

**THE SEPOY AND THE RAJ**  
**A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE BOMBAY**  
**PRESIDENCY ARMY, 1800-1857**

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**1985**

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## Declaration

This is to certify that this dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree to this or any other university and all the sources used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged.



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I know not want,  
He turneth me from the path of misfortune,  
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Having said so much I regretfully conclude that errors, omissions and inadequacies are mine alone.

## ABBREVIATIONS

B.A.M.S.	Bombay Annual Military Statement.
Bom. Mily. Cons.	Bombay Military Consultations.
Bom. Mily. Des. to Court	Bombay Military Despatch to the Court of Directors.
Commons	House of Commons.
For. Pol. Cons.	Foreign Department, Political Consultations.
For. Sec. Cons.	Foreign Department Secret Consultations.
G.L.	General Letter.
G.O.C.	General Order of the Commander-in-Chief.
IESHR	Indian Economic and Social History Review.
Jameson's Code	Code of Military Regulations at Present in Force under the Presidency of Bombay, compiled under the Authority of Government by Captain G.I. Jameson, 1844.
Lords	House of Lords.
No.	Number.
PP	Parliamentary Papers.
Vol.	Volume.

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A NAIGUE,

*Of the Bombay Grenadier Battalion.*

Published Nov. 1863 by W. & A. Nichol, Pall Mall, London.



PREFACE

Indian military history has too often been narrowly conceived, concerning itself only with the clash of armies on the battlefield. This blinkered vision has produced glossy coffee-table books and dull regimental histories. What is forgotten is that armies are not merely war machines but also social institutions. The task, then, is to escape from the minutiae of battle and the broad strokes of strategy, to topple warfare from its dominant position. I attempt a social history.

The protagonists are the state and the sepoy. The state tried to discipline the sepoy, to mould his mind to complement his uniform; he tried to remain himself, to preserve traditional values, to retain the comfort of a world that was familiar. The story is one of conflict. It deals with how the army was used, how it was recruited, inspired and controlled. It also deals with who the Bombay sepoy was, why he enlisted, what he did, and what he felt.

There is much in the story of pay and pension, the rigours of duty, the crushing weight of regulation and authority. There are small details and large emotions. Men struggle to find their footing in a convulsed world. We see glimpses of despair and hope. The men do more than enter a new profession, they embark on a new way of life.

Their behaviour is often curious. Defying the dictates of society, the Bombay sepoys risked ostracism in

crossing the seas. Brahmin and Maratha sepoy marched to the commands of Mahar and Jewish officers. Men of all castes lived, fought and died together; <sup>yet</sup> half the Bombay army consisted of Hindustani men whose relatives in the Bengal Army demanded and obtained every concession to their caste. And in an age notorious for the clamour of mutinous troops, the silence of the Bombay sepoy was striking. The absence of any mutiny in the almost two hundred years of its existence made the Bombay Army unique in the eyes of its contemporaries, the pride of its chroniclers.

I have consulted a variety of sources: the reports of Commissions of Inquiry, together with the testimonies of witnesses; general orders and military regulations, muster rolls and inspection records; personnel files; minutes of senior officials; memoirs and correspondence. This is the voice of authority. But if we listen carefully, the murmurings of the sepoy can also be heard.

The questions are mainly about Bombay, yet in a broader sense I have tried to understand how an army was built up from the people of India themselves, which in the end brought and kept its own country under the sway of its foreign masters.

CHAPTER ITHE MILITARY FOUNDATIONS OF THE RAJ

"The empire has been acquired, and must be maintained, by the sword. It has no foundation, and (is not capable of having any made, that can divest it of this character."

- John Malcolm

"The time may come when we shall find <sup>our</sup> best safeguard in the hearts of a grateful people - but that time has not yet come, nor is there a near prospect of its advent. The sword whether in the hand or in its scabbard, has yet its work to do."

- John Lawrence

In the beginning they were chowkidars guarding factory settlements, then mercenaries hired out to the highest bidder, finally, sprang forth the ubiquitous agents of the paramount power in India.

Metamorphosised by the gold of warring Rajas eager to pay for their services, "the rabble of peons" demanded cash payments, which often failing, land assignments took their place. Like Ganesha at Kubera's feast, where the guest's greed consumed the host, kings first mortgaged their revenues, then lost their kingdoms in paying for the troops they had engaged.

The policy of "troops for territory" secured the British the Diwani of Bengal, the whole of the Coromandel and most of the western coast. Large revenues financed larger armies that checked Hyder, destroyed Tippu, expelled the French and reduced the Marathas.<sup>1</sup>

Subsidiary alliances cemented political paramountcy. A vast 'protection-racket' on an imperial scale, it guaranteed the position of a prince by reducing him to a vassal. To ensure that enemies turned allies stayed allied, British troops were received and maintained by the Indian State.<sup>2</sup> The process of shifting the burden of military finance onto the Princes was complete. By 1832 the payment by Indian States for specified numbers of British troops amounted in revenue to the entire military expenses of Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

The failure to find paymasters amongst Indian Thrones condemned Bombay to obscurity. Though the first sepoy units had been raised in Bombay in 1668, the liabilities of the Presidency retarded the growth of its army.<sup>4</sup> Powerful

1 Evidence of Richard Jenkins, former Resident at Gwalior and Nagpur. Pp. Commons 1831-32, vol. 14. 735 vi. pp. 24-25.

2 For the provisos of a typical subsidiary treaty with an Indian State see: Pp. Commons. 1831-32, vol. 14. 735 vi. pp. iv-v.

3 Evidence of Richard Jenkins, former Resident at Gwalior and Nagpur. Ibid., pp. 25.  
In 1837 the military charges of the Bengal Presidency amounted to Rs. 3,59,00,026. Pp. Commons 1847. vol. 41. Paper 188. pp. 2-3.

4 Cadell, History of the Bombay Army, Longmans Green and Company, 1938, p. 5.

neighbours confined Bombay to a handful of isolated settlements - Salsette (1774), the harbour islands (1774), Bankot (1756), and Surat (1800).<sup>5</sup> Attempts at expansion by backing Raghoba for the Peshwa's gaddi ended disastrously, the army surrendering en masse at Wadgaon to Nana Phadnavis. Bailed out financially and militarily by Bengal, sidelined in the campaigns of Clive and Coote, Wellesley and Lake, the great days of the Bombay Army lay in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The final Maratha defeat in 1818 transformed Bombay from a trading town to the capital of a large province. Bombay acquired the entire Deccan from the Satpura Hills in the north to Mysore in the south. With this great arc went the centre of Maratha power, the Western Ghats and the narrow coastal plain of the Konkan. The acquisition of territory at the head of the gulf of Cambay and the subservience of the Gaikwad of Baroda gave the Company control of the coast line north from Bombay to the borders of Kutch and Sindh.<sup>7</sup>

Subsidiary princes financed the costs and effects of expansion. As early as 1814 Poona and Baroda maintained sixty per cent of the regular Bombay native infantry.<sup>8</sup> The

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5 The Imperial Gazetteer of India - 1908, vol. viii, p. 293.

6. Callahan, The East India Company and Army Reform, 1783-1798, Harvard, 1972, p. 42.

7 A.C. Staples, "Indian Maritime Transport in 1840", IESHR, 1970, vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 62-63.

8 In 1814 Bombay Native Infantry of the line consisted of 18,319 rank and file of which 10,078 composed the forces subsidised by the Peshwa and the Gaikwad. Bom. Mily. Des. to Court dated 21st September 1814, para 24.

Poona territories annexed, Baroda became the chief milch cow of Bombay. Greater administrative expenses were defrayed by greater exactions from the Gaikwad. By treaty, Baroda received and maintained 4,000 native infantry, two regiments of cavalry and a company of artillery and pioneers. On a lesser scale, the Raja of Kutch maintained a regiment of native infantry and an artillery detachment.<sup>9</sup>

Despite subsidized expansion administrative charges crippled Bombay. The annexation of the Deccan, Khandesh, Karnatic and Konkan doubled land revenue from <sup>Rupees</sup> 75 lakhs in 1817 to <sup>Rupees</sup> 1.50 crores in 1822,<sup>10</sup> yet fell short of the increased administrative expenses. In 1831 the paraphernalia of government consumed £ 3,600,841 while revenue only fetched £ 2,421,443 leaving a deficit of £ 1,179,398.<sup>11</sup>

John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay, complained that the generally unproductive territories of Bombay could ill afford the high expenses tolerated in rich provinces. The expenditure on Her Majesty's corps, one Dragoon and four infantry regiments, consumed a great part of the revenue.<sup>12</sup> Besides Bombay's burden was disproportionately heavy.

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- 9 Lt. Colonel ~~Barnes~~ to T.M. Villiers, dated 5th March 1832. Pp Commons 1831-32, vol. 14, 735 vi, p. 115.
- 10 Minute on Bombay Land Revenue, dated India Board, 9th March 1847. Pp Lords, 1852, vol. 12, Paper 147, p. 38.
- 11 Statement of the Charges of the Civil and Military Administration of the Three <sup>P</sup>Presidencies of India... Pp. Commons. 1831-32, vol. 10, Appendix No. 27, p. 412.
- 12 Minute on the Administration of the Bombay Government, dated 30th November 1830 by John Malcolm. Pp. Commons., 1831-32, vol. 10, Appendix No. 31, pp. 418-419.

The Indian army protected an extensive and profitable commerce benefiting all Presidencies yet was charged wholly to Bombay.<sup>13</sup>

Bombay's civil and military structure was the most expensive, extensive and intrusive. For every £ 100 gross revenue, civil-military-marine charges consumed £ 68 in Bengal, £ 97 in Madras and £ 149 in Bombay.

A soldier covered 2.7 square miles and 618 inhabitants in Bengal, 2 square miles and 192 inhabitants in Madras, and 1.6 square miles and 153 inhabitants in Bombay. Total charges per head of population equalled £ 0.135 in Bengal, £ 0.388 in Madras and £ 0.576 in Bombay.<sup>14</sup> Hence every pound spent by the government of Bombay was paid by any two inhabitants, women and children, the sick and the aged included. The smallest and poorest Presidency bore the heaviest burden; a government seen, heard and felt by more people and places than the other Presidencies.

The ascent of British power propelled the army from the peripheries to centre stage. As the threat of external aggression receded, the defensive role of frontier defence declined. The subjugation of newly acquired territory be-

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13 A Regiment of Her Majesty's Dragoons cost £ 79,680 per year compared to £ 34,840 for a regiment of Native Cavalry. A regiment of Her Majesty's Infantry cost £ 61,120 per year compared to £ 52,360 for a regiment of the East India Company's European Infantry and £ 25,670 for a regiment of native infantry. Pp. Commons. 1852-53, vol. 27, Paper 426, p. 9.

14 Statement of the Charges of the Civil and Military Administration of the Three Presidencies of India... Pp. Commons. 1831-32, vol. 10, Appendix No. 27, p. 412.

came increasingly important. Troops dispersed predatory hordes, captured feudatory forts and defeated rebellion. Repression preceded administration. Wrote Prinsep - "The population must first be broken down by the rough hand of military coercion before they will receive civil institutions as a blessing, and change the modes of life to which they have been long accustomed."<sup>15</sup>

Reliance on the army exposed the fragility of British rule. The more astute British administrators had no illusions regarding the popularity of his government. Lawrence bluntly asserted that "differing in colour, caste, language, habits - every thing - having indeed nothing in common with our subjects, our rule can scarcely be a loved one."<sup>16</sup> Malcolm stressed that "we can never expect active support in the hour of danger from the mass of the population of India... it is therefore to the army of India we must look for the means .... of maintaining our power."<sup>17</sup>

Thus the absence of popular support necessitated the presence of military might.

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15 Minute by H.T. Prinsep dated 9th June 1835. Pp Commons 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 163.

16 John Lawrence, "Military Defence of Our Eastern Empire", October 1844, excerpt from "Essays on the Indian Army and Oudh", Serampore 1857, p. 11.

17 Minute by Major General Sir John Malcolm, former Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay army and Governor of Bombay. Pp. Commons. 1831-32, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, p. 168.



State power hinged on military visibility.<sup>18</sup> Sovereignty was only exercised in the presence of troops. Revenue was collected, courts functioned, policemen did their duty, safe in the shadow of red coats and bayonets.<sup>19</sup> Without troops in the vicinity civil establishments collapsed at the slightest quake.<sup>20</sup> Military support for civil policy was essential for how else "in a day convert tribes, who have lived only by war to habits of peace, how make cultivators, who for centuries have never paid a rupee, but under fear of the sword or the scourge - how induce them to pay their dues, unless they know that the civil officer has the power of calling in the military, and that the latter is prompt and bold."<sup>21</sup>

Conquered population saw British rule in military men. The army alone possessed the organized manpower to govern vast lands and restless people. Military officers filled civil offices. British youth sent to India first joined

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18 "Wollington's maxim of 'keeping the troops out of sight' ensured for England, it will not answer for India. There must be trusty bayonets within sight of the understandings if not of the eyes of Indian subjects, before they will pay willing obedience, or any revenue." John Lawrence, "Indian Army Reform", September 1856, op.cit., p. 279.

19 Minute by H.T. Prinsep dated 9th June 1835. Pp. Commons 1857, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 162.

20 Minute by the Governor-General, C.T. Metcalfe, Military Department, dated 16th May 1835, Ibid., p. 156.

21 John Lawrence, "Military Defence of Our Eastern Empire", October 1844, op.cit., p. 5.

the army, took rank, and were then drafted to the revenue, political and judicial departments.<sup>22</sup> The practice was defended as a re-incarnated mansabdari system, as "under Indian government, all ranks, titles and distinctions are military in origin, all estates are held by military tenure, and all authority is exercised according to military forms."<sup>23</sup> Conformity to Indian usage had its advantages for "those Natives who have not yet acquired European ideas naturally consider military men as the only nobles, and as such are disposed to yield a more cheerful obedience than they would to civilians."<sup>24</sup>

A militaristic state ruled through chains of military stations.<sup>25</sup> The position and size of cantonments varied with their relationship to the countryside.<sup>26</sup> Subsidiary stations kept protected Princes in line. Kasirabad, Neemuch and ~~Mow~~ <sup>Mow</sup> controlled western and central India by

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22 Well into the 1870s army officers dominated the Revenue and Political departments. See Pp. Commons, 1867-68, Vol. 51, Paper 108.

23 "In Europe, if every soldier is a gentleman, in India every gentleman is a soldier." Remarks of H. Russell, Pp. Commons 1831-32, vol. 14, 735 vi, Appendix 18, p. 173.

24 Capt. Page, Bombay Infantry, PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 388.

25 "... the maintenance of the country by cantonments of troops distributed over it..." Minute by H.T. Prinsep dated 9th June 1835. Pp. Commons 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 167.

26 Ibid., pp. 163-64.

splitting the Rajputs from the Marathas. Within a fortnight the capital of any power in this region could be invested by an army of 8 - 10,000 men.<sup>27</sup> Camps at Baroda, Kutch, Satara and Kolhapur provided constant reminders of imperial presence. Border posts in Kutch, Deesa and the Sindh frontier discouraged marauders. Garrisons in Bombay, Poona and Ahmedabad threatened the mobs of these large cities. Poona's altitude and climate made it the principal station for European soldiers. Smaller outposts like Hursole in the Mahi Kanta and others in the Bhil areas restrained chronically turbulent tracts.<sup>28</sup> The objective was to overawe large, static populations; the presence of troops determining good behaviour.

The army's multifarious roles demanded dispersion not concentration. Following European military theories, Bentinck heatedly argued that the "dispersion of the whole of our military force throughout every part of the country into small bodies produces universal weakness, is opposed to every established principle of military tactics, is injurious to discipline and objectionable in policy." He recommended the opposite doctrine of concentration: divested

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27 Nasirabad near Ajmer was a British enclave in Rajput territory. Scindia alienated Nsemuch from Mewar. Mhow lay in the Indore territories ensuring British influence at Holkar's courts. All three stations lay outside the Bombay Presidency though Mhow and Nasirabad were garrisoned in part, by Bombay Sepoys. Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Tod, former Political Agent in Rajputana. Pp. Commons, 1831-32, vol. 14, 735 vi, p. 124.

28 Bom. Mily. Cons. 1847-48, vol. 363, pp. 343-358.

of civil and police duties, troops were to be collected in large bodies strategically positioned to swiftly respond to military exigencies.<sup>29</sup> Concentration had no role in Indian conditions. Metcalfe, while "admitting that concentration is the right principle...(found that) dispersion is the *inevitable* practice ... because the army is not sufficient for both purposes, that of forming armies for the field, for which concentration is desirable, and that of local protection, for which dispersion is unavoidable."<sup>30</sup>

Internal coercion demanded troop dispersion. Sepoys were scattered to avoid "laying bare too large a portion of country, and leaving too many places of importance unprotected."<sup>31</sup> Parties of plunderers, especially in Kathiawar and Deccan, were checked by scattered military detachments.<sup>32</sup> To be effective troops had to be in the immediate vicinity. The absence of troops spurred internal insurrection, "one of the greatest of our dangers,.. (occurring) - when the means of quelling it are at a distance."<sup>33</sup> Metcalfe observed that "it often happens that a small and inadequate

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29 Minute by William Bentinck, Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, dated 28th February 1835. PP. Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 81.

