

ASPECTS OF BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF INDIA
A Study of British Administration 1857—1905

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "ASPECTS OF BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF INDIA - A STUDY OF BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA 1857-1905" submitted by Ms. Sharmila Chakrabarty in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil.) degree of this University, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is her own work.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation an attempt has been made to study the operation of ideology in the organisation and continued control of a colonized country by an imperialist power. From the point of view of a study of imperial domination, it involves questions about the role of ideology in perpetuating and justifying colonial subjugation and distorted development. An attempt has been made towards developing certain analytical categories and explanatory propositions about the operation of ideology, in power relationships in a colonial setting. The term ideology has been used in a very broad sense, not merely as falseness or misconception. Here it has been used with reference to that aspect of ^{the} human condition under which human beings live their lives as conscious actors in a world that makes sense to them in varying degrees. The conception of ideology employed here includes both the institutionalized thought system (for example, orientalism) and the consciousness of the social actor with emphasis on the study of the influence of the former on the latter.

The treatment has essentially been from a historical perspective with colonialism as a backdrop. The area of study has been restricted to India after the mutiny, till the beginning of the present century for specific reasons.

This is the period which Greenberger¹ describes as the 'era of confidence' when there was a shared faith in the value of British civilization and the British as the natural rulers representing the 'active positive' world in a 'passive negative' country. The attempt has been to study the dissemination of colonial ideology in two important realms. The British, first by energizing the myth about the Empire through infusion of adventure and heroism and by articulating a sense of responsibility and devotion towards the cause of the Empire, were able to galvanise generations of soldiers and civilians to serve in the colony. Secondly, by generating and perpetuating the myth of the uncivilized and backward subcontinent they were able to justify the British presence in India for the job of 'coaxing and scolding' the country into good living.

In an attempt to study this process of myth-making we had to tread on familiar ground. The aim has been to highlight the gap between the British perceptions and reality. The examination of the stereotypes show that they are important not in terms of their description of reality but as attempts to disfigure it. In ^{the} face of this an attempt has been made to study the British stereotypes of the peasant, the westernised intellectual and the

1. Allen J. Greenberger, The British image of India, Oxford University Press, London, 1969.

administrator and compare and contrast them with reality.

Studies on administrators have generally been conducted from the Public Administration point of view. The administrator has been studied from the point of view of a Weberian ideal type, rather than as a ruler. Public administration treats administration as a politically neutral reality. However it neglects an important aspect of administration which is political administration, which includes the issue of rulership in administration. In an imperialist setting, which involves a relationship of domination and subordination, it is impossible to talk of 'neutral' administration. In contrast, the issue of rulership becomes important in order to examine the relationship between the two states in a one-world system. In order to understand the British administrator in India we have looked into speeches, actions and utterances of a few administrators, particularly Curzon. An examination of the above highlights the existence of certain intellectual stereotypes which guided the perceptions and policies of the men on the spot who acted not so much on the basis of rational-legal authority of an administrator but autocracy of a ruler.

In Chapter I we examine the imperial self-perception and that of the colony. It highlights the imperialist stereotypes about various communities, social groups and classes in India. In Chapter II we examine the various

British perceptions of an agrarian movement. In Chapter III we examine the self-perception of a colonial administrator and his area of governance, with focus on Lord Curzon. Chapter IV analyses Curzon's rationale for partitioning Bengal. Various perceptions on the agitation against partition are examined. In the end we conclude and summarize our study.

The study has been made primarily on the basis of secondary sources. We have taken the liberty of examining some primary sources like official reports, correspondences, speeches, petitions and memoranda. During the course of our study we became aware of some of the limitations. The paucity of secondary sources on the colonial administrator from the historical angle was felt acutely, thus denying the researcher some important insights. Since the administrator should also be studied at the tap and not merely at the top, one would have liked to study a District Collector. However, paucity of literature prevented such an exercise. Thus, an administrator who performs the dual function of input and output in an imperialist system of Governance remains to be studied.

CHAPTER I

A STUDY OF IMPERIAL PERCEPTIONS

Within the Marxist paradigm, ideology refers to a general theory about nature of consciousness, rather than a particular philosophical doctrine, about the nature of knowledge. Marxist understanding of ideology can be divided into three important principles:

- a) Historical Materialism, i.e., ideas of a particular historical epoch are formulated or influenced by material practice.
- b) Ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.
- c) The consciousness of a historical epoch can only be understood by examining the contradictions in the material life.

"Man's ideas are, conscious expression, real or illusory, of their relations and activities of production and their social and political conduct".¹ Thus, ideology refers to those ideas which express these practices inadequately. Marx points out that the reason for this lies not in a faulty cognitive process but in the limitation of

1. Marx and Engels, German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, 1970, p.21

practice itself.

For Marx, therefore, ideology inverts this relation between human subject and consciousness and rests on false assumptions. It creates false consciousness which obfuscates the mental process as a result of which man fails to understand the forces that guide his thinking. In German Ideology Marx describes ideology as a systematic, misleading, inverted world view and also points out that law, religion, jurisprudence and philosophy work as ideology.

An ideology emerges when attempts are made to universalize the ideas and experiences of the dominant social class, which uses it as an apologetic, legitimizing and justifying body of thought in its interest. Thus ideology emerges as a "systematic pervasive bias which is not accidental, but inherent in its assumption, not detachable but structurally embedded, not sporadic but systematic."² Thus it is a body of ideas biased against a particular social group and in favour of another, which has the means of production at its disposal and controls even the means of intellectual production. It is biased as it views society from the perspective of a minority group. The bias however does not spring from the author's incorrect reasoning or misinterpretation but his fundamental assumptions. This

2. Jorge Larrain, Marxism and Ideology, Macmillan, London, 1983, p.7.

leads to distortion of subject matter - it highlights certain facts and not others and establishes misleading connections between them.

Bhiku Parekh³ points out the dual role of ideology. What is a fact for one group is made into a norm for other groups, i.e. the condition of existence of the dominant social group is turned into a universal norm. He points out that ideology rests on assumptions which are not clearly examined or explicitly formulated. These social relations which constitute man's predicaments are accepted even at the sphere of intellectual activity. Thus what man cannot transcend in reality he cannot transcend in thought either. Ideology is characterised by its relation to the interest of the ruling class and not by the genetic relation to the class from which it emerges. Though, it is always in the interest of the ruling class it may not always emerge from it. Thus, ideology can be described as a particular form of consciousness which gives ^a distorted picture of contradictions, in the interest of the ruling class. Marx writes that ideology cannot be identified by its class origin but by objective concealment of contradictions which enables it to serve the interest of the dominant classes.

3. Bhiku Parekh, Marx's Theory of Ideology, Ajanta Pub., Delhi, 1982.

A consequence of this basic understanding within the Marxist school (i.e. belief that the dominant ideology influences every aspect of social relationship) is that it does not allow the separation of individual branches of knowledge, so fashionable in the bourgeois world. "Neither science as a whole, its individual branches, nor art, has an autonomous immanent history arising exclusively from the inner dialectic."⁴ Thus each discipline does not follow its independent course of development, but is determined by the movement of the history of social production, as a whole. "Changes and development in individual areas are to be explained in a truly scientific manner only in relation to this base."⁵ Although the development of particular areas of human activity, are in the final determination, linked up with the levels of social production, they are not denied their specific relative autonomy. Marx and Engels merely deny the possibility of explaining the development of science and art, exclusively or even primarily within their own immanent context. These immanent contexts do undoubtedly exist in the objective reality, but primarily as aspects of the historical context, of the totality of the historical process, within which the primary's

4. Georg Lukács, Writer and Critic, Merlin Press Ltd., London, 1970, p.62.

5. Ibid.

role in a complex of interacting factors is played by the economic; the development of means of production.⁶

The existence, substance, rise and effect of literature can thus only be understood and explained keeping in mind the total historical context of the entire system. "The aesthetic essence and value of literary works and accordingly, their effects are part of that general and integrated social process in which man masters the world through his consciousness."⁷ Thus any attempt to comprehend or understand Marxist theory of aesthetics and literary history require a thorough examination of historical materialism.

Only with the aid of historical materialism can we understand the rise of art and literature, the laws of their development and the varied directions they follow in their advance and decline within the total process. 8

Thus any form of art or literature, or legal or social system, or a way of thinking, can only be fully understood when placed within the specific social, political and economic context. The basic determinate of the historical is the economic base, which influences if not creates, the existing ideologies, art forms, legal system which along with many other factors form the super structure, which

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p.63.

8. Ibid.

act as secondary factors in the process of development. Engels writes,

Political, legal, philosophical, religious, literary and artistic development rest on the economic. But they also react on each other and the economic base. It is not that the economic factor is the only active factor and everything else is mere passive effect, but, it is the interaction with the economic base which proves decisive in the last analysis. 9

However, anyone who reduces ideology as mechanical and passive, produced merely through the economic process, misinterprets its very essence and doesn't expound Marxism, but merely a distorted version of it. Historical materialism is not a single channelled process but a multilevel and a multifaceted one. The evolution of society, i.e., its total process of societal and historical development is influenced by an intricate complex of interactions. Thus, though the sphere of man's intellectual activity enjoys a specific relative independence, especially in the field of art and literature, it does not lead to the denial of the priority of the economic base. "This autonomy has its objective basis in the very nature of that evolution and in the social division of labour."¹⁰ Autonomy of art and literature needs to be interpreted in terms of

9. Quoted from Georg Lukács Writer and Critic, op. cit., p.69.

10. Ibid.

necessity and freedom. In the enjoyment and free pursuit of sensitivity of perception, art forms impose their own logic. The history of each form is linked with the accumulation of human experience. Both generally and in particular each art form is indirectly determined by cultural, scientific and social progress of that society. Therefore it is possible to talk of physics and music,¹¹ of music expressing ideas as it is possible to talk of links between social development and societal needs. Moreover, since knowledge has a social function to perform, i.e. of protecting a class divided society, knowledge became more specialized and as society moved ahead, the division of labour snapped direct links between productive activity and intellectual activity though both performed social functions. This makes clear the fact that division of labour does not exist merely at the level of society where functions are divided to ensure maximum efficiency, but also at the level of building ^{the} ideological apparatus of a particular society. Various mediums are used, some of them least suspect, to assist in the building up of the ideological backbone of a particular society. Art and literature are merely contributing factors which assist in the construction of the ideological backbone. Ernest

11. G. Anlilifilov, Physics and Music, Mir Pub., Moscow, 1966.

Fisher writes

Art is conditioned by time and represents humanity in so far as it corresponds to the idea and aspiration, the needs and hopes of a particular historical moment. 12

Fisher points to the Romantic movement, which he feels, emerged as a petty bourgeois revolt against the classicism of the nobility. The movement emerged in the face of the isolation of the individual in a world where there was an increasing division of labour, fragmentation and specialization, a world in which the 'I' was strictly separated from everything that was not 'I'. Bertolt Brecht writes that in

a 'society' of class struggle the immediate effect of the work of art by the ruling aesthetic is to suppress the social distinctions within the audience and thus while the work is being enjoyed, create a collective, not divided into classes but the 'universal human'. 13

The role of the ideological formulation is best performed by an author, because of the very nature of his work, which essentially consists of elevating experiences he obtains ordinarily, to artistic form.

12. Ernest Fisher, The Necessity of Art - A Marxist Approach, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1963, p.12.

13. Ibid., p.10.

In representing individual men and situations the artist awakens the illusion of life. In depicting them as exemplary men and situations (the unity of the individual and the typical) in bringing to life the greatest possible richness of the objective conditions of life as a particular attribute of the individual, people and situation, he makes his own world which emerges as a reflection of life in its total motion, as a process and totality and in its particular, the common reflection of the events of life. 14

It is this ability of the author, to create an illusionary world, which enables him to use his pen in the interest of giving legitimacy to, and thereby strength, to a set of ideas or the ideology dominant in that society. In different periods, depending on the social situations and need of rising or declining classes, different things which have been latent, are brought again into the light of the day and awakened to a new life. As Fisher writes,

Western Europe in its denial to humanism and in the fetish like character of its institutions, reaches back to the fetishes of pre-history and constructs false myths to hide its real problems. 15

In a similar fashion the literature and art of the bourgeois world, tends towards mystification. Mystification essentially means, shrouding reality in mystery - a tendency born above all as a result of alienation.

14. G. Lukacs Writer and Critic, op. cit., p.39.

15. Ernest Fisher, Necessity of Art, op. cit., p.13.

The industrialized objectified late bourgeois world has become alien to its inhabitants, the social reality seems to questionable, its triviality has assumed such gigantic proportions, that writers and artists are all forced to grasp at every apparent means of piercing the rigid outward crust of things. Both the desire to simplify this unbearable complex reality, to reduce it to essentials, and the desire to present human being as linked by elementary human relationships, rather than by material ones, leads to myth in art. Classicism's use of the ancient myths was purely formal. Romanticism, in its rebellion against prosaic bourgeois society resorted to myths as a means of depicting 'pure passion' and all that was excessive, original and exotic. The danger of the method, in itself a legitimate one, was that from the onset, it opposed an un-historical 'essential man' to man as he developed within society; it is opposed to the external, to the time conditioned. 16

Thus mystification and myth-making, in the bourgeois world, offered a way of evading social decisions, with a reasonably clear conscience. Social conditions and the actual conflict of a particular era, is transposed into a timeless reality, into an 'eternal mythical, changeless original state of being'. Thus the specific nature of the historical moment is falsified and fetishized into a general idea of being.

The socially conditioned world is presented as a cosmically unconditioned one. This way, the outsider not only divests himself of the duty to take part in the social process, but also rises above the world of the commons into that of his 'peers' from where he can gaze down

16. Ibid., p.95.

with sarcastic superiority upon the clumsy efforts of his committed brethren. 17

This tendency towards fetishizing and myth making, can be seen since antiquity in the European perception of whatever has been rejected by them as the East or more precisely the 'Orient'. This strict separation between the East and West, and the fetishizing of the East, helped to build up the self-image of the West for itself. The East-West relation, which was characterised by the relation of subordination and dominance, was being legitimized on the belief that the 'Orient' was irrational, depraved, child-like and different, while, the West was rational, virtuous, mature and normal. Thus, the entire concept of the 'Orient' was an European invention, which clothed the East in a garb of mystery as a "place of Romance, exotic things, haunting memories, landscapes and remarkable experiences."¹⁸

Edward Said, in his book Orientalism, points out that the conception of the Orient was not an 'inert creation of nature' but was essentially 'man-made'. It was a history of "tradition, of thought imagery and vocabulary that has given it reality and presence in and for the West".¹⁹

17. Ibid.

18. Edward Said, Orientalism, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1978, p.1.

19. Ibid., pp.5-6.

In the Post-Enlightenment era, European culture was able to produce orientalism, 'scientifically, politically, socially, militarily and imaginatively'. He further asserts that Orientalism or the study of the Orient, was not a body of myths and lies, but a created body of theory and practice, in which, for many generations, there was considerable investment. This continued investment, led to the development of the system of knowledge, which acted as a filter for the Western consciousness. Two principal elements characterize the relations between the East and West in the middle of eighteenth century. While on the one hand, there was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the East, on the other hand, there was increasing desire and various attempts by the former made for economic penetration of the latter. Thus, the European attempt at creating the picture of the Orient, was not an outcome of a pure accident, but deeply influenced by the economic, political, and military rationale of the day. Thus, it was the political and the economic imperialism which governed and guided, the entire field of study, imagination and scholarly activity. This link between the economic and political necessity of the day made the process of creation of ideas unavoidable. Thus 'Orientalism', which was an attempt to come to terms with the East, was really an integral part of the European material civilization and culture.

In any society other than a totalitarian one, according to Gramsci, some cultural forms predominate over others. This form of cultural leadership he describes as 'Hegemony'. Thus, the ruling class, uses various mediums such as culture, to establish hegemony over the society. In the same way 'Orientalism' became an indispensable concept, vis-a-vis the industrial west, which established the idea of the superiority of the European and it is this which gave 'orientalism' strength and durability. For Said 'Orientalism' represents a "particular culture, even ideologically as a mode of discourse, with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines even colonial bureaucracy and colonial styles."²⁰ It created its own national, cultural and epistemological boundaries which emphasise on the ontological and epistemological distinctions between the Orient and Occident. The entire form in which 'Orientalism' emerged in the west, highlighted the western style and attempt to dominate, reconstruct and establish authority over the East. "It imposed limit of thought, culture and action on studies of the 'Orient'."²¹ It enjoyed a certain degree of intellectual power, whose influence was not only limited to the ruling classes but influenced the perceptions of

20. Ibid., p.2.

21. Ibid., p.3.

even the layman. Said writes that 'Orientalism' was like a

library or Archives of information, commonly and in some of its aspect unanimously held. What bound the archives together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of the Oriental; they supplied the Orientals with a mentality and geneology, an atmosphere and most important, they allowed the European to deal with and even to see⁶ the Oriental as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. 22

In essence, it established the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.

'Orientalism' thus should be seen as a political vision of reality, within the parameters of imperialism, whose strict use promoted the difference between the familiar i.e. Europe, the West 'us' and the strange the Orient, the East, the 'them.' Said writes that, 'Orientalism was produced and made sense in relation to the public at home since the text created "not only knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe."²³ It sees the orient as a fixed static reality and thus categorizes the Orient in terms which reduce its complexity both synchronically and diacronically. This simplification to which the Orient is subjected to is the outcome of specific tactical procedures."Direct observation or

22. Ibid., p.41.

23. Ibid., p. 94.

circumstantial description of the orient are totally secondary to systematic tasks of another sort."²⁴ Said points to the fact that it is the tradition of representation rather than systematic verification which guides the discourse production on the Orient.

The Orient is less a place than a topos, a set of references, a conglomerate of characteristics that seem to have its origin in... some previous habit of imagining. 25

Such a procedure, provided the coercive framework of Orientalism, whose executive power is said to be equal to the "bureaucracy in public administration".²⁶ It, not only fixed the boundaries of the framework with which the Orient was to be studied or viewed, it also established, that intercourse between the East and West was the westerner's privilege as his was the "stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with and give shape and meaning"²⁷ to the Great Asiatic mystery as once described by Disraeli.

