Research Paper HISTORY

GENESIS OF BRITISH MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IN MADRAS – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to highlight the Genesis of British Military establishment in Madras. The army was from the beginning the instrument by which the growing political power of the company was supported. The company's force was the older branch of the army, men with arms were sent to protect the builders and merchants, when the English laid the foundations of Fort St.George. They had with them their old armour and weapons of war. There were match-looks, pikes, halberds, battle-axes and bucklers. This fashion of arming the troops continued for twenty years. The garrison was commanded by one of the company's servants, who was called the Lieutenant or Captain of the Guard. His military duties did not interfere with his mercantile transactions. There was a band of men, not exceeding twenty six at Fort St, George for some time and this was the fore-runner to the Madras Army. In 1670 there had been two companies of Europeans troops consisting of eighty to hundred in each. The ensign and thirty men reinforced by a gunner and his crew of 550 local soldiers and peons formed the Madras Army in 1673. Sir William Langhorne, the Governor of Madras, (1670-1677) framed a number of orders for the regulation of the Madras garrison for the first time. The growth of the Madras Army received encouragement from the company as well as the Government of England.

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The Book of Expenses in Fort St. George revealed that the charges of garrison had been higher than other charges.[5] The government's grand arsenals at Madras had extensive armouries for the storage and repair of small arms. Arms were mainly obtained from England but swords were partly secured from local manufactures. There were many references in the records regarding demands for receipts of muskets and swords.[6] In 1711 an attempt was made at gun-making at Madras, when the council entertained a German, Leopold Furstemberg, in the gunner's crew at eight pagodas a month.[7] For the first time the company, manufactured the gun powder for the use of the military in the year 1715.[8]

In 1687 a third of the men were armed with pikes and subsequently every man had been armed with musket and bayonet. The artillery consisted of the lightest of clumsy pieces which fired perhaps fifteen rounds per hour.[9] Elihuyale ordered that the 280 Indian sepoys who were appointed to guard the suburbs should be formed into three companies under the charge of proper ensigns.[10] He raised a local militia drawing two men form each family having two males between fifteen and sixty.[11] He formed a company of trained bands consisting of the company's servants and English freemen. He divided the garrison into companies and defined their duties.[12] The Directors sent two ships of soldiers from England to Madras. All Jews and merchants at Fort St. George were trained as military troops.[13] Caps and coats with buttons were sent to Fort St. George from England. Other necessaries to make coats for the rest of the soldiers were sent to Fort St. George for stitching, as tailoring was cheap at Madras than in England.[14] In 1687 the store-keeper at Fort St. George prepared a list of the military stores that were available on stock.[15] In the same year the English sent to Bengal a greater number of Europeans than Clive had with him at plassy.[16]

On the New Year's Day in 1690 Elihu Yale held a grand military parade and appeared with all pomp and pageantry with the member of the Council and all the Company's servants "in their best equipage" with the object "of making the greatest show all report in the country". He gave all men in Fort St. George training in military exercise to make them acquainted with the defences of the fort[17] for the purpose of protecting themselves against local Governors and petty chiefs. Even after the war, with the Mughals in 1688, the company's servants were continued to be trained and exercised in military activities.[18] The English enlisted a local militia. In 1697 all the company's servants and European inhabitants were mustered to form the trained band and that commissions were forthwith given to a few persons.[19] The consultation dated 13 November, 1697 at Fort St. David resembled the present day military officials' conference, discussions, summing up of schemes and implementations. All the commission officers were ordered to meet at the fort to discuss and ascertain the number of soldiers, both sergeants and corporals, with English and Portuguese soldiers required for the purpose of guarding the Fort, Tevenapatnam, and Cuddalore, when the countries around Fort St. David were peace. They were likewise to give their opinion how many soldiers were needed to protect the boundaries of the company, if assaulted by any of the neighbouring rulers.[20]

The inhabitants of Fort St. George were also required on certain days to appear on the parade with their arms. They were formed into a company of Train Bands under Raworth in 1710 who was appointed as captain.[21] Perhaps compulsory military

training was given to the people of Madras in the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is interesting to note that while the Governor of Fort St. George claimed that his military was weak, the deputy Governor, Fort St. David, claimed that his military was in very good order, as it was proved in battles. Subsequently in 1711 the soldiers in Fort St. David revolted against the Deputy Governor and council when their pay was reduced.[22] Since the mutiny at Fort St. David a considerable number of men left the military. Fifteen soldiers attached to Raworth with three sergeants went away with their arms and marched to the Tanjore Country where they took service under the Raja.[23] The garrison of Fort St. George laid down their arms twice, refusing to do the duty unless they had rice to at. But the ring leaders were imprisoned and several were sent to England.[24]

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