

**SOCIETY AND THE MILITARY INSTITUTION: A  
CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE 'MARTIAL CLASSES'  
IN THE BRITISH AND POST INDEPENDENT  
INDIAN ARMY**

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Certified that the dissertation entitled "Society and the Military Institution: A Critical Evaluation of the 'Martial Classes' in the British and Post Independent Indian Army" submitted by Govind Nayak in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of the colonial Indian armies the practice of recruiting individuals according to inherent traits of martialness and pedigree. The origins of this practice in British colonial India was predicated on the belief that the 'military instinct' inherent in the Europeans was largely absent among the Indians except in small pockets of territory and communities<sup>1</sup>. As a result, recruitment to the Indian army was made the exclusive prerogative of 'classes' who were identified as possessing this martial quality. Although the policy was officially discontinued by the newly independent Indian state, the 'martial' identity of the Indian soldier still forms the crux of the traditions of the army and its units<sup>2</sup>.

Military historians studying the recruitment to the Indian armies during the colonial period demarcate two distinct phases on the basis of the pervasive common-sense perception of the 'good recruit'. The recruitment of martial classes is believed to have prevailed only in the second phase, from the late-nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>. The new criteria took effect in the wake of the threat of a Russian advance towards the sub-continent, when it was judged for the first time that only certain races and communities

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<sup>1</sup> George MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), see for example p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> The Government of India issued a press communiqué in February 1949 announcing the discontinuation of the policy of restricting recruitment to particular castes and communities. V. Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974). But the recruitment practice continued within a secular framework which defined fighting efficiency by combining the loyalties towards the regiment and the nation. See Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), pp. 190-191.

<sup>3</sup> T.A. Heathcote, *The Indian Army* (London: David and Charles, 1974), see pp. 83-84.

among the Indian population was capable of holding themselves against a European army<sup>4</sup>. As a result, a radical shift in the composition of the Presidency armies was implemented and select northern classes, largely from the Punjab, Nepal and the Hindustan regions came to predominate in the ranks<sup>5</sup>. Some classes from these regions were identified as possessing the requisite martial spirit and proclivity for enlistment and military service. The organisation of the army was also changed to allow the men from the same class, sometimes even of sub-units of castes and clans, to form homogenous units where the special virtues of each, real or illusory, were encouraged and developed to become the basis of the unit cohesion and performance<sup>6</sup>.

In independent India, the core fighting component of the army continues to be recruited from specific classes of Indians although the nomenclature of the 'martial class' has been dropped<sup>7</sup>. There continued to be a marked difference in the rate of enlistment between the erstwhile 'nursery' of martial classes, the Punjab, on the one hand, and states like Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Karnataka and Kerala who earlier were outside the geography of martial classes delineated by the British<sup>8</sup>. Following the unequivocal

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<sup>4</sup> K.M.L. Saxena, *The Military System of India, 1850-1900* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Heathcote, *The Indian Army*, see tables on the class composition of the Bengal cavalry and infantry between 1864 and 1884, pp. 96-101.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> R.K. Sengupta, *Indian Martial Tradition*, ICHR, mimeographed at Nehru Memorial Library, V2:5941 'N47 N51, pp. 4-5 and p.13. Also see Bawa Sundar Singh, *Tradition Never Dies* (Bombay: Lalavani Publishing House, 1972), p.117. The author reports that the recruits from Bihar, the Mahars, the Assamese and the Bengalis mainly perform non-combat and administrative roles.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), p.183.

declaration of a policy of open recruitment, regiments bearing caste titles began drawing recruits from all castes and classes, but from the same region, who were then socialised into the traditions of the unit<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, regiments were allowed to notify vacancies in the unit on a caste basis to the Recruiting Directorate at the Army Headquarters, the central recruiting authority in India<sup>10</sup>. Senior officers argue on the grounds of convenience and necessity, that martial traditions in the army should be preserved, and that by drawing recruits from the same area, community or village having similar language, customs, living conditions and other traits, the performance of the soldier and the efficiency of the army is enhanced<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, newly-raised units and newly-recruited classes had to secure their own martial myths to find a place for themselves in the traditions of the army<sup>12</sup>. These 'traditions' were centred around the collection of distinct peoples, called either 'races' or 'regimental classes', who comprised the army<sup>13</sup>. The narratives of these traditions accord attributes to these classes which are similar to the ones used by the British earlier to evaluate the martial standards of Indians, such as yeoman profession, Aryan racial descent, physical and facial attributes, quality of

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.186 and Sen Gupta, *Indian Martial Traditions*, p.214.

<sup>10</sup> A.M. Sethna and Valmiki Katju, *Traditions of a Regiment* (New Delhi: Lancers Publishers, 1983), pp. 136-137.

<sup>11</sup> Sen Gupta, *Indian Martial Traditions*, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.189.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the lists of the Indians who comprise the army in Singh, *Tradition Never Dies*, Ch. 20, Daharm Pal, *Traditions of the Indian Army* (Delhi: The Publications Division, 1961), who discusses twelve such classes individually and Rajendra Singh, *History of the Indian Army* (New Delhi: Sardar Attar Singh, Army Educational Stores, 1963), pp. 257-283 where the author provides a list of sixteen classes.

the terrain of the place of habitation and previous history of military service<sup>14</sup>. Simultaneously, the nationalist credentials of these classes are also affirmed thereby subsuming them to the project of nation-building<sup>15</sup>.

The arguments behind the criteria of martialness, as articulated by proponents like Lord Roberts, was that Indians living in prosperous and secure environments had over time lost their warlike qualities which fell into neglect and disuse. It was thought that the larger population in India had never been concerned with the military profession under the social structure of caste, as enumerated by the conquering Aryans<sup>16</sup>. Scholars trace the origin of this notion to the application of Britain's own experience with recruiting 'warlike' Scottish Highlanders and Irishmen<sup>17</sup>. Further, historians venture the notion that the definition of 'martialness' comprised qualities that the British officer chose to self-identify with and to which he was socialised by a particular version of manliness prevalent in Britain in this period<sup>18</sup>. All the same, the evaluation of certain communities as martial corresponded with the self-image of some of these communities,

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<sup>14</sup> Singh, *Tradition Never Dies*, see pp. 104-117, Pal, *Traditions of the Indian Army*, passim and Singh, *History of the Indian Army*, pp. 257-283.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the discussion of the "highest ideals of nationalism" of the Marathas and the Sikhs in S.T. Das, *Indian Military- Its History and Development* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1969), pp. 52-66, Pal, *Traditions of the Indian Army*, p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Heathcote, *The Indian Army*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>17</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 23-24 and Roger Beaumont, *Sword of the Raj* (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1977), p. xii.

<sup>18</sup> See Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentleman* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), p.3 and p. 61. Also see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997) for a discussion of 'public school manliness' in nineteenth-century Britain, pp. 9-10.

who did indeed have a martial tradition independent of the colonial encounter<sup>19</sup>. But more importantly the search for martialness among Indians brought into discussion “...the effects of prolonged years of varying religions on their adherents, of early marriage, of premature brides and juvenile eroticism, of a thousand years of malaria and hook-worm, and other ills of neglected sanitation in a hot climate, and the deteriorating effects of aeons of tropical sun on races which were once white and lived in the uplands and the cool steppes”<sup>20</sup>. The evaluation of the martial qualities of Indians therefore incorporated a wider critique of the Indian society.

The recruitment of the martial classes has to be located within the larger context of the colonial relationship, enmeshed with a system of representations as an apparatus of power<sup>21</sup>. The identification of the martial classes of India with the concomitant critique of the Indians who lacked it, and the society and terrain which constantly caused its dissipation, comprised a discourse. It was constituted by a number of intersecting elements of colonial knowledge such as Orientalist research, ethnology, anthropometry, and ruling practices like census enumeration and regimental patronage of the cultural and religious rituals of the sepoys. The identification of the martialness of select Indians did

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<sup>19</sup> See for instance Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 24-25. Noted postcolonial critic Ashis Nandy agrees that there was a latent ideology of martial races in Indian tradition. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), p. 7. Historian B.D. Chattopadhyaya infers from the evidence of stone memorial relics installed to commemorate battlefield deaths that the Rajput community did traditionally participate in the military profession. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), pp. 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1979), p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), p.123.

not merely involve a simple 'discovery' of a particular class which exhibited the required traits or even a straightforward imposition of a particular British idea of martialness. It involved a process of production of a particular identity and stereotypes as a strategy to manage the colonial relationship.

The main objective of this dissertation is to historicise the surviving legacy of the martial classes discourse which now operates within a secular, nationalist framework. The examination of the recruitment preference for martial classes as a discourse will be divided into four main sections corresponding to the four chapters of this dissertation. In the first chapter, the period antedating the one when martial classes begin to dominate the ranks, will be studied. The recruitment of the sepoys in this period will be studied in conjunction with the developments in the emergent structure of colonial knowledge to search for the precursors of the idea of inherent soldierly traits. In the next chapter, the master narrative of the 'Aryan civilisation' in India will be dealt with. This narrative forms an extremely important component of the martial classes discourse by undergirding two of its central tropes-racial stock and caste. The functioning of the military institution in ancient India and the role of the 'Kshatriya' caste will also be reviewed here to see if it is possible to counter the assumptions of restricted and hereditary military service which form the mainstay of the Aryan narrative in the martial classes discourse. The third chapter will focus on the operation of this discourse in terms of the actual practices of recruitment of the martial classes within the army. The stereotypes of the martial individual will be analysed to illustrate the complex series of metaphorical and metonymic descriptions suggesting the working of something more than just ignorance

or malicious, derogatory depictions. In the final chapter, the process whereby the discourses of martialness and nationalism became imbricated in each other, marking a new frame of reference for the martial identities of the Indian soldiers, will be illustrated.

## CHAPTER I

# RECRUITMENT OF THE 'HIGH-CASTE' SEPOYS BY THE PRESIDENCY ARMIES

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will seek to establish that it is necessary to situate the discourse of martial classes in the larger context of colonialism and its impact on the native society and identity. The argument will be divided in three sections, dealing with the theoretical aspects of colonial discourse, the social history of the colonial knowledge gathering enterprise, and the pre-1857 recruiting experience in the presidency armies, respectively. The 'construction' of martial identities was neither a loyal reflection of the identities of soldiers generated in the militaries of India nor completely fabricated by a hegemonic colonial authority. To understand the working of a discourse on the soldiering capabilities of Indians it is first necessary to situate it within the more general structure of power between the coloniser and the colonised, examine how it reaffirmed the colonial relationship of 'power vs powerlessness'.

This chapter will focus on the period before the 1857 mutiny in order to illustrate the working of an earlier phase of colonialism where colonial authority was as yet limited in its political, economic and cultural bases. This is an important period for us since it becomes possible to bring out the dialogical constitution of colonial authority, and of most of the discourses produced therein, which were the foundations for all subsequent colonial sciences and specialised knowledges on India and its peoples. It will be shown in

the course of this chapter that the division of the Indian population between those who are 'manly' and those who are not preceded the elaboration of the martial classes discourse. At the same time the demarcation a clear rupture between the pre-colonial and the colonial phases, where the past is treated as a period of 'innocence' and devoid of instances of cultural competition or will to power, will be challenged here. Through a discussion of the development of colonial knowledge and its agencies, and of the recruiting practices and functioning of the presidency armies as one of the earliest sites of colonial encounter and disciplining practices, the formation of colonial authority in India will be shown to have been less than hegemonic or arbitrary and always incomplete. Establishing this point is especially significant in order to understand the terms of engagement between colonial power and native agency within the grid of colonial authority and the discourses which legitimised and sustained it.

## **COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

This section will outline the theoretical concerns which emerge in the study of the discourse on martial classes in the colonial and post-independence Indian armies. The origin of the practice of allocation of martial characteristics, restrictively, to Indians has to be placed within the broad parameters of colonialism which is a master narrative for the historical periods of our concern. Although historically specific within the larger colonial period, the discourse on martial classes is also symptomatic of the entire structure of power/knowledge, which sustained the colonial enterprise. The construction of the 'martial subject' in the imaginary of this period served a disciplinary intent,

commonly to all colonial discursive formations. It is then necessary to first understand the process where representational conventions, such as certain kinds of tropes, narrative devices, setting and stereotypes, underwrite the grid of authority by producing the structure of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. It is also necessary to view the process of discourse production itself as being polyphonic, and emerging from within an ambivalent condition of articulation, notwithstanding the institutional control over knowledge production by the British.<sup>1</sup>

A discourse involves the specific use of language for the purposes of representation and signification of meaning<sup>2</sup>. It can be identified inductively and aggregatively by looking at the institutions which the discourse relates to, the actors involved in the dialogical process of discourse formation (the speaker and those who are addressed) and the distribution of power, and its mediation, in the relationship with the subject of address. A discourse is the surface manifestation of the underlying 'will to power'. The analysis of a discourse also necessarily includes the examination of social and historical conditions under which specific representations came to be generated, disciplining the object of the discourse<sup>3</sup>. Discourse analysis allows a reading among various fields of representations, such as language, literature, institutions and rituals, to understand how power structures meaning, and what is said about a subject<sup>4</sup>. The emphasis then shifts from the question of how 'real' are the relevant representations to

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<sup>1</sup> Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.30.

<sup>2</sup> Diane Macdonnel, *Theories of Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.97.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.47.

asking what enabled their fabrication, how power is inscribed within the discourse and what effects of authority, control and ascription of roles are produced.

Colonial discourse seeks to create social spaces, and define the terms of interaction within, through the production of knowledges about “subject peoples”<sup>5</sup>. The primary strategic function of the colonial discourse is to legitimise conquest and subsequently establish systems of administration and instruction to perpetuate the authority of those who propagate it<sup>6</sup>. It produces new kinds of knowledge, frames of reference, political practice and subjectivities, through the articulation of racial, cultural and historical forms of difference<sup>7</sup>. It privileges a form of governmentality that “in marking out a ‘subject nation’, appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity”<sup>8</sup>. Although it is possible to discern within colonial discourse, complex and conflicting perspectives and shifting positionalities of the colonial subject, it is theoretically viewed as if its production and circulation is a “recognisable totality”. If, on the one hand, colonial discourse is an epistemological quest for learning and the production of functional, classificatory knowledge, it is on the other, a site of dreams,

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<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.70.

<sup>6</sup> It is also possible that colonial discourse penetrates a territory and begins preparing the ground for the exercise of authority exogenous of the fact of politico-military expansion. In fact, colonial discourse, by acquiring sophisticated techniques of propagation, comes to occupy spaces which are physically outside the boundaries of the colony itself. In India, a ready example would be the existence of several princely states who more or less fashioned their troops along similar criteria and philosophies of composition and organisation, as the British Indian army.

<sup>7</sup> C.A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), see preface, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.70.

images and fantasies centering around the desire and derision for the colonial subject<sup>9</sup>. It does not emerge from a unitary will or a single hegemonising intent forming a congruent system of representation unified in its political ideological intent, because colonial power was also subject to the effects of a conflictual psychic economy<sup>10</sup>. The coloniser was himself caught in a paranoiac relationship with the native, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution<sup>11</sup>. This produces a crisis of colonial authority which can be illustrated by examining the content of the discourse.

By locating the 'process' of recruitment and functioning of Indian soldiers in colonial armies in the colonial discourse it becomes possible to examine the production of the 'martial' category as the "agonistic struggle" between the epistemological demand for the knowledge of the Other and the functioning of the colonial desire and anxiety in its representation<sup>12</sup>. The question of identity of the sepoy - his history, caste or race - is no longer a matter of tracing an original identity which may or may not have been identical with the one it assumed under the martial classes discourse; instead it needs to be seen as a site of operation of a politics of signification, and imbricated within the discursive strategies of the colonial governmentality. Signification, as not simply a functional, policy driven practice, but a technique of exercising power, of designation of

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<sup>9</sup>        *ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>10</sup>        Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Writing India, Reorienting Colonial Discourse Analysis", p. 6 in B. Moore-Gilbert, ed., *Writing India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup>        Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), p. 125.

<sup>12</sup>        *ibid.*, p.29 and p.50.

identities. Such a technique can be observed operating in a variety of disciplinary spaces, not necessarily related directly to the military, and yet implicating the sepoy, in different measures, in each of them.

Colonial representations as techniques of power were necessarily dialogical. If colonial discourse is concerned with identifying 'difference', it is also conversely a management of contact. Enunciation or address is significant in this regard because it helps avoid the reductive simplification in understanding representation or the act of identification as plainly an example of hegemonic imposition or reiteration of features existing indigenously in the native society. It also marks indents within the "structure of attitude and preferences", which is culturally produced, coherent and essential for sustaining empire, by emphasising the gaps or distances - geographical, social, structural - in the moments and processes of colonial interaction<sup>13</sup>. Thus, hegemonic authority of the imperial power is never able to replicate itself in a unilinear manner in the colony. Acts of representation which are carried out in relation to an 'Other', 'discovered' through surveillance, get overwritten by the intervention of the psyche of the coloniser, comprising the paranoia and fantasy of the Other, implying that the image produced is neither original nor identical<sup>14</sup>. Fixity, which is essential to the colonial discourse in

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.10. The author, famous for his thesis about the systematic nature of European imperial culture, does acknowledge that there was no one overarching principle or some pre-existing, semi-conspiratorial design, which governed the entire imperial project. Instead, a structural positivity is observable in Orientalist narratives such as literature, history or ethnology as "contrapuntal ensembles" or arrays of opposites and negatives that are strategically juxtaposed to highlight the Otherness of the Orient. See pp.60-61.

<sup>14</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 44-45.

signifying racial, cultural and historical (read evolutionary) difference, breaks down while having to affirm rigidity, stagnation and unchanging order in the colony, side-by-side with disorder and degeneration<sup>15</sup>. This produces an ambivalence towards the colonial subject, splits the vector of colonial authority, and compounds the problem of colonial control. The legitimacy of its governmentality is dependent on the presence of the native, oppositional or otherwise<sup>16</sup>. If the articulation of the signs of cultural difference are to be re-implicated within the relations of power, the rules of recognition of authority, the transparency of its structure, has to be constantly negotiated. This is source of the resistance to the colonial discourse, which is different from the conventional idea conveying conscious political action. It is a process which simultaneously stabilises and destabilises the position of the coloniser by disturbing the demand for non-dialogical, unbounded power. On the other hand, since the emergent grid of authority is built around dialogical interaction, conscious resistance also is rendered equivocal thereby affirming colonial authority.

An illustration of this point is available when the constitution, and the strategic function of the stereotype, in itself an allegory of the process of orientalisation, is examined. The accumulation of colonial knowledge about diverse peoples and their societies in the colony was accompanied by a simultaneous production of stereotypes.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.66. A good example of this paradox can be seen in the depiction of the caste system in India, which describes the preservation of racial purity and social distance within Indian society- an image which prevailed side-by-side with the discovery of a multitude of caste titles and occupational identities by the Census officials (also see Ch. 3 of this dissertation). In fact the army itself registered a great variety of castes that did not correspond to the four-fold *varna* system which was believed to be a watertight classification in Indian society.

<sup>16</sup> Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p.51.

Similarly the martial classes discourse also comprises of several stereotyped images of individual martial groups. Contrary to what 'stereotyping' usually implies, what is at issue is not a straightforward matter of the crudity of the stereotype as opposed to the complexity of the subject, nor is it the setting up of a false image, either positive or derogatory, instrumental for discriminating practices<sup>17</sup>. It is a form of knowledge and identification, a discursive text of "projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies", which simultaneously reveals the authority and anxiety that is compounded within the process of its articulation<sup>18</sup>. It operates like a 'fetish' managing the anxiety from that which is unfamiliar and disquieting- racial/epidermal/cultural difference, by fixing it within the construct of the stereotype<sup>19</sup>. The stereotype is caught between the imperatives of making the Other knowable and to fix it in a perpetual Otherness<sup>20</sup>. The ambivalence which accompanies the attempt to fix the colonised as an object of knowledge not only makes the power relation more equivocal, it also ensure the repeatability of the stereotype in changing historical and discursive contexts<sup>21</sup>. This puts into relief the doubt whether an image of the colonial subject can be traced back

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<sup>17</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.67.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>19</sup> Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory*, p.127.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.66. The figure of the 'nabob' in the literary texts of eighteenth century Britain, a European profiteer in the EIC, which resembled the image of the Eastern potentates or nawabs, is an example of a stereotype that was evoked to criticise the trading enterprises and question the nature of British authority in India. It also reflected the sense of cultural and moral threat to the British society from these individuals when they returned home from India. This stereotype which projected the image of a corrupt and indolent Company official, transcribed these images to the colony and its native population who were seen to be the source of decadence and cause for the moral dissipation of the Englishman. See discussion in Jyotsna Singh, *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), Ch.2.

confidently to either a conspiratorial intent of the coloniser (specifically the axiom of *divide et impera* ) or to the loyal transliteration of an indigenous practice among the colonised.

It is also necessary to highlight the role of pre-colonial structures of authority and knowledge, which informed and mediated colonial authority<sup>22</sup>. The depiction of a confrontation between “innocence” and “modern Western colonialism” operates on the premise that all the discursive formations of this period were freshly inscribed<sup>23</sup>. Accordingly colonial rule is treated as having created an absolute rupture, and the colonised subject, produced entirely within the colonial discourse. Colonialism does indeed mark a significant departure from pre-colonial instances of imperial expansion, unique and powerful in its vast array of sophisticated technologies and agencies which underwrote the discursive ferment on the colony. Yet it is also possible to detect in the process of constitution of colonial texts and colonial knowledge, significant native agency, indigenous practices and discourses. The task of discourse analysis is to bring out this side-by-side nature in discourses like the one which is presently going to be examined.

## COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE

The above discussion needs to be supplemented by an understanding of the production of colonial knowledge in India and its relevance to the study of the sepoy

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<sup>22</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: OUP, 1997), p.91.

<sup>23</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: OUP, 1998). The author describes this “authentic innocence” as comprising the “vulnerability of a child but which has not lost the realism of its perception of evil or that of its own complicity with that evil”, p.xii-xiii.

armies. It is necessary to begin by clarifying the relationship between this colonial enterprise and the fact of political and economic expansion of the colony and the creation of empire. This query is of considerable relevance to the historical period under consideration in this chapter- the early colonial phase- because it is during these years that a 'colonial ideology' takes definitive shape and presence. In this early period, British colonial knowledge is still insecure, sparsely spread, and dependent on the accounts and evidence of the 'native informant'. It is also during this period that the initial series of contacts take place between the settler and the native where the former is confronted with the bewildering variety of the colony. It is possible to detect an emergent discursive field comprising of some of the familiar tropes of the martial classes discourse. The project of orientalising the East through representations primarily sought to create enclaves for surveillance and control over the body, the society and the culture of the native. By looking at this process of inscribing 'essences' to India, authoritatively elaborating its 'nature', and disciplining the zones of contact between the native and the European, that we can successfully approach functioning of the martial race discourse.

The accumulation of knowledge on India did not have at any time a single, explicit imperial ideology<sup>24</sup>. Yet orientalist representations are a way of conceptualising the landscape of the colony whereby it is rendered susceptible to intervention, management and control<sup>25</sup>. The production of colonial knowledge was a vast and complex project in India, marked by successive stages of consolidation, and shifts in priorities and concerns.

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Delhi: OUP, 1995), p.x.

<sup>25</sup> Breckenridge and Van der veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, p.6.

Various nodal points within the colonial structure emanated information, theses and judgements on a variety of aspects of Indian society and colonial administration. During the initial years of the colonial encounter, colonial knowledge was in fact enumerated on the basis of significant dialogical interaction, in terms of relying on active native agency. To obtain a better focus on this aspect it is necessary to plot a trajectory of the different stages of colonial writing and pronouncements, through the travel writing, indologist, scientific/analytical and classificatory/ bureaucratic phases.

The *mise-en-scene* for the British colonial encounter with India was written in the seventeenth century travel-writers who produced numerous narratives about India. Frequently using the 'discovery' trope, these writers affixed India as a site of alterity and Otherness to a European audience and imaginary<sup>26</sup>. Such accounts claimed a high degree of authenticity by professing to be eye-witness accounts, which, despite considerable textual density and detail, were in fact to a large extent either fictional or plagiarised from earlier authoritative accounts<sup>27</sup>. India was placed as a geographical and cultural entity within British imagination through these rhetorical, figurative and sometimes fictive representations<sup>28</sup>. Its significance lies in its revealing of an already operating "colonial imagination" which 'discovered' new lands by articulating differences via textual representation of the exotic and bizarre<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> The 'discovery' trope in fact had shifting, multiple meanings, frequently mobilised within the context of several projects such as 'civilising', rescuing' etc. See Singh, *Colonial narratives/ Cultural dialogues*, pp. 1-2 and p.28.

<sup>27</sup> Kate Teltscher, *India Incribed* (Delhi: OUP, 1995), p.3 and *passim* in introduction.

<sup>28</sup> Singh, *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues*, p.28.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.2.

