

The Usurpers: The Life and Death of John Company

4.1 Preface: Changing Britain

Before we consider how the British conquered India and founded their own Indian Empire it is perhaps as well to consider in greater depth just what is meant by the 'British.' Table 4.1 provides a chronology of incidental events in three continents over a period of nearly three hundred years and is quite enough to suggest that any definition of 'British' must be a changing one. Not until 1707 was there even unity in Britain, and even then there was Bonny Prince Charlie's rebellion yet to come.

Elizabeth I's England was a modernising state, and in common with other European ones, a state in which there was a growing and quite strong sense of national identity. It had a growing community of merchants and traders whose interests did not always coincide with those of the crown. In the seventeenth century conflict over religious matters and the relationship of the crown to parliament brought on the Civil War, and for a time Cromwell's Commonwealth supplanted the monarchy. After the Restoration the balance of power within the state had changed, and so had much of the financial administration. Throughout this period the trading companies of England, such as the East India Company, founded in 1600, and of other European states continued to grow and contest with each other across the globe. As late as 1695 the Scots founded their own trading company, but by 1707 the Act of Union created a unified Britain and a coalition of commercial interests. British and French interests in the new world clashed, and during what was effectively a war fought across the world (the Seven Years War 1756-63) fighting was seen in both Canada and India, in the former case between government armies, in the latter between the servants of rival companies.

Victory in North America and the assertion of control over French-speaking Canada gave Britain an enlarged empire for a short time. The interests of the colonialists in what became the U.S.A. and those of the home government clashed, and after the War of Independence 2,500,000 settlers were no longer subjects of his Britannic Majesty. 'New England' defeated old England. By then British subjects in India had taken a firm hold on Bengal, but they were not colonists. They were traders, who had become in effect rulers under the pressured assent of and in the name of the Mughal emperor. Other princely courts in India also had their share of Europeans – free-booting adventurers retained as mercenary officers.

Since the British merchants had had no territorial designs on India the legal status of India had not been of prime concern to the British government in the same

Table 4.1 A Chronology of Some Events in America, Britain and India

<i>America</i>	<i>Britain</i>	<i>India</i>
1492 Columbus discovers the New World		
1510		D'Albuquerque of Portugal takes Goa
1525		Babur wins at Panipat and founds Mughal dynasty
1558	Elizabeth I crowned	
1586	Drake singes the King of Spain's beard	
1600	East India Company founded	
1605		Death of Akbar
1607 Jamestown settlement of Virginia Colony	Virginia Company of London	
1613 English settlers destroy French colonies		English receive firman from Mughals to trade Surat founded
1620 Plymouth, Mass founded		
1632		Construction of the Taj Mahal starts: Portuguese driven out of Bengal
1639		Madras founded
1642	Start of Civil War	
1659		Aurangzeb takes the throne
1660	Restoration, Charles II	
1663 Carolinas settled	Charter for Royal Africa Company	
1664 English annexe New Netherlands and rename New Amsterdam as New York		Sivaji the Maratha chief, sacks Surat
1668		Bombay acquired
1690		Calcutta founded

<i>America</i>	<i>Britain</i>	<i>India</i>
1694	Bank of England founded	
1695	Scottish Africa and India Company	
1700 250,000 settlers in Anglo America		
1707	Union of England and Scotland	Population of Mughal Empire 100,000,000 Death of Aurangzeb
1709	Abraham Darby smelts iron with coal in England	
1711	South Sea Company	
1713	Peace of Utrecht	
1739		Delhi sacked by Persian Nadir Shah- who takes Peacock Throne
1756-63	Seven Year War	
1757		Clive takes Bengal after Battle of Plassey
1759 Wolfe defeats Montcalm at Quebec		
1761		Marathas and Afghans in mutual annihilation at Panipat
1773 Boston Tea Party	Regulating Act (of India): first iron bridge built Shropshire	
1775 2,500,000 settlers	British population 8,500,000	
1775 American Revolution	James Watt's steam engine	
1781 Cornwallis defeated by Washington at Yorktown		
1784	India Act	
1786		Cornwallis Governor-General: Calcutta population 250,000

way that the status of the American colonies had been of concern, until the accident of the acquisition of Bengal suddenly raised the stakes. So arose problems which we would call 'extra-territoriality' in our current day, the attempt by a government to assert authority over its nationals even though they be outside the national territory and perhaps even in the territory of another state. (The British for example have clashed with the USA over their attempts to legislate for subsidiary firms based in sovereign Britain.) Would the British overseas acknowledge the authority of the home government? The Portuguese sailors in many parts of the world had degenerated into privateers, and British pirates were well known in the Caribbean. A Briton would even found his own kingdom in Borneo. In controlling the British abroad would the Company or the crown devolve much power locally, and on what basis? Did the Company see India as a cohesive whole? In America there had been separate colonies. The early British saw India as a continent of different lands, and there was no necessary supposition that the affairs of the different trading factories should necessarily be linked – no more than in later centuries the different colonies of East Africa should have been one land.

Technologically the 250 years covered by Table 4.1 saw great changes in Europe, but few in India. Elizabeth's England was not technologically superior to Mughal India. But the years of national rivalry in Europe and the beginnings of the industrial revolution in England gave her a rapidly increasing technical advantage over the Indian states, which became a lethal military advantage. Retrospectively, what seems remarkable is that throughout these centuries of change a continuing cohesive sense of first English then British identity survived long enough in India for there to be a history of 'British India.' Now, as Empire fades in the memory, 'Britishness' is dissolving back into its national constituent cultures.

4.2 European Expansion

Religious intolerance and fanaticism has been as much a property of the earlier religion of revealed truth, Christianity, as it has been of equally dogmatic Islam. After the Moslems had taken the Holy Land, the Christians of West Europe struggled through the centuries of the crusades to re-establish a Christian government in Palestine. The fight was also on to push back the Moslems from Spain and Eastern Europe. Given this irreconcilable hostility, it is no surprise that Europe viewed the Islamic world of Arabia and Persia as a blockage between itself and the fabled Eldorados of the east, lands of gold, of spices and silks, and also, so it was said, of lost communities of Christians. 'The Indies' was a magnetic conception of adventure, wealth, and religious reward.

The Europe that wanted to expand East was one which, in comparison with other continents, had many coastlines and many seas – the Mediterranean, the Baltic, the North, the Irish, and one in which sea-faring and sea fighting was developing fast. The sea indeed provided the easiest and certainly most cost-effective means of transport of goods, land transport being by cart on poor rutted or muddied roads until

the canal age (which in Britain did not start until the 1760s.) A 'properly drawn' transport map of the world of the 17th Century would show all the trans-oceanic coasts close together (across for example the 'Atlantic River') and the landmasses huge and far-flung.

The first of the great European seafarers to seek routes to the east were Portuguese and Spanish, who took both the 'obvious' route round Africa, at all times going East when possible, and the speculative 'round-earth' route west, which resulted in Columbus mis-identifying the islands of the Caribbean as the 'Indies'. The memory of this error is retained in the contemporary term 'West Indies'. The rapid expansion of the Portuguese and Spanish Empires in the New World gave them a new wealth, much of it by plunder, but an increasing proportion by economic exploitation of new crops, principally sugar, grown by slaves on plantations. As was to be expected, trade with the new empires was a monopoly of the imperial power, and denied to the ships of other nationalities.

In 1510, before the Mughals had even come to India, the Portuguese were established at Goa on the west coast of the Deccan. Just like the Spanish in the New World, they spent much of their time and effort in missionary activity, often summarily executing or burning those who resisted. The next major European involvement in the East Indies was by the Dutch, who were much more hard-headed businessmen, and interested above all in the highly lucrative spice trade centred on 'Batavia' (Djakarta) in modern Indonesia. Europe's demand for spices was high: it seems a culinary quirk of imperial history that the Elizabethans both wanted and needed their spices in their drinks and to flavour the salt-preserved meats of the long cold winter, but by the time the British had, three centuries later, established their empire in India, many of those resident in India resolutely refused to eat any curries and preferred plain boiled vegetables.

4.3 The East India Company

The tight control by the Dutch of this trade irked the English considerably. In 1600 the East India Company received a Royal Charter to begin English trading with the Indies. The significance of the charter was two-fold. First, it gave the company monopoly rights. No other English group could trade with India, and so the high level of risk the new venture faced was to some extent insured. (In actual fact there were some other smaller companies involved, but they were soon merged.) The second feature was that it was a company – a 'legal body'. This new 'fiction' which was developing in Europe was institutionally revolutionary. Akbar had to some extent separated the concept of Emperor from himself, but had not resolved the question of succession. Here was a new kind of 'body' which was separate from, but dependent on, all subscribing members, and which could recruit new subscribers on any basis. Its longevity could be indefinite. The State's interest in the Company was simple. The State taxed trade and made money from it: the more there was and the greater its value, the greater the revenues.

The company made attempts to set up a factory (trading station) in Indonesia, but the English were summarily executed by the Dutch, in a manner which was not uncommon in the rivalries of the period. To a certain extent trading with India was accepted as a second best, particularly since India had few spices except pepper. In 1613 John Hawkins received a 'firman' from the Mughal Emperor in Delhi to trade, and set up a factory at Surat (north of Bombay in Gujarat). In 1614 the first vessel laden with cottons and indigo dye reached London. The profits made were good. From then until 1657 the method of financing successive voyages was somewhat haphazard. Capital was sought for each voyage, and the original stake plus the profits divided in proportion and distributed at the completion of sales. This actually meant an investment of several years, since the round trip to India took three years, and the sales in London were also phased over a long period of time as well. The risks of losing a ship at sea were also high, but profits of 100 to 200% were not unknown. The factor who was left in India had, though, a difficult task to perform, ordering textiles and dyes without knowing when and with what capital the next ship would arrive. From 1657 therefore the system was changed to permanent shares, and dividends were paid on a more regular basis, when the true costs of the operation became more apparent. The annual rate of return was usually somewhere around 10%.

In 1639 Madras was founded (the settlement was known as Fort St George) on the Carnatic coast, with a licence from an independent Hindu ruler whose kingdom had not yet been humbled by the Mughals. This, the south-eastern coast of India, might have been attractive to merchants, but was surely not to the sailors. Nearly the whole of Eastern India lacks a good natural harbour, and at Fort St George there was nothing but an endless beach with rolling surf. And it was also exposed to the returning November/December monsoon. (In the Fort there are contemporary cartoons of crinolined ladies being tipped by waves from the lighters which ferried goods from ship to shore.) In 1668 Bombay Island on the west coast north of Goa became the first British territory, a dowry to Charles II from his Portuguese consort which he rented out to the company. Here was an excellent harbour, but contrarily one with a very limited hinterland, hemmed in by the massive cliffs of the Western Ghats, at the top of which lay the plateau which was home to the Marathas. In 1694 work started on constructing Fort William in Calcutta – very much within the Mughal domains – and close to Danish, French and Dutch settlements. Bengal had the key features that the British required most. It is a land of rivers and, importantly, tides – so the big ships of the British could penetrate quite far upstream (Calcutta is 100 miles from the sea). This provided them with some degree of safety – since the ships carried cannon. The province provided a good trade in indigo, in cotton, and in saltpetre for making gunpowder. (Saltpetre is potassium nitrate, which can occur as a salt crust on the soil in hot countries, particularly near villages where nitrogen-rich sewage and other waste is processed by bacteria.) The ships could not get much further upstream than Bengal, since in the monsoon there are winds but strong opposing currents downstream, whereas in the dry season there is less current, but little and unpredictable wind, and a braided course. (Country boats are haled upstream by men or draught animals to this day.)

What did the Emperor and the potentates of the Deccan make of this? The Emperor enthroned in Delhi or Agra ruled a land empire, which had throughout the millennia of its history been attacked and subdued only from the North West. It was true that Arab invasions had succeeded in Sind, and that the Portuguese had made a thorough nuisance of themselves in Gujarat. But power lay with land revenues and military levies, and the fortified cities of the heartland of India. Compliant Europeans provided trade, which provided customs dues, and they had to and did pay in silver bullion. Aside from their slight usefulness, they must have appeared a sickly lot. In the long sea journeys men died of scurvy and ship's typhus, spread by lice. (It is said that in the early Portuguese voyages of a thousand men who might go, only one hundred returned.) In truth they were not a great threat: it was as much the internal collapse of the empire itself that would drag the British and the French in.

4.4 The Pattern of Trade and its Growth

In the early 17th Century the initial 'fleet' of the East India Company was by any standards modest. Annually some 5 or 6 ships might sail together, not just to India but beyond to Indonesia and China, the largest of these being only 600 tons. The English had little to offer to the Indians: the aristocracy of the Mughal Empire had virtually all they needed, and aside from them there was little purchasing power. Much of the payment had therefore to be made in silver bullion – which was acceptable. But the trade threatened the English balance of payments badly, and alarmed the government. In fact, it was partly the fear of being drained of bullion wealth that prompted the European nations to found their own colonies in the New World from which they would import their own tropical and subtropical goods. Since they could not establish settlement colonies in well-populated imperial India, this option did not arise.

After the share system had been put on a permanent basis, trade began to grow quite fast. By 1675 imports into Britain are reputed to have been £860,000 – though exports were only £430,000 by comparison. The exports from England included some novel manufactures, lead, mercury, and woollens. One hundred years later the imports were £3,000,000.

The overwhelming desire for silver led the British to trade illegally with the Spanish New World. After the Peace of Utrecht in 1707 they received the Asiento, which gave them the monopoly to supply slaves from West Africa for silver. Then, following the winds they took sugar and rum to the new colonies of North America and from there tobacco and some cotton to the UK. The profits on this trade helped produce the silver: and in the far east trade with China, which held the world monopoly on the production of tea, and with the Spice Islands, produced yet other goods of value in India. Very soon after Europe's maritime expansion there was a world pattern of trade linking the great oceanic littorals – but a peasant some few miles inland in India would have known little of this unless he also indulged in some handloom production of fine textiles. Then he might have noticed that demand had

increased: and that the agents were giving him strange designs in a strange artistic form from a foreign land to reproduce. (Sometimes with strange results too – the Europeans took prints of classical scenes which included perspective drawings, to India for copying. Not understanding perspective the artisans turned statues of nobles standing on flat surfaces into flying gods hovering above sloping surfaces.)

Given the appalling conditions on board ship and the rigours of the journey, it might have appeared surprising that anyone accepted the task. But there was, of course, great poverty in some sections of society in England; press-ganging was used, and as well as the stick there was a big carrot. Besides the official trade, there was also an extensive unofficial one. The Company's servants often undertook trading on their own account. Elihu Yale who gave his name to Yale University was relieved of his post as Governor of Madras in 1692, by which time he had already made 5 million dollars in 20 years of service to the Company. He stayed on a further 7 years to make yet more. Thomas Pitt (born 1653) went to India on his own account and traded in defiance of the Company's monopoly and returned home with huge wealth and a diamond worth £35,000 (now in the French Crown jewels). The Company's servants indeed appeared at times to be doing more on their own account than on the Company's.

4.5 Rivalry with the French

So long as the trade of either Britain or France remained small, neither was losing out at the expense of the other. Because of poorer commercial and political organisation in the French companies, for a long time the French posed no real threat to English economic interests in India. But after reorganisation in the latter part of the 17th century, their trade began to expand rapidly from the beginning of the 18th century. From being a twentieth of the size of the East India Company's trade it became a half by 1740.

In 1744 word reached India that Britain and France were at war in Europe. The small garrisons of Europeans did have arms in their factories – to protect themselves against local disturbances. This time the disturbance was of their own (not only local) making. The French attacked Madras and took it, though it was returned to the British by treaty in 1748. Both the British and the French noted the impact of the guns they took ashore from their ships, and it also became apparent that land action on the coast could be limited by a naval blockade inhibiting reinforcements.

In the same year the Nizam of Hyderabad, overlord of the Nawab of the Carnatic, died, and the not unusual struggle for the succession took place. Dupleix, Governor of the French factory at Pondicherry some few miles south of Madras, had raised a small army of Indian troops under French officers, and used it with potent effect to intervene on one side of the dispute, thereby installing his nominee on the throne in Hyderabad. The ultimate aim was of course to use the local potentates to evict the British. It is pointless to speculate whether or not without Robert Clive the

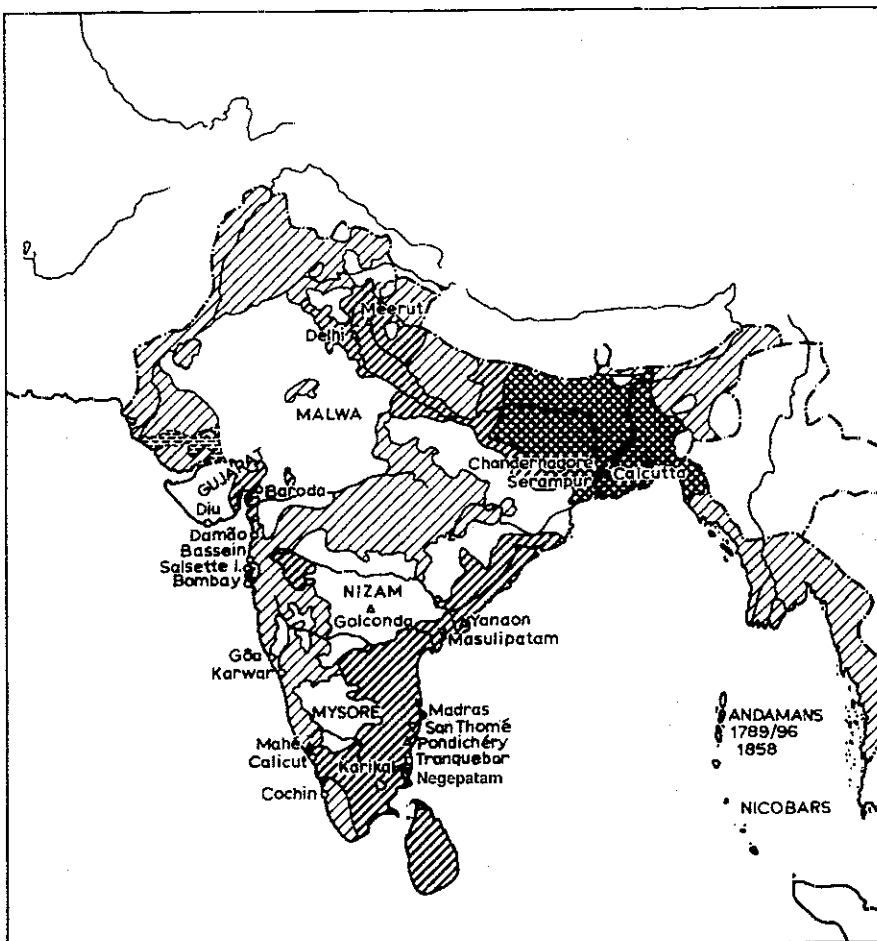
British would have been able to reverse this position, but it must be said that the position on land looked grave even if the British had assumed ascendancy at sea.

Clive had been sent to Madras as 'writer' for the Company. It was a salaried job – essentially being a human Xerox-machine, copying out bills of lading and other documents of business transactions. He had been captured at Madras by the French, and taken to Pondicherry, whence he escaped south to help in the defence of the British factory, Fort St David, at Cuddalore. He had impressed his masters, was given an Ensign's Commission, and began the work of training a small army for the Company, and saw action in several minor encounters – though all of possible mortal danger. By the time of Dupleix's involvement in Hyderabad he was one of the senior officers of the small contingent of British and Indian Sepoy (enlisted mercenary regulars) troops. With his small band he reversed the French position in the campaign at Arcot, near Madras, although further engagements took place between the British protégé Muhammad Ali and his Maratha troops, and the French protégé and his troops. By 1752 the affair was over and the French bid for the Carnatic had been defeated.

The episodes there had a profound effect on Clive's understanding of Indian political and military conditions. It had appeared that troops in the employ of Indian princes, virtually all of whom were mercenaries, often in contracted bands under a contracted captain, would naturally prefer to be on the winning side, but did not necessarily assume that the winning side was the one they were currently 'fighting for'. Much of a 'battle' would be positional, and if it appeared that the position indicated that the other side might win an actual battle, should one be allowed to occur, then desertion or changing sides would gain that same result, but with less loss of human life and general destruction. In addition, it had also become apparent that Indian troops under European officers, and European troops, had been trained with a different concept of discipline (reinforced by direct action by superior officers against deserters) and with better weapons. Principal among these were the field guns, which were to the British and French what the cavalry and Turkish cannon had been to the Mughals. In short, the Europeans had developed far better the institutionalised use of violence, and the British foremost amongst the Europeans.

