

While the East India Company was in supreme charge of Indian affairs, it could fairly be said that the directors always put a brake on territorial expansion, though the men on the spot might sometimes hanker after extended power or feel that it was necessary.

PERCIVAL GRIFFITHS

British rule in India was easily the most spectacular instance of imperialism practised in modern times and India offers the example of a classical colony of exploitation.....The western colonial policy, as could only be expected, was formulated primarily, if not solely, to serve the interests of the western nations.

N. R. RAY

CHAPTER - 3

ENGLISH EXPANSION IN BENGAL

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3.1 ENGLISH STRATEGY IN BENGAL

"The English found it far more difficult to settle in Bengal than in Madras. At Madras they purchased a site for settlement from Hindu Raja; they had built a factory and a strong fort fifty years before the Moghuls invaded Peninsular India. In Bengal the English found the Moghuls already in possession; consequently they had great difficulty in establishing a trade; at last they were allowed to establish factories, but were strictly prohibited from building fortifications of any kind."(1)

Wheeler adds, that in 1633 "the English obtained permission to trade in Bengal....No English ships were allowed to enter the Hugli river. In 1640 the English obtained further privileges from the Moghul. One of the daughters of Shah Jahan had been severely burned by her clothes catching fire. The factors at Surat were requested to send a surgeon to Court. A certain Dr. Gabriel Boughton attended to the princess, and effected a perfect cure. Shah Jahan was overjoyed, and told Dr. Boughton to name his own reward. The patriotic surgeon requested that the English Company might be allowed to trade in Bengal without payment of any duty. The boon was granted; Boughton obtained a firman, and proceeded over land to Bengal. He reached Piply, and saved an English ship from the payment of duties. At that time Shah Shuja, the second son of Shah Jahan, was Viceroy of Bengal. Dr. Boughton paid his respects to the Viceroy. He cured one of the ladies of the prince of some sickness. The English were then permitted to build a factory at Hugli, but without fortifications."

3.2 TRADING PRIVILEGE OBTAINED

Sultan Shuja issued a firmen in 1651, granting the Company the privilege of trading in return for a fixed annual payment of duties worth Rs. 3,000. (2) Keith (3) writes, "... in 1650-1 a settlement was made at Hugli and later extended to Patna and Kasimbazar. But no effective sovereignty could be obtained....The agents of the Company had to content themselves with efforts to secure exemption from transit duties and customs in consideration of an annual payment of 3,000 rupees, and in 1656 they obtained from Shah Shuja a grant freeing them from demands on these counts. The factors were especially interested in the concession which applied to their private trade as well as to that of the Company, while the latter bore the burden of the payments to the local authorities."

3.3 FORTRESSES STRENGTHENED BY COMPANY

The Charter granted by Cromwell in 1657 gave Company fresh opportunities by amalgamating the various joint-stocks into one joint stock, and this greatly eased the Company of its financial difficulties. The thirty years following the Restoration of 1660 was a period of great expansion and prosperity in England. Charles II confirmed the old privileges enjoyed by the Company and on 3rd April, 1661 granted a new Charter (4) "In order to meet the existing circumstances more effectively, the Company's power and command over its fortresses was strengthened. The Company was authorised to appoint Governors and other Officers for proper administration.... The Charter further authorised the Company to empower the Governor and Council of each one of its factories or trading centres at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta to

administer, with respect to the persons employed under them, both the civil and criminal justice according to the English law." The Company under his patronage entered into a period of unprecedented prosperity.

3.4 FROM TRADE TO TERRITORY

The increased prosperity of the Company whetted their appetite and "A peaceful trading body was transformed into a power eager to establish its own position by 'territorial acquisitions' largely in view of the political disorders in the country." (5) Wolpert (6) observes, "New royal charters granted the company rights it had never previously possessed, including permission to coin money, to exercise full jurisdiction over all English subjects residing at its factories or forts, and to make war or peace with "non-Christian powers" in India. The merchant adventurers of London thus became a virtual state unto themselves, and acted accordingly whenever east of Good Hope. More than a hundred English factors resided in India after 1660 and, for the remaining four decades of the century, they received enough specie from home to purchase whatever goods they required to assure the continuing flow of an average annual profit of 25 per cent."

