

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Wafer-Thin History: India and World War I Through Postcards

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## Abstract

World War I (1914–1918) was a defining moment in world history. The Great War came just at the end of the golden age of picture postcards, the Instagram of its time, when humans first shared pictures with each other at a volume and breadth never realized before. This article examines postcards of the war of Indian soldiers and prisoners by French, German, British, and Indian soldiers and associated Europeans to reveal how prejudices and identities were affected by warfare. Postcards also reflected the rise of the Independence struggle as one of its consequences toward the end of the war. As visual media and social extensions of print capitalism, they are a rich source of how complex and contradictory this formative phase of nationalism was for all involved, and the way these humble new media objects were able to play an important role in the psychological conflicts that ensued.

**Keywords:** World War I; Punjab; Pakistan; India; Postcard

## Introduction

World War I (1914–1918) was a defining moment in the history of the world. Nationalism was among the forces that drove communities emerging from fiefdoms and kingdoms to slaughter each other by the millions across the European continent and elsewhere. Weapons like poison gas and airplanes made their debut on the world stage. The Great War came at the end of the golden age of picture postcards, the Instagram of its time, when humans shared pictures at a volume and breadth never realized before. Some 140 billion postcards are said to have been produced in France alone between 1894 and 1919, 22 million postcards a day, with some having had print runs of 500,000 each.<sup>1</sup> Germany, however, was the world's leading producer of picture

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Teulie, "The First Circle of Memory: First World War Postcards of British Imperial Troops in Marseille," in *Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary*, eds. Ben Wellings and Shanti Sumartojo (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, Provence University Press, 2018), 110–16.

postcards during these early years of globalization.<sup>2</sup> The image-soaked epoch had begun when these humble objects danced their way into every corner of the earth like lightly falling snow.

Some 1.2 million Indians served in the British Army in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa during World War I (WWI); 62,000 died, and another 67,000 were wounded.<sup>3</sup> Villages in Punjab were almost denuded of men to fill the trenches in Flanders. Of the roughly 740,000 fighting men recruited through the end of the war, the most significant amount, 136,000, were Punjabi Muslims, followed by about 88,000 Sikhs, 50,000 each of Gurkhas and Rajputs, and almost 30,000 Pathans.<sup>4</sup> The war and its impact jammed open the door to Indian independence, as the British had to promise ever more rights to Indians in exchange for recruits. “When the war is over, Indian expectations will be realized and all Indian difficulties will be put straight. Rulers and ruled will be reconciled and Hindus and Muhammadans will cease to quarrel,” exclaimed the Lahore paper *Desh* on August 21, 1915.<sup>5</sup>

The term “India” in the title of this article was the general term used for the subcontinent and “Indians” for its troops during World War I. It would be almost two decades before the word “Pakistan” was coined, though large numbers of the men involved came from what is now geographically that country, including Sikh and Hindu recruits. Adding to contemporary confusion, the word “Hindu,” especially in France and Germany, was often used non-denominationally on postcards during this period to designate anyone who was “Indian.” While part of the purpose of this paper is to recover overlooked and understudied histories of people in what now comprises Pakistan, it is shared histories across national borders that are most at stake here. I use contemporary terms like “Indians” to refer to the troops and leaders involved, as that is how they saw themselves.

Postcards allow us to refract and listen to the visual voices of their times. They reveal a multi-threaded colonial war experience. With life and death at stake, prejudices could quickly be scrambled. Sudden shifts in attitude were advanced and witnessed by the postcard. As novel social objects, postcards were a building block of the virtual cosmopolis that Partha Mitter describes, which formed before and after the turn of the century, a stretched visual culture across the world’s oceans and larger cities, with innovations coming in from the periphery and many diverse “national” components.<sup>6</sup> These postcards also remind us of Ashish Nandy’s fine point in *The Intimate Enemy* that there were not only political and economic dimensions to the colonial experience but also determinative psychological ones.<sup>7</sup> The postcard designates, as I will try to show, some of the visual components of this psychological

<sup>2</sup> Howard Woody, “International Postcards Their History, Production and Distribution (Circa 1895–1915),” in *Delivering Views Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*, eds. Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>3</sup> Government of India, *India’s Contribution to the Great War* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923), 78. 3.7 million tons of supplies were sent from India, 3 tons per person, and 2.2 million boots were provided (*Ibid.*, 119).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 278 (Appendix C).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Tait Jarboe, ed., *War News in India the Punjabi Press during World War I* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020 [2016]), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Partha Mitter, “The Virtual Cosmopolis,” April 5, 2023 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsyc1WsgivU> [accessed July 27, 2023]).

<sup>7</sup> Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.

experience. As an early media platform, they represent a little-studied but important social form of print media that helped to construct identities and alliances.

“Voluntary recruiting is a key to Swaraj and will give us honour and manhood. The honour of women is bound up with it . . . some will ask ‘Why get killed in France?’ . . . the gateway to our freedoms is situated on the French soil,”<sup>8</sup> spoke Mohandas K. Gandhi, “great hero of the Satyagraha,” as he was already titled on a postcard published during the war.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi’s belief that supporting the war effort would hasten freedom was shared by other politicians, including Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and points to agency among local actors and recruits: Indians were being asked to fight in France in part to further their emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

One way of exploring the complexities of fighting against an unknown European enemy on behalf of an occupier who treats you as his inferior is to examine the postcards from France, Germany, Britain, and India that emerged during World War I. This paper tries to unpack some of their weight as products within the context of the contemporary evidence they subsisted within: messages on the back, eyewitness testimony in newspapers, letters from soldiers, oral interviews made of WWI veterans, true fiction—an unusual assortment of sources, appropriate to the phantom that is the postcard. The postcards come entirely from my collection, assembled over 30 years, in part examining the nearly forgotten war story that put the Raj firmly on the road to Independence and Partition. Many accounts stress the importance of World War II in events leading to 1947, but World War I was just as significant.

French postcards of Indians from the first arrivals of the Lahore and Meerut Divisions in Marseille celebrated new heroes that transcended prevailing racial and ethnic prejudices. Warfare pried open a new space in French consciousness (and the Indian soldier’s consciousness, too). British postcards reflected paternalistic pride, desperate need, and a slight astonishment that their Indian subjects were so willing to fight for them. They became inclusionary. German postcards pushed senders and receivers toward another kind of mental gymnastics: Indian soldiers were seen both as specimens of a degraded race, easily defeated by modern weaponry, but if captured, were to be well-treated.<sup>11</sup> Properly re-educated and de-colonized, they might help the Germans win the war by driving the British out of India.

Indian postcards went from enthusiastically supporting British efforts abroad to rallying against them at home and advancing the cause of freedom from the British. Demands for self-rule grew in proportion to the number of troops sent abroad. The

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<sup>8</sup> M. K. Gandhi’s speech at Ras, Gujarat on June 26, 1918, in *The Bombay Chronicle* (quoted in Santanu Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture Writings Images Songs* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 61). Gandhi continued: “How many men do cholera and such diseases take away every year? The men die unmourned except by their relatives. On the other hand, soldier’s death on the battlefield makes them immortal, if the scriptures are right, and becomes a source of joy and pride to those left behind. From the death of Kshatriyas will be born the guardians of the nation and no Government can withhold arms from such men.”

<sup>9</sup> Gandhi’s first satyagraha is generally considered the Champaran Satyagraha, held in April 1917 in Bihar. This postcard was likely published soon afterwards.

<sup>10</sup> See “Jinnah’s Speech at the Bombay War Conference June 10, 1918,” in *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah the Formative Years 1892-1920*, ed., Riaz Ahmad (Islamabad: National Institute of Cultural and Historical Research, 1986), 215.

<sup>11</sup> George Morton-Jack, *Army of Empire: The Untold Story of the Indian Army in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 111.

Home Rule cause—Indians should rule India within the British Empire—was among the first times postcards played an all-India role in supporting the freedom struggle. They helped, momentarily at least, to crystallize an “Indian” identity in contrast to a colonial one. They show different Indian communities united in this struggle during the war before splintering in the years to come. Postcards show how “Western” attitudes became rather disparate and distinct given rapidly folding events, while postcards “made in India” during the war had their own perspectives and objectives.

### French Postcards

If any French postcard of Indian troops was printed a half-million times, it was *Landing of the Indian Army at Marseille* (Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> The salute from the soldier on the left extends the viewer’s eye toward the Indians marching through the streets at the beginning of the war in September 1914. A few days earlier, the British Secretary of State for War, H. H. Kitchener, announced that he was lifting the color bar, permitting Indians to kill Europeans – the brown man the white – for the first time on European soil.<sup>13</sup> This shift was a significant change in racial policy, necessitated by British battlefield losses in late August. Indians, Asians whom the French had colonized in limited ways, were now welcomed into European homes as liberators. The Germans initially made a big deal about this, calling the Indian troops racial inferiors being sent against their cultural betters.<sup>14</sup> Yet tens of thousands of French men and women on the street cheered their arrival in Marseille. The celebratory act of sending this and the many hundreds of different postcards of Indian soldiers to each other extended the French sense of who they were. The pioneering postcard historian Gilles Teulie has determined that of about 250 postcards of British Imperial troops arriving at Marseille, five showed Australian troops, two New Zealanders, some 29 South Africans, 30 Anglo-Indians (British), and a whopping 182 Indian troops.<sup>15</sup> Some showed intimate personal scenes of soldiers in cars or their hands on a little girl’s shoulder, as in *Indians, Those Terrible Warriors, Love Children*.<sup>16</sup>

Why? The answer may lie, in part, in the postcard *The Allies Mysterious India Stands Alongside Loyal England in the Defense of Civilization* (Figure 2).<sup>17</sup> The Indian troops

<sup>12</sup> *Debarquement de l’Armée Indienne à Marseille* (Landing of the Indian Army at Marseille), L.C.H., Marseille circa 1914. Collotype, divided back, postmarked February 22, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Mulk Raj Anand captures the moment the troops heard where they were going: “‘Is the war taking place then?’ a sepoy asked. No one answered him, as most of the sepoys did not know where the war was. They had not known where they were going until it was announced in the orders of the day that a message had been intercepted through the ‘telephone with wires’ on the ship, that the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, Lord Kitchener, who had been the Commander-in-Chief in Hindustan, had told the House of Lords that two Divisions of the Indian Army were on their way to France” (Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters* [Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2000 [1940], 7).

