

Military loyalty in the colonial context: A case study of the Indian army during World War II.

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Abstract

The British colonial regime in India was heavily dependent on the Indian Army, whose rank and file were Indians but whose officers were British. Despite the apathy of the Indian populace and the hostility of the Indian political parties, the Indian Army remained loyal to its colonial masters during World War II. This article examines the extent of that loyalty and the reasons behind it. Focusing principally on the Indian units that fought in Burma, it analyzes combat motivation and loyalty throughout the war. The article also considers the British elite's concern about the Indian soldiers' loyalty and whether it would change during postwar demobilization.

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Abstract

The British colonial regime in India was heavily dependent on the Indian Army, whose rank and file were Indians but whose officers were British. Despite the apathy of the Indian populace and the hostility of the Indian political parties, the Indian Army remained loyal to its colonial masters during World War II. This article examines the extent of that loyalty and the reasons behind it. Focusing principally on the Indian units that fought in Burma, it analyzes combat motivation and loyalty throughout the war. The article also considers the British elite's concern about the Indian soldiers' loyalty and whether it would change during postwar demobilization.

The colonial regime in India was heavily dependent on the Indian Army, whose rank and file were Indians but whose officers were mostly British. The loyalty of the colonized towards the colonizers was structured by the colonial context. F. W. Perry rightly asserts that despite the apathy of the Indian populace and the hostility of the Indian political parties, the Indian Army remained more or less loyal to the British during World War II.¹ This article attempts to show to what extent the Indian Army remained loyal and examine the reasons behind it. A tenuous link between combat effectiveness, morale, and discipline operated. Discipline and morale in turn were linked with loyalty. This article analyzes the imperial

1. F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies: Manpower and Organisation in Two World Wars* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1988), 119.

Kaushik Roy is an Associate Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) in the International Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). His latest publications are *Brown Warriors of the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008); and *1857 Uprising: A Tale of an Indian Warrior* (Kolkata and London: Anthem, 2008).

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