textsuperscript{424} With the legal classification of criminality under the Criminal Procedure Code of 1861, monastic leaders were increasingly labeled “eunuchs” or subject to harsh regulation as “Criminal Tribes.”\textsuperscript{425} Nonetheless, South Asian soldiers continued to exalt the wandering mobility of “fakirs,” believing that such men had the power to bless weapons, heal wounds, guide men in battle and appear in dreams to give advice and warnings.\textsuperscript{426} While these men helped keep soldiers’ morale high, they represented a challenge to nineteenth century efforts to “civilize” and “Christianize” army men. Until 1900 the predominant occupation of Indian men confined at asylums under the Bombay Presidency was “beggar, mendicant, fakir, etc.” Military officials often claimed that men were “insane” to physically confine them and remove them from their proximity to soldiers, inadvertently encouraging alternative means of expressing devotion, such as preaching and publishing.\textsuperscript{427}

\textsuperscript{423} Avril Powell, \textit{Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India} (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 272.
\textsuperscript{424} Alavi, \textit{Muslim Cosmpolitanism}, 394.
Nineteenth century concerns about “mad” fakirs gave way to considerable anxieties about the international climate of anticolonial “religious” revolution. Publications such as the *Gaelic American* and *Ghadar* (Mutiny) circulated revolutionary ideas between India, Ireland, and the United States.\(^\text{428}\) Dalip Singh, the last maharaja of Punjab, sought allies among Muslim reformers of the Northwest Frontier and Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. He also planned but ultimately failed to mobilize 10,000 Irish soldiers of the British Indian Army to stir another 1857-level uprising.\(^\text{429}\) Yet this revolutionary optimism continued in the form of the Ghadar movement, which meant mutiny, revolt, or uprising, and was based on a newspaper of the same name published in the United States. It was a hybrid radicalism that blended Mazzini’s Italian Risorgimento, Pan-Asianism, Pan-Islam and Irish and Egyptian anti-colonialism. Large numbers of soldiers who fought for the British in the Boxer Rebellion, as well as in the British military police patrolling Hong Kong, Shanghai, and the other Chinese treaty ports, took leading roles in the movement. Tokyo became a central locale for the development of radical international networks of Pan-Asianism, socialism and anarchism. This appealed strongly to Indian students after the 1905 Japanese victory against Russia and the British partition of Bengal. The Criminal Law Amendment in 1908, which attempted to suppress rural unrest in the Punjab, forced political agitators into exile in Paris or North America, where they encountered international networks with dreams of global revolution.\(^\text{430}\)

Several of these individual agitators, global revolutionaries, and “religious” movements hoped to stir revolt in the British Indian Army. V.D. Savarkar’s *Indian War*

\(^{428}\) From War Office, to India Office (21 February 1907), IOR/L/PJ/6/798 file 453.

\(^{429}\) Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism*, 394-5.

of Independence, published in 1908, romanticized the fighting “yogin” and made a compelling case for how wandering monastic figures could be used as revolutionary messengers. Balwant Singh, a former Lance Naik of the 36th Sikhs, may have helped revive this line of thinking when he resigned his post in the army in 1905 to become “a faqir.” He journeyed to Hong Kong, Vancouver and California as a “Granthi” and administered “Sikh baptism,” signaling the religious pliability and plurality of such men. Police suspected several other Indian granthis, such as Bhagwan Singh in Hong Kong and Canada, Indar Singh of Hong Kong and California, and Balwant Singh of “preaching sedition” to troops of the British Indian Army. In Jullundur, the Director of Criminal Intelligence suspected that Kirpal Singh, granthi of the 19th Punjabs, had “strong political views” and aired them “privately among his friends.” This man had supposed sympathies with the Arya movement, although the Commanding officer of the 19th Punjabis affirmed that Kirpal Singh had many years of loyal service and was never suspected of disloyalty. The Director of Criminal Intelligence noted in his November 1907 report that Lakha Singh, a reservist sepoy of the 47th Sikhs, had to be warned to leave the Sialkot Cantonment for “preaching in the lines of the 32nd Lancers.” Officials worried that “his remarks on religious subjects had a political tone” and ordered him out of the cantonment.

Whether real, imagined, or fabricated by the corrupt system of paying informants, institutional records of seditious “religious” figures meant that the colonial state noted
and acted upon the perceived threat of sedition. It was not far-fetched for colonial officials to imagine that, like the lonely and isolated British soldiers who had long served in India under the careful watch of religious and military officials, South Asian soldiers in Singapore, Hong Kong, or China were subject to considerable traumas of distance and isolation that fomented political and cultural upheaval.

Existing anxieties about “religious” figures reaching out to the troops intensified during the 1911 and 1912 Tripoli and Balkan Wars, contributing to what police officer F.C. Isemonger called “a display of fanaticism” which encouraged “wars of the Cross against the Crescent.” In order to stake a definitive claim of the army’s position in this “war,” The Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India, given to many British soldiers upon disembarking for India, warned soldiers about “The priests, known as mullhas,” who are “men of great influence.” It argued that such men were “priestly dictators” who became military leaders. These included “The Mahdi and the Khalifa in the Soudan, the Mad Mullah in Somaliland and the Mullah Powindah among the Pathans.” Most worrying was that those in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier were “ignorant and fanatical” and contributed to unrest and instability on the borders. It argued that such men were “for ever preaching religious wars and urging their simple-minded disciples to destroy the ‘infidels,’ promising all the joys of Paradise to those who join the standards. They work on the feelings of excitable youngsters, until they are seized with a kind of religious mania, becoming ghazi, and are ready to take any risk for the sake of shedding the blood of one ‘unbeliever.’”

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435 Our Indian Empire (1912), 66-67.
The alleged increases in “fanatical” and “religious” dissent after 1911 and 1912 bore a marked contrast to the sensationalized, but relatively rare, real incidents of violence inspired by such men. For instance, in 1908 one man named Shah Alam attacked an Indian officer, reportedly stating during the attack “I am a Ghazi and will kill Sahibs and all of you who are servants of unbelievers.” When arrested he gave conflicting reports about his intentions, no doubt related in part to faulty translation on the part of police. In some instances he stated that he was sent by the Amir of Afghanistan and in others that he came from a shrine. He was imprisoned for having “Committed a murderous fanatical attack on a native officer” and was sent to the Andaman Islands penal colony in 1909. The medical officer reported that he became “insane” in 1913, afflicted with “religious mania,” before committing suicide in 1915. Despite the generalized warning against such men in the *Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* in 1911, the Government of the Punjab stressed in 1915 that Shah Alam’s case could certainly be considered “a case of abnormality amounting to weakness of intellect.”

The revolutionary and reformist stirrings within and beyond the ranks inspired military officials to reevaluate the types of information that entered into the hands and ears of soldiers. Proposed in 1908 and beginning a two-year trial run in 1909, military officials agreed to fund the publication of the “vernacular” periodical *Fauji Akbar*, which would provide an alternative to the “common vernacular publications” that spread information and arguments that were “undesirable for soldiers.” This periodical, eventually published in Urdu, Hindi and Gurmukhi [Punjabi] became a leading source of

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436 Re-transfer to Lunatic Asylums in India of Lunatics now Undergoing Sentence of Transportation in the Andamans. Home, Jails, file number 7 part A (May 1915), PSA.
437 To the Most Honourable The Marquis of Crewe, K.G., His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (5 October 1911), IOR/L/MIL/7/12353.
information and guide for soldierly opinion. Yet the Fauji Akbar had a decidedly secular tone and remained cautious about intervening in or commenting upon issues of an explicitly “religious” nature. It did however make casual references to when Sikh granthis supported soldiers in battles, or asked for prayers for men who had died.\textsuperscript{438} During the First World War, distribution of the Fauji Akbar to troops became a chief means of checking “wild and distorted rumours.”\textsuperscript{439}

Despite the successes of secular-minded weapons against “sedition” such as the Fauji Akbar, the “religious” nature of much early twentieth century discontent inspired army officials to seek men “on the ground” who could oversee soldiers’ thoughts and actions. Army officials realized that many “seditious” seeds within the ranks were planted while soldiers were stationed in imperial outposts outside of India in spaces where they looked to gain a sense of community belonging far from home. This increased the concerns for monitoring South Asian soldiers and further solidified the importance of “religious” leaders just prior to the First World War.

\textit{Army “Religious Teachers” between Ceremony and Sedition}

Prior to the First World War, military officials reevaluated the duties of South Asian “religious teachers” to respond to the immediate concerns about “sedition” within the ranks. In so doing, the army imitated its own strategies for British soldiers’ chaplains. This represented an institutional shift about the appropriating the utility, rather than fixating on the harm, of South Asian “religious” leaders. These men would play a

\textsuperscript{438} M.A. Khan Haidari, \textit{Selections from Fauji Akhbar for Preliminary and Interpreters examinations in Hindustani}, (Delhi: Oriental Book Depot, 1923), 50.

\textsuperscript{439} From Honorable Mr. H. Wheeler, CSI, CIE, Secretary to the Government of India Home Department (Political), to Chief Secretary to Government, United Provinces (7 January 1915), General Administration Department, Box 141, file number 625/1914, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, henceforth UPSA.
formative role in guiding soldiers’ beliefs and practices toward forms of devotion more conducive to military order and discipline.

The hiring of Indian “religious teachers” by European officials, particularly for Muslim and ‘Hindu’ soldiers, existed since the East India Company and borrowed from the recruitment of “religious” leaders among South Asian martial networks such as Khalsa Sikh, Mughal, Marathi, Afghan and Mysore forces. As the Company gained a more prominent role in the region, officials made conscious efforts to marginalize the pandits and maulvis who had helped company officials translate ancient texts into laws, and questioned the influence of monastic leaders who had cultivated loyalty among troops. Into the early twentieth century, the hiring and duties of religious teachers had been wildly inconsistent. According to Paragraph 901 B of the 1912 Army Regulations only certain pre-approved regiments, mostly descendent from the old Bengal Army, were entitled to have “religious teachers.” It sanctioned a maximum of two per regiment. Some wondered if “religious teachers” were even necessary, because Madras regiments, which had the largest proportion of Muslims, had none at all, and none of the units had mutinied in 1857.

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Listed under “Educational Establishment”: “A moulvi, a pundit, or a grunthi is allowed in the following regts. but not more than two of the three for any one regt. and none is allowed in any regt. which has less than three cos. of Musalmans, or Hindus, or two companies of Sikhs respectively.” “In the 1st to 48th, 51st to 59th, 62nd, 66th, 67th, 69th, 74th, 76th, 82nd, 84th, 87th, 94th to 99th, 107th, 124th, 126th, 128th Infy., 1st to 4th, 6th to 9th and 2nd, 10th Gurkha Rifles, Corps of Guides, Inf.” For these the pay of Moulvi “civilian pay” is 8 Rs, for Pundit it is 8 Rs, for Grunthi it is 10 Rs. [note says that for moulvi in the 55th to 59th rgts the pay is Rs 10 and in the 51st to 54th regts for Grunthi is Rs. 15]. In the 72nd, 89th, 93rd regts and 1st-10th Gurkha Rifles the rates of civilian pay are: moulvi: Rs. 15, Pundit Rs. 12 and Grunthi Rs. 15. Note: “Regts. composed entirely of one class are no entitled to more than one religious teacher.”
The financial investment in “religious teachers” was relatively low since most received miniscule pay compared to their European counterparts. In the nineteenth century, religious teachers received 8 rupees per month compared to 7 Rs. for Indian “sepoys.” This echoed the trend for “chaplains” to be paid higher than European soldiers. Yet by 1911, sepoys had received pay raises of Rs. 11, while most Indian religious teachers continued to be paid just Rs. 8. Exceptions included religious teachers who had accompanied troops on field service, in the old Frontier Force or the Burma Battalion, who received between ten and twelve Rs. per month, still far below the hundreds received by the “poorly paid” European chaplains. Sikh granthis were the best paid of all owing to the perception that Sikhism had a “military value.” This included the mandate that Sikh granthis uniformly administer the pahul ceremony to all recruits which included renouncing their allegiance to the “caste prejudice” of “Hindus.” This military value, and extra ceremonial responsibility, meant that Sikh granthis received a minimum of Rs. 10, or up to Rs. 15 if they had accompanied troops on field service. Sikh granthis received nearly double the pay of other South Asian “religious” teachers, not unlike Anglican and Scottish chaplains compared to other denominations. At the same time, it was Sikh granthis who were so often suspected of stirring discontent in the far-off imperial locales of Hong Kong and Singapore.

By 1910, the India Office noted that the term “religious teacher” was somewhat misleading because such men were rather more like “celebrants” because their primary duties were to celebrate religious rites rather than give any particular instruction. These included celebrating the epics such as the Ramayana. Captain C. Watson Smyth of the 1st

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444 India Office Minute Paper, undated and unsigned, c. 1910, IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
445 Ibid.
Brahmins explained in 1911 that the 1st Brahmins regularly let off fireworks each year and staged “a most realistic pitched battle between the two armies, prince Rama being represented by a statue standing some twenty feet high, while the followers of Ravana are demons wearing fearsome masks.” Religious teachers” were, as much as anything else, agents of amusement and entertainment, giving men a change from mundane daily army life, as well as discouraging them from participating in events outside of army control. In addition to offering ceremonial duties, however, “religious teachers” also presented, as the Army Department argued, “immense potentialities for good or evil.” The Army Department argued that South Asian soldiers were educationally and politically “backward” which meant that “the chief, if not the only way of tampering with his loyalty lies, in our opinion, through his religious principles.” They argued that “this was true” in the 1857 uprising to underline what was at stake in the present.

Shortly after circulation began for the *Fauji Akbar*, the Government of India’s Army department wrote to the Secretary of State for India in 1910 to suggest revising the policy for appointing and paying religious instructors for the Indian Army. Due to the heightened fears of “religious” sedition, the Army Department felt that improving the “social status” of religious teachers through higher pay would help stamp out “unorthodox doctrines.” These “doctrines” had created “unrest” and shaken “confidence in orthodox tenets and lawful authority.” Using “social status” mirrored the strategy of the class-based system of moral uplift which placed faith in using socially superior

447 Army Department, Confidential Despatch, to the Most Honourable the Marquis of Crewe, K.G., His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India Separate,” (14 September 1911), IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
448 Army Department, to the Right Honorable the Earl of Crewe, K.G., His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (15 December 1910), IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
European chaplains to inspire clean living and sober behavior in British army men. Yet the India Office opposed this proposal, noting that an increase in pay would attract men with “secular” and “English” education who had more exposure to political education. In marked contrast to the policy for British chaplains, they preferred South Asian religious teachers to be men of a lower status whose education would be limited to “religious” concerns exclusively.

Despite the India Office’s concerns, Army officials pushed to raise the rate of payment for Indian Sikh, Hindu and Muslim teachers from 8-15 Rs. per mensem to a uniform rate of Rs. 25. However, they suggested that the rate for Gurkhas’ religious teachers should remain at Rs. 10 since they were “not so liable to be influenced by the fanatical or unorthodox teaching of outsiders.” Thus, they proposed buying the loyalty of religious instructors perceived as disloyal and failing to reward those who were already presumed to be steadfast. The India Office balked at this proposal. They added that the rate of payment was unlikely to change “religious teachers’” loyalty because, they alleged, most were either “fanatics” who could not be bought, or those who took their salary and supported whatever “they may judge to be the winning cause.”

Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, was especially reluctant to alter the rates of pay for religious teachers. He felt that “Hitherto religion has not been invoked to buttress up either loyalty or military discipline” and the current proposal would be “a departure from the traditions of the past.” This institutional anxiety about breaking with the past echoed the unprecedented widening and institutionalization of the pani patya ceremony.

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449 Ibid.
450 India Office Minute Paper, undated and unsigned, c. 1910, IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
451 From Crewe, India Office, to His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor General of India in Council London (3 March 1911), IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
In that case, military officials were willing to streamline “ceremonial” duties to suit diplomatic concerns. In the case of “religious teachers,” however, the issue was that “religious” figures could influence soldiers both at home and abroad, and “corrupt” the very heart of colonial power with institutional backing.

Adding further tension to the discussion about religious “teachers” was the fact that, in regiments where there was no official appointment, soldiers often took it upon themselves to hire men through “regimental subscriptions.” This allowed “itinerant priests” to enter into military spaces and attend to religious ceremonies even though they were unknown to anyone in the regiment. This not only opened up the lines to “sedition-mongers” but made soldiers invested in and devoted to such men, having borne the financial burden themselves. Some commanding officers such as those of the 127th, 129th, and 130th Indian Infantry argued firmly for the addition of religious teachers to their regiments because they believed that their men were “ignorant, superstitious, and much under the influence of their spiritual leaders.” If such religious leaders were paid regularly, however, the government would “have a hold upon him.” Ultimately, this idea—that military officials would have power and influence over South Asian soldiers’ “religious” influences—justified breaking with the past.

In light of the India Office’s suggestions, the Army Department revised their proposal and requested to uniformly raise the rates of all religious instructors to Rs. 15 per month, and to introduce “religious teachers” to all regiments, including those that did not already have them. At the strong urging of the Army Department, the India Office

452 Army Department to Crewe, (14 September 1911).
453 Army Department to Most Honourable the Marquis of Crewe, K.G. His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India (16 May 1912), IOR/L/MIL/7/7162.
sanctioned the universal increase in pay for religious teachers to Rs. 15 in 1912 but rather than uniformly introducing religious teachers to regiments that did not have them previously, gave the Government of India the authority to approve religious teachers whenever they were requested.\textsuperscript{454} In 1913 alone there were eleven documented requests to the Army Department for religious teachers to be attached to regiments. Requests continued to flow into the Army Department during and after the First World War.\textsuperscript{455} However, this standardized policy became outdated as soon as the war ended, since the rate of pay of the lowest ranking Indian soldiers was raised to Rs.16, once again ensuring that the religious instructors would be paid less than the lowest ranking army men.\textsuperscript{456}

Unlike chaplains, Indian religious teachers were not meant to be a source of “uplift” for soldiers—other methods such as westernized diets and tailored clothing would be the foundations for that. Rather than viewing religious instructors as mere “celebrants” who oversaw occasional ceremonioal duties on special occasions, the army recognized the utility of having men, subject to army pay, who could oversee soldiers’ needs in their daily lives and still be somewhat responsible to military order and discipline. Over the course of the war, this policy would at times show its cracks and demonstrate that officially attached religious instructors were not always capable of representing, or reigning in, the spiritual ideas and actions of soldiers.

\textit{Authority and Mutiny during the First World War}

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{455} See Army Department Index, “Ecclesiastical,” 1913, NAI.

\textsuperscript{456} Captain F.M. Wardle, \textit{The Sepoy Officer’s Manual: A Book of Reference for Infantry Officers of the Indian Army} (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1922). 75 rates of pay for Indian combatant ranks: Subedar-Major Rs 200; Subedars 130-10-160; Jemadars 75-5-100; Havildars 25; Naiks 22; Drummers and Buglers 16; Sepoy and Sepoy Musician 16; [same for last two] Followers (Cooks, Sweepers, Bhistis) 9.
The newly-expanded crop of South Asian “religious teachers” met several unanticipated challenges during the First World War that would shape the way army officials viewed and relied upon such men. Religious teachers played important roles in keeping soldiers loyal by maintaining troop solidarity through customs and ceremony. They also became their advocates in everyday matters such as diet and shaped army practice in matters such as surgery. Wartime experience fully revealed army reliance on “religious” men to guide, regulate and understand South Asian soldiers. In so doing, they solidified their position within the bureaucracy of army control and discipline, shaping the methods and strategies of postwar Indianization. Yet the first years of the conflict revealed the insecurities of the new system, as a freshly-minted crop of South Asian “religious teachers” proceeded overseas with soldiers and faced the unpredictable challenges of war.

Throughout the war, many soldiers found officially-appointed “religious teachers” useful guides to help them maintain their spiritual devotion during their time overseas. In October 1915, Hayat Ali Khan wrote to goat slaughterer Lance Naik Maulavi Talib Khan about disagreements between soldiers about how to best offer prayers. He explained that there are two opinions here. Some say that the Qasr [short service] should be read: others that the service should be performed at length. There is always quarrelling about this, as to how the Command of God may be. Please write and tell us about this. We shall do as you decided. 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. They read the Friday prayers here. There was formerly a Hafiz Sahib here who used to read them. But he has been transferred…And some now say that the Friday prayers ought to be read and some say not. There is no sort of obstruction here in the performance of religious duties. The arrangements are very good. Please write quickly. We shall act according to your decision.

Hayat Ali Khan suggests that the tendency among army men was to debate about the best method of carrying out their ceremonial devotion. They were interested in settling matters themselves, and setting the terms of their own worship, until the point at which it was not possible to do so. Then, men willingly submitted themselves to the authority of a more centralized authority in order to bring peace and unity between factions. Officially appointed “religious teachers,” therefore, represented a desirable authority to be called upon by self-appointed men once a consensus could not be reached, rather than a leader directing practice from the top down.

The case of the 5th Light Infantry, discussed in the first chapter, also indicates the tensions between officially sanctioned religious leaders and their reception among military men. When British officers of the 5th Light Infantry consulted the Indian officers to cancel the fast of Ramzan, they had received the permission from the regimental maulvi. When Sepoy Fazal Rahman protested the decision, he focused on the undue interference of the maulvi, complaining that he was “interfering with their religion.” In the months following Fazal Rahman’s dismissal from service for being “too religious,” the 5th Light Infantry faced a considerable amount of tension and anxiety about the limits of “religious” intervention. One supposed leader in spreading dissatisfaction was Nur Alam Shah, a self-styled pir or holy man who lived in Singapore’s Kampong Java mosque. British officials alleged that, in contrast to the regimental maulvi, who so willingly conceded to the military request for soldiers to give up one of the pillars of Islam, Nur Alam Shah was an important force in inciting unrest among the soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry and Malay States Guides leading up to the mutiny. As the largest mosque near the cantonment, the Kampong Java mosque was an important site for
soldiers to find a sense of community and belonging. Subedar Suleman Khan asserted that it was customary for soldiers to visit the mosque to “say their prayers” and they regularly came into contact with eccentric holy men.\textsuperscript{458} According to a secret agent, referred to in the report of the mutiny only as “R.,” Nur Alam Shah was “a very seditious and fanatical man” who preached against the British Government and told the men not to go to war. Many men of the 5th Light Infantry allegedly listened to his teachings and gave him money. During the mutiny, Nur Alam Shah provided shelter and disguises to some of the mutineers, convincing them that a German warship was on its way to aid in their revolt.\textsuperscript{459} Suspected ringleaders of the mutiny such as Jemadar Chiste Khan and Subadar Muhammad Zaman of the Malay States Guides allegedly funded Nur Alam Shah’s efforts and were among his most devoted disciples. Just as “granthis” and “fakirs” had traveled across British military outposts in efforts to “seduce” the troops, men such as Nur Alam Shah saw international religious communities as an ideal site for attracting soldiers to revolt against the empire.

Despite the regimental maulvi’s willingness to halt the fast of Ramzan, Nur Alam Shah’s prominent role in the mutiny meant that the official maulvi faced accusations of disloyalty during the events of February 1915. The main case against him was that soldiers had offered unusual prayers in the regimental mosque ten days before the mutiny broke out. The general officer commanding noted that there was “an undue amount of


\textsuperscript{459} Section 9, Miscellaneous, Including 2 Secret Agents, Singapore Mutiny Report.
praying in the Mosque prior to the mutiny period” and yet the maulvi reported nothing. Of course, the mutiny occurred just before the 5th Light Infantry was set to leave Singapore for active service, which could have easily explained the “undue amount of praying.” However, one Sepoy Manowar Ali prayed for “the victory of the forces of Islam” in the regimental mosque, which officials retroactively took as an indication of the unrest to come. The regimental maulvi’s inability to prevent or chastise the prayer, despite being in charge of the regimental mosque, suggested that he was either disloyal or incapable of predicting which utterances could be construed as mutinous. Subadar Sharf-ud-din attested to the innocence of the regimental maulvi, stating that he was an “absolutely trustworthy and a straight person. Manowar Ali who made a statement in the mosque, was opposed to the Maulvie.” In fact, the maulvi had attempted to step in and say something to Manowar Ali but the Subadar urged him to “confine himself strictly to his religious duties and nothing else.” Despite such support from army men, the General Officer Commanding the Troops in the Straits Settlements wrote to the War Office that the “Maulvie was under strong suspicion, but nothing could be proved against him.” Nonetheless, he was “returned to India for disposal.” The perception that “religious matters” were a major cause of the mutiny inherently implicated the regimental maulvi and ensured that he would be cast out from his job and returned to India. Despite his history of loyalty, the testimony of those who vouched for him, and his willingness to

460 Letter from General Officer Commanding the Troops, Straits Settlements to The Secretary, War Office, Whitehall, London, SW. Headquarters, Singapore, 26 August 1915, 22-23, IOR/L/MIL/7/7191.
oppose the more “extreme” men of the regiment such as Fazal Rahman and Manowar Ali, his inability to prevent the mutiny made him institutionally irrelevant.

Sepoy Fazal Rahman’s opposition to the regimental maulvi for “interfering in their religion,” and the Subadar’s recommendation that the maulvi pay attention only to strict “religious duties,” demonstrated the early institutional failure of regimental “religious teachers.” Men such as Sepoy Fazal Rahman believed that the maulvi had no authority to cancel the fast of Ramzan, increasing the existing tension between military and spiritual hierarchies. Similarly, soldiers were able to convince the maulvi that Manowar Ali’s prayer to the “victory of Islam” was not a “religious issue” and encouraged him to remain silent about it. The fact that many soldiers went to the Kampong Java Mosque and were moved by the “seditious” teachings of Nur Alam Shah and not by the regimental mosque or the words of the “religious teacher,” indicated that the “regimental maulvi” was not as influential as military officials hoped he would be.

The regimental maulvi lacked sufficient authority to make convincing—or at least popular—decisions and suggestions to satisfy both military authorities and the needs of soldiers. Perhaps, just as British officers condemned “foolish” and “cockney” chaplains, the men of the regiment merely found this poorly paid regimental maulvi uneducated, uninspiring, or socially inferior. Rather than being seen as a definitive authority on religious matters, soldiers viewed him as an outsider—“interfering,” in Fazal Rahman’s words, in something that did not concern him. By contrast, Nur Alam Shah, free from the direct influence of British and Indian officers and the payment through Government funds, was able to gain many supporters among the Indian soldiers. Being paid by the Army department meant that regimental maulvis were expected to take into account what
was and was not religiously lawful according to military needs of war but this did not necessarily make them popular or respected among soldiers.

**Bodies in Chaos**

Despite the underwhelming influence of “religious” teachers at the start of the war, military officials viewed them as an institutional necessity by its end. This occurred by focusing not only on controlling South Asian soldiers’ “seditious” impulses, but mirroring their strategies for British soldiers. This included using “religious” means to better address soldiers’ physical needs. Military definitions of soldiers’ physical needs, however, did not always coincide with soldiers’ own personal, physical, and spiritual desires.

In 1919, W. Molesworth reported that one “Pathan Mussalman” soldier had “a personal repugnance” to “inspection by a doctor of the genitals or rectal passage.” For this reason, the soldier refused “to undergo any operation or treatment for such a disability as ‘piles.’” Although Molesworth was certain that “This repugnance is not religious but is a repugnance based on custom,” he nonetheless suggested that the General Staff Branch to gain the opinion of “some prominent Moulvi” which could guide to Adjutant General’s Branch refusals of operation by “Mussalman sepoys.”

Shamsululma Moulvi Abdullah Tonki of the Oriental College, Lahore, did not comply with the army’s request and several other Muslim leaders were consulted on this issue. All discussion focused on whether Muslims opposed certain surgical operations for “religious” reasons. British officials saw South Asian religious authorities as allies to

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463 W. Molesworth, Note in Reference to Colonel Payne’s note of 14 Jan 1919 (29 January 1918), Army Department (March 1919) file number 3514-15, NAI.

464 H. Gillies, Note (24 July 1918), Army Department (March 1919) file number 3514-15, NAI.
gain control over South Asian soldiers’ bodies and undermine those inconvenient “personal repugnance…based on custom” that did not coincide with army goals.

In digging into the matter of whether Muslims opposed certain surgical operations, British officials issued a loaded query to Asghar Ali, Roohi, and Abdul Wahid, Khatib (Imam) of the Chinian Mosque, Lahore. They asked

What do the ulama [scholars of religious law] of the faith and expounders of Muhammadan law say in respect of this question, viz., if a Muhammadan is wounded in any war, and if in treating him his doctors should wish to amputate any limb (of his) or a part thereof, e.g., a finger or a part of it, or should wish to perform a surgical operation on his organ of generation or to remove some disease in the anus, e.g., the piles, etc., is it or is it not lawful, according to Muhammadan law, to have such an operation performed? Kindly pronounce the fatwa and earn a reward from God.465

In response, Asghar Ali, Roohi stated that “according to Muhammadan law” it is lawful to save a diseased limb through surgical operation. However, he noted that “To uncover the private parts or to allow any other person to see them is an unlawful act.” He stated that theologians disagreed about whether it would be lawful to perform a surgery on the genitals, even though many “traditionalists” believed in using “unlawful means” in matters of extreme necessity. He then pointed out many other times when, in cases of soldiers in battle, theologians made exceptions to unlawful acts such as wearing silks and taking unlawful food and drink. He therefore conceded that “If, therefore, a person performs an operation on a limb which ought to be kept covered he will not be liable under Muhammadan law.”466 Abdul Wahid, of Ghazni, Imam of Chinian Mosque, Lahore, gave a more full-hearted reply, stating that “the person in whose body has appeared the disease requiring an operation may be saved great physical pain, it is lawful

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465 Translation of a query and the replies made by Asghar Ali, Roohi, and Abdul Wahid, Khatib (Imam) of the Chinian Mosque, Lahore, Army Department (March 1919) file number 3514-15, NAI.
466 Ibid.
beyond doubt for the physician or (lit., and) doctor to lance, incise or (lit., and) amputate.” He felt that a medical authority would only be liable to punishment if he was a quack who caused further injury, death, or pain. Both men conceded “God knows better and His knowledge is perfect.”

By stating in their queries that the respondents would receive a “reward from God” or merely “a reward,” British officials revealed their simultaneous desires to have and exert authority over both spiritual and material wealth. These exchanges underlined their use of imperial finances to get advantageous responses from religious leaders, and their ability to set the terms of belief in order to exert metaphysical influence over soldiers. The lengths that they went to to have official “religious” authority weigh in on this issue, even when some refused to cooperate, suggests that it was important to be seen as religiously sanctioned in thought, action and deed. The very act of seeking out these men, however, revealed a desire to undermine the personal wishes, customs, and comforts of individual men who were likely uncomfortable for a variety of “religious” and physical reasons, and to belittle their claims through a combination of spiritual and secular authority. Military desires to regulate the intimate details of soldiers’ own “personal repugnance” to having their own bodies examined suggests the dramatic shift in military influence possible in wartime, and the important role of “religious” leaders in making these bodily incursions possible.

**Spiritual Amenities and the Limits of “Interfaith”**

In addition to granting British officials greater access to South Asian soldiers’ bodies, the First World War also enabled military officials to deepen their strategies for

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467 Reply of Abdul Wahid, of Ghazni, Imam of Chinian Mosque, Lahore, Army Department (March 1919) file number 3514-15, NAI.
forging cross-faith unity among South Asian men. This stood in direct contrast to their
peacetime policies of division and instead mirrored their interdenominational plans for
British soldiers. Like the Sandes homes and R.A.T.A. for British soldiers in India, South
Asian soldiers serving overseas had greater access to the privileges of intimate and
comfortable spaces that had become commonplace for British soldiers in India. In
particular, the Y.M.C.A. organized activities and amenities for soldiers during the war
that would shape their expectations of military service after its conclusion.

