Army Recruitment in Punjab, 1846-1913 : An Evolutionary Study

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Introduction

The present paper is in effect concerned with, as its title evinces, the evolution of Army recruitment in the colonial Punjab, popularly called the 'shield', the 'spear-head' and the 'sword-hand' of India.[1] There are, no doubt, several scholarly studies, contemporary and later, discussing different aspects of the subject.[2] But still our understanding of the phenomenon in question is faint and foggy, because of which we are hard put to satisfy 'the fresh concerns' of the present generation and answer its new questions to a satiable extent. Hence the present exercise – a revisit to the old Punjab, going, in the first place, across its social and economic landscape, albeit in quick pace, to perspectivise the narrative; secondly, to understand the dynamics and complexities of the recruiting system itself by tracing its evolution and operationalisation, stage by stage and blow by blow, from 1846 to 1913.

But before proceeding further, a word on the sources seems imperative. Unfortunately, we have no indigenous sources for the earlier period (19th century), and the ones from the other (British) side are in most of the cases, if not all, problematic. They betray the colonialists' universal policy of showing, in Jean-Paul Sartre's profound words, the naked truth 'with clothes on'.[3] They hide[4] many a thing in the interest of the state or the concerned state actors, and orchestrate many a myth, a number of which, unfortunately, still rule the roost as authentic stuff of history and distort and disorient to an extent even our present discourse.[5] The situation somewhat improves when we come to the following century (20th). The colonialists' cloth-wrap becomes a little less opaque, in the light of some Indian sources, which

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begin to be available in this period. But, unfortunately, it is not so in our case. As a result, most of the experiences of the 'other' side, the side as seen from the receiving end of the stick, remain inaccessible. Yet there is hope to get somewhere near the truth, for, it has, as they say, many strange ways of revealing itself, provided we seek it.

The Perspective

For a better comprehension of the factors, forces and issues involved here, a brief word on perspectival aspect of the study seems imperative. Like several other provinces (now called states), Punjab also witnessed geo-administrative alterations and changes during the period under study. In 1846, whence from our narrative commences, the British held under their absolute sway only its Jullundur Doab (about 7,000 sq. miles). But in less than three years, they were the masters of the entire Punjab, comprising broadly, the present states of Punjab and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in Pakistan, and the states of Punjab, the upper parts of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh of the Indian Union. In 1858, it got the lower parts of Haryana, and in 1901 lost the NWFP. In its new avatar, its spread was about 135,770 sq. miles[6] and its population, according to the 1911 Census, was 24,187,752 persons,[7] 51.1 per cent of whom were Muslims, 35.8 per cent Hindus, and 12.1 per cent Sikhs.[8] All the communities were divided, practically speaking, into castes/tribes.

The province was then, as it is now, a land of villages. Agriculture was the main calling of the people, which was, except in small tracts and canal colonies, where irrigational facilities were available, in very many ways unrewarding. The peasants were, therefore, by and large poor. The colonial masters further locustised them by converting their land into 'private property' and demanding payment of 'revenue in cash,' which was hardly available with them. Worse, to ensure payment of their demand, they created a class of money-lenders (usurers) from whom the poor, cash-crunched peasants were forced to borrow money to pay the revenue on exorbitant interest rates, thus rendering them, as HG Trevaskis has rightly said, with the active interference of the Court, *'the serf of the money lender'* (emphasis added).[9] This was in a way tantamount to putting a noose around their neck. The more the poor people tried to loosen it, the more grasping it became.

They were left with no escape route 'to forestall an impending disaster for themselves and their families' except one – Army service, which they perforce availed in large numbers.[10] That is how their land became, in due course of time, a recruiting ground, and got the above-mentioned epithets like the 'shield', the 'spear-head', etc.[11]

The Evolution

The First Phase

Having portrayed the perspective in broad, brief strokes, let us come to the issue proper, i.e. the system of recruitment during the period under study and its directional policy, organisational structure and operational strategies. The system came into operation, as indicated above, in 1846, when, after the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846), the British became the *de jure* masters of the entire territory, hill and plain, between the river Sutlej and the Beas, i.e. the Jullundur Doab (area : 7,000 sq miles), and the *de facto* rulers of the rest of the Kingdom of Ranjit Singh (area : 74,000 sq miles).[12] They introduced their direct rule in the former[13] and indirect in the latter.[14] But, as it usually happens in such cases, it also brought some serious problems in its train. The bellicose Sikhs were no doubt down after the War, but they were not downright out;[15] over a score of war-like tribes living on the 800-mile long North-Western border, from Hazara in the Himalayas near the upper Indus to Sind in the South, were a perpetual source of trouble;[16] and beyond the border there was a traditionally hostile Afghanistan;[17] and a little further, there was the 'loom of the bear', Russia, the Imperial rival.[18] In view of these unsettling problems, the large Army of Occupation (54,000 men) deployed in Punjab, the loyal and trusted Lahore Durbar troops (27,000) and large contingents of Police of several types, mostly made of ex-soldiers of the Sikh Army who had betrayed their 'king and country' (hereafter BKC), seemed inadequate to them. Consequently, more troops, comprising two Sikh Irregular *Paltans,* called Ferozepur and Ludhiana Sikhs,[19] and a Punjab Frontier Brigade, consisting of four Irregular local Sikh Infantry Regiments,[20] and a Battery of Artillery, were raised by the authority of the Governor-General under the guidance and supervision of Sir Henry Lawrence, the Governor-General's Agent at Lahore. The former two *Paltans* were meant for 'service with the Bengal Army' and the latter Brigade for 'police and general purpose'.[21]

