CHAPTER 10

Military labour markets in colonial India from the Company state to WWII

GAVIN RAND

Introduction

The military capacity of the East India Company (EIC), and the Crown Raj which it sired, derived in large part from the labour provided by South Asians. The ability of the Company to draw upon, monopolise and contain the subcontinent's extant military labour markets – as well as to nurture and exploit new ones – was fundamental to the making and breaking of the Company state, as well as to the British Raj which replaced it. The patterns of recruitment, and associated opportunities which went with colonial military service, have long outlived the colonial presence in South Asia – a reminder that the legacies of colonialism are so important not because of the transformations wrought by Europeans, but because colonialism depended on the participation of local allies and auxiliaries, and the privileges, opportunities and liabilities produced during the colonial period have long outlived the formal end of colonialism.

1. Military labour and the making of the Company State

The EIC took the better part of two centuries to secure a more or less effective monopoly over the means of coercion in the greater part of the Indian subcontinent. For most of the first century of its operations, the Company entertained no such pretensions: survival, not hegemony, was the first objective of EIC employees. Having suffered significant reverses at the hands both of Asian powers and European rivals in the seventeenth century, the Company recognised the necessity of defending its operations at sea and its increasingly numerous territorial possessions. It was from a position of weakness, not of strength, that the EIC first sought to tap India's military labour markets.[1] At Madras, Calcutta and Bombay (as well as in Sumatra), fortifications were erected to protect the Company's fragile interests. While all of the its servants were expected to play a role in defending its possessions, the Company relied on

locally recruited levies to garrison its forts and factories.[2] Until the middle of eighteenth century, these forces were essentially auxiliaries but, as Anglo-French rivalries escalated in the 1740s, both powers recruited and drilled larger numbers of local troops, styled as 'sepoys' (from the Persian *sipahi*). The Company subsequently raised three 'native armies', based in Bengal, Bombay and Madras, each trained in a European style and officered by Europeans, with local recruits providing the bulk of infantry.[3] Competing with other powers to recruit and retain military labour, the Company relied on their ability to provide regular remuneration and favourable terms of service, both of which, in turn, depended on the success of its commercial activities.

The growth of the Company's military establishments prompted alarm from Directors and shareholders in London, whose concerns about the potentially ruinous impacts of military expenditure (to say nothing of concerns re: disruptions to trade caused by conflict), led them to urge 'pacifick measures'.[4] Although EIC officials wrote confidently of their ability to defeat Indian powers, the historical record shows that this confidence was often misplaced and Company troops suffered regular checks well into the nineteenth century.[5] Nevertheless, over time, the EIC's ability to recruit and retain local military labour ultimately enabled it to emerge as the preeminent power in the subcontinent. To avoid the teleology implicit in nineteenth century accounts of the Company's rise, we need to acknowledge the primacy of local factors and actors during the early period of the EIC's activities in the subcontinent, recognising the uneven nature of its expansion, and the many reverses encountered along the way.

One way of approaching, and accounting for, the growth of the Company's power is to trace the role of military labour in the shifting balance of power in the subcontinent. Such an approach was developed suggestively in Dirk Kolff's analysis of the 'ethnohistory' of North India's military labour market in the centuries preceding the Company's rise.[6] Kolff proposed that Hindustan's peasantry, armed and skilled in the use of violence, constituted an enormous pool of military labour, from which a series of powers, large and small, were able to recruit and mobilise armies. While such forces, and the powers they sustained, varied considerably in size, scope and longevity, Kolff's account centres the armed peasant as a significant factor in the formation and transformation of state power across the north of the subcontinent. The abundance of military labour, and the readiness of peasants to resort to violence, shaped and delimited the scale and nature of Hindustan's polities. Mapping the military labour market (and its effects) in relation to ecological and climatic frontiers, as well as to political, demographic

and technological developments, Kolff's reading shows how military labour supplemented and extended other peasant strategies, and how forms of peasant identity varied as these opportunities were navigated. Most importantly, perhaps, Kolff's account casts the peasant soldier as an agent in his own history – and as a powerful force in the making, and unmaking, of empires in North India.

