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Abstract

The British colonial regime in India was heavily dependent on the Indian Army, whose rank and file were Indians but whose officers were British. Despite the apathy of the Indian populace and the hostility of the Indian political parties, the Indian Army remained loyal to its colonial masters during World War II. This article examines the extent of that loyalty and the reasons behind it. Focusing principally on the Indian units that fought in Burma, it analyzes combat motivation and loyalty throughout the war. The article also considers the British elite’s concern about the Indian soldiers’ loyalty and whether it would change during postwar demobilization.

The colonial regime in India was heavily dependent on the Indian Army, whose rank and file were Indians but whose officers were mostly British. The loyalty of the colonized towards the colonizers was structured by the colonial context. F. W. Perry rightly asserts that despite the apathy of the Indian populace and the hostility of the Indian political parties, the Indian Army remained more or less loyal to the British during World War II. This article attempts to show to what extent the Indian Army remained loyal and examine the reasons behind it. A tenuous link between combat effectiveness, morale, and discipline operated. Discipline and morale in turn were linked with loyalty. This article analyzes the imperial

attempt to ensure the loyalty of the Indian soldiery through both monetary and nonmonetary mechanisms. It also portrays the British political and military elite’s perception about the fidelity of the Indian soldiers and their anxiety to maintain it in troubled times. This essay is divided into four parts. The first part reviews the historiography on combat motivation and loyalty. The second part deals with the problems of loyalty among the Indian soldiers during the period when the British Empire reeled under a series of disastrous defeats and went on the strategic defensive. The third part of the article concentrates on the period when the fortunes of the war turned against the Axis powers. The last part analyzes British attempts to tackle the problems regarding the indiscipline and disloyalty that they thought would occur during demobilization after the end of the war.

I. Why Do Men Fight?

What motivated the Indians to join the British-controlled Indian Army? And once inside the army, why did they remain loyal? These issues need to be linked with the debate regarding the combat motivation of soldiers. Omer Bartov and Craig M. Cameron assert that a combination of dangerous battlefield conditions and the military organization's deliberate portrayal of enemies as dehumanized creatures motivated soldiers to fight. John Keegan says that twentieth-century armies, with the aid of a coercive disciplinary apparatus and ideological indoctrination, propelled men on the battlefield.

Let us shift the focus to the organizational format of the British Army, because the Indian Army to a great extent was its mirror image. Many historians focus on the ideological and organizational limitations of the British Army in order to explain the weak morale of British soldiers. David Fraser goes on to say that the British Army was not composed of “patriotic heroes.” Correlli Barnett and Timothy Harrison Place note that the morale of the Tommies was fragile. Weak morale was linked with inadequate battle indoctrination of British troops.


Recent research claims that in tactical terms, the Indian Army, compared to the British Army, performed well in North Africa and Burma. Burma was the principal theatre of the Indian Army during the Second World War and the place where the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) suffered its biggest defeat; hence, this article will also focus mostly on Burma. Ideological indoctrination and inhuman disciplinary culture were absent in the Indian Army. Although nationalism played a role in motivating the British territorial units, patriotism was probably not an important motivating factor for the Indians. Germany and Japan (except during late 1942 and mid-1944) did not directly threaten India. The abstract notion of defeating “barbaric” Axis powers certainly passed over the heads of the mostly illiterate jawans (Indian privates) from rural backgrounds. The anti-Axis ideology probably did have some influence on the newly commissioned Indian officers. According to John Masters, who served in the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Gurkha Rifles, all the Gurkha soldiers were apolitical, but he hints that one Indian Medical Service officer named Santa Padhya Dutt was politically conscious. In 1941, Dutt asserted that he was fighting not to maintain British rule in India but to prevent the replacement of the Raj (the British-Indian government) with Axis rule. Tarak Barkawi notes that all the Indian officers were patriotic, and their loyalty towards the British remained conditional. Field-Marshal William Slim mentions that the Indian soldier had three loyalties: to his religion, to his regiment, and finally to the British officers. It is to be noted that even in the British Army, the loyalty of the soldiers was strongly directed towards their regiments. And the relationship between the jawans and the British officers was much more complex than the affectionate brotherly relationship between them as portrayed by Slim and Masters.

The factors that influenced the soldiers’ behaviour can be divided roughly into external and internal categories. External factors include those societal causes that affected the soldiers. Despite the attempts of the army, the soldiers could not be

totally separated from the influences of broader society; they were not automatons. Internal factors were linked with the institution of the army. While societal factors were important in shaping pre-combat motivation, the organizational apparatus of the army to a great extent shaped the in-combat motivation. This essay analyzes the dialectics between the organization of the Indian Army and the broader society.

The Indian Army was a multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual organization, recruiting Jats, Gurkhas, Marathas, Sikhs, and Pathans. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the size of the Indian Army remained small, that is, 125,000 soldiers. Besides rank and file, some Indians became Viceroy’s Commissioned Officers (hereafter VCOs). The subedar-major, subedar, and jemadar in the infantry and the resaldar-major, resaldar, and dufadar in the cavalry were the VCOs. They ranked below the youngest British ensigns. The naik and havildar were noncommissioned Indian officers. About 20,000 peasants were recruited annually into the army. Most of the soldiers were long-term volunteers from rural families which had supplied troops for generations. Military service was popular, and the annual turnover was quite low, so the army to an extent was capable of separating its personnel from the “seditious” influence of Indian society. Most of the “criminal” activities of the sepoys (Indians trained, disciplined, and equipped like western European infantry soldiers) and sowars (Indian cavalrymen) of the post-1857 Indian Army were linked with the day-to-day working of the internal army administration rather than broader aspects of society. In the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny, the British constructed a welfare mechanism for keeping the sepoys and sowars loyal to the colonial state. Between 1859 and 1913, the occasional malfunctioning of the welfare schemes caused indiscipline among the Indian troops, but all such indisciplinary activities were constrained within the regimental framework. During World War I, the Indian soldiers remained more or less loyal. The only exceptions were disturbances among the 23rd Cavalry, influenced by the Ghadarite (a revolutionary group comprising mostly overseas Sikhs); and the Singapore Mutiny of 1915, caused by the inept leadership of British officers, reduction of men’s rations, and provocation by German agents. In 1930, a Garhwal unit refused to open fire on Indian political agitators. Between 1886 and 1930, there were fourteen minor mutinies in the Indian Army, none of which involved more than one regiment.


The scenario changed during the Second World War when the Indian Army expanded within a very short period. No longer was the core of the Indian Army composed of long-service volunteers from traditional “martial races” who joined for glory and money. During World War II, the Indian Army had to absorb a large number of short-term recruits. Unlike in the second half of the nineteenth century, Indian society during the era of World War II experienced enormous privations and trauma due to the impact of Total War. To cap it all, the political consciousness of the Indians had risen slowly but steadily since the late nineteenth century. Industrialization and the modernization of warfare increased the scope and intensity of distress and hardship for soldiers on the battlefield, due to the increasing lethality of the weapons used and the consequent rise in the number of casualties.16 During the nineteenth century, casualties in campaigns inside the subcontinent did not exceed 10,000.17 During the Second World War, though the Indian Army suffered much less than the metropolitan armies, the total casualties suffered by the former (mostly in Southeast Asia) were 24,338 killed; 64,354 wounded; 11,754 missing; and 60,000 captured.18

In addition to abstract ideologies, tangible incentives and the managerial procedures of the British officers probably kept the Indian soldiers faithful to the colonial regime. As regards the British Army, David French writes that adequate food and shelter strengthened morale.19 This was applicable in the case of the colonial soldiery. The prospect of economic gain in an underdeveloped society obviously encouraged many men from the countryside to join the army, so creature comforts played an important role in managing and motivating the soldiers. Some scholars of the British-Indian Army have touched on this issue without elaborating on it. T. A. Heathcote, Anirudh Deshpande, and Rajit K. Mazumder mention that salary and the hope of gaining glory encouraged Indians to join the British-controlled colonial army.20 During wartime, the colonial regime resorted to extra tangible and nontangible incentives for motivating the troops; hence, this essay focuses on

the welfare mechanism and man-management techniques crafted by the army for the Indian soldiers and also takes into account the effects of broader society on the colonial military organization.

