CHAPTER SEVEN

The Occupational Caste Groups and Madras Army

Again, since Moghal Times, the saying that “He who holds the army holds India, has held true and probably holds true even now when India is a Republic”

---Lieutenant General G. N. Molesworth

Rarely do we recognise the importance of armies and warfare in shaping the course of modern Indian history. The Army in India, which included the Sepoy Army commanded by British officers as well as the British units stationed in the subcontinent, had a dominating presence in the colonial era. Till the 1890s, the Sepoy Army included the Bombay Army, Bengal Army, Madras Army and the Punjab Frontier Force. The Sepoy Army or British-Indian Army, offered the largest government employment to the colonized Indians. Annually, the Sepoy Army, or colonial Army, enlisted about 15,000 Indians in peacetime. During World War II, about 2.5 million Indians were enlisted in the army. Indeed, the colonial army was the biggest item of expenditure for the colonial regime. About 30 percent of the British-Indian Empire’s revenue went to feed the military establishment in the subcontinent. Military service moulded the structure and ethos of colonial Indian society.

Kaushik Roy pointed out that compared to ancient and medieval Indian Military history; the database for colonial India’s military history appears more solid. This is

---


391
due to the book-keeping activities of the bureaucracy, as well as host of unofficial monographs and articles written by the colonial military officers recording their glorious activities in an exotic environment. ³

However, Army played a very significant role in the lives. It gives immense source of social occupational mobility. Army as an occupation acquired an immense honourable place in the society. Military establishments have important social implications, particularly in developing societies. In attempting to determine the relationship between the army and society, several points must be considered. Social Attitudes to military service were important. It regarded as an honourable profession.⁴

The relationship between citizenship and military service is significant. This may range from democratic egalitarianism in which full citizenship includes at least the possibility of military service, to pure expediency and efficiency, in which only the best qualified and most willing are called upon. The function of the military as an agency of social occupational mobility may be considered in two ways: does, or should the structure of the military establishments replicate the social stratification pattern of society, and does it or should it attempt to alter these patterns?⁵

Madras Army

The first English man reportedly to have visited India was Bishop Sighelums of Sherborne in Ad 883. According to Anglo Saxon Chronicle, King Alfred sent him on a

³ Ibid, p. 4.
⁵ Ibid, p. 19.
pilgrimage to Mylopre, then a small village on India’s eastern coast and the reputed site of St. Thomas Tomb. It was nearly 700 years after the return of Sighelmus before another Englishman came to India, in 1579. He was Jesuit, Thomas Stephens, the first Englishman known to have settled in India, and whose descriptive letters to his father, a wealthy London merchant, are believed to have been the unwitting motivation for English Commercial interest in India.\(^6\)

W. J. Wilson described about the Madras Army that “The had no discipline, nor any idea that discipline was required. They were armed with matchlocks, bows and arrows, spears, swords, bucklers, daggers, or any other weapons they could get.”\(^7\)

The Madras authorities received a shock when, in 1748, Captain Stringer Lawrence, promoted to only in the territories of the East India Company, and subsequently deemed by the English as “the father of the Indian Army”, arrived at Fort St. David since Madras at the time was occupied by French, and took up his appointment as ‘Major of the Garrison at Fort St. George (Madras)’. Captured by the French shortly after, he was released in 1749, and, in 1752, was the first army officer to be appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Company’s forces in India.\(^8\)

**The Occupational Caste Groups**

Caste played a very significant role in Indian society and certainly it also gave a very great impact on Indian Army. The historians are divided on the issue of social

---


\(^8\) Ibid, pp.7-8.
implication of army on society. Some says that it has given a negative impact on the society because of their racial discrimination. And some says that it was boon for the lower caste. The historian like S. P. Cohen is of the view that Army was much beneficial for the Indian Untouchables. Meaning thereby Caste and race, assumed colonial ethnographers, were the principal ingredients of Indian history, and had divided Indian society hopelessly. The new scholarly term for ‘race’ seems to be ‘ethnicity’ which was introduced into academic discourse by American political sociologists. For Rosen, Indian society is characterized by caste divisiveness. Hence, the colonial army remained an agglomeration of various castes. In somewhat similar tune, DeWitt C. Ellinwood and Cynthia H. Enloe, following the Historical-Sociological approach, argue that Indian society is ethnically fragmented. Ethnic identity is the product of primordial attachments resulting from religion, culture, language, and political influence. So the Sepoy Army, assert Ellinwood and Enloe, reflected ethnic imbalances. 9 For Rosen, divisions in the host society were automatically reflected in the army. Unlike Rosen, Enloe gives space to the programmes of the power elites. For Enloe, the degree and nature of ethnic imbalances in the armies were to an extent shaped by the politicians in power. 10 In an article Omissi notes that the ethnic make-up of the colonial army was not only shaped by the policies of the politicians and the generals, but also by the attitudes of the ethnic communities of the subcontinent. Only those ethnic groups who calculated that they would gain from military services joined the army. So the ethnic composition of the


