

# EMPIRE OF HONOR: Punjabi Recruitment in the First World War

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*This paper focuses on British wartime recruitment efforts in the northwestern Indian state of Punjab between 1914 and 1918. In doing so, it demonstrates that colonial authorities were not only well-versed in local or regional Indian culture but that they were more than adept at exploiting that culture to serve the needs of their empire, particularly the British empire's need to raise military forces for its First World War effort. Specifically, this study argues that British colonial officials, such as Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who served as the Punjab's governor during the First World War, understood the sort of rhetoric and cultural appeals that would motivate common Punjabis to enlist in the British Indian Army. To prove its claim, this study analyzes the recruitment speeches O'Dwyer made during the war as well as the letters actual Punjabi soldiers wrote from the European battlefield.*

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Using the speeches that Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab (1913-1919), delivered at various recruitment durbars in Punjab throughout the First World War (1914-1918), I will demonstrate that the colonial Punjab government primarily employed appeals to *izzat*, which is an Indian sense of reputation or honor, to increase native recruitment for the imperial war effort. Furthermore, by using letters written by Punjabi soldiers on the Western Front, I will argue that these appeals to *izzat* were effective and resonated with Punjabis. Through this kind of analysis, I hope to demonstrate how pervasively in touch the colonial, official mind was with the colonized and that colonial authorities were well-versed in exploiting Indians' desire for *izzat*. That is, the officials understood what struck a chord with the natives and what sort of rhetoric pushed the right buttons in the common Punjabi. Such a study is significant because it attempts to uncover and recognize the humanity and sacrifice of a community of soldiers who have been largely forgotten in popular narratives of the First World War.

Many historians have heretofore made valuable contributions to the study of Punjab's role in and contributions to the First World War. Their histories have dealt with topics and questions such as how recruitment was conducted in Punjab, how Punjabis conceptualized military service, what motivated Punjabis to fight for empire, and, more recently, the emotional world of the Punjabi sepoys. The seminal historical work in the field is arguably *India and World War I*, which includes key pieces by S.D. Pradhan and DeWitt C. Ellinwood that touch on the Punjabi experience during the First World War.<sup>1</sup> Ellinwood, for instance, posits that economic improvement and social mobility drove many Indians to enlist in the Indian Army.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, using actual interviews of Sikh veterans of the First World War, Pradhan argues that their

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<sup>1</sup> DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan, eds., *India and World War I* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> DeWitt C. Ellinwood, "The Indian Soldier, the Indian Army, and Change, 1914-1918," in *India and World War I*, 177-212.

reputation as a ‘martial race’ in conjunction with economic factors influenced Sikhs to join the Indian Army during the First World War in such large numbers.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Santanu Das, who is interested foremost in recovering the emotional aspects of the Indian experience in the First World War, similarly asserts that while an economic factor was central to Indians’ decision to enlist, “one must take into account too nuances related to the more specific socio-cultural story of the region that intersected with issues such as family and community traditions, livelihood, faith and masculinity, among other factors.”<sup>4</sup> David Omissi is another influential historian who presents a political and social history of the colonial Indian Army. In *The Sepoy and the Raj*, Omissi treats the martial-race theory, which skewed recruitment for the Indian Army during the end of the nineteenth century heavily towards Punjabi castes and communities extensively, and he argues that enlistment in Punjab was usually related to economic opportunity.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, oft-cited historian Tan Tai Yong examines how Punjab became known as the “sword arm of the Raj” and came to enjoy a particularly close relationship with the colonial military for almost a century in *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Yong argues that service in the colonial military was appealing for various martial classes across Punjab as an insurance against famine or debt.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Yong examines Sir Michael O’Dwyer’s role in overhauling of the Indian Army’s pre-First World War recruitment policy and engendering a new cooperation between civil and military authorities for the purpose of extracting as many recruits from the province as possible.<sup>8</sup> All these historians have provided invaluable historical insight into the experience of Punjabi sepoys in the First World War and the colonial Punjab government’s recruiting and enlisting strategies.

