



"I began writing a letter and found that the ink was frozen in the inkstand. I broke the ink-pot, took out the ink, melted it over the fire, and wrote the letter to you with the melted ink." 19th November 1915.

"Do not think that this is war. This is not war. It is the ending of the world. This is just such a war as was related in the Mahabharata about our forefathers," wrote a wounded Indian soldier from a hospital in England on 29th January 1915.

"There was once a man. He used to eat butter in his native Hindustan. This man then came into the European war Germany captured this man. He wishes to return to India. If God has mercy, he will make peace soon. This man wishes to go away from here. If he goes back to Hindustan, he will again get the same food."

Haunting recording of Mall Singh, done on 11th December 1916.



**"When the black pepper is finished,
the red pepper is being used.
But occasionally the black pepper proves useful.
The black pepper is very pungent
and the red pepper is not so strong.."**

Surekha

Black Pepper & Red Pepper, 2015

(Digging deep, crossing far

encounter : Bangalore, Kochi, Karachi & Berlin

Curated by Elke Falat & Julia Tieke

Black Pepper & Red Pepper

While browsing through the archives in Bengaluru, Surekha realized the role of Madras Sappers (MEG, located in Bangalore) and the Mysore imperial army in the First World War, who were sent to an extreme cold weather of France and then to the extreme heat of the Middle East.

Several local organisations and groups contributed money, food, clothes etc. to the army, like the Mahila Seva Samaja (women's service society) . Obviously, sending troupes to fight in a foreign country had created enthusiastic support back home.

The varying and often mutually deviant notes (official and anecdotes) describing the bravery of Indian soldiers as well as their revolt, make one reflect upon the legitimacy and representational modes of war through narratives – individually written letters, newspaper reports, photographs and other documents.

Surekha's installation is an intervention into the mediatic representation of the role of Indian soldiers, extracted from the official military archive and the web. It probes the interaction between the red and black pepper, a code word used for the British and Indian soldiers, and deals with the question of how Indian military troops that were an integral part of the British army in the First World War were depicted and what to make of this "history of fragments" today.

Instead of retaining the desire to construct the actual context of the war, Surekha searches after effects on the current context and the way we understand and define nations. Her installation raises questions about the socio-political epistemology of the colonised, a possible initial seeding of the freedom struggle and the domestic involvement of the militia.

Surekha works with video, installation and performances and deals with diverse topics including Indian identity, gender, ecological issues and military history. She has been exploring how artistic practice can engage with public and private spaces. Surekha often uses photography and video to interrelate the domains of archiving, documenting and performing, by reflecting on how visuality can engage with society. Her works are present both in India and international shows.

<http://surekha.info/>



Bangalore Torpedo demo 2015



Bangalore Torpedo, 1916 Bangalore