

# **The Evolution of Indian Orders, Decorations and Medals during the Era of the USI: 1870-2020**

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## **Introduction**

**W**hen the United Service Institution (USI) of India was founded

in 1870, it constituted a significant and conscious advance in the professionalism and separate identity of the Indian military establishment. Not only did it represent an institution that was increasingly establishing itself as something independent of the parental British military but also one that was moving from a presidency-based military to a separate freestanding and unified Indian system. While this would not be accomplished until 1895, these seeds were planted in the era in which the USI of India was born. The dedication of the institution to the serious examination and study of all aspects of the military craft was central to this process.

## **Pre 1870**

One aspect of that professionalism, one that is frequently overlooked in more recent times, lies in the various tangible and wearable manifestations of the military profession: the decorations and medals that are worn to display achievements. As it had evolved, the Indian Army in 1870 possessed a unique and ever-changing system of recognising achievement and service by its personnel. Such phaleristic devices are important aspects in all countries and all areas, and are adapted over time to serve the changing ethos of the states and systems that employ them.<sup>1</sup>

As will be addressed below, the Indian Army in 1870 had inherited venerable traditions of recognising gallantry, achievement, and service. But in 1870, new customs and traditions were rising in this arena. Most importantly, and publicly,

the wearing of ribbon bars rather than full-size medals was coming into fashion. This was, and is, important not only because it represents a more manageable way of displaying achievement but because it constitutes an every-day statement of one's professional achievement, in a sense a public display of the history and resume of one's career. For those who can read the ribbon bars worn, whether in 1870 or 2020, the career and, indeed, the credibility of the wearer are placed on public display. Without overstating the obvious, the Indian Army in 1870 represented two separate and distinct worlds, career paths, and professional traditions: that of the European officers and that of the Indian Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs) and enlisted personnel. As segregated as these two were in the social ideology of the day, they were rewarded in different fashions in different manners. To understand the past and its evolution to present forms, it is necessary to understand these two traditions.

European officers functioned very much as an ancillary to the British military system and received the same decorations for gallantry and distinguished service as did their cousins in the British Army.<sup>2</sup> The highest decoration for gallantry was the Victoria Cross (VC), only recently established in 1856. After much debate, the decoration had been extended to European officers serving in the forces of the East India Company (EIC) and after the end of the Company the award was continued in the Indian Army. While there was confusion in the early years, only European officers (and the rare European enlisted man) serving with, and in the, Indian Army were eligible for this decoration and it was not available to Indians until 1911. It was, within the class system of the day, an unusual decoration in that it could be awarded for the highest degree of gallantry to both, British officers and enlisted personnel. For distinguished service (sometimes mixed with a degree of gallantry), senior officers could receive the various classes of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath, created in 1725 to recognise military services in the British forces. It, like the VC, was a tool of recognition drawn very much from the habitual British toolbox of recognising honour. While it could be awarded in exceptional circumstances to mid-rank and even junior officers, it was in practice very much an award for senior officers. It would not be until 1898 that the first awards of this order would be made

to Indians holding honorary commissions, and these were also distinguished by being 'princes'. The only distinctions for gallantry for British enlisted personnel were the Distinguished Conduct Medal (created in 1854 for the army) and the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (created in 1855 for the navy). These were not available to Indians in the Indian Army.<sup>3</sup> It was very much a central part of the contemporary British understanding of society and class that decorations for gallantry and achievement were separated by rank, with awards for officers and other awards for enlisted men.