However, the problem with Said's model of 'Orientalism' is that he fails to include India within his purview, and

24. Ibid., p.177.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p.234.

27. Ibid., p.94.

declares that 'Orientalism' varied little between the regions upon which it operated. Thus for him 'orientalism' was a monolithic and a universal phenomenon, whose rules of operation are similar, and which cuts across geographical boundaries. However an indologist finds two essential problems in applying Said to India. While Said talks of a commonality and fusion of interests and attitudes between the colonisers in the metropolis and those in the colony something quite different is seen while studying India. Paradoxically, although, Britain and India were brought increasingly together - the development of a sense of separate identity among the Anglo Indians (the term has been used in the 18th and 19th century context referring to those Englishmen living and working in India and not in its 20th century context as a term for the Eurasians) was also accelerating. Thus, though 'orientalism' was being articulated in the metropolis, the growing body of Anglo Indians had their own distinctive contributions to the discourse. "The vocabulary of the Anglo Indian... had grown sufficiently to demand its own dictionaries - Glossary of Anglo Indians Colloquial words and Kindred Terms 1886"²⁸ or the 'Hobson Jobson'. The impact of the mutiny of 1857 can hardly be exaggerated. Fear and suspicion

28. Moore Gilbert, Kipling and Orientalism, Croom Helm, London, 1986, p.5.

of the Indian, after the revolt encouraged a sense of isolation and self-absorption which later proved to be the community's greatest weakness. Thus this section of the Anglo Indians were less interested or optimistic of their ability to initiate reforms. Moreover, they were hostile and critical of all those Englishmen in their own country, who sought to improve matters by legislation. They particularly resented the interference of a parliament whose knowledge of India was gleaned exclusively from the reports of its touring members. If the accounts circulated by the litterateurs of the period are to be believed, itinerant M.P.'s invariably took the voyage out in the most clement season, enjoyed the weather and did the social rounds to go back with glowing accounts of the wonderful climate and the ease and comfort of the Englishman's life in India. The fact that the travelling M.P. and the philosophical radical came in for severe criticism becomes evident in Kipling's poem 'Pagett, M.P.':

Pagett, M.P. was a liar and a fluent liar
therewith -

He spoke of the heat of India as the

'Asian solar myth';

Came on a four month's visit, to

'study the East' in November

And I got him to sign an agreement vowing to stay till
September.

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The Asian solar myth is exploded as soon as winter passes. The reality of an Indian summer is revealed to Paggett M.P. as he suffers the rounds of sunstroke, dysentery and prickly heat. In his anxiety to escape -

He babbled of 'Eastern Exile' mentioned his
home with tears;

to which the amused narrator says

But I hadn't seen my children for close upon seven
years.²⁹

There was a growing belief among the Anglo-Indian community in India, that those who are not on the spot and have no knowledge of India, have no right to legislate for it.

Thus paradoxically, Said himself falls into the trap of 'Orientalism', which has been bred into him through his western education. He too like the Orientalists believes that experiences of the East-West confrontation have been similar. Although his area of study is Egypt, under British influence he assumes that the Indian experience under British imperialism, has been more or less similar. Said's model applied vis-a-vis India fails, when used in order to understand the British attitudes in India, towards the large community of the Muslims. While in Egypt they were described

29. Rudyard Kipling, 'Pagett M.P.', Department Ditties and Barrack Room Ballads, n.p., London, 1904, pp. 41-2.

as the 'blood thirsty fanatics', in India the Muslims were seen in a favourable historical light and described as possessing values of masculinity, activity and forcefulness - qualities admired by the British.

In contrast the Hindus and especially the Bengalis were portrayed in a harsh light. The reaction for this difference in classification has its roots in the mutiny and the developments in the post-mutiny era.

Intellectually, the European mind was outraged by the Hindus precisely in these three principles which were fundamental to its approach to life, and which it had been applying with ever greater strictness since the Renaissance: that of reason, that of order, and that of measure. 30

The Hindu was now seen in a very narrow light as the "educated mercantile intellectual Indian in contrast to the Muslim soldier and peasant."³¹ Thus throughout this period it is the 'simple peasant' who is referred to, as the true Indian and the Middle class Indian was the most disliked.

The Mutiny of 1857 can be used as an effective landmark after which a shift is seen in the British attitude towards India. The earlier half of the nineteenth century was marked

30. Nirad C. Choud^hhari, "On Understanding the Hindu", Encounter (XXIV), London, July 1965, p.24.

31. Allen J. Greenberger, The British Image of India, Oxford Univ. Press, London, 1969, p.49.

by a zeal for reform which had inspired both philosophical Radicals and Evangelicals in England. Although they criticised the political backwardness and religious superstitions as vehemently as their conservative successors, they felt confident that in the coming generations India would advance along the same civilized path which the western nation, had followed before them. In 1835, Thomas B. Macaulay, a Whig liberal, stressed the value of education in creating the new middle class, and eventually establishing a capacity for self-government in the fragmented India of his times. "Others imbued with the Utilitarian principles of Bentham and Mill, emphasized on constitutional and legal reform as an instrument for progress. In each instance their thought had its foundation in an Enlightenment sense of universal human dignity, and by and large such a conviction set the tone for British rule in the 1830's and 1840's."³²

However in the latter half of the century, thinking about India bore a distinctively different face... once target of reforms, India had now become the hope of reactionaries... excited by the desire to rule rather than reform, concerned the British, ...the ideology of permanence clearly exerted a strong pressure on British life and thought. A permanent raj seemed a practical possibility and to be confirmed by racial and political and religious theories as both sound and high principled. In retrospect, the extent of the British dedication to this

32. W.Y. Wurgaft, The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kipling's India, Westeyan Univ. Press, Connecticut, 1983, p.4.

illusion of permanence seems to have been both regrettable and dangerous. The Empire, seemingly so stable, was in reality growing ever more fragile... The certainty of a permanent Empire in these years, however, increased in proportion to its fragility, and was to serve for many people as a defence and retreat from reason, long after the course of events had proved its impossibility. 33

More recent historical writing such as Erik Stokes' The English Utilitarian in India qualifies this benevolent picture. Stokes has shown the extent to which the authoritarian strain in British rule made manifest in the late 19th century, was implicit in the assumption of the earlier utilitarian reformers. Though he recognised the radically different spirit of reform which divided the 1870's from the 1830's. The policies of a reforming Governor General, like William Bentinck in the 1830's, were envisaged as a co-operative effort between the British and a nascent Indian middle class. In the later period, however, such reforms were carried out at sword's point to which Lord Curzon, British Viceroy at the turn of the century, described as "a benighted people who had to be compelled towards the light."³⁴ The point about the arrogance of the ruler towards the people, if not racism, cannot but be noted.

33. Hutchins, Illusion of Permanence, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 1967, pp.x-xii.

34. Wurgaft, Imperial Imagination, op. cit., p.4.

In order to understand this change in the British attitude towards India, Stokes feels that one must look at the changing economic relations between India and Britain which contributed to a change in the purpose of political domination. "The tide of British policy in India should be seen in the direction set up by the development of the British economy".³⁵ Thus he writes

The relation of such movement in India was not merely personal and fortuitous. British policy moved within the orbit of ideas primarily determined in Europe... The more tolerant attitude of Clive and Hastings, their readiness to admire and work through Indian institutions, their practical grasp of the British position, unclouded by sentiments of racial superiority, of a sense of mission were ultimately the reflections of eighteenth century England. The transition of the Englishman from the 'Nobab' to the 'Sahib' was fundamentally an English and not an Indian transformation...³⁶

Thus for Stokes the Indian experience of the Mutiny may have influenced the character of the British in India but for its roots, one must look elsewhere, i.e. to the nineteenth century English middle class. "India had provided an element of scale and expansiveness to the mind of this new middle class which was so essential for the deployment of its political and moral ideas."³⁷

35. Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians in India, Oxford Univ. Press, London, 1959, p. iv.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

"If the white colonies constituted imperialism's ornate cathedral, cemented by common ties of race, language and religion and the black colonies its private preserve, India was a principal rampart of the Empire, its halting place, its springboard and its central operation theatre".³⁸

The importance of India for Britain cannot be negated as the latter's interests in India were extensive.

A third of the British army was trained and maintained by her and thus considerably relieving the British tax-payers. The Indian army, one of the largest standing armies in the world, was commanded by Britons and guarded strategic areas including Middle eastern oil and Malayan rubber. A third of British overseas trade was militarily supervised by it from Egypt to north China. India was Britain's largest importer of textiles. She absorbed a fifth of British overseas investments. Many members of British parliament had family connections with the Indian army or civil service. No one was, therefore, inclined to relinquish that divine disposition. Without India, it was believed, the empire would expire.³⁹

Thus the raj for all intents and purposes emerged as a singular religion for the Englishmen which cut across all superficial party lines. "Its image was liberally decked up by Britain's left wing socialism and her right wing demand in favour of imperial preferences and exclusiveness".⁴⁰

38. Suhash Chakravarty, "The Exiled Race in Action", Man and Development, New Delhi, Oct. 1986, p.72.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., p.73.

Thus, the extension of Pax Britannica which was essential to allow the British economy to grow and develop was greeted by all Englishmen as an unavoidable commitment. The 'Summum bonum' of imperialism was the new belief among the Englishmen that their service to the inarticulate millions of India would lead to the disappearance of misery, anarchy, oppression, superstition and destitution. It would ensure the expansion of peace, justice, prosperity, humanity and freedom of thought and expression. It was to bring in law, regularity, routine, stability and discipline. "The image of the raj was focussed in the 'relentless' service of the 'Overland mail'. From level to upland, from upland to crest, from rice field to rock ridge and from the rock ridge to the spire."⁴¹ Thus the Englishmen talked in terms of the paternalistic care of a district officer toward his inarticulate subjects in a bid to establish the 'Vakil raj'.

This historical reality of the dominance and dependence relationship between England and its colonies gave birth to a new genre of literature, the function of which was to propagate the ideology of colonialism.

Primarily it sought to justify the control of the colony by the particular government

41. Rudyard Kipling, "The Overland Mail", A Kipling Anthology, London, quoted in S. Chakravarty, 'Exiled race', ibid., p.74.

run by members of an alien power. Towards this goal it distorted that part of social and human reality of the colony which was likely to come into conflict with its main pre-suppositions. History, religion, culture, physiology were some of the main sources utilized for the construction of this ideology.⁴²

Thus colonial expansion in India in the nineteenth century was accompanied by intellectual trends which sought to justify it. Another important trend that took over England, was the emergence of the colonial status system of values which was based on "worship of material progress, cult of good conduct, glorification of hard work and action, patriotism and sacrifice towards the cause of one Empire and racism."⁴³ It was this tension between two contrasting British attitudes towards India, that is, the attraction to India as a land unknown, mysterious and seductive, and the self-mastering and self-sacrificing repression and denial involved in the commitment to govern, which gave birth to rich literature, political memoirs, biographies and fictional accounts. A study of the latter reveals the fact that they played an important role in building up the myth, both cultural and political which a colonial power like Britain would need in order to justify her presence

42. Padma J. Anagol, "Literature as Ideology: Rudyard Kipling's Creative World", Studies in History, Sage Pub., New Delhi, 1987, p.74.

43. Hutchins, Illusions of Permanence, op. cit., p.x.

in the colony and sustain her self-esteem. In order to understand British policy towards India it is important to recognise ideas and images which the British had created about their Indian subjects and their own role in India.

The image building role in literature on colonial India is at its best in the last half of the nineteenth century. In this period a whole galaxy of writers emerged who were writing novels, plays, poetry and stories set in India. They were widely read in England, to an extent that H.G. Wells talks of Kiplingism which he feels dominated this period. Most of these writings took a well defined position of important social and political issues which was influenced by their unshaken belief in 'Pax Britannica'. Thus the writers of this period emerged as Britain's chief imperial spokesmen. They contributed greatly to the building up of the image of the mysterious, historic and awesome Indian subcontinent.

As discussed earlier, the language of ideology, is a powerful force in a situation of social change or disintegration, as it is through it that the experience of chaos and emotional arousal are harnessed and a sense of loss resolved.⁴⁴ Thus through the emotional power vested

44. Gerald Platt, Thoughts and a theory of Collective Action, quoted from Wurgaft, Imperialism Imagination, op. cit., p.xvi.

in the myth, the social group can defend itself against external threat⁴⁵ or internal turmoils. The building up of myths help to create an identity, a history which helps to define a group in a broader culture. Thus these idealizing fantasies help to liberate individual ego and culture and helps them to control and understand the external reality which would otherwise be incomprehensible to them.

The 'inner' or 'absolute' reality of the myth provides an emotional medium for the articulation of the community's political and social beliefs. The social and cultural homogeneity of a group and its response to the pressure to forgo a self-conscious group identity can be assessed by the extent to which fantasy material becomes institutionalized and idealised.⁴⁶

In these respects the Anglo-Indian community in India in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was a close knit socially and culturally homogenous group. "As a group they were exposed to grave pressures which found expression in increasing rigid social behaviour and in the cultivation of political and racial stereotypes."⁴⁷ This period of British conquest of India had been described by Greenberger as the 'era of Confidence', which was marked

45. Wurgaft, Imperial Imagination, ibid., p.xvi.

46. Ibid.

47. A.J. Greenberger, British Image, op. cit., p.111.

by a shared faith in the value of British civilization and the British as the natural rulers representing the 'active positive' world of the west in a 'passive negative' country. They shared the belief, that ruling India was their mission, a duty necessarily imposed upon them by some organic determinism. The administrator visualised himself as a platonic guardian, chosen to rule because of the characteristic feature of intelligence, honesty, daringness which he possessed by virtue of the British blood in him, to bring peace, order and tranquility in this strife ridden land.

Lucien Goldmann, in Sociology of Literature writes that an author "at an advance level of coherence is among the first to constitute the aggregates of categories, tending towards coherent structures, aggregates power to certain privileged social groups, whose thought, sensibility and behaviour are oriented towards the global organisation of interhuman relations".⁴⁸ Thus, literature is seen as an effective medium which the writer utilizes in expressing the dominant social reality of his times, as well as influencing the thought process of human beings. A study of the literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals the fact that literature disseminates colonial

48. Lucien Goldmann, 'Sociology of Literature,' quoted in P.J. Angaol, Studies in History, op. cit., pp 76-77

ideology in two important realms - first by energising a myth about the empire, through the infusion of adventure and heroism and by articulating a sense of responsibility and devotion towards the cause of the Empire, it was able to galvanize generations of soldiers and civilians to serve in the colony. Secondly, by generating and perpetuating the myth about the uncivilised sub-continent, they were able to justify the English presence in India. These writers had a tremendous influence on those who served in India and even on those who stayed at home. Edmund Candler recalls how he had come to India having read about the country only in the writings of Kipling and others. With this background he felt that he could understand India and that she was exactly like the country described in those writings. Leonard Woolf's writings too reflect the same experience. He writes,

the white people also in many ways were astonishingly like characters in Kipling's story. I could never make up my mind as to whether Kipling had moulded his characters accurately in the image of the Anglo Indian society or whether we were moulding ourselves in the image of Kipling's stories.⁴⁹

The mutiny of 1857, should be regarded as the beginning of the new phase of British history in India. Acts of

49. Leonard Woolf, Growing: An Autobiography of the years 1904-1913, Hogarth, London, 1961, p.46.

unbridled violence on both sides left a legacy of bitterness. In contrast to the earlier period the British leadership of Kipling's India perceived its role in opposition to political reform. This period witnessed the development of an articulate and politically self-conscious native middle class, the founding of the Indian National Congress and the widespread demand for broader political and administrative role for native Indians. Although committed in theory to these objectives, the British Government in India did its utmost to ignore these persistent claims and to obstruct the access of Indians to responsible political and administrative positions.⁵⁰ Thus, this period witnessed an increasing suspicion among the British for the new class of Western educated native subjects. The social and cultural concerns of the Anglo Indian Community narrowed accordingly. Anglo Indian society became more and more insular and the gap between it and the native community increased considerably. Wurgaft points to the concrete development of improved communications between Britain and India and a shift in the career pattern of the British who went out to India, as one of the causes for this change. The 'fabled Nobob' or the fortune seeker was now replaced by a civil servant who could mingle less freely in native society.

50. V.G. Kierman, The Lord of the Human Kind, Pelican, London, 1980, p.48.

Moreover with the increase in communication and transport and the coming of the English women to India a whole train of sexual taboos and moral self-consciousness, was successfully implanted on to the Indian soil. The deficiency which was earlier regarded the outcome of 'relative backwardness' was now interpreted in social and moral categories. In the travel accounts of George Trevelyan, who visited India in the early 1860's, one notices the fact that all Indians were at that time described as 'niggers'.

Richard Burton, who did not like Indians (he liked very few of innumerable people he met on his wanderings), pointed out a few years before 1857, how ignorant Britons were of Indian feeling, and of how Indians hated them. "The changes that British rule was bringing about went far enough to antagonize many interests, not far enough to create many new interests as a support."⁵¹

British historians and novelists rejected the idea of an Indian race, but rather stated that there were numerous 'Indian races'. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, etc.

the western educated literate section, which consisted of less than one per cent of the total Indian population. This period witnessed a tendency of applying certain behavioral characteristics to certain regional groups, for example the conception of the 'proud and chivalrous Rajput', the 'astute and hardened Maratha' completely different from the 'emotional and supple Bengali', and the 'simple minded jungle folk of Southern India'. Thus the British in order to justify their existence in India, denied its very existence. The historians of that period, such as Chirol and all those who belonged to the imperialistic school, believed that the organic unity of India was an artificial imperial creation. As a nation, it was asserted time and again, by all those who had a stake in the raj, that India never existed. This perception became one of the main arguments in the hands of Strachey, Seeley and Simon against granting of self-rule to India.

The present day western scholar's comment on the diversity of India is a reflection of the persistence of the stereotypes under changed circumstances commenting on South Asia. Stephen Cohen⁵² says that a Tamil has nothing in common with a Pathan. In contrast the present Indian scholarship points to the fact that conflict in South

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Asia is historically engineered by the imperial powers and are an outcome of attitudes and policies of the present neo-colonial powers. They point to the fact that the myth of the martial races helped not only the recruitment to the army but also in creating certain psychological states that led to assertion of distinction and separation. Some studies have shown how this psyche has led to the problems in Punjab. The perception of India on the basis of community and caste, led to reform acts that not only pitted Muslims against Hindus but one caste against another.

However, although certain 'racial characteristics' of specific groups were highlighted, certain generalizations were also made, under which, all Indians were grouped. The foremost character trait of the Indian people was that they were like little children. In an age when 'sparing the rod' was equivalent to 'spoiling the child' it is obvious that relations with a people considered as children would involve a large degree of force. The image of the Indian as a child fitted in very nicely with the British image of itself as a "strong all knowing leader".⁵³ He was a leader

52. Stephan P. Cohen, "South Asia" in Robert S. Litwak and Samuel F. Wells Jr. (eds.), Super Power Competition and Security in the Third World, Ballinger Co., Massachusetts, 1988, p.153.

53. A.J. Greenberger, British Image, op. cit., p.42.

by virtue of his race and had an obligation to play the father of the child. Any attempt to upset this would go against the law of nature. It was the child like characteristic of the natives which brought in irrationality, dishonesty and the lack of self-discipline among them. Kipling's aphorism half devil and half child for Mangli, bred in jungles with Sher Khan and the other jungle animals was a representative imperial stereotype of an average Indian.

This characterization should be seen keeping in mind the effects of the Mutiny which became an event around which British stereotypes of native treachery, impulsiveness and brutality could crystallize. It provided the ultimate rationalization for authoritarian rule.

