

Soldiering and Society: A Socio-Historical Study of Military Recruitment and Rural Transformation in Haryana (1947–1999)

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Abstract: This research paper explores the dynamic relationship between military recruitment and rural societal transformation in Haryana from the post-Independence period to the end of the 20th century. By examining the historical context, socio-economic structures, cultural narratives, and regional disparities that shaped enlistment patterns, the study investigates how Haryana's strong martial ethos translated into a distinctive socio-military identity. The paper delves into motivations for joining the armed forces—economic, symbolic, and social—and how service in the military facilitated upward mobility, especially among marginalized groups such as Dalits and backward castes. Special attention is paid to the role of caste, masculinity, and landholding in sustaining a militarised culture in Haryana, as well as the symbolic capital attached to military service. Through a mix of historical analysis, sociological theory, and regional case studies—particularly from districts like Rewari, Jhajjar, and Bhiwani—the study contributes to a broader understanding of how military service intersects with caste identity, gender roles, and rural modernity. The paper ultimately argues that soldiering in Haryana has functioned not merely as a career but as a mode of social reconfiguration and cultural prestige that continues to shape regional identities.

Keywords: Haryana, Indian Armed Forces, rural transformation, military recruitment, caste, Jat soldier, social mobility, masculinity, Dalit, Rewari, Jhajjar, martial ethos, post-independence India, symbolic capital.

1.Introduction

The relationship between military service and rural society in India represents a historically embedded and culturally nuanced phenomenon. Nowhere is this interaction more pronounced than in the state of Haryana, a region that emerged as a separate political entity in 1966 but whose martial traditions and soldierly identity long predate its statehood. This study seeks to examine the socio-historical implications of military recruitment from Haryana between 1947 and 1999, a period marked by multiple wars, nation-building efforts, and agrarian transformations. Through a critical engagement with archival data, oral narratives, and existing historiography, this paper aims to explore how military service not only shaped the lives of individual soldiers but also reconfigured the socio-economic contours of rural Haryana.

In post-colonial India, the armed forces have played a dual role: safeguarding national sovereignty and acting as a mechanism for socio-economic mobility among rural populations (Roy, 2006; Cohen, 1990). Haryana's overrepresentation in the Indian Army is not accidental; rather, it is rooted in colonial military recruitment patterns that privileged certain regions and castes deemed "martial" under the British categorization system (Omissi, 1994; Streets, 2004). After independence, these martial networks continued to operate through both formal and informal channels of enlistment, sustaining what can be termed a 'culture of soldiering' in specific districts such as Jhajjar, Rewari, Bhiwani, and Rohtak (Raghuvanshi, 2011).

At the same time, the role of the military in shaping rural Haryana's social structures and developmental trajectory has remained relatively underexplored in mainstream Indian historiography. While studies have addressed India's military history at the national level (Palit, 1993; Das, 2002), there has been insufficient attention paid to regional contributions, especially in understanding how soldiering interfaces with caste hierarchies, landholding patterns, and the aspirations of agrarian communities. This research seeks to bridge this historiographical gap by approaching military recruitment not just as a defence strategy but as a socio-economic institution that intersects with questions of identity, mobility, and state formation (Gupta, 2010).

Moreover, the period 1947–1999 provides a critical lens for such analysis. These five decades witnessed the Indo-Pak wars (1947–48, 1965, 1971), the Sino-Indian conflict (1962), and the Kargil war (1999), during which Haryana's contribution in terms of manpower, casualties, and gallantry awards was significant. Yet, beyond the battlefield, the soldier-citizen from Haryana became an important actor in village politics, rural economy, and collective memory (Kumar, 2005). As such, this study does not limit itself to military engagements but also interrogates the long-term effects of soldiering on rural development, education, and social prestige.

By centring Haryana in this socio-historical inquiry, the paper argues for a more grounded and regionally-sensitive approach to the study of military-society relations in postcolonial India. It posits that military service acted as both a conservative and transformative force: upholding traditional notions of honour and masculinity, while simultaneously offering new pathways for economic mobility and political participation. In doing so, it draws attention to the ways in which the local and the national have been mutually constitutive in shaping India's defence apparatus and rural landscapes.

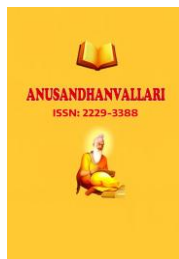
2. Historical Context: Militarisation and the Rural Landscape Cultural, Social, and Economic Factors that Encouraged Military Enlistment

The enduring phenomenon of high military enlistment from Haryana cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural, social, and economic environment that prevailed across its rural landscape from the colonial period into the decades following independence. Military service in this region did not merely emerge as a career path—it became embedded in the very social fabric of rural identity, evolving into a distinct subculture supported by familial tradition, caste pride, economic necessity, and state recognition.

