Chapter 1

The Evolution of the Martial Race Theory

The British-Indian Army was the strongest land force in the subcontinent. Except for its officer corps, the army was composed of Indians. Compared with the vast demographic resources of India, the army’s demand for manpower remained limited. This allowed the British to decide which groups to enlist and on what basis. Their varying perceptions of the loyalty and courage of the different groups shaped recruitment.

Scholars like Stephen P. Cohen argue that the Martial Race ideology which held that only particular groups like the Sikhs and the Jats had the right qualities to produce soldiers moulded the army’s recruitment pattern from the late 19th century onwards. The Martial Race doctrine was viewed as a monolithic, unchanging and coherent ideology, which suddenly flowered in the 1880s.¹

However, some historians argue that the core of the Martial Race ideology demanded that tall and fair men from north of river Narmada were warriors and this idea was prevalent even before 1857 especially in the Bengal Army.² But these scholars do not develop this point.

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The policy makers of the pre 1857 Bengal Army, whom I term the 'Bengal School', assumed that only tall wheat eating peasants produced good soldiers. They believed that good warriors came from the families of enterprising agriculturists who cultivated their own lands. Yeomen farmers were believed to be healthy, hard working and sturdy. Robert Orme, one of the historians of the Company, first propounded this view. High castes were regarded as famous for orderly conduct, subordinate to all superior authority as a habit and faithful to their salt. Low castes and urban occupational groups such as city artisans were rejected, as they lacked the qualifications demanded by the Bengal School. Brahmins and Rajputs from Bihar and Awadh were mostly enlisted: they were the Purbiyas of the Bengal Army. They were preferred because they ate wheat and came from families owning some land, and they were described as zamindars or yeomen peasants by the British officers. Moreover they were tall: all the recruits to the Bengal Army had to be 5'7" tall. The Governor

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General William Bentinck asserted that the north Indian high castes due to their better stature were bolder and more martial than the Madrassis.⁴

James W. Hoover writes that the historians’ assumption that the Bengal Army being filled with high caste zamindars’ sons from Purab is erroneous because numerically the Brahmin and Rajput zamindars of that area were inadequate for that purpose.⁵ Hoover’s essay is an unnecessary piece of shadow boxing. He has misunderstood the meaning of the term Purab. This term denoted the region from Delhi upto Bihar and not merely southern Awadh as Hoover assumes. Actually the Bengal Army recruited Brahmins, Rajputs from the small peasant families and also the Gwalahs (a caste which was engaged in milking the cows) from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Moreover large numbers of north Indian Muslims joined the cavalry of the Bengal Army.⁶

Similar to the reasoning of the Bengal School, a trend existed in the pre 1857 Madras Army, which I label as the Selective Enlistment School. This lobby believed that martialness was the monopoly of certain groups. This idea was expressed in the military regulations of 1765, which confined recruitment to the Rajputs, Telugus and the Muslims. This lobby further believed that only members of certain occupations of the groups mentioned possessed soldiering instincts. Hence weavers were declared

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⁶ Barat, *Bengal Native Infantry*, pp. 119-24, 150, 196, 211; Cardew, *Bengal Army*, pp. 54-57; *Supplementary report*, p. 27.
unfit for soldiering. Members of this School also harped on the physical features of the recruits. In 1795, Colonel Floyd declared that good recruits could not be obtained from the deep south, since this region produced men of small size, under the prescribed minimum height of 5'5". The conviction was that with the passage of time, the south Indians were deteriorating in size and looks, hence they could not become proper soldiers any more.\(^7\) This ideology also seeped among the civilian elites. Echoing Bentinck, H.T. Prinsep in 1835 claimed that the men from the Peninsula were deficient in bodily strength and mental energy and those men should be replaced by the Purbiyas who, because of their larger stature, were equal to the British soldier.\(^8\) Purbiyas were much sought after due to their superior physique and 'handsome' looks. In their absence, Telugus were recruited as they somewhat resembled the former. Tamils were not liked because to the British they looked like 'brute beasts'. The Indian Christians were regarded as dirty and alcoholic, hence they were looked down upon. And this trend continued in some of the regiments of the Madras Army till the 1880s.\(^9\)

The Bengal School and the Selective Enlistment School both used the same indices for judging the recruits and reached the same conclusions. They held that a warlike spirit was confined to certain groups of particular areas. They liked to recruit a particular group from a particular region because they were convinced that heavy recruitment from a narrow area created military habits and ambitions and the


\(^8\) Minute by Prinsep, 9 June 1835, *Parliamentary papers* (1867), pp. 165-66.

\(^9\) Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Tyrrell, 'The Races of the Madras Army', *JUSII*, no. 18 (1881), pp. 11, 18, 20.
inhabitants then began to despise a peaceful life. Such people were then easily motivated to fight.\textsuperscript{10} The chief assumptions of these two camps were similar to the Martial Race ideology, which appeared in full bloom and percolated in four the regional armies (the Madras Army, the Bombay Army, the Bengal Army and the Punjab Frontier Force) when Field Marshal Lord Roberts became the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in 1885.\textsuperscript{11} Roberts and his followers who were Major G.F. MacMunn, Colonel L.W. Shakespear, the commandant of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Gurkha Rifles just before the First World War, two Royal Artillery officers Lieutenant General W.H. Goodenough and Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Dalton, added some more criteria like climate and frontier but the basic paradigm remained same. Only the groups and the regions approved of changed with time. The Sikhs and Muslims of Punjab replaced the Purbiyas of north India.