While some historians like Tan Tai Yong have discussed Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O’Dwyer’s zealous First World War recruitment efforts and others such as David Omissi and Santanu Das have usefully treated and critiqued an extant collection of Indian soldiers’ censored mail, none have viewed the official mind and the Punjabi sepoy mind in relation to one another. No historian has connected the recruiting speeches O’Dwyer made during his Punjabi durbars and real Punjabi voices together. In particular, they have not examined the degree to which O’Dwyer’s rhetoric concerning *izzat* was effective or appealing to his Punjabi audience. Stephen P. Cohen and Nick Lloyd are the only historians I found who touch on the content of O’Dwyer’s speeches and the types of appeals he made. However, both Cohen and Lloyd briefly examine only two of O’Dwyer’s speeches, and neither of them analyze the extent to which O’Dwyer’s rhetoric was culturally-sensitive, persuasive, or purposely crafted to exploit the hopes and fears of Punjabis.<sup>9</sup> Historians have not placed or situated O’Dwyer in the larger web of Punjabi society. I aim to fill the gap by putting O’Dwyer in conversation with Punjabi voices, with real participant experience.

<sup>3</sup> S.D. Pradhan, “The Sikh Soldier in the First World War,” in *India and World War I*, 213-226.

<sup>4</sup> Santanu Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Sounds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 81.

<sup>5</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 10-43, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Yong, *The Garrison State*, 79-83.

<sup>8</sup> Yong, *The Garrison State*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, “The Military Enters Indian Thought,” in *War and Society in Colonial India*, 2nd ed., ed. Kaushik Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 173; Nick Lloyd, “The View from Government House: Sir Michael O’Dwyer’s War,” in *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. Roger D. Long and Ian Talbot (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 49.

## EMPIRE OF HONOR

A presentation of a few key statistics as well as some brief context regarding Indian military recruitment during the colonial era is in order to both highlight the sheer number of Punjabis who served in the First World War and to understand these Punjabis' socioeconomic background. A total of 1,440,437 Indians were recruited for the British Empire's war effort between August 1914 and December 1919.<sup>10</sup> Over a million of these men—1,096,013—served overseas in various major and minor theaters of war, such as France, East Africa, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Gallipoli, Salonika, Palestine, Aden, and the Persian Gulf.<sup>11</sup> Of the total number of Indians recruited, 480,000 men, of whom 408,000 served as combatants, came from Punjab.<sup>12</sup> By the war's end, Punjab had provided over forty percent of the total number of Indian combatants and nearly one third of all Indian recruits.<sup>13</sup> Most of these Punjabi soldiers were "recruited from the semi-literate peasant-warrior classes of north India in accordance with the 'martial race' theory."<sup>14</sup> Das provides a useful explication of the theory of 'martial races':

According to this construct, only certain ethnic and religious groups—such as the Pathans, Dogras, Jats, Garhwalis, Gurkhas and Sikhs, among others—were deemed fit to fight; incidentally, these were men from rural backgrounds who had traditionally been 'loyal' to the government, as opposed to the politicised Bengali who were branded 'effeminate'. Various strands—from Victorian interest in physiognomy and Darwinism to indigenous notions of caste and political calculation—combined to form this elaborate pseudo-scientific theory. Forged in the aftermath of the Sepoy Uprising of 1857, it was enormously influential and shaped the formation of India's armed forces.<sup>15</sup>

The 'martial race' theory heavily informed which Punjabi communities and tribes before, during, and after the First World War. Nevertheless, due to the massive exigency of manpower during the First World War, the colonial government of Punjab, which was headed then by Sir Michael O'Dwyer, ultimately expanded the traditional Punjabi recruitment base and thus opened the Indian Army up for Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim 'non-martial' tribes and castes that had been previously excluded from military service.<sup>16</sup> O'Dwyer was particularly keen on culling as many Punjabis as possible for the imperial war effort.

Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer (1864-1940), who often figures prominently in discussions related to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in April 1919 and the evils of empire, presided over the colonial government of Punjab between 1913 and 1919, a period which roughly includes the outbreak and conclusion of First World War. According to historian Nick Lloyd, Sir Michael O'Dwyer's "elevation to the Lieutenant-Governor was the culmination of a glittering career in the Indian Civil Service."<sup>17</sup> An Irish Catholic, O'Dwyer passed the ICS exam in 1882 and arrived in India in 1885, where he was first posted as a revenue officer in Punjab.<sup>18</sup> Regarding his political philosophy and nature, Lloyd asserts that O'Dwyer "was a man very much in the Punjabi paternalist tradition; a committed believer in the British

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<sup>10</sup> *India's Contribution to the Great War* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923), 79.

<sup>11</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914-1920* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 777.

<sup>12</sup> M.S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, Punjab, 1922), 40.

<sup>13</sup> M.S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Santanu Das, "India and the First World War," in *A Part of History: Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War* (London: Continuum, 2008), 69.

<sup>15</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> O'Dwyer, Michael. *India As I Knew It: 1885-1925* (London: Constable and Company, 1925), 221.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd, "The View from Government House," 43.

<sup>18</sup> Lloyd, "The View from Government House," 43.

Empire and of the importance of ruling directly, strongly, and, above all, fairly.”<sup>19</sup> O’Dwyer’s conception of imperial duty relied upon his enacting the role of a white father-figure to impulsive brown children, who had to be treated with a firm yet just hand. Still, he did not love all his children equally. In fact, O’Dwyer supposedly “prided himself on looking after the interests of the peasantry and regarded himself, with some relish, as an ‘enemy of the *baniyas*’ (the largely Hindu moneylending class).”<sup>20</sup> That is, he saw himself as the champion of the rural, agricultural classes, which incidentally provided the stock of the Indian Army. During the First World War, O’Dwyer played a key role in engendering a cooperation between Punjab’s civil administration and military authorities for the purpose of extracting as many recruits for the Indian Army from the province as possible.<sup>21</sup>

O’Dwyer’s recruitment efforts are treated extensively in *The Punjab and the War*, which was compiled at the behest of the colonial Punjab government in 1922 by M.S. Leigh, an ICS officer, as an official record of the Punjab’s First World War efforts and contributions. *The Punjab and the War* fits neatly into the genre of military or war history. However, this indirect source is heavily biased towards O’Dwyer, whose role in the erstwhile war is seen as invaluable and crucial. In fact, in the text’s foreword, Sir Edward Douglas Maclagan, Governor of the Punjab (1919-1924), extols his direct predecessor: “Through the inspiring energy of its Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Michael O’Dwyer, and his officers the Province was able to give of its best and to feel that it had in no way spared itself in its great effort.”<sup>22</sup> Later in the history, Leigh also retrospectively praises O’Dwyer for his “wonderful energy and ability” and calls him “the mainspring of the whole Province’s effort.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to explain that a mainstay of O’Dwyer’s efforts to raise the number of Punjabi recruits after 1916 was his series of *durbars*, which were essentially public receptions, “covering the whole Province, in which O’Dwyer skillfully adjusted his appeal to suit each several audience.”<sup>24</sup> O’Dwyer evidently attempted to cast as wide a net as he could to entice Punjabis of all backgrounds and creeds to enlist.