30 Minute by C.T. Metcalfe, Governor-General, dated Military Department, 8th May 1835, ibid., p. 154.

31 Ibid., p. 154.

32 Captain Grant Duff, former Resident at Satara and celebrated author of "History of the Marathas". PP. Commons, 1831-32, vol. 14, 735 vi, Appendix 19, p. 175.

33 Minute by C.T. Metcalfe, Military Department, dated 16th May 1835, PP. Commons, 1867, Vol. 52, Papers 500, p. 155.

force stationed anywhere produces all the effect in tranquilizing the country that could be obtained by the presence of a larger army."<sup>34</sup> As effectivity did not depend on size the army was spread thin on the ground, smaller parties covering greater territory.

Dispersed deployment followed logistical constraints. The monsoons paralyzed all movement. Marching over black cotton soil became impossible. The absence of military roads made small cantonments inevitable as troops were needed close at hand.<sup>35</sup> It was easier and cheaper to supply small stations. Poor communications and large cantonments excessively strained the countryside making supplies a major problem.<sup>36</sup>

The army's supply needs created new settlements. As local resources were unable to supply any large emergent demand, troops were surrounded by a variety of establishments. Every large station was cluttered with logistical paraphernalia: commissariat, ordnance, magazines, public cattle, pay offices, bazars and other public property.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Ibid., p. 149.

35 Evidence of Capon, PP. Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 129.

36 Captain Grant Duff, PP. Commons, 1831-32, Vol. 14, 735 vl, Appendix 19, p. 175.

37 Memorandum on the Regular Native Infantry by the Governor-General, William Bentinck, dated 23rd July 1834. PP. Commons. 1867, vol. 52. Paper 500, pp. 8-9.

The military cantonment re-oriented trade and settlement. Traders and bankers clustered around military stations seeking protection and patronage. The rapid expansion of these military nuclei eclipsed older centers. In 1827, Kampti, near Nagpur, was an unknown little village when it became the station of a British force in the heart of Maratha territory. Regimental bazars and markets sprang up expanding into a town which by 1867 contained 60,000 people, annually consumed a million sterling of imported goods, becoming the richest place in all the Central Provinces. Sitabal<sup>di</sup> fort ceded in 1817 by the Bhonsle to the British grew into a large town full of artisans and bankers. Similarly, the growth of the Secunderabad cantonment and the Chandraghad Residency,<sup>38</sup> testified to the changes wrought by new sources of power and money supply.<sup>39</sup>

Requiring protection to flourish, the new settlements increased the demand for military guards. Calls for protection, real and ceremonial, deluged the troops. Every vestige of British authority demanded military guards: kutcheries, collectorates, jails and all establishments of government in civil lines and cantonments. Fear of dacoit-

38 Sir Richard Temple, Resident at Hyderabad, to the under-secretary, Government of India, Foreign Department, dated 16th August 1867. PP. Commons, 1867-68, vol. 51. Paper 108, p. 68.

39 The phenomenon was common throughout Northern India. See C.A. Bayly, "Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars - North India Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870", Cambridge, 1983.

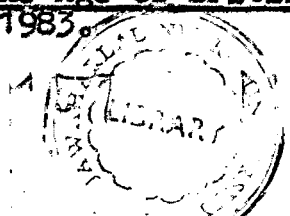
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infested country required detachments going with treasure to be large and efficient. The distances between stations delayed the return of escorts to <sup>their</sup> headquarters. The headquarters of corps itself demanded a large number of guards for ceremonial purposes. On the march the protection of the sick, the followers and the cumbersome baggage train required additional guards.<sup>40</sup>

The European officers demanded nocturnal protection. Every night some 40 to 50 men in each regiment had to guard their officer's compounds. Come daybreak they generally went straight to parade or field duties.<sup>41</sup> Tied down and exhausted by guard duties the army's effective strength fell drastically. In 1833 the Governor-General calculated the disposable force that could be collected in an emergency from the principal stations of the Bengal Army after providing for all guard duties. Out of 45 regiments of Native Infantry consisting of 31,320 sepoys, only 13,213, or less

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40 "No officer coming to India for the first time can look ... without perfect astonishment at the multitude of men and guards that are on duty. He has seen nothing to be compared to it in Europe... the abuse.. of complying with requisitions for guards from officers, civil and military, whether for the sake of consequence, or .. protection... has been carried to a very unjustifiable length." Memorandum on the Regular Native Infantry by the Governor-General, William Bentinck, dated 23rd July 1834. Pp. Commons. 1867, vol. 52. Paper 500, p. 8.

41 Minute by William Bentinck, dated 7th February 1835, ibid., p. 64.

than half, were available for field service.<sup>42</sup> Similarly in the military operations in Coorg, the whole force collectively did not in any one week bring more than one-half of their numbers into the field. In one of the weeks the amount was less than one-half.<sup>43</sup> More extended campaigns reduced regiments to hapless skeletons rendering them ineffective.

Once deployed troops could not be moved without provoking commotions. The very presence of red-coats heralded "Angrezi-Raj". Their role - pacification and policing - paved the way for British rule. In the shadow of their bayonets civil establishments developed. Around their campfires settlements flourished. This world collapsed with the withdrawal of troops. The army as the pillar of stability<sup>44</sup> was suddenly removed. Panic ensued.<sup>45</sup> Allies

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42 Memorandum on the Regular Native Infantry by the Governor-General, William Bentinck, dated 23rd July 1834, ibid., p. 8.

43 Coorg was a relatively short and contained campaign. Hostilities terminated in the fifth week. "The troops were very healthy, and the confined theatre of Coorg precluded the necessity of those numerous and distant detachments which are required in the ordinarily protracted and extensive course of Indian warfare." ibid., p. 9.

44 "What natives usually advance against our Indian administration is, that almost everything is shifting, that very little is stable; the one thing that they see is stable is those three Indian armies." Evidence of Col. H.M. Durand. Pp. Commons. 1859, c. 2515, p. 218.

45 "It is morally difficult (to change military positions) because wher-ever troops are stationed; a general belief becomes established that troops are necessary there; and consequently a feeling of insecurity arises whenever the troops are withdrawn." Minute by C.T. Metcalfe, Governor-General, Military Department, dated 8th May 1825. Pp. Commons 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 147.



felt abandoned. Inimical forces - "the turbulent, the refractory, and the seditious" - raised their heads as the heavy army hand was lifted. The very prospect of movement was daunting. Hyderabad was rejected as the station for a moveable force as the departure of the column would create an impression of weakness.<sup>46</sup> As troops moved disturbances broke out paralyzing the state machinery.<sup>47</sup> The movement of troops to the Punjab frontier in the Sikh Wars created widespread alarm in Bengal, Agra and other provinces furthest from the seat of war.<sup>48</sup> In 1857 the retreat of troops gave the signal to revolt.

Immobilized by local exigencies, war meant massive army augmentation. Dispersed in detachments, the demand for large field forces elicited a sluggish response. Long delays occurred as troops dribbled in from distant stations onto the assembly point. As state power rested on a widely dispersed military presence, stations could not be abandoned without risking serious disturbances. Every station required a protection force which diminished the moveable column. Hence war demands for large, concentrated forces were met by either destabilizing an area by denuding it of

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46 Ibid., p. 150.

47 Memorandum by William Ford, Commissioner Multan Division, dated 9th August 1867. Pp. Commons. 1867-68, vol. 51. Paper 108, p. 30.

48 John Lawrence, "Lord Hardinge's Administration", December 1847, op.cit., pp. 89-90.

troops; or by raising local corps for local service; or by greatly increasing the strength of the army.<sup>49</sup>

Army size oscillated with the whims of war. (see Table I.1, Fluctuations in the Size of the Bombay Army, 1800-1859). In twenty years of constant campaigns<sup>50</sup> the sepoy army doubled from 20,817 men in 1806 to 43,528 men in 1826. Expansion, however, was jerky.

From 1806 to 1811 sepoy strength *climbed steadily* from 20,817 men to 25,450 men. The gain of 4,633 men in six years responded to the rapid augmentation demanded by the second Maratha war, 1803-1805; overseas expeditions to the Persian Gulf, 1809, and Mauritius, 1809-1810; and Campaigns in Kathiawar, 1807, 1809 and 1811.

1811 to 1816 witnessed a levelling-off at lower levels. Strength settled down from 25,450 to 23,746 sepoy. The loss of 1,704 sepoy in six years occurred as the Bombay Army was principally deployed in Gujrat, Kutch and Kathiawar.

From 1816 to 1821 strength shot up from 23,746 sepoy to 33,625 sepoy. 9,879 sepoy were added during campaigns in Gujrat, 1817; the Third Maratha War, 1817-18, Kutch, 1819; Nagar Parker and Dwarka, 1820; and the Persian Gulf, 1819, 1820-1821.

After falling slightly in 1821 to 1823 by 2,962 sepoy.

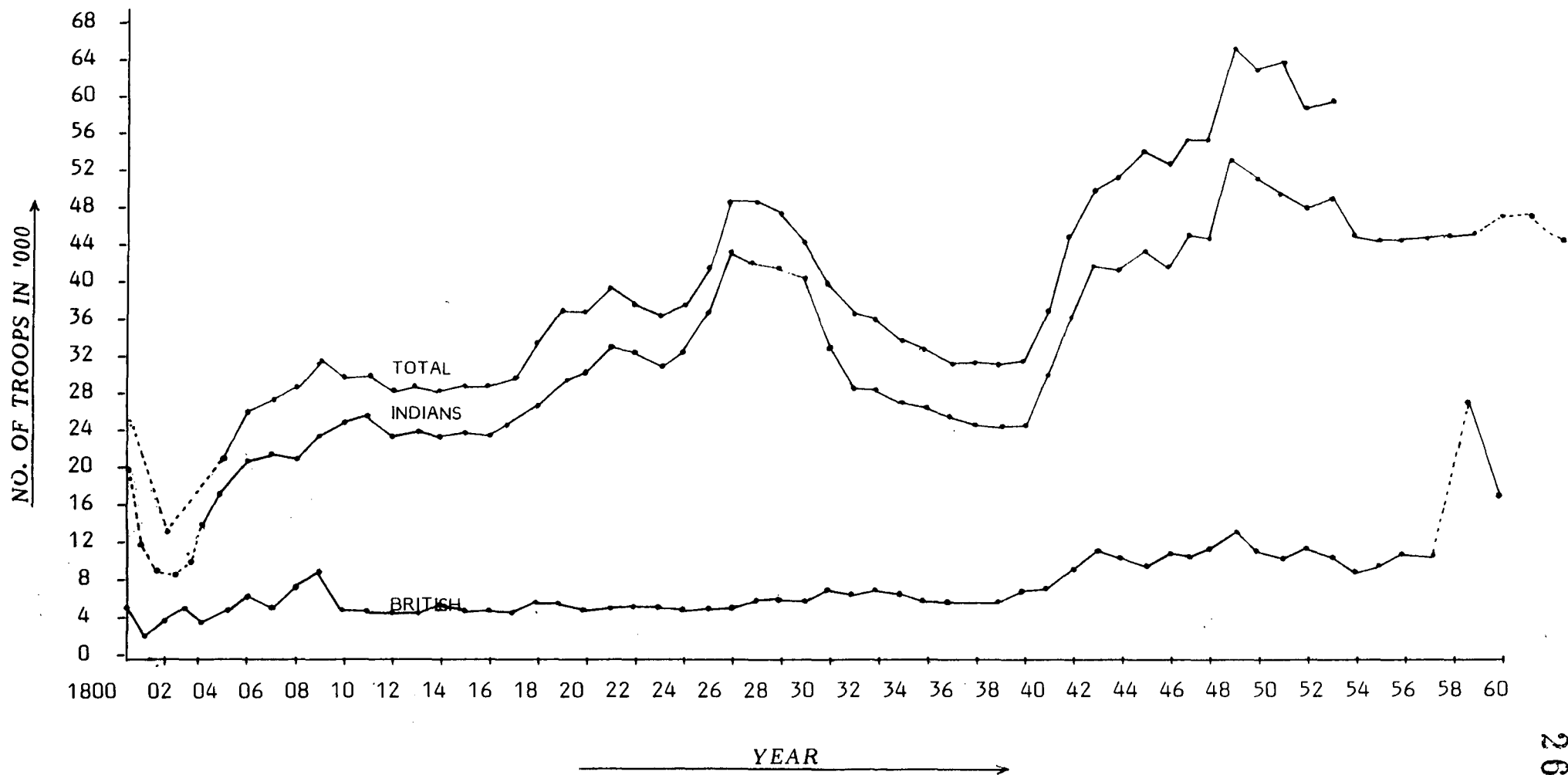
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49 Minute by C.T. Metcalfe, Military Department, dated 8th May 1835. PP, Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, pp. 146-147, 153-154.

50 All references to the campaigns of the Bombay army are from Cadell, op.cit., pp. 307-313.

TABLE I.1

FLUCTUATIONS IN THE SIZE OF THE BOMBAY ARMY 1800-1859



SOURCE: (i) PP LORDS 1852-53, Volume 13, pp 371-372.  
(ii) PP COMMONS 1867, Volume 72, p 56.

strength rocketed by 12,865 men to reach a peak of 43,528 men in 1826. This surge is somewhat inexplicable as only the Kit<sup>ur</sup> insurrection (1824) and the Burmese war (1824-25) intervened in this period, placing few demands on the Bombay Army.

Bereft of campaigns strength plunged. From 43,528 sepoy in 1826, strength fell steadily to 37,400 sepoy in 1829, plummeted to 28,996 sepoy in 1831, thereafter steadied but continued in slow decline to hit a new low of 25,358 sepoy in 1838. Shorn of its war time strength, losing 17,170 men in twelve years, shrank the Bombay Army to pre-1818 levels, when the Bombay Presidency was a glorified trading enclave.

The revival of war restored the army's fallen fortunes. Augmentations demanded by the First Afghan War (1838-42) replaced in three years reductions sustained over a twelve year period. Strength rocketed from 25,358 sepoy in 1838 to 42,526 sepoy in 1841, a gain of 17,168 men.

The conquest of Sindh (1843), the insurrection in the Southern Maratha Country (1844), necessitated troops for subjugation and policing. Sepoy strength fluctuated around 43,000 between 1841 and 1846 before suddenly shooting to an all time high of 53,721 in 1847, a jump of 9,776 men in only two years. Thus warfare and political expansion doubled sepoy strength in ten years from 25,358 in 1838 to 53,721 in 1847.

Peace re-usherred a precipitous decline. Sepoy strength

fell steeply from 53,721 sepoy in 1847 to around 45,000 sepoy at the turn of the Mutiny. To sum up: The Bombay army waxed and waned with the advent and end of wars. In wartime sepoy strength more than doubled: From 20,817 in 1806 to 43,528 in 1826; and again from 25,358 in 1838 to 53,721 in 1847. Come peace the army was pared to the bone: From 43,528 in 1826 to 25,358 in 1838; and from 53,721 in 1847 to 47,671 in 1850. Such wide swings admitted an additional 22,711 sepoy over twenty years (1806-1826), expelled 18,170 sepoy over twelve years (1826-1838), re-admitted 28,363 sepoy over nine years (1838-1847), and re-expelled about 8,700 sepoy over ten years (1847-1857).

The turbulence of periodic augmentation and reduction was moderated at the regimental level. Table I.2 depicts the Bombay army reduced in 1837 and augmented in 1845. The Table shows that while total army strength rose steeply from 25,698 sepoy in 1837 to 41,062 sepoy in 1845, the number of sepoy corps increased marginally from 34 to 38. The strength of the sepoy regulars, cavalry and infantry, remained constant at three and twenty-six regiments respectively.<sup>51</sup> The number of irregular corps<sup>52</sup> increased;

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51 In 1846 the Regular Native Infantry was augmented by three regiments, the 27th, 28th and 29th. Boris Mollo, The Indian Army, Poole Blandford Press, 1981, p. 80.

52 The difference between the regulars and irregulars was that the "irregular corps (were) not furnished with a regular establishment of (British) officers. That is the main distinction. In the irregular cavalry each trooper provides and feeds his own horse; he also provides his own equipment and arms, and the government gives him an allowance for all these objects; whereas in the regular service the government

TABLE I.2

Organization and Strength of the Bombay Army in 1837 and 1845

	1	8	3	7	1	8	4	5
	Regiments	British officers	British rank + file	Indians all ranks	Regiments	British officers	British rank + file	Indians all ranks
Cavalry	3	32	-	1,463	3	34	6	1,430
European Infantry	1	17	692	-	2	46	1,499	-
Artillery*		53	1,268	691		73	660	899
Engineers*		39	29	471		29	25	376
Native Infantry	26	249	21	18,889	26	348	26	28,991
Irregular Horse	1	3	-	843	3	7	-	2,473
Irregular Infantry	4	9	-	3,341	5	13	-	4,958
Sind Camel Company**	-	-	-	-		1	6	1,935
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>2,010</b>	<b>25,698</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>2,222</b>	<b>41,062</b>

\* These arms of the Bombay service were not organized as regiments.

\*\* Not existent in 1837.

Source : PP, Commons, 1847, vol. 41, Paper 33, pp. 12-13.

from one regiment of irregular horse to three, and from four corps of irregular infantry to five.<sup>53</sup>

Regimental continuity preserved the coherence of the Bombay army. Regular regiments were never disbanded. Instead, a flexible regimental constitution allowed for a sudden expansion or contraction of the military body without affecting its skeletal structure.<sup>54</sup> Increase and decrease was effected by manipulating the number of men in a company, or the number of companies, or both. (See Table I.3, Fluctuations in the strength of Native Infantry Regiments). Continuity demanded the retention of the officer class.