II

All the ideologues of the Martial Race camp made a division between the Orient and the Occident. Roberts argued that in the Occident anyone could become a soldier, but in the Orient, due to its peculiar historical and ecological conditions, only some groups were suited for soldiering. He felt that people living in the northwest of India,

\textsuperscript{10} Anon, \textit{The Armies of the Native States of India} (London, 1884), p. 23.

\textsuperscript{11} Lieutenant General S.L. Menczec, \textit{Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty First Century} (New Delhi, 1993), p. 534.
such as the Gurkhas, Sikhs, Dogras and the Pathans, were martial.\textsuperscript{12} In a similar tone MacMunn declared, ‘In Europe, as we know, every able bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort, in the East...certainly in India, this is not so’.\textsuperscript{13} MacMunn claimed that in the Orient only a few groups, could bear arms because the other communities lacked physical courage. He linked this up with the theory of the Aryan invasion. According to him, the Aryans invaded India, defeated the Dravidians, and occupied their lands. The Aryan descendants became the yeomen peasants and landowners of central and northern India; the landless labourers who migrated to the towns were the defeated Dravidians. The land owning and the cultivating groups, who were supposed to have been descended from the Aryans, he categorized as martial. These Aryans prevented the defeated other groups from bearing arms; as a result the non-Aryans lost their martial traditions. MacMunn warned his fellow officers that in India, for the foregoing reasons, the French practice of \textit{levee en masse} or the British practice by which the rich pay and the poor fight was inapplicable.\textsuperscript{14}

The Muslims and the Rajputs of Punjab were categorized as martial by MacMunn because they were regarded as descendants of the Central Asian Aryans, who occupied the land by driving out the original inhabitants. The ‘martial Aryans’ never indulged in trade, commerce and artisanal activities, or in pursuits, which


\textsuperscript{13} Major George F. MacMunn, \textit{The Armies of India} (1911, reprint, New Delhi, 1991), p. 129.

MacMunn said required brains. He labelled the groups following such occupations, especially business communities such as the Khatris and the educated Bengalis, as unmartial.\textsuperscript{15} Goodenough and Dalton also highlighted the linkage between agriculture and the warrior ethos. The Jats were fine agriculturists, so they were regarded as fine fighting materials.\textsuperscript{16}

Certain cultural and physical attributes were ascribed on the 'warrior races'. For Roberts, Goodenough and Dalton, the martial communities were well built, smart, fair and handsome. They assumed that the martial Sikhs with excellent physiques were culturally conditioned for warfare.\textsuperscript{17} Roberts argued that they loved fighting and the excitement of war.\textsuperscript{18} Goodenough and Dalton also accepted that the martial peoples' hereditary profession was fighting and linked it up with their dietary practice. The Jats ate wheat and drank milk, so they were awarded the status of soldiers, while the Tamils were rejected because they ate rice.\textsuperscript{19}

The role religion played in generating 'martialness' among the recruits was another facet of the Martial Race doctrine. MacMunn pointed out that the warlike instinct of the Sikhs was due to the militant faith of Guru Govind Singh and those Jats who accepted Sikhism became warriors due to the Calvinistic effect of the Gurus'.

\textsuperscript{15} MacMunn, The Armies, pp. 129-32, 140-45, 155-56, 162-64; 'Martial Races', pp. 73, 76, 81-82.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 448, Roberts, Forty One Years, p. 530.

\textsuperscript{18} Robson, Roberts in India, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{19} Goodenough et. al. Army Book, pp. 448, 467.
teachings. However long before MacMunn, a Scottish officer, W.L. McGregor, who fought in the Sikh wars claimed that the martial religion-Sikhism, transformed its followers into warriors.

Roberts believed that climate and the frontier influenced the biological and sociological attributes of the inhabitants. He asserted that in the hot climate of India, even erstwhile warlike races rotted. Cold temperate regions produced better warriors than the hot tropics. As northwest India was colder than south and west India, Roberts felt that most of the martial races were located in that corner. Roberts also tried to introduce a connection between the existence of a frontier, mountainous region and the presence of martial traits. He wrote that a live frontier in the hilly region- one with warlike enemies present on the other side- kept alive the martial aptitudes, while long periods of peace, prosperity and security resulted in racial degeneration. In 1882 he wrote: ‘The fact is that the Madras sepoy has never encountered a formidable enemy, and nearly 100 years of peace have almost quenched any martial spirit there may have been in him’. Due to the presence of an open frontier, constant warfare was common in northwest India, hence, claimed Roberts, the Sikhs and the Pathans retained their


