



# WAR NEWS IN INDIA

The Punjabi Press  
During World War I

EDITED BY

**ANDREW TAIT JARBOE**

BLOOMSBURY



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*‘War News In India: The Punjabi Press During World War I* raises the veil from over one of the most heavily recruited, ravaged yet hitherto silent of the colonial home fronts: the province of Punjab, which contributed more than half of the combatants from undivided India during World War I. Andrew Tait Jarboe’s marvellous selection of the translated extracts of newspapers, framed by his thoughtful prefaces, reveals the intensity and diversity with which the war was discussed, debated and manipulated in the Punjabi press: from reports of various international events to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh aspirations and anxieties around recruitment and imperial “duty”, to deliberations on self-government, or a deep questioning of European civilisation. In the midst of the war’s centennial commemoration, Jarboe has gifted us with a singularly rich and important archive which will be crucial to the writing of a more nuanced global history of the conflict as well as to anyone interested in the tangled lives of war, empire and the media.’

– Santanu Das, Reader in English Literature,  
King’s College, London

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# TIMELINE OF MAIN EVENTS OF THE WAR AS THEY RELATED TO INDIA AND PUNJAB

1914

28 June	Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo.
5 July	War Council at Potsdam.
23 July	Austria-Hungary sends ultimatum to Serbia.
24 July	Sir E. Grey suggests international conference.
25 July	Serbia orders mobilisation.
26 July	Admiralty countermands orders for dispersal of British Fleet.
27 July	France and Italy accept British proposals for international conference.
29 July	Belgrade bombarded by Austrians (first shots of war). Admiralty send 'Warning Telegram' to the fleet. The War Office order 'Precautionary Period' to be put into force. Germany makes proposals to secure British neutrality.
30 July	British Government reject German proposals for neutrality.
1 August	Germany declares war on Russia.

2 August	German ultimatum to Belgium.
3 August	Germany declares war on France.
4 August	Great Britain declares war on Germany. German army invades Belgium.
12 August	Great Britain and France declare war on Austria-Hungary.
16 August	Disembarkation of BEF in France completed.
23 August	Battle of Mons. Retreat from Mons begins. Battle of Tannenberg begins.
6 September	Battle of the Marne begins.
25 September	Race to the sea begins.
19 October	Battle of Ypres begins.
1 November	Great Britain and Turkey commence hostilities.
5 November	Basra operations begin.
14 November	Sultan in Constantinople declares Jihad ( <i>Jehad</i> ).

## 1915

26 January	Defence of the Suez Canal begins.
19 February	Naval attack on the Dardanelles begins.
10–13 March	Battle of Neuve Chapelle.
9 April	General Sir John Nixon assumes command of British forces in Mesopotamia.
14 April	Basra operations end.
22 April	Battle of Ypres. Gas attack.
25 April	Allied Expeditionary Force land at Gallipoli.
1 May	Spring offensive in Galicia begins. Battle of Gorlice-Tarnow begins.
23 May	Italy declares war on Austria.
31 May	Advance up Tigris begins.
27 June	Advance up Euphrates begins.
28 September	Battle of Kut.
3 October	Allied troops land at Salonika.
9 October	Belgrade taken by Austrians. Montenegro invaded by Austrians.

- 11 November Advance on Baghdad begins.
- 19 December General Sir Douglas Haig appointed C-in-C. British Armies in France.

## 1916

- 4 January Attempts to relieve Kut begin.
- 21 February Battle of Verdun begins.
- 29 April Capitulation of Kut.
- 5 June Sherif of Mecca begins revolt against Turkish rule.
- 13 June Capture of Mecca.
- 1 July Operations on the Somme begin.
- 27 August Romania declares war on Austria-Hungary.
- 29 October Sherif of Mecca proclaimed 'King of the Arabs'.
- 18 November Operations on the Somme end.
- 13 December Operations for capture of Kut begin.
- 16 December Battle of Verdun ends.

## 1917

- 25 February Operations for capture of Kut end. Pursuit to Baghdad begins.
- 2 March Operations against Mahsuds begin.
- 11 March Occupation of Baghdad.
- 12 March Outbreak of revolution in Russia.
- 24 March First Palestine offensive begins.
- 26 March First Battle of Gaza.
- 6 April United States declares war on Germany.
- 31 July Battle of Ypres begins.
- 20 August Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu establishes 'Responsible Government' as the goal for India.
- 10 December Armistice between Central Powers and Romania.
- 11 December Occupation of Jerusalem.
- 17 December Armistice concluded between Central Powers and Russia.
- 30 December Defence of Jerusalem ends.

