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**MARTIALING THE SIKH SOLDIER DURING THE
FIRST WORLD WAR**

AMERDEEP SINGH PANESAR

U1260204

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts by research

The University of Huddersfield

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Introduction

Sikhism and warfare have been inexorably linked throughout history. As Singh and Madra note, 'Five hundred years ago, this land (Punjab) of conquest serial subjugation was the crucible from which emerged the Sikh warrior' (2013, p. V). Although there is some truth to the statement, the idea of the warrior Sikh has been exaggerated. Remembrance Day and the Centenary of the First World War, serve as places to facilitate constructions of the warrior Sikh (Qureshi, 2013). What often gets overlooked is Sikhism and the colonial constructions of them as a martial race. The martial race theory in India advocated that only specific communities were fit to serve in war, which formed the link between war service and Sikhism. This thesis is an attempt to investigate this connection by exploring the making of the Sikhism as a 'martial race'. It will also address the role of martiality for Sikhs in the First World War.

The positioning of Sikhs as a martial race was a multi-faceted negotiation and not simply an imposition from above. The thesis will show that ideas of martiality grew out of a joint political agenda from Sikhs and the British Raj. Sikhs sought the protection of their religion, and in return provided military service. Therefore, Sikh martiality is understood as a meeting point between the coloniser and colonised. The First World War presented the first significant challenge to this relationship. This can be seen through Sikh soldiers' letters that were sent to their families in India, and official military documents. The thesis will show that issues of recruitment, morale, and anti-imperial movements, caused ideas of martiality to be rewritten, despite martiality being based on the fixed notion of race. These changes ranged from introducing new 'races' to amending the entire recruitment process.

Consequently, the thesis will argue that the pressures of the First World War undermined pre-war ideas of martiality. The war also demonstrates an awareness from Sikh soldiers' of being a martial race and its advantageous position in Colonial India. Hence, the final chapter addresses how this awareness led Sikhs to gain a form of political autonomy by 1925, a

luxury many Indians did not gain until 1947. As Sikhs achieved a form of independence in 1925, it exemplifies the point about colonial negotiation. In summary, the Sikh martial race theory not only uncovers new knowledge of military history but also partly uncovers insights into Sikh soldiers and the agency of their community.

Historiography

Literature Review

The entry point of the thesis is the representation of knowledge and its impact on power in colonial India. The Rebellion of 1857 altered the existing power structures, resulting in new strategies that were centred around Indian customs (Rand, 2006).¹ As Marriot (2003) points out, 'Whatever the precise nature of the shift in Britain's role from a trading partner to a colonial power in India, not in doubt was the dramatic increase in demand for knowledge of the nascent colony' (p.1). Put simply, the East India Company (EIC) would have to govern the domestic affairs of the Subcontinent, rather than just make profits.² The Rebellion of 1857 demonstrated a fault line between the coloniser and colonised, because of a failure to understand the local customs. The British Raj would be appointed to rule in response to the Rebellion. A precedent was set for a more efficient rule, by learning how to integrate the Indian population into Empire. With that in mind, detailed ethnographic knowledge was collected that allowed the British Raj to improve relations with the different Indian communities. The construction of the martial race theory was an outcome of the altered power-knowledge structure in post-Rebellion India. The martial race 'knowledge' of India reshaped the ethnographic complexion of the Indian army by 1914. The 'martial races' were a direct result of a better accommodated empire. Their 'difference' legitimised notions of racial superiority; their employment policed and protected the Empire.

To reinforce the ideas of difference popular publications articulated the concept of martial race. In 1933 George MacMunn summarised the understanding of martiality in *The Martial*

¹ This is the Rebellion of 1857, It will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1 For information on the Rebellion see: Wagner, K. (2010). *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* Witney: Peter Lang

² For more on the transition from profitmaking to colonial power see: Bowen, H.V. (2006) *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Races of India, which is an example of discourse emphasising India colonial 'difference'.

MacMunn (p.2) states:

We do not speak of the martial races of Britain as distinct from the non-martial, nor of Germany, nor of France. But in India we speak of the martial races as a thing apart and because the mass of the people have neither martial aptitude nor physical courage.

The constructed difference MacMunn alludes to 'legitimised' colonial rule of India. Meaning, martial race ideas were not merely used for the purpose of recruitment.

Until recently, studies of the colonial army have been written largely from a British perspective.³ The attention has been on British sources, with a particular focus on the 'great' battles and the 'great' men of the army. Academic historians have challenged this history through, for example, 'New Military History' which examines the military in a wider social and political context. This thesis will join this trend by examining Sikhs and the martial race ideas beyond warfare.

Academics only began reviewing the dynamics of ethnicity and the army during the 1980's. Cynthia Enloe's (1980) study looked at how States used race and ethnicity to recruit armies. She argues, that if the conditions allow, State planners can exploit divisions, and use ethnicity/race to mobilise and deploy an army to enhance security. This is sometimes referred to as a divide and rule strategy. However, it does not explain why the local population would have joined the army. The argument works better as a global perspective on ethnic recruitment, nevertheless, Enloe's work paved the way for more specific case studies.

³ An example is: Farwell, B. (1991). *Armies of the Raj: From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947*. London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

The rise of 'New Military History' has influenced the study of India's colonial army. David Omissi's (1991; 1994) work has developed a greater understanding of recruitment and the colonial army. On the construction of martial race ideas, Omissi argued that self-image was important. However, it was a 'tendency, not a fixed rule' (Omissi, 1991, p. 8). The martial races, therefore, should be viewed as a joint production, rather than as a purely British construction. My thesis will address how it was a collaborative effort in its making, but also in its re-making during First World War. Omissi discusses the implications of the war, although this is mainly on the larger colonial army, not explaining the changes it had on specific communities such as Sikhs. There is a gap in the research on how it impacted the different martial race communities. This work will focus on changes that related to Sikhs, concluding that the war was a transitional period, on martial race knowledge on Sikhs.

More nuanced studies have deconstructed the martial races theory. The focus has been on what the term represents, and how the British used the theory when recruiting. This research will differ, by analysing how Sikh soldiers' experiences caused continuities and changes to the understanding of the martial races theory, during the First World War. Academics have highlighted the important factors of martiality. Caplan (1995) points out that the theory had two main strands: martiality was an inherited trait based on race, and secondly that 'martial' people were born in the northern, mountainous regions. Gajendra Singh (2014b) argues, that the application of pseudo-British qualities to Indian races was also a factor. In recent work, however, there is a consensus that just like the colonial army, the martial race theory was a changing construction (Singh, 2014b; Rand & Wagner, 2012). The thesis will draw on this by highlighting the pragmatic nature of the theory. It will contribute to the way in which the martial races were understood during the First World War. By isolating an event, the thesis will look to identify the key constructs of the martial races theory as academics have studied it across long periods of time making generalisations.

Attempting to understand how the martial races theory operated in practice is a largely under-researched area. Roy (2001) and Streets (2004) look at how it impacted the lives of Indian soldiers. They argue it affected life in the army and was more than just a recruitment strategy. For instance, each martial community would have a distinctive uniform, badges, titles and customs. Roy (2001) argues that this created a group ethos of loyalty and regimental pride which gave soldiers the ability to tolerate the inhuman theatre of battle. This regimental 'community' resulted in soldiers' loyalty beyond pay. Streets (2004) argues that the martial races were aware of their privileged position when it came to jobs in the army. So, they used it for material gain.

There are academics of the imperial army that have more focused articles on the martial races and the First World War. However, these studies do not fully address how martiality was reconstructed after its failings during the war. As Cohen (1991, p. 172) points out 'One of the early casualties of World War One was the system of recruiting the martial races'. He uses the recruitment of Jat Sikhs to support his case, stating that Sikhs during this period were experiencing radical social changes. This led to the recruitment of Mazbhi Sikhs who were a caste within Sikhism, that were not considered fit for military service before the war. The weaknesses of Cohen's study is the exclusive use of British sources. Cohen does not take into account the views of Sikh/Indian soldiers. The purpose of this research is not merely to look at the changes of the war, but how soldiers' letters can shed light on the failings of martiality.

This thesis will provide insights into how the First World War impacted the Sikh martial identity. Martiality became an integral part of Sikh identity. There are studies which explore how the British accommodated Sikh customs.⁴ However, they do not emphasise the

⁴ For more on Sikh history see: Singh, P., & Fenech, L, E. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

importance of the war. For example, in modern interpretations of Sikh history such as Grewel's (1998) substantial history of the Sikhs, he argues that because Sikhs sided with the British during the 1857 Rebellion they held an eminent position within the British Raj. He attempts to make links between the historical martial order of the Sikhs known as the Khalsa, and British war service. What he is trying to say is that they began to be constructed as a martial race. The book serves more as a response to Sikh anxieties as a minority in post-colonial India rather than their experience during colonial rule. This thesis addresses this by placing the importance on the martial races theory as a jointly produced enterprise to accommodate Sikhs.

In the study of Sikh identity, there are two dominant approaches either placing the emphasis on the one hand with Sikhs and on the other with British colonial rulers (Caton, 2001). Richard Fox (1985) places emphasis on the British re-creation of a new Sikh identity. Conversely, Harjot Oberoi (1994) states it was Sikh elites who enforced this change with colonial support. What is meant by Sikh elites for the purpose of the paper is Sikh: royalty, religious leaders, landowners, village chiefs, and heads of influential families. Although a broad term, it is intended to group together those in positions of power that supported the colonial state during the war. Ballantyne (2006) takes a different approach stating the re-creation was a meeting point between the coloniser and colonised. Sikh elites saw the army and the martial race theory as a place to (re)produce and police a religious and distinctive Sikh identity. This benefited the British because it would ensure a steady influx of recruits. These studies have charted the development of Sikh identity and will be drawn from heavily.

Studies of Sikh identity help understand the context of the 'martial races'. They outline how Sikh political events impacted colonial policy. The period between 1880 and 1930 was a critical time for the development of Sikh history (Caton, 2001). The issue with these studies is that they tend to ignore the war's importance. As Kerr (2001) points out between 1849 and 1919 the Sikh community had a positive relationship with the state, but between 1919

and 1925 fault lines appeared. None of these studies consider how the war caused anxiety. They look at the results of the war such as the Gurdwara Act in 1925. They do not look at how the British accommodated Sikh identity directly after the war. They do not fully address how the war impacted Sikh identity.

There is also value in looking into regional studies of colonial Punjab. This is because they investigate how the changes in colonial Punjab better accommodated the imperial army. The most notable studies are Rajit Mazumder's (2003) *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* and Tan Tai-Yong's (2005) *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*. This research draws heavily from these studies. Other studies of the martial races have not sufficiently used knowledge of colonial Punjab to understand how it may have caused the British to accommodate soldiers.

The focus of Mazumder (2003) and Tai-Yong's (2005) studies is the Punjabisation of the army and the interdependent relationship with society. They both come to similar conclusions on the relationship of Punjab and Raj. The difference is that Mazumder (2003) highlights the economic aspect. He argues that comparatively to the rest of India the Raj disproportionately invested in Punjab. This investment had a positive impact and explained the loyalty of Punjab throughout colonial rule. In short, the British recognised the sword arm of India was Punjab. Therefore, the region would be integral to the maintenance of power. So by investing in Punjab, the local population would think favourably of the Raj. Rather than looking at material changes, Yong (2005) focuses more on the political dynamics. He looks at how during the war the colonial administration had to work more closely with local elites to meet the demands of the war. After 1916, Yong argues the civil and military structures joined to produce 'cannon fodder' for the war (2005, p.139). They both argue colonial Punjab emerged stronger after of the war. However, they do not address how there was a need to re-write martiality to meet the demands of the war. This

thesis will be looking into how the state changed and accommodated the Sikh martial race theory during the war.

One purpose of this thesis is to look at soldiers' agency during the war. Mazumder outlines the importance of soldiers' experiences during the War. He argues that soldiers' experiences in the army made them reflect on conditions at home. This was because many of the recruited soldiers were poor, illiterate and not experienced life outside of rural Punjab. So the army exposed them to 'varied moral, social and technological advances' (Mazumder, 2003, p.44) As such it made soldiers believe they were serving a true global power. Mazumder argues that Punjabi loyalty was multi-layered. The economic benefits were a dominant factor, but loyalty also came from the military experience. It is for this reason British recruitment policy and the martial races cannot be read simply as a military matter. I take this approach in the understanding of the impact of the martial races. However, there are weaknesses in Mazumder's conclusions which are that soldiers' voices have been homogenised and depicted as largely positive. There is an example of soldiers' letters countering positive attitudes to war. There is a need to separate soldiers' experiences to understand the war experience.

Mazumder's work on soldiers' agency formed only a small part of his extensive study of Punjab. With the rise of 'New Military History' and the centenary of the war, a spate of studies on soldiers' agency has been published. As Rand and Wagner (2011) point out, scholars of the martial races must consider the agency of the recruited as well as the recruiter. The publication of Omissi's (1999) *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*, a collection of India soldiers' letters, shows an attempt to understand the colonial army beyond the recruiter. These letters present methodological issues when

trying to understand the Indian war experiences through them ⁵, but academics have found them to be a valuable source. This thesis will use a range of sources to outline soldiers' agency during the war. The main focus will be letters from soldiers who served during the war. Omissi (1999) collected over 650 Indian soldiers' letters during the war, which includes Sikh soldiers' letters home. These sources have been published with the aim of being representative of the whole collection. The full collection of letters is now in the archive, but it would be beyond the scope of this project to view them, so the research on letters has been done with Omissi's book. The recruiting handbooks of empire are also useful sources, as Des Chene points out they are a 'site of production of martial race discourse' (1999, p. 123). British soldiers' accounts have also been used to understand of how they maintained the Martial Race ideology during the First World War.