During the War, organizations such as the Indian Soldiers’ Fund and the
Y.M.C.A. extended vast material resources to make war as comfortable as possible for
Indian soldiers. According to the report on the hospitals at Brighton and Netley, once
soldiers disembarked from hospital trains “Each man received in the train a piece of
paper showing his caste” which then ensured that their food, drink, bathing,
accommodation, and funeral rights would be adhered to by invalided men and Indian
medical students of the same status.468 Throughout their stays in hospitals, men received
an assortment of goods including Bhagavad Gitas, Miniature Korans, “religious books,”
Brahamanical Beads, and prayer rugs to help fill their time and satiate their “religious”
needs, strategies similar to the use of devotion and recreation to combat the rigors and
boredom of British military life in India. Parts of the hospital grounds were “set apart for
Hindu and Mahommedan worship” including a “Marquee” for Sikh soldiers to use as a
Gurdwara (temple).” These efforts suggested that it was possible for South Asian soldiers
to receive the type of care and spiritual concern that British soldiers in India took for

468 “General Report on the Indian Section, Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, from its institution on October 20th 1914 to date of closing March 8th 1915,” Mss Eur F143/81.
Compared to the efforts of the Indian Soldiers’ Fund and military hospitals, the Y.M.C.A. went even further to provide recreation, entertainment, and education for South Asian soldiers, signaling the global reach of the U.S.’s military-philanthropic program. In makeshift “huts,” the Y.M.C.A. organized musical performances, games, food and drink, and other amusements. They also provided lectures on sex and hygiene and courses on reading and writing, following the Salvation Army, the RATA, and Sandes Soldiers’ Homes for British soldiers in India. S.M. Jafri, an Indian Y.M.C.A. worker in Marseilles, wrote to the association about the favorable impression that such work had on Indian men. In particular, he suggested that the interdenominational thrust of this Christian Association encouraged “interfaith” unity.

According to Jafri, during one Y.M.C.A. event, a Risaldar, (an Indian cavalry officer) interrupted a musical performance to give a speech to the men. The officer argued that “education” and “unity” were crucial for “The advancement of our country” and praised the Y.M.C.A. secretary for providing lectures on the value of education. Equally important, however, he urged his fellow soldiers to “forget our absurd prejudices of castes and religions.” He stated that even though he was from a high caste family “there is no difference between man and man because of caste. Religion also must not be a matter of difference and disunity.” He encouraged all people, whether “a Hindoo or a Mohammedan, a Christian or a Jew, a Parsi or a Buddhist” that the most important thing was to be they “Do not look down upon a man of another religion with prejudice and enmity.” He noted that although most of the men initially viewed the Y.M.C.A. “with suspicion and mistrust” they helped encourage the men to overlook “differences and ill feeling among ourselves, and we shall be a united and progressive people.” He praised
the Indian members of the YMCA for acting as “comrades” who “fought hardest of all. At the Front they were with our bodies, and now when the War is over, they guard our souls.”

As Jafri described, the First World War was an opportunity to expand goals of interdenominational Christian unity to encourage interfaith solidarity among Indian soldiers. The most successful manifestation of this impulse came not from a British military organization, but from an American religious group that supported army goals. While British military officials were all too eager to take advantage of American funds and resources to support British and South Asian troops during a global conflict, these resources were less readily available when the conflict ended. Army officials remained eager to support British men’s bodies and souls simultaneously through organizations such as the R.A.T.A. and Y.M.C.A. in India, but were reluctant to make the same interventions into South Asian soldiers’ daily lives back in the highly segregated society of colonial India. The physical dislocation of serving overseas allowed South Asian men to have access to some of the amenities commonplace for British soldiers. By contrast, postwar life nominally returned many Indian soldiers “home,” where military officials assumed that they would be able to integrate smoothly into Indian society, despite their traumatic experiences of years abroad. The extremely intimate physical attention that Indian soldiers received during the war contrasted sharply with the hands-off approach to Indian lives in British India.

One of the main reasons that spiritual amenities for South Asian troops diminished was that some of the fears of “religious” dissent had subsided. When the

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469 SM Jafri, “In One of the Largest Camps in France,” n.d., IOR/L/MIL/7/18577.
Government of India discussed efforts to tamper with the troops in 1922, they argued that there was minimal threat from “the activities of Sadhus” because “this form of agitation is practically dead.” Of one hundred seventy one documented attempts to tamper with the loyalty of the troops between 1920 and 1922, only thirteen were categorized as “speeches or fatwas” by “Mullas, Maulvis, Granthis, and Sadhus.” Nearly three times as many attempts came in the form of “seditious pamphlets and notices,” leading the Viceroy to single out the press as the chief means of reaching out to the troops. He suggested that the best way to combat it was through the active distribution of the *Fauji Akbar* and keeping of lists of newspapers “suitable and unsuitable for perusal of Indian troops.” In response to the proposed budget of 1922-23 Mr. Purshotamdas Thakurdas even recommended eliminating religious teachers for Indian soldiers altogether since they are “unnecessary when the Indian soldier is stationed in his own country, with mosques or temples available within reasonable distance of his camp.” Although the British Indian Army kept its crop of “religious teachers,” there was less urgency to ensure that they had strict control over men’s beliefs. Although revolutionary activists such as the pan-Islamic Ali brothers called for men to step down from military service, they had limited success doing so, as will be discussed later. Another crucial difference was that by the interwar period, when many revolutionaries, such as Tiruka, or Sri Ranghavendra

470 Telegram from Secretary of State for India (21 December 1922), Home Department, Political file number (1923), NAI.
471 Note by General Staff, India on subject of attempts to tamper with the loyalty of Indian soldiers, undated, c. 1922-1923, IOR/L/MIL/7/13768.
472 Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department, Secretary of State for (2 March 1923), IOR/L/MIL/7/13768.
Rao, embraced the image of the itinerant guru in order to teach combat techniques, which had some level of success among the troops prior to the First World War. After the war, however, they mostly directed their efforts more at making civilians “martial” through schools and studios rather than directly targeting army men for revolutionary activism.

With less access to spiritual services, many Indian officers between the wars characterized military life as composed of forced sterility only combatted by the self-organized activities of “religious teachers.” Retired Indian officer Lieutenant General S.P.P. Thorat remembered, “men took keen interest in religion” because “of the complete lack of any amenities.” Religious teachers worked hard to make use of “mythological stories and legends” which allowed them to become “greatly respected and exerted a healthy influence on the men.” However, just as many British officers felt that chaplains were intellectually unstimulating for educated men, Thorat felt dissatisfied by the “Pundits, Granthis, or Maulvis” who were “authorised for units” because they possessed “little knowledge of the scriptures. Their sermons which I often attended were elementary.”

With little role in combatting “sedition,” postwar religious teachers returned to their roles as a mere “celebrants.” As one of the few spiritual amenities available to South Asian soldiers, however, they were respected for providing both entertainment and social community. For British troops, the low pay available for chaplains resulted in a shift in policy: emphasizing comfortable and moral spaces to foster interdenominational solidarity—and implicit racial exclusivity—among British troops. By contrast, the extremely low pay for South Asian religious teachers was on par with many other

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employment opportunities in British India. As a result, military officials leaned heavily on these men to carry out spiritual and social needs of their men, in lieu of the creature comforts that were becoming increasingly common for British soldiers.

In contrast to the decreasing attention paid to South Asian soldiers’ “religious” recreation, for British soldiers the type of work inspired by the Y.M.C.A. in wartime enabled such institutions to become common fixtures of military spaces for British soldiers in India after the war. The success of the non-military organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. inspired the disbandment of the Royal Army Temperance Association and its reallocation of funds to other services for soldiers. The true value of such institutions among interwar soldiers was rarely spiritual devotion, but socialization. William Homer recalled going horseback riding with one Anglo-Indian girl named Dorothy, whose father ran the Y.M.C.A. at Nainital and whose mother was Indian. Meanwhile, the Y.W.C.A. in Delhi often held dances, which became a good way to meet nurses and other British, Anglo-Indian, and Indian girls. Homer recalled fondly that he skated, rode horses, and “made love” with one girl named Kathleen Joy who was staying at the Y.W.C.A.475 Similarly, Charles Francis Crossland, who served briefly with the Royal Army Medical Corps in India during the 1920s, noted that the Y.M.C.A. was one of the only ways of meeting women. It was also a desirable place to spend some time because of their large collection of books.476 This bore a marked contrast to Thorat’s recollection that sports were one of the few ways that Indian men could hope to spend their time to the point that

475 William Homer, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 4 August 1976, Imperial War Museum Interview 792, Reel 10.
476 Charles Crossland, interviewed by Conrad Wood, 16 August 1976, Imperial War Museum Interview 797, Reel 4.
he avoided “the company of girls. In fact I rather shunned them.” Compared to the increasing recreational opportunities for British men in organizations such as the Y.M.C.A., which allowed British soldiers to dance or have care-free sex with girls, the segregationist impulses of “Indianization” encouraged sterile sobriety for Indian officers.

By the 1930s, some British soldiers tired of “religious” spaces because they had so many opportunities for recreation. Toco Mose Stevens, who served in the Signals Corps in the 1920s and 30s, recalled that the Sandes Soldiers’ homes in bigger stations such as Rawalpindi, Karachi, and Bombay provided prayer meetings, games, reading material, and writing material which helped soldiers pass the time and “got a lot of use.” The garrison theaters and reading rooms were also popular. The Salvation Army helped soldiers send letters home, sent cards to soldiers during the war and had tennis tournaments making many people remember it as “the most wonderful organization ever.” However, as William Homer recalled that by the 1930s the Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A. and Salvation Army were best for getting tea, a bun, and magazine, but by and large the “Practice of visiting it had gone” because “that’s the last place you’d go to, you see, no sensible soldier would go to the Salvation Army for a cup of tea and a…we’d got other things to do.” With plenty of “amenities,” and competing institutions for soldiers’ time and recreation, British soldiers relied less heavily on chaplains and religious organizations to find comfort, safety, and distraction. By contrast, the upwardly mobile pioneers of “Indianization” faced institutional sterility.

479 William Homer, IWM Interview, Reel 10.
The encouragement of comfortable and interdenominational spaces in which British soldiers could mingle with one another in a positive and healthy environment without worrying about doctrinal and ceremonial differences fully flowered after the war. This desire for all Christians to stand together strong as a symbol of the unity of British Christianity existed at a moment when anti-colonial sentiment was rising throughout the subcontinent, and when amenities enjoyed by South Asian soldiers during the war were being carefully scaled back. Interdenominational unity might help combat the physical evils of soldiers’ daily lives in India, and encourage the cultivation of comfortable spaces that would make their time overseas more enriching. It also underlined the inequality of military life between Britons and South Asians. Failure to maintain such services and amenities for South Asian soldiers after the war, alongside the continuing luxury for British soldiers, revealed the inherent inequality of British conceptions of “religion” in the postwar period.

**Marching to Church**

As comfort and recreation increased for British soldiers, some military officials wished to eliminate that which made Christianity “uncomfortable” for British men. This included questioning the utility of religious and military traditions such as the mandatory parade that compelled British soldiers to march to divine service. The church parade or “parade service” was a prominent symbol of British spiritual and martial performance in India. British soldiers, dressed in their finest and armed with weapons, caused what former British officer Thomas Nickalls called an “awful clatter” as they marched each week to receive the divine wisdom of the chaplain appointed to their particular military
Yet by the 1920s and 30s, many soldiers—and even some clergymen—believed that the tradition was an antiquated and cumbersome duty. Especially uncertain was how a symbol of Christian imperial unity would function as the Indian army became “Indianized” and South Asian men took a more overt role in the leadership of the armed forces.

Soldiers’ presence at the church parade was well-entrenched in colonial policy. The King’s Regulations stated that all officers and other ranks must attend “Divine service” by being marched to and from their places of worship under the charge of an N.C.O. of the same denomination. The Army Regulations maintained that they would do so “with arms” and the church pews had built-in notches to keep soldiers’ weapons in place during the service. Yet the real value of this ceremonial observance was not only encouraging Christianity among men, but having a periodic and performative symbol of empire. Toco Moses Stevens and William Homer, who served in India in the 1930s, recalled that soldiers marched armed to church because during 1857 uprising, mutineers attacked Christian worshipers in church. By having men march to church fully armed, it sent a message that military officials would not let the incident repeat itself. Therefore, twentieth century soldiers participated in the church parade as a means of reliving and

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482 About pews see Patrick Miles Pennington, Interviewed by Conrad Wood, Oral History 966, 17 August 1977, Reel 4.
483 Thomas Nickalls, Toco Moses Stevens and William Homer all recount near identical versions of this practice and its connection to 1857. All men went to India as part of the British army, rather than the Indian army, although Toco Moses Stevens eventually served with the Indian Signals Corps. Interview with Toco Moses Stevens, Interviewed by Conrad Wood, Oral History 776, Imperial War Museum, 14 June 1976, Reel 7; Interview with William Homer, Interviewed by Conrad Wood, Oral History 792, Imperial War Museum, 4 August 1976, Reel 8; Nickalls, IWM interview, 11 August 1977.
reproducing memories of the mutiny, through the physical ardor of marching to church: a
ceremonial display of imperial strength combining British Christian and martial
symbolism.

Despite the symbolic and ceremonial value of the parade, military and church
officials in the 1920s debated tirelessly about whether church parades exerted a positive
or harmful influence on the men. Since the mid-nineteenth century, officials built and
rebuilt of churches to accommodate soldiers who complained of the strain of marching
long distances to church in cumbersome dress, with rifles, in the sweltering Indian
heat. More damningly, this discomfort was even more acute for religious minorities,
who were often forbidden from using the conveniently located Anglican churches and
had to march instead to those located at a considerable distance from the barracks.

After the First World War, the availability of alternative, interdenominational religious
spaces made the church parade seem like an antiquated formality. On behalf of the
Anglican Bishops of India, the Metropolitan stated that “the strictness of the ceremonial
parade on Sunday mornings makes the parade service unpopular and to some extent
unprofitable.” While most Bishops conceded that the parade had considerable military
value, they noted that the whole enterprise was “burdensome to the men” especially “in
warm weather and in stations where the barracks are at a considerable distance from the

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484 Early in the twentieth century there were numerous discussions about adequately providing Wesleyan
and Presbyterian churches and services to avoid making these soldiers walk further in the heat to attend
mandatory church service. Letter from Government of India, Home (Ecclesiastical) Department, to the
Secretary of State for India (26 October 1899), IOR/L/PJ/6/536, File 679; See also from Reverend John
Godber, MA, Bishop’s Chaplain, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Army “Memorandum
submitted to the Army in India Committee by the Metropolitan in India and Ceylon on behalf of the
Anglican Bishops of the Province of India on the subject of the Moral and Religious Welfare of British
Troops in India” (8 January 1920), Army Department, file 197-239 (May 1921), NAI.
485 See for example from McNeill, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department (12
January 1920).
church.” Equally embarrassing, however, was that there was usually poor attendance from officers at parade services which “produces a bad effect on the minds of the men,” especially when “they are marched to church by a junior officer.”

William Homer, who served with a British battalion in India in the 1930s, recalled that church parade “always spoiled Sunday” and that “We all resented it.”

Despite Anglican skepticism about the utility of the church parade, clergymen of religious minorities found the practice more advantageous. The Reverend J.H.H. McNeill, Presidency Senior Chaplain, Church of Scotland, Madras, stated that he supported Parade Services but believed that “long formal parades in preparation for marching off to church, should be done away with as far as possible.” Echoing the debates about the inequality of religious minorities’ access to church spaces, he complained that during the hot weather “concession as regards coolness of dress would make these services more acceptable to the men.” The Reverend Andrew Macfarlane, another Senior Chaplain of the Church of Scotland, celebrated the parade as “One of the main opportunities which a chaplain has in influencing men both from the moral and spiritual standpoint.” Doing so was important because “if he misconducts himself, is unchaste or drunken or insubordinate, he is injuring not merely himself, but also doing that which injures his regiment and even the Army itself.”

Reverend A.E.J. Kenealy, the Catholic Archbishop of Simla, similarly supported the mandatory parade service because “the individual and the nation recognise the duty of publicly worshipping God,

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486 Memorandum from Godber to the Secretary to the Government of India (8 Jan 1920).
487 Homer, IWM Interview, Reel 8.
488 Reverend Andrew Macfarlane, B.D., Senior Chaplain of the Church of Scotland, Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, Views and suggestions on the subject of the Moral and Religious Welfare of British Troops in India, nd., Army Department (May 1921), file 197-239, NAI.
so ought also the regimental body corporate.”\textsuperscript{489} Catholic chaplain A.M. Correya merely opposed the term “compulsory” with regard to the church parade since “The word is irritating to soldiers generally.”\textsuperscript{490} Some Anglican chaplains, such as Reverend Dr. McKelvie and the Venerable G.C.A. Smith agreed, feeling that “True there is a lot of grousing about it; but if the grousing be analysed it will be found that the complaint is not against the service in church but against the long kit inspection and parade which precedes it.” In 1928 McKelvie and Smith argued fervently for the continued relevance of the ceremony, stating that “Parade Service is an official acknowledgment to Almighty God that as a Nation and Empire we believe in Him. Such an official acknowledgment is indeed our bounden duty and service and is even more necessary in India than elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{491}

The mandatory church parade represented a performance of martial Christianity, forcing soldiers to come together and listen to the words of a chaplain, and bringing devotion into the purview of military duty. The church parade therefore represented both the forced sense of community and togetherness, and the tensions of a white colonial community ensuring its strength and unity. It was a triumph over the limiting physicality of India and the tendency of service—military or ecclesiastical—to feel isolating and disconnected from the rest of the world. It was a spectacle wherein the men served their bodies to the will of God, King, country, and empire.

\textsuperscript{489} Letter from the Most Reverend A.E.J. Kenealy, D.D. Catholic Archbishop of Simla, to Lieutenant Colonel A. Shairp, Additional Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department, (12 January 1920), Army Department (May 1921), file 197-239, NAI.
\textsuperscript{490} Letter from Reverend Father A.M. Correya, Dagshai, to Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department (17 January 1920), Army Department (May 1921), file 197-239, NAI.
Marching to Temple, Mosque and Gurdwara

The symbolic value of church parade for British soldiers endured due to its ability to act as a performance of national, imperial, and Christian unity, rather than for its value for the faith of individual British soldiers. In thinking about how best to “Indianize” the Indian Army, however, military officials viewed such rigid performances of spiritual duty as a means of turning Indian men from potentially seditious and unreliable “sepoys” into Indian officers loyal and capable enough to participate in the new global-imperial order. Just as British officials imitated the use of chaplains in encouraging “religious teachers,” “church” parades for South Asian soldiers became a way of using religious diversity as a spectacle of imperial loyalty.

As seen earlier, one of the chief means of preparing Indian men to become fully commissioned Indian officers was through the introduction of military colleges which gave boys a foundational education so that they could enter a military academy. In addition to giving young men rigorous grounding in English styles of diet, education, and military discipline, military colleges also prepared them to pray like an officer. When asked about the spiritual provisions for boys by the committee enquiring into the progress of Indian cadets at the military academy at Sandhurst, Lt. Col. H.L. Haughton, Commandant of the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College, replied that there was “a Sikh teacher, a Maulvi and a Pandit. There is a Gurdwara, a mosque and a temple. Every Friday afternoon is given over to religious instruction.”

Edwin John Watson,

492 Indian Sandhurst Committee, Volume II. Evidence (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch 1926), IOR/26/280/13. In the evidence given to the Indian Sandhurst Committee in 1926, which investigated the current progress of Indian cadets at the British Military Academy, Nawab Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum asked Lt. Col. H.L. Haughton, Commandant of the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College, whether there was religious training for those boys hoping to enter Indian Military Academies and become officers.
former president of the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College, remembered that they were “paraded by religions” and then “marched off to their various temples, the Sikhs to the gurdwara, and the Hindus to the temple and the Muslims to the mosque.” The disciplined precision, and logistical diversity, of incorporating religious difference into standardized military procedure, directly mirrored the church parade for British men. Of course, South Asian soldiers lacked the “interfaith” spaces that had become commonplace for British Christians, making their institutional performances of “religion” deeply segregated.

In addition to marching to their “various temples” while receiving preliminary military education and training at the Royal Military Colleges, South Asian men in the Army had opportunities to make their own imprint on Christian religious ceremony. Brigadier Sukhwant Singh recalled that following his graduation from the Indian Military Academy, he was attached temporarily to the 2nd Welch and “on a couple of occasions I marched the troops to the Church and listened to their prayers.” He added however that “I regularly attended my own prayers at Gurdwara Mai Than” in Agra. By placing his own “prayers” at Gurdwara Mai Than in conversation with the “prayers” associated with the church parade, Brigadier Sukhwant Singh suggests that each ceremony had the same relative value for the men who participated in them. However, compared to the disdain expressed by many British men toward the church parade, Sukhwant Singh recognized the church parade as merely another military duty, noting carefully that he sought his own spiritual fulfillment at a nearby gurdwara. His presence in a Christian-military space,

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cultivated to recall memories of 1857 and warn would-be mutineers, signals that some South Asian martial men were trusted and included enough to perform loyalty and devotion. It also demonstrated that the de facto racial segregation of interdenominational unity that failed to extend to South Asians prior to the First World War finally found a place of inclusion. Of course, inclusion could only be granted when South Asian men of the British Indian Army fully performed the cultural symbols of a white, British, Christian Empire.

The presence of South Asian men in one of the most impressive performances of martial Christianity raised questions about the status of Christianity within the empire. One young officer, Jazwan Singh, used the considerable downtime before the parades to get to know the enlisted British men of his regiment—a far cry from the absentee British officers whom clergymen deplored. Indian officer Dinesh Chandra Misra believed that participating in the Church parade was an opportunity to demonstrate his martial superiority to British soldiers. According Misra, a self-avowed Brahman, his regular and voluntary participation in the weekly parade caused some confusion. His regular and steadfast attendance inspired the commanding officer to declare that he wished “my countrymen, young officers, would be as devout Christians as you are.” On the eve of the Second World War, therefore, South Asian men were capable of outperforming British soldiers at being Christian. While British soldiers lamented cumbersome duty of church parades, South Asian men saw this martial devotion as a means of demonstrating

495 This is according to William Homer, who served with the 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers in India. Homer, IWM Interview, Reel 3.
that they were disciplined, strong, and capable men, worthy of leading the nation in the armed forces.

While both military and ecclesiastical authorities recognized the limitations of the church parade on the spiritual welfare of British soldiers, they endured, demonstrating the inconvenient realities of British soldiers’ physical, martial, and spiritual inadequacy compared to the Indian men they were meant to lead. By adopting the church parade model to the Indian officer corps, the army revealed that imperial rule in India depended not only on the ceremonial displays of unity for British troops, but in using South Asian spiritual devotion to serve military discipline. The hope, perhaps, was that events such as the church parade might dull religious impulses in South Asian soldiers as it had done for British—making them associate religious devotion with a ceremonial obligation, confined to particular spaces and ceremonial duties. The act of worship was burdened by stuffy uniforms, erect posture, and military discipline, and therefore not something men would want to spend their time doing recreationally. This would free them from the clutches of the much feared, if numerically rare, “fanatics.” Their “religious” beliefs were being mobilized as a symbol of loyalty, and devotion, to the empire. Even though British Christian soldiers were divided into separate denominations, and South Asian soldiers into separate “religions”—their marches to prayer were acts of unity symbolizing their devoted commitment to faith, empire, and military service.

**Conclusions**

Prior to the First World War, “religion” was something military officials used as a tool to regulate and control British soldiers’ bodies, and something that was treated with a degree of apprehension among South Asian men. The threat of anti-colonial “sedition”
inspired a shift in policy: religious allies, militarily funded religious leaders, and spaces and ceremonies became a standard-issue as part of army life and duty. It was a documented category, like name, age, and family relations that brought bureaucratic order and discipline to seemingly uncontrollable beliefs.

For British chaplains, a great deal of their religious duties involved desperately finding ways for British soldiers to be as comfortable and engaged as possible, and making chaplains seem both accessible and worthy of admiration. For South Asian soldiers, however, military discipline encouraged finding strategies to make them stop listening to the multitude of voices around them—by issuing the Fauji Akbar and sympathetic pamphlets, or marching them to carefully selected “religious” spaces. “Religious teachers” were intended to be a first line of defense against “sedition,” and thus at times acted as agents of surveillance. At the same time, soldiers could turn to these men for entertainment through myths and legends, or to settle disputes about conducting their own services overseas. When men’s minds had already been “infected,” military officials would seek out “religious” leaders to give a definitive written statement that would undermine alternative beliefs and traditions inconvenient for military order.

The policy on religious teachers demonstrated that by the twentieth century, military leaders recognized the utility of creating a corps of “religious” allies in the image of Christian chaplains. By intervening in South Asian “religious” practice only when it affected soldiers’ abilities to be loyal or disloyal, military officials created few amenities and social opportunities for Indian soldiers. Compared to the multitude of spiritually-sanctioned recreation, comforts, and companionship possible for British men, increasing institutional reliance on figures such as “religious teachers” left South Asian soldiers to
associate military service with stark sterility. By contrast, increasing civilian interest in British soldiers made service in India more pleasant and devotion less centralized beneath military authority. This made the interdenominational fractures that plagued the army in the early twentieth century become less meaningful, especially as they combatted anti-colonial “religious” nationalism among South Asian troops.

By wedding certain manifestations of ethics and morality to the military, and praising symbolic ceremonial movement—such as the march to mosque and gurdwara—the military prized men of spiritual action, unafraid to stand up for and define the symbols and power of spiritual belief. In so doing, it glorified certain beliefs and practices as inherently “moral” and “martial.” As the next chapter will explore, this was a powerful symbolic message for the Sikh community. Military authorities and South Asian nationalists both attempted to redefine what it meant to be a “Sikh” through access to and control over spiritual spaces and symbols. Yet colonial officials often failed to account for the potential challenges of glorifying certain expressions of martial prowess and spiritual devotion that could not be fully controlled.
Chapter Four

The Size of the Spiritual Sword

Attempts to carve out or maintain a “loyal” base of soldiers meant that military officials not only relied on “religious” leaders and ceremonial control, but on redefining texts, symbols, and practices in ways that split communities and created internal conflicts. British rule in India famously made use of the “divide and rule” concept—hardening distinctions among “religious” communities to foment internal disorder and prevent anti-colonial unity. Yet this method of governance also infiltrated and divided communities amongst themselves. In the case of the Sikh community, military officials not only hoped to separate them as categorically distinct from “Hindus” but to distinguish those “loyal” Sikhs thought to be most conducive to military service, and those “disloyal” Sikhs “corrupted” by “Hindu” anti-colonial influence. British officials used concepts of masculinity and emasculation to distinguish the loyal from the disloyal, fueled in part by the perceived sexual desirability of militant Sikh men. By contrast, Sikh narratives of religious change wrote and rewrote histories of the community back to Guru Gobind Singh to define the community outside of the parameters of colonialism. Both relied upon the symbolic power of the Sikh *kirpan*—a sword marking the loyal followers of the Guru’s militant Khalsa sect. Both sides debated who earned the right to be called a Sikh until 1925 when official legislation defined belonging or not belonging. The fractures and fault lines of these contending visions set up the instability and violence of the 1930s and 40s.

This chapter builds on scholarship that explores how “religion” was as a category of imperial bureaucracy that demarcated legal and economic privileges in British India. It
focuses on the “kirpan,” an object described at various moments in time by Sikh scholars and British officials as everything from a sword, dagger, pin, and memento, worn by Sikhs initiated into the Khalsa warrior community. By focusing on a material object that, to British observers, carried a great deal of secular meaning as well as helped define Sikhs as a “religious” community, this chapter asks new questions about how physical objects were instrumental in defining what was “religious,” “martial,” and masculine.

After the First World War, soldiers carried their pre- and post-war expectations back to an economically and politically fragmented imperial space. As Leela Gandhi has recently argued, South Asian soldiers understood their wartime suffering and self-sacrifice as a form of nobility that helped them cope with and rationalize their wartime experiences.⁴⁹⁷ Many active and former soldiers mobilized their wartime glorification of suffering into postwar activism. They encountered British men, and a colonial state, who, as Susan Kent has argued, carried the collective trauma of the First World War across the imperial world and deployed excessive violence.⁴⁹⁸ British soldiers and officials hoped to undermine martial activism by challenging activists not only through violence, but also through carefully calculated emasculation, in an attempt to deprive suffering inflicted by the imperial state of its “nobility.”

The kirpan occupied the shaky symbolic terrain between British understandings of Sikhs as loyal soldiers of empire and a potential challenge to the British Empire’s monopoly over violence. Examining how martial symbols and actions were given or stripped of legitimacy in the first decades of the twentieth century goes beyond the

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familiar story of the “Martial Races”—which acknowledges that British officials affixed meaning to region, ethnicity and “religious” beliefs to define which groups were “martial.” Sikh soldiers were active players in the redefinition of imperial policy, in part through their ability to manage, reclaim or appropriate martial codes. Military officials were often on the frontlines of demarcating racial and martial boundaries that helped the army—and empire—function as effectively as possible. Yet the actions and countermeasures of the South Asian population constantly surprised and confounded British officials. *Kirpans* were central to the negotiation of postwar order and South Asian militancy among the British Empire, the Punjab province, and the Sikh community, globalizing understandings of power and masculinity.

**Defining Sikhs before 1900**

As Arvind-Pal S. Mandair has argued, defining Sikh “religion” was critical to the formulation of imperial rule in Punjab. It demarcated Sikh difference from “Hindu” India, and ensured that the practitioners of the “Sikh religion” could never fully assimilate to British rule. British and Sikh narratives of the Sikh community located their origins as followers of Guru Nanak Chand born in Lahore in 1469. The name “Sikhs” meant “disciples.”\footnote{Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 183.} British officials tended to regard Sikhism through a reformist or “protestant” framework in relation to “Hinduism” by emphasizing the rejection of caste, idolatry, Brahman authority, child marriage, infanticide and pilgrimages. It was under the leadership of the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, when “Sikh” began to carry martial connotations. Guru Gobind Singh created a military fraternity known as Khalsa, or the “pure,” in 1699. Khalsa Sikhs distinguished themselves as loyal followers of the Guru
through various distinguishing markers. Over the next few centuries, five markers of identity (the “5 K’s”) became most associated with the Khalsa: uncut hair (kes), comb (kanga), steel bracelet (kara), the kirpan, and a short undergarment (kachha). Khalsa Sikhs grew as a military force by attempting to preserve territory and authority from Mughal forces and local rulers of the Punjab hills. Over time they borrowed from martial cultural patterns from Jat and aristocratic Rajput and Mughal courts. Khalsa Sikhs remained a numerical minority of around 10 percent in Punjab but became the dominant political power by the mid-eighteenth century. They captured Lahore—the former Mughal capital of Punjab—in 1799, and became an imperial force by the early nineteenth century. This rapid rise to power—and elite warrior culture—caught the eye of East India Company armies and would shape subsequent definitions of “Sikhs” who were or were not part of the Khalsa elect.\(^{500}\)

After the second Anglo-Sikh war (1848-49) East India Company officials annexed the Punjab (1849), and the Board of Administration governing the province raised five regiments of infantry and cavalry from the former Khalsa Army to take advantage of their martial prowess. By 1853 governing power in Punjab passed to John Lawrence, the first Chief Commissioner, who headed local administration and the Punjab Frontier Force. Although the number of Sikhs were initially restricted to 200 in infantry and 100 in cavalry, they rose rapidly to 23,000 at the outbreak of the Uprising of 1857.\(^{501}\)

When Lawrence’s troops rushed to the aid of besieged British and South Asian forces, Sikhs gained special prominence in narratives of imperial power.