Much of this essay remains speculative because, although many Indian officers have written autobiographies, the javans have left no written records. Some excerpts from the letters written by them from the Burma front are available in the morale reports. Transcripts of oral interviews with the Indian soldiers are also nonexistent. In 2002 I tried to converse in Hindi with some of the Jat soldiers (infantry branch) in the Daryaganj locality in Delhi. Most of them were in their late eighties. They were unwilling to talk about their military service and seemed to remember little. At best they could say that they served in Burma or Italy. Most of them claimed that they joined the army because no other job was available and being a soldier was considered more prestigious than being a porter or a waiter. They claimed somewhat incoherently that in combat they fought for their saathis (comrades). They were probably hinting at primary group solidarity, that is, loyalty towards the other members of the small unit formations. The war diaries of the various Indian formations and the private papers of most of the Indian officers remain under the control of the Ministry of Defence, and ordinary civilians are not allowed to consult them. The unpublished regimental records in the regimental centres are also not accessible to civilian scholars. I have deliberately refrained from consulting the private papers of middle-ranking British officers as they would tend to overemphasize the role played by the sahibs in inculcating loyalty among the javans. Hence, this essay mostly depends on the cabinet papers of the British government of India (henceforth GoI) and the morale reports. It attempts a comparative analysis with the African colonial armies because, despite the fact that the armies are shaped by the social and cultural contexts of the host societies, there exist certain similarities among such organizations. For instance, all the colonial armies that participated in the Total War of the twentieth century had an alien hierarchical officer corps and were geared for killing the enemies of the colonizers.

II. The Sick Lion: September 1939 to Mid-1943

Despite the hostile attitude of the Indian National Congress (hereafter INC) towards the war, as the Marquess of Zetland (the Secretary of State for India) claimed in September 1939, there was no evidence of any dangerous movement either in the population or in the army. Zetland assured London that Subhas Bose and his Forward Block had no appreciable hold beyond Bengal. Bose, one-time president of the INC, wanted direct action against the British; however, M. K. Gandhi expelled him from the Congress.21 The British attitude was that Bose's breakaway group could do

21. First Fortnightly Report submitted by the Secy. of State for India covering the period up to 11 September, 12 September 1939, WP®(39)5, Cabinet Papers (hereafter CP), Manuscript Section, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (henceforth NMML), New Delhi, India.
little harm but Gandhi’s INC might prove to be a destabilizing factor. On 28 September 1939, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, sent the following telegram to the British Chiefs of Staff Committee (henceforth CoSC): “I regard nuisance value of Congress, if they turn against us, as very substantial; and I believe, and Commander-in-Chief agrees with me, that they have it in their power in that event largely to cripple our capacity to exert our maximum strength in the war.”

Due to the Civil Disobedience movement launched by the INC, 7,183 activists had been arrested by mid-March 1941. By April 1941, the movement was confined only to the United Province, and the total number of persons arrested came to about 12,891. The government noted that public interest in the movement was declining.

As the war progressed, the British ruling class considered the political situation inside India as sensitive. On 21 January 1942, the month after Japan attacked the British territories of Hong Kong and Malaya, Linlithgow sent the following telegram to Leo Amery (who had replaced Zetland): “I do not believe that we could rely on a united India... solid behind us in fighting the war... Recent reports from military authorities in eastern India [are] to the effect that there is a large and dangerous potential fifth column in Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa, and that, indeed, potentiality of pro-enemy sympathy and activity in eastern India is enormous. Sarat Bose [brother of Subhas Bose] has been a lesson.”

By the end of January, the Japanese had crossed into Burma, where the next month they decisively defeated the British-Indian formations at the Battle of Sittang River. The GoI’s assessment of the internal political situation of India during April 1942 was not bright. Its report stated: “Alarm, despondency and defeatism over the war situation have if anything increased. District reports attribute this in part to enemy broadcasts, which are increasingly popular, but there is no doubt that, in much larger measure, the deterioration in public morale is due to Congress propaganda of the most virulent fifth column type.”

In addition to the degenerating political scenario, the economic situation inside India was declining. In November 1940, the Secretary of State for India calculated that defence expenditures during 1940–41 would increase by 10.75 million pounds sterling. The deficit would be about 9.25 million pounds sterling. The GoI responded by imposing a federal surcharge of 25 percent on income tax and super tax. Further, the government raised the rate of the corporation tax and the...
Postal charges. During March 1941, the budget estimate for 1941–42 noted that the deficit, despite increases in customs and taxes, would be about 95.14 million pounds sterling. To meet this deficit, during 1941–42 the government decided to impose new taxation which would raise 21.9 million pounds sterling. The GoI also resorted to printing more rupees. Between September 1939 and September 1941, the prices of essential commodities in India increased by 42 percent. The result was escalation in the cost of living.

In addition to inflation, India faced a shortage of food grains. In November 1941, India was ordered by Britain to supply 50,000 tons of wheat per month for the British and Indian troops stationed in the Middle East and Iran. Delhi complained that there was already a wheat shortage in India, and that wheat prices were rising from November 1940. The GoI informed the Ministry of Supply in Britain that India must be allowed to import wheat from Australia. The government of Britain replied that this was not possible because of a lack of shipping.

Despite the sensitive political situation and worsening economic scenario, the Raj was successful in expanding the size of the Indian Army because of the vast demographic resources of India and the lack of employment in the rural sector. The GoI never imposed conscription because the number of jawans required was easily met by voluntary recruitment from the 400 million inhabitants of the subcontinent. On 25 July 1940, the CoSC informed the War Cabinet in London that there was no problem in procuring military manpower. In September 1940, the CoSC asserted that the real obstruction to the expansion of the Indian Army was the lack of equipment for training and supplying the recruits.

When the war with Germany started in September 1939, the strength of the Army in India (British units plus the Indian Army) was 237,500. During the first eight months of war, the size of the Indian Army expanded by only 50,000 because London did not authorize large-scale expansion and there was a shortage of weapons in India. From May 1940, the expansion of the Indian Army was rapid. Between May 1940 and September 1941, 550,000 Indians were recruited. On 1 October 1941, the strength of the Indian Army was 820,000. The average monthly intake was 50,000 Indians. During the war, the size of the Indian Army varied

27. Report for November 1940, India, Para 22 (ii), 11 December 1940, WP®(40)209, CP.
28. Report for March 1941, India, Para 23, 18 April 1941, WP®(41)28, CP.
30. Report for November 1941, India, Para 16, 24 December 1941, WP®(41)75, CP.
32. Preparation of more troops in India for service overseas, Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (henceforth CoSC), 25 July 1940, WP(40)291, CP.
33. Details of Equipment Situation in India, Para 6, Annex D, Memorandum by the CoSC, 19 September 1940, WP(40)380, CP.
34. India’s War Effort, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India for the War Cabinet, Expansion of the Armed Forces, The Army in India, 30 January 1942, WP(42)54, CP.
between 1.2 and 2 million.\textsuperscript{35} As a point of comparison, about 400,000 Africans served in British-controlled African colonial armies during World War II.\textsuperscript{36}

The cultural problems associated with the ethnic organization of the Indian regiments to some extent obstructed the pace of expansion. Further, rapid expansion created some problems of loyalty. After the 1857 Mutiny, the British constructed both class regiments and class company regiments. The class regiment was composed of a single ethnic group like the Sikhs or Gurkhas from a particular region. For instance, the 2nd Gurkha Regiment recruited Gurkhas (Magar and Gurung tribes) from central Nepal. A class company regiment comprised from eight to ten companies. In a class company regiment, the different ethnic groups were not mixed within each company but different companies were recruited from different ethnic groups of different regions. The 28th Bombay Infantry Class Company Regiment, for example, in 1900 had two Sikh companies from central Punjab, two Pathan companies from the Indus area, two Deccani Muslim companies recruited from the Deccan (the southern part of central India), and two Rangbar (those Rajputs who had accepted Islam) companies enlisted from Haryana. A soldier served in the same unit throughout his career, which in turn established a sense of belonging to his regiment. The objective was to utilize ethnic pride to generate regimental loyalty.\textsuperscript{37} This mechanism disintegrated when the Indian Army faced mass expansion after 1940. For instance, the battalions constituting the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Indian Divisions were raised by the process of milking existing battalions to provide a trained nucleus for the new units. The vacancies in both old and newly raised battalions were filled with freshly enlisted recruits.\textsuperscript{38} This to an extent reduced group solidarity, which adversely affected morale and combat effectiveness. On 30 January 1942, Amery summed up the situation:

There is a vast reservoir of manpower but the difficulties of utilizing it, apart from those connected with equipment and training, are the complications which arise from differences of race (which carry with them considerable differences in military qualities), caste,


language, religion and custom. In order that these difficulties might be reduced to a minimum the field of recruitment before the war was comparatively small, but it has since been greatly broadened.  

Nevertheless, some units at least continued to recruit from a particular ethnic group which had a tradition of military service. Ethnic identity among the personnel enabled these units to maintain regimental cohesion even in the dark days of the war. To give an example, Padamlal Pun belonged to the 1st Battalion of the 4th Gurkha Rifles. He joined this unit on 20 November 1940 and fought at the River Chindwin. In his words, his regiment was his family. During 1940–42, in the 1st Battalion of 3rd Gurkha Rifles, many soldiers had their relatives serving with them. Similarly, in the King's African Rifles (hereafter KAR), the colonial military authorities worked hard to make soldiering a family tradition. Boy's Platoons and Scout Troops were organized to introduce discipline among the soldiers' sons. Those boys who grew up in the barracks preferred military service. The KAR battalions gave special preference to recruits whose relatives belonged to the same units; hence, men often served along with their sons and relatives. The family tradition of military service, writes Timothy Parsons, fostered discipline and loyalty. The Nyasaland Battalions of the KAR recruited mostly from the Yao “martial race.” The ethnic pride of the Yao recruits, plus the fact that many of their family members were also in the same battalion, generated *esprit de corps* and loyalty.

