CHAPTER II

INDIANISATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

Indians had been excluded from the commissioned ranks of the Armed Forces. In the Company's Army they did hold some higher form of commission, but after the outbreak of the Revolt in 1857 such commissions were reserved exclusively for British Officers.¹ Although after the Crown takeover in 1858, Queen Victoria had proclaimed, "no native of India by reason of religion, place of birth, descent, colour, or any of them, would be disabled from holding any office or employment", this promise remained largely unfulfilled until 1919 when the period of Indianisation of the Armed Forces began. Indianisation was described by Secretary of State for India, Lord Halifax as 'the process of introducing Indians into the Commissioned ranks of the defence forces in India.'²

¹The British had opened the Indian Civil Service to Indians as early as 1862. The entry of Indians into ICS was not perceived as a threat to the imperial interest.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

From the beginning of the twentieth century there was a growing demand by the Indian nationalists for the Indianisation of the higher ranks of the Armed Forces. Initially their demand was met with little or no response from the British. The outbreak of the First World War changed this situation and compelled the British to take measures for Indianisation owing to military and political reasons. Firstly, they had to make concessions to enlist the support of the Indians to fight for them in the War. Moreover, it was also necessary to win over the moderate nationalists who were making consistent demands for overall reduction of defence expenditure and establishment of military colleges to prepare Indians for the King’s Commission. On 20 August 1917, the Secretary of State for India had announced in the House of Commons:

The policy of His Majesty’s government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.

The acceptance of the principle of self-government necessitated some form of Indianisation of the officer cadre of the Armed Forces. During the War, Indians who held the Viceroy’s Commission were made eligible for the
King's Commission. This inducement to martial classes to support Britain's war efforts meant little in practical terms. By the time an Indian became a VCO (Viceroy's Commissioned Officer) he was too old and thus could never hope to rise to the rank of a KCO (King's Commissioned Officer). Another important concession was the announcement in 1917 that ten vacancies at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, were to be reserved each year for suitable Indians who, upon graduation, would receive the King's Commission. This was reserved for "selected representatives of families of fighting classes which have rendered valuable services to the State during the War". Indianisation was thus viewed by the British merely as a reward for the services rendered by Indians. Since the War was in progress, 'no effort was made to define the course Indianization should take, or the limit which it should reach, and in fact the opening of Sandhurst to Indians was more a gesture than the inauguration of policy.'

**INDIANS AT SANDHURST**

The scheme to send Indians to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, was a belated acknowledgement of the principle of equal eligibility for command of British or Indian troops. However, in practical terms this

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concession again meant very little since the entry of Indians into Sandhurst was limited and those who passed out were fewer still. The Skeen Committee calculated that the dropout rate of Indians at Sandhurst was 30 percent compared with only 3 percent for Britishers. Several factors were responsible for the high rate of failure amongst the Indian candidates. Firstly, they were not properly selected. Sandhurst had a tradition of educating products of British public schools, while Indian cadets without exception came from wealthy families and were unprepared for life abroad. One writer gives the following explanation for the failure of Indian cadets, 'The causes would seem to include the different upbringing of British and Indian boys. British cadets coming from public schools were conditioned to physical humiliation... Indians were not accustomed to having their bodies abused.' He further observes 'the NCOs at Sandhurst resented the presence of Wogs as future officers, they were given a hard time and reported on severely.' British racial arrogance which the Indian cadets encountered at Sandhurst no doubt contributed to the high rate of failure amongst them. General Ayub Khan in his autobiography admits being discriminated against at Sandhurst:

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There was a sizeable community of Indian cadets at Sandhurst at that time. Somehow we all sensed that we were regarded as inferior species. The British did not practise the colour bar in a blatant manner, as in some countries, but they were no less colour conscious. In those days anyone coming from a subject race was regarded as an inferior human being and this I found terribly galling.\(^6\)

Ayub Khan was the first foreign cadet to be promoted Corporal with these words: ‘...We have today broken our tradition and decided to grant you two stripes and make you a Corporal. We are doing this as an experimental measure to see whether foreign cadets can discharge the heavy burden of this responsibility.’\(^7\) He was later to discover that he was an honorary corporal and not allowed to command any British cadets.

The opening of Sandhurst to Indians led to a strong protest from British Officers on the ground that it would effect the efficiency of the Forces. General O'Moore Creagh, a former Commander-in-Chief in India wrote, ‘the weakening in leadership caused by giving Commissions to Indians must be reduced by being limited to people of warlike classes... it will preclude British officers from serving in the Indian army and on them its efficiency depends almost


\(^{7}\) ibid.
entirely.\textsuperscript{8} It is evident that the efficiency argument was a device to disguise the racial objections of the British officers to ever having to serve under Indian officers.

During the First World War, the Indian Army more than tripled in size.\textsuperscript{9} As a result of India's significant manpower contribution to the Allied Powers, the Montague-Chelmsford Report on British Commissions for Indians (1919) acknowledged:

If our general policy demands that the Indian element in the civil services of the country should be increased it involves some change also in our military policy. For some years Indian politicians have been urging the right of Indians in general to bear arms in defence of their country. This demand has become much more insistent since the outbreak of war, and there has been a tendency to ascribe the difficulties of the Empire to the short sightedness of the Government which had consistently refused to afford military training to the Indian people. The argument is that if the Government had only conceded this demand, it would have had by now at its disposal millions of trained men, who would have long ago turned the scale in favour of the Allies.... We need only say that we have everywhere met a general demand from the political bodies for extended opportunities of military service....\textsuperscript{10}

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\textsuperscript{9} See Government of India, \textit{India's Contribution to the Great War} (1923).

The British however ignored the promises they had made under the pressure of the War. For nearly three years following the Montague-Chelmsford Report virtually nothing was done for Indianisation.