22 Roberts, Forty One Years, pp. 499, 530, 532, 534; Robson, Roberts in India, p. 264.

23 Robson, Roberts in India, p. 264.
soldierlike attributes, while the Tamils and the Telugus had become unmartial due to continuous peace.\textsuperscript{24}

The medical opinion of colonial India somewhat supported Roberts' contention that the highlands nurtured healthy recruits. In 1928, Lieutenant Colonel W.C. Ross of the Indian Medical Service and then Director of Public Health in Bihar, stated that due to the attack of the hookworms, the people inhabiting the plains of India, especially the region around Bihar and Orissa, had become weak.\textsuperscript{25} The army avoided these two provinces. And the military scenario strengthened Roberts' position that the northwest frontier bred warriors. Continuous 'butcher and bolt' sort of expeditions against the frontier tribesmen were going on along that region. Hence for the Indus tribals and the Punjabi soldiers of the Punjab Frontier Force guarding the frontier, this region provided realistic training in hill warfare. Deployment along the frontier was helpful for combat simulation and was much more superior than the parade ground training given to the Madras and most of the Bombay soldiers who were never deployed along the frontier.\textsuperscript{26}

The Martial Race ideologues tried to distinguish among various 'martial' groups. MacMunn tried to differentiate between the various 'martial' communities on the basis of their regional locations, physical and mental attributes, languages, social and cultural characteristics and religious sensibilities. MacMunn

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. pp. 257-58, 265-66; Roberts, \textit{Forty One Years}, pp. 499, 532.

\textsuperscript{25} Royal commission on agriculture in India: Evidence taken in Bihar and Orissa, vol. 13 (Calcutta, 1928), pp. 335-49.

\textsuperscript{26} From Colonel John A.M. Macdonald, Secy. to Govt., Bombay Military department, to Colonel H.K. Burne, Military department, Simla, Progs. no. 721, 28 Oct. 1878, M.D.P. March 1879, N.A.I.
differentiated the Sikhs of central Punjab with long hair and curled beards from the Pathans who had a 'Jewish' appearance. Further, he believed that the Sikhs were slow witted but doggedly courageous, while the Pathans were characterized by their irresponsible manners.27

The spokesmen of the Martial Race ideology used history to justify their views. Roberts claimed:

I have been reading lately the history of the Madras army, and I cannot find any occasion on which its fighting qualities were ever severely tried... But a study of the campaigns and battles which took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century proves conclusively that the brunt of fighting was always borne by the Europeans and that the casualties amongst the native troops were never very serious.28

Roberts did not provide any figures to support his contention. A glance at the combat casualties suffered by the Madras regiments that fought against Mysore and the Marathas, goes against Roberts' verdict. In the action before Bangalore on March 1791 and at the battle of Assaye the Madras units suffered considerable losses.29 Probably Roberts' plan was to delegitimize the Madrassis and to replace them with the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.

Why did the proponents of the Martial Race ideology consider the Sikhs, Pathans and the Gurkhas to be martial vis a vis the Madrassis? The lacklustre performance of the Company's Indian troops in the Terai during the Nepal War (1814-15), in the swampy jungles during the First Burma War and in the hot plains of Punjab during the two Sikh Wars on the one hand, and the gallant resistance by

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28 Robson, Roberts in India, pp. 263-64.

29 Lieutenant Colonel W.J. Wilson, Historical Record of the Fourth Prince of Wales' Own Regiment Madras Light Cavalry (Madras, 1877), Appendix A and B, pp. 89-90.
the Gurkhas and the Sikhs against the Company’s forces on the other hand, convinced the British officers about the combat capabilities of the two latter groups. What the British forgot was that the two war winning cards of the Company’s Army—the horse artillery and the heavy cavalry were not of much use in the hilly terrain of Nepal and the northwest frontier. Again the Company’s Indian soldiers were not trained in jungle warfare in which the Burmese excelled, and the white officer corps was to be blamed for this deficiency. The Raj’s sepoys line tactics, which were well suited to combat in the plains, proved useless in the hills. In mountain warfare skirmishing was vital and the Pathans and the Gurkhas were masters of this craft because of their acquaintance with the terrain from the childhood. These two groups were physically and psychologically adapted to cold and rain at a high altitude. During the two Sikh Wars, the Company utilized some Gurkhas. Observing their actions, Sergeant Pearman, an Irishman, who was in the Company’s force, described the Gurkhas as ‘a fearless brave mountainous race’ and was for increasing their intake. Charles Napier and Brian Hodgson demanded the enlistment of the Gurkhas; the highlander soldiers according to their perceptions.30

C. Enloe asserts that the political dependability of the recruits was the chief criterion of the Martial Race ideology.\textsuperscript{31} From the above discussion it is clear that Enloe’s view is a bit mechanical. She neglects the religious and cultural elements of the military reality, which went into the making of this complex theory. Further Roberts, the father figure of the Martial Race ideology, argued that combat efficiency was more vital than the political reliability of the groups joining the army. Roberts claimed that some groups like the Pathans were martial but not necessarily loyal; but some like the Sikhs were both loyal and had warrior traits. He was for limited enlistment of the quasi-loyal martial groups like the Pathans. But he was never for the induction of the groups, which he considered loyal, but unwarlike: the Madrassis.\textsuperscript{32} And MacMunn never raised the question of the political reliability of the recruits.\textsuperscript{33}

