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British rule and development in India (1757-1935)

Sanikommu Venkateswarlu and S Murali Mohan

Abstract

The growing British dominion in India and the development of an administration to run the dominion were closely related to developments – Economic, industrial, agriculture, education, political, social, and intellectual – in England itself, and changes in policy and practice in India were often made in response to changes originating with the Court of Directors, the Board of Control, or Parliament. The eighteenth century political background is well covered in Lucy Sutherland's *East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, which details the relationships between "the Company, "the Crown, and Parliament, and Parliament's attempts to control the East India Company through the Regulating Act of 1773. C. H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834*, picks up, although not in so much detail, the relationship of Parliament to the Company for the period down to 1834. In addition Philips' work contains a wealth of information on the structure and functioning of the London end of the Company and on the internal politics and conflicting economic interests found within the Company and their effect on policy in India.

Mr. Thomason, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, had already made a start in the building of roads, and in 1854 the Ganges Canal was begun. The first railway was that between Bombay and Thana, and twenty miles in length, which was opened in 1853, and in the following year another from Calcutta to Hugh was completed. At that time also a Public Works Department was formed in the provinces of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, each being under the control of the Chief Engineer; and a Secretary to the Government of India for Public Works was also appointed. Since then, military have been separated from civil works, and are now looked after by the military department. In the year of 1911 the entire India came under the seat of Delhi (crown) British government from London directly involve in India Politics and it became direct responsible to the Indians.

Keywords: British rule, development, India, Parliament

Introduction

The intention of this paper is not so much to give a historical account of the past as to show how the British nation stands, and what there is for it to do in India now. On the one side we hear orators cry, "Crush! By the sword the empire was won, and by, the sword it must be held." On the other, we hear men cry, in the name of holy freedom, "Retire: India for the Indians! Stand aside, and let the people of the country work out their own destiny!" Meantime, while politicians are debating, sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly, thousands of workers are busy with their daily tasks, "living and dying, spending their" strength and health and the prime of their life in heavy toils, noted by few and soon forgotten. To some are allotted the rifle and cannon, sword and lance. They stand on guard that their brethren may do their peaceful tasks in peace. To some it is given to curb oppressors, robbers, and evildoers; to prevent riots; to protect the honest and peaceful in the enjoyment of their own. To some it is given to judge between man and man, upholding the law. Some let in light by spreading knowledge; or cause wealth to spring up by opening communications, manufactures, or mines. On every side, in offices under Government, and still more in private enterprise, British workers are to be seen in India, doing various kinds of work, all busy. Are they doing Good? Are they doing as much good as they might do? As a humble worker in the field, the writer thinks he has a few practical suggestions to offer, which, if there is anything in them, might guide all this throbbing energy into more profitable channels, and get more good out of the stream of life-blood, that most precious of her gifts, which Britain pours out on her great dependency. These suggestions are more especially directed to the work of the Government, which suffers from two troubles - viz., the want of personal interest on the part of most workers, and in-creasing interference with the work- by persons who know little about it.

As the British worker in India grows older, he begins, if he is at all given to thinking for himself, to look beyond the narrow groove of his daily routine, and to realise that it is in his power to be an explorer and a pioneer, opening up new fields of labour, new resources for his own people and for the peoples of India. As an explorer, the author offers the observations which follow, in the hope that, amid the many errors and defects that they are sure to contain, some thoughts may be extracted from them which may be useful to future explorers.

Objectives of the study

- To find out development of infrastructure in India
- To find out development of Irrigation in India
- To find out the mineral resources of India
- To find out industrial development of India
- To find out the causes of deprivation of India
- To find out the development of nationality and nationhood in India

Historical introduction

"We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind." - Sir John Seeley

"The East is a University in which the scholar never takes a degree." - Lord Curzon

"It is not by believing either ourselves or our laws all purity or all corruption that we are likely to come to a right understanding of what is best for India, but by a close study of its last history, and then by setting ourselves down, each in his own sphere, and working out the details of a code honestly and ably prepared, not shifting and changing from day to day, but founded on experience, and suitable to a rude and simple people, who like all people under the sun prefer Justice to law." - Sir Henry Lawrence

"The essence of the double government' system was that the substance of authority passed from the Company to the crown. The Company reigned but in important matters did by the government." - Sir T.L. Holderness

History the history of British India falls into three periods. From the beginning of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century the East India Company is a trading corporation existing on the sufferance of native powers and in rivalry with the merchant companies of Holland and France. During the next century the Company acquires and consolidates its dominion, shares its sovereignty in increasing proportions with the Crown, and gradually loses its mercantile privileges and functions. After the mutiny of 1857 the remaining privileges of the Company are transferred to the Crown, and then follows an era in which India awakens to new life and progress." (1 gazetteer, vol.IV, p.5) In following the growth of the Indian Constitution, therefore, we shall notice very brief in the first place the charters which were given from time to time to the East India Company in the early days of its history; after that, the Acts of Parliament relating to India and the revision of the charter made every twenty years, which tended more and more to limit the powers and privileges of the Company and to increase the responsibility of Parliament over India; and, finally, the Acts of Parliament since 1857 under which the existing constitution of India has mainly been built up.