The nucleus of each of the newly raised six Regiments was made of British officers, Indian junior commissioned officers (VCOs), non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and some sepoys (about 100), mostly Rajputs and Brahamans from Avadh, belonging to the Regular Regiments of the Bengal Army. The Regimental commandants made further recruitments to fulfill the prescribed strength of their regiments by sending recruiting parties to the well marked areas. The local officials, *tehsildars, patwaris,* village headmen, etc., helped them find able-bodied men they required from the following collectives and regions: the Sikhs, Muslims and others from among the ex-soldiers of the Sikh Army (BKC) from the Cis-Sutlej region for the Ferozepur Sikhs, and the same collectives from the Trans-Sutlej region for the Ludhiana Sikhs. In the case of the four Irregular local Sikh Infantry Regiments, the Sikhs and Muslims (both BKC) and others were recruited from the Cis-Sutlej area for the Ist Regiment; Hillmen (Dogras) were enlisted, through the agency of the rich, loyal family lads from the region (Kangra), who were commissioned as *jemadars,* and some Gurkhas (100) and some Pathans for the 2nd; the Hindustanis, Rajputs, Brahamans, etc. from Avadh, and some loyal Sikhs and Muslims (both BKC) for the 3rd; and a mix of loyal elements – Sikhs, Muslims (Punjabi), Pathans and others (all BKC) – for the 4th.[22]

Almost simultaneously, Sir Henry also raised, on the authority of the Governor-General, an Irregular Corps called the Guides (1846). Later some more corps, called Irregular Levies, were raised by Sir Henry's 'political officers', popularly called his 'young men'. Surprisingly, the Army greybeards and their rules and regulations had hardly any say in any matter in recruitment there.

> We do not want antique generals and brigadiers, Sir Henry said, with antiquated notions, in such quarters, but energetic, active-minded men with considerable discretionary power, civil and military. It is all nonsense sticking to rules and formalities….[23]

Henry's those 'active-minded men', Herbert Edwardes, James Abbot, George Lawrence, Harry Lumsden, and John Nicholson, mostly in their early twenties, enjoyed unlimited powers, and did their work the way they liked. In fact, not they alone, the Punjab of those days (mid-1840s and 1850s) was a typically strange place and whoever had anything to do with it, right from the

Governor-General to the local assistants, and small revenue subalterns to the junior lieutenants, changed, after taking a simple sip of the Sutlej water, into powerful despots, treating, more often, their wishes as laws and their whims and vagaries as rules and regulations. The way Sir Henry's favourite Assistant Herbert Edwardes, raised and operationalised 'his' Levies of North-Western Frontier Pathans proves the point to the hilt. Let us hear him :

> 1st. The (Irregular) army was raised by personal influence; such as it becomes every political officer to have in the country under his charge – such as I am proud to think every other Assistant to the Resident at Lahore had acquired in his own district. … I encouraged the enlistment of brotherhoods; fifty or a hundred clansmen, with their own chiefs at their head. There was subdivision, and a company at once. Then I asked a dozen brotherhoods which of my chief officers they would follow? They picked their own according to their border feuds and friendships; and thus I got together bodies of five hundred, one thousand, and two thousand, each with its responsible leader, who took his orders straight from me and saw them carried out. …
>
> 2nd. The army I thus raised was fed and paid out of the revenues (read *loot*) of the country which it conquered. I commenced the war (against Mool Raj at Multan) with a few thousand rupees in hand, and maintained it for nine months at an expenditure, civil, military, of two lakhs of rupees a month, without receiving more than one lakh from the Sikh (Lahore Durbar), and another one from the British Government. …
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> 3rd. As to discipline. There was no time to attempt what regular soldiers call discipline. The men had to fight the day after they were enlisted; and they could only fight their own way. All I did was to make the best of their way; to draw tight such discipline(?) as they had.[24]

Edwardes is elaborate and frank, but he has not cared to explain how those bold and freedom-loving Pathan borderers, who had long memory and revengeful disposition, forgot their decade-long ruthless persecution,[25] constant blockade of their villages,[26] and curfew-like situation imposed upon them[27] by the British, and came forward to serve them. The explanation is, however, not

difficult to find. Hunger and dragoonisation can break everything—memory, will, even soul. This happened to Pathans; and this drove many of them to criminal activities to remain alive. Edwardes and his associates, who raised Levies and other corps (for instance, the Guides), preferred among them *'the most cunning trackers, the most notorious cattle-lifters, the most daring free booters',* in short, all sorts of *'bold villains ready to risk their own throats and to cut those of any one else'* (emphasis added),[28] – Dostoevesky's characters, criminals, 'men of no character at all'.[29] They made better soldiers, they believed. The belief, strange as it might appear, always remained with them to some extent or the other, as seen below, for a long time.