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As British forces consolidated power over Punjab, British administrators employed an ever-shifting language of tribes, caste, and race to describe and influence social, economic and political organization in Punjab. Many Punjabis negotiated the incursion of British power by acting as intermediaries or using certain labels to gain access to land and employment, including military service. After 1857 British officials hoped to reward the loyal and disarm those thought to be categorically disloyal, creating a landed elite who would maintain law and order, and an increasing number of groups excluded from imperial privilege. British imperial officials found it advantageous to describe and define Sikhs through the Khalsa’s history of sovereignty over Punjab, which marked them as different and distinct from Indian “Hindus.” This helped fortify a foundational imperial myth that dramatically affected the Punjab province: 1) that India was inherently “religious” and 2) that the inhabitants of Punjab were less “bigoted” than their counterparts in the subcontinent. With the rise of the Indian National Congress in the 1880s and 1890s, British officials countered Congress influence in Punjab by cultivating political support from landowners who felt isolated by the Hindu-dominated congress. The colonial state assigned land to military figures, prominent local men, and key institutions of the Sikh faith to gain loyalty.

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502 Ibid., 50.
The systematic representation of Sikhs as martial fully flowered under the leadership of Commander-in-Chief Frederick Roberts in 1885. The 1881 Punjab census gave an ethnographic framework to describe different South Asian “types” and erected often arbitrary distinctions between Indian communities. In 1882 Roberts, commanding the Madras army, suggested that people of south and west of India lacked courage and possessed inferior physiques but asserted that Dogras, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Rajputs and Pathans were natural fighters. After becoming Commander-in-Chief of the army in 1885 he coined the term “martial races” in 1890. Others, such as Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab Sir Michael O’Dwyer, maintained that, like their heavily recruited Celtic counterparts, Sikh soldiers fought for sheer love of fighting. The Army Handbook for Sikhs, published 1899 by A.H. Bingley, noted certain differences within the Sikh community, attaching martial value to some Sikhs but not others. For example, he condemned Sikh Brahmans for having caste prejudices, urban Sikh Khatris for being reluctant to take the plough, and low caste Sikh Mazbhis for supposed criminality. Bingley celebrated rural Sikh Jats as the best recruiting material for their physical prowess and indifference to Brahman dietary restrictions. Hence, the “Martial Races” built upon categorizations that evaluated physical features and propensity to bravery and loyalty by building upon pre-existing social groups fixed by the census. These military impressions laid the foundation for early twentieth century understandings of what it

511 Gajendra Singh, Testimonies, 29.
meant to be a “Sikh,” shaping which men could take advantage of financial and employment opportunities, and which would be debarred from further advancement.

Like British military officials, some Sikh reformers found it advantageous to define and demarcate Sikh difference from other communities. This was in part a response to increasing Christian missionary presence in Punjab and efforts of reformist organizations such as the Arya Samaj to convert or “reclaim” Sikhs and Muslims as Hindus.\footnote{Ibid., 190, 193-4; Maia Ramnath, \textit{Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 18.} Arya Samaj leader Swami Dayanand criticized Sikhs, Christians and Muslim for departing from “Indian” traditions.\footnote{J.S. Grewal, \textit{History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition} (Oxford University Press, 2012), 294.} In 1873, a Singh Sabha, which attempted to spread Sikh beliefs, history, and culture through literature and education, was founded in Amritsar. Two years after the foundation of the Arya Samaj in Lahore a Singh Sabha was founded there in 1879 and was equally militant, leading to several scandals and disturbances.\footnote{Ibid., 295.} By 1899 there were 121 Singh Sabhas in Punjab. The Tat (True) Khalsa, founded in 1899, underlined the importance of warrior Sikhs and the five markers of identity, including wearing the kirpan.\footnote{Ibid., 295.} Bhai Kahn Singh’s \textit{Ham Hindū Nahīn} (We are not Hindu) published in Devanagri (Hindi) in 1897, Gurmukhi (Punjabi) in 1898, and English in 1899, promoted the concerns of the Singh Sabhas by defining a Sikh identity to a multi-linguistic and multi-faith audience. He argued that Sikhs had their own scripture—in the form of the Guru Granth Sahib—and were defined as distinct from both Hindus and Muslims in the Adi Granth. He became closely associated with the Khalsa College of Amritsar and with former civil serviceman and leading British Sikh scholar

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\footnote{Yong, \textit{The Garrison State}, 193-194.}\
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Max Arthur Macauliffe. By 1920 Ham Hindū Nahīn was in its fifth edition and became one of the leading Sikh publications of the early twentieth century, influencing even the Maharaja of Nabha. Although arguments and expressions of distinct “Sikh” identities had existed since the sixteenth century, the terms “Khalsa” and “Sikh” became interchangeable as they never had been in the pre-colonial era.517 This further equated the kirpan with institutional understandings of “Sikh” identity.518

By the early twentieth century, British officials had spent decades defining and integrating Sikhs into the imperial military establishment. According to Lord Kitchener, the army created class regiments, companies and battalions to help Sikhs “keep up the purity of their religion,” as defined by military authorities and civil servicemen. He praised the Imperial Service Troops for maintaining “the purity of Sikhism” in Sikh States such as Nabha and Patiala, where “the observance of strict Sikh tenets is now insisted on.”519 Macauliffe maintained that Sikhism held military value because it “inculcates loyalty, gratitude for all favors received, philanthropy, justice, impartiality, truth, honesty, and all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest Christians. It would be difficult to point to a more comprehensive ethical code.”520 Such enthusiasm meant that a prospective Sikh soldiers’ ability to perform the “5 K’s” became a prerequisite for employment. This encouragement of “pure” Sikh beliefs, defined largely by the Khalsa warrior community, helped to increase the number of Sikhs in the army

517 Grewal, History, Literature, and Identity, 275-276, 278-279, 293; Dhavan, When Sparrows Became Hawks, 12.
518 About the role of Sikh adornment in cultivating regimental pride, see Yong, Garrison State, 192-3.
from 19,000 in 1887 to between thirty and forty thousand in 1903. In 1893, Sikh representation in the army stood at about 18%. Between 1912 and the First World War, they increased to between twenty and thirty percent, even though Sikhs made up less than one percent of India’s total population.

Instability and Unrest

By the late nineteenth century, the Punjab was one of the army’s most important areas of recruitment as well as an agricultural center and space of social engineering. This helped make Punjabi soldiers critical to the security and profitability of colonial India. To maintain a strong rural base, British administrators in Punjab planned canals, roads and railroads to reclaim desert land in western Punjab. British officials gave pensioned soldiers land grants in the so-called Punjab “canal colonies.” Signaling the importance of the military in the organization and leadership of the region, the Chenab Colony’s villages were named after regimental heroes including Fanepur after the 19th Lancers, Fane’s Horse, Rattrayabad after 45th Rattray’s Sikhs and Hodsonabad after 9th Hodson’s Horse. Despite this optimistic military engineering of Punjab as a disciplined agricultural paradise and buffer zone for India’s frontier, the twentieth century witnessed unanticipated unrest and turmoil throughout the province.

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525 Gajendra Singh, *Testimonies*, 27; See also *Gazetteer of Chenab Colony*, vol. 31A, 1904 (Lahore: Civil and Military Press, 1907).
At the turn of the twentieth century there were signs that Punjab generally, and Sikhs in particular, might revolt against British power. In the 1880s, missionaries warned British officials that Sikhs in Punjab were behaving disrespectfully. When Dalip Singh, the last and exiled Maharaja of Punjab, threatened to stir revolution in the army in 1887, commanding officers assured military officials that the troops would remain loyal. Unlike 1857, there was no large, unemployed populations in Punjab to join the revolt, and Sikh “priests” were satisfied with the spread of Sikh beliefs under British rule and would not help spread dissatisfaction. By the early twentieth century, however, several agricultural and legal modifications to the governance of Punjab contributed to widespread unrest in the province. The 1901 Alienation of Land Act restricted transfer of land from “traditional” landowning groups which made it more difficult for some low-caste populations, including many Sikhs, to access land. It attempted to prevent landowners from mortgaging or selling land to moneylenders but instead created a scramble to prove lineages in the category of “agricultural tribe.” Additionally, as discussed in the first chapter, the 1906 Colonization Bill and Bari Doab canal scheme increased water rates 25% and routed resources away from local control for the British commodity market. This came after widespread destruction of crops in 1905 and 1906 by boll worms. The province also suffered greatly from plague between 1904 and 1914, accounting for approximately 36% of the total 5.5 million lost in India, despite having only 1/13th of India’s total population. The immense government efforts to control and

530 “Memorandum on the Moral and Material Progress in the Punjab During the Years 1901-02 to 1911-12” (Lahore: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab: 1914), file 1188 Z/281, PSA.
stabilize Punjab economy and society through military patronage, social engineering, and colonization compared unfavorably to the on-the-ground hardships that many Punjabis faced in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The difficulty of life in Punjab encouraged many Punjabis to look for opportunities outside of India. Growing checks to Asian immigration into the United States and Canada restricted them to seeking opportunities in British imperial service. This contributed to hostility among many Sikh soldiers and civilians who felt that their imperial services and sacrifices were being usurped without reward. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sikh men stationed as soldiers and police officers in imperial outposts were on the front lines of international revolutionary networking. The participation of Indian troops in the Chinese and Boer Wars, the partition of the Bengal province in 1905, and the publication of V.D. Savarkar’s *Indian War of Independence*, which valorized the events of 1857, provided fuel for revolutionary discontent. In 1907 and 1908, Jat Sikh leader Ajit Singh encouraged Sikh soldiers to revolt through an extensive campaign of publishing and public speaking.\(^\text{531}\) Military officials could not help but notice that unrest centered on Manjha region of the Punjab—the army’s main recruiting ground for Jat Sikhs.\(^\text{532}\)

Military officials grew especially weary of the apparent influence that the reformist organization Arya Samaj had on Sikh soldiers. In this period the Arya Samaj reacted harshly to Christian incursions in Punjab and encouraged the “purification” of Hinduism. It appealed to young Sikh military men who valued its encouragement of

\(^{531}\) Director of Criminal Intelligence, Daily Report, (20 July 1907) Home Political Department (August 1907), file 5-90 B, NAI.

\(^{532}\) Yong, *Garrison State*, 95.
sexual discipline and celibacy as a means to restoring martial masculinity.\footnote{Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, Lloyd L. Rudolph and Mohan Singh Kanota, eds. Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh’s Diary, A Colonial Subject’s Narrative of Imperial India (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 91; Malavika Kasturi, “‘Asceticising’ Monastic Families: Ascetic Genealogies, Property Feuds and Anglo-Hindu Law in Late Colonial India” Modern Asian Studies 43, 5 (2009): 1080; Charu Gupta, “Anxious Hindu Masculinity in Colonial North India: Shuddhi and Sangathan Movements” Cross Currents 61, no. 4 (December 2011).} When military officials found a Reservist sepoy of the 47\textsuperscript{th} Sikhs named Lakha Singh preaching in the lines of 32\textsuperscript{nd} Lancers at the Sialkot Cantonment in 1907, they worried about his association with a “school of new Sikhism which is encouraged by the Singh Sabhas and which owes something to the example as well as to the teaching of the Arya Samaj.”\footnote{Director Criminal Intelligence, Weekly Report, (9 November 1907), Home Political Department (December 1907), file 2-9 B, NAI.} The Superintendent of Police in Bannu reported in May 1907 that Sikh sepoys in the city attended Arya Samaj meetings and openly expressed their disdain for the Government.\footnote{“Endeavours of Sikh Sepoys to Spread Sedition,” (26 June 1907), Home (Political) ‘A’ Pros(s), file 113, (August 1907), NAI.} Kirpal Singh, the regimental granthi of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Punjabis, was recalled from leave when the rumor surfaced that he visited an Arya Mandir (Arya temple).\footnote{Director, Criminal Intelligence, Weekly reports (4 October 1907), Home (Political), pros. 459/II & k.w., 1922, NAI.} In 1907, two sepoys and Arya Samaj members were suspected of attempting to incite men of the 45\textsuperscript{th} Sikhs at Peshawar against Government.\footnote{“Endeavours of Sikh Sepoys to Spread Sedition,” (26 June 1907).} Facing the possibility of another 1857-level revolt, British officials believed that arresting Arya Samaj leader Lajpat Rai and Jat Sikh activist Ajit Singh would help quell the distress among Sikh soldiers, but this instead intensified Sikh agitation and hostility.\footnote{Director of Criminal Intelligence, Daily Report, (6 July 1907); Yong, Garrison State, 95.} A meeting of Sikh zamindars in Lyallpur urged all men to contact their relations in the army, start petitions for the release of Lajpat Rai, and give their European officers “trouble” until their demands were met.\footnote{“Daily report on the state of political agitation in the Punjab,” (5 July 1907) Home (Political), August 1907, 5-90 B, NAI.}
For imperial officials, a disturbing element of early twentieth century unrest was the possibility of unity across communities. Sikh enthusiasm for the Arya Samaj confounded British officials who felt that Sikh soldiers would not, or should not, have interest in a “Hindu” organization, despite the shared linguistic and regional heritage among Punjabis. Similarly, many British officials assumed that since the rise of the Khalsa occurred in part as a struggle against the Mughal Empire, Sikhs would be inherently anti-Muslim. This imperial understanding of community difference ignored the fact that despite isolated incidents of violence in the nineteenth century, Sikh and Muslim communities had coexisted and collaborated in Punjab since the rise of the Khalsa.  

Military officials prior to the First World War feared that militant extremists would join forces across faiths and overthrow the British government, reviving the violence of 1857. A special branch report from June 1907 stated that two Sikh sepoys visited Mulla Tirahi’s mosque in Kissa Khani Bazar, Peshawar, and expressed that the Sikhs were waiting for Muslims to join them and urged them get the Amir of Afghanistan to send forces from Kabul against the British. Around the same time a “seditious leaflet” addressed to Indian “sepoys” appeared in the D.A.V. and Islamia Colleges of Lahore. It called for “Sikhs and Pathans” to rise up, declaring “You were once lions and have now become jackals. Rise! The country, your motherland, has hopelessly fallen into the hands of the enemy.”

One method of dismantling inter-community solidarity was by diverting unrest into questions about community representation in legislative politics. Lord Minto

540 Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows became Hawks.*
541 Special branch report, (7 June 1907) Home (Political) A, file number 113 (August 1907), NAI.
542 Director of Criminal Intelligence, Weekly Report, (4 January 1908), Home Department, Political, (January 1908), file 111-118 B, NAI.
proposed communal representation in 1906 and brought it into effect for Muslims in the Morely-Minto Reforms of 1909. Muslims validated their separate representation by claiming that they had earned it through their loyalty to the empire, compared to “Hindu” activists such as the Arya Samaj. This inspired Sikh writers, such as the editor of Khalsa Advocate, to affirm the loyalty of the Sikh community and their significant contributions to the government as soldiers and agricultural laborers. Between 1909 and 1919, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim aristocratic leaders and professionals competed to demonstrate their loyalty to the British while engaging in contemptuous debates with one another. On the eve of the First World War, the Punjab was torn by latent agrarian and communal unrest, repressive government measures, and elite leadership preoccupied with proving their loyalty.543

**Kirpans in the Early Twentieth Century**

Against a backdrop of contested economic and social demands in Punjab, the changing meanings and representations of the *kirpan* signaled the tenuous balance between loyalty and revolution within the Sikh community, the Punjab province, and South Asia. Several images reproduced in British military handbooks after the 1890s depicted Sikh men of the eighteenth century Khalsa Empire carrying long swords.544 However, military officials acknowledged that after the annexation of Punjab in the mid-nineteenth century, the *kirpan* reduced dramatically from long swords to “a miniature 1 or 2 inches in length.”545 Sikh scholar and activist Teja Singh, who stepped down from

545 Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, “Note on the Sikh question in the Punjab, 1919-1922,” Home, File No. 31, (June 1922), Home Department Proceedings, PSA.
the Khalsa College after the First World War, believed that East India Company used the *kirpan* to inflict deliberate humiliation. He described officials forcing the defeated Sikh armies to “pile their arms at the feet of Sir Walter Gilbert. How reluctantly each soldier came forward and, embracing his sword, uttered a groan, deep and long, and placed it on the pile in tears.”

By the late nineteenth century, when Sikh soldiers were widely recruited in the British Indian Army, *kirpans* grew slightly, becoming ordinarily worn “in miniature” around “2 or 3 inches in length.” Such miniatures were even handed out as souvenirs at the renowned Golden Temple of Amritsar, which was managed by Government-appointed officials.

For both British officials and Sikh scholars, the size of the *kirpan* was directly tied to perceptions of Sikh power.

Within the army, the *kirpan* was a significant ceremonial tool that exceeded its potentially threatening nature. One former regimental recruiting officer admitted that when he found young men claiming to be Sikhs who did not wear the five external markers of identity, “These recruits were subsequently put through a course of instruction & made to take the ‘Pahul.’”

The army’s handbook on Sikhs described the “pahul” ceremony as “the drinking, in the presence of five believers, of a mixture of sugar and water which has been stirred by a steel dagger, [kirpan] the baptismal fluid being known

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547 Shaikh Asghar Ali, CBE, ICS, Home Secretary to Government to All Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab (9 February 1921), file 885/17, West Bengal State Archives, henceforth WBSA.
549 Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, “Question whether students who solemnly affirm themselves to be Sikhs but do not wear the prominent symbol (keshas) can be admitted to the K.E. In. College, Lahore, as Sikh Students,” Home: Medical 5796/71, file 48 B (1924), PSA.
as ‘Amrit.’”\textsuperscript{550} British officers valued this ceremony because it required eating “out of a vessel in common with others who are going through the ceremony, thereby professing to break through caste prejudices.”\textsuperscript{551} By 1923, the Honorary Secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in Amritsar agreed with such stringency, arguing that the Military Department should only admit men into the army as Sikhs who wear “the apparent emblem of Sikhism that of wearing keshas, long hairs, and a beard along with the four emblems enjoined on a Sikh to be always worn.”\textsuperscript{552} Thus, Sikhs were permitted to carry the \textit{kirpan} along with performing the other markers of identity because it helped to define them as separate from “Hindus.”

The military encouragement of Sikh soldiers to carry non-military weapons is striking due the fact that the Indian Arms Act of 1878 banned the possession of arms by those without a government license, in practice debarring many South Asian men and women from bearing arms.\textsuperscript{553} By 1885, Bengali men struggled for the right to bear arms in the Native Volunteer Movement, claiming that an inability to do so was emasculating.\textsuperscript{554} By the early twentieth century, the inherent contradiction between official policy and Sikh exceptionalism came into sharp view when officials realized that \textit{kirpans} were being manufactured by Muslim proprietors. In 1912, the Deputy

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{550} Major A.E. Barstow, 2/11\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Regiment (late 15\textsuperscript{th} Ludhiana Sikhs), \textit{Handbooks for the Indian Army, Sikhs: Revised at the Request of the Government of India} (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publications Branch, 1928), 8.
\item \textsuperscript{551} \textit{Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India} (London: Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office and Harrison and Sons, 1932), 66.
\item \textsuperscript{552} Copy of a letter from Honorary Secretary, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar to the Principal King Edward Medical College, Lahore (7 August 1923), Home: Medical 5796/71, file 48 B (1924), PSA.
\item \textsuperscript{554} Mrinalini Sinha, \textit{Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 4, 17, 21-23.
\end{itemize}
Commissioner at Campbellpore observed nervously that Fazal Ahmad, a Muslim at Bhera, was manufacturing ornamental daggers but was claiming that they were *kirpans*. The Commissioner worried that “These daggers appear to be used by Sikhs in religious ceremonies but any one whether Sikh or Musalman can obtain them.”

In 1913 the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar described an unlicensed arms dealer found in possession of four daggers who claimed that “these articles were not daggers within the meaning of the Arms Act, but *kirpans*, and were intended to be used at Sikh initiation ceremonies for the purpose of marking the sacred food.”

Government fears about inter-communal solidarity were manifesting in an unexpected way: around an object that military officials associated with cultivating loyalty among Sikh soldiers and distinguishing them “religiously” from other South Asian communities. As a material object, however, the *kirpan* could pass from Muslim to Sikh hands, making it Muslim neighbors and colleagues, rather than British authorities, that gave Sikhs this implicitly exceptional status to bear arms.

When British officials reached out to Sikh community leaders for comment on the apparently growing visibility of *kirpans*, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the main lobby for Sikhs in the first decades of the twentieth century, confirmed that they were used in ceremonies, such as the taking of *amrit* during the *pahul*, and were permissible if they were less than 12 inches.

Moving forward with this unofficial definition, police arrested one Baba Nihal Singh Nihang in Amritsar for wearing a large *kirpan* in 1913,

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555 From F.H. Burton, ICS, Deputy Commissioner, Attock Division, at Campbellpore to the Commissioner, Rawalpindi Division (25 June 1913) file number 41 (1914), PSA.
556 From C.M. King, ICS, Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, to Commissioner, Lahore Division (2 July 1913), file number 41 (1914), PSA.
which incited a riot. As a result, Sikh organizations such as the Khalsa Youngman’s Association, Rawalpindi, Ramgarhia Sabha, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and the Sabha at Rawalpindi protested “any limitation of the size of the emblems.”558 Representatives of the Khalsa Young Men’s Association at Rawalpindi and Khalsa Bhujangi Sabha in Lyallpur sent letters to the Punjab Government, protesting the increasing convictions against Sikhs for wearing kirpans. They referenced Queen Victoria’s 1858 proclamation of religious non-interference in India and the importance of the kirpan for the pahul. They attempted to define the debate as a “religious” issue, which would invalidate the authority of the governments of Punjab and India to intervene.559 Deputy Commissioner King of Amritsar noted cynically that “It seems that the possession of these weapons by Sikhs, especially those belonging to the forward party, is becoming increasingly common.”560

Despite these activists’ insistence that the kirpan was a necessary “religious” object, the Honorary Secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan conceded that “the question of its shape and size an important one” and consulted Takht Sahibs, gurdwaras, Singh Sabhas and Diwans to come up with a suitable solution.561 By early 1914, he reported that the Diwan considered kirpans under “one foot” acceptable and requested that police be informed so that “Sikhs wearing this religious symbol may not be harassed and hauled

559 From Mohan Singh, Secretary, Khalsa Young Men’s Association, Rawalpindi, to His Honour Sir Michael Francis O’Dwyer, Lt-Governor Punjab (20 August 1913), file number 41 (1914), PSA; From Teja Singh, Secretary, Khalsa Bhujangi Sabha, Lyallpur, to His Honour the Lt-Governor, Punjab (21 August 1913), file number 41 (1914), PSA.
560 From C.M. King, ICS, Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, to Commissioner, Lahore Division (2 July 1913), file number 41 (1914), PSA.
561 Ibid.
up in law courts under the Arms Act.”

Thus, while agreeing to compromise with government officials about limiting the size of the kirpan to one foot, the Chief Khalsa Diwan used this concession to argue for an end to the seemingly arbitrary system of justice. Due to this successful activism, on June 25, 1914, the Punjab Government officially allowed kirpans “possessed and carried by Sikhs,” giving Punjabi Sikh men exclusive rights to show the world their swords. After a few more months of agitation the same rule extended to Burma and Delhi. However, due to the preexisting concerns about limiting the size, no provincial governments gave official definitions of a kirpan’s maximum length. As the Government of India would soon realize: size mattered.

Activism and Revolution during the First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War, British officials found it difficult to extend Sikh access to kirpans across India due to the rise of the Ghadar (mutiny) movement. The Ghadar attempted to overthrow the British Empire through its army and was organized by a small group of revolutionaries from Delhi and Punjab exiled in North America. Lala Har Dayal, a Punjabi exile, became the leader of the movement, and published his newspaper, Ghadr out of San Francisco beginning in 1913. His initial target was Sikh regiments in Indian Army and prospective Sikh recruits. Intelligence officers noted that most Ghadarites were Sikh and over 50% were ex-soldiers. While latent and overt unrest had filtered throughout the Punjab in the decade prior to the First World

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562 From Sunder Singh, Majithia, Honorary Secretary, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, to the Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab, Lahore (13 February 1914), file number 41 1914, PSA.
563 Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, Home—Police, file number 116, (1924); Teja Singh, The Gurdwara Reform Movement, 466; Quote is from Shaikh Asghar Ali, to All Deputy Commissioners (9 February 1921).
564 From Shaikh Asghar Ali, to All Deputy Commissioners (9 February 1921).
565 Yong, Garrison State, 112; Rai, Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle, 65.
War, the war brought a new scope and intensity to Sikh martial activism, complicating debates about the *kirpan*.

During the War, Ghadar activists operated on a global scale. They circulated in Sikh districts of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jullundur, Ferozepur and Gurdaspur during festivals and reached out to regiments such as the 25th and 26th Punjabis stationed at Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{566} The Lahore Conspiracy Case concluded that many Sikh Ghadar agitators stirred dissent among troops in Singapore, contributing to the 1915 Mutiny.\textsuperscript{567} *Gurdwaras*, or Sikh holy meeting places, in Hong Kong, Saigon and Bangkok, attracted a large number of Sikh soldiers and became centers for spreading Ghadar ideas.\textsuperscript{568} In total, twenty people were executed for participating in the “Lahore Conspiracy,” and another fifty-eight were transported for life. Despite the eventual decline of the movement before the end of the war, few forgot the call of the *Ghadar-Di-Gunj*, which declared that “The time to draw the sword has come.”\textsuperscript{569}

Despite the somewhat unstable position of Punjab and the role of some Sikh soldiers in spreading revolutionary discontent overseas, some officials maintained a stringent view of Sikhs as the loyal “martial races” described in nineteenth century military handbooks. One war office film portrayed a “regimental durbar” of the 47th Sikhs in 1916, which included footage of Sikh soldiers unsheathing and offering their

\textsuperscript{566} Yong, *Garrison State*, 112.
\textsuperscript{568} Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadr Conspiracy*, 127; Supplementary Lahore Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/6/1405, File 4095, 22.
swords to their officers in a show of loyalty.\textsuperscript{570} Meanwhile, Michael O’Dwyer’s efforts to collect funds and recruits from Punjab resulted in near-conscription.\textsuperscript{571} The \textit{Morning Post} estimated in 1916 that although the population of the Punjab was 1/12\textsuperscript{th} that of India, it furnished 50\% of wartime recruits, 1/3 of whom were Sikhs, despite Sikhs making up only 10\% of the population of the Punjab.\textsuperscript{572} While Ghadar activists found some receptive ears among Sikh soldiers, the Punjab government filled the ranks of the British Indian Army with soldiers charged with a disproportionate expectation to serve the empire.

When many soldiers returned to the subcontinent during and after the war they returned to homes almost unrecognizable from what they had left behind. The supply of men, money and foodstuffs, alongside the strict backlash of revolutionary activity under the Defence of India Act, increased day-to-day hardships and feelings of distress. The Punjab province endured drought, plague and fluctuating prices for basic commodities.\textsuperscript{573} In 1918, the province was ravaged by influenza, resulting in the deaths of 800,000 people in the just the two months of October and November 1918.\textsuperscript{574} The passage of the Rowlatt Act in 1919 extended the anti-sedition Defence of India Act, passed during wartime, to the peacetime era, and treated returning soldiers like potential revolutionaries rather than

\textsuperscript{570} Geoffrey H. Malins and Edward G. Tong, “With the Indian Troops at the Front Part I” (British Topical Committee for War Films and War Office 17 January 1916), Imperial War Museum online archive, IWM 202-1 \url{http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022700}, accessed 24 January 2016.


\textsuperscript{572} Excerpt from \textit{The Morning Post} (28 November 1916), IOR/L/PJ/6/1405, File 4095; A.E. Barstow estimated that Sikhs made up 12\% of the population of the Punjab. Similarly, the Government of Punjab estimated in 1922 that the Sikh population in Punjab was about 10.5\%. See “The Sikh Question in the Punjab, 1919-1922,” Home Department, Government of Punjab, file 31, June 1922, PSA.

\textsuperscript{573} Rai, \textit{Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle}, 79.

\textsuperscript{574} The Inspector-General of Civil Hospitals, Punjab, “Report on the epidemic of influenza in the Punjab during 1918,” Home: Medical & Sanitary (March 1919), file 89-104, collection number 5207/63, PSA.
returning heroes.\textsuperscript{575} The thousands of Punjabi and Sikh men who had served overseas in extremely trying conditions across France, Mesopotamia, Persia, and beyond, returned to India finding civil liberties reduced, rather than expanded, despite their wartime sacrifices and significant contribution to the British Empire’s triumph. Thus, in the eyes of many soldiers, the reward for intense personal sacrifices of wartime isolation and suffering was finding their homes destroyed by inflation, disease and repression.

Soldiers disappointed by the state of their country after the conclusion of the war met similar unrest among civilians. The mass opposition to the Rowlatt Act, and especially the firing on a crowd of tens of thousands by troops under the command of General Dyer at Jallainwala Bagh in the Sikh holy city of Amritsar in 1919, became one of the most iconic and divisive events of the interwar Indian Nationalist movement. Speaking to the spirit of the period, Urdu poets called for home rule by urging people to have courage and be prepared to sacrifice themselves once again for a noble cause—shifting the wartime language of sacrifice to postwar struggle for revolution.\textsuperscript{576} The difficulties of postwar life convinced many soldiers and civilians that true change and reform could not occur from within the rigid bureaucracy of the British Empire, but would need to be seized with action, and if necessary, by force.

\textit{Postwar Reform and the Kirpan in Sikh Activism}

After the war, British officials recognized the difficulty of establishing an adequate place for Sikhs in India’s postwar order, due to, on the one hand, to their exceptional contribution to the war, and on the other, their leading role in the Ghadar

\textsuperscript{576} Urdu pamphlet, “Bande Mataram,” (Delhi Home Rule Series/Bande Mataram Dilhi Swarajya) (Delhi, 1919), Urdu B 2867/2, British Library.
movement. Sikh leaders in Punjab focused on the manpower contribution of the community and demanded equal political representation as Muslims and Hindus, which would have turned the Muslim majority population into a political minority against Sikhs and Hindus. While the 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms introduced separate representation for Sikhs, they received less than the 33% they demanded, amounting to only 8 out of 54 and then 10 out of 58 seats in the Punjab Legislative Council.\(^\text{577}\) This strained relationships between post-war communities who had similar goals, but alternative visions, for how to rebuild and reform.

While Sikh leaders gained small political concessions thanks to the wartime contributions of Sikh soldiers, many noticed that men returning from the field of battle were still not entrusted with kirpans. During the war, provincial governments in Delhi, Punjab, the United Provinces, the Northwest Frontier, and Burma allowed Sikhs to carry kirpans without licenses. The Government of India recommended in 1917 that all local governments adopt similar concessions.\(^\text{578}\) But some governments, such as the Government of Bengal, found it difficult to grant a full-scale exemption to kirpans due to the province’s role as a prominent center for revolutionary activity.\(^\text{579}\) Teja Singh lamented the contradiction: “Those who used the sword, those whose profession it was to wear arms, were not allowed to wear the Kirpan.”\(^\text{580}\) Finally, as a matter of compromise, in September 1920, the Government of India allowed Sikh soldiers to wear kirpans in plain clothes and uniform as long as they were members of the active list “in recognition

\(^{578}\) From R.B. Hyde, Inspector General of Police, Bengal to Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, file 885/17 (21 December 1921), WBSA; Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, 466-7.
\(^{579}\) “Note on Sikh Enquiries,” Intelligence Branch serial number 13/1916, file 454/16, WBSA.
of the loyal and distinguished services rendered by the Sikhs in the Great War.”\textsuperscript{581} This measure came on the recommendation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, but stipulated that kirpans could be worn by Sikh soldiers as long as the blades did not exceed nine inches.\textsuperscript{582} The postwar climate left many unimpressed with this nominal concession for Sikh soldiers, which compared unfavorably to the immense political, social and economic changes soldiers faced returning home after the war. Others realized that the kirpan could play a decisive role in carving out a new postwar order defined by Sikhs.