Leigh aptly summarizes the contents of O’Dwyer’s formal addresses or speeches as well as the kind of appeals made therein to different cities, regions, and communities in Punjab to inspire enlistment:

Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Rohtak, Ludhiana are reminded of their own high reputation, of the valour of their men and the spirit of their women; it is only necessary to urge them to endure to the end. Karnal, Lahore, Gujranwala, Ferozepore are reminded of bygone traditions of bravery; they are urged to emulate the best districts and the neighbouring States. Backward tracts and tribes are contrasted with their more spirited neighbours. The ‘educated’ are implored not to lag behind Bengal. In one case the number of casualties is dwelt on as an incentive to brave avengers; in another their slightness in comparison with the toll of fever and plague is brought out. Battle honours are held out as a bait for some: rewards of pay or land for others.<sup>25</sup>

Over the course of the war, O’Dwyer thus evolved into an expert at delivering recruitment pitches and manipulating his audience’s desire for recognition, communal pride, and honor. As Leigh explains, “Sir Michael indeed ‘became all things to all men.’”<sup>26</sup> At any rate, the full-length speeches from which Leigh pulls from to form

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd, “The View from Government House,” 45.

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd, “The View from Government House,” 45.

<sup>21</sup> Tan Tai Yong, “Garrison Province at Work: Punjab and the First World War,” in *The Garrison State*, 98-140.

<sup>22</sup> E.D. Maclagan, foreword to *The Punjab and the War*

<sup>23</sup> Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 30.

this condensed synopsis of O'Dwyer's orations actually survive in a collection published by the colonial Punjab government in 1918.<sup>27</sup> In total, there are twenty-four speeches, of which nineteen were given at durbars between January 1917 and August 1918. I will refer to these selfsame primary sources to investigate the extent to which O'Dwyer's speeches resonated with his Punjabi audiences.

We do not have to rely solely on indirect sources such as Leigh, however, for accurate information on Sir Michael O'Dwyer's recruitment efforts in Punjab during the First World War. In fact, O'Dwyer gives his own account of his recruitment efforts in his autobiography, *India as I Knew It: 1885-1925*, which he wrote upon retirement from politics.<sup>28</sup> While it is primarily intended as a record of his four-decade' service in India, with special attention to his term as Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab (1913-1919), O'Dwyer's book can also be read as a vindication or defense of himself and his administration. Indeed, his legacy started to come under fire in his own lifetime after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919. In his autobiography, O'Dwyer hence underscores the contributions he made in strengthening British rule in Punjab, saving Punjab from multiple conspiracies, and securing Punjabi recruits for the British Empire's First World War effort.

In regard to the latter, O'Dwyer argues that "no effort was spared [by his administration] to bring home to the [Punjabi] people that the War was *their* War, one for the defense of their hearths and homes."<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he cites that under his supervision "the whole machinery of the Province was concentrated on providing men for the Army."<sup>30</sup> In terms of his personal contributions, O'Dwyer explains:

The strongest appeal to a Punjabi is one to his *izzat* (honour) or that of his tribe, caste, or community, and the most effective way in which such an appeal can be made is in the public Durbars, which are a traditional feature of Oriental administration. Hence from the beginning of the War I revived the system of holding Durbars in every district or group of districts for war propaganda; and from July 1917, I made use of these great assemblies to meet the prominent men of each district, especially the war-workers, to review by tribes, religions, and localities the results already obtained [in recruitment], to arouse officials and non-officials to a sense of the common danger and the need of raising men to protect their hearths and homes, [and] to encourage further effort.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, O'Dwyer evidently felt confident about his knowledge of Punjabi culture and society. He also believed that he knew what kind of rhetoric or appeals the common Punjabi would listen to and heed. O'Dwyer also implies that he has a competent understanding of the complex Punjabi cultural notions, such as *izzat*.

O'Dwyer believed that his recruitment pitches at his many durbars were successful. Summing up his discussion of his war-durbars and the multi-faceted appeals he made, O'Dwyer asserts, "By such measures, it was brought home to the people that Government would reward loyal service with honour and material benefits." Furthermore, O'Dwyer personally felt that his efforts in hosting and speaking at these public audiences were very effective in raising men.<sup>32</sup> He cites Punjabi recruitment figures from 1917, which is when he began his durbar tours in earnest, and 1918 as evidence for his sentiment. O'Dwyer points out that Punjab

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<sup>27</sup> *War Speeches of His Honour Sir Michael O'Dwyer, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, Punjab, 1918).