This period was marked by a certain amount of contempt for the Westernized Indian whose demands now were threatening to deprive the English of their privileges and powers. This emerging political rival was called the 'babu' which was often "spelt and pronounced with indefinite numbers of 'o's seeking to impress his close affinity with the baboons".⁵⁴ The typical Bengali native living in Calcutta was a babu 'the man of the clerkly, semi-educated class'. He was a man who was timid with no enterprise, no initiative, no

54. S. Chakravarty, Man and Development, op. cit., p. 96.

courage or confidence. Thus, this queer creature became the "object of supreme hatred and a source of unpredictable target for the English".⁵⁵ In 1888, an editorial in Lahore's Civil and Military Gazette declared that:

nowhere in any corner of his character has the Bengali a spark of the spirit which has guided Englishmen in taking and ruling India and upon occasion of legislative difficulty, it is impossible that he could offer, of his own notion, any reasonable advice towards the maintenance of that rule. He is a shrewd judge of all matters regarding his own comforts.⁵⁶

The cities of India in which this new class lived were described with distaste, Kipling refers to 'the great Calcutta stink' and in 'The City of Dreadful Night,' his description of Lahore fitfully sleeping in oppressive heat is certainly not a pleasant picture".⁵⁷

Thus, in this period the 'real India', was the India of the frontier, and the small villages and the "real Indians were the simple village folk the Khidmatgar, the unknown peasant or the impoverished artisan. His sole possession was his meagre income from his fragmented piece of land his complete subordination to the law of karma. British absolutism felt secure in the poverty and fatalism

55. Ibid., p. 97.

56. Civil and Military Gazette, 15th Sept. 1888, p.3.

57. A.J. Greenberger, British Image, op. cit., p.38.

of the Indian peasantry. British India was impregnable, safe and exalted in the company of peasants, artisans, sepoys, servants, orthodox Brahmins steeped in mythology".⁵⁸ Thus increasingly in the post Mutiny period, it became a part of the conventional wisdom of British India to contrast the stereotype of the effeminate resident of Bengal unfavourably with a stereotype of the vigorous and sturdy peasant of the Punjab. S.S. Thornburn summed up this sentiment when he asserted that the people of India were the 'dumb toiling millions' and that the "town bred exotics who were annually forced through our educational hot house and were claiming to be representatives of the people had less claim to the title than the puny representatives of our manufacturing towns have of being representatives of John Bull."⁵⁹ On this ground the British were able to build up a certain degree of legitimacy for their control over India. Pushing forth the belief that only they could rule India on the basis of justice and neutrality and bring in order and remove anarchy which was endemic to native India.

Most British regarded the Mutiny to be a reaction to the inroads the imperial government had made in the

58. S. Chakravarty, Man and Development, op. cit., p. 95.

59. S. Thornburn, Mussalmans and Money Lenders in the Punjab, Mittal Pub., Delhi, 1983.

traditional structure of society and culture which they felt had alarmed the native subjects. This period was marked by the exaggerated image of Indian conservatism which Thomas Metcalf describes as 'imperial folklore'. Between the period of 1859-70, there were a number of attempts by the British to restore the Indian Aristocracy to its paramount position. It was assumed that only a "loyal land-owning class could anchor Indian society in its sustaining tradition and forestall the anarchy and revolt engendered by the 'liberal' approach to imperial administration."⁶⁰ "Thus the second line of defense for the British administration turned to be this faded aristocracy with its husk culture".⁶¹ This period witnessed the organisation of a large number of durbars which were traditional ceremonial gatherings of the native princes at which they affirmed their loyalty to British rule.

The other authoritarian impulse, which drew on the Orientalist stereotype of the Indian, was the belief that only British Government can bring in order and remove anarchy which was endemic to native India. Thus, the belief prevalent was that the English were in India, for the sake of the betterment of the land and its barbaric people. This helped

60. Wurgaft, Imperial Imagination, op. cit., p.22.

61. S. Chakravarty, Man and Development, op. cit., p.95.

to build up the stereotype of the Englishman whose character was marked by his innate capacity for hard work, selfless service, ability to combat the natives' ignorance, the disease and the heat of India. The 'welfare' theme runs through Kipling's 'Song of the white man' where he writes that the white men "go to right a wrong; to clean a land; to give freedom to all."⁶² They also "clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford".⁶³ Besides they fill the mouth of famine and bid the sickness cease. Thus, for him and for others of his time the English were engaged in a task so hard and rewardless that it was referred to as the 'white man's burden'. The British administrators are "worried to death or broken in health... so that the land may be protected from death, sickness, famine and war".⁶⁴ They are to govern a people who are child-like and simple and thus are not in a position to either protect themselves or govern themselves. The creation of heroes out of mediocre and ordinary Englishmen who were serving India without expectation of any rewards, who were suffering the agonies of heat, dust, disease and separation from their kith and kin, in return of only opposition and treachery

62. P.J. Anadol, Studies in History, op. cit., p. 84

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

played an important role in moulding the 'empire consciousness'. "The typical English boy lapped up these myths and images of the brave, heroic, suffering and sacrificing English which besides allaying their conscience, accentuated the existing notion of the great civilising role of Britain on other lands and indispensibility of English rule".⁶⁵ It would not be wrong to assert that literature of that period had tremendous impact on young minds in Britain, as also in India. Mark Nadis writing about one of the most popular of the early authors who employs Indian setting in his stories notes "Henty impressed a whole generation of English reading school-boys (and presumably some adults) with his special image of British India. Since imperial policy in late Victorian times were usually made in the inner circle which came exclusively from the public schools, Henty's idea of India fell on fertile soil."⁶⁶ Thus, these literateurs who were disseminating colonial ideology, had an impact or were being read by the future administrators of India. One is not asserting that all administrators, were influenced by the writings of a particular author or a group of authors but merely suggesting that it is highly likely for those who share a common intellectual influence and educational background, to

65. Wurgaft, Imperial Imagination, op. cit., p.30.

66. Ibid.

share a common denominator of ideas and attitudes.

The stereotype of the average Indian, of the peasant of the members of the Middle class and the Landed aristocracy led to a plurality of policies which came in under the umbrella of the stereotype of the British administrator as a law giver and as performing a civilisational role. In the next chapter we look at the colonial perceptions of a movement that emerged in opposition to the British economic policy of commercialisation of crops, with the hindsight understanding that the Gandhian approach to peasants begin with Champaran where the peasants were agitating on the question of indigo. It was interesting to pursue the study of the indigo mutiny since the indigo agitation takes place during the pre and post-mutiny phase which enabled one to see the change in British perceptions during this period of transition.

CHAPTER II

IMPERIAL PERCEPTION (1) - INDIGO REBELLION 1860

Closely following the Mutiny of 1857, the Indigo Rebellion in lower Bengal in the 1860's, soon became a matter of great concern, not merely for the British administrators, but for all those who had certain stakes in the permanence of the Raj. The significance of this agrarian movement for the British is brought out by the following quote from the 'Indigo Blue book' of 1860.

A sudden and remarkable change has come over the rural population of Bengal. All at once they have asserted their independence. The ryot, whom we were accustomed to class with the enduring helot or the Russian serf, whom we regard as part and parcel of the land upon which he lived, the unresisting instruments of zamindars and planters, has at length been roused to action and has resolved to wear his chains no longer. The extraordinary feeling with which the rural population at this moment regards the system of Indigo Planting as pursued in Lower Bengal, has produced in some localities an outburst, unexpected by the most farseeing. Such symptoms following so close on the events of 1857 cannot but exercise an important influence on the future of Bengal.¹

The peasant protest against the oppressive activities of the planters was an outcome of the culmination of mounting

1. Indigo Blue Book, Calcutta Review, vol. XXXIII, Jan.-June 1860, Quoted in Manju Chattopadhyay, Petition to Agitation - Bengal 1857-1885, K.P. Bagchi and Company Ltd., Calcutta, 1985, p.22.

anger over a very long period of time. The entire indigo industry of lower Bengal ultimately rested on the foundation of coercion and intimidation. Moreover certain changes were taking place in the mufassal life which made the system intolerable.

The growth of Calcutta as the political, administrative and commercial centre of the British Empire had an increasing influence on all classes of mufassal society. As the epicentre of the Bengal Renaissance, Calcutta by the 1850's was seething with political and intellectual activity.

Much of the excitement was communicated to the mufassal through the rural upper classes who sent their sons to be educated in the city and through the villagers who had migrated to Calcutta and returned to their village homes for holidays. In the indigo districts colleges offering western curricula were being established - at Dacca in 1841, at Krishnagar in Nadia District in 1845 and at Berhampur in Murshidabad District in 1853. Between 1852 and 1854 English secondary schools were founded in many of the indigo districts.²

This position is reflective of the position taken by Eric Wolfe on peasant rebellions of the 20th century. His study shows that it is external cultural contact which brings in

2. B. Kling, The Blue Mutiny - The Indigo Disturbances in Bengal 1858-1862, Philadelphia Univ., Philadelphia, 1966, pp.50-61.

a process of revolt in a peasant society.³ Another development, which had a significant influence on the peasantry in this region was the emergence of the Farazis, who were a tightly organized puritanical sect among the Muslims of eastern Bengal.

It is interesting to note that the religious motive was carefully utilized by the Farazis to give expression to their agrarian grievances. Basing themselves on their own interpretation of the tradition of the prophet, they held that it was illegal to pay rent especially to an infidel. The term infidel was conveniently used to apply to all Hindu zamindars and to Muslim zamindars also, who, as a rule, condemned Farazi practices. Indigo planters being Christians also came under the denomination, 'infidel'.⁴

They collected funds, refused to pay taxes and attacked and plundered the estates of Hindu zamindars and European indigo planters. Though this movement was checked in 1859, many of the peasants who participated in the indigo disturbances in the 1860's in lower Bengal were Farazis skilled in military organization and the use of arms. For example, Eden the official Joint Magistrate of Barasat writes,

Charghat has several thousand Mussalman (Farazi) inhabitants, all banded together to prevent any interference with their rights, real or supposed... Being Sharawallas (or Farazis)

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3. Eric Wolfe, Peasant war in the Twentieth Century, Faber & Faber, London, 1971.
 4. Narahari Kaviraj, Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p.92.

they have complete organization and frequently meet together to interchange ideas.⁵

Other events of ^apolitical nature which helped to excite the peasantry were the Santhal Rebellion of 1855-57 and the Sepoy Mutiny.⁶ While, the first set an example for the rural oppressed in their fight against Hindu moneylenders, zamindars and indigo planters, the latter heightened racial tensions by reminding the planters of their isolation. This led to the creation of European 'volunteer' forces. "One such force composed of discharged seamen and loafers, was assembled in Calcutta and sent to Jessore where it intimidated the surrounding villagers."⁷

The oppressive nature of the Indigo planting system, was noted as early as 1810, when Lord Minto instructed the magistrates in this region, to restrain planters from the illegal detention and flogging of ryots. However the violence and oppression continued unabated right upto 1859 as "after 1813 the Government was less concerned

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5. Letter from A. Eden officiating Joint Magistrate of Barasal to Commissioner of Circuit, Nadia District. Selections from the records of the Government of Bengal quoted in Narahari Kaviraj, Wahabi and Farazis Rebels of Bengal, ibid., pp.82-3.
 6. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.61.
 7. Ibid.

with Indian sensibilities".⁸ In 1823 the Governor General Lord Amherst allowed the planters to recover, by summary suit, advances made to ryots. The planters were moreover, given protection against the interference of zamindars during the selling and delivery of the indigo plant.⁹ Bentiⁿck, in a desperate attempt to save the Calcutta agency houses which had most of its money invested in indigo concerns from bankruptcy, authorised the summary criminal trials and imprisonment of ryots who broke indigo contracts. To free himself from the planters, the ryot was now required to furnish proof that his contract had expired. In defence of his moves Bentiⁿck wrote to the Court of Directors,

...that if the Government removed their disadvantage the indigo planters could become a blessing to India. Planters holding land in their own name would take an interest in improving the conditions of their tenants. Conflict between planters over disputed crops would cease and healthy competition take its place.¹⁰

Fundamentally, he argued, the presence of Europeans in the mufassal would help 'civilise' the Indians by diffusing European art and science among them. Bentiⁿck envisioned the rise of a new India with religious sects incorporating Christian ethics and a populace demanding European luxuries

8. Ibid., p.40.

9. Ibid., p.41.

10. John Rosselli, Lord William Bentinck: The Making of a Liberal Imperialist 1774-1839, Thompson Press, Delhi, 1974, p.195.

and English education, inauguration new commercial enterprises, and cooperating with Europeans in business. Nor did the Governor General neglect to mention the importance of encouraging indigo production for remittance purposes. In reviewing the reports from his district officers, on the conduct of the indigo planters, Bentinck concluded that the occasional misconduct of the planters was more than offset by the benefits they brought to the countryside. In spite of the fact that the planters had labored under severe legal handicaps, every factory was "a circle of improvement".¹¹

In sharp contrast to Bentinck's liberalism and faith in the British, the majority opinion in the Court of Directors, emphasised the belief that the company had been able to hold India only because it had never interfered with the religion or the laws of the native people. Indians, they felt, should not be allowed to participate in the working of the Government. The difference in character, habits, language and religion was highlighted and it was felt that social intercourse between the two races would lead to strife. However, within England the evangelicals and humanitarians united with Lancashire cotton interest. While the former wanted to spread Christianity and the British civilization in India, the Lancashire wing was

11. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., pp.42-43.

interested in the growing of cotton within the empire.¹² This development favoured a new phase of European colonization in India. Thus a new plantation system "which was nothing but thinly veiled slavery, was immediately developed in India, and it is significant that many of the original planters were slave drivers from the West Indies."¹³

Under the Charter Act of 1853, the post of Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was created and Sir Frederick Halliday became the first Lieutenant Governor. Halliday soon became extremely unpopular with the Hindu community in Calcutta, so much so that its members refused to sign the customary eulogistic address on his departure from India. The Hindoo Patriot described his career as "remarkable for selfishness aggravated by intense meanness, for insolent blunders, systematic insincerity and a number of hasty doings whose pernicious effects it will take a quarter of a century to undo."¹⁴ Halliday was criticised for his general inactivity, his support to the proposal to introduce Bible study into Government schools, his indulgence of the indigo planter

12. Ibid., p.46.

13. R.P. Dutt, India Today, Manisha Printers, Bombay, 1947, p.105.

14. Hindoo Patriot, May 5, 1859.

and support to the Rent Act of 1859.¹⁵ His support to the planters emanated from the belief that the economic future of Bengal depended on the enterprise of Europeans in the mufassals. He believed, that once given a position of responsibility, the planters would themselves curtail their excesses and reform the system. When Halliday first toured Bengal in August 1854, a large number of zamindars, vakils and mukhtars of Nadia District petitioned to him for relief from the 'tyranny and oppression' of the indigo planters. However Halliday rejected them as "vague and probably not credible".¹⁶ In sharp contrast he devoted a good deal of attention to the complaints of the planters and supported the latter's demand for a law to enforce indigo contracts in criminal courts. Moreover the power of Honorary Magistrate was given to a large number of planters. The peasants expressed their indignation in popular songs and sayings, among them, 'Je rakhak se bhakhak', (the man appointed our protector is our devourer).¹⁷

Halliday's successor was John Peter Grant (Junior), a liberal, who believed that the role of the Government should be to remove restrictions on the individual and

15. Buckland, Bengal Under the Lieutenant Governors, Deep Publishers, Delhi, 1976.

16. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.65.

17. Ibid., p.67.

enable him to enjoy the results of his labour. Soon after taking up office as the Lieutenant Governor he toured Eastern Bengal by water.

For days afterwards, in the same journey, for a distance of 70 or 80 miles, were lined by thousands of people who were running along to keep up with the steamer, the women sitting by the water's edge, the inhabitants of different villages pouring out and taking up the race from village to village, all the time vociferously beseeching him to grant them justice.¹⁸

To the surprise of the petitioners who were largely ryots and small landholders Grant was receptive to the petitions. The Indian Field commented on the affair saying that the ryots were astonished at getting justice done after all these years and had begun to question the assertions of the planters that the Government favoured the growing of indigo against the will of the ryots. They compared Grant's attitude with Halliday's, who had been taken on an elephant to the scene of some of the greatest outrages by a planter, and had "acted the part of a hysterical marine and laughed with the manager over the ruins of Goaltollie and admired the indigo sown, where a prosperous village had once stood."¹⁹ Grant is said to have been impressed by this spontaneous action of the ryots and commented that the "organization

18. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution in Bengal, Bharati Library Publishers, Calcutta, 1953, p.x.

19. Indian Field, December 10, 1859.

and capacity for continued and simultaneous action in the cause, which this remarkable demonstration over so large an extent of country proved, are subjects worthy of much consideration."²⁰

However, it would be erroneous to presume that Grant was an inveterate enemy of indigo planting. When the ryots, who cultivated indigo for T. E. Oman of Siliguri district, sent a list of grievances to the Lieutenant Governor, he rejected them on ground that they were vague and that thereafter they should petition through the proper channels. The Hindoo Patriot commented that the Lieutenant Governor's reply was proof that, notwithstanding the complaints of the indigo planters, the Government was not allying itself with the peasantry; but, after years of pampering the indigo industry it "has simply desisted from zealously siding with the planters and interfering with the operation of the law."²¹ Thus Grant's aim was merely to assure the predominance of law and order in face of violence and social conflict. His efforts, were thus not directed towards the end of exploitation of the ryots, but were attempts to make the Government entirely neutral, which could distance itself from both the planters and the

20. Quoted in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution in Bengal, op. cit., p.x.

21. Hindoo Patriot, March 10, 1860.

ryots while taking decisions.

In line with this attitude, the Lieutenant Governor Sir John Peter Grant (Jr.) was persuaded by the planters, to enact an infamous law on the 31st March of 1860. This act popularly known as Act XI made breach of contract on the part of the ryot a criminal offence. The bill provided that if after March 24, 1860

a ryot willfully delayed or omitted to cultivate indigo according to his agreement for which a cash advance was made, the magistrate, on the oath of a planter or agent could summon the ryot to explain before him and investigate the complaint; on sufficient evidence the ryot could be made to pay damages amounting to five times the advance or to suffer imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months. Another section provided for the fine and imprisonment of any person attempting to intimidate a ryot to break off an agreement for conspiring with others to cause a breach of contract. Other provisions include penalties for willful destruction or damage to indigo crops, the denial of an appeal from the decision of the magistrate and the expiration of the act within six months.²²

This let loose a period of tyranny and oppression and though enacted temporarily for six months, the planters took fullest advantage of this law. In Nadia and Jessore their oppression reached a high point with all the district official joining hands with the planters.

Certain other factors played a part in the en masse ryots refusal to sow indigo. The treatment meted out to

22. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.2.