The Martial Race doctrine was a complex alloy of different elements. One element was the Bengal School’s recruitment doctrine. The other strand was introduced by the Roberts’ caucus towards the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The linkage between martial qualities and the social and occupational backgrounds were present in the Bengal School’s enlistment doctrine. This line was pursued vigorously by the Martial Race ideologues. The physical and dietary criteria of the


Bengal School were also trained by the high priests of the Martial Race camp. The well built agricultural races remained the best soldiers. Why this preference for the small farmers? In general India was an agrarian economy and most of the people were living in the countryside. The army found that many of the people from the agricultural backgrounds were undernourished. So the army preferred the landowning peasants, who at least did not suffer from the adverse effects of malnutrition. The officers saw that when even the soldiers and the reservists remained in the villages for a long period, they fell ill due to undernourishment. The imperial belief was that the urban people were seditious and the cities were the storehouse of diseases due to backward sanitary conditions. The officers were convinced that the cities with their filthy bazaars and the temptations they offered to the ’natives’ resulted in venereal diseases. The Bengali politicians from the secret societies influenced the regiments stationed in Calcutta and the 16th Jat Regiment, when deployed at Kanpur in 1904, came under the influence of the Arya Samaj. As a result many soldiers had to face court martial and then discharged. Hence the army looked down upon occupations, which involved going to the cities and which they conceived required brains. They were probably afraid that the inclusion of too many politically educated people might result in the disintegration of the British authority. In contemporary Europe also there was a general belief that the peasants possessed good physiques and, being simpler, were much more

34 Army committee, vol. 3, p. 647, 677; Proceedings of a special committee assembled at Allahabad by order of Brigadier Fordyce on 10th July to take into consideration and report upon the revision of the cantonment, Progs. no. 12, 14. D.P. Oct. 1860.
malleable compared with the urban underemployed. Roberts emphasis on ecology was a factor, which was absent in the discourse of the Bengal School. Thus the Martial Race ideologues modified, elaborated and revived the Bengal School’s image of model soldiers.

III

Under the superficial unity, which the Martial Race ideology displayed, there existed several fault lines. David Arnold rightly asserts that the Martial Race ideology was a bundle of contradictory ideas but he does not develop this point. All the scholars have treated this ideology as somewhat frozen in time. Hence they have missed out the changes, which the Martial Race theory underwent with time.

In the 1890s Roberts, Goodenough and Dalton emphasized the outward appearance of the martial groups. In 1911 MacMunn challenged this linkage between physical attributes and soldiering. He had written:

It is absurd that the great, merry, powerful Kashmiri should have not an ounce of physical courage in his constitution, but it is so. Nor are appearances of any use as a criterion. Some of the manliest looking people in India are in this respect the most despicable.

The Bengal School and some members of its lineal descendant, the Martial Race lobby were obsessed with height. It is to be noted that the British Army was also

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36 David Arnold, “‘Criminal Tribes’ and “Martial Races”: Crime and Social Control in Colonial India”, Unpublished Seminar paper, Postgraduate seminar, CCSH/ 84/5, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

37 MacMunn, The Armies, p. 130.
obsessed with height. Only after suffering horrendous casualties in late 1914, for
gaining replacements quickly and in large numbers, was the height requirement
lowered from 5'8'' to 5'3''.

In the Indian Army Colonel Shakespear challenged
the criteria of height for inducting his favourites, the short Gurkhas.

The use or rather misuse of history by the theorists constitutes another
issue. Both Roberts and MacMunn used history to justify their views but in
different ways. Roberts used history negatively: to delegitimize some groups such
as the Madrassis, by pointing out that they lacked martial traditions. MacMunn on
the other hand used history positively: to prove that some communities had
brilliant fighting records and hence they were warlike. The Jats, in his eyes,
appeared to be warlike because they fought very well against General Lake's
besieging army during the siege of Bharatpur fort.

Generally all the theorists agreed that the martial groups in India were, at
their best, the equals of the British soldiers. Before 1857, Hugh Gough, the British
general who fought the Khalsa Army, glorified the Gurkhas and thus set the stage
to MacMunn and Shakespear to admire them. Gough's view was that the Gurkhas
could be compared with the elite British infantry, the grenadiers. But Shakespear in
1912 concurred that the Gurkhas were better than the British soldiers. This was

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40 MacMunn, *The Armies*, pp. 159-60.

indeed a revolutionary statement as for the first and the last time, a British officer openly admitted that an Indian martial group was more capable than the white men.

While Roberts established a link between religion and disloyalty and applied it in the case of trans frontier Pathans, MacMunn argued that for the Sikhs, religion functioned as a force multiplier. Thus religion appeared as an important component of the corpus of ideas associated with Roberts’ camp. Hence Cohen’s argument that the Martial Race supporters underplayed the religious aspect of the martial groups is untenable.

