

# REACTIONS OF THE PEOPLE IN TAMIL NADU TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES IN BRITISH INDIA

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## Abstract

This paper is to study about Reactions of the People in Tamil Nadu to the Public services in British India. The British considered Indians unworthy of trust and they could not be allowed to fill in any but the humblest offices in the government. This attitude aroused suspicion in the minds of Indians. Indians, especially the Tamils started opposing this attitude of the British tooth and nail. The age limit was fixed at twenty three years. In 1859, the age limit was reduced to twenty-two. In 1866, it was further reduced to twenty-one and finally to nineteen in 1876. This policy went against the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 which stated "no discrimination could be made in the matter of public employment on the basis of caste, creed and race". Even though the natives took great pain in this regard, the government did nothing in favor of them till 1922 when the government conceded their demands and introduced competitive examination. The British rulers would have got the same amount of loyalty, efficiency and uprightness from the Indian officers as they got from the Europeans and Englishmen if they had given due consideration to the Indians in this particular issue.

**Keywords:** Anglo-Indians, Exploited Indigenous agency, Civil Servant and Proclamation

## Introduction

The British excluded the Indians from holding higher positions in the government services. The best jobs were given to the Europeans in general and the English in particular. The English educated Indians were also exempted from being members in the superior grade of educational service. The British considered Indians unworthy of trust and they could not be allowed to fill in any but the humblest offices in the government. This attitude aroused suspicion in the minds of Indians. Indians, especially the Tamils started opposing this attitude of the British tooth and nail.

## Branches of Public services

Different branches of public services such as military, covenanted and uncovenanted invited the wrath of the Indians. The natives were looked upon as a cheap material. The editor of Vivekavardhani, criticised the distinction shown by the British on a native and a European. The paper remarked, whenever a permanent vacancy arose the European was preferred. In the military service to the Indians got only low grade posts like sepoy. The high grade vacancies like captains, colonels and majors were reserved for the Europeans. The natives received appointments only in the third grade of civil servants, i.e., the uncovenanted. But, in this grade too, they got employments in their restricted scale. However, the British considering the public opinion on this issue came forward in introducing the system of competitive

examination for the civil service in the year 1853. The examinations were held only in England. The age limit was fixed at twenty three years. In 1859, the age limit was reduced to twenty-two. In 1866, it was further reduced to twenty-one and finally to nineteen in 1876. This policy went against the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 which stated "no discrimination could be made in the matter of public employment on the basis of caste, creed and race".

### **Tough pattern**

The system of competitive examination did not operate to the advantage of Indians. It became a safe preserve for Englishmen. As Satyamurti once said, 'India, the poorest country in the world was saddled with the world's costliest civil service. If they were arrogant and adamant and the government ever willing to oblige them, it was because in India the services call the tune and the people play the piper'. In 1863, T. Pycroft, the Chief Secretary and the confidential adviser of Governor of Madras reported that those who had been qualified for the public service had passed their examination in vernacular languages with in a very short span of time. They did not show any interest to acquire oriental dialects. It was further stated that the men of the new order would furnish a larger supply of public servants fitted for the important offices which had to be filled from Madras Civil Service. The old system of nomination had broken down and the then system of competitive examination was superior to the former system. In 1866, when the age limit was reduced to twenty-one, the probationers had to pass a special two year course in an approved University. The examination pattern was very tough .However, three Bengalis entered into covenanted civil service in the year 1869. Of the seven competitors who appeared for the examination in 1870, one candidate was successful.

### **Madras Native Association and Civil Service**

The year 1873 was an important year as far as the Civil Service question for the Madras Presidency was concerned. From Madras, eight candidates were selected. In 1874, the Secretary of State intimated, through a despatch, to the Madras Government that Messrs., Tate, Bird, Faweett and more were appointed as the members of the Madras Civil Service. Madras Native Association played a vital role in this regard. The petition of Madras Native Association demanded an increased employment of indigenous agency in the administration of the country. It suggested that the covenanted civil service should if not wholly at least partially be abandoned. It was also of the opinion that the educated and trained natives of India, who were acting as proxies in the performance of the function be placed under their own personal responsibility.

### **Lord Lytton's proposal**

In 1879, Lord Lytton proposed to close the covenanted Civil Service to the Indians and to create 'a close native service' to satisfy the provisions of the 1870 Act. However, the despatch was rejected and hence the Government of India was compelled to frame new rules and regulations. Accordingly in 1879 rules were framed. The statutory section of the Civil Service was built up. These rules empowered the Governor General in Council to appoint a number of Indians of good family and social standing from among the persons recommended by the Provincial Governments. This number should not exceed one-fifth of the numbers recommended by the Secretary of State. The proportion was reduced to one-sixth by the British Government. In order to prevent Indians from joining the competitive examinations, the maximum age for the Indian Civil Service Examination was reduced to nineteen years.