Abdul Latif the Deputy Magistrate of Kalaroa who had issued an order in 1854 to Mackenzie an indigo planter forbidding him to use force against the ryots and demanding the cultivation of indigo. ^{enraged the ryots.} The second incident took place when J.H. Mangles a Magistrate, in a dispute between the ryots and the Baraset concern of the Bengal indigo company, ruled in favour of the former. In his judgement he said that the ryots were forced illegally to take indigo advances. As a result that year the ryots refused to grow indigo and the output of the Baraset concern recorded an all time low. After getting complaints from the planters, Mangles was reprimanded by Halliday himself.

Ashley Eden, the successor of Mangles as Joint Magistrate, too, soon was throughly antagonized by the lawless activity of the planters. In an attempt to help the ryots against the forced cultivation of indigo he issued an order on 16th March 1859 to his subordinate, the Deputy Magistrate saying that, "Since the ryot can sow in their land whatever crop they like, no one can without their consent and by violence sow any other crop."²³ In August 1859 Eden went further and asserted, that the first duty of a policemen would be to protect the peasants who had the exclusive right to decide as to how to use their land and they did not forfeit

23. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution, op. cit., p. 2.

this right to protection, because of any promise to sow indigo.²⁴ Eden was able to take such a strong stand, because the new Lieutenant Governor John Peter Grant (Jr.) had agreed with him that "indigo cannot be supported at the expense of justice."²⁵ The knowledge of Eden's parwanas (orders) spread throughout the district. Eden testified later before the Indigo Commission and said,

Ryot came from Jessore and Kisnaghur and took authenticated copies of my order, knowing that the effect of intimidation would be, to spread gradually throughout Bengal a knowledge of the fact that it was optional for the ryots to enter into contract or not, as they thought it.²⁶

The circulation of this proclamation undoubtedly reinforced the belief of many ryots and their leaders that the time for action was ripe, and that now there was hope for Government support in throwing off the hated system.²⁷

The planters whom Kling terms as the "interlopers" and describes as "the private trader who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dared to intrude into

24. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., pp.70-71.

25. Binoy Chowdhuri, "Agrarian relations in Bengal 1859-1885", in Narendra Krishna Sinha, The History of Bengal 1757-1905 (ed.), Calcutta Univ., Calcutta, 1962, pp. 280-81.

26. Judicial proceedings, Govt. of Bengal, 21 July 1859, pp.156-64, quoted in B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.72.

27. Quoted in B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.73.

the commercial monopoly of the East India Company, "28 held land in India, under almost every type of tenure from zamindari down to sub-tenancy of a ryot. As a zamindar he was allowed to lease the land and collect rent but could not dictate the crops which were to be cultivated. "If however his tenants objected to growing indigo he could, until the Rent Act of 1859 (Act X) evict them for the non-payment of rent."29 Those planters, who held land under Indian zamindars, were constantly threatened by another law peculiar to permanent settlement. When the zamindari estate exchanged hands, all the contracts with the numerous under tenures, were cancelled and fresh contracts drawn up. One of the major objectives in the formation of the Indigo Planters Association had been to urge the passage of a new sale law to protect undertenures. As the planters improved his land tenure position, the ryot found it more difficult to free himself from indigo.

With the indigo disturbances the planters and their virtual mouthpiece, the Englishman and the Bengal Harkaru launched a vicious campaign against the ryot's action. It was believed to be a movement engineered by the zamindars. A number of letters suggesting such a linkage appeared in the Englishman and Bengal Harkaru throughout 1860. One letter

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 38.

in the Englishman declares,

like a dog in the manger the native zamindar cannot bear to see the English planters make money by growing indigo on land, which he deems his own, and the entire gain derived from which, he is convinced, is his by prescriptive right, the ryot being merely sponges to be squeezed...30

However even today there are historians who agree with this view of the planters. Dr. Palit in 'Tensions in Bengal Rural Society' writes,

there are good reasons to support that the landlords were solely responsible for engineering the indigo uprising to knock out their bitterest enemies once and for all. It does not appear to have been a spontaneous, rational opposition of all sections of society...31

However a more balanced view seems to be that the ryots

found the entire society bitter against the planters - a development immensely encouraging to them. What finally touched off the explosion was a widespread feeling among the peasants that Government itself had been of late becoming more and more critical of the planters.32

Similar sentiment was voiced in a article published in Calcutta Review in 1860. It highlighted the racial bitter-

30. Englishman, 7 March, 1860.

31. Chitrabrata Palit, Tensions in Bengal Rural Society: Landlords Planters and Colonial Rule 1850-1860, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1975, p.141.

32. Benoy Chowdhury, Agrarian Relations in Bengal, op. cit., p.280.

ness of the times. It pointed out "the sepoy Rebellion in the north has been followed by a Ryot Mutiny in lower Bengal... the natives of India may fear that they will never love their European rulers."³³

Still others attributed the indigo disturbances to the mystery of the orient. I.T. Prichard an English Barrister, turned journalist, consoled himself by remarking that the "demonstration... may have been very easily got by working some of those secret springs that are never wanting in the politics of Bengal, when a little intrigue may serve the purpose of a party."³⁴

A certain section of the British opinion was able to see the problem as an outcome of years of oppression of the ryots. Mr. J. Cockburn, who had been an indigo planter for several years before joining the uncovenanted civil service as Deputy Magistrate of Murshidabad, wrote to the Government on 31st December 1859, "Indigo, honestly cultivated is an unprofitable crop, and the expenditure is by no means covered by the returns."³⁵ By calculating all

33. Calcutta Review, vol.XXXIV, Jan.-June 1860, p.240.

34. Administrator of India - 1859-1868, vol.I, p.147.
Quoted in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution,
op. cit., p.x.

35. Quoted in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution,
op. cit., p.xi.

the items he shows that the ryots' net receipt from growing rice on the same field, and his expenses were not covered by what the planter paid him. Mr. Cockburn frankly admits the helplessness of the ryots in their opposition to the white planters,

Those planters who have zamindari, will laugh at any law (of tenant protection) that may aim at a reform of the present system... (because) the law can never be brought to bear upon them, for this simple reason that no ryot of theirs will dare to put himself under its protection, when his jama and in fact all he possesses in this world were in the hands of the planters.³⁶

Even Herschel, when he was posted to the District of Nadia in February 1860 found that "there appeared among the ryots a general sense of approaching freedom. They behaved as if about to be released from something very oppressive and as if impatient of the slowness of the process."³⁷

In the 1850's and particularly after the Mutiny a poisoned atmosphere of racial bitterness permeated the public life of Calcutta. Many Britishers, who had once befriended the Indians, now became their worst enemies. "The Calcutta's town hall where Dwarkanath Tagore had once praised the European settler, now resounded with malicious

36. Selections from Bengal Government Record No. XXXIII, 'Indigo Cultivation', Part I, pp. 230-31. Quoted in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Peasant Revolution, op. cit., p. xi.

37. Quoted in Benoy Chowdhury, 'Agrarian Relations in Bengal', op. cit., p. 281.

recrimination as first the Europeans, then the Indians gathered for mass meeting."³⁸ When the Europeans met, "everything native was denounced in terms and with an earnestness that would be sublime were they not ridiculous. Native judges were accused of corruption, native palkee bearers were known to be refractory, even native ayahs were suspected of poisoning European babies."³⁹ The Indians retaliated with equal bitterness. In 1857 at a meeting Rajendralal Mitter voiced the feelings of his countrymen towards the settlers. He described them as -

Devoid of the merits which characterize a true Englishman and possessing all the benefits of the Anglo Saxon race, those adventures from England have carried ruin and devastation to wherever they have gone... They talk of their energy, education and high civilization. They boast of the capital that they bring to India, and the vast number of men who find employment from their wealth. Surely never was there a more consummate case of making a mountain of a molehill... The country could not have a greater curse than the Anglo Saxon planters, who have been by their own missionaries denounced as the greatest tyrants who have been permitted to fatten on the ruination of the inoffensive and helpless peasants, men whose likes can be had only in the slave owners of Virginia.⁴⁰

The rowdy element within the European community enlisted and formed the Volunteer Corps. It is said to

38. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.109.

39. Hindoo Patriot, Feb. 19, 1857.

40. Quoted in B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.110.

have "terrorised peaceful Indian populace by parading the streets at night, searching, insulting and bullying the natives."⁴¹ Moreover by 1851 an organization uniting the disparate elements with indigo interest in Bengal was created under the banner of the Indigo Planters Association. It brought within its folds the planters in the mufassal and the indigo brokers, proprietors of large concerns and barristers of Calcutta.

Among the political activities the Indigo Planters Association supported two daily newspapers the Englishman and the Bengal Harkaru, presented petitions to the Government and tried to win over the Cabinet and Parliament.⁴²

Moreover the association supported a number of lobbyists in Britain and in 1857 it sent its secretary William Theobald to London to plead its case during a parliamentary debate of the Indian Penal Code.

The missionary bodies of Calcutta, though hesitant in the beginning to commit themselves, later, became the most effective interest group in both Calcutta and London. In 1862, Wood wrote to Elgin,

In England the feeling is on the native side. The missionaries influence - large bodies - people who form aborigines protection societies and the like are always ready to press the Government.⁴³

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. H.P. Wood to Elgin, Nov. 17, 1862, noted in B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.124.

The missionaries had a close and intricate network of communications both in India and England that neither the planters nor the Indians could equal. The missionaries, who were stationed in the mufassal and who were in constant contact with the indigo cultivators, raised their voices against the exploitation of the latter. Reverend Federick Schurr of the Church Missionary in Nadia District wrote in 1853:

"Surely it is time that the Indian Government put a stop to such inhuman and cruel proceedings. Every indigo factory deserves to be closed, yea, utterly abolished."⁴⁴ He tried to convince the general body of Calcutta missionaries that the behaviour of the planters had retarded the spread of Christianity in Nadia. "A section of the missionary leadership in Calcutta now began to defend missionary interference in social and political issues."⁴⁵ Of all the British missionaries the one who most vigorously championed the cause of the ryots was James Long. He authorised the translation and publication of the anti-planter Bengali play Nil Darpan into English. The popularity of this play written by a lesser known Bengali writer Dinabandhu Mitra has been explained by Ranajit Guha:

What then was it that made the publication of not so bright a play in a mufassal, by not too well known a writer, on not too unfamiliar a

44. C.M.S. Schurr to Cuthbert, April 17, 1853, quoted in B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.121.

45. B. Kling, Blue Mutiny, op. cit., p.122.

theme appears like a comet on Bengal's social horizon. The answer is simply that it was the European planters reaction to the play that triggered the baboo's response.⁴⁶

The planters opposed Long tooth and nail and dragged him to court for publishing a play which aimed to destroy the last vestige of public sympathy for the indigo planters and their supporters.

As regards the Indian opinion, all anger and frustration was directed against the immediate exploiter, the planter. The realization that the exploitation of the Indians was an outcome of a larger system of British 'Imperialism' was not realized till the beginning of the next century. Thus, often members of the Indian intelligentsia appealed to the British parliament and the Crown to bring an end to the exploitation of the numerous Indians. In Dinabandhu Mitter's foreword for Madhusudhan Dutt's translation of Neel Darpan he writes,

The Great Queen Victoria, compassionate mother of the proja's, considers it improper that her children should be suckled by her wet nurses. So she has taken them up in her arms and is feeding them at her own breasts. The even tempered, wise, courageous and liberal Mr. Canning has become the Governor General, The high minded and just Mr. Grant who punishes the wicked, protects the innocent, and shares with the ryots their weal and woe, has been appointed

46. Ranajit Guha, "Nil Darpan: The image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror," The Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 2, No. 1, October, 1974, London, p. 2.

Lieutenant Governor. The truthful, astute, non-partisan official like Eden, Herschel and others are gradually coming to blossom as lotuses in the lake of the civil services. It must therefore be clearly evident from all this that we have an indication now of the great soul mentioned above taking soon the Sudarshan disc of justice in order to end the unbearable misery of the ryot who have fallen into the clutches of the wicked indigo planter.⁴⁷

In many respects the indigo uprising is a landmark as well as a point of departure in the history of nineteenth century Bengal.

*In many aspects it showed the things to come. The reliance of kisans on the leadership of richer peasantry, and on the support of city propaganda, the failure of district officials to remedy a defective imperial system of agrarian labour relations, the interference of senior British officials with well intentioned utilitarian policies of younger Indian and British officers, working isolated in the countryside and the ephemeral nature of the alliance of the middle class and the peasantry, were to be common things from 1860 onwards... The failure to solve these problems... marks the essential failure of urban nationalism to establish close links with spontaneous agrarian discontent.⁴⁸

This study on the indigo rebellion reveals a few important aspects of the gap between British policy and the British perceptions of India. While British historians

47. Ibid., p.13.

48. Barun De, Book Review of B. Kling, The Blue Mutiny, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol.V, No.3, September 1968, p.302.

and statesmen of the time painted a benevolent picture of the British administrator in India as neutral and just, in reality they were far from it. Even the administration of a liberal, Grant, operated within the framework of superficial law and order. He rejected the petitions of the ryots from Siliguri on grounds that they were vague. In spite of the fact that Halliday, who was a conservative anti-Indian and Grant a liberal utilitarian, not much difference is seen in terms of their policy towards the Indian peasants.

Moreover, it reveals the gap between the British stereotype of the Indian peasant and the latter's role in history. The Indian peasant who was popularly regarded as a 'passive helot' dependent on a meagre income from a fragmented piece of land and his complete subordination to the law of Karma, now emerges in contrast, as an active participant in a movement, which promises to liberate him from exploitation and oppression. The peasants in lower Bengal basing themselves on their own interpretation of the Kuran, and the message of the prophet, were able to concentrate the peasant discontent against the planters. The peasants armed with Eden's parwana's refused to sow indigo, thus taking advantage of the legal provisions of freedom of contract and the freedom to cultivate the crops of their choice. The 'dumb toiling million', respond not merely to the racialism of the planter, but also to the nationalistic opinion in Calcutta.

The reactions of the Westernized Indian intelligentsia based in Calcutta shows that they were far from being 'cut off' from the 'real India' as the British described them to be. The letters written by Sisir Kumar Ghosh under the pseudonym of M.L.L. and 'a native' highlights the concern of members of this class for the indigo ryots. The pride of this class in this peasant led rebellion can be seen in the editorial of Amrit Bazar Patrika in 1874 -

It was the indigo disturbance which first taught the natives the value of combination and political agitation. Indeed, it was the first revolution in Bengal after the advent of the English. If there be a second revolution, it will be to free the nation from the death grips of the all-powerful police and District Magistrate. Nothing like oppression! It was the oppression which brought about the Glorious Revolution in England and it was the oppression of half a century by indigo planters which at last roused the half dead Bengalee and infused spark in his cold frame.⁴⁹

Despite these negations Curzon went ahead to perfect the image of the colonial administrator, almost as an ideal type. The examination of this ideal type and the gap between it and Curzon as an administrator, is taken up in the next chapter.

49. Amrit Bazar Patrika, 22 May 1874.

CHAPTER III

IMPERIAL PERCEPTION (2) - CURZON'S ADMINISTRATION OF INDIA 1898-1905

Arriving as Viceroy of India in 1898, Curzon responded to the magical character of native life with his devotion to work, within the parameters of his paternalistic vision of Britain's role in India. He embraced the legacy of Mayo and others who reversed the policy of loose administrative control and laid stress on centralized government. He shared their 'iron hand and indomitable resolution' always prepared, as Lipsett writes, to sacrifice his popularity to the demands of his conscience. It was for Curzon to give conservatism in India a new and better face - so as to restore the main features of good administration which would render British administration in India permanent. However, inspite of being in office for seven whole years, the Viceroy never attained the success of statemanship. His "term is remembered not so much for what he achieved as for what occurred in opposition to him."¹ The period after his witnessed the turning point in the fortunes of the Indian National Movement. As a consequence of his policies, Indian

1. S. Gopal, British Policy in India 1858-1905, Cambridge Univ. Press, Great Britain, 1965, p.304.

nationalists emerged as a far more cohesive force than ever before. After Curzon's departure from India in 1905, a radical or extremist wing emerged within the Congress which was more militant in its demands for representative institutions and eventual self-government. Thus after 1905 India had new interests and objectives which compelled a new line of British policy. In retrospect, Curzon's tenure in office signalled both a high point of paternalistic administration and its apparent bankruptcy as a sustained source of imperial values.

Curzon's biographer, Lord Ronaldshay, described him in Oxford as "a striking figure, tall, straight and rigid, bearing himself with a loftiness uncommon among men of his age..."² Curzon's public image was that of a strong-willed sometimes arrogant individual. As the eldest son of the Rev. Alfred Nathaniel Holden Curzon, the fourth Baron Scaresdale, he was proud of his aristocratic connections. The epithet 'a most superior person' which branded him in his early twenties, stuck with him much to the delight of his political opponents.

Curzon's outlook was compounded by an unusual blend of aristocratic pride, romanticism and moral rectitude. He was convinced that the British had shown the emotional

2. Ronaldshay, The Life of Lord Curzon, vol.II, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, 1928, p.40.

qualities of a governing race, and an exceptional capacity to work hard and honestly for others. He was in that sense an 'unrepentant imperialist'.³ Curzon was attracted to imperialism at an early age and it provided the leitmotif of his public career. On the eve of his departure for India in 1898, he recalled, his first infatuation with the British Empire in his student days at Eton. It occurred after an address by Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, who had just returned from India and who declared to the assembled boys, "that there was in the Asian continent an empire more populous, more amazing and more beneficent than that of Rome; that the rulers from that great dominion were drawn from the men of our own people; that some of them might perhaps in the future be taken from the ranks of the boys who were listening to his words".⁴ "Since that day," Curzon stated, "the fascination, and if I may say so, the sacredness of India has grown upon me, until I have come to think that it is the highest honour that can be placed upon any subject of the Queen, that, in any capacity high or low, he should devote such energies as he may, to its service."⁵

3. David Dilks, Curzon in India, Rupert Mart & Davis, London, 1969, p.68.

4. 'Dinner given by Old Etonian's in London,' October 28, 1898. Sir Thomas Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India - 1898-1905, 2 vols., Macmillan, London, 1906.

