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The Army as a Tool for Social Uplift: The Experience of the Paraiyans in the Madras Presidency Army, 1770–1895

Manas Dutta

There has been a rapid increase in the politico-sociological literature on the relationship between the armed forces and society in the emerging nations since the 1960s. A fairly large part of the research deals with the army as a political modernising agent, and only very little deals with the role of the army as a tool of social and economic uplift. One of the studies which examines such problems in detail is the recent work of Morris Janowitz¹ on the role of the army in the socio-political development of new nations. In one place he discusses broadly the role of the army in the economic and social modernisation of new nations. Here the author, while analysing the successes and failures of the contribution the army makes to the social and economic modernisation of new nations, points out that several classes of activities of the army are primarily involved. For example: (1) The army serves as a training ground for technical and administrative skills and organisation of discipline. (2) The army manages economic enterprises to meet its own requirements and for the civilian society. (3) It works as an agency of socialisation, and (4) it serves as a tool for social change.² Edward Shils, while speaking about the political implications of a modern army in a new state, points out the role of the army in forming young men and women of heterogeneous ethnic and cultural backgrounds from traditional societies into citizens of a modern political society.³ Lucian Pye and Hans Daadler also discuss some of the problems involved in the military as a modernising agent of emerging nations and speak of the ways in which the armies in countries where social, economic and cultural gaps among various groups of people are found step in to take political power into their hands.⁴ There are various explanations of modernisation, but in this paper, by modernisation is meant the process of social change by which less economically developed societies acquire several characteristics common to more economically developed societies. Modernisation may start in various aspects of a social structure and may operate inconsistently in several of them concurrently.⁵ The purpose of this paper is to supplement the studies of Janowitz, Shils, Pye and Daalder by presenting the unique case of India, where, in the colonial era, the army played an important role as an agent of modernisation without hindering the state structure. Thus, the present essay explores how the colonial Indian army acted as a tool of uplift for the lower classes called Paraiyans in the Madras Presidency from 1770 to 1895.⁶

The Army and the Condition of Lower-Caste Groups in Pre-Independent India

In pre-independent India, the armed forces, called the British Indian Army, constituted a professional body and consisted of two elements: nearly one-third of the army, including the officers, were European personnel, and the rest were Indian personnel recruited mostly from the rural areas. This army embodied modernity in organisation, operational planning, general efficiency and technical knowledge, and it contributed a great deal to the establishment of a modern basis for the economic development of the country.⁷ During the early period of British occupancy, the East India Company not only tried to expand their territories in the subcontinent, but also invested time to explore the socio-cultural ambience of the subcontinent. By doing this, they tried to understand the issue of caste and its further implications for the socio-economic structure of society that was somehow detrimental to all-round mobility. Lord Cornwallis was the first to initiate such civil activities exclusively undertaken by the military personnel.⁸ Initially, there was an environment which was conducive to incorporating civil-military men into activities for the benefit of the society. Slowly, this atmosphere was relegated to the background and the attitude of the colonial government became ambivalent in this respect.

Lower-caste groups, or rather, marginalised groups, were one of the important pillars of the Indian army under the colonial rule. They played a significant role to maintain the colonial hegemony of British rule in the subcontinent. Very little work has been done on the role of the marginalised or 'untouchable' or 'labourer castes' in the Army. These groups played a very important role in the army, basically in the lower ranks as sepoy, guards, watchman and so on. The English East India Company gave new opportunities to the lower castes, providing them with occupational and social mobility and socio-economic improvement.⁹ Recent researches have explored the role of the Paraiyans¹⁰ in the Madras Presidency army during the colonial rule. They also describe the rise and decline of the Paraiyans in the army hierarchy and subsequent changes in the attitudes of the British military officials as well as the colonial government towards them.

However, the army played an important role in the lives of these people. It was a means of immense social and occupational mobility. The army as an occupation acquired a respectable place in the society. Military establishments have important social implications, particularly in developing societies. In attempting to determine the relationship between the army and society, several points must be considered. Social attitudes towards military service were important. It was regarded as an honourable profession.¹¹ The relationship between citizenship and military service is significant. This may range from democratic egalitarianism, in which full citizenship included at least the possibility of military service, to pure

expediency and efficiency, in which only the best qualified and most willing are called upon. The function of the military as an agency of social occupational mobility may be considered in two ways: the structure of the military establishments replicate the social stratification pattern of society, and it attempts to alter these patterns.¹²