10 Cynthia H. Enloe, Ethnicity in the Evolution of Asia’s Armed Bureaucracies’, in Enloe and Ellinwood (eds), Ethnicity and the Military in Asia, pp. 2-14.
colonial forces was the result of a fusion of the policies of colonial strategists and the dispositions of the various ethnic groups.\footnote{11} In a plural social set-up (in an ethnically heterogeneous society), ethnicity has enormous social and political importance. In a way, ethnic policies are the products of political manipulations as well as 'natural' divisions within a society.\footnote{12} The presence of ethnic communities with distinct characteristics, and jostling for power within the military bureaucracy, reminds one of Namierite factions. This is because the advocates of ethnicity accept that ethnic identities are closely related to interest-group orientations.\footnote{13} For political sociologists, ethnic politics paves the way for political socialization and subsequent mobilization.\footnote{14} The persistence of ethnic groups which are leftovers from the pre-colonial state system even in modern armies.\footnote{15} Somewhat challenges the Modernization theory.

A group of scholars within the War and Society framework view the army as a modernizing agency which transformed the peasant recruits into progressive individuals. This group could be categorized as the Modernization School. The Modernization theory became popular with American political scientists during the

\begin{footnotes}

\footnote{12} Zakaria Haji Ahmad, ‘The Bayonet and the Truncheon: Army/ Police Relations in Malaysia’, in Ellinwood and Enloe (eds), \textit{Ethnicity and the Military in Asia}, pp. 209-10.

\footnote{13} Lanny Bruce Fields, ‘Ethnicity in Tso Tsung- T'ang’s Armies: The Campaigns in North West China, 1867-80’, in Ellinwood and Enloe (eds), \textit{Ethnicity and the Military in Asia}, pp. 55, 74.


\end{footnotes}
1960s. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan widen the analytical frame of the Modernization theory, and claim that mobilization for global war-fare not only modified the social relationship and mentality of the soldiers, but also transformed colonial society as a whole. The Modernization theorists occasionally view the army as modernizing the state apparatus and culture of the marginal groups such as women, lower castes, and untouchables. In Cohen’s view, during emergencies the colonial army functioned as an instrument of modernization for the low castes.

Despite an initial bias for recruiting men of high-caste origin, the Madras Army was composed mainly of Muslims, middle-caste Hindus, some low castes, and only a few high castes. For instance, the 1st Infantry Regiment, which could be taken as a microcosm of the Madras infantry, in 1824, was composed of 45 percent Muslims, 25.6 percent Telingas, and 14.5 percent Tamils, 5 percent low castes, and 9.2 percent high castes. While most of the high castes came from Hindustan, (Purab, that is, west Bihar, Eastern and southern Awadhi/Oudh, especially the Bhojpur region) the other communities came from Karnataka, Mysore, and Andhra Pradesh. Peers ascribe this preference for middle and low-caste soldiers to the fact that military service was not the


18 Carol Hills and Daniel C. Silverman, Nationalism and Feminism in Late Colonial India: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment, 1943-45’, *MAS*, 27 (4), 1993, pp. 742-60.


21 Henry Dodwell, Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army, Calcutta, 1922, Appendix, p. i.
preserve of high-caste communities in south India. 22 Then too, the Bengal Army monopolized the better sorts of higher-caste recruits from north India, leaving second-grade recruits for the Madras Army. 23 However, we feel that the induction of low and middle-caste recruits on part of the Madras Army was not entirely due to the non availability of high-caste soldiers. There were deeper ideological underpinnings involved. Probably this decision to recruit low-caste recruits was intended to isolate the Indian contingent of the Madras Army from local attachments and sensibilities. General Harris, one of the main proponents of low caste recruitment, noted that the lack of religious prejudices and local attachments, among others, as qualities of the low-caste recruits. 24

However, many caste and communities were taken as sepoy in the Madras army. Ardythe Basham, a Canadian Scholar has taken up the study of Untouchables in the Western Army, pointed out that In Madras army consisted of low caste Hindus and Untouchables, Christian converts from these castes beside the Pathan, Rajputs, Muslims from Northern states, Brahmins, Rajputs etc recruited from Oudh, Sihar and

---


23 Kaushik Roy Roy in Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army, 1859-1913, Indian Economic and Social History Review, 34(3), 1997, pp. 345-6, argues that a lobby existed in the pre-1857 Madras Army, which pursued and open-door policy of recruitment. General Harris was one of the prominent proponents of the open-door policy won against the selective enlistment school due to certain factors. One of the reasons was that since Awadh and Bengal Army had the first choice of Brahmin and Rajput recruits in these areas. As a result, the Bengal Army acquired the better variety of Purbiya recruits, leaving the second-grade high-caste personnel for the Madras Army. So the Madras Army decided to go for the non-high-caste men.

Rohilkhand. 25 S. P. Cohen has written exclusively on Untouchable caste soldier that In Madras Army the paria caste were taken largely and got important place in the army. 26 However, the Streynsham Master, the earliest governor of Madras, was a person who made several discipline and rules for the Madras army. He gave order to train the all rank officers and paid heavy discipline. 27 This gave a very new opportunity and new power to the occupational caste groups.