### **Benevolent Policy of Lord Ripon**

During the viceroyalty of Lord Ripon, a good number of natives succeeded in the competitive examinations. This aroused jealousy among the English men who raised the banner of protest against Lord Ripon. He tried to increase the age limit of the candidates who were recruited into Civil Service. The English men who arrived in India became immature as they were guided by Anglo-Indians. This led Lord Ripon to

appoint matured Englishmen. The approval of Government of India was required for such appointments. A civil servant accepting an appointment above the grade of collector or district judge should be understood to forego the intention of applying, except under special circumstances for ordinary leave of absence during the two years immediately following the appointments. Every civil servant was bound to serve whenever the government at any period of his career required him to go. Assistant Collectors were also required to know the works of collector's office. They should be aware of the reports upon the original settlement of the revenue of the districts in which they were stationed. The collectors also allowed the sub-collectors and head assistant collectors to accompany them whenever they were on tours.

### **Role of Madras Mahajanasaba**

The fluctuation in the rules connected with Civil Service Examinations was resented to by the Tamils. In the national agitation, the Tamils too took active part. They expressed their reaction through memorandum and news papers. Memorandums became very effective. In this respect the role of Madras Mahajana Saba seemed to be ever remembered. On 4 November 1884 the Madras Mahajana Saba submitted a memorandum to the Government of India. It expressed the aspirations of the people and demanded not only to relax the age limit but also to conduct the examination both in England and in India. The memorialists pointed out that the successive reduction of age was followed by a proportionate reduction in the number of competitors for the examination. As an example, they stated that in 1869 the number was 323, in 1879, 327, but in 1881 and 1882 it was 182 and 147 respectively. When the age limit for competitions was raised, the candidates found it easy to appear for examination four times.

### **Reactions of the Press**

There were discussions in the press and in the Congress Party meetings. The editor of **Prakasika** requested that as the age of the candidates in other British colonies was fixed at twenty four years, the same age limit to be fixed in India also. The Indians were put in too much hardship when they were asked to undergo the examination in England. The **Vivekavartani** expressed that it added fuel to fire when the natives were asked to undertake a traveling to a far away distance by spending a huge sum of money. The Hindus should make representation before the Queen's Privy Council in order to obtain justice. The Indian Reform Association that was duly inaugurated in London on 5 March 1884 took up the issue of Indian Civil Service. On 3 April 1884, an influential deputation of the association waited upon the Secretary of State, Kimberley and urged him to fix twenty one years as the maximum age for competing the Civil Service Examination.

### **Indian National Congress sessions**

The first session of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in 1885 took up the issue of Indian Civil Service Examination. Resolution No. IV of the Congress stated that the Civil Service Examination held only in England then should be held simultaneously in India also. The successful candidates of both India and England should be put in a single list and that the successful Indian candidates be sent to England for further studies. The resolution further stated that all other first appointments were to be filled by competitive examination held in India. The maximum age of candidates for the entrance into the Covenanted Civil Service be raised to not less than twenty three years.

In the meantime, there developed a desire among the public in Tamilnadu that a Royal Commission was to be appointed to deal with the question of Civil Service Examination. **Swadesamitran** on 13 March 1886 expressed the view of Bombay Mahajana Sabha on this issue. The Sabha wanted that the government should appoint a Royal Commission. In course of time, the Indians found inadequacy in the rules framed by the statutory sections of the Civil Service in 1879. It was mentioned that the Governor General in Council

was to appoint a certain number of good family and social standing. This clause of the rules was exploited by the British Government in India. Men without adequate qualifications or general ability were appointed in the place that they belonged to families of good standing. A strong agitation was launched in India against this. As a result, in 1886 Lord Dufferin appointed a commission in 1886 to examine the whole questions. The commission was presided over by Sir. Charles Aitchison and consisted of fifteen members, of whom five were Indians. A committee set up under the president ship of Dadabhai Naoroji passed a resolution on 29 December 1886 and was placed before the second session of the Congress held at Calcutta in 1886. It strongly suggested the holding of simultaneous examinations both in England and India.

The examination was to be opened to all, irrespective of colour, race or creed. Sanskrit and Arabic were the subjects for the examinations. Pure merit was to be followed in the selection. The age limit was fixed at nineteen. The simultaneous examinations should be held in different parts of the country. Further it resolved to appoint a committee composed of the gentlemen of India to consider the public service question. by S. Subramania and G. SubamaniaIyer from Tamilnadu found a place in the committee. **Swadesamitran** on 29 January 1887 expressed the view that since the maximum age fixed was nineteen they became immature. Therefore the editor requested the government to increase the age to twenty three. **Hindu Jana Samskarini** also of the same opinion that the government should raise the age for Civil Service Examination from nineteen to twenty three and it should abandon the practice of reserving jobs for Europeans and thereby more seats were to be conferred on natives.