Culturally, Haryana has long celebrated martial values such as bravery (veerta), honour (izzat), discipline, and sacrifice (balidan), which are often valorized in folk songs, oral narratives, and public commemorations. Communities such as the Jats, Rajputs, and Ahirs, which dominate the rural demographic landscape of Haryana, have historically associated masculinity with physical strength, endurance, and a readiness to defend the community and the nation (Roy, 2006). These cultural ideals were reinforced during colonial rule through the 'martial races' theory, but they persisted—and even strengthened—in post-independence India, where military service became an extension of these pre-existing masculine ideals (Streets, 2004; Ghosh, 2009).

The idea of the "soldier-son" became a highly respected role within village society. Families often considered military service a matter of honour and continuity, leading to intergenerational enlistment wherein sons followed fathers, uncles, and grandfathers into the armed forces (Raghuvanshi, 2011). This phenomenon was further institutionalized by caste-based regiments and village networks that facilitated recruitment. Serving in the army not only conferred personal prestige on the individual but also elevated the status of the family within the community. In many cases, the social capital gained through military service translated into leadership roles in local panchayats and civil society (Kumar, 2005).

Social factors such as caste pride, kinship networks, and peer influence also played a critical role. In villages where military service was widespread, youth often aspired to emulate their elders and peers who had served or were serving in the armed forces. Peer pressure and community expectations created a localised culture in which



military enlistment became a rite of passage for young men, often taking precedence over higher education or alternative careers (Gupta, 2010). Moreover, recruiters and ex-servicemen acted as informal mentors, guiding and training prospective recruits to prepare for physical tests and written examinations (Jeffrelot, 2007).

Economically, military service presented one of the most stable and desirable employment options for rural youth, particularly during the decades following independence when rural underemployment and agrarian distress were widespread. Haryana's agrarian economy, while relatively prosperous in some districts, was vulnerable to fluctuations in rainfall, declining landholdings, and limited non-agricultural opportunities. For many landless or marginal farmers, military service offered not only a steady income but also long-term benefits such as pensions, healthcare, and educational assistance for children (Deshpande, 2005). The periodic pay commissions and growing respect for defense personnel further enhanced the attractiveness of military jobs.

The economic ripple effects of military service were also significant at the village level. Households with serving members benefited from regular remittances, which were often invested in land, housing, education, and social ceremonies. In fact, in many villages, a visible divide emerged between military and non-military families, with the former enjoying greater access to capital and symbolic authority (Kumar, 2005; Ghosh, 2009). This economic uplift reinforced the prestige of soldiering and encouraged others to follow the same path.

Additionally, the state's role in institutionalising and promoting military service must not be overlooked. The Government of India, recognizing the region's high enlistment potential, supported the establishment of recruitment centres and army preparatory academies in Haryana. State-level schemes offered ex-servicemen benefits such as land grants, educational quotas, and public employment reservations. These policy measures, coupled with the cultural glorification of the soldier, helped convert military service into a socially sanctioned and economically rewarding occupation (Roy, 2006; Mazumder, 2003).

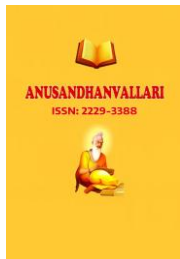
In conclusion, the high enlistment rate from Haryana was not a mere statistical coincidence but the result of a complex interplay of cultural valorisation of martial masculinity, social networks and expectations, and economic necessity. Together, these factors created a robust ecosystem where military service was both a personal aspiration and a collective tradition, deeply woven into the region's rural identity.

2.1 Creation of Haryana in 1966 and Continuity of Martial Ethos

The state of Haryana was carved out of Punjab on November 1, 1966, following the recommendations of the States Reorganization Commission and demands for a linguistically homogeneous Hindi-speaking region. Despite its recent political formation, the area comprising present-day Haryana had long been associated with a robust martial tradition. This continuity of martial ethos transcended administrative boundaries and became a defining feature of the region's social identity. Far from disrupting existing military networks, the creation of Haryana served to consolidate and institutionalise the state's role as a key supplier of manpower to the Indian armed forces (Roy, 2006; Kumar, 2005).