FROM COMMITTEE TO COMMITTEE

In 1919, the Esher Committee was appointed to study the inadequacies in the Army and to report how they could be removed.\textsuperscript{11} The report of this Committee which was published in 1920 evaded the issue of Indianisation. It rejected democratic control over the military, proposed strengthening of the Commander-in-Chief's position and also rejected a broad-based recruitment pattern. In its conclusion the Esher Committee report stated, 'Our principal aim has been to promote the efficiency and contentment of the army in India, and to secure that, the Government will have at its disposal a well-trained and loyal army, fit to take its share in the defence of the Empire.'\textsuperscript{12} The question of Indianisation was referred to in the minutes of two of the Indian members. Sir Krishna Gupta criticised the Committee for ignoring the question of

\textsuperscript{11}See Report of the Esher Committee (India, MOD), File 601/10457.

\textsuperscript{12}ibid, p.97.
Indianisation\textsuperscript{13} and said in his minute "It seems to me that the great importance of the momentous declaration of policy made in the announcement of August 1917 has not been sufficiently realised." He recommended that superior ranks of every branch of the Army should be freely opened to qualified Indians and "Enlistment for the regular army should not be restricted to what are called martial classes." He urged the government to take steps for the establishment of training and educational institutions in India for all branches of the Army. Umar Hayat Khan in his minutes opposed broad-based recruitment for the Armed Forces because, 'to recruit from classes which lack the martial spirit or military traditions would be a great mistake, as they would never stand the strain of war.'\textsuperscript{14} The idea of 'martial races' was a myth assiduously cultivated by the British - a myth which did not stand the test of the two world wars.

**Legislative Assembly Resolution**

Meanwhile there was growing political pressure for reforms in the Armed Forces. In 1920, Mahatma Gandhi launched his non-cooperation movement and had emerged as the leader of the nation. When the new

\textsuperscript{13}ibid, pp.99-100.

\textsuperscript{14}ibid, p.102.
Legislative Assembly met in 1921, it examined the Esher Committee Report. Thereafter, on 28 March 1921, the following resolutions moved by Sivaswamy Aiyer were adopted by the Assembly:¹⁵

"(1) This Assembly recommends to the Governor-General in Council:

(a) that the King-Emperor's Indian subjects should be freely admitted to all arms of His Majesty's military, naval, and air forces in India and the ancillary services and the auxiliary forces, that every encouragement should be given to Indians - including the educated middle classes subject to the prescribed standards of fitness to enter the commissioned ranks of the army, and that, in nominating candidates for the entrance examination, unofficial Indians should be associated with the nominating authority, and in granting King's Commissions, after giving full regard to the claims to promotion of officers of the Indian Army who already hold the commission of His Excellency the Viceroy, the rest of the commissions granted should be given to the cadets trained at Sandhurst. The general rule in selecting candidates for this training should be that the large majority of selections should be from the

¹⁵India, Legislative Assembly Debates, vol.1, Part II, 1921, pp.1753-4. The only demand of the Legislative Assembly which was implemented promptly related to the establishment of adequate facilities in India "for the preliminary training of Indians to fit them to enter the Royal Military College, Sandhurst." In March 1922, the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College was opened at Dehra Dun for giving education on public school lines to the prospective candidates for 'commission' in the Army. The proposal to grant commissions to Indians in the Air Force and the technical services had been rejected.
communities which furnish recruits, and, as far as possible in proportion to the numbers in which they furnish such recruits.

(ii) That no less than 25 percent of the King's Commissions granted every year should be given to His Majesty's Indian subjects to start with."

The second resolution proposed the establishment of a military training facility to prepare Indians for Sandhurst, and also the establishment of an Indian Sandhurst. Sivaswamy Aiyyar, while moving the above resolutions, said: "If there is one feature more than another of the British rule which has filled Indians with a sense of humiliation and wounded their self-respect, it is the way in which they have been treated in the Army of their own country and held to be only fit for being hewers of wood and drawers of water. Great generals have not been wanting in the past in this country...."

The Government accepted the resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly. In 1921, in response to the Indian Legislative Assembly's demand for future policy, a Military Requirements Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Rawlinson.\textsuperscript{16} The Committee, whose resolutions were unanimous declared, "...responsibility for defence is the natural corollary of self-government." It made the following recommendations:

(a) An early announcement of the policy of Indianisation.

\textsuperscript{16} Report of the Military Requirements Committee (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H.
(b) Responsibility for defence being accepted as the natural corollary of self-government, a policy should be adopted which would render India more and more self-supporting in matters of defence; that is, as far as officers were concerned, the gradual elimination of British element and its substitution by Indians.

(c) Indians should be freely admitted to commissions in all branches of the Army and the field of selection for the officer cadre should be widened to include the professional and middle class.

(d) For the time being, as India did not have adequate facilities, candidates selected were to be trained at Sandhurst.

(e) An Indian Military College was to be opened as soon as funds became available.

The Rawlinson Committee's acceptance of the responsibility of Indians for their country's defence was indeed revolutionary. To the Government in London these recommendations were unacceptable. An alternative to Rawlinson proposals was suggested by Alexander Cobbe who was Secretary in the Military Department at the India Office.\(^\text{17}\) Cobbe revived arguments for restricting commissions for Indians. A large influx of Indians into the officer

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\(^\text{17}\) Military Secretary's paper on Indianisation of the Indian Army, 14 September 1921 (India, MOD), File 601/10798/H. See also File 601/12810/H.
cadre, he maintained, would have 'detrimental' effect on the efficiency of the military machine. He argued that Indianisation should proceed with great caution, and that Indians should not be given the King's Commission. He considered it 'most unlikely that the British officer will ever serve willingly and contentedly under Indians, who happen to be his senior in rank...' and was also against the establishment of a military college in India, whose candidates would receive dominion and not King's Commission.\(^\text{18}\)

Cobbe proposed the establishment of a Dominion Army in India, which would be formed side by side with the existing Army, and which would be officered entirely by Indians. As the Dominion Army proved its efficiency and ability to undertake the defence of India, the existing Army would be reduced. The advantages claimed for this scheme were that it ensured the efficiency of the Army, and thereby the security of India and at the same time the formation of a Dominion Army would appeal to Indian sentiment. The Cobbe scheme was unacceptable to the Government which realized that the idea of a separate 'Dominion army' would fail to satisfy the Indian aspirations.