Studies (Singh, 2014b; Omissi, 2007) analyse soldiers' letters by looking at their psyche during the war, but there has not been a strong focus on martial identities. As such, this study will provide insights into Sikh identity during the war. It will look at the breakdown and recalibration of this identity, looking at changes the British Raj made during the war and how it altered their understanding of the martial races theory. Previous studies on Indian soldiers during the First World War such as Omissi's (2007) look at encounters with Europe. They do not fully address how the power-knowledge relationship was altered. My study looks at how the pressures of the war caused changes. Singh (2014b) reviews the idea of the martial races and runs through British ascription of the martial identity to Sikhs during the First World War, which will be valuable for this study. The focus of his study is the letters from Muslim soldiers during the war. Singh argues soldiers became politicised because of their war experience not because of external agents. This is something this

⁵ This will be discussed in more detail in the methodology section.

thesis will attempt to demonstrate but with Sikh soldiers to highlight how their experiences caused the British to re-think colonial constructions.

There have been more nuanced studies of soldiers' experiences and the martial races.

Streets (2004) directly attempts to deal with the martial races theory and soldiers' experience. Streets argues, 'Rather than seeing these men as either brainwashed victims of British propaganda or as passively accepting; we might instead see them as active agents in seeking to improve their own and their families lives' (2004, p.216). The problem is that Streets does not actively look into the political and social developments in Punjab. Streets also generalises her conclusions as she depicts the war as a largely positive experience. Yet there are examples of the breakdown of the martial identity during the war. The most relevant piece of literature is Omissi's (2012) account of Sikh soldiers in Europe. This piece is very sensitive to the different experiences of Sikhs during the war on the Western Front. He argues that the soldiers' letters were rich in rural imagery and references to religious identity. Omissi has produced something that can be developed further. The aim of the thesis is not to outline soldiers' experiences but to demonstrate the limits of colonialism and how the British had to accommodate changes. The Sikh soldiers of the First World War had an active role in the shaping of the martial races theory. This is something that has not been fully considered in the study of the martial races.

The literature published about the martial races theory has tended not to see the war as a transitional period. The focus has tended to be on generalisations of the martial races.

Historians have looked at the term over the course of the Raj rather than specific time or event. As well looking at the 'martial races' over an extended period, they often generalise about the different communities. This thesis involves a specific study of Sikhs, highlighting four different themes of literature: colonial military, Sikh identity, colonial Punjab and the First World War. However, they do not address how the war impacted the British understanding of Sikhs and the martial races theory during the First World War.

Methodology

A series of theoretical and methodological issues underpin imperial history. In the academic discipline of post-colonial studies, there has been a range of approaches (Childs & Williams, 1997; Ramone, 2011; Young, 2003). Post-colonialism has become a term encompassing the study of imperial histories. The focus of this study is looking at imperial constructions of Sikhs as a 'martial race' during the First World War. One of the foremost academics in understanding imperial constructions is Edward Said. His work *Orientalism* (2003) originally published in 1978, brought a new meaning to the term. His work acts as a framework for the study of the 'East' or the 'Orient'. Said brings together notions of 'colonial knowledge' and 'colonial power' to understand the control of colonised people. For my study, this means that knowledge produced by the British Raj on Sikhs was not written to understand them, but to control them. This 'Orient' was therefore constructed and essentialized to be positioned as inferior to the West. Said explains 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal,"'- the Occident (2003, p. 40). Orientalism was a western construction to establish hegemony over Orient.

When Said referred to the 'East' or the 'Orient' his focus was on the Middle-East. Academics such as Ronald Inden (1986) look at how the framework can help historians studying India. Inden suggests that scholars have viewed Indian society as backwards, meaning they accept British dominance of India as sovereign. The example is the caste system which is seen as backwards and irrational and, therefore, confirms rational Western dominance. In the Saidian framework, an Oriental construction of India is what is created rather than what was the reality. The 'martial races' is an example of British Orientalist thinking. It also legitimised imperial rule as martial races needed British leadership. The construction of the martial races theory fits into the Saidian framework; as ultimately the knowledge was used to maintain British authority in India.

The Saidian framework is, however, problematic for the study of the martial races. The major flaw is the emphasis on British production of knowledge of India free from the influence of the Indians themselves.⁶ Sarkar (2000, p.242) points out a weakness of the Saidian approach stating that 'Colonial domination gets robbed of all complexities'. One complexity is the joint production of knowledge. The Saidian approach leaves no place for the role Sikhs played in the building of the martial races identity. As a result, this thesis is critical of the approach because it means Indian knowledge is ignored. This study, therefore, uses sources directly written by Sikh soldiers to understand their contribution to thinking about the constructions of the martial race idea.

Trying to recover the colonised Indian voice is something the Subaltern Studies Collective have sought to understand. Influenced by Orientalism, the Subaltern studies group, provided a new way of thinking about Indian history (Ballantyne, 2001). The aim was uncovering the histories of the non-elite suppressed people of India, who they termed the Subaltern.⁷ This subordination is, according to Ranajit Guha, "The general attribute of subordination in Asian society whether expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, office or in any other way" (Ganguly, 2015, p. 4). A 'subaltern' is more than just the oppressed; they are voiceless outside the realms of power. The Subaltern approach was a reaction against the Eurocentric and nationalist histories with an emphasis on elites. It also rejects the universalisms of capitalism and Marxism as they remove the Subaltern's consciousness. In Guha's (1983) essay, he argues that other academics have looked at factors such as political and economic deprivation that lead to an evitable reaction such as rebellion. This response removes subaltern agency. This is because this response is seen as

⁶ Bayly highlighted the importance of India's influencing British knowledge collection. For more see: Bayly, C. (1996) *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the Subaltern approach see: Guha, G. & Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Selected Subaltern Studies* Oxford: Oxford University Press. and Chaturvedi, V. (2000). *Mapping Subaltern studies and the Postcolonial* London: Verso.

natural, and eliminates the ability of the subaltern make a conscious decision to rebel.⁸ This thesis looks in part to do this. The aim is to understand how Sikh experiences affect British thinking. Looking how they activity impacted British thinking rather than just accepting its authority.

Retrieving the subalterns' voice in the archive is problematic (Spivak, 1993). Subalternists would argue that the archive preserves colonial knowledge (Ballantyne 2001). The body of colonial discourse in the archive only recovers the colonial construction of empire as colonised Indian's left no written record. Singh (2014b) points out a problem when attempting to understand colonial soldiers through the Subaltern framework. In short, soldiers fail to be subalterns. This is because their voices were not suppressed. During the First World War they left behind letters they sent home. He argues because of this they were not voiceless subalterns but part of the colonial machine, in his words, 'not to be repressed or ignored, but censored' (2014, p.184). Santanu Das (2011) conversely argues that they are Subaltern. He argues although they may have been privileged with letters, they were still the peasant non-literate or semi-literate underclass with their agency restricted. Despite this disagreement, they both feel soldiers' letters can be analysed. Das and Singh have set out ways in which the soldiers voice can be recovered. Building on their work this thesis will look to recover Sikh soldiers' voices. Conscious of their limitations, Indian voices can further our understanding of the First World War.

There are clear problems with these letters, which are beyond the obvious point is colonialism conditions them. Firstly, they were not always written by the sending soldier as a scribe would often write for them. They were also censored twice: once by a British officer, then at a centralised office at Boulogne, where the letters would be translated into

⁸ For a critical approach to Subaltern studies approach see: Sarkar, S. (2002). *Writing Social History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

English to monitor morale (Omissi, 2007). This translation stage is another issue as the translators often made mistakes from the indigenous languages in English. The letters that will be examined are from the Western Front as those from the Middle East no longer exist. These letters present problems but in the words of Omissi (2007), 'The crucial issue is, surely, less what we cannot learn from these letters, than what we can learn from them' (1991, p.9). Omissi argues that the importance of the censor can be overstated. He claims that officers had little time to read letters. The sheer volume of letters meant that by 1917 only around 200-300 were being read out of every 100,000 letters. Perhaps the most important factor is that soldiers began to understand they were being censored. Das (2015) points out that code language was used by soldiers to pass the censor. Das believes they are not windows into soldiers' experiences, but they still contain something from the Sepoy. These letters are problematic and incomplete, but at very least they contain evidence of some agency. Only with a careful reading can this be accessed. These letters can help understand how the martial identity operated during the First World War. They can even help us figure out why the British made changes during the First World War.

Conceptualising Race

The imperial discourse on the colony served not only as knowledge but as a social mechanism for the expression of colonial legitimacy and values. The constructions of race in India established a structure for the relationship between rulers and ruled. However, this creates problems because of the meaning of race as it is malleable and subjective. In the historical context, two ideas underpinned constructions of race in colonial India: environmentalist and scientific. Climatic theories of race first served as a colonial difference, as it was suggested that the constant exposure to tropical climate affected the mental and physical character. Pseudo-scientific theories were also applied to the Indian population. These two assumptions while contradictory overlapped which created space for pragmatic re-articulations of race (Fischer-Tine, 2011). Which is why Fischer-Tine (2011) argues there

was no single ideology of race throughout the period of British rule. As Streets (2004) argues scientific theories began to dominate the popular constructions of race in India towards the end of the nineteenth century. In British India, it is evident race is a problematic term but whatever the intellectual base, ideas of race were constantly shifting in response to the imperial rule.

In conceptualising 'martial race theory', the prevailing pragmatic attitudes of race had an impact. While chapter one will explain the concept in more detail, ideas of martiality were malleable, and as this thesis will show they underwent a series of changes. The 'martial race theory' at its core was the belief that selective communities in India were fit to bear arms. This basic premise was put into a recruitment strategy, as the majority of the colonial army by the start of World War One were recruited from the so-called martial races of India. The issue, as Des Chene (1999, p.112) points out, is 'Since 'martial race' terminology was so pervasive in military circles from the late nineteenth century, and because this terminology comes with a daunting array of facts attached to it, it is easy to become convinced that the British were working with a precise concept'. While it appears a stable and fixed term, the reality was that a large body of fiction was used for political ends (Streets, 2004). An inquiry into Sikh soldiers and martiality during the First World War highlights the pragmatic nature of the term. The thesis argues that the multi-faceted theory not only being constructed and re-constructed, but the agency of Sikh soldiers was critical to the formation and the re-articulation of Sikhism and martial races.

It is necessary to consider that the notion of Sikhness, or Sikhi, is an essentially contested concept. As Singh and Barrier (1999) argue, Sikhs have struggled with identity for five centuries. Opinderjit Takher (2005, p.4) argues that there is 'no authoritative yardstick with which to access the issue of Sikh identity'. What is suggested in its place is a federal identity. This includes a few core beliefs with the individual and or a group expressing the unique beliefs and practices. The core component is belief in the Gurmukh or the way of

God as it constitutes Sikh identity and covers all the different types/sects of Sikhs.

However, during this period ideas of identity were becoming increasingly rigid.

Conclusion

The literature review has demonstrated there is a lack of knowledge around: explaining the role of the Sikh martial race theory during the First World War?, and in what ways did the First World War cause continuities or changes to pre-war ideas of Sikh martiality? To answer these questions the argument will centre around the flexibility of martiality, by specifically looking at how the pressures of the war challenged pre-existing ideas. It will locate the war as a significant period of colonial negotiation through martiality. While pointing out that martial race theory during the First World War fostered awareness of the importance of the Sikh martial identity, which alongside other factors allowed Sikhs to achieve political freedoms as early as 1925. The argument will be made using both British and Sikh primary sources. The problem identified in the theoretical framework is that the archive preserves the coloniser's voice. To counter this the thesis will highlight the failings of martiality during the First World War in Sikh sources. Then assess how the British sources reacted and implemented changes to address the problems. Although the sources do not address each other directly there is relations between the disconnect of from soldiers and British military officials reacting to the problems. The Masters will look demonstrate this and argue it's a form of agency.

The argument will be constructed over four chapters. Chapter one will seek to outline the creation of the 'martial races' of India, and the way in which it was a joint production with Sikh elites. It will outline the situation that led to a military structure based on the recruitment of the martial races. Pre-war martial race discourse will be used to outline the parameters of Sikh martiality. Chapter two will seek to explore the Sikh soldiers' martial identity during the First World War. It will argue that the language of martiality was prevalent in their letters; however, the effects of war presented a series of challenges to

Sikh martiality. Next, chapter 3: The changing face of martiality, will outline how these issues altered pre-war ideas. It will demonstrate the role of Sikh agency in the maintenance of Sikh loyalty to the British war effort. The final chapter will draw the first three chapters together outlining how the war impacted the awareness of the ideas about martiality. Conclusions will then be made on continuities and changes the war caused. Ultimately it will outline the impact of the First World War on Sikh martiality and more broadly Sikh history.

Chapter one: The martial races theory and British military thought

The purpose of this section is to provide a contextual understanding of the Indian Army before the First World War. The British, after the Mutiny of 1857-58, sanctioned wholesale changes to the Indian army in order to effectively accommodate the newly acquired Indian empire. After the British formally took over rule from EIC, there was a pragmatic approach to reforming the British Indian army due to the changing needs of the military. After the 1880's the focus was on external threats opposed to domestic uprisings leading to the creation of the martial race recruitment theory. This chapter aims to chart this development as well as give a summary of the Sikh version of the martial race theory.

The impact of mutiny

In Colonial India the political unrest between 1857-1858 changed the landscape of British rule from the EIC to the Crown. The introduction of Crown rule saw modifications to the existing imperial structures in an effort to reassert British rule. The Mutiny, also referred to as the Rebellion, took place between May 1857 - June 1858 and began with the infamous 'bite the bullet' incident. Rumours concerning the standard issue Pattern 1853 Enfield rifle and its greased cartridges were the cause because the grease was alleged to be pig or cow fat; this was offensive to both Muslims and Hindus. As a result of the rumours, there was a series of violent uprisings by the Sepoys (Indian Soldiers) who killed their British officers and occupied towns and cities, including Delhi.⁹ The uprising was mainly confined to the northern and central plains of India. However, it still had the potential to oust company rule. Although it is worth noting that the unrest included civilians, this chapter focuses on the reorganisation of the colonial army in India, a consequence of the uprising.