Caste and the Issue of Recruitment in the Madras Presidency Army

Writings on caste very often ignore the popular conceptions associated with this phenomenon. Caste as a concept generates interest among sociologists and historians around the world. Caste played a very significant role in Indian society and certainly it also had an impact on Indian army.¹³ In India, the caste system derives its ideological sustenance from sacred Hindu texts, which lay emphasis on a principle of binary opposition, in terms of purity and pollution. There is an overarching impression that all castes, whether high or low, conform to the single and somewhat fixed textual hierarchy. But there is considerable difference between what the textual view propounds and what actually takes place at the ground level. In fact, different caste groups adopt different strategies to interrogate the hierarchies and to establish their own notions of hierarchy and social standing. This explains the persistent attempts on the part of the 'lower castes' to repudiate the bonds of subordination that had been imposed on them, on the basis of the Hindu theory of *karma* and birth.¹⁴ This is equally true in the Indian army since the colonial period. Three Presidency armies followed different strategies to incorporate this concept of caste and subsequently the idea of *karma*. Among these, the Madras army exceptionally maintained this policy to make the army a more viable ladder for social mobilisation for particular caste groups that were in need.

Among the Governor's earliest acts was placing of the native contingent on an improved footing during the second half of the eighteenth century in the subcontinent. Records point to there being 280 peons in pay for the watch-and-guard of the suburbs who in this order were scattered about to be of little credit or force to the place. He also passed an order to call the Portuguese army, and trained the peons and moor inhabitants according to their ability.¹⁵ He made rules and passed orders for the military government.¹⁶ The period of Harrison's rule was marked by considerable military activity. He appointed many peons for watching the black town.¹⁷ Records mention that apart from the official deployment, the occupational castes were employed for security of the town. The military establishment consisted of 1,732 gunners, his first and second mates, 68 Europeans, 2 tindals and 27 lascars.¹⁸ General return of the troops in the East India Company's garrison at Fort St. George showed a remarkable presence of the occupational caste groups and their powers were utilised to capture and

extend the British dominion in Indian subcontinent and overseas as well.¹⁹ H.D. Love has referred to the various occupational caste groups who were employed in the Madras army in 1759.²⁰

Historians are divided on the issue of the social impact of the army on society during the eighteenth century in the subcontinent. Some say that it had a negative impact because of racial discrimination. Some say that it was a boon for the lower castes. Stephen P. Cohen is of the view that the army was very beneficial for Indian untouchables.²¹ Colonial ethnographers were pioneering actors in this respect whereby caste and race were identified as primary markers of the society. The new scholarly term for 'race' seems to have been 'ethnicity', which was introduced into academic discourse by American political sociologists.²² For Stephen P. Rosen, Indian society was characterised by caste divisiveness. Hence, the colonial army remained an agglomeration of various castes.²³ In a somewhat similar tune, DeWitt C. Ellinwood and Cynthia H. Enloe, following the historical sociological approach, argued that Indian society is ethnically fragmented. Ethnic identity is a product of primordial attachments resulting from religion, culture, language and political influence. So the Sepoy army, asserted Ellinwood and Enloe, reflected ethnic imbalances.²⁴ But more important than the fact that both society and the army contained ethnic cleavages was the fact that it was to the advantage of the coloniser to do so. As a result, one might argue as Enloe does, the ethnic imbalances were exaggerated, perhaps even produced, by the imperatives of the elite. For Rosen, divisions in the host society were automatically reflected in the army. Unlike Rosen, Enloe gave space to the programmes of the power elites. For Enloe, the degree and nature of ethnic imbalances in the armies were to an extent shaped by the politicians in power.²⁵ David Omissi noted that the ethnic make-up of the colonial army was not only shaped by the policies of the politicians and the generals, but also by the attitudes of the ethnic communities of the subcontinent. Those ethnic groups also calculated that they would gain from military services after joining the army.

So the ethnic composition of the colonial forces was the result of a fusion of the policies of colonial strategies and the dispositions of various ethnic groups.²⁶ In a plural social set-up (in an ethnically heterogeneous society), ethnicity has enormous social and political importance. In a way, ethnic policies are the products of political manipulations as well as 'natural' divisions within a society.²⁷ The presence of ethnic communities with distinct characteristics and jostling for power within the military bureaucracy remind one of internal factions of minds among groups. This is because the advocates of ethnicity accept that ethnic identities are closely related to interest-group orientations.²⁸ For political sociologists, ethnic policies pave the way for political socialisation and subsequent mobilisation.²⁹ The persistence of ethnic groups which are leftovers of the

pre-colonial state system even in modern armies somehow challenges the modernisation theory.³⁰