<sup>28</sup> Michael O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," in *India As I Knew It*, 213-231.

<sup>29</sup> O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," 216.

<sup>30</sup> O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," 219.

<sup>31</sup> O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," 223-4.

<sup>32</sup> O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," 225.

contributed 95,000 recruits in 1917 whereas 134,000 Punjabi men enlisted in 1918.<sup>33</sup> Of course, he does not explain to what extent *his* own efforts led to this overall increase of almost 40,000 Punjabis.

Before analyzing the substance of Sir Michael O'Dwyer's durbar speeches, it would be useful to briefly outline *izzat*. After all, this concept plays a central role in O'Dwyer's recruitment pitches and appeals. A contemporary of O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-General Sir James Willcocks gives an interesting explication of *izzat* in his post-war account of his experiences on the Western Front between 1914 and 1915, where he served as the commander of the Indian Corps.<sup>34</sup> A career Indian Army officer who had also been born and bred in India, Willcocks evidently felt that he was familiar enough with Indian culture to understand *izzat*. Acting as a translator or cultural informant of sorts, Willcocks writes to his intended audience, which was essentially British, "*Izzat* is a thing little understood by any but Indians, but it is a great driving force; it raises men in the estimation of their fellows, whilst the loss of it debases them."<sup>35</sup> However, we do not have to rely on this poetic yet hazy Anglo-Indian understanding of *izzat*.

Scholars, both Indian and British, can help us further understand *izzat*, a complex concept that eludes any simple, easy, or one-word translation into English. According to Santanu Das, *izzat* is an Urdu word "roughly translated as 'honour', 'prestige' or 'reputation.'"<sup>36</sup> David Omissi adds "standing" and "credit" to his definition of *izzat*.<sup>37</sup> Ravi Ahuja, on the other hand, defines *izzat* as "respect, respectability, honour."<sup>38</sup> Thus, *izzat* represents many things simultaneously. While I do not contend with any of these scholars' definitions of *izzat*, I should like to augment these scholars' broad understanding of the term by adding that we can take *izzat* to also mean fame, eminence, as well as the good name of oneself, one's family, or one's community. These forms of *izzat* are particularly at work in O'Dwyer's speeches.

Throughout his speeches at durbars across Punjab between 1917 and 1918, Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer manipulated and exploited his audience's sense of *izzat* to get more Punjabis to enlist in the Indian Army. For instance, in his speech at a durbar in Montgomery in January 1917, O'Dwyer exhorts the city of Montgomery as well as the South-West Punjab as a whole to contribute more men to the war effort by appealing particularly to his audience's fear of missing out on *izzat*. He draws stark comparisons between the splendid manpower contributions of the North-West Punjab and the lackluster efforts of the South-West Punjab. At the end of his speech, O'Dwyer warns that time is running out for "the districts of the South-West Punjab to prove their manhood and their loyalty" and "to remove from these districts the reproach of being the only districts in the Punjab that failed to play their

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<sup>33</sup> O'Dwyer, "The War Effort of the Punjab," 225.

<sup>34</sup> The Indian Corps was composed of two divisions of the Indian Army and was dispatched to Marseilles, France in the autumn of 1914. It represented the first ever batch of Indian soldiers to fight European foes on European soil. The Indian Corps was ultimately transferred to Mesopotamia at the end of 1915.

<sup>35</sup> James Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable and Company, 1920), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Santanu Das, "Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914-1918: Towards an Intimate History," in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82.

<sup>37</sup> David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 12; David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 79.

