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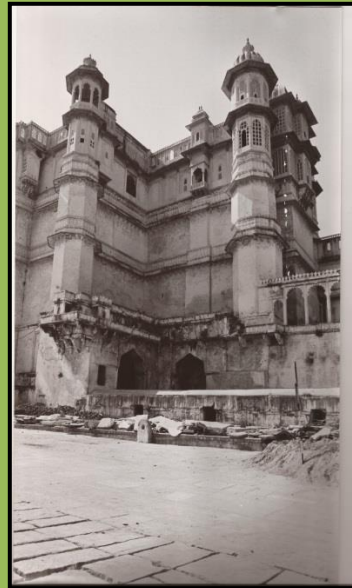
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HISTORY 6200: ASPECTS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.
DR. JUDITH S. LEWIS.

British India and the Raj

British Colonial Influence: 1612 - 1948

James P. Welch



2011



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The British Raj and India:

A love- hate relationship spanning over 300 years.

Introduction



The initial British contact with India was an indirect result of fierce competition with Dutch and Portuguese trading interests in Asia. The British were relative latecomers to colonization and their only remaining option was to take away from others, in an effort to gain a stake in these rich new ventures. Little did the British know, or even suspect, that they would be engaging on a very lucrative and long term relationship with, what would eventually become, “the premier jewel in their imperial crown”. The establishment of the British Empire was a process of evolution, which passed through several periods marked by significant historical events. The initial phase began with a purely commercial and financial perspective and eventually passed through a more realist paradigm, based on expansion and maintaining power. This was, then, followed by a steadfast determination to maintain imperial dignity in the face of the bitter and revengeful, post 1857, mutiny period. A sense of calm was eventually restored during the Victorian period of benevolent enlightenment. This period of calm, was based upon a new restructuring of the government in India. This calm, unfortunately did not last for long, having been interrupted by a series of deadly droughts, and the subsequent famines which followed in their wake. Additionally, extremely poor leadership by misguided Viceroys, and ruthless prime ministers

such as Lord Lytton and Disraeli, added to overall dissatisfaction with Crown policies in general and Britain's colonization in particular.



Commercial Inroads (1612 – 1836).

The first tentative commercial inroads attempted by the British took place in Surat along the Northwest coast in 1608. Their attempts were blocked however due Portuguese interference in the court of the new Mughal Emperor Jahangir. After some coercive seamanship under Thomas Best, the British East India Company finally procured the coveted royal firman and was allowed to establish their first factory in 1612. Commercial exploitation and a sense of benign paternalism characterize this initial period of British influence in India. These principles were accompanied by an expansionist policy and inter-colonial rivalry with other European states, such as France Portugal and Denmark. The Company finally breached the Indian east coast through the acquisition of land in the region of Madras, establishing Fort St. George. When Charles the II married Catherine de Braganza, the Company received Bombay as a part of the wedding dowry. Finally in the year 1690, Admiral Nicholson using gunboat diplomacy, helped the company to establish a colony along the Hooghly River, establishing the future city of Calcutta. At this point the future tracings of British control could be discerned by the three presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta (Bengal) and Madras. Such expansion was also fraught with conflict and problems. The Company faced several important challenges; a large part of their work force was continually lost due to sickness and diseases, such as malaria, cholera and dysentery. Many young men who set out to try and stake their fortunes in India were struck down and died, being buried in ever expanding

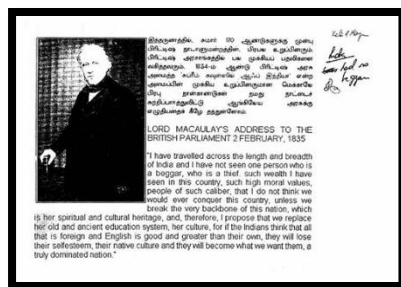
makeshift cemeteries. Another problem was that trade, initially, was a one way affair. British wool, England's largest staple export, was of little use in the heat blasted Indian climate. One way trade ensued and large shipments of silver bullion were used to purchase Indian goods. This eventually brought the Company, close to the brink of financial ruin and in turn, the criticism of parliament. These events resulted in a restructuring of their market strategy, which reduced heavy reliance on their silver reserves and improved their overall investment strategy. Many company employees attempted to enter into free trade of their own accord and this was frowned upon by the Company which had been granted a royal monopoly on trade. In order to counter this new challenge, they were facing from within, the Company devised an ingenious solution. It allowed these interlopers to trade of their own free accord, but only within the Asian realm. They were forbidden to trade directly with Europe. Many worked with Indian intermediaries known as "Banyan" (many of whom were Parsi's) who also developed great wealth and status proportionate to that of Europeans themselves.. The appointment of Warren Hastings² as the first Governor General of India marked a period of enlightened harmony in Anglo-Indian society. Indian laws, literature and sacred texts were translated into English and there was a profound interest in Oriental studies. Intermarriage between British and Natives was common and particularly among the Scottish, who comprised fully one half of the Companies members.

