



THE ORIGIN OF IMPERIAL SERVICE TROOPS AND JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE

Annotation:

The British government always harboured distrust towards the princely states as earlier they were fierce competitors against each other for the conquest of territories in India. But even after emerging victorious their distrust against the states did not vanish particularly due to the First War of Independence. This policy continued beyond 1857 up to a certain period and was only revised when the Russian Empire focused on expanding its empire to its south which threatened the British Indian Empire. Therefore, the British decided to befriend the states and utilize their resources against the Russian Empire particularly Jammu and Kashmir. The distrust against the princely states and change in their policy towards the princely states particularly Jammu and Kashmir forms part of our research.

Keywords:

British, Commission, Russia, State, Guns, Jammu and Kashmir, Imperial, Army.

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Distrust of princely military forces had been a part of British Military policy in India since the eighteenth century when the English East India Company had competed with Indian state formations for political and military supremacy in India. The distrust continued into the nineteenth century and was clearly articulated by the Eden Commission as late as 1879.ⁱ The Eden Commission, which had been appointed to consider the reorganization of the Indian Army, assessed the threat from the forces maintained by princely states and laid down British military policy regards them, “on no account should arms of precision be given to the troops of Native States, ...their field artillery should be kept within the smallest possible limits, and ... the British Government should take no steps to employ or exercise the contingents of different states together”.ⁱⁱ This policy enunciated the Peels Commission of 1859 which established the principle of military organization to prevent the recurrence of armed rebellion in India and it influenced not only the organization of the Indian Army but also attitudes towards the princely armies.ⁱⁱⁱ

The distrust of the native states and its forces as clearly defined needed a change due to the worsening of political situation along the northern frontier of the British Empire with the advancement of the Russian forces up to the doors of the British. This led to a high demand for military manpower created by the growing imperial interests of Russia and its strategic advantage of a large military and proximity eventually formed the backdrop of a departure from the policy enunciated by the Eden Commission. This departure took in the form of Imperial Service Troops, against the backdrop of the threat of an Anglo-Russian conflict in Afghanistan referred to as Panjdeh crisis.^{iv}

Although, the war was averted, in 1887 the Nizam of Hyderabad offered to make a contribution of sixty lakh rupees towards the defence of the Indian frontier on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Queen Victoria^v along with other similar offers made by other princely states. To make use of the offers of the



support from the princely states, the first scheme was evolved by a committee which included Lord Fredrick Sleigh Roberts, the commander-in-chief of the Indian Army from 1885 to 1894. Quoting R.A Johnsons '*Russians at the Gate of India*', according to the author, for Roberts the employment of troops from the Indian states represented part of the solution to the manpower shortages for Imperial defence as it did not involve an increase in military expenditure by the British Indian government.^{vi} From distrust and suspicion of the princely states and its forces to a new pattern of military collaboration, though suspicion of the military forces maintained by the princely forces still continued, marked a change in the overall policy of the British government guided by purposes of defending the imperial interest of British India. As stated by Lee Warner, "The idea expressed in the new experiment of providing Imperial service troops marks a change from the policy of mistrust and isolation which prevailed in the earlier period of British intercourse. The states which have come forward with spontaneous offers of military co-operation are welcomed in the new spirit of union".^{vii}

The states under the administration of the Indian princes maintained armed forces totalling about three lakhs eighty one thousand men and had among them as many as two thousand six hundred ninety eight guns. The British who earlier considered these princely forces as a liability and saw them from the eyes of suspicion decided to utilize the resources of the states for defence of the country. The British treaties with the states had many varying conditions as regards military assistance to Government of India and after 1885 the concept of modern liability of the states towards the British Indian government was set forth before the princes which was a masterpiece of British diplomacy leading to the Princes being turned overnight into allies and in this capacity "they were to feel as much interested as the Queen did in the guardianship of the frontiers, commercial interests and the external renown of her empire. As also in the maintenance of the blessings of peace and friendly relations with the powers that lie upon its borders or are nourished by its trade".^{viii}

Before moving further and giving the detailed description of the Imperial Service Troops, it is pertinent to dwell upon the Interpretation act of 1889, which was introduced in the British parliament defining the British India as "...all territories and places within her Majesty's dominions which are for the time being governed by her Majesty through the Governor-General of India, or through any Governor or officer subordinate to the Governor-General of India, together with any territories of Native Prince or Chief under the suzerainty of Her Majesty, exercised through the Governor-General of India, or through any Governor or officer subordinate to the Governor General of India".^{ix} The timing of introduction of the IST scheme and introduction of the Interpretation Act does implicate to a certain extent British assertion on its territories, both under its direct control or through the subordinate princes in the times of increasing hostility with the Russian Empire.