4.6 The Acquisition of Bengal

In 1739 the Persian Nadir Shah sacked Delhi, slaughtered many of its inhabitants, and returned to Persia laden with wealth and booty, including the Peacock Throne of the Mughals. After his death, Afghan chiefs achieved their own independence, and cast ambitious eyes on India. In the 1756 the Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Durrani sacked Delhi. But more than one vulture hovered around the corpse of Mughal India. Marathas seized on their opportunity to achieve empire by confronting the invaders. At first the invaders retreated beyond the Sutlej in Punjab, but then Ahmad Shah Durrani (also known as Ahmed Shah Abdali) outmanoeuvred the Marathas after they had procrastinated too long, and brought them to battle again at Panipat, in 1761. In



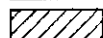
British territory by 1765



British territory by 1805



British territory by 1858



Princely states



Figure 4.1 The Expansion of British Territory in India

Source: Williams (1966)

a grizzly outcome, their principal leaders were killed along with as many as 200,000 troops and followers. Their military might was broken; so it was only the vestiges of this power that the British would have to confront later. But the Afghan army, which had been unpaid for some time, also mutinied and withdrew back beyond the Indus, leaving the heartland of Hindustan in a chaotic vacuum with a pretence of Mughal imperial rule

In these unsettled times the Marathas had even harried Bengal, and to this day the people of Calcutta know where the ditch used to stand to protect the citizens against these predatory hordes, from whom the Nawab of Bengal offered little protection. As well as defences around the town, Fort William was also improving its protection. The improvements were built against the wishes of Alivardi Khan, Nawab of Bengal, who feared an enemy developing within as well as without. In 1756 Alivardi died, and was succeeded by his grandson, Siraj-ud-Daulah, who was basically an independent monarch whether or not he wanted to be, since the empire now had few resources from the centre to offer him in time of need. He was young, inexperienced, insecure and contemptuous of his older generals and advisors. He moved swiftly from his seat at Murshidabad north of Calcutta to evict the British, and in 1756 he seized the town, in the process locking 146 prisoners in the 'Black Hole', a room 20 feet square, with two small windows, both shuttered. By next morning only 23 of the prisoners remained alive, the rest having suffocated, and the event passed into the folklore of British history, to symbolise the barbarity of 'the despots of the Orient' (Table 4.2). The calamity was probably unintentional – but no thought was taken to prevent it.

The Governor in Madras, though in no sense responsible directly for Bengal, took the decision to retake Calcutta, and despatched Clive with a naval squadron and troops. It was not an easy task, since his naval commander felt himself separately and directly responsible to London, and the Bengal Court of Directors were actually jealous of external interference. But with little military opposition he re-occupied Calcutta, provoking Siraj-ud-Daula to intervene. If this book had been written for an audience of young Britons eighty years ago, the Battle of Plassey in 1757, in which Clive's 3,000 defeated the Nawab's 50,000, would have been described as a stirring example of British arms and discipline. In reality it was the culmination of what he had learnt in the Carnatic. Before hostilities had been joined, he had negotiated a secret treaty with one of the Nawab's generals, Mir Jaffa, to install him as a new Nawab. The actual battle was a ritual in which some firing took place, and some men died, but whose outcome was completely prejudiced by the deliberate mis-direction of Mir Jaffa. The Nawab's hordes, true to custom, melted away as the position became clear. In current Indian demonology Mir Jaffa ranks as a traitor of the highest order: he still is to the Bengalis what Quisling is to the Norwegians. It may be acceptable for modern national demonology to disparage him; but in a way he was a token for a deeper shift that was occurring anyway. The Mughals had developed a system of government that relied on, and co-operated with, many classes – but particularly money lenders and bankers, most of whom were Hindu. These classes also prospered from the trade that the Europeans brought – and yet the Nawab had

Table 4.2 The Inscription on a Tombstone in a Christian Cemetery in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The inscription illustrates the global nature of British imperialism, and the fear of Asian Oppressors.

Beneath this Monument lies
EZEKIEL BECK
Who departed this life 1791
Born of respectable parents in the Island of Barbados
An affectionate husband and tender father and sincere friend
Whose social disposition endeared him to all who knew him
He fell a sacrifice to power
Through the conduct of an Asiatic Oppressor
Who terminated his earthly existence
IN THE 37TH YEAR OF HIS AGE

His Disconsolate Widow Susanna
His Absence here must evermore deplore
Until like him alas (she is no more)
Who mouldering lies within this peaceful soil
And in whose name she raised this sacred pile.

tried to eject them by force – thereby threatening one of their interests. They as a class could and did change their allegiance – mostly, but not always, succeeding in improving their position and returns by doing so.

The new Nawab, a tool of the British, assigned to Clive his own Jagir – the revenue rights of 1,200 square miles in the 24-Parganas adjacent to Calcutta. It gave him great personal wealth and roused the hostility of rivals in the Company in India and London. The situation was still not stable: the Nawab administered the province through his own officers, and collected the revenue through a deputy nawab, and another deputy was in charge of law and administration. It was by titles still a Mughal province: Persian was still the official language and all but the highest officials had kept their posts and responsibilities. In fact, since the Company had all the military power, exaction and coercion became commonplace, and Bengal began to be bled white. The inevitable tension led to further fighting, this time with assistance from the upstream provinces of Oudh and the interest of the Mughal Emperor himself. Victory for the British at Buxar (Boxer/Bakser: on the Bihar/Uttar Pradesh border) in 1764 led to a settlement in 1765 in which the Emperor recognised the right of the Company to the Diwani of Bengal – i.e. it became the agent for collecting the land revenue, which Clive estimated at £2,000,000 annually, of which only 20% was to be tribute to the Emperor.

At the time that the British were transforming their toe-hold in India into a foothold, the French, too, made a major territorial gain. In return for their alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad, they had been ceded the territory on the east coast known as the Northern Circars (Sarkars), which surrounded some British trading stations such as Masulipatam. The alliance was clearly a threat: and the simplest way to break it would be to deny the French the revenue, thereby in turn denying the Nizam the support of French-officered forces. In 1759 Clive sent Colonel Forde on a successful expedition which defeated the French, and led to the annexation of the Circars in 1766.

4.7 The Struggle to Assert Control

A Professor of economic history wrote that companies had many advantages as the forerunners of empire

‘When trading with undeveloped peoples a corporation becomes a name and a power. Companies could provide relays of capital if necessary as individuals could not. They could and did take risks which no government would face, and they could, being only corporations, withdraw if necessary without loss of prestige in a way that would be impossible to a government whose national honour would at once be involved. They were, moreover, economical in working as they had not the same standard of expenditure as a government. Government servants must not make mistakes – it is the unforgivable crime – and so the tendency is naturally to play for safety. Companies on the other hand show flexibility and initiative and their officers developed a capacity for taking sudden decisions that would not have been possible to any civil servant.’ (Knowles, 1924:261)

Companies were therefore admirably adapted to do pioneer work, as governments were later better qualified to organise an administration and to think in terms of future generations untroubled by questions of dividends or profit and loss of the moment.

‘It has been the function of the British chartered companies to go in front of the nation and to discover and organise trade. Sooner or later this trade brings the company into conflict with foreigners or with native rulers and the crown has had to intervene either in the interests of its own people or that of the natives, or to preserve order’ (Knowles, 1924:261)

Of course, the East India Company had never had any intent of being the forerunner of Empire. Yet it had become clear to Clive that British dominion was a real possibility, though, as he realised, beyond the capability of the Company alone. For more pressing practical reasons the moment had also come for some kind of role in government. At one moment Parliament was trying to limit outrageous dividends from the plunder, at another moment the Company was in ruin and seeking loans, having broken the economy of Bengal and found itself simultaneously with an

ever-escalating military bill. In the midst of this uncertainty and confusion men paraded their new wealth in London – the Nabobs as the public called them in anger. The first steps were made, not to disband the Company, but to regulate it more closely. At the time the option of direct rule from Britain was not a serious possibility. Other than the Island of Bombay, the property of the Crown, the British had no territorial claim in India at all.

The struggle to assert control had several different aspects. From England the chain might have appeared clearly defined. Parliament needed control over the Court of Directors of the Company. They in turn needed control over their servants in India. And finally the servants in India needed control over events in India. The 1773 Regulating Act was designed to establish the proper lines of authority, and under its terms Hastings was appointed the first Governor-General in Bengal (1774-85), overseen by a Council in Calcutta, and with authority over both Madras and Bombay. The power of those two Presidencies to make war or negotiate treaties independently was abolished, with the intent that the incessant and very costly interventions in the politics and warfare of the hinterlands would be halted. On Hastings' return he was impeached on charges of corruption and abuse of power brought by his political enemies. In the ensuing case, which dragged on for years and which ultimately absolved him, some major issues of principle were debated. Edmund Burke who seemed to have misjudged Hastings made several impassioned speeches for the principle of stewardship – that Parliament should be the trustee of the 'backward' people of the new Empire. The idea of 'trusteeship' was, thereafter, ever present in future relations between the British and the Indians – whether to be kept hidden under the table, waved in the open, or cynically derided.

Cornwallis replaced Hastings (1786-93) and set about creating a fully fledged state, and a Europeanised civil service. He set about the establishment of courts and a legal system based on British custom but incorporating both Muslim and Hindu customary law – at the time the new court system seemed poorly understood in India even if in the contemporary age the Indians seem amongst the most litigious people on earth.

He also set about trying to bring order to the land revenue system, and made what came to be known as the Permanent Settlement. Under the Mughal diwans the next lower tier of tax officials were known as Zamindars – who collected the tax from an assigned group of villages – but they had no direct rights in the land. In return for fixing a final and 'fair' calculation of the revenue to be collected from each of the Zamindars' lands, the freehold of the land was effectively conferred on them, making them landlords in the European fashion. The intent was to create something like the class of landlords in England who were known as 'improving' since the majority were involved in investment in new agricultural techniques. The system, however, backfired. Many sold out to the monied classes of Calcutta, who became absentee landlords – free in effect to jack rents up far beyond the level necessary for taxation. The story of 'Zamindari' in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Assam from that date became one associated with a hierarchy of tenants, sub-tenants, share-croppers and landless labourers, synonymous with over-exploitation, rural poverty

and stagnation. Later attempts were made to remedy the situation; but none were sufficiently radical to make drastic improvements to the fate of the peasantry.

Although he did not seek territorial aggrandisement nor war with neighbouring states, tellingly, Cornwallis was involved in an inconclusive war in the south Deccan against Tipu, Sultan of Mysore, who also had the support of the French. But, this episode aside, Cornwallis departed India 'leaving behind as he thought, an unaggressive and stable state within the complex of the Indian political system ...' (Spear, 1973:101). Yet 'Within 25 years of [his] departure ... the state had swallowed up its rivals to become the ruler of most of India and overlord of the remainder'. The reason for the failure of the policy of limited ambition and non-involvement was simply that the last condition, that the Company's servants would control events in India, was never possible. It was not to begin with a specific policy that the rest of India should be subjugated and to that extent it has often been said that Britain acquired India 'in a fit of absence of mind'.

The interior of the Deccan did not hold much commercial attraction for European traders, who were able to supply their needs by trade with the coastal zones. The lines of communication to the interior meant that trade with it was unreliable and costly. But the interior did have states like Tipu's Mysore able to launch predatory raids on the coastal settlements. And rivals of the British, such as the French, were fully committed to helping some do just that. During Lord Wellesley's Administration, in defiance of the Directors' wishes in England who saw nothing but cost in military action, British territory expanded rapidly, both directly and indirectly. He could see that years of inertia might be just as costly in terms of defence as subjugating the hinterlands to a Pax Britannica. In the south in 1799 Wellesley finally defeated Tipu and annexed half of Mysore. In 1799 Napoleon was active in Syria and Egypt – and quite clearly wondered about the possibility of a land route for the invasion of India.

Wellesley clearly saw the Maratha Confederacy as great a threat as they saw the British. In this unstable atmosphere it only needed a small wind to precipitate the storm, and it was provided by a treaty signed between one of the Maratha chiefs at Poona with the British, against the wishes of the other Maratha chiefs in the Deccan and Hindustan. When war came in 1802, the armies of all three presidencies were used. Wellesley's brother, afterwards the Duke of Wellington, was one of the leading campaigners engaged in what became a major defeat for the Marathas. By now it appeared that the three major British bases, far from being weak because each could be picked off separately by a central power, had become the reverse: bases from which the crumbling core of India could be pincered. The Marathas had been overlords of Delhi, even if they maintained a Mughal puppet on the throne. Now they were forced from the Ganges Valley, and in 1803 the British entered Delhi and took the emperor under their protection. The Marathas kept their homeland states, but were forced into tributary alliance with the British. In Hyderabad Wellesley had earlier forced on the Nizam another subsidiary alliance, and garrisoned British troops with the Nizam at the latter's expense. In 1817-18 further warfare with renegade Maratha bandit gangs, known as Pindaris, who were plunging central India

into anarchy, resulted in the annexation of much of their territory by the Bombay Presidency. By 1818 the whole of India had been subjugated, from Bengal (but excluding the Shillong Hills and Assam) to the Sutlej on the south-east of the Punjab, and to the Thar desert east of the Indus. The parts that Britain administered directly became known as British India. For example, the Maratha dominions in Hindustan had been annexed to form the North West Provinces, later enlarged to form the United Provinces, and now Uttar Pradesh. Some of the empire the British ruled indirectly, acknowledging the internal autonomy of princely rulers in the Native States, also known as the Princely States, in return for control over their external affairs. Invariably, a British contingent of troops was posted in them, at the ruler's expense, 'for his own protection'. Over time many of these States were annexed on such pretexts as misrule, like Oudh (Awadh) in 1856.

The western boundary of this new empire was not so very different from the present boundary between India and Pakistan – with the exception of Kashmir and a part of East Punjab. The boundary in the east was the historic boundary – excluding the sparsely settled empty jungles of Assam. For the first time in South Asia an empire had grown that included the whole of the Deccan, even the extreme south, and even the rarely subjugated and remote tracts of Orissa. Now nearly the whole of India was under British hegemony, and quite clearly much of it not for the purposes of trade. What was the true purpose then? The argument that peace and stability were best assured by the British probably bears scrutiny, and indeed they did manage to re-establish law and order after the tumultuous collapse of Mughal and Maratha power, but at a cost, to the peasants. The new government reviewed the land revenue systems in operation in Madras, Bombay, and the North West Provinces, and made demands which were almost certainly excessive. History was being repeated: this geo-political region had once again passed through turmoil and fragmentation back to a single hegemony, but once again the victor sought the repayment of the costs of conquest with added profit.

In 1813 an Act of Parliament abolished the Company's monopoly rights to trade. In 1833 the trading function of the Company ceased, and the metamorphosis was almost complete: now it was in all but name simply British government in India. The new empire had almost reached its territorial limits. Events from the outside prompted only two extensions. Expansionist Burma occupied Assam, presaging the attempts by Japan just over a century later, and demanded territory in Bengal. A short war resulted in the annexation of Assam by British India (and later in the century the final annexation of Burma, partly to forestall the French in Indo-China).

The case of the northwest frontier was much more complex, resulting in a military and political struggle to secure the borders of the Indian empire that lasted until independence in 1947, and which now continues in a different guise in the continuing struggles between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The problem of the northwest frontier is the subject of the next chapter.

4.8 Trusteeship and Reform

In Europe and Britain in the early 19th century social ideologies were changing fast. There were the new republican ideals in France, and in Britain there was a concerted movement to abolish first the slave trade, and then slavery in British possessions. In 1832 the Reform Bill in parliament cleansed the electoral system, another step on the evolution of democracy in Britain. India too became a subject in these debates, and reforming intentions were expressed to improve the circumstances of these new British subjects. In 1833 Indians were admitted to the officer grade of the Civil Service, though effectively on discriminatory rates of pay. Macauley in 1835 proposed a minute in parliament which was the origin of education in India on Western lines, in English, and in the same year English replaced Persian as the language of Government and the courts. Many of the reformers were quite clear that India would not remain for ever a British possession ruled by aliens, and would one day rule itself. Their intent was openly expressed as leading the Indians to a new enlightenment and the adoption of Western institutions by which, in the end, they would manage their own government. Christian missionary activity was now allowed, though neither subsidised nor encouraged by the Government as had been the case in the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Lord Bentinck, Governor General (1828-35), is associated with many of these great reforms, some of which pressed hard on local custom. Suttee, child infanticide and sacrifice, and thuggee were all outlawed. Equality before the law was enforced, something which disturbed Indian tradition deeply, in which castes were conceived of as unequal. No Brahmin should appear before a man of a lesser caste, and the penalties enforced on Brahmins had always been far less severe than those on an equally offending but low caste culprit. Bentinck is not remembered affectionately by the current Indian public. He is thought to be something of a zealot, who, amongst other things, wanted to dismantle and sell off the Taj Mahal in pieces: but luckily for posterity the cost was prohibitive.

4.9 The Mutiny and Divorce

The events leading up to the Mutiny of 1857, which is commonly known in India as the First War of Independence, are complex. There was resentment at the contemptuous misuse by the British of many shrines, both small and great, both Hindu and Muslim. British disregard for caste taboos in the armed forces played another part, as did the much more immediate cause of pay arrears in much of the Bengal army. There had also been so many interventions in the land revenue system that a reservoir of disaffected élites had been formed. Orthodox groups in society had been offended by many of the social 'reforms' the British had attempted. In fact, much of India had been disaffected – and with good cause – for a number of years. Resentment mounted further when in 1856 the British annexed the state of Oudh, from which many army recruits had been enlisted. The final partly apocryphal flashpoint was reached when the army was issued with greased cartridges for

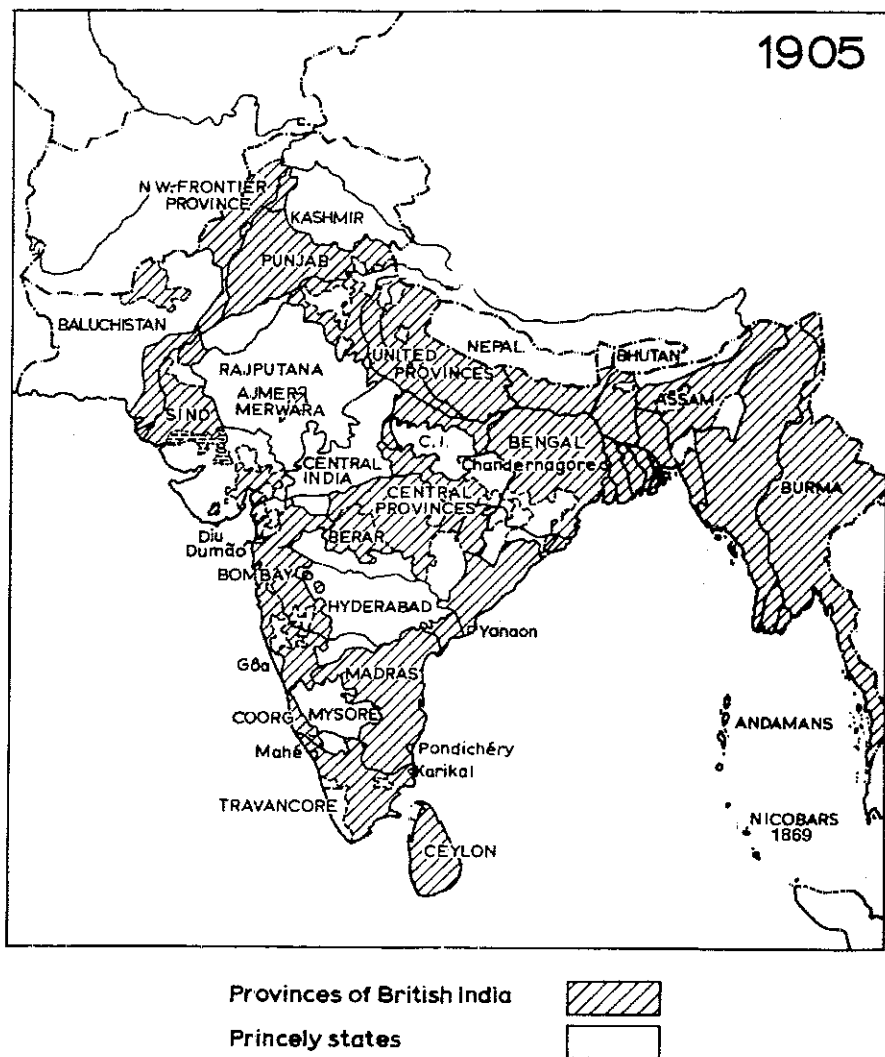


Figure 4.2 The British Indian Empire of 1905

their new Enfield breech-loading rifles: the grease was made from animal fat, both from pigs and cows – the one unclean to the Muslims, the other from the Hindu's sacred animal.

The mutineers turned on their British officers, and in many places massacred both them and their families. Delhi, Meerut, and Cawnpore (Kanpur) were taken over by complete regiments that had deserted. Lucknow was besieged, and the Residency of the British became a heroic symbol of stubborn resistance, in which

the few survivors were reduced to eating rats and cockroaches. But the Mutiny was finally put down, using the armies of Madras and Bombay, and with the aid of the Sikhs who were prominent in the recapture of Delhi. The fighting was desperate and vicious – for the British were suddenly exposed as small rafts afloat in a wild sea. Reinforcements of unquestionable loyalty were summoned from England – but it was a huge distance and the time lag great. Retribution was awful – captured mutineers were regularly blown from the guns. (They were tied across the muzzle of a field gun which was charged but without a cannon ball. When fired the victim was blown into many pieces and splattered across the landscape.)

In truth, this was not a war of independence. Though many forces joined in their attacks on the British, there was no great conspiracy between them and little co-ordination. The mutiny spread by demonstration effects, not by design. Neither was the general populace particularly involved: there was no nationalism, there was no history of grass-roots state-building in India, and the troubled, ever-changing pattern of warring states of the previous hundred years had given little chance for any to emerge.

But the effects on the British were nevertheless traumatic. An alien élite ruling in an alien language, they had never become part of India as the Mughals had done: they had not cut themselves off from their roots. They had not granted themselves new estates in India. Now, after the mutiny they withdrew more, into their cantonments and clubs, but honoured pro-British Princes with styles such as knighthoods derived from Britain. British women had been taken to India before in small numbers: now as transport at sea improved (with the advent of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal) they brought their whole families, to live in isolation separated from their Indian subjects, and during the high point of British rule it was quite common for unmarried daughters to be sent from England for the social season in India, in the hopes of finding a suitable mate. The British thus distanced themselves from groups which had previously been closer to them. In earlier days there had been a number of marriages and relationships between white men and Indian women, the result of which was a new community of light-brown Christians, known as Eurasians.¹ These too were kept now in their proper station. The analogy is often made, falsely but usefully, with a new caste, which would, of course, require a caste-like occupation – but that was forthcoming too, on the railways.