Likewise, the social understandings and constructions of the day did not admit Indians to the recognitions or ranks available to Europeans. The segregated awards dated back to a period in the evolution of the Indian Army when officer ranks, previously available to all, were being restricted to Europeans and Indians were being relegated to lower responsibilities and titles. These awards of the EIC were absorbed by the government and military as India moved under crown governance in the years after the 'Mutiny' of 1857. These represented a move away from the earlier Indian traditions of recognising gallantry and distinguished service by grants of land (land that would be removed from the governmental tax base), tangible objects of gold or silver (expensive objects), or the award of personal or hereditary titles (which were much cheaper). The idea of a wearable decoration to indicate gallantry or distinguished service was something new and was emerging even into European usage in the early years of the 19th century. In 1837 (19 years before the VC would be invented), the EIC established the Order of Merit in three classes (renamed as the Indian Order of Merit in 1903 after King Edward VII created another award in the same name).<sup>4</sup> The award was open to all Indian personnel of the Indian Army regardless of rank. Consciously patterned on the Russian Cross of St. George, a recipient would be admitted to the third class for an act of great gallantry. Subsequent acts of gallantry could earn promotions within the order to the second or even first class. Eventually a unique bar would be created for a fourth act of gallantry by Subedar Kishanbir Nagarkoti, 5th Gurkha Rifles, in 1888. In essence, this exceptional award represented the equivalent of a VC with three bars for subsequent acts. The Order of Merit would

be, and would remain until 1947, the distinctive Indian gallantry award. At the same time that the Order of Merit was established, the need to recognise distinguished service by the emerging subordinate class of Indian officers (what would eventually evolve into VCOs and today's Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs)) would be filled with the creation of the Order of British India in two classes. Recalling older traditions, the first class carried the personal title of '*Sardar Bahadur*' while the second class allowed the recipient to be styled as '*Bahadur*'. When first established, this order was severely limited in numbers available though over time the numbers bloated and expanded.

At the time of the creation of the USI of India, these two segregated worlds of recognising gallantry and achievement represented the toolbox of honour available to the Indian Army. But there was another level of recognition: awards for campaign services. It would be in the arena of campaign medals that new phaleristic customs and traditions came to be led most prominently by the Indian example. Beginning with the First Anglo-Maratha War of 1775-82, a campaign medal would be issued by the EIC to all Indian soldiers involved in the conflict: in gold to *subedars*, in silver to *jemadars*, and a smaller silver medal to all other ranks. There was no corresponding award to Europeans, whether in the service of the Company or the crown. The medal was worn from a cord around the neck. The same medal and structure were used for the Second Anglo-Mysore War of 1779-83. New campaign medals with the same organisation but new designs would be issued for the Third Anglo-Mysore War of 1789-92, the capture of Ceylon 1795/96, the capture of Srirangapatna in 1799, the expedition to Egypt in 1801, the capture of French island possessions in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius and Réunion) in 1809 and 1810, the capture of Dutch possessions in Java in 1811, and the First Anglo-Nepali War of 1814-16. The tradition would be modified slightly when it came to the campaign medal for the first British invasion of Burma, 1824-26, as the campaign medal, with the same metallic rank structure as the earlier awards, began to be worn in the tradition of British medals from a suspension ribbon, in this case the generic 'military ribbon' that had been used since the campaign medal for the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Subsequent campaigns would see an entirely new general

tradition introduced, a new ribbon, the 'India ribbon' of a shaded rainbow said to represent the sunset, a common obverse often showing for the first time the British Queen Victoria whose authority over the EIC and its forces was at best vague, and a reverse representing specific battles or other actions.<sup>6</sup> Such medals were awarded to both Indians and Europeans for action in the first British invasion of Afghanistan 1841-42 (six different medals) and the annexation of Sind 1843 (three different medals). A similar general pattern was used for the Anglo-Gwalior War of 1843.

It would be with the two British wars against the Punjab, of 1845-46 and 1848-49, that an entirely new tradition would be introduced. This would be a custom that would influence both Indian and British phaleristic and military culture from that time until its apparent abandonment in recent decades. For the first war, a medal that was essentially transitional in nature was employed: for the first battle in which a soldier had participated, the name of the battle would appear on the reverse of the medal and any subsequent combat actions would be represented by clasps to be attached to the medal and its ribbon. For the second war, there was a common medal which could be awarded for combatant or non-combatant services but would have clasps attached representing participation in specific and sufficiently important battles. A new pattern was established. The same pattern of common medals with attached clasps would be employed in 1851 by the British when they created their retrospective campaign medals for the Napoleonic Wars, one for the army and one for the navy, decades earlier. As Wellington was Commander-in-Chief and had learned his craft on Indian service, he arranged a third retrospective medal, commonly known as the 'Army of India Medal', to cover various conflicts from 1799-1826. The elderly recipients, both European and Indian, had to apply for the medal, and it is far from clear how many were awarded in India.

