

# Struggle for Indianisation of Indian Army during the British Rule: A View

**Lieutenant S. Rajagopal**, Assistant Professor, Department of History, MannarThirumalai Naicker College, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India

## Article Info

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## Abstract:

Indianisation of the Armed Forces during the British rule was a subject which came up often enough during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet, it made only halting progress, till the beginning of the Second World War which necessitated large scale induction of Indians into the officer cadre. During the British period in India, the Indian National Congress was interested in an enlargement of the Indian Army recruitment, expansion of Indianisation of the officer corps and modernisation of the Indian Army. In 1921 Legislative Assembly session, Sir Sivaswamy Aiyar demanded more percentage of the King Commission Indian Officers. Later by 1928, Indian leaders presented irrefutable argument during the debates in the second session of Legislative Assembly. In 1932, the British Indian government announced 40 vacancies for the recruitment to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun. After a hard struggle from 1932 to 1941, 535 cadets and in early 1947, 8400 Indian officers were commissioned. The present paper through the lights, especially "Struggle for Indianisation of Indian Army during the British Rule: A View" in detail.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the British rule, Indian leaders Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Sivaswamy Aiyar Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru and others have demanded Indianisation of the Indian army. Britishers recruited Indian youth as soldier category, utilised them crudely and they neither granted officer commission nor hired Indian officer under British Indian Army. Because, after uprising the 1801 South Indian Rebellion, 1806 Vellore mutiny and 1857 Indian Independence war, the British be afraid and always some British troops were posted in each formation of the Indian Army. Also, they slice down Indian military leadership in British India Army. Due to enormous pressure from Indian leaders in 1932, the British announced 40 vacancies for Indian Commissioned officer for Indians and opened Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. The selection process was hard, the daily routine training also too hard, term fees for training more expensive for a middle-class Indian family and first sixteen regular courses of IMA cadets' officers

under the microscope by British officers. Regarding this, we discuss the Struggle for Indianisation of the Indian Army during the British rule in succeeding paragraphs.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main focus of the present study are as follows: -

- (a) To discover Indian and British troops proportion before, during and after the uprising of 1857 mutiny.
- (b) To tabulate Indian Cadets admitted to the RMC, Sandhurst, England from 1918 to 1931.
- (c) To analyses the challenges at the time of Entry of Indian Cadet at IMA, Dehradun.
- (d) To examine the political stress created by the Indian leaders to British for the formation of Indianisation of Indian Army among the Indians.

## METHODOLOGY

The study would be both evocative and analytical. By way of historical research methodology, various primary and secondary

sources have been analyzed. The collected data tabulated and utilised persuasively for the subject study. Also, the review of literature provided in a solid base to distinguish the incredible struggle for Indianisation of the Indian army during the British rule in India.

### **FOUNDATION OF BRITISH INDIAN ARMY**

The foundation of the Indian Army was laid by the British in 1748 A.D., by combining the “Watch and Ward” elements to protect the trading centres the East India Company established. Major Stringer Lawrence was the 1st army officer appointed Commander-in-Chief of all East India Company’s forces in India. He deemed as the father of the Indian Army. Primarily Indians were recruited and armed with own their weapons, wore their dress and were commanded by their officers. The troops were armed with matchlocks, bow and arrow, spears swords, daggers or any weapon they could get. These troops were ill-disciplined and were chowkidars and forerunners of armed police. Firstly, army elements were organised into battalions, later by political overtones they grew into commands in the form of Presidency units called the Bombay, Madras and Bengal armies. These armies were comprised of the British and the Indian elements. Indian battalion supported the British units in the spheres of local administration. But as Britain’s expansion policies needed more armed workforces in infantry, cavalry and artillery units, which were raised according to the imperial standards. In army, the British soldiers and officers were given more privileges than Indian soldiers. The British always maintained superiority and senior commander role in army. Later, slowly and steadily the British were annexed more and more Indian sub-continent territories and also enhanced the strength of Indian troops.

### **INDIAN STRUGGLE FOR INDIANISATION**

After the 1857 A.D., uprising, the British be afraid and implemented a strategy of balancing the troops in India, under which some British soldiers were always posted in each formation of the Indian

Army. The British government was to slice down Indian military leadership of the British Indian Army. In army, they neither granted Indian officer commission nor recruited Indian officer under the British Indian Army Department.