In 1922 the Shea Commission rejected General Cobbe's scheme on the ground of 'expense' and maintained that the formation of surplus Dominion

\(^{18}\)Cobbe maintained that the demand made by politically minded Indians for the establishment of an Indian Sandhurst was not shared by the masses and also doubted whether sufficient candidates would be forthcoming (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H.
units would not be acceptable to the Indian public opinion. It proposed complete Indianisation of all arms and services of the Indian Army (excluding Gurkhas) to be carried out in three stages of fourteen years each, commencing from 1925. In a supplementary report the Committee modified this to three periods of 14; 19; 7 or a total of thirty years.\(^{19}\) While it conceded the nationalist demand for an Indian Sandhurst and urged the early establishment of an Indian Military College, the report made it clear that the officer commissions which would be granted to Indians would be King's Commission in His Majesty's Indian Land Forces.

The negotiations between the Government of India and His Majesty's Government on the proposals put forward by the various committees on Indianisation revealed divergence of opinion regarding the actual policy of Indianisation to be adopted. The British Government in London was not willing to commit itself to any definite programme of Indianisation. The Government in India was under tremendous political pressure and the Viceroy,

\(^{19}\)Shea Committee Recommendations (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H. According to a later report it was pointed out that the study of the Shea Committee Report 'makes it apparent that the problem was considered mathematically, and that the solution put forward ignored certain practical difficulties. For instance, it was noted that the scheme would eventually require 6,864 officers, of whom 1,139 would be posted in the first 14-years. The fact that at that particular time, difficulty was being experienced in producing 10 boys of sufficient educational qualification to fill the cadetships at Sandhurst appears to have been over-looked.' No attempt was made to reconcile the supply of officers with the demand. See File 601/12810/H, p.13.
Lord Reading, maintained that the issue of Indianisation was 'the crucial test of our sincerity in the policy of fitting India to advance towards the goal of self-government.' In 1922 when the Governor General in Council sent its proposal for a time-bound scheme of Indianisation of all arms of the Indian Army, the Government in London refused to sanction it.

London wanted slow Indianisation of the Armed forces. Lord Rawlinson is reported to have said: "The Home Government, having introduced the reform schemes, are now afraid they are going too fast.... But we must either trust the Indian or not trust him." The Viceroy doubted whether London 'fully appreciated... the interest taken by the Indian public in matters relating to the Army, an interest which will increase as their capacity for self-government develops.'

20 Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 18 February 1922 (India, MOD), File 601/10798/H.

21 Viceroy to the Secretary of State (India, MOD), File 601/10457/H. The Government in London was shocked when it received the Governor General's recommendation for an extensive scheme of Indianisation. On 14 February 1922, the Secretary of State in his telegram to the Governor-General said: "Reports, of a widely held belief, not only among Indians but among Englishmen, are constantly being received in England, that our mission in India is regarded by us as drawing to a close and that preparations are being made by us for retreat. Such an idea, if it exists, is a complete fallacy...." (601/10798/H).
Institutionalised Segregation

Under pressure from the Home Government, the Governor-General was compelled to revise the original scheme of Indianisation. On 17 February 1923, the final scheme was announced in the Indian Legislative Assembly by Lord Rawlinson, 'The Government consider that a start should be made at once so as to give Indians a fair opportunity of proving that units officered by Indians will be efficient in every way. Accordingly it has been decided that eight units of cavalry or infantry be selected to be officered by Indians.' This announcement did not envisage Indianisation of eight units as a part of a definite future policy. The scheme was adopted 'to test the practicability of successful Indianization in the Army.' One writer regards this concession as 'characteristic of one of the continual themes of Indianisation, the disparity between governmentally sanctioned action and the genuine needs of a

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22India, Legislative Assembly Debates, 1923, vol.III, Part III, pp.2417-18. It was also announced that 'Indian Officers holding commissions in the Indian Army will be gradually transformed to Indianising units...' The 'eight unit scheme' was criticised by Tej Bahadur Sapru, a member of Rawlinson Committee. In his note of dissent he wrote: "It is now proposed by the Government of India that in the first instance Indianisation in its specific sense should be carried out in eight units only, though at the same time it is now recognised that from the practical point of view even eight battalions will afford a narrow basis for the experiment. I regret to say that in my opinion the recommendations of my Hon'ble Colleagues do not go far enough, and I think that an announcement of these recommendations is bound to cause disappointment to the Assembly and the country at large" (India MOD), File 601/10798/H.
self-governing India.\textsuperscript{23} The government after having considered a wide scheme for Indianisation had backtracked under pressure from London.

The announcements of "eight-unit scheme" led to a storm of protest from the Indian nationalists. It provided for the segregation of Indian officers into a few earmarked units. Why was segregation of units considered essential for Indianisation? Lord Rawlinson mentioned in his diaries 'people are frightened... old officers say they won't send their sons out to serve under natives.'\textsuperscript{24} Sir Valentine Chirol in his book published in 1926 also referred to 'strong racial objections of British officers to being placed in the position of ever having to take orders from Indian officers.'\textsuperscript{25} Thus there can be no doubt that the scheme was primarily a solution of the problem of 'serving under natives'. In 1934, the India Office in a written answer to a question in the House of Lords admitted that the reasons behind segregation included:

To prevent a set-back in the recruitment of British officers for the remainder of the Indian Army. There was evidence that candidates were deterred from joining the Indian Army by the fear that their position would be prejudiced if the practice were continued of distributing Indian officers indiscriminately

\textsuperscript{23}Andrew Sharpe, n.2, pp.47-52.