<sup>14</sup> Morton-Jack, 111. He quotes the *New York Times* as describing “an interesting tendency to make fun of the fighting value of the native Indian troops, whose landing at Marseille received much publicity in the German press.”

<sup>15</sup> Teulie, “First Circle,” 119.

<sup>16</sup> *34-Guerre Europeene 1914 Les Hindous, ces Terrible Gurriers, Adorent les Enfants* (Indians, Those Terrible Warriors, Love Children), Phototype Vasselier, Nantes, 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *Les Allies L’Inde Mysterieuse est aux Cotes de la Loyale Angleterre pour la Defense de la civilization* (The Allies Mysterious India stands alongside loyal England in the defense of civilization), La Lithographie Parisienne, Paris, circa 1914. Lithograph, divided back.



Figure 1. Debarquement de l'armée Indienne à Marseille [Landing of the Indian army at Marseille]. L. C.H., Marseille? circa 1914. Collotype, Divided back, postmarked February 22, 1916.

enchanted the French, who already had aesthetic and intellectual respect for distant India.<sup>18</sup> Cards showed *Indian Troops Putting Up the Tri-colored Flag*.<sup>19</sup> On the back of one (i.e., *The Indian Army 3, The Infantry*), for example, someone wrote to Madam Lemaître from the Levant Military Hospital on November 11, 1914: “Opposite a view of the famous army from India which is currently camping in Marseille. Yesterday we visited the campsite of the Hindus during an interesting walk I will tell you about later.”<sup>20</sup> Another sender (on *The Army from India, A Section of the Camp*) writes on October 19, 1914, from Marseille: “The arrival and departure of Senegalese, Hindu and Scottish troops have given a lot of animation and picturesqueness to the city . . . they are really good and arrive in long caravans . . . let us hope with their help that we will soon be able to get rid of those filthy Prussians.”<sup>21</sup>

The French did not perceive Indian troops in a vacuum, for they had their colonial troops in service with the French Army fighting on their territory, most of them from North Africa. The French allowed those who committed themselves to become part of the nation’s “revolutionary and democratic heritage.”<sup>22</sup> This integration was ahead of

<sup>18</sup> A tradition of positive depiction in philosophy, literature, and art goes back centuries. It reached an “apotheosis” in print with the lithographs of Indian art published by Firmin Didot between 1800 and 1805 (<http://old.harappa.com/lith/didot.html> [accessed October 5, 2023]).

<sup>19</sup> 1914 *Infanterie Indienne Arborant le Drapeau Tricolore* (Indian Infantry Putting up the Tri-colored Flag), E.L.D., 11 Serie.

<sup>20</sup> *L'Armée de l'Inde 3. L'Infanterie*, Edition L. Simon Edition, 2 rue Glandeves, Cliché J Bosmian-Marseille.

<sup>21</sup> *L'Armée de l'Inde 5. Un coin du Camp*, Edition L. Simon, 2 rue Glandeves, Cliché J Bosmian-Marseille. Postmarked Marseille October 19, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 2.





**Figure 2.** Les Alliés L'Inde Mystérieuse est aux cotes de la loyale Angleterre pour la defense de la civilization [Landing of the Indian army at Marseille], La Lithographie Parisienne, Paris, circa 1914. Lithograph, Divided back.

its Western allies: Black American soldiers in WWI were astounded by the apparent lack of racism they were so used to at home that they saw France as a color-blind society.<sup>23</sup> Soldiers from British India found themselves in, relatively speaking, one of the more tolerant European nations. Not to mention that the French had their petty stereotypes: in *The Generous Scotsman*, a penny-pinching Scot says to an improperly

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. He quotes the sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who was moved to write: "How fine a thing to be a black Frenchman in 1919!"

clad Indian soldier: “You are not hot, my brave Indian . . . what do you want I am not offering you my pants!”<sup>24</sup>

Postcards show Indian soldiers bringing pieces of their world with them as they put lives on the line for “La Republique.” Scenes like *Requisition of Goats for the Indian Troops and 1914 War—Campment—The Butchery Hindoo* show the accommodations made for them.<sup>25</sup> The Indian Army, writes David Omissi, was “mainly an organization of peasants in uniform.”<sup>26</sup> Some were also musicians and brought their instruments with them as *The Indian Army—The Music*.<sup>27</sup> A correspondent describes one of the many likely events where musicians enthralled their hosts: “Mr. G. Valentine Williams, writing from British General Headquarters in France on July 19 says the pipes and drums of the 40th Pathans, that very fine Indian regiment, scored a notable success with a concert they gave yesterday afternoon in the market-place of one of the principal towns in our zone of operations in France.”<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, “Zakhme Dil” (i.e., wounded heart) was the favorite song of Pathan troops on the front, learned even by English officers who sang along.<sup>29</sup> One Pathan wrote to another serving on the front in September 1915: “I have a great desire to play upon the flute, since the great dejection is fallen upon me. You must, you simply must, get one from somewhere. I have no need of anything else.”<sup>30</sup> “These men carry their atmosphere with them,” wrote another correspondent in a line that could apply to *Indian Bakers at La Penne Near Marseille*; “there was nothing in that yard hooded with fog to remind him or me that we were not at Jullundur still on a thick November morning.”<sup>31</sup>

What did these men think of the world they found themselves in? A generally positive impression of France by the sepoys is reported in David Omissi’s *Indian Voices of the Great War* (1999), based on transcripts of censored letters.<sup>32</sup> Interviews with surviving veterans in the 1970s by DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan concur, as did one veteran among a handful I interviewed who served with his brother in France.<sup>33</sup> After standing in a long line to collect his pension at the General Post Office in Rawalpindi in 1990, Haji Zaman Ali recalled: “It [France] is a beautiful country. They

<sup>24</sup> *L’Eccossais Genereaux* (The Generous Scotsman), Honsiul Artist-signed, Unknown Publisher, France, circa 1914. Halftone, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/requisition-goats-indian-troops> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>25</sup> A newspaper correspondent described the scene: “In France now a certain amount of tinned mutton is eaten willingly by the troops, but the great bulk of commissariat meat must be sent alive to railhead and slain there in accordance with prescribed [religious] rites. Hence the herd of sheep and goats in the boulevard” (“Indians in France: Pictures of Camp Life,” *The Times of India* [December 14, 1914]).

<sup>26</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War Soldiers’ Letters 1914–1918* (London & New York: MacMillan/St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>27</sup> *L’Armée de l’Inde 4- La Musique* (The Indian Army-The Music), Cliché J. Bosnian, Marseille, circa 1914. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-army-music> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>28</sup> “Indians in France: Concert by the Pathans,” *The Times of India* (August 12, 1915).

<sup>29</sup> Morton-Jack, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Ser Gul (Pathan, 129 Baluchis) to Barber Machu Khan of 57th Rifles serving at the front (quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 100).

<sup>31</sup> *Boulangers Hindous La Penne Pres Marseille* (Indian Bakers at La Penne Near Marseille), Unknown Publisher, France, circa 1914. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-bakers-la-penne-near-marseille> [accessed October 7, 2022]); *The Times of India* (December 14, 1914).

<sup>32</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan, *India and the Great War* (Columbia, SD: South Asia Books, 1978), 202.



Figure 3. EN GUERRE – TROUPE INDIENNE DANS LES TRANCHEES [THE WAR – INDIAN TROOPS IN THE TRENCH]. L.V.C., Copyright 'the Sphere,' France, circa 1915. Half-tone, Divided back.

are very nice people and they treated us very well. They looked at us with great respect.”<sup>34</sup>

*The War—Indian Troops in the Trench* (Figure 3) represents many men’s situation on the ground.<sup>35</sup> The same illustration appeared in a French magazine accompanied by this caption: “Hindu Trench. Winter fell to the Hindus as a formidable enemy. Many of them,

<sup>34</sup> Haji Zaman Ali (of Tehsil Kahuta) in interview with author, June 16, 1990 (Rawalpindi, Pakistan).

<sup>35</sup> *En Guerre-Troupe Indienne dans Les Tranchees* (The War-Indian Troops in the Trench), L.V.C., Copyright “The Sphere,” France, circa 1915. Half-tone, divided back.



like the one we see lying there, had frozen extremities. But the cold did not weaken their endurance any more than the ambushes of the Prussians did their bravery.”<sup>36</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), one of the first fine Indian novelists in English, was born and raised in Peshawar, where the air would have been thick with stories of the war. His father fought in France while he was a teenager. Anand wrote his first novel, *Across the Black Waters* (1940), about the conflict. It testifies to the love for France and intimate relationships with French from all walks of life among the soldiers, the mix of disdain and devotion to British superior officers, and the dense, momentous experience for the men involved. Of the trenches, he wrote in a description that could apply to Figure 3: “The response of the sepoy seemed to show as if they had resigned themselves to their *kismet* [i.e., fate]. Covered by their army blankets, like hooded, bell-topped tents, snuggling in the folds of blankets, wrapped in their greatcoats, strapped and bandaged with an assortment of woolen rags on their legs, their backs, and their faces, they huddled together as they crouched over the warmth of a cigarette tip or the end of a candle.”<sup>37</sup> Scrawled on the back of one example of Figure 3: “Long Live the Allies Marcel.”<sup>38</sup>

The cheers for the mainly Punjabi, Pathan, and United Province peasants worked: “With regard to her troops, the Indian Corps reached France in the nick of time and helped to stem the great German thrust towards Ypres and the Channel Ports during the autumn of 1914. These were the only trained reinforcements immediately available in any part of the British Empire and right worthily played their part,” was the official summary a decade later.<sup>39</sup> One-third of the British Army on the western front came from India in November 1914, nearly 90,000 troops, over a third of whom would become casualties.<sup>40</sup> Their heroic role in the initial stages of the war was

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<sup>36</sup> *La Panorama de la Guerre 17*, Libraire Jules Tallander, 75, Rue Dareau, Paris (14, Juin [June] 1915). Original French: “Tranchee Hindoue. L’hiver fut aux Hindous un ennemi redoutable. Nombre d’entre eux, comme celui qu’on voit couche la, eurent les extrémités gelées. Mais la froidure ne fit pas plus fléchir leur endurance, que les embuches des Prussiens leur bravoure.”