While Company forces were involved in minor skirmishes in the south in the first half of the eighteenth century, it was in 1757, from their base at Calcutta, that the EIC began to seriously tap the enormous reserves of military labour surveyed by Kolff. In 1765, these troops secured the decisive victory at Buxar after which the Company assumed the right to collect taxes, notionally on behalf of the defeated Shah Alam II. Thereafter, the Bengal Army swelled to become the largest of the Company's three Presidency armies, drawing recruits from Awadh, Bihar and neighbouring territories to a total strength approaching 30,000 men by the end of the decade.[7] Many came from around Buxar, from where the Mughals and, before them, the sultanates had enlisted large numbers of peasant soldiers, often through alliances with local powers and *zamindars* (landholders). These *Purbiya* soldiers – drilled, dressed and armed by the EIC – served in their thousands to extend British influence across Hindustan. While these men hailed from regions with established traditions of military service, important shifts occurred. Over time, recruiting relied less on *zamindari* intermediaries, with the Mughals utilising 'jobber commanders' as brokers for their armies.[8] Continuing the trend, the EIC recruited directly from the peasantry, reducing further the scope for challengers to intercede in their relationship with the rank and file.[9] While intermediaries continued to play important roles in this process – as brokers for or commanders of men at arms – the gradual decoupling of the peasant soldier from older zamindari networks reflects the disruption which accompanied, and was exacerbated by, the EIC's increasing penetration of north India.

While Kolff's reading draws out important long-term continuities, and makes clear the vital significance of Hindustan's military labour market, subsequent scholarship has developed and refined Kolff's *long durée* analysis. Seema Alavi, for example, shows how important eighteenth-century states – Shuja-ud-Duala's Awadh and Cheyt Singh's Benares – were in the organising and disciplining of regular military service.[10] These states, Alavi shows, helped to produce an increasingly dynamic market for trained and disciplined military labour in in the late eighteenth century, from which the EIC enlisted increasing numbers of troops from the 1780s. Preferring agricultural labourers to experienced 'mercenary' soldiers, the Company

recruited directly from villages, establishing new forms of patronage, even as they built upon extant traditions, to cultivate a well-paid high-status occupation for those peasants who took arms in its service. By the 1830s, when a Company servant at Awadh described the kingdom as 'the nursery for the armies of British India', the EIC had secured a more or less effective monopoly over recruiting across Hindustan.[11] In so doing, it nurtured an army in Bengal which was, in important ways, distinctive, with a soldiery comprised largely of high caste sepoys for whom military service (and the rituals associated with it) provided security and prestige in the midst of a tumultuous change across Hindustan. The yoking together of caste and Company service worked well for both groups of protagonists however, as we will see below, the unweaving of this relationship in 1857 painted the Company's reliance on the *Purbiyas* in a new and very different light.

Much of the literature on British expansion in South Asia focusses on the north, on Bengal and across the Gangetic plain, where the most valuable of the Company's commercial activities occurred. Beyond Bengal, military labour markets responded to the intersection of regional, climatic and commercial forces in different ways and the dynamics of colonial expansion – and the role of indigenous military labour in the process – require alternative models. Whereas in the north, the Company managed to secure a more or less effective monopoly over large-scale, and increasingly direct, recruitment, it was in a much weaker position in the west and in the south, confronted by powerful local rivals and fractured, and highly fluid, military labour markets. Forced to compete in these markets with their rivals, including the Mysore sultanate – where Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan maintained large bodies of troops, including both European and Ethiopian mercenaries (a reminder that military labour markets were already globalised*)* – the EIC relied on local potentates – so-called *poligars* – to supply troops on contract, as well as on free-booting war bands whose loyalty depended in part on the *limited* nature of the Company's ambitions as well as the scope which alliances provided for the consolidation of their own power.[12]