Prior to 1966, Haryana's contribution to the military was subsumed under Punjab, which was already overrepresented in colonial and post-independence army rolls. Districts such as Rohtak, Jhajjar, Rewari, Bhiwani, and Mahendragarh were already known for their high rates of enlistment, shaped by colonial recruitment policies that had valorised certain castes and regions as 'martial' (Omissi, 1994; Streets, 2004). The political reorganisation of 1966 allowed Haryana to emerge as a distinct identity within the Indian federal structure while continuing its long-established tradition of soldiering.

State formation in Haryana coincided with the political leadership's conscious effort to promote and support military service as both a developmental and symbolic asset. The state government collaborated with the central defence establishment to establish recruitment centres, army preparatory schools, and ex-servicemen welfare boards. For instance, the Zila Sainik Boards were activated with renewed emphasis on honouring martyrs and



providing post-service benefits, further entrenching the perception of soldiering as an aspirational career (Mazumder, 2003). Moreover, the state's own commemoration practices, including statues of war heroes and annual Shaheed Diwas (Martyrs' Day) observances, helped solidify the cultural narrative of Haryana as a 'land of warriors' (Deshpande, 2005).

The continuity of martial ethos post-1966 was also reflected in everyday social practices, such as the celebration of army recruitment successes, public rituals welcoming returning soldiers, and naming village landmarks after decorated veterans. Far from being an interruption, the reorganisation of state boundaries served as a reinforcing mechanism, giving Haryana a political platform to promote its military legacy and contribute distinctively to national defence.

2.2 Role of Caste, Landholding Patterns, and Social Mobility in Shaping Enlistment

Caste, landholding patterns, and social mobility have historically played a decisive role in shaping military recruitment patterns in Haryana. The region's agrarian structure, deeply rooted in caste hierarchies, served as both a push and pull factor for enlistment into the armed forces. Military service was not merely an occupational choice but became embedded within caste-based expectations, systems of land ownership, and aspirations for upward mobility.

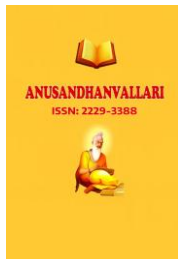
The dominant peasant castes of Haryana—most notably Jats, Ahirs, and Rajputs—have been traditionally associated with both agriculture and martial labour. These groups formed the backbone of the rural economy and simultaneously became the prime contributors to the army, a dual role enabled by their access to land, social capital, and historical alignment with colonial military policies (Ghosh, 2009; Kumar, 2005). Their relatively better landholding status allowed them to maintain physical fitness through agrarian labour while also affording the time and resources to prepare for army recruitment, including coaching, travel, and nutritional needs during training (Raghuvanshi, 2011).

The institution of caste-regiment linkages—such as the Jat Regiment, Sikh Regiment, and Rajputana Rifles—continued to reinforce these alignments. Recruitment officers, often themselves from military families, preferred familiar caste networks for ease of mobilisation and cultural continuity (Roy, 2006). These regiments also helped consolidate the symbolic association of specific castes with soldiering, creating a feedback loop in which recruitment reinforced caste prestige, and caste prestige further encouraged recruitment.

Conversely, lower caste groups and Dalits faced structural barriers to enlistment, ranging from poor access to education and nutrition to the lack of influential social networks. While the post-independence period witnessed some attempts at inclusive recruitment, particularly through Scheduled Caste battalions and reservations, the casteist underpinnings of Haryana's military culture continued to marginalize these communities (Gupta, 2010; Jeffrelot, 2007). The consequence was a dual stratification within rural Haryana: one marked by military-linked families enjoying greater mobility and status, and the other characterised by systemic exclusion from the same pathways.

Landholding patterns further shaped enlistment motivations. In agrarian families with small or fragmented landholdings, military service offered a stable alternative to insecure farming livelihoods. The guaranteed salary, access to subsidised housing, rations, and long-term pensions provided economic security that land could no longer guarantee in the face of demographic pressures and market volatility (Deshpande, 2005). Moreover, remittances from soldiers were often invested back into land or children's education, creating a ladder for economic mobility and diversification of livelihood beyond agriculture.

In several cases, the success of one soldier in a family became the catalyst for subsequent generations to follow suit, resulting in an intergenerational legacy of army service that was reinforced by both necessity and honour.



This tradition created a social landscape where certain villages became recruitment hubs, and some families came to be known as “faujis” (army men), enjoying a distinct social identity within the rural hierarchy (Kumar, 2005).

