Chapter 5

Construction of Regimental Loyalty

Why do men fight? Military philosophers from the dawn of civilization have tried to answer this question. Sun Tzu, the Chinese military theoretician, writing about 2400 years ago and viewing history 'from above', gave credit to the initiative of the leaders who drove the soldiers towards victory.¹ Xenophon (430-350 BC), the Greek military intellectual, harped on the mercenary aspects of the soldiers' service. But he acknowledged that tangible incentives were by themselves inadequate for propelling men forward. He hinted at an esprit de corps, an abstract identity, which bound men who were from different communities, but who had fought together over a long period.² The great Clausewitz focused on raising the combatants' passions and emotions in order to kill the enemy.³ But pugnacity had to be properly directed. For this, an organizational machinery was necessary. Early modern Europe had such an organizational format in the shape of regiments, which were lineal descendants of the Roman legions. The legions, as a framework for structuring armies, survived in the Byzantine empire and re-emerged in Europe with the Nassau brothers' reforms. The Spanish tercio was the last step in the conversion of the legions into regiments.⁴


Why did the Indian soldiers fight for the British? The officer-soldier relationship, along with the incentive structure constructed by the British, definitely constituted important components of the command structure. But these hardly offer adequate explanations.

Managerial expertise was the chief causative factor in enabling the British to structure a combat effective, loyal army from the subcontinent’s manpower. The British success was due to their ability to incorporate the sepoys into a professional combat organization, through the regimental structure. The regiment was one of the chief determinants of the standing armies which were the products of the ‘Military Revolution’ in the West. The regimental culture was imported from Europe and replaced the mansabdar structure, which was the basis of the pre colonial forces.

Under the mansabdar system, the chieftains were granted land for maintaining troops. They, and not the princes, were responsible for recruiting and disciplining the soldiers. This resulted in divided loyalty and frequent desertions. But the British were able to construct impersonal cohesive loyalty bonds with the help of the European regimental mechanism. However, the colonial scenario modified the process of regimental construction in ways, which can be traced back to the pre 1857 era.

---


Along with unit pride, Omer Bartov emphasizes the role of ideology in motivating men during war. The post Mughal polities exploited the religious fervour of the mercenary bands like the Nagas who were deployed as shock troops. However, the Company dissuaded from utilizing the military honour of such Sanyasi warriors. Since the British could not utilize nationalism in the construction of regimental pride for their Indian armed personnel, they tried to motivate the sepoys of the Bengal Army before 1857 by pandering to caste. The British officers paid deference to the rituals for fostering caste pride among the two high castes—the Brahmins and the Rajputs. To please these upper castes, the low castes were not enlisted. By 1852, 70% of the Bengal Army’s personnel were Purbiyas—the high castes of north India. As each regiment was composed of these two castes, drawn from more or less the same district, and constituting a brotherhood, it became impossible to instill discipline. The caste experiment collapsed with the Purbiya rebellion in 1857. The British then aimed to generate regimental ethos by constructing racial identities for the various groups who were dubbed ‘martial’ in late 19th century. Esprit de race became the secret of creating battlefield morale.

---


8 Jadunath Sarkar, Fall of the Mughal Empire, 1771-1788, vol. 3 (1938, reprint, New Delhi, 1991), pp. 15, 189.

This chapter attempts to chart the trajectory of the regiments’ evolution in the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny. The process of regimental construction involved two aspects. Different ‘warrior’ communities were constructed from the diverse groups which entered the Indian Army, and their community ethos was then amalgamated with the units’ ethos. In the 19th century, the British empire invented several ‘martial’ communities like the Scottish Highlanders and the Nigerian warriors by redefining cultural and tribal relations. Construction of the warrior communities in India is part of the same process. But the different contexts involved region specific modulations.

I

Construction of Group Identities

The British constructed several ‘martial’ communities from the subcontinent’s manpower and their group consciousness probably sustained them. The imperial belief was that the various agglomerations of people could be typologized under different racial communities on the basis of their biological origin, as well as on the basis of their varying social and cultural mores. For Major A.H. Bingley, the Jats and the Sikhs, despite their similar biological origin, constituted different races because of their different religions. So the British concept of racial community was a mixture of artificial policy inputs and primordial attachments.


This section focuses on the British policy of shaping the identities of the Gurkhas, the Rajputs and the Sikhs, as the share of these groups in the post 1859 army was considerable. Between 1885 and 1912, the percentage of these communities increased. For the Gurkhas, the increase was from 5% to 11.5%; for the Rajputs, from 6.7% to 7.7%; and for the Sikhs, from 13.5% to 22.5%. In absolute numbers, the increase was greatest for the Sikhs. From 17,774 their number rose to 32,702 men, while the Rajputs rose from 8291 to 12,051, and the Gurkhas from 6684 to 18,100. The size of the Indian Army at that period fluctuated between 130,000 and 158,000 men.  

Certain historical factors were conducive for manufacturing a separate identity for the recruits from Nepal. There was much tension between the tribes of Nepal and the Hindus of north India. The Nepalis looked down upon the Hindus of the Gangetic plains (Hindustanis) because, the Muslims had conquered the Hindustanis but never the Nepalis. The Nepalis, being mostly of Mongolian stock, were physically different from the north Indians. There were also linguistic differences between these two groups. All these distinctions were further exacerbated by the difference in the religious practice of those Nepalis who had accepted Hinduism. The Thakurs among the Nepalis did not accept the sacred thread (*janeo*), which was the primary symbol of Hinduism in the plains. Nor did the Thakurs accept the strict food habits of the high caste Hindustanis. Since the Nepali Hindus rejected many of the caste principles of the orthodox Hindus, the north Indian Hindus conceived the former as 'unconverted

---

barbarians’ and called them *Pahariyas*. This was an abusive term meaning outcaste highlanders. In return, the Nepalis termed the Hindustanis *Madhesias* (inferior plainsmen). All these distinctions not only created a distinct sense of identity among the recruits from Nepal, but also fitted into the imperial game of ‘divide and rule’.

The imperial belief was that the physiognomy of the Nepali tribes was distinct from that of the Hindustanis. For the British, this was one of the principal reasons for ascribing a separate identity to the Nepalis. The imperial ethnographers claimed that the aboriginal tribes of Nepal were of Mongolian-Tibetan stock. The characteristic physical features of the Nepalis, in the British conceptualization of them, were a broad head and face, a large and salient mouth, the eyes wide apart and set obliquely in the face, the nose pyramidal and its base depressed, a lack of facial and body hair, and the stature low but muscular and strong.