⁹ For more on the mutiny see: Wagner, K, A. (2010). *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*. Witney: Peter Lang Ltd.

Other than small-scale disturbances, the resulting reforms ensured the colonial army in India remained a loyal force through to the independence of India. This was to the extent that even through two world wars, India continued to be a significant contributor of labour and soldiers. Only pragmatic imperial policies such as the 'martial race' recruitment system made this possible. Before the Rebellion the Indian army was not a distinctly 'Indian' army because it was split into three Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay (Omissi, 1994). The presidencies each had regional armies which were a mercenary force that protected the interests of the East India Company. The soldiers were all trained in European drill and commanded by British Officers. Each army was distinctly separate with a combined force of 200,000 in 1856 (Omissi, 1994). A collective Indian Army only officially existed from 1895. Despite the fact that Rebellion caused reform, martiality remained an abstract idea and did not impact recruitment until the late nineteenth century.

The meaning of martiality in the British Indian Army

Despite, the extensive ideas surrounding martiality it was largely an ambiguous term, which allowed the colonial military to maintain stability. Put simply it served as a means 'of rationalising practical recruiting decisions and integrating them into an overarching, coherent ideological framework' (Kitchen, 2014, p.185). As this thesis will show the 'framework' grew out of new colonial requirements from the 1880's. Sikhs were perfect candidates, because of their political situation they were ideal partners. This section will argue firstly that the term remained unclear, which left space for the designation of 'new' martial races, and it also eliminated political opponents from war service. The military like the Raj itself was able to grow and develop over time to accommodate Empire and ensure the maintenance of imperial rule. Hence, the chapter will explain how the martial race idea became a concept, and in particular, shed light on how Sikhs became designated, and to view themselves, as martial.

It is first important to fully explain the complex meaning of 'martial race' and its use in this thesis. The 'martial races' were constructed to be 'groups of men [who] are biologically or culturally predisposed to the arts of war' (Streets, 2004, p.1). The term was purposely pragmatic in order to be altered in times of crisis. Despite, it being constructed as dogmatic there were three key elements underpinning martiality: race, loyalty, and climate/geography. Consequently, it allowed the emphasis to be placed on any of the three traits depending on military requirements, or the particular community.

While the role of race has been addressed, theories of loyalty and climate also illuminate colonial ideas of martiality. Geography and the local climate in a colonial context had been historically significant for the construction of race in India, but it was gradually replaced with ideas of scientific difference. However, climate continued to be an key factor in the military discourse on martiality. British military leaders fashioned the North Indian population as more physically able, because of the mountainous nature of the region and its cool weather (Singh, 2014b). In line with previous notions about tropical climates and weakness, these ideas remained prominent in military thinking. Loyalty is perhaps, the easiest to point to express, as Enloe (1980) argued that the majority of communities that were designated as a martial race were previously loyal to the British Empire. Loyalty could also be used selectively for political ends, because of Sikhs, for example, were at war with the British EIC only eight years before Rebellion. Therefore, these elements make martiality malleable, as opposed to the colonial discourse which made it appear as a precise concept.

The ambiguity surrounding the term leads to one of the central points of this thesis. The martial races were constructed as the 'best' soldiers India had to offer, but, importantly, they filled a role in the imperial system. Therefore, a martial identity was formed to tailor to the particular customs of a recruited community to incorporate them into empire. This was essential for the continued loyalty of soldiers because it created a sense of regimental pride (Roy, 2013). These multi-faceted elements allowed it to be manipulated for political ends.

For example, during the First World War, seventy-five new 'martial race' communities were added to the existing ones. Thus, the martial races should be understood as a changing unstable concept.

The development of incorporating the 'martial races' into the imperial system took place between 1870 and 1914. As Barua states, 'Scant years after the revolt of 1857, the British had on their own initiative begun a process which would ultimately pave the way for the complete transformation of the colonial army into modern national army' (1999, p.8). The transformation allowed the army to be more adaptable. This can be seen after 1857, due to the ideas of martiality not being prevalent. A Royal Commission on the Organisation of the Indian Army, known as The Peel Commission, was undertaken to recommend a new military system. For Streets (2004) an important part of the Commission was the divide and rule measures placed on recruitment, which were in response to the anxieties about another combined rebellion. This resulted in the military taking a measured approach recruiting from a number of regions and communities. In theory, this created a balance of power to use loyal communities to suppress revolts. It was in response to pre-Rebellion recruitment as high caste Brahmans were the main source of recruitment. As well recruiting from a range of regions the Commission recommended an overall larger military presence. This would mean increasing the army's size by 80,000, which would be split by stationing 50,000 soldiers in Bengal, and 15,000 in both Madras and Bombay (Peel Commission, 1859). Importantly the Commission suggested, 'This amount and distribution, however, must always be affected by the political exigencies of the country' (p. ix). Therefore, it is explicit in the Commission that the reorganisation of the army in 1858 was in response to imperial anxieties.

The martial races system did not officially enter military thought until the 1880's. Similar to the military changes in 1858, by the 1880's the army demonstrated its ability to reorganise. This was because by 1880 the British had restored order in India, meaning in the primary

role of the army was not internal strife. The problem was the expanding Russian Empire, which had acquired territory only 400 miles from Punjab (Mazumder, 2004). Other external problems become more serious such as the skirmishes against the Afghans. The threats to India became geographically bound which provides an explanation of why location became a part of the martial race thinking.

To reassess the army, the Eden Commission of 1879 was undertaken to address the new problems facing the Raj. The outcome of this was to focus recruitment in North India due to these new threats. It was around this time that idea of recruiting from martial races began to take place. Before the Commission, in 1875, the Bengal army was made up of 44% Punjabis, so in effect this shift was already taking place (Ballantyne, 2006). The Eden Commission just made the designation of martial races an official recruitment policy. The outcome was that recruitment would be based in the north (as *figure one* shows).

The most important factor was Lord Frederick Roberts' influence. Rand & Wagner consider him to be the creator of the 'martial races project' (Rand & Wagner, 2012; Streets, 2003). Since British occupation of India, military officers had played a vital role in the collection of knowledge (Peers, 2005). In Roberts' book, *41 Years in India*, there are implicit references to the shortcomings of certain members of the Indian population:

In the British Army the superiority of one regiment over another is mainly a matter of training; the same courage and military instinct are inherent in English, Scotch, and Irish alike, but no comparison can be made between the martial value of a regiment recruited amongst the Gurkhas of Nepal or the warlike races of northern India, and of one recruited from the effeminate peoples of the south (1897, p.532).

Roberts makes it clear that soldiers from the North of India were superior. He rationalised this idea by being critical of the Southern Army of Madras' poor performance in the Second Afghan War 1878-1880 (Omissi, 1994; Streets, 2003). The sentiment was that if a western

empire such as Russia was to attack India directly, only the finest soldiers of India would be able to repel such a foe. This change in attitude reflected the changing needs of the army.

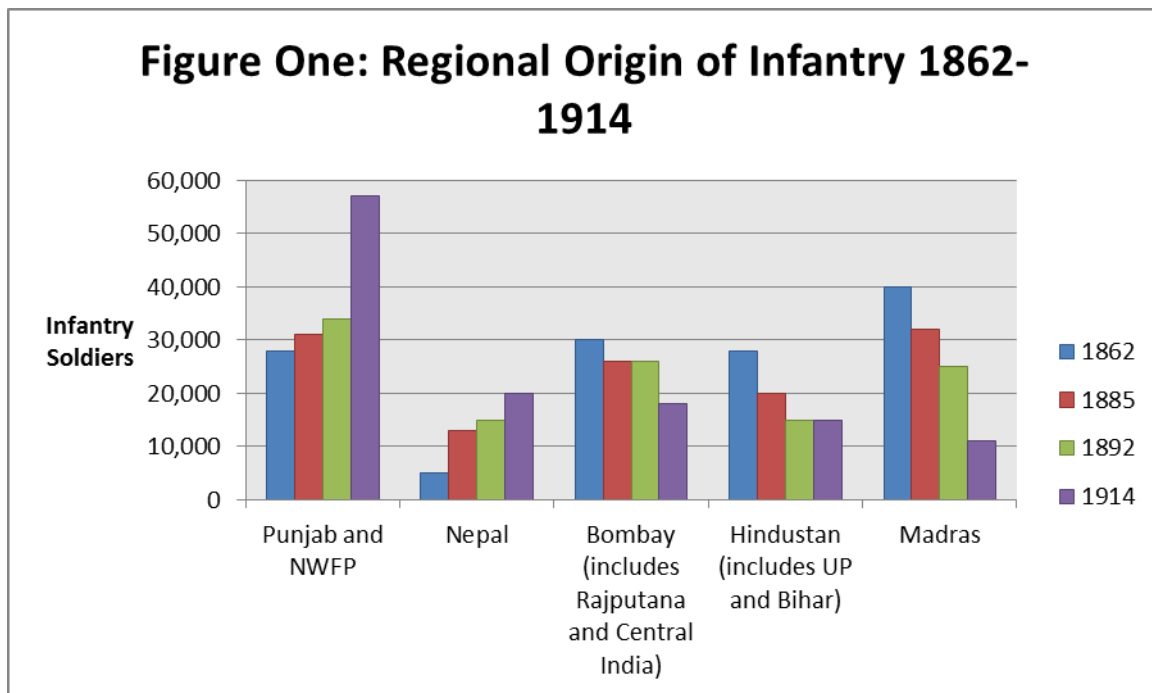
In fact, the British had been constructing Sikhs as martial or warlike as early as the eighteenth century. Harpreet Singh points out the Governor-General of the East India Company, Warren Hastings, stated in 1784, Sikhs 'are by their body frame and habits of life eminently suited for the military profession' (2014, p.202). The portrayal of Sikhs as warriors is linked to the formation of the Khalsa, a religious order started by the 10th Guru of Sikhism Guru Govind Singh, it's role was to defend the religion (Grewel, 1998).

Importantly, its role became idealised as a heroic army that defended against Mughal oppression, which in turn made it an integral part of Sikh identity. Dhavan (2011) argued that the formation of Khalsa should be considered as something not purely religious, but a multifaceted entity. However, it is consistently described in an idealised form, which can be seen in early British writers works on Sikhs, such as McGregor (1846), who stated that 'Sikhs, who from being quiet and peaceable, became at once a war-like tribe, spreading terror and desolation wherever they went' (p.44). Throughout British discourse on Sikhs this historical military sentiment remained constant.

The discourse on the military traditions of Sikhs has been extensive. However, it is important to understand it was not simply a British imposition. As Omissi (1994) points out self-image of the different Indian communities was necessary, for the development of martiality, especially, among Sikhs, due to the political developments during the period. The Singh Sabha movement was a major driving force because the aim was to revive the traditions of Sikhism through a monolithic set of principles (Oberoi, 1994). The movement grew out of anxieties about the falling numbers of Sikhs in Punjab. Since the 1860's fewer members of the Indian population considered themselves a Sikh. The number of Sikhs in the five districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Lahore and Gujranwala, which in 1868 numbered 511,064, fell to 490,677 in 1881 (Omissi, 1994). The fall in number can be

explained by the loss of prestige after the fall of Sikh Empire in 1849. In response, the Singh Sabha movement sought to restore Sikhism to its former position in Punjab. Although the motives were political the colonial government shared this vision of restoring Sikhism by codifying the religion. Ballantyne (2006) argues this was because of the perceived similarities between Sikhism and the British, through identifying Sikhism as rational in contrast to other sections of the Indian population which rebelled in 1857. It is evident that both sides required something from the other: the restoration of Sikhism and the maintenance of British rule. This demonstrates the negotiations underpinning imperial rule. By integrating Sikhs into the British Raj, it proved fruitful for both sides.

Incorporating Sikhism into the British imperial machine had a profound effect on the Sikh population. From the 1880's there was a steady increase of Sikhs in Punjab. In 1881 the number of Sikhs had rose to 1,706,165, then to 2,102,896 in 1901, and to 3,110,060 in 1914 (Omissi, 1994). The reform movements in the 1880's were clearly having a profound effect on Sikhism. The role of the army and Sikh war service was critical in understanding the increase, because if Sikhs enlisted they had to not only to label themselves Sikhs but follow a set of rules. This change benefitted everyone in colonial Punjab as the military became a good source of employment for Sikhs. Sikh elites saw the military as a place to implement, police, and maintain the reformed Sikhism, because recruits would have to conform in order to gain employment. Fox (1980) argues that this was a way of ensuring loyalty from the Sikh community because it would not alter the traditional hierarchies the existing Sikh elites had put in place. Ultimately, the British had a vested interest in Sikhism as it would be a link to their 'martial qualities'. These would then be put in action to recruit Sikhs as a 'martial race'.



(Source: Omissi, 1994, p.3-43)

By 1914 the army had been completely reformed. *Figure one* demonstrates not only the extent of the changes but the speed in which it took place. This chapter highlights the complexity not only of military reform but the way in which Sikhs became a 'martial race'. The political developments led to imperial negotiation, which show that the martial race theory was much more than an imperial imposition. The changes that took place were a product of the army no longer being an imperial police force as the focus changed to external threats to British India. In summary, the martial race theory for the Sikh community happened at a critical time in the religion, which opened the door for a political relationship with the Raj. The result was a jointly constructed martial race theory, which was codified in colonial discourse. What is important to keep in mind was the ability to keep the concept flexible so that it could be altered in times of crisis.