Whereas in the north the Company's military fiscalism was underpinned by its ability to monopolise the military labour markets in the south the EIC's coercive capacity rested more tenuously on alliances and patronage, leaving clients scope to act with considerable autonomy for longer. The career of Anupgiri Gosain, whose ascetic warriors fought against the Company at Buxar in 1764 but were allied with the EIC against the Marathas in 1803, represents a form of military entrepreneurship which the Company continued to rely upon into the early

nineteenth century (despite suspicions about Anupgiri's capacity and reliability).[13] Logistical shortcomings, which forced the Company to contract out commissariat work and constrained its ability to make good its patronage, were a further obstacle. Despite its naval supremacy, and successes in Bengal (and the revenues and access to credit which these delivered), the EIC's ability to constrain, and then defeat Mysore, depended on local alliances with petty chiefs and warrior groups. Only after the fall of the sultanate was the Company able to 'pacify' the fractious warrior groups of the south, and only with the final defeat of the Marathas in 1818, was it able to secure its position across the subcontinent's peninsular. While many of India's regional powers, including the Sikh kingdom in the Punjab, Mysore and the Maratha Confederacy, sought to engage military entrepreneurs and foreign troops – both European and South Asian – the Company's deep pockets, and deeper-pocketed friends, eventually outlasted them.[14] Here, then, the military labour market shaped the dynamics of colonial expansion in in equally important – but in rather different ways – than was the case in the north.

The 'garrison state' which the EIC assembled in the early nineteenth century thus reflected the Company's ability to negotiate South Asia's military labour markets, and to assemble the animal, human and mineral resources required to field and sustain armies. While this ability rested, in large part, on the Company's financial capacity – derived from revenues extracted from Bengal as well as on the metropolitan and South Asian credit which propped up the EIC in times of crisis – the making of the Company state bears the imprint of the South Asian peasants and potentates who took the Company's service as well as those who resisted it. The Company's hybrid military establishment extended the frontiers of British India to the north and the west, annexing Sind in 1843 and the Punjab in 1849.[15] By the middle of the century, more than 300,000 Indians served in the Company's various formations, with 120,000 serving in the Bengal Army alone, far in excess of the fewer than 50,000 Europeans under arms across the entire subcontinent.[16] British accounts frequently depicted the Company's sepoys as sturdy yeoman soldiers but the evidence suggests that recruits to the EIC's service followed established patterns, undertaking military labour to offset agricultural labour and, increasingly importantly, to hedge against the instability which accompanied the Company's rise. The making of the Company state in India depended on the monopolisation of military labour markets, a process which involved securing and dominating existing labour markets as well as, crucially, related processes which constrained and ultimately constricted supplies of military labour. These transformations not only brought to an end the age of 'military entrepreneurship', they also helped to produce the social and economic dislocations from which 'thuggee' and

'dacoity' emerged as new concerns, prompting the Company to further codify the legal and coercive apparatus through which its monopoly over the uses of violence was sustained.[17]

2. From 'mutiny' to 'martial races'

While indigenous labour had underwritten, secured and extended British influence, its rebellion in May 1857 imperilled the foundations of colonial rule across South Asia. The 'mutiny' of the Bengal Army precipitated a wider rebellion across much of north India: confirmation that, if the sepoys felt their privileges traduced in the decades preceding 1857, Hindustan's population had endured a similar fate for much of the preceding century. While the Company had successfully insulated the sepoys through this period, their grievances accumulated and, in 1857, elite *Purbiya* soldiers and peasants aligned in opposition to the Company. The rebellion, in which some 70,000 Bengal sepoys participated, was concentrated around Delhi and Lucknow, sites of alternative Mughal authority, as well as in Kanpur, one of the heartlands of *Purbiya* recruiting. Debates over the rebels' objectives, and the wider relationship between the uprising and Indian nationalism rumble on, though recent works have gone some way towards providing more nuanced insights into the calculations and contingencies which shaped the uprising.[18]

To suppress the rebellion, the Company was able to call upon European reinforcements but the majority of those who put down the 'Indian mutiny' were themselves Indians. Almost 50,000 men – many of whom had served in the Khalsa armies defeated in the wars of the 1840s – were raised from Punjab alone in 1858. Thereafter, the Punjab provided the rump of Britain's Indian Army for the remainder of the colonial period.[19] With military service closed off, the *Purbiya* recruiting grounds of Bihar and U.P. sent indentured labourers to the Caribbean, South Africa and Fiji (as well as to French and Danish colonies) illustrating how traditions of *naukari* evolved across the colonial period. The overlaps and interconnections between military and other forms of peasant labour become more apparent as the sources to trace them become more plentiful.[20]