\textsuperscript{24}ibid, p.49.

throughout the Army.\textsuperscript{26}

The government, however, tried to disguise its racist scheme by varied unconvincing arguments. The official reason given in 1923 was that the scheme would give Indians a fair opportunity of proving that units officered by them could be efficient in every way.

That Indian officers after having successfully completed their education and training at Sandhurst should require test of their efficiency unlike their British counterparts was blatantly discriminatory. As far as the scope of Indianization was concerned the government argued 'If the Indian Army is to be completely Indianized... it is more than doubtful whether a sufficient number of the right type of Indian will ever come forward to supply the military requirements of the army' and maintained that 'In the absence of a definitely Indian patriotism, an efficient and completely Indianized army becomes unthinkable.'\textsuperscript{27} After having pursued a policy of divide and rule under the disguise of 'martial races theory', it was indeed ridiculous that the British should use lack of patriotism amongst Indians as an argument against complete Indianization.

\textsuperscript{26}Quoted in Sharpe, n.2, pp.47-52.

The segregated Indianised units proved very unpopular and there was general reluctance amongst Indian officers to serve in units that were considered socially and militarily inferior. Four of the first ten Indians commissioned refused transfer from the Indian Army units to the Indianising units. An Indian Lieutenant who was later to become the first Indian Commander-in-Chief argued, 'It did not offer Indians incentive to better themselves as they would do in other regiments....'\textsuperscript{28} The segregation of units was undoubtedly a serious blow to the status of Indian officers. It ensured the isolation of Indian officers in their little battalions while the British officers lived in their regiments and battalions with no Indian officers and there was "no mixing of them at all".\textsuperscript{29} General Claude Auchinleck was to observe later:

The policy of segregation of Indian officers into separate units, the differential treatment in respect of pay and terms of service as compared with the British officer and the prejudice and lack of manners by some - by no means all - British officers and their wives, all went to produce a very deep and bitter feeling of racial discrimination in the minds of the most intelligent and

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progressive of the Indian officers....

The 'eight-unit scheme' was criticised in two comprehensive resolutions passed by the Legislative Assembly in 1923 and 1925. There was demand to increase the pace of Indianisation and also to make it inclusive covering all arms and services of the Army. The demand for an Indian Sandhurst was once again reiterated. Under pressure from the Legislative Assembly the government announced the appointment of Indian Sandhurst Committee, called the Skeen Committee in August 1925. The Committee also included Motilal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah as its members. According to the terms of reference, the Committee had to enquire and report as to how it was possible to improve the supply of Indian candidates for the King’s Commission both in regard to number and quality. Secondly, whether it was desirable and practicable to establish a military college in India to train Indians for the commissioned ranks of the Indian Army. And if so, how soon the scheme was to be initiated and what steps were to be taken to carry it out. Its members visited educational institutions in England, France, Canada and the United States before submitting the report in April 1927. It stressed the need for a


31Motilala Nehru resigned in March 1926.
'substantial and progressive scheme for Indianisation of the Indian Army' to be adopted without delay.

The Report maintained that 'the average Indian parent is reluctant to destine his son to a military career, and feels that the Indianization of the army is, in the minds of the authorities, still suspect and uncertain.'\textsuperscript{32} It referred to the harm done by a lecture delivered in 1924 by Lieutenant Colonel Wilson Johnson at Sandhurst on Indianisation.\textsuperscript{33} The lecture contained reassurances to potential Indian army officers that they would never be commanded by an Indian on regimental duty. The report also acknowledged that it was necessary to widen the field of opportunity for recruitment in the Indian Army. The Report made the following recommendations:

1. An immediate increase of 10 vacancies at Sandhurst becoming effective in 1928.

2. A further increase of 4 vacancies at Sandhurst per annum up to 1933.

3. The establishment in 1933 of an Indian Sandhurst with capacity for 100 cadets.

\textsuperscript{32}Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee (Skeen Committee), HMSO, 1927, p.21.

\textsuperscript{33}ibid, p.18
4. When the Indian Sandhurst was established the number of vacancies at Sandhurst reserved for Indians was to be reduced to 20 per annum.

5. On the assumption that all cadets were successful both at Sandhurst and the Indian Sandhurst in 1945 half the number of officers recruited annually for the Indian Army would consist of Indians.

6. By 1952 half the total cadre of officers in the Indian Army would be Indians.

The report had envisaged a slow pace of Indianisation of the Armed Forces - it would take almost half a century for the officer cadre of the Army to be completely Indian. The government had once again used the 'efficiency' argument for retaining a high proportion of British officers. The Report also recommended that 'Indians should be made eligible to be employed as King's Commission Officers in the Artillery, Engineer, Signal, Tank and Air Arms of the Army in India and that for the purpose Indians should be admitted to Woolwich and Cranwell until such time as the occasion arises to create corresponding facilities for training in India.' This was a definite concession since it had been the policy of the government to exclude Indians from these services. The Report recommended the abandonment of the "eight units scheme" in favour of a system of dispersing Indian officers throughout the Army.
The decision of the Government on the Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee was announced in the Legislative Assembly by the Commander-in-Chief Sir William Birdwood. In his speech the Commander-in-Chief assured:

Government contemplates that, as India progresses towards full self-government within the Empire, there may be in process of development an army of the same character as the Dominion armies, organised on a national basis and officered by Indians holding their own distinctive national form of Commission. That is our policy of Indianisation. The process of development will naturally be contingent on the success achieved in the various stages of the experiment. 34

To the Government Indianisation had remained an 'experiment' and it had avoided commitment to any specific time-bound scheme. It was decided that twenty vacancies at Sandhurst, six vacancies at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and about six at Royal Air Force College at Cranwell were to be reserved every year for Indians. The seats allotted at Cranwell were based on the requirement for forming one flight of Indian Air Force. The trainees from Woolwich were to be used for Indianising a few units of artillery, engineers and signals.