Developmental works of British India

"No similar works in other countries approach in magnitude the irrigation works of India, and no public works of nobler

activity have ever been undertaken in the world."

"When in 1844, I first went from Calcutta to the present Agra province, I was carried about a thousand miles in a palanquin on men's shoulders, and it took some three weeks to toil through a journey which is now accomplished in twenty-four hours." - Sir John Strachey.

The Public Works Department occupies a very prominent place in the history of Indian administration. This is not so much the case in England, where the railways are in the hands of private companies, the making and upkeep of roads and bridges regulated by the County Councils and Municipalities, and public buildings erected by private firms. The State only retains supervisory powers, which are carried out by inspectors acting in the service of the departments of State concerned. In India things have been different. In the past the people were poor and lacking in co-operation. In consequence, the means of communication were slight, there was little or no effort made to conserve the water and railways were few.

It was during the rule of Lord Dalhousie that Government began to realize that the management of public works was a part of its responsibilities.

Mr. Thomason, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, had already made a start in the building of roads, and in 1854 the Ganges Canal was begun. The first railway was that between Bombay and Thana, and twenty miles in length, which was opened in 1853, and in the following year another from Calcutta to Hugh was completed. At that time also a Public Works Department was formed in the provinces of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, each being under the control of the Chief Engineer; and a Secretary to the Government of India for Public Works was also appointed. Since then, military have been separated from civil works, and are now looked after by the military department. The control of the railways, which was once vested in the Public Works Department, has been placed in the hands of a Railway Board, and is represented on the Governor-Generals Council by the member in charge of the Commerce and Industry portfolio. Irrigation, buildings, and roads are in the hands of the Provincial Governments; and in Madras and Bombay the Governor himself usually holds the Public Works portfolio. At the head of each department there is usually one secretary for roads and civil works, and another for irrigation. With regard to the former, the tendency of the times has been in favour of transferring the financial responsibilities for ordinary roads and minor buildings to the district boards and municipalities. The Government of India also has a Public Works Department which is under the member of Council in charge of the Revenue and Agriculture portfolio, and has powers of supervision over the work of the Local Governments. As a rule, it only interferes in important projects requiring a large expenditure. For the purposes of administration, each province is divided into "circles," each of which is made up of a certain number of districts. A Superintending Engineer is in charge of each circle, and at the head of each district is an Executive Engineer, who has under him Assistant Engineers and a Subordinate Staff.

In the Public Works Department there are three grades, known as the Imperial, Provincial, and Subordinate Services. In the former are the Chief, Superintending, Executive, and Assistant Engineers. In 1871, the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper's Hill, in England,

was founded, the students of which were trained for the Railways, Public Works, Forests, and Engineering Departments in India. The College was closed in 1906, and the Public Works Officers are now appointed by the Secretary of State. The Provincial and Subordinate Services are recruited in India from those who have been trained in the Engineering Colleges at Roorkee, Poona, Madras, and Sibpur.

The cost of Civil Works, which includes public buildings, is a charge against the Local Governments or, under certain conditions, the district boards and municipalities; and in cases where the estimated cost is above a certain amount the sanction of the Government of India is required. This arrangement is not possible in the case of irrigation, which for financial purposes is divided into two classes, "major" and "minor" works. The latter is a provincial charge, but the former, in that the cost must be met either by loan or from the fund reserved for Famine Relief and Insurance, is in the hands of the Government of India. There is an Inspector General of Irrigation, whose business is to criticize the plans and estimates for irrigation schemes sent up to the Government of India, and to supervise generally the work of irrigation. When once the necessary sanction is given by the Government of India, the construction and upkeep are left to the provincial Governments.

The Indian Governments have very rightly paid much attention to irrigation, and the success of their operations is equal to and even greater than that of any other country in the world. These works serve the double purpose of conserving the water and of providing an easy means of transit. Lack of water has always been a terrible obstruction in the way of Indian agriculture, but by means of irrigation nearly 46,000,000 acres of land already have been rendered suitable for cultivation, and on them most valuable crops are grown. Moreover, the rivers of India, except those in Bengal, are not for the most part navigable, but this defect can be partially compensated by the use of canals.