Defining the colonial Sikh soldier

Definitions of colonial soldiers were a large part of discourse in the military. Sikhs perceived that their historical military prowess provided the backdrop for their martiality. In order to understand fully understand martiality, the term martial race served as a universal concept, which encompassed all the martial races such as the Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Pathans. It was a political term that rationalised favourable recruitment. For this reason, the best way to understand the term martial race is to break it down into the different communities it encompassed. This 'knowledge' can be found in the, *Handbooks of the British Army* and as Des Chene (1999) argues they were the site of the production of the martial race discourse. These were late nineteenth century publications that were intended for British officers to use as guides for the specific customs of their respective regiment. They allowed the reader to deconstruct the colonial Sikh soldier.

The Sikh martial race theory was unique from other martial races because of the emphasis on maintaining the Sikh religion in its purest form. Being a Sikh was not merely enough to join the army as recruits had to be following an orthodox form. This section will outline the 'model' martial race Sikh soldier, to give an understanding of the Sikh martial race theory before 1914 to understand how the First World War would alter these ideas.

When consulting the colonial literature on martiality there is further evidence of a joint production of knowledge. The hyper focus on religious orthodoxy was in line with the Singh Sabha's aims. This can be seen on the requirements placed on potential recruits because they would have to undergo Amrit (baptism) into the Khalsa. The *Handbooks* rationalised this by outlining that only 'pure' Sikhs had the traits of warfare and loyalty because they had embraced their heritage. That can be seen explicitly in the *Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of Regimental officers* by R.W Falcon in 1896: 'Sikhism is a religion, distinct and separate from but with weakling tendencies, which slowly increase towards its parent religion Hinduism' (p.1). Sikh soldiers had to wear symbols of their identity to prove their

Sikh-ness. To initiate soldiers, Granthis were employed by the army to undertake Sikh rituals. British officers also had the role of policing religious discipline of the soldiers. In effect the military contributed to a codified a form of Sikhism. Therefore, the Sikh martial race theory did not just represent a war-like community, but codified a religious identity.

The British promoted the religion as a separate 'pure' Sikhism which created a new social identity for Sikhs within Army (Fox, 1980). The new identity was known as the 'Singh' Sikh, which has a different meaning to what it does today. Alfred Horsford Bingley (1899) pointed out in his handbook, that 'Singh Sikhs' were the followers of Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru of Sikhism: a Khalsa Sikh. What he means by this is that Sikhs would have to be baptised/Amrit. Sikhs who had taken Amrit required outward signs of their faith, known as the five K's (kakkas): Khes - uncut hair, Kachh - short drawers, Kara – an iron bangle, Khanda – a steel dagger, and Kanga- a comb. Bingley in fact gives an important conclusion about Sikhism and the army's role in promoting Sikhism in the military.

Modern Sikhism, in fact, is to a large extent preserved from extinction by the encouragement it receives from the Indian Army, which, by exacting a rigorous observance of the outward signs of the religion from all its Sikh soldiers, keeps the advantages of the faith prominently before the eyes of the recruit-giving classes (1899, p. 57).

By looking into the handbooks, there is a clear evidence of the construction of a 'model Sikh'. Firstly, there was the emphasis placed on being an orthodox Sikh which required outward symbols of the faith. The reformed orthodox form of Sikhism played a central role in the creating of a martial race identity for Sikhs, which made it distinctive from the other martial races. Although it may seem obvious to point out it was the purity of faith which was linked to martial-ness. To the effect, that the more a Sikh followed the principles of the religion the better his military prowess.

Alongside religious principles there were also other aspects that influenced Sikh recruitment. As Singh (2014b) points out, caste was a major part of military recruitment. The Jat caste was singled out as noble peasants with impressive physique (Mooney, 2013). The Jats were respected as a 'high' caste among all religions in North India. Other castes such as 'high' caste Brahmans and 'low' caste Mazbi were seen as untrustworthy and trouble makers (Singh, 2014b). Even in the handbooks, the authors point out the importance of recruiting a Sikh from a 'good' caste (Falcon, 1896; Bingley, 1899), to the extent that they verified recruits to ensure they were not lying about their caste. Recruitment was also restricted to certain areas of Punjab. The Manjha district was viewed as the ideal location for good soldiers, whereas those from the Malwai region were not as desirable, but were still recruited. Areas such as the Dobha, Punjab, was considered to be the worst for recruitment (Bingley, 1899). Each zone down to a micro level of villages was rated from 'very bad' to 'very good' for the quality of recruits. The physical appearance of a Sikhs was also a determining factor, with sketches of 'orthodox' Sikhs to aid recruiting officers. These sketches in the book of Sikhs placed emphasis on the beard and turban (Falcon, 1896, p.112-113). It is this sought of detail that fully explains Des Chene's point of confusing martiality as a precise term (1999).

Izzat, which was a distinctly Indian sense of honour, was a universal concept among the martial races. In the British discourse, it meant that the soldiers had reaped the rewards of service military and would repay the Raj in return with admirable service. A hyper-masculine identity was another universal trait that depicted martial soldiers as fearless 'hot-blooded' warriors (Streets, 2004). It was an almost barbaric depiction of India's finest soldiers. A barbarianism that could only be tamed by a British officer. This made the British Officer an integral part of martiality, because only they would possess the intellect and character required to drill the soldiers to be effective in the art of war. The theory acknowledged the fighting spirit of the Indians, but without British logic they would become mere barbarians. Similar to the Imperial relationship between Britain and India, the British

officer was a guiding figure (Greenhut, 1984). In many ways, the British Officer was the last piece of the puzzle to tame the 'martial races'.

The martial races of India became integral to the Empire by 1914 as the guardians of the Raj, defending, policing and expanding Empire. From 1858 to 1914 rapid changes were made by the military to ensure another revolt would not take place. By the 1880's the military had shifted its focus to the North of India, which was rationalised as appropriate through the martial races theory. The Sikhs, in particular, are an interesting case in the martial races theory; they were few in number, but they dominated the army ranks making up more than twenty percent of soldiers by 1914. The colonial military worked to codify the meaning of Sikhism by 1914, with the focus on 'pure' Sikhism or the 'Singh' identity and it was only these Sikhs who could enlist in the army. Military *Handbooks* simply codified these thoughts for British officers, so they would then be able to police religious discipline. However, while the pre-war discourse appears dogmatic due to the relative peace, the following chapters on the First World War highlight the fluidity of the martial race theory, and the military's ability to strategically change martial ideas.

Chapter two: The First World War and its challenges to the Sikh martial race theory

In the opening months of the First World War, the British forces in Europe sustained heavy losses. In order to address this issue, an effort was made to find soldiers that 'would fill the gaps' and the soldiers in India were identified as the best available: the white colonies of Canada, New Zealand and Australia did not have armies mobilised for combat in 1914 (Morton-Jack, 2014). Sending troops from the African colonies was also problematic due to the German colonial threat. In 1914 the Indian troops arrived on the Western front after having being trained and mobilised for immediate deployment. Sikhs served across all the British theatres of war, and they made up a significant part of the Indian army. Indian soldiers arrived in France in October 1914, and it is estimated that one-quarter of the troops were Sikh. From 23rd October 1914 through to the end of the first battle of Ypres, the Indian army held twelve miles of the trench line: approximately one-third of the entire British line. The Indian army filled the gaps in the line where British forces had sustained heavy losses (Mortn-Jack, 2014). In 1915 the Indian infantry left France, but two cavalry divisions remained until 1918. They also served on other fronts: the Indian Expeditionary Force (IEF) A served in Europe, IEF B and C in East Africa, IEF D and E in Mesopotamia, IEF F in Egypt and IEF G in Gallipoli.

This chapter addresses the difficulties that the Sikh martial race theory faced during the First World War and argues that, although ideas of martiality were prevalent during the war, it began to challenge Sikh soldiers identity significantly. Most soldiers were illiterate peasants, therefore, British discourse had dominated constructions of Sikhs. The aim of this chapter is not to merely highlight that British constructions fell short of reality, but to demonstrate the failings of martial race ideas that have been lost in British discourse. By using Sikh soldiers' letters from Europe in the First World War, the chapter will shed light on the martial races theory from a different perspective. Furthermore, it will conclude that

some of the central ideas of martiality became problematic. The greatest challenge the government faced was recruitment as the pressures of the war meant that the demand for soldiers increased substantially. The conditions of war compounded these problems as the martial identity was disrupted by the experience of war and consequently the strength of religion became a coping mechanism. The remainder of the chapter will acknowledge that the martial race theory also highlights the major inconsistencies of leadership and will show how British soldiers identified failings in the martial race theory.

Martiality in the First World War

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the general war experience given the diversity of the accounts from the soldiers' letters which feature varied positive and negative responses to war (Omissi, 2012). Whilst it is problematic to gauge a general experience from a mass scale event, the theme of martiality is constant. Due to the larger volume of sources from British soldiers in the First World War, academics have drawn conclusions on low morale and fighting spirit (Fuller, 1990). Roper (2011) has argued that the letters sent by British soldiers to their families were an integral part of dealing with the stresses of the First World War, particularly the nostalgic experiences and reassurances they evoked. While British and Sikh soldiers served on the same fronts, both military structures were radically different. Therefore the challenges facing the soldiers were not the same, and in particular was the different ideas of martiality that formed part of their war service.

It is important to acknowledge that the 'martial race' ideas became more than a recruitment process: it was a way of life. Streets' (2004) seminal work on the martial races outlines why soldiers accepted a martial race identity. She argues that this was a self-conscious decision to gain the material rewards that came with war service rather than a British imposition. In comparison to local jobs, the pay in the military was fulfilling as it meant that soldiers could pay off existing family debt. This created a Sikh 'martiality' that fostered a distinctive pride for the religion and generated a sense of loyalty for the religion as well as the Empire.

Ultimately, Sikh soldiers adopted the 'martial race' identity for the material rewards and the importance it placed on Sikh customs.

The ideas of martiality remained prevalent during the war and this is evident in Sikh soldier's letters (Letter 305, Omissi, 1999). In a letter written by a Sikh in 1914, which is indicative of service, he wrote, 'We will do our best to uphold the family traditions and reputation of our tribe' (Letter 387, Omissi, 1999). The notion held of 'upholding reputation' supports the constructed traits of the 'martial' Sikh. No letter projected ideas of martiality during the First World War better than a letter by a wounded Sikh:

Chur Singh has suffered martyrdom in the war. The 47th Sikhs were charging. [The] Sahib said 'Chur Singh, you are not a Sikh of Guru Govind Singh, [you] who sit in fear inside the trench!' Chur Singh was very angry. Chur Singh gave [the] order to his company to charge. He drew his sword and went forward. A bullet came from the enemy and hit him in the mouth. So did brother Chur Singh become a martyr. No other man was like Jemadar Chur Singh. (letter 199, Omissi, 1999).

The language exudes the model martial race soldier and it can be suggested that the letter appears a story from pre-war martial race discourse. In many ways the letter re-enacts the martial races because the religion is used to instil a sense of duty and bravery. The statement 'Sikh of Guru Govind Singh', which at the time implied a pure form of Sikhism, poses the idea that it was as much about living up to Sikhism as well as displaying warrior traditions. The key point of the letter is loyalty. Chur Singh ultimately answered his officer's call. Letters from Sikh soldiers also reflect ideas of loyalty:

Now look, you brother my brother, our father the King-Emperor of India needs us and any of us who refuses to help him in his need should be counted among the most polluted sinners. It is our first duty to show our loyal gratitude to our Government (Letter 7, Omissi, 1999)

The over-riding theme of loyalty is supported by statistical evidence from court martials. In France, between October 1914 and February 1915, British troops received more court martial convictions than Indians (Morton-Jack, 2006). Morton-Jack, claims that this was partly due to 'Indian's "fighting will" [which] derived from the persistence of their pre-war attitudes of honour, shame, and loyalty, and in turn their allegiance to the king and his chiefs' (2006, p.353). This highlights the clear link in France between the martial race ideas and Sikh war service.

The British Raj also made provisions to maintain these ideas. Carlton House Terrace in London, a hospital for wounded Indian soldiers during the war, had provisions for wounded Sikhs (Report of Indian Soldiers' Fund, 2015). This was evident because copies of the Sikh Holy Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, were printed for wounded soldiers. Two-thousand religious symbols were specially commissioned for Sikhs to replace ones they had lost during the war. It is also apparent, in a letter by a Sikh cavalryman, that facilitating the religion was part of military life: 'the Granth (holy book), that is carried in procession through the entire village, and is shown to all the Sikhs in the cavalry . . . our Sirkar (Government) gives us every opportunity for holding them' (letter 358, Omissi, 1999). It becomes clear that even during the war ideas of Sikhism and martiality remained part of service. This was important to the soldiers who appreciated the religious concessions the government made for them during the war (Omissi, 2007).

Sikhs in colonial India also promoted these ideas of loyalty and religion. In the first instance this is seen through the letters that Sikh soldiers wrote home, seeking advice on spiritual matters (Letter 512, Omissi, 1999). Perhaps, it is more implicit in the letters returned to the soldiers from India. The inspector of the Police in Punjab wrote to a soldier on the western front: 'The war for the Sikhs is a religious war, because the war is directed against the [British] rule which our Guru established' (Letter 222, Omissi, 1999). Again this letter suggests ideas of loyalty and religion were part of war service because links were made between Sikhism and British rule. Street's (2004) argued that the pressure of upholding

prestige was important throughout the war. It can be considered that the greatest pressure put on a Sikh is reflected in this poem, which was sent to a Sikh on the front line:

The Sikh roars like a lion on the field of battle,
And yields up his life as a sacrifice
Whoever is fortunate enough to be born a Rajput
Never fears the foe in battle;
He gives up all thought of worldly pleasure
And dreams only of the battle field;
He who dies on the field of battle,
His name never dies, but lives in history;
He who fronts the foe boldly in battle
Has god for his protection;
Once a Sikh takes the sword in hand
He has only one aim-victory
(Letter 296, Omissi, 1999)

From this poem, along with the other letters discussed, it becomes apparent that the martial race theory was upheld for Sikhs during the war. The soldiers' letters demonstrate that martiality remained important, even in times of crisis the links between Sikh war service and loyalty continued to be a constant feature. Furthermore, there was an immense pressure placed on Sikh soldiers. They had to uphold traditions, demanded by the British and Sikh elites, as well as deal with the horrific conditions of the war.