To resume the narrative. Though the above recruiting endeavour (raising of the Punjab Irregular Regiments, Levies and Guides) was on a modest scale, yet it is rated in the Army annals as the most important milestone in the history of the evolution of Indian Army: General George MacMunn has gone even to the extent of declaring that with this raising actually 'commenced the Indian Army of today'.[30] The defining question, then, is : What was so special about this raising that it went to get such an enviable status. Examining clinically, we find nothing in the raising as such, it was in the following special principles which were devised in raising them for the reason that these became by and large the *mantras* for raising the colonial Indian Army of future.

(a) *Divide et Impera (divide and rule)*[31] : The old Roman dictum was initiated by Henry Lawrence, Governor-General's Agent at Lahore, in Punjab regiments and levies in order to counterpoise different collectives in them in 1846, and was perfected and fine-tuned later by his younger brother, John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner, Punjab, by decreeing that, unlike in other places in India, recruits should be 'drawn from the greatest possible varieties of races, differing from each other in religion, birth place, habits and dialect.'[32]

(b) *'Take a country dog to catch a country hare'*[33] : More clearly, 'select from a newly subjected country men willing and capable of military service, who would readily help in keeping down their own people'[34]. The Punjab authorities took up the principle and put it into practice in all seriousness from 1846 onwards.[35]

(c) *All is fair in Imperial interest :* This principle was also seriously followed in Punjab in recruiting where good *chaal-chalan* (character) was normally a pre-requisite for enlistees.[36]

(d) *Ignorant, naïve and uneducated should be preferred.* Men of no education, no culture and no class, having empty bellies, who were least likely to question the order of their officers, like Tennyson's 'six hundred', had been the choicest stuff for the Army for a long time.[37]

The Punjab troops raised and kept going in line with the above principles served, for the most part, their masters well in the Second Sikh War (1848-1849) when several Bengal Army's regular regiments not only wavered but showed sympathy to the Sikh cause. Small wonder then, the Governor-General-in-Council ordered the Punjab authorities to raise ten more Irregular Regiments, five of Infantry and five of Cavalry, comprising 800 and 500 men each respectively, a Sind Camel Corps and three batteries of Artillery and some more Irregular Levies.[38] The nuclei of all the Irregular Regiments were made, as before, of the officers, both British and Indian, from the Regular Regiments of the Bengal Army. The Regimental commandants filled the rest of the vacancies (of sepoys) in their respective regiments through their recruiters with the help of the local civil officials in the following manner :

> For the 1st, the 3rd and the 4th Regiments, of the five irregular Infantry Regiments, they recruited the Pathan tribes from the North-Western border, the Hindustanis, mostly Rajputs from Avadh and Punjabi Musalmans (BKC). For the 2nd and the 3rd Regiments they enrolled Hindustanis, Brahamans, Rajputs, Muslims, again from Avadh. For the five cavalry Irregular Regiments they enlisted North-Western Pathan tribes, for the 1st; Hindustanis, Brahamans, Rajputs and Muslims from Avadh for the 2nd; Hindustanis of the castes mentioned above (half), and Pathans (half) for the 3rd; and the Punjabi Muslims (BKC) from different regions for the 4th and the 5th. For Artillery batteries they went again to the old 'Sikh Artillery men', mostly Muslims (BKC) and to Sindi tribes for the Sind Camel Corp. The strength of the Guides and Irregular Levies was raised manifold.[39]

In raising those corps, the recruiters played an important part, but they alone could not have done much without the help of the local officials and petty loyal *jagirdars.* Both were a great help.

In the year 1850, the doors of the Bengal Army were also thrown open for Punjabis, though partially, by allowing its 74 Infantry Regiments to have 200 of them – 100 being Sikhs – in each.[40] But as no eligible Sikh, i.e. the one who had not fought against the British or was not above 20 years of age – was available, the strength of the Sikhs remained terribly inadequate (about 750) in the Army.[41] Yet, perhaps to show to the world in general and the Sikhs in particular that how broad of mind and kind at heart the British were to have forgiven and trusted their 'staunchest foes' so soon and so easily, Dalhousie declared that he had raised a large 'Sikh Contingent'.[42] It is difficult to know whether the declaration impressed the world and had some cooling effect on the Sikhs or not, but it certainly elicited sharp rebuke from Dalhousie's detractors in India and England. Caught at the wrong foot, the unnerved Governor-General let out the suppressed truth before his trusted friend, philosopher and guide, Sir George Couper, in a private letter thus :

> I have done no such thing. By the acts of the local officers I was *pledged* to employ the troops who stood by us of the Khalsa in last war. Besides these, we had 20,000 levies, to some of whom service was positively promised. I could not employ these in our regular army, for it was full. I could only make local corps of them. There are five regiments of Infantry, five of Cavalry, but so far are they from being Sikh that I have no one Sikh in the Cavalry at all, and only 80 men in a regiment, or 400 in all, in the Infantry. The rest are all to be from the levies, not Sikhs, who served us and fought for us for twelve months.[43]