In 1858, after the Mutiny had been suppressed the company was dissolved and the Crown took control of India through Parliament, instituting a Secretary of State with a Council of 15 members. In 1877 Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India at a Durbar in Delhi, and henceforth the Governor-General of India also added the title of Viceroy to his office. The ironies run deep. A parliament elected democratically by British voters was now ultimately the dictatorial government

¹ These people are known now as Anglo-Indians, of whom there are one hundred thousand in South Asia, mostly in the larger cities such as Calcutta and Bombay. Many of the women still wear European-style dresses, although most may now wear saris. The term Anglo-Indian was formerly used to mean British families in India, particularly those with long established connections, often over several generations.

of India, in the name of an Empress. The British who believed they were to bring education and improvement and enlightenment to India, banned the Indians from their clubs and railway carriages. They were busy creating a new middle class of Western-oriented, liberal-minded Indians, but yet became racialisists who kept the Indians at arms' length. What future could such contradictions have?

The British had to find for themselves the legitimacy of their rule, and they found it in the belief that they had something superior to give to the backward peoples. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London was Britain's announcement to the world of the wonders of science and industry and progress. The Government in India commissioned annual reports from 1859 to 1937 into the *Moral and Material Progress of the People of India*. Look at the Table of Contents (Table 4.2) of a survey of India written in 1880 by a retired British senior office-holder in the Indian Government. This kind of legitimacy depended then on having a fountain source, from which it could be conveyed to India. And so the British in India were bound to be looking back to Britain, and bound equally to be racist, since they saw their race to be the cradle of the new civilisation, the appointed messengers of the new truths. This is not to deny that many found in India both intellectual and moral inspiration, and that European appreciation of the ancient cultures and arts of India grew. But mostly they were separate and aloof – maintaining a cohesive identity had its uses. The bond meant that while the British were in South Asia, the unity of India in the broad sense was never in doubt. But what if they were not there? Was the pattern of their rule building an inherent unity or not? One glance at the territorial organisation would suggest not. The British Provinces were historical accidents, hotch-potch *mélanges* of different linguistic and religious groups within which fractious movements were stirred up. The Princely States were similarly accidental entities: and with a different pattern of administration and power-sharing were bulwarks against new grass-roots political movements spreading from province to province. These were not questions which greatly exercised many minds of the 19th Century. For the majority, Indian self-government belonged to an unimaginably dim and distant future; now, it was the time to build the new economy and infrastructure of empire.

Table 4.3 The Dedication and Contents List of Sir Richard Temple's "India in 1880"

Sir Richard Temple served as Governor of Bombay, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and Finance Minister of India

a) the Dedication

TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

ALBERT EDWARD,

Prince of Wales

IN MEMORY OF HIS VISIT TO INDIA,
ON WHICH MOST AUSPICIOUS OCCASION
GREAT BENEFIT WAS CONFERRED
ON THE
PRINCES, NOBLES, AND PEOPLE
OF THAT EMPIRE

WITH A POTENT AND ENDURING EFFECT
ON THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS,
THIS BOOK IS,

WITH THE GRACIOUS PERMISSION OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,

Dedicated,

BY HIS DUTIFUL AND LOYAL SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR

b) the Contents: Note the sub-headings are given here only for some of the chapters

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CHAPTER I

CLAIMS OF INDIA ON THE CONTINUOUS ATTENTION OF ENGLAND

Need of steadfast attention to Indian affairs on the part of Englishmen – Changeable character of India under British rule – Necessity of observing current events – Therefore survey undertaken of India in 1880 – Circumstances interesting to travellers and sportsmen – To those connected with art and science – To the friends of missions – To those concerned in public affairs – To economists and statesmen.

CHAPTER II OBJECTS OF BEAUTY IN NATURE

Objects of beauty in divers places – Improved facilities for travelling nowadays – Variety of climatic aspects – Phenomena of the rainy season – Different characteristics of the country on the north and on the south of hill ranges forming the backbone of the Indian continent – Pleasant mountain retreats during summer for European residents – Fine views from mountains looking towards the sea – Noble prospect from Himalayas looking towards the plains of India – River scenes – Marble rocks – Cascades – Mountains clothed with perpetual snow – Loftiest peaks yet discovered in the world – Lake region – Scenery of Cashmir valley – Features of the several Indian races – Picturesque effect of their costumes

CHAPTER III OBJECTS OF BEAUTY IN ART

Architecture under British rule – Interesting views at Bombay, at Calcutta, and on lines of railway – European churches and cathedrals – Beauty of Native architecture – Buddhist caves, rock-cut temples, pagodas and monasteries – Ancient frescoes – Sacred mountains of the Jains – Hindu or Brahminical structures – Mention of the finest temples – Mountain fortresses – Beautiful palaces – Excellence of Muhammadan architecture – Interesting remains at many places – Largest dome in the world – City of the dead – Mosque, palace and tomb of Akber the Great – Grand mosque at Delhi – Pearl mosque at Agra – Matchless beauty of Taj Mehal mausoleum.

CHAPTER IV EUROPEAN CLASSES, OFFICIAL AND NON-OFFICIAL

CHAPTER V NATIVE STATES

CHAPTER VI MATERIAL PROGRESS OF THE NATIVES

Census of the population – Gradual growth of the people in numbers – Expansion of cultivation – Land can yet sustain increasing people – Cultivable waste in India itself – Emigration from India to British colonies – Sufficiency of food supply in India – Her wealth under British rule – Remittances of money, public and private, to England – Outlay of English capital in India – Wealth of former times and compared with the present – Capital largely accumulated by the Natives – Increase of cattle – Reasons why India is inferior to Western nations in wealth

– Maintenance of the poor – Public opinion regarding material improvements – Industrial employments – General condition of the Natives

CHAPTER VII MENTAL AND MORAL PROGRESS OF THE NATIVES

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CHAPTER IX RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS AND MISSIONS

CHAPTER X LAW AND LEGISLATION

CHAPTER XI CRIME, POLICE AND PRISONS

CHAPTER XII LAND-TAX AND LANDED TENURES

CHAPTER XIII REVENUES

CHAPTER XIV CANALS AND IRRIGATION

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CHAPTER XXIX
CONCLUSION

Recent War in Afghanistan – Its results and lessons – Prosperity of the Indian Empire, despite some inevitable drawbacks – Adverse calculations contradicted by existing facts – Satisfactory answer to question as to why England should retain possession of India – Virtues and merits in the character of the Natives – Their general contentment under British rule – Happy Prospect rising before them.

Securing the Empire

5.1 Geography and the North-West Frontier

The first chapter of *The Cambridge History of India: Volume I, Ancient India*, published in 1922 by Cambridge University Press, is written by the geographer Halford Mackinder. His purpose is to draw attention to those elements of the geography of South Asia which have had a significant impact on its history. He draws attention to the northwest by saying bluntly and simply:

'In all the British Empire there is but one land frontier on which war-like preparation must ever be ready. It is the north-west frontier of India' (1922:26)

He follows this with an insightful description of the physical geography of the single plateau of Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, which is reminiscent of his writing on the Eurasian heartland (considered in chapter 13). The Persian plateau is not as lofty as that of Tibet, but it is still, as he remarks, one of the great natural features of Asia. It is bounded by escarpment to the sea in the south-west of modern Iran, and by escarpments at the border between Baluchistan and the Indus plains. It has, like Tibet, its lofty mountain ranges – in the north the Elburz and the mountains of the Turkish and Armenian borders, and in the east the mountains of Afghanistan, which are like splayed fingers running south-west from the western end of the Karakoram Mountains, themselves the western end of the mighty Himalayas. Near Kabul is the dividing watershed between drainage going west (the Helmand flowing to Iran), the north (the Amu-Darya), and the south (the Kabul river flowing into the Indus.) The principal mountain range, the Hindu Kush, forms a single lofty ridge separating Central Asia from the Indus valley. It is crossed by a few passes, linking Chitral (in modern Pakistan) with northern Afghanistan, and by the Salang, joining southern and northern Afghanistan. From the plateau area there are two principal routes down to the Indus plains – the Khyber Pass just south of the Kabul river and, much further south, the Bolan Pass leading down from Quetta. In the British period these two were known simply as the Northern Route and the Southern Route. The first led to Punjab, and the second to Sindh. Although these two provinces are both within the Indus valley, they were separate in culture, economy, and even in the history of their most recent conquest and subsequent administration and military defence. Punjab was annexed from the Ganges valley. Sindh was annexed by forces sent by sea from Bombay, and became part of Bombay Presidency. The British Indian army was divided into a northern command, which was responsible for the defence of the northern part of the border, and a southern command, which included the forces of Madras and Bombay, defending the borders of Sindh and, later, of

Baluchistan. Contrarily, within Afghanistan the northern ends of these two routes are simply linked from north-east to south-west, by plains and valleys forming a corridor from Kabul through Ghazni to Kandahar and beyond that, north again, to Herat. There is no obvious border between Persia and Afghanistan; nor one between Iran and Baluchistan (Pakistan). Part of the border between southern Afghanistan and Baluchistan is mountainous, though there are alternative passes that may be followed.

Most of southern Afghanistan and all of Baluchistan is arid, and good grazing is rare. Cultivation in these areas is limited to small tracts where irrigation is possible. Most of the great Persian plateau has bitterly cold winters, and the mountains of Afghanistan particularly so. All of it by day, in the summer, can suffer from searing heat.

Most of these are lands which have bred fiercely independent people. Central authority is nearly always acknowledged only through some sort of titular suzerainty. Each tribe, perhaps each valley, perhaps even each village, will acknowledge only its own khan, a man whose authority stems from his skill and courage in warfare. And the replacement of an old khan by a new has often been the result of violent confrontation and death.

The origin and meaning of the word 'Afghan' is unknown, but it is used in Persia to describe the tribes of the present Afghanistan from at least circa 350, long before the coming of Islam. Although most Afghans would agree to their Afghan identity, tribal division within Afghanistan is most important. A leading authority on their history and culture, Caroe (1962) distinguishes between the Afghan tribes of the plains, in both the west, around Herat, and the east, around Peshawar, and the Pathans, or highlanders, in between, who speak Pashtu or the related dialect Pakhtu. These two broad divisions mask a further division into very specific tribal groups within each. Within the Pathans, for example, two such tribes are the Afridis of the Khyber Pass and the Mahsuds.

The histories of Persia, Afghanistan and India have long been intertwined. As was noted in the first chapters, the Aryan migrations came from Central Asia through Afghanistan; and in the early centuries the Kushans (originally from China) established what became a Buddhist empire, based on Peshawar. They traded with China and maintained relations with the Roman Empire. During this period the massive Buddhas were carved in the rock walls of the valley of Bamiyan, in modern Afghanistan. Many later invaders came this way too, including the Afghans who founded the Delhi Sultanate. The Mughals came through the north-west, and the apotheosis of the collapse of their power was when Nadir Shah of Persia descended from the hills to sack Delhi in 1739.

5.2 The Punjab and the Seeds of the First British-Afghan War

The delineation of a separate Afghan state or kingdom in modern times dates from 1747 when Ahmed Shah Durrani, noted in Chapter 4 for his incursions into India,

took the throne. Although he attempted to install a vassal Mughal ruler in Delhi, effectively he became just another part of the destruction of Delhi's authority, helping to create that vacuum which sucked in the British, and which enabled the Sikhs to establish their own state in the Punjab. In 1767 he formally ceded power in Punjab to the Sikhs. Amongst the Sikhs one young and ambitious clan head emerged as the dominant leader of all the Sikhs – Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) – not only uniting the clans but arming and training a modern army, with European (many of them ex-Napoleonic French and Italian) officers and artillery. His domains included Jammu and the vale of Kashmir, but with no clear northern border. In recognition of the prowess of one of his chief generals, Gulab Singh, the Maharaja awarded him the jagir of Jammu – in effect making Gulab vassal ruler of the territory.

Early in his reign, in 1809, Lord Minto stopped Ranjit Singh's attempt to cross the Sutlej into the British sphere, and the Sutlej was confirmed as the frontier. Peshawar, on his western border, was contested by Afghanistan and subjected in 1826 to a religious jihad of the Pathans, led by a holy fanatic from India, named Sayyid Ahmad, about whom much more is said later in this chapter. Ranjit Singh occupied Peshawar in 1827, and instigated the destruction of many Muslim buildings, but he was thrown out again in 1830.

A Geographical Gazetteer published in London (Landmann, 1840) had not quite kept up with these events. Its descriptions of Afghanistan and of Peshawar are worth consideration:

AFGHANISTAN, a considerable kingdom of Asia, between Persia and Hindostan, bounded on the E. by the Nilab or Indus, N. by a range of lofty mountains, separating it from Bulkh and Budukshan, W. by Persia (Herat being its frontier town), S. by Baloochistan: it lies between Lt. 29 and 36 N, and Lg. 61 and 71 E; comprehending the ancient kingdoms of Zabulistan (Ghazni and Kandahar) and Kabulistan. The inhabitants are esteemed hospitable and brave, but refractory and ferocious; P. about 3,000,000.

All British descriptions of Afghans from this period onwards dwell on the fractiousness and ferocity of the people, and also of their duplicity – but also on their own particular sense of honour and hospitality, and on their courage to the point of recklessness. The separateness of Bulkh (the Greek Bactria near Mazar-i-Sharif) is something to which we will return when thinking of current-day Afghanistan.

PESHAWER, Asia, a city of Afghanistan in Cabul, on the Kameh, in an extensive and fruitful plain, 142 m E of Cabul, the occasional residence of its sovereign; the palace is on a hill; it has many mosques, and a fine caravansary. It is an entrepot between Persia and Hindostan, and has many wealthy inhabitants, especially of shawl dealers.

The Kingdom of Kabul had historically, more often than not, embraced the literally fruitful plains of Peshawar and the valuable trading city itself. Ranjit Singh was partly able to take it because of instability in Afghanistan, following

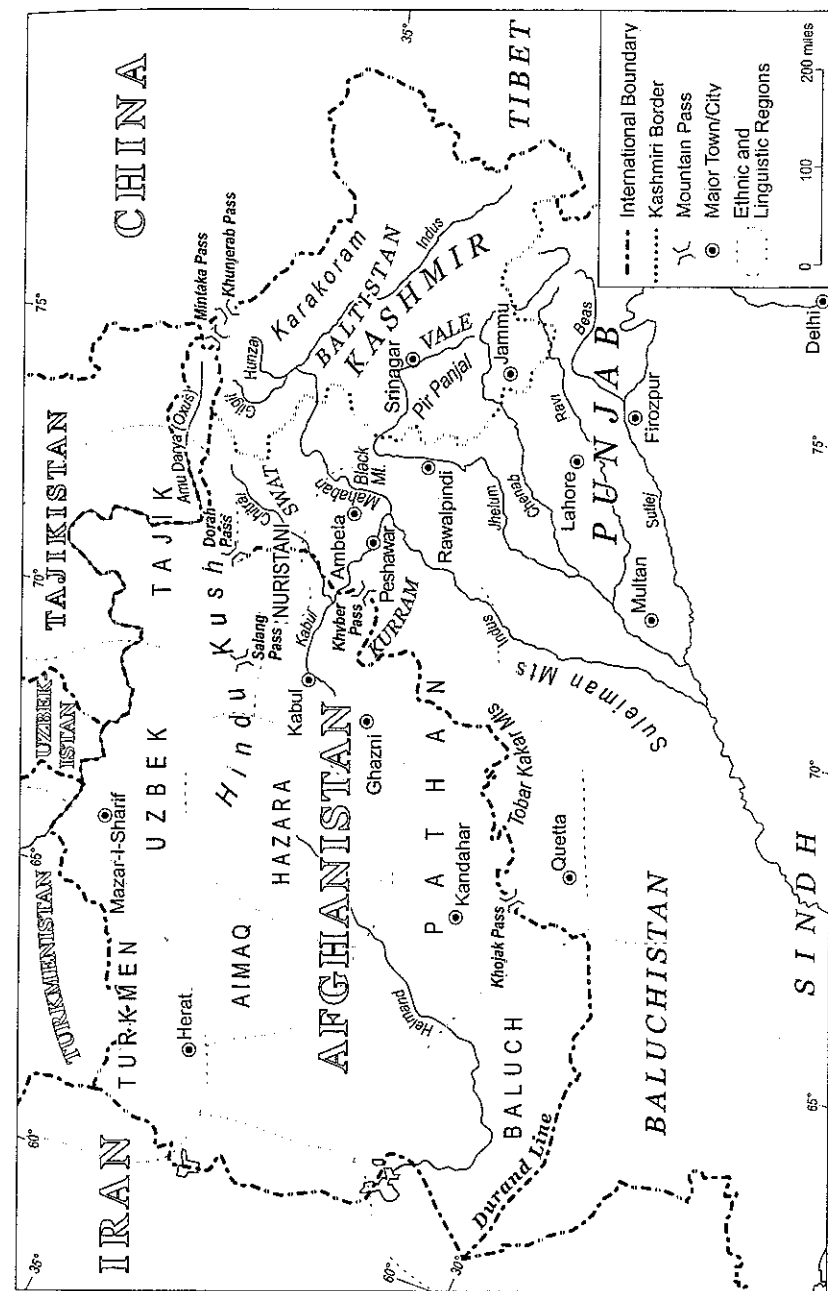


Figure 5.1 Afghanistan, Punjab and Kashmir

the overthrow of the monarch Shuja-ul-Mulk by the new ruler Dost Mohammed. Shuja-ul-Mulk took refuge in British India. Ranjit Singh then turned his eyes south to the lower Indus and Sindh. However, William Bentinck, Governor-General, in 1835 'dissuaded' Ranjit Singh from invading and annexing the territories of the Mirs of Sindh, who then signed treaties of alliance with the British.

The last of the seeds of war concerned the geopolitical ambitions of other powers. The Russians were pushing into Central Asia, an area where the British hoped they might be able to develop new trade, and a Russian envoy appeared at the court of Dost Mohammed. Simultaneously, the Persians advanced on Herat, supposedly with Russian backing, to claim it back for the Persian crown. A British envoy, Alexander Burnes, who had been to Kabul before, was dispatched to persuade Dost Mohammed to support the British cause. But Dost Mohammed had a price – he wanted British help to regain Peshawar from the Sikhs.

5.3 The First Afghan War: The Debacle

The Governor-General, Lord Auckland, said to be an intellectual civil servant, but without the requisite field experience, backed an ill-advised plan which superficially solved everything. The British would support the reinstatement of a compliant Shuja-ul-Mulk, which would be accomplished by the army of Ranjit Singh. Once in Kabul, Shuja would help rebuff the Russians. Ranjit Singh probably never intended to risk his troops in the passes of Afghanistan, but by drawing in the British he calculated they would not be able to back out, and that they themselves would then have to commit the necessary forces, so relieving the threat to Peshawar without him having to bother too much.

With Ranjit Singh moving too slowly, if at all, on October 1st 1838 the British in Simla issued a declaration which committed them to action. They then had to consider how to move an adequate army from the east of the Sutlej, either across the five rivers of the Punjab and then the Indus, before attacking the Khyber Pass; or by taking the long southern route, using the Sutlej as protection, crossing the Indus south of its confluence with the Sutlej, then moving across the northern part of Sindh, again north to Quetta and on to Kandahar; finally, thence to Kabul. They decided on the latter, and arranged to hold a magnificent durbar for their passing army with Ranjit Singh and many of his force at Ferozpur. On 27th of November they met, although the regal elephants were upset by a salute from the cannons, and Ranjit Singh was at risk of being crushed to death.

The army comprised 10,000 men of the British and Indian armies, and 6,000 of Shah Shuja's men, with innumerable camp followers to provide for their wants, and 30,000 camels. During the first 450 miles down the left-bank of the Sutlej the army had sufficient water and supplies. The engineers provided excellent boats for the crossing of the Indus which was completed by February 19th 1839. But, from then on everything began to unravel. The next 450 miles to Kandahar were across un-reconnoitred, arid country. The camels could not be properly fed, and began

to die, so the sepoys lost their rations too. Hostile tribesmen took advantage by attacking the straggling rear of the columns. By the 8th May 1839 the seriously depleted British force and its large number of weakened camp followers had reached Kandahar with Shuja, and installed him as monarch. They had done so with only two days of half-rations left. There was grain enough around Kandahar, but it had not yet been harvested. Money was sent by the British from India to help buy further supplies, but it disappeared somewhere in the mountains on the journey, and local merchants were reluctant to give this alien army any loans. Yet now they were supposed to move against Kabul. At Ghazni the army had a stiff fight with the garrison but, when they succeeded in blowing up the main gates, they then used superior fire power to commit substantial slaughter, followed by looting. Dost Mohammed immediately decided to confront the British on the road between Ghazni and Kabul. He is reputed to have taken the Koran in his hand to urge his army to fight against the infidels. But 'his' army refused to fight, mostly because the British had already bribed the tribal chiefs, and he was forced to flee. (Later he surrendered himself to the British and was given a pension in Calcutta – whence he in turn, later, was to find the British willing to reinstall him in Kabul.)