## 1918

- |              |                                                                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 March      | Peace signed between Russia and Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk.                     |
| 15 March     | German offensive in Picardy begins.                                                  |
| 8 April      | German offensive in Flanders begins.                                                 |
| 17 May       | Peace signed between Romania and Central Powers.                                     |
| 27 May       | German offensive in Champagne begins.                                                |
| 18 July      | Allied offensive of 1918 begins.                                                     |
| 18 August    | Advance in Flanders begins.                                                          |
| 26 August    | Breaking of the Hindenburg Line begins.                                              |
| 29 September | Armistice between Bulgaria and the Entente Powers.                                   |
| 23 October   | Advance on Mosul begins.                                                             |
| 27 October   | Austrian Government asks Italy for an Armistice.                                     |
| 30 October   | Armistice between Turkey and Entente Powers signed at Mudros.                        |
| 31 October   | Hostilities between Entente and Turkey cease at 12 noon.                             |
| 3 November   | Armistice between Entente and Austria-Hungary signed.                                |
| 5 November   | Hostilities between Entente and Austria-Hungary cease.                               |
| 11 November  | Armistice concluded between Entente Powers and Germany. Hostilities cease at 11 a.m. |

# INDIA'S MILITARY CONTRIBUTION DURING THE WAR (JANUARY 1920)

Table 1    Strength of the army in India at the outbreak  
                 of the war

BRITISH	
British officers	4,744
British other ranks	72,209
INDIAN	
Serving	159,134
Reservists	34,767
Non-combatants	45,660
TOTALS	
British	76,953
Indian	239,561

**Table 2** Total recruited in India (Indian ranks) during the war, up to 31 December 1919

INDIAN RANKS	
Combatants	877,068
Non-combatants	563,369
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,440,437</b>

**Table 3** Number sent on service overseas from India, up to 31 December 1919

THEATRE	COMBATANTS			
	British officers	Other ranks	Indian officers	Other ranks
France	2,395	18,353	1,923	87,412
East Africa	928	4,681	848	33,835
Mesopotamia	18,669	166,822	9,514	317,142
Egypt	3,188	17,067	2,204	107,742
Gallipoli	42	18	90	3,041
Salonika	86	85	132	6,545
Aden	952	7,267	480	19,936
Persian Gulf	991	1,059	967	29,408

# MAPS



**Map 1** The Punjab in World War I





**Map 2** Europe, Asia and Africa during World War I



# INTRODUCTION

In the final days of July 1914, Austrian artillery opened fire on the Serbian city of Belgrade, across the Danube river. These shots signalled the start of what some statesmen still hoped might only be another Balkan war – the third in as many years. But halfway around the world, in Lahore, India, newspapermen like Zafar Ali at *Zamindar* saw the writing on the wall. The coming war, his newspaper reported to its Urdu-language readership, would not be confined to Austria and Serbia, ‘but will be a universal war in which all the great empires of Europe will be involved.’

The result of it all will be that the giant which has so far been ruining Asia will now be engaged in ruining himself; the materials of war which have so far been used to destroy Orientals will now be employed in the destruction of Europeans. In time to come the world will find that the same causes were at work as in the day when the Babylonian Empire received its death-blow and the glory of Nineveh shone no more.<sup>1</sup>

One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I, scholars now consider seriously the conflict’s global dimensions and impacts.<sup>2</sup> At the time it was fought, writes Heather Jones, ‘the Great War was seen as a “world” war – it was only in the post-1945 period that it came to be depicted as primarily a European conflict in comparison to

