

The Indian Civil Service and the Raj: 1919-1947

The Indian Civil Service (ICS) was the administrative arm of the British Raj in India, and was closely identified with colonial rule. One picture of the ICS is summed up in the title of Philip Woodruff's famous history -- *The Men Who Ruled India* (a title echoed by David Gilmour's recent book, *The Ruling Caste*). The image of the ICS officer as ruler runs through many British accounts of the Raj.

Indian ICS officers are curiously absent from Woodruff's account, even though they formed more than half the service at Independence. Even more curiously, Indians who wrote about their experiences in the ICS routinely emphasized their role as "servants" rather than as rulers, in memoirs with titles like "Under Two Masters." These memoirs are carefully constructed to disavow their association from the Raj. The image presented is of ambivalent but diligent civil servants, whose "just did their job" despite their nationalist sympathies.

Not surprisingly, the ICS was the target of nationalist sentiment before Independence: what is surprising, perhaps, is that the newly Independent Indian state chose to retain the ICS structure and personnel more-or-less unchanged after 1947. My paper is a study of how this came to be -- how was it that the colonial administrative structure survived more-or-less intact through a major change of political regime?

My paper addresses three questions in particular:

- (1) just what *was* the role of the ICS with respect to the nationalist movement?
- (2) how did *Indian* ICS officers experience, and then present, this role?
- (3) how was it that the ICS structure was left unchanged after independence, in the face of great hostility and opposition?

Along the way, I attempt to elucidate the elusive notion of "bureaucratic neutrality," and assess the role it actually played in the story of ICS transition.