For Sikhs after the First World War, one of the major focal points of post-war reform was the management of Sikh holy places, and many Sikh men found militancy, through the use of kirpans, to be an effective means of affecting change. Gurdwaras were the main gathering points for Sikh community participation and expressions of public devotion. They also had large and fertile plots of land and pilgrims often made profitable donations. Management of gurdwara funds was an important means of collecting resources and creating change within the community. New political formations such as the Central Sikh League started in 1919 to agitate for change in gurdwara management.\textsuperscript{583} Controversially, the famed Golden Temple of Amritsar continued to be managed by government-appointed officials. The breaking point came when General Dyer received an honorary pahul and initiation as a Sikh at the Golden Temple after his leading role in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. This inspired unprecedented

\textsuperscript{581} Ibid., 468; A. Shairp, Colonel, for Major-General, Secretary to the Government of India, To The Adjutant General in India (30 September 1920), IOR/L/MIL/7/12459 : 1920; Pamphlet entitled “History of Kirpan (A Sample of British Government’s recent persecution of the Sikh religion),” (Hyderabad, Standard Printing Works, 1922), IOR/L/PJ/6/1808, Files 3030, page 2. It was printed by R.H. Advani, Standard Printing Works Hyderabad Sind and Mr. Balwantsingh Lokram, Pleader, Shikarpur, for Sindh Sikh Publicity Committee.

\textsuperscript{582} “History of Kirpan,” 1922.

\textsuperscript{583} Mandair, “Colonial Formations of Sikhism,” 78.
activism from Sikh reformers who demanded that the Government of India hand over the keys to the Temple.\footnote{Rai, Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle, 89,111; Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, “The Kirpan Question,” 1924.} During this debate, the Amritsar Superintendent of Police recalled that “The city of the Sikhs was soon thronged” with Sikh men “armed with long \textit{kirpans}.”\footnote{V.W. Smith, Superintendent of Police (Political), Criminal Investigation Department, Punjab, “The Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1921-22” (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab 1922), Home (Political), pros. 459/II & k.w., 1922, page 16, NAI.} Over time, “their numbers, and with their numbers the size of their kirpans, began to increase.”\footnote{Ibid.} The Government of India eventually handed the keys over to the newly formed Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.), which oversaw the management of \textit{gurdwaras} and became one of the most influential organizing bodies for Sikh activism. The incident demonstrated that unified Sikh activism, armed with \textit{kirpans}, could be an influential vehicle of change.

In addition to opposing government control over temples, many Sikh activists opposed the possession of \textit{gurdwaras} by \textit{mahants}. Many \textit{mahants}, or keepers of the \textit{gurdwaras}, were part of a sect known as Udasi Sikhs who were renowned for their asceticism but largely \textit{sahajdhari} —meaning that they cut their hair and were known as “slow converts.” The prominence of groups such as the Tat Khalsa increased pressure on \textit{sahajdhari} Sikhs to embrace Khalsa customs such as the “5 K’s” or be regarded as Hindus. When accusations of immorality fell upon \textit{mahants}, members of the Sikh community started to assemble into \textit{akali jathas}, or bands of Sikhs who identified as “akalis,” interpreted as “God’s devotees” or “immortal soldiers,” and organized along military lines to forcibly occupy \textit{gurdwaras}.\footnote{Yong, The Garrison State, 194, 196, 201; Barstow, Handbook on Sikhs, 35-36; Amarjit Singh Narang, “The Shiromani Akali Dal,” in Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies, Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 339-349, at 339.} This movement placed British officials in
a tenuous position. Sikhs represented a community with considerable military and political value, yet their protests were of a “religious” nature and would therefore make it politically unwise for British officials to intervene. Unofficially, many British officials supported the akali’s reformist goals and viewed *mahants* as corrupt priestly figures whom they were glad to see overthrown. Others felt that single, if corrupt, figures were easier to manage than unpredictable populist movements. Yet the *akali jathas* also represented an affront to law, order, and property, and occurred at a moment of intense anti-colonial non-cooperation.

In February 1920, the rise of *akalis* and seizure of *gurdwaras* intensified when Narain Das, the *mahant* at Nankana, hired a private guard to defend the property from occupation. According to the Punjab government the shrine in Nankana was “one of the richest in the Province” and was administered by a *mahant* who was “a notorious ill-liver.”\(^{588}\) The *mahant*’s hired guards consisted of Pathan men allegedly armed with guns supplied by government-officials.\(^ {589}\) According to the Punjab Government, on February 20\(^ {th}\) 1920, a group of “130 Sikhs” attempted to seize the shrine’s courtyard but were “brutally massacred, the bodies being afterward burnt with kerosine [sic] oil.”\(^ {590}\) Police immediately arrested the *mahant* and sent troops into the site. Soon, the Punjab Government reported that “all the extreme and fanatic Sikhs of the Province flocked to Nankana.”\(^ {591}\) The tension surrounding this event continued to rise when Mohandas Gandhi and Muslim activist leaders the Ali brothers attended an October 1920 Lahore

\(^{588}\) Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, “Note on the Sikh question in the Punjab, 1919-1922,” (June 1922).
\(^{590}\) Ibid.
\(^{591}\) Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, “Note on the Sikh question in the Punjab, 1919-1922,” (June 1922).
Sikh League meeting and paid tribute at Nankana. While these cross-faith allegiances stirred some anxiety for bringing greater attention to these movements, the Commissioner of Jullundur believed that Gandhi’s tour “has had a good effect” because of his “denunciation of violence.”

Ultimately, the Nankana tragedy became a tipping point for militancy that witnessed a dramatic rise in the visibility and size of kirpans. In 1921, officials in the Government of Punjab worried that “certain classes of Sikhs have begun ostentatiously to wear large weapons 2 feet long.” By March 1921, shrines such as Kiara Sahib and Bal Lila were occupied by “Akalis armed with axes and kirpans,” and in September 1921 “some 200 Akalis, armed with lathis, axes and kirpans” marched to Baba Budha shrine at Teja in Gurdaspur district. The Viceroy explained that the kirpan made these events especially worrisome, since many were “almost as long as swords.” The Punjab police believed that the akali movement was more important and dangerous than Mohandas Gandhi’s unarmed followers because “The Akali has acquired the right to arm himself with an obsolete, but none the less formidable, offensive weapon.” In response to this agitation, government officials passed the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act of 1921 to establish a board of commissioners to enquire into cases of disputed shrines, but the

594 From Shaikh Asghar Ali, to All Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab (9 February 1921).
595 “Brief Note on Trouble in Four Indian Units during February 1922” Home (Political), pros. 459/II & k.w., 1922, 2, NAI.
596 Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department, to Secretary of State for India (28 November 1921), IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, File 7087.
S.G.P.C. protested bill, limiting its effectiveness. The next year, the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill of 1922 reiterated that the board would only have influence over “disputed” gurdwaras but met widespread resistance. The S.G.P.C. refused to consider it until those who had been arrested during the agitation were released.598

In light of the failure of the gurdwara legislation, the Government of Punjab attempted to mitigate the growth and prominence of kirpans by issuing licenses to kirpan manufacturers only once they agreed to manufacture those that were nine inches or less.599 Officials struck down on several factories, including one at Amritsar selling kirpans up to 18 inches, another at Bhera turning out implements up to 22 inches in length, and another in Nabha with kirpans as long as three feet.600 These measures served as subtle ways to attack wealthy and influential Sikh leaders, such as akali leader and S.G.P.C. president Sardar Kharak Singh, who was convicted to one year of rigorous imprisonment for “manufacturing kirpans” when police found “179 swords of various sizes” at his factory.601 Additionally, police confiscated kirpans from Sikh leaders including Giani Sher Singh, Sardar Labh Singh and Sardar Dalip Singh of the S.G.P.C. in Ludhiana and Chaudhri Shamsher Singh, Secretary of the Singh Sabhas of Sitapur.602

Long swords that doubled as kirpans became an emblem of British imperial fear and inadequacy. When the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur exceeded his duties by limiting the length of the kirpan to nine inches, the Punjab government defended his

598 Yong, Garrison State, 207, 226.
599 From Shaikh Asghar Ali, to All Deputy Commissioners (9 February 1921).
600 Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, Notes on government evidence to be placed before General Birdwood’s Committee on Kirpans, Home—Police, file number 116 (1924), PSA.
actions based on the existing measures for military men and *kirpan* manufacturers.\(^{603}\)

The governments of Burma, Bombay, and Calcutta followed suit, limiting the size of *kirpans* to nine inches. \(^{604}\) Even though there was never any strict India-wide limitation to the length of civilian *kirpans*, the tragedy of Nankana, and the precedent set in the army and for manufacturers, enabled further government intervention. However, the increasing insistence on nine inch *kirpans* was a direct affront to the Chief Khalsa Diwan, who prior to the war had conceded to a length of one foot.

While government officials thought of ways to minimize the size of *kirpans*, the S.G.P.C. and the Central Sikh League mobilized postwar martial enthusiasm by reclaiming symbols of the British Indian Army. By 1920 they had transformed *akali jathas* into “a dal or army” which in 1921 consisted of about 15,000 men, and rose to 30,000 in 1922. \(^{605}\) Government officials worried that this brought a more revolutionary and militant tone to the movement, since many *akali dal* members had been imprisoned in 1915 and 1916 for Ghadar sympathies and activism. Soon, the *akali dal* adopted a uniform consisting of “black pugris and large Kirpans.” \(^{606}\) When *akalis* encamped at the Nankana fair they formed regular lines with a quartermaster in charge and marched to a “military whistle.” \(^{607}\) Other *akali jathas* armed themselves, set up sanitary camps, wore uniforms, and used alternating shift duties. \(^{608}\) Hundreds and sometimes thousands of men marched together in formation, sometimes on horseback and with flags, under the

\(^{603}\) Report on the Political and Economic situation in the Punjab, 1921.

\(^{604}\) “History of Kirpan,” 14; Extract from “Sikhs and their Kripans” [sic], *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (16 May 1923), Serial 13/17, file 885/17 West Bengal Archives.

\(^{605}\) Mandair, “Colonial Formations of Sikhism,” 78-79; “Brief Note on Trouble in Four Indian Units during February 1922,” Yong, *Garrison State*, 212.

\(^{606}\) “Brief Note on Trouble in Four Indian Units during February 1922,” 19, 23.

\(^{607}\) Yong, *Garrison State*, 198, 212.
leadership of a “jathedar,” on their way to occupy the gurdwara. Some came armed with large swords, carrying the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book), with their own medical corps to attend to men with injuries.\textsuperscript{609} The \textit{akali dal} had become a military force that challenged the British Empire’s monopoly over martial violence as well as its claims to being the leading force of institutional discipline in South Asia.

As \textit{akali} forces grew, British officials such as V.W. Smith, Superintendent of Police of the Criminal Investigation Department, Punjab, and Major A.E. Barstow commended the well-organized and precisely executed \textit{akali} activism, giving the credit ultimately to Sikh training in the British Indian Army.\textsuperscript{610} For British officials, military order and discipline were complicit in developing the methods and style of Sikh activism, first through the deliberate “nationalizing” of Sikh beliefs and practice, and second, through the inculcation of military order and discipline during the Great War. By 1922, the Punjab police worried that the existence of the \textit{akali dal} would have a negative impact on potential recruits. Especially worrisome was the high proportion of Jat Sikhs in the \textit{akali dal} who had hitherto been “the backbone of the Sikh community” and almost sole contributors to Punjabi Sikh recruits.\textsuperscript{611} In the Ludhiana district, which was once a prominent recruiting ground for several Sikh regiments, 240 of the 672 documented \textit{akalis} were pensioned or discharged soldiers.\textsuperscript{612} Teja Singh estimated that one third of the men in \textit{akali jathas} were soldiers who served in the First World War.\textsuperscript{613} There was therefore a widespread perception that former military men swelled the ranks of Sikh

\textsuperscript{609} Photographs of the fourth Akali Jatha (1924), IOR/R/1/1/4903.
\textsuperscript{610} Smith, “A Note On the Guru-Ka-Bagh Affair;” Barstow, \textit{Sikh Handbook}, 19..
\textsuperscript{611} “Brief Note on Trouble in Four Indian Units during February 1922;” 19.
\textsuperscript{612} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{613} Singh, \textit{Gurdwara Reform Movement}, 422, 428.
activist armies, and even threatened the stability of the army itself. However, the Government of India estimated that out of 15,506 total *akalis*, only about 1,270 were military pensioners or discharged soldiers, totaling about eight percent.\(^{614}\) Thus, while British military officials maintained that British discipline had given Sikhs the organizational tools for mounting a successful movement and emphasized the military roots of past *akalis*, government statistics actually indicated that the vast majority of participants were not military men from the colonial army. Instead, it suggested that the culture and symbols of Britain’s imperial military forces had been fully reclaimed, appropriated and redeployed by the largely civilian activist Sikh community.

Despite their relatively small numbers in the *akali dal*, Sikh men in the army continued to be well-publicized participants in the *kirpan* and *gurdwara* agitation. Retired Captain Sardar Ram Singh became one of the Executive Committee members of the S.G.P.C. and eventually Vice President.\(^{615}\) In 1921, Mota Singh of Patara and Kishan Singh “Gargaj,” who were pensioned Havildars of the 35\(^{th}\) Sikhs, gained followers from former Ghadar conspirators as well as ex-soldiers in Jullundur and Hoshiapur districts and planned to murder officials.\(^{616}\) Others, such as Babu Santa Singh, a clerk in the 54\(^{th}\) Sikh Regiment and Ude Singh, a recruit in the 27\(^{th}\) Sikh regiment, resigned from their martial positions to join the Gurdwara Reform Movement and later joined more militant activism.\(^{617}\) After the Nankana tragedy, several soldiers wore *kirpans* that defied uniform regulations.\(^{618}\) Fifteen soldiers of the 57\(^{th}\) Rifles, and several more in Mesopotamia, were

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\(^{614}\) “Brief Note on Trouble in Four Indian Units during February 1922.”

\(^{615}\) Ibid.,” 10-11, 15.


sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from four to ten years for insisting on wearing kirpans.\footnote{Singh, Gurdwara Reform Movement, 390.} Soldiers from the 19\textsuperscript{th} Punjabis and the 36\textsuperscript{th}, 27\textsuperscript{th}, 15\textsuperscript{th}, and 14\textsuperscript{th} Sikhs were tried by court martial in 1922 alone.\footnote{Note by General Staff, India on subject of attempts to tamper with the loyalty of Indian soldiers, 1922-1923, IOR/L/MIL/7/13768.} Although the total number of active and former soldiers in the \textit{akali dal} was relatively low, it had a rippling effect on soldiers serving in the British Indian Army. Military officials wanted to believe that Sikh activists were merely doing what they had learned from British training, but individual soldiers were bringing \textit{akali} culture of dark pagris and long kirpans, into the army. For those men who did not leave the army or become official members of the \textit{akali dal}, they still sent a powerful symbolic message: militancy, and the symbols of martial discipline, was not possessed or controlled solely by British imperial power.

\textit{Expanding the Size of the Sword}

The size of \textit{kirpan}, and the wearing of swords more generally, touched a nerve in India beyond “religious” devotion. It was intimately related to South Asian men’s inability to bear arms. According to the editor of \textit{Mahratta} in April 1922, “The right of bearing arms is the essence of freedom” but by being denied weapons “India has been emasculated—emasculated in every sense of the term.”\footnote{Editorial comment from \textit{Mahratta} (9 April 1922) quoted in “History of Kirpan,” 23.} Teja Singh believed that the \textit{kirpan} should be seen not merely as a symbolic or religious object, but a powerful weapon. He insisted that the \textit{kirpan} was meant to be “an active symbol, an instrument of offence and defence, and not a charm to be tied along with the turban-ends or stowed away in the back of the comb as it came to be done in the British days.”\footnote{Singh, Gurdwara Reform Movement, 464-5.} Rather, the
kirpan needed to be viewed as a sword that can “can cut through armour… through men, horses, even elephants. It is superior to all other instruments.” A more militant thread of the akali agitation, called the Babbar Akali, went further in seeing the kirpan as a centerpiece of armed revolt. At a fair in Jind State, Kishan Singh “Gargaj” made a speech declaring that “wielding of [the] sword was the religious duty of the Sikhs when other means had failed.” He advised the rural population not to fear the police but to “arm themselves with kirpans.”

In 1923, Karma Singh Daulatpur recited a poem in Hoshiarpur which encouraged adherents to “Catch hold of the double-edged dagger, So the Babbar declares aloud. Sharpen both the edges on the whetting stone. Without the dagger, freedom cannot be won.” The same year, the Government of India declared that the Babbar Akalis were an unlawful organization and crushed it ruthlessly. They stationed infantry and cavalry troops in the Doab region, used airplanes to distribute propaganda, and punished pensioners for having sympathy with or harboring suspected members. Of the ninety-one Babbar Akalis tried in the Babbar Akali case, three died in jail, twelve were sentenced to transportation for life, thirty-eight to varying terms of imprisonment. Seven were executed in jail February 1926.

By making claims about South Asian rights to arms, the more militant strands of the akali agitation harkened back to the kirpan’s origins as a weapon of defense, but deployed it violently to challenge British power.

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623 Ibid.
624 Mohan, Militant Nationalism Punjab, 52, 64.
625 The Tribune, 6 October 1923, 10.
626 Mohan, Militant Nationalism in the Punjab, 71-72.
627 Rai, Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle, 146.
The symbolic appeal of the *kirpan* also made it useful for those who sought legal, rather than militant, solutions to the problems of imperial rule. This included employing imperial strategies of knowledge-gathering to challenge the bureaucratic assumptions of the state. Teja Singh turned to “old Hindu books” such as *Agni Puran*, *Varah Samhita* and *Devi Puran*, to define *kirpans* as between one and a half and three feet in length. Others turned to a variety of Sanskrit, Punjabi, Urdu and English texts, often commissioned by state authority, to press for legal recognition of the right to bear arms. In 1922, one Lahore High Court judge admitted that *kirpan* was a Sanskrit word meaning “sword” but nonetheless upheld the Government’s arrest of a man wearing a 22 inch *kirpan*. In 1923, Hari Singh and Kishan Singh appeared before the Punjab High Court for possessing swords 36 inches in length with curved blades of 28 inches. They maintained that “‘kirpan’ and ‘sword’ are interchangeable and synonymous.” After consulting Monier William’s Sanskrit Dictionary, Platts’ Hindustani Dictionary, Bhai Maya Singh’s Punjabi Dictionary and Macauliffe’s work on Sikhs, the court came to the conclusion that *kirpans* were frequently defined as swords. The court added that the 10th Guru directed his disciples to wear a sword as “a weapon suitable for the purpose of practicing arms and not merely a religious emblem.” Since the Government of Punjab had hitherto failed to define the *kirpan* adequately, the court acquitted Hari Singh and Kishan Singh, stating that “the word (kirpan) can only be understood and read as meaning a sword, and therefore a Sikh possessing or wearing a sword has committed no

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628 Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, 463
631 Ibid.
As a result, the Punjab High Court essentially gave Sikhs free reign to move about with swords of any length and size. It seemed for a short time at least that for Punjabi Sikh men, size did not matter, giving them an exclusive right over their spiritual, martial, and masculine potency.

Due to intense criticism, and the successful use of imperial bureaucracy to challenge convictions and confiscations of kirpans, the Government of India in 1922 finally decided to extend a nation-wide exemption to kirpans “possessed and carried by Sikhs,” just as the Punjab Government had done in 1914. Sikhs gained the exclusive privilege of showing the world their swords, at a time when the vast majority of South Asians were debarred from possessing weapons without a license. However, government officials believed that this display of masculine and martial prowess needed to be carefully reigned in by mandating that the swords be kept “sheathed.”

Teja Singh condemned this prohibition as well, arguing that Guru Gobind Singh wielded a “naked sword” and called it “the goddess of power.” Thus, while British officials agreed to acknowledge Sikh kirpans, they would only do so if Sikh men did not display their naked swords, an excessive display of masculine and martial potency.

While Sikh men had been nominally granted the right to bear kirpans in 1922 without prosecution, the fluctuating size of the spiritual sword had consequences far beyond the Sikh community. In 1922, V.W. Smith, Superintendent of Police Punjab argued that the kirpan had “grown in size until it is now indistinguishable from a sword”

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632 Ibid.
633 Excerpt from The Gazette of India (25 February 1922), Home Department: Establishments (20 February 1922), IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, File 7087.
and had “occasioned considerable misgivings to other communities who have not been accorded the privilege of arming themselves with any form of sharp-edged weapon of offence.” Therefore, not only were British officials intimidated by the size of these spiritual swords, but other communities recognized Sikh’s exceptional rights to martial, masculine and spiritual potency with a degree of trepidation. Punjab official H.D. Craik noted that access to kirpans allowed Sikhs to become “a privileged class” moving in “armed bodies, terrorizing passers-by by the open display of swords and battle-axes.”

In 1922, the wives and families of the 23rd Sikh Pioneers petitioned against sending the unit on field service out of fear of being subjected to akali harassment when men were away.

The intensification of violence following the India-wide exemption for kirpans contributed to another government crackdown, bringing Sikh activists into even closer contact with the disciplinary control of the state. Calcutta police arrested several men who carried swords between two and three feet in length but claimed that they were kirpans, and within one year forty people were convicted “for keeping, selling or manufacturing kirpans or weapons passing as such.” The Government of India disagreed with Sikh activists about the number of men who had been arrested. One 1922 pamphlet estimated that the number of arrests was 1,500 but the Government of India maintained that the number was less than 1,000. During these arrests, reports surfaced

638 Report from Officer Commanding 23 Sikh Pioneers, (2 Feb 1922), Army Department, note of 1922, Home (Political), file no. 415, NAI; Yong, Garrison State, 216.
639 Extract from Amrit Bazar Patrika (16 May 1923), “Sikhs and their Kripans.” [sic]
that Sikhs had their long hair pulled or torn, or were even subject to the “savagery” of Pathan guards’ satisfying their “heart’s craving” and sticking “pieces of wood” into the anus of Sikh prisoners, causing a sensation in the Hindi and Urdu press. Increasingly, the spectacle of arrest turned the nobility of personal sacrifice into a humiliating and emasculating trauma.

**Between Loyalty and Humiliation**

By 1922 the Punjab witnessed another tipping point in violence of the *akali* agitation. Twelve miles from Amritsar, Sunder Das was in charge of two Sikh shrines attached to profitable arable land and a small plot sacred to Guru Arjan Dev, known as Guru-ka-Bagh. In August 1922, five *akalis* were arrested for trespassing when they cut down some branches from a grove to provide “fuel for the Guru’s free kitchen.” After the five men were convicted of theft, the S.G.P.C. encouraged agitation surrounding Guru-ka-Bagh. Soon, leaders of the S.G.P.C. were also arrested. Because of the Guru-ka-Bagh incident, *akalis* went to widely-recruited villages to dissuade men from enlisting in the British Indian Army or returning from leave. They organized two separate *jathas* consisting of entirely military pensioners to march in protest. V.W. Smith recalled the success of these pensioner *jathas*, which were enlisted and formed at the Golden Temple in Amritsar and marched to Guru-ka-Bagh through “admiring multitudes” while wearing “a special uniform.” The process of enlisting and dispatching martial men reinvigorated activist enthusiasm in Amritsar while actively serving Sikh men saw the incidents as an

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641 “Prosecution for sedition of the Zamindar, Bande Mataram and Akali newspapers,” IOR/L/PJ/6/1805, File 2598.
643 Ibid.
“unspoken appeal to him to quit service and join his brethren at Guru-ka-Bagh.” One pensioners’ jatha consisted of one hundred former soldiers who marched with a band before getting arrested at Guru-ka-Bagh on October 25th. The pensioners’ jatha represented a deliberate affront to British order and discipline, using “loyal” servicemen to highlight the injustice of British suppression of “Sikh” political activism.

On behalf of the Military Pensioners’ jatha, Subadar Amar Singh released a statement underlining the pensioners’ feelings of loyalty, stating that most of them belonged “to families whose blood has seen continuous military service since the unhappy times of the Indian Mutiny.” He explained that they had served on battlefields across the world, including Afghanistan, Neuve Chapelle and Ypres, and described the “thousands of Sikh soldiers” who “stood entrenched for days together in icy water” in France and the 135 degree temperature in Mesopotamia which caused “no fewer than 190 deaths from thirst in one single day.” Twenty four of the hundred pensioners had been wounded in action and retired on pension, including one who lost a leg and two others who “got their eyesight injured by gas.” Almost all of them possessed medals in addition to other titles and honors. As Amar Singh suggests, it was a powerful and useful strategy to liken the imagery of Sikhs suffering in war in the First World War to their present determination during the jathas. Because of such activism, military officials even suspected Amar Singh of sending S.G.P.C. pamphlets “designed to affect serving Sikh soldiers.”

By utilizing loyal army men as a centerpiece of reform and rebellion, the

644 Ibid., 4, 13.
645 Singh, Gurdwara Reform Movement, 432-33.
646 Ibid., 433-4.
647 Ibid., 433.
648 Extract from the General Staff (India) Summary of Intelligence for the week ending 7.11.22, IOR/L/MIL/7/13768.
pensioners’ jathas attempted to highlight the injustice of the British Raj by mobilizing narratives of Sikh loyalty.

Despite the widespread appeal of the Guru-ka-Bagh akali jathas, many started to feel that akali jathas caused humiliation and difficulty for the Sikh population without providing concrete results. The numbers of akalis arrested per day at Guru-ka-Bagh quickly rose from forty to sixty to eighty, peaking between 100 and 130.649 Due to the swelling number of imprisoned akalis, many were confined in a temporary jails consisting of “an open-air barbed-wire enclosure” that accommodated “hundreds of prisoners.” Ultimately, police confined thousands of men “in barbed-wire pens.”650 At Guru-ka-Bagh, police pickets even cut off rations sent to the akalis, who were forced to choose between the hardship of occupation and the social pressure to uphold the ideal behavior of heroes and martyrs. Many agricultural laborers and landowners were torn between their obligations to till the land and S.G.P.C. pressure to keep up their holy struggle.651

The humiliation that participants in akali jathas faced was not confined to the Government of India or official British power, but raised questions about the extension of British power into the nominally independent “Native” or “Princely” States. As the Government of India gradually extended exemptions for kirpans, on March 19th, 1921 the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, ordered restrictions to kirpans. Patiala was a princely state surrounded on all sides by the Punjab province. The Maharaja carried honorary ranks in the British Indian Army and was regarded as one of the most

650 Ibid.
651 Ibid., 3.
prominent Sikhs in India. Following the Government of India, he explicitly ordered that *kirpans* had to be purchased from the Arms Manufacturers of the State, who were instructed to prepare *kirpans* of a fixed size and shape. All other *kirpans* possessed or carried were liable to confiscation.  

652 British Indian Army troops supported princely authority to quell *akali* disturbances in neighboring Nabha state in 1923.  

653 Rumors and animosity about increasing British intervention reached a fever pitch when the S.G.P.C. asserted that the abdication of the Ripudamman Singh, Maharaja of Nabha, was orchestrated by the Government of India for his alleged sympathies to the *akali* cause.  

In protest, Sikhs in and around the princely states attempted to assemble a “Shahidi Jatha” (Martyr Band) at Jaito to hold an *Akhand Panth* (continuous reading of the Sikh scriptures) one hundred and one times to pray for the restoration of Ripudamman Singh and help purify the “indignity imposed upon the Sikh Faith.”  

655 Jaito became a regular destination for *jathas*, and in 1924, on the anniversary of the Nankana tragedy, a large *jatha* of five hundred people assembled at Jaito joined by a mob armed with axes, swords, spears and clubs. It charged at the police and military when ordered to halt.  

656 The violence of this *jatha* strained relations between the S.G.P.C., the *akali dal*, and the Government of India. Soon, numerous *jathas* arrived at Jaito, calling attention to the

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653 “Adjustment of the expenditure incurred by the Military authorities in the Nabha State in connection with possible disturbances at the time of the departure of His Highness the Maharaja,” IOR/R/1/1/1509(2): 1924-1927.  
656 “Extract from Moral & Material Progress Reports 423/24 page 286, Mss Eur F 161/111
intervention of British forces in the regulation of princely states nominally rule by Sikh authorities.

A selection of photographs taken by British officials during the third and fourth *akali jathas* in Jaito in 1924 demonstrate the continuing centrality of the *kirpan* in Sikh displays of militancy, and highlight British efforts to use humiliation as a strategy to break the will of renegade Sikh men. Once the men of the *akali jathas* were arrested, many were held in barbed wire pens, as had become customary at Guru-ka-Bagh. However, many were also photographed for identification purposes lined up, stripped down and holding their *kirpans* waist high, signifying their defeat and humiliation. It is striking that the *kirpan*, officially recognized as a part of Sikh identity, and an exempted “religious” object according to modifications of the Indian Arms Act, needed to be displayed so prominently in photographs created largely for identification purposes. These images, carefully constructed by British photographers, stood in marked contrast to the way that the *akalis* had represented themselves prior to their arrest: as a well-organized, uniform, proud and martial body of men. Instead, British photographers made these men adopt humiliating forced poses and lay their *kirpans* bare before the imperial gaze of the photographer. The threat that these photos might be distributed and shared—and hence become visible to their communities—played upon men’s fear of public humiliation. The act of occupying a space while armed was deprived of connotations of bravery and strength, and replaced with nakedness and humiliation. While Sikhs under the Government of India were given nominal exemption under the Indian Arms Act, and were permitted to carry swords without restriction, those present in a princely state, not

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657 Photographs of the fourth Akali Jatha (1924).
fully under government control, were humiliated and forced to bear their unconcealed swords. These images suggest that when martial culture could not be deployed on behalf of the British Empire, but appeared in close proximity to it, it needed to be struck down and humiliated. In British India, Sikh men were successfully reclaiming the proud martial imagery of the British Indian Army to produce permanent and lasting reforms. Yet in the princely state, British officials revealed that they desired to humiliate and emasculate Sikh men through their kirpans.

According to the Punjab Government, subsequent jathas at Jaito convinced some agitators that “neither the religious nor the political aims of the Sikhs were likely to be attained by direct action” and by summer 1924 the akalis began to lose prestige.658 The akali movement declined by 1925, owing in part to the success of the passage of the last of several Sikh Gurdwara Bills and the increasing restlessness of the population with the movement.659 The Sikh Gurdwara and Shrine Bill, which passed in the Legislative Council on 7 July 1925, gave Sikhs legal control of disputed shrines. It recognized the S.G.P.C. as a representative of Sikhs in matters related to gurdwaras. This legislation also defined Sikhs as anyone who would declare themselves as a Sikh and a believer of Granth Sahib and Ten Gurus—hardening the distinction between “Sikh” and “Hindu” and forcing those who wished to participate in temple management to declare themselves as officially separate from Hindus.660 When Punjab Governor William Malcolm Hailey emphasized the need to pass a new Gurdwara Bill he believed that this would pacify the Sikh community, absolve the government of blame, and leave South Asians invested in

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658 Ibid., 341.
659 Yong, Garrison State, 236.
660 Ibid., 236.
the issue to “quarrel among themselves.” This institutional decision to pass legislation with the express goal of leaving communities to “quarrel among themselves” reflected a degree of intensely embittered institutional indifference, signaling that the movement had worn the government’s will to resist reform, as well as its effectiveness.