In July 1858 A.D., a royal commission appointed and suggested that the army in India be composed mainly of Indian troops but recommended a change in the properties of Indian to British troops. The new Indian and British troops proportion was 2:1, and it was laid down that the artillery should all be in European hands. The commission envisaged an army of a maximum of 1,90,000 Indian and 80,000 British soldiers, as opposed to the 3,13,500 Indian and 38,000 British troops in 1857 A.D. However, after the re-organisation was completed in 1863 A.D., the actual numbers were 1,35,000 Indians and 62,000 British troops. On 1st April, 1895, the Presidency Armies were abolished and the Army of India was divided into four commands. Each under a Lieutenant General (Lt.Gen.) Commanding the force’s soldiers Punjab, Bengal, Madras and Bombay and all are directly subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief in India’. The British officers indeed joined the Indian Army because, besides higher pay and lower cost of living, the life in India offered a romance and quasi-aristocratic status, which was no longer possible in the British Army. Also, race, language, religion, amongst other aspects separated the British officers from the Indian men. The innovative Viceroy’s Commissioned Officer (VCO) {now called Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs)}. The rank was only a link between the British Officers and Indian troops. The VCO was directly in charge of a body of troops. He was answerable for their discipline, welfare, leave, complaints, and problems at home, even promotion and appreciation. Nowadays JCO ranks only active in Indian sub-continent.

At the same time, in an annual conference of Indian residents in the United Kingdom, arranged by the London Indian Society under the Presidency of

DadabhaiNaoroji on 20th December, 1898. The society passed a resolution demanding Indians should be allowed commission and command the Indian army in the same manner and through the same methods as were open to Englishmen, by competition and training and by promotion and command. In 1905, a distinctive shape of King's Commission established as Native Indian Land Forces (NILF). It was indeed, instituted for the Indian, but it carries only the power of command over Indian troops. Moreover, its recipients could not rise above the appointment of Company Officer. Indians were not satisfied, such some limited opening Indian officers' vacancies, but the government made no further response to the demand for the next ten years. The whole strength of the regular Army in 1907-08 was 2,27,714 including 73,947 British troops. At the outbreak of the Great War-I in 1914, the combatant strength of the Army in India was only 1,55,423 and continued expansion during the four years of war brought the figure up to 5,73,484 in 1918.

### **INDIAN OFFICER CADET IN RMC, ENGLAND**

During the World War-I, there was a necessity of a large number of officers and troops for fighting in Europe and the Middle East. British Indian government was to modify the existing policy. On 20th August, 1917, they granted 10 vacancies reservation for Indians at the Royal Military College (RMC), Sandhurst, England. Subsequently, there are 162 Indian Cadets admitted to the RMC, Sandhurst from 1918 to 1931. Out off, 162 Indian Officer cadets, only 98 were commissioned, 28 resigned or removed for various reasons, two died and 34 were under instruction. At the initial group of RMC, Sandhurst Indian cadets, a bulk of the misery, dismal and reluctant report.

### **CADET SCHOOL AT INDORE**

Due to unique demands of the Great War-I, a temporary cadet school opened at Dally College, Indore, in October 1918 and 39 Indian gentlemen

were granted King's Commissioned Indian Officers (KCIO) with commissions in the infantry out of 49 cadets admitted to the training.

### **POLITICAL LEADERS DEMAND FOR INDIANISATION**

In early 1921 Legislative Assembly in the first session, Sir Sivaswamy Aiyar demanded the increase of 25 per cent of the KCIO annually. Still, Lord Rawlinson agreed only 2.5 per cent and subsequently demand increased. By 1928, in the legislative assembly, when Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah presented irrefutable argument during the debates in the second session. The Indian National Congress was interested in enlargement of the Indian Army recruitment, expansion of Indianisation of the officer corps and modernisation of the Indian Army during the 1930s. As per the Round Table Conference in November 1930, Indian leaders' demand was accepted by the British government and resulted in the arrangement for Indianising the equivalent of one complete division and cavalry brigade. The second recommendation for the creation of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) was accepted.

### **THE INDIAN MILITARY COLLEGE COMMITTEE**

The Indian Military College committee assembled at Shimla on 25th May, 1931 and concluded its agenda on 20th June, 1931. The committee worked out a total requirement of 464 officers who would be required to field 16 units by 1935. After a thoughtful discussion by Committee selected 155.3 acres Railway Staff Training College (RSTC) land for the location of the IMA, in Dehradun, on 1st April, 1932.

### **VACANCIES IN IMA, DEHRADUN**

Meanwhile, there was a continuous demand for the Indianisation of the higher ranks in the armed forces. In early 1932, the British Indian government announced an entrance examination for recruitment

to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun. There were 40 vacancies, 15 selected through open competition, 15 from the Army and ten from the Indian State Forces (various Native Indian states). The examination was conducted by the Indian Federal Public Service Commission, which was similar to the military academy recruitment system in England. The format of the test also closely mirrored that of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), England entrance exam. Vacancies in the IMA were open to unmarried candidates who were British subjects of Indian Domicile or subjected to a Princely State in India. Applications usually routed through the local Collector, the Deputy Commissioner or the local Police Officer.