The new method of recognising campaign service was clearly established. In 1851, a new 'Indian General Service Medal' was established with retrospective clasps extending back to operations on the Northwest Frontier in 1849. In part, this was

done for reasons of economy, in that a single medal could have subsequent clasps attached to it to cover multiple operations. Governments always keep one eye focused on the financial bottom line. Over time, individual actions would be debated in Calcutta (as it was then called) and London, clasps would be accepted or rejected for this medal; services would be recognised or ignored. The idea of a common medal with multiple clasps representing not merely battles but entire campaigns was established as a firm tradition. This resulted, of course, in a potentially ungainly award where a medal might have as many as six or seven clasps. By the end of its life in 1895, 23 clasps had been authorised for this medal. It would take an extraordinary moment for a standalone medal even to be considered and only a traumatic event such as the Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857 would qualify for a separate campaign award. There was occasional grousing, some of which appears in the early issues of the USI journal, that an entire lifetime of service under fire would be represented by only a single medal with numerous clasps.

The ordeal of 1857 brought several relevant changes to India and to the Indian military. The EIC was ended, investors in the Company (especially those serving in parliament) had their potential financial losses covered, and India was transferred to some vague form of rule by the British crown. It would take decades to sort out the full significance of this. But in terms of decorations and campaign medals, everything that had existed before 1857 was de facto transferred to the new government of India. While it would have only limited impact on the military, a new order was created to reward both Indians and Europeans for loyalty and service, The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India. It was originally created only in a single class and would over time sprout lower classes which would occasionally be awarded to military personnel. A sibling order, The Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, would be created in 1878 in a single class and over time would grow higher classes in the order.

#### **1870-1914**

This was the state of general play regarding orders, decorations, and medals that presented a central pillar of the emerging

professionalism and tradition of the Indian Army. As with all customs and traditions, especially in a military environment, the system would be slow to change and evolve. Service in India would be recognised by the familiar gallantry and distinguished service decorations and campaign service would be commemorated primarily by new clasps to the established General Service Medal. Services outside of India, especially in China and Africa, would see additional medals added. All these campaign medals would also be awarded to British troops and to European officers in the Indian Army.

One of the first major challenges came at the time of the second British invasion of Afghanistan in 1878. While the initial proposal had been for two, or perhaps three, clasps to the Indian General Service Medal, political pressure from prominent generals with direct access to the British royal family resulted in the invention of not only a separate campaign medal with six clasps but a duplicative campaign star for another aspect of the war. This was one of the first occasions in India in which political intervention altered the policies and decisions of the government, and resulted in what many saw as a needless proliferation of medals.

Only in 1886 would gallant and distinguished services by mid-ranking European officers be blessed with a decoration for their deeds. In that year, the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) was created for British officers and would be extended to European officers serving in the Indian Army, but of course not Indians who could not serve as officers except in honorary ranks.

The merger of the three presidency armies in 1895 into, what was for the first time, officially the 'Indian Army' saw few changes in the system of honours and awards but it, combined with the journalistically prominent siege and defence of the fort at Chitral on the North-West Frontier, granted an opportunity to deal with what had been a growing cause of concern. As was mentioned above, the Indian General Service Medal had over the years sprouted a prodigious number of clasps and many felt had come to minimise rather than display their service resume. Additionally, changing military fashion saw full-size medals worn on fewer

occasions, replaced by ribbon bars which would display only a single ribbon for a General Service Medal that might have four or five clasps when worn in full size. In 1895, a new medal, the India General Service Medal 1895 (officially, the 'India Medal 1895') was introduced as a successor to the old General Service Medal which was then stopped. At the time it was suggested that pin-on rosettes be added to the ribbon of this new medal to represent multiple clasps; this idea was promptly rejected on the basis that such ribbon appurtenances constituted no more than needless clutter. In effect, if one counted the 'Army of India Medal', this was the third in the venerable sequence of general service medals for service in India. This medal would be continued through the rest of the reign of Queen Victoria and into the early years of her son, King Edward VII, and would have seven clasps before it was replaced by a new Indian General Service Medal in 1908. This medal, in turn, would continue under Edward VII and his son, George V, (twelve clasps) until a new medal was introduced by George VI in 1936. This, the final Indian General Service Medal of the pre-1947 years, would have two clasps created for it before it was suspended during World War II. The assumption at the time was that it would be reinvigorated after the war when business as usual was resumed. Events, of course, would invalidate this hope.