In fact, Dalhousie never trusted Sikhs – rather he feared and abhorred them. He told General Napier, his Commander-in-Chief, that if any trouble would come to them, it would come from Sikhs of Manjha.[44] They believed that Sikhs were like Greeks, the very sight of steel made them fight. They took many measures to incapacitate them like taking their 'King' away from them, and putting the queen-mother, the fiery widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Maharani Jindan Kaur, and every 'real' Sikh leader worth the name

behind the bars; They were starkly disarmed; left with only 'finger-nails' with which, Dalhousie believed, and rightly so, 'men can't make war'.[45]

In this circumstance, the local architecture and grammar of recruitment put to use in 1846 served their craftsmen well. Some strain was, however, felt in 1857 when 'the greatest calamity' (Benjamin Disraeli) befell upon the British Empire and everything seemed to be slipping like butter off a hot plate from their hands. The Bengal Army, the chief component of the East India Company's Indian Army, which had played a major role in conquering the whole of India and much more for them, rose up in full fury to destroy them root and branch. The civil populace took hardly any time to join them. As a result, what started as a mutiny of the troops became a People's Revolt/War. There was, as they say, darkness at noon. The massive Imperial citadel built by Clives, Hastings and Dalhousies seemed to be falling apart.[46] But Punjab, they say, came to their rescue. Thanks to 'the paternalistic' and 'just rule', 1846-1857, of John Lawrence and his chosen band of officers, the grateful Punjabis, Sikhs and Muslims, says MacMunn, who were after their blood some eight years ago, 'flocked from every village . . ., filled the ranks of (our) countless new corps', and saved the situation.[47] Hardly anyone disagrees with him – even eminent historians toe his line. But historically speaking, it is not only not true, the statement is, as they say, a lie, including 'and' and 'the'.

The fact is that British rule over Punjab, 1846-1857, was neither 'paternalistic' nor 'just', as they claim, it was an exploitative, hard-hearted, autocratic rule.[48] The Punjabis had no reason to be grateful and loyal to such an unlawful and rapacious foreign rule. In fact, no Punjabi, particularly Sikh, of any worth or integrity offered his services during the Revolt.[49] Yet, John Lawrence made a case to justify the annexation of Punjab by his mentor, Lord Dalhousie, and to silence his critics, who called it (annexation) a Himalayan blunder. But for annexation, he said, a pretty large number of Sikhs who came on his appeal and fought on their side to capture Delhi, wouldn't have been available. General Macleod Innes who had studied the subject from close quarters very meticulously called Lawrence's bluff: *'One often reads',* he said, *'loosely worded allusion to John Lawrence, having sent down large bodies of newly*

raised Sikhs to Delhi. In point of fact, he sent none' (emphasis added)'.[50] Many more supported him. John Lawrence's repeated pleas and requests to Sikhs to join his Army fell on deaf ears. Shocked and baffled, he made desperate calls to the Sikh chiefs (of Punjab) to furnish men. Yet, says General Innes, *'no bodies of real Sikhs under their own leaders ever seem to have joined at all'* (emphasis added).[51] Almost the same was the case, as seen above, with the Muslims, especially Pathans of 'the class.' They also kept away.

In this circumstance, the Chief Commissioner and his men had no alternative but to go to their old tried and tested constituencies and collectives, the hungry and harassed Pathans, Sikhs, Dogras, Punjabi Muslims (all BKC) and even some Hindustanis, Rajputs, etc. (who were still loyal to them). They expanded their force in two ways : first, they added four additional companies to each of their existing Infantry Regiments,[52] taking officers and men from the earlier raised Punjab Irregular Regiments. Secondly, they 'partially raised 15 Infantry Regiments, some Cavalry Regiments and new Levies, horse and foot', from the loyal stuff mentioned above, the same old way. The strength of the Guides was increased manifold and new Irregular Cavalry Corps like them, namely the Hodson's Horse, Wale's Horse, Lind's Horse, Cureton's Multanis, etc. were also created[53] by the young officers, enjoying full discretionary powers. The total strength of the Punjab corps thus raised (during the crisis) was 23,524 strong – Infantry : 8,461, Cavalry : 7,242; and Levies : 7,821—which was 'trained', held together and made to function, fight and loot like the Levies raised by Herbert Edwardes and his colleagues about a decade ago.[54]

By mid-August, the situation became very grave. Contrary to their expectations, Delhi did not fall and on account of heavy causalities and some desertions, the ranks of the Field Force at the Ridge (Delhi) got thinner. They needed more troops – desperately. But the wind seemed to be blowing, for them, in the wrong direction. The recruiting parties sent for the purpose 'found it difficult to get recruits. Where a hundred recruits came first, now one or two fit for service are presented'.[55] The Sikhs, as General Macleod Innes has said above, stood aloof. The Muslims were hesitant to go to fight their own King (*Badshah*). Earlier, about, 1,200 poor, Mazbhi Sikhs from the labour pool of the Baree Doab

Canal had come to them, but now even they stopped coming.[56] A large number of the loyal Sikhs, Dogras and Muslims (BKC), had already got into the Punjab Regiments, Levies and Police; as such even they were not available in a sizeable number.