5. Ibid.

As might be expected, James Stephen's early influence left Curzon with an understanding of Britain's world role in which omnipotent control was wedded to the ideal of political and social order. Writing to his father of his impressions of Singapore, Curzon said that "the strength and the omnipotence of England everywhere in the East is amazing. No other country or people is to be compared with her; we control everything and are liked as well as respected and feared."⁶ This unwearying sense of mission marked the Indian phase of Curzon's public life. He believed that it was a duty "laid on Englishmen from on high"⁷ to maintain the Empire in India, which was "the miracle of the world"⁸ and the "biggest thing the Englishmen are doing anywhere in the world".⁹ Describing himself as "an Imperialist heart and soul" he wrote:

Imperial expansion seems to me an inevitable necessity and carries a noble and majestic obligation. I do not see how any Englishman, contrasting India as it is, with what it was or might

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6. David Dilks, Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.27.
 7. Curzon to Ibbetson, 26 April 1904, Curzon Papers, vol.209, part 2, quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.224.
 8. Curzon to Younghusband, 19th Sept. 1901. Curzon's Papers, vol.182, part 2, No.33, quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.224.
 9. Curzon to Balfour, 31 March 1901, Curzon Papers, vol.181, part 2, No.121. Quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.224.

have been, can fail to see that we came here in obedience to what I call the decree of providence for the lasting benefits of millions of the human race. We often make great mistakes here; but I do firmly believe that there is no Government in the world that rests on so secure a moral basis, or is so fiercely animated by duty.¹⁰

Curzon saw himself and the Raj as the incarnation of righteousness and moral order in India. Echoing James Stephen, he ascribed Britain's success in India above all to her adherence to the law and an irreproachable sense of justice, that enabled a handful of Englishmen to subdue a civilization with traditions that predated those of their own society.¹¹ In his speech before leaving India in 1905, he proclaimed:

The Almighty has placed our hands on the greatest of his ploughs in whose furrows the nations of the world are germinating and taking shape, to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these million you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment, or a stirring of duty where it did not before exist - that is enough, that is the Englishman's justification in India.¹²

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10. Curzon to John Mosley, 17th June 1900, Curzon Papers, vol.181, Part 2, No.119, quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.225.
 11. 'Speech on Presentation of Freedom of City of London,' July 20, 1904 in Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.36.
 12. 'Speech at Dinner given in Byculla Club,' Bombay, 16 Nov. 1905 in Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.II, p.315.

Although lacking the evangelical conviction of some of his predecessors in India, Curzon time and again used the rhetorical and moral force of the Old Testament and the fervour of New Testament as the tap root of imperial idealism. Like his predecessors Curzon too in his own writing and speeches energized myths about the divine role and the sacred duty of the British in India.

We are here not to draw our pay and do nothing and have a good time. We are here not merely to wave the British flag. We are here because Providence has before all the world laid a solemn duty upon our shoulders and that duty is to hold this country by justice and righteousness and good will and to set an example to its people... But we have come here with a civilization an education and a morality which we are vain enough without disparagement to others, to think the best that have ever been seen; and we have been placed with a power that ordains all, in the seat of the Almighty with the fortunes of the future of this great continent in our hands. There never was such a responsibility. In the whole world there is no such duty.¹³

Three years later he wrote:

To me it is the greatest thing the English people have done, or are doing now; it is the highest touchstone of national duty. If the nations of the Earth were to stand up to be judged by some supreme tribunal, I think that our own colonial record, we should survive the test. But if there were the slightest hesitation on the part of the judge or jury, I would confidently throw our Indian record

13. 'Speech at Army Temperance Association,' Simla, June 6, 1901, in Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.II, p.286.

into the scales. For where else in the world has a race gone forth and subdued not a country, or a kingdom but a continent, and that continent peopled not by savage tribes, but by a race with tradition and civilisation older than our own, with history not inferior to ours in dignity or romance; subduing them not by law of the sword but to the rule of justice, bringing peace and order and good government to nearly one-fifth of the entire human race and holding them with so mild a restraint that the rulers are the merest handful amongst the ruled, a tiny speck of white foam upon a dark and thunderous ocean.¹⁴

By the time Curzon left Eton he had become an ardent imperialist imbued with a feeling of personal responsibility for the future of Britain's vast empire. Though he admired leaders such as Gladstone and Asquith as men, he despised them as statesmen. Their view of the "imperial destiny as an eventual association of equal millions was an anathema to him."¹⁵ His attitudes towards the masses was that of a benevolent patriarch. "He did not believe that Englishmen, let alone Scotsmen, Welsh, Irish, Indians and other lesser breeds, had earned the right of equality with those who have spent their lives and brains in learning to rule them."¹⁶ For the masses he was to rule he was determined to ensure all opportunities of health and decent lives

14. 'Speech on Presentation of Freedom of London,' Raleigh, Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.34.

15. Leonard Mosley, Curzon, Longman Green Co. Ltd., London, 1960, p.31.

16. Ibid., p.32.

except the freedom to rule themselves, which he sincerely believed would be dangerous if not fatal. To Balfour's dictum that 'people only too often prefer self-government to good government' he would only have one reply, 'mere fools they ! They should not be encouraged to encompass their own doom'.

Prior to sailing for India, Curzon in the year 1898, at a dinner given by old Etonians listed out the four most important qualities which he felt must be possessed by any British Viceroy in India.

It is his duty first and foremost to represent the authority of the Queen Empress whose name revered more than the name of any other living sovereign by all races and classes from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, it is in India both a bond of union and a symbol of power and to associate with the personal attributes that cling about that name, the conviction that the justice of the Government is inflexible and its honour is stainless and that its mercy is in proportion to its strength. Secondly, he should try to remember that all those people are not the sons of one race, or creed or clan, and that it is only by regard for their feeling, by respect for their prejudices - I will go so far as to say by deference to their scruples - that we can obtain the acquiescence as well as the submission to be governed. Thirdly, his duty is to recognize that though relatively far advanced in the scale of civilisation compared with the time of Lord Wellesley or even Lord Canning, India is still but ill-equipped with material, industrial and educational resources which are so necessary for her career; and to work, that she may be slow, but sure degrees expand to the full measure of her growth (sic.). And lastly it is to preserve intact and secure, either from internal convulsion or external inroad, the boundaries of the great imperial dominion.¹⁷

17. 'Speech at Dinner by old Etonians.' Raleigh, Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol. I, p. 1.

He pointed to the immense pressure under which every officer of the government of the great dependency functioned. "They are weighed down with incessant anxiety, with an almost overpowering responsibility and with unending toil."¹⁸

"It is the Englishman's passion for responsibility, his zest for action on a large field, that is the ruling motive with most."¹⁹

The widely shared sense of self-sacrifice to an unappreciative native population found no more an articulate spokesman than Lord Curzon "under the burden of Viceregal work he depicted himself as a horse who 'stagger[s] and drops between the shaft until another animal is brought to take its place'."^{19a} To him, as to Kipling, the isolated and unappreciated civil servant was the backbone of the Empire.

I think you only see the civil service at its very best when it is working under the strain of some great affliction or disaster in India such for instance as plague or famine... It is at those moments that you realize, more fully than at any other, the real devotion of the service, not only to the cause of duty, but to the interest of the people of India themselves. Our civil servants on this occasion will work themselves to the bone in the discharge of their duty. Very often the eye of no official, lights on their labour, sometimes, perhaps too often, no order shines upon their

18. 'Speech at the Presentation of Freedom of City of London,' Raleigh, ^(ed.) Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol. I, p. 54.

19. 'Speech at Luncheon at Mansion House' in Raleigh, ^(ed.) Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol. I, p. 161.

19a. 'Curzon, Seventh Budget Speech (Legislative Council at Calcutta), 29 March 1905, Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol. I, p. 161.

breasts. And yet they go on working up to the end even, sometimes, at the sacrifice of their lives.²⁰

Thus according to Curzon, administration of the scope and scale as that in India is dependant primarily on the men rather than on the machine. He exaggerated their role and felt that the "keys of India were neither in England nor in the House of Commons but in the official desks of every civilian in India."²¹

As Viceroy he voiced the same conventional sentiments out of which his predecessors had fabricated the 'illusion of permanence'. He supported the theoretical foundation for the corps d'elite in its administration of India, by arguing that the latter because of their superior education, upbringing, knowledge of principles of Government, habit of mind, heredity and the vigour of character, were the only people capable of effective rule in India. He was doubtful of being able to find an Indian with these qualities and thus in response of Alfred Balfour's proposal to include a native on his Executive Council he maintained "that in the

20. Desmond M. Chapman (ed.), Curzon and the 'Civil Service': A Selection of Speeches and Writings, Allen & Unwin, London, 1915, p.57.

21. To Hamilton, 21 May 1902, Hamilton Correspondence D 510/11. Quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.231.

whole continent there is not one Indian fit for the post."²²
 Justifying the Englishman's presence in India and also the
 vast British Empire he writes,

...if the Empire were to end tomorrow, I do not think we need to be ashamed of its epitaph. It would have done its duty to India and justified its mission to mankind. But it is not going to end. It is not a moribund organism. It is still in its youth and has in it the vitality of an unexhausted purpose. I am not with the pessimists in this matter. I am not one of those who think that we have built a mere fragile plank between the East and the West, which the roaring tides of Asia will presently sweep away. I do not think that the work is over or is drawing to an end. On the contrary as the years roll by, the call seems to me more clear, the duty more imperative, the work more majestic, the goal more sublime.²³

To give strength to his argument he quotes Abbe-Dubois a French Priest who spent thirty years of his life in India and who wrote a book on the customs and manners of her people.²⁴ "I quote him because he is a foreigner and a Christian missionary, he could not be suspected of any undue partiality to the British Government."²⁵ He goes on to

22. Dilks, Curzon in India, op. cit., p.27.

23. 'Speech on Freedom of City of London,' Raleigh, Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.34.

24. Abbe Dubois, Hindu Manner, Customs and Ceremonies, trans. by H.K. Beauchamp, 2 vol., Oxford Univ. Press, Great Britain, 1906.

25. 'Curzon: Bombay Municipality Address,' 9th Nov. 1900, Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.67.

quote from Dubois's book where the latter writes,

The justice and the prudence which the present rulers display in endeavouring to make these people less unhappy than that they have hitherto been; the anxiety which they manifest in increasing their material comfort; above all the inviolable respect which they constantly show for the custom and religious beliefs of the country and lastly the protection they afford to the weak, as well as to the strong - all these have contributed more to the consolidation of their power, than even their victories and conquests.²⁶

Curzon was of the firm view, that none of the politicians including the decision makers in London, knew very much about India and its growing importance in world politics. "In the happiness of our insular detachment or in the pride of racial expansion, he forgets that the greatest constituent of the Empire in scale and in importance, lies neither in these islands nor in the colonies but in our Asiatic dependency."²⁷ He believed that India was the pivot, the political and the imperial centre of the British Empire. He believed that the man who had not been east of the Suez, did not know what the British Empire was. He was convinced, that the eastward trend of the Empire would increase not diminish. "Parliament will learn to know Asia as well as it now knows Europe; and the time will come when Asian sympathies and knowledge will be not the hobby of a few individuals but the interest of the entire nation."²⁸

26. Ibid.

27. 'Curzon: Dinner by Royals Societies Club,' No.7, 1858, Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.7.

28. Ibid.

Like most of the British scholars and historians of his time, Curzon too put a great deal of emphasis on the divisions within Indian society "...we have to deal with races in India that are as different from each other as the Esquimaux is from the Spaniard or the Irishman from the Turk, with creeds that range from the barest animalism on the one hand and the most exalted metaphysics on the other."²⁹ Curzon thus believed that the spirit of nationalism, which was emerging as a powerful force through out the world, would emerge in India as a result of the intermingling of the East and the West. He believed that a more refined and cosmopolitan sense of nationality was emerging in India which he described as 'New Patriotism'. "It is one in which the Englishman may share with the Indian for he has helped to create it, or in which the Indian may share with the Englishman, since it is their common glory."³⁰

He pointed out that for the development of the spirit of nationalism it was important to furnish the feeling of unity and to sacrifice the smaller in favour of the larger interest. He rejected the idea of an India for the Hindus or an India for the Muslims or any descending minor fraction.

29. "Curzon: Freedom of City of London," Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.36.

30. "Curzon: Speech at Convocation of Calcutta Univ.," Feb. 15, 1902. Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. vit., vol.II, p.57 .

That should be a retrograde and a dissolvent process. Neither should it be India for the Indians alone. The last two centuries during which the British have been in this country cannot be wiped out. They have profoundly affected national thought and existence. They have quickened[^] atrophied veins of the East with the life blood of the West. They have modified old ideals and have created new ones:

And not by Eastern windows only:

When Daylight comes; comes in the light

In front the Sun climbs slow, how slowly

But westwards look, the land is bright.³¹

Thus for him modern Indian nationalism would be one which would evolve out of the common interest of both the British and the Indians.

When an Englishman says that he is proud of India, it is not of the battlefield and sieges, nor of exploits in the council chamber, or at the desk, that he is principally thinking of. He sees the rising standards of intelligence, of moral conduct, of comfort and prosperity, among the native people and he rejoices in their advancement. Similarly when an Indian says he is proud of India, it would be absurd for him to banish from his mind all that has been and is being done, for the renunciation of his country by the alien race, to whom have been committed its destinies. Both are tillers in the same field, both are concerned with the harvest. From their joint labour, this new and composite patriotism springs into life. It is Asian, for its roots are embedded in the tradition and aspiration of the eastern people; and it is European because it is aglow with the illumination of the West. In it are summed up all the best hopes for the future of this country;

31. Ibid.

both for your race and mine. We are ordained to walk here in the same track together for many a long day to come. You cannot do without us. We should be impotent without you. Let the Englishman and the Indian accept the consecration of a union that is so mysterious as to have in it something of the divine and let our common ideal be in a united country and a happier people.³²

As the Viceroy in India, Curzon fundamentally believed that he was predestined for this office. Thus he acted as the great patriarch and overlord bringing the benefits of his training, knowledge and instinctive superiority to the guidance of lesser and more infallible multitudes. The crusading zeal with which he performed his functions in India, however was not aimed at importing the ideals of democracy to the Indian sub-continent. "He did not even in his heart believe in democratic equality for his countrymen in Britain; and he was certain that liberty, equality and fraternity were definitely not for Indians. He was, of course, aware that there were stirrings of nationalism and independence afoot in his realm but he scoffed at them as the vapouring of a few misguided idealists."³³

Curzon rejected outright, the demand of some liberals in Britain who called for the introduction of a party system in India. He believed that the Empire was so noble, so sacred a thing that he could not understand people quarrelling about

32. Ibid.

33. Leonard Mosley, Curzon, op. cit., p.87.

it or even holding opposite opinions about it. "Party has nothing to do with India and ought never to have anything to do with it. India stands outside of party We know nothing there/ of party labels of liberals and conservatives or unionists and radicals... I should like to place a ring fence around the whole British empire with a notice board on which should be written 'Any party man will be prosecuted who trespasses here'."³⁴ Curzon identifies three important factors which he feels would be pernicious if anything like parties are introduced in India. Firstly he points to the lines of cleavage which already exist in India that of racial, religious and social and feels that the introduction of the party would introduce yet another source of fissure within native society. Secondly, he points to the need for continuity of administration in India.

Nothing should be more fatal than the violent oscillations of policy when one party goes out and another comes in this country... The third reason is I think the most important of all. In the tremendous task that confronts us in India we want all Englishmen to be united. We cannot afford to have any divisions among ourselves... Let every man who works for India in India or who thinks about India in England do it not as a party man but as a national man. Let India be regarded so sacred a thing that it ought never to be fought about on British hustings and never introduced as a plank into a party programme in this country.³⁵

34. 'Curzon: Presentation of Freedom of Borough of Derby,' July 28, 1904. Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.56.

35. Ibid.

Curzon's greatest achievement in India lies in administration. The machinery of the government was taken to pieces, overhauled and readjusted at every level. To an Indian newspaper in 1905 he described his aim as having been 'nothing but efficiency'. "If I were asked to sum it up in a single word I would say 'efficiency'. That has been our gospel, the keynote of our administration."³⁶ However during his tenure the Vice-royalty was an astonishing attempt on the part of one man to run the government of India. "It is supposed to be a mark of efficiency and even greatness to get your work done for you, by other people. I frankly disagree. I say that if you want a thing done in a certain way the only manner in which to be sure that it is done, is to do it yourself."³⁷ The incapability to delegate authority was accompanied by contempt for his subordinates. His confidence in himself was unassailable. "Over and over again I have tried the policy of delegation, with the same deplorable results."³⁸

36. Letter written on 30th Sept. 1905. Quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.227.

37. Letter written on 13 Jan. 1903, Hamilton Correspondence D510/3 for 29 ff quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.243.

38. To Hamilton, 9 April 1902, Hamilton Correspondence D510/10 for 38.3 ff quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.245.

His lack of courtesy, fussiness about protocol and pettiness became notorious. Hamilton on the eve of laying down office as the Secretary of State wrote to Curzon warning him of the dangers of adopting such an attitude. "Try and suffer fools more gladly; they constitute ^{the} majority of mankind. In dealing with your colleagues and subordinates try and use rare powers of expression in making things pleasant and smooth to those whom you overrule and dominate."³⁹

Not only did he fail to develop a spirit of partnership even with his fellow countrymen who were to assist him in administration, but he also failed to create an emotional identity with the people he ruled. "He spoke of Indians in tones one normally reserves for pet animals."⁴⁰ Efficiency for him was merely a "cool application of daily tasks rather than the furtherance of any belief or ideal. It was Viceroyalty without vision".⁴¹ This attitude was reflected on the issue of the Partition of Bengal, a step taken and justified solely on administrative grounds, in complete disregard for the political and emotional consequences. As a result of this a fervent agitation

39. Letter written on 16 Sept. 1903, Hamilton Correspondence, C 156/5 70 329 quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.251.

40. S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.227.

41. Ibid.

broke out in Bengal and other parts of the country. Indian nationalism which Curzon sneered at, finally attained a revolutionary stage.

As Viceroy, Curzon emphasised on the administration of law with impartiality towards both natives and Europeans. This attitude, awakened some of the animosity within the Anglo-Indian community that had been kindled twenty years earlier by the Ilbert Bill controversy. "I know", Curzon stated, "that as long as Europeans, and particularly, a haughty race like the English, rule Asiatic people like the Indians, incidents of hubris and violence will occur, and that the white men will tend to side with the white skin against the dark. But I also know, and have acted throughout on the belief, that it is the duty of the statesman to arrest these dangerous symptoms and to prevent them from attaining dimensions that might even threaten the existence of our rule in the future."⁴²

Curzon regarded administrative efficiency as synonymous with the contentment of the governed".⁴³ Thus, an attempt was made to improve the bureaucratic procedures of the central administration. He attempted to accelerate decision

42. Dicks, Curzon in India, op. cit., pp.211-12.

43. W.Y. Wurgaft, The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kiplings India, Westeyan Univ. Press, Westeyan, 1983, p.162.

making and reduce paper work to reasonable proportions. He was responsible for a major overhaul of the Indian Railways System in order to increase efficiency and profitability. Concentrated effort was made to improve Indian agriculture including agricultural husbandry. Of more immediate concern, the government introduced the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900. In 1901, the North West Frontier Province was created and its administration was brought directly under the Central Government. With this an unprecedented period of tranquillity was ushered in and for the first time in half a century, the frontier was relatively free of war. In face of the gross corruption and inefficiency of the Indian police he set up in 1902, a Commission which included two Indian non-officials to examine the problem and made detailed suggestions for improvement. Archaeologists were appointed to help preserve India's ancient monuments, which for want of attention were fast falling into decay. Moreover an exhibition of Indian handicrafts was held to give ^a stimulus to handicraft. Separate departments on mining, industry and commerce were set up. Curzon visited almost every Indian state, lectured the rulers in private and in public on their responsibilities. In January 1903, a gaudy Coronation Durbar was held. The Viceroy believed that the princes in particular had been deeply impressed and had departed "proud of their honourable

position as partners and pillars of the Empire."⁴⁴

Curzon emphasized on the contrast between what he described as 'real India' and its unnatural counterpart, the Western educated native. He deplored the influence of Thomas Macaulay on Indian education in the nineteenth century and was actively hostile to the class of Indian lawyers and Congressmen, which we felt, were a result of Macaulay's reforms. He, time and again, advised young Indian students to stay away from politics and instead concentrate their energies in the struggle against backwardness and ignorance. In this spirit, he dedicated his administration to improving the lot of the people of India "the patient, humble, silent millions, the eighty per cent who subsist on agriculture, who know little of policies but who profit or suffer by their results... he cannot read at all; he has no politics. But he is the bone and the sinew of the country, by the sweat of his brow the soil is tilled."⁴⁵ He was convinced that western education was artificially grafted into India, producing a graduate inclined "to a tone of mind and to a type of

44. To Hamilton, Hamilton Correspondence D 510/13, for 29 ff quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.253.