1857 also had significant consequences for the East India Company's European troops, whose compulsory transfer to Crown service in 1858 prompted a second, 'white mutiny' on the part of European officers.[21] Like the earlier rebellion of European officers in 1776, and those of Indian troops in Vellore (1806), Barrackpore (1824) and Singapore (1914), the 'white mutiny' underscores the universality both of soldiers' concerns with pay and conditions and their

common (and limited) means of protest. Indeed, the 'white mutiny' perhaps indicates that 'the traditional habit of the North Indian soldier to renegotiate the terms of his service' was a habit which was shared by European, as well as by local, troops.[22]

Having suppressed the rebellion of their native army by raising a new one, India's colonial military continued to rely on South Asian labour. No part of the subcontinent was more thoroughly transformed by the colonial demand for military labour than the Punjab, which, by the 1870s, was seen as 'home of the most martial races of India and… the nursery of our best soldiers".[23] On the eve of the First World War, by which point the number of battalions raised in Punjab had more than doubled, Sikhs comprised just over 20% of the Indian Army's total strength (32,702 men), while Punjabi Muslims accounted for some 16% (25,299).[24] The rewards for colonial service, in the form of remittances, land grants and infrastructural investments, helped to make the Punjab the breadbasket of north India, and to produce a distinctive, and enduring, alliance between military and landed interests on the one hand and the colonial state on the other. The construction of irrigation canals and, from 1890, the opening of canal colonies to provide land grants for soldiers, inscribed these alliances into the land. So-called *Fauji* grants, which were available only to those ex-soldiers who had completed twenty-one years' service, helped to secure ongoing loyalty to the colonial state, much as *jagir* grants had done under the Mughals and Sikhs. In total, nearly 500,000 acres were allotted to military grantees, illustrating how the recruits who sustained British military power leveraged their military labour to secure investments in land, reformulating the relationship between military service and landholding/working which had long distinguished military labour markets in Hindustan.[25] Similar schemes, which connected military and paramilitary service with land grants, were tried, with much less success, on the northwest frontier.[26]

As well as to the Punjab, the Indian Army turned to Nepal, from where thousands of 'Gurkhas' were recruited. The first Gurkha levies were raised from Nepalese prisoners taken during the Anglo-Nepal wars but it was in the decades which followed 1857, in which the Gurkhas were felt to have distinguished themselves, that Nepal's recruiting grounds were systematically opened to colonial recruiting. Scholarly accounts of Gurkha recruiting (some of which are prone to reproduce romanticised visions of Nepalese bravery) have tended to focus on the imperial and strategic rationale, emphasising the logic of 'divide and rule' to help explain colonial recruiting patterns. Having demonstrated their loyalty and martial ability during the uprising of 1857, Gurkhas emerged as a favoured martial race in the second half of the

nineteenth century, providing a useful counter-weight to the Punjabis (and others) who comprised the remainder of the Indian Army's troops. Other accounts have explained these shifts by charting changing attitudes towards race and masculinity in the aftermath of the rebellion.[27] By the 1880s, when the Gurkha contingent doubled in size, strategic concerns regarding Russia's advance into central Asia were also bearing on colonial recruiting, with Roberts, the Indian Army's Commander in Chief arguing that only the so-called 'martial races' could be put into the field against a European army. Large reductions of the Madras and Bombay armies in favour of increased recruiting in the north, especially in Punjab and Nepal, followed.[28]

The focus on imperial strategy and ideology has often obscured the social and economic contexts which motivated Nepalese men to seek military service in foreign armies. Recentring these contexts shows clearly how service in Britain's colonial military forces followed patterns established by previous generations of émigré military labourers. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork as well as colonial archives, Mary Des Chene has traced the disjunction between colonial constructions of the 'Gurkhas' and the perceptions of those who enlist as 'Gurkhas'. Indicatively, these men were never known as Gurkhas but as *lahores* , after the city of Lahore, to which previous generations of Nepali men went to enlist in the Sikh armies of Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century. *Lahore* is also the term used to describe those men wh take civilian employment in India, or in the Gulf, suggesting that émigré labour, rather than military service, is the primary marker of Lahore/Gurkha identities. Much to their chagrin, colonial recruiting officers found themselves competing with recruiting agents for tea plantations in Bengal as well as with 'emigration agents' offering passages for indentured labour.[29]