Bentinck's ambitious scheme of simultaneously disbanding 29 regiments of Native Infantry was jettisoned as it rendered unemployed at one stroke some 600 European officers, 224 Native commissioned officers and 1,120 Native non-commissioned officers. The attempt throughout was to pro-

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Cont'd... f.n. 52

equips the trooper with his horse, arms and clothing, and gives him pay and batta for his subsistence." Philip Melville, Secretary, Military Department, East India House, London. PP, Commons, 1852-53, vol. 27, Paper 426, p. 4.

53 The main attraction of the irregular corps was its price: A regiment of regular infantry cost £ 25,670 per year as against £ 13,700 per year for a regiment of irregular infantry. A regiment of regular cavalry cost £ 34,840 per year as against £ 18,770 per year for a regiment of irregular cavalry, ibid., p. 9.

54 The Government "leaves regiments weak when they are not likely to be called into service in the full confidence that it can by a stroke of the pen replace any one of these reduced corps, or any number of them within a very short period on a footing of a high numerical efficiency as may be desired." Minute by H.T. Prinsep, dated Calcutta, 19th May 1835, PP, Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 144.

TABLE I.3Fluctuations in the Strength of Native Infantry Regiments

Year	Number of companies	Number of men per company	Authorized additions	Total
1824	8	100	60	860
1826	10	100	60	1060
1827	8	100	60	860
1835	8	80	-	640
1838	8	100	64	864
1840	9	100	74	974
1841	9	100	74	974
1842	10	100	84	1084
1843	9	100	70	970
1844	9	100	70	970
1845	10	100	80	1080
1846	10	100	80	1080
1847	10	100	80	1080
1848	8	100	20	820

- Source: (1) Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 5th March 1824, para 118.
- (ii) Bom. Mily. Cons. 1826, vol. 9, No. 65 of 3rd May 1826.
- (iii) Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 7th July 1826, p. 33.
- (iv) Minute by H.T. Prinsep, dated Calcutta, 19th May 1835. PP. Commons. 1867, Paper 500, p. 144.
- (v) PP. Commons 1847, vol. 41. Paper 33, p. 16.
- (vi) Bom. Mily. Cons. 1847-48, vol. 363, p. 39.



protect the interests of the officer-class, British and Indian. Officers and non-commissioned officers continued to be borne on the strength of their reduced corps. The pay and posts of those rendered surplus was protected by transfers to the supernumerary list.<sup>55</sup> Privates, the expendable pawns of armies, bore the vagaries of unemployment.

The preservation of regiments maintained the facade of stability. Allies and enemies counted the number of regiments not the number of men each contained.<sup>56</sup> Despite expansion and contraction, the regiment remained an organization complete in itself; "presenting the same appearance to the world, and the object of the same respect and dread."<sup>57</sup> Sepoys came and went but the regiment stayed on forever.

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55 Memorandum on the Regular Native Infantry by the Governor-General, William Bentinck, dated 23rd July 1834. PP. Commons, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 65.

56 Minute by C.T. Metcalfe, Governor-General, dated April 1835, ibid., p. 142.

57 Minute by Prinsep, dated Calcutta, 19th May 1835, ibid., p. 144.

FINDING THE SEPOY

"The man is the first weapon of battle.  
Let us study the soldier for it is he  
who brings reality to it."

- Aron Du Picq

The Quest:

Finding men was the perennial problem of the Bombay army. Prior to the Maratha wars, the lack of a hinterland impeded recruitment. Confined to a string of coastal trading posts, Bombay was forced to search for men from foreign, often inimical domains. Scarcity bred competition. Regiments vied with one another in filling their ranks.<sup>1</sup> In the scramble for men physical standards were jettisoned.<sup>2</sup> Desperate for recruits the army enlisted every man they got, rejecting none but those "addicted to drunkenness, thieving or other destructive vices."<sup>3</sup>

1 G.O.C. dated 14th August 1820, Jameson's Code, p. 767, para 44.

2 As per regulations the infantry accepted men less than 22 years and at least 5 feet 3 inches in height. Shorter recruits, upto 5 feet 2 inches in height, were only eligible for the Marine Battalion. The Grenadiers to maintain their elite status recruited tall men of 5 feet 6 inches and upwards. G.G.O. dated 11th April 1807 and G.O.C. dated 24th August 1825, ibid., p. 768, (Paras) 49-50. The Madras army, for similar reasons, ignored recruitment standards. See Dodwell, Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army, Studies in Indian Records, published by the Indian Historical Records Commission, Calcutta 1922.

3 G.O.C. dated 27th February 1789, Jameson's Code, p. 768, para 51.

Meagre territories bordered by powerful neighbours restricted recruitment to communities posing the least political threat. Small, poor and depressed communities were heavily recruited:<sup>4</sup> Topasses, Bombay's Christian converts with Portuguese names;<sup>5</sup> Bene Israelis; Maratha-speaking Jews from the Konkan; Bhandaris, toddy-tappers; Dhangars, herdsmen; malis, gardeners;<sup>6</sup> and especially Parwaris,<sup>7</sup> a conglomeration of untouchable castes predominantly Mahar.

The untouchable castes formed the largest identifiable caste in the Bombay army.<sup>8</sup> In 1824 Parwaris, Mochis and Mangs totalled 19.37 per cent, almost one-fifth of the entire

4 Reliance on communities which were fewest in numbers and shortest in financial and organizational resources typified colonial armies. See Cynthia Enloe, Ethnic Soldiers - State Security in Divided Societies, Penguin, 1980, p. 132.

5 The name "Topasses" originated from the Persian "Topchi" meaning gunner or musketeer. Orme however translated 'Topasses' as "hat-wearers". The wearing of a hat, "topi", distinguished the European Christians and their Indian converts. See Patrick Cadell, History of the Bombay Army, Longmans Green and Co. 1938, pp. 18-19.

6 Cadell, op.cit., p. 13. Also see Evidence of Captain Duff, dated 25th March 1832. PP, Commons 1831-32, vol. 735 v, p. 395.

7 The impure castes "in a Maharatta village live apart outside the village walls, whence the name 'Purwarree', outside the village." Evidence of Sir Bartle Frere, PP, Commons. 1859, c. 2541, p. 51, foot-note.

8 The proportion of low castes in the Presidency armies was the highest in Bombay. "While in Madras and Bengal, all 'Pariahs and Christians' accounted for no more than 5 per cent of the army, in Bombay, the Mahars alone, were probably the most heavily recruited - numbering between one-fourth or a one-fifth of those units in which they were recruited and perhaps a one-sixth of the entire Bombay army." Stephen Cohen, The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army, Journal of Asian Studies, XXVIII, 3, May 1969, pp. 453-468.

army. The Parwaris alone were the most heavily recruited, amounting to one-fourth to one-third of most infantry regiments, reaching a high of 49.2 per cent in the 21st Regiment Native Infantry.<sup>9</sup>

Not caste, but country concerned the Bombay army. Military authorities, by ignorance, necessity,<sup>10</sup> or tradition,<sup>11</sup> turned a Nelson's Eye to the castes of their men. Of all Bombay sepoy, 65 per cent in 1824, 35.5 per cent in 1851-52, and 25.5 per cent in 1859, were lumped together under the miscellaneous head of "Hindus" or "other castes".<sup>12</sup> In contrast the "country" of each and every sepoy was carefully noted.<sup>13</sup>

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- 9 Abstract of the Annual Returns of the Country and Cast of the Men of the Bombay Army. Inspection Reports for the year 1824. Bombay Adjutant General's Office, dated 9th July 1824. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1824, vol. 134, pp. 53-54.
- 10 Paucity of recruits forced the army to recruit from all castes. Bombay infantry recruiting regulations made no reference to caste.
- 11 Cadell notes that the Maratha army's tradition for heterogeneous castes in its ranks had a 'special influence' on the Bombay army, while the bulk of Shivaji's men were Marathas, they included not only the allied castes of Dhangars and Govalas, shepherds and herdsmen, but many who had no claims to kinship: Brahmins and Prabhus, Bhandaris and Kolis, Ramosis and Bhils, Mahars and Mangs. Cadell, op. cit., p. 12. Also see Surendra Nath Sen, The Military System of the Marathas, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi, 1958 (ed.) 1979 reprint, pp. 5, 17-18, 89-90.
- 12 See Table II.1, Changes in the Caste Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.
- 13 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

Changes in the Caste Composition of the Bombay  
Army - 1824, 1851-52, 1859

Castes	1824(i)		1851-52(ii)		1859 (iii)	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Brahmins	Nil		6446	26	3123	10
Rajputs	5	0.02			2289	7
Marathas	Not mentioned		7317	29	12371	37
Parwaris	4868	18	Not mentioned		3761	11
Mochis	346	1.3	-do-		Not mentioned	
Mangs	20	0.08	-do-		-do-	
Hindus or other castes	17131	65	8879	35.5	8562	25.5
Jews	303	1.2	Not mentioned		Not mentioned	
Christians	247	1	229	1	424	1.2
Muslims	3633	13.6	1940	8	3034	9
Telingees and Gentoos	Not mentioned		140	0.5	Not mentioned	
Tamils	-do-		3	0.01	-do-	
Indo- Britons	-do-		5	0.02	-do-	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>25,695</b>		<b>24,959</b>		<b>33,564</b>	

Figures for 1851-52 refer only to privates.

(1) Bom. Mily. Cons. vol. 134, 1824, pp. 53-54.

(ii) Ibid., vol. 492, 1852, pp. 172-173.

(iii) PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 195.

The concern for "country" betrayed the inability of the Presidency to supply manpower to its army. Only 63.6 per cent of the Bombay army in 1824 and 50.2 per cent in 1851-52 hailed from the Bombay Presidency. Recruitment was sparse in Deccan; negligible in Gujrat, Carnatic and Khandedh; nil in Kutch and Kathiawar. The narrow coastal strip of the Konkan supplied roughly half the Bombay army.<sup>14</sup> Yet the South Konkan with a population of only 6,50,000 was unable to support an army of 2,064 cavalry, 25,840 infantry, besides artillery, pioneers and marines.<sup>15</sup> The shortfall was met by recruitment from thirteen regions beyond the Presidency: Hindustan, Malabar, Kanara, Mysore, Malwa, Goa, Madras, Punjab, Rajputana, Northern Circars, Marwa, Arabia and Africa.<sup>16</sup>

#### The System:

Recruitment was undertaken by the regiment<sup>17</sup> but entrusted to the serving soldier. Commanding officers of regiments maintained the strength of their corps by relying on the associations of their sepoys. Ordinarily recruits

14 Ibid.

15 Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay army to Elphinstone, Governor and President-in-Council, Bombay, Bom. Mil. Cons., 1824, vol. 134, p. 41.

16 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

17 G.O.C. dated 14th August 1820, Jameson's Code, para 44, p. 767.

Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay  
Army - 1824, 1851-52, 1859

Regions	1824 (i)		1851-52(ii)		1859 (iii)	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Konkan	13,391	52	10,170	41	16,130	49
Hindustan	7,463	30	12,479	50	13,150	39
Deccan	2,106	8	1,618	7	3,070	9
Malabar	853	3.3	Not mentioned		280	0.8
Gujrat	643	2.5	66	0.22	300	0.8
Carnatic	556	2	471	2	180	0.5
Kanara	313	1	Not mentioned		12	0.03
Bombay	169	0.7	-do-		30	0.08
Khandesh	100	0.4	-do-		160	0.5
Mysore	24	0.1	26	0.1	Not mentioned	
Malwa	42	0.2	Not mentioned		-do-	
Kathiawar	1		-do-		-do-	
Goa	20	0.07	-do-		-do-	
Kutch	Nil		-do-		-do-	
Sindh	Nil		2		75	0.2
Madras	Not mentioned		11	0.04	400	1.2
Punjab	-do-		Nil		155	0.4
Rajputana	-do-		Not mentioned		4	0.01
Northern Circars	-do-		99	0.4	Not mentioned	
Arabia	-do-		2		-do-	
Marwa	5	0.02	Not mentioned		-do-	
Afghanistan	Not mentioned		-do-		-do-	
Africa	4	0.02	-do-		-do-	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>25,695</b>		<b>24,959</b>		<b>33,966</b>	

(i) Bom. Mil. Cons., 1824, vol. 134, pp. 53-54.

(ii) Ibid., 1851-52, vol. 492, pp. 172-173.

(iii) PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 197.

were brought by sepoys returning from furlough.<sup>18</sup> In addition, recruiting parties, headed by native commissioned and non-commissioned officers on leave, enlisted men from their home villages.<sup>19</sup> Selection was limited to local and family acquaintances, recruiters preferring their kinsmen and friends to others.<sup>20</sup>

Acquaintance based enlistment maintained the social equilibrium of the ranks. State patronage was distributed through the kinship network. Via a self perpetuating system the social composition of the recruits duplicated that of the army (see Table II.<sup>3</sup>; Social Composition of the Ranks and Recruits in 1824).<sup>2DA</sup>

Table II.3 exhibits the success of dominant social groups in cornering military employment for their kinsmen. The domination of Hindustan, Konkan and Deccan cummulativey constituting 89 per cent of the army in 1824 was reflected

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- 18 The system of recruitment was the same in all the three Presidency Armies. See Barat, op.cit., p. 126.
- 19 G.O.C. dated 11th April 1807, Jameson's Code, para 76, p. 770; Barat, op.cit., p. 126.
- 20 Enlistment in the Native Indian Army: Circular letter of 1st January 1857. PP, Lords. 1857, vol. 12, Paper 209, p. 215.
- 2DA Table II.<sup>3</sup> is subject to some qualifications: All units of the army were not recruiting at the same time and in similar proportions to total strength. Different units recruited men at different times depending on the size of a corps and its casualties. Moreover all men in a regiment did not have an equal chance or uniform success as recruiting agents. It depended upon the commanding officer who selected men for the recruiting parties and the ability of the sepoy to tap the reservoir of young men in his village which varied with local circumstances.



TABLE II.3

Social Composition of the Ranks and Recruits in 1824

Regions	RANKS (1)		RECRUITS (11)	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Konkan	12,923	57	1,883	55
Hindustan	5,531	24	1,202	35
Deccan	1,920	8	166	5
Malabar	807	3.5	56	1
Gujrat	441	2	52	1.5
Carnatic	475	2	53	1.5
Kanara	302	1.3	-	-
Bombay Island	200	0.8	2	0.05
Khandesh	100	0.4	-	-
Mysore	24	0.1	1	0.02
Malwa	6	0.02	1	0.02
Goa	4	0.01	2	0.05
Kathiawar	1			
Madras			30	0.8
Sadashivghar			8	0.2
Seringapatam			2	0.05
Nagpur			2	0.05
Baroda			1	0.02
Cundapur			1	0.02
Mangalore			1	0.02
Bangalore			1	0.02
Hyderabad			1	0.02
Marwa			1	0.02
Persia			1	0.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,734</b>		<b>3,446</b>	

1. Table II.3 only refers to the Infantry and Grenadier Regiments.

(1) Abstract of the Annual Returns of the Country of the men of the Bombay Army from the Inspection Reports of the year 1824. Bombay Adjutant General's Office, dated 9th July 1824. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1824, vol. 134, pp. 53-54.

(11) Abstract Statement of the Number of Men from each Province or District Enlisted into Native Army of the Bombay establishment during the years 1821, 1822 and 1823 and present with their Battalions on the 1st January 1824, ibid., p. 55.

in the recruits enlisted during 1821-1823, 95 per cent of which belonged to these three regions. This increasing regional concentration in recruitment was at the cost of other regions which contributed only marginally to the army in 1824. No recruits were obtained from Kanara, Khandesh, Malwa and Kathiawar. Only two recruits were obtained from Bombay and Goa and only one from Mysore. Significantly recruitment from eleven new regions hitherto unrepresented in the army was insignificant. Madras, Sadashivghar, Seringapatam, Nagpur, Baroda, Cundapur, Mangalore, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Marwa and Persia, together accounted for only 1.04 per cent of total recruits.

Clearly recruitment depended not on the available manpower in the vicinity, but on contacts within the army. The aspiring recruit had to step forward at the right time, that is, when vacancies occurred, the knowledge of which depended on the receipt of "inside" information. The commandant of the Khandesh local corps, commenting on the few Khandeshis in his battalion, observed, "on vacancies occurring few or no Khandeshis have offered for service. This may possibly arise from the number of Hindustani men on the spot waiting for employment, and the men at present composing the battalion being principally of their own caste, they of course get the earliest information of casualties."<sup>21</sup>

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21 Letter from Lieutenant Shaw, Commandant, Khandesh Local Corps, to Major Robertson, Collector in Khandesh, dated Dhulia, 28th November 1823. Bom. Mil. Cons. 1824, vol. 134, pp. 13-14.

"Self-operating" recruitment was encouraged by authority for the security it provided. The origin and character of a recruit was vouch — safed. Sepoys stood guarantee for the friends and relatives they enlisted.<sup>22</sup> By doing so, the sepoy became responsible for the recruit's behaviour.<sup>23</sup> To protect his own position, the sepoy disciplined the recruit, thereby allowing for a greater degree of control than was otherwise possible.

