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CHAPTER II

POLITICAL FOUNDATION OF THE BRITISH DOMINATION

British East India Company

India is a land of variety, pulsating, alive and vibrant. Land of Vedas; knowledge, wisdom and mythology, India is linked to the philosophical wisdom and eternal spiritual quest of mankind. Some 5,000 years ago, when much of the world was still to be explored, India was alive with the advanced Indus Valley Civilization.

In earlier centuries, India was famous as "Soni Ki Chiriya (Golden Bird)." The innumerable tales of India's wealth and richness gravitated traders as well as invaders to her door steps. Her land frontier and expansive ocean served as important trade routes, linking East and West. The Arabs, Turks, Persians, Mongols, Dutch, French, English and the Muslims came to India for reasons of their own. Once touched by her inner spirits, many stayed. "India" is thus a "confederation of cultures". The "melting pot" in this sense is not new to her.

Like Muslims, the English also came as traders. What occurred between Dutch and English in late 1500's changed the course of India's political history for ever. The humble beginnings of British East India Company was authorized on the Dec. 31, 1599 by a royal decree. A trade company which was chartered in response to Danish price gouging of black pepper by 5 shillings was destined to lay the ground work for future British imperialism and colonization.¹
On August 24, 1600, Hector under Captain William Hawkins anchored in northwest seaport of Surat. Hawkins obtained the royal firman (authorization) to do trade for East India Co. from Mogul prince, Jehangir. Unimaginable in his wildest dreams, Jehangir had signed off the death warrant of Mughal dynasty and India.

The next three centuries were to witness gradual decline of the Mughal Empire and establishment of the British Raj (August 24, 1600 to August 15, 1947). The British traders ventured in India with motto of "trade not war". Thomas Roe, the English Ambassador firmly affirming to this said, "Let this be received as a rule, that if you will profit, seek it at sea in quiet trade and without controversy; it is an error to effect garrisons and land wars in India." However, having pushed Portuguese and Dutch traders off the Indian seas, the British soon expanded their trading posts (factory).

With high profit yields, The Company stepped up its land acquisition and, along with it, exploitation of the locals and their resources. In the first 100 years, The Company shareholders received over 25% dividends. Soon territories such as Madras and Bombay were acquired. By this time, almost the entire coast line of India (approximately 4500 miles) was controlled by the English. With this, the French supremacy in south India declined.

Inspite of a strong Mughal rule, India had simmering groups of independent states ruled by princely Rajas. Seizing the opportunity, the British played one kingdom against another (over 500 in number) and went on to expand their territories. While making independent alliances with various rulers, the British waged wars "one against another" and used men and money of their allies. The exploitation infested the Indian wealth, resources and people which had a incredible "termite effect" on India later on. Adam
Smith wrote prophetically that the formation of The Company was, "for the apportionment of the plunder of India."

Among the reasons why Queen Elizabeth I of England granted a chapter to 24 merchants to do business with India and legitimized the East India Company, three are foremost: To break Dutch eastern trade monopoly; to distinguish her traders from sea pirates, and to establish her dominance in India over other European powers. Although at onset, the last reason was purely intellectual it did override all others later on.

The power of The Company in India was put to test when it pitted its army against the Nawab of Bengal in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Soon they enthroned a puppet ruler. In 1760, there were three main territories with centers at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Due to its land size and larger revenue collection, Calcutta became the most important of the three. Robert Clive was appointed the first Governor of Bengal due to his valuable involvement in the Battle of Plassey.  

By 1763, English East India Company in India remained the only powerful European power eliminating her last European rival, the French. In 1765, Bengal rulers accepted The Company as the official ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. (Table II-1)

As the Mughal power plummeted further, the British became stronger. By middle of 19th century, The Company controlled over three-fifths of India. For the masses, domination and suppression from one firangi (foreigner) to another remained virtually unchanged. But their passion for freedom remained constant.
Table II-1
India In 1772

INDIA IN 1772

[Map of India in 1772 with various regions and territories labeled, including Maratha Confederacy, Mughal Territory, Afghan Supremacy, etc.]
Economic and Human Exploitation

The British invested nothing in India and divested as much as they could. The ever increasing and massive British Empire continued its exploitation of India from the beginning. Although at its early stages it couldn't have predicted its good fortune with India.

