

Military parade during Indian Republic Day

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In news— A grand show of India's military might, as well as its diverse culture, the Republic Day parade holds a close place in many Indian hearts.

Historical background to Military parade-

- There is a historical link between strong displays of soldiers and weaponry, and national pride.
- **Accounts dating as far back as the Mesopotamian civilisation mention marching soldiers.**
- Through the sacred Gate of Ishtar in Babylon, returning warrior kings would march into the city down a passage flanked by 60 giant lion statues on either side, with murals of the gods smiling upon them.
- In the heyday of the Roman Empire, victorious generals would lead a procession into the capital, surrounded by frenzied crowds on all sides.
- **The reason being, through the grand show of force that an organised marching contingent of soldiers displayed, legacies of triumph** and near-mystical power were forged in the minds of onlookers and beyond.
- As empires gave way to nation-states, the tone of the military parade continued to remain the same.
- With rising nationalism in Europe in the 19th century, military parades became national symbols that were supposed to capture the collective frenzy of a nation's inhabitants into feelings of nationalism.
- **The Prussian army (with Prussia consisting largely of modern-day Germany) is said to have been the pioneer of modern military parades.**
- From the notorious "goose-step," that would become a symbol of the Nazi army, to many of the popular

formations seen today, all can be traced back to Prussia.

India's Military parade is a relic of India's colonial past-

- **During the British Raj, royal parades and processions were commonplace.**
- They projected British power not only to Indians but to the rest of the world, especially, to its competing European colonial powers.
- As India gained its independence, it continued with many erstwhile British traditions – the parade being one of them.
- **A military parade marked India's first Republic Day in 1950.** At the time, the country's leaders wanted to commemorate the occasion as a day of national celebration.
- While the day marked India's new constitution officially coming into effect, leaders saw it as a day of victory for the Indian state and its people – victory against colonial rule and the coming of a new, sovereign and strong republic.
- Thus, the military parade was chosen as an integral part of Republic Day celebrations.
- **The parade in 1950 was held in the Irwin Amphitheatre (presently known as the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium).**
- **The ceremony included the official swearing-in of Dr Rajendra Prasad, India's first President, as well as a marching contingent of over "3000 men" with the artillery firing a "21 gun salute" and Liberator planes of the Indian Air Force flying overhead.**
- **As the parade shifted to Rajpath (now Kartavya Path), its scale grew grander.**
- In its new setting, the imagery of the parade was also different, replete with colonial symbols that were being reimagined as national images.

- **From the erstwhile Viceroy's house to the memorial for British Indian soldiers that we know today as India Gate,** over time, these colonial creations underwent a **process of "Indianisation" as their colonial associations** were systematically pushed out of the public consciousness and a new meaning was provided to them.

A symbol of unity in diversity-

- Moreover, **the Republic Day parade** soon began to include many **non-military elements** as well.
- The **iconic tableaux became an integral part of the event**, not only adding colour to the stoic military tone of the parade but also becoming symbols of India's diverse culture.
- In the 1950s and 1960s, there were still significant tensions between India and many of its states, mainly due to linguistic differences and fears of cultural imposition.
- **The tableaux showing various states were introduced as a way to celebrate India's differences while espousing a coherent national identity.**

Further

reading:

<https://journalsofindia.com/how-republic-day-tableaux-are-selected/>