The British took the term Gurkha from a district in the northeast of the Gandak basin in Nepal. The Magars, Gurungs, Khas and the Thakur tribes inhabited this locality. A dynasty called Gorkha ruled over the region from the 18th century. For several reasons, the British mainly used the inhabitants of the Gorkha district to forge the Gurkha community. Under the Gorkha dynasty, the people of this region conquered Nepal in the late 18th century. The Raj’s officials believed that martial prowess was hereditary. The Khas, the Magars and the Gurungs constituted the Gorkha Army. By enlisting these tribes, the Raj wanted to utilize an existing military


tradition to build a warrior community. In the local society of the Khas, military service was regarded as honourable. Those Khas who ran away from battle became outcastes in their own society and their wives refused to accept them. However the British favoured the Magars and the Gurungs, who constituted the rank and file of the Gorkha force, more than the Khas. This was because the latter dominated the officer corps of the Nepali Army and the Raj could not offer higher officer ranks to the South Asians. The British also probably conceived the Khas as too skilled, and hence too dangerous, to be inducted into the colonial army in large numbers. Other clans like the Limbus and the Rais, though they were not inhabitants of the Gurkha district, were given the Gurkha identity. Limbus were recruited by the British because, being hunters, they were skilled marksmen. Their familiarity with hilly jungles made them excellent light infantry skirmishers who could be used for high altitude warfare both in northeast and northwest India.16

The British never included any tribes from west Nepal, as enlisting them would run counter to the programme of establishing a Gurkha identity distinct from the Hindustanis. This was because the customs and traditions of the Hindustanis were very similar to the tribes of west Nepal, on account of the continuous immigration of the Brahmins and the Rajputs into that region from 12th century onwards.17

What were the techniques which the British used to convert the 6 tribes into a homogeneous Gurkha community? The British had to be cautious, because Kathmandu also simultaneously constructed the Nepali Army from the same tribes. The Nepali sardars eagerly followed the British practice of drilling the recruits, so as

---


to transform them into infantry on the Western model. In 1814, the Nepal Army had 12,000 men organized in regiments. When Nepal fought Tibet in 1864, each of the Nepali regiments deployed 650 men.\textsuperscript{18}

The British policy of structuring the Gurkha community was geared to preventing an amalgamation of identities between the Nepal Army’s soldiers and the Gurkhas of the Indian Army. The Indian Army, unlike the Nepali Army, never went for mono-tribal units but mixed the various tribes to create a supra-tribal identity: the Gurkha community. Kathmandu’s military establishment used tribal identities while organizing their regiments. The Bhairanath Regiment of the Nepal Army was composed of the Limbu tribe of eastern Nepal, whereas the Indian Army never had any Limbu regiment. The Limbus and the Rais were mixed together in 1890 within the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion of the 10\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles in an attempt to integrate these two groups within the Gurkha identity. Till 1877, the 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifles accepted the Limbus and the Rais. But the dominant majority in these units were the Magars and the Gurungs. The Nepali force also had Gurung regiments. The Gurung tribe was divided into Charjat and Solahjat clans. For using clan identities to build up primary group loyalties, the Kali Bahadur Regiment of the Nepal Army enlisted only the Charjat Gurungs. None of the Indian regiments was composed only of the Charjat clan or the Gurung tribe.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 33, 51; To Lieutenant Ball Nroughton in charge of the Gurkha force, from G. Ramsay, Resident of Nepal, no.15, 29 Jan. 1858, Return showing the number of each rank and subsistence allowance drawn by each individual per mensem in the Nepal regiments forming a part of the Saran Field Force, List showing the number of each grade and the subsistence allowance drawn by each individual per mensem in the force under the command of Maharaja Jung Bahadur, signed H. Byers, 17 July 1858, Military letters from Nepal, N.A.I.

\textsuperscript{19} Vansittart, Gurkhas, pp. 34, 81, 89, 97, 99, 101-2; John Gaylor, Sons of John Company: The Indian and Pakistan Armies, 1903-91 (1992, reprint, New Delhi, 1993), pp. 235-40, 244-45.
Much has been written about the Kukri as the traditional weapon of the Gurkhas. But the Nepali soldiers also used Kukris. It was the distinct uniform evolved by the Raj, rather than the Kukri, which played an important role in establishing the distinct Gurkha ethos. In the 1790s, the Nepali military introduced Western dress for their personnel. They wore red jackets with white facings and white cross belts. The elite units wore blue cotton tunics and pyjamas of the same colour. Their head dress was a skull cap, with thick, tightly-rolled coils adorned with brass wires. The Gurkhas wore rifle green shirts, and trousers with Kilmarnock caps. The British introduced Western dress among the Gurkhas slowly and steadily, as its rapid and forcible introduction might have prompted a reaction. When the 2nd Gurkha Rifles was raised between 1815 and 1818 from the prisoners of war of the Anglo-Nepal conflict and the disbanded Nepali soldiers, they preferred their mountaineers' dress, their own shoes and traditional headgear, rather than pugris or European dress. 20

The British deliberately gave their Gurkha regiments titles and numerical designations which were different from the Nepali Army units. The latter had Hindu gods' names like 'Ram Dull', 'Gorucknuth' etc. The British numbered their Gurkha regiments from 1 to 10 depending on their year of raising. All these units had subsidiary titles, which bore a connection with the places where the units were originally raised. The 1st Gurkha Rifles was raised at Malaun fortress in 1815. So its subsidiary name was the Malaun Regiment. The 2nd Gurkha Rifles was raised later in the same year at Nahan in Sirmoor. So its subsidiary title was the Sirmoor Rifles. 21


21 Gaylor, *Sons of John Company*, pp. 219, 221, 223; To Colonel H. Rowcroft, commanding Saran Field Force from Ramsay, no. 11, 21 Jan. 1858, Return showing each rank and the subsistence
The ‘Gurkha’ community, an amalgam of 6 tribes, had no uniform religion. Religion, the British perceived, was an essential aspect of community feeling. The Khas were strict Hindus, while the Magars and the Gurungs were lax in their practice of Hinduism, and the Limbus were Buddhists. The British, in their attempt to encourage homogeneity over this heterogeneous group, encouraged them to practise a single religion-Hinduism. The British decided to Hinduize the Gurkhas instead of encouraging Buddhism, because Nepali society itself was moving towards Hinduism. The Gorkha regime imposed the caste hierarchy on society to strengthen the position of the ruling elites (the Brahmans and the Chetris) over the tribes. The distinction between the high castes like Thakurs and the low castes became very rigid, and the Brahmans enjoyed several privileges in Nepali society. The penal code was based on Hindu scriptures. In Nepal cow killing was punishable by death.  

Seema Alavi writes that Prithvi Narayan, the Gorkha king who conquered Nepal, used the Hinduism of north India to provide Kshatriya identity to his tribal soldiers. Hence the British created ‘Hill Hinduism’ for the Gurkhas to give them a separate ethos from the Hindus of north India and the soldiers of Nepal.