Thus forced, the Punjab authorities again looked towards the hills – the North-West Frontier, to be precise. There the poor, wretched Pathans were lured with juicy carrots.[57] 'Delhi and *loot!',* says Cave-Browne, *'was now the cry they heard, and the city of the Mogul with its fabulous wealth and splendour, like an Eldorado of the 16th century, or a California of the present, drew off by hundreds the daring or the needy'* (emphasis added).[58] This resulted in the Levies being over-crowded with, again in the words of Cave-Browne, *'the outlaws, desperadoes, escaped convicts, idle vagabonds'* (emphasis added).[59] Some idea as to how 'over-crowded' were these Levies with such elements can be had from the Punjab Government's official Report on 'Mutiny' : *'One troop alone that is fighting at Lucknow (1857),' it says, 'contains no less that 60 outlaws'* (emphasis added).[60] The loyalists brought in their men. Thus the Province was able to give, whatever their make or character, a formidable force, numbering 58,815 strong – 24,815 belonging to the old Sikh troops and Military Police, and 34,000 new recruits to win back Delhi and upper India. In terms of their social composition, 24,072 of them were Muslims, 13,344 Sikhs, 5,338 Hindus other than 2,203 Dogras and Gurkhas, 2,430 Hindustanis and 16 Christians.[61]

In sum, this novel Punjab experiment, perhaps the first of its kind ever made on such a scale in any Army laboratory from 1846-1857, was in a way successful in serving the Imperial interest and need, but not in the making of a modern professional army. That happened in the ensuing period – the second phase.

The Second Phase

After the burning embers of the Revolt somewhat cooled off, serious steps were taken to overhaul and 'make the Army in India such a force that would be always available and prepared for any emergency (and) would ensure to Great Britain the permanent command and possession of Indian Empire' A high-powered 8-member Commission, headed by Major-General Jonathan Peel, Secretary of State for War, London, was constituted[62] for

suggesting the ways and means to do it. On its recommendations, the Army was re-organised – rather rebuilt. The Punjab Irregular Regiments and Levies were mostly merged with the small remnants of the Bengal Army. In recognition of their loyal and meritorious services during the Sikh Wars and the great Revolt, they were given pride of place in the new Army. Placed under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, they stood, in their new avatar, as follows:

> The old Ferozepur and Ludhiana Sikh Irregular Regiments became the 14th and 15th Bengal Infantry Regiments; the 14 Punjab Irregular Infantry Regiments raised during the Revolt, became the 19th to 32nd Bengal Infantry Regiments; the 8 local Infantry Corps raised during the Revolt as Levies became the 33rd to 40th Bengal Infantry Regiments; and the 8 Sikh Irregular Cavalry Regiments and the Horses (like the Hodson's, Wale's, Murray's, etc.), which were also raised during the Revolt, became 9th to 15th Bengal Cavalry Regiments.[63]

In place of North-Western Provinces, now Punjab became the centre of recruitment. The old 'Punjab Force' rules and practices for enlistment were done away with. In the new scheme of things, the civil authority had no business to enroll sepoys directly, as was done earlier. It was now Army's job which it did following the old two-pronged strategy – 'Direct Regimental Recruiting' and 'Class Recruiting'. In the former case, the Regiments, whenever they needed recruits, formed recruiting parties consisting mostly of some junior commissioned officers (VCOs) and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). The parties visited their recruiting areas and picked up men of the required classes. The relatives of men serving in various regiments could also go directly to the regiments and get, if otherwise fit, enrolled. In the case of 'Class Recruiting', enlistment was made by Army recruiting officers whose offices were located at various cantonments. They enrolled recruits from particular classes/castes for 'Class Regiments' or 'Class Company Regiments'.[64] In peace time the recruiting strategy worked well, but not in the war days. But that is another story.

Besides changes in the recruiting strategies, some changes were also effected in the social fabric. The old policy of not to enlist Sikhs and others who had ever taken arms or worked against them in the past was relaxed, if not completely given up. Some

new peasant-castes, as seen below, were added to the recruiting list. In short, men from the Land of the Five Rivers occupied major space in the re-organised Army.