The Martial Race ideologues attempted to classify and categorize the different ‘military races’ of the subcontinent. For such an elaborate programme, their analytical categories and the basis of their disaggregation remained ever fluctuating, which in the end produced a confusing picture. Peers argues that before the 1830s the British used the category caste for analyzing the composition of the army but gradual disillusionment with the Bengal Army’s performance forced them to introduce a new analytical category, race. In his monograph, Peers writes that caste was a tool for man management in the hands of the British officers. They assumed that each caste had its own characteristics, but there was some disagreement among the officers on those fundamental attributes. However in the later 19th century, this categorization became more systematic.

Omissi

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42 Cohen, *Indian Army*, p. 49.


writes that the term ‘martial races’ was used consistently till the early 20th century when it gave way to martial classes.\textsuperscript{45} We will see that the term race, caste and class were used arbitrarily between 1859 and 1913 and there was disagreement about the particular characteristics of these terms.

In his autobiography Roberts used the terms race, caste and class interchangeably while referring to the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.\textsuperscript{46} In his correspondence during 1878 he described these two groups as classes but in 1882 he described them as hardier races.\textsuperscript{47} MacMunn also used these categories indiscriminately. He described the Pathans as a race that was divided into many tribes, which in turn were further subdivided into clans. But for him the Pathans were also a class.\textsuperscript{48}

IV

Geostrategic considerations, political factors and personalities interacted constantly to influence the rise and fall of the Martial Race doctrine at various moments of time. Before 1857, the colonial armies were used against the indigenous powers of the subcontinent. The strategic threat centres for the Company shifted to north India in the early 19th century. This aided the expansion of the Bengal Army. As

\textsuperscript{45} Omissi, Sepoy and the Raj, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{46} Roberts, Forty One Years, pp. 534, 540.

\textsuperscript{47} Robson, Roberts in India, pp. 34-36, 256-59.

\textsuperscript{48} MacMunn, The Armies, pp. 145-54.
the zone of operation was nearest to it, it saved time and transportation costs to deploy the Bengal Army. The continuous success of the Bengal Army also resulted in the acceptance of its recruitment ideology. The Bombay Army could not enlist the Marathas because they remained enemies of the British till the second decade of the 19th century. Since south India was already pacified, and after the last decade of the 18th century no big war occurred in that region, the Madras Army did not experience any large scale operations. This resulted in the decline of its status. 49 Hence the Bengal School remained dominant and its star continued to rise till the fatal Sunday of 1857 when the Pandies turned their muskets against their white masters.

Several factors ensured the decline of the Bengal School, the precursor of the Martial Race ideology after 1857. By 1856, the size of the Indian Army, including the regulars and the irregulars was 250,000 men and out of them about 120,000 personnel came from north India. 50 The Bengal School's policy of depending on the Purbiyas was proved wrong by a series of incidents, which started on 10th May 1857 and finally culminated in the Bengal Army's ruin. The Purbiyas conducted most of the Mutiny. Other factors also downgraded them in the eyes of the military establishment. From 1860 onwards, successive Secretaries of State demanded that the Indian units be deployed along the imperial outposts in Afro-Asia for policing duties. Charles Wood was one Secretary of State, who

49 Menezes, Fidelity and Honour, pp. 5-80, 145, 147, 150; V. Longer, Red Coats to Olive Green: A History of the Indian Army, 1600-1974 (New Delhi, 1974), pp. 14-54; Mason, A Matter of Honour, pp. 29-34, 75-110; Cardew, Bengal Native Army, pp. 128-36; Supplementary report, p. 45.

50 General George Chesney, Indian Polity: A View of the System of Administration in India (1894, reprint, New Delhi, 1976) pp. 221, 224, 236, 239.
demanded the Indian units for overseas duties. The Purbiyas, due to their rituals and customs, were unwilling to cross the *kalapani*, whereas the Sikhs and the Gurkhas had no such problems. In fact the introduction of the General Enlistment Act in 1856, which stated that soldiers were liable to serve anywhere, provoked the Purbiyas to rebel.

By the 1880s the situation again turned in favour of the Martial Race spokesmen. With the passage of time, the memory of the 1857 Mutiny receded and in the official mind the external threat replaced the internal threat, which declined due to the development of the telegraph and the railways. The authorities felt confident of quickly concentrating forces to crush internal uprisings. So the army thought that the policy of maintaining four different armies recruited from all over India could be done away with. The external threats were of two types: raids by the frontier tribes, and fear of a Russian-sponsored Afghan expedition. The Indian Army was geared to launch repeated expeditions against the northwest frontier tribals. Delhi became a pawn in the 'Great Game' between London and St. Petersburg. The military calculated that to retreat inside India before the advancing invaders would cause an uprising of the Indians, especially among the Muslims. So the generals decided to maintain an advance frontier line in Afghanistan till reinforcements from Britain could arrive. Local and provincial battalions were found unwilling to serve away from their homes for long periods. Roberts argued

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51 From Charles Wood to the Governor General, no. 58, para2, no. 1159, Feb. 1860, Military despatches of the Secretary of State, vol. 1, part 1, 1860, N.A.I.