In summary, caste and land were not just background variables but central organising principles in Haryana’s military recruitment ecosystem. Together, they provided the material, social, and symbolic capital necessary for army enlistment, while also reproducing hierarchies that privileged dominant caste groups over others. The interplay of these factors ensured that military service functioned as both a conservative force—upholding caste-based honour—and a transformative avenue—offering economic and social mobility, albeit unevenly distributed.

3. Recruitment Trends and Motivations (1947–1999)

The period between 1947 and 1999 witnessed a remarkable continuity and expansion in military enlistment from Haryana, positioning the state as one of the top contributors to the Indian armed forces on a per capita basis. Although Haryana formally came into existence in 1966, the regions that now constitute the state had long been militarised under British colonial policies. Following independence, the state’s contribution to the armed forces remained disproportionately high, a trend sustained by a complex combination of historical precedent, socio-cultural factors, and state policy (Roy, 2006; Kumar, 2005).

Quantitative data on military recruitment reveal the depth of Haryana’s involvement. According to Ministry of Defence records and ex-servicemen welfare boards, Haryana accounted for approximately 8–10% of the total strength of the Indian Army by the late 1980s, despite comprising only about 2% of India’s population (Mazumder, 2003; Raghuvanshi, 2011). In some years, this representation peaked even higher, especially during periods of military escalation such as the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars, when emergency recruitment drives were launched across key districts.

District-level data provide further insights into the geography of enlistment. Districts such as Rewari, Jhajjar, Bhiwani, Mahendragarh, Rohtak, and Sonapat consistently emerged as recruitment hotspots. For example, Rewari—often referred to as the “Ahirwal region” because of its large Yadav population—alone contributed thousands of soldiers to the armed forces, including several awardees of gallantry honours such as the Param Vir Chakra and Vir Chakra (Ghosh, 2009). Government figures from the Directorate of Sainik Welfare (Haryana) indicate that by the early 1990s, Rewari had over 25,000 serving and retired personnel, the highest for any district in the state (Raghuvanshi, 2011).

A longitudinal analysis of recruitment trends also reveals certain patterns. The post-independence decade (1947–1957) was marked by the continuation of colonial recruitment practices, favouring caste-based regiments and martial belts. The 1962 Sino-Indian War and subsequent Indo-Pak conflicts in 1965 and 1971 catalysed significant spikes in enlistment. Recruitment during these periods often took the form of semi-voluntary mobilisation, where state propaganda, community pride, and economic desperation worked in tandem to encourage youth to join the armed forces (Roy, 2006; Kumar, 2005).

The decade of the 1980s witnessed a slight dip in direct enlistment due to increased educational aspirations and the rise of alternative employment opportunities through Green Revolution-induced agrarian prosperity. However, the 1990s saw a renewed surge in applications, particularly after the implementation of the 5th Pay Commission, which significantly improved the pay structure and benefits for armed personnel. The 1999 Kargil War served as a patriotic flashpoint, reviving enlistment drives and rekindling martial pride across Haryana’s rural hinterland (Deshpande, 2005; Kumar, 2005).

One notable trend across these five decades is the overrepresentation of specific caste groups in the recruitment statistics. Jats, Ahirs, and Rajputs formed the bulk of the recruits, consistent with the British-era “martial race” categorisation. These groups not only dominated in numbers but also formed socio-cultural clusters around military service. Ex-servicemen often returned to their villages and played active roles in encouraging younger

generations to join the armed forces, thereby perpetuating a cyclical pattern of enlistment (Omissi, 1994; Jeffrelet, 2007).

The gendered nature of this data must also be acknowledged. Military enlistment remained overwhelmingly male throughout the period under study, with women's entry into the armed forces restricted to non-combat roles and occurring only in the later years of the 1990s. Haryana's patriarchal rural society further reinforced gender-based exclusions, often valorising male soldiering while simultaneously restricting women to domestic and agricultural roles (Gupta, 2010).

In sum, the statistical trajectory of military recruitment from Haryana between 1947 and 1999 reflects more than numerical participation; it reveals an institutionalised culture of enlistment shaped by historical legacy, caste structures, regional identity, and evolving economic aspirations. The enduring overrepresentation of Haryana in the Indian Army is thus not an anomaly but a historically conditioned outcome, sustained by both state mechanisms and societal norms.

3.1 Motivations for Joining the Armed Forces: Economic, Social, and Symbolic Dimensions

The motivations for joining the Indian armed forces among the youth of Haryana during the post-independence decades (1947–1999) were deeply embedded in the region's agrarian structures, cultural ethos, and historical military legacies. These motivations were not merely instrumental in nature, but often reflected a complex interplay of economic necessity, social status, and symbolic aspiration (Kumar, 2005; Roy, 2006).

