

Sikh and Indian Australians

Teacher Resource 4 - Indians in World War One - Source Analysis

Source 1: Off to the Front

A fine specimen of the Sikh race (says the Townsville “Star”) in Kaiser Singh, standing over 6 feet, leaves... to join his comrades for the front. Kaiser Singh is a well-known and respected hawker on every station and in every town back to the Gulf, and a most reliable business man. Although a Queensland resident for 14 years, the doings of the Indian contingents in France have fired his fighting blood. Added to this was the news of twelve near relatives who are fighting for their King and country, and a start was made for Townsville. A trained man with over six years’ military experience [in India], an excellent bush education in Australia, Kaiser Singh can be counted on to give an excellent account of himself when he reaches the firing line.

He has left his large team of horses and pack saddles on a Northern station, where the manager has guaranteed their safety until his return. With his personal effects he takes an Australian saddle which he has had specially made, after being assured by the Indian authorities that he may take it to the front. No better volunteer will leave Australia than the six-foot Sikh,... and his reception on his return to his old run between Townsville and the Gulf will be a genuine one.

Northern Miner (Charters Towers, Qld), Thursday 14 January 1915, page 3

Source 2: A letter from the Front

Mrs. G. Searle, of Westbury, received this letter from her son, Viv Searle in 1915

I was not in the second rush. I had to go with our officer and about a dozen men to escort an Indian mountain battery into action. They had their guns packed on mules, and the way they got up that hill was marvellous. They were Sikhs — big, black-bearded men, and cool hands, too. We got the guns into position at last, and we had to get down in front of them to protect them from being rushed. The roar they made nearly deafened us. Then the Turks started to get the range on us with shrapnel, and we had to lie there and do nothing. A good few of the Indians got knocked out, and how we escaped is a mystery to me. Bullets were hitting the ground all round us, and shells bursting right over us, but God was merciful. One of our sergeants was shot in the heel, and it was then I was hit in the shoulder with a piece of shell, which tore a hole in my tunic, but only grazed the shoulder. The Indian battery pushed on into the firing line.

Examiner (Launceston), Wednesday 14 July 1915, page 6

Source 3

“A group of eight unidentified Australian artillerymen and two Indian drivers on the beach at Anzac Cove.”

Source: Australian War Memorial

Source 4: Diary extracts on Indian soldiers

Private Archie Barwick thought highly of the Indians. “[T]he way the Indian batteries behaved on the first day or so of the landing is beyond all praise, they suffered heavily too”...The Australians admired the way the Indian soldiers fought and were grateful for the hard work of the Indians who brought supplies to the trenches using mules on the steep hills.

Dudley V Walford of the Thirteenth Battalion observed in his diary: “Throughout the Gallipoli campaign the Indian Mule Corps played an important part for it was to them that we trusted all our supplies of ammunition, water, food and necessary timbers being punctually brought to the firing lines... We daily awaited their arrival & their cheerful Indian leaders whom we called Johnny...”

<https://stumblingpast.com/2015/04/28/indian-soldiers-fought-at-gallipoli/>

Use evidence from the sources to support your answers.

i. Describe the context of the four sources (include the year, location and events).

ii. Do you think the sources are reliable? Give reasons for your answer.

iii. Compare and contrast the information provided in Sources 1 and 2. (How is the information similar and different?)

iv. What information can you learn from the photograph in Source 3? What is the significance of this photograph?

v. Explain the perspective of AIF soldiers in Source 4 about the importance of the Indian Expeditionary Forces supporting the ANZACs on Gallipoli.

vi. How useful are these four sources in providing information about the role of the Indian forces on Gallipoli and Australian attitudes towards their Indian allies?

Sample answers

A suggested marking key, adding up to 20 marks, is provided at the end of each answer.

i. Describe the context of the four sources (include the year, location and events).

Sources 1 and 2 are from newspapers published in 1915, during the second year of World War One. Source 1 is written before the Gallipoli campaign while Source 2 refers to events during the Gallipoli campaign, evident by mention of the Turks. Source 1 refers to events in Australia where Source 3 is a photograph taken at Anzac Cove during the Gallipoli campaign and Source 4 uses diary extracts to describe support by Indian artillery (Indian batteries) and the Indian Mule Corps on Gallipoli.

[This could be worth 2 marks as the answer requires comprehension of the sources. 1 mark for the year and linking the sources to the broader context of World War One in 1915 when Australians were on Gallipoli and the varied locations (Australia and Gallipoli Peninsula); 1 mark for the events/ people referred to in the sources. Use of short quotes as evidence from the sources is recommended.]

ii. Do you think the sources are reliable? Give reasons for your answer.