However Hasting shares the spot light of Imperial success, however, with another, keystone



figure of British history, Robert Clive. However, both Clive and Hastings had been tainted by the severe corruption of the Company which had led to the pauperization of Bengal. Still had there been no Clive, one might speculate there would have been no Empire. Under Clive's leadership Company, finally, firmly established itself and ended French aspirations

following the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Their hold on India became firmly established after the defeat of the Mughal Emperor Alam II during the Battle of Buxar (Bihar) in 1764. His importance in the eyes of the British remains, to this day, as an integral reminder of British greatness in India. The role he played in establishing the political and military supremacy of the British in India can be seen in the fact that he is often referred to simply as “Clive of India”.



“Onward Christian Soldiers” (1813 – 1857)

Known as the Clapham Sect, Macaulay, following in the footsteps of Warren Hastings’ oppressor, Burke; along with his own followers; William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton were

devoutly carrying on the traditions of their predecessors. Powerful forces driving this movement were vociferous condemning slavery and calling for its abolition. This driving moral force was what defined, and set the stage for the staunchly conservative, and stultifying Victorian period which followed. This period was also marked by a more sinister aspect; that of the rise of Christian evangelical fundamentalism. These missionaries saw it as their divine duty to bring enlightenment to the benighted “heathens” of the realm, and to Christianize Britain’s Colonies. In respect to their religious views, they were ethnocentric and ruthless in the extreme believing their vision was the only one that mattered in their “might makes right” approach. The same group had now been reinforced by Charles Grant, a former Company director and recent convert. This offer of saving souls and sharing spiritual illumination was neither desired nor accepted by the native population of India. The fervent proselytizing by the Christian missionaries would serve as one of the igniting sparks for the Indian Uprising in 1857. Despite these shortcomings certain social and religious changes which were effected did have a positive impact. Improved

education as well as aid to lepers and the poor were some of the more constructive aspects. Social legislation barring the practice of thuggee, (1830's) infanticide (1836) and Sati (1829) were also welcomed by many.



Victorian Period; Iron Wills and Tempered Steel. (1837 – 1901)

The reign of Queen Victoria coincides approximately with the expansion of the Industrial revolution. This period had a great impact on India in three specific areas; the development of the steamship, the Railways and the telegraph. This period also marks the advent of the dissolution of the British East India Company and the subsequent establishment of the British Raj. No longer would the vested interests of India be controlled by the influential British East India Company board of directors, but rather by a specially designated Viceroy. The crowning of Victoria as Empress of India, a consequence of the Royal Title Act of 1876, and the Delhi Durbar under the direction of Lord Lytton, sealed the immediate future of the future empire. Despite the infrastructural improvements provided by the industrial revolution, life for the average Indian actually worsened, due to two distinctive factors. The first was; while the railways installed by Britain after 1826 and subsidized by taxes on the natives, afforded a possibility to travel further and cheaper, the price of the 7 anna ticket, was returned directly back to government coffers as profit. Thus, the railway opened India to trade, but an inequitable trade. The goods, now being carried to the far corners of India, were cheap, machine manufactured, industrial goods originating in; the factories and mills of London, Lancashire and Manchester. Indian goods could not compete. Therefore the raw materials were being drawn from India,

processed in Britain and being resold again to the native population, creating a vicious circle of economic impoverishment. The second, more sinister aspect had nothing to do, directly, with the industrial revolution, but was an outgrowth of poor government policy and greed during the cycles of deadly famine.