<sup>38</sup> Ravi Ahuja, "The Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)," in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 134.

part in this great struggle.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, O’Dwyer plays to a sense of regional, collective, and gendered *izzat*, which is supposedly at stake. O’Dwyer likewise employs appeals to a reputational form of *izzat* in his speech at a durbar in Kasur in August 1917. Here, O’Dwyer appeals to the reputations of both the Sikh and Muslim tribes of the Lahore District: he asks the Sikh whether they will “let it be said that prosperity has deadened their military spirit and sapped their courage,” and he similarly asks the Muslims whether they will “allow it to be said hereafter that they took no part in defending their country.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in his speech at a durbar at Jhelum in November 1917, O’Dwyer again manipulates his audience’s fear of missing out on *izzat* to encourage recruitment: he warns that “the clan, the family or the individuals who could have helped in one form or another but failed to do so will never cease to regret that they stood aloof when opportunities of service and honour presented themselves.”<sup>41</sup>

Whereas O’Dwyer presents enlisting in the army as the vehicle by which *izzat* is maintained, if not gained, *not* enlisting in the army is the means by which the *izzat* one’s community has already accumulated is lost. For example, in his speech at a durbar in Gujranwala in August 1917, O’Dwyer warns the men of Gujranwala that they are not doing enough in raising men for the army and will therefore suffer for it in more ways than one. He threatens Gujranwala with an imminent loss of *izzat* and tries to shame the city to into a proper sense of duty. O’Dwyer declares:

Your neighbours in Gujrat, Amritsar and Gurdaspur will point the finger of scorn at Gujranwala, and say, ‘that is the district which stood aloof in the great war when we gave our manhood in tens of thousands to fight for the *Sarkar*.’ It will be said that you were either too cowardly or too well off to do your duty. If those things are said, and they certainly will be said, what *izzat* will you have with Government or your neighbors? You have still a chance—a last chance—of making good the lost ground, of coming into line with your neighbors and of redeeming the good name of your clan, your race and your district.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, according to O’Dwyer, a community that collectively fails to heed the call of duty risks derisive scorn from its neighbors and also ambivalence from the government, and it also risks an irrecoverable loss in *izzat* in the eyes of both.

In contrast to his recruitment speeches from 1917, O’Dwyer’s speeches from 1918 focus more on the potential increase in one’s *izzat* through military service. For instance, at a durbar in Jullundur in January 1918, O’Dwyer ends his speech by stating that “those who come forward in this great crisis” will have “their descendants...always point with pride to the fact that they played a man’s part on the right side in the decision of the greatest issues with which the human race has ever been faced.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, O’Dwyer manipulates his audience to associate *izzat* with a positive legacy in the eyes of posterity. Additionally, in his speech at a durbar in Dera Ghazi Khan in February 1918, O’Dwyer claims that “the man who does his duty well and has ability, can rise to the commissioned ranks and establish his own *izzat* and that of his family for good.”<sup>44</sup> Hence, O’Dwyer depicts military service as a once-in-

<sup>39</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Montgomery on the 17th January 1917” in *War Speeches*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Kasur on the 6th August 1917,” in *War Speeches*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Jhelum on the 1st November 1917” in *War Speeches*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Gujranwala on the 8th August 1917,” in *War Speeches*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Jullundur on the 28th January 1918,” in *War Speeches*, 87.

<sup>44</sup> Michael O’Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Dera Ghazi Khan on the 18th February 1918,” in *War Speeches*, 112.

a-lifetime *izzat* jackpot. Furthermore, in his speech at a darbar held at Gujranwala in August 1918, O'Dwyer asserts that “those who do their part in bringing this great struggle to a triumphant close can ever hold their heads high, confident that they have brought honor to themselves, their families, their tribes and their race or religion.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, O'Dwyer promises that enlisting will result in one gaining *izzat* for every aspect of one's identity or every kind of group one associates with.