52 Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p. 78.
that due to the very nature of their isolation, such units’ combat effectiveness tended to decline. This meant that most of the recruits needed to be raised from the area around the operational zone, which meant northwest India because if the regiments’ recruiting grounds were far away from their area of deployment, then it would take a long time to supply manpower to replace the casualties.\textsuperscript{53}

The aversion of the Madrassis to serving in Burma and in the northwest frontier, because of the climate and high cost of rice, reduced the prestige of this group in the army’s eyes. Burma experienced high rainfall and the unacclimatized Madrassis and the Purbiyas fell ill in large numbers. Moreover, the Madras troops’ families normally lived with them. The Madrassis were unwilling to leave their families and perform garrison duty in Burma. The army found out that transporting the families of the troops along with the regiments to their area of deployment to be very costly. For all these reasons, Lord Napier was against using the Madrassis during the Lushai expedition in 1871.\textsuperscript{54}

The intrigues and charisma of Field Marshal Roberts also aided in the victory of the Martial Race lobby. Roberts contacted many influential personalities both inside and outside India, formally and informally. Brigadier General Charles George Arbuthnot commanded some units in Afghanistan during the Second


\textsuperscript{54} Eden commission, Ch. 7, pp. 82-83.
Afghan War. He was assured by Roberts of the 'cowardliness' of the Madrassis. Roberts also got in touch with the powerful military bureaucrats. He informed the Adjutant General of India in 1878 about the 'unmartial' character of the Bombay Army and the presence of the 'warlike races' around the northwestern corner of India. In 1890, George Chesney, the Military Member of Viceroy's Council, came to know about the combatworthiness of the Punjabis from Roberts. An influential figure Major General Martin Dillon, the Assistant Military Secretary responsible for India, to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, the Duke of Cambridge in London was told about the 'fearless' Gurkhas by Roberts. Dillon was requested by Roberts to present the latter's view in front of the Duke, the most powerful military man in the British empire.\(^{55}\)

Roberts also contacted many powerful civilians. During the Second Afghan War, Roberts wrote to the Viceroy about the excellent performance of the Gurkhas against the Kurram tribes. Later, as the war was drawing to a close, he warned the Viceroy about Major General H.W. Norman, the Military Member of the Viceroy's Council and General Donald Stewart, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1881 to 1885. Norman was for limited induction of the Punjabis but Roberts was for total Punjabization of the army. As neither Norman nor Stewart shared Roberts' rosy views about the 'martial' groups, he regarded them as enemies. Roberts also privately contacted one influential-British politician, the Conservative M.P. Lord Randolph Churchill, and informed him about the

‘disastrous’ performance of the Madrassis in Burma. In one of his despatches, Roberts urged Churchill to accept the post of Secretary of State of India, in the case of a Conservative victory in Britain. Only then, he claimed, would it be possible to fill the Madras and the Bombay armies with the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.\footnote{Menezes, \textit{Fidelity and Honour}, p. 534; Roberts to Viceroy, 14 Dec. 1878, 31 March 1880, Roberts to Churchill, Private, 15 April 1885, 1 Feb. 1886 in Robson, \textit{Roberts in India}, pp. 38-39, 181-82, 317, 338-41; Memorandum on the subject of our policy with Central Asia, 5 Oct. 1867, Memorandum on the occupation of Herat, 7 June 1875, Norman minutes, N.A.I.}

Very few people dared to challenge Roberts, the most distinguished field commander of the day. But some hit back. When Roberts informed Stewart about the utter incapacity of the Bombay and the Madras soldiers to take part in overseas operations or to fight in Central Asia, the latter disagreed. Stewart did not believe that the people of the Bombay and the Madras presidencies, which supplied the bulk of the personnel of these two regional armies, were morally or mentally inferior compared to the so called warlike races of northwestern India. Stewart pointed out that many officers were biased against the Hindustanis and were averse to recruit them. General Frederick Haines, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1876 to 1881, backed Stewart’s views.\footnote{Menezes, \textit{Fidelity and Honour}, p. 534; Roberts to Stewart, 3 June 1882, Stewart to Roberts, 6 July and 3 Aug. 1882 in Robson, \textit{Roberts in India}, pp. 256-59, 260-61, 263-67.}

However, Roberts’ voluminous correspondence bore fruit in the end. He won over important figures in the War Office at London. Major General Charles Brownlow, Assistant Military Secretary in the War Office, agreed with Roberts that the positive views of Lord Hardinge and Haines about the operational
capabilities of the Bombay and the Madras armies amounted to nonsense. Brownlow agreed with Roberts' view on demobilizing the Hindustanis and the Deccanis. Powerful civilians such as Lord Dufferin supported Roberts.\textsuperscript{58}