<sup>37</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters* (New Delhi: Orient, 2008 [1940]), 109. The quote continues: “For, although they had been in the trenches only a few days, one hour had begun to seem to them like the other and each day like the last and the dreary sameness of life in this unknown had begun to assert itself. A passionate people, prone to sudden exaltations and depressions, more faithful than any other if they believed, they were neutral in this war, because this was not a war for any of the religions of their inheritance, nor for any ideal which could fire their blood and make their hair stand on end. Ordered about by the Sarkar, they were as ready to thrust their bayonets into the bellies of the Germans as they had been to disembowel the frontier tribesmen, or their own countrymen, for the pound a month which the Sahibs paid them. But they were like conscripts, brutalized and willing to fight like trained bulls, but without a will of their own, soulless automations in the execution of the army code, though in the strange dark deeps of their natures, unschooled by the Sarkar, there lay the sensitiveness of their own humanity, their hopes, their fears and their doubts. And as if convinced by centuries of faith that the sentinels of Yama, the God of Death, alone would be able to awaken them from their bored somnolence in the corridors of their journey to the netherworlds, they would begin to move, however slowly, when an N.C.O. came and shunted them off into fatigue parties.”

<sup>38</sup> Original French: “Vivent les Allies Marcel.”

<sup>39</sup> Government of India, *India’s Contribution to the Great War*, 221.

<sup>40</sup> George Morton-Jack, “The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration,” *War in History* 13, no. 3, (2006): 329 (he quotes the *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914–1920* [London: The War Office, 1922], 777.



Figure 4. Paschendaele Nov. 1914 Cavalerie indienne [Paschendaele Nov. 1914 Indian Cavalry]. Paris Color/Visé Paris No. 11 Nos Allies [Our allies], Circa 1915. Halftone, Divided back.

captured on *Paschendaele Nov. 1914 Indian Cavalry* (Figure 4).<sup>41</sup> The soldier is relaxed and casual, with a cigarette hanging from his lips in an artist-signed portrait.<sup>42</sup> The almost continuous availability of this postcard on online exchanges a century later testifies

<sup>41</sup> *Paschendaele Nov. 1914 Cavalerie Indienne* (Paschendaele Nov. 1914 Indian Cavalry), Paris Color/Visé Paris No. 11 Nos Allies [Our allies], circa 1915. Halftone, divided back.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* [(Original French, Recto) Le 17 Juin 1915, Marius Collon. 110 Reg. Gerritoual 3 Compagnie” [Verso] “Mon cher Jean Je t’envoi une jolie collection qu’il faudra garder en souvenir de la guerre. Je t’embrasse bien. Ton papa, JE.” [English translation by Luce Neidert] Maurice Collon of the 100 Brigade Gerritoual 6th Company to his son: “My dear Jean I am sending you a pretty collectible that you have to keep as a memory of the war. I hug you. Your Papa, JE.”).

to what must have been millions of impressions garnered by the brown-skinned icon of a cherished victory.

The soldiers sent to France would have been least likely to have had interactions with memsahibs, white women in cantonments, married to British officers or civilians. In France, they unexpectedly found themselves objects of the memsahib's desire. "At the moment we are watching the handsome men represented on this card march, there are large quantities of them arriving and leaving every day," wrote a nurse on the back of *The Indian Army—Indians Washing*.<sup>43</sup> "Having a wash" postcards with semi-clad soldiers like *The Indian Army—Indian Hairstyle* were quite popular.<sup>44</sup> "The French cities were very beautiful. The French people were very friendly, especially the women," recalled one soldier.<sup>45</sup> There are no precise statistics on mixed French-Indian babies born, though in northern France, where troops rested later in the war, one report tallied a hundred.<sup>46</sup> There is evidence of Punjabi soldiers staying in touch with old girlfriends in France, even a marriage, and complaints about "violently amatory" letters from French women to Indian soldiers by British censors.<sup>47</sup> Sepoy Yakub Khan recited a popular French verse when interviewed in 1970: "What sadness! Indian soldiers leave, French women cry."<sup>48</sup>

Sepoys were not only driven by desire in their interactions with memsahibs. They also saw how educated French women were and their emancipated societal role. Many were impressed: "A matter which I am desirous to urge you on is this—that in the

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<sup>43</sup> *L'Armée de l'Inde 6-Toilette des Hindous* (The Indian Army-Indians Washing), Unknown Publisher, France, circa 1914. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-army-indians-washing> [accessed October 7, 2023]). It states: "Ainsi que je le disais dans ma dernière carte que j'espère vous avez reçue je suis redevenue Marseillaise; nous voyons en ce moment défiler ces jolis hommes représentés sur cette carte, il y en a des quantités qui arrivent et partent chaque jour; j'aurais [sic j'aurais] donc le plaisir de vous envoyer des très intéressantes cartes que vous ajouterez à votre collection. Je suis très occupée ici comme à la campagne je travaille beaucoup pour les blessés. Nous avons beaucoup de jeunes gens de notre connaissance qui sont déjà disparus. Quelle horreur." (English translation by Luce Nediert: "As I said in my last card that I hope you have received I have become Marseillaise again; at the moment we are watching the handsome men represented on this card march, there are large quantities of them arriving and leaving every day; I will therefore have the pleasure to send you some very interesting cards that you will add to your collection. I am very busy here as in the country I'm working a lot for the wounded. Many young people of our acquaintance have already disappeared. How awful.")

<sup>44</sup> *L'Armée de l'Inde-La Coiffure de Hindou* (The Indian Army-Indian Hairstyle), Cliché J. Bosnian, Marseille, Edition L. Simon, circa 1914. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-army-indian-hairstyle> [accessed October 7, 2023]). One correspondent described such a scene: "La toilette des Sikhs" is another attraction even more bizarre and curious, though as a spectacle, to the fair onlooker at least, requiring some concession of modesty. The native soldiers do not frequent the city as a rule unless they are marching through, so the "citoyenne" [citizen] must bestow her offerings on the humbler camp followers. The daughter of the concierge will run out into the street and pin her tricolor to the coat of a Musulman driver. The "blanchisseuse" will hold out a cigarette bashfully to a Sikh warrior, who is forbidden, by all the laws of his Gurus to smoke. Her child perhaps will be honoured by a joy ride in the mule transport wagon as far as the corner of the street" (*The Times of India* [December 14, 1914]).

<sup>45</sup> Darshanpurva Dubey (District Kanpur) in interview by S. D. Pradhan, 1971 (British Library [BL]/India Office Records [IOR]/European Manuscripts [MssEur]/F729/2/19).

<sup>46</sup> Teulie "First Circle," 117.

<sup>47</sup> Morton-Jack, 521; Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> "Que malheur! Indiens soldats partis, Mademoiselles France pleurer [sic]." Letter from Yakub Khan to Lance Dafadar Ali Ahmed Khan (5th Cavalry, Rawalpindi, Punjab), Urdu, August 2, 1916 (quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 215).

mosque you should establish a teacher to give instruction to the little boys and girls,” wrote Lance Dafadar Mahomed Khan to Arsalla Khan in Rawalpindi District from France in May 1917.<sup>49</sup> Omissi notes that this sentiment was widespread, and George Morton-Jack lists the better treatment of women in villages and the setting-up of schools for girls as later effects of the war experiences on villages.<sup>50</sup>

The British withdrew most Indian troops from the French lines in continental Europe at the end of 1915 and redeployed them to Mesopotamia. Their inspirational presence continued to play a role for the French—an Indian soldier was on the artist-drawn postcard rallying troops on *Pas-de-Calais Day They Will Not Break Through!* (published three months before the end of the war in August 1918). *Neuve Chapel* in Pas de Calais, a vast graveyard and memorial designed by Sir Herbert Baker (an architect of Raj Delhi) to the almost 5,000 unidentified Indian soldiers who perished on the front, was opened in a ceremony witnessed by survivors in 1927. Attendees included Rudyard Kipling, who spoke movingly of their contribution.<sup>51</sup> As Sarojini Naidu wrote in one of her most famous poems, *The Gift of India* (1917): “They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance/On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.”

“The French people were very friendly to us because they thought we would liberate them,” remembered one sepoy.<sup>52</sup> Postcards were torchbearers of that friendliness. From what I can estimate, up to a thousand different ones were printed in France alone during four years of war, a few hundred in large quantities, others in smaller batches, pressed into albums and shoeboxes for decades to come, a tear in the typically unequal fabric of colonial relationships.

### British Postcards

The British published far fewer postcards of Indian troops than the French, as if discrete about the Indian contribution, except at the beginning of the war. *Want to Fight for England* and *Comrades* had an excerpt on the front from a speech by Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith on September 4, 1914: “Every class and creed, British and Native, Princes and People, Hindoos and Mahometans vie with one another in a noble and emulous rivalry.”<sup>53</sup> Cards were meant to reassure domestic British audiences that help was coming: “Our Indian Warriors, staunch and true, have proved their worth to all; To guard the flag, they dare and do—at England’s battle-call!” went

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Lance Dafadar Mahomed Khan (Pathan) to Arsalla Khan (Rawalpindi District) from France, in Urdu on May 5, 1917 (quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 291).

<sup>50</sup> Dafadar Ranji Lal (jat) to Prem [illegible] (Rohtak District, Punjab), Urdu, November 26, 1916 (quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 258); described by Sir Malcolm Darling in his tours of Punjab during the 1920s (Morton-Jack, 520–21).

<sup>51</sup> Kipling’s impromptu speech (he was on the Imperial War Graves Commission) at the occasion is quoted in Charles Allen’s Introduction to Rudyard Kipling, *The Light of Asia* (London: Kashi House, 2017), 26. Interestingly, Kipling’s last fictional work on India was four renderings of letters home by Indian soldiers on the front published in 1917 in British and American newspapers to support the war effort and encourage American participation (published in book form as *The Light of Asia* in 1917). It appears that an old friend of Kipling’s in Lahore had facilitated the author’s access to translations by censors of original letters by soldiers as part of this effort (*Ibid.*, 33–34).