### The Crisis:

Personal securities contracted recruitment in times of turbulence. A system of sureties collapsed amidst uncertainty. The Commandant of the Sind<sup>h</sup> Irregular Horse, a corps dominated by Hindustani Muslims, observed in 1857; "the men of the two regiments already formed cannot be induced to go (give) security even for their relatives in Hindustan, who are desirous of entering the third regiment, and from

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22 "The commanding officer prefer that a sepoy of the regiment should present and give an account of a recruit, in which case he is, in a manner, his guarantee. When a regiment is popular, a great part of the recruits for it are enlisted in this way; young men come to their friends or relatives in a regiment for the purpose of enlisting into it." Testimony of Major-General Hugh Rose, Commanding Field Forces South of the Narmada. PP. Commons. 1859, c. 2541, p. 72.

23 Brigadier-General John Jacob, Commandant, Sind<sup>h</sup> Irregular Cavalry, observed: "during many years it has been our practice to require security from ~~two~~ silhedars for the good conduct of every recruit enlisted. This security is absolute, to the end that the securities deem a fault committed by the soldier for whom they are responsible as chargeable against themselves." Pelly, The Views and Opinions of Brigadier-General John Jacob, London, 1858, p. 447.

whom they have been separated during the past two years. Many applications have been made to our silhedars<sup>24</sup> for such security, but the reply has been - 'No, it is true you were loyal when we parted. But God knows what may be in your hearts now. The times .. are ..., treacherous. Come first, and show what you are, and what you have been doing and then we may agree'."<sup>25</sup>

Political turbulence necessitated changes in the system of recruitment. Regimental recruiting based on <sup>Kinship had two drawbacks</sup> the official criterion of physical fitness became a casualty to the sepoy's preference for his friends and relatives.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, a restricted catchment area only provided recruits in dribbles, barely sufficient to replace normal casualties. War and insurrection demanded large scale army augmentation. To cater for the huge demand for recruits and regulate their distribution to different regiments, recruitment was temporarily centralized by establishing recruit depots.<sup>27</sup>

24 Originally derived from the Persian, 'Silah-dar', 'bearing or having arms'. Silhadar literally means equipment holder, i.e., a soldier who finds his own horse and arms. An ancient system in India it dates, according to S.N. Sen, to the 12th century A.D., finding mention in the Sukranitsara, a digest on polity by the sage Sukracharya. S.N. Sen, op.cit., p. 5.

Its Angle-Indian application is to a soldier, in a regiment of irregular cavalry, who provides his own arms and horse, and sometimes to regiments composed of such men - "a corps of Silhadar Horse." Hobson-Jobson, p. 836b.

25 Pelly, op.cit., p. 447.

26 Army authorities complained that too many recruits out of batches sent to headquarters were physically unfit to carry out the duties of a soldier. Enlistment in the Native Indian Army: circular letter of 1st January 1857. PP. Lords. 1857, vol. 12, Paper 209, p. 215.

27 Lieutenant-Colonel Powell, Adjutant-General of the

Recruit depots increased the proportion of Hindustani sepoys. Prior to the Maratha war, Hindustanis in the Bombay army did not exceed 4,000 men. The establishment of a depot at Mhow, astride the Bombay - Hindustan trunk road, made the Bombay ranks more accessible to Hindustans.<sup>28</sup> During the Maratha and Burmese wars large numbers of Hindustanis enlisted via the Mhow connection. While the proportion of Hindustanis in twenty-two infantry regiments averaged 23 per cent, they constituted 56 per cent of the two extra battalions<sup>29</sup> raised at recruit depots. By 1824 Hindustanis numbered 7,465 men or 30 per cent of the entire army.<sup>30</sup>

Further augmentations further increased Hindustani strength. The panic caused by the rout of the British forces before Kabul in 1841-42 re-established<sup>31</sup> and expanded

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Army to Major Holland, Acting-Quarter-Master General, dated 23rd March 1844. For. Sec. Cons., dated 18th May 1844, Nos. 15-17, p. 5. Also see Bom. Mily. Cons., 1846-47, vol. 308, p. 473.

28 Malcolm partially traced the increasing Hindustani proportion in the Bombay army to "the station of Bombay troops at Mhow, where an officer was specifically employed to recruit for the army." Report by Sir John Malcolm to Lord William Bentinck on the Bombay army, dated 27th November 1830, PP, Commons, 1857, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 175. Also see PP, Commons, 1831-32, vol. 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, p. 198.

29 Bom. Mily. Cons. 1824, Vol. 134, pp 53-54.

30 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

31 Adjutant General of the Army to Lieutenant-Colonel Wood, Secretary to Government, Military Department, dated Poona, 25th September 1838. Bom. Mily. Cons., 1838-39, vol. 118, p. 553.

the recruit depots at Poona and Mhow to 1,000 men each.<sup>32</sup>  
 The increased reliance on depot-recruitment made Hindustan  
 the largest single source of recruits.<sup>33</sup> From 1830<sup>34</sup> to  
 1852 one out of every two Bombay sepoy was a Hindustani.<sup>35</sup>

Hindustan was the great nursery of the Presidency  
 armies. Almost the entire Bengal army hailed from Bihar  
 and Awadh.<sup>36</sup> Hindustanis constituted a significant portion  
 of the Madras army and half of the Bombay army from 1830 to  
 1852. Hindustani recruits were welcomed for their superior  
 stature and military bearing.<sup>37</sup> Governor-General William

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- 32 Adjutant-General of the Army to Lieutenant-Colonel Melville, Secretary to Government, Military Department, Bombay, dated Poona, 31st August 1842. Bom. Mily. Cons., 1842-43, vol. 181, pp. 9-30.
- 33 "Mhow is the principal quarter from which Hindustani recruits are now drawn for the Bombay army, and who now compose nearly half the number found in its ranks, from which station they march for others within the territories under this Presidency." Adjutant-General of the Army to Lieutenant-Colonel Wood, Secretary to Government, Military Department, Bombay, dated Poona, 13th June 1841. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1839-41, vol. 140, p. 417.
- 34 In 1830 the Bombay Army consisted of 12,476 Hindustanis, 10,015 Konkanis, and 1,910 Deccanis. PP, Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 175.
- 35 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.
- 36 Barat, op.cit., pp. 118-121.
- 37 The Duke of Wellington wrote in 1804 that the Oudh recruits were chosen because they were of a better size and appearance than any other to be had in India. Major-General Sir Thomas Reynold stated before the Select Committee in 1831 that, "the Oudh men were thought of as the best soldiers." Similarly Melville, Military Secretary of East India House, observed in 1852, that "the sepoy from Oudh are generally men of fine structure." See Barat, op.cit., pp. 120-121.

TABLE II.4Physique of Different Classes of Recruits in the  
Three Presidency Armies<sup>1</sup>

	<u>A V E R A G E</u>	
	<u>Heights</u>	<u>Weights</u>
<u>Bengal Infantry :</u>		
Generally recruited from Hindustan	5.7.82	9.0.8
<u>Madras Infantry:</u>		
Men, formerly Recruit Boys	5.5.36	7.9.73
Madrasis recruited	5.6.34	8.1.10
Hindustanis recruited	5.6.59	8.5.28
<u>Bombay Infantry:</u>		
Men, formerly Recruit Boys	5.4.75	8.5.25
Konkanis recruited	5.5.5	8.5.5
Deccanis recruited	5.5.5	8.9.25
Hindustanis recruited	5.6.5	9.0.5

<sup>1</sup> On the composition of the Army in India, Minute by Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, dated Calcutta, 13th March 1835. PP, Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 71.

Bentinck attributed the Madras and Bombay reliance on Hindustanis as a preference for taller and heavier men.<sup>38</sup> Even Malcolm, critical of the high proportion of Hindustanis in the Bombay army, admitted that "the Hindoostanee men, in size, appearance, and perhaps in a certain degree of military pride, (are) superior to the Konkanese and Deccanees."<sup>39</sup>

The Hindustani influx consisted of a variegated social mix. One part consisted of men from middling and low castes barred from the Bengal army,<sup>40</sup> who obtained employment in Bombay.<sup>41</sup> They included Ahirs, cowherds; Dhobis, washermen; Kunbis, cultivators; Naes, barbers; Telis, oil pressers;<sup>42</sup> and Malis, gardeners. The other part consisted of Brahmins

38 See Table II.4, Physique of Different Classes of Recruits in the Three Presidency Armies.

39 Report by Malcolm to Bentinck on the Bombay army, dated 27th November 1830. Ibid., p. 176. Malcolm however noted that the Konkanis and Deccanis "are more patient under privation and fatigue, more easily subsisted and managed, and in bravery to be fully their equals. They are the descendants of Shivaji's 'Mountain-Rats' whom neither the stature nor military bearings of the Hindustanis could debar from advancing to the gates of Delhi."

40 "... special care.. must be taken to reject all men of the inferior castes, such as Bunneahs, Kyeths, Naes, Telees, Thumolees, Gurrereas, Lodhs, Bhojoahs, Kahars, Mooraees, Kandors, Malees, Kachees, and any other habitually employed in menial occupations." Extract Regulations of the Bengal Army, 1855, Section XXXI, Clause 6. Quoted by Major-General Bissh, Military Secretary to the Government of India, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, Appendix 61, p. 77.

41 Testimony of Sir Bartle Frere, Commissioner in Sind, PP, Commons. 1859, c. 2541, p. 50.

42 See Proceedings of the Special Committee assembled by order of Colonel Dundas, Commanding at Karachi, to examine and report upon thirteen general service recruits received from Poona Depot for the 4th Regiment Native Infantry. Dated Camp Karachi, 5th May 1847. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1846-48, vol. 348, p. 365.



and Rajputs, the latter labelled "Chutree" a corruption of Kshatriya, the *crème de la crème* of the Bengal army.<sup>43</sup>

Hindustan supplied what was hitherto missing: the high caste sepoy.<sup>44</sup> Previously the Bombay army mainly relied on low castes from the Konkan. Only with the Hindustani influx did the high castes enter the army in significant numbers. The proportion of high castes waxed and waned with the Hindustani wave. As the torrent from the Gangetic plain <sup>swept</sup> over half the army between 1830 and 1852, Brahmins, ignored in the 1824 Returns, surged to a high-water mark of 6,446 men or 26 per cent of the army. As the Hindustani tide ebbed to 39 per cent in 1859, Brahmins receded to 3123 men, just 10 per cent of the force.<sup>45</sup>

The high caste Hindustani sepoy bullied new castes from the Bengal army<sup>46</sup> and old castes from the Bombay army.

43 Barat, op.cit., pp. 121-125.

44 In the Bombay army "the high caste men come from the Bengal Provinces." Lieutenant General Sir Thomas M'Mohan, former commander-in-chief of the Bombay Army. PP. Commons. 1852-53, vol. 27. Paper 426, p. 28.

45 See Table II.1, Changes in the Caste Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859; and Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

46 Sikhs entering the Bengal army encountered the "quiet but persistent opposition of the Oude and Behar men... that such opposition is no small obstacle to the introduction of new classes into the army, all experienced officers know full well. Even the determination of the present Commander-in-Chief at Madras, when commanding the Hurriana Light Infantry, eighteen years ago, did not enable him to carry such a measure. He tried to introduce into its ranks the hardy 'Aheers' and 'Ranghurs' of the Province, but failed: we have it from his lips, the Rajpoots and Brahmins *bullied*

Formerly no races, tribes or castes were denied enlistment, either by the regulations or the practice of the Bombay army. This changed. The confidence of numbers encouraged the high caste sepoy to refuse to serve in the same corps with the lowest of the untouchable castes, the Mangs, the Mehnters and the Dhers. Objections from an increasingly influential body stopped the recruitment of these men, until in despair they no longer presented themselves as soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Other untouchable castes survived but in diminished proportions, Parwaries and Mochis declining from 19.3 per cent in 1824 to 11 per cent in 1859.<sup>48</sup>

The Hindustanis displaced the men of the Bombay Presidency. As Hindustan rose from 7,465 men or 30 per cent of the army in 1824 to 12,479 men or 50 per cent in 1851-52, the Konkan slipped from 13,391 men or 52 per cent in 1824 to 10,170 men or 41 per cent in 1851-52.<sup>49</sup> Displacement accompanied demoralization. The Hindustanis's disproportionate share of promotions caused despair. Malcolm observed, "the inhabitants of Bombay Presidency are discouraged from entering our ranks ... from an impression that the superior stature, and the more soldier-like appearance of the Rajputs, often recommend them to promotion in cases when

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the new levies out of the corps." Lawrence, *Indian Army Reform*, September 1856, op.cit., p. 228.

47 PP. Commons. 1859, c. 2541, pp. 71, 207.

48 See Table III, Changes in the Caste Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

49 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

the equally efficient Konkani and Deccani in all the substantial qualities of a soldier give them as good if not better pretensions."<sup>50</sup> To protect Konkani and Deccani recruitment Malcolm suggested ~~the~~ segregation of Hindustanis in a distinct corps, "than that their numbers, aided by their looks, should tend to lessen the self esteem, and damp the hopes of men of lower caste and stature."<sup>51</sup>

The change in recruitment caused social and economic disruption. Malcolm in pleading the cause of the displaced Bombay recruit, stressed the backward linkages that recruitment forged with the countryside: "For the welfare of the Presidency there is (a) very good reason.. why its army should be recruited from ~~its~~ own provinces. Not only do the men receiving pensions retire to spend them in its villages, but the sepoys on actual service remit (as is well known to everyone acquainted with the kind and filial feelings of the Natives of India), a portion of their pay for the subsistence of their parents and families. This not only to a certain degree enriches the village, but affords a great inducement to the youngmen to enlist, with the view of following so enviable an example. With the Hindustani sepoys all this is lost."<sup>52</sup>

Disruption provoked protests from peasantry and offi-

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50 Report on the Bombay Army by Malcolm to William Bentinck, dated 27th November 1830. PP, Commons, 1867, vol. 52, Paper 500, p. 176.

51 Ibid., p. 176. Also see PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 199, para 30.

52 PP, Commons, 1831-32, vol. 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, pp. 198-199.

cialdom. In Ratnagiri, a centre for Konkani recruitment, poverty and unemployment increased as "recruits for the Bombay army are drawn to a far less extent than formerly from the Bombay territories."<sup>53</sup> In the Southern Maratha Country, villagers complained that many of their finest young men had for years past sought enlistment but recruitment parties had rarely visited them. Revenue officials warned that the worst was yet to follow for "when this change (in recruitment) begins to diminish the present numbers on the pension list, its influence will be still more disadvantageous to the industry and also to the revenue of the collectorate."<sup>54</sup> Alarmed, the Bombay Government resolved that "the change in the mode of recruiting by transferring large funds which used to be devoted to the support of the population of this Presidency to that of other countries, British and foreign, cannot but have a prejudicial effect upon the peasantry and revenues of Bombay."<sup>55</sup>

Economic resentment at Hindustani dominance stoked political nervousness. The Bombay government feared that its army would follow the Bengal example in being controlled

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53 Extract para 45 of a letter from the Superintendent, Revenue Survey and Assessment, Southern Maratha Country, No. 44, dated 30th January 1844. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1851-52, vol. 492, No. 169 of 1852, p. 155.

54 Ibid., p. 153.

55 Extract para 10 of the Resolution passed by Government under date 7th May 1852 on a letter from Captain Wingate, Survey Commissioner, No. 97, dated 29th March 1852, reporting on the plan of Survey and Assessment most suitable for the Collectorate of Khandesh. Ibid., p.155.

by a Hindustani clique. The proverbial clanship of the Hindustani sepoys<sup>56</sup> was known to inspire the *mutinous* character of the Bengal army.<sup>57</sup> To curtail Hindustani influence, the Bombay army was ordered to direct regiments with a preponderance of Hindustanis to recruit from Ratnagiri and the Southern Maratha Country. The idea being that "a due proportion of different castes should be mingled in the ranks of the native regiments of the line, that the country and the army too would be benefited by recruits being drawn from the (Bombay) districts."<sup>58</sup>

Army officers too criticized the high proportion of Hindustani sepoys. Sinclair resenting the preference for Pardeshis (strangers) over men of 'our' Presidency, said;

56 Malcolm worried that the Bengal sepoys are alive to every impulse, and from similarity of feeling, all vibrate at the same touch. PP, Commons, 1831-32, vol. 735 v, p. 189.

Similarly Sleeman noted with some awe of "the sepoys belonging to (the) Rajput class whose hostile feelings when excited know no bounds, and the injuries, real or imagined, of one member are avenged by the whole class with a reckless disregard of life almost incredible."

Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Sleeman, Resident at Oudh, to Charles Allen Esquire, officiating Secretary to the Government of India, dated Lucknow Residency, 17th January 1853. For. Pol. Cons., dated 28th January 1853, Nos. 92-103.

57 "The normal state of the Bengal army.... appears as a state of mutiny." Brigadier-General John Jacob, Views and Opinions, p. 117. For an account of the *fast* of mutinies that overlook the Bengal army, see Barat, op.cit., pp. 187-290.

58 Letter from the Secretary, Military Department, Bombay, to the Adjutant General of the Bombay army, dated 21st May 1852. Bom. Mily Cons., 1851-53, vol. 492, pp. 157-158.

"I do not think that the Native ..... from Hindustan was equal to his work; he was a large and good looking man, but still he had not the activity and intelligence which the (smaller) lower caste man has."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, upper-India recruitment entailed administrative difficulties; for "the Bombay officer generally learns a different language from the Hindustani man. The dialects of India are so very different that frequently a man who could communicate well with the subjects of the Bombay Presidency, have a difficulty in communicating with Hindustani men, or rather in understanding them..."<sup>60</sup>

The Bombay army did not wait for government orders to reduce Hindustani preponderance.<sup>61</sup> Right from 1848 infantry regiments were ordered to "ensure a due proportion of men of different castes and districts being mingled in the ranks, ..two-thirds of every corps being for the future natives of the Bombay Presidency and states adjoining."<sup>62</sup>

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59 Evidence of Sinclair, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2575, pp. 98-99.