What were the imperial policy directives for producing this new form of Hinduism? The Raj invented Gurkha Hinduism for the Gurkhas by negating certain

allowance drawn by each individual per mensem in the Gorucknath and Burrack regiments, Abstract of sum paid in advance to the Gurkha force under the command of Bukht Jung and Khurg Bahadur from 12 Jan. 1858 to 11 Feb. 1858, Byers, Nepal Residency, 27 July 1858, Military letters from Nepal.


caste rules, which hampered the army’s operational capacity, and by appropriating certain tribal customs. Occasionally, the British modified the Nepali tribes’ religious customs to suit their project of popularizing Hinduism among them. Under pressure from the British, officers of the Gurungs in the regiments called the Brahmins, instead of the Lamas, while performing any religious festivals. When the Gurungs of the regiments got married under British patronage, the Brahmins were called to preside over the marriage ceremonies. This was a case of the imperialists interfering in the personal lives of their armed personnel.

If the religious superstition of the Gurkhas fell within the ambit of Hinduism, then the army went out of its way, by bending its service rules, to back such customs. The Nepali Hindus worshipped Hindu deities like Deorali and Devi, and this trend was encouraged. Epidemics were believed to be angry visitations by these goddesses. When in March 1899, a Gurkha woman died due to cholera in the Gurkha recruiting depot at Gorakhpur, all the Gurkha soldiers contributed to a fund from which goats and fowls were purchased and then sacrificed to please the deities. To please the soldiers, even the British officers contributed financially, and then themselves joined in the sacrifice. Imperial participation in indigenous customs was part of the British programme of constructing a special identity for their favoured ‘martial’ group.

The regimental officers were ordered that Hindu festivals like Dussehra should be organized in the camp, or in the field if the unit was on the march. All the personnel contributed to the purchase of animals. The festival was transformed by the army into a symbolic spectacular event, which was incorporated into the collective memory. Spectators were invited to see how quickly the Gurkhas could sever the

24 Vansittart, Gurkhas, pp. 49, 51.

25 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
heads of the sacrificial buffaloes. In addition to the aim of encouraging Hinduism, the British emphasized such ceremonies probably because they believed that such ‘martial’ rituals would activate the warrior instinct among the soldiers. Before the introduction of Shamanistic Buddhism from Tibet and Hinduism from north India, the tribes of Nepal were animal worshippers. Sacrificing buffaloes was an essential feature of their religion. The British, in evolving Gurkha Hinduism, absorbed this strand. 26

The army not only absorbed elements of traditional religion but also added new elements to suit imperial demands. The Durga pujas (a certain set of rituals for worshipping the Hindu goddess) performed in the Gurkha units were distinct from those followed in India. In the army’s Durga pujas, the Brahmins sowed barley at the place of worship, rather than having clay images of Goddess Durga made, as in Bengal. To ensure the split between the Nepali Hindus of the Gurkha regiments and the north Indian Hindus, the army invented a distinct tradition of Durga puja. Temples and idols were uncommon in Nepal. But, so as to build a religious tradition separate from the Hinduism of Nepal, every Gurkha regiment had a shrine of the goddess Deorali, which the whole battalion visited during Dussehra. The army used religion to raise the troops’ morale. During the Durga puja, the Gurkhas asked for protection for themselves, and blessings, for their weapons and regimental colours, from the warrior goddess Durga. 27

For the north Indian Hindus, unlike for the Gurkhas, caste rituals were vital. But they had adverse effect in military matters. The high castes took many baths and

26 Ibid., pp. 55, 129-30.

27 Ibid., pp. 55-6, 119.
their elaborate rituals meant that 4 hours a day were required for cooking. H.G.W.
Smith declared in 1859 that, if the Purbiyas were cooking, and an order for duty came,
they threw away their victuals and would not cook again that day. He asserted that
such caste taboos reduced the army's fighting power. During the First Sikh War
(1845-46) his 3 Purbiya regiments lost their baggage, which contained their cooking
pots and their vessels for drinking water. Though provisions were readily available
and they were hungry, they refused to cook using others' utensils. Hungry soldiers
fought badly and this probably explains the Purbiyas' indifferent performance against
the Khalsa Army. Viscount Melville claimed that, when ordered to dig trenches, the
Purbiyas protested saying that they were not coolies. Such menial tasks would have
undermined their caste pride.28

The British-tailored Gurkha Hinduism encouraged its followers to throw to the
winds the upper caste north Indian Hindus' concept of ritual purity. This, besides
giving the Raj's Nepali mercenaries a distinct tradition, also aided British military
deployments. The Gurkhas joked at the Purbiyas' custom of taking a bath before
eating. Unlike the Purbiyas, on active service the Gurkhas finished their meals in half
an hour. Also the Gurkhas, unlike the high castes, did not find carrying provisions on
their back degrading. Further, the Gurkhas did not consider foreign service polluting.
In crossing the Kalapani, they saw only the prospects of glory and spoils.29

The high caste taboo against taking food together created a logistical burden,
as the separate castes had to carry their own cooking utensils for preparing their food
separately. The Brahmin soldiers ate alone. But eating and drinking in a common

28 Hugh Cook, *The Sikh Wars: The British Army in Punjab, 1845-49* (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 9, 48; Peel committee, pp. 8-9, 48.

mess was necessary to create a sense of oneness, which strengthened group spirit. Socializing together produced intense personal bonding among the soldiers, which in turn strengthened group spirit. Enhanced group spirit was necessary for creating the 'will to fight'. The army, in order to create strong primary bonds among the men, tried to encourage common messing among the Gurkhas. Initially the Gurkhas, like the high castes, ate in small groups varying from 3 to 12 men. The soldiers were encouraged to eat game acquired by hunting together. The various Gurkha clans were unwilling to eat rice commonly. Hence a custom was introduced that allowed rice cooked in clarified butter to be eaten together by all the clans.  

The British encouraged Hinduism among the Rajputs. The practice of Hinduism among many Rajput clans was ambiguous before the British intervened. In order to establish religious homogeneity within the Rajputs, the British suppressed other forms of worship, like serpent worship, which was originally a Scythian practice. The tribal totem of the Bais Rajput clan of Farrukhabad was the cobra. But when they joined the army, serpent worship was disallowed.  