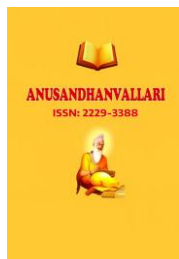
Economically, military service offered a rare path to financial stability and upward mobility for rural youth. With the agrarian economy of Haryana undergoing considerable transformation—particularly with land fragmentation, stagnation in farm incomes, and mechanisation limiting labour opportunities—military recruitment provided a salaried, pensionable career with state benefits (Chowdhry, 1994; Jeffrelet, 2007). For smallholder peasants and landless labourers alike, army service became an appealing alternative to uncertain agricultural incomes and limited rural employment. Notably, the economic incentives extended beyond the soldier to their families, including access to subsidised goods through the Canteen Stores Department and eligibility for housing and education benefits (Singh, 2009).

On the social front, military service conferred honour, respectability, and an enhanced status in the village hierarchy. Soldiers—referred to as *faujis*—were accorded ceremonial importance in village functions and frequently participated in the panchayat system and local governance. Families with generations of military service enjoyed prestige, and having a son in the army was often a marker of social accomplishment (Raghuvanshi, 2011). This social prestige often translated into better marriage alliances, especially in caste-conscious rural Haryana, where the uniform was seen as a badge of discipline, masculinity, and modernity.

Symbolically, military enlistment was embedded in the martial culture of Haryana's rural communities. Castes such as Jats, Ahirs (Yadavs), and Rajputs—classified under colonial martial race theory—carried forward the narrative of martial pride and ancestral service in the British Indian Army (Omissi, 1994). Many families viewed service in the armed forces as a continuation of lineage-based obligation, tied to notions of sacrifice for the nation and honouring family tradition. War memorials, stories of decorated veterans, and village celebrations of martyrdom all reinforced this symbolic universe of valour and duty.

In short, recruitment into the armed forces in Haryana cannot be explained solely in economic terms. Rather, it must be understood as an institutionally structured and culturally valorised pathway for achieving security, status, and symbolic legitimacy in a competitive rural order.

3.2 Regional Disparities in Recruitment: The Case of Jhajjar, Rohtak, Rewari, Bhiwani, and Hisar



Although Haryana as a whole contributed significantly to India's armed forces post-1947, there existed marked regional disparities in recruitment across its districts. Certain districts—such as Jhajjar, Rohtak, Rewari, Bhiwani, and Hisar—stood out for their disproportionately high rates of enlistment. This spatial concentration reflects a confluence of socio-cultural tradition, demographic patterns, historical legacies, and state-supported recruitment infrastructure (Mazumder, 2003; Ghosh, 2009).

Rewari, often referred to as the “Ahirwal belt,” has historically been a powerhouse of military recruitment. Predominantly inhabited by the Yadav community, Rewari produced a large number of decorated soldiers and officers. The community's martial legacy dates back to pre-colonial and colonial periods, and continues to be celebrated through memorials, sainik sammelans, and intergenerational narratives. The presence of sainik schools, ex-servicemen's networks, and sustained recruitment drives has institutionalised military service in the socio-economic structure of the region (Roy, 2006).

Jhajjar and Rohtak, largely Jat-dominated districts, have also maintained a high soldier-to-population ratio. Here, the practice of kin-based recruitment—where younger generations follow the military path of elder relatives—has created strong localised military cultures. In many Jat villages of these districts, families boast multiple generations of service, with some even maintaining informal registers of military participation. These practices reinforce communal expectations and perpetuate a self-sustaining cycle of enlistment (Jeffrelot, 2007).

Bhiwani and Hisar, though more agriculturally diverse, have also shown consistent military recruitment levels. In these districts, the challenges of semi-arid agriculture, combined with relatively lower industrial employment opportunities, made the army a practical and respectable occupational choice for youth across caste lines. Hisar, in particular, saw rising recruitment from backward castes seeking social mobility and state recognition through military service (Kumar, 2005).

Infrastructural support also played a crucial role in sustaining these patterns. The establishment of army recruitment offices, coaching centres, sainik rest houses, and veterans' welfare boards in these high-recruitment districts ensured a continuous supply of motivated and prepared candidates. Moreover, the visibility of ex-servicemen in public life and their political representation reinforced the prestige and practicality of military service.

