

The Army, Military Education, and State Sovereignty

With the support of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, I was able to conduct archival research in London, England. My research began in February 2020. I conducted my research principally at the British Library, utilizing its Indian Office Records and collection. The documents and materials allowed me to gain much greater insight into the development of military sponsored primary and secondary schools during the late period of the British Empire.

One of the major questions proposed by my thesis is what elements of these colonial schools made them attractive enough for the post-colonial Pakistan military to adapt and how were these institutions initially received. Documents from the archives revealed the importance of secondary and primary education in developing officer material was a pressing matter for all parties involved, whether the British colonial authorities, representatives of the so-called ‘martial races’ who enjoyed a monopoly in military recruitment, or among Indian nationalists who viewed the process of Indianization as a means to secure an independent India. Indeed, all three factions constantly argued, allied, and confronted one another throughout the interwar period to secure their interests for the future of the Indian Army and eventual post-colonial military. The British wanted to maintain the institutional integrity of their military system, the so-called ‘martial race’ communities sought officer commissions as a reward for their services, especially during the Great War, while nationalists argued an officer corps with wide representation was crucial to establish a truly democratic, national military.

The other aspect illuminated by the documents found is the symbiotic relationship between the colonial state and the so-called ‘martial’ communities it recruited from. These communities enjoyed access to military positions and related employment, yet at the same time the British purposely worked to keep these areas underdeveloped in terms of education and industry. Understanding with more employment opportunities or education, these pools of recruitment could dry up. These new angles of investigation shift the study of Indianization beyond its macro impact and more to how it effected local communities and led to a specialized military education network designed to “catch them young” and prepare boys as young as 10 for future careers as military officers.

With the information gleamed from the archives, it is now much clearer to see why the Pakistan military chose to embrace a hybrid of the British and so-called ‘martial race’

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perspective on officer recruitment and the development of elite secondary schools meant to feed the service academies. The Pakistan military, from the 1950s, wished to re-establish the colonial era institutions to preserve their institutional culture while building a stronger bond between the military and the communities it historically recruits from. The latter factor being especially important after 1971 when the demographics shifted in favor of historical so-called 'martial' communities following the independence of Bangladesh.