Why the economic and human exploitation in India? The answer to this question lies in change of British focus from India as a commercial concern to the vision of the empire building. As long as it was profitable to its directors, the British East India Company operated as a business enterprise. However growing industrialization or England required more trade and manufacturing and India with its massive population, rich raw materials supply and consumer market was very attractive. English wanted to expand their hegemony and imperialistic control over various parts of the world.

In the beginning the East India Company did trade for which it was chartered. It traded Indian goods abroad and made profits by shipping Indian spices, silk etc. It is interesting to note that they started the trade in India in protest of increase in price of black pepper by the Dutch East India Co., who had been trading with India already. With increased activities and profits, the Company began to give stiff competition to its European rivals and began to have armed conflicts with them. (Table II-2 and Table II-3).

In order to protect their trading interests in India, soon the Company began to intervene in the local Indian politics as well. It needed to gain the influence of various members of the ruling classes who wielded sovereign powers over some 500 principalities and kingdoms. In the battles of Plassey and Buxar, the Company fought with Bengal and in the outcome gained control over a large territory. Now, they had an important control
Table II-2
India at the time of the French-British Struggle
Table II-3
British Conquest 1837

British conquests in India up to 1837

1756-93 (Clive, Hastings and Cornwallis)
1798-1805 (Wellesley)
1805-37
* SINDHIA: Princes who became "allies under
Bombay Presidency control"

Legend:
- Bombay Presidency Capital
- 0 - 300 - 500 miles

Map showing the conquests of British India up to 1837, including territories like Bombay, Bengal, Calcutta, Madras, Ceylon, and regions such as Punjab, Rajasthan, and Sindhia.
of natural resources and large human resources who were expert artisans and trained workers.

The Company had been trading Indian handicrafts and products in the Europe which proved to be far more superior than the poor quality English product. The British industrial revolution in the early stages could not compete with fine quality products made in India. As a result there was a great resentment among the British merchant class and growing underclass of untrained workers.

The British government adopted the policy of protectionism at home that sent the Indian handicraft industry to a tail spin. With confident success in manufacturing, the British government adopted Laissez-faire (hands-off) capitalistic ideology. While they began to get a mastery over high volume, machine made products, the Indian handicraft industry began to amass huge financial losses. Without any future of livelihood prospects, the practice of many trades, that were passed on from generation to generation, suffered and soon there was a major decline and some were discontinued forever. The conditions of the artisans were deplorable and their plights went unheard and ignored. The patronage of the ruling classes also dwindled as they diverted their attention to court the British for their safety and petty and selfish favors. The handicraft industry began to have a steady decline under the British which has been revived in post independence India under various government schemes.

The British progressed with industrialization but lacked two things: raw material for their factories and consumer market for its products. For this, they needed a good, reliable transportation system throughout their widespread British Empire. A major network of railway system soon began to be built. The major railway expansion program
to link all corners of India began in which Allahabad proved to be vital, along with its
good waterways system.

The Company was badly in debt and needed the British government to bail out.
From that point on the British government began to take control of the power little by
little with many acts. The first Act of Parliament of 1773 did just that and established a
Supreme Court in Calcutta. The Company's accounts and correspondence now were privy
to Government's checking and review. The Governor of Bengal was called the governor-
general and presided over the Governors of Madras and Bombay. Warren Hastings
became the first governor-general of India. In a series of subsequent acts, Regulating Act
of 1784 more restrictions were imposed on the Company's activities and freedom, the
Governor-General's powers were widely expanded to act freely on behalf of the
Parliament.