The 1925 legislation hardened the definition of “Sikh” and gave further institutional backing to loyalist, military-minded Sikh men. Those who chose their own interpretations of what it meant to be Sikh, or protested the government’s ability to intervene in such decisions, would be regarded as “Hindu” or marginalized as disloyal and unmartial. Shortly after the S.G.P.C. gained official recognition and status from the government, they rejected all affiliation and association with more extreme factions such as the Babbar Akali. These divisions created a greater tensions between those willing to cooperate with the government and those who had believed in the cause of Ghadar and the Babbar Akalis in Punjab. The Shiromani Akali Dal became a leading political party of Sikhs. Teachers and students dissatisfied with the progress of non-violence at National College, Lahore, formed the Naujawan Bharat Sabha which organized laborers and peasants and encouraged patriotism in youth. The Kirti-Kisan Party similarly emerged as a radical Punjab peasant organization influenced by Ghadar, Babbar Akalis, and the Communist Party. The fractures and divisions inspired in the gurdwara reform and Sikh agitation reverberated throughout the Punjab province and the Indian nationalist movement.

Renewed Activism and Violence

662 Ibid., 147.
Although the *akali* movement was largely crushed by 1924, isolated incidents, such as the hanging of six Babbar Akalis in 1926, continued to incite widespread criticism against the government, including one Jullundur event that attracted a dissenting crowd of 4,000 people.\(^{664}\) Yet after the 1925 legislation, the central issue concerning Sikh political activism was not how Sikhs were defined, or how they gained control over “Sikh” spaces, but how Sikhs were to be understood in relation to other communities. Their ability to secure *kirpans* as “religious” rites, and their institutional definition as a martial community enjoying economic and employment privileges that it entailed, caused anxiety and animosity.

By the mid-1920s, some South Asian politicians vocalized the dangers of the exceptional status of Sikhs. This came after the rise of communal riots between 1922 and 1926 which increased violence and hostility among communities.\(^{665}\) In August 1926, both Khan Bahadur Makhdum Syed Rajan Bakhsh Shah and Mr. Abdul Haye asked questions in the Legislative Assembly debates about Sikhs who used *kirpans* aggressively. While the latter worried about Sikhs who “recently used their *kirpans* as a weapon of offence” in disturbances at Rawalpindi, Amritsar, and Calcutta, the former specifically protested the “use of these swords against the Muhammadans” and requested plans for government protection.\(^{666}\) In both instances, Sir Alexander Muddiman, Leader of the Legislative Assembly, denied knowledge of such incidents and declined to suggest corrective action.\(^{667}\)

\(^{664}\) *Rai, Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle*, 73.
\(^{665}\) Ibid., 148.
\(^{667}\) Ibid.
Due to concerns about violent militancy in Punjab, fomented by the presence of Sikh *kirpans*, the Punjab Legislative Council carried a motion in October 1926 granting wealthy men, government officials, and high ranking retired army men, regardless of community background, the right to carry swords. Lt. Sardar Raghbir Singh, a Sikh man from a rural section of the Amritsar district, put forward the proposal in Urdu on the basis that all those who are liable to commit crimes already possessed weapons such as rifles and swords. Therefore, Raghbir Singh believed that passing the resolution would mean protecting “the lives and property of the people” by allowing them “to defend themselves against thieves and dacoits.”

Shaikh Muhammad Sadiq, a Muslim man from Amritsar City, supported his proposal by highlighting the prominence of Sikh *kirpans* and the martial prowess of Punjabi men. He wondered “Is it necessary that the Musalmans also should say that their religion enjoins them to wear talwars [long curved swords] before the Government would allow it in the case of Musalmans?” He called attention to the contradiction in government policy where “here in this province which is the home of martial race [sic] whose praise has been sung from the Viceroy down to the district officers” and yet most Punjabis, other than Sikhs, were not permitted to carry swords.

This tense collaboration—between the protection of property and the desire to preserve the “martial spirit” of one of India’s most militarily significant provinces—enabled the relaxation of the Indian Arms Act. The exceptional status to bear arms granted to Sikhs, was extended to wealthy and influential men of the Punjab province regardless of their community affiliation and beliefs.

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668 Ibid.
669 Excerpt from the Punjab Legislative Council, (23 October 1926), 1785, IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, File 7087.
670 Ibid, 1786.
Although the Punjab granted further concessions of swords to certain Punjabis, some worried what this would mean for violence in the province. Revenue Member Mian Sir Fazl-i-Husain stated that the Government was eager to “prevent the possibility of a dangerous instrument being used in these unfortunate riots which give trouble to the communities and to the Government from time to time.” 671 By 1927, the India Office and the Government of Punjab acknowledged that kirpans had played a role in riots between Sikhs and Muslims. 672 Al Fazl of Qadian stated that during recent riots Sikhs were “perfectly free to wear Kirpans” but members of other communities were unable “to carry even a walking-stick.” 673 When police arrested Sikhs, the Magistrate ensured that they were quickly released, giving the order that “no Sikh should be arrested for wearing a Kirpan.” Al Fazl maintained that kirpans were “really the root cause of all the disturbances.” 674 The conservative British periodical The Civil and Military Gazette in Lahore took the opportunity to condemn the carrying of “arms on religious grounds” because India was “a country where passions are so soon aflame.” In addition to this standard imperial view of India as excessively religious and passionate, the Gazette also criticized the government for having “no ability or power to lead.” 675 Thus, the exceptional status granted to certain communities to bear arms contributed to rioting and incidents of violence, raising questions among loyal imperial proponents about the Raj’s ability to rule.

Militancy and Violence Reimagined

671 Ibid., 1788.
672 Correspondence by Captain C. Waterhouse, MP forwarded to the Earl Winterton, MP, India Office (28 July 1927), IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, File 7087.
673 Ibid.
674 Ibid.
675 Excerpt from Civil and Military Gazette of Lahore quoted in Correspondence between the Earl Winterton and Captain C. Waterhouse, (28 July 1927) IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, File 7087.
By the 1928, the Hindustan Republican Socialist Army became a martial counter-point to state violence. They targeted the Lahore police, whom they held responsible for the death of Arya Samaj leader Lala Lajpat Rai. This martial opposition to state violence reached a fever pitch when young revolutionary Bhagat Singh attempted to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai by assassinating assistant superintendent of police Saunders and was caught throwing bombs into the legislative assembly. He was executed by the state and martyred as a hero by Hindu nationalists in 1930.676 Famous for his sharp western dress, martial extremism, and “martyrdom”, Bhagat Singh was the nephew of prominent Ghadar Sikh revolutionary Ajit Singh, and participated in the agitation against the Nankana tragedy.677 Following his conviction, revolutionary meetings encouraged men to “wear hats and keep pistols,” rather than adopt the homegrown cloth [khaddar] like Gandhi’s followers or proudly bear kirpans and turbans as akalis had done. Yet when celebrating Bhagat Singh’s sacrifice, Mota Singh gave an enthusiastic speech that included a history of the Babbar Akalis.678

By 1930, the martial spirituality of the akalis was revived during the renewal of the non-cooperation agitation. Individuals inside of Delhi’s Sisganj Gurdwara allegedly threw objects onto British officials, inspiring troops and police to enter and fire inside the holy place and drag individuals into the streets.679 This inspired another akali jatha that marched to Peshawar, producing a negative effect on “Sikh soldiers” and “other classes

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677 Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*.
of Indian troops recruited in the Punjab.” However, just as the Guru-ka-Bagh incident had encouraged the distribution of more extreme Babbar Akali literature, the Sisganj firing inspired increased distribution of leaflets for the secular Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. Rather than encouraging soldiers to participate in the agitation, however, a group of Sikh women occupied the Sisganj Gurdwara and refused entry to anyone wearing foreign cloth, including Sikh soldiers in uniform. Thus, by the 1930s the martial symbols and strategies encouraged by Sikh military men in the 1920s for community reform were co-opted by a wider array of South Asian anti-colonial activists who were no longer dependent on, and were at times even overtly hostile to, Sikh men actively serving in the British Indian Army.

When armed Sikhs used their martial capacity to assert power over places of worship in the 1930s, they rarely did so to in opposition to the British government, or those “slow converts” and “Hindus” as they had done in the 1920s. Instead, they turned more sharply against India’s Muslim population. For example, the Shahid Ganj mosque in Lahore was handed over to the S.G.P.C. in 1935. Both an active mosque and gurdwara had stood on the same grounds until 1835 when the property was handed over to Sikh custodians, an arrangement further confirmed in 1927. When the S.G.P.C. proposed to destroy the mosque and build a wall, Sikh men occupied the grounds and armed themselves. The Government of Punjab feared that this would lead to a violent escalation among approaching Muslims. When the army opened fire on Muslims, the

680 Report ending the 15 May 1930, IOR/L/PJ/12/705.
681 Report on the political situation in the Punjab for the fortnight ending the 15th November 1930, IOR/L/PJ/12/705.
682 Report ending the 30th September, 1930, IOR/L/PJ/12/705.
Shahid Ganj mosque became a focus of renewed Punjabi Muslim anti-colonialism in the 1930s.\footnote{Chander “Congress-Raj Conflict and the Rise of the Muslim League,” 308.} The tension it created contributed to the Lahore District Magistrate’s instructions to prohibit the carrying of kirpans in 1935. As a retort, the S.G.P.C. declared December 5th “Kirpan Day.”\footnote{Cutting from the Delhi Police, First Incident Reports (21 December 1935), file number Sikh-7, Nehru Memorial Library (New Delhi), henceforth NML.} Dr. Mool Singh suggested that the Punjab government allowed Muslims to carry swords to foment violence between communities, which they deliberately exacerbated by banning the kirpan.\footnote{Delhi Police, First Incident Reports, (21 December 1935).} After condemning the government’s ban on kirpans, Hari Singh, an akali leader, took the fight back to a Sikh-Muslim struggle by stating that a quarrel for possession of the Punjab Province was inevitable because as long as Sikhs lived in the province they would fight against Muslims who attempted to rule.\footnote{Ibid.}

The struggle of Shahid Ganj mosque demonstrated a general shift in tone and focus of “Sikh” martial activism. By the 1930s, Sikh activists were as concerned with asserting power over the dominant Muslim population of Punjab as they were gaining rights from British authorities and “slow converts.” Central to this shift was that, in direct contrast to the early S.G.P.C. and Akali Dali, Sikhs activism in the 1930s was not usually spearheaded by former or active Sikh soldiers, who had served for decades alongside Punjabi Muslims in the British Indian Army. Instead, Sikh leaders were civilians who laid claim to Sikh martial and spiritual heritage to gain control over Sikh political participation and property.\footnote{“Report on the Firing into the Gurdwara Sis-Ganj, Delhi” (May 1930-March 1931), IOR/L/PJ/6/2005, File 2097.}

The Decline of Kirpans in the Army
Despite the increasing concessions given to South Asian communities to bear arms, British officials grew increasingly anxious about their own swords. In 1926 the Punjab Government changed the inscription on a statue of Sir John Lawrence in Lahore from saying “will you be ruled by the pen or the sword?” to “With the pen and the sword I have served you,” owing in part to pressures from Mohandas Gandhi to have it removed.\(^{689}\) The army’s perception of the *kirpan* similarly shifted from being an object used to cultivate loyalty and non-Hindu habits among Sikh soldiers, to being subtly undermined. In 1912, the issued military pamphlet *Our Indian Empire: Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India*, did not mention the *kirpan* explicitly, but stated that on their turbans Sikh men wore “an emblem of the weapon which his ancestors used with great effect in bygone wars.”\(^{690}\) Compared to this symbolic object representing a weapon of “bygone wars,” the 1932 edition engaged with the specifically sword-like nature of the *kirpan*. It described the 5 K’s, calling the *kirpan* “a short sword.” However, rather than acknowledging the nine-inch concession given to soldiers to wear *kirpans* after the First World War, it stated that *kirpans* were “usually worn in miniature in the hair” making it unnecessary “to wear the larger Kirpan provided he wears the miniature.”\(^{691}\) By 1939, Sikh troops such as the 4\(^{th}\) Battalion of the 11\(^{th}\) Sikh Regiment even mandated that “Kirpans will not be worn” in their Standing Orders.\(^{692}\) British military officials found it necessary by the 1930s to undermine the *kirpan* among actively serving troops. By doing so...

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\(^{689}\) Extract from *Pioneer Mail* (3 May) and extract from *New York Times* (12 November 1921), “Gandhi Exhorts Hindus to Remove Lawrence Statue,” IOR/L/PJ/6/1776, file 7098.

\(^{690}\) *Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India* (London: Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office, n.d., c.1912), 51-2.

\(^{691}\) Lieut. Col Alexander George Stuart, *The Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch 1932), 67.

\(^{692}\) W.H. Barlow Wheeler, Lt, Adjutant, 4\(^{th}\) Bn, 11\(^{th}\) Sikh Regt, *Standing Orders, 4\(^{th}\) Bn. 11\(^{th}\) Sikh Regiment* (Landikotal, March 1939), 72.
so, they unwittingly drew an uncomfortable distinction between those martial men serving the empire, who could not be trusted with anything more than a “miniature,” and those self-consciously martial men who fought against the empire with swords of any length and size.

The trepidation about the kirpan within the army signaled the growing prominence of weapons and martial violence in South Asia. By the 1930s, bearing arms in the Punjab province was often central to political activism and became a hard-won battle justified through “religious” rights. The Khaksar movement, a militant thread of Muslim activism and reform based in Punjab, developed under the leadership of Allama Mashriqi, who had studied at Punjab University and Cambridge. He believed, like akali reformers and Hindu nationalists, that martial discipline was central to effective religious reform and revival. He encouraged parades and military formations, and mocked maulvis (Muslim religious scholars) for having never handled swords. According to Dr. Mool Singh, the government allowed 7,000 Khaksars to march with belcha (spades), which he believed were as dangerous as kirpans. Like kirpans, carrying the belcha was justified through its value as a sacred symbol. In this case, the Prophet used them at Uhud to defend against the people of Mecca. By 1932, a former Subedar Major of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Gurkhas asked the Punjab Government if Nepalese Gurkhas domiciled in India on pension would be able to carry their short, rounded blade known as kukri. He argued that “every Gurkha is expected to worship his Kukri on one day in the

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694 Cutting from the Delhi Police Abstract of Intelligence, First Incident Reports, (4 January1936), NML.
Keeping in mind the concessions granted to Sikhs for the *kirpans*, the Punjab Government recommended to the Secretary to the Government of India that *kukris* be granted exemption all over India. The exceptional status given to Sikhs to bear arms because of their apparent loyal devotion to the British Indian Army opened the doors for other communities to make similar claims, increasingly arming men in the Punjab province.

As opposed to the widespread support that the early *akali* movement had gained among troops who showed their solidarity by wearing black turbans and carrying *kirpans*, by the 1930s soldiers’ support for reformist and revolutionary activism was far more fractured. Douglas Sidney Francis Stacey noted that by the Second World War, this increasing activism had created a difference of opinion among Sikh men: the rank and file appeared apathetic about political leadership, non-commissioned Indian officers hoped to retain British rule, and educated Indian officers spoke overtly and proudly about their goals for an independent India. These men felt the strain of having to choose between the militant nationalists who used violence to overthrow the empire and targeted officials for violence, or to embrace fully the narratives of Sikh loyalty in the Mutiny and the First World War. This revealed that British efforts to divide the Sikh community amongst itself to separate the loyal from the disloyal, fractured the unity of the troops along lines of belonging based on rank.

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697 Exemption of Kukris possessed or carried by Gurkhas from the restrictions imposed under the Indian Arms Acts the rules made there under, Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, B Proceedings, 6934/88, File 199, PSA.
698 Ibid.
The increasing military reluctance to embrace *kirpans* indicates that by the 1930s, Sikh martial prowess was no longer something over which British officials had complete control, in direct contrast to Kitchener and Macauliffe’s enthusiasm to spread Sikh texts across Punjab around 1900. For Indian revolutionaries, it was not enough to rely on the trained army men and urge them to mutiny, but to extend militancy—from the *akali jathas*, to the Babbar Akalis—to a wider population. Former soldiers such as Ex-Risaldar Anup Singh continued to organize jathas into the late 1920s and 1930s, but their goals shifted from having rights over “religious” spaces to gaining material compensation for their wartime service.\(^{700}\) While the symbols, strategies, and martial enthusiasm of the *akali* movement lived on, its “religious” underpinning had a more ambiguous legacy.

**Objects of Desire**

Despite Sikh activism throughout the 1920s and 1930s, many British soldiers regarded Sikhs as the most loyal and martial men in the British Indian Army. Former British soldiers William Homer and Toco Mose Stevens, who served in India between the wars, recalled that British soldiers tended to prefer working in the Punjab because of the Sikh soldiery found there. Homer admired Sikh regiments for being “hard fighters” while Stevens said that “the Sikhs were better than the others” because they were “more loyal.”\(^{701}\) Major A.E. Barstow of the 2/11th Sikh Regiment argued in 1928 that “The Sikh is essentially a fighting man” and could be counted as “the bravest and steadiest of soldiers” as well as “more faithful, more trustworthy” compared to other soldiers of the

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\(^{700}\) See various reports on the political situation in Punjab including for fortnight ending 31 July 1929, 30 September, 1929, 31 October 1929, 30 November 1929, 15 December 1929, 31 December 1929, IOR/L/PJ/12/694 : 1929.

\(^{701}\) Toco Moses Stevens, Imperial War Museum Interview, Reel 6; William Homer, Imperial War Museum Interview, Reel 12.
“Martial Races.” 702 This portrait of Sikh men as moral, martial, and loyal among British men suggests that the political activism associated with Sikh men during and immediately after the First World War did not linger for them as much as reputations of disloyalty did for other groups—such as the “Brahmans” of 1857. This is, in part, because of the specific institutionalized desirability of Sikh men and Sikh bodies that made them admirable and enviably masculine to British soldiers.

As Gajendra Singh has recently argued, “sexual desire was always implicit in comparisons of ‘martial’ classes to Europeans.” 703 Recruitment manuals encouraged searching for Indian men of “good physique” in villages and at festivals. Recruiters described Sikh Jats in particular as “generally tall and muscular, with well shaped [sic] limbs, erect carriage, and strongly marked and handsome features.” 704 Major A.E. Barstow romanticized the eighteenth century Sikh army as “composed of the handsomest and strongest young men.” 705 Yet this desirability went beyond recruitment and influenced how military officials put Sikh bodies on display. War Office films during the First World War which included footage of Sikh men presenting their swords to British officers in a show of loyalty, also included footage of Sikh men wrestling in loincloths. 706 Colonel F.T. Birdwood even kept photographs of Sikh men bathing in his personal photo album. 707 Within the British Indian Army, the desire for and display of Sikh bodies were

704 Barstow, *Handbooks for the Indian Army, Sikhs*, 152.
705 Ibid., 13.
well-entrenched by the twentieth century. Men felt comfortable capturing and gazing upon Sikh bodies, ostensibly for their value as robust, martial men loyal to the empire.

Retired Indian Army officer Francis Yeats-Brown indicated that the display of Sikh bodies in the British Indian Army went beyond observation and actually enabled physical intimacy between Sikh and British men. He recalled visiting a colonel “at a lonely station up-country” who used Sikh bodies for entertainment by dressing “Sikh boys, with their long hair” into “fascinating saris” and telling the British and American soldiers and R.A.F. personnel that they “belonged to the harem of a local maharajah.”\textsuperscript{708}

It did not take long for soldiers to become “soppy over these agile and enigmatic young ladies.” Of course, such displays were not entirely uncommon among British troops. Charles Francis Crossland recalled that “one man was a nancy” who “was 6’2” but when “you dressed him up as a woman and he’d look like one,” suggesting a sort of complicity in the men who “dressed him up.”\textsuperscript{709} Yeats-Brown’s story took an unusual turn when the colonel surprised everyone with an impromptu wrestling match, declaring “We’ll show you the emancipation of Indian womanhood! Out of purdah and into the ring!” Yeats-Brown took this opportunity to explain that Sikh men “are sometimes inclined to look rather like girls, though there is nothing in the least effeminate in their behavior.”\textsuperscript{710} He also implicitly conveys the fluidity of gender and sexual desire within a military context, the attractiveness of aggressive martial and athletic masculinity, and the willingness of certain Indian Army personnel to imagine and enable physical intimacy between British and Indian soldiers.

\textsuperscript{708} Francis Yeats-Brown, \textit{Martial India} (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1945), 45.
\textsuperscript{709} Charles Francis Crossland, Interviewed by Conrad Wood, Imperial War Museum number 797 (16 August 1976), Reel 3.
\textsuperscript{710} Yeats-Brown, \textit{Martial India}, 45.
The institutional desirability—and opportunities for intimacy—of Sikh men encouraged British men to journey to India in the hopes of serving with Sikhs. Douglas Stacey, who served with the 6/11th Sikh regiment, remembered that he was “attracted” to serving with a Sikh regiment after hearing a brief outline of “Sikh religion,” in which he saw parallels to Christianity. In addition to this religious appeal, Stacey was also drawn to their reputation as good warriors and their actions in the 1857 uprising and on the frontier in the 1920s. When it came time to meet them he was “thrilled” and admired that many Sikh men had volunteered “purely because they were warriors and wanted to fight”. He also revealed, however, that “There were a number of homosexuals in the Sikhs and uh, there would be intrigue amongst older men for the affections of, say, a younger soldier. This, when discovered, was severely, severely punished.” He recalled that one Jemadar had “run down in character” another Jemadar solely over the attentions of another soldier. His observation existed within a longer-held tradition of British officials associating “homosexuality” with the widely recruited “martial races.” The same qualities that made men robust, active, attractive, and well-suited to homosocial army life also, in British eyes, made them more likely to have sex with one another.

British perceptions of Sikh soldiers as “handsome,” “loyal” and “erect”—as well as having a higher propensity to be “homosexual”—suggests the additional potency of the kirpan within debates about Sikh identity and martial prowess. The desire of men such as Teja Singh to wield the “naked sword” and British trepidation about swords longer than “nine inches” suggests that there was a tension between the kirpan’s martial value and its role as a masculine tool of phallic desirability. The tamed, violent allure of

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711 Douglas Sidney Frederick Stacey, IWM interview 10633 (10 March 1989), Reel 1.
712 Ibid., 2.
Sikh men helped make them ideal paragons of martial strength and prowess to support the British Empire. Once this violence and martial prowess became uncontrollable, however, British officials found it necessary to emasculate and make ugly those South Asian bodies that they had so long desired. These qualities affected British perceptions of Sikhs during and after times of armed political upheaval. “Enemies” and “allies” were not created equal, particularly if there was a hint of desire.

**Conclusions**

As British officials realized in the twentieth century, when it came to the *kirpan*: size mattered. Some felt that if the *kirpan* stayed below nine inches, it was not intimidating, but once the *kirpan* grew to a less manageable, ostentatious size, it was unclear whether it could be considered a ceremonial religious object, or simply a weapon. In the first decades of the twentieth century, British officials had many visions of what the *kirpans* represented: a symbolic link to the past and a tool of ceremonial belonging, a threatening object, a token or award commemorating Sikh contributions to the army, and a weapon of inequality and community turmoil. It acted at once as a tool for British officers to help cultivate a “true” ethos of Sikh unity but also became a challenge to the British Empire’s monopoly over violence. The Army’s early twentieth century enthusiasm for Sikh soldiers made them a preferred group for deployment overseas, but, as the aftermath of the First World War indicates, also gave Sikhs heightened expectations for how India should be governed when they returned home. By 1925, the Gurdwara Act continued a pattern of using legislation to demarcate differences between communities, yet it was also inextricably linked to army policies and reformist movements which were institutionally defining what it meant to be a Sikh.
The flooding of weapons into interwar India increased the level of real and potential violence. This manifested in the “privileged class” of Sikhs who had access to arms, or in the fear that contributed to violent responses from British and South Asian officials and civilians. At the same time, kirpans sent a message to imperial authority that their privileged right to deploy martial violence as a method of state strategy, and the symbolic power of martial objects, was not held solely by the imperial state. The inconsistent imperial response to kirpan agitation spilled over into broader criticisms about the incompetence of the British government. Dictionaries meant to help British officers to better control their South Asian men became modes of undermining government legislation. District commissioners issued instructions and made arrests which contradicted the recommendations of the Government of India. Some provinces banned kirpans of a certain length while others believed that kirpans were synonymous with swords. While British officials held themselves responsible for the rationalization of Sikh activism—attributing the well-organized akalis to British military training—British imperial administration lagged behind the rapidly changing postwar world, and could not help but appear irrational and unpredictable.

British officials in the twentieth century hoped to control Sikh militancy to the point that it could only exist within the British Indian Army. This created the disharmony between akali’s self-presentation as a well-organized, disciplined, robust and militaristic force, and the stripped down prisoners, minimally clothed, bearing their kirpans waist-high. It became an imperial necessity not only to disperse, arrest, and confine unruly Sikh men, but to humiliate their masculinity, with the kirpan acting as an emasculated centerpiece, laid bare before power of the empire. The kirpan represented the British
Empire’s greatest fear: its ostensibly loyal and martial subjects, whose beliefs had been actively encouraged, not only exerting power over their own bodies and beliefs, but using this power to shake the stability of the empire. While British officials hoped to humiliate Sikh men, the true humiliation was that British officials lost control over the martial symbols that had built and protected the empire. As the next chapter will explore, Britain’s inability to control desirable and dangerous martial masculinities met its full expression in the intimate relationships between British and South Asian Muslim men.
Chapter Five

Intimate Islam and Dangerous Desire

British desires for South Asian bodies shaped not only recruitment but also definitions of what was martial and masculine, dangerous and desirable. At times this desirability went beyond institutional inclinations, biases, and predispositions, and translated into actual physical contact. British longings for Muslim lands and bodies in the interwar years sometimes facilitated sexually-charged encounters between British and South Asian Muslim soldiers. After the First World War, the British Empire governed the world’s largest Muslim population, a sizable and influential portion of which lived in British India. As military forces looked to consolidate power over Muslim-majority territories formerly held by the Ottoman Empire, a political and social appreciation for Islam could be a distinct imperial advantage. At the same time, the diversity of Britain’s Muslim subjects meant several unexpected challenges and opportunities for consolidating imperial rule. Muslims from around the world rallied around symbols and arguments of pan-Islam, while trying to understand their cultural, religious and regional place in the world amid the disintegration of Ottoman Empire, which previously held the leadership of global Islam in the form of the Caliphate (Khilafat). In the British Indian Army, Muslim soldiers faced several conflicting demands on their loyalty, piety, and national belonging. Indian nationalists called for religious unity immediately after the First World War. Yet to some South Asian Muslims, it was unclear whether Muslims belonged in this future “Indian” nation. Continuing calls for the overthrow of the British Empire came from a variety of sources—and South Asian Muslims were attractive allies for a variety of colonial and anti-colonial visions of the future. By examining how the spaces in which
men met, and the access that they had to one another changed over time, it suggests that British perceptions of Muslims—as potential enemies and then allies of imperial rule—had on-the-ground visibility through the places in which British and South Asian men met and mingled.

This chapter examines two case studies of British and South Asian Muslim soldiers as they moved from the fringes and frontiers in the 1920s to the heart of colonial society in the 1930s. It considers the case of First World War veteran and former Captain Reginald Abel Lewis Moysey of the 22nd Punjabis and his relationship with Pathan soldiers and an adopted “boy” named Nur Hussein Shah. Moysey took advantage of flexible borders, intense and conflicting local politics, and the rapid and unpredictable movement of people searching for land, bread and salvation on India’s Northwest Frontier. It then considers the case of Signalman H.H. Somerfield, whose 1930s mountainous sojourns with Muslim soldiers such as Signalman Sultan Mohammad reflected the strivings for upward mobility among both British working class and South Asian military men. By focusing on men who craved homosocial intimacy, this chapter suggests that the hierarchies of colonial difference, represented by presumed supremacy of heterosexual, white, British Christian masculinity, and the privileged distance between the bodies of colonized and colonizer, were being carefully questioned and reconfigured in the two decades before the Second World War.

*R.A.L. Moysey and the First World War*

Although the British Empire used alliances with the crumbling Mughal Empire to consolidate power over South Asia, and relied on Muslim manpower throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during the First World War Muslim soldiers were a
source of institutional anxiety. British officials worried that Muslim troops might be unwilling to fight against Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire, or in Muslim holy lands. Germany’s many declarations to be friends of Islam before and during the war, as well as its alliance with the Ottoman Empire, contributed to rumored and real desertions among certain Muslim troops. South Asian Muslim soldiers readily exchanged rumors that German troops and even the German Kaiser had converted to Islam.\footnote{From L. Robertson, esq. Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Special Department to the Honble Mr. H. Wheeler, CSI, CIE, ICS, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, (1 February 1915), Home Political Department, March 1915, file 54 Deposit.} When the 5\textsuperscript{th} Light Infantry mutinied in Singapore in 1915, and the 15\textsuperscript{th} Lancers refused to set sail for Mesopotamia in the same year, Britain’s hold over its sizable Muslim population appeared tenuous.\footnote{Later officials would blame German agents as well as the entirely-Muslim composition of these forces for these incidents. Minute Paper by H.V. Cox (17 July 1918), IOR/L/MIL/7/18848.} Yet British officials relied on strategic alliances, such as those orchestrated by T.E. Lawrence during the Arab Revolt, or the Sykes Picot agreement with France, to stake a claim for the lands of Ottoman Empire after the war had ended—expanding its claim over Muslim subjects. In this climate of anxiety and uncertainty, Reginald Abel Lewis Moysey disembarked for India in December 1915.

R.A.L. Moysey came from a relatively distinguished military family—he was the fifth and final child of a retired Naval Commander who died eight months before Moysey’s birth. He was a Roman Catholic who could trace his lineage to Edward III. His stepfather was R.H. Rattray, a Colonel in the British Indian Army, who served as a wartime recruiter and could trace his own family’s service in India to the 1857 Uprising. Moysey’s family was of sufficient importance in Tonbridge for his sister to have a “fashionable” wedding noted in the local papers, and for the tragic drowning death of his
younger half-brother to receive the sympathy of the local press. Prior to leaving for India, Moysey participated in stints at well-regarded institutions such as Tonbridge School and St. Anthony’s in Eastborne. In order to prepare for his military examinations he studied at a “Crammer” in Eton House Tonbridge under rugby player Major John Le Flemming. It took him three tries to pass his exam before he was admitted to the Cadet College at Quetta, disembarking at London for Karachi in December 1915. The Quetta College was a wartime response to the high casualty rates on the western front among British officers and the need to grant further commissions to officers of the Indian Army. Of the utmost importance was safeguarding the frontier during the duration of the war, and securing enough men in addition to those receiving commissions at the Royal Military College Sandhurst.715 After completing the course at Quetta, Moysey was labeled “backward” and “unfit for a Commission.” He was only one of two boys in his cohort required to complete the course again.716 He finally began his career in February 1917, on the eve of his twentieth birthday, attached to 2nd battalion, 19th Punjabis, before joining the 22nd Punjabis.717 He likely served on the frontier and in Persia and Mesopotamia during the final years of the war, and he received a medal for his wartime service.