On the 7th of August Shah Shuja re-entered Kabul and reclaimed his throne, but without any show of popular local support. A British army of 10,000, mostly comprising Indian troops, was left to occupy the capital, but their disposition did not provide them with strong defensive positions. No chiefs came from the hills to offer their allegiance, and Shah Shuja left Kabul to spend the winter in the lower and warmer city of Jalalabad. The British political and military officers spent most of the long winter of 1839-40 squabbling amongst themselves, and trying to manage some sort of government with corrupt local officials. Local leaders kept increasing the monetary demands to buy their loyalty. By 1841, Auckland could no longer afford the costs of the occupation, and he cut the level of subventions. Immediately, the Ghilzai tribes of Pathans (recorded by Caroe (1962) as Haji) revolted, blocking the passes east from Kabul back to India. All through the summer of 1841 the remaining British had to fight off attacks against them around Kabul, and gradually the numbers of dead, wounded and sick increased. In November Alexander Burnes was hacked to death by a mob, and in December the political officer Macnaghten, who met with local chiefs for negotiations, was also murdered with his companions, in a manner which was to confirm British prejudice about the duplicity of the Pathans, and which rankled as a national insult at the highest levels of the British establishment. In January 1842, under poor leadership and believing they had been promised safe passage against bills of indemnity to be paid when they reached safety, the remaining 4,500 troops under British command (690 European and 3,800 Indian) and 12,000 camp-followers pulled out of Kabul. They were attacked in every defile and at every opportunity. On January 13th the sole survivor (apart from some hostages remaining in Kabul), Dr William Brydon, reached the safety of a British garrison in Jalalabad.

Three months later Shah Shuja was murdered, and any remaining pretence of a central power in Kabul evaporated.

Reviewing the wars and skirmishes between the British and the Afghans and the frontier tribes, Caroe (1962:397) observed wryly:

Unlike other wars, Afghan wars become serious only when they are over; in British times at least, they were apt to produce an after-crop of tribal unrest

5.4 The First Afghan War: Retribution

What the British Empire lacked in political acumen, it could make up for in resources. The population of India from which an army could be raised was vastly greater than that from which the tribal armies could be raised in Afghanistan.

A new Governor-General, Ellenborough, took over from Auckland and instigated a policy of punishment and retreat. The British still held Kandahar and Jalalabad. They were joined by fresh forces in an Army of Retribution, which had retaken Kabul by 15th September. They then flattened as much of the city as they could, and withdrew, 'successfully' this time, to Peshawar. In October 1852 Ellenborough issued a proclamation from Simla, which read in part as follows:

Disasters unparalleled in their extent unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery by which they were completed have, in one short campaign, been avenged. The British arms now in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej. The Governor-General will leave it to the Afghans to create a government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes. (Cited in Richards 1990:55)

In January 1843, with British consent, Dost Mohammed returned to claim his throne in Kabul, where he reigned until his death in 1863. In one of his last interviews with the Governor-General he said:

'I have been struck with the magnitude of your power, of your resources, with your ships, your arsenals and your armies: but what I cannot understand is why the rulers of so vast and flourishing an empire should have gone across the Indus to deprive me of my poor and barren country.' (Marshman (1867):233; cited in Dunbar, 1943: 490)

But the experience clearly left an impression on him. In 1857 when the Mutiny broke out and the Punjab was deprived of its European and loyal Indian troops, the mullahs of Kabul, and even his sons, pleaded with him to 'bind on his head the green turban of Islam and sweep the English from the plains of India' (Aitchison (1892):12, cited in Dunbar, 1943:490). But he refused, keeping his alliance with the British until his death.

The second phase of the war became nakedly imperialistic when the British provoked the Sindhis into insurrection. The British were anxious to forestall moves into Sindh by either Afghanistan or Punjab, and found a military solution to their

anxieties on the open plains away from the defiles of the hills. In 1843 small contingents of British troops (mostly Irish peasants) under Sir Charles Napier did achieve what legend would like the school boy think that Clive achieved at Plassey. A force of 2,500 achieved a victory in a real bloody battle against 35,000 at Miani, although the latter's tribal loyalties made a concerted command impossible. (A larger British force had been despatched from Bombay for the purpose but had lost a significant proportion of its men through cholera.) There is an apocryphal story that Napier sent a telegram to Bombay (there was no telegraph at the time) saying but one word 'Peccavi' – the Latin meaning 'I have sinned' (Sindh).

5.5 The Annexation of Punjab

The Maharajah Ranjit Singh died in 1839 without any clear successor. There followed a period of intrigue and murder, from which the collective leadership of the Khalsa (here meaning Sikhism in general) passed into the hands of the army's generals. The European officers were driven out in 1841. In 1843 a five-year old son of Ranjit Singh was proclaimed Maharaja, to give a veneer of legitimacy to the true powers behind the throne. To retain power, the generals needed to retain the loyalty of the army, more than 50,000 strong. It needed to be kept occupied, and it needed to be paid. The military leadership had no clear political vision, and decided to do what most such leaderships do in such circumstances – to unite their forces in a war that promised much. There were also *casus belli* that could be cited: the British had annexed Sindh, yet their power in the north in Afghanistan had been shown not to be invincible, and they had retreated from Kabul.

Macnaghten, writing from Kabul in 1841, had had his suspicions of the Sikhs, and had urged Auckland to:

'crush the Sings, macadamize the Punjab and annex the province of Peshawar to Shah Shooja' (Marshman (1867):275, cited in Dunbar (1943):497)

In December 1845 the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej. They were met by the British at Mudki, near Ferozpur, where they were repulsed after a fierce battle that brought heavy casualties to both sides. A second battle took place at Aliwal on January 28th, again a fiercely contested affair, in which valour was recognized on both sides. At its conclusion, the British fired a salute, then played the national anthem. It is said that the Sikh band was heard playing 'God save the Queen' back from behind Sikh lines. A final decisive battle was fought at Sohraon on February 10th, and Lahore was occupied by the British shortly afterwards. One of Ranjit Singh's great soldiers, Gulab Singh, who had been awarded the jagirdar of Jammu, kept aloof from this fight and avoided confrontation with the British.

The British did not want to annexe Punjab – as ever they thought it cheaper and more effective to allow a client state to run its own internal affairs under treaty obligations. Thus the treaty of March 1846 included some demanding clauses, but

not the dissolution of the Maharaja's rule. However, the Sikh council of regency invited the British to appoint a resident British administrator, and the government became an extension of the company's rule. The Sikh army was to be reduced, the doab (interfluvium) between the Beas and the Sutlej ceded to British India; and most significantly of all, the sovereignty of Hazara and Kashmir was ceded in perpetuity to the British. This was in lieu of war indemnity which the Sikhs could not afford. Within five days the British had done another deal, which lays one of the foundations for the threat of nuclear war which hangs over the subcontinent now. The British sold Kashmir to Gulab Singh for £750,000, plus an annual tribute measured in shawls and goatskins. It is almost certainly the prospect of this deal which had kept Gulab inactive during the war. Now a new dynasty, the house of Dogra (Gulab's jati name) ruled in a new state, that of Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1849 resentment against Company rule exploded into open rebellion in Multan, where the Mulraj urged a religious war against the English. Within short order the Sikhs had raised an army of between 30,000 and 40,000 men, and what might have been a small police action again became a full-scale war, forcing the British again to commit substantial troops to combat. After two fierce battles, the Sikhs again lost, and the Punjab was formally annexed. Eight short years later, Sikh support proved vital in defeating the Mutiny in Delhi.

5.6 Interim Conclusions

There are few places in the world which have not at some time in their history been colonized by the powers of Western Europe. Those that have not are mostly those that the maritime powers cannot penetrate, as pointed out famously by Mackinder in 1904. They include the massive Eurasian heartland colonized by Russia (it is the opening subject of Chapter 13); and the Persian Plateau, including Afghanistan. There are exceptions; China's population in the main lives by large navigable rivers, but, arguably, China was forced by the maritime powers to open itself to a colonial trading pattern; and Thailand – a true exception.

The story of the northwest frontier told so far includes all the ingredients of the continuing story from then until now. The geography of isolation, the wild and rugged terrain, the harsh climate, and the lack of major resources, mean that the mountains are sparsely settled. Neither have they ever attracted outside powers for their own sake. But they have a strategic geopolitical position. They have been crossed time and time again by invaders on their way to the population and wealth of the Indian plains. They have been the route for a small trade, mostly in high-value fabrics like silk and Kashmir shawls. Today they could be the route for a massive trade between the oilfields of central Asia and the oil-deficient populations of Pakistan and India.

The isolated mountain valleys are home to fiercely independent villages and clans. Islam alone does not breed war-like fanatics. In the Middle Ages the main export of the Swiss mountains was mercenary soldiers – hence the Swiss guards of

the Pope in Rome. Even today all men of military age in Switzerland have a rifle at home, and annually have to join in training. Where now you see civilians, tomorrow you could see an army. In a less organized and less formal way the same has always been the case in the mountains of the north-west. Men are armed, with the best weapons they can buy or steal, prepared to fight, sometimes in age-long feuds between families, sometimes between valleys, often behind a tribal chief, between tribes. Or depending on money and politics, perhaps the tribes unite to form an army – a lashkar. Such an army does not fight as a unitary whole: tribes may join or leave the fray according to their opinion of its worth and progress. At any time a fixed formation can dissolve back into the hills, to resort to guerrilla war and raiding; or simply to become farmers and herdsmen again. Contrarily, mountains also attract mystics and holy men. Communities in the mountains accept wandering mullahs and Sufis.

Religion also comes into the story. Although not much written into the first part of this chapter so far, it is always there in the subtext. European memories included the Moorish occupation of Spain and the Ottoman attacks up to the gates of Vienna. Islamic memories include the Crusades (literally the followers of the cross) of the Christians attacking their holy city of al-Khuds, or al-Quds (simply meaning The Holy, and the third shrine of Islam after Mecca and Medina), which most English-speaking readers would know by the name of Jerusalem. One way of uniting a fractious people is to appeal, as the Sikhs did, as the Amir's advisers did, to take on war as a holy duty; in the case of Moslems, to proclaim it a jihad. The Christian British saw their crusade in terms of being a civilizing force in India, and also as the even hand between the 'inferior' religions of India – be it Islam or Hinduism, or indeed Sikhism. When the Army of Retribution returned from Afghanistan, Ellenborough ordered General Nott to bring back from Ghazni the gate stolen from the temple of Somnath. At an elaborate reception at Ferozpur he proclaimed their return to 'avenge the insult of eight hundred years' (of Muslim domination of Hindu India). As a propaganda coup it was a failure: the gates had not been made in India (they had in fact been ordered by Sabuktigin, 977-997, an early Muslim monarch of Ghazni) and, therefore, did not come from Somnath; and they were subsequently left in a lumber room of the Muslim Red Fort at Agra.

To the extent that the British had 'won', their victory had depended firstly on the resources of a large empire, and on technology – since usually they managed to keep their weaponry one step ahead of the tribal fighters, and on superior sources of wealth which sometimes, but unpredictably, enabled them to bribe the tribes.

Finally, it is clear that events in one part of the North-west can easily be linked with events elsewhere, from Afghanistan to Kashmir.

5.7 'Muslim Fanatics' and the Revolt of 1863

In the late 18th Century a reformed brigand Zamin Shah from Buner (also spelt Bonair) established himself as a recluse at a place called Sittana on the southern

flanks of the Mahaban (Great Forest) Mountain west of the Indus near Amb. Two of his grandsons became lieutenants of the Muslim Crescentaders,¹ Sayyid Ahmad,² known at the time as the Prophet, who had united some of the Pathan tribes against Ranjit Singh in 1824 and had taken Peshawar by 1826. There he struck coins with the legend 'Ahmad the Just, Defender of the Faith; the glitter of whose scimitar scatters destruction among the Infidels' (Hunter, 1871). Sayyid Ahmad was finally killed by the Sikh army in 1831, but the two brothers escaped back to Sittana with some of the remnants of Ahmad's forces. One remained there, the other was enthroned as the King of Swat (who died in 1857).

The surviving brother, Sayyid Umar Shah, continued with the crescentade that Sayyid Ahmad had begun. Now, Sayyid Ahmad himself had been born in Bareilly District of modern Uttar Pradesh, on the Ganges Plains. He had been on the pilgrimage to Mecca, where he had attracted the authorities for his fundamentalist pro-Wahhabi leanings. On his return to India he preached across the country with passion, became convinced of his own mission and set up a religious foundation at Patna, run by his appointed Caliphs. They taxed the local faithful, so that the institution was permanently funded, and it spawned other local centres from Bengal across northern India supported by dedicated preachers. Sayyid Umar Shah used the chain to find recruits, money and supplies, from right under the noses of the British.

Until 1849 Sayyid Umar Shah's forces descended from the hills in sporadic attacks on Ranjit Singh's Punjab – so it appeared to be no great matter to the British anyway. However, in that year the Punjab was annexed, and the northern border did become of interest to the British, who were disquietened by the raiding and hostage-taking, which continually increased. The general approach to controlling them was to exert pressure on the local tribes, by threatening their villages or by fining them, so that they in turn would control the crescentaders in the hills. Between 1850 and 1857 sixteen expeditions totalling 33,000 regular troops were committed to these exercises. In 1857 the crescentaders sensed they could form a coalition with the tribes to attack the British while the Mutiny threatened Delhi. General Sir Sidney

¹ This term is currently unusual, but was used by the British to express the Muslim equivalent of a Crusader. Much of this account is based on Hunter (1871) who used the term throughout his book.

² Sayyid Ahmad's supporters circulated a manifesto across north India which goes as follows: 'The Sikh nation have long held sway in Lahore and other places. Their oppressions have exceeded all bounds. Thousands of Muhammadans have they unjustly killed, and on thousands they have heaped disgrace. No longer do they allow the call to prayer from the mosques, and the killing of cows they have entirely prohibited. When at last their insulting tyranny could no longer be endured, Hazrat Sayyid Ahmad (may his fortunes and blessings ever abide) having for his single object the protection of the faith, took with a few Musalmans, and, going in the direction of Cabul and Peshawar, succeeded in rousing Muhammadans from their slumber of indifference, and nerving their courage for action. Praise be to God, some thousands of believers became ready at his call to tread the path of God's service, and on the 21st December 1826 (in the original 20th Tamadi-ul-Sani 1242 Hijra) the Jihad against the Infidel Sikhs begins.'

Cotton³ commanded 5,000 troops in an expedition which:

'burned the villages of the rebel allies, razed or blew up the two most important forts, and destroyed the Traitor Settlement at Sittana' (Hunter, 1871:24)

The next sentence continues

'The fanatics, however, merely fell back into the fastnesses of the Mahaban mountain; and so little was their power shaken, that a new Settlement at Mulka was immediately granted them by a neighbouring tribe.'

By 1861 they were back in Sittana

So long as we left it alone, it steadily sent forth bands to kidnap and murder our allies: when we tried to extirpate it by our arms, it baffled our leaders, inflicted severe losses on our troops, and for a time defied the whole Frontier Force of British India' (28)

In 1863 a major British Force of 7,000 men with 4,000 pack animals and supplies under General Sir Neville Chamberlain, was sent across the Indus, beyond Amb, and into the Ambela Pass (the suffix '-la' simply means 'pass'). The idea was to go round the Mahaban mountain so the rebels could not escape north, but would be driven east and south towards the Indus and other British forces. Reports had suggested the tribes would not be hostile. On October 19th the first troops reached the narrow wooded defiles at the head of the pass, and were immediately attacked. Though the top of the pass was successfully occupied, further passage proved impossible. Seeing the British in difficulties, more and more of the local tribes sided with the rebels, until some 60,000 were pitched against Chamberlain's army. Fighting to take, to hold, to repulse, to re-take the ridges of the mountain crests raged night and day for weeks, while cold and sickness also took its toll. Word spread southwest into the Pathan areas of Afghanistan, where further insurrections threatened. By late November disaster clearly threatened. Then the tide turned, when the Commissioner from Peshawar managed to buy-off some of the Buner clans, backing up the carrot with some violence in which Ambela village was destroyed and 200 clansmen left dead or wounded. Other tribes began to defect, the British forced the pass, and succeeded in destroying the settlement at Mulka, hunted down the fanatics, and returned to the plains by the end of December. Some peace and stability was brought to the area for some years, but at a high price: British losses had been heavy (see Table 5.1).

It is the aftermath that proves so interesting. Hunter's book was written while the trials of the conspirators were still being conducted in India. His book begins as follows:

³ A brother of General Sir Arthur Cotton, the irrigation pioneer quoted in the next chapter.

Chapter 1

The Rebel Camp on our Frontier

The Bengal Muhammadans are again in a strange state. For years a Rebel Colony has threatened our Frontier; from time to time sending forth fanatic swarms, who have attacked our camps, murdered our subjects, and involved our troops in three costly Wars. Month by month, this hostile Settlement across the border has systematically recruited from the heart of Bengal. Successive State trials prove that a network of conspiracy has spread itself over our Provinces, and that the bleak mountains which rise beyond the Panjab are united by an unbroken chain of treason-depots with the tropical swamps through which the Ganges merges into the sea. They disclose an organisation which systematically levies money and men in the Delta, and forwards them by regular stages along our high-roads to the rebel camp two thousand miles off. Men of keen intelligence and ample fortune have embarked in the plot, and a skilful system of remittances has reduced one of the most perilous enterprises of treason to a safe banking operation' (9)

How the power of Empire could long be resisted was a question needing to be addressed

'It is easy to understand how a Settlement of traitors and refugees, backed by the seditious and fanatical masses within our Empire, could, in an excess of bigoted hatred, throw down the gauntlet. But it is difficult to comprehend how they could, even for a time, withstand the combined strategy and weight of a civilised army' (28)

The allure of the extremists was felt in all sections of Muslim society

'While the more fanatical of the Musalmans have thus engaged in overt sedition, the whole Muhammadan community has been openly deliberating on their obligation to rebel' (10)

'Somehow or other, every Musalman seems to have found himself called upon to declare his faith; to state, in the face of his co-religionists, whether he will or will not contribute to the Traitor's Camp on our Frontier; and to elect, once and for all, whether he shall play the part of a devoted follower of Islam or of a peaceable subject of the Queen' (10)

Hunter's book has the delightful title: *Our Indian Musalmans: are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?* Victoria had only been proclaimed Queen in 1858, after the Mutiny, and why many, if any, Moslems should feel loyalty to a distant, absent woman, is unclear. But his point was real enough. He knew that such a wide-spread treason could only have worked if there had been sufficient numbers of people sufficiently aggrieved, and he took Muslim grievances seriously. They had lost power and office under the British and had not adapted as well as Hindus to the new education on offer. Hunter discusses in great detail the exact question of his title. In Islamic law there are two kinds of political states: Dar-ul-Islam, countries of submission (to the faith), and Dar-ul-Harb, countries of the enemies. There are definitions given for these terms. If a Muslim is in Dar-ul-Harb, he should rebel (it is

lawful to make jihad), or else leave for Dar-ul-Islam. The Muslim lawyers of Northern India, the three most senior lawyers in Mecca, and the Calcutta Muhammadan Society were all asked to rule on the matter of whether India under Christian British rule was or was not Dar-ul-Harb. In all three cases the ruling (fatwah) was that because the British afforded protection and because they permitted Islamic worship to continue, India was not Dar-ul-Harb, and for these reasons and the further reason that there was no realistic probability of overthrowing them by force, jihad was not lawful.

In case, which I very much doubt, the reader has missed the parallels: for Wahhabi read Taliban, for Sayyid Ahmad read Osama Bin Laden, for Sittana read Tora Bora; for Sayyid Umar Shah read Mullah Omar; for Treason-depot read terrorist cell; for banking operation – well, read banking operation. In June 2002 during the same month as the jubilee celebrations in Britain for the fifty-year reign of the Queen, *The Guardian* newspaper ran a series of articles on the role of moderate Moslems in Britain, and asked whether or not they could be both Muslim and English or British. In India it is all too easy in time of tension with Pakistan for *agents provocateurs* to suggest the disloyalty of Indian Moslems, so that non-Moslems turn on them.

5.8 The Search for a Frontier, 1860s to the Second World War

Some of the British wanted to establish a 'scientific border', following a 'forward policy', in which the British would take control of the high passes in the Hindu Kush, necessarily annexing part of Afghanistan. It would not only have been 'scientific'; it would have been supremely historical as well. This was the frontier of the Indian empire of the great Mauryan monarch Chandragupta in 305 B C (The name of the mountains is supposed to denote the deaths of Hindus guarding the border passes.) The British experiences of direct involvement were that this would be a painful and costly policy to adopt. It is also the case that it is not necessarily rational to use watersheds as borders. In historical and cultural terms different societies evolve and settle different altitudinal zones, so that at higher levels the people on both sides of a 'natural border' are often closely related. The Ladakhis of India are essentially Tibetans, and in the British period Baltistan was subtitled on maps 'Little Tibet'. In Afghanistan, Hazaras and Tajiks straddle mountain divides, and so do most of the Pathan tribes.

If the forward policy could not be adopted, the second best option was to keep Afghanistan as a client state, and a buffer between the British and the Russians. In 1877 a British mission was sent to Kabul which achieved nothing, and in 1878 a Russian mission arrived. When a British ultimatum was ignored, again they invaded in force, at the beginning of what is known as the Second Afghan War. Again they had major debacles, and again there was heroic retribution; it was a costly and bloody affair, which created new heroes for the Victorian public in London. After a series of coups and different attempts at finding a new ruler, Abdur Rahman was installed as Amir in 1880. He signed a treaty with the British, which gave them control

Table 5.1 A Record of 'Pacification'

Note this does not include the very much more substantial number of troops committed in the Afghan Wars; nor does it indicate the names of tribal leaders, and the casualties they suffered.