Although their forces lay outside the scope of the British Indian Army, the symbolic value of orders, decorations, and medals was such that in the last years of the 19th century and into the following century, many of the most prominent of the Indian states would create their own awards for their subjects and their military forces. As the King-Emperor was the 'font of honour' for his subjects so were the *Maharajas* for theirs. While the British resented and tried to halt this practice, there was little they could do about it and this dimension of Indian phaleristics blossomed.<sup>7</sup>

It had been increasingly realised that when it came to recognising gallantry by Indian enlisted personnel, there were relatively few awards to be employed. In effect, there was only a single award – the Indian Order of Merit (IOM). As the Indian Army was called upon to serve in increasingly diverse operations in theatres, there was the very real risk of cheapening the venerable IOM through too many awards. In 1907, the Indian Distinguished

Service Medal was added to the toolbox of gallantry awards (and, on occasion, as recognition for distinguished service).<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the Durbar in 1911 in which King George V was installed as Emperor of India, several changes were made to the Indian system of honours and awards. The most relevant one for the military was the extension of the VC, for the first time, to enlisted personnel of the Indian Army. While it had been available to European officers of the service, it had been denied to Indians. While there were different opinions regarding this change, especially since it carried the abolition of the first class of the IOM and the renumbering of the two lower classes, it represented a gradual process of bringing Indian military honours and awards into resonance with the British system. Unfortunately, it is difficult to gauge how Indian enlisted personnel reacted to the substitution of an enamelled gold star by a rather plain bronze cross. While there would be no awards of the VC to Indian enlisted personnel until the Great War, it had been added to the pyramid of honour.<sup>9</sup>

#### **1914-1947**

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Great War (World War I) in human history. There are few moments in time to which we can point and with certainty observe a change of such magnitude. The Indian Army and its professional voice, the USI of India, felt the impact of that conflict and, in many ways, it still resonates in our world today. Compared to all the other results, the arena of decorations and medals may seem mundane but it constituted a major watershed moment in that area as well.<sup>10</sup>

Within the British service, new awards were created as the range of decorations available to them came to be strained under the pressure of the new responsibilities added to the battlefield. In 1914, at the outbreak of hostilities, the British created a new decoration, the Military Cross, to recognise gallantry by their junior officers. There was much debate at the time whether this decoration should be extended to Indians in the Indian Army since few held King's commissions as officers and there was an expressed concern over the use of a cross-shaped decoration for personnel who were overwhelmingly non-Christian. In the final decision it was extended to the Indian Army, to those few

commissioned officers who existed and to the VCOs (today's JCOs).<sup>11</sup> Quite by accident, the DSO was awarded on several occasions to Indian officers, particularly to *Parsis* serving in the medical corps, one of the few branches in which an Indian could obtain a commission. In 1917, the British created another new award for the army, the Military Medal, an award specifically for bravery by non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel. It was intentionally not extended to the Indian Army although occasionally ethnic Indians serving in other military units would receive the award during the war.

The years after 1918 were a time of challenge and soul-searching for the Indian military as much as they were for wider Indian society. The trauma of the war years transitioned into a time of economic difficulty, of political challenges, and of new stresses and opportunities in all aspects of society. The gradual commissioning of Indians as officers, the rise of the Indian Navy and Air force, and the pressure for forces to be deployed in 'aid to the civil operations' to counter the rising Freedom Struggle, all presented challenges to the older systems and traditions. While many of these challenges fell as heavily on the police as they did on the military, they were in a time of professional readjustment. While the police saw a proliferation in their awards for new kinds of service and challenges, the military continued with the same resources of honour.