However, the British were nervous about the fidelity of the African colonial soldiers and the *jawans*. Imperial perception was partly shaped by racial prejudices. Amery discussed with Claude Auchinleck (Commander-in-Chief of India from January until July 1941 and again from June 1943 until August 1947) the issue of the loyalty of the Sikhs, who were considered as the most important “martial race” of India. Auchinleck told Amery that the Sikhs by nature indulge in intrigues. The Sikhs, in Auchinleck’s view, were arrogant bumpkins who were liable to make trouble. India maintained between nine and eleven infantry divisions. Each Indian

39. India’s War Effort, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India.
43. Frank Furedi, “The demobilized African soldier and the blow to White prestige,” in Killingray and Omissi, eds., *Guardians of Empire*, 188.
44. L. S. Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow, Private, London, 5 October 1940, no. 36, The Marquess of Linlithgow’s Correspondence with the Secy. of State for India, Linlithgow Collection, MSS.EUR.F125/9, ACC no. 1063, M/F, NMML.
division was composed of two Indian brigades and one British brigade.\footnote{45} Such an arrangement probably deterred the Indian soldiers from displaying disloyalty.

Among the Indian troops deployed within the subcontinent, most of their indisciplinary activities were apolitical. For instance, during the third week of April 1942, at Feni, the villagers attacked a party of Sikh soldiers while the latter were cutting trees. In retaliation, the soldiers opened fire and killed two villagers. The villagers alleged (which the District Magistrate considered untrue) that the soldiers had resorted to molestation of women and looting.\footnote{46} At least some British officials were suspicious and looked for political undertones behind the indisciplinary activities of the Indian soldiers. In April 1942, clashes between British troops and Indian soldiers occurred at Allahabad and Agra. Maurice Hallett, the Governor of United Province, assumed that these clashes were due to the anti-British feelings stirred up by Gandhi’s INC.\footnote{47} The \textit{Faqir} of Ipi, a guerrilla leader, tried to incite the trans-frontier Indus tribes against the British; in fact, many recruits came from the trans-frontier Pathans.\footnote{48} Overall, despite the activities of the INC and the disturbances created by the \textit{Faqir} of Ipi, there was no large-scale disloyalty among the soldiers.

Within India two politicized mutinies occurred. In 1940, at Bombay, the Sikh Squadron of the Central India Horse refused to participate in what they described as “imperialist war.” Four men were executed and 100 were transported to the Andaman Islands. The British suspected that when the Sikh squadron was stationed at Meerut, the men were infected by the anti-imperialist ideology of the \textit{Kirti Lehar} party (a political party with some hold over the peasants). In April 1943, at Ranchi, the 3rd Battalion of the 4th Bombay Grenadier Regiment protested peacefully.\footnote{49}

The biggest INC challenge to the Raj in wartime was the Quit India movement of August 1942. Anticipating trouble, the British government in India had arrested most of the top leaders of the INC. Economic hardship and news of the Japanese defeat of the British armies in Southeast Asia resulted in a spontaneous mass uprising in eastern India, encouraged by the INC slogan that the British must leave India immediately. Under their local leaders, the people ripped apart the railway lines and attacked railway stations, telegraph and post offices, and police

stations. When the Indian police proved ineffective, the Raj had to deploy fifty-five battalions of Indian troops to crush the Quit India movement. The soldiers used against the uprising were well fed, well trained, and well led, and showed no sign of disloyalty. Although the morale of the Indian troops deployed in internal security duties was not adversely affected, morale flagged among the 14th Indian Division when it was deployed in the unhealthy Mayu Peninsula against the IJA.50

Let us analyze the disciplinary state of the Indian troops deployed overseas. In January 1941, there was disaffection among the Sikh troops and the Sikh community in Hong Kong. The British assumption was that Japanese agents operating from Shanghai were responsible for these troubles.51 Against the Japanese Blitzkrieg in Southeast Asia that began in December 1941, the Indian Army disintegrated. The IJA was able to capture 50,000 Indian soldiers. Of them 20,000 joined the Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army (henceforth INA) under Captain Mohan Singh.52 The indifferent combat performance of the Indian Army and the subsequent entry of so many prisoners of war into the INA needs to be delved into.

Trouble was brewing among the Indian units stationed in Southeast Asia even before the Japanese attack. The 4th Battalion of 19th Hyderabad Regiment was an Indianizing unit; hence, most of the commissioned officers in this unit were Indians. In May 1940, Lieutenant Zahir-ud-din of this unit, stationed at Singapore, was charged with encouraging the Ahir and the Jat companies to rebel against the British.53 According to Auchinleck, mismanagement in the Indianization of the officer corps was a major factor that prepared the ground for disloyalty.54

The story of Indianization can be traced back to the First World War when the British, in order to encourage more intense Indian participation in the war effort, promised to grant officer commissions to the Indians. However, after 1919 the British dragged their feet in opening up the officer corps to Indians. Due to pressure from the Moderates (a section within the INC who believed that dominion status for India could be achieved by negotiating with the British),


51. Report for January 1941, Report by the Secy. of State for the Colonies, Para 34, 17 February 1941, WP®(41)13, CP.

52. Vice-Admiral Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia: 1943–45 (1951; repr., New Delhi: Natraj, 1990), 32.

53. From the Marquess of Zetland to Linlithgow, London, no. 19, 9 May 1940, Linlithgow Collection.

the British set up several committees to study the issue. In 1932, the Raj decided that eight units should be selected for complete Indianization. The segregation of eight units did not satisfy Indian aspirations. Moreover, the newly commissioned Indian officers in these units had very limited avenues for promotions. However, the scenario changed rapidly after 1939, when the expansion of the Indian Army required a large number of officers. Most of the newly commissioned British officers went to join the expanding British Army, which had already sustained enormous officer casualties. Consequently, the Raj and the London government were forced to recruit politically conscious university-educated urban middle-class Indians in the officer corps.55

Between May 1940 and September 1941, about 1,400 Indians were recruited into the officer corps. In 1942, due to the pressure of war, the Raj planned to increase the annual intake of the Indian officers from 900 to 2,000.56 Racial discrimination soured the relationship between the Indian commissioned officers and the British officers.57 During 1941–42, Harbakhsh Singh was commanding the Manjha Sikh Company of 5th Battalion of 11th Sikh Regiment, which was part of the 22nd Brigade in Malaya. He writes that the British commanding officer had no confidence in the Indian officers and that the colour bar between the whites and the nonwhites was very strict; Indian officers were not allowed in the clubs, swimming pools, buses, and railway carriages.58

Deterioration in the leadership and man-management capabilities of the officer corps was an important factor behind the weakening of the loyalty bonds. Those British officers who served in particular Indian units for a long time were able to establish personalized bonds of loyalty with the jawans under their command. The process of milking resulted in the withdrawal of experienced long-serving British regular officers.59 In order to fill the vacancies in the officer corps during the war, temporary commissions were given to a large number of British and Indian youths. The plan was to discharge them after the war. They were known as Emergency Commissioned Officers (ECOs) and Emergency Commissioned Indian Officers (ECIOs). The Adjutant General of India noted in a confidential report that these young officers lacked a sufficient sense of responsibility. In mid-1943, the Adjutant General noted: “One of the chief anxieties among the soldier class of the martial races, the backbone of the Army, is the feeling of uncertainty. . . . They fear that the old and trusted officer will leave and that his place will be taken by a new type of officer, who does not know India or like India, is not very interested

56. India’s War Effort, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India.
59. Kirby, et al., The Loss of Singapore, 165.
in the sepoys.\textsuperscript{60} And this was exactly what happened. The ECOs were unaware of the religious sensibilities of the various types of Indian troops under them. Further, many British officers were demoralized because they believed that serving in the Indian Army was a dead end and that the army would not be used in actual combat against the Japanese. While coming to India, the young officer cadets of the United Kingdom fell prey to rumours that the Sikhs were cowards and that all units of the Indian Army except the Gurkhas were used as labour battalions.\textsuperscript{61} Further, most of the British commissioned and noncommissioned officers disliked service in India.\textsuperscript{62}

R. C. B. Bristow, who served in the 5th Battalion of the 17th Dogra Regiment, notes in his memoir that most of the British ECOs lacked training, were inexperienced, and had only a rudimentary knowledge of Urdu.\textsuperscript{63} In the 45th Brigade, which was part of the 17th Indian Division in Malaya, the ECOs lacked knowledge of the vernaculars needed to communicate with the jawans.\textsuperscript{64} The communication gap not only reduced the combat effectiveness of the Indian formations, but also loosened the loyalty bonds between the jawans and their British officers.