The army took pains to provide martial reputations for the various sub-units (clans) which constituted the 'martial' groups, probably in the hope that this would enhance the troops' combat morale. The Bhaduriya Rajput clan of Kanpur provided soldiers. The British constructed their military tradition by claiming that they fought well under the Mughals. The army also tried to ascribe a martial tradition to the community as a whole. The Rajputs were assumed to be pre colonial India's sword


31 Bingley, Rajputs, pp. 39, 145, 149.
Occasionally a communal tinge was added as part of the ‘divide and rule’ policy, to prevent an amalgam of the martial tradition of all the ‘martial’ groups, which then might take an anti-British colour. The Rajputs were made to believe that, even in the hour of desperation, they fought bravely against the Muslim invaders of north India.\textsuperscript{32} Between 1885 and 1912, the size of the Muslim contingent in the Indian Army rose from 50,000 to 55,000.\textsuperscript{33} The Raj was apprehensive about the large number of Muslims in the force, and about their loyalty.\textsuperscript{34} So there was no pure Muslim regiment recruited into the army. And any Rajput-Muslim tension favoured the British.

The territorial identification of the Rajput clans settled along the Ganga-Yamuna rivers with Hindustan, and those Rajput clans west of the river Chambal with Rajputana, enabled the British to divide the Rajput community, despite all of them being Hindus, into eastern Rajputs (north Indian Rajputs) and western Rajputs (Rajasthani Rajputs). This was similar to the 19th century Chinese government’s plan of dividing the Muslims into various groups according to their territorial locations. Social and cultural factors further helped the British to create divisions within the Rajput community. The western Rajputs had fewer caste prejudices as regards eating and drinking. In the second half of the 19th century, the British favoured the western Rajputs against the eastern Rajputs for several reasons. The former group enjoyed a higher status in India. So the British, like the Mughals, tried to harness the greater

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., pp. 7, 9, 50-51.

\textsuperscript{33} Army committee, vol. 1-A, Minority report, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{34} The Muslims were considered as ‘fanatic’ and ‘treacherous’ by the Martial Race lobby, which was ruling Indian Army from the 1880s. Kaushik Roy, ‘Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army: 1859-1913’, IESHR, vol. 34, no. 3 (1997), p. 351.

206
Rajput tradition by attempting to enlist the Rajputana Rajputs. Further, the disloyalty of a big chunk of the north Indian Rajputs during 1857 pushed the British towards the western Rajputs. But the shift was not total, as clans of Hindustani Rajputs, like the Pundirs of Saharanpur who remained loyal during 1857, were enlisted.  

The British also encouraged distinct war cries for different groups. Besides creating separate traditions, the battle cries gave the soldiers martial ardour in the high risk encounter zones. The Sikhs shouted *Fateh* or *Wa Guru* and the Punjabi Muslims cried *Allah, Allah.* Unlike these communities’ war cries, the Gurkha and the Pathan battle cries were secular. Instead of drawing inspiration from the religious faith, the Gurkha war cry emphasized on ‘Gurkha’ greatness. The Gurkhas shouted *Moro Sangin, Gorkhali Ki Jai.* The Pathan battle cry was *Bal, Bal, Bal.*

However, imperial inputs did not completely shape the identity of the communities like the Gurkhas. Local tradition also modulated the imperial sponsored identity formation process. Occasionally the imperial attempt to include newer groups in a community suffered checks due to the customs of the traditional society. The British attempt to include the Damais and the Sarkis in the Gurkha brotherhood faltered due to opposition from the Magars and the Gurungs. They

---


37 R. G. Fox in *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (New Delhi, 1990) argues that the Sikh identity was totally an imperial construct.
considered the first 2 groups as 'menial' classes. So the Damais were enlisted as buglers and the Sarkis as armourers, and not as soldiers in the Gurkha regiments.³⁸

In order to construct a martial culture, the British could not enlist low status clans. Civilian socialization of the personnel was vital in generating positive group dynamics. Stanford W. Gregory argues that a soldier's fighting qualities depend on how civil society perceives him.³⁹ The Magar tribes had many clans. The Paria clan was never enlisted as they were regarded as outcastes within the Magars. The Rana clan was favoured because a family, which had lost 3 generations of ancestors in warfare, got the title of 'Rana'.⁴⁰

The imperial identity-formation scheme had a massive impact on the indigenous society. The army strengthened Sikhism among the Sikh recruits, not only to give them a separate religious identity, but also because the imperial belief was that Sikhism, being a 'martial' religion, imparted a martial ethos to those Jats who embraced Sikhism. W.L. McGregor, a British officer, represented the pre 1857 army's views. He thought that in general Indian soldiers were mercenaries and deserting the army was not a religious sin for them. But Sikhism, he claimed, demanded that its followers should never renounce their weapons before death.⁴¹

Major G. F. MacMunn voiced the post Mutiny army's view when in 1911 he wrote:

³⁸ Vansittart, Gurkhas, p. 145.


⁴⁰ Vansittart, Gurkhas, p. 88.

Sikhism is an austere faith, demanding some simplicity and rigour of life from its adherents. So much is this so, that for many years there has been a tendency for young men to avoid the pahul and grow up as ordinary Hindus, for whom life has few irksome restrictions. But as the value of the Sikh as the simple, faithful soldier, has lain in his adherence to the simple tenets and hardy life of his forebears, no non-baptized Sikh is admitted into a regiment of the Indian Army. So careful are regiments in this matter, and so much are regiments the home of the old martial and simple Sikh principles, that it has been said, not without some shadow of truth, that it is the British officer who has kept Sikhism up to its old standard. 

The British preference for the Jat Sikhs encouraged many Hindu Jats to accept Sikhism. In 1891, there were 250,000 male Sikhs in Patiala. Despite heavy enlistment in the army, their numbers rose to 323,000 in 1900. Many Hindu Jats of Hoshiarpur district became Sikhs for enlistment.

Uniforms were another technique to create distinctive identities for different groups. The pugri was designed for the Punjabis by British officers. This headgear became so common that even now the Punjabis identify the pugri as a crucial element of their religious identity. Thus the modern Sikh identity was partly the creation of an alien state.

The imperial attempt to differentiate various communities had certain aspects which the Indians exploited for their own gains. After 1859, the British saw the Brahmins of north India as completely disloyal. So the army did not enlist them, and

---


recruited eastern Rajputs instead. The officers differentiated the Rajputs from the Brahmins by means of the sacred threads which they wore around their shoulders. The Rajputs' threads were shorter and had knots. Those Brahmins eager to enter the military service for economic or social reasons bluffed their way into the army by imitating the Rajputs' sacred threads.46

II

The Construction of Regimental Traditions: The Cap- Badge Rivalry

Once community consciousness was created, it was fused with the regimental fabric. The Indian Army was a collection of regiments. And each community provided a group of regiments. By 1911, the Gurkhas supplied 10 regiments. Each Gurkha regiment had 2 battalions of 912 men each.47 All the Gurkha units possessed a distinct Gurkha identity vis a vis the other groups. Primary group solidarity among the soldiers encouraged them to fight. Primary group cohesion increased among the personnel of a unit if they were made to believe that they were distinct from the society, and from other units of the army.48 The Raj tried to generate this feeling among the troops by providing each unit with a separate identity. The imperialists attempted to create, through several organizational techniques, a distinct identity for each unit. The institutional mechanism was also geared to establish traditions both for the class company regiments and the general mixture regiments.