### Lord Dufferin's recommendation

The commission appointed by Lord Dufferin submitted its full report in 1887. It recommended for the abolition of simultaneous examinations for the covenanted Civil Service and statutory Civil Service. The public services were to be divided into three grades. They were Imperial, Provincial and Subordinate. The Provincial Civil Service and Subordinate Civil Service were exclusively for Indians. As far as the Imperial Civil Service was concerned, all the rules were put in the way of Indians entering into it. All the important posts were put in this group. Indians were excluded either by the pretext of race or by practical difficulties. Admission to Provincial Service was made through examinations, nominations, by Provincial Governments and promotion from subordinate service. The commission recommended the maximum age as twenty-three.

The Congress Party appreciated the concession proposed in the report of the Public Service Commission. Yet the Congress opinioned that justice would never be done to the people of this country until the open competitive examination for the Civil Service of India was held simultaneously in England and in India. On 3 October 1888, the Government of India passed a bill in regard to the Civil Service issue. It was decided to hold simultaneous examination in London on 1 June 1889. The selected candidates would be placed in the lower and upper provinces of Bengal, Burma, Madras and Bombay.

The public had complaints about the treatment of Indian and European civil servants. **Vrittantachintamony** was of the opinion that the British Government in India showed partiality to Europeans with regard to the appointments made even in the offices of superintendents and Assistant Superintendent of Police. **Sudarshana** observed that the concessions made by the Secretary of State to the natives of India with regard to the higher appointments in the public service were not calculated to give any sort of satisfaction to the people since the position of the natives was in no way improved.

On 2 June 1893, the House of Commons passed a resolution which accepted the holding of simultaneous examination in England and India for the Indian Civil Service. The Government of India remained indifferent to the resolution and did not take any effective steps to implement the same. Since the government did not take initiative to implement the resolution of the House of Commons, people started appealing to the government to implement it with immediate effect. On 30 July, 1893, a letter was sent by the members of the 'Banerjee Reading Room' to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Fort St. George.

The letter placed few suggestions before the government and requested that the resolution should be implemented at a faster rate. Meetings were held in different parts of Tamilnadu.

In July 1893 a public meeting was held at Trichirapally. It was decided that the Viceroy should be requested to adopt the resolution holding simultaneous examinations both in England and in India. A telegram was sent to the Viceroy on 31 July 1893. A similar meeting was held on 20 July 1893 at Nagapatnam. It was resolved to appreciate the resolution of the House of Commons on the Civil Service issue. It made it clear that the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 would remain a dead letter until the Civil Service was freely opened to the natives through the Civil Service Examination to be conducted both in England and India. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who presided over the meeting at Nagapatnam wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Fort St. George, Madras requesting him to hold simultaneous examination both in England and in India.

S.N. Banerjee mobilised the support of the people all over the country to discuss the civil service questions. He called on leaders of Madras including Mr. Chensal Row, the Hon'able Humayoon Teg Bahadur and others and urged them to hold a public meeting. But the meeting could not be held in Madras. However, he succeeded in convening the leaders at Pachayyappa's Hall for a conference at which their memorial and resolutions were adopted. He appreciated the people of Tamilnadu and commented that "today Tamilnadu, is fully on line with the rest of India as regards its public spirit and its efforts for the public good".

The Nineteenth Session of the Congress held at Madras in 1903 concurred with the resolutions of the previous Congress session on the question of public service appointments. The resolution stated that the Government of India proved void of any good result to the people of the country. The recommendations of the commission did not do justice to the claims of the people of the country. Further it condemned the policies of the government banning the appointment of Indians in the public and railway services. It is pointed that it was a grave violation of the pledges and assurances given by the government. The Congress affirms that the economic drain of the country was caused by the then system of appointments and so it wanted the government to utilise the vast knowledge and experience that the educated Indians would get through training in the public service. Therefore it demanded a policy of free employment in all branches of the services.

On 24 May 1904, the Government of India passed a resolution on the subject of the employment of Indians in the higher grades of the Public Service Commission. The twenty first Session of the Congress in 1905 strongly protested against the above resolution since it was inconsistent with those laid down in the Parliamentary Statute of 1833 and the Queen's Proclamation of 1858. This resolution deviated from arrangements arrived at by the government after careful examination of the whole question by a public commission. The Congress reaffirmed its conviction that the real remedy lay in the wider employment of Indians in the higher branches of public service. It demanded the reorganization of the Indian Civil Service which should be reconstituted on a decentralized basis. Moreover the Congress was opined that since the government policies of bringing unfit men into service and a system of appointment by official favor etc. degraded the administration. Therefore the Congress urged the Government of India to restore the competitive test for the provincial service wherever it was abolished.

## Conclusion

Even though the natives took great pain in this regard, the government did nothing in favor of them till 1922 when the government conceded their demands and introduced competitive examination. The British rulers would have got the same amount of loyalty, efficiency and uprightness from the Indian officers as they got from the Europeans and Englishmen if they had given due consideration to the Indians in this particular issue.

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