The Role And Challenges Of Anglo-Indian Troops In Early Colonial India

MOHD IMRAN ALI
Research Scholar
Department of History
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh U.P

Abstract:

This research paper aims to examine the role and challenges faced by Anglo-Indian troops during the early colonial period in India. By exploring historical archives and academic studies, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between European powers, indigenous forces, and the Anglo-Indian community, shedding light on the socio-political landscape of British India. This research paper examines the significance of Anglo-Indians in the early colonial settlements in India and the reasons behind their recruitment and subsequent exclusion from various roles within the British East India Company. This paper explores how the Anglo-Indian community emerged, its contributions to the military, and the complexities of its relationship with the British and indigenous powers. This paper also discusses the discriminatory policies and shifts in attitude towards Anglo-Indians by the British, analysing their impact on the community's social standing and political influence.

Keywords: Anglo-Indians community, Army, Country-born, Nepotism, Policies towards Anglo-Indians, Topasses.

Introduction

The early colonial settlements in India witnessed the presence of European powers, including the English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese, who sought to expand their trade and solidify their profits. However, maintaining an adequate number of European troops in India during this period proved to be a daunting task. Due to the distance, expense and risks involved in bringing soldiers from Europe, European traders initially relied on the Mughal Empire or local chiefs for security.[1]

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, battles erupted in both Europe and India, involving various factions, including the Mughals, Rajputs, Marathas, and Sikhs. The prevailing instability and conflicts among these indigenous powers created an atmosphere of disorder, making it challenging for the European powers to expand their companies and ensure their interests.

The early presence of European troops in India was limited until the Portuguese handed over Bombay to the East India Company. In the mid-seventeenth century, a garrison at Madras primarily consisted of Anglo-Indians, known as topasses, who served their fathers' defence in Portuguese India.[2] Captain Stringer Lawrence, arriving in India in 1748, was credited as the founder of the British Indian Army.[3]

To address the need for a powerful army capable of controlling resources in a vast country like India, the British and other Europeans turned their attention to the Anglo-Indian community. The Anglo-Indians, born from the unions between European men and Indian women, emerged as a distinct group that played a significant role in British India.[4] The British, in particular, recruited members of the Anglo-Indian community into their army, gradually bolstering their influence and power in the region.[5]

The demand for soldiers surged as the East India Company expanded its territorial holdings and encountered rival European powers and indigenous rulers. British soldiers were required not only to protect these territories but also to engage in conflicts with France, which often involved British troops from home. As a result, the East India Company extensively hired the sons of its own workers, who were predominantly Anglo-Indians born in India.[6] The Anglo-Indians played a crucial role in defending British interests against warring Nawabs and Rajahs.

Changing Attitudes and Policies Towards Anglo-Indians:

The descendants of mixed ancestry came together to form the Anglo-Indian community, which served as a bastion for the British Raj, acting as a safeguard between rulers and the subjects.[7] However, the Anglo-Indian community faced discrimination and inconsistent treatment from the British. Their employment opportunities and social standing fluctuated depending on the company's policies and changing attitudes towards mixed-race individuals. The British used race as a tool to justify allowing or restricting Anglo-Indian access to positions of power.[8]

Over time, the British became apprehensive about the growing Anglo-Indian population, which posed a potential challenge to their interests.[9] In response, they implemented regulations that restricted the Anglo-Indians' employment opportunities and political influence. These discriminatory measures led to widespread unemployment and diminished social status within the Anglo-Indian community.[10]

During the late 1800s, Anglo-Indians were ousted from all ranks of the military and were barred from serving in the company's civil, military, and maritime services. [11] This was viewed as unjust by the Anglo-Indian community as they had previously been regarded as British and identified themselves as having a culture and

mindset that aligned with Britain. As a result of these mandates, Anglo-Indians were no longer part of the ruling group, which V. R. Gaikwad argues led to them being stripped of political influence and social standing. [12]

Orders were issued in 1791, declaring that "no son of a Native Indian henceforth be appointed" to operate in the company's "employment in the Civil and Military forces of the Company." [13] at that time, growing friction between the Directors of the Company in England and their administrators in India regarding appointments in the company. They wanted their relatives and sons in the sectors of the company's jobs.[14]

> "Nepotism was rampart; and more often than not, any legitimate or illegitimate brother or half-brother of 'somebody' was landing from England and had to be appointed to a higher post on the basis of the order he brought, to the utter dismay of the company's already working in India."[15]

Despite the hardships faced by Anglo-Indians, they proved their loyalty and capabilities to the British and Indian rulers. Many Anglo-Indians rebelled against Indian rulers and joined the British Army, while others trained the armies of Indian princes. Their military skills and discipline earned them prominence and respect in the princely states.[16]

The Indian rulers also appointed European soldiers, engineers, and officers to the British and French armies. The most powerful Indian princes, including the Maharaja of Alwar, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Sultan of Mysore, and the Maratha chiefs Madhoji Scindia and Holkar, channelled a ray of hope and career opportunities for the Anglo-Indians. Anglo-Indians were in high demand as generals, trainers, and disciplinarians among these princes. They were very impressed by their discipline. Some of them lived a high standard of living and earned a lot of wealth and power in India. They joined the state armies using their skills and talent in training sepoy armies.[17]

Conclusion:

The research paper concludes that the Anglo-Indian community played a significant role in the early colonial settlements in India. While initially valued for their skills and loyalty, they faced discrimination and exclusion from the British East India Company's services. However, their importance in maintaining British interests led to their reintegration into the military. The complex relationship between Anglo-Indians, European powers, and Indian rulers shaped their socio-political standing and influenced their contributions to the colonial period in India.

However, as the British East India Company gained greater political power, there was a shift in attitude towards Anglo-Indians. Discriminatory policies emerged, leading to the exclusion of Anglo-Indians from military and civil service positions within the company. The reasons behind this shift varied, including concerns over Anglo-Indian loyalty, competition for jobs with British workers, and changing perspectives on race and social hierarchy.

The research findings highlight that Anglo-Indians played a crucial role in the British East India Company's military endeavours. They were enlisted in significant numbers due to the lack of European troops and the need to protect the company's interests from European rivals and indigenous powers. Anglo-Indians participated in critical battles, wars, and campaigns alongside the British forces, contributing to their victories and defence of British interests.

Sources

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