This policy took place in the form of asking the states which had material of serious military value to offer for preparing and equipping a portion of their armed forces, so as to take their place besides the British troops when required. Consequently in 1889 portions from armies of the princely states were converted into Imperial Service Troops, who were to be financed by their respective states and officered by the State Commissioned Officers, however, training was to be supervised by the British officers from the regular Indian Army and were designated as Inspecting Officers or Assistant Inspecting Officers. They were not to reside in the states where they were deputed except for in certain states like Jammu and Kashmir which provided large contingent to the Imperial Service Troops. At the Government of India level was to be an Inspector General and Inspecting Officers were to form his staff.^x

Since the Imperial Service Troops were to be financed by their own states, it was bound to create another problem which was regarding the financial aspect. In order to attain the level of efficiency required for Imperial Service the corresponding financial stress would have been great. This was



especially in case of states like Jammu and Kashmir which because of particular circumstances was bound to provide the largest contingent for Imperial Service.^{xi}

The total strength of the Jammu and Kashmir State Force on 31 December 1888 was twenty two thousand three hundred ninety eight of which two thousand six hundred sixty seven were artillery, six hundred thirty cavalry, twelve thousand two hundred twenty nine infantry and six thousand eight hundred seventy two irregulars (both cavalry and infantry). This marked a reduction of five thousand troops since 1885, probably in preparation for the formation of the Imperial Service Corps. The strength of the Army was further slashed to nearly half in 1889 and on the eve of the great event in March 1890 it stood at just nine thousand nine hundred sixty five men of which the share of the artillery was eight hundred ninety three, that of cavalry was five hundred one, of infantry was seven thousand two hundred eighty three and the remaining one thousand two hundred eighty eight were the irregulars.^{xii}

Preliminaries having been completed in 1889, the Kashmir Imperial Service Corps actually took form in 1890. In April that year a brigade of selected men from all three arms was assembled at Jammu under the command of General Suram Chand and placed at the disposal of the Government. Major Drummond and Captain Hogge who had supervised the organization of the force were appointed as the Inspecting officers. The force with a total strength of two thousand eight hundred eighty one all ranks was composed of the following.^{xiii}

- A. Two squadrons Cavalry designated as the Kashmir Lancers.
- B. Two Mountain Batteries.
- C. The Raghupratap Battalion designated as the 1st Kashmir Infantry.
- D. The Bodyguard Battalion designated as the 2nd Kashmir Rifles.
- E. The Sappers and Miners designated as the 3rd Kashmir Infantry.

Because of its commitments along a vast international frontier, the Jammu and Kashmir had considerably more experience than other state forces, particularly in frontier, mountain and tribal warfare. The J&K Army for example were the only state forces which contributed to the Imperial Service Artillery.^{xiv} Besides having fought to extend India's borders to where they were at the time, they had engaged in hill warfare against the border tribes continuously for well over fifty years which had kept them alert and ever ready for action. This was to prove a great asset to the British in their endeavours to establish their control over Gilgit region. Especially, in the context of Russian threat, the location of Jammu and Kashmir State gave it a strategic key to an entrance gateway to India. The British wanted not only the Infiltration routes to be blocked but also the trade route to be protected against Khanjuti robbers of Hunza. War or no War, Jammu and Kashmir forces were required to be on their toes to fight and put down any kind of adversity.

ⁱ Sherawat, Samiksha, 'Hostages in our camp', article published in *Indian Princely States*, edited by Waltrand Ernst and Biswamoy Pati, Routledge, Oxon, 2007, p. 119.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 120.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 119.

^v Beatson, Stuart, *A History of the Imperial Service Troops of Native States*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1903, Preface.

^{vi} Sherawat, Samiksha, Op. Cit., p. 120.



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- vii Lee-Warner, William, *The Native States of India*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, London, 1910, p. 232.
- viii Ibid., p.62.
- ix Head, Richard and McClenaghan, Tony, *The Maharajas Paltans*, Mahohar Publisher, New Delhi, 2013, p.4.
- x Mac Munn, George, *The Indian States and Princes*, London, 1936, pp. 179-184.
- xi Singh, K. Brahma, *History of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (1820-1856)*, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p. 62.
- xii Annual Administrative Report of Jammu and Kashmir, 1889-90.
- xiii Ibid.
- xiv Palit, D.K, *Jammu and Kashmir Arms*, Palit and Dutt Publishers, Dehra Dun, 1972, p. 70.