the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> To a significant degree, comprehending the ‘globality’ of World War I necessarily involves writing the colonial presence into histories of the conflict. Important works on the experiences of African and Asian combatants and non-combatants challenge dominant Eurocentric narratives; it will no longer do, for instance, to treat the protracted campaigns in Africa and Asia offhandedly as ‘sideshows.’<sup>4</sup> Another line of work situates the experiences of colonial subjects alongside those of Europeans, enabling us to draw comparisons and tease out long-overlooked connections that were (or were not) readily apparent to the war’s contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> Important works of this sort – by way of example, take those of Richard Fogarty, Santanu Das and Heike Liebau – allow us to better capture the pre-1918 world ‘in all its integrated and multifarious complexity.’<sup>6</sup> Santanu Das writes, ‘The global reverberations of what at the time Germany alone, among the European nations, called the “*world* war” (Weltkrieg) become apparent as we substitute people, processes and effects of the war for places and events.’<sup>7</sup> Battles and place names no doubt serve as one marker of the war’s globality. The myriad cross-cultural and interracial encounters engendered by the wartime mobilisation of millions of human beings from almost every corner of the globe, the discursive representations of those encounters and the implications of these on peoples near and far – these encompass a second and no less important aspect of the war’s global reach.<sup>8</sup>

This volume presents the translated extracts of newspaper articles published during World War I, intended for Indian audiences in the Punjab.<sup>9</sup> These newspaper articles were originally translated during the war by British officials and Indian clerks employed by the Criminal Investigation Department in Lahore. The extracts survive today in British intelligence reports on the Indian vernacular press, filed during the war years. Constituting an invaluable and heretofore largely unexamined source record, these documents offer a lens into the anxieties and aspirations of Punjabis, a population that committed treasure, foodstuffs and more than 360,000 combatants to the British war effort between 1914 and 1918 – more than any other province in British India.<sup>10</sup>

### India and the war

Among the belligerent powers of World War I, none drew more extensively on overseas colonial resources than Great Britain, and no overseas territory contributed more to Britain's imperial war effort than India. Between 1914 and 1918, Indians supplied money, materiel and manpower: £100 million flowed outright from Indian coffers in 1914, and another £20 to £30 million each year through the end of the war. At the start of the conflict, the Indian Army constituted the only overseas professional force available to Great Britain. One of India's largest employers, the army numbered 39 regiments of cavalry and 139 battalions of infantry in August 1914, comprising in total some 160,000 Indian ranks. Up to 31 December 1919, the Indian Army recruited another 877,068 combatants and 563,369 non-combatants.<sup>11</sup> This constituted the single greatest contribution made by any of Britain's colonies or dominions. Between August 1914 and December 1919, India deployed 622,224 soldiers and 474,789 non-combatants overseas, to fronts in France and Belgium, Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine, East Africa and Mesopotamia.<sup>12</sup> In the late autumn of 1914, soldiers employed by the Indian Army (Indian and British) made up one-third of the British Expeditionary Force then engaged on the Western Front.<sup>13</sup> Between October 1914 and December 1915, Indian infantry fought in the trenches of Belgium and France at Ypres, Festubert, Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle, Second Ypres and Loos. In Mesopotamia, Indian troops deployed to Basra on 6 November 1914. In January 1915, Indians held the Suez Canal against attacking Turkish forces. In 1916, Indian cavalry fought on the Somme. Infantry tried, and failed, to rescue their surrounded comrades of the 6th Division at Kut. In March 1917, Indian troops participated in the capture of Baghdad. In December, Indian soldiers marched into Jerusalem.

In Great Britain, the topic of 'India in the war' practically became an industry unto itself during the war years. Newspapers regaled audiences with the exploits of Indian troops – especially of those serving embedded within the British Expeditionary Force on the continent. Newspapers captured the imagination of their home

readership with headlines like 'Indian Troops in Action,' 'Dash of the Indian Troops,' or 'Valour of the Indian Troops.'<sup>14</sup> Penny pamphlets declared that India was 'Heart and Soul' with Great Britain, that the war had 'swept away all hesitation, all doubt' and any misgivings about British rule.<sup>15</sup> 'In battle, the Indian troops were once again covered in glory with the kukri of the Gurkhas playing, as always, its terrible role,' French audiences read in the newspapers.<sup>16</sup> This sort of sensational reporting and propaganda – for that is what it was – was not the result of any coordinated effort of the part of the embattled governments of the Allies (not at this early point in the war, anyway). Rather, the press barons and their staff took the lead in framing the discussion about the war and its meaning.<sup>17</sup> The British government was happy to let them, believing plainly that the government required this kind of propaganda to sustain civilian morale.<sup>18</sup>

There is at long last a real push to rescue Indian perspectives and incorporate these into the larger narrative of the war. There exists now a small but productive cohort of scholars uncovering a range of Indian perspectives from the war. Important existing works and forthcoming works by David Omissi; Santanu Das; Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja; Gajendra Singh; and Rozina Visram come to mind.<sup>19</sup> A collection of sound recordings of Indian soldiers, taken between 1915 and 1916 at a German prisoner of war camp, has recently been found at Humboldt University in Berlin and is presently being digitised. At the recent conference, 'Perspectives on the "Great" War,' hosted by Queen Mary University of London to mark the centennial of the war, there was an entire strand devoted to the subject of Indian perspectives.