Around 1880s, the position improved still further when certain activities in Central Asia and thereabouts convinced the British that Russians, after befriending/over-running Afghanistan and nearby territories, were coming. Several Commanders-in-Chief of the Indian Army, especially Lord Roberts (1885-1893) thought that because of its human resource and geo-physical and strategic location, only Punjab could supply men who could fight Russians. But there was a problem there too. Punjab had 4,013,920 male population of recruitable age at that time. They had to be, therefore, selective in choosing the required number. But the task (taking in some classes/castes and leaving some others) was not easy. Nonetheless, after taking social, economic, political and psychological factors into account, they selected the following peasant classes/castes: 'The Rajput Dogra of the lower Himalayas, the Punjabi Mohammadan of the north-west, the Sikh of the central districts and the Jat of the south-east,' for enlistment,[65] and put a tag of 'martial races' around their necks.[66]

The tag was neither biologically tried-and-true nor militarily or politically prudent. Even for its creators – as it was proved during the war-days – it was a disaster. But for Indians it was, both in short and long run, a misfortune. In the first place, it deprived a huge multitude of them living in different provinces, the right of bearing arms in defence of their country, their life, their honour and their property.[67] Secondly, it harmed them socio-politically by adding one more division to their already divided society, which the British exploited to the hilt. They patronised its elite heartily, made them their subordinate collaborators and bestowed *izzat* (honour) and *iqbal* (prosperity) upon them. The grateful class served them loyally and faithfully.[68] Its non-class folk became the choicest material for their Army.[69]

As time rolled on, the process of 'Punjabisation' gathered more steam and strength. About 1913, says O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab then, 'one-half of the Indian Army was drawn from the Punjab, over one-sixth from the Frontier and the trans-border Pathans and…Ghurkhas (non Indians), and less than one-third from all the remaining Indian races'.[70] Numerically,

the Punjabis amounted to about 100,000 – 87,000 combatants and 13,000 non-combatants.[71] There was no change in the recruiting system; the old one remained intact in term of its architecture, grammar and functioning.

The Indian Army was now, as people sarcastically, but not quite baselessly, said, 'the Punjab Army': It was, in other words, an ethnically and territorially 'imbalanced Army,'[72] which served the Imperial purpose well, but not the broad Indian interests and aspirations. The Indian Army is now a truly National Army but it has taken a few decades after Independence to correct the compositional contortions.

Endnotes

[1] Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, London, 1925, p. 213; HG Trevaskis, *The Punjab of to-day,* Lahore, 1931, pp. 36-37.

[2] Most of these studies have been mentioned, and sometimes critically appraised, in the references and notes at the relevant places.

[3] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Eng. tr. C. Farrington, New York, 1963, p. 7.

[4] The official documents and reports are more often selective and misleading. For instance, the eminent historian, Sir John W Kay, found the '*State Papers*' as 'one-sided compilations of garbled documents': cited in Ad. to the Second Edition of J.D. Cunningham's *History of Sikhs*, by his brother Peter Cunningham, Kensington, 1853, p. XVIII. '*The Blue Books*' presented to the British Parliament were no less untrustworthy (see *The Punjab Papers*, ed. Bikrama Jit Hasrat, Hoshiarpur, 1970, pp. 233-34); Dolores Domin, *India in 1857-1859,* Berlin, 1977, p. 253. Even '*Parliamentary Debates*' are not always truthful. *Calcutta Review*, vol. 29, July-December 1857, p. 424. And so on. Yet, truth comes out, as they say, in her own strange ways, provided we seek it.

[5] The myth of the Punjab loyalty in 1857 is an apt case to illustrate the point. See, for details, KC Yadav, *1857* : The *Role of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh,* Delhi, 2008, pp. 13-117.

[6] See *The Census of India*, *1911,* Calcutta, 1913, vol. 1, pp. 2-3.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

[9] Trevaskis, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

[10] Mustapha Kamal Pasha, *Colonial Political Economy : Recruitment and underdevelopment in the Punjab,* Karachi, 1998.

[11] Op. Cit 1.

[12] NM Khilnani, *The Punjab Under the Lawrences,* Shimla, 1951, pp. 13-46.

[13] John Lawrence, holding the rank of a Commissioner, 'ruled over' the Jullundur Doab from 1846 to 1849 with an iron hand. For details, see R.R. Sethi, *John Lawrence as Commissioner of the Punjab, Jullundur Doab, 1846-1849,* Lahore, 1930.

[14] Sir Henry Lawrence, was appointed Resident at the Lahore Durbar (1846). For his 'reign', see S.S. Thorburn, *Punjab in Peace and War,* London, 1883, pp. 73-9; Khilnani, *op.cit.,* pp. 47-101.

[15] 'The Sikhs had been defeated and humiliated, their country garrisoned and their military formation broken up; and their Maharani was banished and they were betrayed by their leaders. In spite of all this, their spirit had remained undaunted. They held their heads high' (Khilnani*, op.cit*., p. 62), proudly declaring that … 'Gobind would clothe his disciples with irresistible might and guide them with unequalled skill' (JDCunningham). *Ibid*.

[16] For their fighting skills, see Charles Napier, *Defects, Civil and Military of Indian Government,* London, 1853, pp. 113-14.

[17] Come rain come shine, the British always used to have very suspecting and uneasy relations with Afghanistan, which led to three wars, 1848, 1878, 1919.

[18] For fear of Russia in the British mind, see JH Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain*, Cambridge, 1950.