The ECIOs were no better than their British counterparts. In Stephen P. Cohen’s view, the ECIOs joined the army not because they liked military service but because it offered them government jobs. They were motivated more by their personal comfort and self-interest than by any loyalty towards the army.\textsuperscript{65} The Adjutant General of India noted that most of the ECIOs desired “soft jobs.”\textsuperscript{66} One ECIO claimed that he had joined the military service because of relatively high pay and the status associated with a commissioned officer.\textsuperscript{67} Captain Anthony Irwin, who was in Burma from 1943, notes in his memoir that due to the huge expansion of the Indian Army, many “babu officers” entered the army, and when bullets were flying, they proved to be cowardly.\textsuperscript{68} In addition, says Alan Warren, the Indian

\textsuperscript{60} Adjutant General in India’s Committee on Morale, Report of the Fourth Meeting, 15 July–15 October 1943, 12–3, L/WS/2/71, India Office Records (hereafter IOR), British Library, London, United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{61} Adjutant General in India’s Committee on Morale, Report of the Fourth Meeting, 15 July–15 October 1943, 12–3, L/WS/2/71.

\textsuperscript{62} Secret India Command Inter-Service Morale Summary no. 2 for the period Aug.–Oct. 1944, L/WS/2/71.

\textsuperscript{63} R. C. B. Bristow, Memories of the British Raj: A Soldier in India (London: Johnson, 1974), 117.


\textsuperscript{66} Adjutant General in India’s Committee on Morale, Report of the Fourth Meeting, 15 July–15 October 1943, 10.

\textsuperscript{67} This man was a Hindu from Sind. He was in the engineering branch. After the war, he was discharged from the army and is now the owner of a bookshop in Kolkata.

\textsuperscript{68} Anthony Irwin, Burmese Outpost (London: Collins, 1946), 84–85. Babu means a non-martial Bengali gentleman who was considered weak and cowardly by the British.
noncommissioned officers of the newly raised units were inexperienced in leading men from the front.  

The situation was further exacerbated by shortages of equipment and inadequate training. For instance, Captain Mohan Singh’s 1st Battalion of the 14th Punjab Regiment was part of the 15th Brigade of the 11th Indian Division. In December 1941, Singh’s unit took part in the defence of Jitra against the Japanese. Singh writes that his unit crumbled because the IJA used tanks and had air support, and his unit had no antidote against these enemy weapons. The general officer commanding 17th Indian Division in Burma accepted that the British and Indian soldiers had no training in jungle warfare, which to a great extent explains their poor performance. T. R. Moreman writes that most of the Indian and British divisions that fought the Japanese were trained for open armoured warfare in the desert; hence, they fell easy prey to the infiltration and encirclement tactics of the Japanese. This is not to suggest that superiority in jungle warfare was innate to the Japanese soldiers. Before 1942, the IJA had no experience in jungle fighting, but by the time the Japanese entered Burma, they had acquired experience in jungle warfare which the Indian soldiers lacked. The Japanese occasionally improvised but suffered from an inadequate supply of food and a lack of heavy weapons. And the Japanese also suffered heavily in the rainforest of New Guinea.  

Discrimination in pay between the British and Indian soldiers further lowered the morale of the jawans. While an Indian soldier was paid Rs 285 annually, a British private in India got Rs 850 per year. Further, there was discontent among the infantry regarding the decreasing purchasing power of their pay due to inflation. Most of them demanded an increase in their pay packet.

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Most of the Western democratic powers used colonial soldiers. In 1940, France deployed seven African divisions against the German army. The African soldiers of France, unlike the Indian soldiers, fought well, because the French colonial military system was less colour conscious than the British one. Most of the officers of the British African divisions, like the Indian divisions, were white. As in the Indian Army, there was a colour bar for black officer commissions in the British African forces. This colour bar was lifted during World War II, but still the black officers faced racial discrimination. Among the colonial African troops of both Britain and France, most of the insubordinate activities were due to apolitical causes such as denial of leave to the men and low pay. The African divisions deployed in Burma faced similar problems regarding officer–soldier relations. The African soldiers complained that the British ECOs were not much interested in the welfare of their men. The British officers also lacked vernacular capabilities adequate for the establishment of cordial relations with the African privates.

Logistics was an important component of the loyalty mechanism of the colonial troops. Major B. N. Majumdar of the Army Service Corps, who fought in World War II, asserts that in 1942, the discipline and morale of the Indian Army units retreating from Burma were badly shaken because of inadequate canteen facilities. The reduction of the ration of firewood (required for cooking) from three pounds to two pounds, the lack of variety in the rations, and the shortage of fresh vegetables further demoralized the Indian troops. In contrast, the supply system of the 4th Indian Division in North Africa during 1941–42 was much better. Those soldiers who received tinned vegetables instead of fresh vegetables were issued Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) tablets. The battle rations of the Indian soldiers consisted of jams, biscuits, and tinned fish. Since the Indians liked ghee (clarified butter), the supply depots arranged for it. In addition, fresh meat and fresh fruits were also issued. To an extent this explains the relative stability among the Indian troops in North Africa even after the disaster at Tobruk in mid-1942. However, the situation in Burma went from bad to worse.

After the disaster at Sittang River on 22–24 February 1942, the battered 17th Indian Division continued to retreat. Lieutenant-General William Slim, the corps commander, tried to improve conditions for the soldiers. He increased the supply of fresh vegetables and fresh fruits, and issued Vitamin C tablets to those who received tinned vegetables instead of fresh vegetables. In contrast, the supply system of the 4th Indian Division in North Africa during 1941–42 was much better. Those soldiers who received tinned vegetables instead of fresh vegetables were issued Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) tablets. The battle rations of the Indian soldiers consisted of jams, biscuits, and tinned fish. Since the Indians liked ghee (clarified butter), the supply depots arranged for it. In addition, fresh meat and fresh fruits were also issued. To an extent this explains the relative stability among the Indian troops in North Africa even after the disaster at Tobruk in mid-1942. However, the situation in Burma went from bad to worse.

81. Pillai, Campaigns in the Western Theatre, 283.
commander, notes that during March 1942, the soldiers lacked boots, clothing, and equipment. About morale, Slim writes in his memoirs: “This was the most serious danger of all. The troops had . . . no success. Constant retreats, the bogy of the road block, the loss of Singapore and Rangoon, and the stories of Japanese supermen in the jungle, combined with the obvious shortages of every kind, could not fail to depress morale.”82 Mark Harrison writes, in the context of the First World War, that the Indian soldiers demanded medical care from the British military authority.83 This also applies to the Indian troops during World War II. The medical infrastructure almost disintegrated during the retreat from Burma. During the wet season in Burma, malaria and scrub typhus were prevalent, further sapping the morale of the troops.84

After the retreat from Burma, which ended in May 1942, the Indian units were deployed along the India-Burma border to guard against possible Japanese incursions. The underfed, disease-stricken Indian refugees fleeing Burma undermined the morale of the 23rd Indian Division deployed along the Naga and Chin Hills. Then, the failure of the postal service further degraded the morale of the troops. Stamps were not available in the Palel-Imphal area, and the post office at Dimapur refused to accept unstamped letters. During late 1942, Japanese propaganda had an adverse effect on the Indian troops stationed in Assam. The underlying Japanese theme was anticolonialism and freedom for all Asians. The slogan was “Asia for the Asians.” The Japanese treatment of Indian refugees and Indian soldiers was milder than that meted out to the British. The Japanese allowed Indian civilians to proceed to India on the condition that after reaching their homes, they would preach that all Asians belong to one family.85

In the first half of 1943, the GoI launched an offensive in the jungle-clad mountainous terrain of Arakan. The offensive failed, and the morale of the Indian units reached rock bottom.86 Compared to the performance in Arakan, the soldiers in the 4th Indian Division in North Africa fought well against the Afrika Korps because they got one full year to train with new weapons and vehicles that had been issued to them.87 On 14 April 1943, Archibald Wavell (Commander-in-Chief of India from 7 March 1942 until 19 June 1943) admitted, regarding the failure in Arakan: “There has thus been no great disparity in numbers, though the advantage has been slightly on our side, especially in artillery. The story of these operations sounds somewhat depressing, as if we had been outmaneuvered and

82. Slim, Defeat into Victory, 37. The quotation is from p. 40.
84. Majumdar, Administration in the Burma Campaign, 13.
86. Mountbatten, Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 16.
87. The Tiger Strikes (Calcutta: Director of Public Relations for Govt. of India, 1942), 12.
outfought by the Japanese. . . . Our troops have not yet had the necessary experience of jungle fighting, and the Japanese are undoubtedly most skilful in this type of warfare.”88 Moreover, the troops that participated in the Arakan operation suffered from malaria, cholera, skin infections, and dysentery, which further depressed the jawans.89

Overall, the British had succeeded in maintaining the loyalty of the Indian soldiers to a great extent during the dark days of the war. Until June 1943, the casualties of the Indian Army (most of them occurring in Southeast Asia) were 5,618 killed; 13,084 wounded; and 85,178 missing and taken prisoner. The total came to about 103,880.90 The relatively small number of Indian soldiers killed, compared to the large number taken prisoner, shows that the combat motivation of the troops was not that good. It is to be noted that the British troops also fought badly during the 1942 Southeast Asian campaign.91 However, the tide of war was turning in favour of the Allied powers. Though the British were able to check the Japanese along the India-Burma border, a bigger threat emerged. The Bengal famine hit the Raj.