The establishing of information systems and the relationship between knowledge and power is not unique to colonial authority only. In fact surveillance and the self-conscious use of knowledge as power is a significant part of the ideology of the state<sup>30</sup>. The political elite of pre-colonial India, and in the early colonial period when they were competitors with the British in the struggle for monopoly over the information order, collected, centralised and stored information employing classificatory schema like religious community, caste and lineage<sup>31</sup>. Surveillance performed a strategically important function by informing on aspects of socio-political existence such as infractions of morality and transgressions or threats to the prerogatives of the monarchy<sup>32</sup>. Overlapping idioms such as those of empiricism, moral ecology and genealogy were employed when collating information<sup>33</sup>. Such knowledge producing enterprises also created essentialisations of social types such as caste, distinctions of skin colour and appearance, and even race, for the purposes of maintaining ready, cross-referential records on the people<sup>34</sup>. However, unlike in the colonial information order, there was never any attempt made to correlate this information in any ideological matrix or to subject the people to bureaucratic control through its instrumental use<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, p.12. Kautilya's treatise on statecraft is an excellent example of the elaboration of the imperative for constant surveillance and maintenance of detailed records by the state on its subjects.

<sup>31</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.20.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.19. Apart from networks for political surveillance, Indian society of this period is believed to have possessed a highly dense network of social communication, comprising of a range of agents such as astrologers, physicians, midwives, marriage-brokers etc.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp.28-29.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, pp.20-22.

If India was, on the one hand, already part of an orientalist vision of the East, the initial information concerns of the East India Company were largely regarding understanding the nature of the political and revenue administration as it functioned among the various political and social institutions of India<sup>36</sup>. There was no systematic body of colonial knowledge until the very end of the eighteenth century and instead there existed a rough collection of commercial information of a technical nature, and records of impressions on the Indian states, drawn from diplomatic interaction<sup>37</sup>. It is apparent from these records that the Company servants were puzzled by the revenue organisation of the state within which functioned a flexible, interpenetrative system of rights to the shares in the produce, and the elaborate system of patronage networks that undermined the notions of rigid hierarchies that they were familiar with<sup>38</sup>. Though it took the ambassadors of the Company considerable time to enter into any such relationship or network with the Indian states, they did manage to become a significant patron of political intelligence in the pre-colonial information order.

Little of the information that the British obtained during this period in terms of social knowledge or political intelligence arose from direct observation. A direct consequence of the competition between the British trading interests and other Indian

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<sup>36</sup> Rosane Rocher, "British Orientalism in the Eighteenth-Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government", p.217, in Breckenridge and Van der veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*.

<sup>37</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.44.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.52. The author also finds significant evidence that, notwithstanding the failure to fully comprehend the nature of political authority and the interwoven revenue collection network, these functionaries did certainly manage to maintain relations with the Indian powers in a pragmatic, functional manner.

and European powers was the penetration of the upper levels of the information orders by the former, thereby obtaining the services of the networks of news-writers, groups of spies and runners, informants operating from religious centres and bazaars, bands of militia and wanderers to anticipate political and military developments<sup>39</sup>. Parallel to this the Company also employed the services of individuals such as news-writers, banias, munshis and diplomats, as translators and official mediators while interacting with its affiliates and rivals<sup>40</sup>. The native agency also played a significant role in another stream of colonial knowledge, viz. for facilitating Orientalist administration of indigenous laws and customs<sup>41</sup>. Two treatises on Hindu law were commissioned to be translated and interpreted using the expertise of some Brahmin pandits and published as source-books for the courts set up by the Company in its territories<sup>42</sup>. These texts were found to contain, what the British believed to be, the original and uncorrupted legal system of the Indian society. In this sense, the process of consultation with the Indian pandits in the search for similar textual sources on Indian society and the need to access them by the

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.97. However, even in mid-eighteenth century, when the EIC had emerged as the largest political power in the Indian region, there still existed within and outside its territories, networks of privately subsidised intelligence services, bands of military levies and private trade. See for instance p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.87 and p.180.

<sup>41</sup> There is a difference between the Saidian Orientalism and the Orientalist phase of EIC administration. The former as discussed earlier refers to a tradition of representation in texts on the Orient that originate in the West. The latter, on the other hand, pertains to a period of Company policy, inaugurated by Hastings, that was based on the contemporary emphasis on Indological studies; and the belief that it was only ethical that Indians were governed by laws reconstructed from the high civilisational achievements of India's ancient past.

<sup>42</sup> Rosane Rocher, "British Orientalism in the Eighteenth-Century", p.220, in Breckenridge and Van der veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Condition*. These treatises served to symbolise the Orientalist intention to recover the glory of the Aryan/ Hindu civilisation. This project was also addressed to a public debate in Britain where they were advanced as evidence of the advanced state of the Indian peoples, and thus bolster Hasting's case for limited government. pp.223-224. Also see Ch. I of this dissertation.

British was believed to be a recovery of 'pure forms' of Indian social knowledge. However, the relationship itself between the pandits and the Orientalist scholars was always ambiguous and the latter were generally suspicious of the former. In fact, the project of translating treatises of law, believed to be central to the Hindu civilisation, was based to a large extent on the suspected unreliability of these individuals who had for some time been hired in colonial courts to give advisory opinion pertaining to 'Hindu' law and language<sup>43</sup>. Indians were also in the employ of the Orientalist scholars to gather documents, ancient texts, genealogical lists, and record oral evidence from local resources, in their attempts to study Indians and their social forms. In the final stages of collation and transcription of these elements into the imperial archive, the different voices, agencies and authorship became blurred and eventually got lost<sup>44</sup>. Therefore the possibility of retracing any of the information produced within this structure (such as the genealogical records, caste designations, even interpretations of textual sources), either to its original form or the moment of its manipulation by the knowledgeable authority, becomes doubtful given the highly contingent nature of the process.

For most of this period colonial knowledge remained divided into specialised compartments and in private collections. For a large part, these collections were simply accumulations of textual data that was believed to contain an accurate description of things as they ought to be, in contrast to the local practice which signified deviance and

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, pp.234-235.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive", p.301, *ibid.* The author describes how a considerable amount of this information gathered from local sources were fashioned as petitions for recognition of lineage, status, titles etc. rather than being objective historical records. see p.300.

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decline from these standards. This information served to evaluate Indian society and its members, while simultaneously enabling command - create and locate cheap and effective means to assess and collect taxes, maintain law and order, and organise the population in various kinds of administrative and bureaucratic records<sup>45</sup>. The production of codices on 'Hindu' civilisation, through the translation and publication of 'key' grammars, treatises on law, philosophy and religion, defined a colonial epistemological space from which the British increasingly sought to evacuate the Indian intermediary by imposing systematisation<sup>46</sup>. The earlier project of patronage of specialists and institutions, who were carriers of traditional knowledge, was replaced by creating specialised agencies and enclaves of surveillance and discipline, whereby the colonial gaze came to be adjusted within a structured relationship with its subjects<sup>47</sup>. The early eighteenth century therefore witnessed the creation of new knowledgeable institutions such as the police, revenue, legal and educational establishments, occupying the empty

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<sup>45</sup> Bernard Cohn, "The Command of Language and the Language of Command", p.311, in Ranjit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, vol. IV (Delhi: OUP, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.282-283. This epistemological space created in collaboration with Indians, organised and made knowledgeable Indian difference- ranging from the simplest and most obvious of distinctions such as appearance, dress, facial marks, coiffure, names, food habits, to broader and more general conceptual features such as the caste system and its religious origins.

<sup>47</sup> This shift also marks the assumption of authority of instruction in Indian knowledge, to the Indians. For example, the British sponsored a system of panditic education, in 1791, by the founding of the Sanskrit college at Benares. It is significant because it illustrates the new relationship between the British and Indians, wherein the former increasingly decided what was authentic and worth knowing about India for themselves and the Indians. See Rosane Rocher, "British Orientalism in the Eighteenth-Century", p.231, in Breckenridge and Van der veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*.

spaces left by indigenous communities of embodied knowledge in Indian society such as the harkaras, astrologers, physicians, Hindu and Muslim law experts<sup>48</sup>.

The military labour market and the armies in pre-colonial India represent one area of operation of a variety of knowledgeable actors, which very early in the history of colonial presence became a crucial enclave for colonial knowledge. The army under the Mughals and subsequent polities was a highly dense body of talent, skill and information<sup>49</sup>. The Mughal armies in fact placed a high preference for a literate and culturally skilled military elite. Parallel to this, the military labour market expanded, bringing in a variety of skilled professionals and specialists, from blacksmiths, armourers, horse-keepers, victuallers to letter-writers, runners and regimental accountants<sup>50</sup>. During the years of expansion, the Company relied on a lot of military intelligence for its mainstay, employing all of the major intelligence communities of the old order<sup>51</sup>. Its own

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<sup>48</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.143. Nevertheless, the replacement of a pre-existing information order did not extend the deeper levels of the Indian society (i.e. below the level of the district office). The area of slippage between the two, referred to by the author as a 'zone of ignorance', where knowledgeable colonial institutions failed to interface with the local people, is considered to be the mainstay of all colonial stereotypes. The author believes that these stereotypes were not malignant tools of epistemological conquest, and instead they were "conceptual fig leaves to conceal desperate ignorance", p.52. Also see p.171, where the author supplements this argument by the observation that orientalist stereotypes were reactions to information panics and conflicts between official and public objectives of British administration.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, pp.43-44 and p.155. Not all of these agents were literate in the sense of being able to read and write, but were knowledgeable about their fields of profession, were able to make pragmatic calculations and analysis about relevant information. The military therefore was a vast repository of knowledge even before the British arrived.

<sup>51</sup> These comprised of communities such as Kallars, Coorgs, Brahmins and Gosains, some of which later on found themselves serving in the India army or fighting it. The Company also enlisted the help of controllers of ferries and tribal watchmen to maintain vigil over military developments in and around their territories. This meant keeping track and records of movement of a variety of actors given the proliferation of sub-military cultures after the decline of the Mughal empire. *ibid.*, p.69 and p.155.

armies on the other hand had become a centralised body even while its administrative structures remained minimal and stretched<sup>52</sup>. These armies were at the forefront of a variety of investigations and articulations of colonial knowledge. Its European officers were significant actors in the emerging public space and conducted several pioneering investigations into Indian society. The formalisation of the Hindustani language and the Devanagari script, reports on disease, many of the first systematic surveys on health, food and physique of Indians and the first tentative classification of castes, tribes and racial types were carried out here<sup>53</sup>. The army became a vast storehouse of information centred around the regimental commissariat archives, where records such as muster-rolls of recruits, personal “character books” on sepoys, information on areas of recruitment were assiduously maintained<sup>54</sup>.

The preoccupation with ‘caste’ as the fundamental building block of Indian society, each caste individually unique in terms of characteristics and aptitudes, originates in the sepoy armies of this period<sup>55</sup>. The trope of caste did play a significant role in the textualisation of Indian identity from the late eighteenth century onwards<sup>56</sup>. Contemporary Indo-Muslim states took recourse to caste designations in routine administration, although the term was used generically to include attributes such as tribe,

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<sup>52</sup> See the third section of this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> See Cohn, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command”, p.158, in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*. Also see Bayly, *Empire of Information*, p.158. One of the first printed books in “Hindui” language using the Devanagari script was an infantry manual in 1824.

<sup>54</sup> These records subsequently became the staple for colonial anthropology, *ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>55</sup> See section three of this chapter.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Dirks, “Castes of Mind”, p.64 *Representations*, #37, Winter ‘92.

community or nation. Under Company administration caste histories not only filled the gap created by the demise of dynastic histories and declining relevance of temple histories, they also provided a ready means to evaluate 'claims' to authority and social positions of Indians who were to be granted revenue titles<sup>57</sup>. However, even the British usage of caste had multiple meanings, often including occupational and honorific designations<sup>58</sup>. It is only in the subsequent application by the colonial ethnography of formal techniques of recording, measurement and classification, that this trope becomes formalised and canonical, enabling the implementation of legal codes differentially, the identification of 'criminal castes' and the search for pure racial types among a largely effete population<sup>59</sup>. It is possible to remark, even in the early period, essentialisations based on caste, such as, the prevailing sense of untrustworthiness of lower castes who symbolised the degenerated, diseased India of dubious authenticity and pedigree<sup>60</sup>.

Colonial rule not only drew legitimacy and decision-making competence by inhabiting a realm of ritual and social authority that was 'essential' to India, it also built a wide battery of texts and discursive practices using the site of the body of the native. Colonial medicine, in this regard, appraised India through the erection of spatial grids comprising of a geographical and perceptual space of the 'tropic', and more material structures such as the hospital, prison, army, barracks and the cantonment<sup>61</sup>. It was

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<sup>57</sup>     ibid., p.65.

<sup>58</sup>     Bayly, *Empire of Information*, p.170.

<sup>59</sup>     Dirks, "Castes of Mind", p.68.

<sup>60</sup>     Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, p.145.

<sup>61</sup>     David Arnold, *Colonising the Body*, (Delhi: OUP, 1993), pp.28-29.

observed that there was a general tendency to degenerate among the Hindus was common to the plant life and animals as well<sup>62</sup>. In this environment the European lived with the constant certainty of losing his “physical hardihood”<sup>63</sup>. The medical commentators, theorists of disease and topographers of this period developed a medical representation of India’s ‘pathogenic’ climate and landscape, which sought to explain the physical discomfort and high levels of mortality experienced by the Europeans<sup>64</sup>. The articulation of this pathogenic space was the necessary precursor to the defining of the frame of reference in which colonial medicine could operate, and the terms of engagement between colonial authority and the contagious landscape<sup>65</sup>. The interpretation of this pathogenic environment was wide enough to include social and cultural practices among Indians along with the climatic and topographical attributes, although the distinction between the two was often blurred when it came to the circulation of this discourse<sup>66</sup>. This climatic determinism also incorporated a substantial

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<sup>62</sup> Abbe Dubois, *Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India* (Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1970), p. 202.

<sup>63</sup> See the Minute of the Governor General, 1829, p. 277 in *Report of the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, 1831-32, vol. V* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1970).

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.30. It was advanced that “The climate of India, particularly of the south-east provinces, must be allowed to be less favourable to the human constitution than the more temperate regions of Europe. The bodily frame is less strong and hardy, the faculties have less energy, their exercise is less expanded and delightful ardour is checked, the oppressed spirits yeild more easily to indolence and indulgence...”. See p. 31 of appended paper of Charles Grant in *Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, 1831-32, vol. V* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1970).

<sup>65</sup> A series of theses on martial climatic effects of the marshy lands, areas with heavy rainfall and humid weathers came to circulate dividing the geography of India into regions habitable or otherwise. Bengal, from the 1760s stood out as a singularly unhealthy and hazardous region, whose native inhabitants demonstrated the appropriate traits of physical degeneration from living in such an environment. *ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p.40.

anxiety over the loss of masculinity in terms of energy, resolve and courage, in a hot, humid and enervating climate<sup>67</sup>. With the growth of competence of colonial medicine, the sense of European vulnerability gave way to the belief that the Indians were responsible for their own weakness and mortality. A variety of characteristics such as the relative physical weakness of Indians in general, vegetarian diets, ignorance, superstition, indolence, crowded houses, insanitary living spaces and cities, religious practices and social institutions like child marriage and the caste system, were all cited singly or cumulatively as evidence for and causes of the degenerate corporeal feature of India<sup>68</sup>.

With the consolidation of the Company's political authority in its territories, colonial knowledge, comprising incipient sciences like colonial ethnography, became more authoritative, deploying empirical techniques instead of relying on the native informant<sup>69</sup>. A rapid diffusion of the print media and photography enabled the further movement away from human intelligence to statistical surveys, replacing embodied knowledge, specialists and knowledgeable bureaucracies, with more abstract concepts having wider application than just within these initial enclaves<sup>70</sup>. The colonial knowledge that was dialogically constituted, once codified within the legal and administrative

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp.104-105. The idea that the physical environment exercised significant influence on human health is of great vintage. Evidence of such beliefs are to be found in both Greek and Indian Ayurvedic traditions. In contemporary Europe, Montesquieu, considered to be the earliest proponent of environmentalism, argued that hot climates produced physical lethargy, and the people therein were disposed towards barbarous and despotic institutions. See David Arnold, *Colonising the Body*, p.30.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, pp.42-43.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Dirks, "Caste of Mind", p.65. This shift also coincides with the new self-confidence of European social theory in the 1830s.

<sup>70</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, pp.178-179 and p.212. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.119.

structures, provided the conditions for reproducing the forms of social power and division which had resourced it in the first instance<sup>71</sup>. The power effects of this knowledge was neither subsequent to the loss of context and abstract application of the information collated in this period, nor were the stereotypes simply a reflection of the ignorance of the coloniser<sup>72</sup>. The epistemological space constructed by the colonial knowledge was certainly articulating a highly unequal relationship between the knowing actor and the subject of knowledge. Orientalist fantasy and stereotypes can themselves be analysed to demonstrate the working of something more than just a vivid imagination. Textual representation of India was highly structured, identifying India not only as a site of alterity but also evaluating the 'nature' of its society. Historian James Tod, who served as the Political Agent to the Western Rajput states, in recording the chronicles of the Rajputs, clearly believed them to be "the martial races of Central and Western India"<sup>73</sup>. Simultaneously, caricatures abound in European writing on India, of the indolent Mughal/native/low castes, the enfeebled, fatalistic and disloyal Indian soldier serving in the armies of the Indian states, alerting us to the mixed and split, polymorphous articulation in colonial knowledge<sup>74</sup>. The portraiture of the Indian was carried out within this mixed economy of desire and anxiety, where the drive for

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<sup>71</sup>        *ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>72</sup>        *ibid.*, p.4, p.143 and p.150.

<sup>73</sup>        See James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), vol. I, p.17. Writing in 1829, the author also explains that the Brahmins, while making good soldiers still retained "their intriguing habits". He argues that admitting too many of them in the army was "a dangerous error". p.24, footnote #3.

<sup>74</sup>        Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, pp.112-116.

unbounded knowledge, for attaining control and predictability only produced more evidence of India's strangeness, difference and menace.

### **SEPOY RECRUITMENT UNDER THE EAST INDIA COMPANY**

The institution of the sepoy armies comprises one of the first instances of intimate contact between Indians and Europeans. Along with the need for military intelligence to sustain its widening political role and military challenges, the East India Company, necessarily made some of the first attempts to understand the native society for the purposes of recruiting native military labour. These early attempts at management of the colonial encounter presents a good sample of the dynamics and tensions which were built into the more general colonial structure. By examining the process of sepoy recruitment of a period earlier than the one with which we are concerned the terms of engagement that came to be elaborated between the two, acted out in the recruitment practices and organisation of these armies, will be illustrated.

The social origins of the sepoy armies has to be traced to the Indian peasantry, and more specifically, the peasantry of northern India. Under the Mughal military system, despite the rural background of a significant number of the cavalry troops, the most distinguishing feature is believed to have been its urban social base, reflected in the institutional structures that were attached to the army and in the idiom of service<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), p.13. This urban base of the cavalry, the most important strategic and symbolic component of the Mughal armies, was actively cultivated by its members creating a network of religious, racial and clan ties. A shared sense of lifestyle, etiquette, literary preoccupation inspired by the imperial court, circulated within this network. pp.14-16.

Parallel to this military tradition, in later medieval India, there existed a vast armed peasantry, some of whom were recruited to the infantry in the Mughal armies while the rest remained either permanently or temporarily outside the purview of the state<sup>76</sup>. These armed peasants were products of a tradition which dates as far back as the fourteenth-century where several instances of armed resistance to imperial advance are recorded<sup>77</sup>. The political turmoil surrounding the struggles over succession and territorial expansion in northern India also extended to the countryside, spreading militarisation among the peasantry in its wake. At the same time, the peasantry also seems to have developed a tendency to take to adventurous soldiering and plundering in war-bands, adjusting to the rhythms of the harvest cycle<sup>78</sup>. Similarly, in Southern India a considerable number of armed men were operating as brigands as well as joining service as retainers<sup>79</sup>. In addition, under the Mughal system of recruiting, military jobbers and sub-contractors were widely scattered creating pockets of armed individuals, who were employed for a limited period as irregular corps during war<sup>80</sup>.

It is likely that the open-status of a war-band was a dominant source of self-identification among the peasantry of medieval and early modern India<sup>81</sup>. Soldiering was

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<sup>76</sup> Dirk Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), p.3.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p.195. In fact, Kloff prefers to put the date as far back to Ashoka's era or further back. He uses the term 'peasantry' to include the agrarian society as a whole comprising the dominant caste, artisans and agricultural labourers. p.x.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995), p.61.

<sup>80</sup> Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.19. Also see Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, pp.12-13.

<sup>81</sup> Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.198. The author believes that the structures of cognatic kinship and caste are a relatively recent phenomenon in northern India.

commonly resorted to for the security in belonging to such groups, a desire for free vagabondage, and often this choice reflected the resolution of the conflicting imperatives of asceticism and eroticism that operated in the family structures of the peasantry<sup>82</sup>. The ready availability of arms and numerous teachers of weapons skill, as well as the popularity of military sports in most villages does seem to convey a sense of martial tradition having been prevalent among the peasantry of northern India<sup>83</sup>. Many among these pastoralist bands had come to acquire landed status and formed open-status groups of clans and lineages, instead of castes, and assumed a group identity of 'Rajput'<sup>84</sup>. Some of the more prosperous among them also formulated genealogies, claiming a kshatriya status and descent from ancient Indian dynasties<sup>85</sup>. Similarly the titles of 'Afghan' and 'Pathan' were acquired by Hindu soldiers who had converted to Islam<sup>86</sup>. This certainly does give the impression that such terms were already part of a common consensus on self-identification in the soldiering tradition of India and that the 'military labour market' was a significant locus of socio-religious identity generation. Notwithstanding the seeming worth of such identities in according status, these never consolidated into endogamous groups or marked any natural abilities among those who professed it.

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<sup>82</sup>        *ibid.*, p.183 and p.197.

<sup>83</sup>        *ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>84</sup>        The term 'Rajput' is believed to have been initially used as a title to signify statuses of 'horse-soldier', 'trooper' or 'headman of a village', but later on acquired a generic meaning conveying the military/ landed class as a whole. *ibid.*, pp.71-72. Also see Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.101.

<sup>85</sup>        *ibid.*, pp.72-84. From the author's analysis it becomes apparent that the kshatriya status was at a certain level equated with martial qualities among the Indians. The kshatriyadharma came to define the idiom of 'Hindu' soldiering, making an unusual choice for an employer, and most certainly the chief arbiter of this status, in the person of the Mughal Emperor. p.144.

<sup>86</sup>        *ibid.*, p.57.

Armies predominantly comprising of peasants were raised by Indian powers about the same time that European powers were raising their own native contingents in India. It is important to note that the fame of regions like Awadh and Bhojpur as recruiting areas preceded the enlisting of the 'Hindustani' soldiers in the Company armies<sup>87</sup>. The peasantry as a source of military labour became a significant alternative, for the emergent Indian powers, to the existing urban military elite who had continued to be politically influential even after the decline of the Mughal empire<sup>88</sup>. Some changes in the recruitment procedure and organisation of the army were also undertaken to replace the earlier clan based identity by a corporate identity centred around the regiment<sup>89</sup>. At a lower level, the zamindari which had been part of the imperial system of recruitment, consolidated into sub-military cultures expanding the military labour market. As a result the military culture of north India came to comprise a differentiated structure. While Indian powers experimented with Western techniques of drill and discipline, there were other instances where recruitment was carried out invoking various symbols, images and histories for legitimacy (for example, the authority of the Mughal dynasty, Hindu and Muslim religious symbols, involvement of ascetics in recruiting, timing the recruitment around the calendar of festivals etc.), both practices nevertheless managing to attract considerable enlistment. Moreover, the 'Hindustani' sepoy was not the only active soldier at this time; there were rival bodies and communities of individuals who

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>88</sup> Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, see p.19 and *passim* for various recruiting and organisational experiments in the composition of the military by the Indian powers in the eighteenth-century.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, see for example the case of the Awadhi Nawabi, 1764, p.24

responded to calls for enlistment, such as the Ahirs, Jats, Gujars, Mewatis, Gosains, and some Europeans and Eurasians who hired themselves out to train these bands of men and other private armies<sup>90</sup>. It appears therefore that when the British entered as new arrivals into this political and military situation, pre-colonial India had a variegated set of recruitment practices and an active military labour market in which various communities circulated, resourcing a variety of political actors<sup>91</sup>.

Indians had entered the service of all the European commercial enterprises in India even before the organising of sepoy armies by the British, performing quasi-military duties of guarding the factories and escorting convoys along routes frequented by roving armed bands. Records refer to these individuals as 'peons', and it is likely that they were professional retainers who were also locally in the service of native 'Poligars' or petty feudatories<sup>92</sup>. The first contingent of local Indian levies to be raised by the British was in

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, p.20 and p.246.