There are various types of irrigation works in India, but they may be conveniently classified under three heads: wells, tanks, and canals. There are thousands of wells in the country which draw off the sub-soil water, and some of these have been sunk at considerable cost. Taken individually they are of comparatively minor importance, and only irrigate in each case land ranging from one to twenty acres.

This may seem a small amount, but wells of this nature are so numerous all over India that it is estimated that nearly 13,000,000 acres are irrigated by these means.

Tanks or reservoirs are used very largely in the Madras Presidency. They are formed in a narrow gorge between two hills by the construction of a dam or embankment which conserves the water in what looks like a big lake. The water is drawn off from the lower end by means of sluices, and is distributed amongst the surrounding fields. These works are often the results of private enterprise, but the Government has undertaken the construction of certain of the largest works and also the maintenance of a large proportion of all the tanks. About 7,000,000 acres, mainly in Madras, are irrigated in this way.

Irrigation from rivers by means of canals has been almost entirely the work of Government, both in construction and in maintenance. A weir is built across the channel at the head of the river delta and thus holds up the water which would otherwise flow down to the sea and be of little value

to the country. The water thus stored up is taken away in side channels and distributed to the fields. This system is used very largely in the Madras Presidency. In Northern India a different principle prevails. The water is not so necessary in the lower reaches of the Ganges, as in that part there is usually a sufficient rainfall, but is urgently required in the United Provinces and the Punjab. At a certain part of its course the Ganges runs through a large valley, sometimes six miles broad, and also at a considerably lower level than the surrounding country. It is necessary, therefore, to intercept the water further up the river at Hardwar, where it leaves the Himalayas, and to bring it in what may be termed an artificial river to the watershed of the Doab, whence it can conveniently be conveyed even to distant parts of the country by means of canals. In the Punjab the waters of the Sutlej, the Jhelum, and the Chenab have also been diverted by similar means, the latter being a work of special magnitude.

In 1905 the administration of the railways was placed under a Railway Board, consisting of a chairman and two other members, whilst the Member for Commerce and Industry takes charge of the work on the Governor-General's Council. The Board is subject to the Government of India and not to the provincial Governments. The Railway Companies may appoint their own staff, but the Government of India enforces its right of approval in the case of the higher offices. The chief officer of each railway is usually known as the Agent, and under him work the Traffic Manager, the Chief Engineer, the Locomotive Superintendent, and the Store-keeper, who are in charge of their respective departments. Some of the higher posts are recruited from England, but exceptions to this rule are often made when men of necessary qualifications can be found in the country.

Towards the middle of last century the Government of India began to see the necessity of supporting the construction and maintenance of rail-ways. Contracts, therefore, were entered into with certain companies in England for that purpose. Government granted the land free of charge and guaranteed the payment of interest at five per cent.; whatever profits there might be over and above that amount were to be shared between Government and the Company; Government had the right of buying up the railway at a fixed rate after the lapse of twenty-five years; and it also had the means of supervision over the management and working of the line. The companies concerned were the Great Indian Peninsula, the Madras, the Southern India, the East Indian, the Bombay, Baroda, and Central India, the Eastern Bengal, and what are now called the North-Western State Railway, and the Oudh and Rohilkband. Undoubtedly the work done by these companies was of immense value to the country, but for many reasons the financial results were unsatisfactory. The cost of construction proved more than was anticipated, there was a good deal of unnecessary extravagance, the supervision was faulty, and, above all, the Mutiny threw everything into disorder for a time. In 1870, Government instituted a scheme by which the State should take in hand the construction of railways, and a fixed sum was allocated for a certain period of years. The new scheme, however, did not prove a success. Progress was painfully slow, and eventually the old guarantee system was again adopted, with certain alterations, which were to the advantage of Government. During the last forty years many companies have taken a share in the development of Indian railways

under these conditions, and more and more money has been borrowed by the Government in the interests of the railways. The manner of raising these loans will be explained in the next chapter. Government has retained its right to buy up these lines thus guaranteed or assisted at the termination of a fixed period of time, and this is being done in many instances.

Much criticism has been levelled at the railway policy of the Government of India. Undoubtedly in the early days the contracts erred on the side of leniency, and there was also a certain laxity in supervision and some extravagance. The mere fact, however, that since the beginning of this century almost every year the railway budget, after deduction has been made for the payment of debt and working expenses, shows a profit, gives evidence of much wisdom and business-like capacity in the management of the railways. And, in addition, the examination of the balance-sheet is not the only test. In every country, and especially in one of vast distances such as India, the railways have increased very largely the wealth of the people. Lines also which could not possibly hope for satisfactory returns have been built in sparsely populated districts with the sole object of improving the means of transit, and of increasing the resources of those parts. Other lines, especially in the north-west, have been constructed primarily for military purposes, and from these losses must be anticipated. Above all, the great part played by railways in the prevention of famine is so important.

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