3.5 COMPANY'S JUDICIAL POWERS

Jain (7) comments that the Charter of 1661, "has an important bearing on the evolution of the judicial system in India. In the year 1661, the Company presented an address to the Council of state in England, praying for the grant of powers under the Great Seal of England, to their Presidents and Councils in India to enforce obedience in all Englishmen resident within their jurisdiction, and to punish offenders conformably to the

laws of England...Consequently, on April 3, 1661, Charles II granted a new Charter to the Company. It authorised the Governor and Council (Bruce's Annals, I.p.459.) of each factory to judge all persons, whether belonging to the Company or living under them, in all causes, civil or criminal, according to the laws of England, and to execute judgment accordingly." Jain (8) adds, "whereas the purpose of the charter of 1600 primarily was to make arrangements for keeping discipline among the servants of the Company, the charter of 1661 had a wider perspective; its purpose was to create a judicial system for the Company's territorial possessions. The charter indicated clearly that the Company was not merely a trading concern but that it was on its way to becoming a territorial power also."

3.6 COMPANY RAISES MILITARY FORCE

Keith (9) recounts, "By Charter of August 9th, 1683 the Company was given full ^{power} / to declare and make peace and war.... to raise, arm, train, and muster such military forces as seemed requisite and necessary....This remarkable grant was accompanied by a proviso reserving to the Crown the power of making peace and was 'when we shall be pleased to interpose our royal authority therein', and 'the sovereign right, power, and dominion over all the forts, places and plantations'. We have expressed in unmistakable fashion the essential rule that the acquisition of sovereignty by subjects of the Crown is on behalf of the Crown and not in their own right." Keith further adds, "The charter also made important provision regarding the judicial arrangements of the Company.....the charter provided for the establishment of a court of judicature to consist of one person learned in the civil law and two assistants to be

appointed by the Company. The court was to determine cases of forfeiture of ships or goods for trading contrary to the charter, and mercantile and maritime cases concerning persons within the charter limits, and cases of trespasses, injuries and wrongs done on the high seas or within the charter limits."

3.7 A FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT

The Company decided to protect themselves by force, for which they thought of having a fortified settlement at Hugli. Hostilities actually broke out between the Mughals and the English on the sack of Hugli by the latter in October 1686. Hijli and the Mughal fortifications at Balasore were also stormed by the English. The English were repulsed from Hugli; and abandoning it went down the river to a fever-stricken island at the mouth of the river, whence, Job Charnock, opened negotiations which ended in securing permission for the English to return to Sutanati in autumn of 1687. But hostilities were renewed in the next year when a fresh naval force was sent from London, under Captain William Heath, with orders to seize Chittagong. The commander, however, failed in his object and then retired to Madras. These rash and aggressive actions on the part of the English stopped as a result of the President and Council of Bombay concluding a peace with the Mughal Emperor in 1690. Job Charnock returned to Bengal in August, 1690 and established an English factory at Sutanati. (10)

3.8 COMPANY'S PRIVILEGES SUSPENDED

Fawcett (11) records that in Calcutta, "After Job Charnock had finally settled at Sutanati in 1690, the factory had various difficulties to contend with. Thus in 1693, owing to the piracies in the Red Sea that were

attributed to Europeans, Aurangzebe suspended the Company's privileges, and their trade could only be carried on secretly. All idea of establishing a Court of Judicature was, therefore, postponed; (C.R.Wilson, Early Annals of the English in Bengal, vol. I. p. 147.) and in 1698 the Council was instructed to send prisoners to Madras for trial, if necessary. (Bruce, John, Annals of the Honourable East India Company, 1600-1708, London 1810.)"