<sup>91</sup> Peasant militarism as a significant aspect of pre-colonial Indian society figures in various European travellers accounts, journeying through rural India. Local revenue collection, which normally occurred only under armed escorts, was sometimes violently resisted. There are also records of frequent raids made on contingents of British troops even when marching through Company territories. The expansion of Company territories which was as a rule accompanied by disbanding large parts of the incumbent armed forces, resulted in groups of such armed erstwhile soldiers roaming the countryside, constantly challenging the Company's authority. See for instance Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>92</sup> The Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the Danes and the French, all maintained a number of such peons. The records of the Dutch East India Company, for example, makes mention of native troops hired to protect caravans on the Agra-Surat road. These probably were well organised bands of armed individuals generally available in important towns along such roads which were frequently used. See Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, pp.4-5 and H. Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1922), p1. Another account, but of doubtful authenticity, records that Akbar's army in 1590 had encountered a band of two hundred native soldiers in European uniform and some Portuguese, in the service of some local rulers of Sindh. V. Longar, *Red Coats to Olive Green* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1979), p.16, footnote #4.

1642 in Madras, comprising of a very small number of these peons<sup>93</sup>. The garrison at Bombay also began hiring their service, though for the first time to counter the threat from other European powers<sup>94</sup>. The Governor of Bombay got them clothed in uniforms for the first time “to be of one colour for the greater awe of the adversary”<sup>95</sup>. Locally recruited troops acquired more significance in the light of the recommendations of the Court of Directors, as an alternative to British troops who were expensive to ship and suffered a high mortality rate during the voyage to, and service in, India<sup>96</sup>. The French were also experimenting with native soldiers at the same time and raised a unit of these persons in Pondicherry (1676) for town defence<sup>97</sup>. It was under the French that, in 1740, the possibility of raising and maintaining “cypayes” or sepoys dressed, trained and outfitted in the European manner, was explored<sup>98</sup>. On the side of the British, it was Stringer Lawrence who, in 1748, raised the first few companies of Indian soldiers at Fort St. George, as a supplement to the European troops but separate from the main body in

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<sup>93</sup> James Lawford, *Britain's Army in India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), p.24. Madras presidency raised a company of Rajputs led by their own officers in 1664. T.A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.31.

<sup>94</sup> The peons at the Bombay garrison were drawn from the Bhandaris, a community of toddy-tappers who claimed to a long military tradition of service among Sivaji's troops. In 1667, the first of the Deccanis were recruited, followed by the Muslims and Rajputs in 1673. Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.5 and Patrick Cadell, *History of the Bombay Army* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), p.21 and p.29.

<sup>95</sup> Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.5.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp.7-8.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>98</sup> Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army*, p.4. These 'sipahis' comprised of Muslims, Topasses, Moplahs and Nairs.

being allowed to live and eat apart, and wear personal caste marks<sup>99</sup>. By 1756 the French and the British were employing nearly 10,000 native troops<sup>100</sup>. After 1757, the establishing of British supremacy over Bengal was accompanied by the raising of several native companies that together came to constitute the Bengal Native Infantry<sup>101</sup>. Subsequently these sepoy companies were brought together and organised along the lines of European battalions and officered by native commandants<sup>102</sup>. Until about 1810 sepoy regiments were generally raised before each battle by an individual British officer who led the unit and gave it his name<sup>103</sup>. Recruits were obtained by relying on the traditional offices of the military jobber (or Jemadar) who was in charge of selecting the right individuals on the basis of their past and future good character and their general acceptability within the unit<sup>104</sup>. This meant that recruiting was done by tribes, aptitudes and previous employment as a soldier, instead of obtaining untutored persons and training them from scratch<sup>105</sup>. In 1758, the Madras and Bombay presidencies followed

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<sup>99</sup> Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.19. It is likely that these sepoys were of 'purabiya' origin, who already seem to have entered the consideration among the British as an important source of recruitment. The term 'purabiya' referred to sepoys from the West Bihar, East U.P. and the Awadh regions. see pp.12-13 and p.109.

<sup>100</sup> Arthur Broome, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Bengal Army, vol. I* (Calcutta: W. Thacker and co., St. Andrew's Library, 1850), p.75. The author records that these troops comprised of 'northern adventurers and their descendants', Pathans, Jats, Rajputs, Rohillas and Brahmins. He also mentions that the natives of the provinces themselves were never entertained. See p. 93.

<sup>101</sup> Clive raised the famous Lal Paltan in 1757 comprising of 300-400 carefully selected sepoys who became the first unit of the Bengal Native Infantry. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, p.35.

<sup>102</sup> Lawford, *Britain's Army in India*, pp.278-279. In terms of administration, the British members of the battalion continued to be divorced from all responsibilities of the Indian contingents, including the enforcement of discipline and court-martialing.

<sup>103</sup> Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), p.33.

<sup>104</sup> Heathcote, *The Military in British India*, pp.30-31.

<sup>105</sup> Bidwell, *Swords for Hire*, p.3.

suit and raised sepoy companies of their own<sup>106</sup>. Nevertheless the Bengal presidency came to occupy a position of relatively greater importance in terms of the recruits it obtained and the military resources that were allocated. While the limited territory and revenues of the Bombay presidency, until the Maratha wars (1798-1805), placed severe restrictions on the size of the Bombay army, the intermittent clashes and the Mysore wars not only dried up the finances of the Madras presidency, it also amounted to a shortage of recruits from the depleted population in the surrounding areas. The Bengal presidency on the other hand became the mainstay of the financial and military resources of British power in India. This presidency not only managed to attract a considerable amount of resources, its relative position improved with every reduction of military expenditure being borne by the other two presidencies<sup>107</sup>. Its position of influence also meant that it established the dominant set of criteria and beliefs regarding sepoy recruitment and discourses on the Indian sepoy, whose broad parameters survived despite the later institutional changes and shifts in discursive formations.

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<sup>106</sup> Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.32.

<sup>107</sup> The logic behind the imposition of such cuts and limitations on these two presidencies was that both were located in relatively peaceful areas and also had limited territories under jurisdiction. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, p.37 and Raymond Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform, 1783-1789* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp.2-3. It is interesting to note in this context that in the competition over resources and status between the three Presidencies, arguments were circulated regarding the differences in climate between them, the greater concern over the health of the European troops serving in the Bengal region, the necessary strain on expenditure incurred by having to acknowledge and allow the maintenance of caste practices and customs, to augment the image of the unique conditions of the Bengal army. The significance of such elaborations becomes manifest subsequently as precursors of imperial attitudes towards race, caste and climate. See Amiya Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry* (Calcutta: Firma K.C. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), p89.

The recruiting tradition in eighteenth-century Britain saw the ideal soldier in the yeomanry of the rural areas of Ireland and Scotland. There was a general belief that the recruits from rural areas were able to bear the physical hardship of military service and psychologically and morally equipped to deal with its privations<sup>108</sup>. This was however not generally applicable to the entire peasantry of India or its communities traditionally involved with soldiering. While the early instances of recruiting peons and sepoys had not generated any serious admiration of the military worth of the Indian soldier, the discovery of the caste system seemingly divided along the lines of occupation, gave fillip to the finding that only a few select Indians by profession, and therefore by ability, were worth recruiting<sup>109</sup>. In 1750, Robert Orme, the historiographer for the East India Company had already marked out a military class in the sub-continent, distinct from the general "effeminate" population<sup>110</sup>. He also is believed to have argued that Indians living in the wheat-producing zones were physically better endowed than the short-statured

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<sup>108</sup> Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, p.89 and Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, p.37.

<sup>109</sup> For an account of the opinion about Indian peons, see the "Sepoy Origins" chapter in Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army*. The author also finds the earliest definition of appropriate castes, to which recruitment was to be confined, to an army order listing the Rajputs, Muslims and three Telugu castes. The British also believed that weavers, agricultural labourers were to be excluded since they were "seldom found to make staunch sepoys", p.14. Governor General Hastings, the leading advocate of Orientalist administration, believed that due to the caste system only a few people in India were allowed to be soldiers. See Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, p.39 and p.45.

<sup>110</sup> Orme argues that "From this institution of the military class, the wisdom of which is surely impeached by the general effects it has produced, the military spirit came at length to reside almost wholly in one portion of the people". He further finds that "Notwithstanding the general effeminacy of character which is visible in all the Indians through the empire, the natives of Bengal are still of weaker frame, and more enervated disposition, than those of any other province; bodily strength, courage, and fortitude are unknown...". Quoted by Charles Grant in his appended paper, pp. 75-76 and p. 80 in *Report of the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, 1831-32, vol. V* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1970).

inhabitants of the rice-producing zones<sup>111</sup>. That some regions of India did not produce military labour of satisfactory quality was an idea already operating at the outset of the creation of sepoy contingents for the Bengal army. Despite the availability of soldiers from the Bengal region, after the disbanding of large parts of the Nawab of Bengal's army, they were not recruited for the specific reason of their being "unfit" for military service<sup>112</sup>. A tradition of recruiting high caste men from the Northern Provinces, Awadh, Bihar and the Doab region, and of Brahmin or Rajput identity, came to dominate all the three presidency armies<sup>113</sup>. Commanding officers of the regiments preferred these recruits for their 'high-stature', handsome looks and clean habits, which they associated with their caste status in Indian society<sup>114</sup>. They were also seen as being naturally endowed with qualities such as bravery and manliness<sup>115</sup>. These recruits were also found to be better than their Muslim counterparts, who were found wanting in the physical

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<sup>111</sup> Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, p.37.

<sup>112</sup> See for example "The Inhabitants of the Provinces of Bengal, being in general extremely unfit for Soldiers....". Letter from Lord Cornwallis to the Court, 6 Nov., 1789, para 12, p.364. *Fort William-India House Correspondence vol. xix, 1789-1791* (Delhi: National Archives of India, 1975). Also see Hariprasad Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny, 1857* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited, 1957), p.72 and Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, pp.37-38.

<sup>113</sup> Cadell, *History of the Bombay Army*, p.9 and p.161. The author finds that before 1857, the Bombay regiment were full of purabiyas- Brahmins and Rajputs and Hindustani Muslims ('Hindustani' being a generic term to refer to all people who spoke the Hindustani language). Also see Hariprasad Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p.83. The Madras army sought to experiment with recruits from the Bengal presidency in 1795, to meet the shortage of suitable recruits after the Mysore wars. It failed to produce any significant results due to frequent desertion by these sepoys. Afterwards the Madras army recruited specifically Hindustani Muslims from the Northern Circars region. See Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army*, pp.33-35 and *passim*.

<sup>114</sup> See Barat, *Bengal Native Infantry*, p.49 and pp.118-124 and Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.183.

<sup>115</sup> In 1809, a general officer writing about the recruiting grounds of the Bengal army stated that "The zemindars throughout this tract are almost entirely Brahmins and Rajpoots, and are a brave and manly race of people". Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army* (New Delhi: Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 1971), p.54.

endowments of the former<sup>116</sup>. Such criteria soon became the qualitative measure for recruitment against which the Madras and Bombay armies had to defend local enlistment when material conditions prevented the meeting of the former's standards<sup>117</sup>.

If there was an already existing set of beliefs regarding the 'nature' of the recruits available in India, the discourse on caste and customary practices of the Indian sepoys contributed greatly in installing these beliefs in the institutional structure of the army. The caste discourse developed into the institutional logic of the army through changes in the methods of recruitment and the emphasis given to the matters of deportment of the sepoy. After the army reorganisation in 1796, detailed records of the sepoy in 'muster rolls', 'pay abstracts', and 'acquittance rolls' were introduced, standardising the specifications of recruitment, service and retirement<sup>118</sup>. The process of procuring recruits, which was earlier left to the military-jobber, was now entrusted to the

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<sup>116</sup> It was "impossible even by the most active commanding officers of the Battalions to obtain the proportion of Mussulmen that would be desirable for the proper composition of their corps". Moreover the Hindu sepoys were "more regular and better sized than the Mussulmen". Lord Cornwallis to the Court of Directors, 1789, p.363, *Fort William-India House Correspondence, vol.xix, 17789-1791*. In fact only 1/10th of the Bengal Native Infantry were Muslims. See Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*, p.121 and Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.180.

<sup>117</sup> For example a Madras officer writing in 1830 believed that "The appearance of the Bengal sepoy is in general more in their favour than that of the Madras soldiers. The Bengalee has generally greater height though he does not ordinarily possess muscle in proportion." in Roger Beaumont, *Sword of the Raj* (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merril Company Inc., 1977), p.8. Lord Wellesly wrote that "Supposing all the consequences to be equally convenient, I acknowledge I should wish to see the Bengal troops composing all the subsidiary forces. The men are a better size and description, of a higher caste, and the natives have more respect for them than they have for the Coast or Bombay troops" in Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army*, p.116. Also see Pythian-Adams, *the Madras Regiment, 1758-1958* (Wellington: The Defence Services Staff College Press, 1958) where the author frequently defends the Madras sepoys despite their low caste origins and unimpressive appearances.

<sup>118</sup> Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army*, p.68 and Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.50. To help recruiting authorities detailed specifications of physical requirement for recruits were drawn up in 1796 and frequently republished in the subsequent years. See Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*, p.129.

commanding officers of the regiments. The practice of fresh recruits accompanying native officers and sepoy returning from furlough became the chief method of recruitment, followed by the occasional sending out of recruiting parties under a British officer<sup>119</sup>. A ceremony of recruitment was followed, where, on passing the medical examination, the first four Articles of War dealing with desertion were read out and explained to the recruits in Hindustani, after which each had to take an oath of fidelity in front of the colours of the regiment and according to the tenets of one's religious belief<sup>120</sup>. Thus a combination of Indian agency, bureaucratic practice and religious idiom was effectuated within the army, producing the basic structure of representation and identification of the Indian sepoy that was to remain intact until the end of the nineteenth-century.

The textualisation of caste within the army, actually centred around a confusing range of criteria such as occupation, region of habitation and ritual ranking<sup>121</sup>. For example, the returns of a regiment raised at Benares in 1814 listed categories of religion, wherein the Hindus were divided into higher and lower castes, while the Muslims were classified into different ethnicities such as Pathans, Mughals, Afghans and Rangars<sup>122</sup>. The army administration relied on various levels of verification to establish the acceptability of the recruit in terms of his social origin and character. While a committee in 1807 considered it highly desirable that the native army be composed of as far as

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<sup>119</sup> Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.180.

<sup>120</sup> Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*, pp.129-131.

<sup>121</sup> Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, p.88.

<sup>122</sup> Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*, p.41.

practicable by men of superior castes, low-caste recruitment was to be allowed following the endorsement of such recruits by high-caste sepoys<sup>123</sup>. The anxiety over impersonation, although there certainly were enough instances of false returns, drove the enumeration of a ritual of enlistment whereby each recruit was taken to the tahsildar (the chief native revenue officer of a sub-division of a district) for verification of the recruit's name, caste, parentage and residence, followed by more cross-checking at different official levels<sup>124</sup>. The Company army thereby became the chief repository of 'authentic' knowledge on the identity of the sepoy, as well as its arbiter.

Although the maintenance of Indian regiments of high-caste sepoys provided the British with a framework within which they were able to culturally construct British authority in India, the sepoys themselves used military service to strengthen their caste status in their society<sup>125</sup>. The Hindu-image of the Company's army, the possibility of preserving ritual status by strict maintenance of customs, dietary and travel restrictions, enabled communities serving in the military to claim a higher caste than the one they were accorded for socio-economic reasons<sup>126</sup>. However, the caste rituals and customs

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<sup>123</sup> Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p.69. Other regulations also followed, officially discouraging the enlistment of lower castes in the ranks. Irfan Habib, "The Coming of 1857", *Social Scientist*, vol. 26#1-4, Jan-Apr 1998, p.8 and Kloff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p.186.

<sup>124</sup> For example when in 1830 a circular was issued to discourage the admission of Brahmin recruits, many Brahmins enrolled themselves as Rajputs. See Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p.70 and also Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*, p.128.

<sup>125</sup> The European officer of the Bengal Army allowed and sometimes encouraged the maintenance of caste hierarchies in the unit. See para 573 of *A Synopsis of the Evidence taken before the East India Committee in Relation to the Army of India*, at 355.0954 Ar 5 Sy, National Archives of India. Also see Alavi, *The Sepoy and the Company*, p.51.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, pp.50-52. The author puts forward the example the Bhumiards of Bihar who had been denied the status of Brahmins since they had taken to agriculture. Military service in the Bengal army was used by them to reassert their Brahmin identities.

were redefined, within the space of the barracks and garrison, and acquired new militarised guidelines of enactment, particularly the celebrations of festivals such as Ramlila, Dussehra and Holi<sup>127</sup>. The military, through specific preferences and standardisation of recruitment, provided the social space where high-caste status was marked out more effectively than would have been possible in the villages. Thus, the caste identity was reinvented within this space although it was not identical with its counterpart in the Indian society nor was the latter possible to continue parallel to it for long<sup>128</sup>.

The army was also the major institution of discourse production of this period. Despite the shifts in the ideological definition of colonial administration between the Orientalists and the Anglicist reformers, the army was central to both colonial policy and British imagination<sup>129</sup>. Not only was the army given first call on Indian resources and priority in financial planning, British imagination saw India as a great military adventure and fascinating spectacle where the need to guarantee security was the foremost<sup>130</sup>. A peculiar brand of militarism shared by the army officers and civilian employees of the Company prevailed which perceived Indian society as anarchical and developed a lasting conviction that the British domination rested on convincing the Indians of their military omnipotence<sup>131</sup>. Military officers were suitably placed to observe and evaluate Indian

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<sup>127</sup> *ibid.* p.75, pp.266-269 and p. 279.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, pp.76-79. Also see pp.81-83 where the author illustrates how religious ceremonies were merged with the regimental identity.

<sup>129</sup> Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, pp. 6-8 and Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company* p.46.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, pp.-3 and p.8.

<sup>131</sup> See *ibid.*, p.9.

society, produce systematic tracts and texts through participation in various scientific and literary societies in the presidencies<sup>132</sup>. The army itself was a highly structured institution for undertaking surveillance and creating enclaves for the production of disciplinary knowledge on the sepoys, in particular, which was naturally applicable to the general Indian as well<sup>133</sup>. It is in this period of domination of the colonial discourse by the army that some of the first discourses on the sepoy and conceptual referents regarding Indian society, emerge<sup>134</sup>. Recruiting practices and classificatory schema like caste which were first enumerated in this period, continue to organise the identity of the sepoy long until the end of the nineteenth-century<sup>135</sup>. The mutiny of 1857 collapsed almost the whole of the Bengal army and resulted in the disbanding of almost all the high-caste regiments. But many of the tropes and frames of references on military aptitude and Indian social organisation remained. Instead, what changed were the

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<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, pp.12-13.

<sup>133</sup> See for example Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, Ch.3 where the author discusses the colonial enclaves such as the Invalid Thanah where pensioned sepoys were settled, and the Monghyr lunatic asylum for the Indian sepoys. In fact there were no similar asylums for the British either in England or in India, pp.146-147. The Company also maintained extensively detailed records of each of the sepoy families and assumed the right to determine the 'legal' heirs and the right to interfere in the family disputes. The army therefore came to comprise the foremost knowledgeable agencies among all other colonial institutions and relationships.

<sup>134</sup> Tod's work on the history of the Rajputs states and their 'martial traditions', was so authoritative that it carries legitimacy even in post-independence India. See Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.73. Its status was reaffirmed despite later ethnologists finding that it was difficult to find a family of pure descent, since this lacuna was explained by the observation that "nathnais, mehteranis and the dancing girls are kept in the zenana in disregard alike for ordinary decency and public sentiment; and the race is perceptibly declining in physique and manliness". See Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.105.

<sup>135</sup> See for example *Manual for Bengal and Punjab Cavalry* (Delhi: Mayur Publications, 1985) para 561- "Commanding officers may avail themselves of the service of native officers and men going on furlough to bring recruits with them on return", and para 563- "every recruit is to be taken to the tahasildar of this village to verify his name, caste, parentage and residence", p.103.

techniques of colonial knowledge with the introduction of increasingly self-confident and authoritative sciences like colonial ethnography and anthropology, which produced the shifts in the strategies and location of the discourses. Although there certainly are significant differences between the discourses of caste and martial races, it is impossible to ignore the familiar terms of engagement between the Indians and their society, and the colonial gaze, carried along the tropes of caste, unmanliness, excessive sensuality and morally depravity, and their effects, climate etc.- all of which acquire a new coherence and energy with their deployment within a racial analysis.

## **CONCLUSION**

The practice of recruiting the high-caste sepoys by the Presidency armies enumerated the framework for making the distinction between Indians who were fit for military service and those who were not. Its authority was buttressed by the incipient colonial knowledge of the native society and history. The information that was amassed undergirded the colonial practice of classification of the native society in discrete measurable categories. However this information was not constituted hegemonically, and instead considerable native agency was involved. Therefore the question whether Indian communities were already martial even before they were identified as such by the colonial knowledgeable authority, or whether a certain caste title connoted a martial status and traditions of military occupation, becomes redundant. Interestingly, the army was at the forefront of investigations into the Indian society and comprised a vast, centralised information archive on account of native recruitment. It appears that there

was already existed a rudimentary distinction between regions, castes and climates, on the question of natural aptitude for military service and courage. But it was ambiguous, unsystematic and was not racially interpreted.

## CHAPTER II

### THE 'MANLY' ARYANS AND THE WARRIOR CASTE

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the master narrative of the martial classes discourse—"Aryan race", will be discussed. The study of the so-called Aryan component of Indian history during the colonial period produced an erudite body of work which continues to be of significant use to scholars of ancient Indian history. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect certain general premises and broad trends within this body of work which are of relevance to the discourse of martial classes. So first, the general scholarship of the Orientalists and the ethnologists who made use of the Aryan narrative will be critically analysed to delineate the frame of analysis within which the martial qualities of certain Indians and their lack among the rest was attributed. Next, the usage of the term 'Kshatriya' in ancient Indian society, and its relation to the military institution, will be examined, to explore the validity of the contention that the military profession was hereditarily restricted to a specific military caste in ancient India. The chapter will refer to sources on ancient Indian history by Indian scholars, some of whom have written in the post-independence period to illustrate their sensitivity to the martial classes discourse, which continues to make demands on these historians to refute it, while simultaneously interpenetrating their analyses with many of its other assumptions.

## COLONIAL INDOLOGY AND THE ARYAN RACE

One of the key aspects of the martial classes discourse was the celebration of the 'natural relationship' between the Indian sepoy and the British officers that in a larger context was an allegory of the relationship between the Raj and its Indian subjects<sup>1</sup>. The 'Indo-European' referent of the narrative of the Aryan history of India conjoined Europe and India in a kinship which attended, in the context of Empire, the loyalty of Indians to their Aryan rulers<sup>2</sup>. Although much of the Orientalist knowledge on the Aryan origins of Indian civilisation was not produced strategically to perpetuate Empire, colonial authority was enhanced by the employment of specific motifs and valuations of Indian racial personality in their analyses which relegated Indians to a position of irredeemable difference and relative inferiority<sup>3</sup>. The transcription of a racial essence to India through the narrative of Aryan civilisation in fact anticipates the stereotype of the martial Indian.

The study of the Sanskrit language by comparative philology in eighteenth-century Europe produced an unexpected grouping of languages and of people who spoke them. The science of comparative philology which was concerned with the elucidation of historical relations among languages and their classification as a family revealed a radical conjunction between the people of Europe and India<sup>4</sup>. Sir William

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<sup>1</sup> See for example George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1979), pp.48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Dilip Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj", p.230 in C.A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp.131-132.

Jones first articulated this case for philology in 1786 by arguing that there had been a 'proto-community of origin' in the world, who now could be identified as the speakers of the Indo-European languages<sup>5</sup>. The employment of a 'segmentary logic' of radiating linguistic branches from a common origin, assuming sameness and not difference, justified this premise of kinship<sup>6</sup>. The term 'Arya' was taken from Sanskrit and applied to the family of Indo-European languages by Max Mueller because he found that it was frequently used as self-designation in the Sanskrit texts<sup>7</sup>. The main source of authority and evidence of authenticity of Orientalist knowledge was its dialogical technique of information acquisition employing Indian agency<sup>8</sup>. The establishing of philological link between the Indian and European civilizations was based on the study of Sanskrit literature in particular<sup>9</sup>. The Orientalists for a large part relied on the pundits/Brahmins, who were considered the guardians of an ancient and pure tradition, and many of their prejudices and interpretations became institutionalised during British efforts at historical reconstruction of Indian society<sup>10</sup>. British Orientalism of this period produced three major projects of cultural and historical reconstruction of India's Aryan past with respect to colonial administration<sup>11</sup>. The first involved the codification of Indian languages as

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<sup>5</sup>       ibid., p.13.

<sup>6</sup>       ibid., see discussion of the master image of the 'branching tree of nations' corresponding to this segmentary logic at pp.7-10.

<sup>7</sup>       ibid., p.13. For the other usages of the term 'Arya' in the literary sources of ancient India see p.12.