Challenges to the martial race theory on the Western Front

The soldier's letters help us to understand the First World War from a Sikh perspective. These letters are far from transparent accounts and present many problems however these letters 'open up a whole new world in First World War History' (Das, 2015, p.1276). So far the letters have shown that ideas of martiality were a part of soldiers psyche. Nonetheless, this section will argue that ideas of martiality began to shatter due to the experience of war

and will highlight the discontent between soldiers and the concept of martiality. Although ideas of martiality were prevalent, so were the realities that challenged it. Ultimately the pressures of the First World War deconstructed the pre-war notions of martiality among some Sikh soldiers during the war.

The letters suggest a juxtaposition of the Sikh religion and war service. The British imperial view held that Sikhism was the source of strength: this is what made Sikhs 'theoretically' better at warfare than the rest of India's population. However, the horrific conditions of the war shattered these constructed beliefs (Singh, 2014b). Mayer (2011) suggests that, for British soldiers, the symbols of being heroic, such as uniform, failed due to the idealised vision of war were being broken. For Sikh soldiers, it was the failing martial race military structure: this can be seen in soldiers' letters, particularly one written by a Sikh in France who stated he was having suicidal thoughts (Letter 146, Omissi, 1999). Some soldiers began to abandon their warrior-like status, accepting that the war had made them weak (Letter 571, Omissi, 1999). These letters are far from the idealistic letter written by Chur Singh wanting to prove his Sikh-ness. While soldiers' letters provide evidence of the deficiencies of the martial race ideas, they simultaneously show an awareness of the expectations placed on them: 'It being the religion of the Sikhs to die facing the foe - all you say is true. But if only you yourself could be here and see for yourself' (Letter 163, Omissi, 1999). These letters reveal two points that are clear throughout. They highlight that the constructions of martiality became more difficult to maintain, while demonstrating the Sikhs awareness of martial ideas.

The explanations why martial race ideas became strained can be seen at certain points during the war. The most notable cause was the death toll. By December 1914 the Indian regiments had suffered 9,578 casualties in France. In particular, the 47th Sikh battalion suffered heavy losses. This was due to the high number of soldiers sent to war on the 26th April 1915: eleven British officers, ten Indian officers and 423 other ranks. The following day only four officers and ninety-two rank and file soldiers answered the call. By the time

the 47th Sikhs had left France in 1915, only twenty-eight soldiers of the original regiment had not been killed or absent for more than ten days (Omissi, 2012, p.39). These casualties 'shattered the Kiplingesque likeness of the stalwart Indian sepoy and replaced it with an unflattering depiction of the Indian troops as panicky and inclined to self-inflicted wounds,' (McLain, 2014, p.63).

The poor conditions of the war also contributed to soldiers' reasoning for abandoning the martial identity. By doing so, soldiers felt they could find ways to cope with the war and think of exit strategies, such as purposely injuring themselves to escape the war. Greenhut (1983) argued that fifty-seven percent of wounds to Indian soldiers in 1914 were to the hand and went as far to suggest that the majority of these wounds were self-inflicted. These figures were significantly higher compared to British regiments. Self-inflicted wounds were seen a universal problem across Indian regiments and were not a specific issue attributed Sikhs. Omissi supports Greenhut's argument by implying that there are examples of soldiers' letters that reference self-inflicted wounds (letter 12, Omissi, 1999). While an inquiry was set up to investigate these claims during the war, no evidence was found to prove them to be true (Omissi, 1994). As McLain (2014) argues, it is impossible to know if the self-inflicted wounds took place. This would only be possible if more evidence was found from letters that directly state they did self-inflict wounds. At present, historians have drawn these conclusions by interpreting data or decoding letters. Much can be argued about how many or how few wounds were self-inflicted. What is important here is that it was yet another inconsistency in the martial race theory.

The soldiers' letters about the conditions of the First World War allow for a few conclusions to be drawn. Sikhism did not incite the strength the martial race theory had predisposed; the religion had instead become a coping mechanism. The reason it had failed can be explained through Mayer's (2011) point, that symbols of war that underpinned war service began to fail. In Sikh letters it becomes clear that their symbol of Sikh martiality was damaged by the experience of the conditions on the Western Front. Greenhut's (1983) argument that

soldiers resorted to self-mutilation furthers this point as it gave soldiers an escape from the war. The religion then somewhat took on a different role for soldiers writing home. It becomes clear that a shared sense of British war service was integral for Sikh prosperity. This theme is apparent in soldiers' letters that it was a way of them coping throughout the war.

The biggest problem the British Raj faced when it came to the colonial army was recruitment, simply because it had dried up. A narrow martial recruitment structure, with no space for a mass recruitment drive, was problematic because martiality was attributed to a small part of the Indian population. Although this did not directly impact the soldiers, they understood the impact of recruitment. This was an anxious topic:

We are serving the Sirkar (government) well, and have no anxiety about the war. Lakhs of other mothers' sons are also present at the war. We are not tobacco consumers. We are Sikhs, and the duty of Sikhs is to exalt in battle and show our prowess. When we were in India, expect for God, we feared no one, and enlisted for our own free will. Now people say we enlisted from fear of the police; but we have no regard for lumberdars or the police or anyone else. If we had anything to fear from the police, we should soon settled accounts with them. Our object [in enlisting] was to obtain some benefit from the Sirkar, and now people say we enlisted from fear of the police!' (letter 494, Omissi, 1999)

This letter raises a few themes for discussion. Foremost is the awareness of recruitment problems. The tone of unhappiness about the suggestion that Sikhs are conscripted demonstrates an awareness of Sikh martiality. Furthermore there are references to the martial race ideas of Sikhism through statements that they are the best soldiers in India. Finally, there is a link to religious obedience when talking about not consuming tobacco. Collectively these are subtle ideas that link to a martial identity. Additional evidence suggests that soldiers demonstrated an awareness of the issues surrounding recruitment as they urged friends and family not to enlist (letters 22 & 500, Omissi, 1999). Recruitment

became a significant issue for the British as they needed to portray a positive outlook on the war in order to sustain recruitment. If soldiers were advising other Sikhs not to enlist, then martiality was a risk. As Chapter three argues, the pre-war martial race recruitment system were abandoned in an effort to sustain recruitment.

Military officials blamed the poor performance of Indian soldiers on the lack of leadership. It was claimed that if a British officer died in combat, his Indian soldiers were left without the direction required for effective battle. The best way to summarise the military leadership of Indian soldiers is by acknowledging that it reflected broader ideas of Empire; Britain was the fatherly figure towards the childlike India. This was the case when it came to Indian soldiers and their officers, as it was seen to have created a unique 'Sahib and Sepoy' relationship. Therefore British officers formed a critical part of the martial races success on the battlefield and were portrayed as the guiding force to martial race military prowess (Omissi, 1994). Consequently, if a British officer died during combat, a Sikh (or other martial race) soldiers would lack the discipline required to fight effectively. British officers of the Indian Army would be trained to speak the language of the regiment and adopt the particular customs making them difficult to replace as training was significantly longer than a British officer in the British army.

By focusing on British leadership it reveals another challenge. Before the war, Indian soldiers could only become Viceroy Commissioned Officers (VCO). The VCO acted as a link between the British officer and the other ranks in an Indian regiment but only had authority over Indian soldiers. During World War One Indians were granted further concessions such as the ability to progress to officer rank. Indian soldiers recognised the importance of being promoted to an officer rank and acknowledged its importance: 'British rank has now been sanctioned for Indians. It is a matter for much congratulation that our Government has conceded this right to us' (letter 580, Omissi, 1999). This extract contradicts the martial race theory as it eliminates the need for British leadership; an idea which was constructed as essential.

External threats to the Sikh war effort presented further difficulties. The Ghadar Party was an organisation founded outside of India with the political goal of gaining the independence of India. They targeted soldiers in the First World War with the majority of the focus on attempting to get Sikhs to rebel. To insight unrest similar themes of the martial race discourse were used. For example, they used the 'revolution within Sikh and Punjabi religious and literary tales of masculinity, martyrdom and self-sacrifice' (Singh, 2014a, p. 349). An extract from a Ghadar leaflet reflects this: 'You sons of the Guru are Singhs, and there is much oppression. Where are your lion-like traits?' (Singh, 2014a). This use of language is not dissimilar to that used by British writers of the Sikh martial race theory. Whilst nationalist politics was largely absent from soldiers' letters, the problem was that soldiers were aware of the Ghadar party's presence (Singh, 2014a). One soldier wrote that the Ghadar movement had tainted British views of Sikhs (letter 280, Omissi, 1999). Although the Sikhs remained loyal during the war political movements began to understand the political uses of the warrior Sikh. This was problematic as 'martial' language was being used for anti-British purposes. What is important to note is that martial language was used against its creator. Soldiers recognised the impact of the Ghadar movements on the political position of Sikh within empire.

Sikh soldiers' letters from Europe demonstrate an awareness of their identity while simultaneously displaying various challenges to the maintenance of the martial races theory during the First World War. This chapter has focused on letters which posed a threat to the martial identity. The conditions of the war meant there was a break-down in the 'war-like' identity of soldiers resulting in many wishing to leave and self-harm. The leadership of the martial races was also uncertain with the heavy losses of British officers. In short, the letters show a disconnect from the martial race discourse and a need for the British military to address sikh problems during the war.

The martial races in the Middle East

The Sikh letters shed light on the issues surrounding the martial race theory from a Subaltern viewpoint. Unfortunately, the equivalent sources from other fronts have not survived (Das, 2011). It is important to understand the changes in martiality within the Middle Eastern front, because the majority of the changes took place in the latter half of the war. The challenges on the Middle-Eastern and Western fronts share some commonalities. For instance, by 1915 only a small Indian presence remained in Europe and the infantry units had moved to support the other fronts. There are also frequent themes such as self-inflicted wounds and low morale, as even British officers began to raise questions of Sikh martiality. The evidence here is drawn from the Mesopotamia and Gallipoli campaigns in order to support the argument that ideas of Sikh martiality were failing.

Kitchen sums up the importance of the Indian contribution outside the Western Front: 'The Indian army's combat record during the war has been coloured almost entirely by the experiences of Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' sent to Mesopotamia in 1914' (2014, p.183). The most famous battle in which IEF D engaged was the Siege of Kut-al-Amara, which lasted from 3rd December 1915 to 29th April 1916. The 6th Indian Division, commanded by Charles Townshend, had garrisoned at the town Kut which was sieged by the Ottomans until they surrendered (Gardner, 2004). The defeat was seen as an embarrassment as the British had lost to what they saw as a vastly inferior foe (Gardner, 2015). Townshend ultimately blamed the failure on his troops. However academics have debated whether Townshend's conclusions were justified. Nevertheless it is important to understand the ways in which ideas of martiality were challenged.

The surrender after the Siege of Kut helps us to understand why the war challenged martiality. Early military ethnographers believed that martial soldiers were able to fight western imperial armies. From the 1880's and onwards, the communities that were labelled martial lived up to their discourse by performing an effective role in the subcontinent. These

performances strengthened martial race discourse by acting as empirical evidence. An example for Sikhs is the Battle of Sharagarhi in 1896, in which twenty-one Sikhs fought to the death defending a British outpost against thousands of Afghans (Lunt, 1977). These stories added to the contemporary martial race publications and ultimately reinforced these ideas (MacMunn, 1933). It is difficult to measure how important these stories impacted upon British views, but it is clear that soldiers had preconceptions. A direct quote from a British soldier exemplifies this point: Richard Empson states 'the Sikhs are born soldiers. They can beat our army at every single thing - guns, signalling, & every trick.'¹⁰ Despite not being an officer of an Indian regiment, he believed that Sikh soldiers possessed these abilities. While Indian soldiers at Kut were not exclusively Sikh, their defeat was damaging to the 'martial race' soldiers' reputation.

Similar to the Western Front, the conditions in Mesopotamia affected morale. This was partly due to lack of adequate supplies for the soldiers (Gardner, 2012). The food, for example, arrived spoiled due to the heat and soldiers lacked essential supplies such as clothes, tents and blankets. The food was problematic as they had to provide a selective diet for particular castes and religions. These challenges led to lack of food and nutritional deficiencies for India soldiers resulting in over 11,000 Indians contracting scurvy in the last half of 1916 (Gardner, 2012). To make things worse only one medical vessel was available to transfer soldiers. Similar to the Western Front, British officers had a high mortality rate. These problems only intensified during the Siege of Kut as they led to a small number of soldiers resorting to self-harm and even desertion. Although soldiers remained largely loyal, the horrific conditions shattered pre-war notions of martiality.

The papers of Reginald Savory, an Officer of the 14th Sikhs in the Gallipoli campaign, shed light on Sikh identity in the Middle East (Reginald Savory, Private Papers, National Army Museum). His papers are some of the few British primary sources which discuss Sikhism

¹⁰ Empson, Richard, H, W, M. *Private papers*. Imperial War Museum: Documents 3077.

during the war in detail and, like all British officers of Sikh regiments, he was conscious of Sikh customs. Savory recalls this in a discussion with his Commander about growing a beard in order to fit in with his regiment. This is notable because religious obedience was a requirement for Sikhs in the army. The religious understanding of Sikhs by their officers is key to understanding the challenges and changes of the martial race theory during the war.