45. Curzon speech at Byculla Club, Raleigh (ed.), Lord Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.I, p.54.

character that is ill-regulated, averse to discipline, discontented and in some cases actually disloyal."⁴⁶ He thus initiated reforms which aimed to arrest the influence of political westernization as against pragmatic modernization. Emphasis was on vernacular education at the primary level. Moreover, attempts were made to increase government control over university policy.

These reforms aroused the ire of Indian critics who saw them - not inaccurately - as an effort to undermine the potential of the universities as a political training ground. In general, it might be said, that Curzon's efforts to divorce the issue of administrative functioning from the political work of government, simply accelerated the opposition of Indian nationalists to his politics.⁴⁷

"The real confrontation between Curzon and the nationalists intelligentsia came through three successive measures: changes in Calcutta Corporation in 1899, the Universities Act of 1904 and the Partition of Bengal 1905".⁴⁸ The first, reduced the number of Indian representatives in the Calcutta Corporation. The second, attempted to establish official controls on affiliations

46. Michael Edwardes, High noon of Empire: India under Curzon, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1946, p.146.

47. Wurgaft, The Imperial Imagination, op. cit., p.169.

48. Note of 7th February 1904 - Home Public Progs A, Feb. 1905, no.155. Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi, 1983, p.105.

and grants-in-aid which were used in 1905 to curb student militancy. However, Curzon's most unpopular measure was the Partition of Bengal. On this issue Curzon's administrative orientations came in sharp contrast with the aspirations of the people of Bengal. The alienation of the middle class Indians, especially the Bengalis, from the government seemed to reach its crescendo. Curzon justified the partition on the ground that Bengal was 'over swollen' and was too unwieldy to be ruled. It was for the Home Secretary to develop a political argument in favour of the partition.

Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull several different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel; their apprehensions are perfectly correct and this forms one of the greatest merits of the scheme...49

However the plan was received by the westernized intellectuals as an attack upon the growing solidarity of Bengali nationalism. "We object", wrote Surendranath Banerjee in the Bengalee "to the proposed dismemberment of Bengal and we are sure the whole country will rise as one man to protest against it."⁵⁰ The Congress in its

49. Note of 7th February 1904 - Home Public Prog. A, Feb. 1905, No. 155.

50. Bengalee, 13 Dec. 1903.

annual session passed a resolution to condemn this 'preposterous scheme' to undo the work of welding India into a nation. Curzon failed to anticipate the emerging storm and rejected the agitation as an artificial turmoil. "The speakers of the Congress session were to him 'ancient agitators' who were 'untaught and unteachable' and he described their speeches as "a stale rehash of belated cries and obsolete platitudes."⁵¹

The Bengalis who think of themselves^{as} a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out and a Bengali Babu will have been installed in the Government House, Calcutta, of course bitterly resents any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of this dream. If we were weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying on the eastern flank of India a force already formidable and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future.⁵²

The episode helped immeasurably to strengthen the Nationalist Movement in Bengal and elsewhere in India. Within Bengal itself the 'swadeshi' movement emerged, which marked a highpoint of agitational politics. Outside Bengal 'swadeshi' was able to win the support of radical leaders

51. S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p. 270.

52. Curzon to Brodrick, 17 Feb. 1904, Curzon Papers, vol. 163, Part 2, No. 9, Quoted in S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p. 302.

like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and helped in the growth of nationalism on an all India basis. In the wake of the agitation the Congress transformed itself from a collection of loosely tied groups to an organized party. An extremist wing had emerged within the Congress, which pressed the party to formulate a more radical programme. Meetings and processions were held throughout Bengal and thousands carried black banners as a sign of mourning. The day of Partition was celebrated as the day of mourning throughout Bengal. The poet Rabindranath Tagore, left his seclusion to agitate and wrote songs for the occasion. Ezra Pound later said "Tagore has sung Bengal into a nation".⁵³ Thus in 1905, a new robustness was stung into the politics of Bengal and of India. "Indian nationalism moved away from both mendicant resolution and stray bomb outrages, to ardent broad based revolutionary pressure."⁵⁴ This transformation of a mild nationalist sentiment into a resentful revolutionary movement can be described as the greatest of Curzon's achievement, though unintended.

Curzon rejected the Congress as a organisation consisting of a few misguided idealists completely out of touch with the feelings of fellow Indians. He described the

53. Cited in K. Kripalani, Rabindranath Tagore, Taylor Garnett Evan and Co. Ltd., Great Britain, 1963, p. 104.

54. S. Gopal British Policy in India, op. cit., p. 274.

Lucknow Session of 1899 as a "general conspiracy of good behaviour",⁵⁵ and of the next annual session the Viceroy reported that the "speakers seemed to have spent a great part of their time complimenting me."⁵⁶ "My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall", he said in one of his speeches, "and one of my ambitions in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise."⁵⁷ He was critical of the Congress leaders. He rebuked the Governor General for attaching importance to Gokhale and his new Servants of India Society. He described Surendra Nath Banerjee as a 'vitrollic windbag'.⁵⁸ He rejected the suggestions put forward by Romesh Chandra Dutt in a series of open letters to the Viceroy as a 'layman's grasp'. The latter had contended that the intensity and the frequency of the famines were largely caused by over assessment of land revenue. Curzon rejected this line of argument and asserted that famines were caused by want of water and that over assessment was not a cause of the widespread famine.

55. Curzon to Hamilton, Hamilton Correspondence, 1 Feb. 1900 D 510/4, 85 ff. Quoted in S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.252.

56. Ibid., 3 Jan. 1901 D 510/7 for 3 ff. Quoted from S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.253.

57. Quoted in Leonard Mosley, Curzon, op. cit. , p.88.

58. Curzon to Hamilton, 9 Aug. 1907, Hamilton Correspondence, D 510/8 for 287 ff. Quoted in S. Gopal, British Policy in India, op. cit., p.199.

While campaigning for his reforms in Bengal in 1904, he confronted the universal hostility of the native press and people. However public resistance only increased his determination to through with his programmes. He responded by dismissing the extent of opposition to Partition, or by branding it as unreasonable and seditious. Even a sympathetic biographer like Lord Ronaldshay cites his "almost contemptuous indifference towards the agitation which his proposals had aroused."⁵⁹ Writing to John Brodick in 1904 he belittled the Bengali opposition in these terms

you can scarcely have any idea of the utter want of proportion, moderation or sanity that characterises native agitation in the country. Starting with some preposterous fiction or exaggeration, the Bengali, after repeating it a few times ends by firmly believing its truth. He lashes himself into a fury over the most insignificant issues, and he revels in his own state, under the happy conviction that owing to the circumstances of the case it can provoke no reply.⁶⁰

Curzon's arrogance and shortsightedness further isolated him from the native Indians and his supporters in London.

The announcement of the Partition helped immeasurably to strengthen the nationalist movement. The British

59. Ronaldshay, The Life of Lord Curzon, vol.II, op. cit., p.326.

60. Dilks, Curzon in India, op. cit., vol.II, pp.203-4.

responded to these developments by chastising extremists and terrorists while trying to mollify more moderate opinion. Tilak was jailed on a charge of seditious behaviour in 1909. But in the same year the Morley-Minto reforms were instituted to appease moderate nationalist sentiment. In 1911 the capital of British India was moved from Calcutta to Delhi and the Partition of Bengal was revoked much to the satisfaction of the Bengali people.

Thanks to these conciliatory policies the full force of Indian nationalism was not felt until a few years later under the impact of world war I. But for many Indians the struggle during Curzon's rule had laid open the question of the very legitimacy of the British Raj.⁶¹

Curzon was thus the very incarnation of the official values of British India, as well as, the sense of moral superiority and arrogance that were components of these values. He embodied the exacting sense of justice that has since become the legacy of the British experience in Imperial administration.

"It may be merely trite to say that the very greatness of the British Raj contained the seeds of its ultimate dissolution; but it is nonetheless clear that such a style of imperial rule successfully masked the emotional foundation

61. Wurgaft, Imperial Imagination, op. cit., p. 168.

of British Government in India and helped to render political transformation, all the more traumatic when it finally came."⁶²

62. Ibid., p.171.

CHAPTER IV

IMPERIAL PERCEPTION (3) - PARTITION OF BENGAL (1905)

From 1773 to 1912, Calcutta served as the capital of British India. This gave the city and the region of Bengal a unique position of significance. The British Empire in India in its initial years, had Calcutta as its political and administrative base and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century it had become India's most important commercial and industrial centre. Goods for exports were brought to Calcutta from the northern and eastern parts of the country and imports were carried into Calcutta and then inland. As a result of its growing importance all those who sought fame, fortune and accomplishment, flocked to Calcutta. Here the levers of imperial, provincial and university power were close at hand and helped them to assume positions of importance in the British establishment. As a result of this, a number of Bengalis especially those from the upper strata, came to Calcutta and made it their home. The census report reveals that there was a much higher ^{pro}portion of high caste hindus in Calcutta than in Bengal as a whole.¹ Numerous high caste families - Kayasthas,

1. Census of India, 1931, Calcutta, 1932, vol.V, Part 2,
pp. 225-32.

Vaidyas and Brahmins flocked to Calcutta making it the centre of Bengali culture, wealth and power. According to the 1931 census high caste Hindus formed 6.1 per cent of the population of Bengal but 28.9 per cent of the population of Calcutta. This upwardly mobile group which was placed at the top of the economic and social hierarchy made repeated attempts to enter into the Indian Civil Services, the senates of the newly constituted universities, the provincial and imperial legislative councils, local self-government institutions, and the bar and the bench of the high court.

While, on one hand after the shift from East India Company's rule to Crown rule in 1858 there was a gradual shift to a more conservative governmental policy, on the other hand, some Indians were allowed to enter new positions of responsibility within and in connection with the Raj. However top places of responsibility were almost all held by Europeans. Thus what A.P. Thornton describes as the 'habit of authority' dominated the very decision making process of the Raj until its dissolution.² "We need to show", said Lord Elgin, "that we are the dominant race".³

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2. A.P. Thornton, The Habit of authority, Macmillan, London, 1966 quoted in Leonard A. Gordon's Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1974, p.3.
 3. R.J. Moore, Liberalism and Indian Politics 1872-1922, Cox and Wyman Ltd., London, 1966, pp.63-64.

Thus, having entered into the British administrative set up, this section, found its avenues of progress blocked. This realization generated a feeling of discontent. Members of this group made a number of attempts in the second half of the nineteenth century to press upon the British for some concessions relating to increasing the age limit for the ICS examinations, holding the examinations in India, greater promotional avenues for the Indian ICS officers etc. However, a number of British officers felt that the gradual Indianization of the services would bring in people, who would be innately unable to handle positions of executive authority. Thus, the slow pace of entry of Indians into the ICS was controlled by the low age requirement and the fact that the examination could be given in Great Britain only. As a result, Indians secured 2.5 per cent of vacancies between 1878-1891 and 5.6 per cent between 1892-1912.⁴

Another factor that prevented the development of closer ties between the Europeans and the Bengalis was the conception many Europeans had of the Bengali character. As discussed in the preceding chapters, the Englishmen often tended to find similarities and differences vis-a-vis

4. L.S.O'Malley, The Indian Civil Service 1601-1930, Oxford Univ., London, 1965, p.249.

themselves and the Indians they encountered. In the course of time they formulated separate categories to classify the Indians they came in contact with. One general typology which the British used in the nineteenth century was the dichotomy between martial and non-martial races, thus aiding the selection of Indians to serve in the army. The Bengalis were relegated to the category of the non-martial races. The English viewed the Bengalis as weak and deceitful and this feeling of contempt found its way into the writings of many Englishmen in the nineteenth century. Luke Scrafton, an official in the East India Company in Bengal, wrote of the Bengalis as

the Gentoos of the lower province are a slight made people. Rice is their chief food. It seems to afford but poor nourishment; for strong robust men are seldom seen among them... Thus the spring of life is but of short duration, and the organs decay before the faculties of the mind can attain perfection. Is nature then deficient? ...We must rather look for it in that early indulgence in venereal pleasures, their excessive abstemiousness, their sedentary way of life, and in Bengal and the conquered provinces, in the dejected state of their mind oppressed with tyranny of their conquerers. No wonder then, that with such customs, such bodies, and such minds they fall an easy prey to every invader.⁵

Some sixty years later Lord Macaulay described the Bengali as

5. Luke Scrafton, Refunctions of the Government of Indostan, London, 1770, p.17. Quoted in Leonard A. Gordon, Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, op. cit., p.7.

... the physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable. His mind bears a singular analogy to his body. It is weak even to the extent of helplessness for purposes of manly resistance; but its suppleness and its tact move the children of sterner climates to admiration not unmingled with contempt... What the horns are to the buffalo, what the paw is to the tiger, what the sting is to the bee, what beauty, according to the old Greek song, is to the women, deceit is to the Bengalee. Large promises, smooth excuses, elaborate tissue of circumstantial falsehood, chicanery, perjury, forgery, are the weapons, offensive and defensive of the people of the lower Ganges.⁶

Others like Robert Carstairs, feared that with the withdrawal of the British and the establishment of a 'Bengali Republic' at any point in the future would lead to such chaos and anarchy that they would soon call for their former rulers to return, as all the Bengali can do in moments of difficulty is talk.⁷ The term 'Babu' which was used often for a typical Bengali native living in Calcutta has been described in the Hobson and Jobson dictionary as

6. Lord Thomas Macaulay, Critical Historical and Miscellaneous Essays, Redwood Press Ltd., Boston, 1860, pp. 19-20.

7. R. Carstairs, Human Nature in Rural Bengal, Hogart Press, London, 1895, pp. 201-32.

...Properly a term of respect attached to a name ... and formerly in some parts of Hindustan applied to certain persons of distinction... In Bengal and elsewhere, among Anglo Indians, it is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterising a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate Bengali... the word has come often to signify a native clerk who writes English.⁸

The word babu was often "spelt and pronounced with indefinite number of 'o's seeking to impress his close affinity with the baboon."⁹ Thus, this typically Bengali native who was regarded as timid with no enterprise, initiative and courage, became an object of supreme hatred and scorn for the English.

This feeling of contempt was further strengthened when the latter put pressures on the British demanding the same institutions and freedoms the English enjoyed in England. These demands threatened to deprive the British of their powers and privileges. Carstairs, Kipling and others pointed out the organic inability of the Bengali to run such institutions. They asserted that the Bengali could only talk like an eloquent Englishmen but not behave like one. In sharp contrast, they praised the rural and tribal Bengali from the far western and far eastern areas

8. Hendry Yule and A.C. Burnell, Hobson and Jobson, William Crooke, Delhi, 1968, p.44.

9. Suhash Chakravarty, 'The Exiled Race in Action: A Study of imperial perception', Man and Development, New Delhi, October, 1986, p.96.

as the 'true Indian', who was physically strong, more honest and simple. To contrast the stereotype of the effeminate western educated Bengali with that of the peasant helped the British to justify their belief that the former in no way can or does represent the 'real Indians'.

In sharp contrast to the stereotype of the westernized Bengalis, who were seen as attempting to make inroads into the imperial government, there developed another stereotype of the Englishmen in India. The latter's innate capacity for hard work, selfless service and their herculean efforts to combat native ignorance, poverty and disease was lauded by the English writers of that time. Thus, behind the Orientalist stereotype of the Indian was the belief that only the British government can bring order and remove ^{the} anarchy which was endemic to native India. The Civil and Military Gazette of July 5, 1905 published the text of a lecture given by Sir Francis Younghusband in Cambridge on the 10th of June 1905. Younghusband is reported to have said,

We must retain our connections with India, we must regard not merely our own selfish interest but the good of the people of India as well. In the development of the human race, the use of force seems inevitable. But the fact that we had had in the past to use force in India, would make us all the more ready and determined in the present to ensure that the good Indians would receive from us, would in the end far outweigh the injury done. To benefit the people was the

inspiring thought of every British administrator in India, though in working that idea we must not let our old virility evaporate into washy sentiment. The idea of training the people was not one which would nowadays either be practicable or beneficial to the people.¹⁰

Curzon too in a letter to the Secretary of State, Hamilton, expressed his concern for an increasing number of higher posts, "that were meant and ought to have been exclusively reserved for Europeans... being flinched away by the superior wits of the natives..."¹¹ In the budget speech of 1904, he made it explicit that posts in the Imperial civil service in India, as a general rule should be held by Englishmen who "...partly by heredity, partly by upbringing and partly by education..."¹² possess a knowledge of Government. As a consequence, the Congress that year passed a resolution protesting against the exclusion of Indians from the higher grades of the services. When the President of the Congress of 1904 Sir Henry Cotton, as head of the deputation, came to present the resolution of that session before the Viceroy, Curzon refused to meet him. Commenting on the above incident the Bengalee wrote,

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10. Civil and Military Gazette, July 5, 1905, Microfilm, Nehru Library.
 11. Letter to our Secretary of State Hamilton on 23rd April 1900, Curzon Papers, Reel No. 10, MF, NAI.
 12. T. Raleigh, Lord Curzon in India, Macmillan, London, 1906, vol. I, p. 56.

By refusing to accept Sir Henry Cotton personally, and the copy of the resolution passed at the recent session of the Congress in Bombay, we are afraid, His Excellency the Viceroy, has left slip a golden opportunity of diminishing his unprecedented unpopularity with the educated section of the Indian community.¹³

Curzon's attitude to the Congress and its leaders might, perhaps to a great extent, be explained by his belief that the Congress was 'tottering to its fall'. Thus he regarded his greatest ambition to be to 'assist it to a peaceful demise.'¹⁴ This attitude naturally annoyed the Congress leaders. But no measure did more to exacerbate their feelings than the Partition plan for Bengal.