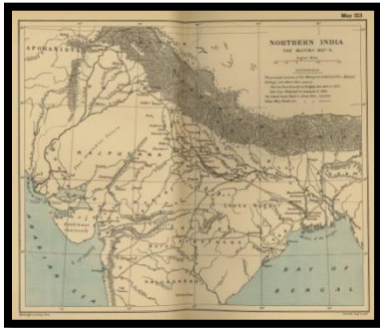


The Mutiny of 1857

Commonly referred to by a plethora of titles, was not a simple uprising of the sepoy's in response to the greased Enfield cartridge episode, as has so often been suggested, but rather a myriad host of conflicting situations. Among the most confrontational were; the zealous efforts of Christian fundamental missionaries and their desire for converts. Additionally there had been, problems with a land tax reform scheme and ungoverned money lenders which drove many Indian farmers into desperate impoverishment. Finally, poor policy decisions such as that instituted by Dalhousie with his infamous "Doctrine of Lapse", as well as his widow remarriage act. The mutiny, represented one of the most significant episodes in Anglo-Indian relations and carried with it severe repercussions for Indians and British alike. As has been mentioned, it also spelled the death toll for the British East India Company and the Birth of the British Empire, known hitherto as the Raj. The uprising lasted approximately 18 months and the fighting was fierce on both sides. The battles raged along the Ganges River beginning in Meerut and raging to Delhi the site of some of the fiercest fighting. In the end, the British were able to overcome the rebels through strategic alliances with various Princely states. Revenge, was expedient and as brutal as the atrocities which had been



committed. The British were shaken to their very foundations as a result of the uprising. However, as pointed out by Percival Spear; “But it was a shock to their complacency rather than to their self confidence” (Spear 1986, 145). The fallout was a complete restructuring of the army with a large increase in non native troops. Furthermore, troops would be preferably of different regions, castes and language groups. Finally, there would be greater reliance upon troops which had never wavered in their loyalty such as the Sikhs and Ghurkhas. By having termed the uprising as a “mutiny” the British attempted to downplay the significance and numbers involved. The truth, however, is that although the peasants attempted to remain neutral during the event,



many others had grievances which led to their participation. Besides the Princes, who rose in revolt against the Widow remarriage laws enacted by Dalhousie, there were also those who joined out of fear of suffering the same fate, as well as the taluqdars, the local dispossessed tax collectors of Oudh, and some of the most important leaders during the revolt. .



Times of Feast and Famine (1866 – 1900)

In addition to the many other hardships faced by the British in India, and even more severely its native inhabitants, were a series of diseases: Cholera, bubonic plague, typhoid fever, malaria, leprosy, and dysentery. These illnesses were all fuelled by famine which served to decimate populations in India with little regard to nationality, religion or caste. There were a total of 15 different famines

during the period of British rule in India, The worst, the Great Indian Famine of 1876 – 1878. One may wonder if this horror was allowed to take place as a reprisal to the recent Indian Uprising of 1857. It is estimated that over 10 million people perished during this period. There were so many dead that they could not be buried or cremated. Two years earlier under the careful, enlightened guidance of Lord Northbrook there had not been a single death during the famine of Bihar 1873- 1874. One fact is certain the roots of the catastrophe can be directly attributed to the ignominious policies of Benjamin Disraeli and the somewhat questionable ones promulgated by Lord Lytton. In addition to these regular famines, there was also an outbreak of bubonic plague, which ravished Bombay in 1898. There was rioting in Calcutta in reaction to typical, poor government response. The result was the institution of the plague prevention measures. The plague returned, however, with ferocity between 1899 -1900 taking the lives of over 1 million people.



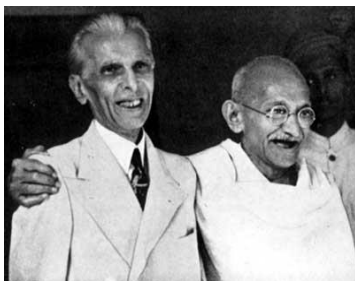
The Raj: Imperial Splendour. (1858 – 1947).