While Nepalese recruits unquestionably distinguished themselves in battle, and British officers saw strategic advantages in recruiting from outside India (and sometimes racial explanations for the Nepalis' martial aptitude), military labour was only one of the ways in which Nepali peasants navigated the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing, and unstable, world. Like their contemporaries from the Punjab, and the previous generations of recruits from Bengal, Nepal's émigré soldiers responded to colonial demands for military labour in ways shaped not by timeless martial traditions but rather by the specific, and shifting, opportunities which emerged as colonial influence extended across north India. Tracing these calculations, and the opportunities which shaped them, provides greater insight into the strategies of those who enlisted, and into the operations of the military labour market. Native officers played key

roles in recruiting military labour from Nepal, much as their predecessors had done in Benares and Awadh as the EIC bypassed jobber commanders.[30] Trusted officers recruited family members and associates, confirming the martial pedigrees of those presented for enlistment. While colonial understandings of recruiting – and composition of the Indian Army itself – changed significantly in this period, the fundamental forces through which colonial demand and indigenous supply of labour were negotiated remained basically consistent. As with the 'dominance' of the high caste, *Purbiya* recruits in Bengal before 1857, the predominance of the 'martial races' attests to the ability of a minority of colonial subjects to secure privileged positions within colonial structures. In this sense, as Kolff noted of the early colonial period, the army was often the most important redistributive institution of the British empire in South Asia.[31]

3. Global wars and military labour

The mechanisms for incentivising and rewarding military service which had been established in the nineteenth century can be seen in full operation in the global wars of the twentieth century. While the demands of these wars threatened to outstrip the ability of colonised labour markets to supply and sustain imperial armies, they provide further illustration of how fundamental indigenous military and auxiliary labour was in shaping the global histories of empire and war. Historians have examined these processes fitfully: early histories celebrated the contributions of the millions of Indians who fought and laboured on behalf of the British imperial state in the world wars but, following partition and independence, the centrality of South Asian labour to the British war effort was elided. Only in more recent years, and especially as the war's centenary approached, have historians turned their attention once again to the various roles played by Indian soldiers during the First and Second World Wars.[32]

In the First World War, during which nearly 1,500,000 Indians served, the increased demand for Indian troops was supplied from the established recruiting grounds, notably from Punjab, which provided more than 446,976 men, and from Nepal, which supplied nearly 60,000 additional recruits. Together, Punjab and Nepal supplied roughly half of India's 826,855 combatants. Jats, Pathans, Dogras and Garwhalis were also recruited in greater numbers and from 1917 recruits were taken from provinces without established martial traditions, and more than 115,000 men were supplied by the notionally independent Princely States.[33] The losses sustained by Indian troops, on the western front from October 1914 and then in the Middle East

from 1915, posed serious challenges for the Army's recruiting and command infrastructure. In t Punjab, civil and military authorities were combined, and powerful rural interests mobilised, to encourage greater enlistment. 180,000 acres of new land grants in the canal colonies were offered to those who enlisted with a further 15,000 reserved for those helped supply recruits, a reminder of the ongoing importance of brokerage in the supply of military labour. [34] To secure and preserve the loyalty of men serving outside of India, soldiers' interests were represented in official and demi-official committees, as well as by influential local notables. These kinds of welfare mechanisms supplemented the pay, pensions and other forms of patronage and reward which had long shaped the size and structure of India's military labour markets. While accessing the perspectives of Indian soldiers and followers is difficult, some insight may be gleamed from contemporary censor's records as well as from latter oral histories, both of which reveal the hopes, fears, frustrations and calculations of Indian troops. Evidence of resistance and disquiet – in the form self-inflicted wounds or outright mutiny – suggest the limits of the military compact struck between colonial power and colonised soldiers.[35]