III. The Lion Strikes Back: August 1943 to Mid-1945

The GoI accepted that in order to retain the loyalty of the Indian soldiers, it had to take care of the Indian society. On 13 August 1943, Linlithgow warned the War Cabinet in a telegram that unless the food situation was rectified, Delhi would not be able to keep India stable. Auchinleck argued that if food grains were not imported, adverse consequences might follow for the British in India. By September 1943, Bengal and Assam experienced famine. The situation became so serious that the CoSC pointed out that the critical food situation might jeopardize the security of India as a base for operations in Southeast Asia. On 17 September 1943, Amery requested 500,000 tons of wheat for India between September 1943 and February 1944. London agreed to provide shipping for 100,000 tons of barley from Iraq and 50,000 tons of wheat from Australia in the near future.92

However, Amery was not satisfied. On 23 September 1943, he warned Churchill’s War Cabinet:

92. Indian Food Situation, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India, Para 5, 10 September 1943, WP(43)393; Economic Situation in India, Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff, 17 September 1943, WP(43)407, CP.
The conditions so described becoming a serious menace . . . to the movement of troops. The sight of famine conditions cannot but cause distress to the European troops and anxiety to the Indian troops as to the condition of their families in other parts of India (where . . . conditions afford ample cause for anxiety), and they provide all the more a dangerous handle to Japanese propaganda of which full use is being made. . . . I must most earnestly urge the War Cabinet to reconsider in the light of the Chiefs of Staff memorandum the request of the Government of India for the import of up to half a million tons of food grains to India between this month and March of next year.93

During 1943–44, a large number of troops were stationed in eastern India to check the Japanese threat. And eastern India was hit hard by famine. The jawans were so demoralized by the pitiable conditions of the common masses that at times they distributed their own rations among the undernourished and dying Indian civilians.94

The food situation continued to worsen. On 7 February 1944, Wavell (who had replaced Linlithgow as Viceroy), sent the following telegram to Amery: "Bengal famine was one of the greatest disasters that has befallen any people under British rule and damage to our reputation here both amongst Indians and foreigners. . . . Please warn your colleagues once more that rigid statistical approach is futile."95

On 13 February 1944, Amery replied to Wavell by telegram:

The shipping situation of the Allies is such that the War Cabinet do not feel able at this critical juncture of the war to make ships available for further imports of wheat. The strategic requirements of forthcoming operations are such that . . . it is not possible to provide shipping for any imports from Australia and the most that can be done is to provide shipping for 50,000 tons of Iraq barley to Indian ports. It might be possible to increase this amount to 80,000 tons.96

The food shortage was caused by a combination of shortages in production and acute problems in distribution. Between 1938 and 1944, the population of India rose by 30 million, resulting in an annual increase in consumption of 4 million tons of food grain. An extra 4.5 million acres were planted with rice in 1943. The rice yield was estimated between 26 and 28 million tons, but due to transportation problems, the surplus did not reach the urban areas.97 On 19 February 1944, India Office advised: “They [War Cabinet] recommend that the government of India should be asked to give the fullest consideration to the utilization to the outmost

93. Economic Situation in India, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India to the War Cabinet, 23 September 1943, WP(43)411, CP.
94. Report for October 1943, India, Para 106, 26 November 1943, WP(43)495, CP.
95. Viceroy’s Telegram, 7 February 1944, Annexure, WP(44)103, CP.
96. Telegram from Secy. of State for India to the Viceroy, 13 February 1944, WP(44)103, CP.
97. Report by the President of the Board of Education, 11 February 1944, WP(44)99, CP.
advantage of such supplies of barley as will be made available from Iraq." Barley was not a cereal crop Indians were used to. While the Punjabis consumed wheat, the Bengalis and the Madrassis ate rice, so London's advice was not of much help for the colonial state.

The GoI was never able to solve the food problem. Even as late as June 1945, Delhi was anxiously monitoring the food situation. Britain agreed to provide wheat to India at the rate of 100,000 tons per month for six months. In return, India was asked to provide 25,000 tons of rice to Ceylon for the next few months. Only by importing rice from Burma could the situation be ameliorated, but this was not possible as long as the Japanese were there. Though rice production was good in Bengal, the rice harvest failed in south and west India. The wheat harvest was good in Punjab and United Province but bad in west India. The GoI thought that a public announcement regarding the import of wheat would aid procurement of wheat from the provinces having surpluses, like Punjab, for distribution in the areas having deficits. Tan Tai Yong writes that during the later part of the war, the colonial government's policies of food requisition, rationing, and price control compromised rural stability in Punjab and alienated the rural elites who were supporters of the Raj and provided much of the soldiery. The state's procurement of grain at controlled prices prevented the Punjabi peasants from making large profits, which in turn made them hostile to the Raj. But, all this had no overt effect on the loyalty of the Indian soldiers.

The British assumed that the Indian soldiers were partly politicized. The Raj's officials believed that the Hindu Mahasabha (a political outfit which aggressively emphasized cultural rejuvenation of the Hindus and aimed to create a Hindu India) had some influence on the Hindu personnel of the army. On 9 September 1944, F. Mudie wrote a note suggesting that in the future, discussions about the type of government that India would get after the war must include members of the Hindu Mahasabha to prevent any dissent among the Hindu soldiers. After the Quit India movement, the INC did not pose much of a threat to the Raj. The intelligence report noted that during late 1944, the troops did not show any interest in the talks between Gandhi and M. A. Jinnah to negotiate a formula for power sharing between Hindus and Muslims in a postwar government under the INC; the talks failed because Jinnah insisted that the Muslim League represented Mus-

98. Report of the Committee on Indian Food Grain Requirements, 19 February 1944, WP(44)118, CP.
99. Report for June 1945, India, Para 68–70, 26 July 1945, CP(45)88, CP.
lims and the INC represented Hindus.\textsuperscript{102} In July 1945, the INC leader Maulana Azad assured Wavell that the INC would support Britain’s war against Japan.\textsuperscript{103} Among the general populace, there was neither any apparent hostility nor any sign of extraordinary enthusiasm for the Allied cause. The government noted that the victory celebrations of the surrender of Germany in Europe in May 1945 did not evoke much response in India.\textsuperscript{104}

Despite the food problem and the somewhat muted anti-Raj activities by political parties, the Indian soldiery remained loyal, and recruits continued to flow into the army between late 1943 and mid-1945. The pace of recruitment was linked with the rhythm of agriculture. Due to the unfavourable crop situation in Jabalpur Division, recruits joined in large numbers. During the first half of March 1944, recruitment in the Patna and Ranchi divisions was slack because of the prosperity of the rural areas.\textsuperscript{105} After 1942, the Indian Army did not expand any further, and recruitment was adequate for maintaining the existing formations. In 1944, an average of 25,304 men joined the Indian Army per month. The average monthly figure for 1945 rose to 27,723.\textsuperscript{106}

On the Burma front, one of the biggest threats to the loyalty of the Indian Army remained the INA of Subhas Bose (who had replaced Mohan Singh). But no large-scale desertion of Indian troops occurred despite the prodding of the INA. During May 1944, in the forward areas, the Indian troops made no distinction between the Japanese and the INA personnel.\textsuperscript{107} Overall, between January and February 1944, the desertion rate was below 5 percent.\textsuperscript{108} An analysis of the court-martial cases of the India Command and the Southeast Asia Command from late 1943 until mid-1945 shows that most of the charges brought forward in the courts-martial against the jawans involved desertion and absence without leave. Most of the offenders were recruits. Some veteran soldiers overstayed their leaves to help their families in the villages get rations from ration shops far away and retrieve their ancestral plots that had been acquired by troublemakers in their villages. These problems for the soldiers’ families were exacerbated as there were no other male members (except old men and boys) present in their villages. Some jawans overstayed their leaves when they fell ill. Since the Muslim soldiers’ wives

\textsuperscript{102} Army in India Morale Report for the three months ended 31 October 1944, 22 November 1944, p. 1, L/WS/2/71.
\textsuperscript{103} Congress President’s Statements to the Press, Appendix, Memorandum by the Secy. of State for India, 18 July 1945, CP(45)84, CP.
\textsuperscript{104} Report for May 1945, India, Para 115, 25 June 1945, CP(45)47, CP.
\textsuperscript{106} India’s Part in the Sixth Year of the War, Printed by the Manager, Govt. of India, New Delhi, n.d., p. 63, NMML.
\textsuperscript{107} Report for May 1944, India, Para 96, 29 June 1944, WP(44)352, CP.
followed the *purdah* system (meaning that they did not show their faces to any men except their husbands and did not go out of their houses), there was no one in the villages to take the sick soldiers to the hospitals located in the small towns.\(^\text{109}\) Most of the recruits for the combatant branches were Sikhs and Muslims from Punjab, where massive recruitment in certain localities left no males except old men and young boys in many villages.\(^\text{110}\)