A group of scholars within the War and Society framework view the army as a modernising agency which transformed the peasant recruits into progressive individuals. This group could be categorised as the modernisation school. The modernisation theory became popular with American political scientists during the 1960s.³¹ Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan widened the analytical frame of the modernisation theory, and claimed that modernisation for global warfare not only modified the social relationship and mentality of the soldiers, but also transformed colonial society as a whole.³² The modernisation theorists occasionally viewed the army as modernising the state apparatus and culture of marginal groups such as women, lower castes and untouchables.³³ Stephen Cohen also supplemented this notion and informed that the colonial army functioned as an instrument of modernisation for the low castes.³⁴

Social Composition of the Madras Army

Due to a bias initially against recruiting men of high-caste origin, the Madras army in the second half of the eighteenth century was composed mainly of Muslims, middle-caste Hindus, some low castes and only a few high castes.³⁵ For instance, the 1st Infantry Regiment, which could be taken as a microcosm of the Madras Infantry in 1824, was composed of 45 per cent Muslims, 25.6 per cent Telingas and 14.5 per cent Tamils, 5 per cent low castes, and 9.2 per cent high castes. While most of the high castes came from Hindustan (Purab, that is, west Bihar, eastern and southern Awadh/Oudh, especially the Bhojpur region), the other communities came from Karnataka, Mysore and Andhra Pradesh.³⁶ Douglas M. Peers ascribes this preference for middle- and low-caste soldiers to the fact that military service was not the preserve of high-caste communities in south India.³⁷ Then too, the Bengal army monopolised the better sorts of higher-caste recruits from north India, leaving second-grade recruits for the Madras army.³⁸ However, we feel that the induction of low- and middle-caste recruits on the part of the Madras army was not entirely due to the non-availability of high-caste soldiers. There were deeper ideological underpinnings involved. Probably this decision to recruit low-caste recruits was intended to isolate the Indian contingent of the Madras army from local attachments and sensibilities. General Harris, one of the main proponents of low-caste recruitment, noted the lack of religious prejudices and local attachments, among others, as qualities of the low-caste recruits.³⁹

However, many castes and communities were taken as sepoys in the Madras army. Ardythe Basham, a Canadian scholar who has taken up the study of untouchables in the western army, points out that the Madras army consisted of low-caste Hindus, untouchables and Christian converts.

Besides, there were Pathan, Rajputs and Muslims from the northern states, Brahmins from Oudh, Bihar and Rohilkhand.⁴⁰ According to Stephen P. Cohen, the Madras army exclusively recruited untouchables as soldiers and they followed, as was expected, the principle that all armies were intended to fulfil the orders of the colonial government. In this way, the Madras army employed the Paraiya caste and within a short time they earned an important place in the army.⁴¹ The Paraiyans used to incorporate themselves in the colonial army so that they could explore their physical ability as well as earn maximum respect in the society. However, Streyntsham Master, the earliest Governor of Madras, was a person who made several disciplinary rules for the Madras army and gave orders to train all rank officers.⁴² Somehow, Madras Presidency gave new opportunity and new power to occupational caste groups like the Paraiyans in the army.

Agrestic Bondage, Caste and Social Segregation

Studies of the agrarian history of Madras Presidency have invariably stressed the importance of the Paraiyans as agricultural workers in varying degrees of bondage. A historiographical breakthrough was made when Dharma Kumar established that the great majority of members of the 'Tamil agricultural labour castes' followed their traditional occupations, and owned little or no land in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ The East India Company was extremely reluctant to institute drastic changes in the agrarian structure, especially at a time when paramountcy was just being consolidated and there was a great fear that revenue collection would be affected.⁴⁴ There was also an extreme reluctance to antagonise the agrarian elite in any way. The ritual and social inferiority of outcaste labourers like the Paraiyans were explored when the East India Company began a survey on them. They were victims of the inequities of the caste system.⁴⁵ They were obliged to live in separate settlements with separate public amenities. For instance, they were prevented from drawing water from wells of other castes but had their own next to their homes around which they placed the bones of animals so that they would be avoided. In extreme cases, when a caste Hindu spoke to a Paraiyan, the latter was obliged to hold his hand in front of his mouth to prevent the former from being contaminated by his breath; if he was met on the highway he had to cross the road to let the other pass; touching a Paraiyan meant that a purificatory bath was required. They were not allowed to enter the houses of other castes they were employed in; separate doors were reportedly made for them. Great care was taken not to eat anything cooked by them or drink out of their vessels – in fact it is said that if a Paraiyan so much as looked in the direction of an upper-caste kitchen, all the utensils in it had to be broken.⁴⁶

The daily indignity of being outcaste therefore was a part of the everyday life of a Paraiyan in a Tamil village. This was true regardless of occupation – for although most Paraiyans worked on land, they provided

other services as well. In fact the word Paraiyan has an association that has little to do with land; it is derived from the Tamil '*parai*' or drum, as some Paraiyans acted as drummers at marriages, funerals, village festivals and on occasions when government or commercial proclamations were announced. There were references to Paraiyan fishermen and hunters as well as occupations peculiar to their lowly caste status: grave diggers and conch bearers and wailers at funerals.⁴⁷