The renewal of global conflict in 1939 thrust India into a truly 'world war' that would strain the professionalism of the military institution. However, there would not be any major alterations in the modes of recognising gallantry and achievement until the final years of the war. With increasing demands on the Indian Navy and Air Force, they became increasingly likely to receive the same gallantry and service awards as would be extended to their British siblings. In 1940, a new pair of awards was created to recognise civilian gallantry and military gallantry in a non-combatant situation: the George Cross and the George Medal. These awards were extended to India and recognised an important broadening perspective beyond a military-specific concept of bravery. In 1944, the decision was made to extend the Military Medal to the Indian Army.<sup>12</sup> This was a fairly controversial decision in many circles as

it carried with it the further reduction of the IOM to a single – and fairly crippled – class. From what had once been an esteemed three-class award for the highest levels of gallantry, the IOM had been demoted to a mere single-class award. This step represented the culmination of a process that had been underway since at least World War I of integrating the awards system of the Indian military into that of the United Kingdom. It is ironic that as this merger was underway, the South Asian subcontinent was moving in a quite different direction, one that would culminate on 15 August 1947.

#### **1947-2020**

As the years after India's independence were a challenging time for the USI of India and the defence forces it represented and served, they also presented trials for the established systems of recognition of gallantry and distinguished service.<sup>13</sup> Not only was the subcontinent's territory and administration partitioned, not only were the military forces partitioned, but the system of honours and awards used by pre-1947 India seemed to be up for vivisection as well. As with any divorce, question of custody of the orders, decorations, and medals was a subject of discussion. Not only was there the logical impossibility of independent India and Pakistan simultaneously continuing earlier awards, awards that often carried heavily Imperial symbolism, but there was the irreconcilable problem of the two States sharing the same awards in some fashion, awards that would be awarded first of all for a war between the two nations. This was complicated by the simple fact that London and the King were unwilling to cooperate in a situation that would lead to awards granted in the name of the King (until India and Pakistan wrote and implemented constitutions as republics, they were still dominions and required approval from London for any awards) for conflict between two members of his 'Commonwealth'. It was clear to all involved that there could be no resolution to the problem of decorations and awards for the two sibling nations until they wrote their own constitutions. This was a particular problem given that active military operations were underway in Jammu and Kashmir. Prime Minister Nehru was acutely aware of the need to recognise gallantry and distinguished service by the military forces as

promptly as was possible, but the delay of a few years was a constitutional necessity.

Meanwhile, India had to confront unfinished business of striking and awarding campaign medals for the recently concluded World War II. In a very real sense, they were doing the job of the British. This did allow India to do something that the British had neglected to do for their own forces: to name individually the campaign medals for this service. Although not every medal was named, the vast majority were. Unlike those who went to Pakistan or those *Gorkhas* that went into British service, Indian recipients would receive individually named medals. This naming, which had been conducted on a routine basis ever since the First Anglo-Afghan War, was an important and central aspect of the professionalism of the Indian military and of the government showing proper respect to those who had served it on the field of battle. Unfortunately, this process has been stopped in recent years for reasons that are often explained away as being 'financial'.

The system of honours and awards that had evolved in India during the period of British occupation had moved over time to more and more closely resemble that of the United Kingdom: a system that reflected the class structure of the British nation, that mirrored the division between officers and enlisted personnel. For independent India, there was a sense, perhaps overly optimistic, that India had entered a new world, those earlier divisions of class and caste could be swept away in a spirit of freedom. It was made quite clear in the drafting of the Indian Constitution that any neo-British system of orders, classes, hierarchies, or of superiority/inferiority would be impossible. Not only would 'orders' be impossible and quite unconstitutional, but awards partitioned between officers and enlisted personnel or even decorations that came in 'classes' would be problematic. It is important to understand the new and self-consciously revolutionary ideas that lay behind the Indian Republic and would be reflected in the recognitions of service extended to all Indian citizens, those in uniform and those not in uniform.