<sup>8</sup>       ibid., pp.135-136.

<sup>9</sup>       Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1996), p.2.

<sup>10</sup>       ibid. p.3.

<sup>11</sup>       Bernard Cohn, "The Command of Language and the Language of Command", p.316 in R.Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies, vol. IV* (Delhi: OUP, 1996).

instruments of rule and for facilitating further knowledge acquisition about Indian society. The second entailed the 'discoveries' within the textual sources of India, details regarding its ancient civilisational achievements, enumerating a relationship between the West and India on a evaluative scale of progress and decline. The third project comprised the patronage of institutions and religious and literary specialists who would be occupied with the production of what had been identified as the traditions of Indian civilisation. The colonial Orientalist administration thus came to prortray itself both as the origin of authoritative knowledge about India and as the protector of this knowledge and its practice in social life<sup>12</sup>. Orientalist representations of this period followed a theory of their own activities that involved claims of binding the Indians to British rule through some form of loyalty and friendship<sup>13</sup>. At the same time Orientalist work also presumed a hierarchical relationship of paternal generosity in relation to the Indians whose history they were reclaiming<sup>14</sup>.

The historical scenario which explained the arrival of the speakers of the Indo-European languages in India was depicted using the motif of conquest of an aboriginal population by Aryan tribes<sup>15</sup>. The former were identified as a "dark negroid race of low culture" who belonged to another linguistic group residing in the southern parts of India<sup>16</sup>. The distiction between the Aryan and non-Aryan read in terms of a conquering

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<sup>12</sup> Ludden, "Oriental empiricism: Transformation of Colonial Knowledge", p.267.

<sup>13</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, pp.15-16.

<sup>14</sup> David Ludden, "Oriental Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge", p.256 in C.A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*.

<sup>15</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, p.156.

<sup>16</sup> E.J. Rapson, ed., *Cambridge History of India, vol. I* (Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1955), P.537.

and a conquered race became dominant from mid-nineteenth century onwards, when the Aryan narrative began to take on distinctly racial overtones. The discourse of martial classes follows a particular geography of Aryan settlements in northern India. The mapping of this terrain by later military historians and army recruitment handbooks closely aligned with the routes of advance of the conquering Aryans<sup>17</sup>.

The science of colonial ethnology has been charged with having cast the colonial relationship in unambiguously racial terms. However, ethnology initially shared some of its assumptions with comparative philology. Jones's project of tracing the Indo-European language family was primarily ethnological, not linguistic<sup>18</sup>. The study of Sanskrit at the local level also had an ethnological role since it sought to explain its relationship with the existing linguistic forms in India<sup>19</sup>. The Sanskritists in fact provided the principles for the enumeration of the broadest possible categories for the classification and overall organisation of the vast masses of ethnographic materials that the ethnological surveys had generated<sup>20</sup>. The decoupling of linguistic kinship around 1850 in favour of a narrative of racial distinctiveness was a reaction against the idea that Europeans and the Indians shared the same blood<sup>21</sup>. Evidence contrary to the thesis that

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, See Ch.II on the different races which inhabit the sub-continent and compare with the description of Aryan advance in Sarkar, *Military History of India* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar and Sons, 1960), p.7. Also see George MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), Ch. I where the settlements of martial classes are aligned along a historical narrative of invasions.

<sup>18</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, p.40. Also see Ch. I for a discussion of the 'mosaic ethnology' which originates in the Biblical historiography of the humankind.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.134.

<sup>21</sup> The racial history of India was unfolded by Max Mueller to promote a *modus vivendi* of cultural coexistence of a superior race with an inferior race on mutually beneficial terms by

a common language implied common racial origin was already available during this period<sup>22</sup>. Further, the spread of a particular language among different communities was just as plausibly explained by its adaptation among the most influential groups of the society and by the traditional networks of communication<sup>23</sup>. The new racial sensibility sought to explain everything including class, temperament, martial capabilities and intellect, by dividing people according to distinct racial types. Consequently, the Sanskritists were obliged to reexamine their own work to determine the actual relationship between language and race in Indian history<sup>24</sup>. The earlier stray instances of inference of physiology from language, such as the 'whiteness' of Aryan language speakers and the 'darkness' of aboriginal speakers, was systematised within the Aryan conquest narrative and historians began to consistently overread the sources in favour of racial interpretations<sup>25</sup>.

The consequence of accepting a theory of Aryan invasion and internecine conflict was that the history of ancient India was analyzed looking at the evidence of tribal warfare, empire-building, dynastic histories and the expansion of 'Aryandom' and the subjugation of the "aborigines"<sup>26</sup>. A schema of periodisation came to dominate

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making the Aryan conquest allegorical to the British political expansion in India. Interestingly he chose to highlight the similarity of the blood between a British soldier and a Bengali. This one of the issues which attracted severe criticism by the ethnologists during their challenge to the utility of comparative philology. *ibid.*, pp.175-181.

<sup>22</sup> Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, (Delhi: OUP, 1994), p.3.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>24</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, pp.199-204.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, see for instance pp.158-160 and pp.206-210.

<sup>26</sup> See R.C. Dutt, *A History of Civilisation in Ancient India, vol. I* (Delhi: Vishal Publishers, 1972), p.26. Also see B.K. Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Firma

historiography which classified about 3 to 4 millennia of Indian history as one unchanging period, followed by a medieval Islamic and a modern British periods<sup>27</sup>. The general analysis of historical change in India's past was linked to politico-military developments, the records of which were sparse and in whose vacuity Indian society was believed to have stagnated<sup>28</sup>. The absence of a record of political centralization in ancient India attested to its anarchical condition and just as convincingly explained its lack of social evolution. While invasions explained the arrival of the non-indigenous elements in the society, their identification as separate peoples was enabled by an interpretation of Indian social structure which saw the caste system as its dominant mode of social organisation. The four-fold caste distinction of India was divided ethnologically by separating the higher castes supposedly comprising the Aryans from the lowest caste of the Sudras comprising the non-Aryans<sup>29</sup>. Not only did this make caste available to the new sciences of measurement such as anthropometry, it enabled the British to detach the masses of non-Aryans from the general body of Hindus<sup>30</sup>.

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K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1960), p.13 and p.212- "The waves of Hindu conquests rolled outwards, and the aborigines submitted themselves to a higher civilization and a nobler religion".

<sup>27</sup> James Mill is said to have first enunciated this schema and it is observed that its discursive pattern evolved during Europe's own experience with Islam in the post-renaissance period of its history. See Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: OUP), p.16.

<sup>28</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India, vol. I* (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1972), p.26 and see also Rapson, ed., *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I, p.47.

<sup>29</sup> Majumdar, *The Military System of Ancient India*, p.14. The author cites a point argued by the historian K.V.R. Aiyengar, which state that the relegation of the "rude non-Aryan tribes" into the caste system, which prevented intermixture while appearing socially inclusive, averted racial struggles and "the overwhelming of the Aryan element from the superior numbers of the aborigines". Also see Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1969), p. 274 for a recounting of the formation of castes in India using the 'conquest' and 'sexual selection' motifs.

<sup>30</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, p.199.

Features of ancient Indian history such as the expansion of the Aryan settlements and the functioning of the caste system can be explained convincingly by the study of changes in the socio-economic conditions over a period of time and historical shifts at the local and regional levels<sup>31</sup>. The employment of motifs like 'conquest' and the racial interpretation of the Aryan narrative of Indian history on the other hand, suggests the functioning of a frame of analysis which incorporated particular values regarding civilisational vigour, cultural expansion and social organisation. It thus proved to be the ideal referent with which the marked difference in martial attributes among the Indians could be understood and readily classified.

#### **THE MILITARY INSTITUTION IN ANCIENT INDIA**

Affirmation of the military ardour of the Aryan peoples relates in a peculiar way with the martial classes discourse where it is used sometimes to highlight the deterioration of the stock and in other instances to counter such a notion. The early Aryans of the Rig Vedic age are depicted as a war-mongering people who shared a military ardour across different castes and professions<sup>32</sup>. An Aryan society is described wherein soldiering is presumed to have been a natural condition<sup>33</sup>. This period becomes very crucial for it not only makes available a history of vigour, it also enables the

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<sup>31</sup> Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.12.

<sup>32</sup> See Dutt, *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, p.5 "...with a strong love of action and capacity for active enjoyments" and "..., and the strong lord of many acres, who ploughed his fields and owned large herds in times of peace, went out to defend his village or plunder the aborigines in times of war, and often composed spirited hymns to the martial gods in his hours of devotion". Notice the 'warrior-cultivator' image here, which is a dominant element in the discourse of martial classes.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.65-66. Also see Sarvadhama Singh, *Ancient Indian Warfare* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), p.14.

demarcation of the subsequent and contemporary society whose deterioration and effete-ness were so remarkably evident<sup>34</sup>. The civilizational decay and degradation that was observed was buttressed by the analysis of the caste system. In the preceding section it was shown that the theme of invasions validated the ethnological classification of the Indian society using caste markers. The prevalent understanding of the caste system hinged on the terminology of the 'Arya' and the 'Varna'. The former was believed to connote an ethnic group distinct from the aborigines of the country. It was believed that the early Aryans who arrived at the northwest frontier were innocent of the caste system since the Rig-Veda does not contain any such mention<sup>35</sup>. With the subsequent further penetration, eastwards from the Punjab region, where the Aryans came into contact with different races, the caste system is believed to have emerged as a "compromise" between the Aryans and the more primitive society<sup>36</sup>. However, the usage of the word 'Arya' in the Sanskrit sources signified a social and ceremonial status of the speakers of the Sanskrit tongue<sup>37</sup>. The term 'Varna', whose etymological meaning could be translated to signify 'colour', observed to be the technical term referring to the caste structure, was used to underscore the ethnic distinctiveness of the Aryans<sup>38</sup>. Its misinterpretation as human pigmentation became the mainstay of the racialism in classificatory sciences like

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<sup>34</sup> See for example, Abbe Dubois, *Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India; and their Institutions, Religious and Civil* (Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1970), p. ix and pp.189-202.

<sup>35</sup> Rapson, *Cambridge History of India*, p.41.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>37</sup> Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.4. Also see Trautman, *Aryans and British India* for a list of the different usages of the term 'Arya' in the Sanskrit sources, p.12.

<sup>38</sup> E.W.Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India* (Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1972), p.18.

colonial anthropometry, and the census-, both of which were crucial for the recruitment of martial classes<sup>39</sup>. The 'Varna' concept, it is now argued, may really have been largely a theoretical model and not actually practised in society. Historians have remarked that the references to this concept found mainly in the Dharmashastras is in fact not corroborated, and is sometimes even contradicted, by the evidence from other sources<sup>40</sup>. Varna in fact, as discussed in anthropological research, is believed to have referred to ritual status in ancient India. The concept Varna, included the idea of pollution, functional specialization and occupational differentiation, distinctions between ethnic and regional populations, among other things<sup>41</sup>.

The caste system in India, taken as a socio-religious ordering of the entire society, was central to the qualitative critique of the Indians and their society. A rigid four-fold caste structure was identified from the Sanskrit sources, of which the higher divisions were further differentiated from the lower two, in terms of purity of the Aryan element<sup>42</sup>. Religion which was also noticed to have permeated the social institutions in India was blamed for the "enervation of the Hindus", the loss of their "vigor and manliness", and the effeteness of a ceremonious and superstitious people<sup>43</sup>. Rigidity in

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<sup>39</sup> Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.29. The discourse of Aryan invasion is also considered to mirror the European dichotomy of the Aryan and Semitic racial confrontation, p.28.

<sup>40</sup> Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.112. It is also argued that the Dharmashastras themselves combined a multiplicity of authoritative texts and commentaries, which was not readily amenable to clear codification. See Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj", p.237.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p.112.

<sup>42</sup> See especially J.Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts, vol. I* (London: Trubner and co., 1868), Ch. II and passim. Also Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India*, pp.36-37.

<sup>43</sup> Dutt, *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, p.7

the caste system, which successfully reproduced social distance, provided the explanation for the perceived lack of dialectical change<sup>44</sup>. This made possible the conclusion that Indian society had evinced little or no change or progress<sup>45</sup>. The narrative of ancient Indian history therefore allocated specific traits of physiognomie and psyche to the Indians which were not crucial to the analysis nor evident from their sources<sup>46</sup>.

The thesis of compartmentalization of Indian society via the caste system drew on evidence found in the Dharmashastra texts. Nevertheless, there already was evidence as well as opinion to the contrary among Indologists. A thorough reading of the Sanskrit texts had certainly revealed that there was no uniform orthodox and authoritative doctrine explaining the origin of castes<sup>47</sup>. Moreover the simplified schema of a four-fold caste system was a discrepancy relative to what British administrators themselves had come across in its actual working<sup>48</sup>. The caste system can be more appropriately explained as a “series of vertical parallels” with each Varna having a separate internal hierarchy which expanded as more people of different tribal and occupational identities were included and considered to be a separate caste group<sup>49</sup>. The operation of the caste

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<sup>44</sup> See Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.6

<sup>45</sup> Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, p.47.

<sup>46</sup> It might appear coincidental but one Indian historian develops a very familiar imagery of colonial exploration to describe the Aryan conquest. “We can imagine hardy colonists penetrating into this encircling belt of unknown and uncivilized regions, obtaining a mastery over the aborigines wherever they went, establishing some isolated settlements on the banks of fertile rivers, and presenting to the astonished barbarians some of the results of civilized administration and civilized life”, see Dutt, *History of Civilisation in Early India*, p.144.

<sup>47</sup> Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. I, p.159. The author finds mystical, mythical, rationalist and even morality based explanations for the caste structure among Sanskrit sources.

<sup>48</sup> Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p.48 and p.115.

system in terms of admission of newcomers and social mobility across a seemingly hierarchical caste structure was more fluid and complex than has been previously acknowledged. Upward mobility was possible for a group through shifts in habitation and geographical location, and conscious adaptation of social and religious attitudes of the upper castes<sup>50</sup>. For an individual, on the other hand, vertical mobility was possible through hypergamy for six generations, although upward mobility was relatively difficult for the individual as compared to a group<sup>51</sup>.

The martialness of Aryans had significant rhetorical use in relation to three themes that had emerged from the analysis of Indian society and its institutions- the passivity of the people reflected in their religion, the licentiousness and timidity of the Hindu, and the monopoly of the intriguing priestly/Brahminical caste. The idyllic, passive and otherworldly characterization of the Hindu approach to existence that was used to celebrate India's high level of civilization was subsequently turned around by the Utilitarians and condemned as evidence of its effete<sup>52</sup>. To rescue came the study of "...the coarse, sensual, brutal, strife-loving, blood-hungry Hindu warrior" in the "...manly but simple hymns"<sup>53</sup> of the "sturdy conquerors of the Punjab"<sup>54</sup>. A scathing indictment of the "depravity of manners" of the Hindu incorporated largely hysterical

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<sup>50</sup>     ibid., p.112.

<sup>51</sup>     Bhandarkar, "Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population", *The Indian Antiquary*, vol. XL, 1911, p.8

<sup>52</sup>     Compare for example Max Mueller's description in Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.5 and Mill, *History of British India*, vol. I, the discussion of the Hindu religion and manners, Chs.6 and 7.

<sup>53</sup>     Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India*, p.126.

<sup>54</sup>     Dutt, *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, p.7

descriptions, accompanied by explicit frissons of disgust, of “gross images of sensual pleasure” in the festivals, in the institution of marriage, and the scatological rites that were reported in India<sup>55</sup>. A geography of corporeal degradation visibly overlapping the spread of the Aryan settlements was elaborated<sup>56</sup>. Once again, the circumscription of the ‘natural rights’ and individuality within the caste structure was blamed for the demonstrable “lack of courage in battle”<sup>57</sup>. Also, the politico-military history of India was a familiar story for the European memory, which had recorded its own historical experience of the wrangle for power between the priestly and the warrior classes<sup>58</sup>. A tale of natural conflict between the manly, warlike, and political class with the officiating, ceremonious and intriguing priests was seen reflected in the logic of the caste structure. Translated into the context of the celebration of the relationship between the British and the martial races, the machinations and failure of the “Brahminical framework” took on new significance in the context of the new effete priests of nationalism<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> See Mill, *History of British India*, p.205-passim and end-note on p.233.

<sup>56</sup> “Their stature is in general considerably below the European standard, though such inferiority is more remarkable in the south, and diminishes as you advance towards the north”. *ibid.* p.292.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p.317 and also Dubois, *Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India*, p.543.

<sup>58</sup> See for instance Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India*, p.126 and pp.16-17 “The King is a King and not an appendage to the priest”. Also pp.104-106.

<sup>59</sup> MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, p.92. The author in fact reveals a more contemporary interest in his depiction of the “...disgrace of the Brahminical framework with its national claim”, because he is actually alluding to the nationalist claims of the new Brahminical/western educated class, which was claiming to speak for the loyalty of the Indians, including the martial classes. Also see mention of “Baba Ghandi” at p.1 and p.3 while referring to the martial classes.

Among the four castes, the Kshatriyas are accorded a central role in the unraveling of India's past<sup>60</sup>. Simultaneously representing a warrior community and nobility, they are considered to have been the locus of political and military power in India. Since the usage of the terms kashtriya and /or rajanya was found to occur in passages referring to the state or empire, the above inference came to be generally accepted<sup>61</sup>. References to distinct ceremonial garb and ceremonial distinctions of address of the kshatriyas reinforced the belief that there was a separate class of people who hereditarily performed military duties. Along with the thesis of a warring and manly Aryan people who became effete as civilization advanced, a functional explanation of the caste system also gained acceptability. The existence of a separate class of people given to military functions was considered to have arisen during the period of Aryan conquest and expansion, and the simultaneous specialization and monopoly of the professional soldiers in the military<sup>62</sup>. Greek historians also substantiate the claim that the kshatriyas were a warrior caste in their recording of Alexander's incursion into India. Kautilya in his treatise on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*, also refers to this term while expressing his preference for the composition of the ideal army<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Majumdar, *Military System in Ancient India*, p.28 and Rapson, ed., *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I, where the post-Mauryan Empire phase of Indian history is considered to be one essentially comprising of many independent states or military clans of kshatriyas/Rajputs.

<sup>61</sup> Singh, *Ancient Indian Warfare*, p.139.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p.36 and p.138 and Mill, *History of British India*, p.47.

<sup>63</sup> Rapson, ed., *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I, see Ch. XV, especially p.313 and Ch. XIX p.441 in particular.

A more sociological interpretation of the evidence, however, presents a different, non-militarist explanation for the kshatriyas. Studied as lineage society, social stratification in ancient India can be explained as being based primarily on kinship rituals of gift giving and prestation, whereby social status was renewed and reinforced<sup>64</sup>. The kshatriya Varna is therefore likely to have signified a ritual status in the early Aryan society. It is now believed that the kshatriya tribes were land-owning tribes having oligarchic political organization who later came to be described as royal lineages<sup>65</sup>. This term as evinced in the Jataka literature also had a wider signification covering the dispossessed chiefs and princes of the smaller principalities who coalesced into larger units during the expansion of Aryan society<sup>66</sup>. The expansion of Aryan society closely followed the extension of the agrarian economy and was accompanied by settlements by small numbers of Brahmins who spread the culture of the Aryans. This expansion of the Sanskrit culture and the assimilation of the local people into the Aryan society generally involved some of them fabricating genealogies and claiming kshatriya status<sup>67</sup>. The detailed genealogies of ruling clans formulated during the transition from a feudatory to an independent status was sometimes also accompanied by the growth of military strength which somewhat justifies the association of the kshatriya identity with a military role<sup>68</sup>. Some foreigners who had arrived on the scene for some time already, such as the

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<sup>64</sup> Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.120.

<sup>65</sup> Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.38. The historian also argues that the existence of a 'Rajanya' tribe is attested by both literary and numismatic sources, p.115.

<sup>66</sup> Singh, *Ancient Indian Warfare*, p.138.

<sup>67</sup> Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, p.138.

<sup>68</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), p.72.

Greeks, Scythians and the Parthians were also admitted into this privileged society as 'degenerate kshatriyas' who had not remained true to the rituals of the Aryas<sup>69</sup>. Therefore the category of the khsatriya caste was neither homogenous in terms of its 'Aryan' membership, nor did it necessarily suggest military caste in ancient India. Similarly there was never a uniform preference among the new entrants into the Aryan society for a specifically khsatriya identity<sup>70</sup>.

Although much of the narrative of ancient Indian history is done from the point of view of invasions and warfare, our knowledge about the workings of the military institution of this period is very limited. The military profession is by and large discussed as a component of the larger caste system. Consequently the argument countering the caste-based or racial depiction of the military institution has to be a conjectural synthesis of already available evidence. It is also possible to notice at the same time a visible attempt by the Indian historians, both, concerned with the military as well as those studying the larger society and civilization, to dislodge the notion of restricted recruitment to the army. This results in a peculiar transference of much of the analytical grid- i.e. a history of invasions, the Aryan race, and military aristocracy- to serve a different ideological purpose of national self-assertion.

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<sup>69</sup> Bhandarkar, "Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population", p.22; also see Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts, vol. I, Ch. IV* where the author records mention of these people in the mythic tradition of history narration in ancient India.

<sup>70</sup> Thapar, *Ancient Indian Socia History*, p.128.

Kautilya attests to the fact that there were hereditary troops in the armies of ancient India<sup>71</sup>. However, he does not equate hereditary troops with the kshatriya caste, and instead classifies them distinctly as “maula” troops<sup>72</sup>. They are considered to be superior troops for their loyalty, since they were recipients of the benevolence of the king and not for their inherent fighting abilities<sup>73</sup>. Kautilya prefers them also because these troops bore more easily the losses and expenses on long marches without becoming demoralized troops<sup>74</sup>. They were recommended for a defensive role at the capital or fort and normally were the last to be sent into battle. The armies of ancient India were a composite of six kinds of troops distinguished from each other on the basis of the area and the source of recruitment<sup>75</sup>. Military labour in ancient India comprised of hereditary troops, hired mercenaries, levies raised from agricultural and industrial guilds, soldiers supplied by the feudatories or allies of the king, captured troops and forest tribes. The armies of these periods are said to have had a host of non-Aryans who, unlike in the civil society, were not amalgamated into the fabric of the regular army<sup>76</sup>. Kautilya enumerates a gradation of troops based on the terrain where they would be used and in

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<sup>71</sup> R.P.Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra, Part II* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1988), p.441-“Also a bare army, without standards consisting of warriors related as fathers, sons and brothers, should be the place of the king”.

<sup>72</sup> One instance of misinterpretation of Kautilya where the hereditary troops are equated with the kshatriyas can be found in Ch. XIX, p.441 in Rapson, ed., *Cambridge History of India, vol. I*.

<sup>73</sup> One instance of misinterpretation of Kautilya is readily available where the hereditary troops are equated with the kshatriyas. See Ch. XIX, p.441 in C.H.I., vol. I, op.cit.

<sup>74</sup> Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra, Part II*, p.410.

<sup>75</sup> Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972), p.3. The author finds references to such a six- fold composition being prevalent, in inscriptions of the period between the sixth and the eleventh centuries, the epic literature, the Arthashastra and other similar treatises.

<sup>76</sup> Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India*, p.8.

terms of the loyalty that could be resourced, which pays put to the notion of any natural martial aptitude even in ancient India, when Indian society is said to have been in a 'purer state of preservation'<sup>77</sup>.

The "excellences" of the army, as Kautilya puts it, were "Inherited from the father and the grandfather, constant, obedient, with the soldier's sons and wives contented, not disappointed during marches, unhindered everywhere, able to put up with troubles, that has fought many battles, skilled in the science of all types of war and weapons, not having a separate interest because of prosperity and adversity shared, consisting mostly of Kshatriyas"<sup>78</sup>. What is clearly evident in the above list is the author's concern with the question of morale, skill and efficiency more than prescribing the appropriate source of recruitment or the inherent bravery of any particular class of troops. In the earlier age of the Rig-Veda military organization and battle arrays were shaped along the social units of the clan, village and family<sup>79</sup>. This practice can be explained easily by the functional requirement of small group cohesion during war, which was dropped subsequently from the more composite armies of the later periods. That military service was possible across the caste system is attested to by the evidence of Brahmin and Vaisya troops serving in the armies of these times<sup>80</sup>. Epigraphic records

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<sup>77</sup> Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra, Part II*, p.348 and passim in sections 137, 138 and 139.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.316.

<sup>79</sup> Singh, *Ancient Indian Warfare*, p.10 and Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India*, p.42 and p.137.