Overall, the regional disparities in Haryana's recruitment landscape reveal that enlistment was not a uniform or random process, but one closely tied to caste-based legacies, economic geography, cultural memory, and institutional scaffolding

4. Military Service and Social Mobility

The institution of the military in post-independence India has functioned not only as a coercive arm of the state but also as an instrument of welfare and mobility, particularly in rural and agrarian regions like Haryana. Between 1947 and 1999, the cumulative impact of service in the armed forces—through pensions, gratuities, educational incentives, and social prestige—restructured rural hierarchies and redefined the social aspirations of many households. This section examines how military service reshaped the material and symbolic structures of village life, especially among marginalized and backward-caste populations.

4.1 The Impact of Military Pensions, Benefits, and Quotas on Rural Households

Military pensions and welfare benefits have historically constituted a stable and predictable source of income for rural families in Haryana. While agriculture has remained subject to market volatility, climatic unpredictability, and structural inequalities, military pensions provided assured monthly income, thereby cushioning families from rural distress. This economic security often served as a base for upward mobility—enabling investment in land, housing, and education (Jeffrelot, 2007; Kumar, 2005).

Upon retirement, soldiers were not only entitled to pensions and gratuities but also gained access to additional welfare schemes such as the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), the Canteen Stores Department (CSD) benefits, and priority quotas in government employment, transport permits, and housing schemes (Singh, 2009). The cumulative impact of these provisions meant that households with one or more serving or retired soldiers were considerably better placed than their peers in the same caste or economic category.

Moreover, ex-servicemen often emerged as mediators of development schemes and government programs in villages, either as sarpanches or respected community elders. Their connections with state bureaucracies, cultivated during their service, allowed them to navigate officialdom more effectively than other villagers (Raghuvanshi, 2011). As a result, the influence of military pensions and quotas extended beyond the household to shape broader power relations in the rural polity.

4.2 Case Studies of Upward Mobility Among Marginalized Groups (Dalits and Backward Castes)

While Haryana's recruitment patterns have often been associated with dominant caste groups such as the Jats and Ahirs, military service also enabled considerable upward mobility among Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), particularly in the latter half of the 20th century. The post-independence Indian Army, unlike its colonial predecessor, did not explicitly follow martial race theory, thereby opening avenues for historically excluded groups to participate and benefit from military service (Omissi, 1994; Roy, 2006).

Among Dalit communities in districts such as Hisar, Kaithal, and Jind, military service emerged as a rare opportunity to escape the social stigma associated with caste-based occupations. Even a single generation of army service allowed families to transition from leatherwork or agricultural labor to salaried livelihoods, thereby altering their caste-based identity in the eyes of the community (Chowdhry, 1994). Anecdotal accounts and oral histories frequently highlight how retired Dalit soldiers constructed permanent housing, invested in their children's education, and distanced themselves from caste-embedded dependency on dominant landholders.

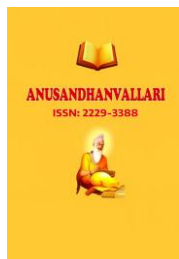
Backward castes, such as Kumhars (potters), Lohars (blacksmiths), and Nais (barbers), also benefited disproportionately from the Indian Army's recruitment infrastructure, especially as competition for caste-based reservations in civilian employment intensified. Military service allowed members of these castes to break the hereditary occupational mold and aspire toward modern middle-class identity—evident in changes in surnames, dietary habits, and even religious practices. In several villages, backward caste families with military backgrounds became prominent contenders in panchayat elections and local dispute resolution, a role traditionally dominated by upper castes (Jodhka, 2002).

These case studies reveal that while military service could not entirely erase caste-based exclusion, it provided material and symbolic capital that allowed marginalized communities to negotiate new terms of inclusion in the rural social order.

4.3 Changes in Landownership, Education, and Consumption Patterns in Military Families

Military service also engendered significant shifts in patterns of landownership, education, and consumption. Retired servicemen often invested their pensions and terminal benefits into acquiring land—either by consolidating existing holdings or purchasing new plots. This was particularly evident in the Bhiwani and Mahendragarh districts, where army families began to occupy larger landholdings over time, gradually entering the ranks of kulaks or wealthy peasants (Ghosh, 2009).

The acquisition of land also carried cultural value: owning land symbolized stability, respect, and independence. Unlike migrant laborers or daily-wage earners, ex-servicemen were perceived as "settled" and hence more desirable in village alliances. In several villages, agricultural land purchased by army families served as a means



of diversifying income—by leasing it out or employing sharecroppers—thus allowing the ex-soldier to maintain a dignified retirement without becoming re-entrenched in the hardships of farming.