### **THE ENTRY OF INDIAN CADET IN IMA**

Selection for Indian State Forces (various Native Indian states) for Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in England was purely on nomination whereas as Indian Military Academy had decided to obtain candidates through a competitive examination. The Pioneer batch including Sam Manekshaw (later Field Marshal of India) went to Delhi and appeared the entrance examination on 14th July, 1932. The entrance examination was consisting of general knowledge, languages, mathematics, science, history and geography along with an interview. Entrance examination marks were 1,900 including 500 marks for an interview.

The selected candidates have divided into three categories Viz., 'O', 'A' and 'S' Cadets for training. Candidates selected through competitive examination were called 'O' Cadets (15 Candidates), candidates from the Army was called 'A' Cadets (15 Candidates) and candidates who came from the various Indian Princely States (10 Candidates) were called 'S' Cadets. Out of fifteen candidates in open competition, Sam Manekshaw stood sixth in the order of merit. He joined the IMA, Dehradun on 30th September, 1932. Training commenced on 1st October, 1932. But, the IMA was formally

inaugurated on 10th December, 1932 at 10.00 hours (hrs.), by the Commander-in-Chief of India (C-in-C), Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, Bart, GCB, GCSI, KCMG, DSO. He gave the opening address and insisted that an "Indian Military Institute for Indians". Later the hall where he delivered the inaugural address was called as ChetwodeHall whenever the new IMA Cadets are coming for training. The three principles stated by Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode is remembered till today and insisted in the first lesson, which must guide every officer of the National Army, and they are: -

"The safety, honour & welfare of your country  
come first, always & every time;  
the honour, welfare and comfort of the men you  
command come next,  
your own ease, comfort and safety come last  
always and everyone"

Now, his words serve as the main motto of the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun in Uttaranchal; Officers Training Academy (OTA), Chennai in Tamilnadu; and National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakwasala near Pune in Maharashtra.

### **THE PIONEERS AND FEE STRUCTURE OF IMA**

The first course was consisting of 40 Gentlemen Cadets (GC)\*, who were known as 'The Pioneers'. Three of them later rose to the position of chief of the armies of their respective countries. General SHFJ Manekshaw commanded the Indian Army, General Smith Dun, the Burmese Army and General Muhammad Musa Khan, the Pakistan Army. For the first two terms fee have fixed as Rs. 800/- each and Rs. 750/- per term. After that, the total cost for the entire course was Rs. 3,850/- a far more affordable sum for a middle-class Indian family of some means. During the training army cadets received a monthly stipend of rupees 60/- along with khaki uniforms and brass buttons. However, some personnel kits like hats, white flannels and swimming trunks had to be paid by the individual.



## INDIAN CADET UNDER MICROSCOPE

The IMA curriculum reflected greater academic emphasis that of Sandhurst; the annual exam system was very similar. One exam was held at the end of the term; the entire course was comprised of five terms over a two and a half years period. The examination was consisting of two main sections Viz., the general military education and comprehensive military education. The pioneers did not have an easy time by any standards. During their first term, the proportion of cadets to officers was nearly 3:1 and they lived under a microscope by British officers. The daily routine training started early in the morning. The cadets had to do both drills, physical exercise and followed by breakfast. After which there were five periods of training in military and academic subjects. Lunch was followed by a period and games parade at evening Viz., Hockey, Football and Athletic according to the season. The cadet rest of the day, the movement was on the run and lighted off at 22.15 hrs. They were always busy with routine. The young men who entered its portal were transformed disciplined, polite, well-mannered and perfectly turned out, because of his excellent academic scores in English and Mathematics. Student of English and Mathematics, was initially been picked up for the training for Technical arms like Engineers, Signals etc.

## CADETS ABSENT FROM PARADE AND PUNISHMENT

During the Pioneers training in the IMA, on liberty, on the weekend, Sam Manekshaw and his two-course mates, Maharaja Kumar Jit Singh of Kapurthala and Haji Iftikhar Ahmed decided to visit the nearby hill station to Mussoorie and seek out pass. Since the hill road could take only one-way traffic, there was a gate system between Mussoorie and Dehradun. The three young men went to a show on Sunday evening at Hakman's Hotel and lost track of time. When they came out, they found that the last bus going down had already left and they had to go back to the hotel and spend the night in Mussoorie. They returned to the IMA on Monday morning and were promptly marched up to the adjutant Capt J.F.S. McLaren of the Black Watch Regiment. As a punishment, all three were confined to barracks (Known as Gated in Barracks) for fifteen days. Sam was stripped off his rank of Corporal on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1933 and he was reverted to the rank of "Gentleman Cadet" by the Commandant of the Academy, Brigadier L.P Collins, DSO, OBE on the charge of being absent from parade. According to Number of Indian Army officer's cadet's intake training into RMC Sandhurst, England from 1919 to 1925 and IMA, Dehradun from 1932 to 1936 details shows in Table 1.