Still, historian Tan Tai Yong reminds us that measuring the impact of the war on Indian society is no easy task, 'given the variable impact of the demands of war on different parts of the subcontinent.' 'There could be no better place to carry out such an examination than the Punjab, without a doubt the province in India most affected by the war.'<sup>20</sup> Between August 1914 and the November 1918 Armistice, about 60 per cent of all combat troops raised in India were Punjabis.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the Indian Army recruited in the Punjab to the

very near exclusion of some other provinces. By 1918, Punjabi Sikhs, who made up less than 1 per cent of the population of British India, accounted for 90,000 combatants, or one-eighth of all Indian soldiers deployed overseas during the war.<sup>22</sup> Bengal, with a male population of roughly 23 million, had only a single combat battalion at the front at the end of the war.<sup>23</sup> This policy was the product of design, not accident or oversight. Annexed by the East India Company in 1849, the Punjab (like much of India) came under Crown rule in 1858. The preceding year had witnessed a massive popular rebellion, sparked by a mutiny among Bengal infantry and cavalry stationed in Meerut. The 'Sepoy Mutiny' (as many in Britain preferred to call it at the time) very nearly drove the British from South Asia altogether. But in June 1858, the last of the rebel strongholds in Gwalior fell to the British. Grateful to the nearly 30,000 Punjabis who helped put down the rebellion, the British began immediately to replace 'disgraced' Bengal units with soldiers mustered in the Punjab. By June 1858, of the 80,000 native troops in the Bengal army, 75,000 were Punjabis, with Sikhs alone numbering 23,000.<sup>24</sup>

Recruitment in India remained largely haphazard for some time after that, but Russian expansion into Central Asia in the 1880s combined with the explosion of social Darwinist racial theories at the end of the nineteenth century left policy makers scrambling to find South Asia's best fighting material, the so-called 'martial races' of India.<sup>25</sup> Army policy narrowed the pool of potential recruits to select groups – Sikhs, Muslims, Dogras and Hindu Jats of the Punjab, Pathans from the North West Frontier, Gurkhas from Nepal.<sup>26</sup> This was an army, by British thinking, 'based on a systematic grouping of men by race and sept and clan, with a view to the full development of race thinking.'<sup>27</sup> 'It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West,' wrote one popular commentator, 'with certain exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior.'<sup>28</sup> By 1914, nearly 75 per cent of the Indian army hailed from the Punjab, the North West Frontier and Nepal.<sup>29</sup>

The demands of war brought about profound changes in the administration of the Punjab. Starting in 1915, the state began directing all of its energies towards supporting the war effort. By 1917, 'the whole administrative structure of the province was converted into a formidable and monolithic recruiting machine, utilised mainly for the purpose of supplying military manpower for the Indian Army.'<sup>30</sup> In 1918, Punjabis who prior to the war otherwise had little or no contact with the Punjabi state or the Indian Army might then have dealt with both as facets of daily life. The army earmarked 75 new classes as eligible for recruitment during the war, and Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Punjab's wartime Lieutenant Governor, toured the countryside alternatively exhorting, shaming, or threatening young men into uniform.<sup>31</sup> Still, much of India never experienced anything like the kind of levy *en masse* underway across much of Europe during the war. In his postwar memoirs, Lieutenant Governor O'Dwyer highlighted this very fact in order to discredit what he called those 'down-country politicians' who spoke 'eloquently of India's war achievements.' 'As a matter of fact,' he wrote, 'even including the Punjab, the only great Province which made a really serious war effort, the death-casualties for all India, with 320 millions of people, were less than those of Canada with her 8 millions, of Australia with only 5 millions, and only double those of New Zealand with little over a million of people.'<sup>32</sup>