Fighting on India’s Northwest Frontier, and in Persia and Mesopotamia represented a particular set of wartime challenges. Many Indian soldiers who served in Persia were so malnourished that they were unfit for service when they returned from the war.718 British attempts to consolidate food resources in Mesopotamia contributed to

715 Copy of Telegram from Viceroy regarding Establishment of Quetta and Wellington Cadet College (23 October 1914), IOR/L/MIL/7/2635.
718 James, Faraway Campaign, 26.
shortages and price hikes in 1917 and 1918. Military efforts to expand centralized control over resources increased the hostility among people who were previously only loosely subject to Ottoman authority. In Mesopotamia, young Indian army officers were often expected to use violence to force submission of local tribes. As in India, the extension of wartime powers in Mesopotamia after the war fueled considerable nationalist backlash. 719

In Persia—which was split prior to the war between British and Russian spheres of influence—British troops no longer viewed Russians as allies, but as potentially formidable “Bolshevik” opponents. After the Revolution, Bolshevik forces in central Asia reached out to Muslims as a national body, referring to them as “Oppressed Peoples of the East.” British officials worried about the comings and goings of Indian revolutionaries and German spies bound for Kabul. After the 1919 Anglo-Afghan War and the resurgence of anti-colonial fighting following the Rowlatt Acts and the Amritsar Massacre, anti-colonial hostilities in India reached a fever pitch. Uncertainty about the future of the Muslim Caliphate and Muslim holy places, including the Haj to Mecca, mobilized the South Asian Khilafat movement and encouraged many South Asian Muslims to support Turkish nationalists. Wartime fears of German “spies” were supplanted quickly by British anxieties about communism, pan-Islam, and anti-colonialism as Russian Communists, British Indian army deserters and South Asian revolutionaries collaborated to spark mutiny in the North-West Frontier. 720

In the midst of these tense political collaborations and counter-measures, many British soldiers imagined these vast contested landscapes—from Arabia to the Northwest

frontier—as mystical lands and robust spaces in which true glory could be won. These lands were uncontrolled and romantic, cruel and unforgiving, and conducive to a language of hyper masculine suffering and homosocial intimacy. Most famously, T.E. Lawrence described being fermented by the sun in the “naked desert.” He described young men who

...began indifferently to slake one another’s few needs in their own clean bodies—a cold convenience that, by comparison, seemed sexless and even pure. Later, some began to justify this sterile process, and swore that friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace, found there hidden in the darkness a sensual co-efficient of the mental passion which was welding our souls and spirits in one flaming effort.

Like many of his contemporaries, Lawrence found this an inherently “eastern” phenomenon and described one quintessential example of “eastern boy and boy affection which the segregation of women made inevitable. Such friendships often led to manly loves of a depth and force beyond our flesh-steeped conceit.” Beyond these romanticized visions, many soldiers found unanticipated allies and intimacies in these difficult wartime locales. One British officer in Persia combatted the cold and lonely Persian nights by forgoing his isolated officers’ hut and sleeping with his Indian troops. Indian soldiers and non-combatants in Mesopotamia reported forming intimate attachments with Armenian orphans and cleaners, or sharing trepidation about Germans with their Turkish captors. British wartime activity in these regions, therefore, gave

722 T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (Ware, Hertfordshire, 1997), 8.
723 Ibid., 224.
724 F. James, Faraway Campaign (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1934), 70-71.
unconventional access to cross-cultural intimacy, bolstered by the romanticized hyper-masculine image of rugged frontier life in which the homo-social blended somewhat seamlessly into the homo-sexual.

Compared to these romanticized spaces of rugged wartime intimacy, Moysey’s immediate post-war life was no doubt uninspiring. He spent the end of 1919 and beginning of 1920 home on leave, far removed from the hot and visceral desperation of the war. His outlet for homosocial intimacy was becoming a “prime mover” of reviving the Tonbridge Rugby Football Club. He departed Liverpool on the White Star Line ship “Zeppelin” with other British officers bound for India in April 1920. Shortly after returning to India his behavior sounded far more like Lawrence’s “eastern boys” than a sporting Englishman. In addition to living “in a tent away from any other officer” he adopted a boy called Nur Hussein Shah, described by Moysey as “Pathan youth” around seventeen years of age. Moysey was twenty three when this adoption took place.

According to the adoption certificate, Moysey took custody of Nur Hussein Shah from his father, Muzaffar Shah, who resided in the Kohat district of the Northwest Frontier, nearly two hundred miles from Moysey’s station at Rawalpindi in Punjab. The agreement for adoption was signed, fingerprinted by witnesses, and stamped—a transaction legitimized by colonial authority. It maintained that Muzaffar Shah was handing over custody of his son because he had overindulged in opium and could no longer support his family. He appointed Moysey as his son’s “guardian” giving him

726 Kent & Sussex Courier (31 October 1919), 8; Kent & Sussex Courier (2 April 1920), 3; Kent & Sussex Courier, (10 April 1925), 11.
727 Names and Descriptions of British Passengers Embarked at the Port of Liverpool (9 April 1920), White Star Line “Zeppelin,” National Archives (UK), henceforth TNA.
728 From Lt. R.A.L. Moysey, 1/22nd Punjabis, Rawalpindi to the General Officer Commanding, Rawalpindi District (21 November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
control over the boy “as if he were his father.” This dramatic contrast—between Moysey’s life in Britain playing football in his hometown—and his life in India sleeping in tents with Pathan soldiers and adopting a Pathan “boy”—indicates how men’s lives could be torn between vastly different experiences of empire. On the one hand, recognizing himself as a “father” to a young man only six years his junior fit within the paternalistic organization of the British Indian Army which encouraged its British officers to view even South Asian men older than them as children. At the same time, Moysey was a man wealthy and privileged enough to have attended public schools in Britain, giving him experience with the intimacy of homosocial institutions. By “adopting” a Pathan boy, he participated in Orientalized ideas about what was possible and acceptable in British India, where a trade in boys played significant roles in both military and monastic life, later made notorious by Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* and authors such as J.R. Ackerley. Meanwhile, Indian authors and Hindu nationalists were starting to condemn more vocally the cosmopolitan spaces of colonialism such as cinemas, British public schools and military cantonments, for having a sexually “corrupt” influence on young South Asian men.

Moysey’s intimate attachment to Pathan men was, in some ways, well entrenched in imperial thought and behavior. Pathans, also known by the colonial state as Pushtuns,

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729 Copy of an agreement made between Muzaffar Shah and Lieut. Moysey, regarding the adoption of Nur Hussein Shah (27 November 1920), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
Pashtuns, Pukhtuns, Pakhtuns, and Afghans, were, broadly conceived, the ethnic majority on the frontier. They occupied a space that British observers simultaneously exalted and condemned for being unconquerable.\textsuperscript{732} In turn, British authors regarded frontier Pathans as braver and manlier than other South Asians due to their reputation as “unconquered.” When Richard Francis Burton journeyed to Mecca and Sindh, he did so disguised as a Pathan, appropriating their unchecked access to the borderlands of empire.\textsuperscript{733} British writers and officials portrayed Pathans as democratic and noble, masculine and chivalric, yet uncontrolled and sometimes cruel, echoing the standard to which British soldiers held themselves.\textsuperscript{734} This discursive representation of Pathans was so common and enticing that some soldiers, such as Private J.P. Swindlehurst, who served in India just after the war, copied entire sections on Pathans from military handbooks into his diaries. Placing these alongside copied poems by Rudyard Kipling describing their brutality, he attempted to capture the fantastic and romantic qualities of these men.\textsuperscript{735} Many British soldiers felt that Pathans had more in common with British soldiers than they did with other South Asians, a familiar trope for those men deemed a part of the “Martial Races” who were widely recruited within the British Indian Army.\textsuperscript{736} In fact, the institutional appeal of these “martial” men—portrayed as robust, athletic, “erect” and even “attractive” was in


\textsuperscript{733} Peter van der Veer, Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), 93-6.


\textsuperscript{735} Diary of Private J.P. Swindlehurst, (29 March 1920), Documents 10415, Imperial War Museum, henceforth IWM.

some ways a self-conscious tactic for making service in India desirable for British soldiers.  

During the First World War, the army’s admiration for Pathans clashed with growing suspicions about their relationship to the frontier. Existing at the fringes of imperial rule, Pathans were able to cross borders to escape British retribution, giving them a greater degree of freedom to voice and act upon their objections to imperial power. Yet this resulted in noted institutional backlash. British officials halted the recruitment of trans-frontier Pathans in 1915, blaming their so-called “religious prejudices” about fighting against Turkish forces. By 1916 they were withdrawn from Mesopotamia.  

British officers were reluctant to send them back to India out of the fear that they would stir discontent on the frontier.  

Indian Army units continued to face Pathans in combat on the frontier throughout the war. F. James recalled that “A party of Pathan soldiers, escorting a convey, decided to desert to their homes in Afghanistan with their rifles and ammunition,” but died in the desert before making it there. In 1918, Lieutenant General H.V. Cox argued that the trouble “amongst Indian troops in Mesopotamia, Egypt, or France has practically been restricted to Pathans” while “the Musalmans of India (other than Pathans) have been generally reliable.” Thus, Indian Muslims were exempted from the institutional condemnation and anxiety that they faced.

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737 Singh, The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers, 28.  
738 Minute Paper by H.V. Cox (17 July 1918), IOR/L/MIL/7/18848.  
739 From Viceroy, Military Secret, (15 Feb 1916), IOR/L/MIL/7/18848.  
740 David Omissi, Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914-18 (New York, 1999), 15; Rahman Ali (Hindustani Muslim) to M. Pargan Singh (6th Jats, France) Peshawar, 29 March 1915, cited in Omissi, Indian Voices, 46. In a letter from Risaldar Samand Khan he celebrates the defeat of Pathans on the frontier in 1917 and compares it to the Tirah campaign of 1897. Risaldar Samand Khan (retired) to Jemadar Muhammad Hayat Khan (18th Lancers, France, 35) India, 1 August 1917, cited in Omissi, Indian Voices, 310.  
741 James, Faraway Campaign, 17.  
742 Cox, Minute Paper, (17 July 1918).
at the start of the war, while their Pathan brethren became not quite “Indian” enough. This former source of praise became the key to their newfound status as untrusted imperial adversaries. During the Third Afghan War in 1919 and rebellion in Waziristan 1919-2, in which Moysey took part, British military officials continued to accuse Pathan militias of succumbing to the “call of Islam” and defecting to pan-Islamist leaders such as Mullah Fazl Din. When Moysey returned to India its borders were sites of upheaval and revolt and Pathan soldiers’ positions in the army and Empire were far more tenuous.

Contributing to anxiety on the frontiers was the Hijrat movement which began in May 1920 and peaked in the summer months. Following the Khilafat movement, proponents of Hijrat in the Northwest Frontier believed that India was *Dar-al-Harb*—the realm of war—and called for pious followers of Islam either to stay and fight or to migrate to regions of the world under Muslim control. These were met with promises from the Amir of Afghanistan to support pilgrims and migrants with land and food. In the face of hard economic and political times in an already impoverished region of India, tens of thousands of South Asian Muslims migrated to Afghanistan from the frontier. Some encountered Bolshevik revolutionaries and Indian nationalists who used Kabul as a home base during the war and continued to disperse revolutionary militias throughout Central Asia. Most simply found hardship, theft, starvation and the broken promises of Afghani officials who could not accommodate their swelling numbers. Two-thirds returned home. Meanwhile, British officials recognized that one of the main reasons that Pathan men joined the British Indian Army was due to poverty and having few alternatives for

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employment. Thus, these men were being scaled back from their imperial positions at a time when pan-Islamic movements in the frontier called on them to abandon India for a promise of spiritual and economic salvation. Moysey returned to a region of India witnessing vast dislocation and turmoil, and to soldiers who were unsure whether their service to Britain and residence in India made them unholy sinners.

A Confirmed Sodomite

The tense environment of the postwar frontier meant that Moysey’s unconventional actions to sleep in tents with Pathan men and adopt a Pathan boy carried immense political significance. Making matters worse, his commanding officer reported to Deputy Commissioner Smith that Moysey had been helping trans-frontier Pathans carry out raids and had plans to steal rifles. One officer turned over a detailed operation for an attack on the depot that was supposedly prepared by Moysey. Based on this information, half of the garrison spent a night guarding the points which Moysey “and his gang” were expected to attack. Because of a storm the raid did not take place. Military officials could find little conclusive proof to hold Moysey directly responsible. By summer 1921 Moysey journeyed even deeper into the frontier, serving briefly with the 2nd Battalion, 21st Punjabis in Waziristan, a region characterized by British officials as composed of “fanaticism” and “Blood feuds.” If his career was not already destroyed

746 From H.A. Smith, Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi to H.P. Tollinton, Commissioner, Rawalpindi, (23rd November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458; Hadow, Report, (22 November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
747 Smith to Tollinton (23rd November 1921).
748 Indian Army List, July 1921, 1104-1105. See also http://www.researchingww1.co.uk/2nd-battalion-21st-punjabis; India. Army. General Staff Branch, Operations in Waziristan 1919-1920 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1921), iii. Operations in Waziristan indicate that “active operations” ceased in May 1920. Moysey was listed with the 2/21st Punjabis in July 1921.
by the rumors of his role in raids, his return to Rawalpindi ushered in a new phase of his unpredictable frontier life.

Shortly after Moysey returned from Waziristan, his Pathan “boy,” Nur Hussein Shah, was arrested for violating the Indian Arms Act in September 1921. According to Superintendent Hadow, the boy “got running wild one afternoon with an automatic pistol and was eventually arrested with difficulty.” Hearing the news, Moysey “forcibly released” him from police custody and was also arrested. 749 Moysey applied for his resignation and received authorization on 19 November 1921. Nur Hussein Shah was recaptured to serve a nine month sentence under the Arms Act in the Rawalpindi jail. 750 After this incident it did not take long for British officials to speculate on the reasons for Moysey’s behavior. Hadow claimed that “There is very little doubt that Moysey’s mania is unnatural offences and that this boy is his particular paramour.” 751 H.A. Smith argued more explicitly that Moysey was “a confirmed sodomite” which “may not be entirely relevant, but it adds to the undesirability of letting him stay in India.” 752 The Home Department of the Viceroy’s Office echoed these concerns and maintained that “he is strongly suspected of having illicit relations” with Nur Hussein Shah. 753

It is striking that Moysey’s status as a so-called “confirmed sodomite” in and of itself did not exclude him from military service. The Manual of Indian Military Law adhered to the Indian Penal Code of 1860, which defined “Sodomy” as an “Unnatural Offence” and carried a punishment of Transportation for life, or imprisonment for 10

749 Hadow, Report, (22 November 1921).
750 From Moysey to The General Officer Commanding (21 November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458; From Smith to Tollinton (23rd November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259.
751 Hadow, Report, (22 November 1921).
752 From Smith to Tollinton (23 November 1921); Ibid.
753 Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department to Secretary of State for India (6 February 1922), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
years, or less, and a fine.  

Anxieties about sex between men in barracks was a long-standing military concern and British officials put forth considerable effort to regulate soldiers’ sexual lives.  

Lord Kitchener, a Commander-in-Chief of India and Secretary of War at the outbreak of the 1914 conflict, appealed to soldiers’ sense of family and regimental shame to encourage them to resist their sexual urges.  

Despite this official institutional condemnation, and officials’ quickness to blame Moysey’s actions on his supposed “unnatural” “mania,” military leaders demonstrated an unwillingness to discuss the matter further. Explicit and implicit references to sex with Nur Hussein Shah were physically scratched out of some of the copies of correspondence.  

Moysey received neither a court martial nor imprisonment for these acts, and Police Commissioner Smith declined to elaborate on how or when exactly Moysey’s status as “sodomite” was “confirmed.” This suggests that the army exercised a degree of deliberate institutional silence when it came to British soldiers having sex with men.  

As several scholars have argued, locating evidence of same-sex activity in the archives, especially between soldiers, is a challenging task. Court-martials for crimes involving “sodomy” were often either not carried out, or were handled internally without leaving an institutional record. Many men only received punishments when they

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757 While these accusations remains in the British Library’s copy of the incident, they have been physically scratched out of the National archives’ version. See FO T7947/7947/334 (1922), TNA.
committed some other unrelated offence. Anjali Arondekar has argued that military officials sometimes used the titillating scandal of sex between men to cover up instances of imperial mismanagement or atrocities of governance. By contrast, they tended to take for granted that Pathan men had sex with one another. Richard Francis Burton claimed that sodomy was one among many “vices specific to Muslims.” Later British officials considered it one factor influencing Muslim soldiers’ supposed tendencies toward desertion and religious radicalism. Others linked sodomy to the robust frontier. Lal Baz, an Afridi of the 40th Pathans, found it necessary to remind his brother in the Frontier Constabulary “Do not commit sodomy with your messmates.” Until the First World War, sodomy was rarely prosecuted in the Indian Army despite hints of admissions to same-sex relationships by Pathan soldiers as late as 1917. The frequency with which British soldiers described Pathans sneaking into tents while they were sleeping to “steal their rifles” hinted at the dangerous—and potentially embarrassing—allure of these men. British censors during the First World War even referred to theft as “Pathan morality.” Only once the frontier fighting of the 1920s and 30s threatened military borders did sex between Pathan men become a source of institutional condemnation.

758 Many thanks to Erica Wald for our ongoing conversation on this subject.
759 Arondekar, For the Record, 39.
760 Ibid., 44.
761 Singh, The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers, 39.
763 Lal Baz (Afridi) to his brother (Frontier Constabulary, India) 40th Pathans, France, Urdu, (7 September 1915), quoted in Omissi, Indian Voices, 99.
765 From Muhammad Aslam, Signaller, Pathan, Peshawar Cantonment, to his brother Gul Badshah, serving with 129th Baluchis in France (9 August 1915), IOR/L/MIL/5/825.
766 Singh, The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers, 40.
Although British officials found Moysey’s actions a relatively straight-forward matter of his being a “confirmed sodomite” inflicted with the “mania” to protect his “paramour,” Moysey gave a much different account of his motivations for rescuing Nur Hussein Shah. He claimed that the boy was a “friend” who had journeyed into Adra Village to buy vegetables and pray in the mosque. While there he saw “a crow carrying some entrails” flying nearby and “To prevent the desecration of this holy place,” he fired at the crow with a pistol and killed it.\textsuperscript{767} When village police saw him they demanded the weapon. Nur Hussein “refused” and pointed out that “his breach of the Arms Act had been for the protection of the Holy place.” When police tried to arrest him, he resisted and ran away, but was later captured. Moysey admitted that he “released” the boy as soon as he heard about the incident. This apparently angered the police who brought forward a “false charge” that Nur Hussein Shah had shot at them. The boy was sentenced to one year imprisonment and a fine for violating the Arms Act. Moysey accused the district judge of altering evidence and believed that the Magistrate was unnecessarily harsh simply “because Nur Hussein Shah was my friend.” After an appeal the boy’s sentence was reduced to eight months. Moysey claimed that he would submit the matter to the High Court but could not afford it because he spent every penny “defending an innocent man” who had merely “acted in the defence of the sanctity of a place of worship and would not pay the Police money to let him go.”\textsuperscript{768}

For Moysey, the entire incident had little to do with the intensity of his relationship with Nur Hussein Shah, but was a straightforward example of police corruption. Nur Hussein Shah was merely a young man who steadfastly protected a holy

\textsuperscript{767} From Moysey to The General Officer Commanding, Rawalpindi District (21 November 1921).
\textsuperscript{768} Ibid.
place. The police and magistrate were guilty of concocting an elaborate conspiracy that included forging evidence all because of their “friendship.” Of course, Moysey’s statement did not account for how or why Nur Hussein had a pistol, or what measures he took to free the boy from police custody. Moysey’s statement—so self-righteous in preventing a holy desecration and condemning police corruption—was written in part to protest Nur Hussein Shah being transferred to Lahore Jail. In addition to begging authorities to keep him in Rawalpindi, this document served as Moysey’s declaration for how and why he was kidnapping Judith Birdwood.769

A Kidnapping

On 21 November 1921, two days after securing his resignation, Moysey confided to a fellow officer that he planned to attend a dance hosted by General Sir William Birdwood without an invitation. While there he hoped to abduct “the General’s youngest daughter” and take her “into independent territory.” His main object was to “secure the release of” Nur Hussain Shah.770 The officer reported everything to Superintendent of Police.771 Both Hadow and Deputy Commissioner Smith were flabbergasted by the situation and spoke with General Birdwood about what to do. None of them believed that they had real grounds to arrest Moysey because, as Smith confessed, “none of us really believed that such an extraordinary scheme would be carried out.”772 On the night of the dance Moysey arrived at 10:45 pm with a motor car containing “provisions for the journey, two Mills grenades and a loaded Webley revolver with a bandolier full of

769 Ibid.
770 From Hadow to the I.G. of Police, Punjab, the D.I.G of Police, Western Range, the Deputy Commissioner, Police Office, Rawalpindi, (22 November, 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
771 Hadow, Report, (22 November 1921).
772 From Smith to Tollinton, (23rd November 1921).
cartridges. On his person he had an automatic pistol loaded and a magazine in it fully charged” and “another full magazine.”  

773 His plan was to drive Judith to the Lyons Cinema and get a ride to a rail station fifteen miles away.  

774 When he climbed into Birdwood’s garden to carry out his plot, police tried but failed to arrest him. His car was “put out of action and the bombs and revolver removed.”  

775 Subsequent “traps” were laid near his car and in his bungalow, where he was arrested.  

While Moysey was being held for attempted kidnapping, police and officers collected a substantial body of documentary evidence against him. Moysey had produced detailed hand-written plans for the abduction, in which he fashioned himself Lieutenant Colonel, Commanding the “Last Hope Relief Force,” a peculiar and romantic title for a kidnapping plot.  

777 In a letter intended for the General Officer Commanding, Moysey claimed that he was “compelled” to abduct Judith and hold her ransom “for the release of Nur Hussein Shah.” In addition to portraying himself as a heroic figure, protesting the “corruptness of the present day justice,” he described in almost titillating detail his plans for Judith.  

778 If his terms were not met “this little girl will never be returned to her parents but will become a Pathan and the wife of a certain Pathan who will claim her at sunset on the date I have fixed.” If any attempt was made to rescue her “she will be disposed of at once.”  

779 He provided a list of over twenty terms to have the girl returned.

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773 From Hadow to the I.G. of Police, (22 November, 1921); See also From Smith to Tollinton (23rd November 1921).
775 From Smith to Tollinton, (23rd November 1921).
776 From Hadow to the I.G. of Police, (22 November, 1921).
777 From Smith to Tollinton (23rd November 1921).
778 From Moysey to The General Officer Commanding, Rawalpindi District (21 November 1921).
779 R.A.L. Moysey, Terms for the Release of Judith Birdwood, (21 November 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458. Moysey opens the document with the standard military phrase: “I have the honour to submit for your
These included pardons and guarantees for both Nur Hussein Shah and himself signed by the Viceroy, exempting them of all crimes. He also demanded permission and payment for them to travel to England “in the same cabin” and live together once they got there. He insisted upon a gratuity of no less than one thousand pounds. After detailing the terms thoroughly, he added at the end of his demands that “It will be sufficient if the pardons for Nur Hussein Shah and myself together with one thousand rupees in cash are handed over.” He intended to give the Viceroy one month to carry out the terms.

Despite this substantial body of evidence, British officials proceeded cautiously with the best way to bring justice against Moysey. Smith initially planned to commit him to the High Court, but others argued that since Moysey did not enter Birdwood’s house, it would be difficult to convict him of an “attempt” to abduct. At most he could be charged with “simple trespass” for which there was a maximum penalty of three months’ imprisonment. Of the utmost importance was keeping the matter quiet. If Moysey was committed to the High Court it would create “the gross scandal of a British officer attempting to abduct the daughter of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Army.” Looking to avoid this, Smith, General Birdwood and the officer Commanding agreed to drop the kidnapping case. Moysey’s only conviction was for two months rigorous imprisonment for releasing Nur Hussein Shah.

Although they did not pursue a kidnapping case against him, officials felt the need to take more serious action. The India Office, Punjab Government, and Superintendent of

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780 Ibid.
781 Ibid.
782 From Smith to Tollinton, (23rd November 1921).
783 Ibid.
784 Kabul Diary, No. 42 for Week Ending 29 October 1923, IOR/L/PJ/12/67.
Police were worried that Moysey possessed “an intimate knowledge of Pushtu,” had “many Pathan friends.” He had even crossed borders “disguised as a Pathan.”\textsuperscript{785} They feared that he would continue “to assist trans-frontier raiders and to organize their activities” and perhaps even take retribution against the officer who had foiled his plan.\textsuperscript{786} Smith argued that Moysey’s “attitude towards Government” has “never been loyal” while the “standard of his morals” was undesirable. As a result, they pressed to have him deported.\textsuperscript{787} The Punjab Government requested deportation in December 1921. His two-month imprisonment expired in January 1922 and he arrived in London on the P&O steamship “Egypt” in February.\textsuperscript{788}

Despite all of the rumors and evidence about Moysey’s intentions to raid the cantonment, have sex with Pathan men, arrive armed at a general’s place of residence, blackmail top officials including the Viceroy, forcibly release a man from police custody, and kidnap a general’s daughter, he only faced two months in prison and deportation from India. Meanwhile, Nur Hussein Shah endured eight months in prison for violating the Indian Arms Act. At the end of it all, Moysey could still return “home” and live an “ordinary” English life, a choice quite absent for South Asian men who fell afoul the colonial state. However, this was not what Moysey had in mind.

\textit{A Frontier Spy?}

\textsuperscript{785} From the India Office to the Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, Secret Draft Paper, (19 July 1922), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
\textsuperscript{786} Copy of letter from Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, Home Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department (7 December 1921), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458; From Hadow to the I.G. of Police, Punjab, (22 November 1921).
\textsuperscript{787} From Smith to Tollinton (23 November 1921).
\textsuperscript{788} Copy of letter from Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, Home Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department (7 December 1921).
On his return journey to England Moysey gave subtle indications that he was not finished “trying on” imperial identities or using colonial bureaucracy to create chaos and disorder. On the passenger list of the “Egypt,” he was put down erroneously as both a “Captain” and a thirty-five year-old cultivator, rather than a demoted and disgraced former officer on the eve of his twenty-fifth birthday.789 One month after returning to England, he received correspondence from a Michael Gilmore who encouraged him to journey to Tehran in July and warned him not to “do any more mad stunts.”790 Just three months after returning home, in May 1922, Moysey applied for a passport to Persia. Once again he represented himself falsely, claiming that he was a married, thirty-five year old fur-trader.791 Unsurprisingly, the Foreign Office, the Director of Military Intelligence, and Commissioner of Police were unwilling to give Moysey a passport.792 The India Office was all too eager to provide supporting evidence to refuse it to him and supplied extensive details about all of his antics in India. Officials ultimately agreed that he should be denied access to Persia and any country in close proximity to the Northwest Frontier.793

In response to being denied a passport, Moysey composed a somewhat desperate letter claiming that while in Persia he would “work in the interests of the British

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789 Names and Descriptions of British Passengers, Whence Arrived: Shanghai, Port of Arrival: London, P&O Steamship Line “Egypt” Date of arrival: 5 February 1922, TNA.
791 “Declaration to be made by Applicant for Passport” (15 May 1922) completed by Rex (Reginald) Abel Lewis Moysey, IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
792 Passport Office Minute (4 July 1922), FO 7947/7947/334, TNA.
793 From the India Office to the Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, (19 July 1922), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458; Letter from M. Villiers of the Foreign Office to the Under-Secretary of State, India Office, (31 July 1922), IOR/L/E/7/1259, File 458.
government.” He added emphatically that he had a wife and children in Persia who were facing starvation. He admitted that “When in India in despair I contemplated committing a certain offence and I have paid for it, but to deprive me of my wife and children is indeed an unnatural punishment and I cannot believe that such is your intention.” Appropriating the language of “unnatural offences,” which had played a role in his condemnation by the state, Moysey accused the British government of forcing an “unnatural” distance between heterosexual spouses and biological children. Of course, this alleged “wife and children” facing starvation in Persia had played no role in Moysey’s kidnapping plot. When he demanded assurances that he be permitted to travel and live with Nur Hussein Shah, he made no requests for any wife or children to get money, food or travel assistance. The Foreign and Passport Offices were unmoved by his declarations and flatly denied him a passport.

Being denied a passport did not prevent Moysey from returning to India. He visited the Afghan Legation in London in April 1923, disguised himself as a lascar seaman on a ship to India and then crossed into Afghanistan “disguised as an Afridi tribesman.” By September 1923, he arrived in Jalalabad wearing “Afridi clothes” and saying “his prayers fluently as a Mussulman.” He claimed that he had resigned from service in the British Indian Army to serve the Afghan Government and was awaiting orders from the Foreign Office to proceed to Kabul. He arrived in Kabul using his stepfather’s surname—“Rattray”—as his own. He then claimed that he was proceeding

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795 Ibid.
796 Letter from New Scotland Yard to J.W. Hose (1 January 1924), IOR/L/PJ/12/67; L.D. Wakely, Minute Paper (5 Feb 1924), IOR/L/PS/11/243, P 533/1924.
797 Kabul Diary (29 October 1923); See also FO 371/9288 (1923).
to Lahore to bring his “family” and that he was to be employed doing railway work. British officials in Kabul realized that “A knowledge of the character of the man does not warrant the placing of any credence on his statements” and they suspected that he was a spy.\textsuperscript{798} He was arrested at Landi Khana in November 1923. Rather than simply sending him back to England again, the Viceroy and Secretary of State for India arranged to have Moysey shipped to Penang, Malay States, to work on his brother’s rubber plantation.\textsuperscript{799} He entered into an agreement with the Northwest Frontier Province stating that he would not to return to India for five years, under the terms of the European Vagrancy Act. He was banned from doing so under the Frontier Security Regulation.\textsuperscript{800} These acts, like deportation, were extreme pieces of legislation only selectively used against Europeans. Using them against Moysey suggests that he represented a considerable threat to the colonial state that exceeded the potential embarrassment of disgracing and condemning a former officer.

Although Moysey was physically removed from India in January 1924, he continued to cast an institutional shadow. Officials in the India Office’s Public and Judicial department wondered how a man deported “for very good reasons” in 1922 could reenter the country as a seaman in 1923.\textsuperscript{801} The Government of India assured them that the Bombay police carried out rigorous examinations of passports and that no one could land without having papers stamped by the Passport Examining Officer with the Police stamp.\textsuperscript{802} However, their main concern was not whether other discontented British

\textsuperscript{798} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{799} Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department, to Secretary of State for India (11 December 1923), IOR/L/PJ/12/67.
\textsuperscript{800} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{801} Minute Paper, P. & J., (22 May 1924), IOR/L/PJ/12/67.
\textsuperscript{802} From Government of India Home Department (Political) to the Secretary, Public and Judicial Department, India Office, London. Simla, (22 May 1924), IOR/L/PJ/12/67.
soldiers might illegally cross borders and cause disorder, but whether “Indian revolutionaries” could enter “disguised as seamen.” The illicit movements of a British soldier resulted in scrutinizing South Asian mobility.

**Imperial Tensions**

Moysey’s ability to reenter India after being deported highlights the tenuous hold of imperial power over the movement of its British subjects. Despite mandating passports for travel, its offices could not prevent men from journeying without them. Its massive ships, which moved goods and peoples from one imperial port to another, facilitated clandestine journeys of wanted men. Just a year after being deported a man could not only reenter a country, but cross borders freely into hotly contested regions. Moysey’s ability to “pass” as both an Afridi and a lascar seaman for non-official purposes also upended the privileged and widely romanticized ability of British spies who dressed and moved as they pleased when pursuing the goals of the imperial state. The role that men such as Richard Francis Burton had played in crossing borders to gather intelligence, further romanticized by Rudyard Kipling’s Irish spy-hero “Kim,” were appropriated by a man who had used British imperial bureaucracy to make demands for the body of a Pathan boy. His spy-like disguise tactics enabled free movement to pursue whatever he desired—whether that was sex, spiritual conversion, or service to Afghanistan.