In 1858, India formally came under the British rule. The newly acquired, "The
Jewel of the Crown" and her people were pulled toward the western industrialization. The
rise of industrialization and the need for labor force led to their travel across the seas to
England, Africa, Canada and America. The British domination and industrialization led to
the migration of thousands of Indians to other parts of the world in the nineteenth
century(1830's). The British pushed them to the Mauritius and the Caribbean islands.
Most of the Indians went to the British Dutch, the French West-Indies and the Guineas as
indentured laborers. The Indians were sent to other British colonies to build
infrastructure, lay railroad lines, and fight the wars. The subsequent generations of such
groups of Indian workers or soldiers formed a new class of immigrants in countries
outside India. A large part of them remained after completion of their contractual services
and formed a part of the larger community.
British transition from Imperialism to Colonialism began a *rule with an iron fist* despite of emerging opposition of the Indian people. A general perception of the British government about India included that it was not a homogenous nation like England or France and thus was easy to break. Although this would prove to be wrong with nationalistic fervor that later led to its final freedom from the British.  

From the beginning of their administrative control, the British created a two tier bureaucratic system. Robert Clive initiated this system that built an infrastructure of corruption, and bribery that is present even to this day. The British kept the rubber stamp rule of the Indian Nawabs and Rajas and increased their real control. The British demanded money for every things and interfered when they did not get their way. The feudal system, under which the Indian farmers and villagers lived, became more treacherous and oppressive for now it had to feed itself and the British above them. This way, life and condition of the oppressed did not change, it became even worse. The British became richer by taxing, trading privileges, loans, bribes, favors and kickbacks. Indians were getting poorer and poorer while the British began to get rich.

In India, the British squeezed both rich and poor. Like Europe, India also had tax farming. In India under this system, Zemindars, taxed farmers within its territory, collected the taxes and paid to the government.

However, their was one main difference between the European system and the Indian system. In India, although Zemindars did not own the land, they had the hereditary rights to tax and collect. Under the English system, farm land ownership of the farmers, was arbitrarily transferred to the Zemindars. Now, the farmers not only lost their lands, they were tenants who worked for Zemindars and still pay taxes. Their meager existence became even more precarious. In bad harvest years, there was no mercy or exceptions. The taxes were levied and non-payment meant loosing the basic means of livelihood.
Burdened with loan sharks, lack of education, the farmers fell in cruel hands of their own people. They fell into the vicious cycle of poverty, destined to bring doom to them and many future generations who were forced to inherit and repayment the debts. The new zemindari system became more oppressive under the tutelage of the British.

The rampant corruption led Robert Clive to write this about Calcutta, "Corruption, Licentiousness & a want of Principle seen to have possess'd the minds of al the Civil Servant, by frequent bad Examples they have grown callous, Rapacious & Luxurious beyond Conception." Clive's grave corruption required a parliamentary inquiry and in the end Clive was extremely depressed, lonely and committed suicide.\(^8\)

The intrusion of British at almost every level of their daily life continued to be overbearing. However, no other governor general implemented the British colonial policy of expediency in India with greater fervor than Dalhousie.\(^9\) Under the Governor-Generalship of Lord Dalhousie, more and more feudal state systems were eliminated to expand the British rein. Only a hand full of largely independent, though fully under the British central government control, were allowed to exist.\(^10\)

Dalhousie wished to "tidy up" India.\(^11\) Dalhousie began to confiscate massive tracts of land under, land without "proper" title of ownership, scheme. He consolidated feudal kingdoms under the annexation policy of "lapse," known as the Doctrine of Lapse. Greed, gross ignorance and misunderstanding of Indian cultural intricacies led to countless incidents of impropriety and injustice.\(^12\)