How did the Paraiyans themselves see the society and the position they occupied in it? In 1819, the Collector of South Arcot declared that they 'in time became so attached to the village in which they are settled, that they seem not to consider their situation, nor to show any desire to be free and independent'.⁴⁸ It was the colonial rule that offered alternative livelihood to them since the colonial documents often tried to project that. As we know that this was often the colonial claim, some may raise their voices against it. Under such circumstances, desertion of land had always been a frequent occurrence. This period offered new routes of escape. Collectors from all over Madras Presidency found that they were faced with angry landlords who complained bitterly that their workers had enlisted as sepoys in the Company army. Further, as colonial towns, particularly Madras, began to grow, the prospect of urban employment also increased. The adoption of 'alternative identities' did not merely represent protest against physical hardship and a striving for social and economic mobility. By the late eighteenth century, growing colonial towns began to offer substantial opportunities for employment to the lower castes. This was particularly true of Madras. In 1819 the Collector of Chingleput was to remark that

the condition of the people composing the chief part of the Pariahs of the district has of late been considerably changed. This may in great measure arise from the vicinity of their situation to Madras where this system is known to be abrogated many of them there find employment and their proprietors would find it difficult to reclaim them.⁴⁹

The setting up of the physical edifices of British rule began to demand a large number of workers for various activities. In such a situation, the Paraiyans found it exciting to join the Company army. In addition they worked as domestic servants.⁵⁰

Paraiyans and the Madras Army in the Nineteenth Century

The advent of British rule in south India provided the Paraiyans and kindred classes with opportunities of employment in the army. Paraiyans, as part of a dishonoured humanity, were scattered throughout the Tamil-speaking districts of Madras Presidency. Their population was concentrated heavily in Chingleput, South Arcot, North Arcot, Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts. They had mostly migrated from the surrounding countryside,

and were deeply influenced by their ties with and experiences in the rural world. 'Agricultural labourer' is the identity most frequently ascribed to the Paraiyans by colonial officials, missionaries and in agrarian histories of south India.⁵¹ By the nineteenth century, the British had designated and categorised the Paraiyan as 'agrestic slaves'. There has however been little questioning of the unproblematic imposition of the category of 'slavery' on the agricultural labour castes of south India, or to historicise and contextualise the dynamics of bondage.⁵² Like other caste groups, they too had many sub-divisions. Interestingly, these districts provided a large number of soldiers for the colonial army.⁵³ They were for long treated as 'untouchables' and their social inferiority was utilised by the upper castes to maintain their economic dominance in the agrarian sector. Naturally, there was a search for the upliftment of socio-economic conditions within the Paraiya community. They were looking for alternative employment which would give them economic freedom as well as societal respect. The colonial army during the second half of the eighteenth century started to form an army establishment in the south, and this opportunity served to help the Paraiyans and the British. The Paraiyans since the 1760s and 1770s had constituted the bulk of the foot soldiers in the Company's army.⁵⁴ In the following decades too they continued to find employment in the military department. The military depots functioning in Madras and Trichinopoly often served as recruitment centres for the Paraiyans. The British army bosses praised Paraiya recruits highly for their submissive nature and dutiful conduct. High-ranking British officials expressed the opinion that opportunities to serve in the army had inculcated among the 'untouchables' a certain degree of self-respect and independence. The Paraiyans also sometimes expressed their satisfaction at being offered employment in the British army, as it provided them with the privilege to experience the civil equality enjoyed by other British as well as native subjects.⁵⁵ The extremely docile and loyal attitude of Paraiyan soldiers towards their British seniors more than often accounted for their promotions.

Significantly, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, recruitment in the British army brought about important changes in the self-perceptions of ordinary Paraiyan soldiers. In fact, they might have realised that sincerity and devotion could guarantee an improvement in their economic status.⁵⁶ Thus, many of them adopted an overtly loyalist line to gain promotions to the ranks of non-commissioned officers in the regiments. The performance of the military rituals and drills also invoked in them a sense of belonging to a martial race. The award of the King Emperor's uniform instilled in them an idea that caste discrimination could no longer keep them tied to bonds of servitude and exploitation.⁵⁷

The Paraiyans were exclusively recruited for one of the regiments of the Indian army, more popularly known as the '*Queens Own Sappers and Miners*' till about the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ But, after the Great

Rebellion of 1857, there was a shift in the British government's military recruitment policy. At this time, the British military superiors felt that the recruitment policy needed to be based on the 'martial race' theory. It was argued that while recruiting soldiers from the various native communities, the military, social and environmental perspectives needed to be taken into account. In other words, different aspects of the martial race theory were employed to recruit native soldiers for the Indian army. Jats, Gurkhas, Sikhs and Pathans were recruited in large numbers in the Bengal, Bombay and the Madras armies.⁵⁹ These communities were believed to be more trustworthy, tough and hard-working than the native soldiers belonging to other communities.