60 Ibid. pp 98-99.

61 The army explained that following the reductions ordered in 1847 many regiments still had supernumerics on their rolls. Consequently very little fresh recruitment took place. Accordingly few recruiting parties visited the Bombay districts.

Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel H. Hancock, Adjutant General of the Army, to Major Maugham, Officiating Secretary to Government, Military Department, Bombay, dated Poona, 24th June 1852, ibid., p. 166.

62 Ibid., p. 165.

Social Composition of the Recruits Enlisted  
During the Years 1848 to 1852.

Regions	R E C R U I T S	
	Numbers	Percentage
Hindustan	949	30
Konkan	1536	38
Deccan	295	9.2
Central Carnatic and Madras	175	5.5
Gujrat	108	3.5
Coa	82	2.5
Sindh	29	1
Khandesh	11	0.3
Bombay	7	0.2
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>3192</b>	
<b>Castes</b>		
Marathas	1620	50
Muslims	625	20
Brahmins & Rajputs	193	6
Christians	173	5.4
Other castes	584	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3195</b>	

Note : Difference in total between regions and castes are original mistakes.

Source : Bom. Mily. Cons. 1851-53, vol. 492, attached to p. 177.

Accordingly of recruits enlisted from 1848 to 1852, 62 per cent were from the Bombay Presidency. Konkan accounted for 48 per cent, Deccan 9.2 per cent, Gujrat 3.3 per cent, Sindh 1 per cent, Khandesh 0.3 per cent, and Bombay Island 0.2 per cent. Goa, an adjoining territory comprised 2.5 per cent. Outside Presidency recruitment shrank to 35.5 per cent; Hindustan contributing 30 per cent, Central Carnatic and Madras 5.5 per cent. The caste break up of the recruits reveals Marathas 50 per cent, Muslims 20 per cent, other castes 18 per cent, Brahmins 6 per cent, Christians 5.4 per cent, and Eurasians 0.3 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

This recruitment pattern explains the social composition of the army in 1859. The preference for Bombay Presidency recruits led to Konkans rising to 49 per cent of the army, Deccanis remaining constant at 9 per cent, while Hindustanis sank to 39 per cent. Continuity was interspersed with change. Konkan, Deccan and Hindustan strengthened their monopoly over military employment from 89 per cent in 1824 to 97 per cent in 1859.<sup>64</sup> However it was a different social strata from these three regions which filled the Bombay ranks. The Bombay army remained heterogeneous but shed its earlier low caste character. The typical Konkani recruit was no longer a Parwari but a Maratha. Marathas formed the

63 See Table II.5, Social Composition of Recruits Enlisted from 1848 to 1852. Bom. Milv. Cons. 1851-53, vol. 492, Attached to p. 177.

64 See Table II.2, Changes in the Regional Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.



largest single caste in the Bombay army. With Marathas, 37 per cent, Brahmins, 10 per cent, and Rajputs, 7 per cent, totalling 55 per cent of the entire force, the Bombay army took on a high caste colouring.<sup>65</sup>

The cavalry was preserved as a high-caste enclave. To defeat the Marathas, predominantly a cavalry power, the company was compelled to raise regular cavalry regiments.<sup>66</sup> The infantry's 'open-door' recruitment policy was inapplicable to the cavalry for horsemanship was the prerogative of the higher orders of society. Amongst the Indian states, "service in the cavalry was socially an honourable profession; thus a common trooper was looked on as a gentleman, and such men, even when illiterate, often rose to the highest positions."<sup>67</sup> To persuade these upper-class horsemen to enlist, the company maintained its cavalry regiments on an exclusive footing. This entailed a policy of no-admission to all save the horse-riding high castes, an exclusion scrupulously adhered to.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly the Bombay

65 See Table II:1, Changes in the Caste Composition of the Bombay Army, 1824, 1851-52, 1859.

66 The first regular cavalry raised in Bombay was a troop in 1804 followed by another in 1816. These two troops formed the core of the 1st and 2nd Regiments of Bombay Light cavalry raised in 1817. A third Regiment was added in 1820. Boris Mollo, The Indian Army, Blandford Press, Dorset, 1981, p. 21. Also see Raymond Callahan, The East India Company and Army Reform, 1757-1798, Harvard, 1972, p. 5.

67 Irvine, op.cit., pp. 10-11.

68 "It is in any case advisable that the native cavalry should be maintained on that respectable footing which had hitherto been preserved with care." PP, Commons,

cavalry restricted recruitment to "men of the Musselman, Mahratta, or Poorbee caste... (who).. should know something of the management of a horse."<sup>69</sup>

Such special dispensation made the Bombay cavalry a Hindustani bastion.<sup>70</sup> The cavalry drew "principally from Hindustan, Oude, and the Doab, between the Jumna and Ganges."<sup>71</sup> Consequently the troopers were "chiefly Hindoostanees, Mahomedans and Hindoos, (with) a higher proportion of Brahmins and Rajpoots than the Native Infantry regiments."<sup>72</sup> There were a few Marathas and Muslims from the Bombay Carnatic and the Madras Presidency.<sup>73</sup>

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1857-58, vol. xliii, quoted by 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, Monton. The Hague, 1959, p. 169.

69 G.O.C. dated 5th November 1817, Jameson's Code, p. 768, para 48.

70 In 1824, 72 per cent of the riders came from Hindustan, 7.8 per cent from Gujrat, 5.7 per cent from the Deccan, 4 per cent from the Carnatic, 3.2 per cent from Malabar-Kanara, 2.6 per cent from the Konkan, 2.4 per cent from Malwa and 1.4 per cent from Bombay Island.

~~Organization and Social Composition of the Bombay Army in 1824~~, Bom. Mily. Cons., 1824, Vol. 134, pp 53-54.

71 Evidence of Colonel Green, PP. Commons. 1859, c. 2541, p. 207.

72 Ibid., p. 207.

73 Evidence of Brigadier-General John Jacob, ibid., p. 78.

The Hindustani character of the Bombay cavalry was undisturbed by orders restricting recruitment to the Bombay Presidency. From 1848 to 1852 two-thirds of all recruits to the Bombay army were from the Bombay Presidency but 63 per cent of the cavalry recruits continued to be from Hindustan.<sup>74</sup> Ironically, a period of cutbacks in outside Presidency recruitment saw a further increase of Hindustanis in the cavalry, from 72 per cent in 1824 to 79 per cent in 1851-52.<sup>75</sup>

The advent of cavalry heralded the arrival of the Muslim trooper. The Muslim passion for horses, "a horse (is) a delight of a Mahomedan at all periods of life,"<sup>76</sup> translated into a preference for the cavalry.<sup>77</sup> Malcolm commented that "with the exception of the Mahratta tribe, the Hindoos, are not, generally speaking, so much disposed as the Mahomedans to the duties of a trooper."<sup>78</sup> As it was the

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74 Return showing the number of recruits enlisted in each regiment of the Native Army since the Inspection of the Season 1847-48 with their castes and countries. Adjutant General's Office, Poona, dated 16th September 1852. Bom. Mily. Cons., 1851-53, vol. 492, attached to p. 177.

75 Extract from the Annual Inspection Reports of the Native Army of the Season 1851-52, showing the number of each caste and country of Privates in each regiment. Adjutant General's Office, Poona, dated 20th July 1852. Ibid., pp. 172-173.

76 Reply of Captain Balmain dated 31st March 1832, PP. Commons 1831-32, 735 v, p. 315.

77 Ibid., pp. xcvi, cvi.

78 Ibid., p. 188.

Bengal regular and irregular cavalry was largely Hindustani Muslim.<sup>79</sup> The Madras cavalry, originally raised by the Nawab of Arcot from the local Muslim aristocracy, was almost wholly Carnatic Muslim.<sup>80</sup> In the Bombay army the recruitment of Hindustani Muslims began with the formation of the cavalry regiments.<sup>81</sup> In 1824 Muslims formed 13.6 per cent of the Bombay army but 35.8 per cent of the cavalry.<sup>82</sup> Malcolm welcomed the high proportion of Muslims in the cavalry for through this prestigious employment the British secured the affections of a powerful landowning élite.<sup>83</sup>

The policy of high caste recruitment for elite arms extended to the artillery. The importance of artillery exacted the gunners. Observers recognized that "the value

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79 Evidence of Philip Melville, Secretary, Military Department, East India House, PP. Commons. 1852-53, vol. 27. Paper 426, p. 2. Evidence of Colonel Harrington of the Bengal Cavalry, PP. Commons. 1859, c. 2515, p. 48. Also see Rizvi and Bhargava (ed.), Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, 1957, vol. 1, p. 321.

80 Reply of Captain Balmain, op.cit., p. 315.

81 Cadell, op.cit., pp. 13-15.

82 ~~See also~~ Organization and Social Composition of the Bombay Army in 1824, Bom. Mily. Cons., 1824, vol. 134, pp 53-54.

83 "... though the Mahomedans may be more dissipated and less moral in their private conduct than the Hindoos, they are zealous and high spirited soldiers, and its excellent policy to have a considerable proportion of them in the service, to which experience has shown they often become very warmly attached." PP. Commons. 1831-32, 735v, p. 188.

of artillery is .. greater in (India) than in any other part of the world. Guns are an object of intense fear to the natives, and ... become objects of attachment and worship to the Indian gunners."<sup>84</sup> Sepoys refused to fight unless accompanied by guns and gunners.<sup>85</sup> The Golandaz<sup>86</sup> formed an elite, "making it a point of honour .. to remain with their guns to the last, even when deserted by the other arms."<sup>87</sup> Such exclusiveness bred exclusion for at enlistment, "the idea was first of getting high caste men for what we considered high caste service."<sup>88</sup> Consequently the enlistment of "very low castes" was prohibited.<sup>89</sup>

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- 84 Extract from General Remarks by Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, Brigadier-General Chamberlain, and Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards. PP. Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 62, para 26. Also see remarks by Willoughby, former Chief Secretary, Bombay, ibid., p. 102.
- 85 Evidence of Colonel Harrington, ibid., p. 47.
- 86 Golandaz, literally meaning 'ball thrower', is derived from the Persian, 'gol' (ball), and 'andaz' the root of 'andakhtap' (to throw). Its Anglo-Indian appellation referred to the corps of Indian gunners. Irvine, op.cit., p. 158.
- 87 Evidence of Sir Robert Scott, PP. Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. xlvi. For the British the professionalism of the Golandaz proved a double-edged sword: "... the (Indian) gunners (are) most excellent, but they cannot be trusted; they have a religious veneration for their guns; and, in proportion as they are most valuable to the government they serve, so are they more formidable when they choose to be rebellions." Minute by the Governor-General of India, dated 9th August 1858, PP. Commons, 1859, c. 2515, Appendix No. 56, p. 61, para 20.
- 88 Evidence of Sinclair, ibid., p. 99.
- 89 Evidence of Brigadier-General John Jacob, PP. Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 101.

High caste exclusiveness, made the Golandaz a Hindustani preserve as Hindustan was the largest supplier of high caste sepoys.

As the handling of guns required strong men, the better built Hindustani was preferred.<sup>90</sup> Contemporaries observed that the Golandaz drew mainly from Hindustan proper with a sprinkling of Marathas from the Konkan and Deccan.<sup>91</sup> In 1851-52 Hindustanis totalled 85 per cent, Konkan 6.7 per cent, Deccan 5 per cent, Northern Circars 2.7 per cent and South Carnatic 0.75 per cent.<sup>92</sup>

Thus efforts to control the influx of Hindustanis into the Bombay army were only partially successful. Mixed success hinged on mixed feelings. Initially Bombay officers were flattered by the size and military bearing of the Hindustani. However alarm at their high numbers and bullying tactics, the adverse economic effects on the Presidency inspired a cut back of Hindustani enlistment. Accordingly in the infantry, which constituted 85 per cent of the Bombay army, Hindustanis experienced a drop. However the

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90 "Hindustanis were selected on having more physical power to manage artillery." Evidence of Colonel Green, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 211.

91 Ibid., p. 211.

92 Extract from the Annual Inspection Reports of the Native Army of the Season 1851-52, showing the number of each caste and country of Privates in each Regiment. Adjutant-General's Office, Poona, dated 20th July 1852. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1851-53, vol. 492, pp. 172-173.

Hindustani character of the cavalry and artillery was undisturbed. The excuse offered was that these prestigious services required the high castes and large men predominantly supplied by Hindustan; thereby justifying a growing Hindustani monopoly.



A CUISINEGERRA,

*And Soldiers' Cook-boys.*

Published. Duv's 1800. by W. G. Nisbet, Pall Mall, London.



CHAPTER IIIINSPIRING THE SEPOY

"This army is our safety and our danger .. plots and conspiracies may be formed, but they will never succeed while we maintain the good spirit and fidelity of .. our force .. we must beware of .. any measure that impairs the confidence, that undervalues the merits, or slights the pretensions of men, who are every-day becoming sensible of their own importance, and naturally seek for participation in the benefits of a power they have so largely contributed to establish, and of which they cannot be ignorant that they must continue the principal support."

- John Malcolm<sup>1</sup>

Now it is time to examine the other side of the picture. We have dealt with how the state went about the process of recruitment. It realized the importance of keeping the sepoy happy. But the extent to which it succeeded was another matter; as it depended on the extent to which the sepoys' expectations were met. In

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<sup>1</sup> PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, pp. 168-169, 202-203.

this chapter we examine why men joined the Bombay army, why they chose to stay in it, and why they sometimes chose to leave.

### The Lure of Money:

Predictably the primary enlistment motive was economic. The Marathas had been poor paymasters; their pay scales were arbitrary<sup>2</sup> and rarely enforced.<sup>3</sup> To obtain their promised wages soldiers frequently mutinied or sat on dharna.<sup>4</sup> The Company's armies introduced a system,

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2 Sen, op.cit., p. 11.

3 Ibid., pp. 53-54, 65-68.

4 Scindia, Holkar and the Peshwa were often indefinitely detained by their unpaid soldiers sitting on dharna. On this peculiar method of realizing arrears, Major Broughton writes: "The man who sits the dhurna, goes to the house or tent of him whom he wishes to bring to terms; and remains there till the affair is settled: during which time the one under restraint is confined to his apartment, and not suffered to communicate with any persons but those whom the other may approve of. The laws by which the dhurna is regulated are as well defined and understood as those of any other custom. When it is meant to be very strict, the claimant carries a number of his followers, who surround the tent, sometimes even the bed, of his adversary, and deprive him altogether of food; in which case, however, etiquette prescribes the same abstinence to himself: the strongest stomach of course

Pay Scales in the Bombay Army

Ranks	Cavalry			Golandaz			Infantry			Gun Lascars		
	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.
<b>Subedars</b>												
1st Class	119	0	0				70	0	0	42	0	0
2nd Class	101	2	0	42	0	0	52	0	0	31	2	0
3rd Class	91	0	0				42	0	0	24	2	0
<b>Jemadar</b>	31	2	0	28	0	0	24	2	0	17	2	0
<b>Havildar</b>	21	0	0	14	0	0	10	2	0	10	2	0
<b>Naik</b>	17	2	0	10	2	0	8	3	0	8	3	0
<b>Drummer/Fifer</b>	17	2	0	8	3	0	8	3	0	-		
<b>Farrrier</b>	21	0	0	-			-			-		
<b>Sepoy/Trooper/ Lascar</b>	10	2	0	8	1	0	7	0	0	7	0	0

Source: 1832 Synopsis, p. xxxix.

novel to the sub-continent, of monthly payments, both fixed and regular.<sup>5</sup> An assured income made the sepoy independent of the vagaries of the monsoon and the fortunes of war. As night followed day, he got his seven rupees every month.<sup>6</sup>

At rupees seven per mensem sepoy pay was modest but "considerably superior" to a labourer's wages. British officials agreed that the advantage in favour of the sepoy was "4 : 7 .. that the sepoy has nearly double what the lowest workman or common labourer has."<sup>7</sup> For a sepoy this was the absolute minimum.

In the cavalry and Golandaz pay scales were higher. Anxious to preserve their élite character, these corps paid more to get the best recruits. Their different status, level of training and nature of duties was used to justify the higher grade. Whereas every month an infantry sepoy got Rs. 7, a golandaz gunner got Rs. 8.1.0, and a cavalry trooper Rs. 10.2.0.<sup>8</sup>

In the entire army pay increased with rank. Promotion from private to non-commissioned officer involved a modest increase, but from non-commissioned officer to commissioned

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Cont'd... f.n. 4

carries the day." Broughton, Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp, pp. 31-32. Quoted by Sen, op.cit., p. 137; also see pp. 53-54 f.n.

5 Barat, op.cit., p. 127.

6 See Table III, Pay Scales in the Bombay Army.

7 PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. xxxix.

8 See Table III, Pay Scales in the Bombay Army.

TABLE III.2Staff Allowances in the Bombay Army

Ranks	Infantry			Cavalry			Golandaz		
	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.
Subedar-Major	25	0	0	25	0	0	25	0	0
Native Adjutant	17	2	0	17	2	0	-		
Havildar-Major	10	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0
Drum/Fife Major	6	1	0	14	0	0	6	1	0
Farrrier Major	-			21	0	0	-		
Drill Havildar	5	1	0	10	2	0	5	1	0
Drill Naick/ Riding Master	3	2	0	17	2	0	3	2	0
Pay Havildar	5	1	0	5	0	0	5	0	0
Colour Havildar	2	0	0	2	0	0	-		

Source : 1832 Synopsis, Appendix (A), pp. 119-120.

officer, pay increased sharply. Thus an infantry sepoy could aspire to the rank of First Class Subedar, with a pay ten times his own.<sup>9</sup> (See Table III.1, Pay Scales in the Bombay Army.)