The Martial Race lobby knew that the distance between victory and defeat was marginal indeed. When Roberts was the Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army (1881-1885), there was a chance that he might be appointed as the Adjutant General in Britain (he was interested in that post) and the post of the Commander-in-Chief in India would go to Lord Wolseley. But the latter was not appointed because London feared that Wolseley being a 'hawk' would start a war with the 'Bear' immediately after coming to India. The Queen and the Duke of Cambridge wanted to appoint the Duke of Connaught as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, but Salisbury’s cabinet opposed this proposal.\textsuperscript{59} Roberts was also lucky in that when he moved to the centre stage of the Indian Army, the opponents of Punjabization were on their way out. G.F. Hamilton, the Secretary of State, pointed out that had Stewart been in the office for a little longer, then the rise of the Martial Race lobby would have been checked if not blocked completely. Stewart thoroughly opposed the cut in the recruitment of the Hindustani Muslims in the cavalry and the dominance of the Sikhs in the infantry. The appointment of

\textsuperscript{58} Roberts, \textit{Forty One Years}, p. 532; Charles Brownlow to Roberts, 20 June 1884 in Robson, \textit{Roberts in India}, p. 297.

\textsuperscript{59} Adrian Preston, 'Wolseley, The Khartoum Relief Expedition and the Defence of India', \textit{JICH}, vol. 6, no. 3 (1978), pp. 254-80; Brownlow to Roberts, Napier to Roberts, 9 July 1885, 31 July 1885 in Robson, \textit{Roberts in India}, pp. 234, 326, 447.
Kitchener and Curzon settled the issue. Both were admirers of Roberts' views as regards the 'martial races', and this is evident from their correspondence. Whatever might be the difference between the duo, they never disagreed on the issue of the 'martial races'. Both wanted to replace the Madrassis with the Gurkhas. The Martial Race lobby took great pains to keep its opponents out from the corridors of power. Hamilton conspired to keep Mansfield Clarke out of the post of the Military Member of the Viceroy's Council because the latter belonged to the Madras Army, and Hamilton feared that Clarke might obstruct the reduction of the Madras Army. If British military politics led to the appointment of Wolseley, then instead of Roberts' caucus, the 'Wolseley ring' would probably have ruled the Indian Army and its history would have been different.  

The victory of Roberts' group was reflected in the actual social and regional composition of the Indian Army. Table 1 shows that in 1885 the social and geographical basis of the army was broad: The groups from north, south and northwest India joined in more or less equal proportions. The Martial Race lobby aimed at filling the army with particular groups from a narrow area. Between 1885 and 1912, the share of the Hindustanis and the Deccanis declined drastically. In the same period the proportion of the 'martial' groups: Sikhs, Garhwalis and the Gurkhas, increased proportionately. By 1912, the 'martial' groups from the northwest became as dominant as the Purbiyas were just before the 1857 Mutiny. Interestingly the share of the Purbiyas in 1857, and Roberts' favourite martial groups (Sikhs and the frontier Muslims) in 1912 was same-44%. The low castes'
share declined from 6.5% to 1.5%.\textsuperscript{61} In the long run there was a decline in the ritual status of the groups that entered the Indian Army in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} Army committee, vol. 1-A, Minority report, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{62} Unlike the Purbiyas, Roberts' martial communities were either outside the varna system or very low in the ritual hierarchy. So the sociologist A. Bopegamage's assertion that the Martial Race lobby favoured the high castes is erroneous. A. Bopegamage, 'Caste, Class and the Indian Military: A Study of the Social Origins of Indian Army Personnel', in Jacques Van Doorn (ed), Military Profession and Military Regimes: Commitments and Conflicts (The Hague, 1969), p. 145.
Table 1: Social and Regional Composition of the Indian Army

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>1857 %</th>
<th>1885 %</th>
<th>1912 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West Frontier Province and Punjab</td>
<td>Pathans, Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(4.5+6.5+14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh and Nepal</td>
<td>Gurkhas, Garhwalis and Dogras</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8 (5+3+0)</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana and Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>Jats, other middle ranking Hindus and Low Castes</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana</td>
<td>Hindustani Muslims</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North India (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>Purbiyas (Brahmins and Rajputs)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11 (5+6*)</td>
<td>9 (2+7*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Marathas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South India</td>
<td>Madrassis (Tamils, Telugus and South Indian Muslims)</td>
<td>15 (8+7)</td>
<td>19 (12+7)</td>
<td>10.5 (5+5.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including Rajputs from Rajasthan.

As Roberts was a farsighted soldier, he probably understood the dangers posed by Punjabization in the long run. Hence his schizophrenic attempt to ascribe martial status to some frontier tribals along the Indo-Burmese border. He urged Kitchener to enlist them. Kitchener agreed to Roberts’ proposal of using the Burmese frontier tribes as general purpose troops. But their unwillingness to join in large numbers, even in the local corps, wrecked Roberts’ scheme. The Muslims of north India could have been a counterweight to the Sikhs, but anxious officers felt that Pan-Islamism might hamper the loyalty of the Muslim soldiers. Some officers believed that it was necessary to reduce the enlistment of the Muslims further, because if the Middle East politician Arabi Pasha declared a jihad against the British, then the Muslim sepoys of the Raj might turn their loaded rifles against the British. The fear that the Muslims, though ‘martial’, were disloyal spread like an epidemic within the higher echelons. Hamilton warned Elgin not to use the ‘disloyal Muslims’ in the northwestern frontier. For this reason, Hamilton did not want any Muslim soldiers in the Chitral Expeditionary Force. In the end, Roberts became desperate. He understood where his own doctrine was leading his much loved Indian Army. His attempt to balance the ‘martial’ groups was in complete ruins. Like a drowning man clutching at a straw, he turned to Chesney to enquire about the possibility of using the ‘martial’ Zulus to balance the Punjabis.