While the battlefields of the First World War were concentrated between 0 and 60 degrees longitude, in its mobilisation of labour, and materiel, the conflict of 1914–18 was truly a global war.[36] Colonised labour had long been vital to sustaining commerce and industry across Britain's empire: lascars comprised 17.5% of Britain's merchant marine before the war and this proportion increased during the conflict, as it did again during the Second World War. Some 445,582 Indians served as non-combatants with nearly 350,000 Indian labourers sent to Mesopotamia alone.[37] Their work, as medics and engineers, or in supply and support roles, was vital to the prosecution of the war and to the consolidation of the British empire in the aftermath of the war.[38] Wartime mobilisations of labour tapped pre-existing networks of migrant labour, prompting concerns that commercial activities, some of which were crucial to the prosecution of the war, might be undermined by competing demands, a further reminder that, for all of its coercive power, the colonial state always depended on securing and sustaining the labour of its subjects. To distinguish wartime labour from widely distrusted forms of indenture, the 'Coolie Corps' was restyled as the 'Indian Labour Corps' and 'Indian Porter Corps'. Demand for labour still exceeded supply, so in 1916 India's prisons were opened to recruiters, leading to more than 16,000 prisoners enlisting in return for remission. While opportunities for colonial subjects were proscribed by imperial hierarchies, South Asia's military and auxiliary labourers calculated and calibrated their strategies to maximise their often-limited opportunities, to

burnish their social status, to secure post-war exemptions from customary taxes and, on occasion, to defend their interests by withdrawing their labour.[39]

The crucial role played by Indian labour in Britain's war effort is mirrored for the other principal belligerents, whose armies also drew extensively on colonised labour, enlisting more than one million Africans, and some 140,000 Chinese labourers. More than four million non-white men served in European and American armies during the war, and the Ottoman Empire's multi-ethnic and multi-religious army included Armenians, Greeks and Jews. Similar mobilisations, on a yet grander scale, were required during the Second World War. These too built on, and in turn transformed, existing labour relations and obligations. From a pre-war strength of some 210,000 the Indian Army swelled to nearly 2,300,000 by the war's end.[40] Millions more men and women were tempted, cajoled or pressed into war-related civilian work, from mining to prostitution, to create and service the infrastructure, institutions and soldiers required for prosecuting the war. Once again, the ability of the colonial state to tap such huge resources of labour was crucial to the British and allied war effort. From the Punjab, some 800,000 combat troops were recruited[41]; an additional ten battalions were recruited from Nepal, swelling the ranks of Gurkhas to a total of nearly 130,000.[42]

Having suffered serious reverses in the early years of the war, the enlarged and reformed Indian Army performed creditably across several theatres, notably in North Africa and Italy, as well as in Burma, where defeats to the Japanese were avenged over 1944 and 1945. These successes reflect the transformation of the army from its pre-war status as colonial security force into a modern, effective combat force, the largest 'volunteer' army ever raised.[43] While the scale of the conflict and the size of the armies raised to fight it were unparalleled, the calculations made by those Indians who enlisted are familiar. In Punjab, where agricultural prices (and thus the profits derived from them) soared, recruiters struggled, and failed, to supply the manpower required from previously favoured martial castes, turning instead to groups previously refused colonial service, as well as to former, but long since deprecated, recruiting grounds in Madras and Bengal.[44] To a greater extent than in the First World War, the opening of recruiting allowed more Indians to seek out the opportunities presented by military service. While the adventure and rewards of service overseas were doubtless attractive to some, others were pushed into war-related work by poverty. As expansion gathered pace, pre-war requirements were relaxed to allow recruiters to enlist smaller men. Army medics found that on basic rations, new recruits gained on average between five and ten pounds of weight during their first four months of

service.[45] From 1942, push factors were compounded by scarcity and then famine in Bengal, which eventually claimed the lives of at least 2 million people. As a consequence, Bengal's military – and auxiliary – labour markets, from whence generations of peasant soldiers had sold their service to hedge, and extend, their investments in the land, burnishing their social status in the process, disgorged millions of starving and desperate prospective recruits, including thousands of women who sold sex to Allied troops.[46]

The fortunes of war presented many difficult choices. For the 45,000 Indian troops captured by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore, these included the choice to join the Indian National Army (INA) and take up arms against their former colleagues and colonial paymasters. As the British had done with their Nepalese and Sikh adversaries in the first of half of the nineteenth century, so the Japanese, aided by indigenous brokers, sought to engage Indian military labour in the service of their own imperial ambitions. While many of those who chose to join the INA undoubtedly did so to secure short-term improvements in their treatment, such calculations would have been familiar to generations of recruits, in India and elsewhere.[47] In Singapore in 1942 and Bombay in 1946, those who rebelled against colonial service did so for variety of reasons, some personal, some political. What all shared with previous generations of rebels at Vellore, Barrackpore, and Meerut was a readiness to forcibly renegotiate the terms of their service, a reminder of the fundamentally transactional nature of colonial soldiering, and of the strategies employed by military labourers in Asia to navigate the opportunities and threats which colonisation, and its conflicts, presented. That many INA men subsequently deserted Bose's nationalist army and that post-war attempts to prosecute those who did not revealed considerable sympathy suggests the realities of colonial military service.[48]