3.9 BENGAL DEVELOPMENTS OF COMPANY

Captain Hamilton (12) summarises the developments in Bengal as, "The English settled at Calcutta about the year 1690, after the Moghul had pardoned all the robberies and murders committed on his subjects. Mr. Job Channock (13) being then the Company's Agent in Bengal, he had liberty to settle an emporium in any part on the river's side below Hughly's..... Mr. Channock choosing the ground of the colony, where it now is, reigned more absolute than a Raja.... for when any poor ignorant native transgressed his laws, they were sure to undergo a severe whipping for a penalty, and the execution was generally done when he was at dinner, so near his dining-room that the groans and cries of the poor delinquent served him for music..... Mr. Channock went one time with his ordinary guard of soldiers, to see a young widow act that tragical catastrophe (sati); but he was so smitten with the widow's beauty, that he sent his guards to take her by force from her executioners, and conducted her to his own lodgings. They lived lovingly many years, and had several children."

3.10 CONSTRUCTION OF FORT WILLIAM

Hamilton (14) further records, "Fort William was built an irregular tetragon, of brick and mortar, called puckah, which is a composition of brick-dust, lime, molasses, and cut hemp; and when it comes to be dry, is as hard and tougher than firm stone or brick.... Within the limits of the Mahratta ditch the English Governor and Council reigned supreme. At one time, the Moghul authorities outside would have liked to interfere in matters of revenue; they never cared much about the administration of justice. As far as natives were concerned, the English were free to exercise the powers of life and death. They had nothing to fear from Hugli, Murshedabad or Delhi; and the time had not come for them to have anything to fear from Westminster Hall. The administration of justice, wherever Englishmen are concerned, has always been a matter of paramount importance. Wherever there is an English element, there is a development of English courts of justice and forms of law. In the earlier history of the English Settlements in India, the Governor exercised a paternal authority as the agent of the Court of Directors - the local head of the Company's establishment."

3.11 ATTITUDES OF BRITISH IN INDIA

Discussing the attitudes of the British in India Michael Edwardes (15) elaborates, "FOR the first fifty years of their rule in India, the British never felt wholly secure or even convinced of the permanence of their dominion. They were often critical of what they saw around them, but they were careful not to allow their feelings to influence their actions in case it aroused opposition which they might not be in a position

to resist. At the same time, they had some respect for Indian culture or at least certain aspects of it. In the eighteenth century there was considerable social intercourse between the British and the Muslim aristocracy. Many British officials spoke and read Persian, the literary language. Some of them regarded themselves as Indian rulers..... Towards the end of the century, however, the British were becoming conscious of a sense of racial superiority. The easy social relations they had with Indians began to decline."

3.12 GULF BETWEEN INDIANS AND CONQUERER'S

John William Kaye (16) meticulously elaborates, "There is one point of difference (between Mahomedan rule and those of our own dominions in the East) which will readily present itself to the mind of even the most inexperienced reader. It will at once occur to him, that the Mussulman conquerer, though differing in religion, and to a certain extent in manners, from the Hindoo, was still a member of the same great Oriental family, and exhibited, in his ordinary intercourse with the inhabitants of the conquered land, as many points of resemblance as of difference, and even in the latter very often assimilated his own customs to those of the country of his adoption. He sat on the ground; he ate his dinner with his fingers; he covered his head and uncovered his feet in-doors; he secluded his women; and if he did not bring with him the same amount of regard for ceremonial observances, and the same rigid ideas on the subject of cleanliness and uncleanness of external things, he was very soon impregnated with them. The Mahomedan conquerer rapidly became Hindooised. He fused himself into the general mass of the people. He was not a

Tartar, or an Afghan, but a Mshomedan Indian. India was his country; he was not merely in it, but of it. He, or his father, or some more remote ancestor, had emigrated thither, and had forgotten the country he had left behind."

"But between the English conquerer and his Hindoo subject there is an impassable gulf. There is nothing in common between them. The British gentlemen, who fill all the principal offices of the state, are not Christian Indians, but Christian Englishmen. They have brought their own costume and their own customs with them, and keep them on the bank of Ganges as they would on the banks of Thames. They live alone - utterly separated from the mass of the people - and are surrounded with a prestige of superior wisdom and superior strength; but still, in many respects, an astonishment and a reproach in the eyes of our benighted brethren."

R E F E R E N C E S

CHAPTER-3

THE ENGLISH EXPAND IN BENGAL (1600 - 1697)

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