<sup>80</sup> Hopkins finds evidence of legal sanction permitting the Brahmins and the Vaisyas to serve in the army in case of absence of other alternatives for subsistence, *ibid.*, p.37 and p.129. Majumdar, *The Military Institution in Ancient India*, p.15.

also indicate two kinds of commercial guild levies who are said to have performed military duties in the society- a kind of contractual quasi-military corporations who hired themselves out to fight wars, and commercial guilds who had acquired fighting and weapons skills, employed for the protection of temples, lands, property and serfs<sup>81</sup>. Some Brahmin communities are also recorded to have exchanged priestly duties for martial pursuits and were soon afterwards merged into the kshatriya caste<sup>82</sup>. Notwithstanding this, there are hints of indigenous notions of the 'good soldier', closely resembling the British recruitment ideology of the pre-1857 period. It is probable that sometimes troops were regularly recruited from specific localities and villages<sup>83</sup>. It is also likely that some stereotypical depictions of soldiers of a particular regions also operated during this time<sup>84</sup>. Nevertheless it is necessary to remark the frequent exhortations of the caste duty of the warrior and promise of attainment of heavenly abode in case of battle death, the use of intoxicants and war music before the battle, etc. which clearly reveals that even the 'warlike' people required considerable and constant motivation to do battle<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India*, pp.6-7. The latter kind referred to traders, workers, textile weavers etc. A federation of working-class communities, of the name 'Velaikkara' in southern India is seen figuring prominently in a large number of south Indian inscriptions. Apart from supplying troops to the Chola Army they were also said to have acquired political power for themselves.

<sup>82</sup> Bhandarkar, "Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population", p.22, see specifically the discussion of the 'Brahma-Kshatra' caste category.

<sup>83</sup> Majumdar, *The Military Institution in Ancient India*, p.62 and Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India*, p.4.

<sup>84</sup> See scattered mention of such stereotypes in V.R.R. Dikshitar, *War in Ancient India* (London: Macmillan and co., 1948), p.187 and passim.

<sup>85</sup> See for example Sensarma, *Military Wisdom in the Puranas* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1979), p.13. The author cites the Agni Purana which enjoins a soldier to fight and promises the release of his forebearers from all their legacies and liabilities in the event of battle-death.

## CONCLUSION

The military historians of ancient India in the post-independence period demonstrate a continued need to refute the depictions of Indians contained in the earlier historiography, particularly their lack of military ardour<sup>86</sup>. They not only seek to normalise India within the common social experience of warfare and urges to violence, the 'nationalist' credentials of the kshatriya personalities are simultaneously affirmed, conjoining the military heritage of ancient India with the project of nation-building<sup>87</sup>. The earlier stereotypical depictions of pervasive fatalism leading to enfeebled will, loss of military ardour relative to civilisational growth and the moral dissipation of the rulers and the military institution, relocate in their analyses and acquire new strategic purposes in the changed context of their enunciation<sup>88</sup>. This suggests that the martial classes discourse became imbricated with the nationalist discourse rearranging the field within which the martial identity of Indians could be defined and authenticated.

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<sup>86</sup> See for example, Majumdar, *The Military Institution of Ancient India*, p.14, Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India*, pp.78-80 and Singh, *Ancient Indian Warfare*, p.36.

<sup>87</sup> Majumdar, *The Military Institution of Ancient India*, "...love of the country of the Shatavahana rulers and their unflagging zeal to rid the land of foreigners..", p.79; on Chandragupta II, "A believer in Aryan institutions and Kshatriya glory, he was determined to free the country...", p.82 and "The military ardour of the Rajputs, it may be presumed was foreign, their patriotism and devotion to [sic] was Indian", p.102.

<sup>88</sup> See for example Majumdar, *The Military Institution of Ancient India*, pp.152-155.

**CHAPTER III**

**RECRUITMENT OF THE 'MARTIAL CLASSES' BY**

**THE INDIAN ARMY**

**INTRODUCTION**

In the present chapter the recruitment of the martial classes to the Indian army will be examined and explained. The discussion will be divided into three parts in which the recruitment practice of the army will be located in the larger institutional and ideational changes that followed the mutiny of 1857. Next, the understanding of 'race' as an analytical paradigm will be examined to obtain the main themes explaining the conception of hereditary and immutable attributes which was necessary for convincingly enumerating the logic of the martial classes discourse. In the third section of the chapter the process of recruitment will be described to highlight the general contours of the understanding of martial classes. The stereotype of the martial class itself will be analysed in this section to substantiate the central argument of this dissertation that this discourse, notwithstanding its traces in both indigenous and British cultures, the martial class identity had a wider implication within the colonial relationship.

## CONTINUITIES AND SHIFTS IN RECRUITMENT AND ORGANISATION

This section will pursue the question of whether the martial race discourse can be contained within the chronological brackets of 1857-1914 or 1880-1914<sup>1</sup>. Continuing the argument elaborated in the previous chapters, it will be shown here that the identification and recruitment of specific groups of Indians on the basis of their inherent fighting abilities survived the ostensible reorganisations and crisis-driven shifts and broadening in the social base of recruitment in the army. The colonial government's recruitment policy did undergo a clear shift following the mutiny of 1857 and a new sensibility of the unreliability of the Hindustani sepoy made a marked presence. At the same time, the broader approach to colonial government itself changed, implicating even the recruitment practices of the army. It is certainly possible to make an argument that the predominance of the Sikhs and the Gurkhas in the ranks occurs only towards the last two decades of the nineteenth-century, yet, it is equally important to examine the wider institutional and ideational changes that had been occasioned during period following the mutiny, which made the explicit recruitment of martial classes possible.

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<sup>1</sup> The post-1857 army reorganisation is believed to mark a significant shift in the recruitment policy of the Presidency armies since it stopped the recruitment of high-caste sepoys from the Hindustan region. G.F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), p.2. The other date of 1880, as the starting point of the period when the martial races begin to dominate, is argued by Kaushik Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army: 1859-1913", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, #34(3), 1997, p.339. He also proposes that the broadening of the social base of recruitment during the First World War marked the end of their domination in the ranks, p.353. This date is also endorsed in S.D. Pradhan, "Indian Army and the First World War", pp.55-65 in DeWitt Elinwood and S.D. Pradhan, eds., *India and World War I* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978).

The mutiny of 1857 is an important watershed in the history of colonial India and its impact on British perceptions of the natives cannot be overrated. An army of 214,985 Indian sepoys experienced a large-scale mutiny among the ranks, which soon outgrew its immediate causes and developed into something akin to an agrarian revolt and a self-conscious attempt to end British political supremacy<sup>2</sup>. Its suppression and violent retribution against its perpetrators was followed by much soul-searching and a general determination to among the British never to be caught unaware again. The Peel commission was set up in 1858 to examine the organisation of the Presidency armies and recommend such changes as were necessary to prevent the recurrence of such widespread disaffection. Written and oral testimonies of the European officers of all the Presidency armies were collated even though the brunt of the of the mutiny had fallen mainly on the Bengal Army. The officers of the Madras and Bombay armies, given their practice of maintaining mixed units openly recruited from all castes, recommended balanced recruitment to prevent domination of any single caste in all the units<sup>3</sup>. Expressing the exact opposite of this view a large number of officers argued against the maintenance of mixed units which was believed to erode the natural prejudices of the natives and allow the growth of a "common sentiment". The rapid spread of disaffection to almost all the regiments of the Bengal Army was considered to have been facilitated

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<sup>2</sup> The figure for the number of sepoys is an 1856 estimate recorded by the Eden Commission-*Report of the Special Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor General in Council to enquire into the Organisation and Expenditure of the Army in India, 1879* (Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1879), p.4. This report also records that between 1824 and 1857 the Bengal Presidency raised irregular contingents of "...mainly men belonging to the warlike races of the Delhi territory, of the Punjab, of the Afghan border, and the Nepal hills" which adequately challenges both the dates 1857 and 1880 as starting points for the recruitment of the martial races.

by a similar sentiment among the sepoy<sup>4</sup>. There was also a significant body of opinion against the practice of exclusion of all except a few classes believed to be from a military background and hereditarily possessing a military aptitude from the same<sup>5</sup>. All opinion concurred however on the decision to eliminate the castes who had instigated and actively participated in the mutiny<sup>6</sup>. During the course of the enquiry there was general agreement also on the point that less deference had to be shown to caste, both while recruiting and during the period of service<sup>7</sup>. The Commission finally recommended mixed composition of different castes and nationalities for all the native units. It however did not specify whether recruitment was to be open to all castes or if certain regions or castes were more preferable than others<sup>8</sup>. For some time, until a reorganisation was properly undertaken, new and untried levies were hastily raised to replenish the greatly diminished Bengal army. It was only in 1864 that the first general order regarding

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, pp.36-38.

<sup>4</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, pp. 84-45.

<sup>5</sup> See Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army: 1859-1913". The author demonstrates that during the Peel Commission, a distinct 'anti-martial race lobby' came together which argued that anybody given sufficient training was capable of acquiring the skills of soldiering. p. 322 and *passim*. Such advocates of open recruitment policy were present even in the 1840s. Henry Lawrence of Lucknow had expressed that even the lower castes having no military traditions could perform efficiently with sufficient military training. David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.38. The Brahmins, the Hindustani Muslims and Eastern Rajputs were from then on discouraged from enlisting. This is the last we see of the 'Purabiya' sepoy in the Indian army.

<sup>7</sup> In fact the exaggerated deference shown to caste rituals and prejudices of the native sepoy had been changing even before the mutiny. Recruits began to be notified in 1856, at the time of enlistment that they were bound to 'general service' which included going overseas when required. The practice of individual cooking by the sepoy was disallowed and common messes were introduced in the same year. F.G. Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to Year 1895* (New Delhi: Today's and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 1971), p.262.

<sup>8</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.8.

regimental composition was issued, listing the Dogras, the Jats, the Sikhs, the Rajputs and the Marathas among the Hindus, and the Pathans, the Baluchis and the Duranis among the Muslims, as the classes to which recruitment was to be restricted<sup>9</sup>. While in the earlier armies caste-status was a guarantee for discipline and military aptitude of the sepoy, the same from now on was ensured by his racial pedigree<sup>10</sup>.

The new sensitivity to race in sepoy recruitment has to be seen in the context of the broader changes in the structure and imperatives of colonial power prompted by the traumatic events of 1857. The general conclusion drawn by the British was that safety was to be found only among one's kind and race thereby became the prime indicator of security<sup>11</sup>. Elaborate changes were made in all aspects of colonial rule ranging from policy objectives to architecture, replicating their entrenched position and beleaguered sensibilities. In the city of Lucknow, their principal city and seat of regional authority in the Awadh province, where the British and Europeans were besieged the longest by mutinous sepoys, the attempts to create a rebellion-proof environment typified the colonial response during this period throughout India. A new rationale for reconstructing the urban space was elaborated centred around the objectives of safety, sanitation and loyalty<sup>12</sup>. First, a highly detailed and interlinked system of surveillance, intervention and

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<sup>9</sup> Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to the Year 1895*, see the tabulated order at of September 1864, pp. 329-331.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt; India, 1857-70* (Princeton, New Jersey: PUP, 1965), p. 297 and MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p.119.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.290.

<sup>12</sup> Veena Talwar-Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1857-1877* (Princeton, New Jersey: PUP, 1984), p. xv.

ordering was erected within the native society. For themselves, a secluded area where the civil lines, the church, the central administrative office, and the cantonment flanked each other, was built. The two structures together spatially and morphologically reproduced the new articulation of the colonial relationship<sup>13</sup>. Every native inhabitant of means within the city was also documented on the basis of his or her putative role during the mutiny<sup>14</sup>.

The earlier Utilitarian belief in the universality of human nature, the possibility of altering all inherited characteristics, and the power of ideas and institutions to do so, was entirely discarded<sup>15</sup>. Along with the realisation that British institutions and political ideas were largely inappropriate given the state of the social attainments of the Indian civilisation, came the belief that Indian regeneration was not only impossible, any attempts to force it through would result in another conflagration<sup>16</sup>. Some of the Orientalist perspectives of the earlier period, especially their master trope of the Aryan race, returned to the public sphere with renewed legitimacy<sup>17</sup>. The casting of the colonial relationship in exclusively racial terms was also bolstered within contemporary scientific and political thought. The ethnological thesis that human-beings were marked unequally by immutable evolutionary facts of physiology and intellect came to inform these

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 52-53, pp. 58-60 and *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.189. More than half a century after the event, the recruiting handbooks still classified communities according to the stance they had adopted in 1857. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.30.

<sup>15</sup> Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt*, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> Lord Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India, vol. I* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897), see for instance pp. 443-448.

<sup>17</sup> Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt*, pp. 321-332.

domains as well<sup>18</sup>. There was in fact less legislation in the British parliament regarding social reform, and instead the locus of action shifted to the colonial bureaucracies-civil and military, who in their own understated style managed to articulate a highly intrusive system of social control<sup>19</sup>.

It is argued by some scholars that the objective of maintaining distinct groups of Indians within the ranks as counter-balances to each other informed recruitment practice for this period till the 1880s<sup>20</sup>. The initial recruitment of the Sikhs and the Gurkhas into the Bengal Army was carried out to counteract the domination of the caste-conscious Hindustani sepoy<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, the annexation of the Punjab had required that some part of the disbanded Khalsa army be absorbed into the Indian ranks as a measure to ensure internal security and co-opt the population living near the newly-expanded frontier<sup>22</sup>. While the above arguments certainly seem probable and corroborated by the evidence from the records of regimental composition, two points nonetheless stand out-the self-

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 309-310. The author says that "...cranial measurement and Kanpur massacre taught much the same thing", to illustrate that the racial anxiety of the events of 1857 and the racial hierarchies within the dominant modes of scientific analysis, such as ethnology and anthropometry, reinforced each other. See p.313. Also see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997), p.179.

<sup>19</sup> Talwar-Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow*, see the preface.

<sup>20</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 9-10. Also see Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army", where the author substantiates the same with tables on the social composition of the native regiments. pp. 339-345.

<sup>21</sup> In 1832 Hodgson, who was the earliest of the British officials to study the Gurkhas, contrasted the Gurkha with the Hindustani sepoy to illustrate the suitability of the former for military service. This distinction proved to be one of the most enduring aspects of the Gurkha sepoy's identity. C.J. Morris, *Gurkhas. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Delhi: Manager of Publication, 1942), pp. 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 12 and Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army", p.

conscious exclusion of the Purabiyas and Hindustani Muslims and the corresponding arrival of the Pathans, Punjabi Muslims, Sikhs and Gurkhas into the ranks. The fact that none of these groups or recruits from any particular region dominated over the rest does not undermine the thesis that these groups were the new warlike people and it was not caste, but race which this time attested to this fact<sup>23</sup>.

The initial series of events around the 1880s which form the backdrop for the propagation of a martial classes "doctrine" is believed to begin with the reviewing of the lacklustre performance of the Indian units in the Burma wars, the Afghan campaigns and the Sikh wars. The analysis of their performance was overlaid by the doubt regarding the ability of native troops to face the army of a well-organised, and more specifically European, power like Russia<sup>24</sup>. Under the influential arguments of Lord Roberts who subsequently became the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, recruitment began

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<sup>23</sup> A variety of terms were used interchangeably while referring to groups of martial Indians, such as race, class, nation and tribe. The term 'class' was used more often than the others because it loosely conveyed signified any group which had a traditional identification in Indian society and who were recruited into the army in sufficient numbers. See D. Ellinwood, "The Indian Soldier, The Indian Army and Change", pp. 179-180 in Ellinwood and Pradhan, eds., *India and the First World War*.

<sup>24</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.12 and Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army", p.328. An earlier version of similar belief regarding the Awadhi sepoys prevailed before 1857, when the selective campaign histories underplayed the leadership and planning failures during the First Burma War (1824) and the Bharatpur Campaign (1825), and instead found the sepoys wanting in "physical strength and moral energy". See Douglas Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris publishers, 1995), p.232. For example a committee in 1832 mentioned that "The Burmese war shows, that when brought against their superiors in physical strength, and required to surmount obstacles of a different kind to those they have been accustomed to, the Native troops to a degree not ordinarily contemplated..". It also characterised the native troops to be wanting in "physical strength and moral energy". *A Synopsis of the Evidence taken before the East India Committee in Relation to the Army in India*, at 355.0954 Ar 5 Sy, National Archives of India, p. xi.

showing a marked trend, with a northern bias and the Punjab and Nepal in particular<sup>25</sup>. The strategic threat-centres had shifted to northern India since the early nineteenth-century and as a consequence the views of the officers of the Bengal Army carried more than usual influence. In addition, the Commander-in-Chief usually operated from the Bengal, Presidency again augmenting the clout of the attitudes of its army in matters such as recruitment, always at the expense of the Madras and Bombay armies<sup>26</sup>. This inclination to recruit heavily from specific regions like the Punjab also presented a practical solution to the need of heavy and continued deployment at the north-west frontier by enlisting from areas alongside it. The threat to internal security from the domination of recruits from specific areas was mitigated by now with the development of the telegraph and railway networks<sup>27</sup>.

The sustained emphasis on the recruitment of martial classes during this period was effected by a series of developments and organisational changes within the army, suggesting the presence of a widespread preference for such recruits, rather than just the efforts of individual figures like Lord Roberts. The Commission to examine the

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<sup>25</sup> Roy, "Recruitment doctrines of the colonial Indian army", see the table on the recruitment trend for the period 1885-1912 which shows that the share of the martial classes rose in this period from 33% to 62%. p.352.

<sup>26</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 13. Lord Roberts writing of the sepoys of the Bombay and the Madras armies finds that "...long years of peace and security, and prosperity attending it, had evidently upon them, as they always seem to have on Asiatics, a softening and deteriorating effect; and I was forced to the conclusion that the ancient military spirit had died in them (the Madras sepoys) as it had died in the ordinary Hindustani of Bengal and the Mahratta of Bombay, and that they could no longer with safety be pitted against warlike races or employed outside the limits of southern India." Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, vol. II, p.383.

<sup>27</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.16. But the author ignores the fact that despite Nepal being nowhere near the north-west frontier, the Gurkha numbers in the ranks increased much the same as those of the Recruits from the Punjab.

organisation of the army in 1879, while explicitly mentioning the criteria of 'divide et impera' in recommending territorially fixed division of the armies, also recommended that sub-divisions of the army be territorially and racially exclusive of each other<sup>28</sup>. To carry out the last, the Commission recommended that the bulk of the army be organised into class-company battalions and maintain a small number of single-class regiments of the Gurkhas, the Sikhs, and others<sup>29</sup>. In 1881, in accordance with the Commission's other recommendation of territorially restricted recruitment, each regiment was given specific recruiting areas which evidently coincided with the identity of the recruits of the class-companies<sup>30</sup>. For the second time after 1864 another general order was circulated in 1883, listing those classes who were allowed to enlist in the Bengal Army along with a list, for the first time, of those classes whose recruitment was discouraged<sup>31</sup>. A significant change in the organisation of the infantry took place in 1886 wherein battalions were linked together in general groups of two or three and were given permanent regimental centres. Recruits were then enlisted and would be called to serve in any one of the battalions of this group<sup>32</sup>. The division of the army organisation along

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<sup>28</sup> *Eden Commission, 1879*, "...so organised, recruited and constituted, as to act in time of excitement and disturbance as checks upon each other". p.17 an pp. 78-79.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.79. The Commission defined a class-company as a unit where "...men of each class or race are kept apart in separate companies", p.77.

<sup>30</sup> V.R. Raghavan, *Infantry in India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997), p.182. Interestingly, the Bombay Army was officially sanctioned the regions of Rajputana, Sindh and Central India for its recruiting thus populating its ranks with the martial classes of these regions. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.21. Also see the table on p.22 for the ethnic composition of the Bombay infantry as of 1903.

<sup>31</sup> Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to the Year 1895*, p..405-409. See details of the classes listed in this general order. For example in this list there is no separate category of 'Other Hindus' which normally implied the low-caste Hindu recruits.

<sup>32</sup> John Gaylor, *Sons of John Company* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1992), p.8. In the same year the first recruiting depot was set up at Gorakhpur for the Gurkhas, which would be open

the lines of its composition was further reinforced in 1888 when fixed regimental centres were ordered on the principle of territorial distribution of all the native battalion groups<sup>33</sup>. In 1892 a number of recruitment depots were opened for each of the martial classes which would be open throughout the year, and in charge of a Recruiting Officer who was personally acquainted with the specifics of the particular class<sup>34</sup>. The major break in the recruitment pattern, centred around a restricted number of Indians recognised as inherently martial, is believed to have occurred during the First World War. The Indian Army had sent an expeditionary force to participate in the fighting in the European theatre. The army soon faced a shortage of recruits in 1916 when it dawned that the traditional sources of recruitment had not been overdrawn but had actually begun to dry up completely<sup>35</sup>. In response, the Government in India broadened the permissible social base for recruitment by opening the ranks for seventy-five new classes, including Bengalis, for deployment in the war<sup>36</sup>.

Nevertheless, the official preference for martial classes to populate the ranks of the Indian army did not alter from this experience. The Committee, established to report

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throughout the year. This marked a change from the usual practice of seasonal recruitment. C.J. Morris, *Gurkhas. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1942), p.129.

<sup>33</sup> Cardew, *A Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to the Year 1895*, p.411.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.428. These were: Peshawar- Pathans, Rawal Pindi- Punjabi Muslims, Amritsar- Sikhs, Dharamsala- Kangra Dogras, Delhi- Jats and Hindustani Muslims, Lucknow- Hindustani Hindus, Sialkot- Kashmiri Dogras. Junior British officers from the native battalions were posted to these depots to assist the Recruiting Officer and familiarise themselves with the particular class.

<sup>35</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.38.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.69.

on the post-war conditions of the army and on the questions of its future administration and organisation in 1919, reaffirmed previous trend in recruitment<sup>37</sup>. It observed that the urban classes, which had demanded the right to volunteer and create a territorial force as a second line of defence, had failed to produce fighting material of any appreciable number or quality<sup>38</sup>. The demobilisation undertaken to reduce the army to its peace-time strength basically did away with the newly recruited classes and the recruitment bias towards the martial classes became even more marked from 1923 than it had been in 1914<sup>39</sup>. The recruitment handbooks detailing the specifics of different martial classes were being reprinted well into the early 1940s. The marked preference for classes with military traditions also figured in the debate on Indianisation of the officers of the army. The Indian Sandhurst Committee recorded that the army had a tendency to draw on such material as was ready at hand than experiment with new ones<sup>40</sup>. In a revealing summation of the logic behind the recruitment of martial classes, the Simon Commission in 1930 began with the reiteration of the common Aryan race origin of the people of Europe and

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<sup>37</sup> *Report of the Army in India Committee, 1919-1920 (Esher Committee)* See p. 71 where it makes a comparative list of the total population vis-a-vis the number of recruits raised, of each province. While the Punjab with a population of 26 million sent 326,000 and the NWFP and Baluchistan sent 33,000 from a 3 million population, Bengal with a population of 45 million sent only 7000 and Madras, 46,000 out of its 40 million people.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.72. The Committee felt that the advocates of the territorial movement during the war had "...overrated the practical strength of the desire of urban classes to share in the burden of defence and creating a sense of discipline and sacrifice among those classes". The history of the Bengali battalion was considered illustrative of this problem, since the recruits often broke down during training and many resigned despite "...every effort made to render the experiment a success, by especially selecting officers and enlisting the sympathy of the military authorities at the front". pp. 73-74.

<sup>39</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.40. Also see the list of classes being recruited after the First World War in Roger Beaumont, *Sword of the Raj* (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1977), p.6.

<sup>40</sup> See for example the opinion of Sir Malcom Hailey in *Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee, 1926* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1927), p.31.

India. It observed that most of the ancient social systems and institutions, such as caste, had remained exactly as they had been formulated initially during India's early past<sup>41</sup>. It also marked India's essential difference from the rest of the self-governing dominions on the basis of the fact that "races of widely different military capacity" were to be found here<sup>42</sup>. The necessity for continued British presence especially of their troops was linked to the old argument that this secured the rest of the country from its warlike races<sup>43</sup>.

The Eden Commission of 1879 while advocating the necessity for separation and counter-balancing the native classes within the army also observed that "The Punjab is the home of the most martial races of India and is the nursery of our best soldiers"<sup>44</sup>. This suggests that there was already a substantial appreciation of the military worth of the martial classes among the British. Lord Roberts who is treated as the chief proponent of the theory of martial classes, himself had a very narrow conception of who they really were, which excluded the Tamils, the Telugus, the Hindustanis, and the Marathas-all of whom were recruited and accommodated within this category<sup>45</sup>. The understanding about the martial classes- who they were and why they were martial, had a much wider field of construction than just the trends in recruitment and composition. The emphasis on different martial groups at different times, the exaggerated importance of the Sikhs

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<sup>41</sup> *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, vol. I* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1930), p.10.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>44</sup> *Eden Commission*, p.10.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India, vol. II*, p.441.

and Gurkhas even among them, were to a significant extent the products of the exigencies of policy, and equally the availability and the willingness of these classes to enlist. But this did not significantly undermine the larger discursive structure from where this belief originated.