<sup>52</sup> Sepoy Ram Singh (No. 1390, Punjab) in an interview by S. D. Pradhan, 1971 (BL/IOR/MssEur/F729/2/2).

<sup>53</sup> *Comrades* (trans. n/a), B.B., London, Series W, circa 1914. Lithograph/Halftone/Embossed, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/comrades> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

*The Empire's Flags*.<sup>54</sup> Another showed *Our Indian Troops in France on Their Way to Battle*. The reiteration of “our” speaks to the need to bring what was a subjugated, if not once hostile, people to a new status as allies fighting for “us.”

Many enlisted men vied for their religion or tribal or family lineage to distinguish themselves on behalf of their ruler, the “Sarkar.” The message printed on *the King Emperor's Message to the British Troops from India* would have been read out and translated on the spot into Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, or another language by the sepoy's commanding officers.<sup>55</sup> The quest for honor was not merely some self-referential asset for the King Emperor. In addition to economic incentives for recruits, there was also the question of gaining honor—*izzat*—by enlisting. A sense of personal duty to the King Emperor was strong.<sup>56</sup> As a recruiting postcard in the Gujarati-Bohri dialect (i.e., *The Flag*) stated: “You are the cause of our existence.”<sup>57</sup> David Omissi points out that the King Emperor is mentioned in letters from the front more than any other individual. At the same time, Chaudhry Hameed shows how, by hitting the “*izzat* jackpot,” tailoring the concept to each group's aspirations, the Punjab Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer had significant success recruiting during his many district tours.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, there was the belief that, as the tri-weekly *Panjabee* put it on September 5, 1914: “The employment of Indian troops in the present war is to be commended principally for the reason that it is a step towards the eventual obliteration of existing racial prejudice, so essential to India's self-fulfillment as a nation and an integral part of the Empire.”<sup>59</sup> The daily *Zamindar*, also published in Lahore and edited by the famed Urdu journalist Zafar Ali Khan, reiterated that “our sepoys who have gone to the front will see . . . that there is no difference—except in color—between Indians and Europeans.”<sup>60</sup> In no hurry to join themselves, their urban literate brethren saw this predominantly peasant sacrifice as an argument for their freedom (a sentiment soon expressed in domestic Indian postcards, discussed below).

Indian troops who passed through Britain in large numbers were, to British natives, quite a spectacle: “This is the view of the Indians. Close to my house in Tolton

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<sup>54</sup> *Flag of the Viceroy of India, Flags of the Empire. The “Classic” All British Series - No. 16*, W. N. Sharpe Ltd., Bradford & London, circa 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *King Emperor's Message to the British Troops from India* (trans. n/a), C. W. Faulkner & Co., London, circa 1915. Lithograph/Halftone, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/king-emperors-message-british-troops-india-0> [accessed October 7, 2023]). The card reads: “You have been recalled from service in India, together with your comrades from that country, to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire. Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been devastated and France invaded by the same powerful foe. I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done. I shall follow your every movement with the deepest interest and mark with eager satisfaction your daily progress; indeed your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts. I pray God to bless you, guard you, and bring you back victorious.”

<sup>56</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> *The [British] Flag*, Gujarati postcard, Unknown Publisher, circa 1917. Translation from the Gujarati-Bohri dialect by Ambedkar: “You are our cause of existence. You symbolize and make us aware of our truthful rights. Under your banner and oath our soldier fights the battles with pride. For your sake the soldier gives his life smilingly. Upon such dear son of soils, the Lord showers his blessings.”

<sup>58</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 20; Chaudhry Hameed “Empire of Honor: Punjabi Recruitment in the First World War,” *The Crimson Historical Review* 3, no. 3 (2021): 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Panjabee* (September 5, 1914) quoted in Jarboe, 30.

<sup>60</sup> *Zamindar* (October 1, 1914) quoted in Jarboe, 42.





Figure 5. Wounded Indians at the Dome, Brighton. Unknown Publisher, UK, Circa 1915. Real photo, Divided back.

I went to see them last Sunday, Love from TUG and Jim,” reads the back of *Indians at Ashurst*, a candid real photo postcard taken in a village in Hampshire, England.<sup>61</sup> Rudyard Kipling, who also visited Indian troops passing through Britain, wrote in December 1914 how the “one unmistakable whiff-of *ghi* [clarified butter] . . . for the moment pretended to be the lower slopes of the Dun [a range of foothills in the Himalayas].”<sup>62</sup> The British press emphasized how well Indian troops from France were being treated at the resplendent Indian-themed former Royal Pavilion illustrated in *Wounded Indians at the Dome, Brighton* (Figure 5).<sup>63</sup> The soldiers were impressed by their care—“I have been in a hospital for one month and 22 days in bed, and the Government treated me so kindly that not even my own father and mother could have done more,” wrote Jamadar Ghulam Muhiyudin.<sup>64</sup> Some 120,000 postcards of Indian troops convalescing at Brighton were sold.<sup>65</sup> It seems that the presence and sacrifice of Indian troops did result, as the *Tribune* (Lahore) put it in September 1916, in “a change of opinion regarding India,” a softening of prevailing negative attitudes toward people of the subcontinent that had persisted since the “uprising” of 1857 against the British.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Indians at Ashurst* (trans. n/a), Unknown Publisher, England, circa 1915. Real photo, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indians-ashford> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>62</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (December 7, 1914) quoted in Allen, 26.

<sup>63</sup> *Wounded Indians at the Dome, Brighton* (trans. n/a), Unknown Publisher, UK, circa 1915. Real photo, divided back.

<sup>64</sup> “Indian Wounded: The Hospitals in England,” *The Times of India* (August 24, 1916).

<sup>65</sup> Shrabani Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914–18* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016 [2015]), 143.

<sup>66</sup> *Tribune* (June 28, 1916) quoted in Jarboe, 28.

To be sure, there were limits to this new-found enthusiasm. Note the many female nurses in the postcards. Unlike in France, where women could freely mingle with Indian soldiers, the “woman question” was a problem for British authorities who feared women, as Lord Curzon once wrote, might “offer themselves” to Indian soldiers.<sup>67</sup> Restrictions on female nurses were introduced, and the soldiers chafed under rules that locked them in the Pavilion.<sup>68</sup> Curzon added that female nurses “had the idea that the warrior is also an Oriental prince,” showing how messy superimposed stereotypes could be.<sup>69</sup> The Army Council ordered the “withdrawal” of nurses at the Pavilion in June 1915, in part because of a photograph showing a nurse with the first Indian Victoria Cross winner, Khudadad Khan, which indicates how transgressive an image could be at the time with respect to prejudices on the separation of races.<sup>70</sup>

The caption for *An Indian Hotchkiss Gun at Work* from an official *Daily Mail War Pictures* postcard speaks to British discomfort: “The strange kaleidoscope of the War produces the picture of turbaned Indians working a Hotchkiss gun on the British Western Front.” As with the French, sometimes humor was the best way to engage and deflect. On the train called *India to Berlin*, a dark-skinned Punjabi soldier beams out of a First Class Cabin. Might he stay forever?

### German Postcards

Just before the war began in July 1914, the German Kaiser had said, “If we are going to bleed to death, England must at least lose India.”<sup>71</sup> Indian sepoys had a “venomous” attitude toward the Germans but greatly respected their fighting abilities. For the sepoys, the German’s use of poison gas and the destruction of orchards and land upon retreat from an area was beyond the pale.<sup>72</sup> German postcards of Indians are more dramatic, artist-signed, and fantasy-laden than the French ones. They depicted actual fighting, like *The European War 1914–15 No. 13: Battle with Indian Troops (Gurkhas) Near Ypres* (Figure 6) with Indian soldiers dying en masse.<sup>73</sup> French and British cards of Indians rarely showed bloodshed. This postcard was a counterpoint to *Paschendaele* (Figure 4), meant to refute stories of German defeat in the battle. Others pushed German technical advantage like the artist-drawn *Reconnaissance Vehicle Breaks through Indian Cavalry Units*, which also revealed a new presence on the battlefield, the biplane

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<sup>67</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 185 (quoting Lord Curzon to Lord George Hamilton on November 15, 1901 [BL/IOR/MssEur/F111/160]).

<sup>68</sup> Ellingwood and Pradhan, 203.

<sup>69</sup> Visram, 185 (quoting Lord Curzon to Hamilton on November 15, 1901 [BL/IOR/MssEur/F111/160]).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted by Douglas McGetchin, “Indo-German Connections, Critical and Hermeneutical, in the First World War,” *The Comparatist* 34 (2010), 98.

<sup>72</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Der Europäische Krieg 1914/15 Nr. 13: Kampf mit Indischen Truppen (Gurkhas) Bei Ypern* (The European War 1914–15, no. 13: Battle with Indian Troops (Gurkhas) near Ypres), T. R. Rache [Artist Signed] Feldpostkarte [Field postcard], Unknown Publisher, Von Kgl. Sächs. Ministerium des Innern zugelassen [with permission of the Ministry of the Interior, Kingdom of Saxony], Germany, 1914. Halftone, divided back. Another artist-signed postcard by Curt Schulz, Steglitz shows *Deutsche Truppen Schlagen Indische Hilfstruppen by Ypern* (German Troops Beat Indian Troops by Ypres), Karl Voegels, Berlin no. 27, Blumenstr. 75 (67).



**Figure 6.** Der europäische Krieg 1914/15 Nr. 13: Kampf mit indischen Truppen (Gurkhas) bei Ypern [The European War 1914-15 No. 13: Battle with Indian Troops (Gurkhas) near Ypres]. T.R. Rache [Artist Signed] Feldpostkarte [Field postcard], Unknown Publisher, Von Kgl. Sächs, Ministerium des Innern zugelassen [with permission of the Ministry of the Interior, Kingdom of Saxony], Germany 1914. Halftone, Divided back.

in a top corner.<sup>74</sup> Ravi Ahuja describes how Germans generally saw using these men “as a breach of ‘racial etiquette’ or even a racial war crime.”<sup>75</sup>

One of the most heralded German events with respect to India came at the very start of the war when a lone German destroyer wreaked havoc on British India’s west coast. In September 1914, the *Emden* sank and captured numerous vessels in the Bay of Bengal and later bombarded Madras (Chennai) with its large guns, setting off fires and scaring the population. Scuttling about the Indian Ocean, it was not until November that an Australian warship finally sank the *Emden*. During its three-month tenure covering 56,000 kilometers, the *Emden* had sunk two warships and captured 16 ships. These events led to a slew of German postcards like the narrative *Upon the Return of First Lieutenant v. Muecke with the Emden Crew in Germany* (Figure 7).<sup>76</sup> Von Muecke and part of the crew escaped, taking a captured ship back to Germany via the Ottoman Empire, and were welcomed as heroes by the German public.