Savory's papers suggest that British officers' perceptions of the Sikh martial race theory began to change during the war. This was because of the apparent rejection of oriental constructions of Sikhs. In a letter home to his mother, Savory states 'there was some twaddle in the Daily Graphic about Sikhs crawling on their stomachs, with knives in their mouths, tracking snipers: all rot'.¹¹ This statement suggests a rejection of the martial race construction of Sikhs which was what the Daily Graphic was trying to depict. Savory was also critical of high command since he attributes the poor performance of Sikhs on deficient tactics, rather than the soldiers being inept. These views differ from the beliefs of British commanders such as Townshend. While Savory and Townshend display the weaknesses in martiality, their beliefs as to why the martial race theory failed are dissimilar. In broad terms, Townshend believed they had failed to live up to their martial billing, while Savory rejected the martial constructions of them.

Savory's personal papers reveal other problems facing soldiers. He stated that heavy losses to the sister battalions (35th and 47th Sikhs), which suffered high casualties, affected morale. He also wrote in detail about specific events affecting soldiers' day to day lives. He stated that Subedar-Major Hardom Singh of Patiala was a bad influence on the men, labelling him a coward for being evacuated for what Savory felt was a self-inflicted wound. He also commented on the politics of the men within his camp. For example, Subedar

¹¹ Savory, Reginald. *Private Papers* (Letter 11). National Army Museum: 7603-93-1-18, Box 16305.

Sundar Singh was murdered. Savory believed 'he had his enemies' and the culprit who left a bomb near his bed was never found. Ultimately, he felt the same issues of low morale were important. Savory also gives an insight into the politics of service and how events in the camp caused anxieties amongst soldiers and potential recruits.

In summary, this chapter has highlighted the shortcomings of the martial race theory during the First World War. Similar themes occur across both fronts. One of the main tenets of martiality was loyalty however despite this sense of loyalty, other parts of martiality began to fail. The Sikhs were constructed as India's finest soldiers yet they did not live up this billing. Another notable point was the falling of morale. The war mentality shattered some Sikhs' sense of martial spirit showing that they were no different to the other non-martial races of India. The loss at Kut considerably dented their war-like credentials. Alongside all these problems the recruitment system was failing. As chapter three will explore, the martial race system was rewritten in response to the war. On a side note, Sikh soldiers demonstrated in their letters that they were aware of the Sikh martial identity. Savory demonstrated that even British officers became aware of the failings. Chapter three will show these challenges were considerable enough for ideas of martiality to be rewritten in response to the growing demands of the war.

Chapter three: The changing face of martiality

The previous chapter focused on the challenges facing the martial races theory during the First World War. This chapter looks at the changes made to deal with these difficulties. It points out that during the war substantial changes were made to the Sikh martial race theory. In order to deal with the pressures of the war, the British Raj put in place a number of measures to increase recruitment. To point out the significant changes this chapter draws heavily from the Indian Army Compendia of Orders (IAO). The first change was to widen the recruitment base by adding 'new' martial races. The second was to incorporate local elites in Punjab to help sustain recruitment. The chapter points out that at first, the British Raj was not sure how to deal with problems in India the war was causing. However, towards the end an efficient system was put in place to address the pressures of the war.

Changes in Army and Recruitment

The First World War had a significant impact on the nuances of the martial races theory. The best explanation to why these changes took place is Sheffield's argument that the British leadership went through a 'bloody learning curve' during the war (2002, p.xvii). His case is built on the idea that the type of warfare was new at the time, and only towards the end did the military leadership learn the tactics required for victory. In some ways, the colonial state learnt more about the complexities of the martial race communities during the War. Roy (2012) supports this argument pointing out the army evolved over the course of the war; from an imperial police force into a professional army. This chapter will show the First World War was a 'learning curve' about the limits of martial race recruitment. Ideas of martiality were being rewritten to deal with the difficulties Sikhs faced.

Wartime measures for recruitment had been put in place before, which set a precedent. The Second Afghan War (1878-1880), in the words of Hudson, 'certainly showed some radical defects in the organisation of the Indian army' (1919, p.3). This war was one of the drivers

for reforming the recruitment system based on the 'martial races' of India. It had shown the adaptability of the military as it introduced emergency war-time measures. These were material rewards such as a bonus of twenty-five rupees which was given on enlistment and a further twenty-five after three years of service (Hudson, 1919). After all military recruitment policy in India was always shaped by imperial requirements (Rand & Wagner, 2012). Similar changes would have to be made in order to sustain the martial race recruitment during the First World War.

Havelock Hudson, who served as a commander in France in the First World War before becoming the Adjutant General of India in 1917, stated that 'The introduction of any system of compulsory service involves very grave political considerations' (1916, p.8). He warned that civil unrest would be inevitable if conscription were to be used in India. His report included the different ways in which more Indian's could be recruited if the pressures of the war increased. While compulsory service was not possible a complex system could be created to work around the issue. The system still placed the 'martial races' at the centre of war service by stating, 'On this principle, from a Province like the Punjab our demand would, for the most part, be for fighting men; from Assam and Madras for labourers' (1916, p.9). The limitations on recruitment highlighted the parameters of colonial rule in India. The martial race ideas were so integral that even in times of crisis, military officials would work to expand rather than replace them.

The war-time measures that were put in place expanded ideas of martiality. The pre-war martial race recruitment guidelines would be rewritten. A critical change was to hire permanent Indian recruitment staff. The state would hire ex-servicemen or those formerly formally employed by the government. They would provide an essential link between the local population and military. To improve recruitment further a bonus structure was put in place for meeting enlistment targets. For example, a grant of three rupees would be paid for every recruit, also for every 114 recruits, a recruitment officer would be promoted (IAO, 1919). Omissi (1994) argues that these officials would resort to intimidation and kidnap to

get the local population to enlist. The reasons behind this were high targets from the local authority and personal gain. The inclusion of local Indians changed the dynamic of British recruitment parties selecting soldiers. Local officials were more efficient in understanding how to increase the recruitment.

The changes in the military structure were also critical in improving recruitment. This meant altering the war service expected from soldiers, such as the short service scheme. Shorter serviced altered pre-war ideas, as Roy (2012) argues before 1914 soldiers were expected to serve in the military for life. Long and stable service was the norm for soldiers because they had been recruited from the same castes for generations. The high demand for soldiers saw these traditional recruitment sources dry up. Part of the 'learning' process was that potential recruits outside the pre-war bases did not see military service as a long-term future. The shorter policy would attract many Punjabis when the harvest seasons were over. Martial race ideas of long term service had to be abandoned to improve recruitment. Another contentious issue was colonial anxiety about training large numbers of the rural population, potentially giving them the means to overthrow the Government. Short term contracts demonstrated the ability of the state to alter pre-war ideas to facilitate the needs of the war (Roy. 2013). Shorter term service is a noteworthy shift from the pre-war ideas. Lifelong military service was perceived by soldiers as important to the community because it was constructed around a sense of regional, caste and religious pride. Specifically loyalty was not only to the Raj, but also represented regimental pride (Roy, 2001). In practice, this means a Sikh regiment was serving to uphold the Sikh religion as well the Raj. Hence, the short service scheme had challenged this uniquely 'martial' identity, because it was built on financial gain and not community pride.

The short service scheme was essential during the war so recruitment could be expanded beyond the pre-war martial races. As Cohen (2006) argues, 'the war verified the warlike characteristics of the classes designated as "martial", it also demonstrated that other classes, given adequate training performed equally' (p.172). The British became aware that

their pre-1914 recruitment base was far too narrow. This was because the demands on regiments went from needing seventy-five new recruits per year during peace time to needing 100 per month during the war (Omissi, 1994). To broaden recruitment seventy-five 'new' communities that had previously not seen service were recruited. Cohen (1969) points out that opening up the recruitment pool gave opportunities to even the lowest castes. Previously non-martial communities such as the Mahars from Southern India found new opportunities as 51,233 combat troops were recruited from Madras. These changes directly affected the Sikh martial ideas. Pre-war Jatt Sikhs were the desired caste. The need for additional recruits opened up opportunities for the Mazabhis (low-caste Sikhs). Other Sikh 'non-martial' castes such as the Khatri, Mahtam and Baruia Sikhs were recruited (Omissi, 1994; Hudson, 1919). Cohen argues the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Michael O'Dwyer used this expansion to the advantage of the state. He did this by making a series of speeches goading the Jats to prove their worth over the low-caste Mazabhis. The demands of the war reshaped British ideas on martiality.

The physical side of martiality also changed during the war. For Sikhs to enlist, they had to meet height and chest measurements. These checks were used across all martial races, but were significantly varied. For example, Gurkhas did not have strict checks on height. However, for Sikhs, much emphasis was placed on their physical attributes. They were required to be five foot eight inches (Omissi, 1994). These measures were relaxed in response to the war. For Sikhs, the standard requirement was initially shortened to five foot, six inches, then to five foot, three inches (Hudson, 1919). By April 1918 it was lowered to five foot, two inches across all regiments. The age limit was also lifted so men up to the age of thirty could enlist. While it may seem an inevitable response, the martial race theory was altering the idea of the imposing martial soldier.

Until this point, the chapter has outlined changes to recruitment, from reducing the physical requirements of recruits to expanding the origins of those recruited. These changes demonstrate the instability of martiality during the war. The main impact on recruitment

was the increase in material rewards. As these incentives were put in place an extensive amount of propaganda was used in Punjab to encourage soldiers to enlist. Hudson claimed that propaganda was produced 'especially when new concessions were granted' (1919, p.34). The lack of sources makes it difficult to gauge the importance of propaganda, Hudson's conclusion suggests the military believed they were important. It showed the 'learning curve' of the state as they were able to put in place changes to meet the demands of the war as *figure two* shows. The propaganda policy was not different as they understood it was the major factor in why Indians joined the army. So rather than basing martiality on religious pride, there was an acceptance by British Raj, military officials that material changes were more effective.

The majority of improvement in material rewards occurred in 1917. The first was to increase the pay of soldiers who had fought or still were fighting on the Western Front by twenty-five percent; only two cavalry regiments were stationed on the Western Front after 1915 (Kitchen, 2014). As chapter two highlights, this can be explained by the dreadful conditions. Other pay increases were put in place such as a fifty rupees bonus when soldiers enlisted (Hudson, 1919). The bonus structure best demonstrates the pragmatic nature because only twenty-five rupees was paid once passing the medical then the other twenty-five rupees when the war ended. When the war entered its fourth in 1918, the recruiting officers were permitted to make a larger initial payments or a full payment (IAO, 1919). The promise of land on return was often an incentive used by the colonial government. Provisions for soldiers were improved with increased pensions and payouts for the family if the soldier was killed in action. The introduction of the material rewards (as *figure two* demonstrates) correlates with a sharp increase in recruitment from 1917 onwards. The material changes transformed the dynamics of the martial race recruitment system. Now soldiers were being asked to join, rather than the selective pre-war process of recruiting.

Figure two: Recruitment of Sikhs

(Source: Roy, 2013, p. 1340)

Total number of Sikhs in the army in 1912	Number of Sikhs recruited between 1st August 1914 to 31st July 1915	Number of Sikhs recruited between 1st August 1915 to 31st July 1916	Number of Sikhs recruited between 1st August 1916 to 31st July 1917	Number of Sikhs recruited between 1st August 1917 to 31st July 1918	Number of Sikhs recruited between 1st August 1918 to 30th November 1918	Total number of Sikhs in the First World War
32,702	12,293	14,973	16,231	31,265	14,160	121,624

Alongside material rewards the army also attempted to improve the conditions for troops.

The first change was the implementation of free rations in 1917 (p.449, IAO). This concession, in particular, demonstrated the agency of the soldiers. A series of telegrams between the Viceroy and Secretary of State in late 1916 show the importance of these changes (Secret and Confidential Telegrams to India 1914-1916, British Library: L/MIL/3/2528). The series revealed that British officials at the highest levels were keen to ensure the conditions for soldiers were improved. The State was also anxious to reassure soldiers that the state would protect their domestic affairs. So the Raj made any interference with the internal affairs of soldiers an offence when they were on duty (Roy, 2013).

The most important change for ideas of martiality was the policy of Indianisation, which was a process of allowing Indian soldiers to be promoted to officer positions; the King's Commissioned Officer (KCO). Deshpande (2006) asserts that the practical implications of Indianisation would drive down military costs due to Indians having lower wages. Before the war Indianisation schemes did exist but were only for the Indian elites. An example was the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, who was an Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel in the First World War. However, during the war, a policy of Indianisation opened up the role to all soldiers. In 1917 ten positions would be reserved for Indian soldiers at Sandhurst to

become KCO's (Cohen, 2001). It is worth noting that these posts were not part of the political road to self-governance, they were to reward war-service and to have a more stable army (Omissi, 1994). The process of Indianisation had little impact during or after the war with only a minimal number of soldiers graduating. The process itself, however, challenged the very idea of the martial races theory. It broke the concept of British leadership being an essential component to the martial races theory since it accepted the leadership qualities of those from the martial races.

The pressures of the First World War were enough for the colonial state to make changes to the martial race recruitment theory. The changes made were all part of a learning curve for recruitment in India. As *figure two* suggests, it was not until the later part of the war the British began to meet the quotas that were set. The war-time changes such as increased pay and protection of domestic affairs were a part of why soldiers enlisted. The war-time measures were essential as the previous system was not meeting the demands of the war. The problem was that these changes challenged some key tenets of the martial races theory. The physical measures were relaxed alongside 'new' communities being considered fit for war service. Before the war, the martial races theory was put in place by the army to police the colonies. The war had reshaped it into a complex system capable of recruiting an Indian army to fight in a world war.

Colonial Punjab

Reforms that were made in colonial Punjab impacted the Sikh martial race theory. After all, during the war, Punjab effectively became a home front. This was because of the 683,149 combative troops recruited, 349,688 were from Punjab (Tai Yong, 2005). As the war progressed, the Government of Punjab introduced policies which would address the pressures of the war at home and accommodate locals. The result gave unprecedented influence to the local population in Punjab.

The First World War presented a series of challenges to the Indian soldier on service. The province of Punjab was no different. The pre-war colonial military system was doomed to fail in the initial years of the war. This was because the Government of India had only anticipated minimal involvement. At the outbreak of war, the Raj offered a maximum of two infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade. However, it soon became clear that India would make a far more significant contribution. As early as June 1915 over 80,000 combatant Indian soldiers were serving aboard.