### **MEASURING RACE: THE SITE OF SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE**

In the following section the dominant tropes and concerns of racial analysis in the late nineteenth-century colonial India will be discussed. The operation of a recruitment preference of martial classes in its more precise and systematic manifestation corresponds with the growing authority of racial perspectives and techniques of classifying populations of this period. Recruitment to the Indian army drew on ethnological knowledge, more specifically on the census enumeration which exhaustively detailed the different sections and the sub-sections of the society, for information on the 'enlisted classes' and their numbers of potential recruits<sup>46</sup>. Ethnology was of yet more significance to army recruitment because it lent the authority of its scientific methodology to the practice of attributing particular traits to each social grouping of Indians-tribes, castes and nations- thereby confirming what the army had come to believe through experience. The work of the ethnologists themselves was markedly interested with such traits, and pronouncements on the physical courage of Indians and the martial

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<sup>46</sup> See David Arnold, "Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859-1947, p.7, in Ranjit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies, vol. IV* (Delhi: OUP, 1996).

classes were not uncommon<sup>47</sup>. The emphasis on the manly and military attributes thus implicated in the two distinct areas of the colonial government and the complicitous operation of the two in resourcing these stereotypes, needs to be examined.

Race was familiar to Indian social thought and practice even before the colonial encounter<sup>48</sup>. Racially distinct groups and peoples had encountered each other all through Indian history. It is possible to come across indigenous characterisations which marked physical attributes, and it is also likely that linguistic and political divisions were congruent here<sup>49</sup>. At the same time one is not certain whether biological difference and bodily attributes such as skin or colour unambiguously signified either merit or status<sup>50</sup>. Even under the British the usage of the term 'race' conveyed a variety of meanings during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth-centuries<sup>51</sup>. This term was used by the Orientalists to convey linguistic and cultural distinctions, whereas other meanings such as tribe, class or nation also prevailed simultaneously<sup>52</sup>. The interpretation of race in exclusively biological and physiological terms occurred at the specific historical juncture

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<sup>47</sup> See for instance Risley, *The People of India*, "The peasantry of Punjab, the manliest and most attractive of all Indian races...", p.263.

<sup>48</sup> See corresponding discussion in Chs. I and II of this dissertation.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Robb, "South Asia and the concept of Race", p.8 in Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: OUP, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Bayly, "Caste and 'Race' in the colonial ethnography of India", p.172 in Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia*.

<sup>52</sup> Robb, "South Asia and the Concept of Race", p.5.

where a heightened awareness of the 'Other' coincided with the widespread use of the techniques of categorisation such as the census and anthropometry<sup>53</sup>.

The science of ethnology endeavoured "...to define the various physical types with reference to their distinctive characteristics, in the hope that, when sufficient data have been accumulated, it maybe possible in some measure to determine the elements of which they are composed, and thus establish their connection with one or another of the great families of mankind"<sup>54</sup>. The ethnologists also shared the premise that individual intellect and social institutions corresponded to the stages of physiological evolution<sup>55</sup>. Thus under this scheme of things it was possible to make a circular and mutually reinforcing argument of the interconnectedness of physiological traits and attainments of civilisation, accompanied by a range of implications for the subject races who provided the empirical samples to validate the thesis. However, some scholars are of the opinion that the thesis of the critics of colonial discourse regarding the collusion of the work of the ethnologists with colonial will to hegemony misconstrues the larger concerns behind their work<sup>56</sup>. While India was an important source of ethnological data, the conclusions drawn thereof became part of wider debate in Europe revolving around the threat of

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<sup>53</sup>     ibid., p.6 and Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.115.

<sup>54</sup>     *Military Handbook of General Information on India* (Simla: Government Monotype Press, 1908), p.119.

<sup>55</sup>     Bayly, "Caste and 'Race' in the colonial ethnography of India", p.179.

<sup>56</sup>     ibid., see for instance p.171 and p.180. The author argues that much of the ethnological work was conceived as a contribution to the broad debates in social theory and scientific ethnology, and was not 'colonial' in the sense of being preoccupied with the objective of knowing and subjugating Indians. p.214.

racial degeneration<sup>57</sup>. Similarly, India was not the only ethnological Other and neither was there a pan-Indian approach to ethnology. Their empirical investigations were in fact concerned with finding and documenting varieties of physical “types’ in ethnologically varied regions such as the Punjab, Bengal and different parts of southern India<sup>58</sup>. Much of their work, though based on spurious premises, these scholars argue, is at least accurate insofar as their empirical observations are concerned and more intellectually sophisticated than what their critics would allow<sup>59</sup>.

The above argument is not very convincing because it casts the relationship between colonial ethnology and colonial discourse simply as one where good information was put to bad use<sup>60</sup>. The Otherness of Indian society and Indians was in fact a vital component of the work of colonial ethnologists equally to mark both ‘difference’ and affirm selfhood<sup>61</sup>. Although it was not crucial to ethnological analysis, the earlier stereotypes of savagery, effeminacy and excessive sexuality among Indians was

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.168. These included the dangers to national identity posed by large-scale migration by other races, and the anxiety over the much debated global ‘struggle for mastery’ among European powers.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>59</sup> Bayly, “Caste and ‘Race’ in the colonial ethnography of India”, p. 169.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.171. The author, for example, argues that “The problems being ‘solved’ in ethnological enquiries were not simply ‘imperial’ problems, though they readily lent themselves to colonial purposes”.

<sup>61</sup> See for instance the description provided by Risley on the stages of perception of an Englishman from the time he arrives in India. The Englishman only begins to understand the native society when he is able to increasingly differentiate markers of caste, facial traits, dress and physiognomy and when he is able to tell “at a glance” the essential differences between the local, racial and linguistic aggregates. Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1968), pp. 5-6.

developed and given scientific explanations<sup>62</sup>. The Orientalist identification of the Aryan linguistic genealogy became the motif for universal racial confrontation, and a new metonymic equivalence between racial vigour/manliness and conquest/imperial drive, was introduced<sup>63</sup>. The motif of racial conquests when used to explain the variation in physical types necessarily also implicated the manliness and the fighting abilities of such people who showed signs of racial intermingling. Risley for example found that the “...guerrilla methods of warfare,....individuality of character and tenacity of purpose...” attested to the Scythian ancestry of the Marathas<sup>64</sup>. Such abilities of the conquering race manifested itself even among those who were conquered, and by corollary inferior, because the element of “sexual selection” during such times would be dominated by “...the strongest and the most warlike men...” who chose the best of the women from the subdued captive race<sup>65</sup>. On the other hand, while imperial control of India was evidently the outcome of the natural dynamism of the dominant race, the manifest manliness of the Englishman was cast differently<sup>66</sup>. While the British demonstrated virility in their predisposition to vigour, use of intellect, and a scientific temperament, the native was

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<sup>62</sup> See Robb, “South Asia and the concept of race”, p.3 and Loomba, *Colonialism/Post-colonialism*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>63</sup> Linking Indian civilisation to a common Aryan origin with Europe meant that the former’s society and institutions were studied as the living memorial of the European past. See W. Crooke, *Natives of Northern India* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995), p. vi. The leading Orientalist scholar Max Mueller, however, protested against the “unholy alliance” between ethnology and comparative philology, to Risley. Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1968), p.7.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 108-109 and p.274.

<sup>66</sup> Bayly, “Caste and ‘Race’ in the colonial ethnography of India”, p.181.

either predisposed to robust muscularity or became “mild-eyed philosophers”<sup>67</sup>. The masculinity of the native was thereby split between the mental faculty and physical prowess, marking an imperfection, which of course implied the imperfection of that masculinity itself.

The distinctive fluid tribal structure of the societies of the Indo-Aryans was an important contrast against the caste instinct of the majority of the Indians which was seen originating in the “...characteristic peculiarities of the Indian intellect..”, “.. its lax hold of facts, its indifference to action, its absorption of dreams,...its passion for endless division and sub-division..”<sup>68</sup>. It was also possible to thus infer about the vigour and virility of distinct groups of peoples who demonstrated some version of libertarian principles<sup>69</sup>. The 1901 census, which enumerated a system of classification on the basis of ritual status as current in popular practice, drew a flood of petitions from the ‘educated classes’ which for the ethnologists confirmed the strength of the class sentiment among a people preoccupied with mental activity<sup>70</sup>. Therefore, although the caste system itself was believed to correspond with the hierarchical racial composition in Indian society there was no guarantee of its consistency beyond a point when the original

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.187 and pp. 119-200. Also see Crooke, *Natives of North India*, p.10 where the author describes the Bengali, the Assamese and the Sindhi as being easily identified by their “...lanky stature, ill-developed muscular system, and want of robustness”. This was because “...the intellectual have grown at the expense of the physical qualities...”.

<sup>68</sup> Risley, *The People of India*, p.275 and *passim*. The author clearly state that there is a correspondence between caste hierarchies and certain variations of physical type.

<sup>69</sup> Bayly, “Caste and ‘Race’ in the colonial ethnography of India”, p.215.

<sup>70</sup> Risley, *The People of India*, see p.275 and *passim*. The author records two instances of such petitioning of the Lingyats of Karnataka and the Khatrias, who demanded being listed as Kshatriyas. See pp. 78-79 and p.113.

racial attributes of the dominant race became indistinguishable. A more precise science of measurement of racial attributes had also entered the stage which sought to correlate bodily stature, cranial cavity and intelligence<sup>71</sup>. Anthropometry also measured the nasal index on a scale where the "...finest nose shall be at the top and that with the coarsest at the bottom of the list..." to detail in minute the variations in different racial physiognomies<sup>72</sup>. Although anthropometry in general failed to impress the ethnologists, it was certainly common enough to describe the Aryans as fair-skinned and Dravidians as 'broad nosed'<sup>73</sup>. Notwithstanding the argument of accuracy or inaccuracy of the empirical evidence of sciences like ethnology and anthropometry, what this does suggest is the circulation of the head, the skin and facial features of the natives as fetishes of racial difference.

Racial perspectives in colonial India were considerably substantiated by climatic-environmental tropes, which had been recently revived during the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment<sup>74</sup>. The attributes of intellect and physiognomy were aligned along a hierarchical climatic geography which separated the hilly regions from the "pestilential parts" in the plains of India<sup>75</sup>. A combination of climatic extremes and congestion of

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<sup>71</sup> Crispin Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The early origins of Indian Anthropometry", p.226 in , ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. One of the first colonial officials to demonstrate interest in anthropometric measuring was William Sleeman, who was convinced that criminality was a hereditary attribute. See p.231.

<sup>72</sup> Risley, *The People of India*, p.29- "...the social status of the members of a particular group varies in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses".

<sup>73</sup> See Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, p.87.

<sup>74</sup> Bayly, "Caste and 'Race' in the colonial ethnography of India". The central thesis was that civilisation was an attainment of an inherently virile population living in temperate climatic zones. p.174.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.176 and Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, pp. 9-10.

population in the plains affected the physical health negatively as much as encouraging a “pessimistic” and “submissive” temperament and “habitual melancholy” from bondage of caste<sup>76</sup>. India constituted a unique geo-space-the Tropic, where the British were constantly threatened by the enervating heat, organic disease and all kinds of epidemics<sup>77</sup>. The need to “protect the “..manly brains-bulky and busy-turgid with the blood and thoughts of blood...” of the British soldier marked him as the exotic in the Indian landscape<sup>78</sup>. The urgency to enlist the help of science to protect the British from this landscape also contained a substantial undercurrent of anxiety to not appear weak in the eyes of the natives. The native himself suffered considerably less in such climate because his acclimatisation had deprived him of “...such a surplus of animal heat”. More significantly the climate of the tropics affected the British at the very site of his difference-his skin. It was held that most of the diseases peculiar to the tropic such as cholera, dysentery, liver inflammation and malaria were caused by the excessive heat of the tropical sun which through the skin “...excited the internal organs and the secreting organs into working themselves into exhaustion”<sup>79</sup>. While the ethnologists saw Indian climate either producing warlike agriculturists such as Jats or their less healthy

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<sup>76</sup> Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> Julius Jefferys, *The British Army in India* (London: Longman, Brown, Longmans and Roberts, 1858), p.9, p.152 and p.167. India was in fact distinct from all the other “healthy colonies” of England. pp.204-205.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.38 and pp. 41-42.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p.244. The urgency was not only the fast deteriorating health of the British soldier but the challenge to the imperial presence from the native who would perceive that the former had a “sickly constitution” and was unable to “occupy their country without aid”.

counterparts in the same profession, the Muslims, a much more deep anxiety about the effect of the same on their own race was constantly present.

Ethnology like other elements of the colonial knowledge structure did “produce” colonial power by enumerating narratives and tropes which sought to systematically arrange aspects of the colonial relationship in fixed and ‘natural’ hierarchies. Attributes such as manliness, virility and military prowess of race were a significant concern even though ethnology had wider application and functioned as a distinct bureaucracy, independent from the military.

### **RECRUITING THE MARTIAL CLASSES**

The discussion till now has been concerned with demonstrating that the wider structure of representations and theoretical constructs about Indian society and Indians—ranging from the Orientalist master narratives of Aryan conquest and the Varna system, to ethnological tropes of physical types and skin, both precede and anticipate the discourse on martial classes and the different stereotypes contained therein. We will now examine the main contours of the discourse itself, at the very site of its operation—recruitment. So in the following section the official, codified specifics of the recruitment of these classes will be described and its stereotypes will be theoretically explained as the function of not just hegemonic knowledge but something that negotiated both colonial desires and anxiety.

The recognition that variegated races with distinct customs and practices, religion and temperaments constituted the Indian army units also implied the necessity for some form of codification of these aspects in the form of ready-to-use manuals for administrative ease and most importantly- “the full development of race efficiency”<sup>80</sup>. The manifold aspects of the discourse on martial races which gave it its convincing logic, originating from different sectors of the colonial structure and the beliefs of civil and military officials, was summarised in recruitment handbooks, institutional and regimental histories, and brought to bear directly on recruitment practices<sup>81</sup>. Recruitment itself had been centralised through the establishment of recruiting depots individually for each martial class, although the practice of recruits accompanying sepoy returning to the unit after leave, and the sending of recruiters whenever the numbers of a particular clan or group fell short of the required strength, continued much as before. Recruits were also obtained through the issuing of advertisements in the *Fauji Akbar*, maintaining lists of unit nominees proposed by serving personnel and occasionally sending British officers to tour specific districts and take note of likely recruits and supplement the information provided by serving Indian personnel<sup>82</sup>. Recruitment had thus developed an interesting arrangement where the British military officers wrote and consulted manuals on fighting

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<sup>80</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*. The author describes how the systematic grouping of men by race, sept and clan had “..called for a through study of the clans and tribal systems of India”. pp. 2-3

<sup>81</sup> A similar codification of a related stereotype of the criminal castes was carried out through district manuals and gazetteers and through the census from 1860s which listed some Indians as belonging to criminal castes. This suggests a much wider process of codification of colonial stereotypes than just of the martial classes. See Arnold, “Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859-1947), p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> A.H. Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1941), p.93.

classes, Indian recruiters personally visited localities where specific martial classes were recorded as residing (according to the census data), and selected the potential recruits following a set of physical standards, medical requirements and verifiable specifics of identity, which the serving personnel then faithfully enacted in their respective units under the supervision of the British officers. While this suggests a mutually reinforcing structure that worked on a certain internal dynamic, the various points of agency around which this was erected, and certainly depended on, is remarkable.

The central observation of the discourse was one of the “essential differences” between Europe and India was the fact that while “...every able-bodied man, given food and arms is a fighting man of some sort in Europe...”, in India “...only certain classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior”<sup>83</sup>. Whereas in the British army the “...inferiority of one regiment over another was only a matter of training, the same courage and military instinct are inherent in the English, Scotch and Irish alike...”, the regiments of the “warlike races of northern India” and of the “effeminate peoples of the south brooked no comparison to each other in terms of their “martial values”<sup>84</sup>. Three explanations were posited to explain the phenomenon of martial classes-membership among the races located in the north, habitation in dry, cold and harsh weather, and the quality of life which either encouraged maintenance of military skills or allowed it fall into disuse and neglect<sup>85</sup>. Thus defined, a list of the

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<sup>83</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p.129.

<sup>84</sup> Roberts, *Forty-one years in India*, vol. II, p.442.

<sup>85</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p.132. Also see Jefferys, *The British Army in India*, where the author contrasts the dry, superior weather of the mountain heights and the plains with the

classes comprised- the Ancient Aryan races viz. the Rajputs and the Brahmans, the Jats and the Gujars, the Pathans and the Moguls from outside India, the Pathans and the Afghans within India, and the Gurkhas<sup>86</sup>. However this checklist was malleable and different versions of the same, with other races added, existed throughout the period<sup>87</sup>. Similarly, the army also sought for specific services, such as transport and menial work, classes who hereditarily performed such tasks and who according to the rules of caste practice could come into contact with the martial classes<sup>88</sup>. The exclusivity of the two domains was strictly maintained, and the lower castes were never assigned any combat duties<sup>89</sup>. The master trope for the discussion of martial races, as we saw earlier, was the Aryan/northern race identity. The narrative of expansionist, virile Aryan races conquering the aborigines explained a large part of the phenomenon of varied physiognomies with varied measures of physical courage and military aptitude<sup>90</sup>. The working of the caste system, interpreted as the logical outcome of the pressure on the

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stagnated air and the ground contaminated by the “gaseous products of putrefaction in all stages”. The author believes therefore that “Few children of pure English blood can be reared in the plains of India”. pp. 153-160 and p.172.

<sup>86</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p.131.

<sup>87</sup> See for example Beaumont, *Sword of the Raj*, p.6 where the author lists sixteen races who were listed as being martial after the First World War and Edmund Candler, *The Sepoy* (London: John Murray, 1919) who lists a slightly different list for the same period.

<sup>88</sup> For example the Santhal was a “hereditary bearer”, and the Kahar a “hereditary servant”. Both were employed in the Supply and Transport Corps. See Candler, *The Sepoy*, Ch. 17.

<sup>89</sup> Low-caste recruits had been inducted into the army to quell the mutiny in 1857. They continued to enlist even afterwards but were organised into separate regiments or class companies. But in 1868 the ‘experiment’ was considered to have failed and an order was issued to effect their exclusion. K.M.L. Saxena, *The Military System of India, 1850-1900* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974), pp. 99-100.

<sup>90</sup> The depiction of early Indian history as a struggle between a fair-skinned Aryan race and a dark-skinned lower-race was the common preamble in the recruitment handbooks for the martial classes. See for instance Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs*, p.1, Bingley and Nicholls,

dominant race to preserve racial purity, was cast in terms of a hierarchy of occupational skills with fighting abilities on the top-rung and reserved for the Aryans, and agricultural labour performed by the “conquered aboriginal races”<sup>91</sup>. Almost all the martial classes, including those ostensibly belonging to different cultural and racial backgrounds, such as the Pathans, the Afridis and the Nepalese, were accommodated within the discourse by affirming if not their Aryan credentials, at least their affinities<sup>92</sup>. The martial identity of the remaining martial classes such as the Marathas and the Muslims was secured by tracing their stock to other invading races like the Scythians and the Moguls<sup>93</sup>. The topography of settlements, and environmental and climatic features conveniently aligned with the lines of advance of such conquests<sup>94</sup>. Further, narratives of dynastic and imperial histories of these classes also confirmed the vigour of a superior race and the maintenance of their military aptitude in honed states of readiness.

The more general discourse of the martial classes comprised many stereotypes of individual martial communities<sup>95</sup>. On the one hand, if each martial class exhibited a

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*Brahmans. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1899), p.27 and *Military Handbook of General Information on India*, p.37.

<sup>91</sup> See for example Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs*, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> Ridgeway, *Pathans. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1910), p.2 and p.50. Also Morris, *Gurkhas*, p. 39.

<sup>93</sup> *Military Handbook of General Information of India*, p.122.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>95</sup> For example the Jat was “...essentially an agriculturist, and sturdy, independence and patient labour are his strongest characteristics” or “...manly without false pride; independent without insolence, reserved in manner, but good-natured, light-hearted and industrious”. Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs*, p.22 and p.52. Also see Morris, *Gurkhas*, p.39 for the stereotype of the Gurkha; Ridgeway, *Pathans*, where the author tries to dismantle the negative stereotype of the Pathan and advances a more martial version of his own. pp.14-15.

specific set of traits that marked the ideal for the rest of the community, there were several minor sub-divisions of the same for the sub-units of that class depending on the level of its proximity to the original racial stock, the area of residence and occupation. While the stereotype itself was quite vague and open-ended, it was constructed around a series of metonymic interpretations of the attributes of martialness. Traits such as fighting behaviour, place of habitation, absence of a predilection for caste, are examples of such metonymic correlation. There were others, such as the affinity of a particular language with the Indo-Aryan linguistic group which identified its speakers as warlike<sup>96</sup>. Similarly, the treatment of women, marriage practices and sexual propriety also indicated the inherent manliness, and equally, the reason for its preservation<sup>97</sup>. The Kshatriya was defined in one of the military manuals as those whose caste profession was to “..protect people and abstain from sexual pleasures”<sup>98</sup>. The natural ease on the playing field, where sports was a metaphor for civilised conduct of combat, and the predilection for ‘manly sports’ like hunting, fishing and hawking among these classes confirmed their credentials as natural warriors<sup>99</sup>. The stereotypes of prominent martial classes such as the Rajputs

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<sup>96</sup> Pashto for example was recognised as “...a strong, virile language capable of expressing ideas with neatness and accuracy, and though harsh-sounding, suits the nature of its speakers...”. Ridgeway, *Pathans*, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> Risley refers to the confidence that is invoked from seeing a Punjabi regiment about the marriage practices of that community. But once one moves away from the recruiting grounds of the Indian army towards the Gangetic plain “...the healthy sense which bids the warrior races keep their girls at home until they are fit to bear the burden of maternity seems to be cast out...”. Risley, *The People of India*, p.194. The Bengali men were considered effeminate because they were harsh and cowardly in their treatment to women. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 44. Also see Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs*, p.60 where the author remarks that the Jats do not practice debauchery as other classes of Indians did.

<sup>98</sup> *Military Handbook of General Information on India*, p.151.

<sup>99</sup> See for instance Morris, *Gurkhas*, p.51 and Ridgeway, *Pathans*, p.27.

and the Gurkhas also drew on the similarity with their counterparts in Britain, such as the Scottish Highlanders.<sup>100</sup>

The martial class stereotype has been analysed so far along two lines of argument—one which says that the stereotype was simply a transference of one's own attributes to the native; and the other which believes that it was an ideal of perfection-of a soldier, of a subject and of masculine excellence.<sup>101</sup> But the stereotype of martial Indian did not present its subjects as perfect. For example, the relationship between the perfect martial class of the Gurkha and the British officer is related as “A sixfoot-two grenadier of the 59th would offer a cheroot to the ‘little Gurkhi’ as he styled him; the latter would take it from him with a grin, and when his tall and patronising comrade stooped down with a lighted cigar in his mouth, the little mountaineer never hesitated a moment in puffing away at it with the one just received and they are consequently patted on the back and called ‘prime chaps’”<sup>102</sup>. This narration clearly reveals the unequal positions of the two individuals who enact the scene, and more importantly the Gurkha's child-image. The representation of the Gurkha who is both the embodiment of a warrior's fighting spirit and the guileless innocence of a child suggests a chain of ambivalent signification in the discourse.

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<sup>100</sup> MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1979), p.6.

<sup>101</sup> The first argument is put forward in Caplan, *Warrior Gentleman*, p.3. He finds that the military writers on Gurkha soldiers represented the qualities that they believed they shared with the Gurkha. These officers perceived in the Gurkha the qualities of their own public-school manliness which converted him in their eyes into a ‘Warrior Gentleman’. p.155. The second analysis is made in Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 25-26. A similar analysis of a related stereotype of ‘the special Oriental vice’ of homosexuality, can be found in Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj*, p.121

<sup>102</sup> See the narrative of this encounter in Morris, *Gurkhas*, p.52.

Moreover, the immutability of the stereotype was itself obtained in the most stringent of conditions. One example of the paradoxical precariousness of the martial stereotype can be found in the context of the Gurkha line-boys who by coming into contact with urban areas lost their martial attributes and those of their progeny<sup>103</sup>. This was because these Gurkas having “grown up extremely intelligent”, acquired many “loose habits” and “vices” and physical degeneration quickly followed this moral degeneration<sup>104</sup>. A common refrain among all the stereotypical depictions of martial natives was that they were “...alive to injury and prone to resent all ill-treatment whether fancied or real...”<sup>105</sup>. This suggests a crisis at the very heart of the stereotype arising from the anxiety that the martial classes, despite the elaborate and intrusive knowledge of the coloniser, were in the end unknowable and unpredictable. Though loyalty could be instilled through training and discipline there always remained in the colonial mind an anxiety that their loyalty to them was always precarious and never assured<sup>106</sup>. The stereotype also made in its turn demands of conformity to a particular identity for the British where they had to prove worthy of the loyalty of these other fair-skinned warriors. The British always saw themselves as acting on a public stage in India where

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<sup>103</sup>        *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>104</sup>        *ibid.*, p.126- “...and the prospect of a large number of Gurkha children being brought up in the most unsatisfactory conditions of India is not a pleasing one, for there is no doubt whatever that the Gurkha deteriorates rapidly when he comes into close contact with the worst type of Indian such as frequents the Calcutta bazaars”. Also see a discussion of the same in Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), pp. 96-98.

