Conclusion

If we know how to fight, if we know how to conquer, there is not much more wanted; to combine successful results is easy, because it is merely an affair of a well practised judgement,... All that is essential in the few principles which there are, and which depend chiefly on the constitution of States and Armies...

Clausewitz’s Summary of Instructions to the Crown Prince

Faced with the enormous manpower reserves of South Asia and its cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity, the army had to chalk out a strategy for selecting groups for enlistment. This resulted in the Martial Race theory. However, ideological opposition and power politics gave birth to an opposite body of ideas: the Anti-Martial Race theory. While the Martial Race ideology at times appeared like a grand theory, having connections with other ideologies operating in the West, the perspective of the Anti-Martial Race ideology was narrow and its origin was local. Thus the recruitment policy was the product of a continuous dialectic between the two opposing ideologies.

Besides enlistment, the army was concerned with conditioning the recruits, so that they would remain in the military machine and fight for the Raj. A mixture of coercion and welfare, which included both symbolic elements and material incentives, solved the problem. Neither the quantum of coercion nor the amount of perquisites delivered had to be overwhelming, because there were no other potential employers left in the subcontinent, to whom the sepoys and the sowars could turn for employment. The Indian economy was backward. So there were no competing civilian sectors which could attract the recruits away from a long-term volunteer

military force. The imperial techniques which transformed the rural recruits into disciplined and obedient soldiers were the court martial mechanism, the regimental fabric and the welfare bureaucracy. The end result was the construction of a bureaucratic standing army.

Did this involve a Military Revolution in India? Did India experience any other Military Revolutions before the Company’s intervention? Textbooks have often analyzed Indian history on the basis of rise and fall of empires. Many have divided Indian history into three neat categories—ancient, medieval and modern. A new scheme which could explain better the role of power politics and state formation is the ‘Military Synthesis’ model. Military Synthesis stands for a complex amalgam of foreign revolutionary military inputs with indigenous military elements. The Indian context made imported revolutionary institutions inadequate for the military domination of the subcontinent. Hence a balance between innovative foreign technologies and primordial elements in the Indian society was necessary.

The subcontinent experienced 3 Military Syntheses which changed the course of Indian history. A Military Revolution occurred in the Near East about 3000 years ago. It involved the use of horse drawn war chariots. This weapon platform enabled the Aryans to invade Hindustan in about 1000 BC. However they integrated this revolutionary weapon with indigenous military techniques—infantry, cavalry armed


3 One representative is R.C. Majumdar et. al., An Advanced History of India (1946, reprint, Madras, 1991).

with swords, and elephants. Thus emerged the *Chaturanga* armies of the Mauryas and the Guptas.\(^5\)

Another Military Revolution which involved the introduction of horse archery occurred between 600 AD-1600 AD. The horse archers threatened all the agrarian civilizations of the world. The men on horseback were able to dislocate the foot slogging infantry armies of the agrarian states by altering the ‘speed of battle’. The element of surprise and mobility provided by horse archery enabled the Inner Asian nomads to dominate the north Indian plain by destroying the *Chaturanga* forces. But India did not possess the huge grasslands necessary for grazing the Central Asian steppe horses. Moreover, the nomadic warriors gradually merged with the settled agrarian populace. Thus Indian ecology and the existence of numerous forts forced the *Badshahs* to integrate their horse archers with infantry, siege cannons and elephantry. Thus the Sultanate and the Mughal period witnessed a transition from an Empire on Horseback towards a rudimentary Gunpowder Empire.\(^6\)

Between 1600 and 1800, northwest Europe experienced a Military Revolution arising from infantry equipped with hand-held firearms, supported by mobile field

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The British imported this lethal combination into South Asia. However the South Asian demography, economy and geography resulted in several changes. Instead of the underemployed urban proletariat on which the European infantry forces mainly depended, the British led Sepoy Army had to depend on the peasants. This resulted in the evolution of elaborate recruitment ideologies. Also, the Company was forced to tune its military machine to the demands of the agrarian scenario: For example, furlough was given at harvest time.

In early modern European warfare, the light cavalry had became useless, due to the rise of the volley firing technique by the infantry. But in India the lack of light cavalry hampered the Company’s war making capacity. The heavy European cavalry that the Company brought with it was geared for shock actions. But for reconnaissance, foraging and screening, the British needed light cavalry. Further, the

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7 One School challenges the concept of Military Revolution. This School argues that a series of incremental military innovations occurred from 1400 onwards and the slow development of military techniques continued even after 1800. Hence Jeremy Black argues for using the concept of Military Evolution. In response, Clifford J. Rogers has come up with the concept of successive Military Revolutions. The Infantry Revolution occurred between 1420-1440 and then came the Artillery Revolution etc. To my mind if one takes the long durée perspective then the concept of Military Revolution could be maintained especially if we consider the decisive effect which Western arms had on Asia between 1700-1900. Jeremy Black A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1500-1800 (London, 1981); Geoffrey Parker, ‘In Defence of The Military Revolution’, and Clifford J. Rogers, ‘The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years War’, in Rogers (ed), The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe (Colorado and Boulder, 1995), pp. 55-93, 337-65.