Education was another domain transformed by military service. Army schools, welfare grants, and children's quotas enabled servicemen to educate their sons and daughters in better institutions, often in urban centers like Ambala, Rohtak, or Chandigarh. Literacy and schooling rates among military families—especially for daughters—were significantly higher than the village average. This trend also reflected an aspirational shift: many ex-servicemen encouraged their children to pursue civilian government jobs, bank employment, or technical education, thereby contributing to the rise of a new rural middle class (Kumar, 2005).

In terms of consumption, the difference between army and non-army households became visible in clothing, diet, mobility, and housing. Military families had earlier and wider access to consumer goods—motorcycles, refrigerators, sewing machines, and even private vehicles—than their village peers. Architecturally, the transition from mud huts to cemented houses (pakka makaan) often served as a visual indicator of military service within the village. These material changes, however, were not merely individual markers of success but were also interpreted as collective gains by the caste or kin group—thus encouraging more youth to pursue military recruitment (Raghuvanshi, 2011).

Furthermore, exposure to diverse geographies, languages, and administrative systems during service years shaped a more cosmopolitan worldview among ex-servicemen. Many became informal counselors, legal advisors, or liaison agents for government programs within the village, thereby assuming a semi-bureaucratic role. This new form of rural leadership—rooted in state service but functioning within local structures—reshaped hierarchies of authority and accountability in profound ways.

Taken together, these shifts in landownership, education, and consumption signify the army's capacity to serve not merely as a source of employment but as a vehicle of social transformation in post-colonial rural Haryana.

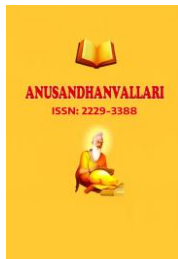
5. Militarised Masculinities and Caste Identity

The armed forces have long served as a critical site for the production and performance of masculinities, particularly in regions such as Haryana, where military recruitment intersects with dominant caste hierarchies and agrarian values. This section explores how soldiering in postcolonial Haryana not only contributed to the reconfiguration of caste identity, but also reinforced a specific vision of masculinity—one rooted in martial valor, physical strength, and patriarchal authority. These processes had significant implications for the construction of regional identities, inter-caste hierarchies, and gender relations in military-dominated rural areas.

5.1 The Cultural Construction of the “Jat Soldier” and Regional Masculinity

The image of the “Jat soldier” emerged as a powerful cultural trope in both colonial and post-independence military narratives. Drawing on the colonial construction of “martial races,” Jats were historically valorized for their supposed physical prowess, agricultural hardiness, and martial loyalty—traits that made them ideal recruits in the British Indian Army (Omissi, 1994; Streets, 2004). Although independent India ostensibly moved away from colonial recruitment ideologies, the stereotype of the Jat soldier continued to persist in the popular imagination and in army folklore well into the late 20th century.

In Haryana, this archetype was internalized and celebrated within the Jat community itself, contributing to the construction of a hypermasculine self-image centered around honor (izzat), discipline, and martial readiness. Military service was seen as both an extension of agrarian masculinity—rooted in land, labor, and kinship—and as its highest ideal. Tales of bravery in wars (especially 1965 and 1971), medals won by local heroes, and the display of uniforms during village festivals all contributed to reinforcing this militarised masculine ethos.



This form of masculinity had a disciplining effect on the socialization of boys in Jat households. From a young age, physical strength, stoicism, and readiness to join the armed forces were emphasized as key attributes of a respectable male identity. Sports such as wrestling (kushti), kabaddi, and athletics were encouraged not merely as recreation but as preparation for potential recruitment. Failure to live up to these ideals—such as opting for "feminized" professions like tailoring, teaching, or nursing—often led to ridicule within the community.

Thus, military service operated as a rite of passage into manhood for young Jat males, conferring not only economic security but also community recognition and honor. This hegemonic model of militarised masculinity, however, also marginalised other caste and gender identities in significant ways.

5.2 Role of Caste-Based Regiments and Symbolic Capital in Rural Haryana

The continuance of caste-based regiments in the Indian Army—such as the Jat Regiment, Rajput Regiment, and Sikh Regiment—played a crucial role in reinforcing caste identity among serving soldiers and their communities. For Jats in Haryana, inclusion in the Jat Regiment became a source of immense symbolic capital, often worn as a badge of ethnic and regional pride (Roy, 2006).

This affiliation extended beyond individual service to shape collective caste identity. Recruitment rallies, army reunions, and martyr commemorations in Jat villages often emphasized regimental pride and heritage. The names of fallen soldiers inscribed on village gates or memorials were often presented with caste-specific titles, further embedding the link between military service and caste honor in the rural landscape.