46 Bingley, Rajputs, pp. 149, 170-71.


Every regiment was given its own home (depot) to aid in fostering distinct custom. Each Gurkha battalion had a separate depot. The 1st and 2nd battalions of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles had depots at Dharamsala in the Kangra valley of Punjab, and Dehradun.\textsuperscript{49} The regimental depots were situated at the centre of each regiment’s recruiting base. The depot of the 14th Madras Infantry Regiment was Bangalore, because this unit enlisted the Tamils and Deccani Muslims from Karnataka, Tanjore, Madras and Mysore.\textsuperscript{50} The recruiting parties went out from the regimental depots and returned there with the newly enlisted men. The recruits were stationed and trained there, before joining the units which were on active service. The reservists of the regiments were trained at each unit’s depot. The regimental centre of the 20th Punjabi Infantry Regiment was Lahore. Even though this unit’s Pathans were enlisted from the Indus frontier, for fostering unit spirit, they were brought all the way to the depot at Lahore for training. The reservists were then distributed in the various companies according to their communities. For training, the regiments paraded at their depot parade grounds. Senior military commanders inspected the units on parades in the depot parade grounds, and occasionally distributed medals for gallantry. Further, the annual examination of the Indian officers of the regiments, and the musketry instruction classes, were held at each regiment’s depot.\textsuperscript{51}

For building up unit spirit, even non-Western forces like the Burmese used flags and standards. In November 1885, after being driven from the Thitkokkuin village by the British column under Captain F. D. Raikes, the Burmese militia left 3


\textsuperscript{50} 14th Madras Infantry, N.AI., pp. 39, 134, 198.

\textsuperscript{51} Army committee, vol. 3, pp. 901, 903-04; 8th Bombay Infantry, N.AI. (This manuscript is unpaginated. Information is given under each date.), 28 May 1881, 13 Sept. 1893.
standards behind. Each standard had the picture of a dragon. For the British, the standard (in the case of the cavalry) or the colours (in the case of infantry) were an essential part of the regiment. In the West, the tradition of using standards to provide regiments with a continuous and coherent identity went back to Rome. Marius provided each regiment with a standard, and the Emperor Julius gave a particular number to each legion, which was inscribed on its standards, to distinguish the legions from each other. In the mid 18th century, Marshal Saxe reintroduced these techniques for creating distinct identities among the different French regiments.

Following this tradition, the British gave each regiment a standard or colours. In 1788, the Madras Light Cavalry Regiment was first issued with a standard. The British tried to design the regimental flag of the Indian Army units in conformity with the military customs of the metropole. In 1801, Fort Saint George was ordered to transmit to the Adjutant General’s office an indent for a set of colours for the respective units, which would be made in imitation of the flag of the United Kingdom. The colours were generally kept in the regimental head quarters, but during battle the colours were carried into actions by special officers-Colour Havildars- to provide moral encouragement to the men. The colours were presented to the units in formal public ceremonies so that the ‘great’ events were stamped in everybody’s mind. The delivery of the colours was observed with the solemnities due to the occasion. Each regiment received its colours under a general salute and then fired guns in celebration

52 Diary of Capt. F. D. Raikes, Deputy Commissioner Thayetmoyo with the Movable Column, eastern frontier from 16 to 30 Nov. 1885, no. 830, Proceedings of the Govt. of India, Burma, 1885-1886, N.A.I.

of the event. This public spectacle aided in the production of a unit tradition. Occasionally, senior political elites participated in such 'dramas', to provide added grandeur. On 28 October 1899, the commandant of the 44th Merwara Regiment announced to the men that the Viceroy would present the new colours to the unit. The soldiers were made to understand that this was indeed a rare honour for them, as the Viceroy rarely condescended to perform such a duty. On 1 November 1899, the regiment staged a rehearsal of the parade held for the presentation of new colours by the Viceroy. The colours, which functioned as the regimental flag after the presentation on 1 November were, in the Viceroy's words, to be the guarantee of orderly conduct and good discipline of the unit, and the symbol of loyalty and allegiance. He told the men to regard the colours as a gift from the Queen, which must be guarded properly. The regiment as a whole swore loyalty to the colours and assured the Viceroy that the loyalty, which they had displayed for the last 70 years, would continue and that no stain should be allowed on the regiment's reputation.

Different regiments were allowed and encouraged to possess different types of uniforms (facings, laces, pugris, badges, mottos and cuffs) for making each unit a distinct entity. The army assumed that these external markers functioned as symbols of distinction, and so created a separate unit ethos and heightened each unit's prestige. Uniforms which were worn by famous units, asserts John Keegan, instantly turned the recruits of those regiments into battle hardened warriors. In the post 1859 era, the 1st

---

54 Lieutenant Colonel W. J. Wilson, *Historical Record of the Fourth Prince of Wales Own Regiment Madras Light Cavalry* (Madras, 1877), pp. 6, 33; 8th Bombay Infantry, 25 Nov. 1886.

55 44th Merwara Infantry, N.A.I. (This manuscript is unpaginated and the information is given under the heading of various dates.), 28 Oct. and Nov. 1899.

Bengal Cavalry had yellow uniforms, black facings, golden lace and badges inscribed with the words ‘Bharatpore’ and ‘Kandahar 1842’, commemorating the successful battles in which this unit had participated. The 1st Punjab Cavalry’s dress was different. It was dark blue with blue and scarlet coloured pugris. Delhi and Lucknow were inscribed on their badges, to remind the unit’s personnel of their loyal behaviour during the stormy days of 1857. 57

Details of uniforms were a technique, not only to differentiate various regiments, but also to introduce distinctions between the units of different communities. The British drove a wedge between the Gurkhas and the Punjabis, by giving the former the circular pill box type caps known as Kilmarnock forage caps, instead of the pugris worn by the latter group. 58

The symbolic markers of status were awarded to a loyal and brave unit for establishing its special position within the military hierarchy. Providing elite status to a unit, claims an American sociologist Anne Hoiberg, raised its members’ sense of importance and self esteem, which in turn enhanced the military staying power of the regiment. The 2nd Gurkha Regiment was given a special identity, by putting it on a par with an elite white unit, because the Gurkha Regiment had remained loyal during 1857 and fought well with the 60th Rifles against the rebels in Delhi. For its extraordinary comradeship with the 60th Rifles at the Delhi Ridge, the dress of the 2nd Gurkhas was made similar to that of the crack white unit. So all the Gurkha soldiers of that regiment wore the distinctive scarlet facings of the 60th Rifles. In 1858, the 2nd Gurkhas was given the prestigious title of the ‘Rifles’. Hitherto only famous British