<sup>74</sup> Aufklärungskraftwagen Durchbricht Indische Kavallerie-Abteilungen, Kriegskünstlerkarten Nach Originalen des Schlachtenmalers, C. W. Kiesslich.

<sup>75</sup> Ravi Ahuja, “Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asian Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915–1918,” in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds., Franziska Roy, Heike Liebaw, and Ravi Ahuja (New Delhi: Social Sciences Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>76</sup> Zur Ankunft des Kap. Leut. v. Mücke mit der Emden-Mannschaft in Deutschland! [Top to bottom sub-captions] S.M.S. Emden. KapitänLeutnant v. Mücke. “Emden” Versenkt in Hafen v. Bengalen 5 englische Schiffe (Upon the Return of First Lieutenant v. Muecke with the Emden crew in Germany! [Top to bottom sub-captions] S.M.S. Emden. First Lieutenant v. Mücke. The Emden Sinks Five English Ships in the Harbor of Bengal), N.P.G., Germany. Colored real photo, circa 1915.





**Figure 7.** Zur Ankunft des Kap.=Leut. V. Mücke mit der Emden-Mannschaft in Deutschland! [Top to bottom sub-captions] S.M.S. Emden. Kapitänleutnant v. Mücke. “Emden” Versenkt in Hafen v. Bengalen 5 englische Schiffe [Upon the Return of First Lieutenant v. Muecke with the Emden crew in Germany! [Top to bottom sub-captions] S.M.S. Emden. First Lieutenant v. Mücke. The Emden sinks five English ships in the harbor of Bengal]. N.P.G., Germany. Colored real photo, circa 1915.

Naval success was part of German postcard force projection. *Indian Crew from Enemy Ship Sunk by the S.M.S. “Möwe”* shows sailors standing under a flag with the crescent and star, a few years later the symbol of the Indian Muslim Khilafat Movement supporting the Ottomans, and in 1947, the main element of the Pakistan flag.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Inder-Mannschafter der von S.M.S. “Möwe” Versenkten Feindlichen Dampfer* (Indian Crew from Enemy Steamship Sunk by the S.M.S. “Möwe”), Kloppmann [Photographer], Unknown Publisher, Germany, circa 1916. Real photo, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-crew-enemy-steamer-sunk-sms-mowe> [accessed October 6, 2023]).

A German Imperial cross at the top corner suggests these were primarily captured Muslims, but the early appearance of the flag motif draws one's attention. Muslim prisoners, shown in the *Prisoner Camp Zossen-Wunsdorf Muslims*, were, in fact, given special attention by the Germans, who printed a camp newspaper called *Jihad* and even built a mosque for them.<sup>78</sup> Germans believed that Indian Muslims could be turned and dropped through the Khyber Pass from Afghanistan into the Northwest Frontier Province, leading to a general uprising against British rule. Pathan prisoners or war (POWs) were the target of these efforts, called out even as sub-tribes on cards like *Indians—Akka Khel—Afridis*.<sup>79</sup> Wisely, the Afghan king stayed neutral despite a German delegation accompanied by former Pathan POWs, fewer than 50 of whom ultimately seem to have signed up for the mission.

The Germans published trophy postcards of their prisoners, especially the French, but those of Indians had nuance. *Prisoner Camp 2, Münster, Roll Call 1916* has titles in French because they were meant to show the French and Indian soldiers how well they would be treated if captured or defected, propaganda doing double duty for their citizens and the enemy.<sup>80</sup> The camp was near Berlin, and professional photographers were employed to document conditions.<sup>81</sup> Sometimes, a simple camera angle could be revelatory, as two profiles of the “people type” Indian Muslim (i.e., “Hindou Mahometan”) prisoner suggest (Figure 8).<sup>82</sup> The first portrait shows a reasonably well-cared-for prisoner (#54), and in the second, moving the camera to a fuller three-quarter view (#55), the same man is nothing if not stunned by war.<sup>83</sup> Hat and scarf were not accidental: postcards of Indian and other prisoners often show men wrapped in blankets, for in their memoirs, they complained of bitter cold and hunger at the camps.<sup>84</sup> Muslim prisoners described unsatisfactory treatment if they did not join the Ottomans. Few did—German efforts “largely failed,” in the words of one

<sup>78</sup> *Gefangenenlager Zossen-Wünsdorf Mohammedaner* (Prisoner Camp Zossen-Wunsdorf Muslims), Wilhelm Pader, Kunstanstalt, Berlin, circa 1916. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/prisoner-war-camp-zossen-wunsdorf-muslims> [accessed October 7, 2023]). There is an example of postcards of the mosque at Wunsdorf in Vedica Kant, “If I Die Here, Who Will Remember Me?” *India and the First World War* (Delhi, Roli Books, 2015), 188.

<sup>79</sup> *Inder-Akkakhel-Afridi*, Verlag M. V. Jakubowski, Danzig. Postmarked 24.1.17.

<sup>80</sup> *Gefangenenlager 2. Münster i. W. [in Wunsdorf] 1916* (Prisoner Camp 2, Münster [in Wunsdorf] 1916), Photogravur Siegburg, Germany, 1916. Photogravure, divided back. (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/prisoner-war-camp-2-munster-wunsdorf-1916-roll-call> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>81</sup> See Margot Kahleiss, *Muslims in Brandenburg-Kriegsgefangene in 1. Weltkrieg Ansichten und Absichten* (Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> *Gefangenenlager 2. Münster i. W. [im Wunsdorf] 1916. Volkertype Nr. 55. Hindou Mahometan* (Prisoner Camp 2. Münster in Wunstorf 1916. People Types nos. 54 & 55 Indian Muslim), Photogravur Siegburg, Germany, 1916. Photogravure, divided back.

<sup>83</sup> Both are excellent portraits that could have been taken by the well-known photographer and author Otto Stiehl, who was active at the camp during this period, but direct evidence for this has not been found (Kahleiss Margot, 1998, 52–63). Vedica Kant includes the side view of this prisoner in her book but says that it was not taken by Stiehl (Kant, 181).

<sup>84</sup> Sophie Bajart and Cosima Gotz, “Discovering the Men behind the Image: Stories of Muslim Prisoners during the Great War,” in *Cahiers Bruxellos*, ed. Musées et Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles (Brussels: Archives of the City of Brussels, 2014), 262.





**Figure 8.** Gefangenlager 2. Münster i. W. [im Wünsdorf]1916. Volkertype Nr. 55. Hindou Mahometan [Prisoner Camp 2. Münster in Wunstorf 1916. People Types No. 54 & 55 Indian Muslim]. Photogravur Siegburg, Germany, 1916. Photogravure, Divided Back.

scholar, partly because of conditions which, as Figure 8 suggests, could not always be hidden from the camera and because many had also internalized the Empire.<sup>85</sup>

One thing the Germans could claim was that their photographers were the best. *Downed British Fighter Plane* shows a biplane named “Punjab 29 Rawalpindi.”<sup>86</sup> Note how well-composed the postcard is: the man cut off by the frame on the right, the higher-ups in trench coats under the front of the craft, the legs beneath the wings at the back, the fellow in the cockpit, the cloth in the left foreground and wings stretching out of the frame, an angle that heightens its menace, remarkable depth of

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Tait Jarboe, “Indian Soldiers in Hospital and Prison,” in *Empire in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*, eds., Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard S. Fogarty (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 109, 125–26, and 128. However, German efforts to parse their treatment of Indians may have worked in India. On February 6, 1915, the Lahore-based paper *Prabhat* wrote: “However barbarous and tyrannical the Germans may be, they have some regard for Indians, whom they do not desire to harass or displease” (Jarboe, 60).

<sup>86</sup> *Abgeschossenes Engl. Kampfflugzeug* (Downed British Fighter Plane), Schaar & Dathe, Trier, Germany, ca. 1915. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/downed-english-fighter-plane> [accessed October 7, 2023]). Note: The 29th Punjabis served in Africa during World War I, so this aircraft may have been named after it or a detachment from the Regiment. See *The 29th Punjabis in East Africa*, <http://www.kaiserscross.com/188001/524201.html> [accessed September 29, 2023].



Figure 9. "Recruiting, Jhelum, Punjab, 1915". Unknown Publisher, circa 1915. Real photo, Divided back.

field in a few inches of space. On the back, someone has written in English, perhaps an Allied soldier: "This is what routed me out of my sleep more than once."

### Indian Postcards

Two rare postcards testify how a shadow archive of WWI postcards from India helps to cast light on history. One is the photo *Recruiting, Jhelum, Punjab, 1915* (Figure 9).<sup>87</sup> It was likely taken early one morning when men were lined up for inspection by recruiters. The year before, the local newspaper *Siraj-ul-Akhbar* in Jhelum had reported that "signs of famine are visible in the country."<sup>88</sup> Some 40 percent of able-bodied men in Jhelum District in western Punjab between Rawalpindi and Lahore ultimately signed up, nearly 28,000 men, the second-highest number of enlistees among Punjab districts, supporting the thesis of one British observer that the "proportion of recruits forthcoming from the different districts varies in inverse ratio to the prosperity of the land."<sup>89</sup> Recruitment was largely voluntary in the first months of the war, but "by the middle of 1915, the initial enthusiasm for recruiting amongst

<sup>87</sup> *Recruiting, Jhelum, Punjab, 1915* (trans. n/a), Unknown Publisher, circa 1915. Real photo, divided back. The back of the card says "Jhelum" in handwriting; the entire caption in quotes was apparently given in an album.