After the Streynsham Master, the Yale, s administration was one of military activity. Among the governor's earliest acts was placing of the native contingent on an improved footing. Records points out that there being 280 peons in pay for the watch and guard of the suburbs who in this disorder they were scattered about be of little credit or force to the place. He also passed order to called the Portuguese army and trained the peons and moor inhabitants according to their ability. 28 He also made rule and passed order for the military government. 29

The period of Harrison, s rule was marked by considerable military activity. Harrison appointed many peons for watching the Black town. 30 Records mentioned that the apart from the official the occupational castes were employed for securites for the town. The military establishment consited in 1732 of


30 Records of Fort St Geroge, Diary and Consultation book, 1714, p, 133.
agunner, his first and second mates, 68 Europeans, 2 tindals and 27 lascars were disposed as follows—

At the inner fort gunroom------------------------8
At the saluting Battery --------------------------21
At the new Powder house-----------------------12
At the Garden point---------------------------9
At the queen point---------------------------6
At the bridge point----------------------------2
At the spuur point---------------------------2
At the clark point---------------------------2
At the clark gate-----------------------------2
At Madepollam point--------------------------2
At the fleet point--------------------------2

--------------------------------------------------

68

H. D. Love has referred about the various Occupational caste groups, who were employed in the Madras Army 1759. 32

General Return of the Troops in the Honourable East India Company’s Garrison of Fort St. George, December the 12th, 1758.

Officers. N. C. O.

's and

---

31 Records of Fort St Geroge, Diary and Consultation book, 1732, p. 81.

Men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Men.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troop of Horse</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Artillery</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Honourable Company's Artillery</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Majesty's 64th Regiment</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Detachment of Marines</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Honourable Company's 1st Battalion</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd do</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernumeraries</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Record of fort st. George has documented the various communities which are following.

**Troop of House**

Rodolphus de gingins—Captain—Pagodas

1. Serjent—7
2. Corporals—4
3. 34 privet men—3

---

33 Records of Fort St Geroge, Diary and Consultation book, 1749-50, p. 32. See the list of servants in the page no, 202 in the same record.
1st Company of Foot

Rodolphus de gingins---- Captain—receives Pay in the hourse

Francis Cook -------Lieutenant----- 5 Pagodas

James Speers -----Ensign--------4 Pagodas

5 Serjent
8 Corporals-
1 Drummer
70 Centinels

2nd Company of Foot

Dugald Mac Donald --- Captain---10 Pagodas

John Hood-------------Lieutenant--5 Pagodas

Joseph Smith--- Ensign---4 Pagodas

6 Serjent
6 Corporals-
2 Drummer
68 Centinels

3rd Company of Foot

Donald Campbell---- Captain--------10 Pagodas

Charles Campbell-- ------Lieutenant---5 Pagodas

Peter Campbell--- Ensign--------4 Pagodas
6 Serjent
8 Corporals-
3 Drummer
82 Centinels

4th Company of Foot

William Richards—- Captain-------10 Pagodas
Daniel Pepper -- ------Lieutenant 5 Pagodas
Edward Stubbs--- Ensign--------4 Pagodas
6 Serjent
8 Corporals-
1 Drum Major
2 Drummer
67 Centinels

Detachment Of Major Lawerence Company of Artillery

James Hockett------- ------Lieutenant
Lawrence Merryman-- ------Lieutenant
3 Serjent
6 Corporals-
9 Gunners
13 Mattrosseses
4 Topasses’
Complain against Sepoy

The record of Fort St Geroge documented that the inhabitants had made complained against soldiers. On 26 March on 1713, the president acquainted the Board that there had been of late many complaint made by the black inhabitants of disorders committed in the outports of the chitty by the soldiers in the night, that he had made several new regulations to prevent their getting without walls, but they will be ineffectual unless something be done at the mud point where the palisades were so rotten that people may go in and out in a dark night, without being perceived. And upon examination it appearing that the palmeras, of which the pallisadoes were made were very subject to decay and required repair.

Conclusion

The Madras army has given much benefited to the Occupational caste groups. It become a source of social Occupational mobility. It gave a new identity and new power. Their caste become empowered. They got education and trained from the English which produced some marshal caste like pariahs become much empowered. Armies were however quasi-mercenary forces commanded by a foreign group of officers, who had established their sway by force. Consequently, the question of national loyalty did not arise. Loyalty in a quasi-mercenary army could only mean loyalty towards commanding officers who, by exhibiting dynamic leadership, sought to win allegiance. The British initially tried to ensure personal loyalty by encouraging a very personal and heroic style of leadership. With the transition to an impersonal style of leadership, both the armies suffered to an extent, especially in times of crisis caused
by contractual violations, flouting of long-standing traditions, and so on. Consequently, in mutiny-like situations where the privileges, both the armies were extremely vulnerable and mutinies were often marked by a total collapse of the command mechanism. While the Indian officers sided with European officers in maintaining day-to-day discipline, they could not be relied upon in times of acute or mass discontent. Then the European officers were left helpless spectators.
MADRAS IN 1768.