While the war helped to expedite the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent, and the division of its army, the legacies of the colonial military persisted long after 1947. In Pakistan, West Punjab's military elite emerged as a powerful force in the postcolonial state, entrenching the advantages associated with military service (and contributing significantly to the process which lead to war in 1971).[49] In India, despite a notional commitment to a more representative army, military labour remained unevenly distributed, with Punjabis, and Sikhs in particular, continuing to be over-represented.[50] Under the terms of a tri-partite agreement with the governments of Nepal and the United Kingdom, serving Gurkhas were offered the choice of service in either the Indian, or British Army. The majority chose service with India,

a final reminder that South Asia's military labour markets reflected the calculations of those who enlisted as much as it did the designs of those who recruited them.

Conclusions

Recruiting, retaining and disciplining military labour was central to the making and breaking of empires in South Asia. Of the various powers which emerged to challenge the Mughal empire, it was the East India Company which most successfully navigated the subcontinent's military labour markets. In part, this was because the Company was able to call upon maritime, commercial and financial resources from the United Kingdom but it was also, and perhaps principally, because the Company found productive ways of exploiting and, in time, of monopolising Indian military labour. Crucially, the EIC, and then the colonial government, were able to connect increasingly global circuits of labour (military and otherwise) in ways which generated reciprocal returns. While most of these returns accrued to the Company, military service also acted as a redistributive force. If colonial and nationalist historiographies did much to obscure, and misrepresent, the importance of military labour markets in the history of South Asia, a proper accounting for the importance of colonial military calls attention to the complex, and changing, relationships between military labourers and their employers. Recentring these relationships provides a much better perspective on the vital role played by military labour in the making and breaking of empires in, and beyond, South Asia, as well as on the various ways in which colonial soldiers helped to shape the postcolonial world.

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[1] For useful overviews of the chaotic and often parlous nature of the Company's activities, see Company's early William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (place: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019); Jon E. Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2016).

[2] Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: OUP, 2011) esp. pp.185–206; Philip J. Stern, "Soldier and Citizen in the Seventeenth-Century English East India Company," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 15 (1–2), 2011, pp. 83–104.

[3] Channa Wickremesekera, *"Best Black Troops in the World": British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1746–1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), pp. 76–95; Kaushik Roy, *Military Manpower, Armies and Warfare in South Asia* (London; Brookfield, Vermont: Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

[4] P. J. Marshall, "British Expansion in India in the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Revision," *History*, 60 (198), 1975, pp. 28–43.

[5] For examples, see P. J. Marshall, "Western Arms in Maritime Asia in the Early Phases of Expansion," *Modern Asian Studies*, 14 (1), 1980, pp. 26–7.

[6] Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge; New York: CUP, 1990); For global comparators, as well as useful summary from Kolff,

see the essays in Erik Jan Zürcher (ed.), *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour 1500–2000* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

[7] Marshall, "British Expansion in India in the Eighteenth Century", p. 41

[8] Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, pp. 169–92.

[9] Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in 19th Century India* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 1995), p. 89. Peers concludes: "It was the nature of the pre-colonial military labour market that initially determined the composition of the Bengal army; it was not a deliberate colonial policy."

[10] Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India 1770–1830*, New Ed edition (New Delhi; Oxford: OUP India, 1999), pp. 46–8; Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire 1500–1700* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 67–97.

[11] Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*, p. 43.

[12] Mesrob Vartavarian, "Warriors and States: Military Labour in Southern India, c. 1750–1800," *Modern Asian Studies*, 53 (2), 2019, pp. 313–38; Mesrob Vartavarian, "Pacification and Patronage in the Maratha Deccan, 1803–1818," *Modern Asian Studies*, 50 (6), 2016, pp. 1749–791; idem, "An Open Military Economy: The British Conquest of South India Reconsidered, 1780–1799," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 57 (4), 2014, pp. 486–510.

[13] William R Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 104–47.

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