The first issue to address in Punjab was the revolutionary movement known as the Ghadar Party. The party was started by Indians based in North America seeking to gain independence from British rule (Singh, 2014a). The Ghadar rebels saw the war as an opportunity to attempt to overthrow the British. The problem they faced was they had to travel from San Francisco where their printing press was based. As a result, the colonial state was tipped off about their arrival and placed officials at the ports ready to arrest them (Puri, 1980). Although many high-profile Ghadarites were captured and put on trial, some managed to escape. The rest were captured with the help of local elites and this curtailed Ghadari activity (Tai-Yong, 2005). Sikh religious leaders in particular labelled Ghadarites as apostates. Local loyal Sikhs also infiltrated Ghadar Party ranks and supplied the Government with the information to arrest them. This would not be the only time local elites were instrumental in helping the state. To end the threat in India, the Lahore Conspiracy trials began where many Ghadarites were imprisoned or executed. Gill (2014) points out that the remaining threat in North America was stopped because of America's entry into the war. The printing press in San Francisco was shut down by the American authorities, and by 1918 the threat had all but ended.

Due to the leadership of the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer, of Punjab between 1913 and 1919, the unrest in the Punjabi difficulties were addressed (Lloyd, 2010a). By the end of the war the pre-war recruitment system had been replaced with a complex system able to supply soldiers for the war effort. The main problem was the lack of troops. O'Dwyer

put in place a system to solve this with a much tighter civil-military cooperation, in what Tai-Yong (2005) argues was a 'closer link between the civil and military authorities in the province to stimulate and facilitate a greater output of manpower from the province' (p.109).

The previous system was problematic as once forty-one different recruiting parties were found in the same village. To prevent this, the Centralised Recruitment Board (CRB) was set up in Punjab. Recruiting areas were re-drawn to distribute recruiting parties better. The new system was also more flexible as there was no longer religious specific recruitment. So before Sikhs would only be hired by a Sikh recruitment officer. Now there was a 'martial race' recruiter looking for all recruits to meet quotas set by the CRB. The CRB worked alongside the already mentioned permanent recruitment staff. Tai-Yong (2005) argues what made this so successful was that the military had access to the Punjabi civil framework. They now had links to all parts of society down to the village and local religious leaders. This new system made it easier for Indians to be incorporated in the war-time recruitment system.

In the later years of the war the Punjabi Government began to rely on locals as they once did to help eliminate the Ghadar threat. The majority of the changes thus far were universal. They helped ensure the survival of the Sikh martial race theory as well as other martial identities. The incorporation of local elites effectively ensured this martial identity would survive the war. In the case of the Sikh martial race theory, this was done in cooperation with Sikh elites. Their support was critical in ensuring Sikhs would continue to enlist. In return for their the support the state rewarded them with patronage. Also like they soldiers the war made them conscious of their role within the Indian Empire.

The Sikh elites had already been used to help deal with the Ghadar threat. During the war the state was able to gain the support of influential Sikh leaders in India to help recruitment. The prominent Sikh families such as the Ramgharias, Shindhanwalias, Ahluwalias, Majithas, Bagarians and Bedis all encouraged Sikhs to enlist (Tai-Yong, 2005).

Even a distant descendant of Guru Nanak (1st Guru of Sikhism) used his influence to encourage Sikhs to enlist. These families were part of an old but established aristocracy in Punjab. They had an impact on the local population the British Raj could not replicate.

Alongside the local leaders and landowners, members of Sikh/Punjabi royalty were incorporated into the war effort. The Maharaja of Patiala offered his personal services, despite the state of Patiala being a Princely state free from British rule. He served on the war committee in France as an honorary member. The Maharaja contributed to the war effort with money and war materials such as vehicles (Leigh, 1922). It was also estimated that fifteen percent of adult males in Patiala enlisted. The Maharaja's best service to the Raj was his endorsement. He toured Punjab encouraging enlistment. In one of his many speeches he claimed:

the brave Sikh nation, to whom I am proud to belong and which looks upon me as its leader, regards it as one of the most important principles of its faith to unstintingly shed its blood for the honour of the British Flag (Bhupindra Singh, 1920, p.9).

The charismatic Maharaja's statement sought to make links between Sikhs and British, creating a sense that this was a joint war. The speech whether intentional or not is heavily plagiarised martial race discourse. The local elites used this language alongside their influence to help drive recruitment and loyalty during the war. As figure two has shown, when local elites became part of the recruitment system, Sikh enlistment dramatically increased. By incorporating these influential local figures, an appeal could be made to all sections of society.

The British Raj needed to make essential alterations to the way in which it recruited. The pre-war martial race system proved inadequate. So during the war there was an expansion of those considered as martial races. This resulted in widening the recruitment pool and increasing material rewards. However, these changes still were not enough. Changes to colonial Punjab were the only solution. In colonial Punjab, Sikh elites became a major part

of the war effort. They also had benefited greatly from State patronage during the war. As Mazumder (2003) argues it was this disproportionate investment which maintained colonial rule. Letters from Colonial Punjab to soldiers showed an astute awareness of the Sikh martial identity. The war then also gave a greater martial race awareness among the Sikh elites because they became integral the Sikh martial race identity during the war. They were pushing ideas of loyalty and honour for the state. The next chapter will show this awareness grew into post-war agitation.

Chapter four: Restabilising the Sikh martial race theory

So much has been written of the Gurkha and the Sikh that officers who pass their lives with other classes of the Indian Army are tired of listening to their praises.

(Candler, 1919, p.1)

The First World War presented a significant challenge to the Sikh martial race theory. This thesis has shown that in many respects soldiers failed to live up to their pre-war martial billing. Sikh soldiers' letters demonstrated that the horrific conditions affected the morale of a large section of Sikhs, to the extent that even British officers began to question the martial construction of Sikhs. However, in one respect martiality was successful, because 88,000 Sikhs were recruited during war. This was due to reforming the ideas of martiality and by 1916 it had been completely reshaped. This section will outline how the martial races theory survived the war. The main point is that in the post-war era there was a new found martial race political identity. Communities that were martial began to understand their prominent position within the Raj and they used this identity to gain concessions. In short, the reason why the army returned to pre-war levels is that the martial communities wanted that to happen, since they benefitted most from this.

Post-war Crisis

The First World War had reached every section of the Sikh community in India from the 'high' caste Jats to 'low' caste Mazhbis. It is estimated that between thirty to fifty percent of young male Jat Sikhs enlisted, moreover, that one in fourteen Sikh males served in the military during the war (Omissi, 1994; Tai-Yong, 2005). Despite these pressures there remained a strong relationship between the Sikhs and the state. Kerr (2001) argued that from 1849-1919, Anglo-Sikh relations were at their highest, but after 1920 the partnership began to breakdown. Academics (Fox, 1985; Tai-Yong, 1995) argue this was due to the development of Sikh communal awareness. Tai-Yong (1995) downplays the role of the war

as a site in which this consciousness was fostered claiming it was brewing since the 1880's. While this is partly true, as chapters two and three demonstrate, imperial negotiations were taking place to appease Sikhs in order to gain further support. So the martial race theory was the middle ground for both sides to discuss their requirements. Once the war ended, Sikh awareness had reached an all-time high, which Fox (1985) claims was the 'Third Sikh War'.¹²

There were three main causes of the 'Third Sikh War'. The first was that the local economy of Punjab was in turmoil, which resulted in mass price rises; for instance, wheat costs soared by forty-seven percent between 1914-1918 (Tai-Ying, 2004). Consequently, all sections of society began to suffer due to the post-war crash. The second was the mass demobilisation of the army back to pre-war levels (Omissi, 1994). This left many unemployed and caused resentment towards the state. After all martiality had been altered in order to increase recruitment, now it was becoming restrictive once again. The final and most important factor was the political motivations of Sikhs, seeking religious autonomy from the Raj, as imperial officials continued to control the functioning of Sikh religious shrines.

The increasing tensions led the colonial government to pass the Rowlatt Act in early 1919. In broad terms, it was an extension of the wartime measures that allowed the state to imprison suspected anti-imperial agitators. Indian politicians resented the measure as it broke post-war promises, and was a factor in Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent campaign against the British (Lloyd, 2010b). This caused rural and urban populations to protest. Punjab in particular was problematic and the then Lieutenant-Governor Michael O'Dwyer introduced a form of martial law in response (McLain, 2014). Curfews were set and mass

¹² Fox labelled this the Third Sikh War because there had already been two Anglo-Sikh wars. The first between 1845-46 and the second 1848-49 for more on the wars see: Chatterjee (2012)

gatherings were banned. These powers were used in Amritsar to deport two local nationalist leaders, which triggered mass unrest across the region (Wagner, 2016). The result of the riots was that five Europeans were killed by protesters, and the colonial response was aggression towards the local population. Therefore, the Rowlett Act fuelled rural aggression against the state.

The culmination of the above factors resulted in the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, known as the Amritsar Massacre, on 13th April 1919. The Massacre took place at the Golden Temple in Amritsar against anti-government protesters, although on the same day the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi was taking place, which resulted in numerous bystanders being caught in the crossfire. Due to colonial anxieties during the period, General Reginald Dyer and his soldiers were part of the colonial effort to stop anti-British protests. The ensuing violence used by the colonial troops against the protesters included '1,650 bullets fired by the colonial troops over the duration of ten minutes' (Wagner, 2016, p.186): this response made the event notorious in colonial history, leading many historians to label it 'imperial terrorism' (Lloyd, 2010a). Officially it was reported that 379 were killed with 1200 wounded at Amritsar (Tai-Yong, 2005). Subsequently, there were reports of Sikh and Muslim soldiers being disobedient (Tai-Yong, 2005) demonstrating the event had a significant impact on Indian consciousness in the army.

Following the Amritsar Massacre, the years 1920-1925 saw a sustained anti-government stance from influential Sikh leaders. While it was not exclusively a result of the Amritsar Massacre, anti-British tensions among the Sikh community were becoming increasing problematic. This culminated through the Gurdwara Reform Movement known as the Akali Movement; their aim was to gain control of Sikh religious shrines (Tai-Yong, 2005). A particularly contentious reason was the control of the Golden Temple: the Sikhs holiest shrine, which was managed by officials appointed by the British Raj. This was done after Punjab was annexed in 1849 by the EIC to stop it becoming a political centre of rebellion (Tai-Yong, 1995). Sikh leaders of the Akali movement wanted official control of the temple

as it would be a fulfilment of religious aspirations. To achieve this political aim a committee known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was set up as political entity to negotiate. The Nankana Massacre in 1920, where 130 Sikhs were killed, caused Sikh led anti-British movements to become hostile (Mazumder, 2003; Tai-Yong, 1995). In many ways, it was the turning point in Anglo-Sikh relations.

The Sikh troubles in Punjab had become increasingly problematic by 1922 (Agitation Becoming a Danger, *Daily Mail*, 27 Oct 1922). The dangers of the agitation were reported on by British newspapers; *The Times* reported in 1923 that Sikhs of the Akali movement had been sending threats to Gurdwara officials to cede control of the shrine (Another Sikh Shrine Dispute, *Times*, 19 Feb 1923). Unlike the Ghadar movement, the Akali threat was a considerably greater problem, due to the political elites of Sikhism no longer siding with imperial officials (Mazumder, 2003). The crime statistics demonstrated the impact of the Akali movement as between 1920 – 1925 30,000 Sikhs suffered arrest, 400 were killed, and collectively over 1.5 million rupees of fines were given out (Fox, 1985, p.79). Fox (1985) argues that the highly militarised identity the British Raj had fostered for Sikhs was now being used against them by ex-soldiers that were once loyal to the state.

This rural agitation had an impact on Sikh martial race theory. This was because the anti-British movement were being sustained by the Jat Sikh peasantry (Tai-Yong, 1995), who were the 'most' martial caste of Sikhism. Government officials became progressively concerned with Sikh loyalty in the army, to the extent that threats were placed on Sikh ex-servicemen that their pensions would be removed if they rebelled. Villages sympathetic to the Akali's were blacklisted for military recruitment (Mazumder, 2003). As Mazumder (2003) argues in his monograph *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*, the Indian army was integral to the making of Punjab, these troubles had the reverse effect; Sikh politics began to affect military policy.

The Government of Punjab yielded to the demands of the Akali movement with the passing of the Gurdwara Act, in July 1925. In effect, the ban on the Akalis was lifted, with full,

sovereign control of Gudwaras. This signalled an end to the impasse between the Sikhs and colonial state. The act was integral to the survival of the Sikh martial race theory. This was because it ensured the long-term support of Sikhs for the colonial state. As Tai-Yong (2005) put forward, the government aimed to appease the Sikhs, because of their strategic importance to the stability of the Indian Empire.

The colonial government were pragmatic in their approach to dealing with Sikh unrest. What it does show is awareness from Sikhs about their strategic importance to the Raj. As Tai-Yong (1995) points out if the sole aim was to eliminate the Sikh threat, then the response would have been to continue to use strong-arm tactics as they did at Amritsar. Instead, negotiations took place to reconcile the Sikh community. The outcome was a form of autonomy for Sikhs. What can be drawn from this is that pre-war martial races such as the Sikhs could not simply be replaced. The war served as a place to enhance their bargaining position, while allowing them to be conscious of their position.

Reconstructing the Sikh martial race theory

After the Armistice, there was a substantial demobilisation period. The number of combatant soldiers was reduced from 500,000 in 1918 to 120,000 in 1923 (Omissi, 1994). For all the changes made during the First World War the Sikh army effectively returned to the pre-war martial race system. In fact, Omissi (1994) argued that the North Indian bias was more profound after the war than it was in 1914. These statistics raise further questions as to how and why the army reverted to a system which had shown cracks in the First World War and only survived because of substantial changes. The first reason was that they had created such a complex military system in Punjab, that quite simply no other community could fulfil the role as a martial race. The other reason was the pressure from martial race communities to enjoy the fruits of favourable employment still. The way in which the colonial Government was able to re-establish Sikhs as a martial race was through vigorous colonial discourse. In many ways it re-wrote Sikh history, depicting them as loyal subjects despite the post-war agitation.