O'Dwyer believed that the war provided Punjabis “an opportunity which will never recur to do *khidmat* and thereby raise their *izzat*,” and Punjabi soldiers in fact do express in their letters the capacity of military service to bring *izzat*.<sup>46</sup> Hence, O'Dwyer's incessant appeals to *izzat* actually resonated with Punjabis. For example, in an Urdu letter dated May 22, 1916, Gholam Mustafa, a Punjabi Muslim of the Sialkot Cavalry Brigade's Machine Gun Squadron, writes from France to his friend Mahomed Akbar Khan in Bombay, India primarily to tell Khan that he is glad to hear of Khan's decision to enlist. However, he warns Khan to “stiffen [his] heart first...for unless one's heart is in one's work one cannot perform it properly.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he ends his letter by proudly asserting that while he and the other Indian sepoy in France “are required to do things of which [they] had never dreamed in [their] whole lives,” they “meet trials and misfortunes with so much tact and perseverance that fame is secured thereby to the whole of Hindustan and to [their] illustrious Government.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, for Mustafa, one benefit of service in the army is bringing fame to both his own countrymen and to his colonial government. Mustafa conceptualizes sepoy like himself as the instrument by which prestige and honor—*izzat*—can come to India. Furthermore, in an Urdu letter dated June 5, 1917, Jemadar Sultan Khan, a thirty-four-year-old Punjabi Muslim serving with the 18<sup>th</sup> Lancers in France, urges Malik Fateh Mahomed Khan in Shahpur District, Punjab to “raise the name of the Buranas...by getting the *lumberdars* to enlist men of Burana village as Buranas.”<sup>49</sup> He exhorts his addressee to “emphasize...that [their] caste has got to win a name by serving Government.”<sup>50</sup> Khan complains that while he is an officer, few respect him because his clan, the Buranas, does not have a history or tradition of serving in the army.<sup>51</sup> He wistfully remarks, “We get our livelihood here all right, but what about our *izzat*?”<sup>52</sup>

Sultan Khan also points out a few examples of other clans and castes that have successfully gained *izzat*, or good name, by serving in the army in large numbers. Khan ends his letter by explicitly stating what he believes is a primary aim in enlisting: “The whole object of military service is to raise the reputation of one's caste, and that is what we have to do.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, to sepoy from lower-status backgrounds, service in the military is reconfigured as the vehicle whereby one's social group can acquire an increase in social status and standing. Additionally, in an Urdu letter dated September 17, 1916, Fazullah Khan, a Punjabi Muslim, writes from the Adjutant-General's office in Rouen, France to his kinsman Chandhir Ghulam Sarwar Khan in Gujrat District, Punjab. Fazullah Khan's statements demonstrate that proving one's loyalty to the

<sup>45</sup> Michael O'Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Gujranwala on the 3rd August 1918,” in *War Speeches*, 137.

<sup>46</sup> Michael O'Dwyer, “Speech Delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor at a Darbar Held at Gurdaspur on the 2nd February 1918,” in *War Speeches*, 99.

<sup>47</sup> Gholam Mustafa, letter to Mahomed Akbar Khan, May 22, 1916, in *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 188.

<sup>48</sup> Mustafa, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 188.

<sup>49</sup> Jemadar Sultan Khan, letter to Malik Fateh Mahomed Khan, June 5, 1917, in *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 296.

<sup>50</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 296.

<sup>51</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 295-6.

<sup>52</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 296

<sup>53</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 296



government and gaining repute for one's clan are ample reasons to sign up and fight. He relates his willingness and readiness "to lay down [his] for Government" if necessary, and he declares that "now is the time to show one's loyalty."<sup>54</sup> In addition, he reminds his addressee to try to raise a cavalry regiment of their fellow Gujars "because only in the Army is any *izzat* to be acquired."<sup>55</sup> He warns him if more Gujars do not enlist then their "caste will be despised" and their "caste will be disgraced."<sup>56</sup> Overall, his letter reads just like any number of O'Dwyer's recruitment speeches that emphasize the potential increase and loss in communal *izzat* that accrues from military service or the lack thereof. Nonetheless, the similarity between the way Punjabi soldiers themselves think about *izzat* in their letters and the way O'Dwyer speaks about *izzat* in his durbar recruitment speeches points to the pervasive nature of British officials' knowledge of Indian culture, which the British officials maneuvered to work for empire rather than against it.