In the army all ranks enjoyed batta.<sup>10</sup> Originally a field allowance batta defrayed the expenses of the march, sepoys having to pay for food, fuel and shelter on their own. Amounting to almost a third of their basic pay,<sup>11</sup> batta served as an inducement to the sepoy to serve outside the territory he was recruited in. In time

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9 Staff Allowances made a substantial addition to the pay of non-commissioned and commissioned officer. See Table III.2, Staff Allowances in the Bombay Army.

10 "Bhata or bhātā: an extra allowance made to officers, soldiers, or other public servants, when in the field, or on other special grounds; also subsistence money to witnesses, prisoners, and the like. Military Batta originally an occasional allowance, as defined, grew to be a constant addition to the pay of officers in India... The question of the right to batta on several occasions created great agitation among the officers of the Indian army... The origin of this word (is obscure). There are, however, several Hindi words in rural use, such as bhāt, bhānta, "advances made to ploughmen without interest", and bhatta, bhantā, "ploughman's wages in kind," with which it is probably connected. It has also been suggested, without much probability, that it may be allied to bahut, "much, excess". It is just possible that the familiar military use of the term in India may have been influenced by the existence of the European military term bât or bât-money. The latter is from bât, a pack saddle and implies an allowance for carrying baggage in the field." Hobson-Jobson, p. 72.

11 See Table III.3, Field Extra Batta Scales in the Bombay Army.

TABLE III.3

Field Extra Batta Scales in the Bombay Army

Ranks	Infantry			Cavalry		
	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.
Subedars	15	0	0	28	0	0
Jemadars	7	2	0	10	2	0
Havildars	2	2	0	7	0	0
Naiks/Trumpeteers	2	2	0	3	2	0
Drummers/Farriers	2	2	0	7	0	0
Troopers/Sepoys	2	2	0	3	2	0

Source : 1832 Synopsis, Appendix (A), No. 62, p. 121.

batta became a customary *perquisite* as various cantonments were designated as half or full batta stations. It was expected by way of right by both European officers and sepoy; batta stoppages causing serious disaffection, even mutiny as in the Bengal army.<sup>12</sup>

Differentiation and gradations in pay scales are important for, while enlisting, the recruit calculated carefully. To induce men to enlist, the army had to offer a higher remuneration than what they obtained at home. Efforts to emulate the policy of the Royal Sappers and Miners, in recruiting artisans specialized in particular crafts, failed as -

"anything like skilled labour in India now obtains far higher wages than what enlistment holds forth."<sup>13</sup>

Similarly the sea-faring castes of the Bombay Presidency; Grabdees, Karmees, Colies, Boes and Daldees, refused to enlist as they gained a "sufficiency for their livelihood" as lascars in coastal shipping. Hence their enlistment into the Marine Battalion, a service compatible with their vocation, depended on,

"a sufficient inducement offered to them to give up their (traditional) calling."<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, the camel drivers and other camp followers who returned home/rather than serve the 17th Dragooris on

12 Barat, op.cit., pp. 242-243, 249. Also see Callahan, op.cit., pp. 26-30, 125, 140, 193, 210.

13 PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 225.

14 Ibid., p. 73.



reduced pay, proved that;

"it could never be established in the (British) territories, that men should be pressed whenever their services might be required, and still less could these people be forced into the Field on an allowance only equal to what they could earn at home."<sup>15</sup>

Enlistment behaviour was highly sensitive to changes in pay scales. Prior to 1837, the extra rupee ensured the Golandaz the *pick* of recruits; big, strong men to handle the heavy guns. In 1837 the discontinuance of the extra rupee, by standardizing pay at infantry rates, ruined the Golandaz.<sup>16</sup> The pay cut punctured the gunners' prestige. Artillery officers moaned that;

"oneslight circumstance will shew with what a different feeling the sepoy now looks to the Golundanze, hitherto, men from all regiments were desired to be enrolled among its number, now the Golundanze wish to go to other regiments."<sup>17</sup>

The Golandaz, desperate for recruits, scraped the bottom of the barrel. The once elite corps now attracted a very "inferior description" of men, deplored as;

"wretched specimens of artillery.. a downright imposition on the state having such men in the army at all, but especially in the

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15 Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 12th August 1815, para 35.

16 Testimony of Colonel Green, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 211.

17 Extract from a report made to the Inspecting Field Officer by the Officer-in-Charge of the 1st and 2nd Golundanze Battalions. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1844-46, vol. 268, pp. 532-533.

Golundanze... (being mere) apologies for soldiers."<sup>18</sup>

Salvaging the lost prestige of the Golandaz depended on a pay rise.<sup>19</sup> Appreciating the recruit's rationale, the commander-in-chief of the Bombay army successfully observed;

".. the argument used by the men themselves when invited to enlist for the Golandanze is, that the duties in the infantry is lighter, the reliefs more regular, and the pay the same, and that therefore the infantry is the preferable line of service - and I confess that I am not able to refute such reasoning."<sup>20</sup>

Recruitment to unpopular services required the stimulus of higher pay. A pay rise was recommended for the sappers and Miners to

"make the corps efficient, for the corps is not popular by reason of the hard work required from the soldiers."<sup>21</sup>

Recruits therefore did not blindly volunteer for just any corps on the simple understanding that all corps offered

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- 18 Letter from Major Dechuran, Commandant Artillery, Poona Divisional Authority, to Major Coghlan, Brigade-Major Artillery, Bombay, dated Poona, 28th November 1844, Ibid., p. 531.
- 19 Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Chagart, Adjutant-General of the Army to Lieutenant Colonel Melvill, Secretary to Government, Military Department, Bombay, dated 20th December 1844, ibid., pp. 525-526.
- 20 Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Griffith, Commandant of Artillery, Artillery Head Quarters, Bombay, to the Adjutant-General of the Army, dated 24th January 1845, ibid., pp. 539-540.
- 21 Testimony of Colonel Green, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 208.

a regular remuneration and opportunities for advancement. There was a marked tendency to avoid units where the duties were onerous without any compensatory benefits; the recruit refusing more work for the same pay.

Careers Open to Talent:

The promotional system stressed merit not seniority. Merely lengthy and blameless service conferred no insuperable claim.<sup>22</sup> Instead conformance to the military ethic was crucial; sepoy being promoted for smartness, drill, conduct and all round proficiency.<sup>23</sup>

The power of selection vested in the European officers of the regiment. From personal knowledge of the men's habits, sepoy were identified for promotion.<sup>24</sup> In some regiments, like the elite Sindh Irregular Horse, examinations preceded promotion to the non-commissioned ranks.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the rival qualifications of the men were known.

Merit-linked promotions strengthened European control over the sepoy army. Promotion was an incentive for zeal and loyalty. To earn his reward the sepoy had to perform his duty to the satisfaction of his European superiors.

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22 Evidence of Sir Bartle Frere, ibid., pp. 54-55.

23 Evidence of Colonel Poole, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 117.

24 Evidence of Sir Bartle Frere, op.cit., p. 55.

25 Evidence of Colonel Green, ibid., p. 192.

The men therefore strove to please their officers, who thereby exercised great influence, appointing only trusted Indian subordinates to maintain European ascendancy.<sup>26</sup>

To the Bombay sepoy, promotion by merit, promised responsibility whilst still young.<sup>27</sup> The average age of a 'Native' Commissioned Officer in the Bombay army was only 33 years.<sup>28</sup> As most British officers avoided regimental duties, administration and training devolved on the Indian officers. The details of arming, clothing and payment, the smaller duties of camp and station, the interior economy of the sepoy lines, the consideration of applications for furlough and character, fell to the lot of the Indian officers.<sup>29</sup> Youthful, active and highly intelligent,<sup>30</sup> these Indian officers were superior

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26 Evidence of Trevelyan, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, pp. 107-108. Also see Pelly, op.cit., p. 114.

27 In contrast, in the Bengal army, promotion by seniority restricted the commissioned-officer grade to old men of 55 to 60 years or more. For reports of the Bengal officer corps as aged and useless, see Barat, op.cit., p. 154; Pelly, op.cit., p. 113; Evidence of Colonel Atchinson and Captain Macan, PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. xc, para 623; Evidence of Colonels Harrington, Wintle and Birch, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, pp. 50, 130, Appendix 61, p. 81.

28 Evidence of Willoughby, ibid., p. 104.

29 Evidence of Captain Capon, ibid., p. 127.

30 Evidence of Colonel Hill, ibid., p. 96.

not only to the privates from amongst whom they rose,<sup>31</sup> but also to the European Sargeants<sup>32</sup> and the younger European officers.<sup>33</sup>

Hence all sepoys took a very close interest in promotion. In an era of restricted advancement, military service remained the path to fame and fortune. British officials resisted the Peel Commission's suggestion to abolish the cadre of Native Commissioned Officers, in favour of graduated scales of pay and pension, for -

"such a measure would soon effectually abolish the native army .. as enlistment would cease.. Our best native officers and soldiers do not serve simply for pay but for distinction, and would not enter at all if debarred promotion to posts of honour and prestige."<sup>34</sup>

The exalted status of the Indian officers excited the recruit. To Sitaram, his uncle, a Jemadar in the Bengal army, seemed the very personification of power and riches:

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- 31 Evidence of Colonel Green, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 192. For a contrary view see Melvill, ibid., p. 222.
- 32 Evidence of Colonel Green, ibid., pp. 193, 206.
- 33 "... it often appeared to me very hard that when the native officers had made themselves more efficient than the European officers, some of the younger ones of whom were very often for a very long time unfit for anything, they should be placed so immediately under those unfit European officers." Captain Capon, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 130.
- 34 Testimony of Sir Bartle Frere, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, pp. 55, 206.

"The rank of Jemadar I looked on as quite equal to that of Ghaziuddin Hyder, the King of Oudh himself. Infact, never having seen the latter, I naturally considered.. my uncle as of even greater importance. He had such a splendid necklace of gold beads .. and above all, .. an unlimited supply of gold mohurs. I longed for the time when I might possess the same, which I then thought would be directly I became the Company Bahadur's Servant."<sup>35</sup>

Even the lowest of the low dreamt such dreams. The Bombay army offered unprecedented opportunities to the untouchable castes.<sup>36</sup> These men, mostly Mahars,<sup>37</sup> entered the ranks freely and mixed on an equal footing with sepoy of higher castes. Many, through sheer merit, ascended to the coveted grade of Native Commissioned Officer.<sup>38</sup> Thus military

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- 35 From sepoy to subedar - being the life and adventures of Subedar Sitaram a Native Officer of the Bengal Army. Written and related by himself. Translated and first published by Lieutenant-Colonel Novgate, 1873. James Hunt edition, Vikas, 1970, p. 4.
- 36 Of the three Presidency armies, the proportion of untouchable castes, was highest in Bombay, constituting one-fourth to one-fifth of the entire army. Cohen, *The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army*, op.cit., p. 455.
- 37 The position of the Mahar in the village was ambiguous; "inferior and yet responsible in a way beyond that of servants." Their ritual status was low, their presence polluting. Yet they acted as village watchmen, scouts and guardians of shrines. There is some evidence of their inclusion in village panchayats. Their testimony was essential in boundary disputes. In all, despite their untouchability, they seem to have had greater responsibilities and perhaps more influence in the village community than might be expected. Evidence of Sir Bartle Frere, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 51; also see evidence of Captain Duff of the Bombay Infantry, PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 395.
- 38 Evidence of Major General Sir John Malcolm, ibid., Appendix B, No. 3, p. 199 f.n.

service created incongruities between the Mahar's caste status in society and the status which their military achievements entitled them.<sup>39</sup>

The Mahar movement for emancipation was launched by ex-soldiers. Military service created a new elite capable of serving as brokers between the community and the government; men with some education, considerable knowledge of British ways and the habit of command. Gopal Baba Walangkar, a retired soldier from Ratnagiri, founded the first Mahar newspaper. Gopal Swami Yagavkar, venerated as a saint, was a paymaster in the army. Subedar Bahadur Gangaram Krishnaji presided over the Conference of Deccan Mahars. The army produced the community's greatest leader, Dr Balasaheb Ambedkar, whose father, both grand-fathers, and six maternal uncles were all Subedar-Majors.<sup>40</sup>

#### The Advantage of Office:

In Awadh the Hindustani sepoy enjoyed considerable influence. Sepoys involved in litigation in Awadh, forwarded their petitions to the Resident in Lucknow, who sent it to the Diwan, where it was immediately heard free of all

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39 Ardythe Basham, Untouchable Soldiers - The Mahars and the Mazhbis, edited by Bhagwan Das, Ambedkar Sahitya Prakashan, Bangalore, p. 42. I am grateful to Shri S.K. Thorat of the Centre for Regional Studies and Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for drawing my attention to this booklet.

40 Ibid., pp. 33, 37-39.

charges and formalities.<sup>41</sup> This unique facility probably originated as a gratuity for severance from home. It was rationalized on the ground that service in the British armies prevented the Awadh sepoy from prosecuting his case in person. Hence the British Resident expedited their claims.<sup>42</sup>

High powered attention to sepoy petitions popularized litigation. Sepoys obtained leave to return to Awadh to establish their title. As leave was granted with full pay and allowances, complaints were made that -

"many (sepoys) get leave of absence from Bombay for ten months at a time for the sole purpose of prosecuting their claims through the Resident at Lucknow... and there are several instances in which the same person has obtained the same period of leave twice or thrice over to prosecute the same claim or pretended claim."<sup>43</sup>

Litigational advantage encouraged the sepoy to challenge the village hierarchy. Gangaram Sipahi of the 24th Bombay Native Infantry, petitioned the Lucknow Resident, alleging extortion by his landlord. Gangaram was a Mali. Most families of Mali sepoys cultivated land, the rent being defrayed by hundi remittances from their army pay.

41 Evidence of Colonel Harrington, PF, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 50.

42 Letter from Colonel Sleeman, Resident at Lucknow, to Charles Allen Esquire, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, dated Lucknow Residency, 17th January 1853. For. Pol. Cons., 28th January 1853, Nos. 92-103.

43 Tucker, Adjutant-General of the Army, to Birch, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Military Department, dated 13th December 1852, ibid., No. 90.



The military connection of a low-caste sepoy like Gangaram, not only financed his family's tenancy, but provided sufficient leverage to humiliate his landlord. The landlord's humiliation was all the more galling as the village panchayat found that the impugned amount was his due rent, Gangaram's plea of extortion being dismissed as false.<sup>44</sup>

The challenge to local authority often reached alarming proportions. The most spectacular incident is provided by Subedar Hussain Ali of the Bombay Marine Regiment. Subedar Ali left Awadh as a young recruit never to return to his native land. Twenty-five years passed. He married, raised a family and was altogether domiciled in the Bombay Presidency. Yet, for his relatives in Awadh, he petitioned the Resident at Lucknow to get eight whole villages in the Sultanpur district. The Subedar's claims were set forth as decrees to be at once enforced by men bearing warrants for confiscation. The defendant, one Raghubir Dayal, a large zamindar, revolted. Defying the military force of Awadh, the zamindar retreated with his followers into a large, well constructed mud fort. As the fort was located on the border of Awadh and British India; the cannonade caused damage in the British territories, creating a diplomatic incident between Awadh and the Company.<sup>45</sup>

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44 Letter from Colonel Sleeman, Resident at Lucknow to Charles Allen Esquire, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, dated Lucknow Residency, 17th January 1853, ibid., pp. 17-20.

45 Tucker, Adjutant-General of the Army to the Officiating Secretary of the Government of India, Military Department, dated 13th December 1852, ibid., pp. 12-14.

The power <sup>(a)</sup> sepoy wielded stimulated recruitment to the Companys' armies. Sitaram's father urged him to enlist as he was fighting a law suit over his right to a large mango grove. He thought that;

"Having a son in the Company Bahadur's service would be the means of getting his case attended to in the law courts of Lucknow; for it is well known that a petition sent by a soldier, through his Commanding Officer, who forwarded it to the Resident Sahib in Lucknow, generally had prompt attention paid to it, and carried more weight than even the bribes and party interests of a mere subject of the King of Oudh."<sup>46</sup>

#### The Last Resort:

Pay, prestige and power were good reasons for joining the army. *Often however* they were not persuasive enough; the recruit enlisted not because he wanted to, but because he had to. He was not pulled into the army; he was pushed into it.