From the correspondence of the Government of India regarding partition, it appears that Curzon did not initiate the matter. It had arisen out of a suggestion made by Sir Andrew Fraser, who was then the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, on the question regarding the readjustment of the boundaries of Orissa. In April 1902, while writing to the Secretary of State on the question of placing Berar in the administration of the Central Provinces, Curzon also mentioned his intention of looking into the larger question

13. The Bengalee, 6 January 1905, Editorial "Lord Curzon and Sir Henry Cotton".

14. Hamilton Papers, Curzon Hamilton private correspondence, vol. XVIII, Letter, 18 Nov. 1900, MF, NAI.

of the boundaries of the local governments in general and Bengal in particular, for "Bengal is unquestionably too large for a single man."¹⁵ According to him the boundaries of Bengal, Assam, the Central Provinces and Madras were "antiquated, illogical and productive of inefficiency."¹⁶ He aimed to "fix the provincial boundaries for the next generations."¹⁷ In the new reorganisation scheme the population of Bengal was to be reduced from 78½ millions to 67½ millions by transferring the districts of Chittagong Division Hill Tippera, Dacca and Mymensingh to Assam and Chota Nagpur to the Central Provinces. At the same time, it was proposed to add certain territories from the Central Provinces and Madras, with the object of bringing all the Oriya speaking population under a single government. Curzon approved of this scheme and it was published in the Resolution of the Government of India on 3rd December 1903.

The Government of India described and justified the division of Bengal into two provinces as a purely administrative measure. Three important factors were put forth as factors necessitating the partition, (1) It aimed to relieve the Government of Bengal of a part of the burden imposed

15. Ronaldshay, Life of Lord Curzon, vol.II, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, 1928, pp.321-22.

16. Ibid., p.322.

17. Ibid.

upon it and at the same time it wanted to make provision for more efficient administration of the outlying districts of the Province; (ii) The Government wanted to promote the development of Assam by enlarging its jurisdiction so as to give it an outlet to the sea; (iii) The Government wanted to unite under a single administration the scattered sections of the Oriya speaking population.¹⁸ However to believe that the Partition of Bengal was suggested and carried out merely for administrative convenience would be erroneous. In Curzon's minutes of 1 June 1903, he explicitly acknowledged his debt to Frazer -

There remains an argument to which the in-coming Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir A. Frazer, attaches the utmost weight and which cannot be absent from our consideration. He has presented to me ^{that} the advantage of severing these eastern districts of Bengal, which are a hotbed of the purely Bengali movement, unfriendly, if not seditious in character and dominating the whole tone of Bengali administration, will immeasurably outweigh any possible drawbacks...¹⁹

Others like Risleigh justified the plan of partition on the ground that "Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the merits of the scheme."²⁰ He further went

18. Home Public ^{Progs A,} Letter No. 3648, dated 3rd December, 1903, 155, NAI.

19. Sunit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973, p. 17.

20. Note of 7 February 1904 - Home Public Progs A, Feb. 1903, 155, NAI.

on to say that

It is not altogether easy to reply in a despatch which is sure to be published without disclosing the fact that in this scheme as in the matter of the amalgamation of Berar to the Central Provinces, one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.²¹

The 'solid body of opponents' has reference, of course, to the predominantly Hindu nationalist public opinion. The Muslims, as Minto explained to Morley as late as 5th February 1906, have been "inactive so far; it is only the Hindu population which constitutes a political voice of the province".²² With the ultimate aim of weakening the further consolidation of Hindu nationalist public opinion and its spread among the Muslim population Curzon toured Eastern Bengal in February 1904. In the various speeches made by Curzon in Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong, Curzon stated that the proposal for partition would make Dacca the centre and the capital of the new self-sufficing administration. The meetings that he addressed, were, specially convened for the purpose of wooing the audience which was predominantly Muslim. He explained to them that "his object of partitioning Bengal was not only to relieve the Bengal administration,

21. Note on 6th December 1904, Home Public Progs A, Feb. 1905, 164, NAI.

22. Sumit Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement, op. cit., p.18.

but also to create a Mohammedan province where Islam would be predominant and its followers in the ascendancy, and it is with this view he had decided to include the two remaining districts of the Dacca division in his scheme".²³ In an address at Mymensingh on the 20th February 1904 Curzon stated, that the partition would invest the Muslims in Eastern Bengal with "a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroy and Kings".²⁴ His speeches were conciliatory and explanatory in character "ostensibly with the object of ascertaining public opinion but really to overawe it."²⁵

However the "trend of feeling was sufficiently manifested by the swarms of small boys carrying placards on which was inscribed the legend, 'Do not turn us into Assamese'."²⁶ The walls of Dacca streets were placarded with mottos containing the words: 'Pray do not sever Bengalis', 'Do not divide us' 'Do not flout history and

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23. A.C. Majumdar, Indian National Evolution, G.A. Natesan & Co., Madras, 1917, p.207.
24. Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1905, col.2746. Quoted from P.C. Ghosh, Indian National Congress, Kirma KLM Pvt Ltd, Calcutta, 1905, p.107.
25. Surendranath Banerjea, A Nation in the Making, Oxford, London, 1963, p.172.
26. Lovat Frazer, India under Curzon and After, William Heineman, London, 1911, p.381.

nationality'. Curzon himself had "realized that the scheme, in the form it had assumed, would be unacceptable".²⁷

Instead of coming to terms with it the Viceroy chose to ignore it. "So far as I can judge", he wrote on February the 22nd, "My speeches simply have dumbfounded the opponents. The native people were knocked silly and are left gasping, for I showed that all the wild things that they said would ensue, are pure fabrications. As for the Calcutta English newspapers, they also do not know what to do or say."²⁸

He believed that with the agitation the Government's case would be "established with no great difficulty and with general consent".²⁹ He dubbed all opposition as inspired by pure political motives and directed to a purely political end.

The announcement of the plan for partition was met with widespread protest all over the country particularly in Bengal. The Bengali speaking people regarded it as a deliberate attempt on the part of the British Government to drive a wedge into their growing solidarity. Surendranath Banerjea described the feeling of humiliation experienced by the

27. Ibid., p.381.

28. Letter to Lady Curzon, February 22nd 1904, Curzon's Papers, MF N.A.I.

29. Ibid.

Bengalis in A Nation in ^{The} Making. "We felt that we had been insulted, humiliated and tricked. We felt that the whole of our future was at stake and that it was a deliberate blow aimed at the growing solidarity and self-consciousness of the Bengali-speaking population".³⁰ The Muslim Chronicle of 9th January 1904 in its editorial said "We do not recollect that there has, in the discussion of the public question, ever before been so much unanimity of voice as that which is raising its shouts of protest against the proposed partition of Bengal."³¹ Others like Nawab Salimullah of Dacca is said to have described the Partition plan as 'beastly'.³² These leaders pointed to the underlying motive of the Partition plan as an attempt to divide the Hindus and the Muslims and undermine the growing solidarity of the people of Bengal. Surendranath Banerjea writes: "To divide Bengal into two provinces keeping the Bengali speaking population together in one province and the rest in the other, would have removed all administrative inconveniences whatever they are and gratified public opinion. But this would not suit Lord Curzon and his Government. For as we believe, there was an underlying motive which would

30. Surendranath Banerjea, A Nation in the Making, op. cit., p. 172.

31. Muslim Chronicle, Calcutta, 9th January, 1904.

32. Hendry W. Navinson, The New Spirit in India, London, 1908, pp. 190-91.

not be satisfied with such a division of the province..."³³

The fact that there is some truth in this argument becomes abundantly clear from the letters sent by the Viceroy to the authorities in England. The aim to undermine the solidarity of the politically advanced Bengalis and lessening the political importance of Calcutta is amply proven in a letter to the Secretary of State in which the Viceroy said,

The Bengalis, who like to think of themselves as a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out and a Bengali Babu will be installed in the Government House, Calcutta, of course bitterly resents any disruption, that will be likely to interfere with the realisation of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flanks of India, a force already formidable and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in future.³⁴

Regarding the importance of the city of Calcutta, Curzon, in another letter, wrote to the Secretary of State -

Calcutta is the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated throughout the whole of Bengal and indeed, the whole of India. Its best wirepullers and its most frothy orators all reside there. The perfection of their machinery, and the tyranny which it enables

33. Surendranath Bannerjea, A Nation in the Making, op. cit., p.174.

34. Curzon's ^{the} letter to Secretary of State of India, 17 Feb. 1904, Curzon's Papers, MF, NAI.

them to exercise are truly remarkable. They dominate public opinion in Calcutta; they affect the High Court; they frighten the local Governments and they are sometimes not without serious influence upon the Government of India. The whole of their activity is directed to creating an agency so powerful that they may one day be able to force a weak Government to give them what they desire.³⁵

The call for the partition of Bengal was resisted by the public opinion not only of Bengal but all over the country. The resistance to the measure, was more pronounced, vocal and aggressive in Bengal than elsewhere. The Bengalee on 7th of July 1905 brought out an article titled the 'Grave National Disaster', which warned the Government of an impending national struggle of the greatest magnitude in case the Government did not reverse the decision.³⁶ B.C. Pal writes, "The whole country with one voice protested against it, and have prayed that the mischief may be stayed. The protest has been in vain. The prayer has not been given any heed to."³⁷ He added,

The partition was an evil measure. The partition was a hateful measure. The Bengalis hated to be divided from their people, the eastern provinces from the western provinces... We have been living together for how many centuries past nobody knows; we have developed a peculiar culture of our own through a common language and

35. Viceroy's letter dated 2nd Feb. 1905, to Secretary of State for India. Curzon's Papers, MF, NAI.

36. Bengalee, Calcutta, 7th July 1905.

37. B.C. Pal, Swadeshi & Swaraj, Yugayatri Prakashak Ltd., Calcutta, 1954, p.45.

a common literature. Belonging though, no doubt, to the wide life of Indian Hindu and Indian Moslems, yet in Bengal Hinduism has its own peculiarity as the Moslem ideal and culture of Bengal have also their own peculiarity. Bengal has been for many centuries past, a nation speaking one language, belonging to one civilization, practically trying to develop one culture...38

The agitation against the partition of Bengal emanated from the city of Calcutta. The first public meeting to discuss this issue was organized on 7th August 1905 by prominent leaders of Bengal like Surendranath Bannerjea and Babu Ananth Bandhu Guha in the Town Hall of Calcutta. People from all walks of life attended it. A resolution was passed condemning the plan for partition and asking the Government to repeal the same. The Calcutta Town Hall Meeting was followed by more than 2000 public meetings in the province, attended by both Hindus and Muslims in large numbers.³⁹ The Town Hall meetings put forth arguments against the partition which were more or less similar to those expressed by the Congress in its annual sessions in 1903, 1904 and 1905. The main objections raised were with regard to the loss of national unity. The division of Bengal into separate units and the disruption of its historical, social and material progress was highlighted. It was argued

38. Ibid., p.119.

39. R. C. Majumdar, Struggle for Freedom, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Bombay, 1969, p.26.

that with separate administrations the two parts of Bengal would be estranged in sympathy, in the feeling of social unity and, social degradation would follow.⁴⁰ Another reason put forward was that Bengal was a 'forward province' compared to Assam and that this would result in a conflict of interests if parts of the two were joined together to form a single province. Yet another objection was that there would be great educational losses to the transferred districts, as the Engineering, Medical and other colleges were concentrated in Calcutta and gave preference to the students of that province.⁴¹ Moreover, according to various Chambers of Commerce the commercial interests of the Eastern districts would suffer by its disconnection with Calcutta. Besides taxation would go up as the cost of administration of the new province would have to be borne by the already heavily taxed people.⁴² The loss of the jurisdiction of the High Court, the fear of being separated from Calcutta, the capital of the province, the fear of the loss of the Bengal Council of the Board of Revenue, and of the common press were factors which contributed to the feeling of suspicion among the Bengalis vis-a-vis the Partition plan.

40. Parliamentary papers, House of Commons, 1905 Cd 2746 quoted from P.C. Ghosh, Indian National Congress, op. cit., p.109.

41. An Open letter to Lord Curzon by 'One of the People', Home Public prog A 1905, 164, NAI

42. Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1905 Cd 2746 quoted in P.C. Ghosh, Indian National Congress, op. cit., p.102.

A large section of the Anglo-Indian press too were opposed to the Partition plan. The Statesman after the Town Hall meeting on 7th August 1905 wrote, "there never was a time in the history of British India, when public feeling and public opinion was so little regarded by the supreme Government as they were by the present administration."⁴³ It warned the Government that in the same way as religion thrives on persecution, public discontent is fostered by the systematic disregard of public opinion. A similar warning was given by the Englishman "It would be interesting to know, whether the Government of India has, in its wisdom, realised the gravity of the precedents of this partition business. The case of Poland is an ominous one."⁴⁴

The announcement of the Partition had a significant impact on the Congress. For the politically conscious, the Partition was regarded as a last straw, in a long series of humiliations. The very modest demands of the educated 'Bhadralok' for jobs in the Civil Services and some reforms in the Council fell on deaf ears. Above all now they were faced with a Viceroy, who was determined to treat the Congress as an 'unclean thing' and to reject all overtures

43. Statesman, Calcutta, 10th August, 1905.

44. Englishman, Calcutta, 9th August, 1905.

made by its leaders with the "same polite but frigid indifference"⁴⁵ - a Viceroy who in six years had brought about a reduction in the elected representatives in the Calcutta Corporation. He had helped in the formation of the Universities Act which was looked upon as an attempt to tighten Government control over education and the Official Secrets Act curbing press freedom. Another important factor which sharpened the political disappointment of this group was the cumulative effect of racial discrimination and arrogance. Cases of assaults on the native population increased, while arrogance in the trains, steamers, factories and offices were becoming increasingly unbearable. Unfair treatment in matters of pay and promotions led to a worsening of race relations. The belief among the natives that they were being discriminated against, on the basis of race, and not, ability, was placed on firm ground when Lord Curzon, in a convocation address at the Calcutta University said, "I hope I am making no false or arrogant claim when I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a western conception."⁴⁶ Moreover, the logically faultless exposure of the 'unBritish' rule in India and the successful attempt made by Naoroji and Dutt to attribute poverty of the Indian masses, and the repeated famines and epidemics to British

45. Curzon to Amhill, 15 June 1903, Curzon's Papers, vol. 28, MF, NAI.

46. Quoted in Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, India's fight for Freedom, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1958, p. 25.

exploitation and the drain of wealth added to the feeling of frustration of this class. Another important impetus was that, avenues of employment for this educated middle class was declining, while prices were escalating.⁴⁷ In the face of this growing public discontent, the announcement proposing partition was made.

With this announcement, the Congress underwent significant changes. The twentieth session which met at Bombay had the largest gathering since 1895, as 1010 delegates registered their names.⁴⁸ Moreover the presence of two distinguished Englishmen, Sir Henry Cotton and Sir William Wedderburn within the Congress added to its importance. In his address the President of the Congress described the proposed Partition plan as "a most arbitrary and unsympathetic evidence of irresponsible and autocratic statesmanship."⁴⁹ The resolution of the Congress pointed out that any division of the "Bengali nation into separate units will seriously interfere with its social, intellectual and material progress, involving the loss of various constitutional, and other rights and privileges which the province, has so long

47. Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement, op. cit., p.25.

48. P.C. Ghosh, Indian National Congress, op. cit., p.109.

49. Report of the Indian National Congress, 1904, Presidential Address, p.45. Quoted from P.C. Ghosh, Indian National Congress, op. cit., p.110.

enjoyed, and will burden the country with heavy expenditure which the Indian tax payer cannot at all afford."⁵⁰ This resolution did not only criticise the scheme of partition but also brought forward an alternative proposal. It pointed out that the solution to the problem lay not in redistribution of territories, but in organic changes in the Government such as the conversion of the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal into a Governorship with an Executive Council like that of Bombay and Madras.⁵¹ However these requests fell on deaf ears. With this a section within the Congress which was critical of moderate attitudes and values was gathering strength in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra.

The starting point of the new approach was a two-fold critique of the Congress Movement. The basic technique of appealing to British public opinion was condemned as 'mendicancy', futile in its efforts and derogatory to national honour; the Congress itself was attacked for representing merely the English educated elite, alienated from the common people. Instead of prayers and petitions, self-reliance and constructive work became the new slogans - gathering 'swadeshi' enterprises and stores, trying to organize education on autonomous and indigenous lines, emphasising the need for concentrated work at the village level. Such efforts at self-help together with the use of vernacular and utilisation of traditional popular customs and institutions (like the mela or fair), were felt to be the best methods for drawing the masses into the national movement.⁵²

50. Proceedings of the 20th Indian National Congress Resolution, N XIV, Bombay, 1904, p.xxxiv.

51. Ibid.

52. Sumit Sarkar, Swadeshi Movement, op. cit., p.47.

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The overall reaction against moderate 'agitation' took in the end, three main forms, which became distinct only after 1905, but can be seen in germ from 1890's - "a somewhat non-political trend towards self-development through constructive work, ignoring rather than directly attacking foreign rule; political extremism proper, attempting mass mobilization for 'swaraj' through certain new techniques which came to be called passive resistance; and revolutionary terrorism, which sought a short-cut to freedom via individual violence and conspiracies."⁵³ Thus with the struggle against the partition of Bengal there began a new phase in the history of Indian nationalism whereby, older methods of agitation generally described as 'pressure-compromise-pressure' was replaced by new techniques such as boycott of English goods and the use of indigenous products. With the emergence of these new techniques of agitation "the abrogation of the partition came to be regarded as no more than the pettiest and narrowest of all political objects - a mere stepping stone in a struggle for 'swaraj' or complete independence."⁵⁴

53. Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, Macmillan India Ltd. Delhi, 1983, p.97.