The Raj was Imperial Britain's takeover of the rights and responsibilities of the former British East India Company, following the latter's dissolution due to mismanagement. The

Raj might be seen as the convoluted offspring of imperial aspirations coupled with forces of immediate, post mutiny, pacification. The Indian Empire was considered to consist of two separate entities; that of British India and that of Princely India. Some have viewed Britain's Imperial hold over India as a case of simple plundering, while others, such as Lord Curzon considered it as appropriate political machinations for power during the "Great Game", a faceoff

with other powers such as Russia, Germany, Italy France and the Ottoman Empire. Queen Victoria's famous proclamation of 1858, addressed many of the major concerns of the Indian population, correcting injustices and giving clear hope for improvement. However, many of these changes proved as ephemeral as a kite blown in the wind. Once the painful memory of the uprising had faded from the collective conscience, many of the promises were rescinded; such as was the case of the new land settlement scheme. As Belmekki points out; "Therefore, once stability was restored to the region and the events of 1857 became a mere memory, this scheme was discarded as the British could no longer afford to maintain it" (Belmekki 2008, 122). Britain was now the paramount power in much of the world and controlled the seas with her formidable navy. The very existence of the British Raj, itself, was dependent, however, upon India. More particularly it was dependent upon its large standing army, composed primarily of native Indian troops. Both the Raj and the Indian Political Service (IPA), were also dependent upon the indomitable spirit of its highly elite and efficient Indian Civil Service; a handful of dedicated 'heaven born' in a land of millions. The British were bent upon displaying the same type of aristocratic splendour as their Mughal predecessors. Nowhere was this more evident than with the ostentatious pageantry of the Delhi Durbar in 1877. The Durbar was more, however, than a mere display of imperial splendour and power, it was a political statement guaranteeing the Princes their right to existence and protection in exchange for their loyalty to the crown. Formerly, the British had held Indians in contempt, seeing them as uneducated heathens, simple minded and little better than children. While these feelings of ethnic superiority still remained manifest, they were now tempered by suspicion, fear and hatred following the events of the recent mutiny. As was so astutely pointed out by Banerjee; "The relationship between British officials and native Indians was hierarchical and charged with racial arrogance". And again he goes on to state

“Recorded evidence of the kind of behaviour meted out to the Indian servants and the ‘negative’ qualities attributed to them indiscriminately point to the unequal and racialised [*sic*] character of the relationship” (Banerjee 2010, 781). No longer would the *dyes* or *amahs* wet nurses be allowed to breast feed future generations of sahibs and memsahib’s. The British were steadfast in their determination to hang on the cornerstone to their Empire. Losing India would mean losing, for all intents and purposes the entire British Empire. This was pointed out by Lord Curzon, in 1901, when he stated these rather prophetic words "As long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straight away to a third rate power.” Following the Mutiny, there was a change in perceptions. Despite the fact that officially India was controlled by the Secretary of State for India; it was assumed that the actual business of governing India would take place in India itself. But the British were not the only ones to experience an ‘awakening’. The soul of ‘mother India’ had been stirred and claimed recognition. Indians began to pose themselves important questions concerning subjects such as female education, widow remarriage and more generally the position of women in society in general. Much of this was bolstered by a new emphasis on learning and upon English education. Coupled with government expansion this meant more Indians were receiving education and entering into government service than ever before.



Independence: Imperial Endings, National beginnings. (1885 – 1947)

Who could have suspected that the inception of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the first stirrings of a national movement would come from within and would owe its origins to a Briton? This was, however, the case. Allan Octavian Hume in an address to the graduating class of Calcutta University.

The INC, composed of lawyers and other intellectuals met for the first time on December 28, 1885. Their primary objective was to give India a greater voice in their own destinies.

Confrontation with the British arose soon after the establishment of the Congress party with the ill-fated partition of Bengal in 1905. It was during this period of Swaraj that the British were forced to repeal the act in face of strikes and non-violent non-cooperation. While initially the movement was aimed at finding a peaceful resolution such high aspirations were not on the agenda for everyone concerned and in 1907, following the annual session of the INC, there was a decisive split between moderates and extremist elements led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Soon after violence flared up in Maharashtra and in Bengal. Armed terrorists waged a campaign of terror and assassination on British officials. In an ironic twist of historical fate, the British now supported the newly formed Muslim League, whose interests, they felt, could not be served by the INC. It was also at this time that the capital of the Indian Empire was transferred to Delhi and a series of grandiose structures were built to reflect the power of the British Empire. It was not long after World War I and the infamous Rowlatt Act. In retaliation to the failure of the British to live up to their promises Gandhi began his movement of non-cooperation in 1920. It was not long after, however, before the question of "Purna Swaraj" or complete self rule came to the forefront in 1930. Of course the clashes between Hindu and Muslim are well known today and resulted in the catastrophic loss of life on both sides.