In spite of the recommendation of the Report of the Indian Sandhurst Committee for the abandonment of the eight unit scheme, it was to continue.

34See (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H, pp.22-23.
Moreover the scheme was extended to include Artillery, Signals and Engineers. During an adjournment motion in the Assembly, C.M. Young (Secretary in the Army Department) while giving reasons for the retention of the eight unit scheme argued:

... it was the most rapid method of laying the foundation of a national army, and that if the scheme was abandoned, British recruitment would cease. This was not a question of racial arrogance, but that the highest military opinion did not consider that an officer establishment of persons of widely different nationality in fighting units was a practical solution.  

Platoonisation

In order to accommodate the growing numbers of Indian King's Commissioned Officers, it was announced that when the cadres of squadron and company officers in the eight units had been filled up with Indian officers, a start would be made in forming "homogenous units on the British model". This meant that the Indian officers would then be posted to these units as platoon commanders in place of the Viceroy's Commissioned Officers. It was argued that platoonisation would improve the efficiency of the Indianised

35 Statement by the Army Secretary, April 1928 (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H.

36 Introduction of the British Army Organisation (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H, pp.26-28. It was argued that platoonisation would 'prepare a framework on which an Indian national army may be developed on the British model', p.26.
units since better trained Indian officers would give their units the 'best chance of proving their military capacity'.\textsuperscript{37} If this was so, why were non-Indianised units being denied this advantage? While an Indian officer would start his service by commanding a platoon, a British officer with equal seniority in the non-Indianised unit was to command a company or a squadron and draw a higher pay. Moreover, while in the non-Indianising units a senior Non-Commissioned officer could hope for the Viceroy's Commission, in the Indianising unit he could at best become a Warrant Officer, with only honorary Viceroy's Commissioned Officer rank upon retirement. The Government's attempt to justify 'platoonisation' lacked conviction and it was criticized in the Legislative Assembly. It was evident that the policy aimed at reducing the opportunities of promotion for Indian officers. Previously, while one out of every three officers had the opportunity to reach a Lieutenant Colonel's rank, after the reorganisation only one out of every eight officers would have similar opportunity. Therefore, the reorganisation seriously affected the prestige of Indian officers. Platoonisation also provided temporary solution to the problem of disposing of the surplus officers since the Indian officers in the Indianised units had reached a saturation point. As far as the service of the British officers in the Indianised units was concerned, it was later announced that, all

\textsuperscript{37}ibid.
British officers would belong to the Imperial Indian Army and would be seconded for periods of four to five years to the "Indian Federal" Army as long as they were needed.38 This did not give Indian officers the power of command over British officers.

At the time when the Government announced its decisions on the Sandhurst Committee Report, moderate nationalists pressurised the government for reforms with the publication of Nehru Report of 1928 in response to the Simon Commission.39 The report demanded full responsible government and dominion status for India. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was involved in drafting its defence and military sections. It had advocated democratic control over the Army: "We believe that the representation of the Army in the Legislature by a responsible Minister, who will, in actual administration, no doubt be guided by expert advice, is bound to lead to the establishment of more intimate relations between the Army and the Legislature...." It also recommended accelerating the rate of Indianisation of the Armed Forces since at the existing pace it would take "at least a century before the Army is really Indianized." The Nehru Committee Report also wanted defence expenditure to be sanctioned by a vote of the House of

38Military Council Proceedings (India, MOD), File 601/10616/H.

Representatives.

The Report of the Simon Commission had failed to satisfy the political and military aspirations of the Indian people. It did not promise the formation of a national army and instead observed:

India and Britain are so related that Indian defence cannot, now or in any future which is within sight, be regarded as a matter of purely Indian concern. The control and direction of such an army must rest in the hands of agents of the Imperial Government. 40

Meanwhile Mahatma Gandhi had launched his Civil Disobedience Movement with his famous Dandi March. The government was under tremendous pressure to grant concessions to satisfy Indian nationalists.

During the first Round Table Conference, held in London, the government appointed a Sub-Committee on Defence. Srinivasa Sastri, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Phiroze Sethna, M.R.Jayakar, Dr.B.S.Moonje and M.A.Jinnah were among the members of this Committee which submitted its report in January 1931. It included the following resolution:

The Sub-Committee consider that with the development of the new political structure in India, the Defense of India must to an increasing extent be the concern of the Indian people and not of the British Government alone...

That immediate steps be taken to increase substantially the rate of Indianisation in the Indian Army to make it commensurate with the main object in view, having regard to all relevant

considerations, such as the maintenance of the requisite standard of efficiency.\footnote{See (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H, p.29.}

It had endorsed the setting up of a military training college in India 'at the earliest moment' and proposed the setting up of a Committee of experts to work out the details.

**Opening of an Indian Sandhurst**

Acting upon the recommendations of the Defence Sub-Committee the Government appointed the Indian Military College Committee in May 1931 under the Chairmanship of the Commander-in-Chief, Philip Chetwode 'to work out the details of the establishment of a military college in India, to train candidates for Commissions in all arms of Indian Defence Services.'\footnote{ibid.}

The Report of this Committee acknowledged the need to recruit widely so as to prevent 'passionate feelings of national patriotism' finding expression 'in anarchist and revolutionary activities'.\footnote{Report of the Indian Military College Committee, HMSO, London, p.40. See also Indian Military College Committee (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H, pp.31-36.} It recommended the establishment
of an Indian Military College with a training course of three years and a fifty per cent reservation of seats for the cadets from the ranks of the Indian Army.