The disruption of agricultural pursuits forced uprooted peasants to consider the army as a means of livelihood. The Collector of Khandesh reported;

"when the Natives of this Province enlisted, the country was, as an old Pensioner told me, either densely populated or a prey to anarchy and confusion. In the first case it was considered a good provision for some of the members of a large family to enlist and in the second the insecurity both of person and property that existed from ... depredations of freebooters, obliged whole villages to desert and many persons who

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<sup>46</sup> Subedar Sitaram, op.cit., p. 5.

were thus forced from their homes entered the army as a means of support."<sup>47</sup>

Hence amidst anarchy recruitment increased, serving two main functions. Firstly, it siphoned off displaced men from disturbed areas. Secondly, it provided economic sustenance to impoverished families. However prosperity and stabilization discouraged recruitment. In a peaceful Khandesh the men no longer regarded the ranks with favour, for;

"if a man should at present enter the army his departure from his village would create a blank which, but in a few cases would be supplied by his relations and connections and many that are dependent on him. would suffer, while the comparative quiet and comfort which is experienced under the Company's government does anything but encourage or excite a desire to forsake the occupations of their forefathers."<sup>48</sup>

Well settled men avoided the army. In Gujrat, Banias felt ~~disinclined~~ to serve, not for any want of martial qualities, but because "few are compelled for want of employment or subsistence to think of military service."<sup>49</sup> The recruitment of Muslim khasbatties, a martial class, "much

<sup>47</sup> Letter of Major Robertson, Collector of Khandesh, to Chaplin Esquire, Commissioner of Poona, dated Dhulia, 5th December 1823. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1824, vol. 124, pp. 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Letter of Major Miles, Political Agent at Palampur, to Lieutenant-Colonel Blair, Secretary to Sir Charles Colville, Commander-in-Chief Bombay, dated 4th March 1844, ibid., pp. 44-51.

addicted to debauchery" was only consequent to <sup>a</sup>"total deficiency of other employment."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the reluctance of the military classes of Kathiawar to enlist, was based on;

"the facility with which these classes procure lands, when unemployed free of rent on a tenure of service, enabling them to obtain a sufficient subsistence to render them able to live in indigence without subjecting them to a sacrifice of those habits of indolence that entering our regular service would call for."<sup>51</sup>

Thus any hopes of Kathiawari recruitment hinged on changes in the tenurial structure, or as the Political Agent vividly termed, changes in the "present state of power and property."<sup>52</sup>

In affluent Gujrat, only declining classes desperate for employment considered military service. The Rajputs were identified as the most likely recruits as their hereditary plots of lands proved too inadequate for their subsistence. This made them serve in the armies of various Princes which were being whittled by the Company.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the coolies offered excellent chances of recruitment due to their destitute state. The partial suppression of

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50 Ibid., pp. 44-51.

51 Letter from the Political Agent at Kathiawar to the Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay, Political Department, dated 25th December 1823, ibid., p. 36.

52 Ibid. p. 36

53 Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay army to Elphinstone, Governor and President in Council, Bombay, ibid., p. 39.

their raids made many, including village chiefs, enter the Bombay service as dooly<sup>54</sup> bearers and grass-cutters.<sup>55</sup> However even these forlorn classes objected to the British service, writing under the

"discipline, drill and difficulty of learning the exercise and the difficulty they suppose to exist in obtaining a discharge."<sup>56</sup>

Thus military service was only considered when <sup>other</sup> means of livelihood were exhausted. So long as customary forms of subsistence persisted, the people clung to their traditional vocations, habits and lifestyles; no need being felt to subject themselves to the harshness of British service. Hence the Bombay army was seen as a last resort, a disagreeable short term involvement to be jettisoned with the availability of other, less rigorous employment.

#### Exit of the Disillusioned:

The sepoy joined the army partly for the salary it offered immediately, and for the promise of future riches.

54 "Dhooly, Doolie: A covered litter; Hindi doli. It consists of a cot or frame, suspended by the four corners from a bamboo pole, and is carried by two or four men... As it is lighter and cheaper than a palankin it costs less both to buy or hire and carry, and is used by the poorer classes. It also forms the usual ambulance of the Indian army." Hobson-Jobson, op.cit., p. 313.

55 Letter of Major Miles, Political Agent at Palampur, to Lieutenant-Colonel Blair, Secretary to Sir Charles Colville, Commander-in-Chief, Bombay, dated 4th March 1824. Bom. Mily. Cons., 1824, vol. 134, pp. 44-51.

56 Ibid., p. p. 44-51

The army provided an outlet for his ambition; the desire to command, and achieve an office of status. It gave him an edge in civil disputes. In his village he was respected, perhaps feared, certainly not harassed with impunity. Despite these incentives he enlisted reluctantly, leaving his old life with misgiving. This attitude explains why he often deserted to return to his village, and to <sup>the</sup> comfort of a life that was familiar.

Having backed into the army the recruit was forcibly kept in. Escorts accompanied recruiting parties to apprehend deserters. Bounty-hunters were paid five rupees for every deserter caught. The frequency of this phenomena made desertions assume epidemic proportions. From 1803 to 1808 desertions averaged more than 4,000 sepoys per annum. Thus in a period of five years, deserters equalled the entire numerical strength of Bombay's sepoy army.<sup>57</sup>

To understand this exodus requires a detailed corps by corps analysis over a considerable period of time. Unfortunately few records of deserters are available as regimental papers were rarely preserved. However we have the

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57 Major-General Sir John Malcolm, PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, p. 200. In 1808 the Bombay sepoy army totalled 21,237 men. A return to an Order dated 30th November 1852, showing the total number of Europeans and Natives employed at each Presidency, and in all India, from the year 1800 to 1851. Submitted by Philip Melvill, Secretary Military Department, East India House, dated 29th November 1852. PP, Lords, 1852-53, vol. 13, p. 371.

enquiry reports on the mass desertions in the 2nd Grenadier and 22nd N.I. Regiments posted at Baroda in 1846. This source has obvious limitations. It covers desertions at one station, in two regiments, over a short period of four months. Nevertheless, in conjunction with other data, these reports are invaluable for they identify the deserter and how he made his exit.

Most deserters were recruits and privates with limited service. Of the nineteen deserters from the 2nd Grenadiers, ten were recruits with less than a year's service. The remaining nine were privates who had served between one to four years.<sup>58</sup> Of the fourteen deserters from the 22nd N.I. only three were privates. This trio deserted to return to the arms of their mistresses left behind in Mhow;<sup>59</sup> the attraction of the army palling before that of their women. The eleven recruits were not so lucky. They had -

"no reason for their desertion further than that after a short trial of the service these young men were indisposed to submit to the strictness of the discipline and took the first opportunity of deserting."<sup>60</sup>

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- 58 Evidence of the Adjutant, Lieutenant Jermya, Drill Subedar Tularam, Jemadar and Native Adjutant Sanghram Singh, and Drill Havildar Bhikh Singh of the 2nd Grenadier Regiment. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1846-47, vol. 307, pp. 109-111.
- 59 Evidence of Subedar-Major Bhawani Deen of the 22nd N.I., ibid., p. 114.
- 60 Evidence of Major Hale, Commanding Officer, 22nd N.I., ibid., p. 112.

Significantly, non-commissioned officers rarely deserted, and commissioned officers almost never. This is hardly surprising as these men had invested a large portion of their lives in a rewarding military career and were reluctant to forsake this investment. Thus the commitment to soldiering as a profession, expressed by length of service in the army,<sup>61</sup> determined who deserted, and equally important, who did not.

Entering for the money the recruit left on obtaining his dues. Desertions erupted following paydays. In the 2nd Grenadiers all nineteen deserters made their exit immediately after receiving their pay.<sup>62</sup> Similarly in the 22nd

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61 Military professionalism is a crowded and confused field. Samuel Huntington identifies the basic ingredients of professionalism, military or otherwise, as : expertise, responsibility and corporateness. The soldier and the state, New York, 1957, pp. 8-10. Except for the first criterion these ingredients are internalized values difficult to measure or even determine in historical circumstances. Accordingly I have followed Scott's emphasis on "length of service in the army (as) the most simple, if not the most reliable, criterion for the professionalism of the soldiers of the line army... It is a measure of exposure to military principles and discipline, particularly for the majority of the men who had enlisted as adolescents or young men. Also, it may be something of a measure of acceptance of military life, since possible alternatives existed, such as desertion or... discharge." Samuel Scott, The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution - The Role and Development of the Line Army 1787-1793, Oxford, 1978, p. 8.

62 Bom. Milv. Cons. 1846-47, vol. 307, pp. 109-111.



N.I., paydays preceded all fourteen desertions.<sup>63</sup> As the sepoy paid for his uniform, arms and equipment in installments, he took these with him, thereby avoiding 'unnecessary' expenditure.

Collecting their dues and deserting particularly appealed to the Hindustani sepoys. Most of the deserters from the 22nd N.I. were Hindustanis. Likewise, in the 2nd Grenadiers, thirteen out of nineteen deserters were Hindustanis.<sup>64</sup> The rash of desertions amongst Hindustani sepoys was traced to economic factors. Malcolm noted that;

"the Hindoostanee men, indeed, were after a certain period of service almost certain to desert; their view in enlisting was generally to obtain any opportunity of saving a sum of money, which their parsimonious habits enabled them to do, and they had no local bias, for they never brought their wives and families with them from Hindoostan. When their object was attained, they took the first opportunity of deserting; and the distance of their homes, which, as well as their right names, are generally unknown, secured them from subsequent detection."<sup>65</sup>

To the army the deserter was a misfit. Of the 2nd Grenadier deserters; three are described as robbers, five as debt-dodgers, four as 'doubtful characters', and two as 'dislocated' men formerly of the Gwalior military service.

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63 Evidence of Major Hale, ibid., p. 113.

64 Ibid., p. 116.

65 PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, p. 200.

Descriptive Roll of Deserters from the 2nd  
Grenadier Regiment

No.	Rank and Names	Service period		Date of Desertion	Remarks
		Yrs.	Months		
1	Rec. Rameswaran	-	4	11th July 1846	Deserted on knowing they were to be discharged by the surgeon with the intention of joining another corps.
2	Rec. Shiv Deen	-	4	-do-	
3	Pvt. Buskee Garadia	1	4	31st July 1846	Infamous bad character. Deserted on robbing a Native officer's house.
4	Pvt. Jaganath Dubey	4	2	10th August 1846	Fair character.
5	Pvt. Dudhraj Dikshit	4	3	-do-	Infamous characters deeply in debt. Deserted on instigation of Kalka Singh and Shri Dubey who had borrowed weapons and money of large amount.
6	Pvt. Kalka Singh	3	9	-do-	
7	Pvt. Shri Dubey	3	7	-do-	Good man. Deserted from hospital. No reason.
8	Pvt. Shankar Dubey	1	8	-do-	
9	Rec. Basant Upadhyay	-	5	-do-	Bad characters. Latter 2 probably responsible for robbery on day of desertion from Poona Depot.
10	Rec. Mossee Rasmoraze	-	5	31st August 1846	
11	Pvt. Sheikh Mohar Ali	3	4	5th September 1846	Quiet good man. No reason.
12	Pvt. Poorai	3	2	-do-	
13	Pvt. Ram Charan Tiwari	1	9	-do-	Doubtful characters. Deserted at the instance of Sheikh, Rec. Deen Mohammad, since deceased in jail.
14	Rec. Ballu Gorania	-	7	-do-	
15	Rec. Shiv Govind Tiwari	-	5	-do-	Govind Tiwari originally of the Gwalior Military Service.
16	Rec. Thakur Deen Mishra	-	6	-do-	
17	Rec. Ram Dayal Tiwari	-	6	-do-	Dislocated man. Formerly of the Gwalior Military Service.
18	Rec. Dari Deen	-	7	-do-	
19	Rec. Guzraj Singh	-	3	23rd September 1846	

Source : "Court of inquiry held in the Cantt. of Baroda on Saturday, 10th Oct. 1846 by order of Lt. Col. Soppitt, Commdt. at Baroda for the purpose of inquiring into the cause of the late Desertions from the regiments at this station."

Only three men are admittedly of 'good character.'<sup>66</sup>

Faulting the individual eccentricities of the deserter diverted blame from the regiment. The European and Indian officers who gave evidence before the enquiry committee exonerated one another of any guilt. With suspicious unanimity they stated that the drill and discipline were mild; the stoppages on account of necessities were made by easy installments not exceeding what was authorized; the drill-masters were on no account allowed to abuse or strike the recruits; hence the deserters really had no cause of complaint.<sup>67</sup>

The success of a deserter's escape depended on a sympathetic society. Where populace and authority ignored or assisted the deserter, apprehension was impossible. Efforts by a military party to arrest deserters in Sawantwari were frustrated by the city Fouzdar who refused assistance when the soldiers were attacked by a mob of over a hundred villagers.<sup>68</sup> The failure of the mamlatdars to detain or report the initial batch of deserters from the 2nd Grenadiers, though ordered to do so, encouraged other sepoys to desert with impunity. None of the deserters

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66 See Table III, 4, Descriptive Roll of Deserters from the 2nd Grenadier Regiment.

67 Bom. Mily. Cons. 1846-47, vol. 307, pp. 109, 113.

68 Translation of a letter from Havildar Vithu Sheth, 5th Bombay N.I. on recruiting service in Sawantwari to Captain Hommerz, Commandant, Recruit Depot at Poona. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1843-45, vol. 216, pp. 373-374.

from the 2nd Grenadiers were ever caught.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, seven of the fourteen deserters from the 22nd N.I. were captured by the Raja of Chotte Udaipur who seized the luckless sepoys in one of his villages and forwarded them to the Political Agent.<sup>70</sup>

To check desertion the army tried to plug all possible loopholes. To reduce the temptation of past-pay day desertion, the recruit's monthly pay was paid in three installments at ten day intervals.<sup>71</sup> Escorts accompanied recruiting parties to apprehend deserters.<sup>72</sup> Bounty-hunters were paid five rupees for every deserter caught.<sup>73</sup> The army used traditional structures of authority to exercise control over the recruitment area. Patels were ordered to keep a register of recruits from their villages and report those who returned home without a discharge.<sup>74</sup>

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69 Adjutant-General of the Bombay army to Lieutenant-Colonel Melvill, Military Secretary, Bombay, dated Poona, 20th October 1846. Bom. Mily. Cons. 1846-47, vol. 307, p. 65.

70 Letter from Seton-Karr Esquire, Acting Political Agent in the Rewa Kanta, to Lieutenant-Colonel Soppitt, Commandant at Baroda, dated 10th October 1846, ibid., p. 94.

71 Jameson's Code, para 68, p. 769.

72 G.O.C. dated 25th November 1826, ibid., para 65, p. 769.

73 See 'monthly military charges' in B.A.M.S., 1807-1808, p. 59.

74 G.L. dated 6th August 1818, Jameson's Code, para 82, p. 771. Also see letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Hancock, Adjutant-General of the Army, to Lieutenant Colonel Maugham, Secretary to Government, Military Department, Bombay, dated 4th August, 1854. Bom. Mly. Cons. 1853-55, vol. 581, p. 257.

TABLE III 5

DESCRIPTIVE ROLL OF A RECRUIT

NUMBER	NAME	DATE OF ENLISTMENT	SUPPOSED AGE	HEIGHT		COMPLEXION OR MARK	CASTE		COUNTRY			NAME OF PATELL OR HEADMAN OF THE VILLAGE	OPINION AND REMARKS OF THE COMMITTEE
				FEET	INCHES		RELIGION	TRIBE	PROVINCE	PURGUNA OR ZILLAH	CITY OR VILLAGE		
1	SHAIK ALLIA	1st JANUARY 1842	13	5	8	SALLOW	MAHO-MEDAN	SHAIKH	CONKUN	CHIPLUN	KHEIR	DOWDOO PUNT	FIT OR UNFIT FROM MALFORMATION OF THE CHEST

Simultaneously the army devised an intricate system of personnel rolls for every recruit.<sup>75</sup> These specified the recruit's appearance, caste, village and the name of the village Patel. (See Table III.5, Descriptive Roll of a Recruit) Thus the tentacles of authority extended to the villages to detect the deserter.

The checks failed. Recruits continued to desert in large numbers. From 1821 to 1823 the army enlisted 3,446 recruits. Of these men 626 deserted. In these three years desertions accounted for 74 per cent of all casualties and 18 per cent of all recruits. Hence one of every six recruits became a deserter. (See Table III.6, Casualties Amongst Recruits Enlisted in the Bombay Army 1821-1823).

The stick was followed by the carrot. The army realized that combating desertion was not a question of apprehending the deserter as inspiring him to stay and serve. To encourage life-long attachment, after retirement benefits were overhauled. The unpopular system of gratuities was abolished<sup>76</sup> and replaced by a vast and expensive pension

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75 G.O.C. dated 23rd February 1804, Jameson's Code, para 54, p. 768. G.O.C. dated 2nd November 1811, ibid., para 71, p. 770. G.O.C. dated 1st March 1824, ibid., para 72, p. 770.

76 Gratuity was only paid to families of sepoys who had died in service. "When the system of gratuity prevailed, and the families of deceased soldiers had spent the amount they received, in lieu of all demands on the Honourable Company, they continued to follow the corps to which the sepoy had belonged, became a burthen on them, and it is not doubted in

TABLE III.6

Casualties amongst the Recruits Enlisted in the Bombay Army, 1821-1823

C A S U A L T I E S   O F   A L L   D E S C R I P T I O N S							
Deceased	Deserted	Discharged	Drummed-out	Pensioned	Rejected	Misc.	Total
91	626	97	23	1	5	2	845

Total number of Recruits enlisted in the Bombay Army in 1821-23 = 3,446 men.

Source : Abstract Statement of Casualties of all descriptions among the Recruits Enlisted into the Native Army on the Bombay Establishment during the years 1821, 1822 and 1823. Bombay Adjutant-General's Office, 9th July 1824. Bom. Milv. Cons., 1824, vol. 134, p. 56.