This was not the first time the government attempted to rewrite the Indian experience in the First World War. The pressures of the war meant that they had to rewrite the events as they were happening. In 1917 Rudyard Kipling, re-wrote soldiers letters that detailed their experiences. They were initially published in the American weekly paper *The Saturday Evening Post* and then republished in the London *Morning Post* (Singh, 2014b). Singh points out, 'It emerges that he was tasked with writing a propaganda piece by the British Military Intelligence' (p.69). It is then clear that Government were anxious about portraying a particular view of the Indian war experience.

After the war's conclusion, a spate of literature was published to re-assert the way in which the Colonial Government wanted the Indian war contribution to be understood. Chapter two outlined how the Indian army's performance was criticised during the war. McLain (2014) argues that in the official history of the war: *Military Operations in France and Belgium* looked harshly at the Indian contribution, to make it appear like an imperial scapegoat. The death of British officers was a predominant theme, as Indian soldiers without their leader simply became 'children'. The defeat in Mesopotamia was especially damaging to their reputation as Indian regiments made up the bulk of the force. As Gardner (2015) points out the campaign in Mesopotamia damaged the fighting prestige of the British military due to losing to what was perceived as an inferior enemy. Regardless of these perceived failings, the British Raj would work hard to maintain the integrity of the Indian Army, moreover the martial races. This is because the martial races of India in 1918 were still the cornerstone of the Imperial rule of India.

Whereas the Indian army may have faced criticism, the martial races theory was not cited as the problem. Morton-Jack's (2014) book *The Indian Army on the Western Front* has revised the view of the Indian army's performance on the Western Front stating they did perform the task required of filling the gaps in the trench line. From a military point of view the performance was creditable when considering it was not trained or equipped for European warfare. However, Morton-Jack overstates his point that British commanders were

happy with the army's performance. As this thesis points out, the official histories were not so kind. The majority of these positive depictions were directed at towards the martial races.

Former officers' publications shed light on the praise towards the martial races. An example is James Willcocks, the commanding of the Indian Expeditionary Force in France from 1914-1915. Despite the range of problems Willcocks stated:

The Sikhs are a fighting race, the Khalsa or chosen people as they style themselves. Of all Indian soldiers I know the Sikh the best and have served with him in every imaginable condition. He does not so readily imbibe discipline as many of the other classes in the Army. He has grievances born of his own imagination, and can be troublesome when it is most inconvenient for him to be so, but he is a fine manly soldier, will share your trials with genuine good humour, and can always save something in cash out of nothing. In France some of the first fighting by Indians was done by Sikhs, as I shall relate. My own motto with Sikhs is to give them all they deserve, and we owe them much, but not to spoil and pamper them. (p.56)

The key part to take away from this statement is that it mirrors the early martial race discourse which appeared in the late 18th century. To reiterate my point, chapter two highlighted the obvious problems of the Sikh martial race theory, however, the post-war narrative was to reconstruct their contribution, because of their strategic importance to imperial rule.

There is further evidence to suggest the Sikh contribution was reconstructed after the war. Omissi claimed the 'martial race discourse also regained its vigour' after the war (1994, p.41). In the case of the Sikhs much was written to retrench the idea of Sikhism and martiality. The best example of this was the re-writing of the martial race handbooks. For example, A. E. Barstow's (1928) *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Sikhs*. It was effectively a mirror of the early martial race discourse on Sikhs. The only change was addressing the

problematic anti-British movements. Singh (2014b) best outlines the books rationale for this, 'for Barstow, the manly qualities of Sikhs came to be seen as a double-edged sword. The Sikh was naturally given to sedition unless properly channelled in military service' (p.23). In essence, it stuck to the basic premise of the 'pure' Sikh being the better soldier. Sikhs that reverted to Hinduism were seen as prone to Bolshevism and rebellion (Singh, 2014b). The military even took this a step further writing military histories reconstructing the Sikh service in the First World War. Examples are *The 14th King George's Own Sikhs the 1st Battalion (K.G.O.) (Ferozepore Sikhs)* by Talbort and *Regimental history of the 45th Rattray's Sikhs: during the Great War and after, 1914-1921* by R. H. Anderson. These books glorified Sikh war service. In the words of Anderson (1925), 'They (the 45th Sikhs) never lost a yard of trench' (p.1). These books exclusively draw out the positives of the First World War. These post-war documents were written by the military to recast Sikhism into the pre-war martial race mould. Ultimately, the Sikh contribution to the First World War was re-written. So despite substantial problems the Sikhs once again in the eyes of the military were the stalwarts of Empire.

The language used in popular post-war publications emulated the military discourse. The statement by Candler (1919) at the start of this chapter illustrates the point. He stated that Sikhs and Gurkhas receive so much praise that the other martial races of India are often forgotten. The irony of this statement is that it was done purposely to re-assert Sikhs as a martial race. Colonial discourse on Sikhs is full with links to Sikhism and war service, and Candler's book was no different, 'It has often been said that the Indian Army has kept Sikhism alive' (p.26). It is clear that even in the metropole the martial identity of the Sikh was still important to recast.

George MacMunn's (1933) *The Martial Races of India* was written in late colonial India, which Rand (2011) argued that it was a 'culmination' of years of discourse on martiality, and suggests that because it was largely narrative, therefore, its readership was a public audience rather than for military use. Again Sikhs would occupy a large part of the book as

MacMunn dedicates a whole chapter to the 'Story of the Sikhs' (1933, p.118). He outlines what thoughts are evoked when British citizens hear the word Sikh;

'The term Sikh is a name to conjure with in the minds of the ordinary British citizen. It brings memories of many wars in which the Sikh soldier has covered himself with glory, and the public picture, rightly enough, a tall, often hook-nosed and heavily bearded man. The British memory will be right' (p.251).

The statement reflects an idealistic view of the colonial Sikh soldier. It is also a far cry from the war-time failings and the post-war problems. Rand and Wagner (2012) argue that at this point that MacMunn's book was idealised and outdated. It also ignored the martial race expansion during the First World War. However, the important point to take away from MacMunn's book is not the inaccuracies but what he is trying to construct; the narrative of reasserting Sikhs as a martial race.

After the war, the grand narrative from the military and popular publications recast Sikhs back in the imperial system as a martial race. This section has demonstrated the mass post-war literature focused on Sikh successes during the First World War. No one illustrates this point better than the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab in post-war India, McLain outlined O'Dwyer's feelings at a post-war meeting with Indian nationalists that 'his province had been doing all the fighting while the "educated classes" of Bengal and similarly effete Bihar and Orissa did nothing but try to exploit the sacrifices of the martial races' (p.52). The irony is that O'Dwyer would not grant concessions to Punjabis and instead imposed martial law. Nonetheless, these feelings show the martial races theory was a complex system beyond a recruitment system or even a cheap imperial police force. Their presence legitimised the British Raj. Its discourse was powerful enough to engulf even the largest of colonial negatives.

Impact of the First World War on the Sikh martial race theory

So far this thesis has shown the inconsistencies of the martial race theory and the First World War. Changes were then made to the martial race theory to meet the demands of the war. After the war, the martial race recruitment doctrine had returned to its pre-war vigour. In fact, as the preceding sections suggest it was more codified than ever before. So what was the impact of the war? From a military point of view very little. However, politically it created a martial race consciousness. In summary, Sikhs became even more aware of the advantages of being a martial race. While, this was evident during the during the war, afterwards Sikhs were able to achieve political freedoms. Their privileged position in the army allowed them to gain political concessions, which Indian nationalist politicians failed to do until 1947.

Numerous academics (Fox, 1985; Mazumder, 2003; Streets; 2004; Roy, 2001) have suggested that communities constructed as martial races used the identity to their advantage. The Sikh martial race theory was no different. What is worth mentioning is that the martial races theory affected all levels of society. From employment opportunities for Mazahbis to Sikh elites who were given patronage by the British Raj. Religious leaders used it as a place to reproduce the reformed religious ideology from late 1880's and onwards. As such it is evident the martial race theory had the potential to affect all sections of Sikh society. Its impact on Sikh society led Roy (2001) to argue that it was an alien identity. Roy's notion is a little simplistic, because as Streets (2004) points out Sikhs actively accepted martiality for their advantage, and it was a jointly produced enterprise.

From a purely statistical point of view, it would appear that ideas of martiality fell among Sikhs. The percentage of Sikhs in the army stood at twenty in 1912, and then dropped to twelve percent in 1925, to an all-time low of ten percent by 1942 (Singh, 2014b, p.23). The figures are explained by Kerr (2001) that Anglo-Sikh relations in the years of British rule between 1925-1947 were driven by mutual self-interest. Despite, the falling number, they

still supported the British Raj and the martial races theory would act as a meeting point for both parties. However, the martial race theory accommodated any problems for both sides as the partnership remained until 1947.

There are two sets of evidence to support the argument that martial race consciousness took place. The first was a call for greater representation. During the First World War, Sikh elites requested that thirty percent of seats should be reserved for them in the democratic elections of Punjab after the war (Omissi, 2012). Even in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, there were recommendations for separate elections. After the war, Sikhs were only granted twenty percent of the seats, and although this did not match the request, it was still a significant concession for one of India's smallest communities. More importantly was the passing of Gurdwara Act in 1925, which ended British authority over the Sikh religion. It gave Sikhs political freedom to shape the region. They also gained control of the money received at the shrines. So in theory, they received a form of economic and political freedom. Hence why this drew loyalty, it was advantageous for both groups. To put this in perspective during imperial rule, the Sikh community suffered heavy losses of soldiers during World War One and suffered at the hands of state at the Amritsar Massacre in 1919, which resulted in five years of anti-British protest. One would expect the relationship to remain turbulent, but not in the case of the Anglo-Sikh relations, which was partly due to the martial races theory. The political concessions had re-accommodated Sikhs back into Empire and perhaps shows the political ability of the Raj to maintain imperial rule. Although it was not the only reason, the martial races theory played a significant role in ensuring close Anglo-Sikh relations until independence. Even the British had worked hard to re-affirm their military position in the metropole. Being able to gain these concessions showed a keen awareness not seen before the war.

These concessions were significant milestones for the Sikh community, in which the martial race theory played a key role. Clearly, during the war, India's martial races were granted concessions which greatly benefitted them. The problem for historians always has been the

lack of sources on India's martial races. After all, the vast majority of soldiers were illiterate. Without sources to compare to war-time letters, it is hard to understand how day to day martiality had changed. Though, one thing is clear, which is the martial race consciousness. It gave the martial races political power rather than just favoured recruitment. This is best seen in a letter titled *Address on behalf of the Martial races of the Punjab* in 1928. A short extract of the letter helps us understand the purpose:

In this connection we desire to urge that the advantage of the franchise conferred on us can only be fully realised by us, provided also that we are given the opportunity of separate electorates. Without a separate electorate, the benefit given to us is but a half measure and we therefore ask for separate electorates for all those who enjoy soldiers franchise. (Address on behalf of the Martial races of the Punjab, 1928)

This letter was signed by fifty-four of India's 'martial races' all from different castes and religions united under the martial race banner. This shows an astute awareness of the martial race community protecting their interests. It indicates that after the war the martial identity became increasingly political. The impact of the First World War on the Sikh martial race theory was small regarding military policy but paved the way for an increased amount of political concessions such as shown in this letter.

Post-war Colonial India presented a significant challenge to the Sikh martial race theory. In all, the relations between the British and Sikhs improved during the war. Conversely, after the war they reached an all time low. This section has shown that the martial race theory survived because of the ability of the state to accommodate Empire. The impact of the war was the increased political awareness which Sikhs and the 'martial races' used to their advantage. As this chapter has shown these difficulties were lost in the various post-war martial race discourse. The British Raj made considerable efforts to maintain martiality. This was because they had created a system in Indian reliant on a small population. The war saw the martial race communities understand this and as such they used ideas of martiality to their advantage.

Conclusion

Numerous academics have established that the martial race theory was a complex idea in colonial India. This thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how it can help the understanding of South Asian communities in colonial India. Martiality was a joint production, which means it contains firstly, the knowledge of the colonised and importantly, a site of negotiation. This negotiation is not always clear as the Indian sources do not exist to outline the details explicitly. To overcome this, the thesis used the First World War as the site that altered ideas of martiality. While the obvious answer would be that the changes were pragmatic in order to meet the demands of the war, which is partly true. There is a deeper negotiation that led to political unrest, then freedoms after the war. The thesis argued that numerous factors such as wartime conditions, low morale, and low recruitment led the colonial state to re-write ideas of martiality. The re-writing of these ideas was integral to solving the issues. As by the end of the war, India was producing the soldiers efficiently. These changes while efficient undermined the basic ideas of martiality such as recruiting from undesirable castes and lowering entry standards. All these changes did have a profound effect on Sikhs in Punjab. Due to it fostering a Sikh awareness that paved the way for social and political concessions that would be granted thirty years before the rest of India.

Moreover, this thesis has shown the impact of martiality beyond the military. The martial races theory affected an entire community. From the high caste Sikh elites to low caste Sikh soldiers they were all affected by the war and the martial race theory. On the one hand, it caused unrest in the immediate aftermath of the war, on the other, it was important for Sikhs in the road to gaining political freedoms. The 'martial Sikh' was the leverage that allowed Sikhs to negotiate their imperial relationship despite the post-war problems. This shows that martiality has the potential to shed light on matters beyond the military. Perhaps, there is a potential for future studies to use martial race discourse to shed light on the complexities of colonial communities in India.

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