Table of Expeditions Against the Frontier Tribes

Year	Tribe	Commander	Numbers	Casualties	
				Killed	Wounded
1847	Baizais	Lt Col Bradshaw, C B	Mixed Brigade	1	13
1849			2,300	7	40
1850	Afridis, Kohat pass	Brig Sir C Campbell, K C B	3,200	19	74
1851	Miranzai Tribes	Capt J Coke	2,050	2	3
			incl levies		
1851-2	Mohmands	Brig Sir C Campbell, K C B	1,597	4	5
1852			600	2	8
	Ranizais		3,270	11	29
	Utman Khels		2,200	3	15
	Wazirs, Darwesh Khel	Major J Nicholson	1,500	24	7
1852-3	Hassanzais	Lt -Col Mackeson, C B	3,800	5	10
			incl levies		
1853	Hindustani Fanatics		2,400	nil	nil
	Afridis, Ada Khel	Col Boileau	1,740	8	29
1854	Mohmands	Col Cotton	1,782	1	16
1855	Afridis, Akra Khel	Lt -Col Craigie, C B	1,500	9	25
	Miranzai Tribes	Brig Chamberlain	3,766	14	
	Orakzais, Rabia Khel		2,547	11	4
1856	Turis		4,896	5	3
			incl levies		
1857	Yusafzais	Major Vaughan	400	2	3
			990	5	21
			1,625	1	8
			inc levies		
1858	Khudu Khels	M Gen Sir S Cotton, K C B	4,877	6	29
1859-60	Wazirs, Darwesh Khels	Brig Gen Chamberlain, C B	5,372	1	19
			incl levies		
	Wazirs, Mahsuds		6,796	100	261
			incl levies		
1863	Ambela Expedition (Hindustani Fanatics, etc)	(later M Gen Garvock)	900	238	670
1864	Mohmand	Col McDonnell, C B	1,801	2	17
1868	Orakzais	Major Jones	970	11	44
			incl levies		
	Black Mountain Tribes	M Gen Wilde, C B, C S I	12,544	5	29

1869	Orakzais	Lt -Col Keyes, C B	2,080, incl levies	3	33
1872	Dawaris	Brig Gen Keyes, C B	1,826	-	6
1877	Afridis, Iowaki	Col Mocatta	1,750	1	10
1877-8		Brig Gens Keyes and Ross	7,400	11	51
1878	Utman Khels	Capt Battye	280	-	8
	Ranizais	Major Campbell	860	nil	
	Utman Khels	Lt Col Jenkins	875	1	
	Afridis, Zakha Khel	Lt Gen Maude, V.C., C B	2,500	2	9
1879			3,750	5	13
	Mohmands	Capt Creagh and Major Dycce	600	6	18
	Zaimukhts	Brig Gen Tytler, V.C., C B	3,226	2	2
1880	Mohmands	Brig Gen Doran, C B	2,300	2	3
	Batannis	Lt Col Rynd	721	5	
	Wazirs, Darwesh Khels	Brig Gen Gordon, C B	800	nil	
1881	Wazirs, Mahsuds	Brig Gens Gordon and Kennedy	8,531	8	24
1887	Bunerwals	Col Broome	460	3	2
1888	Black Mountain Tribes	B Gen J McQueen, C B, A D C	9,416	25	57
1891		M -Gen W K Elles, C B	7,289	9	39
	Orakzais	Brig Gen Sir W Lockhart, K C B	4,600	nil	
			8,000	28	73
1894	Wazirs	Brig Gen Turner and Lt Gen Sir W Lockhart, K C B	11,150	45	75
		M Gen Sir R Low, K C B			
1895	Chitralis	M Gen Sir R Low, K C B	15,249	21	101
		Col Kelly	1,400	165	88
1897	Wazirs, Darwesh Khel	M Gen Corrie-Bird, C B	8,000	29	61
	Akozais (Swat)	Col Meikeljohn, C B, C M G and M Gen Sir B Blood, K C B	12,650	97	386
	Mohmands	Brig Gen E Elles, C B	8,500	12	96
	Akozais and Tarkanris (Dir and Bajaur)	M Gen Sir B Blood	12,200	61	218
	Utman Khels	Col A Reid, C B	2,900	nil	
	Orakzais	M Gen Yeatman-Biggs, C B	9,500	26	54
	Afridis	Lt Gen Sir W Lockhart, K C B	34,550	287	853
	Chamkannis	Lt Gen Gaselee, C B, and Col Hill, C B	9,700	26	35
1898	Bunerwals	M Gen Sir B Blood, K C B	8,800	1	
1899	Chamkannis	Capt Roos-Keppel	1,200	1	
1900-1	Wazirs, Mahsuds	Brig Gen Denning	small column	32	114
1901-2	Wazirs, Darwesh Khels	M Gen Egerton, C B		4	15
1908	Afridis, Zakka Khel	M Gen Sir J Willcocks, K C M G	14,000	3	37
	Mohmands		12,000	38	184

Source Wylly, 1912

Table 5.2 British 'Control' of the Tribes

Note The extent to which the word 'controlled' actually applied is debatable.

Table Showing by Whom the Tribes are Controlled

Dep. Commissioner, Hazara	Cis-Indus Swatis – Allai, Tikari, Deshi, Nadihar and Thakot Yusafzais – Trans-Indus Utmanzai, Mada Khel, Amazai, Hassanzai, Akazai, and Cis-Indus Chagarzai.
Political Agent, Dir, Swat and Chitral	Yusafzais – Trans-frontier Akozai Sam Ranizais. Bajauris. Chitralis
De. Commissioner, Peshawar	Yusafzais – Trans-Indus Chgarzai, Kudu Khel, Chamlawals, Sam Baizai and Cis-Indus Utmanzai. Utman Khel. Mohmands. Gaduns. Bunerwals. Afridis – Adam Khel of Janakor and Kandar.
Political Agent, Khyber	Afridis – except Adam Khel. Mullagoris. Mohmands – Shilmani Shinwaris.
Dep. Commissioner, Kohat	Orakzais – except Massuzai Afridis – Adam Khel Bangash.
Policial Agent, Kurram	Zaimuhkts. Turis. Orakzai-Massuzai. Chamkannis.
Dep. Commissioner, Bannu	Bannuchis
Political Agent, Tochi	Darwaris Wazirs – Darwesh Khel
Political Agent, Wana	Wazirs – Mahsuds.
Dep. Commissioner, Dera Ismail Khan	Batannis.

Source: Wylly (1912) Appendix C

over his foreign affairs, but which also committed them to paying him a handsome subvention. They then proceeded to negotiate with the Russians the definition of Afghanistan's northern border – which they managed to do more to Afghanistan's favour than Russia's.

But they had not yet negotiated formally a border between Afghanistan and British India. By the 1890's they were avidly building railway lines to supply the garrisons beyond Peshawar in the Khyber Pass, and beyond Quetta to the Khojak Pass commanding Kandahar. They dug a tunnel under the Khojak Pass. At the Amir's

request a conference was held with the British to demarcate the border. The senior British negotiator was Sir Mortimer Durand, whose name is now attached to the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The agreement was signed in 1893, and then for two years a Joint Commission worked to demarcate it on the ground – with small pillars erected every few miles. It has frequently been attacked as the freezing of a temporary and illogical demarcation – which splits ethnic groups and tribes, and which produces strategic nightmares on both sides. Many local people neither knew then, nor know or care now, where exactly it is. Later Afghan governments have on occasion taken to repudiating it, claiming that it was a treaty signed under duress, but there have never been serious negotiations to change it.

In 1901 Amir Abdur Rahman died and was succeeded by Habibullah Khan. During the First World War the latter was approached by a Turco-German mission, who promised him a treaty recognising Afghanistan as an independent state. Although here was a major opportunity to create trouble for the British, who had deployed much of the Indian army in the Middle East, Habibullah maintained his neutrality, to the annoyance of many in his higher counsels. In 1919 he was murdered, and after the usual struggles, a new Amir Amanullah Khan emerged. He set about organising an invasion of British India. It is also often charged that he preceded this by fomenting trouble for the British in Punjab by supporting the nationalists there, in part being implicated in the events which led up to the massacre by the British under General Dyer in Amritsar in the same year. The British had to fight the Afghans both in the Khyber and in the Kurram Valley to the south. For the first time airplanes were used, aging biplanes from the War, though to begin with the rules of engagement were very restrictive. To protect women and children, pilots had to drop leaflets 24 hours before a bombing raid. This caution was not popular with the troops since women, and indeed children, were also happily capable of torturing prisoners in grotesque ways. This, the Third Afghan War, ended in failure for the Afghans, though only after costly fighting and the commitment by the British of huge resources. It also left the frontier again in a troubled and unsettled condition, and with the British laying waste to the country where local tribals had supported the invasion.

The 'fanatical revolts' also continued. In 1897 a holy man the British nicknamed the Mad Mullah proclaimed himself Zia-ul-Millat wa ud-Din (the light of the nation and religion). He preached to the tribes in Swat, published tracts justifying jihad, and then led an uprising, which grew in scale until major military forces had to be committed against it. The revolt also spread among most of the tribes along the frontier – perhaps because of their resentment at the demarcation of the Durand line. In the late 1930s Mirza Ali Khan, known as the Fakir of Ipi, fanned revolt by the Mahsuds and Wazirs, with a mixture of religious and tribal fervour. In the Second World War Hitler also used agents to try stir the border, but without success.

British policy to control 'their side' of the frontier involved the hiving off, under Curzon, of a North-West Frontier Province from Punjab in 1901. This was administered by a Commissioner in Peshawar, answering to Delhi. It meant that the laws and courts of Punjab were no longer relevant, and that the internal autonomy of the tribes could be recognised and used. Frontier Forces were then raised locally,

under British officers, in a further attempt at pacification and integration – but though they were as capable of fighting with their usual ferocity for the British, they also proved equally capable of defection with their weaponry in circumstances they favoured. The system was discontinued. Armed marches of ‘pacification’ by British and Indian troops continued right through to Independence – and until the current day. These days they are more likely to be called ‘search-and-destroy missions’

5.9 Conclusions

The long and difficult search for a secure frontier in the north-west of India produced a multi-layered result: a border (which was not the best that Russia might have achieved) between Russia and Afghanistan; a buffer and client state (Afghanistan itself), and finally a border Province of British India which never pretended to the same civilian law and administration as in the other provinces. The instability of the region depended in part on the fact that there are no obvious borders. In the North-West Frontier Province and Afghanistan, spatial continuities and discontinuities in ethnicity, language, religion and culture are as confusing as the patterns of mountains and passes. Given the difficulties of transport, and the primitive near self-sufficiency of the fiercely independent tribes, there is no utilitarian integration. Exactly the same conditions mean that coercive integration is extremely difficult. This leaves identitive integration, which is possible, but which rarely holds for long, given the fractious and feuding nature of the society. The higher levels of identity that seem to work best are ethnicity, as for example when the Pathan tribes unite, or religion – the call to jihad against the infidels. The two working together can be momentarily quite explosive, the most recent example being that of the Taliban.

In the British period the frontier became a mesmerising obsession, where the virility of Empire could be tested against a doughty foe. In every year for the military officers there was a sporting chance of a jolly good scrap, which would test them out and keep them on their toes. A whole literature grew around this manly way of life and the confrontation with the idealised Pathan, perhaps best summed up in the way the unrelenting brutality of one characterisation is sanitised in the title ‘Exploits of Asaf Khan’ (‘Afghan’ (1922)). The book is introduced by Major General Sir George Younghusband, who served for many years on the North-West Frontier, and who describes it as ‘absolutely top-hole’.

Only one state outside of Sri Lanka has directly meddled in its civil war. Sri Lanka is of very limited geopolitical importance. By contrast, it seems that any number of states have meddled in Afghanistan and the northwest – certainly since Alexander the Great’s invasions we have a continuous record of Persian, Indian, Central Asian, Turkish, Russian, British, German and now American (and other NATO) intervention. At every stage of history the mountains have been awash with arms and intrigue. The culture of instability and bigotry of this area is not simply the fault of its own population. What the armed Congo has become, Afghanistan has always been. But it has no diamonds. It has one thing only – position.

Chapter 6

A New Geography: A New Economy

6.1 The Railroading of Empire

In the region which was the most favoured for transport in India, the Ganges valley, in 1812 a fast 500-mile journey by boat from Calcutta to Cawnpore/Kanpur could be accomplished in about 11 weeks. In 1832 that new-fangled contraption the steam boat, could reach Allahabad (short of Cawnpore/Kanpur, but not by a large fraction) even when the wind did not blow, in 3 weeks. In 1852 it took Lord Roberts 3 months to ride on horseback from Calcutta to Peshawar near the Afghan border (note he did not go up the Indus Valley), which was twice as fast as it took a regiment to march the same distance. The electric telegraph reached India in 1864 linking the small British system with the smallish Indian system already developing, and was used *inter alia* to report jute and cotton prices to manufacturers in Britain. In 1869 the Suez Canal was opened – and cut the journey from England to India and vice-versa, from a fastest possible time of 100 days to 25, and, in addition, progress could now be reported en route. It also proved, against expectations, that steam could compete in cargo trade profitably against sail, since sailing ships had no wind to blow them through the Red Sea, and still had to use the Cape Route. And it further meant that agricultural produce could be exported much more safely, since evil weevils now had far less time in which to multiply and sabotage the cargo. By 1880 when Assam was still awaiting its railway, the journey from England to Calcutta was quicker than the journey from Calcutta to Upper Assam.

The biggest change that occurred in the new Indian Empire in the 19th Century was clearly the rapid transformation of communications: on which nearly all other major changes in the geography and economy hinged. At the beginning of the 19th Century even the roads which had been delineated and guarded by the Mughals had broken down, and in many parts not even a bullock cart could pass. In 1839 the Company’s Engineers embarked on the complete reconstruction of the Grand Trunk Road, now to run from Calcutta to Delhi and, later to Peshawar, a length of 1,400 miles. Before it was half-finished a count at one point in 1846 estimated 390,000 tons of goods were being transported annually by bullock and buffalo carts, and camels and mule trains. The start was made in 1840 on a road from Bombay to Agra, and another from Calcutta to Bombay. As the new communications structure was being laid down, it occurred to several men that the fastest and most capacious communications could be had by using the latest and best, the steam railways. There were doubts expressed: that the white ants would eat the sleepers; that the monsoon

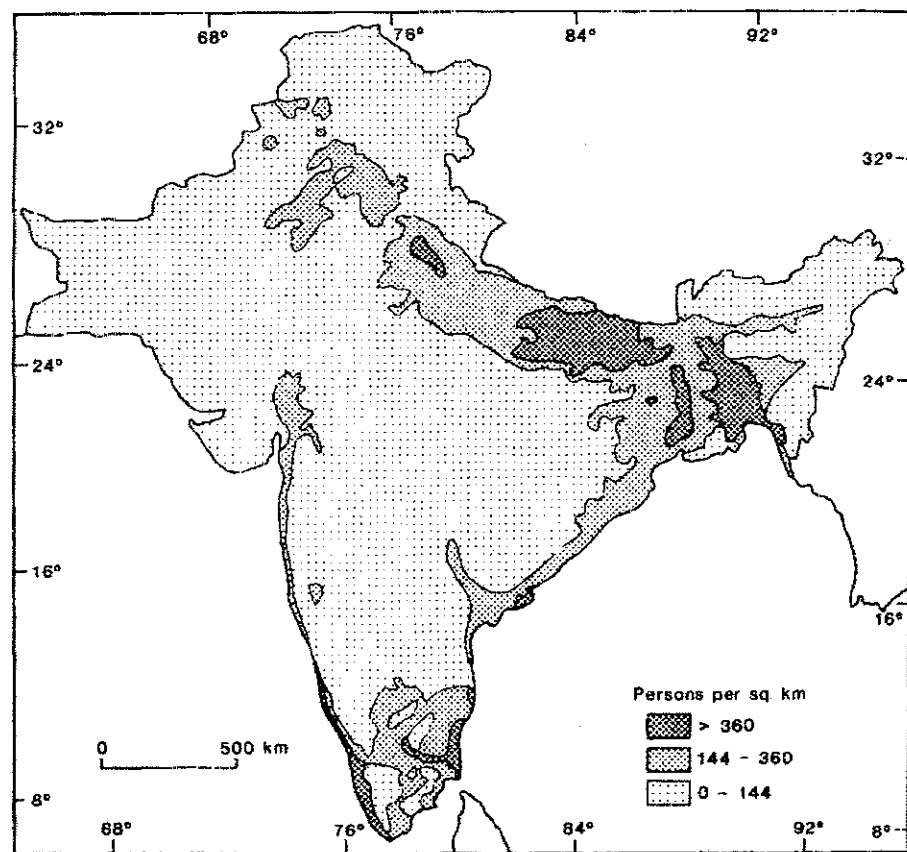


Figure 6.1 Rural Population Density

Source: Spate and Learmonth (1967)

torrents would wash away the tracks; that, indeed, the cyclonic conditions which occurred would simply blow the trains over – and indeed the doubts later proved to have been founded at least in part on some realistic assessments. Neither was there in India the industry to produce the capital goods, nor yet the men trained in surveying and civil construction. In short, there were doubts about the appropriateness of the technology.

Besides, it was hugely expensive. In 1845 Mr MacDonald Stephenson recommended to the Directors the construction of a line from Calcutta to Delhi at a cost of £15,000,000, a figure which can be put in perspective by comparing it with the figure for India's Imports of £14,250,000 in 1856. The cost was clearly beyond the Company's means, and the project might have stagnated indefinitely, except that some small experimental railways in Bombay and Calcutta opened successfully in

1852, and Lord Dalhousie, Governor General, was a complete enthusiast. He wrote a minute to the Court of Directors in 1853 as follows:

'A single glance cast upon the map recalling to mind the vast extent of the empire we hold, the various classes and interests it includes, the wide distances which separate the several points at which hostile attack may at any time be expected; the perpetual risk of such hostility appearing in quarters where it is least expected; the expenditure of time, of treasure¹ and of life that are involved in even the ordinary routine of military movements over such a tract . . . will suffice to show how immeasurable are the political advantages to be derived from a system of internal communication which would admit of full intelligence of every event being transmitted to the Government under all circumstances, at a speed exceeding five-fold its present rate; and would enable the government to bring the main bulk of its military strength to bear upon any given point, in as many days as it would now require months, and to an extent which at present is physically impossible . . . The commercial and social advantages which India would derive from their establishment are, I believe, beyond all present calculation.' (Cited in Griffiths, 1952:423)

I will continue his minute, which deals with his other expectations, below. But his priorities were clearly laid down in this first part. The railways would be of military value first and foremost, and his plans were for 'Presidency Lines', i.e. those that would link the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, and also the new North West Province centred on Delhi. A cursory glance at the population map of India would show that the greatest part of this mileage would make little economic sense at all – the wide distances across the Deccan crossed dry tracts of sparse use. The map of rural population (Figure 6.1) is a fair indication of the relative weight of population and trade in the different regions. In seeking investment capital in England it appeared that because of suspicions about the environmental problems and about political stability, potential backers were dubious. The impasse was broken by the Railway Guarantee Scheme, by which the Company would guarantee a return of 5% (a good return at the time) on capital invested by railway companies. This attractive offer resulted in sufficient investment, 99% from England, although there was nothing to stop Indian investors subscribing if they so wished. Several companies began building the first trunk lines. Then the Mutiny of 1857 provided dramatic proof of Dalhousie's prophetic words about the railways' military utility, but it also rattled potential investors even more. The Guarantee Scheme had to be continued at considerable cost. By 1868 eight companies had between them opened 4008 miles of trunk line. This was a prodigious feat in many ways – rails, engines, wagons, and the engineers and craftsman, all were brought (such things as locomotives in knock-down form of course) from England, and off-loaded at small jetties in Calcutta or Bombay, or onto the lighters that struggled through Madras' rolling surf. It was also prodigious in standards. The gauge adopted, to stop trains being blown over, was a broad gauge of 5'6"; and all the lines were double lines, with very restricted minimum curvature and gentle maximum gradients. The result of this policy was

¹ The word means silver – the bullion in which the rupee was denominated.

of course expensive cuttings and earthworks throughout the lines, which employed vast armies of local castes and tribes as coolies. As such groups migrated with the new lines, the railways had their first major social impact on India, as the canals had moved Irish 'navvies' around England.

On all of this the East India Company had to pay 5% (even, as it was wryly observed, if the Railway Companies chose to invest by throwing bricks into the River Hooghly at Calcutta). The revenues were not enough to make the railways pay, and indeed the railways in India did not pay until into the twentieth century. So the people who subsidised the investors were of course the peasants whose land taxes were the basis for the government's revenue with which it could honour its Guarantee. The people who made the most money were the railway manufacturers in Britain, who had a powerful lobby in Parliament.

The railways were proving though to have other virtues. In 1865 there was a severe famine in Orissa; in 1868-70 in United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh). For the first time the Government had the means to help move major stocks of food, and to alleviate some of the suffering in those regions they could reach. Realising the excesses of the original companies and finding itself able to borrow money at a lower rate than the guarantee, the post-mutiny Government of India began building the second phase in 1867 directly as State Railways, much of it metre and standard gauge. But in the 1870's and 1880's the Rupee, which was denominated in silver, began fast to lose its value against gold-backed currencies such as Sterling. The Government again had to borrow capital by reverting to guarantees for private companies.

By 1905 the system was one of the world's largest, incorporating 28,054 miles of track, and often viewed with pride by the British as possibly their greatest and most beneficial achievement in India. But it was also chaotic: 15,000 miles of State Railways; 7,000 miles of Guarantee Scheme; 3,500 miles in Native States; 1,400 in Assisted Non-Guarantee Schemes; and 1,300 in Non-Assisted Companies. There was a lot of 5'6" track, a little standard gauge track, a lot of metre gauge track, and a large number of narrow gauge railways (in hill regions and Princely States mostly) of 2'6" and 2'0" and any other gauge someone had cared to build. To this day, transshipment from one gauge to another is a not infrequent, costly and slow business.