54. Ibid., p.112.



The British administration failed to comprehend the growing discontent among the people. Instead it labelled the movement as, stage-managed by a group of 'professional agitators' and 'noisy vakils'. Curzon himself described the movement as "I found the agitation got up by the native party to rest in the main upon the grossest misrepresentation. Hundreds of poor ignorant natives had been paid to hold placards (frequently upside down) with English inscriptions printed on them in Calcutta and set up by the gross before my arrival."⁵⁵ In another letter to the Secretary of State he adds,

Here in Bengal the parallel question of territorial distribution has involved us, as you may see in the Calcutta newspapers, in a turmoil which is mainly of an artificial description. It has for long been recognised that Bengal is far too big for the charge of any single man and proposals to reduce the burden have been made, some successfully, the majority unsuccessfully at different periods during the last quarter of a century. We recently framed a plan which you have probably seen, for reducing its size by material addition to the neighbouring territories of the Central Province and Assam. At once a prodigious outcry was raised from the parties whom it is proposed to take away from Bengal, that they are being torn from the bosom of their ancestral mother and that, the act of spoliation is both a blunder and a crime. Dacca and Mymensingh, which it proposed to incorporate with Assam, rent the air with piteous outcries. Amhill writes to me that he is going

55. To the Right Hon'ble St. John Brokrick, M.P.
Secretary of State for India - Feb. 23rd, 1904, Curzon Papers, MF NAI.

to struggle vigorously against any surrender of anything in Madras... So far in the hundreds of letters that I have written on the subject, at any rate the partition of Eastern Bengal, I have not found one single line of argument; there is nothing but rhetoric and declamation; and one almost becomes too weary of attempting anything in the nature of a positive administration, reform in a country where so few people will ever look ahead, where public opinion is so unstable and ill-informed, and where sentiment overrides almost every other consideration.⁵⁶

He rejected all suggestions of a compromise - thereby, the question of creation of a Commissionership for Chota Nagpur and Orissa was looked down upon as "it would fail to secure anyone of the objectives for which we recommended partition".⁵⁷ He points to one of the consequences of such a decision as "it would tend to consolidate the Bengali element by detaching it from outside factors and produce the very effect that we desire to avoid. The best advantage of our proposals is its dislike by the Congress party."⁵⁸ The Government of India took a similar position as Curzon, and the Home Department in India warned the British Government "to adopt any other course would revive the agitation against

56. To the Right Hon'ble St. John Brodrick, M.P. Secretary of State for India, Dec. 31st 1903. Curzon Papers, M.P., NAI.

57. Telegram to the Secretary of State, 24th May 1905, 1.30 p.m. Curzon Papers, MF, NAI,

58. Ibid.

partition in redoubled strength and would stimulate the perverse ingenuity of the Bengalis to manufacture all sorts of legal obstacles to partition."⁵⁹

The entire agitation was rejected as "a movement on the part of the English educated class calling themselves a 'Bengali Nation'."⁶⁰ It was attributed to the litigious character of Bengalis who it was claimed to have a "great love for debate, remarkable fluency and intolerable prolixity of speech and considerable ingenuity in devising questions of a certain type."⁶¹ The Government described the agitation as fermented and led by the literate class who knew English, thereby claiming that the demands of the agitators were merely in the interest of this section of society and not the people as a whole. The Government records comment that most of the petitions received by the Government were in English and that the leaders of the movement realized that if all memorials were submitted in English the popular character of the movement would be in question. "The latter are anxious therefore to secure the co-operation in the agitation of all classes of society and thus not only to give the proceeding:

59. Govt. of India, Home Deptt., Public Branch, Oct. 1905, File No. 163-198. NAI.

60. Govt. of India, Home Deptt., (1905), Feb. 1905, File No. 155-167. NAI.

61. Ibid.

the appearance of a popular, rather than a class movement but to prevent other people from seeing that the interest of the entire population are not necessarily identical.⁶²

The Home Department Report lists the causes of the agitation as

- (i) Loss of prospects of appointment - particularly in the case of Eastern Bengalis who will lose probable chances of employment in Assam etc.
- (ii) Loss of business profits.
- (iii) Loss of the Board of Revenue.
- (iv) Loss of Legislative Council - loss attributed to the Bengalis love for debate.
- (v) Loss of national unity "This is the Congress point. Bengal united is a power-divided it will pull different ways. This is perfectly true and is one of the greatest merits of this scheme."⁶³
- (vi) Loss of the High Court.
- (vii) Loss of Educational advantages.
- (viii) Social difficulties - marriages etc.
- (ix) Exchange of a higher for a lower standard of administration.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., p.2.

- (x) Loss of historical associations.
- (xi) Financial disadvantage.
- (xii) Fear of possible change in law.
- (xiii) Linguistic deterioration.⁶⁴

From the factors listed above one can infer that the Government perceived the disadvantages faced by the educated middle class, as a cause of the movement, thereby attempting to strengthen their characterization of the movement as 'class based.'

British historians of the early twentieth century such as Ronaldshay, Chirol and Lovat Fraser have described and justified the partition plan in various ways. Chirol believes that the plan for partition was necessitated on grounds of the administrative efficiency that Curzon had committed himself to.

*Lord Curzon preferred to govern her (India) himself and Government for him meant the highest possible standard of administrative efficiency, required to make her a great Imperial asset and not least in the sphere of international politics in which he was himself an expert, having graduated in the late school of Victorian Imperialism. 65

Thus for Chirol it was the unwieldy size of the province of Bengal which necessitated partition. He attributed

64. Ibid.

65. Valentine Chirol - India - Ernest Benn. Ltd., London, 1926, p.115.

the agitation following the partition to, the emotionally charged Bengali whom he described as a "singularly sensitive race . They are intensely proud of their province as the senior of the three great 'Presidencies' of India, of their capital as the capital city of India and the seat of Viceregal Government and of their Calcutta university as the first and the greatest Indian university, though already menaced they declared, by Lord Curzon's Universities Act."⁶⁶

Ronaldshay in his exhaustive biography of Curzon, too, justifies the Partition Plan on the grounds of Curzon's desire for administrative efficiency and thereby the attempt to reduce the unwieldy dimension of Bengal. Ronaldshay attributes the agitation, that followed, to certain interested sections of the middle class, who were able to whip up the regional sentiment of the Bengali people.

The Calcutta bar, the most numerous and powerful in India, had visions of a separate High Court coming into existence to serve the populous districts of the proposed new province, to their own material and political disadvantage. The politicians who controlled the native newspapers of Calcutta are equally alert of the probable curtailment of their own activities and influence in the event of other newspapers springing to life in the capital of a new administration. But it was sentiment that gave the movement the force which it ultimately acquired.⁶⁷

66. Valentine Chirol, India - Old and New, Macmillan and Co., London, 1920, p.114.

67. Ronaldshay, The Life of Lord Curzon, vol.II, op. cit., p.322.

Other apologists such as Lovat Fraser have put the partition of Bengal as the first of the four principle achievements of Lord Curzon in India.

unhesitatingly
I place the partition of Bengal first, because I believe it to have been fraught with the largest and the most tangible benefits to many millions of people. The systematic neglect of the vast trans-Gangetic areas of Bengal was the greatest blot upon our administration of India. Crime was life, the peasantry was crushed beneath the exactions of absentee landlords, the police system was feeble, education a mere shadow and internal communication disgracefully inadequate. The old Bengal government was engrossed with Calcutta and the districts near its headquarters. Eastern Bengal was less known and less thought of than the Punjab and the Frontier. A single district with an area of 6000 sq. miles and a population of four million was sometimes left in charge of a solitary English officer. The division of Bengal formed no part of Lord Curzon's original programme, because at first he shared the prevalent ignorance of the deplorable condition of the remoter portion of the province. He finally drifted into the project by accident, and as will be shown, largely without elaborate premeditation which usually marked his reform; but by it he will probably be best remembered and as all impartial remembered persons who have seen the new province, believe, ultimately blessed.⁶⁸

To drive home the point that the Partition of Bengal would ensure administrative efficiency, Lovart Fraser quotes Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of United Bengal - "It has been increasingly difficult,

68. Lovat Fraser, India under Curzon and After, op. cit., p.19.

until it had become practically impossible to conduct efficiently the administration of this great province. It was not a matter only of the burden of work laid on the Lieutenant Governor, but rather the impossibility of efficient working of the various departments of the Government. No head of a department was able efficiently to deal with the charges committed to him. The result of this was, that many of the districts of Eastern Bengal had been practically neglected. There were many reasons which led the ordinary head of a department, when he found that he could not overtake efficiently his whole charge, to give to Orissa and Eastern Bengal such time as he had at his disposal; and the districts of Eastern Bengal suffered most from the undue pressure of work."⁶⁹

Arguing against the complaint that the partition plan was formulated secretly without consulting the people, who would be effected by it, Sir Andrew Fraser put forward that the plan was passed after the "fullest consideration, after public and private discussion with representatives of all in the interests concerned, and from no other motive than the real and permanent benefit of the people of the two provinces. I have never known any administrative step

69. Ibid., p.371 .

taken after fuller discussion and most careful consideration."⁷⁰ Moreover the Government of India Resolution stated,

It is more than eighteen months since the first proposals of the Government of India were officially published. In the interval they have been subjected to widespread and searching criticism at the hands of those who are directly or indirectly concerned. Representations from an immense number of public bodies or gatherings have reached the Government. These have in every case been attentively examined; many of them have not been without effect upon the course adopted; and the very last charge that could with justice be brought against the Government, would be one of undue speed in arriving at a final decision.⁷¹

Lovat Fraser sums up by saying, "If any man is still disposed to think that the Viceroy and his advisors deliberately and maliciously sat down and devised a devilish scheme to break Bengal in twain, and to pit Hindus against Mohammedans, he is insensible to facts. Nothing is clearer than that, it did not even occur to the first framers of the scheme that the 'Bengali Nation', would be perturbed at the slightest degree of change. Why should it have done? In 1878, 3000,000 Bengalis had been involved in the province of Assam and nobody wore black or poured ashes on his head

70. Ibid., p. 383.

71. Ibid.

in consequence."⁷² Fraser thus attributes the agitation to the fear that a separate province would mean a separate High Court - damaging the weight and wealth of the great horde of Calcutta lawyers. The other was the fear of the Calcutta native press, that the people of East Bengal would turn to Dacca for news and not Calcutta. Thus, for Fraser, this together with the vindictive animosity which had been aroused against Lord Curzon among Bengalis by the Universities Act, have been described as the causes of the agitation. Rejecting the claim of the agitators that the Partition was a deliberate blow aimed at the growing solidarity and self-consciousness of the Bengali speaking people, Fraser asserts that a "feeling of solidarity which can be shattered by a parochial feeling of rearrangement must be singularly feeble."⁷³

Moreover Lovat Fraser attributes the partition agitation to a certain stage in the history of the colonial world. He writes,

No doubt the excitement engendered by the Universities Act and the Partition of Bengal was cleverly utilized to propagate the doctrines of anarchism which, disaffected Indians had borrowed from the west; but unrest and its accompaniment of violence would have appeared in India at this juncture and would have spread with so much incendiary rapidity, if the universities had been left alone, if Bengal had remained out and indivisible, if, indeed Lord Curzon had never been

72. Ibid., pp. 383-4.

73. Ibid., p. 385.

born. The time was ripe for it; all Asia was astir; and it was only a chronological coincidence which led shortsighted observers to attribute its appearance of an educational reform and a rearrangement of administrative boundaries, however important the effect of these measures may have been.⁷⁴

Thus the agitation was regarded as an outcome of a particular process and not a movement in reaction against a discriminatory and exploitative rule.

The official British attitude towards the agitation on one hand aimed at suppressing the agitation, while on the other it tried to win over the Muslim population by emphasising that the partition was in their interest. Nawab Salimullah of Dacca who was one of the most influential leaders of Dacca and whom the Mohammedans of Bengal regarded as 'their natural leader', had described the partition plan in its earlier stage as 'beastly'.⁷⁵ However, "shortly after the partition the Government of India advanced a loan to relieve the Nawab's (Salim-ullah's) private munificence from bankruptcy - a loan amounting to about £ 100,000 at what was, for India a very low rate of interest. This benevolent action, combined with certain privileges granted to Mohammedans, was supposed by many Hindus to have encouraged

74. Ibid., p. 32.

75. Hendry W. Navinson, The New Spirit of India, op. cit., pp. 190-91.

the Nawab and his co-religionists in taking a still more favourable view of Partition itself."⁷⁶ The Nawab was made to believe that the interest of the Muslims will dominate the administration of the new province and the Nawab as their leader will occupy a unique position there. Moreover, others like Sir Bampfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of the new province, made certain indiscreet speeches which had the effect of setting the Muslims against the Hindus. He said that he was the incarnation of Shaista Khan, one of the Mughal Governors of Bengal under Aurangzeb, and said in jest that he had two wives, one Muslim and the other Hindu and that the Mohammedan was his favourite.⁷⁷ "The jest was taken in earnest, and the Mussalmans genuinely believed that the British authorities were ready to forgive them all excesses."⁷⁸ This encouraged the Muslims, and it is said that "priestly Muslims went through the country preaching the revival of Islam, and proclaiming to the villagers that the British Government was on the Mohammedan side, that the law courts had been specially suspended for

76. Ibid., p.193.

77. Sir B. Fuller writes, "I was like a man who was married to two wives, on a Hindu the other a Mohammedan - both young and charming - but was forced into the arms of one of them by the rudeness of the other". Some Personal Experiences, John Murray, London, 1930, pp.140-41.

78. Hendry W. Navinson, The New Spirit of India, op. cit., p.192.

three months, and no penalty would be exacted for violence done to Hindus, or for the loot of Hindu shops or the abduction of Hindu widows."⁷⁹ Consequently riots broke out in Eastern Bengal - at places like Comilla, Jamalpur, Mymensingh etc. "with this communal riots came to be almost a normal feature in some parts of Eastern Bengal."⁸⁰

Moreover, this period witnessed the emergence of a fresh generation of agitators, which challenged the very legitimacy of British rule and of the dominant nationalist leadership. New spokesmen and political workers came forward. They had been marginally involved in politics earlier and had criticised the Congress leaders for more than a decade, but had not made available an effective alternative. During the 'Swadeshi' Movement this group minimized their differences with the dominant moderate group. However differences within the national movement proved fundamental and could not be contained. The new nationalist leaders, the Extremists, regarded themselves as representatives of a higher stage in Indian nationalism. They embodied nineteenth century cultural and religious trends which were barely evident in the views and work of the earlier Moderates. Some called for a return to ancient

79. Ibid.

80. R.C. Majumdar, Struggle for Freedom, op. cit., p.26.

Indian ideals, widening the scope of nationalism to include all aspects of culture and called for national revival in art, education, literature, historical research and morality. Bipin Chandra Pal said in his famous Madras lectures in 1907,

There is another attitude that - with the decadence of the faith in the foreign people and in the foreign Government, with the decadence of our faith in the foreign administration which has come to us, we have learnt to look nearer home. Our eyes have been turned away from the Government House, away from the Houses of Parliament, from Simla and Calcutta, and our faces have turned now to the starving, the naked, the patient and long suffering three hundred million of our people, and in it we see a new potency, because we view them now with an eye of love which we never had felt before, and in the teeming, toiling, starving and naked population in India we find possibilities, potentialities, germs that have given rise to this new Movement. That is the cornerstone of this Movement. Faith in the people, Faith in the genius of the nation, Faith in God who has been guiding the genius of this nation through ages by historic evolution, Faith in the eternal destiny of the Indian people... to understand the New Movement properly, you must look upon it through the prism of this new Faith in the Indian people.⁸¹

Though British statesmen and historians justified the partition of Bengal on administrative grounds, the political motives cannot be ignored. The attempt to draw cleavages within Indian nationalism, the Bengali people

81. Bipin Chandra Pal, "Swadeshi and Swaraj", op. cit. quoted from Bipin Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India, Orient Longman, 1979, p.140, fn.5.

and between the Hindu and Muslim communities was with the ultimate aim of maximizing imperial control. Thus the colonial administrator in the garb of efficiency performed functions relating to political administration, thus emerging more as a ruler rather than a neutral Weberian bureaucrat whose rule is autocratic rather than bureaucratic.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

We find that in every society certain myths are built in an attempt to evade social decisions and give legitimacy to certain social processes. The reasons for certain social conditions and social conflict is conveniently attributed to changeless, mythical original state of being. This tendency towards fetishizing and myth-making can also be seen in the European perception of the East. East-West relations which is characterized by domination and subordination have been and are still, to an extent, being legitimized on the belief that the East is childlike, depraved and different, while the West is rational riotuous and mature. In the colonial period, this involved a process of myth-making about the colonized people and also the European rulers. Every social and religious group in India was regarded as different from the other, with hardly any common characteristics. Indians were regarded as a heterogeneous people and it was believed that the organic unity of India was an artificial imperial creation. As a nation, it was asserted time and again by all those who had a stake in the raj that India never existed.

The steretotype of the westernized 'effiminate resident' of Bengal or the 'Babu' was built in sharp contrast to that of the vigourous and sturdy peasant of Punjab, and the two

were often compared, unfavourably. These contrasts helped to support the British claim that the westernized Indians in no way could represent 'real India'. It was believed that only the 'just and neutral' British administrator could relieve India from destitution chaos and poverty and that only British administration could ensure the expansion of justice, prosperity, humanity and stability.

However, the gap between British perception and British policy was revealed to us in the course of our study. The British administrators were far from being neutral and just. The rule of the conservative anti-Indian Halliday was not very different in terms of policy from that of liberal utilitarian Grant, though the latter appeared more.

The Indian peasant who was regarded as the 'passive helot', emerged in sharp contrast, as an active participant in a movement which promised him liberation from the exploitation of the planter. Thus these stereotypes played an important part, not in terms of their description of reality but as attempts to disfigure it.

In spite of these negations Curzon went ahead to perfect the image of the colonial administrator. He believed that heredity, education, habit of mind and vigour of character all went into making the British a governing race. It is his complete confidence in himself and the British imperial

system and his total disregard for the Indian public sentiment which played an important part in the announcement of the Partition of Bengal. Though the partition was sought to be justified on grounds of administrative convenience, but when seen in the context of the rising crescendo of the nationalist movement, it emerges clearly as an attempt to negate the same. Usually, Curzon's rule has been interpreted as bureaucratic, however, if one looks at his measures, his rule emerges as more autocratic than bureaucratic. This is not to say that bureaucracy is opposed to autocracy, but only to suggest that when autocracy becomes a political input into Bureaucracy, it distorts the normal functions of the latter, in terms of administration imparting justice and development.

The irony of autocratic administration comes out more clearly when Curzon's actions are seen in the context of the traditional role of the bureaucracy in terms of industrialization. Max Weber takes the position that modern bureaucracy in its rational-legal framework has a classic function of managing an industrial and technological revolution. Even if one accepts that Curzon's rule was bureaucratic one cannot escape the fact that it was industrial development which suffered a setback. At best there were pockets of industrial development in an otherwise agrarian colony. Baldev Raj Nayar in India's Quest for Technological Independence says that "the role of the administrative state was system maintenance rather than

system transformation. If there ever were transforming impulse of British imperialism, these ended with the revolt of 1857."¹ The imperialist school attributed lack of industrialization to local culture, giving rise to the 'incapability' thesis. It, very conveniently "chooses to ignore the relationship of economic consequence to public policy on the part of a foreign conquered power. Its unstated and at times implicit assumption of a white man's 'trusteeship' evidences the lack of an adequate theory about the role of interest in public policy."²

The idea of the white man's burden which was being propagated at that time had a deep influence in shaping the administrators perception of the people and his role in India. Colonial domination thus not merely involved the imposition of foreign rule on a people through military force but also conquering the mind and heart of the colonized people. This involved a process in which pre-colonial history was devalued and aspects of its culture were distorted and destroyed. Marx writing on India said,

1. Baldev Raj Nayar, India's Quest for technological Independence - policy foundations and policy changes, Lancer Pub., New Delhi, 1983, p.110.

2. Ibid., p.107.

"England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu and separates Hindustan ruled by the British, from all its ancient tradition and from the whole of its past history."³ The British thus, by glorifying their own culture and negating that of the native society, were able to establish the 'natural right' of the former to control the latter.

3. Marx and Engels, Pre-Capitalist Socio-Economic Formations, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, p.11.

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