**Table 1 :** Indian Officer's Cadet's at RMC, Sandhurst and IMA, Dehradun

Sr No.	Province or State Agency	Number of Indians Intake into RMC, Sandhurst from 1919 to 1925	Number of Indians Intake into IMA, Dehradun from 1932 to 1936
1	Punjab	35	165
2	Bombay	12	19
3	United Provinces	9	41
4	Bengal	9	4
5	NWEP	5	50
6	Hyderabad State	3	-
7	Rajputana Agency	3	-
8	Burma	2	3
9	Coorg	2	-

10	Bihar	1	2
11	Assam	1	-
12	Central India Agency	1	6
13	Other/Unknown	2	1
14	Delhi	-	13
15	Madras	-	6
16	Gujarat	-	4
17	Kerala	-	3
18	Orissa	-	1
19	Princely State	-	88

Between 1st October 1932 to May 1941, there were sixteen regular courses. Off the 693 cadets were admitted, 535 were commissioned, giving a success rate of 85.72 per cent, remarkably high numbered when compared to the Indian Sandhurst cadets. The ratio between British and Indian, Army Officers from 1926 to 1947 details shows in Table 2.

**Table 2 :**The ratio of British and Indian Army Officers from 1926 to 1947 in India

Sr No.	Year	British Officers	Indian Officers	Total Officers
1	1926	-	74	-
2	1931	3033	108	3141
3	1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 1939	4028	396	4424
4	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1940	4028	415	4443
5	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1941	7194	596	7790
6	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1942	13833	1667	15500
7	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1943	25565	3676	29241
8	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1944	29740	6566	36306
9	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1945	32344	7546	39890
10	1 <sup>st</sup> Sep 1945	34590	8340	42930
11	1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 1945	34100	7800	41900
12	1 <sup>st</sup> Apr 1947	11500	8400	19900

At the final stage of the Indianisation process, Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 4th July, 1947 and received the Royal Assent on 18th July, 1947. With effect from 15th August, 1947, the government of the United Kingdom did not have any responsibility towards the governance of the erstwhile British Empire in India. On the eve of Independence, the (British India Army) Indian Army was divided proportionately between India and Pakistan. India

retained strength of approximately 2,80,000 troops and less than 1,50,000 went to Pakistan.

## CONCLUSION

After the formation of the Indian Army by the British as “Watch and Ward” element of the East India Company, they slowly and steadily annexed more Indian sub-continent territories. They also enhanced the strength of British Indian troops. The British always maintained superiority and senior commander role in the British India Army. After the 1857 uprising, the British officers be afraid and implemented a strategy, British troops were always posted in each formation of the Indian Army and slice down Indian military leadership of British Indian Army. They Newley innovate the rank of VCO, that was only a link between the British Officers and Indian troops. Later distinctive shape of King’s Commission was established NILF for the Indian, but it carries only the power of command over Indian forces. Moreover, its recipients could not rise above the appointment of Company Officer. Sir Sivaswamy Aiyar demanded the increase of the KCIO annually, but Lord Rawlinson agreed only 2.5 per cent. Initially, for Indianisation process, there are 162 Indian Cadets admitted to the RMC, Sandhurst from 1918 to 1931 and, only 98 have commissioned, 28 resigned or removed for various reasons, two have died. British India, legislative assembly members Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and others were interested in enlargement of the Indian Army recruitment, expansion of Indianisation of the officer

corps and modernisation of the Indian Army. After a long struggle, Indian leaders' demand was accepted by the British government and recognised for Indianising a complete division and cavalry brigade and creation of the Indian Military Academy. The selection process was very hard for ordinary Indians. During training, the selected Indian officer cadets lived under a microscope under British officers. If they found a small mistake, Indian cadets confined tough hard punishment. Early-stage the commission ratio also very low. Between 1st October 1932 to May 1941, there were sixteen regular courses of IMA, 693 cadets were admitted, 535 were commissioned, giving a success rate of 85.72 per cent, remarkably high numbered when compared to the Indian Sandhurst cadets. The majority of the entrants came from Punjab, and they included Sikhs, Punjabi Hindus and Muslims. For achieving the commission Indian officer's cadets have taken more pain by physically, psychologically and lived under a microscope by British officers.

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