Anglo-Indian Reciprocal Influences.

(1612 – 1947)

Though today, the British Raj is seen as a historical relic and an anathema, it remains an integral part of Indian life and history. Try as they may to efface the memory of the British presence in India, the souvenir of the Raj is painted upon the collective unconscious of India and its people, as permanently as a layer of indelible paint. They may attempt to rid themselves of what is perceived, quite rightly in certain circumstances, as distasteful reminiscences of exploitation. However, changing the names of streets, buildings, organizations and cities will have little impact outside of India itself. Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, will remain Bombay, Madras and Calcutta in the collective memory of mankind due to their historic and cultural associations. Today it is possible to see the vestiges of the once powerful Empire scattered throughout India. The impact of the British can be seen and felt in all walks of life ranging from architecture, to education, the courts of laws, medical services, social clubs, and other organizations. The life expectancy of the average Indian was improved due to improved clean water facilities and the introduction of quinine based, anti malarial medications. The red post boxes on street corners and the double-decker busses that roar down the left side of the road are reminders of their Anglo origins. Political and financial institutions, systems of taxation, and the winding systems of railways all owe their origins to the Empire which imported them. Of course this relationship was not entirely one sided. The British drew sustenance from this thriving Sub-continent in the form of untold wealth and natural resources. India was also a major market for British material exports (nearly 20%). By 1910 these exports were worth £137 million.. Entire generations of up and coming civil servants and soldiers afforded Britain the manpower a tiny island could not provide. Generations of Britons had been weaned at the breast of female Indian servants and close bonds of affection and kinship were often established. The fact that non-kin female caretakers played a significant role in the colonial British household can be attested to by the

relatively high wages they received in respect to other servants. Many servants actually laid down their own lives in order to save and protect their British masters during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Opinions fall on both sides of the aisle concerning British motivations and intentions, but one fact which remains unshakable is that India and Britain are caught in a long standing history with mutual influences. One can amble down shaded Victorian colonnades and turn into the maidan near the imposing Victoria Terminus to find young men playing cricket. Time seems to stand still for a brief moment as the sun sets on the former British Empire.



GLOSSARY

1. **British East India Company:** founded in 1599, dissolved in 1858. Hitherto referred to as simply; “The Company”.
2. **Raj:** Meaning “reign”, was the term applied to British rule in India, in the post mutiny period until independence.

3. **Warren Hastings:** India's first Governor General 1773-1785. Accused of corruption by Edmund Burke and Parliament and acquitted.
4. **Taluqdars:** From the Arabic *ta' al-luq* meaning district, and *dor* meaning "holding"; were small land owning nobles under princely suzerainty and responsible for collecting taxes.
5. **5. Mughal:** Although there are numerous renditions, this is the chosen form. This Empire, descendants of the Turco-Mongol Timurids, ruled India from 1525 – 1585.
6. **Banyan:** Were the middle men or the native brokers between the Company and the rural manufacturing sector.
7. **Sahibs/Memsahib:**
8. **Purna Swaraj:** Complete home rule the objective of the INC.



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13. Victoria Memorial. Source: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_VrCFuUxs7kY/S7IeWvOSYZI/AAAAAAAAA34/aSt7gb-WtPE/s1600/VictoriaMemorialKolkata.jpg
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Other historians point out that ruling India brought huge benefits

On the other hand, research suggests that from about 1870 to 1930 Britain took about 1% of India's wealth per year. This was much less than the French, Dutch and Germans took from their lands. The British invested about £400 million in the same period. They brought in an irrigation programme, which increased the amount of land available for farming by 8 times. They developed a coal industry, which had not existed before. Public health and life expectancy increased under British rule, mainly due to improved water supplies and the introduction of quinine treatment against malaria.

Big landowners, Indian princes, the Indian middle classes all gained in terms of job opportunities, business opportunities and careers in areas like the law. Ordinary Indians gained little, but the argument still continues about whether British rule made much difference to their lives. Many historians think that the majority of Indians would have remained poor even if they had been ruled by Indians.