vast theatre of military operations in India made it necessary for the combatants to maintain light cavalry. And a light cavalry made up of Indians was best. So the Raj was forced to raise sowars on the Indian model, through the Silladari system. In the final analysis, the British were able to rule India not merely through the Western modelled infantry, but because they were able to construct a hybrid military machine, by balancing institutions from the East and the West.11

What effect did this process have on the construction of the British-Indian State? In an essay, C. Bayly, influenced by John Brewer’s categorization of the early modern British state as a Fiscal-Military State, asserts that Britain’s Indian empire was also a Fiscal-Military State. Bayly then goes on to analyze the innovative revenue administration which sustained the British-Indian polity. However, he neglects the role of the semi-professional army which maintained this state and was also one of the

10 For the idea that the vast distances resulted in stretching the Asian war machines to the maximum, which in turn made the employment of cavalry necessary, see Jeremy Black, ‘War and the World, 1450-2000’, *JMH*, vol. 63, no. 3 (1999), p. 677.

11 I am not suggesting that Military Synthesis is an example of European exceptionalism. Ranjit Singh effectively integrated the field artillery of the European armies with the light irregular cavalry of the Sikhs. But he failed to build a stable political infrastructure. This proved to be the Achilles heel of the Khalsa military machine during the Anglo-Sikh Wars. Colonel Mouton, ‘The First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846)’, *Panjab Past and Present*, vol. 15 (1981), pp. 116-27; Donald Featherstone, *At Them with the Bayonet: The First Sikh War* (London, 1968), pp. 3, 6-14, 25, 32-35, 55-59, 72, 80, 165-66.

motors behind its administrative expansion and penetration into the society. The other aspect of John Brewer's concept like high taxation for maintaining large armies if applied to the Indian scenario will not shed much light on the contours of the British-Indian state because this trend was also present in the Mughal polity. In another essay, Bayly asserts that the collection and assessment of information about the 'Orient' aided the British in constructing the Indian empire. But he neglects the army's information collection activities. The vast amount of anthropological data, collected by the military officers for shaping the manpower procurement scheme, transformed the colonial polity from a Night Watchman State into a Knowledgeable Military State.

What was so colonial about the Sepoy Army? The Martial Race doctrine was not a peculiar South Asian colonial development. Some of the assumptions of the Martial Race ideology had roots in the Western society. Lord Bacon had written:

... It hath seldom or never been seen that the far southern people have invaded the northern, but contrariwise whereby it is manifest that the northern tract of the world is... more martial... Cold of northern parts... both makes the bodies hardest and .... courage warmest.


The Martial Race tradition could be traced back to Classical Antiquity. The Caesars preceded Roberts in believing that tall handsome men from cold frontier regions made good soldiers. So they inducted the Batavi tribe from the Rhine frontier in the corps de elite of the Roman Army— the Germani Custodies Corporis. 17

Till the 11th century, the Byzantine emperors, like the 19th century British officials in India, had a liking for farmers, who were believed to be the best material for soldiering. 18 The medieval Islamic polities also followed a selective enlistment policy. The Sultans believed that compared with the Greeks, Arabs, Armenians and Kurds, the Turks were much better warriors, due to their ‘handsomeness’ and ‘manliness’. Hence the Turks were recruited from the Islamic frontier which ran along Central Asia. 19

Back in India, the Mughals preferred the Iranis and the Turanis compared with the Hindustanis and the Afghans in the cavalry, which was the elite branch of their army. Mansabs were granted to selected Rajput clans: to the Rajawats and the Shaikhwat clans of the Kachawaha group of Rajputs, but not to the Narooka Rajput

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clans.\textsuperscript{20} The British in India built upon such traditions, and this ideology was then transported to other imperial colonies in the Middle East and Africa.\textsuperscript{21}

The absence of nationalism in the Sepoy Army was not unique to it. Like the Indian Army, the Habsburg Army also did not depend on nationalism, but depended rather on allegiance to the Emperor. The Habsburg regiments, like the regiments of the Indian Army, were composed of 3 to 4 nationalities. And the German officers of such units like the British officers of the Indian Army, had to be specialists in several languages in order to establish working relationship with their soldiers.\textsuperscript{22}

The uniqueness of the Indian Army was the excessive emphasis on regimental traditions. The army remained a loose collection of several distinct regiments, rather than a homogeneous, monolithic, unified structure. This proved adequate as long as the Indian Army was deployed to check the 'Drang Nach Osten' of the Pathan tribes. But when faced with Totaler Krieg and the Imperial German Army, heavy battle casualties and mass expansion became the order of the day. For the Indian Army in France, 1914 brought defeat, death and disaster. Then the Sepoy Army faced Gottardammerung.


\textsuperscript{22} Norman Stone, 'Army and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1900-1914', \textit{Past and Present}, no. 33 (1966), pp. 95-111.