[19] For details relative to their composition, etc. see PG Bamford, *The Sikh Regiment, the King George's own Ferozepur Sikhs,* Aldershot, 1948, pp. 1-2; E.G. Talbot, *The 14th King George's own Sikhs, 1846-1933,* London, 1937, pp. 1-2; *History of the First Sikh Infantry 1846-1886, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1903; The Sikh Regiment : Brief History, 1846-1968*, (cyclostyled copy) issued by the Sikh Regimental Centre, 1970.

[20] They were designated as the Ist, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sikh Local Infantry. See *The Sikh Regiment: Brief History, op. cit*., pp. 1-2; *History of the First Sikh Infantry, op.cit., pp. 1-7;* Talbot, *op. cit*., pp. 1-2; W.E.H. Condon, comp., *The Frontier Force Regiment,* Aldershot, 1962, pp. XXI-II, 1-5; *The Punjab Administration Report (*hereafter *PAR*), 1849-50, 1850-51, p. 42.

[21] *Vide* the Government of India, GO, no. 2457, dated 14 December 1846.

[22] For details see Bamford, *op. cit*., pp. 1-2; Talbot, *op. cit*., pp. 1-2; *The Sikh Regiment,* official, pp. 1-2.

A question usually arises here: Why were the above regiments made of such heterogeneous elements called 'Sikh regiments'? The designation might have given the impression to the general public that the Regiments

were either 'wholly Sikh' or Sikhs 'preponderated' in them when none of the two things, as seen above, was there. The reason was simple: they were called 'Sikh' because bulk of the sepoys in them came from the old Sikh Army. As for the Sikhs, actually, a very small number of them (only BKC) were there. See Condon, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[23] Henry Lawrence to Lord Stanley (private), 31 March 1853, in Herbert Edwardes, H Merivale, *Life of Sir Henry Lawrence,* London, 1872, p. 219.

The Army seemed to have somewhat lost its authority in those days. From 1792 to 1853, 14 Commanders-in-Chief served in India. Out of them, 10 resigned for not being allowed full say even in the matters of purely military nature. Of the remaining four, two were themselves Governors-General; only 'two held their command to the last, suffering all things' Napier, *op.cit.,* 1853, p. 220.

[24] Edwardes, *Punjab Frontier,* vol. 2, pp. 721-25.

[25] Soon after their occupation of Punjab, the British sent several expeditions to subdue the freedom-loving, 'warlike' Pathan tribes living on the North-Western border. Each expedition attacked their villages, burnt them, and bolted away, to do the same again till the Pathans were down and out. The policy was called, 'Butcher and bolt policy'. See Khilnani, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

[26] There was hardly a tribe', says a contemporary writer, 'that was not in what is technically called a state of blocade—scarcely less potent than the interdict of medieval Rome'. J.Cave-Browne, *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857,* London, 1861, vol. 1, p. 139.

[27] The Pathans who were found roaming outside their villages between sunset and sunrise were punished. See *PAR,* 1849-50-1850-51, p. 52.

[28] Bosworth Smith, Life of Lord Lawrence, New York, 1883, vol. 2, p. 263; for 'villians', See J.C. Marshman, *The History of India*, London, 1867, vol. 3, p. 315.

[29] Smith, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 263.

[30] George MacMunn, *Armies of India* (hereafter *Armies*), Delhi, reprint, 2007, p. 67.

[31] The principle was, no doubt, in vogue elsewhere also, but it was not taken so seriously and used so meticulously as in Punjab. Sir John Lawrence's biographer, Bosworth Smith, (see his work, *op.cit.,* vol. 2, p. 98), confirms the fact, though in his own biased manner, thus: 'Seldom has the somewhat sinister maxim, *divide et impera,* been acted upon by a ruler with less selfish motive' (to be objective, read 'more selfish motive).

[32] *Punjab Mutiny Records, Reports, Lahore, 1911,* vol. 8, pt. 2, p. 340.

[33] Herbert Edwardes, an important actor in the affairs of Punjab in those days, was very fond of using this folk wisdom in the North-Western region

(see his *Punjab Frontier*, p. 732). MacMunn has given another version of it, 'to set a thief to catch a thief'. *Armies*, p. 132.

[34] Dolores Domin, *India in 1857-59,* Berlin, 1977, p. 105. The soldiers who formed the bulk of the Punjab Irregular Regiments were, as seen above, from among those ex-soldiers of the Sikh Army who had betrayed 'king and country' (BKC) during the late Sikh Wars.

[35] In 1862, Sir Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India, wanted the principle to be used universally: '*We should have*', he counseled, *'a different and rival spirit in different regiments, so that Sikh might fire into Hindoo, Goorkha into either, without any scruple in case of need'*. Quoted in Steven. I. Wikinson, *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy since Independence,* Delhi, 2015, pp. 37-38.

[36] The principle was seriously adhered to from 1846 to 1857 and to some extent in the later times – even during WWI.

[37] Nirad C Chaudhury, 'The Martial Races of India', *The Modern Review*, vol. 48, no. 1, January 1930, p. 43.

[38] *PAR*, *1849-50-1850-51*, pp. 35-38.

[39] *PAR*, 1849-50-1850-51, pp. 35-38. The strength of the Guides went, for instance, three times up, and that of the Levies a little more. Taken together, they numbered about 20,000 strong.