Infantry regiments, and no Indian units, had been designated Rifles. Each member of the 2nd Gurkhas was designated a rifleman instead of a sepoy.\(^5\)

In 1891 all the Gurkha regiments were given the prestigious title of Rifles to distinguish them from the other communities’ regiments in the Indian Army. Each Gurkha regiment still maintained its own distinct identity, which also kept alive competition among them. The 2nd Gurkha Rifles’ 2nd Battalion, unlike other Gurkha battalions, wore white helmets. Every soldier was ordered to wear the regimental badge, to inculcate the feeling that he was a member of a particular family. The Gurkha units’ badges had Kukris painted on them, which strengthened the Gurkha community’s identity. But the numerals painted between the Kukris varied, as they represented the regimental number of the particular units. For example the 7th Gurkha Regiment’s badges had the numeral 7 between the Kukris.\(^6\)

Though the regimental badge was a European concept, the imperialist’s accommodated indigenous elements like the Kukris within it. A similar mixture of the Oriental and the Occidental tradition was evident in the case of the evolution of the soldiers’ dress. Initially the British tried complete Europeanization of the Indian troops’ dress. But the Vellore Mutiny forced them to go slow. In May 1806, the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Madras Infantry Regiment declined to use cockades and stocks of leather. The Indian personnel complained that the leather was made from the skins of hogs and cows. Both the Hindu and the Muslim soldiers considered it as an affront to their religion. After the suppression of the Vellore Mutiny, the Westernization of uniforms slowed down, but did not stop. Till 1812, the personnel of the 14th Madras

---


Infantry Regiment were allowed to use slippers. They then had to change to boots. Similarly, the 9th Bombay Infantry Regiment’s men were asked to wear pantaloons instead of drawers.61

As a reaction to 1857, the British became more sensitive to the brown soldiers’ feelings. By 1864, the leather chin straps were replaced by the pugris. The aim was to create consciousness among the soldiers that the regimental dress was not a totally alien construction. The amalgamation of the Eastern and the Western elements in uniforms was evident in the case of 28th Bombay Infantry Regiment. By 1880, the men wore socks, boots and Khaki coats, along with pugris and pyjamas. The uniforms, while representing regimental uniqueness, also took into account the men’s cultural sensibilities and climate. In the hot climate of India, loose pyjamas were more comfortable than tight trousers. Occasionally a contradiction developed between cultural and professional needs. When, in November 1880, the 28th Bombay Infantry Regiment was ordered to serve in Afghanistan, the men were asked to wear tunics, great coats and trousers, though they preferred pyjamas and dhotis. In the case of the 4th Battalion of 9th Jat Regiment, the Eastern traditions dominated over the Western elements in the uniforms. The men used dark blue turbans, kummerbands, serge pyjamas and red serge blouses, but black leather ankle boots. On the one hand, uniforms represented regimental collectiveness because all the personnel of the unit wore more or less similar dress. But symbolic distinctions in the details of the uniform of the same unit reflected hierarchy. The Indian officers of this unit, unlike the

61 Lieutenant General S. L. Menezes, Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty First Century (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 100-101; V. Longer, Red Coats to Olive Green: A History of the Indian Army, 1600-1974 (Bombay, 1974), p. 57; 14th Madras Infantry, pp. 171-72; 9th Bombay Regiment, N.A.I (This manuscript is unpaginated and the information is given under various dates.), 1769, 1787.
privates, used brown leather gloves and their kummerbands had golden lines within dark blue.\footnote{62}

Regimental identities were also strengthened with the help of inter-unit games like 3 mile cross country races, football tournaments, firing competitions, etc. The officers organized such games even in the British Army. The soldiers participated in them as representatives of particular units and tried their best to keep up their regimental status. All these sports, besides keeping the troops occupied, also kept them physically fit. Sporting competitions to encourage competitive spirit, and hence better performance, were held even in the post 1945 Soviet Army. Rifle shooting competitions in the Indian Army, apart from forging a regimental ethos, also raised the units' combat potential by upgrading the individual marksmanship of the participants, a necessary skill required for fighting in the mountains of the northwest frontier. In the Quetta District Rifle Competition, the participants had to shoot over ranges of 800 yards and 500 yards respectively. The prizes were as follows-Rs 15 (1\textsuperscript{st} prize), Rs 8, 5, 4, 3, 2, and Rs 1 (last prize). In 1890, at the rifle shooting test organized by the Bengal Punjab Rifle Association at Meerut, the 5\textsuperscript{th} prize was won by the soldier from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkha Regiment.\footnote{63}

\footnote{62} Lieutenant (Adjutant) Carter, 28\textsuperscript{th} Bombay Regiment, N.A.I. (This document is unpaginated and the information is given under various dates.), 27 Sept. 1860, 26 Dec. 1870, 7\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 1880; 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, N.A.I. (This manuscript is not paginated and the information is given for various years.), 1911.

Each regiment was composed of 8 to 10 companies, and each company had 80 to 100 men. The company was both an administrative and a tactical unit. In the 'small' colonial campaigns, not the regiments as a whole, but the various companies had to fight separate scattered actions. Two examples will suffice. In Burma on 17th November 1885, Colonel Simpson and Major Hill, operating under Major General Harry Prendergast, captured the Minhala masonry redoubt with a company of the 12th Madras Infantry Regiment. Another company of the 11th Bengal Infantry Regiment, under Lieutenant Downes, supported this attack. Then, on the night of 26th July 1897, Lieutenant E.W. Costello, with a company of the 24th Punjab Infantry, repulsed a tribal attack on a field hospital in Malakand.

How was cohesion maintained among such small groups in such dispersed actions? The personal heroics of the British officers, which traditional historiography emphasizes, are an inadequate explanation. The construction of a distinct ethos for each company enabled it to face such scattered firefights.