The vicious example of the "Doctrine of Lapse" was evident in one particular case of Jhansi. When the King of Jhansi, Gangadhar Rao, died in 1853 without a biological
status. Even though, the King had adopted Damodar Rao as his son-heir prior to his death, it did not count as the legitimate successor under the Doctrine of Lapse.\textsuperscript{13} This doctrine was later abolished under Lord Canning, Dalhousie's successor, in his healing darbar of 1859. Implementing this and many other policies, he earned the nickname of "Clemency" Canning.\textsuperscript{14}

Kings, stripped of their actual powers were allowed to keep only their titles and revenues. But even this was not honored when the Maratha Peshwa died and his adopted heir, the Nana Sahib was refused both title and pension.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1856, before Dalhousie finished his term in the office, he went further and annexed a much larger state of Oudh, later United Province. Since 1848, he dreamed of controlling it and considered it "on the high-road to be taken under our management."\textsuperscript{16} This time, the annexation of the area and final removal of the Nawab was in pretax of Nawab's excessive and many transgressions against his subjects. Although the plan was supposed to provide protection to farmers and citizens from their feudal rulers, it did not. From one layer of ruler, now the underprivileged had two. In order to lodge their complain they had to go through the same layer that was imposing oppression on them. There was no avenue for justice. Furthermore, the former feudal rulers now had to please, bribe and take side of the British bureaucrats to get favors, acceptance, positions or titles. The British administrators exploited both end of the situation to their best advantage.

What would be the result of ruthless, unfair and blatant British colonial policies on indigenous population? Could anyone predict its outcome? If anyone had the crystal ball, it had to be Lord Canning, who replaced Dalhousie in 1856. In this context, it is worth quoting part of his 1855 speech to the Court of Directors of the East India Company in
London. "We must not forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a cloud may arise, at first no bigger than a man's hand, but which growing bigger an bigger, may at last threaten to overwhelm us with ruin." 17

That Dalhousie's policy of annexation contributed decisively to the uprising and rebellion is shared by some historians. 18 Inspite of all what was going on, no one could have predicted anti-British rebellion. As late as April, 1857, Lady Canning in conversing with Queen Victoria ridiculed rumors of mass Christianization of all Indians within three years by her husband, Lord Canning and further reported about circulation of chupatties from district to district as a code to start an anti-British rebellion.

Though it seemed totally ridiculous to think about any dent to the British holdings at the time, within 5 months, the Queen sounded worried as she wrote to the King of the Belgians. "We are in sad anxiety about India, which engrosses all our attention." In light of the Indian Prince Dileep Singh, who was dispossessed and grew up with her own sons, she further wrote, "What can it be for him to hear his fellow countrymen called fiends and monsters?" 20

Under the British Raj, the exploitation and plunder accelerated. The industrial revolution in England was largely fed by Indian raw materials: cotton, indigo, jute, and other commodities of steel, tea and coffee, etc. With this, the British advanced massive infrastructure and communications projects and controlled everything of value in the country.
Dissension and Discontentment Among the Indians

By the end of 1856, most groups, castes, and classes were in some form or other were effected by the British policies. Working middle class that served the British bureaucracy and westernized Indians seemed to be the British loyalists. However, the Princely clans of Oudh, and other territories who had lost their kingdom to the British policy were waiting for an appropriate opportunity. The British provided the gunpowder for such an offensive.

The British were different than any other invaders who came to India. The British came to trade and rule but not to settle. Others who came before them, assimilated despite of their religious and cultural differences, became part of India and Indians. the British stood apart with arrogant sense of superiority. English women came to India in search of a suitable English match. Their children were sent away to British boarding schools and the parents in India lived segregated lives in a replicated English style.