As new decorations for gallantry and distinguished service were debated for the Indian military, several things were clear: there would be no division between officers and enlisted personnel, they would all be eligible for the same decorations and medals; there would be no titles, no '*Sardar Bahadur*' name augmentations, and even the habitual postnominals of the pre-1947 era would be rejected with no 'OBEs' and sparing use of postnominals for new awards. Not only would the earlier awards and their underlying ethical ideals not be continued but there would be no conscious analogies to earlier decorations. While it is clear that people thought unconsciously within terms inherited from the British, there was an effort not to say that the newly created decoration 'A' equals the old decoration 'B'. When such questions are raised, even today, they are difficult to answer in any meaningful way.

To commemorate India's independence, a medal was created to mark that moment. It was an extraordinarily controversial medal, coming as it did at the end of one era and the commencement of another. The instituting warrant signed by Jawaharlal Nehru and countersigned by George VI reflects that transition. Problems arose with the ribbon which was to represent the Indian tricolour flag. Since this replicated (although reversed) the King's South Africa Medal's ribbon, the suggestion was raised to stitch a blue chakra onto the white stripe of the ribbon. This proved to be too expensive and the suggestion was made to use a silver chakra glued to the ribbon. This too was rejected as a piece of needless clutter that would only snag on the uniform. Suggestions were raised for a civilian version of the medal as the Independence Medal 1947 was only for the military. This idea was speedily rejected though it resurfaced in 1950, when an independence medal was created for the police although the date 1950 had nothing to do with independence.

Regarding decorations for combatant military gallantry, a three-tier system was established on 26 January 1950, as one of the first presidential actions after the promulgation of the Constitution. Again, there was no distinction regarding the rank of the recipient, but degrees of gallantry were recognised by the Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, and Vir Chakra. For non-

combatant gallantry, rendered both by civilians and the military, the Ashoka Chakra was created at the same time. When first established, it was in three classes but in 1967 these classes would be renamed as today's Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra, and Shaurya Chakra to remove the class distinctions. While these were intended to be awards for both civilians and the military, in recent years they have become increasingly the preserve of the military. Also, as the police wished to retain their own medals for gallantry, they were to be specifically excluded from receipt of the Ashoka Chakra series.

Also, in January 1950, a new General Service Medal was created, in many ways following in the venerable pre-1947 tradition, to be awarded with clasps for specific campaign services. The first class would be for service in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-48 and over time six additional clasps would be created until the replacement of this General Service Medal by the Samanya Seva Medal in 1975 (which would have six clasps across its lifetime). Never awarded without a clasp and awarded only for specific campaign/operational services, these medals represent (or must we now say represented?) an unbroken chain of tradition within the Indian military.

In 1960, several new decorations were created to deal with expanding expectations of the Indian military. To reward distinguished service by all ranks, the Vishisht Seva Medal was established in three classes, not by rank but by degree of service. Like the Ashoka Chakra, this decoration would require renaming in 1976 to remove the class distinctions, becoming today's Param Vishisht Seva Medal, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, and Vishisht Seva Medal. In the early years, this decoration was awarded sparsely, was much respected, and was available in all three classes to all ranks of the military. As is so often the case, over time these earlier standards seem to have deteriorated and some may argue that the decoration has been transformed into a supplementary badge of senior rank. Additionally, in 1980, the Sarvottam Yuddh Seva Medal, Uttam Yuddh Seva Medal, and Yuddh Seva Medal were created to supplement – some might say duplicate – the Vishisht Seva Medal for services particularly in a combat environment.

Another child of the 1960 expansion of awards was service-specific medals for a poorly defined mixture of bravery and commendable service: the Sena Medal, Nao Sena Medal, and Vayu Sena Medal, for the army, navy, and air force respectively. The dual purpose of these awards has remained a source of confusion and although in recent years they have been separately announced in the *Gazette of India*, the same decoration and ribbon are worn for different achievements.

While such medals are controversial in many military services, India created a Wound Medal in 1973 for wounds received in combat (but not available for posthumous award). This represents an important statement in that in many military services, wounds are seen simply as a cost of doing the job. In 2000, this medal was, somewhat inexplicably, renamed as the Parakram Padak (Courage Medal).