Changing Attitudes of the Colonial British Military Officials

The Company's military officials had frequently praised the Paraiyan soldiers for their submissive nature and dutiful conduct. Some of them had opined that opportunities to serve in the army had inculcated in these recruits a degree of self-respect and independence. *The Calcutta Review* of 1859 pointed out that serving the Company's army was very much a satisfying experience for the Paraiyans, as it provided them with the opportunity to experience the civic equality enjoyed by other subjects of the Company.⁶⁰ Paraiyans also thought that the performance of military rituals and drills instilled in them the idea of belonging to a martial race. There was a belief that the prestige associated with a military uniform would ultimately pave the way for elimination of all forms of caste discrimination, and the 'untouchables' would no longer be kept tied to the bonds of exploitation and servitude.⁶¹

The colonial Indian army represented, to the Paraiyans, one of the most effective channels for upward social mobility.⁶² In traditional India, a person's station in life and his occupation were determined mainly by his birth, and social mobility remained highly restricted. It permitted a man to rise in social position through sheer ability, performance and merit, and this had a special appeal to the lower-caste people in the country, the untouchables in particular. In the beginning, there were some restrictions imposed on the scheduled castes; recruitment was mostly confined to certain classes of people and any position of importance in the army was occupied either by the British or Indian elite.⁶³ The army was later opened to all the castes and classes in the country, though in a relatively restricted way. Those belonging to the lower classes played a crucial role in the suppression of the 1857 Mutiny. This revolutionised the social and political outlook of most of the untouchable castes in the country. Realising the important role played by the military for the uplift of the lower classes in the country, B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the erstwhile untouchable castes, hailing from a family of military traditions, openly encouraged untouchable castes like the Mahars to join the army in vast numbers for social and political uplift.⁶⁴

As the military was one of the modernising forces in India, and as it was identified with the rulers in power, some regarded a career in the military as a means for social advance and prestige. The native who joined the army at that time was not an outcaste, but the mainstay and pride of his house and community. When he returned home he began to boast that he was eating 'British salt', and in the marriage market he was rated only second to members of the Indian Administrative Service.⁶⁵

From the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, changes occurred in the recruitment policy. Besides, there was an appreciable decline in the number of Paraiyan soldiers around this time. In the 1870s, the British military officials favoured the recruitment of upper-caste Hindus, Christians and Muslims, particularly in the Madras Presidency army.⁶⁶ However, the Paraiyans did have an impressive presence in some of the branches of the military department. In fact, as late as the 1890s, they enjoyed a virtual monopoly as sappers and miners. The upper-caste apathy towards menial occupations was partly responsible for the impressive presence of Paraiyans in certain branches of the army. So, we could say that, among the various factors, the upper-caste apathy and the contemporary army as an institution gave the Paraiyans an opportunity to make better fortune.⁶⁷

In the early 1890s, the disbandment of the old Presidency armies as well as the increasing recruitment of north Indian martial races denied the Paraiyans further opportunities for future recruitments in the army. The Paraiyan community leaders were greatly disturbed by these developments. Most of them believed that military employment could act as a channel for their economic and social mobility. The memorandums and petitions sent to the British government by the Paraiyan community leaders like Pandit C. Iyothee Thoss clearly brought out the importance the community members attached to military service. In a memorandum sent to a government official in 1894, Iyothee Thoss emphasised that government intervention was needed to improve the conditions of the 'untouchables', since they had displayed great valour and sacrifice as soldiers.⁶⁸ But Iyothee Thoss was not the lone person to raise the issue of preferential treatment in lieu of the long-standing military service offered by members of the socially despised communities. The small coterie comprising Paraiyan ex-servicemen and army pensioners also raised this issue to establish themselves as the real representatives of the community. Thus it could be argued that a long-standing involvement with the British Indian army served as one of the key elements behind the growth of Paraiyan community consciousness in the Madras Presidency.⁶⁹ Thus the army in a way helped to define a sense of Paraiyan community identity even when excluding Paraiyans from service in the army.