It is evident that colonial officials like O'Dwyer had an insidiously intimate knowledge of Punjabi culture, which they exploited to serve the interests of empire. After all, O'Dwyer's rhetoric on *izzat* is uncannily familiar Punjabi soldiers' own discourse regarding *izzat*. Hence, O'Dwyer tapped into, appropriated, and ultimately manipulated Punjabi cultural notions, namely *izzat*, to extract as many recruits as possible for the British Empire's war effort across the Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. This study demonstrates that the distance or divide between the official mind and the colonized mind thus not so great after all. In other words, the chasm of cultural ignorance was bridged. However, this was not a bridge of multiculturalism, British respect for Indian culture, or British admiration for Indian difference. Rather, it was a one-way bridge of exploitation crafted by the British, who sought to understand Indian culture only for the empire's own needs. A further direction for research is examining to what extent other appeals O'Dwyer made in his durbar recruitment speeches, such as promises of tangible benefits and potential future rewards or special consideration from the government, resonated with Punjabis. Additionally, the question of whether Punjabi patriotism during the First World War was genuine—if patriotic feelings were based in Punjabis' belief in the inherent goodness of empire—or artificial—if outwardly patriotic sentiments among Punjabis were the result of faith in O'Dwyer's appeals and the desire for material gain—presents another rich area for a larger, postcolonial-historical study.

A secondary motive or purpose of an essay like this is to raise much-needed awareness of forgotten, subaltern historical actors. While the number of Indians, particularly Punjabis, who fought for the British Empire between 1914 and 1918 is undoubtedly staggering, Indian soldiers' participation in the First World War is a marginalized history at best. Das argues that the Indian soldiers who served "have been doubly marginalized: by Indian nationalist history which has largely focused on the heroes of the Independence movement and by the grand narrative of the war which still remains largely Eurocentric."<sup>57</sup> In a similar vein, even Sashi Tharoor, a non-scholar yet important interpreter of Indian history, recognizes the importance of India's contribution to the First World War. Tharoor writes that Indian troops "were destined to remain largely unknown once the war was over: neglected by the British,

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<sup>54</sup> Fazullah Khan, letter to Chandhir Ghulam Sarwar Khan, September 17, 1916, in *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 236.

<sup>55</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 236.

<sup>56</sup> Khan, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 235-6.

<sup>57</sup> Santanu Das, "Imperialism, Nationalism, and the First World War in India," in *Finding Common Ground: New Directions in First World War Studies*, ed. Jennifer D. Keene and Michael S. Neiberg (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 68.

for whom they fought, and ignored by their own country, from which they came.”<sup>58</sup> Regarding their marginalization, Tharoor insightfully explains that “part of the reason is that they were not fighting for India. None of the soldiers was a conscript: soldiering was their profession. They served the very British empire that was oppressing their own people back home.”<sup>59</sup> More than a century after the First World War, the existence of these colonial troops is still subject to widespread historical amnesia: regarding the depiction and inclusion of a Sikh soldier in Sam Mendes’ award-winning First World War film *1917* (2019), a British actor infamously complained that the filmmakers were ‘forcing diversity’ on audiences.<sup>60</sup> More work needs to be done to honor the legacy and increase awareness of empire’s forgotten children.

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<sup>58</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (Brunswick: Scribe, 2016), 75.

<sup>59</sup> Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> “Laurence Fox Apologises to Sikhs for ‘Clumsy’ *1917* Comments,” *BBC*, January 24, 2020.

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