**Table 4** Total combatant recruits raised in India and Nepal, 1914–18<sup>33</sup>

	Punjab	India (including Punjab)	India (excluding Punjab)	Nepal
1914	14,000	28,000	14,000	3,000
1915	46,000	93,000	47,000	14,000
1916	50,000	104,000	54,000	5,000
1917	95,000	186,000	91,000	12,000
1918	134,000	317,000	183,000	10,000



### The Punjabi press and the war

Urban centres in the Punjab boasted a variety of English, Urdu and Gurmukhi language newspapers at the outbreak of the war. Lahore was the epicentre of this industry, where readers could choose from more than 70 titles in August 1914. That same month, Amritsar housed no fewer than 28 newspapers, Rawalpindi had at least seven, and Jullundur offered three. Most newspapers had a modest circulation of fewer than 1,000 copies. Some, like the English-language *Tribune*, printed in Lahore, had a more robust daily run of 2,000 copies. Competing for an English-language Indian readership was the *Panjabee*, which circulated 2,400 copies daily. These dailies shared the streets with Bal Kishen's Urdu-language *Akbbar-i-'Am*, which printed 1,000 copies each day. The largest Lahore daily in August 1914 was the Urdu-language *Zamindar*, edited by Zafar Ali, which circulated 15,000 copies. The only other Urdu newspaper that could match the circulation of *Zamindar* at the outbreak of the war was *Hindustan*, offered to Lahore readers on a weekly basis. Meanwhile, in Lahore, the Criminal Investigation Department had been filing weekly reports on the content and tenor of hundreds of Punjabi newspapers since 1896. It continued to do so into the interwar years. In these weekly reports, the Inspector-General and his staff did not reprint the entire contents of each newspaper they reviewed. Rather, they translated, and then reproduced those articles of interest to them, allocating each to one of seven broad topical categories to which the Criminal Investigation Department believed they most aptly pertained: (i) Politics, both foreign and domestic; (ii) Afghanistan and the Trans-Frontier; (iii) Native States; (iv) Kine-Killing; (v) Native Societies and Religious Matters; (vi) Legislation; and (vii) General Administration.

Through 1916, much of the task of compiling newspaper reports fell to H.E.C. Beaver, Personal Assistant to the Deputy Inspector-General and Officer-in-Charge of the Press Branch of the Punjab Criminal Investigation Department. His 30 September 1916 report offered 45 newspaper excerpts. War news had taken something of a back seat at that time. Only two excerpts dealt chiefly with the war.

A few others dealt with issues germane to the war, like the recently formed Bengali Double Company, or frontier raids on the Afghan border. Most of the entries for his 30 September report had little or nothing to do with the war: obstruction of the Ganges near Hardwar, Sikh and Hindu relations, political arrests, free and compulsory education in India, landowners and predatory money-lenders. Some weeks, however, the Punjabi press focused on the war to the very near exclusion of everything else. At other times, they offered nothing on the war, but a great deal on reform proposals, the Punjab Muslim League, the National Congress, the Press Act, high prices, the arrest of Mrs Annie Besant (co-founder in 1916 of the All India Home Rule League) for protesting the Defence of India Act, or the plight of Indian emigrants in South Africa or Canada.

The appetite Punjabi newspapers showed for reporting war news ebbed and flowed between late 1914 and the close of 1918. The war received considerable attention in the heady opening months of the conflict. Newspapers pledged their unflinching support for the British Empire. They urged young men to enlist, expressed outrage when they learned that the Indian Army would not admit educated Indians to its ranks, and voiced their shock and disgust at the behaviour of German troops in occupied Belgium. In November 1914, Muslim newspapers lamented Turkey's decision to enter the war, but maintained that Indian Muslims did not owe any allegiance to the Sultan in Constantinople. It was manifest, newspapers proclaimed again and again, that the Turks had fallen victim to the machinations of the Kaiser. The year 1915 witnessed the Dardanelles campaign, Germany's decision to unleash submarines and flame-throwers, fighting in the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, stalemate in France and atrocities in Armenia. Also in 1915, Italy joined the war for the Allies, and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers. In 1916, the Punjabi press followed the uprisings in Ireland and the Hedjaz with rapt attention. Newspapers followed closely the developments at Verdun. The Punjabi press showed comparably little interest in battlefronts in 1917 and overwhelmingly turned its focus to the discussion surrounding Home Rule for India. But the toppling of the Tsar's government sparked some comment, as did America's decision