Several factors accounted for the lack of disloyalty among the Indian soldiers during the second half of World War II. In October 1944, the Adjutant General of the India Command rightly noted: “The sepoy’s main interest is in the welfare of his family.”\(^\text{111}\) The Raj was able to take special care of the colonial soldiers in particular and their families in general, because despite the massive increase of the Indian Army, the military participation ratio (hereafter MPR) for Indian society remained low. According to one calculation, between June and July 1945, the size of the Indian Army was 1,730,000 and the males in India aged from twenty to twenty-five numbered 16,315,000. The MPR came to .11. In contrast, during the same period, the size of the British Army was 2,920,000, and the number of men eligible for enlistment within the same age group was 1,737,000. For Britain, the MPR came to 1.68.\(^\text{112}\)

Tangible and nontangible incentives for the soldiers continued to increase. In January 1944, due to Wavell’s initiative, the British government agreed to distribute “Military Medals” to those Indian soldiers who had performed “heroic acts” on the battlefield.\(^\text{113}\) In fact, the Indian soldiers demanded the Africa Star and the Burma Star.\(^\text{114}\) The GoI doubled the monthly monetary allowance of the gallantry decorations like the Indian Order of Merit and Victoria Cross.\(^\text{115}\) By March 1944, the British authorities noted that the pay increase had a positive effect on the Indian troops.\(^\text{116}\) Between November 1943 and April 1944, twenty-nine monetary grants

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109. Quarterly Reports of Adjutant General in India Committee on Morale, Inter-Service Morale Summary No. 1 for the quarter May, June, and July 1944, Part II, Para 3, Adjutant General in India’s Committee on Morale for the three months ended 15 April 1944, Part II, Para 2, Morale Report November 1943–February 1944, Part II, Indian Troops Discipline, Adjutant General in India’s Committee on Morale, Report of Fourth Meeting, 26 January 1944, Part II, Para 2, Adjutant General Committee on Morale for three months ending on July 1943, L/WS/1/939, IOR.

110. Minutes of the 8th Meeting held at General Head Quarter India New Delhi on 19 December 1944, L/WS/2/71.

111. Army in India Morale Report for the three months ended 31 October 1944, Part II, Indian Troops, Para 1.


113. Wavell to the King Emperor, 4 January 1944, Wavell Collection, MSS.EUR.D977/1, Roll No. 1, ACC. No. 7430, M/F, NAI.


115. *Fauji Akhbar* (henceforth *FA*), vol. 23, 8 May 1945, 9, Author’s Personal Collection (hereafter APC).

116. Report for March 1944, India, Para 89, 27 April 1944, WP(44)229, CP.
amounting to Rs 3,050 were issued by the Defence Forces Relief Fund for the Sikh and Punjabi Muslim soldiers. With the passage of time, the number of such grants increased. Between May and October 1944, the government issued thirty-four grants aggregating to a sum of Rs 4,446 for the soldiers from Punjab and their dependents. Such grants were for the marriage of daughters, construction of houses, and so forth. Punjab suffered from shortages of clothes. To meet the requirements of the soldiers’ families, the government opened several shops in big towns like Lahore. In the Bombay Presidency, at Miraj, the Tuberculosis Sanatorium was expanded for treating both soldiers and ex-soldiers. Those princely states supplying combatants were ordered by the Raj to take measures for the welfare of the troops. The Charkhari State granted *jagirs* (land grants, whose recipients were entitled to the land’s revenue for a period of twenty years) to those soldiers who were recruited from that state and had been given gallantry awards.117 To give another example, in April 1945, the Ruler of Bilaspur gave a cash award of Rs 1,000 and sixty *bighas* (one *bigha* is equivalent to twenty *kathas*, and one *katha* is 700 square feet) of land to sepoy Bhandari Ram, who had received a Victoria Cross.118

At the frontline, the army took steps to care for the soldiers. The improvement of the logistical infrastructure resulted in better rations and heightened medical care for the frontline soldiers. The Indian soldiers did not like tinned food and dehydrated meat; hence, from late 1943 onwards, cattle, sheep, and goats were sent by railway from central India to Arakan and Assam to feed both the British and Indian troops. By 1944, Indian soldiers under the Southeast Asia Command were provided with the Neptune and London brands of cigarettes for which they had developed a taste.119 Fresh vegetables and eggs were supplied in the hospitals.120 During the battles of Imphal-Kohima, the mechanism of evacuation of battlefield casualties worked well. Captain Sukhwant Singh was in the 14th Battalion of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles, which was deployed along the Imphal-Ukhrul road during June 1944. When Sukhwant was wounded by a shell, he was evacuated to the regimental aid post. The medical officer, after dressing his wound, sent him to the rear medical area in Imphal. After spending a couple of days in the Imphal hospital, he was evacuated by air to Comilla. After a week, he went by an ambulance train to Chittagong. From Chittagong, an ambulance ship took him to Calcutta. Then an ambulance train evacuated him to Bareilly, where he met his family.121 For checking malaria, the Southeast Asia Command resorted to widespread use of DDT. At times, the

118. “State’s Corner,” *FA*, 1 May 1945, p. 19, APC.
DDT was spread from Hurricane fighters over large areas through which the Allied forces moved.122

In order to reduce the boredom of the troops, the All India Radio (henceforth AIR) started programmes which were more popular with the Indian soldiers than with the British, who favoured the programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation. In December 1944, General Headquarters India arranged a Special Forces Programme, for which the AIR allotted thirty hours of air time per week.123 The GoI issued documentaries and newreels for propaganda purposes, but these proved to be unpopular as the soldiers were more interested in watching cinema for entertainment.124 Between July and November 1944, India received twenty-four projectors for military purposes. Copies of 35 mm Anglo-American and Indian films were distributed for the troops, and they proved to be popular. In December 1944, there were about twenty-eight mobile cinema units for the troops deployed within India and Burma. Along with cinemas, theatres and dramas were sources of entertainment for both British and Indian soldiers. The Fauji Dilkhush Sabha (FDS), set up in July 1944, organized entertainment shows for the jawans. In December 1944, the FDS ran twenty-two parties in India, one in Ceylon, one in Italy, three in the Middle East, and two in Persia and Iraq. These performances proved to be very popular, and the troops demanded more shows. With the passage of time, the number and quality of live shows for the Indian soldiers improved. By February 1945, five large and ten small parties performed shows for the Indian soldiers in Burma.125 Lieutenant-General Beresford Peirse, head of the Directorate of Welfare, Education, Resettlement and Services Kinematography, opened several leave centres in the big towns and cities for the British and Indian soldiers.126

Adequate training was another reason behind heightening morale. In 1944, the 4th Indian Division did well in Italy because of the intensive training it received in Lebanon.127 Credit is due to Auchinleck for emphasizing jungle training among the Indian troops from mid-1943,128 which dispelled the myth of Japanese supermen. The India Command set up centres at Jhansi and Faizabad to train noncommissioned officers and potential VCOs. The course offered was actually an

123. Report by the Earl of Munster on the Welfare of the Troops in India and South East Asia Commands, Para 53, 11 December 1944, Annex II, WP(44)722, CP.
125. Report for February 1945, India, Para 111 (b), 1 April 1945, WP(45)212, CP; Report by Munster on the Welfare of the Troops, Para 49, 50, 52.
Officer Training Service (OTS) course and lasted for four months. The troops were trained to avoid Japanese booby traps in the dense undergrowth and to lay traps and ambushes for the unsuspecting Japanese soldiers in the jungles. Further, fire discipline of the troops was insisted upon. The Infantry School at Saugor focused on training marksmen, which were needed against Japanese snipers. Further, the quantity and quality of equipment registered improvement, which further raised the morale and combat effectiveness of the javans. Sten guns, bren guns, 3-inch and 4.2-inch mortars, number 36 grenades, and grenade-launching rifles became available in larger numbers. Due to the immense superiority of the Western powers in men and materials, from 1944 the Axis powers were on the receiving side. Air supply and air support in the ground battles in Burma were also responsible for rising morale.

Victories in Italy and success in Burma from 1944 raised the morale of the Indian soldiers. Many javans developed pride in their fighting formations. Besides esprit de corps, at the least the Indian officers developed a sense of patriotism which further heightened motivation in combat. An Indian captain wrote in a letter home that he was fighting to save his country from the Japanese. An Indian lieutenant wrote: “I have joined the army to serve my country . . . Everybody should try to drive the Fascist Japanese from our country.” A jemadar noted in his letter that he was fighting to save not only India but also the world from the brutal Japanese. A naik noted the same sentiment in a letter to his family. The letters of three havildars show that they realized the necessity of checking the Japanese who had reached the gates of India. D. F. Karaka, a war correspondent of the Bombay Chronicle, interacted with the personnel of the Fourteenth Army during 1943–44. He argued that the Punjabis fought for izzat, which was different from patriotism. A man fighting for izzat thinks that a person of his social standing ought to fight. Izzat implied both self-respect and one’s standing in the eyes of his local community. In contrast, most of the Africans who joined the colonial armies in wartime were poor men who were not respected in their own local societies.