The British desired to rule a "westernized India". Analogous to Jehangir's firman, this was the death warrant for British Raj. Michael Edwardes analyzes the War of Independence as "Meeting of Two Dying Systems," British India and the traditional India. The British began to bring about many social reforms in India propelled by negative British view of Hinduism and its practices. Anglo-Saxon British, seething with their Christian faith, viewed Hindu faith contemptuously as paganistic, barbaric and uncivilized. They took upon themselves this as "White Man's burden" and a moral obligation to rid the society of these ills.(Table II-5)

With a zeal to modernize and westernize, the British attacked the most fundamental and integral Indian social order based on caste and religion. In the early
The Company's Bengal army, 1757-1857

In 1757 the Bengal army consisted of a few hundred British, recruited in Britain by the Company. Clive added companies of sepoys, each with a British officer in command and a British sergeant. These were later formed into sepoy regiments. After 1758 five regiments were organized, and within a few years there were many more, grouped in brigades with the Company's British units.

A sepoy regiment consisted of:

Regimental H.Q.:
- British commanding officer
- Senior Indian officer
- British special officers (e.g. surgeon)
- British senior N.C.O.

5 companies commanded by:
- British officer
- Indian officer
- British N.C.O.

4 platoons of 50 sepoys in each company commanded by 1 senior and 4 other Indian N.C.O.s

A brigade consisted of:
- 7 regiments of infantry
- 1 troop of cavalry
- 1 company of artillery

Note: Exact numbers of British would vary according to local custom, availability and quality of Indian officers.

The Bengal army after 1765 consisted of 3 brigades.

Though uniforms changed and the size of the armies varied from time to time, this pattern of organization was basically still the rule in 1857.
1800's the British banned many practices in the society such as Sati Pratpha, and attempted to infiltrate the practice of Thagi and robbery by groups who worshipped Goddess Kali.

Unlike other previous invaders, the British, for the first time, had amassed control over a wide territory of India. They began to see themselves as "Romans among Barbarians." As land acquisition increased so did the need of a strong army. It soon had the Indian foot soldiers (200,000) with British commanding officers (40,000).\(^2\) (Table II-5).

The question was why would anyone join the foreign army? Within the existing caste hierarchy, fighting was considered the second best profession after priesthood. Secondly, those who joined the army did so more for prestige and status in the society than meager salary that it paid. With an army title and the Company's backing, they were able to exert their influence in their villages and town.\(^3\)

All three British presidencies, Bombay, Madras and Bengal in that order raised the army units called Sepoys (stemming from Hindi term, Sipahi, meaning soldier). There were many reasons for the Sipahi mutiny that led to the War of Independence in 1857. When Robert Clive first started to raise the Bengal army, he recruited soldiers from all over India and from all castes and religion. He also trained them in same way as the British soldiers were. With a systematic fashion he divided the army in platoons and brigade but kept equal proportion of people with different religions and divided them into different companies. This strategy was devised so they could not band together against their officers. But with enormous increase in army size and culturally and religiously insensitive policies began to show signs of soldier discontentment.
Table II-6
India 1837-57
Driven with the Christian zeal, army officers took upon every opportunity to seek new converts and proselytize them to Christian faith. This led to discontentment among the soldiers. They were increasingly becoming unhappy with arbitrary military requirements that limited the practices required by various castes and possibility of excommunication from the caste status. Hindu society was based on caste system, a social matrix that was founded on division of labor to sustain a whole society. (Table II-6)

Within this hierarchical system, a Brahmin of priest class was on the top. The belief that achievement of this caste had come after many reincarnations and it was the final one before one could achieve Moksha and enter the heaven, was an important one. Since most of the sipahis were from the Brahmin class they saw Christianization a grave threat to that final Moksha.

Table II-6
Hindu Caste System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRAHMAN</th>
<th>PRIEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KHASHTRIYA</td>
<td>WARRIOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAISHYA</td>
<td>BUSINESS CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHUDRA</td>
<td>SERVING CLASS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unwilling to learn and respect the culture, "the British officials openly encouraged the Bible and disparaged the holy books of India." Members of the British parliament openly espoused to establish Christianity. There had been discontentment among the Indian soldiers before on interference on caste issues. In 1806 in Vellore, the Sikh soldiers
rose up against orders requiring them to shave off their beards and remove caste marks etc.\textsuperscript{25} Earlier some years before, a regiment was disbanded. The soldiers refused to over overseas, as it was not allowed by their caste and would have meant excommunication.