The creation of a distinct tradition for each company was especially vital in the case of mixed regiments. The 8th Bombay Infantry Regiment was a polyethnic unit. In 1884 it comprised: 17 Indo-Portuguese, 18 Jews, 51 Sikhs, 186 Muslims and 502 Hindus. The personnel were further divided on caste and territorial lines. Among the Hindus, 47 were Brahmins and 27 were from the low castes. Of the middle castes,

64 Army committee, vol. 3, p. 950.

65 Extract from Major General H. Prendergast’s diary, para 31-32, no. 635, 17th Nov. 1885, Burma proceedings; Evidence in the case of Lieutenant E.W. Costello, attached to 24th Punjab Infantry recommended for the reward of the Victoria Cross for bravery in presence of the enemy at Malakand on the night of 26th July 1897, no. 668, Proceedings of the govt. of India, Malakand 1897-98, N.A.I.

the Marathas dominated, as there were 355 of them. The Muslim community was
differentiated both on regional and on cultural lines. There were 93 Deccani Muslims
who were Shias from the Bombay region, 8 Hindustani Muslims from north India, 59
Muslims from Punjab, and of them 51 were Rajputs who had converted to Islam. To
cap it all, there were 25 Pathans who were Sunnis from the northwest frontier. This
polyglot mixture with its religious, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity was organized
into 8 companies. The British tried to generate a company ethos by holding annual
musketry competitions within the units’ various companies in the hope that it would
create a competitive spirit among the various sub-units. The annual musketry
competition for 1884 was held on 31st March. In that competition, B company came
first with 95 points and E company came last with only 81 points. 67

The British tried to make the regiments a sort of communal enterprise for the
soldiers. The dominant imperial view, in the post 1857 era, as propounded by Major
General H. Hancock, was that long service allowed the Indian recruits to make army
service a lifetime’s career. Their regiments in general, and the companies in
particular, became their homes, thus enabling them to identify their interest with the
unit. But short-service would make their loyalty precarious, as their ties with the units
would be temporary. 68

There was another reason for introducing long term volunteer service for the
Indians. The Eden Commission in 1879 voiced the Raj’s fear:

It must be remembered that our native army is a mercenary force,
serving an alien government.... And it would be politically inadvisable
to adopt for India short-service system of Europe, whereby the largest
possible number of men are passed through the army, returned into the
general population, and are kept by periodical training in a state of

67 8th Bombay Infantry, 1st Jan. and 31st March 1884.

68 Hancock report, p. 30.
military efficiency. There can be no advantage and there might be
much risk in scattering hundreds of thousands of trained reservists over
the several provinces of India.69

Military theorists as well as military commanders agree that the stability of the
personnel in the unit gives rise to cohesion. Ardant Du Picq, a French military scholar
of late 19th century, wrote that 4 brave men who did not know each other would not
dare attack a lion. But 4 less brave men knowing each other well, sure of their
reliability and mutual aid, would attack resolutely.70 Field Marshal Von Manstein
asserted that the mutual acquaintanceship and trust that comes after fighting battles
together are important. So men who had fought together should be kept united.71
Historical case studies also supported these assumptions. The frequent transfer of
personnel within the American regiments stationed in Europe during the Second
World War resulted in men serving with strangers. The net result was low morale and
high desertion rates.72

The British aimed to create a sort of joint enterprise in the regiments by not
transferring the long service Indian personnel from one unit to another. The absence
of inter-unit transfer was geared to encourage ‘buddy feeling’ among the members of
the regiment. When the privates of the 13th Punjab Infantry were invalided in May
1861, most of them had more than 12 years service behind them. When he retired in

69 Eden commission, p. 87.


71 Field Marshal Erich Von Manstein, Lost Victories, tr. by Anthony G. Powell (1958, reprint,

72 Michael Howard, ‘Leadership in the British Army in the Second World War: Some Personal
1895, Subadar Major Rana of the 28th Bombay Infantry Regiment had completed 33 years service in the same unit. Subadar Mussunjie of the 8th Bombay Infantry Regiment was pensioned off in August 1878 after 35 years of service in that unit. Numerous other examples could be given. However the British Army used short service recruits from 1871 onwards under the Cardwell system, because, unlike the Indian Army, it could afford to utilize nationalism.

Under the Cardwell scheme, each battalion was recruited from a particular district for encouraging local connections. G.J. Wolsey, a British commander, believed that territorial connections strengthened *esprit de corps*. In the Indian Army, to take advantage of clan and family feelings and territorial links, each company recruited men of a particular clan from a particular district. Particular clans inhabited particular localities. Men from a community liked to join the companies which had their clans, probably for reasons of familiarity. The imperial assumption was that the troops felt comfortable among their relatives and friends, and such personal ties heightened unit cohesion. In the high risk action zones, the men wanted to be surrounded by others whom they could trust, whom they knew and who came from the same neighbourhood and had same culture and dialect. If some man was unable to get furlough, then others from his company, who belonged to the same clans and villages, conveyed the news back to his family and brought to him in the unit information about his domestic affairs. All this created strong interpersonal bonds among the men, and was a step in the growth of unit spirit. Close personal ties among

---

73 Roll of men of the 13th Punjab Infantry Regiment, signed Capt. V. Tonochy, commandant, Progs. no. 103, 20 May 1861, M.D.P. Oct. 1861; 8th Bombay Regiment, 28 Aug. 1878; 28th Bombay regiment, 2nd March 1895.

the troops were an essential ingredient for the willingness to enter the battle zones. Sun Tzu II, who lived 100 years after Sun Tzu, had written that victory depended on trust and loyalty among the soldiers.\textsuperscript{75}

In the Indian Army, the soldiers’ offspring received a free education in the garrison school, and they were designated as recruit boys. Many of them enlisted in their fathers’ regiments. The army hoped that this policy would make the serving soldiers more loyal and also that those recruits who had been born and brought up in the regimental lines would be inculcated with the traditions of service and loyalty.\textsuperscript{76}

It is interesting to note that the Soviet Army believed that what a child was taught during his formative years had a lasting impact on the beliefs carried into adulthood. So in the Soviet Union the militarization of youth started at an early stage.\textsuperscript{77} The Madrassi units being mostly general mixture regiments (Tamils, Telugus, and the Deccani Muslims were mixed within each company) had weak ethnic loyalties to back up their regimental ethos. Hence in the Madras regiments, the sons and relatives of the soldiers were given special preference when vacancies occurred. From the regimental records of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Madras Infantry Regiment it is clear that the recruit


\textsuperscript{76} Army regulations, \textit{India}, vol. 2, \textit{Regulations and Orders for the Army} (Calcutta, 1913), pp. 118-19; Minutes on the organization of the army in India, Ch. 1, Bengal Army, British officers, para 2-3, 11 Oct. 1875, Norman minutes, N.A.I.

boys constituted 30% of the unit’s manpower. Why did a regiment not depend totally on the recruit boys? We could hazard a guess that the British were probably afraid that to convert a regiment into a set of family monopolies would result in a narrow base which might prove to be dangerous in the long run.

Not only did the regiments have soldiers’ sons, but other relatives from the same locality also served in the same unit. In 1857, the 1st Punjab Cavalry Regiment had 3 Duffadars and 20 troopers who were Ranghars from Hansi and Rohtak districts of Haryana. They were all related to each other. Then there were two brothers Naib Risaldar Firoz Khan and Lance Dufadar Akbar Khan who fought against the rebels. The 1st Regiment of Beatson’s Horse was raised in March 1858. It had about 579 troopers and several had their relations serving in it. Sowar Imam Ali was the son of Risaldar Rustum Ali Khan. Mahmud Khan, a trooper, was the uncle of Naib Risaldar Abdullah Khan. Another Afzal Khan was the father of Naib Risaldar Hakim Khan. In 1861, the 24th Madras Infantry Regiment had 2 privates named Mahmud Hussain and Moonerpah, who were cousins.