<sup>105</sup>        See for instance G.E.D. Monat, *Madras Classes. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1942), p.9.

<sup>106</sup>        Arnold, “Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in colonial India”, p.15.

they were constantly under the judging gaze of the Indians<sup>107</sup>. The natural affinity of the martial classes for military service was more than anything predicated on “..some power of the white man for attracting faithful service and admiration...” and they would continue to enlist only as long as the British remained “true to themselves”<sup>108</sup>.

While the relationship between the British and the martial classes was based on the anxiety that such a recognition would fail to obtain, it was similarly fraught with anxiety about impersonation. This is because the stereotype is a way of exercising control through fixity of native identities, and impersonation undermined control by insidiously contaminating the management of the martial identities within the regiment. All the recruitment manuals were sensitive to this problem of “pretenders” trying to “...pass themselves off as better born than they are...”<sup>109</sup>. Elaborately detailed information regarding the caste, the clan, the sept and sub-division, occupation and socio-economic status was acquired, increasingly complicating the stereotyped identity<sup>110</sup>. This entire range of minutiae of identity was necessary because it was observed that people in India, especially the converts, often “assumed some high sounding title” or caste-identity to acquire a high-born pedigree<sup>111</sup>. Recruiters and village headmen who were in charge of

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<sup>107</sup> Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj*, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p.153 and p.214. Also see Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India*, vol.I, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>110</sup> See for example B.L. Cole, *Rajputana Classes. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1942) where a Rajput recruit's identity could comprise of the following details- “Caste= Rajput. Clan= Jadu. Sept= Bhatti. Sub-division=Khianh”. p.22.

<sup>111</sup> Monat, *Madras Classes*, p.62 and Ridgeway, *Pathans*, p.36.

authenticating the recruit's identity also colluded with such pretenders<sup>112</sup>. To provide for this not only were spurious counterparts of the martial class listed, an inventory of trick questions concerning the recruit's professed identity was provided to the British military officer<sup>113</sup>. This placed him in a knowledgeable position vastly superior to that of the Indian recruit being interrogated since the former was self-assured of a more comprehensive knowledge regarding the Indian society than the Indian himself. At the same time this also forced the members of a particular community to know and conform to what the British officer acknowledged as the chief markers of their identity<sup>114</sup>.

The recruitment preference for martial classes and the enumeration of various stereotypes to characterise them continued beyond the moment of recruitment. While the class-company regiments ensured the exclusivity of their identities, a range of aspects of regimental life such as titles, regimental uniform, celebration of religious festivals, insignias, consolidated into distinct collective identities<sup>115</sup>. In turn this also worked back into their community away from the regiment, by legitimising specific ritualistic aspects and behavioural traits over others<sup>116</sup>. It is argued that this constitutes ample evidence of

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<sup>112</sup> Bingley, *Sikhs*, p.136, Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, p.50 and Fitz-Bourne, *Hindustani Musalmans and Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab. Handbooks for the Indian Army* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1914), p.130.

<sup>113</sup> Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, see list of such questions at p.52. Similarly see Fitz-Bourne, *Hindustani Musalmans and Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>114</sup> Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, p.53, Fitz-Bourne, *Hindustani Musalmans and the Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab*, p.35 and Cole, *Rajputana Classes*, p.26.

<sup>115</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp.90-93 and Ellinwood, "The Indian Soldier, The Indian Army, and Change", pp. 179-180 in Ellinwood and Pradhan, eds., *India and World War I*.

<sup>116</sup> MacMunn believes that the Sikh faith was revived and maintained by the British officer of the Sikh regiments of the Indian Army. *The Armies of India*, p.135. The 'Gurkha' identity itself was a British construct which conflated several ethnically and linguistically distinct communities of the Nepal region. Caplan, *Warrior Gentleman*, p. 11.

the hegemonic ascription of highly detailed identities to Indians who participated in the colonial relationship. The process was hegemonic because the discourse was produced exclusively by the British military officers through regimental histories, memoirs and popular histories, whose readership was once again British officers serving with these martial classes<sup>117</sup>. These texts comprised a closely knit body of knowledge, which asserted its authority from an authorship which was intimately connected with the subject-matter, mutually reinforcing each other. For instance the handbooks of recruitment often reproduced literatim, passages on Aryan history, the caste system and stereotypes of martial races other than the ones they were specifically concerned with<sup>118</sup>. The information contained within these handbooks, although of a very descriptive nature, was strictly confidential and inaccessible to the general public<sup>119</sup>. Notwithstanding all this, these texts were significantly polyphonic, in that ethnological detail was substantiated by oral histories, indigenous genealogies, anecdotes and proverbs that were prevalent among these classes themselves<sup>120</sup>. If, on the one hand, this provided a certain amount of legitimacy of the discourse since the British believed they were objectively

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<sup>117</sup> Caplan, "Martial Gurkhas: The Persistence of a British Military Discourse on 'Race'", p.272 in Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. MacMunn was one such military officer who wrote for a target audience of young British military officers. MacMunn, *The Armies of India*, p. V.

<sup>118</sup> The passages on Aryan race, on aborigines and lower castes, caste system as the machinations of an astute priesthood, for example are repeated literatim in Bingley and Nicholls, *Brahmans*, pp. 1-2, Bingley, *Sikhs*, pp. 27-28, *Military Handbook of General Information on India*, pp.37-38 and p.122 where Risley's opinion on the Scythian ancestry of the Marathas had been reproduced.

<sup>119</sup> The cover of all the handbooks carry the legend- "...not to be communicate either directly or indirectly to the Press, or to any person not holding an official position in His Majesty's Service" or "Return to Intelligence Branch when no longer required".

<sup>120</sup> See for instance Bingley, *Jats, Gujars and Ahirs*, p.26 and Cole, *Rajputana Classes*, pp. 32-34.

recording what was prevalent in Indian society itself, it also meant that the stereotype depended for its continued validity on its faithful enactment by the sepoys themselves.

## CONCLUSION

The earlier caste based classifications of military qualities became hardened when the sensitivity to race acquired greater scientific authority within the colonial relationship. However, the martial classes discourse also depended on a hierarchy of attributes-physical, moral and behavioural-for authoritatively identifying the incumbents, which of course was again adjusted to racial difference. The system of colonial knowledge, along with authoritative techniques of classification were necessary pre-conditions for the identification, authentication and finally recruitment of the members of a particular community into the army. But they were also the source of the crisis of the stereotype. The anxiety over impersonation by the natives resulted in the production of a wide variety of inconsistent information, for the verification of the identity of the recruit. As a result, the stereotype which was a necessarily reductive, fixated form of representation easily circulated within the discursive field, was increasingly burdened by detail. This made the knowing authority more uncertain and the stereotype more precarious.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **MARTIAL REJUVENATION AND NATIONAL DEFENCE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the present chapter we will examine how Indians engaged with the discourse of martial classes in the context of the nationalist efforts at political revival and reclaiming cultural authority under colonial rule. The objective of the following analysis is to examine the specific period of colonial history when the fighting capabilities of Indians became a matter of social policy, national security and nation-building. The argument will be presented in two parts, where first, the different Indian contestations of the colonial arrangement of masculinity-the hyper-masculinity of the martial classes and the effeminacy of the rest- will be discussed. In the next section the main arguments seeking to challenge the division of Indians into martial classes and non-martial classes, in the context of the debates and political demands for Indianisation of the army and national defence, will be studied. The analysis of a discourse necessarily has to incorporate the question of resistance to the discourse, which, either by deploying alternative discursive formulations or by appropriating the discourse itself and re-deploying it after altering the internal arrangement of meaning, seeks to alter the structure of the relationship and the distribution of power which sustains it. This chapter will attempt to establish the main contention that the enumeration of empowering self-definitions and assertion of cultural authority, through the reclaiming of a collective

history, culture and the experience of colonial rule, drew significantly of the elements of the martial classes discourse.

## RESCUING MASCULINITY

The structure of colonial authority in India had throughout implicated the masculinity of the coloniser and the colonised in a paranoiac relationship where the constant anxiety of its loss demanded its frequent assertion. British imperial culture was deeply rooted in a Western cosmology which shaped this anxiety of impotency as a fear of the loss of activism and the ability to be violent<sup>1</sup>. The 'colonial consciousness' of the nineteenth-century, with its composite articulation of racial meanings to colonial rule, arranged the polarities of 'masculinity' and 'effeminacy' to signify the colonial relationship<sup>2</sup>. However, the relationship between the two was not an easy reflection of a discrete British notion of masculinity and, its antagonist, effeminacy<sup>3</sup>. There was certainly a particular version of masculinity or manliness that was being produced in the British public schools of the nineteenth-century, where most of the British civil and military officials received their training for imperial administration and adventure<sup>4</sup>. However, the colonial hierarchy of masculinity with senior British officials of the administrative and military establishments and other non-official elite at the top and the politically self-conscious, western educated Indian intellectuals at the bottom, was tied to

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<sup>1</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997), p.8.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, see pp. 9-10 for a description of the historical evolution of the public-school manliness in Britain.

the entire ensemble of strategies and practices of colonial rule<sup>5</sup>. The Indian efforts at socio-religious revival, political mobilisation and legislative action during the national movement was deeply conscious of this hierarchy and the concern over reclaiming masculinity was imbricated in all these areas.

A vast majority of the Hindu nationalist leaders and revivalists of this period are observed to have shared a remarkable consensus regarding the 'degeneration' of Indian society. This degeneracy of the Hindus was represented using familiar expressions such as 'mental poverty', 'immobility', 'static repetition', 'comparative feebleness of creative intuition', to convey the sense of loss of cultural vigour and potency<sup>6</sup>. This degeneration was at the same time categorically interpreted as physical degeneration by popular Hindu leaders like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo who lamented that Hindus had become weak and passive<sup>7</sup>. The terrorist associations in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra, despite professing different justificatory idioms of violent activism, concurred on the argument that colonial rule had rendered the Indians 'effeminate', 'cowardly', 'passive', 'lifeless', and 'paralysed with a deep sense of inferiority, fear and powerlessness'<sup>8</sup>. Nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Tilak also made Indian degeneration, in terms of the lack of physical and moral courage, the central concern of

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<sup>5</sup>        *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>6</sup>        From a quote of Sri Aurobindo in Bikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989), p.39.

<sup>7</sup>        John McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, New Jersey: PUP, 1977), p.338.

<sup>8</sup>        Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, p.146.

their agenda of national social regeneration<sup>9</sup>. In Bengal, intellectuals and political leaders made strategic use of their 'effeminate' stereotypical image by equating the negative impact of colonial rule with the symbol of emasculation<sup>10</sup>. The self-perception of effeminacy among Bengalis was also part of a larger socio-cultural critique of the middle-class. They adopted similar lines of criticism as the British to explain Bengali degeneration-decline of physical pursuits under the material security of the British rule, excessive emphasis on education leading to 'feeble development of muscles', a rice diet, early parenthood, and so on<sup>11</sup>. This time around the re-deployment of the stereotype was intended to act as an incitement for reclaiming masculinity<sup>12</sup>.

This common acceptance of the frame of reference of the degeneration/effeminacy trope implied that the strategies to redress the same were elaborated along mobilised, militarist notions of activism. Hindu nationalist leaders and revivalists like Swami Dayananda Saraswati were deeply influenced by Orientalist historiography and tried to remain abreast with their research on Vedic/Hindu civilisation and culture<sup>13</sup>. They were also influenced by the premise of Western historiography, namely, that a civilisation was pure and robust in its early phase and gradually declined over time and that the remotest recorded past was the source of cultural knowledge in its

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.78 and McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, p.339.

<sup>10</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 16-17. The negative connotation of the term 'babu' can be traced to early nineteenth-century Bengali social satirists who used the term to typify the middle class in Bengali society.

<sup>13</sup> Christofe Jaffreot, "The Idea of the Hindu Race in the Writings of Hindu Nationalist Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: A Concept Between Two Cultures", p.330 in Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: OUP, 1997).

true manifestation<sup>14</sup>. The acceptance of the Aryan race and culture as the starting point of Hindu civilisational achievement produced an inexorable logic which explained the loss of masculinity and cultural regression as a departure from these standards<sup>15</sup>. The narrative of Aryan origin was not deployed simply in racial terms even though it had taken on such connotations among its European theoreticians of this period<sup>16</sup>. Instead race was interpreted in cultural terms where the 'bond of blood' conveyed the idea of a 'race spirit' that was shaped by the "desires and aspirations of the people"<sup>17</sup>. In regions like the Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra, the movement for Hindu revitalisation explicitly favoured a project of 'martial regeneration' for the revival of such a spirit<sup>18</sup>. The alleged deficiency of courage within the Hindus and the concomitant necessity for restoration of 'physical vitality' of the Hindu became the central objective of organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the secret societies it inspired<sup>19</sup>. Many Hindu leaders of the day such as Tilak and Swami Vivekananda incorporated the advocacy of sports and gymnastics within their political and religious rhetoric<sup>20</sup>. Various religious and cultural festive occasions were converted into popular drives for martial regeneration of

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<sup>14</sup> Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>15</sup> Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p.25.

<sup>16</sup> Jaffrelot, "The Idea of the Hindu Race in the Writings of Hindu Nationalist Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: A Concept Between Two Cultures", p.332 and p.343.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, see discussion of Sarvarkar's thought at pp. 334-335 and *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, p.338. Also see Mihir Bose, *The Lost Hero* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), Ch.I for the discussion on 'Muscular Hinduism' and of its proponents Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

<sup>19</sup> McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, p.337.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

the Hindus<sup>21</sup>. The celebration of such populist events adopted a distinct militarist idiom by combining the main rituals with processions by disciplined bands of youth and enactment of sports events<sup>22</sup>. This was accompanied by numerous attempts to reinterpret the main textual sources of 'Hindu' culture, such as the two main epics, the Puranas and the Gita, in activist and collective terms<sup>23</sup>. The philosophical content of these texts, and particularly those having to do with war and the duty of the individual to fight for *dharma*, were appropriated and deployed to counter the stereotype of the non-violent and passive Hindu<sup>24</sup>. The terrorist groups and secret societies which cropped up in Bengal and Maharashtra and subsequently in the Punjab and the United Provinces, proceeded in remarkably parallel lines in adopting a Hindu activist philosophy based on the Gita, along with a physical/martial culture centred around the akharas and gymnasia<sup>25</sup>.

The Gandhian project of reclaiming the self-respect of the Indians and his idiom of activism was similarly deeply conscious of the sense of racial inferiority that was produced by colonial rule. He regularly wrote on matters of public hygiene, social, civic and political morality, and more significantly, with great detail on public behaviour and

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<sup>21</sup> Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p.150. The most important movement for martial regeneration of this period is believed to have taken place in Maharashtra. Here during the 1890s Tilak initiated the custom of celebrating Ganesh festivals and Sivaji celebrations as a means of mobilising the public and encouraged the setting up of several athletic clubs for physical training of the youth. See McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, pp. 339-340.

<sup>23</sup> Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 140-142. See similar discussion of the terrorist movement in Bose, *The lost Hero*, p.42.

composure, thereby binding political ideology with a specific set of behavioural traits<sup>26</sup>. Gandhi is believed to have been greatly attracted to the discipline and organisation that resulted from military training<sup>27</sup>. His vocabulary for political activism in much of his writing and public speeches incorporated similar meanings of mobilisation and discipline such as 'power', 'energy', 'will power', 'vigour', 'struggle', 'karmayoga' and so on<sup>28</sup>. The concept of 'Shakti' or power derived from moral, spiritual and physical energy, which he elaborated for activist politics, relied on a metaphoric parity between sexuality and death or in other words loss of energy<sup>29</sup>. Continuing within the prevalent narrative of several nineteenth-century Indian leaders that India had been laid open and defenceless to foreign invasions by the self-indulgent and sensuous life-style of the Indians, Gandhi's vision of social transformation for India was centred around the person of the celibate individual possessing, evidently for the same reason, enormous physical, psychic and spiritual energy<sup>30</sup>. It is certainly true that Gandhian thought and political activism was much more nuanced and interpretative than its analysis here would allow. Nevertheless, the point that is being made here is regarding the embeddedness of his program for socio-cultural reform and politicisation in a specific colonial discourse on corporeal attributes and masculinity of Indians. This meant that Gandhi had to respond to a particular meaning of Indian regeneration in a manner that had also been readied within

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<sup>26</sup> Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, p.84.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Cohen, *The Indian Army* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), p.103.

<sup>28</sup> Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, p.172.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 181-184. The equivalence between sexuality and death has been observed to be a standard refrain in Gandhi's writings. He also believed that certain kinds of food, rich, heavy and spicy stimulated sensuousness.

the discourse, resulting in a further legitimisation of particular mode of collective action and individual self-empowerment<sup>31</sup>.

The self-perception of effeminacy had entered a politicised public space in Bengal as early as the mid-nineteenth-century. The recruitment practice of the Bengal Army, among other colonial ruling practices, produced a politics of cultural assertion and search for empowering self-definitions<sup>32</sup>. The physical capabilities of the Bengalis became a subject of debate, criticism and strategies for incitement in numerous efforts of vernacular historiography, and at literary and dramaturgical fora<sup>33</sup>. Bengali self-assertion of masculinity and a martial tradition relied explicitly on the self-identification with a pan-Indian Aryan heritage and a heroic Rajput self-image<sup>34</sup>. The colonial definition of masculinity, epitomised through the stereotype of the martial classes, was countered by the enunciation of a wider meaning of masculinity comprising of a range of Aryan socio-cultural behaviour. The narrow definition of the concept of femininity which was integral to the stereotype of Bengali effeminacy was also recast within a specific image of an

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<sup>31</sup> Also see Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, pp. 52-55 and *passim* for a discussion on Gandhi's counterpoise of androgyny to challenge the antonymic structure of the masculinity-effeminacy stereotypical depiction of Indians.

<sup>32</sup> See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, which specifically deals with the political processes centred around the construction of the "effeminate babu" stereotype of the Bengalis, at various moments of late-nineteenth century colonial Bengal. The author focuses on colonial politics such as the Ilbert Bill controversy and the native volunteer movement where racial and gender ideologies configured a hierarchical masculinity to depict the colonial relationship.

<sup>33</sup> Indira-Chowdhuri Sengupta, "The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Colonial Bengal", pp. 288-290 in Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia*.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.290. The author finds that Tod's famous treatise on Rajputs was in wide circulation in Bengal and several attempts were made at its translation. Also see discussion of Bengali attempts to trace an Aryan genealogy for themselves in Dilip Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), pp. 131-132.

Aryan womanhood with capacity for heroic-sacrifice and giving birth to heroes<sup>35</sup>. The military history of Bengal was rewritten in a manner where the Bengali could lay claim to 'virility' and 'manhood', the same as other martial classes<sup>36</sup>.

The self-perception of emasculation figured prominently in the political debates surrounding issues of native volunteering, freedom to bear arms and restricted recruitment to the Indian army, during the sessions of the Indian National Congress and the Legislative Assembly sessions. The demand for native volunteering by the urban and educated classes of Bengal was in fact put forward as a symbolic act of redeeming their manliness<sup>37</sup>. The Government's response to this demand, which was followed by several similar petitions from other parts of India, was one of scepticism since it was believed that the demand originated from an effete class of Indians who had become nervous about the possible imbroglio with Russia<sup>38</sup>. The Indian National Congress conjoined the demand for native volunteering with that of the amendment of the Arms Act, and passed resolutions to this effect in every one of its sessions. The colonial policy of internal disarmament and restricted recruitment was depicted as having degraded Indianness,

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 292-293. See discussion of the comparison between the 'feminine' traits of the Englishwoman and Bengali men during the Ilbert Bill controversy. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p.35.

<sup>36</sup> Sengupta, "The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Colonial Bengal".

<sup>37</sup> Sinha, *Colonial Movement*, see Ch. II on the native volunteer movement. Volunteering in India till then had been the exclusive privilege of the Anglo-Indian and Eurasian community and it had its origins in the period following the mutiny of 1857.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.80. The author records that the colonial officials were at pains to distinguish between the "bonafide eagerness of warlike races...to share in the burdens of the country and risks of defensive war" and the "utter sham" of the others who were using the demand to volunteer "to strip away any distinction which belongs to their fellow subject", p.87.

systematically crushed out their martial spirit and converted “a race of soldiers and heroes into a timid flock of quill-driving sheep”<sup>39</sup>. The loss of knowledge of the use of arms was made symbolic of both the destruction of the ‘national spirit’ and Indian masculinity. The portrayal of the curb on the right to bear arms as the emasculation of Indians and the ‘amputation’ of the nation was quite common during the Legislative Assembly debates as well<sup>40</sup>. The demand for the restoration of the “unalienable right to carry arms” as an expression of “valiant manhood” was also made by prominent liberal leaders like Sarojini Naidu, who described her herself as representing the motherhood of emasculated Indians<sup>41</sup>. The prevalent criticism in the discourse of martial classes of the educated classes who were the non-martial Other of the martial Indian stereotype, was appropriated and the “emasculating system of English education” was instead accused for having produced “meek and docile” Indians for the perpetuation of the British domination<sup>42</sup>. Therefore the demand for physical training and familiarising military drill and arms for the Indian youth was made not only to “restore the strength and virility of the Indian students”, but more importantly to meet broader nationalist objective of

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<sup>39</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Second Session of Indian National Congress, 1886*, p.93.

<sup>40</sup> See for example *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Session of Indian National Congress, 1887*, “A nation without trained military men in its midst is not a perfect nation. It is an imperfect, one-armed, one-legged thing, unfit to do its duty in this rough world”, p.116 and *Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Session of Indian National Congress, 1888*, p.57. A speaker referred to the Arms Act as a move to “emasculate the whole nation” and that “...once The Indian people become emasculated it will be a very long time before you can get them to recover their manliness and vigour”. Also see *Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-First Session of Indian National Congress, 1916*, “..history does not record another example of the complete emasculation of an active nation in the way in which the Arms Act emasculated and is emasculating the descendants of the valiant heroes and soldiers of Hindustan. It has crushed out and is crushing out our martial spirit. It has very nearly done its fatal work...”, p.51.

<sup>41</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-First Session of Indian National Congress, 1916*, p.53.

<sup>42</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.I, 1929*, p.293 and p.304.

“manly citizenship”<sup>43</sup>. The upbringing that Indian boys received in their homes and their nurture by Indian women was also put under interrogation, necessitating their affirmation that “Indian women are second to nobody in their desire and readiness to make sacrifices (by allowing their sons to enlist) in the service of the country”<sup>44</sup>. The demand for native volunteering was pushed to the background with the setting up of a Volunteer Corps by the Indian National Congress during the civil-disobedience movement. Although it was to be uniquely non-violent following the specifications by Gandhi, the pledge taken by each recruit stressed that civil-disobedience was the only strategy “...for preventing arbitrary, tyrannical and emasculating use of authority...”. The recruits were also trained in explicitly militarised drills and organisation exemplifying a particular activist idiom of ‘martial non-violence’<sup>45</sup>.

The discourse on martialness of Indians was implicated in a larger colonial discourse on masculinity of the colonised Indian. This discourse on recruiting practices did insinuate itself significantly into the politics of resistance to colonial domination, requiring response to the stereotypes of effeminacy and physical degeneration. At the same time the strategies to counter it-militarisation, muscular masculinity and mobilised non-violent activism, continued to be embedded in the logic of the discourse. By making the Legislative Assembly responsible for the martial rejuvenation among Indians the

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 821-822.

<sup>44</sup> See speech of Smt. Radha Bai Subbarayan, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. V, 1938, p.1504.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Session of Indian National Congress, 1921*, see Appendix VI, p.114 and *Report of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Second Session of Indian National Congress, 1939*, pp.7-9.

nationalist leaders introduced the traits of physical courage and military aptitude into the realm of social policy and social engineering. This marked a break from the past where only the regiment was the site of the martial identity and the British officer/ethnologist was its authenticator.

## **CHALLENGES AND REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE DISCOURSE OF MARTIAL CLASSES**

The subject of the Indian army and its recruitment became part of the nationalist agenda around the same time that the martial classes are said to predominate completely in the ranks of the army. But a clear challenge to the discourse itself had to await the end of the First World War when Indianisation of the officer corps became probable. The Legislative Assembly and different committees appointed to look into the organisation of the Indian army and its Indianisation became the site for contention and coming to terms with the logic of the martial classes, for the nationalist leaders. Although they came very close to undermining the main arguments of the discourse, the notion that individuals are inherently martial was never entirely discarded. Instead, the earlier category of 'martial spirit'-physical courage, military aptitude, willingness to enlist and loyalty-was made coextensive with nationalism by the politicisation of the martial identity at different fora.