Conclusion

The discussion on the Paraiyans of south India has tried to trace the transformation of the community from a marginalised group to one that

was believed to be one of prized recruits for the colonial army. While the narrative dwells on their exalted status as military subalterns within the general set-up of the army department, it also traces their subsequent declining position in the department under colonial rule. Though they depended primarily on agriculture for their survival, a large section of them also joined the army. The Madras army had given much benefit to the occupational caste groups and became a source of their social occupational mobility. It gave them a new sense of identity and power as a caste. They received education and training from the English, which produced some martial qualities among the Paraiyans. Slowly, the situation became critical for the Paraiyans because the army officials changed their recruitment patterns, and lastly came the question of amalgamation of the three Presidency armies. This gave them a rude shock since the army officers preferred the north Indian martial races for the sake of the army's integrity and survival in the subcontinent. The army, which had once acted as a source of social and economic mobility for the Paraiyans, under the changed circumstances, barred the same group from employment, thereby sanctifying the discrimination of groups that were believed to be low down on the social scale. Thus, while the Paraiyans began their career on a promising note, the developments in the course of a century witnessed a downslide in their professional fortunes. Perhaps there was very little validity in regarding the army as a government agency that could secure their economic and social improvement.

Notes and References

- 1 Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 45–49.
- 2 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History*, (Berkeley, 2005), p. 89.
- 3 Edward Shils, 'The Military in the Political Development of the New States', in John J. Johnson, ed., *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 57–67.
- 4 Lucian W. Pye, 'Armies in the Process of Political Modernization', in *ibid.*, pp. 68–89; and Hans Daalder, *The Role of the Military in the Emerging Countries* (The Hague, 1962), pp. 12–16.
- 5 The very term modernisation denotes some kinds of westernised notion. Many of the characteristics of economically developed societies supplemented the notion of modernisation. Sometimes, this has been reflected in the countries of the Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia. Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (London, 1958), p. 89; Wilbert E. Moore, *Social Change* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 90.
- 6 There are various definitions of modernisation, but in this paper, by modernisation I mean the process of social change where less economically developed groups acquire characteristics common to more economically developed groups of a society. In this paper, the less economically developed group refers to lower-caste people who thought of joining the colonial army as a source of socio-cultural and economic uplift.

- 7 The colonial Indian army followed the European model, combining the Indian traditional methods of organisation and functioning in the subcontinent and abroad. See, John J. Johnson, *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (New York, 1962), p. 43.
- 8 *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, 1907), p. 402, and Nicolas Dirks, *Castes of Minds: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 78.
- 9 In some cases yes, but in other cases the British intervention probably had the reverse effect: consolidating the influence of the higher castes in Bengal for example. See Hara Prasad Chattopadhyaya, *The Sepoy Mutiny, 1857: A Social Study and Analysis* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 34.
- 10 The Paraiyans, who were scattered over a large part of Tamil Nadu, comprised the largest 'untouchable' agricultural labouring community in early nineteenth-century Madras Presidency. It was widely believed that they derived their name from the Tamil word *parai*, denoting a musical instrument resembling a drum or a tom-tom. In their writings, the English officials frequently referred to them as a community of drummers who performed during funerals and village festivals. The term Paraiyan, in terms of a caste, or more correctly an occupational nomenclature, is believed to have first appeared in a poem of Mangudi Kilar of the second century AD. For more details, see Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956* (New Delhi, 2011), p. 11, and Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion and the Social in Modern India* (New York, 2014), p. 19.
- 11 Ardythe Basham, *Untouchable Soldiers: The Mahars and the Mazhbis*, Bhagwan Das, ed. (New Delhi, 2008), p. 19.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 13 Dipankar Gupta, *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society* (New Delhi, 2000), p. 1.
- 14 Dipankar Gupta, 'Towards Affirmative Action', in Ira Pandey, ed., *India 60* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 153.
- 15 Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Book, 1778, Tamil Nadu Archives (henceforth TNA), p. 107.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 108-09.
- 17 Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Book, 1714, TNA, p. 133.
- 18 Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Book, 1732, TNA. This describes the various duties of the occupational caste groups. These are as follows: 8 persons were disposed at the inner Fort gunroom, 21 were at the Saluting battery, 12 were at the new Power house, 9 were at the Garden point, 6 were at the Queen point, 2 were at the bridge point, 2 at the spur point, 2 were at the Clark point, 2 were at the Clark gate, 2 were at the Madepollam point and 2 were at Fleet point, and the total was 68 persons who were in charge of the all-round security of the garrison.
- 19 The return shows the presence of the occupational caste groups. The numbers are as follows: Troops of Horse were 35, Royal Artillery were 132, the Honourable Company's Artillery were 64, His Majesty's 64th Regiment were 195, the Detachment of Marines were 100, the Honourable Company's 1st Battalion were 625, the Honourable Company's 2nd Battalion were 375, Supernumeraries were 32 in numbers and the total was 1,758 whereas the officers in these said battalions were only 94. For more details, see Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Book, 1749-50, p. 32 and the list of servants on p. 202 in the same record, TNA.
- 20 H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras 1640-1800*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi, 1996), p. 140; first published, 1913.
- 21 Stephen Peter Cohen, *Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 45.