Sivaswamy Aiyer and Dr. B.S. Moonje were opposed to allocation of fifty per cent vacancies to cadets already in the Indian Army and were in favour of allocation of higher proportion of the vacancies to open competition. Moreover these members felt that fifty per cent reservation of seats would further perpetuate the distinction between martial and non-martial classes. The Indian Sandhurst Committee had recommended open competition with no preferences for any class. However, concerted efforts were made to ensure that the Army drew a large proportion of its officers from military classes and this led to the decision to grant the Commander-in-Chief the power to nominate fifty per cent of the seats. Nomination of seats had not only reduced the chances of dissatisfaction amongst the martial classes, but simultaneously it also ensured the exclusion of educated and politically conscious groups from the Army.

The Indian Military Academy was formally inaugurated on 10 December 1932, at Dehra Dun by Commander-in-Chief, Chetwode. The first Commandant of Dehra Dun, Brigadier Lionel Peter Collins, was an immensely popular officer. Sympathetic British officers were chosen as instructors for Dehra Dun which reflected a sincere attempt on the part of the Government to create a Dominion Army in India. A former cadet wrote about the
instructors at Dehra Dun: 'One would say that you could look to them for fair play. There were occasions when some vindictiveness was apparent but by and large we depended on them to give us a square deal.'\textsuperscript{44} This was unlike Sandhurst where Indian cadets had consistently complained about being discriminated against. The atmosphere at Dehra Dun was no doubt different from Sandhurst and most cadets remember Dehra Dun as an inspiring place, while Sandhurst had generally been a searching ordeal.\textsuperscript{45}

With the opening of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) Indians were no longer eligible for admission to Sandhurst and Woolwich. The IMA's capacity was sixty Regular Indian Army Cadets and twenty for the Indian State Forces. The length of training was fixed at two and a half years, which was longer than Sandhurst. In the selection of cadets for the IMA the Government tried its best to keep the Army isolated from the forces of Indian nationalism. Even the Sandhurst batches 'collectively were the most reliable, politically inert, aristocratic and conservative group the British could

\textsuperscript{44}Major General D.K.Palit, "Indianisation: A Personal Experience", \textit{Indo-British Review: A Journal of History} (Madras), vol.16, no.1, March 1989, pp.59-64.

select'. About his interview for selection to the IMA an Indian Army officer wrote: '...I have a sneaking suspicion that the questions were aimed quite a lot towards discovering whether we young people had any political ideas, or not... I was asked what I thought of Gandhi and replied that he was a saint... I was also asked whether I had been a member of the Oxford Union which had voted that on no account would they fight for King and Country.' By and large the Army remained a neutral force.

If the opening of the IMA was a clear indication of the fact that the British could not stay in India for long it was also a serious blow to the status of Indian officers. A Dehra Dun graduate was called Indian Commissioned Officer (ICO) and his commission was valid only in India. His pay and allowances were considerably less than those of the King's Commissioned Officers (KCO's). Since Indians were no longer eligible to Woolwich and Sandhurst there would be no further Indian KCO's. The KCO's could not command British officers or troops without a special Viceregal dispensation. Therefore, in spite of the successful foundation of the IMA the differential treatment in respect of pay and service conditions deterred many Indians from


47 Palit, n.44, pp.59-64.
pursuing a military career and they preferred the Indian Civil Service and Police which offered better career prospects. In the Civil Service, Indians were accepted as officers and the pretext of 'efficiency' was never used to segregate them and limit their intake. In 1939, only fourteen per cent of the Army's officers were Indian, as opposed to fifty per cent in the Indian Civil Service and Police.48

THE INDIAN AIR FORCE AND THE INDIAN NAVY

The Indian Air Force which was the youngest of the three fighting services was an entirely Indian-personnel service.49 The Indian Air Force Act had laid down that only Indians or those domiciled in India were eligible for commissions in the Indian Air Force, though Royal Air Force Officers could be seconded or attached to the Indian Air Force whenever required. Recruitment was on an all-India basis and there was no distinction between 'martial class' and others. Officers were recruited by means of a competitive examination held by the Federal Public Service Commission in the same way as the officers of the Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Army. Selected candidates were

48 Andrew Sharpe, n.2, pp.47-52.

49 See Monograph 'Recruiting for the Defence Services in India' (India, MOD), no.364.
trained in Cranwell. By the end of 1938 there were three flights of the Indian Air Force.

From 1934 when the Indian Marine was designated the Royal Indian Navy, its commanding officer was called the Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy (FOCRIN) and its headquarters were located in Bombay. Although Indians were eligible for the officer ranks of the Royal Indian Navy up to the end of 1927, the Royal Indian Marine was manned entirely by European officers. The first Indian to be appointed an officer was S.N. Mukerji, who was a qualified marine engineer.\(^{50}\) After 1928 one-third of the vacancies every year were reserved for Indians, who were selected on the basis of competitive examinations held in India and in the United Kingdom. By August 1934 only three Indians had obtained commissions in the Royal Indian Marine. In the first half of 1939, the Royal Indian Navy established two officer Reserves.\(^{51}\) The Royal Indian Naval Reserve consisted (RINR) consisted of professional seamen and marine engineers who were officers and warrant officers of the Merchant Marine Service. The Royal Indian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RINVR) officers were selected direct from the public and required no

\(^{50}\)See Notes on the Indianisation of the Armed Forces (India, MOD), File 601/12160/H.

\(^{51}\)See Monograph, 'Recruiting for the Defence Services in India' (India, MOD), no.364, p.20.
previous sea experience.

By the 1930s the issue of Indianization was strongly linked with the demand for independence and self-government for India. The Government of India Act of 1935 had provided autonomy for the provinces within the Federal framework and in the elections which were held under this Act, the Congress formed Ministries in seven out of eleven provinces ‘Defence’ however remained a ‘reserved’ subject under the direct control of the Governor-General who was responsible only to Whitehall.