<sup>88</sup> The *Siraj-ul-Akhbar*, Jhelum, March 5, 1914, reported that "Signs of famine are visible in the country and it is necessary that young men should gain honour and fame by joining the army and, instead of ruining their ancestral property by borrowing on interest, should earn money for the maintenance of their families by enlistment in the army and sacrificing their lives in killing the enemy of the British Government," quoted in Jarboe, 154.

<sup>89</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, 203; M. S. Leigh, *Punjab and the War* (Lahore: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1922), 9–60 (quoted in Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State the Military: Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947* [New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005]), 131; A. E. Barstow, *Handbooks for the Indian*

the local population had given way to reluctance.”<sup>90</sup> They would have heard from the front: in May 1915, Havildar Abdul Rahman with the 59th Rifles in France wrote to a village headman in Jhelum District: “For six months I have not taken off my boots for one second, nor taken off my uniform, nor have I had one good night’s rest. This fighting goes on day and night all the same . . . I cannot find words to describe the skill of the Germans.”<sup>91</sup> To another friend, the same Havildar wrote: “For God’s sake don’t come, don’t come, don’t come to this war in Europe.”<sup>92</sup> That he had forced men into the Army to meet quotas was one of the most significant accusations that Sir Michael Dwyer, the conservative Punjab Governor, later had to face.<sup>93</sup> Even if these men in *Recruiting* had lined up voluntarily, wearing uniforms or carrying the guns of relatives whose service gave them preferential priority, the postcard brings home the stark reality of an effort that took an army from 200,000 to 900,000 trained soldiers in 50 months.

Much of what we know about sepoy recollections comes from letters and text postcards that passed through the British military censors who had some transcribed and evaluated for further dispatch or not. By some estimates, by March 1915, Indian soldiers in France and Belgium were sending 10,000–20,000 letters a week to India.<sup>94</sup> Yet the originals have almost entirely been lost. Over the years, a handful of surviving original text postcards in Urdu and Hindi (admittedly, not of the illustrated type otherwise discussed here) have found their way into my collection.

One is a standard blank *With Indian Expeditionary Force* postcard stamped the day before the final day of the war. It is addressed in Urdu to “M. Boucharde, Chambre du Commerce, Rouen, France.”<sup>95</sup> Urdu was the language of most soldiers’ mail, and Rouen was the site of their first main post office.<sup>96</sup> The fact that a sepoy or family member could think that a postcard with an Urdu address could make it to Rouen shows an international multilingual communications system intact. Another postcard in Urdu, sent to the father of Sher Jan Khan in Chakdara, Swat Port, Peshawar District in 1916, thanking him for a “well-wishing letter from the village itself, which was very comforting,” reminds us how men on the front supported and were supported by communities back home.<sup>97</sup> Written “on behalf of” a Risaldar, it emphasizes the participation of scribes behind so much of this communication, given literacy rates in the single digits.<sup>98</sup> A third original card thanks a soldier for “the money we received, out of which we bought new ox of Rs. 900, now have 4 oxen.”<sup>99</sup>

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*Army: Sikhs* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1928), 156 (quoted in David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860–1940* [Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1994], 48).

<sup>90</sup> Yong, 105.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Havildar Abdul Rahman (Punjabi Muslim) to Raja Sajawal Khan Lumberdar (Dalwal Village, Jhelum District, Punjab) in Urdu, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 63.

<sup>92</sup> Havildar Abdul Rahman (Punjabi Muslim) to Naik Rajwali Khan (31st Punjabis, Fort Sandeman, Zhob District, Baluchistan) in Urdu from France on May 15, 1915 (quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 61).

<sup>93</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, 125.

<sup>94</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> *With Indian Expeditionary Force* (trans. n/a), Indian Expeditionary Force, circa 1919, undivided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/indian-expeditionary-force> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>96</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Field Service Postcard from Muhammed Osman dated November 19, 1916, to Mr. Umar Sahib.

<sup>98</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Indian Expeditionary Force Postcard September 29, 1915, to Pardeshardin Upadhyya, 9th Infantry.

The port city of Bombay, as Sarah Ansari has shown,<sup>100</sup> was the significant transit camp for over one million soldiers and auxiliaries going to war, packed on vessels like *Troopship Leaving Bombay Harbour*.<sup>101</sup> By 1915–1916, the war shifted for most Indian soldiers from Europe to Mesopotamia, or modern Iraq, partly because morale was depressed in the face of another winter of heavy losses.<sup>102</sup> The British called it “Mespot,” abbreviating the term for the ancient civilizations that once had flourished in the region. Almost 600,000 Indians served in Mesopotamia, half non-combatants compared to the 132,000 who served in Europe. Bombay also became the primary destination for the sick and wounded, with 10,000 hospital beds available.<sup>103</sup>

“Mesopot” did not start well. In the April 29, 1916, surrender at Kut-al Amara near Ctesiphon, over 10,000 Indians were captured and over 4,000 killed. Troop management was taken out of the government of India’s hands and put into the hands of London’s War Office. *The Ctesiphon Arch, Mesopotamia*, from the Bombay Women celebrated its reoccupation the following year.<sup>104</sup> There were few, if any, views of fighting, but 1917 holiday cards “Presented by the Women” of the city showed scenes from the front: *A Front Line Trench at the Jebel Hamarin, Advanced Head Quarters at Kara Tepe, Mesopotamia*. *Ancient Bridge Destroyed by the Turks, Mesopotamia* even accused the enemy of an archaeological crime. In addition to historical sites, just as for the Germans, prisoners as war trophies made up another set of postcards: the *Times of India* published *Turkish Prisoners Marching through Baghdad*, men standing in *The Advanced Prisoner’s Compound, Mesopotamia*, or *Turkish Officers Who Surrendered at Shaiba*.

Iraq was a more uncomfortable battlefield than Europe for Indian Muslim soldiers. The British were concerned about them fighting against the Muslim Ottoman Empire, whose rule extended over the holy city of Mecca. Local inhabitants were not nearly as friendly to soldiers as the French. Haji Zaman Ali, who was sent to Iraq from France, recalled:

People from Iraq, especially from Baghdad, were very angry with us. They said, “Why do you salute them [i.e., the British]? He is also a man like us. Why do you respect them? Whenever you saluted the British in front of them, they would consider it a bad thing in Arabic. One God, One Messenger, One Qur’an, what is it? Why do you salute them?” They considered it very bad.<sup>105</sup>

For Haji Zaman Ali, however, there was another reward for going to Iraq: “There I saw Kufa and the place where the flood started in the time of Noah and also saw the place

<sup>100</sup> Sarah Ansari, “The Bombay’s Presidency’s ‘Home Front,’ 1914–1918”, in *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment*, eds., Roger Long and Ian Talbot (London, Routledge, 2018), 60.

<sup>101</sup> *Troopship Leaving Bombay Harbour* (trans. n/a), Unknown Publisher, circa 1915. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/troopship-leaving-bombay-harbour> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>102</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> *The Ctesiphon Arch, Mesopotamia* (trans. n/a), The Times Press, Bombay, circa 1917. Halftone, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/ctesiphon-arch-mesopotamia> [accessed October 7, 2023]). Another example in the series was *Ancient Bridge Destroyed by the Turks, Mesopotamia*. Ctesiphon, just south of Baghdad on the east bank of the Tigris River, was the capital of the Sassanian Empire, which ruled the area until the Muslim conquest in 650 A.D. The famous still-standing arch was part of a royal palace.

<sup>105</sup> Zaman Ali (of Tehsil Kahuta) in an interview with author June 16, 1990 (Rawalpindi, Pakistan).

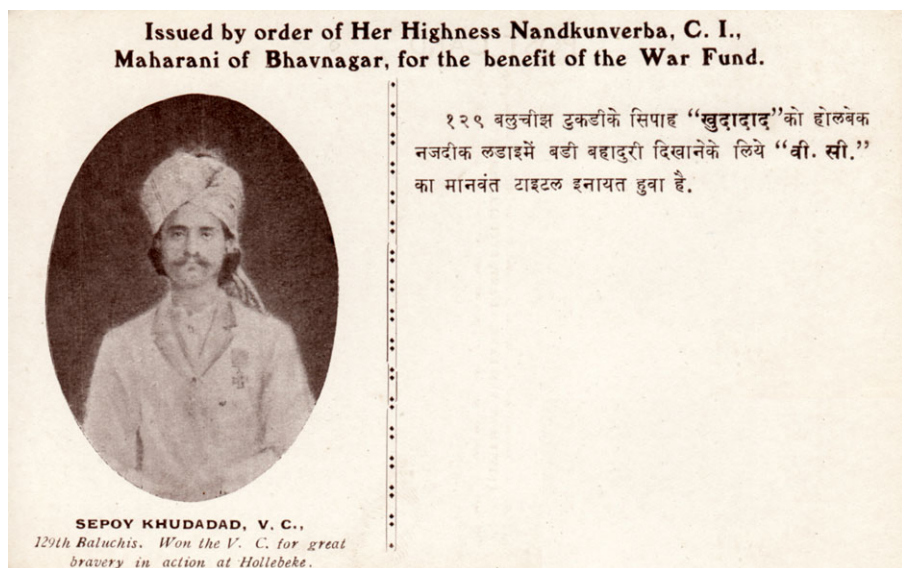


Figure 10. Sepoy Khudadad V.C., 129 Baluchis. Won the V. C. [Victoria Cross] for great bravery in action at Hollebeke. Maharani of Bhavnagar, for the War Fund, printed at the Lakshmi Art, Byculla, Bombay, circa 1915. Halftone, Divided back.

of that old woman's tandoor where its fire and water came out from and we saw the place where that storm [the Flood] started. The place was also in Kufa. We have seen it all."

"Why, a sepoy, Khudadad Khan, of our regiment," said the Baluchi, "has got the highest medal, the Victoria Cross," wrote Mulk Raj Anand in *Across the Black Waters*.<sup>106</sup> Sepoy Khudadad V.C. (Figure 10) was part of a domestic Indian series, "Issued by order of Her Highness Nandkunverba, C. I. Maharani of Bhavnagar [Gujarat], for the benefit of the War Fund."<sup>107</sup> It celebrates the winner of the highest combat award, which Indians had only become eligible for in 1911. Khudadad Khan was from a Rajput family in Chakwal District near Rawalpindi in northern Punjab, still the heart of the Pakistan Army's recruiting belt. He held off the Germans for a full day with a single machine gun as part of the 129 Baluchis on October 31, 1914. Left for dead when his trench was overrun, he crawled back to safety wounded and alone at night. Cards like this were offered to improve the welfare of Indian troops and prove that they were just as capable as Europeans in battle.