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63 Robson, *Roberts in India*, pp. 64-68, 266-67, 350-51; Kitchener to Roberts, 4 Dec. 1904, 6 June 1904, Kitchener papers, Reel no. 2.

64 Roberts to Chesney, 4 Dec. 1890 in Robson, *Roberts in India*, p. 404; Hamilton to Elgin, 10 Oct. 1895, Hamilton papers, Reel no. 2.
Sikhs, Pathans, and the Punjabi Muslims from northwest India supplied the bulk of the army’s recruits under the Martial Race gameplan. As evident from table 1, their share under the Martial Race lobby jumped from 25% to 44%. In 1885, when they had just taken over, the army drew only 19.5% of its personnel from Punjab, but by 1912 this proportion rose to 36%. In 1912, the army drew about 62% of its manpower from a narrow tract running from central Nepal to Peshawar. In 1912, at the eleventh hour when the army committee met, they realized that the Martial Race doctrine was indeed faulty because the army had become overdependent on a few groups from a narrow region. The Akali disturbances further unnerved them. The officers realized that the Sikhs had become ‘swollen-headed’, and demanded reduction in the entry of the Punjabis. 65 By then it was too late, as the Great War was coming.

Some long-term factors also operated, which aided the induction of the Purbiyas and the Sikhs. The Indian Army was generally deployed at the borders of the Indian empire, and after conquering the frontier enemies, the slow induction of the ex-enemies started. After the lapse of a certain period, the volume of recruitment of the ex-enemies rose. The frontier then advanced again, new frontier groups became favourites, and the old frontier groups were then sidelined. This was partly the product of cooption. After conquering the frontier enemies, the British officers also developed a healthy respect for these groups. The officers recognized their soldierlike qualities and created a literature about their martial activities, which generated interest about these groups and guided their enlistment in the military establishment. This process operated throughout the 19th century.

In the last half of the 18th century, the Bengal Army was deployed along the frontiers of Awadh. The heavy enlistment of the Purbiyas in the Maratha regular infantry, then the most dangerous enemy of the Company, and the tough fight put up by these units made the British interested in enlisting them. And as the Awadh Nawab’s army was reduced, the Purbiyas from the Nawabi force were coopted in the Company’s Army. This partly explains the rise of the Bengal School. Between 1790 and 1830, the Bengal Army recruited the Purbiyas heavily. Later, in the 1840s, as the British frontier expanded to the Terai and to Punjab, the tough fight which the Gurkhas and the Sikhs gave heightened the admiration of the British for these communities. The British officers produced a prolific literature on them. The Gurkha and the Sikh recruits started trickling in, partly to absorb the disbanded Khalsa Army and the Nepal Army’s soldiers. Some Sikh units were raised after the Sikh Wars. But due to lethargy and institutional inertia, the Purbiya dominance continued for some years. After 1857, as the disloyalty of the Purbiyas became apparent, the recruitment of the Sikhs and the Gurkhas increased slightly, but became massive in the last two decades of the 19th century, as the army was deployed along the northwest frontier.66

66 H.G. Keene, Hindustan under Free Lances, 1770-1820: Sketches of Military Adventure in Hindustan during the period immediately preceding British Occupation (London, 1907), p. 128; Lewis Ferdinand Smith, A Sketch of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Regular Corps Formed and Commanded by Europeans in the Service of Native Princes of India with Details of the Principal Events and Actions of the late Maratha War (Calcutta, n.d.); McGregor, History of the Sikhs, vol. 2, pp. 30, 46-48, 50-51,
Conclusion

The propagandists of the Martial Race lobby conceived that the subcontinent was composed of various groups and tried to judge their martial capacities with the help of several criteria. The policy of the Martial Race spokesmen was to establish a special collaborative relationship with only some groups from definite areas. So their doctrine emphasized that soldierlike traits were the monopoly of only certain groups. The strategy of the Martial Race lobby was risky because it tried to fill most of the army with a particular group and if that specially favoured group rebelled, then all was lost. Before 1857, the army was dominated by the Purbiyas from north India and when they became disaffected, the result was the 1857 Mutiny. But the Raj, unlike the Bourbons, learnt nothing but forgot everything. Its army again became overdependent on a narrow area-Punjab. The Martial Race ideology, focusing on limited groups, could supply only limited manpower to the army. Hence this ideology was adequate as long as the Indian Army was engaged in 'small colonial wars' in which the regiments suffered small combat losses. But when the Indian Army was used in the First World War, it suffered huge manpower losses. At this critical juncture, the Martial Race ideology temporarily retreated.


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