- 22 The distinction is that ethnicity emphasises more than just skin colour, which race was often more or less directly equated with, even though it was clearly used in a wide variety of ways.
- 23 Stephen P. Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and Its Armies* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 5.
- 24 DeWitt C. Ellinwood and Cynthia H. Enloe, 'Preface', in Ellinwood and Enloe, eds., *Ethnicity and the Military in Asia* (New Brunswick/New Jersey, 1981), p. 2.
- 25 Cynthia H. Enloe, 'Ethnicity in the Evolution of Asia's Armed Bureaucracies', in *ibid.*, pp. 2–14.
- 26 David Omissi, 'Martial Races: Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India, 1858–1939', *War and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1991, pp. 2–27.
- 27 Zakaria Haji Ahmed, 'The Bayonet and the Truncheon: Army and Police Relations in Malaysia', in Ellinwood and Enloe, eds., *Ethnicity and the Military in Asia*, pp. 209–10.
- 28 Lancy Bruce Fields, 'Ethnicity in Tso Tsung-T'ang's Armies: The Campaigns in North West China, 1867–80', in *ibid.*, pp. 55–74.
- 29 William R. Heaton, 'The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Minority Nationalities', in *ibid.*, p. 177.
- 30 Constance M. Wilson, 'Burmese–Karen Warfare, 1840–50: A Thai View', in *ibid.*, p. 19.
- 31 For a discussion on these aspects, see Jonathan R. Adelman, 'The Formative Influence of the Civil Wars: Societal Roles of the Soviet and Chinese Armies', *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1978, pp. 93–116.
- 32 DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan, 'Introduction', in Ellinwood and Pradhan, eds., *India and World War I* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 2–18.
- 33 Carol Hills and Daniel C. Silverman, 'Nationalism and Feminism in Late Colonial India: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment, 1943–45', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1993, pp. 742–60.
- 34 Stephen P. Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1969, pp. 453–68.
- 35 Henry Russell, *Select Committee for Indian Affairs, 1831–32*, Minutes of evidence, Vol. 13, TNA, p. 567.
- 36 Henry Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta, 1922), Appendix, p. i.
- 37 Douglas M. Peers, 'Habitual Nobility of Being: British officers and the Social construction of the Bengal Army in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, Issue 3, 1991, pp. 551–52.
- 38 Kaushik Roy, 'Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army, 1859–1913', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1997, pp. 345–46. Here he argues that a lobby existed in the pre-1857 Madras army, which pursued an open door policy of recruitment. General Harris was one of the prominent proponents of the open door policy won against the selective enlistment school due to certain factors. One of the reasons was that the Awadh and Bengal armies had the first choice of Brahmin and Rajput recruits in these areas. As a result, the Bengal army acquired the better variety of Purbiya recruits, leaving the second-grade high-caste personnel for the Madras army. So the Madras army decided to go for the non-high caste men.
- 39 W.J. Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, Vol. 3 (Madras, 1883), p. 151.
- 40 Ardythe Basham, *Untouchable Soldiers*, p. 9.
- 41 Stephen Peter Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier'.
- 42 Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Book, 1678, p. 122. See also Diary and Consultation Book, Military Department File No. 123/2, TNA, 1679.