The second of twelve Indian Victoria Cross (V.C.) winners, *Jemadar Mir Dast, V.C., I.O.M.* (i.e., Indian Order of Merit) celebrates a man whose entire career speaks to the

<sup>106</sup> Anand, 259.

<sup>107</sup> Sepoy Khudadad V.C., 129 Baluchis. Won the V.C. [Victoria Cross] for Great Bravery in Action at Hollebeke (trans. n/a), Maharani of Bhavnagar, for the War Fund, printed at the Lakshmi Art, Byculla, Bombay, circa 1915. Halftone, divided back.



double-mindedness an Afridi Pathan could find himself immersed in.<sup>108</sup> Originally from Tirah, in the Khyber Pass just outside the strict limits of the British Empire, he won his medal for dealing with poison gas first released in April 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres, when “in a single night . . . the Lahore Division lost 3,889 men, more than thirty percent of its total strength.”<sup>109</sup> As he described, “with a party of men, I removed the bodies of officers who had been killed, and took eight British and Indian wounded officers to a place of safety. We worked the whole night.”<sup>110</sup> Despite the gas effects, he remained on the front until he was wounded a few months later and sent to Brighton to recover. He was awarded his medal by King George V on August 25, 1915, and he presented a petition on behalf of other men asking that recovered soldiers not be sent back into battle, the foremost demand of wounded men. The request was denied. His younger brother, Mir Mast, also a well-regarded soldier, later deserted with a group of 23 Afridi soldiers in a blow to British honor.<sup>111</sup> Mir Mast went on a diplomatic trip with Germans to Kabul and, after it failed, made his own way back to Tirah to recruit men for the cause of freedom together with Turkish officers. Mir Dast however could not gain traction when Mir Dast returned to the village as a hero and stood in his brother’s way.<sup>112</sup>

Divided loyalties were not just a Muslim or Pathan issue. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the great Bengali poet who was drafted but never served, wrote several stories and poems about the war while posted in Karachi: “The surging waters of the roaring Tigris/Are now filled with the blood shed at Amara.”<sup>113</sup> Santanu Das points out that writers like Nazrul Islam hailed the Turks and Arabs as liberators and the Indian troops as mere mercenaries.<sup>114</sup> Nirad Chaudhry confirms how widespread pro-German Indian sympathies were in Bengal among all communities during the war.<sup>115</sup> Even as the conquest of Baghdad and Jerusalem by mostly Indian troops helped to reinvigorate an Imperial project in Britain, it became increasingly unpopular at home. As one politician put it, speaking of freedom in 1917: “I venture to say that the war has put the clock of time fifty years forward.”<sup>116</sup>

Annie Besant, a Theosophist and feminist who adopted India as her homeland and lived there for 30 years, believed, like other politicians, that India’s loyalty during the

<sup>108</sup> *Jemadar Mir Dast, V.C., I.O.M.* (trans. n/a), Maharani of Bhavnagar/War Fund, Bombay, Circa 1915. Halftone, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/jemadar-mir-dast-vc-iom> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>109</sup> Yong, 101.

<sup>110</sup> Morton-Jack, 254.

<sup>111</sup> He apparently “resented the unequal treatment of the Indian soldier” (*ibid.*, 206).

<sup>112</sup> Mir Mast ended his life in poverty. This incredible story, expertly researched by George Morton-Jack, had yet another chapter only discovered recently—Mir Dast also ended up disillusioned with the British. Not promoted as he thought fit, feeling slighted by Punjabi officers who were, he deserted to Tirah and nearly lost his pension until an observant British officer saved it at the last minute. But the damage was done. Morton-Jack concludes: “Like his brother, he was first and foremost an Afridi with a highly individualistic tribal identity that shaped his worldview” (Morton-Jack, 23).

<sup>113</sup> Kazi Nazrul Islam, “Sat-il-Arab” (poem) published in May 1920 in *Muslim Bharat* (quoted in Das, 332).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>115</sup> Chaudhry Nirad, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (New York, Addison Wesley, 1989 [1951]), 307.

<sup>116</sup> Speech by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in the Imperial Legislative Council, March 23, 1917 (Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, *Speeches and Writings of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya* [Madras: G. A. Natesan & Co., 919], 129, and quoted by Ellinwood and Pradhan, 22).

war would be rewarded. In 1917, she was elected president of the Indian National Congress, only to be put under house arrest after refusing a suggestion by the viceroy to return home. Jinnah, Gandhi, and others came to her support. Hastily produced postcards (e.g., *For Freedom's Sake Interned June 16, 1917*) were sold to domestic audiences, the presence of two foreigners affirming the righteousness of their cause.<sup>117</sup>

The most popular Home Rule leaders were Mohammed and Shaukat Ali. The popularity of the postcards of these brothers illustrates how the medium of the postcard, first used for propaganda by the British colonial state, could easily be turned in the other direction.<sup>118</sup> Joshi Brothers in Bombay offered the portrait *Maulana Mohamedali* (Figure 11), the Khilafat symbol on his fez, while another publisher had *M. Shaukatali, Mohamedali, Shankacharya and Kitchlew in Jail* in 1921; the men were accused of having subverted the allegiance of Indian soldiers to Britain.<sup>119</sup> A mainstream Karachi publisher offered *Shaukat Ali Entering Prison* in the city, reiterating how widespread resistance to colonial rule sentiments were among local middle and upper classes who would have purchased a card with English titles.<sup>120</sup> Shaukat Ali's oft-quoted words at his trial in the city's Khaliq Dina Hall rang across the subcontinent: "Damn this Court, damn this Government, damn this prosecution and damn this whole show."<sup>121</sup>

Joshi Brothers also published postcards of other leaders like *Mr. Mohammedali Jinnah, Bar-at-Law* (Figure 12).<sup>122</sup> Dated in handwriting 1919, blind stamped in ink "S. Janakiram Chetty & Bros., Scent and Booksellers, Davaraja Market, Mysore," it shows how these images coursed throughout the land, captions in Hindi and English, reflecting and helping to weave the unified front demanding freedom from British rule. Jinnah was a young and handsome nationalist lawyer in Bombay defending in court the most popular of Congress politicians, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, himself the subject of postcards by numerous publishers before and after his death in 1920.<sup>123</sup> Tilak, representing the Indian National Congress Party, and Jinnah, president of the Muslim League, had reached the first and only compromise around separate

<sup>117</sup> *For Freedom's Sake Interned June 16, 1917* (trans. n/a), Home Rule League, Madras, 1917. Halftone, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/home-rule-league-madras> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

<sup>118</sup> *Maulana Mohamedali* (trans. n/a) Joshi Brothers, Mumbai, circa 1917. Halftone, undivided back. This card was sent to Mrs. A. G. Strong, Esq., Professor of Household Arts at Olaga University in New Zealand, as an example of using the medium to garner support abroad.

<sup>119</sup> *M. Shaukatali, Mohamedali, Shankacharya and Kitchlew in Jail* (trans. n/a), A. L. Nanawati & Co., Bhandari Street, Bombay, 3 L.A.P.W. circa 1921.

<sup>120</sup> *Shaukat Ali Entering Prison* (trans. n/a), Standard Bookstall, Karachi, circa 1922. Collotype, divided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/shaukat-ali-entering-prison> [October 7, 2023]).

<sup>121</sup> The hall itself was postcarded as well (e.g., *Khalik Dina Hall-Karachi*. Johnny Postcards, Karachi, circa 1925); Saquib Salam, "Maulana Shaukat Ali: An Advocate of Hindu-Muslim Unity," *Awaz*, 2022 (<https://www.awazthevoice.in/culture-news/maulana-shaukat-ali-an-advocate-of-hindu-muslim-unity-7703.html> [accessed July 27, 2022]).

<sup>122</sup> *Mr. Mohammedali Jinnah, Bar-at-Law* (trans. n/a), Joshi Brothers, Mumbai, circa 1917. Halftone, undivided back.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Joshi Brothers offered a postcard of *Sriut Balgangadhar* Tilak, and the Indian Art Press had a colored *Late Lok* Tilak, both with Hindi and English titles (Omar Khan, *Paper Jewels Postcards from the Raj* [Ahmedabad and Delhi: Mapin Publishing/The Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2018], 101).

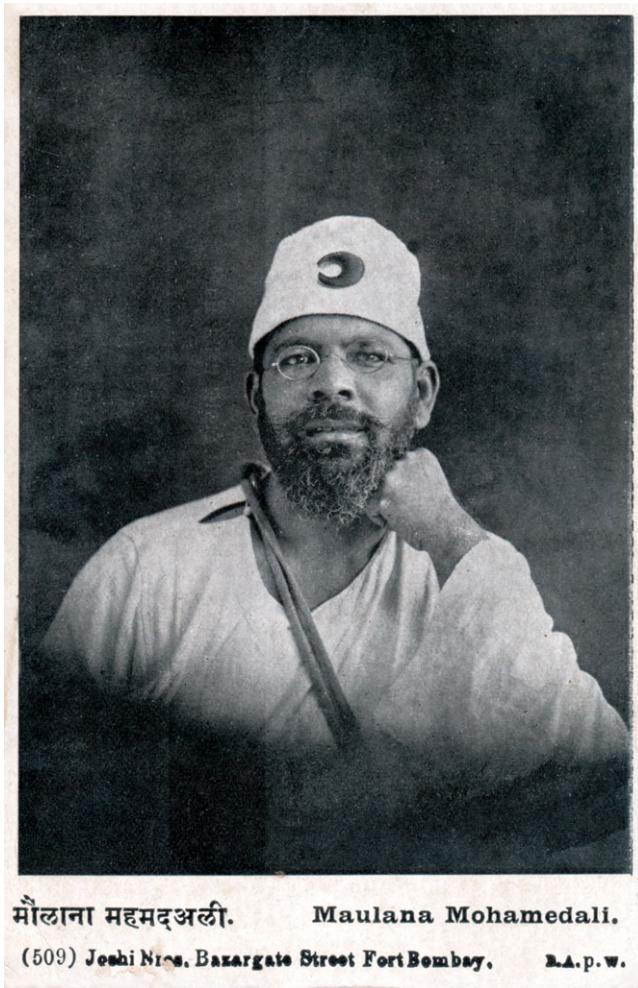


Figure 11. Maulana Mohamedali. Joshi Brothers, Mumbai, circa 1917. Halftone, Undivided back.

electorates and power-sharing between religious communities in December 1916. Known as the Lucknow Pact, it came at the height of the war. In early 1918, Jinnah's speeches were collected in a volume with an introductory note by Sarojini Naidu, where she referred to him with the epithet "Ambassador of the Hindu-Muslim Unity." She called the Rajah of Mahmudabad, who wrote the Foreword and was a big supporter of the Muslim League, "a great-hearted Prince of Indian Nationalists."<sup>124</sup> He, in turn, described Jinnah as "no apostle of frenzy . . . Whatever success he

<sup>124</sup> Sarojini Naidu, *Mohomed Ali Jinnah an Ambassador of Unity His Speeches and Writings 1912-1917* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1918), x.