Institutional documentation about Moysey portrays him at various moments as a spy, a disloyal subject, a would-be kidnapper and the mastermind elaborate raids, yet the difficulty that officials had pinning him down institutionally and physically reveal the uncertainties and silences of imperial records. Despite his alleged disloyalty and

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803 From the India Office, Public and Judicial (26 June 1924), Home Political 28/II/1925, TNA.
propensity to undermine the rule of property in frontier raids, official records never
categorised him as a “Bolshevik,” “communist,” or “revolutionary.” They simply
deployed the extreme and uncommon legislation of the European Vagrancy Act and the
action of deportation, veiling the exact nature of his threat beneath the ambiguity of the
written record. Similarly, officials never saddled him with contemporary terms such as
“homosexual” or “pedophile,” preferring veiled references to “unnatural offenses” and
“sodomy” which were, in some cases, stricken from some of the institutional records.
Unlike the “Indian revolutionaries” they feared, and the “Criminal Tribes” on the frontier
who lived in a perpetual state of institutional suspicion, British officials were reluctant to
admit that a British officer could be a habitual offender. They hoped that relocating
him to other parts of the empire could reduce his propensity toward becoming a sexual
and political danger.

The clearest image that emerges of Moysey is that he was a man who was deeply
immersed in the instabilities of British imperial power on the frontier, and was, at the
same time, an expert at mining the fragilities of imperial bureaucracy for his own ends.
Having thorough paperwork for his adoption of Nur Hussein Shah, and standing orders
for his kidnapping plot, he relied upon the military efficiency he was so carefully
undermining. Despite the overwhelming evidence against him, he was neither executed
nor removed from service. Had Moysey been a South Asian soldier, his career, if not his
life, would have been immediately terminated after any one of his plots. As a point of
comparison, one Indian cantonment schoolmaster was sentenced to seven years rigorous
imprisonment for sending a series lurid and explicit letters to an English officer’s wife

804 Arondekar, *For the Record*, 85.
threatening to kidnap her. Unlike Moysey, he had never approached her place of residence. Yet it was institutionally easier to dispose of an Indian school master than a British officer. Moysey had the benefit of requiring an irrefutable case against him to receive punishment. This made it all too easy for him to engage with the frontier as an almost fantastic and imaginary space of wild and untamed “Islam”—a vehicle through which he, as a white British man, could explore his own “savage” impulses with few consequences. At the end of it all he could retreat to his brother’s Malay plantation, reclaiming a position as a member of white imperial landed authority, unstained by his flirtations with kidnapping, assault, raids, prison, and the frontier. By the late 1920s and 1930s, however, white British officers of impeccable pedigree were not the sole inheritors of imperial privilege. South Asian and British working class men appropriated the symbols and identities of elite, white, imperial pleasures, opening up the luxuries, opportunities, and intimacies of imperial rule.

_Islam in Transition_

After Moysey left India’s Northwest Frontier, the relationship between Indian Muslims and British Empire underwent considerable changes. The General Staff reported by 1922 that

As regards Mahomedans the G.S. have no evidence to show that any definite harm has been done. Recruiting continues to be satisfactory. In the event of a very severe strain, such for instance as hostilities against Turkey, sporadic cases (of the nature of which the Mesopotamian Campaign afforded examples) would probably occur but it is believed that the main bulk of Mahomedan soldiers are not sufficiently interested in Khilafat matters to be adversely affected.

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805 Copy of the Judgment in King Emperor versus Kandhar Singh Rangin charged under Sections 506 507 I.P.C., IOR/R/1/1/1285 : 1909.
806 Note by General Staff, India, nd., c. 1922-23, IOR/L/MIL/7/13768 : 1922-1923.
Initial calls for religious unity and pan-Islam had failed to produce a revolution against the British Empire. The Hijrat in Afghanistan collapsed into an embarrassing and traumatizing failure. As a result, some Indian Muslims believed that the best way forward was by collaborating with British officials.

Despite the political activism of the 1920s, Muslim soldiers of the British Indian army appeared relatively unmoved. Part of the reason, as discussed in the third chapter, was that South Asian “religious teachers” helped redirect men’s interests away from more extreme and radical interpretations of their faith. British Indian Army officer Francis Yeats-Brown singled out Khan Bahadur Maulvi Qazi Abdul Hakim Khan who had served as the regimental Maulvi of the 17th Cavalry since 1885. Yeats-Brown celebrated that

During the troublous times of the Khilafat and the Hijrat it was his sound teaching and unquestioned piety that kept the regiment straight, so that all through the war, and after, there was never a word said against the loyalty of the 17th Cavalry, although no sowar could have remained indifferent to that strange pilgrimage into Afghanistan which so closely affected the land and families of our men. Tall, handsome, full-bearded, as the Holy Prophet was, his life is a shining example of true religion.  

Yeats-Brown believed that the maulvi had maintained “the tradition of loyalty and true religion” and encouraged “the best traditions of Islam and of the Mohamedan soldier.”

Speaking to the changes that would occur throughout the 1920s and 1930s, another maulvi named ‘Abd al-Hakim wrote an impassioned Urdu pamphlet urging Muslim men to ignore calls for non-cooperation and instead to join the army and police in large numbers, believing that it was a “religious duty.” His outlook was likely

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808 Ibid.
inspired by the Ahmadiyya movement which argued during the First World War that it was a duty for Muslims to fight for Britain. During the war many Indian soldiers harshly condemned Ahmadiyya advocates of being “false” Muslims or Christians in disguise.\textsuperscript{810} After the war, however, ‘Abd al-Hakim strongly condemned political leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and the Ali brothers for encouraging Muslim men to step down from service saying that they were telling “lies” and spreading “false education.” He felt that encouraging Muslim men to step down from their government posts would merely hurt the Muslim community. It would hand over hard-won positions of power to the Hindu majority and further rob Muslims of a political voice and material opportunities. While he acknowledged the large role that the British Empire played in confiscating Muslim lands and dismantling Muslim power after the Uprising of 1857, he felt that interwar Indianization was a sign that the British Empire was willing and eager to restore power to Indians once and for all.\textsuperscript{811} Moreover, he celebrated the British Indian Army, and implicitly the theory of Martial Races, for believing that Muslims made good soldiers.

‘Abd al-Hakim’s ostensibly secular arguments blended seamlessly with his religious justifications for Muslims to serve the British Empire loyally. He argued that there was nothing in the Koran which stated that it was unlawful for Muslims to fight in the army but, by contrast, it did state in the Koran that it was necessary for Muslims to support their lawful rulers, no matter their origins.\textsuperscript{812} Violence conducted in the name of nationalism, however, was unlawful. Further, he believed that it was important for Muslims and Christians to stand together and support one another, owing to their shared

\textsuperscript{810} Gajendra Singh, \textit{The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers}, 124-5.
\textsuperscript{812} Ibid., 12.
monotheistic traditions. Abd al Hakim spoke to post-war pan-Islamic sentiment, fostered by the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, by suggesting that Indian Muslims unite under British rule. His arguments provides insight into the reasons why Muslims did not, in fact, drop out of imperial service en masse. He suggests that the interwar stirrings of non-cooperation and Indian nationalism encouraged a more complex set of “choosing sides.” If Muslims fought for independence, they risked alienating the British, who were gradually becoming more useful allies. If they handed power over to a Hindu majority, they might lose their political rights and representation as well as opportunities for employment.

In some spaces, such as the Northwest Frontier, the arguments put forth by men such as ‘Abd al Hakim failed to account for the difficulties that many Muslims faced under British rule. Having participated in the Hijrat movement, Abdul Ghaffar, who became known as the “Frontier Gandhi,” urged social and rural reform. Yet the connections between the Hijrat movement and global communism meant that many officials continued to regard frontier activism as either a stage upon which communists were playing or a site of “religious” grievances. The Afridi invasion of the Peshawar district in 1930 intensified these fears. After his release from prison in 1931, Ghaffar gained a following of Pathan nationalists known as the “Red Shirts” who numbered 30,000. The years 1932 and 1933 witnessed some of the most brutal military and police actions in the frontier. Abdul Ghaffar officially affiliated his Red Shirt party with Congress in 1931, just as the N.W.F.P. became a full governor’s province with Indian

813 Ibid., 18-19, 2-3.
815 Ibid., 134, 138.
ministers and a Legislative Council in 1932. When the Emergency Powers Ordinance of 1932 allowed for the arrest of over 14,000 activists in India, nearly half were from the N.W.F.P. Such activism made questions of recruiting frontier Pathans and Afridis more controversial throughout the 1930s. Some thought that putting together an irregular frontier corps or force would help pacify the region by “keeping the tribesmen out of mischief” and provide additional defenses for a Russian attack against Afghanistan. Others maintained that such recruitment would prove unreliable and open the ranks to unsuitable agitators.\textsuperscript{816} Until 1940, the army remained unwilling to expand frontier recruitment, owing to the fact that “men who received training in the Indian Army went back to their homes and used the training and our tactics against us in tribal warfare on the Frontier.”\textsuperscript{817}

In order to reconcile the “disloyal” frontier with the loyal calls to arms of men such as ‘Abd al Hakim, British officials separated “disloyal” Muslims from those more useful to the imperial project, as they were also doing with Sikhs. By the 1930s, the global economic downturn reinvigorated some of the divisions that had been a source of conflict after the First World War and complicated the choices and opportunities for South Asian Muslims. Some believed that the best way for Muslims to prevent factionalism amongst themselves was to resist collaboration with Hindus who were a stronger political force and who, they felt, had earned the distrust of the British.\textsuperscript{818} In

\textsuperscript{816} Letter to Mr. Walton from India Office Seal (22 June 1940), IOR/L/PS/12/3163; Letter from L.S.A. to Sir Firoz Khan Noon, High Commissioner of India to UK from 1936-41, (28 June 1940), IOR/L/PS/12/3163; Letter from Honorable Sir Steuart Pears, [sic] KCIE, CSI, Chief Commissioner, NWFP to the Foreign Secretary to the Govt of India, Foreign and Political Department (3 September 1931), IOR/L/PS/12/3163.
\textsuperscript{817} India house, Aldwych, from Firoz Noon to Rt. Hon. L.S. Amery, P.C., M.P., India Office London (21 June 1940), IOR/L/PS/12/3163.
1930, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal made his famous declaration that the goal and destiny of
Indian Muslims was to have a consolidated state in India’s northwest frontier. By 1932, the “Communal Award” granted separate electorates to various communities in India and increased suspicion of the Empire’s efforts to “divide and rule” through communal antagonism. Yet the position of some Muslims in imperial services had considerably improved, giving them opportunities for economic mobility previously absent. The ratio for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs respectively in the imperial services had changed from 40/40/20 to 50/30/20. Muslims were given preference for positions over non-Muslims regardless of their educational qualifications, contributing to anxiety about the Government’s pro-Muslim stance. Yet this extension of rights and privileges to “Muslims”—as suggested previously—extended to only certain communities. Punjabi Muslims in particular were almost exclusively recruited for police and prison work, as well as overseas services in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Between the beginning of the First World War and the 1930s, Muslims had gone from being represented by British officials as potential imperial enemies and “fanatics” who were likely to defect to Ottoman forces, to appearing increasingly as reliable imperial allies. Punjabi Muslims in particular were entrusted with many of the positions set aside for South Asians in an ever-increasingly “Indianized” imperial service. In this environment, working class British soldier H.H. Somerfield served beside men in the technologically advanced Signal Corps described a “class composition” of “Punjabi

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819 Satya Rai, 179
820 Satya Rai, 190.
821 Letter from Government House, Hong Kong, from W. Peel. to Right Honorable Sir P. Cunliffe-Lister, GBE, MC, MP, (1 February 1933), IOR/L/PS/12/3163.
Mussalmans and Sikhs.” The Signal Corps—which offered opportunities for education and advancement in complex fields—was especially clear in its preference for the “Martial Races.” An Urdu recruiting poster for the Signal Corps boys’ school explicitly declared its desire for “non-Brahmins.” A few years after serving besides these venerated “Martial Races,” who were welcomed back into the imperial fold after the turbulent 1920s, Somerfield attempted to get circumcised and convert to Islam.

**H.H. Somerfield and Sexual Opportunity**

Born in 1915, Harold Harwood Somerfield served in the Royal Corps of Signals beginning in 1933, before moving to India to serve with the Indian Signal Corps in 1936. Unlike Moysey, who attended well-regarded schools, had family connections to the army and Indian civil service, and became an officer, Somerfield was a low-ranking British soldier at the bottom of India’s white imperial hierarchy. His family had sufficient capital to own a home in Nottinghamshire, to consider emigrating, and for his grandfather to purchase a discharge for one of his brothers upon their father’s death. Yet he lacked the education and polish to become an officer. Not solely motivated by the hard economic conditions of the 1930s, he journeyed to India in part because “Certain of the NCOs and chaps here, too, can be seen to advantage at long distances. That is the only reason for my desire to quit these shores.” While becoming a soldier India did not alleviate his

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822 “3rd Indian Divisional Signals, Meerut: Class Composition—Punjabi Mussulmans and Sikhs,” HHS/1, H. H. Somerfield Papers, IWM. This document appears to be an official publication relating a brief history and current organization of the Signals.


824 13 February 1939 and 3 July 1939, diaries, HHS, IWM.

825 “Notes for 1936,” HHS, IWM. He arrived in India in 1936 and discusses being at Tidworth with the E Troop Cavalry Divisional Signals in 1935, when the diaries begin. For full details about enlistment information see Army Form B. 271, Regular Army (All Arms) Attestation of Royal Corps of Signals.
distaste for his fellow British army men, it did provide him with social and economic opportunities.

Being a member of the ruling race in India, Somerfield enjoyed privileges uncommon for working class men in Britain. These included buying many books and reading voraciously, and, like many imperial paragons to go before him, daydreaming about becoming a writer.\textsuperscript{826} He spoke frequently about buying food and “gorging” on the delights of Indian culinary arts.\textsuperscript{827} Despite these joys, purchasable with a regular income, he came face-to-face with some of the difficulties of living in India. His stints in hospital ranged from lacerating his hand to getting kicked by a horse and included numerous incidents of fever, swollen legs and various named and unnamed illnesses throughout 1936 and 1937. Prior to his departure for India in February 1936 he was five feet, seven inches tall, weighing around 128 pounds, yet by 1938 he expressed fears that he was losing too much weight from his already slight frame.\textsuperscript{828} He also found that, as in England, he did not get along well with his officers and became the “pet hate of the O.C.”\textsuperscript{829}

Even though military life in India became stifling and exhausting, Somerfield had a greater means of finding comfort. While stationed at the Meerut cantonment in India’s colonial United Provinces, he received an invitation, along with another British soldier, to meet with a man named Brij Lall who served them tea and sandwiches “in his shanty.”

\textsuperscript{826} About being a writer see for example 23 May 1936 and 5 August 1939.
\textsuperscript{827} 25 September 37, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{828} See for example 10 July 1936, 12 November 1936 and 16 November 1936, 17 November 1936, 7 February 1937, 14 April 1937, HHS, IWM; Somerfield lists his weight as an even nine stone in “Memoranda,” 1937 Diary, HHS, IWM. See also 25 September 1937 and 21 May 1938, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{829} 3 Feb 1939, HHS, IWM.
They nattered “for quite a while on religion and sex, chiefly sodomy.” About the
incident, Somerfield cryptically editorialized, “Very interesting, suggesting possibilities.”

Three days later, he returned for coffee and decided that Brij Lall “possesses a rather
lewd mind.” This did not stop him from accepting Lall’s gifts of chocolate or
confessing two years later that “Brij Lall’s café and bed have engaged my nights.”

Somerfield’s willingness to discuss sodomy and spend time in Brij Lall’s bed was
part of a more general pattern of spending intimate time with men in his young adulthood
and military service. Prior to leaving for India he had enjoyed a camping trip with the
scouts and shared a tent with “Frank Taylor one of the mischievous but affectionate
sort.” He applied to become a Lone Rover, a position in the Boy Scouts open to boys
over the age of 18, but was rejected. In India he applied again to serve with the Boy
Scouts in Meerut but his application there was rejected also. Having served at various
military bases in Britain prior to his departure for India in 1936, he was no doubt familiar
with perceptions of working-class military men as sexually available to elite and middle
class men who performed queer acts in Britain. In fact, the medical officer inspecting him
upon entry into the armed services noted that he had already had a venereal disease by the
age of eighteen, prior to enlisting. Thus, when he decided to read George MacMunn’s
The Underworld of India shortly after arriving in India, he was likely combining his own

830 Somerfield, 3 January 1937, HHS, IWM.
831 6 January 1937, HHS, IWM.
832 30 April 1939, HHS, IWM.
833 4 August 1935, HHS, IWM.
834 About being rejected by the Boy Scouts see 19 September 1935, HHS, IWM.
835 29 August 1937, HHS, IWM.
836 The doctor makes note of venereal disease when discussing Somerfield’s distinguishing marks or
evidence of previous illnesses. Army Form B. 271, Regular Army (All Arms) Attestation of Royal Corps of
Signals.
preexisting sexual experiences with his newfound status, and read with interest about elite men’s abilities to travel the world and purchase whatever they desired.

Serving in India in the mid-1930s meant coming face-to-face with a sexual landscape especially fraught in the aftermath of Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* (1927), which targeted a supposedly “oversexed Hindu culture” to argue for the necessity of imperial rule.837 George MacMunn argued in *The Underworld of India*, that “Perversion is a horror West as well as East, but in India is curiously enough mixed up with the religious question.”838 Hindu nationalist groups such as the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha fought back against such accusations. Hindi literature such as Ugra’s *Chaklet* and Madhavacharya’s translation of the *Kamasutra* (both 1927) gave lengthy descriptions of sexual encounters between men ostensibly in an effort to condemn such practices and urge men to learn the “proper” forms of sexual contact.839 Selections from Mayo’s text were translated into Indian periodicals alongside lurid discussions of Western sexual practices to indicate that corrupt imperial rule, rather than “Hindu” customs, was to blame for same-sex activity.840 Yet additional works, such as J.R. Ackerley’s *Hindoo Holiday* (1932) described working for the Maharaja of Chhatarpur, arranged by his friend E.M. Forster, which gave him the opportunity to take a personal tour through the sensual

840 Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 24, 110, 257.
displays of the Maharajah’s court life and enabled him to enjoy sexual contact with Indian servants.841

While British and American authors associated Indian “religion,” or other “traditional” Indian powers such as Maharajas with same-sex activity, Indian authors condemned the cosmopolitanism of colonialism for enabling such sexual opportunities. Ugra’s Chaklet condemned the practice of sending boys to English boarding schools, which he saw as a hotbed of such practices. He criticized cosmopolitanism by having his protagonists speak in English, Urdu and Hindi.842 Pandit Madhavacharya’s Hindi translation of the Kamasutra, published in 1911, was reissued in 1934 with a fifty page introduction demanding that young people study the text to learn right forms of conjugal sex and stay away from non-vaginal forms including masturbation, oral and anal sex. He quoted sections about oral sex between men and male servants and between consenting male friends stating that “These evil practices are spreading among young men today like an infectious disease. If these tendencies were removed from their hearts by good education, they could become healthy, disease-free, good charactered heroes, who would adorn the country by their lives.”843 Of particular concern for Hindu nationalists was undermining the supposed sexual profligacy of Muslim men working for the colonial state. Anglophile brothers Zulfaqar Ali Bokhari and Ahmed Shah Bokhari, who rose through the ranks of the BBC’s All India Radio, faced accusations about their real and rumored sexual relationships with British officials. It became an explosive source of

843 Quoted on 238 of Indroduction… page 26 of original book
demonizing the queer cosmopolitanism of empire compared to resurgent masculinist Hindu nationalism.844

As Somerfield’s conversations about “sodomy” with Brij Lall suggest, his first introduction into the “underworld” that Hindu nationalists condemned was not by meeting cosmopolitan Muslims. In fact, it was Brij Lal who encouraged him to read the Ramayana, and took him to an out-of-bounds bazaar to purchase a picture of the birth of Krishna. Authors such as ‘Ugra represented Krishna as having homoerotic encounters with other warrior heroes such as Arjun and Surdas.845 Thus, Somerfield’s relationship with Brij Lall opened up a new world of possibility in India quite distinct from the frustratingly sterile environment of cantonment life. It also crossed “religious” and racial boundaries, undermining the simplistic narratives of sex and masculinity constructed in the period. For many British, American, and Indian audiences, sex between men in the late 1920s and 1930s was short-hand for moral corruption and political impotence. For others, it demonstrated the sexual opportunities of the empire.

Performing Race and Class

In addition to the sexual intimacy offered by men such as Brij Lall, the economic privilege of being a soldier in India gave Somerfield an imperial life of renting cars, visiting the cinema, and hunting that would have been the envy of working class men at home. He went hunting with a British soldier named Evans, Sher Singh and Sohan Singh, and drank toddy in Kishan Singh’s village with British soldier Skellon.846 When he rented

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844 Bent 208-10
846 16 December 1938 and 1 January 1938, HHS, IWM.
a “Chevrolet” for a night out of drinking and dancing he spent time with “some sixteen IOR’s [Indian Other Ranks]” who crowded into the vehicle to enjoy the good times.847 By having the economic opportunity to find ample recreation, Somerfield adopted the lifestyle of elite British men who traveled the empire in relative luxury. This lifestyle also afforded him opportunities to spend time alone with other men in a variety of imperial spaces.

Of all of his recreational opportunities, one of Somerfield’s favorite ways to spend time with Indian soldiers was going to the cinema.848 When he was transferred briefly to Lucknow in 1938, he suggested that “The cinema will probably be my chief interest here.” He quickly visited “all three” in town.849 Despite his frequent visits, Somerfield described cinemas as the “last refuge of an un-thinking half-wit” because “the great majority are just piffle,” suggesting that the films themselves were not the draw of spending time in a dark room with other men.850 Despite this assertion, he continued to visit cinemas frequently with male companions, noting that the “experience is generally spoilt by the military audiences whose mere existence is obnoxious.”851 For soldiers seeking a retreat from military surveillance, cinemas could be spaces to side-step cantonment segregation and possibly even engage in sexual acts, undermining some of the control that the British Raj had over colonized and working-class bodies. For Somerfield, however, the experience was ruined by the extension of military life in the cinema audience.

847 30 October 1938, HHS, IWM.
848 10 May 1936, 15 May 1936, 21 July 1938, HHS, IWM.
849 27 December 1938, HHS, IWM.
850 25 November 1939, HHS, IWM.
851 He described staying in a hotel and visiting the cinema with Hugill and Mills in Secunderabad. 11 December 1939, HHS, IWM. See also 4 April 1940 and 5 April 1940, HHS, IWM.
Sommerfield’s social and sexual landscape improved again when he was detailed with “a no. of I.O.R’s to lay cable at Bareilly for an R.A.F. Stunt.” He “became acquainted with several of the Sikh chaps I was working with and did tours of the city and went to the pictures with them.”

By the year’s end, he visited Sikh places of worship (gurdwara) and religious scholars (granthi). He also visited cinemas with a Sikh Havildar, or noncommissioned officer, while dressing in Indian clothing and darkening his skin. Yet wearing Indian clothing was just one of his disguises. He was pleased that “My moustache is coming in well and with my spectacles makes a decent disguise.”

He pretended to be a captain in a bar at the urging of Ujagir Singh who claimed that he had a large salary in order to attract the attention of dancers. Being a white man in India enabled him to be perceived as capable of purchasing whatever he desired, while enjoying the privileged position to “put on” and “take off” whichever racial and class identities he found most desirable or advantageous. At the same time, his Indian companions took opportunities to participate in and benefit from his privilege. Thus, these disguises enabled deeper participation in a space that enabled sexual fantasies about women, while also granting interracial intimacy to men participating together in an erotic environment.

In addition to visiting clubs and wearing various disguises, Sommerfield listened to and learned from a variety of South Asian men who made his escapades possible. Brij

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852 “Notes for 1938,” end of 1937 diary, HHS, IWM.
853 27 October 1937, 30 December 1937, HHS, IWM; 26 November 1937, 30 December 1937, HHS, IWM. The rank of a Havildar is comparable to that of a sergeant.
854 26 November 1937, 30 December 1937, HHS, IWM. The rank of a Havildar is comparable to that of a sergeant.
855 8 January 1937, HHS, IWM.
856 He reported attending with Skellon, Ujagir Singh and Kahmira Singh, where he had “a bottle of brandy and 2 bottles of beer” with “the 2 Sikhs.” 19 October 1938, HHS, IWM.
Lall, who so graciously offered Somerfield snacks, advice on sodomy and descriptions of the Ramayana, also made Somerfield his Hindustani clothing and allowed him to store and change into it at his café.\textsuperscript{857} Somerfield described numerous conversations with both Brij Lall and a fellow Signalman named Sultan Muhammed about different types of Indian clothing, and later wrote that he bought what they recommended or received clothing directly from them.\textsuperscript{858} South Asian men also helped make these performances more convincing. He went to the movies with Havildar Pritan Singh dressed in Hindustani clothing and accompanied Kishan Singh into the city wearing both Indian clothing and rubbing “burnt cork in any visible places.”\textsuperscript{859} He wore “Indian kit” to the Nauchandi Fair in order to meet up with “Pakhar Singh and several other IOR’s I know.”\textsuperscript{860}

Somerfield’s use of Indian clothing as a disguise stemmed in part from a desire to better blend into his new surroundings. He mentioned that after attending a Muslim festival in the Lalkurti bazaar with fellow British soldier Skellon he discovered that “annoying Europeans seem to be an attractive sideline to the revelers.”\textsuperscript{861} When they went out again, they went “as Punjabi Mussalmans.”\textsuperscript{862} Just as Moysey found inspiration for his disguises in the Pathan soldiers beside whom he fought and slept, Somerfield took inspiration from the “Punjabi Mussalmans” recruited for the Indian Signal Corps. At the same time, this desire to pass as Indians underlined their privilege to use whatever racial identity he found most convenient or amusing, and thus imitate the practice of

\textsuperscript{857} 29 March 1937, 23 November 1937, 26 November 1937, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{858} 20 November 1937, 25 November 1937, HHS, IWM. About clothes from Sultan Mohamed see 16 December 1938, in which he discusses Sultan sending him “pagri and kumise.”
\textsuperscript{859} 23 December 1937 and 26 November 1937, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{860} 31 March 1938, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{861} 13 October 1938, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{862} 13 October 1938, HHS, IWM. He discusses both visits to the bazaar during the same entry.
“blackface” seen in stage and film performances of the era. It also highlights his desire to pass undetected in public with another man.

As Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai have argued, social suspicion of public displays of affection between men and women in India contributed to a perception that gay Indian men had an easier time moving in public with one another than they would have with Indian women. This may have contributed to Somerfield’s desire to pass as Indian: appropriating Indian men’s ability to move unfettered with one another would have granted him more freedom to move in public without social suspicion, compared to being a white man who stood out from the crowd and had to uphold (heterosexual) standards of white British masculinity. Dressing in Indian clothing, therefore, was one of many ways in which Somerfield hoped to “blend in” and move undetected within India, and thus have more freedom to enter into the darkened cinemas, dancehalls or rollicking cafes with male companions.

Somerfield also may have felt comfortable “trying on” new styles of clothing and darkening his skin in ways similar to the working-class men in “Queer London” described by Matt Houlbrook during the same period. As Houlbrook suggests, men participated in various forms of masking: for many men it might be a “mask” of “normalcy,” whereas the increasingly dominant image of the “quean” and the “painted boy” as the representative of queer life involved the wearing of literal alterations to their

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863 See for example the film version of The Lives of a Bengal Lancer (1935). For a discussion on vaudeville and “blackface” see Alison Oram, Her Husband was a Woman! Women’s Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 2007), 103.

faces to both invite and avoid detection.\textsuperscript{865} While in India his access to a reliable income and a lower cost of living allowed him to perform the role of the respectable middle-class “homosexual” by frequenting clubs and cinemas with men. He also emulated the “effeminate quean” by wearing elaborate dress and makeup.\textsuperscript{866}

Although some South Asian men were willing to participate in and benefit from Somerfield’s disguise fantasies, others pointed to the limited utility of such masquerades. Khan Bahadur Risaldar Shahzad Mir Khan, whose memoir was published initially in Urdu and then translated into English in 1934, explained that successfully “passing” involved far more than a mere “putting on” of external markers of identity. He argued that his efforts to disguise himself as a “mulla” while sketching maps for the army failed because of his improperly groomed hair, his inadequate knowledge of different languages, his unfamiliarity with canonical texts and his desire to defy local knowledge by walking into bad weather, leaving him frequently accused of being a spy and imposter.\textsuperscript{867} Similarly, F.L. James claimed that, during the First World War, a man named Juma Khan spotted him immediately in a crowd and “told me that it was no good for British officers to think that the disguise of a turban and kurta (Indian Cavalry long-coat) made them indistinguishable from their men.”\textsuperscript{868} Despite colonial efforts to make Indian bodies legible and knowable through handbooks and photographs of clothing and racial “types,” coded patterns of local knowledge and behavior threatened to give up the

\textsuperscript{866} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{868} James, \textit{Faraway Campaign}, 52.
disguise. Somerfield’s ability to pass as an Indian soldier, therefore, might succeed only due to the presence of actual Indian soldiers. His other attempts to “pass” as Indian were likely betrayed by the fact that he was a man whose clothing failed to match his patterns of behavior. His inability to play the part fully probably underlined the fact that he did not belong—and meant that his disguises were unlikely to fool Indian men. At best he only succeeded in avoiding British detection. By failing to “become” Indian by dressing himself in Indian clothing, Somerfield imitated not only the disguise fantasies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also those men and women whose dress signified a queer performance to invite or avoid British detection. He likely remained fully detectable to the Indian men whom he desired. The performance, in and of itself, may also have provided Somerfield and his companions with innate satisfaction and the illusion of subversion.

*Spaces of Desire*

In addition to dressing in “Indian” clothing, Somerfield started to rent a private “den” where he entertained British and Indian men. A private room was an asset in the army, where close proximity to other men could lead to both surveillance and jealousy. He argued that “Kishan Singh’s nightly visits” distracted him from his study of Urdu, while “uska dost” [his friend] Karnoul Singh also made an “occassional [sic] appearance.” Somerfield hinted at the social utility of his “den,” noting that it cost him about 6 rupees per month but “it saves in other ways. I feel no urge to go to the pictures,

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870 See for example 16 March 1936 and 1 January 1940, HHS, IWM.
871 For an example of surveillance in the barracks, see Rudolph, *Reversing the Gaze*, p. 240.
872 1 January 1938, HHS, IWM.
and even the City and bazaar do not attract so much.”\textsuperscript{873} Although he expressed disappointment in his initial inability to convince men to visit him, he eventually enjoyed drinking alcohol with several British and Indian guests.\textsuperscript{874} After one particularly raucous evening in the den with Kishan Singh, Somerfield admitted that he “had a glimpse of the underworld.”\textsuperscript{875} For a short time at least, the “den” became a safe space of comfort and security that had otherwise eluded him in India.

Whether or not Somerfield had sex with the men whom he invited over to his “den,” this space offered him a sort of imperial queer sociability that he desperately missed when he was transferred to Lucknow. His “den” in Meerut allowed British and Indian men to mingle outside of the segregated cantonment spaces, past the watch of the public, and beyond the pale of the “evil tongues in the lines.” Just as middle-class men in “Queer London” used private space to enjoy intimate encounters free from public scrutiny, Somerfield utilized his newfound economic privilege to create his own social opportunities.\textsuperscript{876} Yet he was not the only man in his social circle to have a private space. After all, it was in Brij Lall’s ‘shanty’ wherein Somerfield first had his discussions of religion and sodomy with Indian men.\textsuperscript{877}

Having a taste of freedom and pleasure in India contributed to Somerfield’s desire to desert in 1938. In order to minimize the risk of his plans being discovered, he disguised this word in his diary by writing the English word “desertion” in devanagari script (‘देसर्शन’), once again appropriating Indian codes to mask his desires.\textsuperscript{878} To carry

\textsuperscript{873} 1 January 1938, HHS, IWM.  
\textsuperscript{874} See entries from 24 December 1937 through 31 December 1937, HHS, IWM.  
\textsuperscript{875} 28 December 1937, HHS, IWM.  
\textsuperscript{876} Houlbrook, \textit{Queer London}, p. 131.  
\textsuperscript{877} 3 January 1937, HHS, IWM.  
\textsuperscript{878} 9 April 1938, HHS, IWM.
out the plan he hoped to secure “a hillmans [sic] cottage on the spot.” Unlike Moysey, whose sojourns to the Northwest Frontier played upon frontier desert landscape romanticized immediately after the First World War, Somerfield’s desired escape was in the hills. This reflected, on the one hand, the growing popularity of trekking and mountaineering in the 1920s and 30s. At the same time, the harsh ruggedness of the frontier and desert, which appealed to elite men such as Moysey, was no doubt less enthralling to a working class man who had experienced habitual hardship. Hills and mountains satisfied his longings to have full access to the romanticized spaces of privilege and power of British imperial life.

