Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army. Kate Imy. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781503610026

The British Indian Army's need for soldiers, especially during the first four decades of the twentieth century, resulted in both the formation and exaltation of various martial classes that paradoxically included and excluded those same groups from the popular imagination dependent on spatial parameters and where the Indian Army saw their allegiances fall in that time frame. Kate Imy seeks to tease out those jumbled interpretations of nationality, faith, and loyalty that the British imperial power sought to impose on Indians in her new book, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army*. Imy argues that the very creation of these martial races and their coveted inclusion into the Army as inherently more masculine and militaristic bodies consequently created the anti-imperialistic dialogue between soldiers themselves and civilians on an international level. Imy's work is an intelligent and thought-provoking look into the complicated nature of power dynamics and relationship building available to both the British Empire and the indigenous groups of South Asia during the early twentieth century, highlighting the intersecting struggle attached to identity formation under the prism of national autonomy, national identity, and military culture.

Imy introduces the Kirpan, a spiritual object used by Sikhs, in the first chapter, "Spiritual Swords and Marital Violence." She delves into imperial representations of Sikhs in the metropole as the model martial race and how that perception allowed greater navigation of religious and social rights otherwise forbidden to other South Asian groups—setting the 1857 uprisings as the stage that intensified British idealization of the group as a whole regardless of spiritual conviction or regional differences. Imy argues that the Army's perception of the five markers of Khalsa identity as inherently Sikh drastically transformed the Punjabi region's religious makeup, resulting in the wearing of Kirpans. However, Imy makes sure to point out that

this was a contested and pragmatic capitulation. Britain's anxieties and concerns regarding the loyalty of martial races in its colonies conflicted with its fixation and need for these same groups as military assets. So, when Major A. E. Barstow, wrote in the 1920s, "[Sikhs are] more faithful, more trustworthy than other widely recruited communities known to the British as martial races," (28) it reinforced the idea that Sikhs were the most loyal of these disloyal martial races. However, that popular imagination did little to change the length of the sword to 2 or 3 inches in length, a visual and pragmatic size in case of rebellion.

In the next two chapters, "Borders, Boundaries and Belonging" and "Purifying the Soldier," Imy pivots her attention to a group characterized as a martial race yet barred from the social privileges held by Sikhs. The Indian Army's stance on Muslim groups exemplifies Imy's argument that they failed to take into account the complexity and fluidity of South Asian identities, inadvertently creating or discrediting different spiritual, linguistic, and geographic communities, thus failing to take into account the varying degree of differentiation possible within those communities and how those differences could impact recruitment schemes. The unfailing characteristic of the British Army to overgeneralize colonized people thwarted attempts to solidify loyalty to the empire, illustrated by a pamphlet called *Our Indian Empire* that warned British soldiers of the "ignorant and fanatical" Muslim men from India's Northwestern borderlands while at the same time recruiting Muslim men. (71) The potential connections and restrictions that Muslim men had also fed into imperial distrust of the group, especially when juxtaposed to groups like Nepal's Hindus, who thanks to the *pani patya* ceremony, were able to navigate the stigma of traveling overseas. However, Imy explains that the Ahmadiya movement made religious appeals that actually helped reinforce loyalty to the Indian Army, especially within certain Muslim Indian groups that saw the Army and classification as a martial race as an

opportunity to navigate imperial control and secure more rights and opportunities. Nonetheless, attitudes regarding religiosity and militarism proved challenging to overcome, as Imy highlights by referencing the 1915 handbook on Gurkhas that suggests that Nepalese soldiers "see in foreign service nothing but the prospect of glory." (110) On the other hand, the same East India Company text states that Indian Hindus "can discover in it nothing but pollution and peril from unclean men," (110) but as was the case with Sikh and Muslim groups, there was not a generalizable Gurkha soldier. Instead, Gurkhas recruits were "ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse." (113)

The next three chapters, "The Government's Salt from Fast to Famine," "A Nation at Odds with Nationalism," and "Martial Masculinity in the Fascist Utopia," shift the focus from specific spiritual and religious contentions and groups towards rapidly changing dynamics and opportunities afforded to members of the Indian Army as a whole, specifically during the rise in nationalism. Imy considers the various opportunities and revelations the Indian Army introduced to different groups within South Asia as an unintended consequence providing a mechanism for transnational communication with other colonized groups. Anti-imperialist conversation taking place on a transnational scale was a consequence the Indian Army sought to deter by creating the idea of martial races and privileging different groups thereby fermenting class and ethnic conflict. Imy uses an Indian civil servant's argument regarding British Rule and the twenty-two famines that had occurred during that time to highlight the reality of food scarcity, job scarcity, and the need uphold familial duties as the household provider. These chapters serve as a reminder of the complicated nature of native subjects participating in an occupying force's colonizing army.

This book is a must read for those interested in the Indian Army's social history and those interested in the construction of race and national identity. Imy's addition to the growing literature on the Indian Army expands on the social and cultural aspect of the military organization, and her analysis is inestimable. Her argument reveals the importance the Indian Army had in creating national, religious, and cultural identities and how those various groups used those formations to navigate a world of imperial rule.

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