The British were also learning and changing their ways. Misbehaviour by the Tommies towards the javans depressed the latter. Such incidents were rampant among the Eighth Army in Italy and the Fourteenth Army in Burma. This created discontent among the Indian soldiers and depressed their morale. However, from May 1944, the military authorities took steps to improve relations, especially...

129. Infantry Liaison Letter No. 2, pp. 1–3, 6, 1 January 1944, Infantry Liaison Letter No. 4, pp. 1–3, 5, 17 February 1944, L/WS/1/778, IOR.
130. Report for May 1945, India, Para 105-6, 109.
among the frontline Indian and British troops. The material conditions and career prospects of the Indian officers also improved.

The British ECOs who joined the Indian Army towards the end of the war were less racially prejudiced towards their Indian colleagues than the regular British officers of the pre-1939 Indian Army. The reason was probably that they were not public school products but came from a lower social background. Towards the end of the war, the Indian commissioned officers were more or less content. K. V. Krishna Rao was posted in the 3rd Battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry. In November 1944, this unit was engaged in policing Malakand on the North-West Frontier. Rao describes his British commanding officer as affectionate towards him. John Prendergast, who commanded the 3rd Rajputana Rifles during the Fourteenth Army’s offensive in Burma, notes in his memoirs: “Indianization had increased greatly in my own regiment and I had several Indian officers. . . . I was at pains to make them at home even to the extent of insisting that both Indian and English food should be served in the mess.” In November 1944, Major S. P. P. Thorat was given command of 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Punjab Regiment. This battalion was part of the 51st Infantry Brigade of the 25th Indian Division deployed in Arakan. Thorat writes in his memoirs that initially he was apprehensive about the behaviour of the British officers. However, his British subordinates proved to be loyal and affectionate.

From late 1944, the relations between the jawans and the British officers improved, thanks to the man-management techniques emphasized by the India Command, which ran the OTS courses. The training instruction emphasized that the British officer’s primary duty was to take an interest in the welfare of the jawans under him. Without a cordial officer-soldier relationship, all training was bound to be useless. The learning of Urdu, the lingua franca of the Indian Army, was especially emphasized so that the British officers could communicate freely with their Indian troops.

Those British officers who had served for a long time in the Indian Army required no training regarding respect for the jawans’ cultural and religious sensibilities. One such officer was Francis Ingall, who commanded the 6th Bengal Lancers, which was part of the 8th Indian Division. On 9 April 1945, 6th Lancers launched an attack in the Argenta Gap within the German Irmgard Line in north Italy. Several personnel of Ingall’s unit became casualties. Ingall noted: “The Gun

134. Report for May 1944, India, Para 83, 95.
Troop were mainly Muslims and high caste Hindus and I now faced an interesting but sad religious problem. The Muslim dead, I knew, had to be buried with their faces towards Mecca, but the Hindus were another matter. In the Imperial Indian Army all religious beliefs and customs were sacrosanct, and I wanted to be sure I did the right thing. . . . I decided to ask my senior Indian officer, the Regimental Resaldar-Major who was a Hindu.”

The jawans appreciated such a display of sensibilities by the sahibs. The censor department noted that in most of the letters the jawans spoke about their commanding officers in glowing terms. Some of the soldiers wrote that it was their good fortune to work with such experienced officers. The censor department was probably overstating the case. In general, a different picture emerges from the reminiscences of the British officers. William Pennington, a junior officer of 134th Field Regiment in the 19th Indian Division in Burma from late 1944, writes that there was no real intimacy between the jawans and sahibs. However, the sahibs had an intimate relationship with the Gurkhas. Scott Gilmore was an officer of the 4th Gurkha Rifles, which fought in Burma. He writes in his memoirs that both the officers and the men participated in games like soccer and basketball even when they were deployed at the front, and friendship developed between the officers and men during such “rough-and-tumble, no-holds barred game[s].” The periodic visits by the charismatic Lord Mountbatten, chief of Southeast Asia Command, had a tonic effect on the VCOs of his command. One subedar wrote: “He is very kind, serene and humorous. It was a golden opportunity in my life that I met such a big Lord and also had a talk with him.” What impact the “big Lord” had on the jawans remains unknown.

Along with the colonial Indian Army, colonial African armies also fought in Burma. The West African troops, like the British soldiers, hated service in India. The British, the West African, and at least some Indian troops wanted to go back home as soon as possible. The British soldiers, and to a lesser extent the Indian soldiers, believed that due to their long absence from home, their wives were being adulterous. The British soldiers believed that the main culprits in this regard were the American soldiers stationed in Britain. The jawans wanted to go back to their villages because in their absence, their families suffered from economic hardships. The West African soldiers demanded palm wine and women, and both these amenities were lacking in India and Burma; hence, there were frequent appeals for

140. Report on the Morale of British, Indian and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Forces South East Asia for the months of November, December 1944 and January 1945, Para 82, p. 17.
143. Report on the Morale of British, Indian and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Forces South East Asia for the months of November, December 1944 and January 1945, Para 82, p. 17.
discharges and discontent due to lack of adequate leave. Leave centres for the West Africans were opened at Ranchi and Chittagong. However, these leave centres were not popular because they had no women and placed too many restrictions on the West African troops. Traditionally, both East and West African soldiers were accompanied by their families during campaigns. European officers did not like this practice, which dated from pre-colonial times, because they believed that it reduced the combat effectiveness of the troops. Attempts to discourage this practice resulted in threats of mutiny by the troops. When the Africans were deployed in Burma, their families could not be brought with them, hence, these troops’ desire for women.

Further, the African troops in the leave centres were not allowed to move freely. Even when facing the enemy, the soldiers remained anxious about their families back home. The British, Indian, and African soldiers were eager to receive mail from home. The Indian and the African soldiers were anxious regarding whether the money orders they sent home regularly were reaching their recipients. Any delays by the postal officials in delivering mail irritated the troops. The postal service in India was somewhat restored by the end of 1943. The British civilian officers tried to rectify matters in the recruiting grounds of these troops—Punjab (for the Sikh and Punjabi Muslim soldiers of the Indian Army) and Sierra Leone (for the West Africans)—especially by cooperating with the civil authorities in these regions. Further, the Civil Liaison Officers and the District Soldiers Board provided information to the troops about their families and organized the soldiers’ remittances to their relations. The British, Indian, and West African soldiers demanded better canteen facilities at the front and more film and mobile concert parties. For recreational and educational purposes, monthly magazines were distributed among the troops, who welcomed the magazines for the photographs. The British troops received the Army Digest. While Fauji Akhbar and Illustrated Review were popular among the Indians, Hoshima was popular among the East African soldiers.144

The askaris (East African privates) were more enthusiastic than the West Africans in fighting the Japanese in Burma. They, unlike the West African soldiers, were not eager to go back to their homes in Africa and were satisfied when they returned from the front to the leave centre at Ceylon. The askaris, like India’s “martial races,” were proud of their martial prowess and considered themselves superior to the Japanese. All these sentiments were evident from the letters written by them during the second half of 1944. One askari letter to his family said: “We have killed so many (Japanese) that we use their bodies to make bridge across the river for our trucks.” No doubt he exaggerated, but the letter captures the aggressive spirit of the askaris. Another askari letter narrated: “The people who once called us African

144. Report by Munster on the Welfare of Troops, Annex II, Para 26; India’s Part in the Sixth Year of War, 59; Report on the Morale of British, Indian and Colonial troops of Allied Land Forces South East Asia for the months of August, September and October 1944, pp. 2–3, 12, 15, 20–23. For the African troops and their families, I am indebted to personal e-mail communications with Dr. Bruce Vandervort.
apes are finding out their mistake for we are beating him like a woman. . . We knew that we Africans are better fighters than these people." And yet another letter depicts the askaris' combat motivation: "We do not fear these enemies whom we fight. They think that we eat people, so if they see us coming they run away. At first they were very fierce, but we fought well and made our Europeans happy." This letter notes the askari's joy in satisfying his commanding European officers. However, at times prolonged campaigning took its toll on the loyalty of the colonial troops. In late 1944, one infantry battalion of the 11th East African Division refused to cross the Chindwin on the grounds that they had been promised a rest after the capture of Kalewa; hence, in January 1945, this division was withdrawn from the frontline.

IV. Planning for Demobilization: Late 1942 to Mid-1945

Unlike the Tommies, the jawans were not eager to be released from military service. The Indian troops believed that postwar conditions would not be favourable because they would lose the financial perquisites they enjoyed while serving in the army. The jawans were concerned with the economic problems they would face in the postwar era.