This source only refers to the two Grenadier and twenty-two infantry battalions.

establishment.<sup>77</sup> Old and disabled soldiers, as well as the families of sepoy killed on service, obtained pensions for life. Rates were generous. After twenty years service a sepoy was pensioned at three-fourths of his pay; after thirty years full pay was granted.<sup>78</sup>

With pensions desertions declined.<sup>79</sup> Prior to 1810, when pensions were introduced, desertions averaged more than 4,000 sepoy per annum. Consequently desertions decreased to 2,500 sepoy per year upto 1812; to 1,253 sepoy per year between 1812 to 1822; and to 300 sepoy per year in the post-1822 era.<sup>80</sup>

Thus the introduction of pensions gave the sepoy a stake in the service. He realized that prolonged service

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numerous instances proclaimed great dissatisfaction at a system by which they were reduced in a few months to beg for their bread." Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 15th October 1813, para 29.

77 Bombay sepoy pensions per annum in 1857 cost Rs. 60,000 for the artillery, Rs. 90,000 for the cavalry, and Rs. 8,70,000 for the infantry, totalling to Rs. 10,20,000 per year. Evidence of Colonels Green and Melvill, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, pp. 192, 219, 223, 228.

78 Evidence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, PP, Commons, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, p. 200.

79 Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 15th October 1813, paras 27-30.

80 Ibid., p. 200.



led to the army taking care of himself and his dependants for life, thereby making desertion a self-defeating exercise. The large investment in pensions paid rich dividends as it was identified as the most powerful incentive to loyalty; the stability of the sepoy armies providing the foundation of British power in India.

EPILOGUE : MANAGING THE SEPOY

"The fewer elements of combination there are in the Native army the better; and therefore, the more nationalities, and castes, and religions, the more secure we shall be. Discipline alone should bind the army together."

- Lord Ellenbrough<sup>1</sup>

Sepoy behaviour was moulded by an elaborate system of control. This system consisted of many parts.

The first part was the army's heterogeneity. Mixed social composition, born of necessity, was elevated to a virtue. It admirably served the principle of "divide et impera." Social mixtures were maintained right down to the company level so that each caste checked and reported on the other. Senior civil and military officials continually reiterated,

"it is clear.. that as a general rule or a safe system, mixture of races or castes in a regiment is the best guarantee against confederacy and insubordination."<sup>2</sup>

An internally divided army meant that soldiers had no bond of union other than their duty to the state.<sup>3</sup>

1 PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, Appendix No. 2, p. 6.

2 Evidence of General Sir Hugh Rose, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 7~~8~~.

3 Evidence of Sir Bartle Frere, Commissioner in Sindh, ibid., p. 52. Bombay officers scathingly criticized the Bengal army's policy of recruiting only high caste

Secondly, promotion by merit strengthened European control over the Sepoys. It taught the men to look for promotion exclusively to their foreign superiors.<sup>4</sup> This system further divided the sepoys. On the one hand it injected an element of rivalry as sepoys competed with one another for attention. On the other hand, the Indian officer, anxious to please, kept his masters informed of the murmurings of the men. Colonel Poole stated that the merit system gave him more information than any other system:

"I have never found any man that failed in giving information of any sort whenever I have asked for it."<sup>5</sup>

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men from Awadh, for:

"The effect of enlisting men of a certain caste or creed to the exclusion of others<sup>(15)</sup> to subject that army to the control, not of the Government and of the Articles of war, but to that of Brahmins and Gosseins, Moolas and Fakeers... The consequences are ruinous to discipline. By reason of this, a native soldier in Bengal is far more afraid of an offence against caste than of an offence against the Articles of War, and by this means a degree of power rests with the private soldier, which is entirely incompatible with all healthy rule." Pelly, op.cit., p. 109.

4 Evidence of Colonel Stannus of the Bombay N.I., PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, pp. xc, 383; Pelly, op.cit., pp. 114, 123; Evidence of Trevelyan, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, pp. 107-108.

5 Ibid., p. 117. In contrast promotion in the Bengal army was strictly by seniority, and therefore automatic. Hence -

"under this system, the private soldier feels himself entirely independent of his officers, he knows that they neither hasten nor retard his advance in the service.. confidence and pride in each other, between men and officers, cannot exist. There is no real co-operation; for one being powerless to aid, the other becomes careless and offending." Pelly, op.cit., p. 113.

Thus a corps of informers was created in the Bombay army.

Thirdly, the sepoys were bought for life. They were paid to serve till death or infirmity overtook them.<sup>6</sup> On an average twenty to thirty years of their lives were spent with their regiments. Although they occasionally took furloughs to visit their villages, their ties with their civilian background weakened. Their wives and children, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters often travelled with them.<sup>7</sup> An observer remarked,

"The corps is their home, it is their village, they are all isolated from the body of the population; there is no public opinion influencing them."<sup>8</sup>

In this isolation the British tried to foster a new spirit. It was necessary to cultivate to the utmost a powerful feeling of esprit d'corps to attach the sepoy to the service. Ideally, the source of inspiration was to be the unit. Some officers claimed to see this spirit at work already:

".. it is difficult to describe the strong feelings of the native troops on these points, and the interest and enthusiasm with which they express themselves when speaking of the branch of the service or regiment to which they may belong."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Major-General Hancock, member of the Peel Commission, ibid., p. 316.

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of Durand, ibid., p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence of Thomas, ibid., p. 85. Amiya Barat has shown that in the Bengal army the sepoy retained his allegiance to past loyalties; "he therefore remained a civilian ~~at~~ heart though becoming a soldier by profession." op.cit., pp. 125-126.

<sup>9</sup> Major Wilson of the Bombay N.I., PP, Commons, 1859, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 360.

The British eagerly seized examples of the new code of honour. Colonel Hill supplied the Peel Commission with the story of the Awadhi Brahmin Sepoy who broke out of hospital and marched day and night from Poona to Bombay to rejoin his company, then embarking for Persia, because he would be disgraced if his company went on service without him.<sup>10</sup> Thus what mattered to him was not caste, but the feeling the British tried to inculcate - regimental pride.

Regimental pride was to re-order the sepoy's social universe, revolving not around kinship but comradeship.

Brigadier-General John Jacob observed:

"In the Bombay Army the Brahmin.. from Hindoostan, from the same villages, of the same caste, and even of the same families - brothers of the same fathers and mothers - as the fine gentleman of the Bengal Army, are seen in the ranks, shoulder to shoulder - nay, even sleeping in the same tent ... with the Maratha, the Dher, and the Purwaree, without scruple or thought of objection. If this subject is mentioned to a Bombay Brahmin sepoy, the ready answer is, "what do I care? Is he not the soldier of the state".<sup>11</sup>

10 PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 95. The different organizing principles of the two armies may be illustrated by an incident in 1818. A Brahmin sepoy left the Bengal service in disgust at the promotion of a low-caste man and joined the Bombay army where he served under a Jew Subadar, a Parwari Jemadar and other low-caste men. Questioned as to how he tolerated these greater indignities in the Bombay army, he replied,

"Hindustan jat-ke-ghyrat,  
Bombay pultan - ke - ghyrat."

That is, in Bengal it is the pride of caste, in Bombay, that of the regiment. Related by John Malcolm, PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, Appendix B, No. 3, pp. 799, f.n.

11 Pelly, op.cit., pp. 110<sub>v</sub> 119.

The commitment to duty over-rode caste scruples. It was customary in the Bombay army for all sepoys without distinction to dig trenches, go on fatigue parties, construct houses, barracks and fortifications, groom and picket horses, and even cross the dreaded Kala-Pani.<sup>12</sup> The compunctions of service disoriented the high-caste sepoy. General Hugh Rose observed that -

"... a soldier of high caste says he is contaminated by touching a man of low caste; but in a regiment composed of men of all castes he must, in the various duties of military life in the ranks, on guard, in railroads, come constantly in contact with a comrade of low caste. The contact gradually wears away the sensitiveness of caste, although its exclusiveness may have been offended by inroads on its privileges inseparable from the discharge of military duties."<sup>13</sup>

Obedience was enforced by an iron hand. Colonel Willoughby, a former-commandant of Golandaz, stated that though caste was not made an objection to the performance of military duty, the men required to be "ruled with firmness."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Colonel Wilde observed -

12 Evidence of Captain Capon, Major Merewether and Colonel Poole, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, pp. 57, 118, 128. Pelly, op.cit., p. 112.

13 PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 73. Speaking of the high caste Bengal sepoys, the European officers commented -

"treated justly, you may rely on their fidelity, treated kindly, you may rest assured of their devoted attachment; but you must not interfere in their religion nor in their prejudices regarding caste .. Any wrong done to them on these matters cannot be atoned for by apologies or expressions of regret."

Reply of Colonel Pennington, dated 7th March 1832; PP, Commons, 1831-32, 735 v, p. 296.

14 PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 103.

".. it was a strong system; they dared not refuse, they would have been severely punished if they had made caste a pre-  
tence to avoid duty."<sup>15</sup>

The refusal of a section of the 17th Bombay N.I. to do manual work led to the immediate dismissal of thirty-five men whereupon no further problems were encountered.<sup>16</sup> Thus discipline was evoked by fear. Consequently dissidence in the Bombay army was subtle and covert. An example of the Bombay sepoys' resistance to his Europeanized uniform is related by General Hugh Rose:

"The (Bombay) native soldier likes his English uniform, with the exception of his trowsers, these he invariably wears to his great discomfort, especially on marches, over his "dotees", (dhctis) or native trowsers."<sup>17</sup>

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15 Ibid., p. 92. (*Emphasis mine*).

16 Bom. Mily. Des. to Court, dated 23rd October 1829, paras 29-32. Bom. Mily. Des. from Court, dated 4th May 1831, paras 24-25. On grounds of caste, the Bengal sepoy refused to do any manual work or embark on sea voyages or cross the Indus without higher pay. This meant, according to contemporary observers, that the Bengal sepoy was not trained to obey orders instinctively; rather the obedience of soldiers depended on their own pleasure. Pelly, op.cit., p. 112; Evidence of Colonel Poole and Captain Capon, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, pp. 118, 126, 128.

17 The attachment to traditional civilian clothing at variance with military uniform was a phenomena common the world over. The Hungarian soldier wore his traditional tight pantaloons under his linen trousers even in summer heat. PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 77. Similarly, the Scottish Highland troops insisted on their kilts and baggies, breaking out in a rash of mutinies when ordered to wear breeches. John Prebble, Mutiny - Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1803, Penguin, 1975.

His dress showed his confusion. He could not forthrightly reject his uniform, an action tantamount to mutiny. Instead he compromised. The dhoti he wore next to his skin as it ought to be, and over it his uniform, the outward submission to military authority being maintained.

The challenge to authority was furtive. It was expressed not in the ranks but by leaving. Desertion, endemic in the Bombay army, was the most common form of insubordination.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever its human cost the system of control worked incredibly well. The Bombay sepoys present a picture of amazing loyalty. There is not a single recorded instance of mutiny by the Bombay sepoys from the founding of the Bombay army in 1684 to the revolt in 1857, a period of 173 years!<sup>19</sup>

Even in 1857 the Bombay army remained relatively steadfast. Despite its large proportions of Hindustanis and Marathas it remained largely immune to the revolt in Hindustan and Nana-Saheb's claim to the Peshwa's gaddi and his unfurling of the 'Bhagwa Jhenda', "the traditional standard of the Maratha people."<sup>20</sup> In 1857 only two Bombay regiments,

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18 For an analysis of the political character of mass desertions see Samuel Scott, The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution - The Role and Development of the Line Army, 1787-1793, Oxford 1972, p. 77.

19 Cadell, op.cit., p. 9. In contrast (in spite of mutinies dogged the career of the Bengal army. See Barat, op.cit., pp. 187-290.

20 Cadell, op.cit., p. 10.



the 21st and the 27th N.I., mutinied; and even these only partially, as many sepoy held aloof from the mutineers. The sparks of revolt were extinguished by the Indian officers. Three mutinies in Sindh largely involving Golandaz troops were betrayed by them. Two Hindustani Brahmin officers reported the mutineers in the 21st Bombay N.I. The attempt by a civilian provocateur to make the 29th Bombay N.I. mutiny was failed by Lance-Naik Ayodhya Dubey. The most serious Bombay mutiny, that of the 27th N.I. at Kolhapur, was rendered partial by more than six Indian officers who disclosed the conspiracy and arrested the instigators.<sup>21</sup> In 1858-59 it was officers such as these who reconquered India for the British.

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21 Evidence of Colonel Poole, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 117; Evidence of Colonel Green, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2541, p. 212; Bom. Milly. Cons., 1857-58, vol. 686, pp. 41-43, 95, 189-190. Indian officers in the Bengal army usually refused to betray the mutineers due to the,

"clanship amongst them, they preferred adhering to their own countrymen (than) to inform against them to foreigners."

Evidence of Colonel Harrington, PP, Commons, 1859, c. 2515, p. 50. In fact the Bengal mutinies were led by the Indian officers. The rebel Commandant at the seige of Delhi was Subadar-Major Bakht Khan of the Bengal Artillery. The revolt consumed almost the entire army the defeat of the revolt spelling the death of the old Bengal army.

GLOSSARY

Ahir	Caste of cowherds.
Bania	Hindu trading caste.
Batta	An extra field allowance paid to officers and soldiers, European and Indian, Hobson-Jobson, p. 72.
Bene-Israeli	A community of Marathi-speaking Jews from the Konkan.
Bhandari	Caste of toddy-tappers.
Boes	Sea-faring caste from the Konkan.
Colies	Menial caste represented in the Konkan, adjoining districts of the Deccan and Gujrat.
Daldees	Maritime caste from the Konkan.
Dhangars	Caste of herdsmen.
Dharna	A mode of extorting payment by creditors who sat at the debtor's door, and remained there without eating or drinking till their demands were met. Frequently resorted to by the troops in the Maratha service to obtain their arrears of pay. Hobson-Jobson, p. 316.
Dher	An untouchable caste from the Bombay Presidency.
Dhoti	An undergarment of cotton wrapped round the body, the end being then passed between the legs and tucked in at the waist, reaching down below the knee, half way to the ankle. Hobson-Jobson, p. 314.
Diwan	Prime Minister of an Indian State.
Fouzdar	Local official in charge of police.
Golandaz	The corps of Indian gunners. From the Persian, 'gola' - ball, and 'andaz' - to throw.
Grabdees	Caste of sea-farers.

Havildar	A sepoy non-commissioned officer, corresponding to a sergeant and wearing a sergeant's chevrons. It is a corruption of the Persian, 'Hawaladar', 'one holding a position of trust', being applied to different charges and subordinate officers. Thus among the Marathas the commandant of a fort was so styled. Hobson-Jobson, pp. 412-413.
Hundi	A promissory-note or bill of exchange.
Jemadar	From the Persian 'Jamadar'. As 'jama' means an 'aggregate', it generally indicates a leader of a body of individuals. In the Indian army, it is the title of the second rank of Indian officer in a company of sepoy, roughly corresponding to Lieutenant. Hobson-Jobson, pp. 458-459.
Karmees	A maritime caste of the Bombay Presidency.
Khasbatties	A martial community of Gujrati Muslims.
Lascar	Originally from the Persian, 'lashkar', an army, camp or soldier, its meaning was later restricted to men performing menial jobs; viz., a tent-pitcher; or an inferior class of artilleryman, gun-lascar. Hobson-Jobson, pp. 507-509.
Mahar	An untouchable caste whose traditional role was that of the village watchman.
Mamlatdar	From the Arabic, 'mu'amala', affairs or business; it designated in the government of Indian Princes, the chief civil officer of a district. In the Bombay Presidency it referred to the title of an Indian civil officer in charge of a Taluk, a sub-division of a district. Hobson-Jobson, p. 549.
Mali	A caste of gardeners.
Mang	An untouchable caste traditionally employed as scavengers and hangmen.
Mehter	An untouchable caste traditionally employed as sweepers.
Mochi	Leather-workers and cobblers, an untouchable caste.

Naik	From the Sanskrit, 'nayaka', a leader, chief or general. Its common Anglo-Indian application is to the non-commissioned officer of sepoys who corresponds to a corporal, and wears the double-chevron of that rank. Hobson-Jobson, p. 614.
Panchayat	From the Hindi, 'panch', five. A council, properly of five persons, assembled as a court of Arbiters or Jury; or as a committee of the village elders, or the members of a caste, to decide an issues submitted to the body. Hobson-Jobson, pp. 739-740.
Parwari	A general term used in Western India <sup>to</sup> cover a conglomeration of untouchable castes who generally live apart; hence 'par-wari', outside the village.
Patel	Headman of a village.
Purbia	From the Hindi, 'purab', the East; it generally meant Awadh, the Benares division, and Bihar. The Marathas and the Company's armies applied this term generally to recruits from Awadh. Hobson-Jobson, p. 724.
Sepoy	From the Persian, 'sipahi', or 'sipah', soldiery, an army. In Anglo-Indian use an Indian soldier, disciplined and dressed in the European style. Hobson-Jobson, p. 809.
Silahdar	From the Persian, 'Silah-dar', bearing or having arms. Its Anglo-Indian application is to a soldier in a regiment of cavalry who provides his own horse and equipment. Hobson-Jobson, p. 836.
Subadar	The chief Indian officer of a company of sepoys; under the original constitution of such companies, its actual Captain. Hobson-Jobson, p. 856.
Teli	A caste of oil-pressers.
Topasses	A name used in the 17th and 18th centuries for soldiers of Indo-Portuguese descent. Hobson-Jobson, pp. 933-934.
Zamindar	Large landholder.
Zilla	A district.

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