Escaping to the hills also represented a particularly homosocial space. As Paul Deslandes has argued, enthusiasts praised mountaineering as an expression of vigorous and aggressive masculinity and promoted it as a potential “cure” for the “unnatural” desires of sex with men and boys. However, it also enabled intimate contact between men who lived, ate, bathed and slept beside one another. After his several bouts of ill-health, Somerfield had declared his “need for increased physical fitness.” He turned to mountain climbing, deciding that even hill stations were not a suitable reprieve from the stresses of daily life and “the maddening crowd.” He unsuccessfully planned several trekking expeditions but found it difficult to get permission because of his frequent ill health and his having earned the general dislike of his superior officers. By March of

879 9April 1938, HHS, IWM. This was a strategy recommended to him by Moulchand Sharma in the Lalkuurti Bazaar.
881 About physical fitness see 9 January 1937, HHS, IWM; 17 May 1939, HHS, IWM.
882 3 February 1939, 29 August 1937, 10 September 1937, 14 June 1938, HHS, IWM. He also discusses attempting to join up with Boy Scouts on 22 November 1937, 29 August 1937 and 31 August 1937, HHS, IWM.
1938, after months of dreaming, planning and applying for leave, a finally approved trekking trip had to be cancelled after Somerfield fell ill again. Rather than strengthening his body in the hills, he endured an operation on a cyst, which caused a loss of appetite and spasms in his chest.\(^883\) While hospitalized he longed for higher climates, fearing that “a prolonged stay on the Plains will soon return me to hospital.”\(^884\) With a bit of time and distance from his illnesses, Somerfield increasingly felt that he would only desert “as a last resort.”\(^885\) By 1938 and 1939 he finally got opportunities for trekking, which contributed to an improvement of his “health and general outlook.”\(^886\) In the next few months he reported going on several long cross-country hikes and felt strongly that this created “a more robust outlook on life.”\(^887\)

In addition to finding revitalization in India’s hills and mountains, Somerfield’s outlook on life also improved after meeting “P. M.” [“Punjabi Musalman”] Signalman Sultan Mohammad in June 1938.\(^888\) He explained that Sultan “showed his goodwill towards me in various practical ways” which led to “jealousy from the others.”\(^889\) To escape this jealousy, Sultan Mohammed visited him in his den and “were it not for evil tongues in the lines we could be proper friends.”\(^890\) Despite these “evil tongues” Somerfield developed a close relationship with Sultan, explaining his disappointment that he was going to be transferred to Lucknow because ‘Sultan Mohd, whom I had been

\(^{883}\) 31 March 1938 and 9 April 1938, HHS, IWM.
\(^{884}\) 16 November 1936, 6 December 1936, 9 April 1938, 29 February 1938, 31 March 1938, HHS, IWM.
\(^{885}\) 18 April 1938, HHS, IWM.
\(^{886}\) 6 January 1939, HHS, IWM.
\(^{887}\) 6 January 1939, HHS, IWM.
\(^{888}\) 20 December 1937 and 21 December 1937, HHS, IWM. He initially expressed that he “was disturbed to receive none of the OR’s as visitors. Sat and nattered with Kishan Singh and Skellon. Decided to try and get new quarters.”
\(^{889}\) His emphasis. 14 June 1938, HHS, IWM.
\(^{890}\) 11 November 1938, HHS, IWM.
meeting, will also be puzzled at my sudden absence.” He hoped that “Fate will arrange a re-union for us, and also the numerous other I.O.R.’s for whom I have a genuine liking.” He was most upset about losing contact with Sultan, wondering frantically “whether he is my दोस्त [dost, friend] in his दिल [dil, heart].” He longed for them to get leave at the same time and “spend that time together” but worried that when he planned to visit Meerut that Sultan “has given no rendezvous where we could meet.”

He was relieved to receive a letter from Sultan Mohammad suggesting that “he is all for the Somerfield Sahib” and continued to refer to him in his journal as “mera piyare dost” (my beloved/dear friend) until 1940. When describing their relationship, Somerfield may have used devanagri words to affect a communion with Sultan Mohammed, conveying their closeness in words that they both could understand. At the same time, the only other instance in which Somerfield used devanagri script was to hide his plans for desertion (देसुरशन), signaling that he employed devanagri as a code to avoid detection.

Like the room of his own, his diary indicated that he was never entirely safe nor capable of containing his enthusiasm for his encounters with other men within the narrow confines of military life.

**Circumcision**

Despite his fondness for Sultan Mohammad, Somerfield was much more skeptical about Islam. In the rare instances when he spoke about the faith he did so unfavorably,

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891 14 October 1939, HHS, IWM.
892 14 October 1939, HHS, IWM.
893 25 November 1938, HHS, IWM.
894 25 November 1938, HHS, IWM.
895 For ‘mera piyare dost’ see 3 January 1940, HHS, IWM. For the reference to Sultan Mohammad’s letter see 12 May 1938, HHS, IWM.
such as when he declared that Muslims possessed a “lust for easy money” and frequently annoyed him by demanding “baksheesh” (alms) in mosques.\textsuperscript{896} However, after developing a close relationship with Sultan Mohammad, he attempted to convert to Islam in July 1939. The impetus for this dramatic realignment of faith came after Somerfield was kicked out of a mandatory Sunday church parade for inattention. When questioned about his lack of reverence during the service, Somerfield proclaimed that “I was not C. of E.,” [Church of England] adding as an aside in his diary “which is correct except officially.”\textsuperscript{897} He received fourteen days confinement to barracks for misconduct in church. The next day, he protested his punishment by reporting to the medical officer to be circumcised.\textsuperscript{898}

Many factors may have influenced Somerfield’s rapid change of heart toward Islam. Two weeks prior to his disruption of the church service, his father passed away. He spoke infrequently about their relationship but it showed some strain. He expressed prior to his departure for India that his father was “difficult to get on with as usual.”\textsuperscript{899} Somerfield was not included as a beneficiary with his two brothers in his father’s will.\textsuperscript{900} When his father first fell ill and required an operation in 1938, Somerfield expressed more concern about his leave. When his father recovered, Somerfield simply stated that he was “not altogether sorry” that his leave to visit “Blighty” had been cancelled, “as the

\textsuperscript{896} “Notes for 1938,” HHS, IWM; 13 April 1940, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{897} 12 July 1939, HHS, IWM. His official recruiting forms put him down as “C of E.” Army Form B. 271, Regular Army (All Arms) Attestation of Royal Corps of Signals.
\textsuperscript{898} 19 July 1939, HHS, IWM.
\textsuperscript{899} 18 November 1935, HHS, IWM.
money can be well employed out here.”\(^{901}\) When his father took another turn for the worse in 1939, from which he would not recover, Somerfield proceeded with his planned leave to the hills.\(^{902}\) It is unclear whether or not Somerfield’s decision to take part in a recreational leave in India while his father was dying reflected indifference or a desire to suppress his pain by seeking pleasure in India. Yet his decision to dramatically modify his body along with his religious and, to a degree, “national” identity, might be easier to consider without a paternal link to his own “masculine” heritage.

In addition to the personal reasons guiding Somerfield’s attempts to get circumcised, conversion to Islam had a rich and controversial history within British India. In The Underworld of India, retired General Sir George MacMunn discussed Richard Francis Burton’s explorations of “homosexuality” and came to believe that “it was to a great extent the vice of the circumcised which is possibly the very reason that the operation was not deemed necessary to Christians.”\(^{903}\) MacMunn slyly portrayed “homosexuality” as non-Christian and thus “other,” yet some believed that Burton himself had chosen to be circumcised – an act of marking himself as homosexual.\(^{904}\)

While MacMunn was one of many authors to portray sex between men as a prevalent “Eastern” or “Indian” problem, his view on circumcision as a marker of sexual “deviance” existed within many conflicting European opinions about the utility, or harm,

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\(^{901}\) 18 April 1938, HHS, IWM; 21 May 1938, HHS, IWM. This contrasted sharply with his attitude at the end of the year when he was transferred to Lucknow and he calls India an “unsuitable country.” It is clear that his feelings about India are directly related to the quality of his relationships at the time, as he reports difficulty communicating with Skellon and Sultan Mohammed during this entry. 27 December 1938, HHS, IWM.

\(^{902}\) 3 July 1939, HHS, IWM.


\(^{904}\) Frank McLynn, Burton: Snow Upon the Desert (London: John Murray, 1990).
of circumcision in the 1930s that likely shaped Somerfield’s understanding of the procedure. Within British India, attitudes toward circumcision were often rooted in assumptions that, since the eighteenth century, Muslim troops used circumcision against Europeans as a means of collecting converts and allies against non-Muslim forces. Richard Francis Burton, commissioned to enquire into the matter of male prostitution near the Karachi cantonment, regarded sodomy as a particularly Muslim problem, and described in lurid detail the extent to which sodomy was used as a form of punishment and humiliation, sometimes against British soldiers. While Burton suggested that non-Muslim soldiers could become susceptible to these temptations, he maintained that Hindu men were more trustworthy, owing to their holding “pederasty in abhorrence.”

According to medical worker Kathleen Vaughan, who wrote to the *British Medical Journal* in 1935, forced circumcision still carried immense political weight. Rather than being used against British troops, however, she asserted that “In the Moplah rising the Mohammedans forcibly circumcised Hindus who fell into their hands.” According to a group of Muslim men and women from Uttar Pradesh interviewed by Deepak Mehta in the late twentieth century, circumcision remained a defining marker of difference between Hindus and Muslims. One mother believed that the act of circumcision turned her son “from Hindu to Muslim.”

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906 See the interesting discussion of the “general rising at Cabul” in Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 42, 44.
907 Ibid., 45, 50.
In addition to acting as a marker of belonging, late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century surgeons and journalists across the imperial world claimed that circumcision decreased sexual urges, including masturbation, and risks of venereal disease. These ideas shaped radical European physicians who encouraged alterations to genitalia as a way of rejuvenating patients with a “second puberty.” These included the vasectomy-like procedure of Eugen Steinach embraced by leading thinkers such as Sigmund Freud. W. B. Yeats linked his own Steinach Operation in the 1930s to his understanding of Tantric Hinduism, through which the preservation of semen encouraged a vital sexual and creative force. This echoed the encouragement of brahmacharya, or celibacy, among Indian nationalists such as Mohandas Gandhi and sexologists such as R. D. Karve in the same period. Some Hindu men discussed with sexologists the possibility that circumcision was a key to the masculine virility and martial superiority of Muslims. Meanwhile, the popular 1920s medical guide Harmsworth’s Home Doctor & Encyclopaedia of Good Health argued that “the advantages of circumcision are so great,

910 Darby, A Surgical Temptation, 205, 285.  
911 Chandak Sengoopta, “‘Dr. Steinach Coming to Make Old Young!’: Sex Glands, Vasectomy and the Quest for Rejuvenation in the Roaring Twenties,” Endeavour 27 (2003), pp. 122–6, here 123.  
913 For a further discussion of South Asian debates about life force and vital fluids see also David White, The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998). Many thanks to Clare Tebbutt for pointing me toward Steinach and for the presentation on R. D. Karve by Douglas Haynes and Shrikant Botre at the “What is the History of the Body?” colloquium at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), 14 March 2014.  
914 Many thanks to Shrikant Botre for this insight presented at the ‘What is the History of the Body?’ colloquium at the IHR, 14 March 2014. Botre explained that this impression of Muslims was commonplace but also conveyed by anonymous letter writers to R. D. Karve, an Indian sexologist who wrote in English and Marathi. It is interesting to compare this Hindu perspective to a view of one Muslim woman named Miriam in her early seventies interviewed by Deepak Mehta, who was considered an expert in her community on circumcision, which she considered a unity of male and female elements that prevented excessive passion and brutality in marriage. Deepak Mehta, “Circumcision, Body and Community,” 223. See also David White, The Alchemical Body.
and the operation so trivial” that “the rest of the human race might well follow the example of the Jews and Mahommedans and make it a compulsory rite.”

Army officials in India took a similar interest in circumcision owing to the general pattern of lower rates of venereal disease among Indian troops. Although the published reports of army doctors in the 1901 *British Medical Journal* suggested that the rates were not actually lower among circumcised men in India, by 1929 the same publication mentioned that a delegate to The Fourth Imperial Social Hygiene Congress urged compulsory circumcision of male children based on experience with a Muslim battalion in India. In the late twentieth century, many Muslims in the United Provinces continued to consider circumcision a defensive measure against the dangers of sexual union as well as a preventative measure against masturbation. Although most 1930s British medical officials came to the conclusion that there were no distinct advantages to circumcision, the frequency with which commentators in Britain and India encouraged circumcision for disease prevention suggests that it cannot be dismissed as a possible motivating factor for men who considered the procedure. As a man who was frequently ill, had a history of venereal disease, and dreaded the thought of another relapse into ill-health, it is possible that Somerfield—and Sultan Mohammad—viewed circumcision as a way of staving off the threat of contracting another disease. Circumcision may have been

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an effort of self-preservation, particularly after serving in a region of India with an uncommonly high rate of venereal disease among Indian soldiers and civilians.

Despite Somerfield’s spiritual and physical anxieties, he ultimately did not go through with circumcision and conversion while in India. When he reported to the assistant surgeon to get circumcised, he was quickly referred to a captain, who refused to perform the surgery and instructed him to leave the hill station and report to the Reverend Linton in Meerut.919 After an “inconclusive” talk with the clergyman, Somerfield was forced to accept his initial punishment of confinement to barracks for misbehaving in church.920 Soon enough, he found himself in the hospital again diagnosed with malaria.921 He spent his time in the hospital reading the literature that the Reverend Linton had recommended to him, and received a letter from a friend who urged him not to go through with the conversion, to which he replied that he no longer intended to change.922 After his conversion episode, Somerfield was willing to perform Christian devotion only insofar as it could absolve him from the performance of other duties, noting for example that on Christmas morning he attended “a holy communion service” because it got him out of attending another parade service.923 As usual, he left before it started.924 After his flirtation with conversion, he remained an unenthusiastic soldier and Christian.

The apparent ease with which Somerfield backed off from his efforts to convert suggests that he may have been motivated by something other than a steadfast enthusiasm for Islam. The only times in which he indirectly spoke of Islam favorably were in his

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919 19 July 1939, HHS, IWM.
920 19 July 1939, HHS, IWM.
921 27 July 1939, HHS, IWM.
922 5 August 1939, HHS, IWM.
923 26 December 1939, HHS, IWM.
924 26 December 1939, HHS, IWM.
close friendship with his “piyare dost” Sultan Mohammad, in his choice to dress as a Punjabi Musalman when he went in public with Skellon, and his flirtation with circumcision and conversion. Compared to his numerous discussions with Sikhs and Hindus, he never mentions reading the Koran, participating in prayer with other Muslims or taking an active role in festivals such as Eid. Those sources that do discuss circumcision further suggest that Somerfield was not participating adequately in Muslim ritual and practice, in that he was considered too old to undergo the procedure, which was generally done on pre-pubescent boys. His attempts to get circumcised before a medical officer, rather than before an assortment of male and female Muslims in a carefully prepared private household, further suggests that the army, with its homosocial organization of martial masculinity, was the intended audience for his conversion. Rather than using a physical injury to his body to have it restored to a community of Muslims in solidarity, he attempted to use physical pain to divorce himself from the community of Christians with which he was associated by default and against his wishes. For Somerfield, being a Muslim more often meant facilitating his ability to “pass” in India, warding off the “evil tongues” that had condemned his friendship with Sultan Muhammad, and keeping him from having to participate in the Sunday church parade. It was a marker of his belonging as a man of empire—capable of reclaiming the performances of many imperial officials who journeyed to India before him. For a

925 Ja‘Far Sharif’s Islam in India suggests that circumcision was performed on boys aged between seven and twelve. It was written originally in the 1830s and in his 1921 introduction to the text, W. Crooke suggests that this was one of the most influential texts on Muslim practices. A late-twentieth-century study on Ansari Muslims in Uttar Pradesh by Deepak Mehta found that circumcision was performed on boys between the ages of two and six. Ja‘Far Sharif, Islam in India or the Qanun-i-Islam: The Customs of the Musalmans of India, tr. G. A. Herklots (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 48. Mehta, “Circumcision, Body and Community.” 217.
working class man, India offered an opportunity to perform class difference, which hinged upon a presumed power over racial and religious identity.

**A Global Malcontent**

Somerfield’s apathy toward military order and discipline, along with his deliberate efforts to flaunt British racial, religious, gender, and sexual orthodoxy, should not be viewed merely as a singular response of one discontented youth. Instead, he represented a more general trend to question the rules and hierarchies of imperial power. While travelers were inspired by the potential of India’s sexual landscape, many British officials in India adopted the fashionable cynicism of the 1930s. Young men driven by paternalistic idealism to serve the empire soon withered in the face of on-the-ground disorder and challenges. By the 1930s, many elite British officials worried that the quality of Englishmen was deteriorating at just the moment when Indians were “improving.” The well-polished political movements and increasing numbers of elite college graduates in South Asia made the imperial project itself seem like a misguided fantasy to those Britons facilitating it.927 The crushed enthusiasm of the First World War, and a sense of international embarrassment, plagued many young men charged with serving the empire.

Homosexuality, cosmopolitan wanderlust, and anti-Semitism were common outlets for some young men’s cynicism.928 Criticism about the First World War and an embarrassed sympathy for Muslims following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire slid all too easily in the late 1920s and 1930s into anti-Semitic feeling. For example, after

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928 Ibid., 201.
passing his civil service examinations, pioneer of Indian broadcasting Lionel Fielden lambasted Foreign Office officials for the Balfour declaration that “sold the Palestinian Arabs out to the Jews.”

In this tense political environment, BBC Empire Service programs banned discussions of Indian politics but listed Italian and German programs, including Hitler Youth programs. For British officials in India, it was preferable to be a Fascist than a supporter of Indian nationalism.

Like many British officials in India, Somerfield was an unapologetic anti-Semite. He named Francis Yeats-Brown, a former Indian army officer and vocal advocate of Adolf Hitler and British Fascism, as his favorite author. Despite his tendency to socialize with a diverse array of men in India, Somerfield detested the incursion of “foreigners” into England. His casual anti-Semitism extended to those with “hooked noses,” whom he regarded as distinct from “us real English people.”

He condemned “Jewish propaganda” in cinemas and believed that only Jews would suffer from Adolf Hitler’s victory over Europe because Germans would not harm “Anglo-Saxon people who are akin to them.”

By criticizing physical characteristics as an indication of his antipathy for Jews in Britain, Somerfield reveals an even deeper complexity to his thoughts of conversion. After growing close to and intimate with men such as Sultan Mohammad, he attempted to modify his body in a way that could mark him as both a Muslim and a Jew.

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929 Ibid., 199-200.
930 Ibid., 215.
932 30 November 1939, HHS, IWM.
933 30 November 1939, HHS, IWM; regarding cinemas see 1 January 1935.
Sommerfield consistently suggested that his employment was little more than a means of making his life more interesting: in 1939 that when thousands of troops left India for Malaya and Egypt, “It would just be my luck to miss a trip abroad.”\(^934\) Once life in India became too dull for him, he daydreamed about emigrating to East Africa or joining the Air Force.\(^935\) It was little wonder that when he attempted to purchase his discharge in August 1939, his commanding officer blithely remarked “Well, in spite of the company being almost at war, I think we can spare you.”\(^936\) He watched the international situation closely, noting that “A war would prevent my obtaining my discharge, but then I would not want it as a radical change is what I really need. Six years is too long for peace time soldiering.”\(^937\) Yet serving in the Second World War did not exactly result in the romantic adventure he longed for. While serving in Egypt in 1943, he deserted his post and was absent for a full month. He was convicted by court martial for desertion and was sentenced to two years of hard labor. After less than a year, his sentence was suspended and then remitted by the Commandant. Although initially losing claim to his prior service upon conviction, it was restored to him in 1946. At the time of his discharge in 1947, he had served over 13 years, never attaining a rank above private. By the 1950s, he left England once again in the official service of the empire, settling into New Zealand as a civil servant. When he passed away in 1990, he was remembered as “A dearly loved husband, father, and grandfather.”\(^938\) Despite his unconventional service in

\(^{934}\) Ibid., 5 August 1939. \\
\(^{935}\) 13 February 1939, HHS, IWM. \\
\(^{936}\) Ibid., 14 Aug 1939. Due to the outbreak of war, however, Sommerfield did not purchase his discharge and prepared to leave for British Somaliland on 18 August 1940. Ibid., 17 August 1940. \\
\(^{937}\) 14 August 1939, HHS, IWM. \\
\(^{938}\) Records of Sommerfield’s life after his diaries end in 1940 come from a variety of places. About his desertions, see Army Form B. 200, Statement of Services of Army No. 2323272, Christian Names: Harold Harwood, Surname: Sommerfield, kindly provide by the Army Personnel Centre, Support Division Historical Disclosures, Glasgow (UK); “In the High Court of New Zealand, Nelson, Registry, In the Estate of Harold
the British Indian Army, and the multiple performances he enacted during his time abroad, he lived out a public life in a British dominion as a white family man giving a lifetime of loyal service to the empire. Just as Moysey had the opportunity to retreat to his brother’s Malay plantation to take up his birthright as an elite white man of empire, Somerfield’s spiritual, racial, sexual, and martial transgressions did not take away his privileged access to the empire. His contribution to the “racial” future of the empire all but forgave him of his past indiscretions.

Conclusions

The stories of Moysey, Nur Hussein Shah, Somerfield, and Sultan Mohammad indicate a shifting landscape of spatial and identity difference within British India, hinging upon the relationship between the British Empire and Islam. For Moysey, engaging with Pathan soldiers on the Northwest Frontier underlined his spatial and cultural difference from sterile cantonment life: he was physically rejecting the segregated spaces of British India after having experienced intense wartime intimacy alongside South Asian soldiers. Rejecting spaces of British India also included rejecting its codes of morality—embracing Islam by saying prayers, and becoming “intimate” with Pathan soldiers and Nur Hussein Shah. In the early 1920s, admiring Islam was both useful and subversive, as calls for pan-Islamic unity criticized Britain’s imperial expansion around the globe. By the 1930s, however, many of the dreams of anti-imperial

unity had fragmented into factional difference. Widespread criticisms of empire were filtered and deflected, in some important and imperial circles, into anti-Semitism. British officials in India made conscious and concerted efforts to be more inclusive of its significant Muslim population, in part to fragment the political unity of anti-colonialism that had emerged after the First World War.

The intimate encounters between the upwardly mobile white British working class soldiers and South Asian Muslim soldiers—working and trained in the technologically advanced units such as the Signal Corps—suggests that working class and South Asian Muslim men were similarly striving for a more pronounced role in the world through imperial service. Somerfield enacted many performances similar to Moysey such as adopting disguises and flirting with spiritual conversion. In so doing he appropriated both “Muslim” markers of identity and elite imperial pretensions of mastering racial and religious difference. At the same time, Somerfield and Sultan Mohammad embodied the criticisms of imperial cosmopolitan “queerness” derided by Hindu nationalists. Neither Somerfield nor Sultan Mohammad could belong in a “Hindu” India, and their place in Britain in the 1930s was also up for debate. Yet by living global-imperial lives, and eventually serving in the Second World War, these men had access to a wider variety of imperial locales. Empire, and the upward mobility of working class Britons and South Asian Muslims, did not necessarily need to include India.
Conclusion

Britain’s increasing reliance on colonial troops for overseas expansion from 1900 to 1940 transformed the way that Britons and South Asians viewed and participated in the world. By 1940, British soldiers sought salvation in the frontiers and mountains—an escape from the bureaucratic rigidity of military life. The inability of imperial service to match up to the grand imperial adventures of popular fiction encouraged men to seek intimacy and excitement in fringes, frontiers, hills and cinemas. “Religion” for them was often little more than a cold bureaucratic inconvenience—an another mandatory ceremonial and military duty. Most British soldiers cared more about their access to food and recreation than having the ear of a chaplain or a comfortable place to pray. By contrast, the absence of amenities for South Asian soldiers meant that they sought their own opportunities for food, entertainment, comfort, and solidarity. “Religion” was something that could provide recreation, facilitate participation in broader political life, and maintain soldiers’ connections with their home communities as they sought international employment. Yet words and concepts such as “ritual,” “religion,” and “prejudice,” so often condemned by British officials, were often most fervently upheld and institutionalized by British authorities, despite South Asian men and women frequently urging one another to pursue “enlightened” paths. While religion remained a tool of empire, it was also repurposed for anti-colonial, and post-colonial, ends.

The trauma, turmoil, innovation and destruction of overseas military service transformed Britain, South Asia, and the world. From 1900 to 1940, the careful certainties of imperial rule—especially the “Martial Races”—were being carefully
dismantled. The British Indian Army functioned through institutional segregation but nonetheless enabled intercultural exchange of spiritual beliefs, masculinity and martial ethics. Britons and South Asians migrated and worked in diverse imperial locales—from Australia to New Zealand, Singapore to Hong Kong. This diversity and international fragmentation signaled the future of the empire—and Britain and South Asia—as nation states competed for a place in a new international order. “Globalization” served as an alternative but parallel model to empire. The British Indian Army was an institution that shared ideas, social codes of belonging, and hierarchies of difference with both broader imperial networks and South Asian anti-colonial nationalism. Yet these innovations also emerged as part of an on-going dialog as nationalists and imperialists responded to and reflected upon increasing globalization.

Soldiers’ ability to access food, cross borders, seek moral guidance, participate politically, and have sex were all shaped and guided by their employment in a British military establishment. Through comparative chapters on the access to food and the search for moral guidance, this dissertation underlined some of the similarities—and noteworthy differences—between British and South Asian experiences of military life. These chapters went beyond narrow parameters of identity difference to question institutional categories. While “Anglicans” and “Catholics” shared the privileges of white Christianity, “Muslims,” “Hindus” and “Sikhs” were all expected to tow the line of military-sanctioned loyalty, diet, and belief, or be cast out from service. The two chapters ostensibly covering only “Gurkhas” and “Sikhs,” by contrast, used the institutional logic of the army to examine and question theories of martial difference. This moved the analysis from the comparative large-scale, to the more focused and localized questions of
how the army forged community belonging. The result was finding that the relationships between borders and empire, and political activism and colonial rule, played out in debates about two of the most praised martial communities. The most trusted and desired men were in fact the most contentious and dangerous. The final chapter personalized these discussions through small-scale and intimate stories about transgressing sexual, racial, religious, physical, and political boundaries. The final result was interrogating how global army life influenced soldiers at the individual, community, and institutional level, with wider social and cultural reverberations in Britain and South Asia.

As this work has demonstrated, the first decades of the twentieth century became less about distinguishing a strong “West” from a weak “East” than using spiritual and martial codes of ethics to mark those bodies that did—and did not—deserve to participate in the emerging global-imperial order. While the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented level of violence from soldiers of the British Indian Army, soldiers’ own bodies were battlegrounds for secular and spiritual ideals of nationhood and manhood. Each time that British officials tightened their definitions of martial men, a new challenge—from British men who felt inadequate or used these ideals to their own advantage, or South Asian men who redefined martial prowess outside of the army—underlined its failings. Those men who were recruited as martial and loyal often had visions for the future that were inconsistent with British goals. Others who were barred from military service more effectively mobilized martial violence to stir anti-colonial activism against the empire. The result was fracturing unity within South Asia—between the loyal and the disloyal, the martial and the so-called “effeminate.” In Britain, the inability to retain control over the empire—or to make British men feel that they were
just as masculine as their South Asian counterparts—threw the romantic certainty of empire into question.

Between the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Partition of India (1947-48), the British Indian Army underwent considerable changes. Bombay and Nepal supplied equal numbers of recruits. Madras was second only to Punjab in furnishing the largest number of men.\(^{939}\) Meanwhile, the Indian National Army (1942) helped stir upheavals, mutinies, and alterantive constructions of martial prowess. During the partition, the army was literally split between those regiments assigned to the post-colonial Indian Army, and those who would belong to the newly founded nation-state of Pakistan. Gurkha regiments were divided between the Indian and British armies, signaling Nepal’s continued placement between nations and empires. Yet what did these divisions mean at the individual level? Did the Sikh men who fought to occupy and reclaim the land in Punjab in the 1920s—reclassified as Pakistan in 1947—feel at home in the new India? Did Nepalese soldiers traveling beyond the Indian subcontinent in the service of Britain’s empire add greater complexity to debates about labor, purity, and belonging? Did men such as Sultan Mohammad find a home in Pakistan or Britain? Did he instead settle in Egypt or Somalia? While the answers to these questions are, in some cases, unknown, the questions themselves reveal the post-colonial global fragmentation of the British Indian Army, echoing the transformative pathways carved out in the first decades of the twentieth century.

\(^{939}\) Map showing recruiting percentages from different regions of British India and the states into the Indian army, National Archives (WO 32/14406), http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/wo32-144061.jpg.
Unifying the armies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay into a united “Indian Army” at the turn of the twentieth century represented a late, sweeping, institutional effort to overstate and force unity in the face of South Asian diversity. Yet agreeing to recognize a unified “India” failed to accommodate, contain, or give voice to the multitude of visions for post-colonial states and regions. The transition to the “Indian” Army, instead, marked a new and deeper stage in the globalization of South Asia. By connecting South Asian military forces to Britain’s other imperial colonies and spheres of influence—from East Africa to Mesopotamia, Singapore to Hong Kong, this institutional change established a precedent for how South Asian martial men understood mobility and power in relation to the rest of the world. Imperial infrastructure and international partnerships deepened the opportunities for certain South Asians to seek personal growth and development. This mirrored the possibilities of empire that had long been offered to working class Britons, who also embraced imperial service for the promise of personal gain. While twentieth-century Britons and South Asians questioned and chafed against the legacies of empire, the empire nonetheless provided real and lasting opportunities for some individuals to participate in a global-international stage. Backed by nation-state ideals after 1947, South Asian commitments to, and representation of, the colonial project, lingered and transformed as journeys for commerce, trade, and employment continued to flow along pathways forged by empire.

In the face of diversity and difference, the imperial state favored deeply entrenched institutional inequality, creating a process of slow violence that exacerbated both hostility and transgressive cultural innovation. Distinctions and differences—of food, gender, and borders—hardened under British imperial rule. Yet the empire also led
to interactions and encounters that exploded, questioned, and transgressed these boundaries. These apparent polarities—between hard stagnation and flux and fluidity—were entwined in the history of empire. It was the result of combining immense diversity and rapid mobility, with the confident certainties of bureaucracy. Rigidity fed desires to break free from norms, just as unpredictability increased wishes for demarcating difference. As people and armies continue to traverse the globe, intimacy and belief remain inseparable from structures of global power and hierarchies of difference shaped by Britain’s histories of empire.
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