Sources 1 to 3 are primary sources, from the time of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. Source 4 is a secondary source, written after the war using diary extracts to support an interpretation of how “Australians admired the way the Indian soldiers fought” on Gallipoli. Newspaper and photographic evidence is reliable, especially when specific newspaper dates and pages are cited. Source 3, a photograph held by the Australian War Memorial, is probably reliable but as the names and battalion details of the Australian artillerymen and Indian drivers are not identified, nor is a date provided, the source is less trustworthy. However, as the Australian War Memorial site is dependable, and provides sources which can be checked, the image can be trusted. Source 4 requires more detailed information on the origin of the quotations from Private Barwick and Dudley Walford. A comparison with other documents from the Gallipoli campaign may be required to check reliability of this document. [This question could be worth 3 marks as students are required to provide reasons for or against the reliability of each source, and provide evidence from the documents to support their answer. Evaluation requires higher level thinking skills.]

iii. Compare and contrast the information provided in Sources 1 and 2. (How is the information similar and different?)

Both sources reflect admiration for the fighting ability of the Sikh soldiers. Source 1 refers to Kaiser Singh as a “fine specimen” who had “over six years’ military experience” in India, as well as a “bush education” in Australia. Respect for Singh is also evident in the words “No better volunteer will leave Australia”. This compares to the respect shown for the Sikh artillerymen at Gallipoli. Source 2 notes “the way they got up that hill was marvellous” and they had “cool hands” (calm actions) when handling the guns. Searle, the author of the letter, also comments on the bravery of the Sikhs when they “pushed on into the firing line”.

The sources contrast in several ways. Source 1 is set in Australia before Singh has joined the Indian Army, while Source 2 refers to actual fighting in Gallipoli. Source 1 could show bias as the author from the *Townsville Star* may know Singh personally or has gathered information from Singh’s friends. Singh’s fighting ability has not been observed. Also, Source 2 is based on observations of the Sikh troops in action by an Anzac on Gallipoli. It is only one perspective but provides direct eyewitness information. It is factual information, whereas Source 1 is an opinion about Singh’s abilities. [As students are analysing the sources this question could be worth 4 marks. The comparisons with supporting evidence from the sources given 2 marks, and contrasts using evidence given 2 marks.]

iv. What information can you learn from the photograph in Source 3? What is the significance of this photograph?

Source 3 provides information on the role Indian drivers providing supplies for the Anzacs on Gallipoli. Boxes of food, ammunition, medical supplies and much more were delivered indicated by the covered deliveries and boxes in the background. The photograph shows the Australians and Indians posing together in a comfortable manner.

The significance of the source is that it indicates a glimpse of the national groups who fought and worked together on Gallipoli such as the Indians and Australians. This interaction would have forged friendships between men of various nationalities. [Could be given 3 marks as the students are to use evidence from the source to support what can be learnt, and also make a judgement on the historical significance of the photograph.]

v. *Explain the perspective of AIF soldiers in Source 4 about the importance of the Indian Expeditionary Forces supporting the Anzacs on Gallipoli.*

The perspective of both of the soldiers in Source 4 is supportive and positive toward the Indian soldiers. Private Barwick noted the behaviour of the Indian batteries during landings at Gallipoli was “beyond all praise”. While Walford was grateful to the Indian Mule Corps for providing supplies and noted that the Indians were cheerful, punctual and reliable. The reasons for these views could be that the Australians recognised the importance of the Indian troops in maintaining all the supplies and important military support to Allied troops on Gallipoli. [3 marks could be given to students for indicating perspectives using evidence from the source and an explanation of why the Anzac soldiers held these views.]

vi. *How useful are these four sources in providing information about the role of the Indian forces on Gallipoli and Australian attitudes towards their Indian allies?*

The sources are useful in providing evidence of the role of the Indian artillery and the Mule Corps in supporting the Anzacs. Sources 2 and 4 indicate the bravery, persistence and military skills of the Indian troops. While Source 3 is useful in showing the cooperation and friendship between the Indians and Australians. The attitudes evident in the sources include admiration of the fitness of the Sikh soldiers in Sources 1 and 2, and recognition of their bravery as they “pushed on into the firing line” (Source 2). The comfortable relationship between the Australians and Indians is shown in Source 3, while trust for the Indians to bring all essential supplies is evident in Source 4. Sources 2 and 3 are very useful but only provide a limited perspective on the war. While Source 1 does not provide information on the role of the Indian forces in action and Source 4 requires more information on the origin of the quotations to check its reliability. [This question could be worth 5 marks, 2 marks for information on the role and attitudes, 1 mark for evidence from the sources and 2 marks for the evaluation of the usefulness of the sources.]