Dalhousie's minute of 1853 went on;

'Great tracts are teeming with produce they cannot dispose of. Others are scantily bearing what they would raise in abundance, if only it could be conveyed whither it is needed. England is calling aloud for the cotton which India does already produce in some degree and would produce sufficient in quality and plentiful in quantity, if only there were provided the fitting means of conveyance for it, from distant plains to the several ports adapted for its shipment. . . Ships from every part of the world crowd our ports in search of produce which we have, or could obtain, in the interior but which at present we cannot profitably fetch to them, and new markets are opening to us on this side of the globe under circumstances which defy the foresight of the wisest to estimate their probable value, or calculate their future extent. . . A system of railways,

judiciously selected and formed would surely and rapidly give rise within this empire to the same encouragement of enterprise, the same multiplication of produce, the same discovery of latent resource, to the same increase of natural wealth, and to some similar progress in social improvement, that have marked the introduction and improvement of and extended communication in various kingdoms of the western world' (Cited in Griffiths, 1952:423)

The prophetic remarks about the commercial impact were also true, and we will deal with these in a moment. What no-one had anticipated was the social impact: it had been believed that the Indians were too poor to create much demand for passenger traffic, but the railways suddenly opened the possibility of making pilgrimages to holy shrines, reducing perilous and lengthy journeys to quick and comparatively safe ones. The safety of the railways was indeed accredited with depriving Thugs of travelling victims, and playing no small part in the end of Thuggee.

In 1908 it was said:

'the passenger traffic contributes to the business of railways to a very much larger extent than was anticipated. The development has been in all classes; but the principal increase has been in the third class passengers, of whom nearly 200,000,000 were carried in 1904' (Government of India, 1908:386)

This meant that in crude per capita terms the whole population of India took at least one railway trip. The same source mused:

'It is less easy to gauge the moral influence which railways have exercised on the habits and customs of the people. It is often said that they are helping to break down caste; but it is doubted by many, whose opinions are entitled to respect, whether there has been any weakening of caste prejudices amongst the orthodox. There can however be little doubt that increased travel and the mixing of castes in carriages which railway travel necessitates, must produce greater tolerance, if it does no more.' (Government of India, 1908:388)

Such mixing and tolerance was of course not required of the British, who reserved carriages and waiting rooms for Europeans. Neither can it be said that in the staffing of the railways was caste broken down. The 500,000 employees (in regular pay: this excludes piece workers, casual workers, and contractors' labourers) were neatly differentiated. Moslems were drivers and workshop men; Eurasians were predominantly clerical and lower executive, the British higher executive and administrative, the Hindus the porters and incidental labourers.

The commercial impact was two-fold – on the relationships between markets inside India, and the relationships between India and the outside world. Since time immemorial there could be wide fluctuations in the price and availability of basic commodities between different districts, even on occasion districts which were very close to each other. Without transport for bulk goods, a surplus in one area could not be moved to a deficit area. The British had from time to time to suspend

the collection of land revenue from famine districts: but they also had to suspend revenue payments in districts which sometimes produced too much. In the late 18th century they had occasion to relieve the collection in Sylhet District, since the rice harvest was so bountiful that the price was almost zero, and not even enough to cover the cost of transport to market. Times of surplus were usually celebrated with great festivals and feasts: there was nothing else to be done. Clearly, the inability to turn surplus into capital was one of the many reasons why Indian agriculture stagnated. But the country – sub-continent – is so large that in every year there are areas of surplus and areas of deficit. Linking these would enable those in need to acquire food, those in surplus to turn it into expendable capital, and would also lead to increasing stability in food prices. There is overwhelming evidence that this is exactly what did happen.

Both Mughal and British Governments had sought to monopolise the trade in common salt, using it as a source of tax revenue. The main sources of salt in North India were the salt pans in the Bay of Bengal, and the salt mines of Rajasthan. From the latter trains of pack animals moved laboriously down the Ganges valley heavily guarded and moving along a garrisoned trail. A locked and sealed carriage made thousands redundant, enhanced the monopoly, and reduced the price of salt at a stroke. Good quality coal in large deposits is primarily available in one region in India – the Bengal and Bihar coalfield, some two hundred miles west of Calcutta. Before the railways, in cost terms this was further from Bombay than England. Indeed the west coast settlements were supplied with coal by ship from England – although this was also partly because India never imported as much from Britain as Britain did from India, and freight rates on the outward journey were therefore lower. To some extent coal was half a ballast item. But the railways enabled the Indian coalfields to develop, and indeed they became one of the principal industrial employers before independence.

The other impact was the linking of the interior with the external world economy, in the way that the littoral regions had been for some centuries. British and other overseas trade with India had either stagnated or grown only slowly in the seventy five years before the Mutiny. Indeed, the lack of opportunity in India was one of the reasons the Company would always produce to defend its monopoly. Some theorised that it was because India was too poor to import enough from Europe. Per capita incomes in India in the nineteenth century were undoubtedly lower than in Europe, but the number of capita was of course very large, and obviously the inability to penetrate much beyond the coast, and the anarchic political conditions of the interior until 1820, were also significant factors. After the advent of the railways, imports from Britain grew fast in volume, and to some extent exposed the 'market poverty' argument. Exports grew apace too: the railways began to haul food grain surpluses for sale on the international market. When the first canal colonies were developed north of Delhi in the 1840s, the aim was to use irrigation to secure local food supply. By the 1880s the purpose of developing irrigation in the Punjab was to produce export crops of cotton.

After more than 200 years of European trade, suddenly, there was an impact that could be felt in many districts right down to the grass-roots of the economy.

There are two schools of thought about this impact: the immiserationists, who claim that the railways commercialised agriculture, producing industrial crops for profit rather than food crops, and raised land values, all in all creating a new class of rural landless poor. There are the ameliorationists, who claim that new wealth and prosperity trickled through the economy to everyone's gain. The truth must surely be a composite – depending on the region and the time. There is no doubt that there was a rising tide of prosperity in Punjab. There seems evidence that local artisan

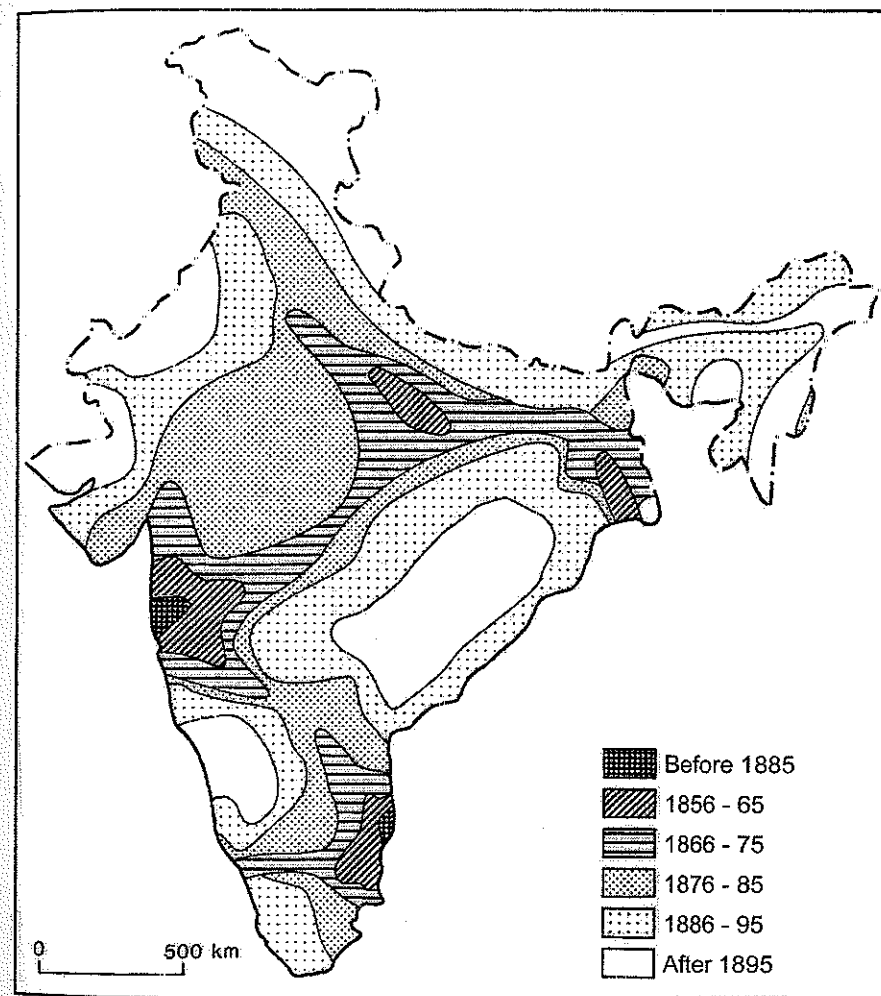


Figure 6.2 The Dates of Railway Expansion in India

production in small towns in Bihar and Bengal and elsewhere suffered badly from new competition. We will return to some of these issues below.

Beside the economic impact, the railways had a particular physical impact. In the riverine lowlands of India, for mile after mile the railways had to be raised on embankments above the maximum known flood levels. This meant that huge new barriers were drawn across the landscape which impeded drainage. And the embankments took earth from near at hand as well – creating what are known as 'borrow-pits' which remained as shallow swamps afterwards. The combined effect was to create literally hundreds of thousands of acres of stagnant pools in the plains, with the consequent risk of an increase in malaria. It does seem likely that the railways were indeed one of the causes of a resurgence of the disease in the second half of the 19th Century.

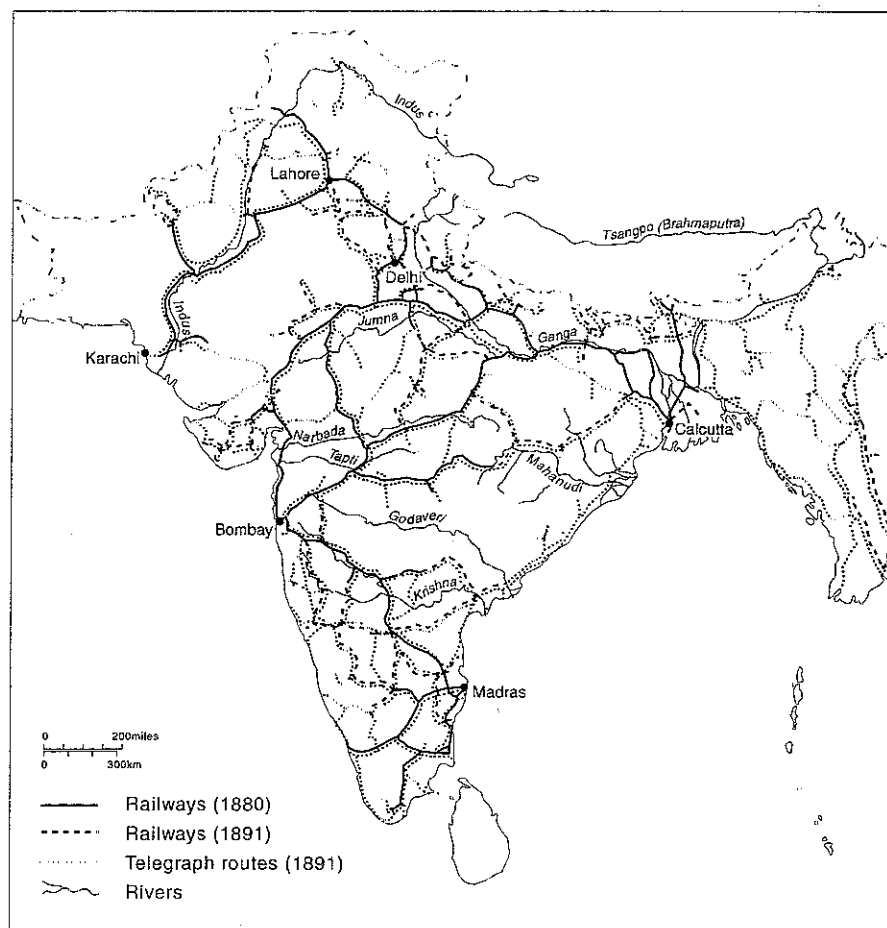


Figure 6.3 Railways and Telegraphs in India 1880

The railways were also the cause of other ecological pressures. Already by the 18th Century the British demand for tropical hardwoods for shipping and wharfage (ships for His Majesty's navy and the merchant marine were built in Bombay and Chittagong from teak) had started extraction from the forests, but this was little compared with the voracious wood demands of the railways. Each mile of track required 860 sleepers – and each sleeper lasted only 10-12 years. More than 1 million were required annually – and from superior sources such as teak and sal. When these seemed to be in short supply, experiments were conducted with the Himalayan cedar, the deodar, and that was judged adequate too, so the cutting of the forests of the middle Himalayas started. Then there was the question of fuel. In the early decades this was also wood – not until the last quarter of the 19th Century were the railways

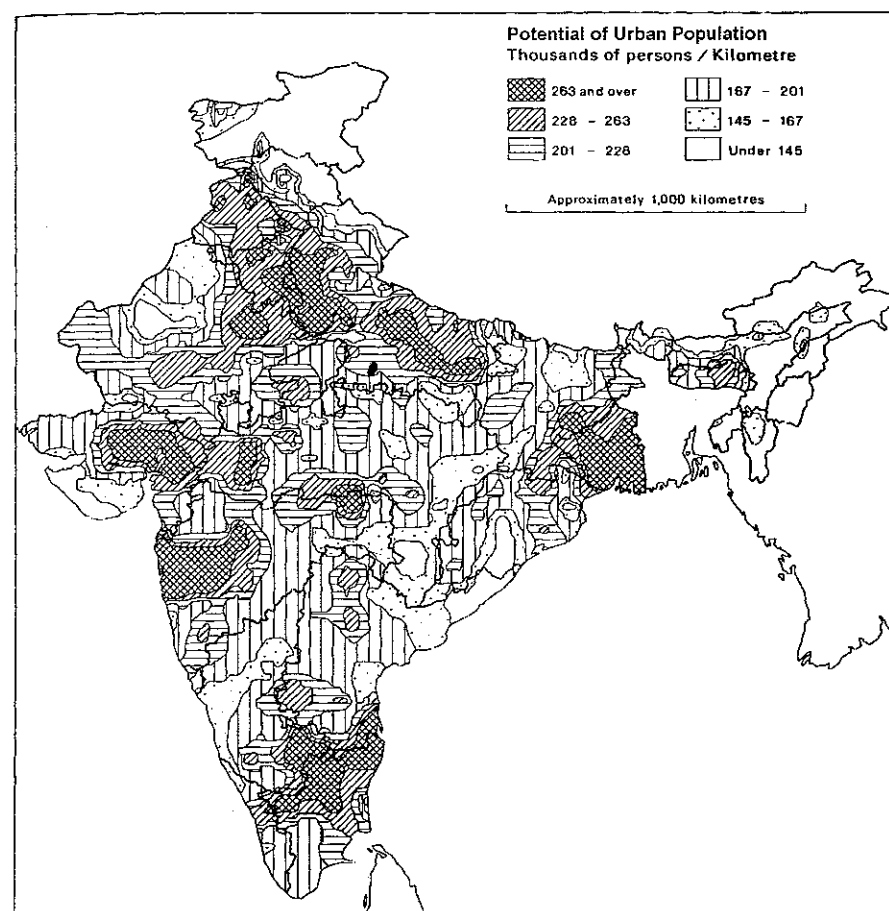


Figure 6.4 Urban Fields of Influence in India 1961

Source: Chapman and Wanmali (1981)

themselves and the mines of Bihar developed enough for the whole network to become coal-fired.

It was the demands of the railways more than anything else that led to the foundation of the Forest Department in 1864 and the passing of the first Forest Act in 1865. It was the beginning of a process of the extinction of local customary rights, and the commodification of the forests, that has marked India down to the present day.

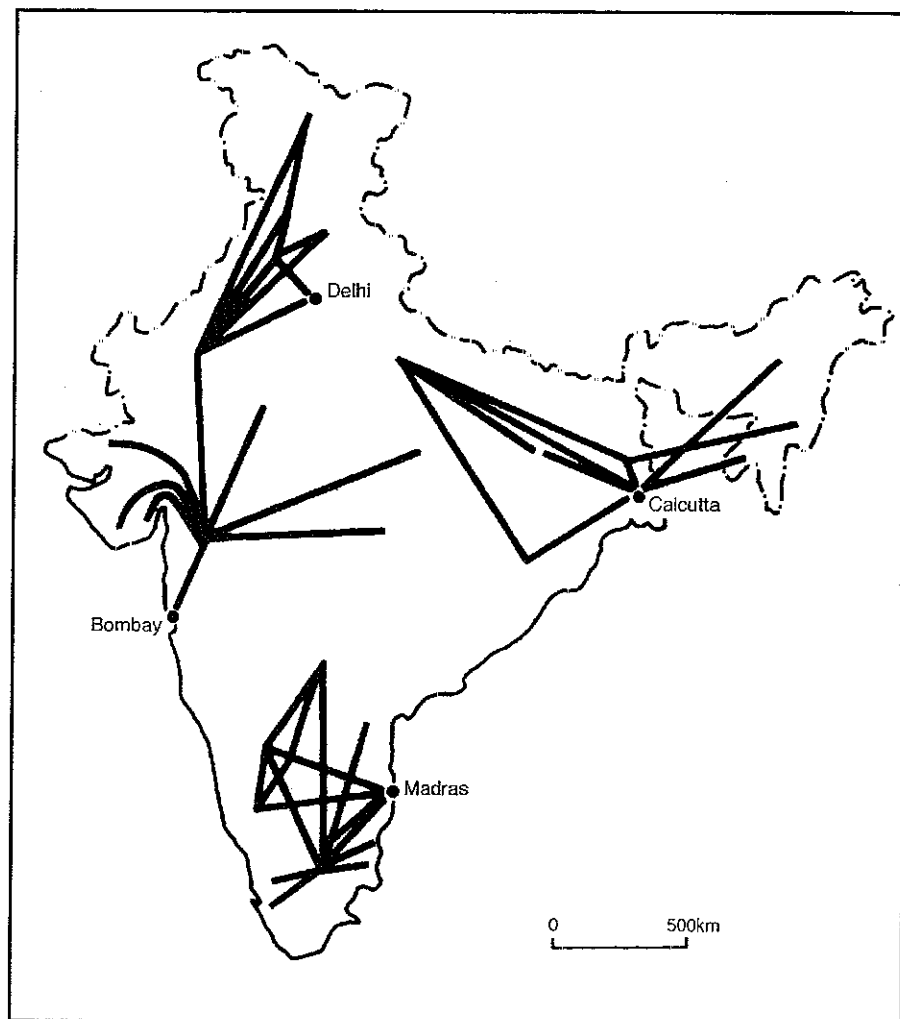


Figure 6.5 Commodity Flows in the Indian Economy 1960s

Source: Berry (1968)

6.2 Irrigation

Given the extreme seasonality of India's rainfall, it is inevitable that irrigation has had a long history. Indeed, more than four thousand years ago in the Indus Valley, Mohenjo Daro was an 'hydraulic' city based on irrigation systems. There are small wells, sometimes with water wheels, unchanged in design for thousands of years; there are small 'tanks', or local reservoirs, that govern most of the paddy lands of peninsular India, and for millennia there have been quite large barrages and canals in some of the lowlands – in the Kaveri (Cauvery) delta in Madras, for example. Most of the larger schemes had fallen into disuse during the latter half of the 18th Century because of the political turmoil and not infrequent war. When the smoke began to clear in the early 19th Century, the Military Engineers of the East India Company began to take a strong interest in the restoration of some of these older works. This was not as incongruous as it seems: much that was taught to military engineers of the period concerned fortifications, with massive stone abutments and revetments; in short, building skills closely allied to those now required. Starting in the 1820s, the Western and Eastern Jumna in the North West Province near Delhi canals were repaired and renovated. In the 1830s in Madras Major Arthur Cotton redeveloped the Grand Anicut (Barrage) on the Kaveri (Cauvery) and its distributaries, and then later the Krishna-Godavari delta as well.

The income from these works was collected in different ways in different provinces. In the south it was customary to charge an enhanced land revenue for wet land as opposed to dry land, regardless of what crops were grown. In some schemes in the north, records were kept of the crops grown, and farmers were charged a water revenue accordingly, in addition to land revenue. Early calculations seemed to indicate that the rates of return were very high; in the first fourteen years the Cauvery Anicut scheme repaid 70% of its original capital. In the north, the West Jumna rehabilitation scheme, started in 1820, had by 1845 accumulated a surplus of 20% of revenue over expenditure, and by then the annual income stream was little encumbered by further capital cost. But these high rates of return were to some extent a fiction, since these schemes benefited greatly from the existing capital works, even if in disrepair, and in the case of income calculated on land revenue, this should on occasion have been attributed to factors other than the canals. Yet success for such schemes nevertheless seemed assured. And the administration wanted to prove their success: there would be nothing less hostile to the British than a richer and more contented countryside, which happily also swelled government coffers. Further, control of the headworks of a canal several hundred miles long (the West Jumna canal had 445 miles of main canals and distributaries, its irrigated 900,000 acres covered a quarter of four revenue districts) was a form of political domination. There has been considerable discussion over whether more small wells would have been better: certainly they would not have given rise to the problems of water-logging associated with the canals. The water-logging was mostly the result of building unlined canals – i.e. canals were dug with simple earthen banks and beds, and not lined with an impermeable layer such as (in the current age) concrete. As in a natural

river, clay and silt would form some kind of natural lining, but water transmission losses were still high, often as much as 60% of the water at the head. The other way in which canals caused water-logging was by impeding natural lines of drainage. When a canal left the headworks on a river and traversed 'inland', it would meet small tributaries. These would have variable discharges, and often considerable silt loads, so they could not be admitted to the canal. Aqueducts over such tributaries, and siphons beneath them, were expensive, and so were restricted to larger streams. Water-logging itself had two effects: ultimately an increase in salinity which first depressed crop yields and then made soil sterile, and, secondly, an increase in breeding grounds for anopheles mosquitoes. The canals, like the railways, brought malaria in their train.