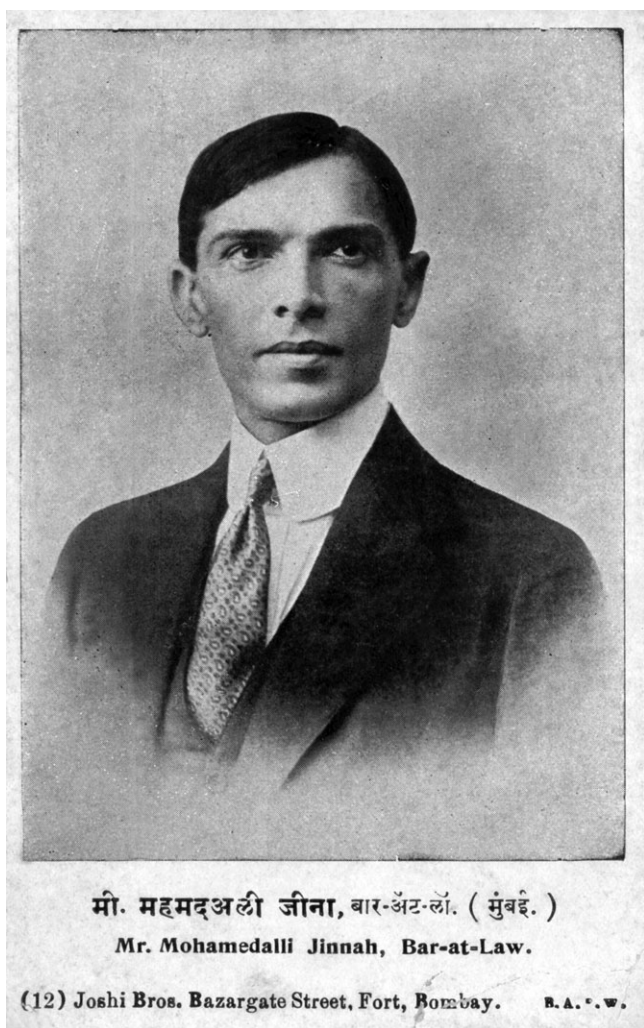


Figure 12. Mr. Mohammedali Jinnah, Bar-at-Law. Joshi Brothers, Mumbai, circa 1917. Halftone, Undivided back.

has gained in his mission has been entirely due ... to arguments and facts dispassionately put forward and discussed in a calm and rational manner.”<sup>125</sup>

Another much-postcarded figure, especially by Bengali publishers, was *Rabindranath Tagore*.<sup>126</sup> Tagore was the first Asian Noble Prize winner (1913), a poet, a songwriter, and perhaps the first global intellectual. Listening to what he called his “inner wireless” three months before the war began, he foresaw what would ensue:

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>126</sup> *Rabindranath Tagore* (trans. n/a), R. B. Anant Shivaji DBS, Bombay, circa 1928. Bromide real photo, undivided back (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/rabindranath-tagore> [accessed October 7, 2023]).

“It is not enough to call it a war. This is a momentous meeting of epochs [yuga-sandhi samagata].”<sup>127</sup> In a strange twist of fate, it would be one of Tagore’s poems—“When I go from hence let this be my parting word . . .” —that would be found handwritten in a pocket on the corpse of Britain’s great anti-war poet, Wilfred Owens.<sup>128</sup> Postcards were much simpler objects than the deep cultural transfusions marked by poems, but they would have helped. The French seem to have consistently published more Tagore postcards for the next two decades than any other European country, and while there is no proof for this, one wonders if it was in part a legacy of the warm reception of Indian soldiers during the war.

The growth of the Home Rule movement led to the ascendancy of the more liberal Sir Edwin Montagu as secretary of state for India. On August 20, 1917, he announced that the ultimate goal of British rule was now to be “self-government for India.” Ahmed Syed wrote to Abdur Rahim Khan, “The war has changed the sentiments [of the British] towards us . . . India, like Australia and South Africa, should get independent Government, and many other great Sahibs share his opinion.”<sup>129</sup> Starting with World War I, postcards in India shifted from propaganda and recruiting functions for the colonizers into popular visual markers of resistance and the desire for freedom.<sup>130</sup>

A curious footnote to the history of Indian postcards from World War I is that there were postcards published of POW camps within India like that of *German Camp, Ahmednagar* (Maharashtra)—prisoners were allowed to run businesses in the camp (although all their property was confiscated later in the war). Several prisoners seem to have been German-speaking lithographers and printers employed by Indian presses, one of whom appears to have made the lithographic postcard *Merry Christmas*.<sup>131</sup> Clever and sarcastic yet able to slip by the censor, it depicted a man glaring in the hot sun under Christmas snow and ferns and was likely sent to the author’s daughter in an Austrian village by “H. Pome 161 A. Lager, Sect I Prisoner of war Camp, Ahmednagar, 19.11.1919.”

## Conclusion

Postcards can serve as cultural lozenges. In the French case, they welcomed Indian soldiers and proposed widening the conceptual national frame, given an immediate battlefield need in the autumn of 1914. British postcards also wrapped their Indian subjects in the flag and affirmed a common purpose, a delicate mission because it undermined their very right to subjugate. This contradiction was seized upon by German cards, which also trod a fine double line, affirming their own racial and

<sup>127</sup> Das, 308 (Das’ translation quoting Tagore, *Balaka II*, 255).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 367–68.

<sup>129</sup> Sepoy Ram Singh (no. 1390, Punjab) in interview by S. D. Pradhan, 1971 (BL/IOR/MssEur/F729/2/2).

<sup>130</sup> Faisal Devji writes: “Unlike its European career, therefore, the First World War may be said to have continued in India, as indeed in the Middle East, well into the 1920s, where it was defined not by Anglo-German conflict but instead by issues having to do with imperial subjugation and the possibility of its transformation into world-historical and global rather than national forms of citizenship” (Faisal Devji, “Gandhi’s Great War,” in *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment*, eds., Roger D. Long and Ian Talbot [London: Routledge, 2018], 203).

<sup>131</sup> *Fröhliche Weihnacht* (Merry Christmas), Unknown Publisher, Ahmednagar, circa 1919. Lithograph, divided back, Postmarked November 19, 1919 (<https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/frohliche-weihnachten-merry-christmas> [accessed October 7, 2023]).



fighting superiority, and as bait for a subjugated population to throw off another white man's rule.

The counterpoint to foreign war cards was locally published Indian cards, which seized the narrative as the war unfolded by promoting war heroes, celebrating victories on the front in Mesopotamia, raising funds for the Army, demanding the proper compensation sacrifices, and promoting the Home Rule movement and its leaders. They represented different communities in varying degrees of conflict with those deploying the troops. For a few short years, they helped bring together, just like the WWI Indian Army did, most sectors to speak with one voice that said they were just as capable and deserved the same rights as their colonial masters. They helped to contribute to an Indian identity-in-formation that sought freedom from foreign rule. Moreover, the postcard served as a durable means of communication not only on the ideological level but also between soldiers and families; even prisoners could make them from within confines to stay in touch, using the visual to outwit the censor. Contradictions didn't cancel each other out. They stretched the resonance of visual culture and reminded us how dynamic and unsettling the colonial war experience was for everyone involved: light objects, heavy quarry.

This point brings us to this paper's final question: Whose history do these postcard histories illumine, Pakistan's or India's? They belong to both. While the reasoning behind continuing to use the term "Indian" was justified in the Introduction, it is problematic. Pakistanis are reluctant to embrace history contained in a word freighted with so much baggage and hostility (on and off the cricket pitch). Yet these postcards are as much part of Pakistani history as Indian, if history is made up first of people's accounts; as other works have shown, the war recruitment of Punjabis and Pathans during the First World War led to an even more significant, Punjab-focussed recruitment drive 20 years later, laying an abiding foundation in the villages that has affected Pakistan's history under Army rule ever since.<sup>132</sup> As Maria Rashid has shown in *Dying to Serve* (2020), many of the same concepts of honor and sacrifice, now transmuted into an Islamic rhetorical framework, have endured in the province. Similarly, the Sikh contribution to the British Indian Army was largely from areas now in Pakistan.<sup>133</sup> A lot of Pakistani history is buried under the stone "Indian," and vice versa. As these postcards and their intersection with history show, names only go so far, and interactions between people from the subcontinent and Europeans, themselves diverse, were as subtle and contradictory as those between what became separate nation-states. For a moment – from 1914 through 1921 – the postcard helped to shape identities from the inside and the outside. These war postcards were born by a spirit of nationalism; that they should be lost a century later to the same congealing of nationalism would be ironic and unfortunate.

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<sup>132</sup> Maria Rashid, *Dying to Serve Militarism: Affect and the Politics of Sacrifice in the Pakistan Army* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

<sup>133</sup> Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh, *Warrior Saints Three Centuries of Sikh Military Tradition* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).