The recruitment of martial classes in the wake of the Russian war scare, the rebuff of the demand for native volunteering and the creation of an all-India nationalist platform for elite public opinion, all coincided in 1885<sup>46</sup>. While the rejection of the

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<sup>46</sup> See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 69-70.

demand of native volunteering by the colonial government was interpreted as another act of emasculation in Bengal, the very first session of the Indian National Congress also raised the issue and urged the government to "...moderately encourage rather than readily damp the martial spirit of our martial races..." and allow for volunteering<sup>47</sup>. The Congress similarly raised the demand for Indianisation of the commissioned ranks and allow "sons of noblemen and gentlemen of all classes" to occupy them<sup>48</sup>. It is evident from the debates on the resolutions concerning the army and native volunteering that the Congress from the onset had made a distinction between the "fighting races" and the rest of the emasculated population of the country. It also simultaneously made the State responsible for the revival of the "smothered martial spirit" among the latter<sup>49</sup>. In a continuous series of resolutions on the army till the first two decades of the twentieth-century, the Congress made separate demands for the inclusion of the martial classes into the higher ranks of the army and the repealing of the Arms Act to allow for the capacity for national defence. The category of the martial classes was never challenged and instead a line of argument was developed where the recruitment policy of the Indian army itself was criticised for allowing only certain martial classes to dominate, to the

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p.93 and *report of the Proceedings of the First Session of Indian National Congress, 1885*, p.104.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Session of Indian National Congress, 1887*. See Resolution #V, p.115. In the subsequent debate on the resolution an amendment was added to include even the uneducated classes and lower castes within the demand. All the same the demand for volunteering and Indianisation of the ranks did include implicit elitism as the demands were never seriously extended to the lower classes of the society. Also see Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p.70 for a similar argument about native volunteering in Bengal.

<sup>49</sup> See *Report of the Proceeding of the Fourth Session of Indian National Congress, 1888*, p.53 and also *Report of the Proceedings of the Seventh Session of Indian National Congress, 1891*, pp. 46-47. In this session Tilak proposed the organisation of a militia of the more "warlike races" and an increased people's participation and responsibility in national defence.

detriment of the martial spirit of other similar classes<sup>50</sup>. They were more concerned with disputing the argument made by Lord Roberts and the official line of the government that Indians did not “posses the qualities that go to make leaders of men”<sup>51</sup>. It was very rare that any reference was made demanding open recruitment for the lower ranks of the army as well<sup>52</sup>. This period of Congress nationalist history extending up to the First World War, demonstrates this thematic uniformity with regard to the recruitment of martial classes. Interestingly, the delegates who usually proposed resolutions on matters of the army and volunteering were from either the Madras or the Bombay Presidencies. The Congress itself recognised a variety of social identities from race, religion, and caste categories, while listing its delegates<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> See for instance *Report of the Proceedings of the Eleventh Session of Indian National Congress, 1895*, p.41; *Report of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Session of Indian National Congress, 1900*, p.45 and p.48; *Report of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Session of Indian National Congress, 1902*, p.147; *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Session of Indian National Congress, 1906*, p.57- “The history of the British army in India is a history of the decay of the martial spirit of the several military races of India. The history of the British army in India is a history of the emasculation of the people of India”.

<sup>51</sup> Lord Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India, vol.II* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897), p.444. And see Gautam Sharma, *Nationalisation of the Indian Army, 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1996)- “..the native officers are only capable of either discipline or gallantry on a sustained scale when led by European officers”. Quoted from Foreign Department Proceedings, 1900, p.14.

<sup>52</sup> The first protest regarding the exclusion of “races and castes” from Madras, Bombay and Bengal, in the context of the remarks made by Lord Roberts in his in his autobiography, was made only in 1912. In the context of a proposal to broaden the recruitment base of the army the speaker also argued that “..long military training gives a very good character as well as good citizenship”. *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Session of Indian National Congress, 1912*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>53</sup> See for example the ‘List of Delegates’ in *Report of the Proceedings of the Eleventh Session of Indian National Congress, 1895*. The delegates are listed as ‘Brahman’, ‘Maratha’, ‘Kshatriya’, ‘Hindu’, ‘Mohammedan’, ‘Sonar’, ‘Rajput’ etc. Such entries are likely to have been open-ended and dependent on how a delegate represented himself. These categories underwent several qualifications during the subsequent years. The listing of delegates stopped after the Congress sessions attracted mass participation with the arrival of Gandhi

The creation of the Imperial Cadet Corps in 1901 by Lord Curzon was the first perfunctory measure of Indianisation of the officers of the Indian army<sup>54</sup>. The composition of this corps was restricted to Indians belonging to the princely or noble families. It was merely intended to satisfy the demand of the Indian aristocracy for prestigious military service in the Indian army, although they would potentially be given staff duties and not regimental appointments<sup>55</sup>. The first real impetus for challenging the colonial depiction of lack of leadership qualities came with the First World War. The Congress associated the participation of the Indian soldiers at various overseas theatres of war, with the attainment of a "political manhood" for India, within the Empire<sup>56</sup>. The earlier demands of for the right bear arms, to organise a militia for national defence and Indianisation were now yoked to the 'self-respect' and the self-realisation of the 'nation'<sup>57</sup>. For some British officers the war-time experience only confirmed the previous wisdom that "The Indian is simply not fit to lead his men against the Europeans; he will lead a charge or cover a retirement, but if he has to think he fails"<sup>58</sup>. Nevertheless, in the face of the increased political pressure from the Home Rule movement which now comprised the alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League, an ambiguous

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<sup>54</sup> See Chandar Sundaram, "'Martial' Indian Aristocrats and the Military System of the Raj: The Imperial Cadet Corps, 1900-1914", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, #25(3), Sept. 1997, pp. 415-439 for the details on the training and the experiences of the cadets.

<sup>55</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1994), p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Session of Indian National Congress, 1914*, pp. 60-62. The demand for native volunteering was acquired a new shape and the Congress began demanding the political right of all classes to "enlist themselves as citizen soldiers of the empire", p.63.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>58</sup> Opinion of General Wilcocks who was in charge of the Indian units deployed in the European theatre, quoted in Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.161.

declaration of Indianisation of all branches of administration was made in 1917<sup>59</sup>. In the same year ten vacancies for “..selected representatives of families of fighting classes which have rendered valuable services to the State during the war” were created at Sandhurst to make Indians eligible for the King’s Commission in the army<sup>60</sup>. As for the other nationalist demand for participation in some institutional form of national defence, the recruitment experience of the war had demonstrated for the British the difficulty involved in the task of creating or reviving military qualities among varied races<sup>61</sup>. All the same, a Territorial Force and an University Training Corps were created in 1920 as a preparatory measure for a future national army by imparting “military and patriotic ideals to the non-martial classes”<sup>62</sup>. The Territorial Force battalions were linked to a regular infantry regiment for supply of drafts during war-time although it was never assured that they would be deployed for combat duties. Similarly the University Training Corps in theory prepared Indian candidates for commissions and general military service in the regular army, but it was never certain that this would actually take place<sup>63</sup>.

The newly installed Legislative Assembly passed an unprecedented fifteen resolutions in 1921 on matters of national control and Indianisation of the army<sup>64</sup>. For the first-time the role of the Indian army was defined as primarily the defence of India

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<sup>59</sup>     ibid., p.162.

<sup>60</sup>     Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.74.

<sup>61</sup>     *Report of the Army in India Committee, 1919-1920*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>62</sup>     See Preambles of the Territorial Force and the University Training Corps quoted in *Final Report of the Army Sub-committee of the Central Retrenchment Advisory Committee, 1932* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1932), p.34.

<sup>63</sup>     Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.165.

<sup>64</sup>     *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.I, 1921* see pp. 182-198.

and not of the British Empire as stated by the Esher Committee in 1920<sup>65</sup>. It was comprehensively proposed for the first time that all the arms of the army, air force and navy allow enlistment from all eligible Indians and specified the educated classes as well<sup>66</sup>. The government however added an amendment to the resolution calling for an increase in the number of commissions available for Indians, which specified that a majority of these commissions were to be reserved for “communities which furnish recruits to the army” and in proportion to that contribution<sup>67</sup>. One of the arguments behind this amendment was that the martial classes could be officered only by another of their own and that “the great qualities of courage, perseverance and endurance which are the products of social heredity, of moral traditions; they are not to be learned in any school or from books”<sup>68</sup>.

The debate on this amendment revealed a rift between the representatives from the martial classes and the rest of the Indian representatives. This rift remained a strong undercurrent during all debates on Indianisation and defence matters in the Assembly. The Sandhurst Commission constituted in 1925 to look into the question of increasing the number of Indian candidates for commissioned ranks, also reported doubts expressed in the course of its enquiries on “...whether a strong and genuine military spirit, such as is essential to the training and command of troops, can be created...(or) revived in the

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<sup>65</sup> V. Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974), p.183.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.80.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

people of India as a whole"<sup>69</sup>. The representatives of martial classes themselves continued to be long opposed to the idea that any Indian from a non-martial class command troops drawn from the martial classes<sup>70</sup>. The other representatives in the Assembly legitimised this distinctiveness of the martial classes by their claim that Indians had indeed lost their military spirit and had become incapable of defending their country<sup>71</sup>. They also at the same time laid the blame fully on the British recruitment and internal disarmament policy for this loss and for "sapping the manhood of India"<sup>72</sup>.

The Simon Commission, appointed in 1930 to examine the feasibility of the demand for self-government in India, argued in its report that a national army officered by Indians from distinct races was difficult in the light of the recruiting experience outside the usual recruiting grounds of the army during the First World War<sup>73</sup>. The legitimisation of the division of Indians into races of different military capabilities, and its usage as proof of India not being a nation, provoked the first systematic challenge to the logic of martial races. Nirad Chaudhuri in 1930 made a historical survey of the recruitment of the Indian army and concluded that the theory of martial classes was unknown before 1857 and that it was brought in by the post-mutiny army reorganisation

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<sup>69</sup> *Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee, 1926* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1927), p.13.

<sup>70</sup> See for instance *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.IV, 1929*, p.994 and *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.II, 1937*, p.1373.

<sup>71</sup> See for example *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.IV, 1928*, pp. 3478-3479; *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.I, 1929*, p.292 and p.293 and *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.II, 1933*, pp. 1707-1709.

<sup>72</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.IV, 1928*, p.3485; *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.I, 1929*, p.293 and *vol.IV, 1929*, p.995 and p.1709.

<sup>73</sup> *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, vol.I* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publications Branch, 1930), pp. 94-97.

to ensure the security of British rule by preventing the preponderance of any single class of the army<sup>74</sup>. He observed that the new measures adopted by the army divided Indians in class-company units to maintain a balance between different regions and classes and foster mutual prejudices and parochial identities between the units<sup>75</sup>. He felt that while there were differences in the military capabilities between different people depending upon various factors such as the original character, the socio-historical context, the level of military training available, the quality of life and the habits of living, British recruitment practice had never been free from considerations of political safety to make a fair assessment of the Indian military potentialities<sup>76</sup>. He believed that the “natural tendency” of exhibiting a “healthy scepticism” regarding the valour of foreigners had been overlaid by a belief in Indian incompetence, political and racial prejudices and considerations of political safety<sup>77</sup>. The author made a further two-fold distinction of the military energy of a people into the instincts of pugnacity and defence. While the former instinct combined “...the spirit of adventure, the love of physical prowess, sport and fighting for fighting’s sake to form the psychological basis of the ideal professional soldier”, the instinct of defence was its more sublimated counterpart and comprised of the “...idea of defending one’s life and property, the idea of defending personal and national freedom, personal and national individuality, national culture, national religion

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<sup>74</sup> *Indian Military College Committee, 1931* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1931). See summary of Nirad Chaudhuri’s arguments in the appended minute by Sivaswamy Aiyer and Raja Ganapat Rao Raghunath Rao Rajavade, pp.73-74.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>76</sup> Nirad Chaudhuri, “The Martial Races of India”, Part III, *Modern Review*, #XLIX (1-6), Jan-June 1931 and Part IV, p. 220-221.

<sup>77</sup> Chaudhuri, “The Martial Races of India”, Part III, pp. 72-73.

and national honour”<sup>78</sup>. While the two were certainly complementary the advance of civilisation diminished the instinct of pugnacity in people while the non-aggressive military outlook remained and could be mobilised whenever the any of the core values were threatened<sup>79</sup>. The author also maintained the standard refrain that India had in fact lost its military spirit during the years when the military was ensconced “..amidst a thoroughly disarmed and emasculated population”<sup>80</sup>.

The report of the Indian Military College committee in 1931 also carried appended minutes by its Indian members challenging the logic of the martial classes. They emphasised its artificiality, the political interests that guided such a recruitment policy and the significance of training in the development of military qualities<sup>81</sup>. Nevertheless, they all concurred on the fact that areas under a recruitment ban had indeed lost their military traditions and ardour, and therefore protested that British policy and recruitment practice was a “...serious slur on the manhood of a large class of India’s population..” and had caused their emasculation<sup>82</sup>. The above arguments represent the typical quandary that Indian political leaders faced in their efforts to force a crude homology between colonialism and emasculation and at the same time demand for open recruitment and Indianisation of the army<sup>83</sup>. They could argue the two consistently only

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<sup>78</sup>     ibid., p.77.

<sup>79</sup>     ibid., p.79.

<sup>80</sup>     Chaudhuri, “The Martial Races of India”, Part IV, p.225.

<sup>81</sup>     *Indian Military College Committee*, see for instance minute by B.S. Moonje, p.50 and the minute by Sivaswamy Aiyer and Raja Ganapat Rao Raghunath Rao Rajavade, p.73.

<sup>82</sup>     ibid., pp. 35-36 and p.50.

<sup>83</sup>     See for instance *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. I, 1936, p.131 and p.140, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol.V, 1938, pp. 1518-1519 and p.1530.

by making nationalism a substitute for the martial spirit with the result that nationalism itself in this context took on militarist implications.

Meanwhile, the Indian officers in the army themselves maintained that the military was best organised into class-companies and that the martial classes made better soldiers and therefore were preferable to those who were not. These classes had by now acquired long traditions of military service, most times within the same family, and they were more inclined to enlist in large numbers than compared to any other class<sup>84</sup>. Nor did the army appear greatly motivated by the idea of India as a single nation for a variety of administrative and organisational reasons and because of its own operational role inside the country. The geographical alignment of the army recruiting grounds differed considerably from the geographical idea of nationalist India as a unitary entity and the Simon Commission in 1930 had indeed perceived this sentiment intuitively<sup>85</sup>. All the same the demand for Indianisation had by now also enfolded aspects of civilian control and open recruitment for the rank and file of the Indian army<sup>86</sup>. But this process was overtaken by the outbreak of the Second World War once again bringing home the defects of the system of recruitment. The old principles of recruitment had to be dropped once again before the Indian army could be converted into a modern fighting force to perform effectively in a changed technological environment of modern warfare<sup>87</sup>. The traditional recruitment areas were themselves not very forthcoming in terms of

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<sup>84</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p.133.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 124-126 and *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, vol.I*, p.98.

<sup>86</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.II, 1937*, p.1508.

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, pp. 139-141.

enlistment as a result of a number of political and socio-economic changes that had taken place in the meantime<sup>88</sup>. Indian political leaders had also by now come to believe that the nature of war itself had changed, conveniently invalidating the knotty issue of martial classes. They held that modern warfare marked a significant change from its previous versions since it was now waged by entire nations and because its conduct required considerable mental faculties<sup>89</sup>. It was argued that waging national wars required the utilisation of the entire manpower resource and production potentialities within the country more than the physical prowess of the martial classes<sup>90</sup>. An official re-examination of the system of recruiting confirmed this argument by observing that the pre-war notions regarding the usefulness of non-martial groups and the degree to which Indians of different yet cognate castes could be mixed<sup>91</sup>. The phenomenon of the Indian National Army during the war appeared to recapitulate the complex of positions that had developed around the question of a national military effort. The official interpretation of the propaganda activities directed at the Indian army linked the latter's vulnerability to such 'subversive activities' to the change in the class composition of the commissioned officers during Indianisation, bringing in classes who were not traditionally linked to the

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<sup>88</sup> See discussion of recruitment methods of this period in Anirudh Deshpande, "Hopes and Disillusionment: Recruitment, Demobilisation and the Emergence of Discontent in the Indian Armed Forces After the Second World War", *IESHR*, #33(2), 1996, pp.175-207.

<sup>89</sup> See the minute of Sivaswamy Aiyer and Raja Ganapat Rao Raghunath Rao Rajavade in the report of the *Indian Military College Committee*, p.78. And also *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol.I, 1938, p.382 and vol. VI, p.2324.

<sup>90</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol.I, 1938, pp. 378-0379.

<sup>91</sup> Cohen, *The Indian Army*, pp.141-142.

institution of the army<sup>92</sup>. The Indian National Army operated by acquiring for itself a national martial history around a 'national' group of martial personalities and a militarist notion of citizenship<sup>93</sup>. For the Indian legislators who had for some time been complaining of the mercenary nature of the Indian army, the Indian National Army vindicated their claims that a more broad-based 'patriotic' army was not only feasible but also eminently desirable<sup>94</sup>. The capitulation of these soldiers and the public opinion build-up in their support, especially during the highly politicised Red Fort courts-martial of three of its leaders, was accompanied by attempts to pass numerous resolutions calling for the release of these detenus in the Assembly<sup>95</sup>. But on the question of their reinstatement there was a great deal of ambivalence in the army and among the Indian political leaders themselves since it dragged in the issue of the efficiency and the professionalism of the army. In spite of the ideational similarity of the Indian National Army and nationalist discourse, and the background of martial rejuvenation that of some of its leaders shared with the Indian nationalists, the morale, loyalty and cohesion of the army was a much more significant imperative and could not be taken for granted<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> T.R.Sareen, *Select Documents on the Indian National Army* (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1988) See p.97, Letter from the General HQ to the G.O.C. Army regarding the subversive activities directed against the Indian Army, March, 1943.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, see p.42, Proceedings of the Tokyo Conference, 1942; Propaganda Scheme of the Indian Independence League, Oct. 1942 paras 2 and 3, pp. 81-93; Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Azad Hind Fauj, Oct. 1943, p.186.

<sup>94</sup> See Martin Wainwright, *Inheritance of Empire* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1994), p.35, *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol. IX, 1936*, p.3268 and *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol. VI, 1938*, p.2337.

<sup>95</sup> See for instance *Legislative Assembly Debates, vol. I, 1946*, p.279, and p.428.

<sup>96</sup> See for example the discussion on Bose and militarism in Cohen, *The Indian Army*, pp.100-101 and Bose, *The Lost Hero*, a biographical work which discusses Bose against the background of 'Muscular Hinduism'.

## CONCLUSION

As early as in 1931 Nehru had argued for the creation of a “truly national army with a national purpose and national outlook”<sup>97</sup>. He had in mind a complete revamping of the composition of the army and open recruitment from the “workers and peasants”, who would make efficient soldiers by being motivated by the ‘national principle’<sup>98</sup>. But before India could think of a complete reorganisation of the armed forces the problem of partitioning it between two states came to the fore. At the end of the war the Indian army comprised of a large number of newly recruited groups who had been organised in mixed units without any consideration for class<sup>99</sup>. The post war reorganisation and Indianisation of the armed forces had proceeded without deferring to the possibility of its break-up and as such no consideration was given to forming purely Muslim units<sup>100</sup>. So the armed forces were allocated between the two states according to the territorial division of recruitment and the personnel from mixed units were allowed to volunteer on a communal basis<sup>101</sup>. For the period of the division and reconstitution of the forces, the basic organisation, formations, units and class composition of the units were maintained

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<sup>97</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “The Defence of India”, *Young India*, vol. XIII, Oct.1, 1931.p.284.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p.285. The term national principle is borrowed from Chaudhuri, “The Martial Races of India”, p.77.

<sup>99</sup> Wainwright, *Inheritance of Empire*, p.72 and K.C. Praval, *Indian Army after Independence* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1987), p.7.

<sup>100</sup> See Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, eds., *The Transfer of Power, vol.XI, The Mountbatten Viceroyalty Announcement and Reception of the 3 June Plan* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1982) #215, Note by Indian Cabinet Secretariat, Apr. 1947, paras 2 and 3, pp. 419-420.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, #416, Meeting of the Partition Council, case no. P.C. 7/4/47, June 1947, p.758. There would be one exception to the right to volunteer in that a Muslim serving in Pakistan armed forces would not have the option to join Indian armed forces and vice versa for a non-Muslim in the Indian armed forces.

as it was earlier<sup>102</sup>. But once the reconstitution had been accomplished, the Defence Ministry of independent India announced in 1949 that the policy of 'fixed percentages' of class recruitment was eliminated and opened recruitment to all classes<sup>103</sup>. As an epilogue General Cariappa declared at the same time that "We are all 'martial', everyone of us", figuratively describing the new manifestation of the discourse of martial classes accommodated within a secular and nationalist frame of reference<sup>104</sup>. The State along with the regiment became the guarantor of the same martial identities around which the traditions of the army had been built. More importantly, because of the policy of open recruitment it was possible for all classes of Indians to partake of a martial identity depending upon the identity of the unit to which they were assigned.

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, The Draft Terms of Reference of the Armed Forces Reconstitution Committee, Assumption IV, p.760.

<sup>103</sup> Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green*, p.277 and p.288.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p.289 and Cohen, *The Indian Army*, see the point about "Secular theory of martial races", which the author says now defined the fighting efficiency of the personnel in the identification with the traditions of the regiment and loyalty to the nation, pp.190-191.

## CONCLUSION

The notion of martial classes in the British colonial armies had different axes of construction like the racial theory of civilisation, the ethnographic classification of the peoples of the sub-continent, colonial medical discourse on the 'tropic', Orientalist knowledge and the politics centred on the hierarchical arrangement of masculinity. Although individually they were not concerned with the actual recruitment into the Indian army, together they corroborated the division of Indians between martial and non-martial by entwining in the colonial relationship elements such as masculinity, courage, effeminacy, sexual propriety, and immorality. Increasing knowledge of the native only confirmed the stereotypes that were already in operation or which had developed independent of the efforts to objectively know the native and his society. The Indian society in turn was deeply affected by such discursive formations and stereotypes. When Indians did challenge the negative depictions and images, they attended only to the details and surface meanings and failed to address the composite arrangement that made such representations possible. Furthermore they even appropriated the same and strategically deployed them in the effort to redefine selfhood and confront imperial rule, thus providing a different context of operation and sustain different relations of power.

Representations of war in pre-colonial India were equally gendered, and in the absence of any general tradition of systematic training preparing individuals for military service recruitment relied on a vague assesment of inherent military aptitude. At the same

time, there did exist communities which were predisposed to the soldiering profession. It also appears that the term 'Kshatriya' and 'Rajput' had come to connote an indeterminate martial status among Indians. At the time when the East Indian Company began to recruit Indians for the native contingents of its armies, portions of Northern India were militarised and traditions of military service and skills had commingled in the societal fabric suggesting a rudimentary martial quality among its members.

The martial classes discourse is different from the above indigenous counterparts for a number of reasons. To begin with the the martial classes as defined by the British served to mark the essential difference between Britain and the colony, which by corollary also reflected the latter's inferiority. It also served to illustrate the menace to qualities which constituted martialness, like masculinity, energy and courage, in the colony. In this, the anxiety of the coloniser, who fears their loss, simultaneously stands revealed. By the identification of the martial classes as belonging to a fair-skinned Aryan stock, the discourse affirmed 'similarity' and their recruitment into the ranks of the Indian army was a celebratory moment of a 'natural relationship' of shared race and martialness. Yet the martial Indian was attributed an incomplete 'self' of hypermasculinity which could be secured only under the supervision and patronage of the British officer and the army unit. As a relationship it also exacted conformity from the British to a 'self' which attracted enlistment and loyalty from the martial classes.

The argument that the larger population of India was incapable of courage and unfit for military service constituted a significant challenge to the project of rejuvenation

of national selfhood. The Indian nationalists were acutely aware of the larger implication to Indian society of the hierarchy of martial classes and non-martial classes. Moreover, this evaluation disallowed the possibility of the army ever coming to acquire a national character. The martial classes discourse insinuated itself into the nationalist movement by permeating the idiom of nationalist activism and resistance with a specific notion of masculinity and spirit of mobilisation. By emphasising martial rejuvenation through physical exercise, celibacy and recovery of a nationalist martial history, Indian nationalists allowed the discourse to inform the emergent political culture centered around the nation-state. Consequently, the nation-state not only became the object of loyalty of the martial classes in the army, it also assumed the position of the arbiter to whom different communities could petition for obtaining martial status. The status of the martial classes themselves remained intact and its discursive construct was never challenged in its entirety. The traditions of the unit or the regiment were built around these classes purportedly for the sake of maintaining efficiency and morale. But the racial overtones of the discourse were dropped and instead martialness was interpreted more in terms of a tradition to which the new entrants, of even erstwhile non-martial classes, could be socialised or acquire their own during the period of service and in war. It is this manifestation of a 'secular martial classes discourse' that we see today in the Indian army.

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