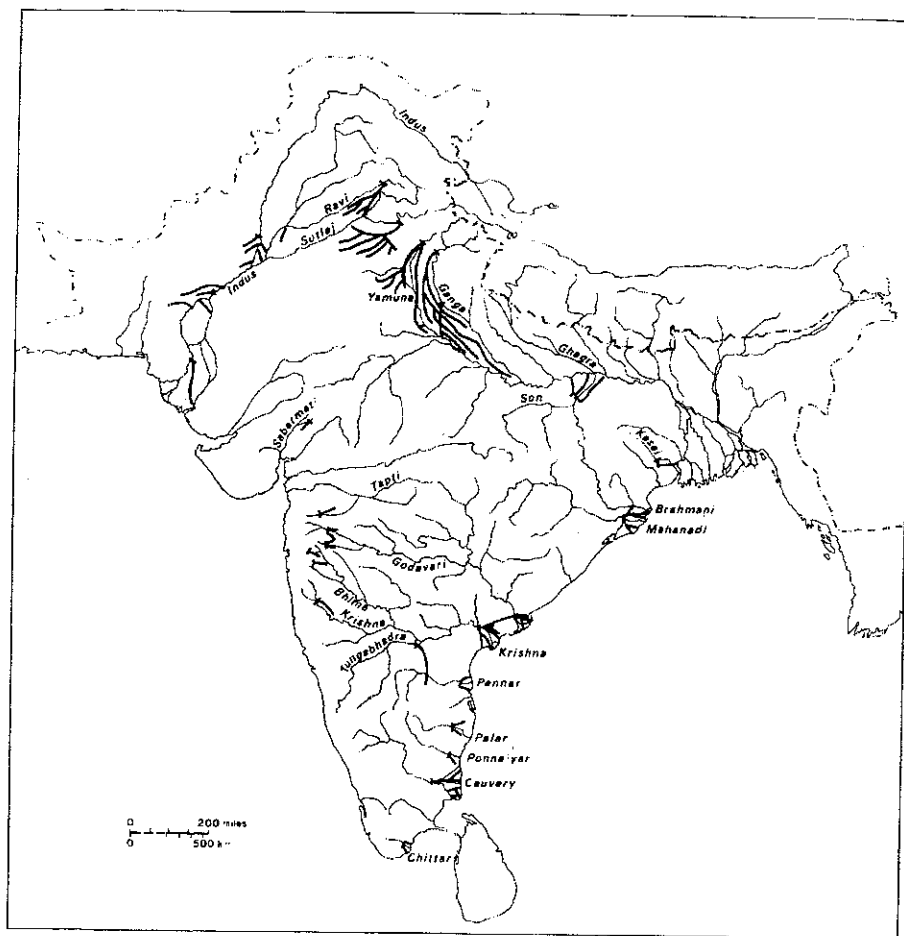


Figure 6.6 Canal Irrigation in India 1870

Source: Schwartzberg (1992)

But canals also saved the populace from famine in drought years. And on average they boosted production – perhaps by 20 to 40% in their command areas. In 1840 Major Probey Cautley began the Ganges Canal, from Haridwar, to irrigate the whole of the upper Doab.² Cautley was a pioneering zealot of an engineer. This, the first of the wholly new large canal schemes of the British, was built on an epic scale, and at an epic cost. The first twenty miles of the canal contained a string of astounding engineering features, aqueducts, siphons, level revetments against erosion, all built in a superbly engineered manner. Cotton believed it unnecessary, and thought the headworks could have been located lower down the Ganges. In the present day the Irrigation Department have to pay twice as much to modify Cautley's masonry and brickwork as they pay to modify equivalent later structures, because of the toughness of what has to be demolished.

The costs of Cautley's dream mounted. Periodically he would have to ride the two or three months journey to Calcutta, to seek further financial support, which was not easily forthcoming. He had to struggle with other problems too: as happened with the railways later, he had a shortage of skilled surveyors. So, at Roorkee near the headworks he built an engineering college, the origin of Roorkee University, still the premier centre for irrigation engineers in India. In the University there is a workshop built by Cautley before the Mutiny for the making of sluice and lock gates, with a tall chimney rising above it. The chimney is not what it seems. It is in fact a ventilation shaft for a secret underground room in which the British hid their families in time of trouble. (It is reputed that one of Cautley's children was born there.) They knew their canal was part of a process of pacification of a very troubled land.

Cautley's Ganga canal scheme did not give the kinds of returns government expected: in fact it lost money. The costs had been too high. It was also deliberately designed on uneconomic principles, in that it had a command area more than twice the size of the area it could irrigate. Therefore the capital cost was twice as high on that account alone as it need have been. The logic of this, pursued also in the Punjab, was that the greatest number of cultivators were reached that way, all of whom had some water, all of whom, therefore, had some protection against famine. The principle was to give protection to the greatest number possible. In the Punjab it became fairly standard in the early schemes to provide enough water so that each farmer could irrigate only one third of his fields. Given that the Ganga canal was built before the railways had reached the north-west, the idea that it was for local relief and not economic development for export seems reasonable.

Arthur Cotton, who had rebuilt the Grand Anicut on the Cauvery near Madras, continued his distinguished career, and became a knighted general. In Britain he campaigned ceaselessly for more support and investment in irrigation – he saw it as the government's Christian duty to ward off famine amongst its Indian

² The word Doab means literally Two Rivers, and refers to the interfluvium between two rivers. There are many Doabs in Punjab, all with descriptive names such as Rechna Doab. When people talk of The Doab, they mean the land between the Ganges and the Jumna.

subjects. In 1866 he gave a lecture in Manchester at the Social Science Congress held that year

'The first question is, What is the nature of these famines – as to their occurrence, extent, effect &c ? They occur in some parts of India perhaps every ten years. and we may therefore consider their return in future a certain event, and at least as much to be provided for as war, or any other of the matters for which Government is instituted' (1866:4)

Famine in Orissa in the 1870s and in Madras persuaded the government in India that unremunerative canals were actually justifiable in some circumstances. Therefore the Public Works Departments (created in the 1850s to take over from the Military Engineers) classified works into Productive (revenue raising) and Protective (loss-making within reasonable limits, but raising yields), and they were not unsympathetic to the latter when finances could allow and the proven need was urgent.

Cotton continued his campaigning. In 1877 he issued a pamphlet on famine in the north east Deccan, which reiterated his line that not only was the control of water the answer to India's problems (both for irrigation and transport), but it had perforce to be large-scale canal irrigation – that in which engineers like himself were superior to any indigenous talent.

'It will be well perhaps to remark on some mistakes which are almost universal on this subject. The first is, that if a tract has plenty of rain, there is no necessity for irrigation.

One plain answer to this is, that the Famine in Orissa occurred after a Monsoon of 60 inches. The question is not how much rain falls, but how it falls. In Orissa 30 inches fell in June and July. There was then a pause of six weeks during which the whole crop perished, and the 30 inches that fell in September could not restore it.

Again, when we say "irrigation", we always mean the complete regulation of the water, that is including draining; and so there is never a season when there is not at some moment excess of rain, which requires to be carried off by a system of drains.

It is this regulation of the water that is needed, and which so abundantly repays the cost of works. God gives us the rain, but as in everything else, he leaves something for us to do, which if we are too indolent to do, we must suffer for it.

The second is that water is water, but this is also a great mistake: there are three kinds of water in agriculture. That from rain, water that has been stored in tanks, and water led direct from the rivers to the field. The first has been filtered, and does little more than afford moisture; the second has deposited most of its rich contents which have been held in suspension, though it conveys to the field what was in solution; but the third comes to the land loaded with everything that the plant can want. With this, the land is perfectly renewed. Lands that have been watered for hundreds of years from rivers, continue to afford white crops without diminution, though without manure. The district of Tanjore which has lands in it that were watered from the Grand Anicut in the second century and ever since, continues as fertile as ever. No application of well or rain water, can make up for the want of river water. Thus the

Midnapore ryots begin to understand this, so that after a fall of rain they empty their fields as quickly as they can, and fill them again from the canals.

A third is that irrigation as a rule produces fever.' (1877:33)

Fever did indeed accompany the march of irrigation just as it did the march of the railway lines, but these correlations, although believed by many, were dismissed by Cotton, peremptorily observing that he never suffered from any, and he certainly lived to a vigorous and active old age, hardly stopping until he died at the age of 96.

Cotton was a committed Christian who saw his life's work tied up with Christian duty, and argued the case for irrigation from that stance –

'But what shall we say to the loss of our character as a Christian Government from our having so neglected both to execute those works that can alone prevent these famines, and also to prepare for each famine when it was imminent?' (1866:6)

and indeed he actively understood the value of recruiting the Great and Good of his day to support his cause. In the 1866 pamphlet there is a supporting letter appended, written by Florence Nightingale, which shows the true nature of Christian mercy:-

'If all England could set their face against the Suez Canal, we must not be surprised if there are other people almost as stolid. Another Nation had to cut the Canal for us and thus force upon us an incalculable benefit. In England and Bengal you must take people as you find them and force blessings upon them. So we thank God and take courage. We are really gaining ground.' (Nightingale in Cotton, 1866:30)

By the 1870s the irrigation works in India were achieving a world-wide reputation for their size and performance, and they were set to become something of a focal point for the international traffic in engineers and politicians interested in them. Visitors and ideas flowed between the Americas, the Mediterranean, Egypt, India and Australia. One such rover was Alfred Deakin, formerly Chief Secretary and Minister of Water Supply, Victoria, Australia, who visited the United States in 1885, Egypt and Italy in 1887, and India in 1890-91 – publishing a valuable and detailed survey entitled *Irrigated India: An Australian view of India and Ceylon. Their Irrigation and Agriculture* in 1892-93. He was quite clearly a very Australian and very independently-minded individual, who admired the technology, but wondered about its purpose. He had a kind of Malthusian anxiety over the teeming Asian hordes.

'The main purpose of this book is to sketch the superb systems of water supply, by means of which many millions maintain existence upon tracts that without would only support a fraction of their number. At this stage it is but just to indicate that there is a point of view from which the great schemes appear less admirable in their net results.

'As the real notion of irrigation in India is to maintain life, and its success lies in minimising famine, it brings those who would sum up the case for and against it fairly face to face with an old problem of history, pertaining in some degree to all races, but especially under Asiatic conditions. Progress in numbers is readily measured, and at each census the totals of the Indian Empire are enlarged. The prospect of a country doubling its population in five or ten years may appear at first sight matter for congratulations. It means peace and plenty, to some extent health and morality, increased production, increased consumption, increased trade, and increased wealth. All these can be predicted of India, whose total population for British and Feudatory states alike was 256,000,000 in 1881, and was 286,000,000 in 1891. In the same period Australia has added 1,000,000 million as against this 30,000,000; and though the latter total has been swollen by annexation and improved methods of enumeration, the broad fact remains that the gain in 10 years exceeds the population of Italy or Prussia. Among the most potent means of this rapid growth in the population is unquestionably the irrigation, which not only makes agricultural settlement closer wherever it obtains, but provides the vegetable food of the Hindus for countless thousands beyond the schemes. It may be held to have saved the lives of millions who would otherwise have perished, and to have enabled them to beget millions more, whom it now assists to maintain.'

'Is this a real gain? Does it deserve the name of progress? Does it benefit either the individual or the race? Many will reply without hesitation in the affirmative; but surely in so doing they confuse the size of a nation with its eminence – they mistake quantity for quality?' (1893:53)

'The struggle of the British government to raise the masses, like that of the daughters of Danaus, seems fruitless as well as endless; the courage, energy, self – sacrifice, ability, and benevolence of its rule, idle and without avail. The history of its superb conquest of the elements, like that of its conquest of the country, when viewed from the standpoint of philosophic history, concludes, not with a paean, but with a melancholy question – Cui bono?' (1893:55)

Little irrigation was developed in Bengal, for a number of reasons. The drought risk was less, to be sure, but in Bengal there was also under Zamindari a more tangled hierarchy of vested interests in land, greater population density, and greater fragmentation of holdings. All of this made the acquisition of land more difficult and much more costly, and the later revenue-raising more difficult. (Land acquisition costs in the poor Doab had been low for Cautley. He bought enough land to allow for the many changes and improvements, which are still being made even now.) In addition, in the majority of years rainfall would be adequate, so that there was not quite the same degree of urgency as in the drier districts to the north-west.

6.3 The Land of the Five Rivers

The Province in which the development of irrigation under the British most concerns us in this book is Punjab, which means the Five Rivers, the great tributaries of the

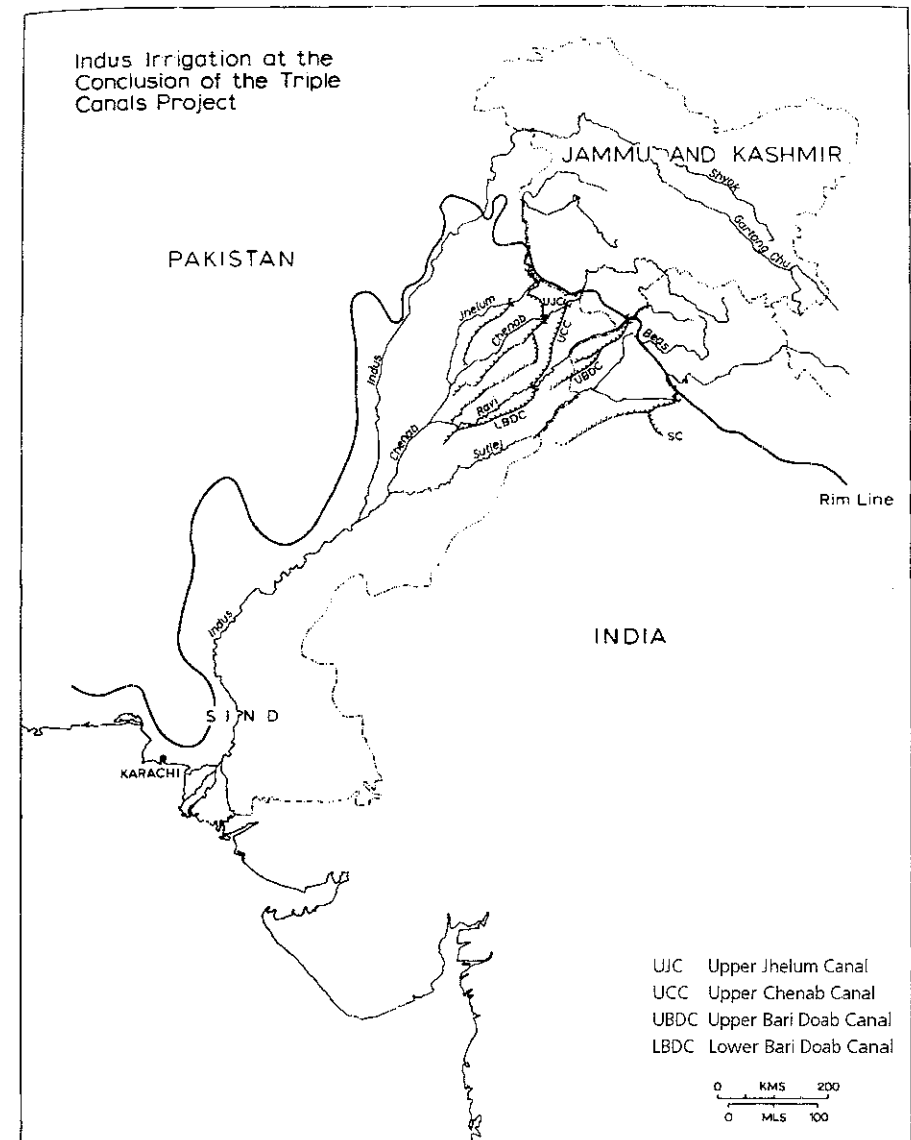


Figure 6.7 Canal Irrigation in the Upper Indus at the Conclusion of the Triple Canals Project

Source Michel (1967)

Indus They flow down out of the Himalayas onto what is naturally a semi-arid land. There had been little cultivation away from the banks of the rivers and the rim line of the hills themselves, and so here the great Doabs were mostly scrublands used by wandering pastoralists but not formally owned by them in any British legalistic sense. In 1849, after the Second Sikh War, the Punjab was formally annexed and the Sikh army disbanded. As with the independence fighters of Mugabe's Zimbabwe, it was imperative to find occupations and incomes for the former warriors before they became lawless gangs of bandits, and in a society based on agriculture or husbandry, that meant giving them land. The wastelands of the Doabs were formally claimed Crown Lands, available to the new administration for use as it saw fit. A solution to these various problems was, of course, then sought in developing irrigation on the Doabs and founding new settlements.

In 1850 the first plans were laid for the Upper Bari Doab³ Canal, which was planned to be 247 miles long from its headworks at Madhopur. Like the Ganga canal it would have to start right where the rivers debouched from the hills onto the plains, since the rivers were incised, leaving the Doabs as slightly raised tablelands. The planners were in buoyant mood: '... striking into the deeps of the wildest wastes of the lower doab, and running past the ruined cities, tanks, temples, and canals, all of which it is to vivify and regenerate, it will join the Ravee 56 miles above Multan' (General Report on the Administration of the Punjab, cited in Michel, 1967:59). With no clear idea of the discharge of the Ravi, Colonel Napier set the capacity of the canal to be 3,000 cusecs (cubic feet per second.) For 180 miles it would provide irrigation: for the last 80 it would reconnect with the Ravi so that it could be used for navigation. In practice it never reached its goal, so navigation did not become an important source of revenue. It was also built with too steep a gradient, and the bed eroded. The engineers were, in fact, conducting what amounted to massive experiments in hydrology, and were building themselves a flume the envy of any modern geomorphologist. The canal was not a great success financially, but it did again have a beneficial impact on agriculture. (It also became blamed for water-logging and malaria, and part of its command in the early twentieth century became the first to be treated with diesel and then electric tube wells to reduce local water tables.)

The next canal attempted was the Sirhind on the Sutlej, sanctioned in 1869. This had a gradient set at 30% of the Upper Bari Doab Canal's gradient, which proved too shallow as siltation began to choke it. It also employed a barrage across the river for the first time (the UBDC had only had a side weir: the engineers had not thought they could build a barrage to withstand destruction by peak floods). In 1895 the barrage was redesigned to include a silt trap, and its performance again improved. But, as with Cautley's Ganges Canal, the costs had been too high in relation to revenue, and the Government felt disinclined to try further investment. Famine in 1879 proved the spur to overcome caution, and further schemes were

³ The Doab names are easily remembered as they combine the names of their two rivers. The Bari Doab is that which lies between the Beas and the Ravi.

sanctioned for the lower Doabs, each being built with an increasing competence and confidence, and, finally, with growing financial success.

The Chenab Canal of 8,000 cusecs on the lower Rechna Doab was sanctioned in 1891 to irrigate 1 million acres, and so was born Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), named after the Governor of the Punjab at the time. The settlement patterns changed: the Sikhs came down from the hills and became the dominant farming and commercial group everywhere, though outnumbered by the Muslims in nearly every district.

All of these canals were limited by the fact that they were run-of-the-river systems: they used barrages to head up water, but not to store it. In those days large storage dams were a dream, not yet an engineering commonplace. This meant that when a river had been tapped, further expansion could only be achieved by bringing water from elsewhere. And by a quirk of geography, the eastern rivers of the Punjab were those with the smallest discharge, despite the fact it is the west that is driest. The biggest discharges were down the Jhelum, and of course the Indus itself. To overcome these imbalances in 1905 the Triple Canals Project (Figure 5.7) was sanctioned to bring water from the west to the east. The Upper Jhelum Canal was to run from Mangla to the Chenab above Khanki. The Upper Chenab Canal ran from Marala on the Chenab and crossed the Ravi at Balloki, and from Balloki ran the Lower Bari Doab Canal. Nearly another 2,000,000 acres were brought under cultivation. Since by now the railways were an established fact of life, the schemes could be designed from the outset to maximise the production of cotton for export, to the hungry mills of Lancashire.

The important point that comes from this is that the British had now created a system-wide single scheme, each part dependent on the others. No part could be operated without consideration of the others. It irrigated land both directly under British control, and in the territory of princes, since the British had decided that the overriding goal must be the irrigation of the greatest area regardless of political considerations. In the early twentieth century it even came to mean that agreements had to be negotiated between the Government of British Punjab and British Sind, since the whole Indus Valley became interdependent.

Any irrigation scheme, no matter how small, is a political statement first and foremost. It is also of course an economic statement of costs and revenues, and a technological artefact of good or bad design. The acquisition of land, the methods of revenue raising, the distribution of water, all take place *given* the nature of the political system. The political system here was British imperial hegemony. It created the largest integrated irrigation schemes ever seen on earth. What would happen if the hegemony ever ended? That is a theme to which we must return later in the book.

6.4 International Trade in the 19th Century and the Balance of Payments

Before 1757 the British were almost unable to export anything to India to pay for their imports because they produced very little that was in demand, and perhaps as

much as 80-90% of British trade was settled by payment in silver, the drain which the British Government so disliked. By about 1800 British manufactures exported to India were worth about a third of the value of imports from India, which were still dominated by cotton piece goods. Instability in Europe during the Napoleonic Wars and the turmoil in India itself combined to produce erratic trading conditions for the next twenty years, with no discernible signs of growth. But, from somewhere about 1825, a long-term secular change starts, with trade growing at an ever-increasing rate in the second half of the 19th Century as the railways expanded. Imports grew fast, but so too did exports, although of a changing nature. Throughout the whole century (except for a brief period 1855-63) India remained in trading surplus, although in the latter part of the century she was in trading deficit with her principal partner, Britain.