In 1938 the last pre-war committee on the Indianization of the ‘officer ranks of the Indian Army’ was appointed. This was the outcome of a resolution adopted by the Legislative Assembly demanding the implementation of the recommendations of the Indian Sandhurst Committee of 1925 which had provided for a review of its scheme five years after the inauguration of an Indian Sandhurst. The terms of reference of the 1938 Committee were:

1. To examine the progress of Indianisation of the officer ranks of the Indian Army;
2. To examine the methods of recruitment and terms of service of the officers of the Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force and to make recommendations.

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52 Committee on the Indianisation of the Officer ranks of the Indian Army, 18 August 1938 (India, MOD), File 601/12810/H
Before this Committee could complete its task, the Second World War broke out and it was adjourned on 24 August 1939. From the incomplete report available it is evident that there was no radical change in British policy and the object of Indianisation remained the evolution of a Dominion army.\(^{53}\)

**INDIANISATION DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND AFTER**

During the six years of war, Indianisation made substantial progress in all the three services. There was rapid expansion of the Armed Forces and the Government of India dispatch of 17 June 1940 declared that: 'In effecting the expansion of the Army which is now at hand and the further expansion which is proposed, all units of the Indian Army (including Corps and Departments) will be thrown open to Indian Commissioned Officers.' The Viceroy's Commissioned Officers were reintroduced and the war also ended the isolation of Indian officers. Regarding the progress of Indianisation during the war an Indian Officer wrote:

> Firstly, the sudden war-expansion programme in the Army erected a demand for more and more regular officers to be posted to new units. No longer could large number of Indian regulars be kept bottled up in segregated battalions. By mid-1940 we were being sent out of our 'Indianised' units to become adjutants and

\(^{53}\)British officers were considered essential for the efficiency of the Indianised units. The Committee expressed itself against the replacement of Viceroy's Commissioned Officers and felt that they were necessary for the efficiency of the Indianised units as well.
quartermasters in newly raising battalions. Secondly, a large number of young Englishmen fresh from schools and colleges in England, and unburdened by colonial inhibitions, came out as Emergency Commissioned Officers to fill the gaps in junior ranks. It was they with whom the Indian officers - particularly the younger ones - began to establish easy relaxed friendships.54

With the outbreak of war the 'martial races' theory also lost its relevance. It became necessary to enlist 'new classes' and to recruit from untouched parts of India since 'fighting classes' alone could not provide the requisite numbers for the wartime expansion planned.55 Between November 1941 and September 1942, 50.7 percent recruits were from pre-war catchment areas and 49.3 percent were from new groups.56 And in 1944, although Auchinleck had been instructed to reduce the size of the Army relying 'as much as possible on the martial races'57 he disbanded six battalions of martial class


55 See Memorandum on Expansion of the Armed Forces 1939-45 (India, MOD), File 601/7170/H, p.7.


regiments as a 'result of maintenance difficulties'.

Initially the political climate had adversely affected the recruitment of Indian officers. The Congress declared that it was not supporting the war and had passed the "Quit India" resolution. In 1941 the ratio of Indian officers to British officers was 1:12. This was however a temporary phase. The Government offered inducements by relaxing age-limit and qualifications to increase the supply of Indian officers. However the admission of raw cadets for IMA was stopped and only 'temporary' or 'emergency' commissions were granted up to the end of the war. The courses at IMA were shortened to eighteen months and then to a year and in some cases for seven months. The capacity of the IMA was expanded to six hundred. Instead of the pre-war system of offering sixty commissions per year, commissions were granted depending on the expansion targets. New officer schools were opened at Mhow and all fees were abolished. Since the segregation of Indian officers was given up, orders were passed for posting officers to any and every unit of the

58 Gupta, n.56, p.6.

59 See (India, MOD), File 601/10618/H.

60 An average of 160 cadet per month was being taken by mid 1943. Nandan Prasad, Expansion of the Armed Forces and Defence Organisation 1939-45 (Bombay, 1956), p.102.
Indian Army. At the end of the war in 1945 there were more than 8,300 Indian officers in a total establishment of 42,000 officers. Thus in 1945 the ratio of Indian officers to British officers was 1:4.61

After the outbreak of the Second World War the grant of regular commissions was suspended in the Indian Air Force in December 1939. On completion of training, officers were granted temporary commission in the Royal Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RIAFVR).62 Between 1 January 1942 and 31 August 1945 the demand for General Duty officers and Ground Duty officers was substantially higher than the supply of such officers.63 The main reason was that the 'standards' demanded by the Royal Indian Air Force were high, and recruits to meet these demands were not forthcoming.64 Indian pilots were in such short supply that it was found difficult even to replace the normal operational wastage of the nine Indian Air Force Squadrons

61ibid, p.183.

62See Monograph, 'Recruiting for the Defence Services in India' (India, MOD), p.68.

63ibid, p.74. Between 1 January 1942 and 31 August 1945 the demand for General Duty Officers was 3,006 and the supply was 1,298 - approximately 44 per cent.

64ibid.
that were formed during the war and the tenth Squadron was formed only after the end of the war. In spite of the slow progress of Indianisation in the Air Force, the strength of Indian officers increased steadily during the war. When the war began there were only 14 officers and at the end of the war their number was about 1,375.65

Unlike the other two services recruitment in the permanent cadre of the officer ranks of the Royal Indian Navy continued throughout the war. Temporary commissions were also granted in one of the two ‘Naval Reserves’ which were formed shortly before the outbreak of war.66 By the end of the war, the strength of European and Indian commissioned officers was roughly equal in the Indian Navy.67 Moreover, with the advent of the war the recommendations of the Chatfield committee were implemented with speed for the modernisation of the Indian Navy. In 1939 the Indian Navy had a strength of five sloops, one survey vessel and one patrol craft and at the end of the war it had 16 frigates, sloops and corvettes and 62 other ships along

65Prasad, n.60, p.184. The progress of Indianisation in the Air Force is given in a table.