The growing recognition of the climatic extremes of India and the demands for military service under challenging conditions resulted in the creation of the Sainya Seva Medal, also in 1960, with individual clasps for specific services. This medal and its clasps have in recent years found themselves augmented and duplicated by new awards such as the Ucchh Tungta (High Altitude) Medal<sup>15</sup> and as the police have begun to award this medal to themselves together with their own Police (Special Duty) Medal. It is often forgotten how integral these clasps are to the medals, especially in these days when they seem not to be worn. And as India began to play a wider role on the world stage, the Videsh Seva Medal was also created in 1960 to reward overseas deployments, either in multinational training operations or United Nations service. As with all other medals, specific clasps were authorised for a wide range of specific services.

Until the 1965 India-Pakistan war, this remained essentially the state of play for Indian military decorations and awards. Even accounting for pre-1947 service, a senior officer might have two or perhaps three rows of ribbons with the only appurtenances being those for subsequent bestowals of gallantry or distinguished service awards. This uncluttered professionalism would, of course, be eroded over time. For the 1965 war with Pakistan a new

approach was adopted. For pre-war hostilities, a clasp was added to the General Service Medal of the day. For the war itself a separate medal, not a bar to the General Service Medal, was established, the Raksha Medal. For combat service during the war rather than mere service during a block of time, a companion star, the Samar Seva Star, was created. Curiously, by almost independent invention of the same system, Pakistan would embrace a similar solution to the Indian one. This same pattern would be adopted for the 1971 war with Pakistan, with two combat service stars, depending on the theatre of deployment, the Poorvi Star or Paschimi Star<sup>16</sup>, instituted along with a medal for service during the period of the conflict, the Sangram Medal. Subsequent conflicts with Pakistan, or even non-conflicts, have seen additional medals created: OP Vijay Star, Siachen Glacier Medal, OP Vijay Medal, and OP Parakram Medal. In 1986, another new medal was created for services that could not be easily subsumed under other decorations, the Special Service Medal with its own pair of clasps. In effect, the Special Service Medal constitutes the latest, and possibly final, evolution to the general service medal series as it is a replacement for the Samanya Seva Medal (though many continue to wear this medal but as it is worn without any clasps, is difficult to know what service it is intended to represent).

As a continuation from pre-1947 practices, the Meritorious Service Medal and Long Service and Good Conduct Medal were continued for enlisted personnel in independent India although they were sparsely awarded. In 1971, these were expanded with the introduction of long service medals for all ranks, initially for nine years and twenty years, with a medal for thirty years being added in 1980, and with rumours of possible future expansions. Curiously, the older medals have been continued.

There have been a variety of other new decorations, awards, and badges created in recent years, for example the ever-burgeoning commendation badges. However much military awards seem to have proliferated in recent years, the picture is nothing compared to what exists elsewhere in Indian society most particularly in the Indian police, though that lies beyond the scope of this article.

In the realm of physics, there is something called 'Boyle's Law' which, to put it simply, states that the pressure of the gas increases as the volume of the container decreases. In many ways, there seems to be an Indian military inverse analogy to that law in which the number of awards increases as the rank of the wearer increases. This is not to suggest that undeserved awards are presented at a rate any higher than other professions or in other nations. But it is more than simple change over time. There has clearly been a proliferation in the number of awards often with needless appurtenances glued onto the ribbon bars even while the medals themselves must stand without their integral clasps. It seems there has been a relaxation of earlier standards. Few awards now have recommendations published in the *Gazette of India* and many medals and clasps are created not by Presidential notification but by notifications from individual government branches. Central supervision over awards and decorations – to say nothing of their actual bestowal – seems to have been largely abandoned in recent decades.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The USI of India has, over a century and half, been the touchstone of Indian military professionalism and standards. Maintaining those standards even in the face of social, political, economic, and technological change has been a challenge, a challenge to which the highest values of the institution have always risen even in the most difficult of times. As has been suggested, a central part of any military system is custom, tradition, and heritage and the ongoing struggle to maintain those in the face of changing social standards has always been and will probably always present a great challenge. A significant factor in this military professionalism and tradition are the decorations and medals awarded for gallantry and service. For those who can read the code, the medals or ribbons worn by the military are a clear statement of the individual deeds and achievements of the recipient within the overarching environment. For those who cannot read the code, which will inevitably include far too many civilians and perhaps a few serving personnel, those bits of coloured cloth or overly shiny metal are seen as no more than baubles, as a stylish addition by some military tailor to an already