From 1828 to 1840 the export of cotton piece goods fell by 48%, as British cotton manufacturers supplied their own home market, and indeed as they increasingly supplied manufactured cotton to India. In the same period India's imports of yarn rose 80% and of cotton cloth 50%. After 1860 imports of cloth rose dramatically, and of course imports, too, of railway goods. A major shift was occurring: India that had once exported manufactures, was now increasingly importing them. To pay for these, her external trade began to be more and more in primary produce, including by the latter part of the century, raw cotton, jute, food grains (rice and wheat), indigo, tea, and opium. This new relationship is depicted as the stereo-typical colonial dependency: the colony was the source of raw materials and ultimate captive market for the Mother industrial economy.

There were obvious consequential internal adjustments. The distressed plight of weavers, particularly of the finest muslins, in Bengal was noticed even by the hard-nosed British administration, though ideas of protection had no support in an era ideologically committed to free trade – and indeed the disturbances of the Maratha raids and the blockades of the Napoleonic Wars had also been to blame for the loss in trade. There was good as well as bad: the imports of British cotton were predominantly 'grey cloth' i.e. cloth that had yet to be bleached, dyed and, of course, tailored. The consistent quality and the comparative cheapness of British cloth gave a stimulus to these sectors, and prices for the Indian consumer fell.

The continual surplus of India's balance of trade meant that the hunt for bullion (treasure) never ceased. One estimate suggests that India imported one-third of the world's silver production in the last quarter of the 19th Century (and although not a producer, it is currently thought to have more than half of world stocks). It was here that opium was so useful. This was grown in Bengal under government supervision and control, and in the native states near Bombay under private control, but ultimately exported under government control from the port itself. Its greatest market was China, which the British insisted on supplying, despite the hostility of the Chinese Government. Indeed the British fought two Opium Wars in 1839 and 1855 to keep the trade open. It was also very heavily taxed, and in the late 19th century opium was the second largest source of revenue to the Government, only being exceeded by land taxes.

Sir Richard Temple, the Contents of whose 1880 survey of India was listed in Table 4 2, in the same volume compared the taxation of opium with the taxation of spirits, and said of the trade in general:-

'There cannot be any objection to the taxation as it falls upon an article which is a luxury and which if it be useful in extreme moderation, is more deleterious if used in excess. Inasmuch as the culture is profitable to thousands of cultivators, and as the exportation is still more profitable to traders and capitalists, any attempt on the part of the State at suppression would be futile, and would only lead to serious abuses. It is manifest, however, that if the Chinese Government shall ever attempt to prevent the importation of an article of luxury much desired by the people, it will be essaying a task which has rarely been undertaken by any Government with success anywhere and which the Government in most civilised countries does not attempt' (Temple 1880:240 and 241)

The absolutely addictive nature of the drug was not well understood at the time, and its use was not uncommon in British society itself – as witnessed by the central confusion in Wilkie Collins' novel *The Moonstone*. Indeed Robert Clive was a frequent user of Laudanum, a liquid potion containing opium and alcohol, used as a pain killer and sedative. Only with hindsight does Temple's justification of the trade seem quite so appalling.

Opium was thus an important part of the triangle of trade between Britain, India and China. When the trade collapsed after the turn of the century, it seemed to do so for economic reasons as much as a result of tightening government policy. Other competing sources developed abroad, and in consequence the accumulated profits were taken out and invested in new textile mills in India.

Exports of raw cotton were slowly increasing in the first half of the nineteenth century, but did not really take-off until the latter half. At that time Britain's favoured supply was from the Southern States of the U.S.A. India's cotton had proved inferior for the new machinery, being of shorter staple. But the stimulus provided by the American Civil War (1861-65) which badly disrupted supplies, was followed by the successful development of long-staple hybrids suitable to Indian conditions, and then the development of the Punjab and Sind Canal colonies in conditions which were also suitable for long staple production. By the end of the century cotton was exported to China in great amounts as well, and then also to Japan.

An agricultural industry that was new to India was opened up in the second half of the 19th Century – the cultivation of tea. It seems impossible now to realise that only eighty years ago British writers noted that people in Indian towns were beginning to take up the new custom of drinking tea – its is now such a deeply ingrained part of Indian life. Indeed, it is hard now to remember that there ever was an India without railways and the chai-wallas who pitch on the platforms. Tea had been exported originally from China to Britain, being apparently unknown in India. In the 1850s there were attempts at trying to cultivate this tea in India, when the discovery (or rediscovery, since it had been noticed thirty years earlier) was made of a native tea plant in Assam. In the 1860s European planters were encouraged

to develop new tea 'gardens', a grimly euphemistic expression given the horrific conditions in which the labour force was kept. The labourers were mostly recruited from lower castes and tribes from poor areas of Chota Nagpur and the Deccan, and transported in appalling conditions to be given little shelter, medical help, or food. Introduced into a new climate and environment in which all the worst jungle diseases were rife, as many as a third of the workforce might die in 6 months. The echoes of shame and scandal have not died to this day. Tea production grew rapidly, as did exports, by 1900 being one-third the value of cotton's exports. But, in a classic case of the declining terms of trade, continually rising production forced down prices. Cultivation did not stop: simply the conditions of the labourers remained appalling, if not quite so mortal.

6.5 The New Geography

The geography of India was indelibly changed by the pattern of infrastructural development in the 19th Century. Figures 6.2 – 6.4 show the way in which the railways entrenched the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, and produced an urban system in India that was at variance with the previous urban structure, and with the distribution of the bulk of the populace, which was, of course, rural. Discriminatory freight rate policies underlined the supremacy of each of these cities in their own regional economies. The pattern was still visible in the freight flow maps produced by Berry in the 1960s (Figure 6.5), and persisted in the period of India's autarkic development since Independence. These economic regions paid little regard to cultural and linguistic regions, a fact which was to prove of significance. Population redistribution had also occurred in specific areas, such as the canal colonies of Punjab and Sind, and in the export-oriented tea gardens of Assam, and in new farming areas in the Valley of Assam. Areas of new industry grew – though one must stress that industry singularly failed to achieve the general take-off widely hoped for and predicted, but never actually encouraged, by the British. Such industry as did develop formed small islands in a sea of rurality. North of Calcutta there were the extensive jute mills, mostly in British ownership, and nearby the expansive railway works at Kharagpur (which built far too few locomotives compared with the numbers imported from Britain: before independence 12,000 locomotives were imported from Britain, and 700 built in India). Around Bombay and in the Madras Presidency, there were new cotton mills, most of which were built with Indian capital and management. Some of these, emulating Lancashire, began to achieve export success in China, until early in the 20th Century Japanese competition defeated them. In the Damodar Valley of Bengal and Bihar were the new coal mines, sunk with British capital. At Jamshedpur the Indian capitalist Jamshedji Tata built India's first, and at that time one of the world's biggest, iron and steel works, much to the surprise of the British.

At a smaller scale there was a new urban form imprinted on the landscape to one side of most cities and towns. Mortality rates amongst the early British traders

and soldiers from diseases such as malaria (literally 'bad air') and cholera had often exceeded those of the native population. The cause was nearly always put down to impure air and water, with the obvious conclusions that cleaner air and water was desirable. New cantonments for the British soldiers and civilians were built in prodigiously spacious settings, segregated from and upwind of the dense and noxious native settlements.

'Impure air and water may not be the only source of cholera, dysentery, malaria ... but when the source of these impurities is the exhalations from the human body, they are the most powerful exciting causes of those diseases ... I believe that the part which the excrementitious matters of the affected play in the dissemination of epidemic diseases is chiefly due to the gases given off by them immediately or soon after they are voided, which gases enter the system through the lungs' (Clerk 1864:103, cited in King 1976: 109)

This led to the conclusion that airiness was necessary. Buildings for the colonialists needed more space:

'European inmates in tropical climates to have 1,000 to 1,500 cubic feet of air. For natives, these numbers admit of reduction (to) ... 600 cubic feet of air' (King 1875:220, cited in King 1976:110)

To be sure the spacious nature of cantonments and civil lines had other purposes as well, providing fields of fire for artillery, and minimising the hiding places for rebellious infantry. The doctrine of space was pursued to its climax in the building of New Delhi, a city seemingly built with the kind of personal mobility in mind which is available in modern Los Angeles, although in New Delhi's case that mobility could be had at a slower pace by horse-drawn tonga or the messenger's bicycle. Motor transport was for the very few.

6.6 The Language of Empire

Depending on the definitions used and the extent to which a dialect becomes another language, there are between 200 and 1,600 different languages spoken in India. There are at least fifteen different scripts, and although for some of the northern languages derived from Sanskrit the scripts are very similar to the Devanagari used by Sanskrit and Hindi, there are at least ten different calligraphic systems. Administrative systems would work better if there were some major official language, and indeed English had replaced Persian at official levels in the early 19th Century. Table 6.1 documents a stage in this ascendancy. English also became the favoured language of new institutes of higher education. Ancient India was noted for its scientific achievements, and in particular its contribution to mathematics, but since the Renaissance scientific advance had been fastest in Europe, foremost perhaps in England. English became a prominent language for the communication of the new knowledge.

English was not adopted in India as the language of higher education without debate. But the British rejected the use of vernacular languages because

'the vernaculars of the country do not as yet afford the materials for conveying instruction of the comparatively high order' (Naik, 1963 quoting government documents from 1860, cited in Khubchandani, 1983:20)

The situation has never really changed, since scientific knowledge has grown apace throughout the 20th Century and English has acquired new ideas and terms faster than they can be translated or assimilated by the vernaculars. Thus, English became the new lingua franca of India. Major newspaper publication began in English – The Times of India, in Bombay 1838; Amrita Bazar Patrika and The Statesman, both in Calcutta in 1868 and 1875 respectively; The Hindu in Madras in 1878. The new nationalist leaders of India used this same foreign lingua franca not for local affairs and not for daily business, but they did use it to communicate

Table 6.1 A Letter from the Governor-General to the Nawab of Bengal, 1833
(in the Hazaduari Palace at Murshidabad, West Bengal)

His Highness
Nawab Shuja ul Mulk Ehtesham ud
Dowlah Humayoon Jah Syeed Mobaruck
Ali Khan (Behadur Feroze Jung)

My Honored and Valued Friend,

Your Highness has probably heard that in the early part of the cold weather I left Simla and Sabatheo and proceeded on my journey to Calcutta and I have now the pleasure of informing your Highness that I arrived at the seat of Government on the 2nd February last. As I am sure that a knowledge of this event will be gratifying to your Highness I have hastened to communicate with your Highness on the subject. I am always conscious to receive accounts of your Highness' health and welfare and I shall therefore hope to be favored occasionally with your Highness' friendly letters. I am not myself conversant with the Persian language and it is of course satisfactory to me to communicate my sentiments to my faithful Allies in my own words unaltered by any foreign mediation. With this view I propose to carry on my correspondence with you in the English language. I presume you can have no difficulty in commanding the services of persons acquainted with that language and in the meantime I shall direct my letters to be accompanied with Persian translations. In conclusion I beg to express the high consideration I entertain for your Highness and to subscribe myself

Your Highness' sincere friend
W Bentinck
Fort William
16th March 1833

between East and West, North and South. Indeed, perhaps the trains, the post office, the use of English and the press were essential preconditions for an independent and united India. There was also a vernacular press – which was accused from time to time of being too anti-government, so that an Act was passed permitting its muzzling if necessary. Many of the vernacular papers were not founded until into the 20th Century. But English literally ruled:

'The imposition of English as the language of politics transfigured Indian public life in at least two ways: it obviously divided the British rulers from their Indian subjects; and it also divided Indians themselves, between those who could speak English, who knew their Dicey from their Dickens, and those who did not. These often immaculately anglicised élites were also, it is essential to remember, fully bicultural, entirely comfortable in their own Marathi, Bengali or Hindustani milieux: it was, after all, exactly this amphibious quality which made them useful porters to the British Raj. The slow extraction of power from the society and its concentration in the state was in India's case crucially a matter of language. The social power that Sanskrit – and Persian – had once held was replaced by a new, still more mysterious, more potent language of state: English' (Khilnani, 1997:23)

Lord Curzon ordered the erection of an obelisk on the site of Clive's command post at the Battle of Plassey. It had an inscription commemorating the valiant soldiers and their victory. Recently it was refurbished, and re-opened in 1998 by Sri R Bandopadhyay, IAS, Commissioner of Presidency Division. The plaque now reads:

Battlefield of Plassey June 23rd 1757
In memory of the valiant warriors of Siraj-ud-Daula
Plassey – Nadia

This re-interpretation of history has been written in the language of conquest.

6.7 A Necessary Understatement

In the 1920s when India's population was about 275 million, enrolment in secondary education was 0.6% of the population, and in Universities 0.03%. Official British thinking suggested that these figures were good and stood comparison with more highly developed economies in Europe. The figures reflected in particular the schools and colleges of urban India, which really were producing a new small, but influential, Indian urban middle class. But India was only 10% urban, and the figures for primary education, which should have embraced the countryside as well, were actually extremely bad. Less than 4% of the population were in any form of instruction, and the literacy rate was about 10%. There is a suggestion that the syllabi in schools (where there were any) was so completely irrelevant to farming needs that it was

rejected even by those who could have had it. Education then formed small islands of privilege in a sea of ignorance, just as industry and other aspects of modernisation were similarly restricted. It also formed disciplinary islands: one curious feature of higher education was the disproportion between graduates in popular subjects such as law, and scientific subjects which were not widely available.

It is therefore possible to claim far too much for the transformations that were undoubtedly taking place in the 19th Century. In 1901 Digby wrote:

'There are two countries: Anglostania, the land especially ruled by the English: in which English investments have been made, and Hindustan, practically all India fifty miles from each side of the railway lines' (Digby, 1901 :291 cited in Bose, 1973:51)

There was, despite the size of the network, a huge amount of India that lay more than 50 miles from a railway line. And overall, more than 70% of the populace still relied on agriculture for its income, and 90% were rural inhabitants. They were for the most part still interested in self-sufficiency: cropping for export was restricted to specific areas like Punjab and the cotton-growing parts of the Deccan, or perhaps to many peasants in a region, such as the jute growers of Bengal, but even then each farmer would usually put only a lesser part of his holdings to jute. Perhaps the influence that reached furthest through the economy was the linking of internal prices from region to region, which had a beneficial dampening effect, and to world markets, which was not always so beneficial. At a time of local plenty, the poor could still be outpriced in their quest for food if prices quoted in Chicago's grain markets had risen high. And the major traders at the turn of the century knew by telegraph any price changes within 24 hours.

The contributions that the British like to be remembered for are in the fields of administration (the iron frame of the Indian Civil Service which at one time commanded greater respect than the home civil service), the army, the posts, telegraphs and banking systems, the irrigation schemes, and above all the railways. They had forged a new imperial state which was in one aspect much stronger than the Mughal state. It had developed aspects of utilitarian integration which the former had lacked, based on this new infrastructure. But it was not an Indian State, in that the British never made their home in India and were never automatically committed first to India's interest before Britain's imperial interest, although it *was* an Indian State in that most of the personnel who ran it were Indian. The few British who were there represented just the top of the pyramid of government, whose employees as police constables and railways guards at the base were all Indians – with Indian fingers wrapped round the handles of the lathis, and poised on the triggers of rifles. There were in the 1930s only 4,000 British gazetted officers in the civil service, the police, the railways and in forestry. There were the traders, managing agents, tea-planters, bankers as well, perhaps only a maximum of 30,000 civilian Britons in India, and in addition units of the British Army garrison which peaked at 70,000.

Given this fragile hold, the British were obsessed with how to maintain law and order and to retain power, for as long as practically possible. What their imperial

state failed to do in fields such as agriculture, education, public health, and industry, is a story that should be written alongside the march of the railways lines. But since they did not do very much, it is a hard story to write. Above all; their imperious, timid and reactionary attitudes meant that they were never in much haste to develop new political infrastructure, and it is perhaps no surprise that the new middle classes would become impatient for change in that too; and that ultimately the loyalty of the government servants could be stretched to the limits.

6.8 Concluding Remarks

The empire the British created surpassed the Mughal empire in size. It included the furthest south, which the Mughals had never dominated, and similarly included Assam and Burma temporarily. It did not however encompass Afghanistan, and at best that only came under British 'influence'. Although the precursor to empire had been a trading company, the basis of government finance became land revenue – just as in Mughal times – for all the areas of direct British government. Perhaps more than the Mughals had done, the British also relied on indirect control via tributary chiefs – the Princes of the Princely States. The prime bond maintaining the integrity of the area was undoubtedly the identitive bond of the British themselves – a bond which showed less sign of dissolving into the local territories of India than it had for the Mughals, probably mostly because the vast majority of British never actually settled themselves as colonisers. In that sense they did not make India their home. They also, like the Mughals, devised a system of administration – the Iron Frame of the Indian Civil Service – which has to be included in the fourth category of bonds – the bonds forged by an able bureaucracy. Towards the end of empire more Indians were incorporated into this administration, and given rank and security which brought quite a strong degree of loyalty and co-operation with the Government, although the British incorporated the local élites in Government less than the Mughals had done. But in the building of the transport networks they provided the first strong elements of utilitarian integration in South Asia – even if on a rather strongly regional basis. The imposition of English in government and higher education together with the communications networks, permitted the beginnings of an articulated Indian sense of 'Indian' identity – something that was new to South Asia. The British had inadvertently stimulated it, and they were always ambivalent in their reaction to it.

This account is, however, rather one-sided – it is written from the viewpoint of the British impact on India, as though that was what stimulated change. The impact is exaggerated because this book is written in English, and from sources written in English. There are many of them – the British in the 19th Century accumulated facts and data and wrote about India with an extensiveness that that is astounding.

There would have been change in India anyway – although the speed and kind of such counterfactual change cannot of course be proved, but only suggested as a kind of thought experiment. It is possible, though, to write accounts which stress

movements and change at the level of the peasant masses much more than older writing, and recent studies such as that by Sarkar (1989) and the series of 'subaltern' (non-élite) studies by Guha and his associates do adopt this wider perspective. It is also possible to quote the outsider, Deakin, observing the British not just as irrigation engineers, but as imperialist administrators.

'Finally, then, the British government of India is a compound of contradictions, for, while practically absolute in authority and vested in two or three men entirely, it is supposed by many to be controlled by a popular assembly; military in spirit, it is bureaucratic in method and pacific in end; conservative in practice, it adopts many radical principles; and committed wholly at first, and often still, to the energy, judgement and initiative of individuals. It has created for them a complete system of written regulations embracing the whole field of possible activity. No public service is so constrained by the pen, and yet even the civil members of it may be said to live in the shadow of the sword. Separated by immense distances which forbid frequent personal association, all business is conducted by correspondence; the affairs of the country, from the most momentous foreign relations to the pettiest details, being set out upon papers which are passed from hand to hand. It is a Government of minutes based upon memos.' (Deakin 1893:28)

British India, in short, is British neither in race, religion, language, policy, sentiment, nor aspiration. Garrisoned by a few Britons, and governed by still fewer, it not only retains its Asiatic complexion but impresses its character to a large extent upon its conquerors. The British in India have themselves ceased to be British in many respects. They have developed castes and curious creeds, walk with troops of retainers, live like Persian satraps or Roman proconsuls, coming at last to think and speak in the phrase of the Orient, and with its vivid colouring. It is they who have adapted themselves to the Hindu, and not the Hindu who has taken their imprint. It was not to strengthen her hold upon her British subjects that the time-honoured title of the Queen was altered to that of Empress of India. Bearing in mind how few are the whites in proportion to the hordes of varied hue who swarm from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, and the extent to which they have required to stoop to the conditions of life in the tropics in order to conquer, it is not too much to say that the first fact requiring to be fixed in the mind of the inquirer is, that India today is altogether Asiatic in the spirit and form of its life and institutions, and British only in flag, in fame, and in name.' (Deakin, 1893:29)

The New Nationalisms and the Politics of Reaction

7.1 Contesting Dynamics

The new geography of India also had a new cultural dimension, in particular there now existed a new lingua franca that enabled educated people to communicate with one another from furthest north to the deepest south. It is possible to exaggerate the importance of this – it is said that in the 1930's less than half of 1% spoke English. But equally one should not underestimate the significance of that 0.5%, the new intelligentsia and middle class, nor forget that it was the language of the courts, of much of business and commerce, and it was also the most important access to the new institutions of higher learning. And in addition, the railways and the posts conveyed the speakers and the pamphlets, newspapers and private messages from one region to another.

Here were the means to promote new senses of identity across India.

The new communications also connected India increasingly with political ideas derived from other parts of the world (initially mostly from parliamentary Britain) and also led to an increasing awareness of the great events elsewhere – such as early in the twentieth century the defeat of great imperialist Russia at the hands of the Japanese. That was followed by the First World War, in which omnipotent Europe was exposed as a divided and destructive civilisation, and in which Britain in particular came perilously close to defeat. Out of the ashes emerged the post-isolationist anti-colonialist democratic America and the anti-imperialist revolutionary Russia of the masses.

Here were new models of power and independence.

But there was an unevenness with which the two largest communities of India – the Hindus and the Muslims – took up the new ideas and the new opportunities. After the Mutiny the Muslims were to an extent kept out by the British (Persian was no longer the language of Government), but also to at least as great an extent, opted out. They had their traditional patterns of Islamic education, and had during their time of imperial ascendancy largely left commerce in the hands of the Hindu merchant groups. It was mostly, therefore, the Hindus who filled the ranks of the emerging urban middle classes, and who accepted much of the higher education that was becoming available. In 1878 there were 3,200 graduates from the new universities – nearly 3,150 were Hindu. Of course, this is only a generalisation; but even the exceptions to it demonstrated the way in which thoughtful Muslims perceived the trend in history. There were indeed great Muslim families who accepted much that the West had to offer, and some, for example, became eminent barristers.