In 1824, one of the Bengal army regiment refused to move to Burma when separate cooking pots for various casts were not transported along with the regiment. Over 1 dozen men were hanged and hundreds were sent to 14 years of hard labor. Subsequently in 1842 war in Afghanistan and 1843 conquest of Sindh, lack of leadership led to death of thousands of soldiers and many refused to go abroad when the foreign duty allowance was canceled. Similar allowance was withdrawn after successful fighting against the Sikhs in 1845 and later in 1852 again, troops refused to go overseas to Burma.\textsuperscript{26}

Soon, Bentinck and Macaulay's initiatives introduced English and western education system in India. With English language, the Indians who spoke over 18 languages and some 800 dialects now had a common language. This produced a special elite class of English "Babu-sahibs" and Mem-sahibs." A prototype of native Indians behaving as their English colonizers English emerged. Among many terms to describe this interesting (Brown outside, white inside) phenomena are, "Indian Oreos", "Coconut" and to use Mark Tully's term "Powder milk Indians."\textsuperscript{27}

With English language and western education, Indians were allowed to compete for civil service jobs. Since all the jobs were controlled by the British, procurement of government civil service jobs was much desired. Economic prosperity combined with prospects of prestige and higher social status was now accessible for educated Indians. The Hindus went for it while Muslims regarded English as "language of infidel" and remained behind. The economic prosperity of the Hindus began to incite the Muslims and
soon an invisible rift began to create a rift whose impact would be evident on the events leading to the partition of India.

The danger to social order was foremost in the Indians minds. The railroad, telegraphic communication progress in name of modernization and work equity meant working side by side with people of different castes. This concept of equality, threatened to demolish the status-quo caste system where Brahmin and the untouchables would have to co-mingle as co-workers.\textsuperscript{28}

In 1857 the British decided to replace the old musket known as Brown Bess with the new Enfield rifle (Table II-7). This rifle had a much longer range and infinitely greater accuracy. However, to load the rifle, they had to bite the greased cartridge. Since the soldiers believed, and rightly so, that cartridge was made with either cow or pig's fat, they rebelled against its use. The cow is sacred to the Hindus and pig is unclean to Muslims. This attempt was viewed by the soldiers as another attempt to proselytize leading them to full fledged rebellion against the British.\textsuperscript{29}
This percussion-lock rifle was produced in the British Ordnance Factory at Enfield near London. It came into use in the British army in 1853. Shortly afterwards it was sent out for trials for the Company army in India. The 'riffing' on the inside of the barrel made the shot more accurate and gave the weapon a greater range. It was an enormous improvement on the Brown Bess smooth-bore flintlock musket which had been the standard weapon of all British forces since the early eighteenth century.

A greased cartridge

1. The soldier tears open the end of the cartridge with his teeth.
2. He pours the powder down the muzzle of his rifle. Then he thrusts the bullet, still wrapped in the cartridge paper which makes it a tight fit, into the muzzle.
3. He takes his ramrod from its slot beneath the rifle barrel, and rams paper, bullet and powder to the bottom of the barrel.
Chapter II

NOTES


2. Surat is a sea port north of Bombay

3. Charles II had acquired Bombay as dowry in 1661 when he married Chatherine of Braganza of Portugal. In 1668, the British East India Co. started to rent the Island for mere sum of 10 pound a year.


5. Indenture labors-Five years contract for fixed wages which was renewable for another five years with either the same or another employer. After 10 years of total service, the worker was entitled to passage home.


10. Edwardes, p. 149.

11. Rawding, p. 16

12. Edwardes p. 149

15. Rawding, pp. 16-17.
22. Rawding, pp. 9-10.
23. Rawding, pp. 11-12.
29. Edwardes, pp. 149-152.