Caste-based regiments also created informal caste networks within the army, allowing for smoother access to promotions, postings, and informal mentorship. Upon retirement, these networks often transformed into political and economic alliances in the village. Ex-servicemen's associations, war widows' groups, and veterans' cooperatives frequently aligned along caste lines, thereby reinforcing caste cohesion within the evolving socio-political landscape of rural Haryana.

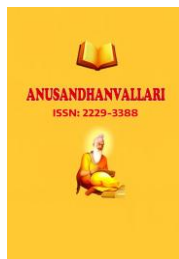
However, this valorisation of caste-based martial identity also entrenched social hierarchies, often marginalising those from Dalit or non-martial caste backgrounds. Non-Jat recruits—especially those from Scheduled Castes—who entered the army through general service units did not enjoy the same social prestige or regimental camaraderie as their Jat counterparts. As such, the symbolic capital derived from soldiering remained unevenly distributed along caste lines, reinforcing pre-existing asymmetries.

5.3 Impact on Gender Roles and Inter-Caste Relations in Military-Dominated Villages

The militarisation of caste identity had profound implications for gender roles and inter-caste relations in Haryana's rural areas. The ideal of the "army man" as the protector, provider, and enforcer of order bolstered patriarchal norms that privileged male authority within the household and the village community. Wives and daughters of servicemen were expected to uphold the family's izzat by maintaining sexual propriety, modesty, and domestic discipline, especially in the absence of the male guardian posted away from home (Chowdhry, 1994).

This entrenchment of patriarchal values often translated into greater control over female mobility and sexuality. While education and material resources did improve for many women in military households, these gains were frequently framed within the logic of discipline and respectability rather than autonomy. Women were expected to manage the household efficiently, raise children with nationalist values, and abstain from political or social dissent.

At the same time, military prestige exacerbated inter-caste tensions in village life. Dominant caste families with a history of army service increasingly asserted their social superiority over lower castes, often translating their symbolic capital into political influence—whether as panchayat heads, local strongmen, or patrons of temples and



public works. In some cases, this led to a re-entrenchment of caste-based inequalities, as backward castes and Dalits were expected to show deference to “faujiyon ke ghar” (families of soldiers), even when their own material conditions had improved through alternative means.

Furthermore, caste-based martial pride occasionally fueled conflicts in inter-caste romantic or marital alliances. A Dalit boy seeking to marry a girl from a military Jat family, for instance, would be viewed as transgressing a moral and social boundary—sometimes resulting in violence or ostracization. Military service thus became not only a marker of pride but also a tool for enforcing caste discipline and social exclusion.

In sum, the militarisation of masculinity and caste identity in postcolonial Haryana represents a complex interplay of pride, hierarchy, and power. While army service opened up avenues of mobility for many, it also reproduced hegemonic ideals of masculinity and caste superiority that reinforced social stratification in new forms. Understanding these cultural and symbolic dimensions is crucial to any sociological analysis of military recruitment and rural transformation in modern India.

6.CONCLUSION

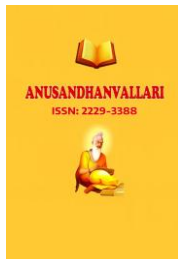
The case of Haryana offers a rich and nuanced insight into how military service extends beyond the battlefield and becomes a deeply embedded socio-cultural institution. From 1947 to 1999, the state’s consistent contribution to India’s armed forces was not only a continuation of colonial recruitment patterns but also a reflection of enduring martial values, regional pride, and socio-economic aspirations. Military enlistment in Haryana was shaped by a complex interplay of caste hierarchies, landholding patterns, and symbolic honour, creating a distinctive soldiering tradition marked especially by the figure of the Jat soldier. Simultaneously, military service provided opportunities for social mobility to marginalized communities, thereby subtly reconfiguring rural hierarchies and modernising consumption patterns.

The economic security afforded by pensions and quotas, combined with the cultural prestige of the uniform, established soldiering as one of the most desirable and transformative professions in Haryana’s rural landscape. Moreover, regional disparities in recruitment mirrored historical inequalities in access to land, education, and social capital, reinforcing the significance of local contexts. Gender roles, too, were both reinforced and challenged within military households, with male-dominated service redefining masculinity and shaping familial identities.

In sum, the intersection of soldiering and rural society in Haryana represents a vital dimension of post-independence India’s socio-political development. The armed forces acted as a vehicle of both continuity and change—upholding traditional hierarchies while enabling new pathways of mobility and recognition. As such, the story of Haryana’s contribution to the republic’s defence is not just a tale of valour, but also a lens into the making of modern rural India.

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