gaudy and strange multi-coloured outfit. Over time there has been a trend toward other institutions in society encroaching on the traditions, and even the awards, of the military services, adopting them as their own, and pretending to a false 'military' status. All of these seem to be challenges for leadership, to take decorations and medals seriously, to award them professionally and appropriately (including maintaining high standards of manufacture by the mint, attaching appropriate clasps, and naming the medals), and to preserve them as representations of service to the nation and not as mere fashion statements. Moving forward, beyond the sesquicentennial of the anniversary of the founding of this venerable institution, the maintenance of knowledge of the professional core and tradition will be a challenge to preserve them from becoming submerged beneath discussions of new technology and strategic trends and slogans. Recognition of heritage, of change over time, of adaptation to altered circumstances, and of the modest pride that should be taken in medals and ribbons should remain a part of the mission of the USI of India.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Many of the issues addressed here will be discussed in greater depth in Edward S. Haynes, *From Izzat to Honour: Changing Modes of Representing Honor in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century India*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to distinguish clearly between the British Army and the Indian Army as they were entirely separate bodies. Very often, especially among amateur historians, these two are confused and conflated. The British Army served in Britain and wherever deployed by authorities in London. This deployment included service in the colonies and in India. When serving in India British regiments were often described as the Army in India. While these regiments were often brigaded with Indian units (to keep them under control and 'loyal' in the aftermath of the 'Mutiny') they remained part of the British military establishment. The Indian Army, sometimes referred to as the Army of India, was a separate institution quite distinct from the British Army and under a different command structure. While some use the strange term 'British Indian Army' there never was such a thing.

<sup>3</sup> For those who are interested, specimens of these and all the other awards I will be discussing are held in the very rich collection of the USI, held in the Colonel Pyara Lal Memorial Library.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this decoration see Cliff Parrett and Rana Chhina, *Indian Order of Merit: Historical Records 1837-1947*, three volumes to date ([Brighton]: Tom Donovan Editions, 2010—).

<sup>5</sup> To date, the best source on these campaign medals is John Hayward, Diana Birch, and Richard Bishop, *British Battles and Medals*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Spink, 2006). When it deals with India, however, the volume is weak and something much better, more focused, and deeply researched is needed.

<sup>6</sup> This is somewhat of an oversimplification.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this topic, see Tony McClenaghan, *Indian Princely Medals: A Record of the Orders, Decorations and Medals of the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, [1996]).

<sup>8</sup> For more on this award, see Rana Chhina, *The Indian Distinguished Service Medal* ([New Delhi]: Invicta India, [2001]).

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, there was never serious discussion to extending the British gallantry award for enlisted personnel, the Distinguished Conduct Medal, to the Indian Army. Perhaps it was seen as duplicated by the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this complex period, see Edward S. Haynes, "The Phaleristic Impact of the Great War on Indian Military and Civilian Society," *The Great War in Phaleristics: I International Colloquium Proceedings*, eds. Humberto Nuno de Oliveira, José Vicente de Bragança, and Paulo Jorge Estrela ([Lisbon: Academia Faleristica de Portugal], 2014), pp, 127-66.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this award, see Sushil Talwar, *Indian Recipients of the Military Cross*, two volumes ([New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd., published in association with the United Service Institution of India, 2017]).

<sup>12</sup> For more on this award, see Sushil Talwar, *Indian Recipients of the Military Medal*, forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup> For more on post-Independence Indian awards, see Edward S. Haynes and Rana Chhina, *Medals and Decorations of Independent India* ([New Delhi]: Manohar, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> See Edward S. Haynes, "A Medal that almost destroyed a Commonwealth: The Indian Independence Medal, 1947", *Journal of the Orders and Medals Society of America*, 55, 6 (November-December 2004): 19-26.

<sup>15</sup> High Altitude Service Medal. High altitude being service over 9000 feet for one year.

<sup>16</sup> The Eastern Star and the Western Star.

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