The Indian officers in charge of enlistment generally acquired men from their own villages, and frequently enlisted their relatives. A typical example was sepoy Sitaram who was enlisted in 1812 by his uncle, who was a Jemadar. Both were Brahmins, who came from Tilowee village in Awadh, and both served in the same


80 Camp Bairseah, signed Captain E.G. Wood, commandant 1st Regiment of Beatson’s Horse, Progs. no. 1813, 11 Oct. 1859, M.D.P. March 1860.

81 Roll of men of 24th Madras Infantry Regiment, Progs. no. 74, 6th May 1861, M.D.P. Oct. 1861.
regiment throughout their lives.\textsuperscript{82} It was the army’s policy to encourage soldiers on furlough to bring recruits. The aim was to utilize the already existing interpersonal bonds for the construction of group cohesion. So each company became a caucus for a particular clan from a particular locality, and these clans resisted the entry of other clans in their companies. This policy was geared to create a sense of emulation among the various companies of a regiment.\textsuperscript{83}

The imperial belief was that the ‘martial’ ethos had roots in the Indian society. Further the British belief was that the military clans looked down upon other clans, and if the clans were mixed within the companies, then the esprit de corps would disintegrate. The men in the companies were very concerned that only members of their own clan should join them. Many non-Rana Gurung recruits tried to enlist along with the Rana clan of the Gurung tribe. The army, to ensure clan homogeneity in the companies, asked the recruits—what clan they belonged to, from which districts they hailed, and what their family backgrounds were.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} James Lunt (ed), \textit{From Sepoy to Subedar being the Life and Adventures of Sita Ram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army Written and Related by Himself}, tr. by Lieutenant Colonel Norgate (1970, reprint, London, 1988), pp. 3-6, 13-16.

\textsuperscript{83} Bingley, \textit{Rajputs}, pp. 174, 176.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 177; Vansittart, \textit{Gurkhas}, p. 88.
The regiments became a network of families of particular clans. The 5th Gurkha Rifles recruited mostly members of the Thapa clan of the Magar tribe, and people from the Srisht clan of the Newar tribe. The catchment area of this regiment was Nepal valley in central Nepal. Most of the officers were from the Kala family of the Thapa clan. Many officers of the 8th Gurkha Rifles were from Nagarkoti family of the Srisht clan of the Newars.85

The companies of the polyethnic regiments also harnessed the primordial loyalties (clan and family affinities). The 20th Punjabis was a class company regiment. In 1912 it had 8 companies with a total of 912 men. This unit had 2 companies of Jat Sikhs and 2 Dogra companies (the Rajputs and not the Brahmins of this community were enlisted). And the other 4 companies (B, C, F, and G) were composed of trans Indus tribes. Though only 2 companies (the Jat Sikhs from central Punjab) were enlisted from Punjab, the unit as a whole was still given the title of ‘Punjabis’ to create an artificial territorial identity. As the companies were of distinct groups, they were never mixed, but functioned as separate entities. For small unit actions, the companies were divided into sections. Each section had a minimum of 16 men. And, for making use of the primordial ties, each section was composed of a single clan. Colonel L.C. Dunsterville, the commandant of this regiment, commented in 1912 that new clans should not be inducted in the sections as it would create obstacles in the evolution of clan spirit. Hence the personnel of different sections were never mixed. Training was based on sections. B and G companies were filled with the Afridi tribe. B Company had 4 sections. They were filled with Adam Khel, Malikdin Khel, Kuki Khel and Zakka Khel Afridis. G Company was filled with Kambhan Khel Afridis.

The Pathans were in F Company. 2 sections of this company were filled with the Sagri Khattak clan and the other 2 sections had Bangi Khel and Barak Khel Pathans.\textsuperscript{86}

Another example of the companies utilizing territorial, clan, and family links was the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion of the 9\textsuperscript{th} Jat Regiment. In 1903, this unit was allotted Ludhiana and Ferozepur divisions for recruitment. By 1908, this class company regiment had 4 Rajput companies (A, B, E, and F), 2 Gujar companies (C and D), and 2 Muslim Jat companies (G and H). A, D and G companies were recruited from Ferozepur, Faridkot and Bhawalpur districts. B, C and H companies enlisted men from Ludhiana, Maler Kotla and Nabha districts. E Company acquired its personnel from Ambala, Patiala and Karnal districts. F Company derived its manpower from Rohtak and Hissar districts.\textsuperscript{87}

Conclusion

The creation of an identity was not an event, but a process extending over a century. In one sense 1857 was a break in the history of regimental construction in particular, and British rule in general, because caste consciousness was replaced by ‘racial’ pride. But there were also elements of continuity, for example in the use of colours for establishing regimental pride.

The regiment building process included both indigenous and foreign strands. The British imported modern institutions like the regiment to India. But in the subcontinent it appropriated traditional elements like tribes. The regiments’ uniforms bore evidence of the ethnic content. Hence the end product, the Indian regiments, were an amalgam of tradition and modernity. In fact, the construction of regiments

\textsuperscript{86} Army committee, vol. 2, pp. 895-97, 900.

\textsuperscript{87} 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, 1903, 1908.
moulded many supposedly ‘pre colonial’ trends, like religious consciousness, in Indian society. Lionel Caplan has asserted that the British manufactured images, which reflected those very traits which the imperialists admired in themselves, for the various communities. 88 The imperial construct was more complex than that.

Since national ideology could not be utilized to propel colonial soldiers into the field of fire, the only option for the imperialists was to generate regimental cameraderie. The organizational gamut of the regiment was designed to reduce individuality at the cost of bureaucratization, in an attempt to transform the soldiers into a set of automatons. Distinct regimental traditions, by appropriating certain primordial traits, gave rise to a group ethos, which enabled the sepoys and the sowars to tolerate the inhuman ‘face of battle’. Simultaneously, regimental loyalties also prevented mutinies among the colonial soldiers. Professional soldiers did not fight merely for monetary rewards. 89 The sepoys were motivated not only by tangible incentives but also by the regimental consciousness which the British manufactured. Therefore, the Indian Army cannot be typologized as a purely mercenary army. It was also a semi-professional force. How successful was the British policy? All went well till the mass casualties of the First World War destroyed the intricate clan and family networks within the Indian regiments. But then the Indian Army was designed for ‘small wars’ and not for modern industrial warfare, which also destroyed the most effective combat force of contemporary time, the German Army.