[40] Domin, *op.cit.,* pp. 114-17.

[41] The strength of the Punjabis should have been 14,800, but it was far less. The position of Sikhs was still worse. They numbered less than 750 (1857) in all the 74 Regiments. See, for details, K.C. Yadav, 'British Policy towards Sikhs, 1849-57', in Harbansh Singh, N.G. Barrier, eds., *Punjab Past and Present : Essays Presented in Honour of Ganda Singh*, Patial, 1976, p. 191.

[42] JGA, Baird (ed.), *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie*, London, 1910, pp. 84-85.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] NAI, Foreign, Secret Consultations, nos. 114-17, 26 April 1850. Napier agreed with Dalhousie, at least on this count, and told him that he had placed troops all round the Manjha; at Nurpur, Kangra, Hajipur, Mokerian, Badapind, Hoshiarpur, Kartarpur, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepore, Lahore, Govindgarh and Sialkot. 'Thus the Manjha is in centre of a girdle of troops which can in a few hours, and the most distant in two marches, be poured in rapidly from Jullundur and Lahore under two of our ablest general officers, Sir W. Gilbert and Brigadier Wheeler'. Napier, *op.cit.,* p. 406.

[45] Dalhousie shared this truth, privately, with the President of the Board of Control, Hobhouse, on 17.4.1849 thus : 'Men can't make war with their

finger-nails; and if you only let me, I will take care that even those should be pared close', *Punjab Papers*, p. 230.

[46] For Punjab's role in role in the Revolt, see K.C. Yadav, *1857 : The Role of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh* (thereafter *1857),* Delhi, 2008.

[47] MacMunn, *Martial Races*, p. 216.

[48] See, for details, Yadav, *1857,* pp. 13-117.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Macleod Innes, *The Sepoy Revolt* : *A Critical Narrative,* London, 1877, pp. 118-19.

[51] *Ibid*.

[52] *Punjab Mutiny Records, Reports,* Lahore, 1911, vol. 8, part 2, p. 340; Domin, *op.cit*, p. 145. The relatives of those who left their companies were brought in to take their places.

[53] MacMunn, *Armies*, p. 65.

[54] *Punjab Mutiny Records, Correspondence*, Lahore, 1911, vol. 7, part 2, p. 19; for 'class' composition, see Condon, *op.cit*., p.4.

[55] NAI, Foreign, Secret Consultation, no. 47, 30 October 1857.

[56] Domin, *op.cit*, pp. 160-61.

[57] Cave-Browne, *op. cit*., p. 151.

[58] For poverty as a policy to facilitate recruitments, see Pasha, *op.cit.,* pp. 107-11.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] *The Punjab Government Records : Mutiny Reports,* vol. 8, pt. 2, p. 183. A troop ordinarily consisted of 65-70 sepoys there.

[61] *PAR*, 1858-59, pp. 398-400, quoted in Domin, *op.cit*., p. 210.

[62] For a brief but highly useful account of the proceedings of the Commission, see *Calcutta Review,* vol. 33, July-December 1859, pp. 186-259.

[63] MacMunn, *Armies*, p. 66. They formed, says the General, 'the nucleus and model' for the new Army.

[64] *Recruiting in India* : *Before and during the War*, 1914-1918, official, Calcutta, 1920, pp. 11-15.

[65] *Ibid.,* p. 213.

[66] For detailed discussion on the issue, see Nirad C. Chaudhary, 'The Martial Races of India,' *The Modern Review,* vol. 48. 1 and 3, 1930, and vol. 49, no. 1 and 2, 1931.

[67] Chaudhury, *op. cit.,* vol. 48 no. 1, July 1930, p. 41.

[68] Yong, *op.cit.,* pp. 240-280; Raghuvender Tanwar, *Politics of Sharing Power: The Punjab Unionist Party,* Delhi, 1999; Rajit Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the making of the Punjab,* Ranikhet, 2011.

[69] For details, see the Table in Chaudhary, *op.cit.*, vol. 48, no. 3, September 1930, p. 296.

[70] O'Dwyer, *op.cit.,* p. 214. O'Dwyer's calculation of the non-Indians is not right. The non-Indian elements made about a quarter of the Indian Army. See H.C. Mookerjee, 'Why India helped Britain in the last World War, in *The Modern Review,* vol. 72, no. 3, July 1942, p. 221.

[71] Leigh, *op.cit.,* p. 33.

[72] The European colonial armies were, in most of the cases, 'populated disproportionately by minorities: a largely Punjabi and Pashtun Army in India, northern-dominated armies in colonial Tango, Ghana and Nigeria, a Sunni dominated army in Iraq, an army of Karans, Chins and Kochins…in colonial Burma, and Ambonese and Minhassans in Dutch controlled Indonesia'. See Wilkinson, *op.cit.,* p. 2.

India Remembers

Children of Smile Foundation with war veterans and descendants at the commemorative event organised as a part of the India Remembers project on 26th September at the Delhi War Cemetery.