

### 3. EMPLOYMENT

Education was necessary so that young Mohyals were “employable” – having the requisite educational qualifications. The Founding Fathers also considered the ways and means of facilitating their chances of “securing” employment. To understand the significance of their efforts, it is also necessary to have a look at the conditions prevailing at that time.

#### **‘Notifying’ Mohyals as Agricultural Tribes**

The War of Independence (or Mutiny) 1857 was a shattering experience for the British. They set about to identify loyal classes among their subjects. They observed that the Jat Peasant-proprietors in East Punjab and Muslim Landlords in the West had stood by them during the most critical period. The growing indebtedness of the cultivating classes and a concomitant transfer of landed property to urban money lenders could cause rural agitation in Punjab, from which the Indian Army was largely recruiting its soldiery. So they created what may be called an “agricultural tribes” category, through the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 (enforced in 1901).

This Act prohibited the transfer of agricultural land from *the “tribes”, it “notified” as ‘agriculturists’* to ‘non-agriculturists’. In West Punjab (now in Pakistan), agriculturists were mostly Muslims and non-agriculturists non-Muslims (Hindus). The Act was promulgated by the British administration of Punjab, it was stated, to protect the rural Muslim peasantry from the urban Hindu money-lenders.

In a Province in which the population lived mostly in rural areas, being considered a member of ‘agricultural tribes’ became critical – as other facilities like the present-day caste-reservations – were also extended to ‘agriculturists’. There were better economic conditions for the agricultural castes (tribes) and it adversely affected the Hindus. The Mohyals, a miniscule minority, were nowhere in the reckoning in this scheme of things. Let us offer a salute to our ancestors of those times, who exerted pressure beyond their weight, to get most of the Mohyal castes ‘notified’ as agriculturists in one district after another, under the said Punjab Land Alienation Act.

Jhelum and Rawal Pindi districts had the maximum concentration of Mohyals. Efforts were first made in those districts, which bore fruit. Mohyals in these two districts were duly ‘notified’ as ‘agriculturists’. Mohyal Conference held at Amritsar, in 1909, directed that “Government had declared Mohyals of Rawal Pindi and Jhelum Districts as Agriculturist Communities. It is decided to press for similar declarations in the cases of Mohyals at other places of Mohyal concentration like Gurdaspur and Sialkot also.” Obviously this was pursued with success because the Mohyal Conference held at Lyallpur (now Faisalabad in Pakistan) directed that “Government had classified *Dutts* of Districts Sialkot and Gurdaspur as Agriculturist Community. The Conference desired that a communication might be sent to Government for the substitution of the word Dutt by the word Mohyal in the Government notification. It was further requested that the Districts of Lyallpur, Gujranwala and Gujrat also be included in the list.” At the Mohyal Conference held at Gujranwala, in April, 1915, the records state “Declaration of Mohyals as Agriculturist Community. Because of the War,

it was decided that the time was not ripe to take up this matter with the Government Authorities.” So, the Mohyal Conference Lyallpur, (towards the end of World War I) in December 1917 decided to “recommend to the British Government to include Mohyals of Lyallpur in the list of Agricultural classes” and the Conference at Hoshiarpur, in December 1918 decided “to recommend the British Government to declare Mohyals throughout India as Agriculturist Community.

The problem was identified as of vital interest to the Mohyal community, was pursued consistently at the Conferences and with the Government district by district (probably using the previous success also as an argument in the next district). It brought tremendous benefit to the community, and I personally know some instances.

### **Recruitment in the Army: Martial Race**

During the uprising in 1857, the bulk of the rebels in the Bengal Army came from the Indo-Gangetic Plain, while those who remained loyal were mostly from the Punjab. This experience of the Mutiny gave rise to the theory of “martial races”.

F. S. Roberts, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army from 1885 to 1893, regarded the Bengalees, Marathas and southern ethnic groups as lacking the martial virtues. Even in the North-western India, only certain communities were recognized as ‘martial races’ and recruitment limited to these. The Nepalese, Gorkhas, Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims from the northern and frontier regions formed the main pool for recruitment of the Indian Army.

The miniscule Mohyal community was nowhere in this reckoning. Reportedly, if a Mohyal went for recruitment, the answer was, “Who, Mohyal?” If Brahman, “Receivers of charity not eligible.” “I am a Brahman-Rajput”: The Recruiting Officer had no directive about this strange category.

Our Founding Fathers must have noticed that the Indian Army was the major employer in Punjab. The doctrine of ‘martial races’ postulated that the ability and desire of a soldier was inherited and that most Indians, with the exception of specified castes, did not have the requisite genes that would make them warrior. *So how could Mohyals qualify at this test of ‘inherited soldierly virtues’?*

Through the District Gazetteers, that were being compiled, and other forums available to them, the Founding Fathers tried to forcefully distance themselves from the priestly Brahmins: Mohyals were indeed not performing such functions anyway. They tried to present their community as a sort of Brahman-Rajputs, whose ancestors had always fought battles and ruled over vast regions before the Muslims. That Mohyals had held responsible positions in the forces of Muslim and Sikh administrations, without giving up their religion. So they qualified as a ‘martial race’ and should be eligible for recruitment in defence forces.

There was a problem. Unlike the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which identified and ‘notified’ the ‘agricultural tribes’, there was no statute about ‘martial races’, under which one could represent to the ‘designated’ authority.

This problem about employment in Army must have been under serious consideration for some time, because it was listed on the top of the 'proposed' Agenda for a Mohyal Conference (vide Mohyal Mitter, July 1893, quoted above). The first Conference could not be organized till 1902. Minutes of the Conferences in 1902, 1903 and 1903 are not available but the issue must have been debated, with or without any final suggestion about this vexed problem. There is the following directive in the minutes of the fifth Conference held at Jammu in 1906:

A memorandum should be prepared for giving priority to the Mohyals in the matter of recruitment to the Armed Forces and the same should be *submitted to the concerned authorities through Bakshi Ram Das Chhibber.*

No stone by the community left unturned! Reportedly, 167 delegates (somewhat less than the normal attendance) had registered in the winter month of December, 1906 at that far off retreat, Jammu, who must have deliberated seriously for two or three days over this, and all other serious issues: and they gave decisions in respect of each. It was not a conclave of the top leaders. The Conference was like a meeting of the General Body (which phrase had not yet been introduced).

The Mohyals were indeed treated as a 'Martial Race' and there is, let us say, a Prologue. When "*The History of Muhiyals: The Militant Brahman Race of India*" was written by T. P. Russel Stracey, it had a brief Foreword:

4<sup>th</sup> November, 1911

I have read with great interest "The History of the Muhiyals" presented to me by Munshi Ram Das Chhibber.

Many of them served under me in India and In Afghanistan and proved themselves to be excellent soldiers doing all that was required of them with good will. In civil life, too, many of them have attained to responsible positions and have proved themselves capable of holding them worthily.

In short, the History shows the Muhiyals to be as I have always found them. An intelligent, high-spirited and loyal race.

(Sd.) ROBERTS F. M.

(Field Marshal)  
Late Commander in Chief)

Where was the need for any notification now? Here was a certificate from the progenitor of the 'martial race' theory, and an ex-Commander-in-Chief.

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