66See Monograph, Recruiting for the Defence Services in India (India, MOD), p.20.

67Prasad, n.60, pp.186-7. There are two tables showing the progress of Indianisation in the Navy during the war.
with 400 landing craft and defence launchers. Notwithstanding the enormous expansion during the war it continued to be a small ship Navy - the largest warship was only a frigate. Therefore it was suitable only for coastal defence.

Auchinleck, who became the Commander-in-Chief in 1943, more than any other British officer foresaw the political reality of transfer of power and thereby the need for rapid Indianisation of the Armed Forces. As early as March 1945 he had recommended that in future only Indians should be granted permanent commissions in the Army. Finally on 22 October 1945 the Government announced:

The grant of permanent commissions in the Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Army will, in future, be restricted to Indians and to other persons domiciled in India who are subjects of His Majesty's or of a Prince or Chief in India. The recruitment of officers to the Royal Indian Air Force is already subject to this restriction...

... it will be generally recognised that the three Indian services will still require a quota of British officers until such time as there is an adequate supply of qualified Indian officers... The quota of seconded or attached British officers of the three Indian services will be systematically and progressively reduced as Indian officers become available.68

Underlying this decision was the acceptance of the fact that 'political' independence for India was only a matter of time.

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68 Sapru Committee Report, 1945, App. XVII.
According to the Cabinet Mission plan an Interim Government was formed on 2 September 1946. Jawaharlal Nehru as Vice President of the Executive Council in a letter to Auchinleck enclosed the following note:

... one of our first tasks, as a national Government based on popular approval, is to attempt to transform the whole background of the Indian Army and make it feel that it is a national army of India. It was impossible for this to be done in the past because the whole conception of the Indian Army was different and the average soldier fought for more in terms of an external allegiance than for allegiance to his own country... it is equally necessary to make the Indian public feel that the army is theirs and is not some kind of hostile force imposed on them. They should be proud of their army....

Thereafter, Auchinleck in his communication to all Army Commanders on November 1946 observed: 'It has been decided, and in my opinion inevitably decreed, that we - the British officers - are to go.' The Indianisation of the Armed Forces could no longer be disputed.

On 30 November 1946 an Armed Forces Nationalisation Committee was appointed with Gopalaswamy Ayyangar as the Chairman - this was the last

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69 Nehru's letter to Auchinleck of 12 September 1946 (John Ryland University Library, Manchester), File LXXI, MUL 1193.

70 Quoted in Connell, n.57, pp.854-5.
formal body set up to guide on the progress of Indianisation. According to the terms of reference the Committee was formed, 'In order to nationalise the armed forces of India, namely the Indian Navy, the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force and all ancillary services, both officers and men, within the shortest possible time, with due regard to Indian national interests and reasonable efficiency....' The Committee envisaged a two-stage programme of Indianisation - the first ending in January 1947 and the second in January 1951. It did not provide for a comprehensive Indianisation and even in 1951 almost 19 per cent officers would have been British.

The Government had generally argued against the rapid withdrawal of British officers. In his letter to the Defence Member of the Interim Government, Auchinleck wrote: '...I am firmly convinced that to attempt to achieve complete nationalisation of the Armed Forces, and especially of the Indian Army, by June 1948 is to run a very grave risk of their disintegration and disruption.' Within the Council of State when a resolution was moved by Pandit Kunzru for fixing a time limit for the 'nationalisation' of the Armed Forces, Auchinleck had argued against it on the ground that it would be 'highly

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71 Committee for the Nationalisation of the Indian Army, 15 October 1946 (India, MOD), File SEC/11/192/H.

dangerous' and 'most undesirable'. Auchinleck's demand for the retention of British officers was also influenced by other considerations. As late as March 1947 Auchinleck and most senior British officers were working under the assumption that division of the country would not entail bifurcation of the Armed Forces. And as such retention of a substantial number of British officers in undivided Armed Forces would have ensured Britain's control over the defence and foreign policy of the successor states.

The Nationalisation Committee submitted its report in May 1947. Its report was not made public in view of the changed political situation. In April 1947 the Government had in principle accepted that the partition of the country would also involve the division of the Armed Forces. Thereafter the issue of 'Nationalisation' of the Armed Forces lost its relevance.

CONCLUSION

The study of Indianisation during the inter war years reveals the Government's lack of commitment. Concessions were made due to military and political compulsions. Although it was a progressive idea, the execution of the policy at best lacked governmental initiative, and at worst smacked of

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73 Auchinleck's Speech in the Council of State of 8 April 1946 (John Ryland University Library, Manchester), File LXX, MUL 1147.
institutional racism. Auchinleck had rightly observed:

...The Indian has always thought, rightly or wrongly, that we never intended the scheme to succeed and expected it to fail. Colour was lent to this view by the way in which each new step forward had to be wrested from us, instead of being freely given. Now that we have given a lot we get no credit because there was little grace in our giving.

The entry of Indians into the officer ranks had threatened the reliability of the Armed Forces as a tool of British imperialism. The Government under the disguise of maintenance of efficiency had tried to limit the intake of Indian officers. The Armed Forces were kept insulated from the forces of nationalism. The fact that Indian political leaders did not attempt to subvert the Armed Forces had also ensured their neutrality. Mahatma Gandhi’s creed of non-violence had ruled out the involvement of the Armed Forces in the nationalist upsurge. He is reported to have said, ‘I do not want them to be disloyal to the present Government in whose power they are, for if they are disloyal to the present Government today, by the same token they may be disloyal to the national government tomorrow.’

74 Sharpe, n.2, pp.47-52.


76 "The Better Way", The Harijan, 10 March 1946.
independence the Armed Forces were the main pillar of strength which ensured a smooth transfer of power. In spite of the grudging admission of Indians into the officer cadre, India inherited a highly professional Armed Force with a strong apolitical tradition.