From late 1942, the British officials started tackling the problems that would arise from demobilization after the war in the context of what they conceived as a "hostile political environment." On 21 August 1942, Delhi warned all the provincial governments: "they [Communists] will make every effort to take advantage of the troubled conditions that are bound to accompany the difficult processes of demobilization and changing over from war time to peace time economy."

On 31 August 1944, E. Jenkins, Private Secretary to Wavell, noted:

There would be large numbers of demobilized Indian soldiers[,] some of them discontented, and a strong Indian Army, still under arms and perhaps open to political influence. Throughout the last war Egypt had remained quiet; but there was a flare up as soon as the war ended. The same sort of flare up is likely to occur in India, after the war. His Majesty's Government had never understood the Egyptian problem, and paid no attention to it until the trouble
began. They did not understand and are not attending to the Indian problem today. . . . By the end of next year, therefore, we might be faced with demobilization. . . . Discontent is inevitable, and we could expect little relief from our present economic strains—high prices and inflation. . . . If the political prisoners are released, embittered by their long confinement[, they] would have dangerous material ready to their hands.149

In September 1944, Wavell warned London: “At the end of the Japanese War we shall be faced immediately with demobilization. . . . All this will cause unemployment and discontent. . . . We can hope for no quick improvement of the economic troubles caused by the war.”150

In the meantime, the GoI took certain steps that satisfied the jawans for the time being. In June 1943, a plan for postwar reconstruction and the settlement of the soldiers who would be discharged by the army, was being considered.151 The Post War Reconstruction Fund for the permanent benefit of the enlisted classes in October 1943 amounted to Rs 5 crores (1 crore is equivalent to 100 lakhs; 10 lakhs is equivalent to 1 million). The Raj calculated that by October 1945, it would amount to 12 crores. This fund’s money was contributed by the soldiers themselves. When the pay was increased in April 1942, it was decided that instead of the soldiers getting an increase of Rs 4 per month individually, Rs 2 should be set aside for this fund for their collective benefit after the war. For those soldiers who died, the money would be used for the benefit of their sons, daughters, and wives. The government calculated that the deferred pay of each soldier amounted to Rs 3 per month payable to him on demobilization. In addition, the soldier would be granted 3 percent interest on all his undrawn balance. This way, the government encouraged savings among the jawans so that they could use it to improve their lot after the war rather than spend the extra pay in riotous living. By October 1943, the soldiers’ savings in the collective fund amounted to 800 lakhs. Many jawans also put their money in postal savings. This allowed them to earn 1 percent more interest than the current rate and exempted their savings from income tax.152

About 80 percent of the jawans were from rural areas. Most of the soldiers were actual cultivators and owned land themselves or were tenants. Most of them expected liberal jagirs.153 Agricultural headquarters were established in the recruiting areas where the ex-soldiers and their families were advised about techniques for improving agriculture. Pamphlets were printed by the Welfare and Amenities Directorate on the advice of the agricultural experts and in consultation with the

149. Note by E. Jenkins, 31 August 1944, in Mansergh and Lumby, TSP, 5: 1–2.
150. Memorandum by the Viceroy to the War Cabinet, September 1944, WP(44)684, CP.
151. Report for May 1943, India, Para 92, 23 June 1943, WP(43)261, CP.
152. From Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Madras, New Delhi, 29 October 1943, File no. 180/43, GoI, Home Department, Public, NAI.
provincial governments. These pamphlets were then distributed among the soldiers. Among the schemes put forward for the soldiers’ benefit were the establishment of training centres for animal husbandry (dairying, sheep rearing, poultry farming), well sinking, and the installation of tube wells for the plots of ex-soldiers. The soldiers were informed by their company and platoon officers about the government’s activities regarding the postwar scenario. In every unit, trained personnel from the Agricultural Department demonstrated improved agricultural methods involving sophisticated implements and improved varieties of seeds. Pictures of pests, statements of milk yields, and photographs of selected types of livestock were also shown to the audience.\textsuperscript{154}

In January 1945, the government sanctioned 375,000 pounds sterling for work projects of the soldiers.\textsuperscript{155} From late 1943, welfare centers for the female members of the soldiers’ families were opened in Punjab. In such centers, the women were taught flower growing, chimney making, toy making, and so forth. The objective was that such trained women could supplement the income of their households.\textsuperscript{156} The British officers noted that those Indian troops who had served overseas in Italy and Greece had more contact with Western conditions than those who were stationed in India and Burma, so the former group showed an increasing tendency to insist on the need for better education of the Indian masses in the postwar era.\textsuperscript{157}

In December 1944, the GoI issued a proclamation that many of the ECIOs would be granted regular commissions after the war because officers would be required to man the postwar Indian Army.\textsuperscript{158} Such promises temporarily cooled the apprehensions of Indian officers, but the harsh reality after the war posed problems for the Raj. After the war, out of 13,000 ECIOs, only 450 were selected for permanent commissions.\textsuperscript{159} Only then did the Indian officers, along with the unemployed demobilized jawans, turn against the Raj.

**Conclusion**

Besides tangible and nontangible incentives, unit pride and loyalty towards their commanding officers also motivated the Indian troops. Loyalty bonds between the jawans and their officers were dependent on the personal touch of the officers. A feature unique about the Indian Army was the fact that officers had to take personal care of the troops, especially their religious and cultural sensibilities. Many of the material measures undertaken by the colonial state to keep the Indian soldiers contented were not uniquely colonial but similar to those initiated for the

\textsuperscript{154} From Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Madras, New Delhi, 29 October 1943, File no. 180/43, Para 3, 5–6.
\textsuperscript{155} Report for January 1945, India, Para 111, 22 February 1945, WP(45)108, CP.
\textsuperscript{157} Report for February 1945, India, Para 112, 1 April 1945, WP(45)212.
\textsuperscript{158} “Post War Indian Army Commissions,” \textit{FA}, 19 December 1944, pp. 5–6, APC.
\textsuperscript{159} Pradeep Barua, \textit{The State at War in South Asia} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 153.
British and the African soldiers. Taking all these into consideration, the Indian Army could be categorized as a quasi-mercenary professional colonial army. The term “quasi-mercenary” is used because compared to the national armies, tangible incentives probably played a more important role in ensuring the loyalty of Indian soldiers. However, it would be improbable to expect men to be willing to sell their lives just for money. Unit pride, loyalty to their saathis, concern for the izzat (especially in case of the “martial races”), and personalized loyalty bonds with their officers also motivated the jawans to face the “face of battle”; hence, the Indian Army was also partly professional. Nevertheless, such an army could probably never be as loyal and combat effective as an ideologically indoctrinated national army. This formula might act as a foil to assess the loyalty of other colonial armies.

Being a quasi-mercenary army, the Indian Army’s loyalty remained somewhat conditional and brittle in the age of Total War. The mass expansion of the Indian Army during the first part of the war resulted in some problems of discipline and morale. About 500,000 Indian troops served overseas. Against a weak enemy like the Italian Army in Abyssinia, its loyalty remained adequate. But, against a strong enemy like the IJA, especially when the welfare mechanism malfunctioned during 1942, the Indian Army started disintegrating. The disintegration was further accelerated by the defective man-management techniques of the inexperienced officers. Even in 1943, the Indian Army’s performance in Burma was indifferent. From 1944, the Indian Army did not suffer any loyalty crisis because by that time, the Axis powers had lost the battle of production. During the second part of the war, the size of the Indian Army remained static, and because of the increasing material resources at the disposal of the British Empire, the military authorities could take care of the soldiers and their families. Further, proper man management of the jawans by the commissioned officers, as emphasized by the training command, somewhat reestablished the personalized loyalty bonds between them. Nevertheless, if the Indian Army had been engaged in a high intensity war for a considerable time resulting in millions of casualties, then it probably would have melted like snow under the sun. This might open up a debate regarding combat motivation theory in general: whether without the support of a national ideology or an inhuman coercive apparatus, can any army face the ordeal of Total War effectively?

Ironically, the Indian Army started to unravel when the war was over, because the “home front” was also a crucial factor in the loyalty mechanism of the Indian Army. Both London and Delhi were anxious about the possibilities of disorder breaking out in India, which in turn could have engulfed the Indian Army. From 1940 onwards, India suffered from food shortages. The War Cabinet, engaged in waging a global war, could not afford to provide adequate succour to the Raj. The political parties in India did not attack the Indian Army’s loyalty directly. The INC and Muslim League were either unwilling or unable to destroy the loyalty bonds of the jawans with their British masters. This shows the limitations of the reach of

160. Molesworth, Curfew on Olympus, 283.
the freedom movement and the apolitical nature of the Indian Army. Only when the Indian soldiers were thrown out of lucrative military service did they become “nationalists.” The real problem started with the onset of demobilization in the immediate aftermath of the Axis surrender, and then Jenkins’s nightmare became a reality.

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