- 43 Dharma Kumar drew a close link between caste and occupation in this period by using evidence from the official reports that used caste names as synonymous with 'agrestic slaves'. She then proceeded to extrapolate census data on caste from the early twentieth century to arrive at the number of landless agricultural labourers in the beginning of the previous century. See, for more, Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1965).
- 44 By 1800 Madras had been transformed from a fishing village to a modern metropolis that was the seat of government in south India as well as a major centre of trade and industry. By the mid-eighteenth century, Paraiyans constituted 10 per cent of the city's population and by 1830 at least forty identified untouchable settlements existed in Madras. As the East India Company began to settle down, administrative and military establishments had to build within Fort St. George; sub-urbs had to contain residential quarters, hospitals, churches, schools. Both the physical labour required for setting up Madras and the domestic service required by Europeans in the city were provided by the low castes. For more, see C.D. Maclain, *The Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1885), pp. 68-69; Susan Neild, 'Colonial Urbanism: The Development of Madras City in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 21, 1979, p 227.
- 45 David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia*, Part 4, Vol. 4 (New Delhi, 1979), p. 114.
- 46 Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VII (Madras, 1909), pp. 78-79.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78 and 81.
- 48 Report from the Collector of South Arcot, Board of Revenue Consultation, Vol. 840, 25 November 1820, TNA.
- 49 Report from the Collector of Chingleput, Board of Revenue Consultation, Vol. 840, 25 November 1819, TNA.
- 50 The different kinds of Paraiyan domestic servants have been mentioned in 1780 in 'The humble petition of all the Pariar Cast residing in Madras'. The Paraiyans described themselves as 'menial servants to the Gentlemen and ladies of this Settlement, such as Butlers, Butler's Mates, Cook's Mates, Roundel Boys, Coachmen, Palanquin Boys, House Keepers, Grass Cutters, Dry and Wet Nurses, Water Wenches, Scavengers, Cart Drivers, Tots, Women Sweepers, and Lamp Lighters'. H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol. 3 (London, 1929), p. 165 and Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem*.
- 51 The origin of the Paraiyans' traditional role in rural society has been discussed in Baker's study of the Tamil countryside as well as in the works of Burton Stein and David Ludden, accepted classics on peasant history in pre-colonial south India. It is held that it was in Tamil Nadu's wet-zone areas, its fertile river valleys and deltas, which had become by the tenth century centres of a rich agricultural and trading economy, that those caste titles were first used for agricultural labour. Names like Paraiyan were used to denote servility and dependence by upper-caste Vellalar agriculturists who, in alliance with their Brahman ritual specialists, subordinated the rest of society. See Christopher Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy 1880-1955: The Tamil Nadu Countryside* (Delhi, 1984), pp. 19-46; Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1980), p. 59; David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 15-46.
- 52 Dharma Kumar's careful study of official reports and papers on slavery does reveal that the extent and nature of bondage varied so greatly from area to area that there was a need for certain scepticism as to the aptness of British terms to discuss agrarian relations in India. See Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*.

- 53 General Order of the Governor, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1852, TNA, p. 145.
- 54 T.P. Kamalanathan, *K. Veeramani is Refuted and the Historical facts about the Scheduled Caste Struggle for Emancipation in India*, Tiruppathur, 1985, p. 35.
- 55 *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 33, 1859, p. 143.
- 56 Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children*, p. 160.
- 57 Ibid. See also V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millenium: from Iyothee Thoss to Periyar* (Calcutta, 1998), p. 72.
- 58 T.P. Kamalanathan, *Veeramani is Refuted*, p. 34.
- 59 For more details, see Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (New York, 2004); Kaushik Roy, *Brown Warriors of the Raj: Recruitment and the Mechanics of Command in the Sepoy Army, 1859–1913* (New Delhi, 2008); David Omissi, '“Martial Races”: Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India 1858–1939', *War and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1991; and Stephen P. Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier', p. 456.
- 60 *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 33, 1859, p. 143.
- 61 V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium*.
- 62 Generally, historians like A. Bopegamage, Stephen P. Rosen, Stephen P. Cohen, Seema Alavi and most recently Raj Sekhar Basu argue that joining the colonial army for the lower classes like the Paraiyans became very significant as it helped them achieve upward social mobility. See A. Bopegamage, 'The Military as a Modernizing Agent in India', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1971, p. 75; Seema Alavi, *The Sepoy and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770–1830* (New Delhi, 1995), p. 67; Stephen P. Cohen, 'The Untouchable Soldier', p. 87; Stephen P. Rosen, *Societies and Military Power*, p. 90; Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children*, p. 161; and Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem*, p. 13.
- 63 A. Bopegamage, 'The Military as a Modernizing Agent in India', p. 11.
- 64 Along with B.R. Ambedkar, some of the national leaders of the country, such as Gokhale, Nehru and Patel, and other popular leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, Desai and Savarkar, also realised the importance of the military as a social and political modernising force in the country. For more details, see Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 336–37; Sardar Patel, 'The Role of the Army', in *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel, 1947–50* (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 168–69; Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), p. 246; Bhulabhai Desai, *Speeches of Bhulabhai J. Desai, 1934–38* (Madras, 1938).
- 65 A. Bopegamage, 'Caste, Class and the Indian Military', in Jacobus Adrianus Antonius van Doorn, ed., *Military Profession and Military Regimes: Commitments and Conflicts* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 107–27.
- 66 Madras Army Records, Box 10, Series II, January 1872, TNA, cited in Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children*.
- 67 T.P. Kamalanathan, *Veeramani is Refuted*, p. 34.
- 68 Pandit C. Iyothee Thoss, Open letter to the Hon'ble Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar (Inspector General of Registration), Madras, 1894, Theosophical Society Library, Adyar, p. 4, cited in Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children*.
- 69 Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children*, p. 162.

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