



Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu meets French President Emmanuel Macron at Elysee Palace in Paris/ Twitter

On 11th November 2018, the Armistice that was signed between Germany and the Allied forces to bring an end to the first World War, completed a centenary. Since the day it was signed, efforts have been made by the leaders of Britain and France especially, whether royal or elected to commemorate the millions who died fighting in the war. Each year on the 11th of the 11th month at 11:00 am silence is observed for two minutes in Britain to pay respect to the war dead and including Britain, for many countries, this day is an official holiday. This year as well the tradition continued except there was a grand commemoration ceremony in France, with [dignitaries such as Trump, Merkel, Putin, Trudeau as guests attended and French president Emanuel Macron made the speech.](#)

The white leaders of these nations all these years have been commemorating without any mention of the huge number from the Commonwealth nations who voluntarily fought with the white soldier's shoulder to shoulder for their fight. And amongst the commonwealth nations, the most number of soldiers came from Undivided India. Around [1.5 million Indian soldiers](#), from all regions of the country, Muslims Sikhs and Hindus volunteered and [won 13,000 medals](#) for their performance in the trenches overseas. They fought in the harsh cold that they had not experienced before, in clothing that was not adequate and with weapons they had never used before.

In the year 2014 which marked a centenary since the World War-I, the conversation regarding recognising the efforts of the Commonwealth nation's contribution began. Four years later, in addition to the old traditions of the 'Poppy Day', amends are being made. With [Lord Gadhia proposing the idea](#) of wearing a poppy made of Khadi instead of a poppy made of paper to give due importance to the Indian war heroes and bring light to the fact that a huge chunk of the army was Indian and not white as is understood by the mainstream. This idea was not only carried out by the British Legion but also [Mosques, Temples and Gurudwaras distributed Khadi Poppies](#) without accepting donations for the veterans all over the UK. Adding to it, Theresa May a week before the 'Remembrance Day' promised to wear a Khadi Poppy as well. Even though, John Elliot a journalist in his [blog post](#) notes that May wore a paper Poppy during the Cenotaph ceremony. Other than the poppies, a number of events to commemorate the Indian soldiers were organised a week

before the actual day, including an event in Westminster Abbey, London where [Prince Harry honoured the Indian soldiers with a wreath made of Marigold flowers in the shape of 'Om'](#).

On the other hand, in France, the first war memorial to merit the significant bravery of the Indian soldiers was [unveiled by the Indian Vice President at the grand centenary celebrations](#).

But, to be fair it was not just them who did not give due importance to these soldiers. Even in their own country, not much was done to honour their courage and spirit. As Shahi Tharoor rightly points out, [these soldiers were volunteers and they fought for another nation's 'traditional hatred'](#) thus, garnering not much praise back on their own soil. And after a hundred years, even in India finally, mindsets are changing to set up a [National War Memorial and Museum](#) to throw light on the forgotten history of the 1.3 million who fought for 1914 -1918.

Artists such as [Nabihah Iqbal, Hollie McNish Lowkey](#) etc are researching and bringing in stories from relatives and archival data such as the letters exchanged between the soldiers and their families to paint a picture where its not just the white man fighting but it also has soldiers from the Commonwealth nations, white prostitutes, gender divide and class divide playing a major role.

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