

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The importance of Lord Curzon's life and career to a student of modern Indian history cannot be underestimated. British imperialism reached its high noon with Curzon and in him was embodied both its meanest and finest manifestations. His impact on India lingers politically with the Partition of Bengal, and elsewhere through the works of the Department of Archaeology and the reformed universities.

There has been no dearth of biographers for Curzon. Among them Kenneth Rose devotes his research to Curzon's early years culminating with the Viceregal appointment; David Dilks, Lovat Fraser and Michael Edwards deal with Curzon's tenure in India and Sir Harold Nicolson tackles the last phase in Curzon's career. Lord Ronaldshay and Leonard Mosley alone attempt a study of Curzon's entire life. Lord Ronaldshay's three-volume official biography (1928) based largely on the conventional political historical data does not, I feel, take sufficient account of the crucial factor of individual motivation in history. In the light of present-day theory which places greater emphasis on the psyche, this account becomes, as a consequence, an insufficient explanation.

Mr. Mosley's biography, which appeared in 1960, has claimed to have attempted specifically a study of Curzon not merely as a figure of history but also as a human being - complex, temperamental, afflicted with constant pain. Lord Beaverbrook put the Curzon papers at the author's disposal and he has, as he has claimed, had

permission to use letters, notes and memoranda which were not available to Curzon's previous biographers. Quoting extensively from the personal and intimate papers of his life, Mosley has produced a lively and dramatic insight into Curzon the man. Mr. Mosley, however, I feel has not done sufficient justice to Curzon's career in India nor has he been always precise, as we shall see. Devoting less than four out of eighteen chapters on the Viceroyalty, Mr. Mosley seems to concentrate largely on the Viceroy's clash with Kitchener and the Home Government which finally hounded him out of India. There is very little on Curzon's educational reforms or the Partition of Bengal.

I began my study of Curzon the Viceroy and the man almost seven years ago. I was intrigued as to why such a 'superior man' should have failed to impose his judgement upon either the Government he served or the people he had been called to rule. Curzon's knowledge, brilliance, energy and zeal were unquestionable yet he returned from India a humiliated man. What went wrong? Was it that Destiny which had smiled so generously in his early years crowning him Viceroy before he was 40 - withdrew her favour? Or was the failure a more personal one? A flaw in his own character which soured the gifts?

I was particularly intrigued by the invincible superhuman image that Curzon both as a man and as a Viceroy was at such pains to maintain at all times. A spinal injury in schooldays forced him to be strapped up in a steel harness for the rest of his life. Pain racked him by day and robbed him of sleep at night. Yet the glutton for self-punishment that he was, he slaved for as much as fourteen hours a day, some of it on doing chores which could have well been done by subordinates.

Having made the mistake of inviting the ruthless Kitchener as his Commander-in-Chief against all well-meaning advice, he insisted on returning to India to resume his second term. The controversy was smouldering and Curzon was well aware that the Home Government would side with the soldier when the crunch came. Besides, his first wife Mary was seriously ill and could never hope to rejoin him in India. But discretion was never the better part of valour with Curzon. Return to India he did, like a Christian martyr to the stake. He declared, "I was aware of the severe struggle, I felt it a duty, however, to the Government of which I had been the head for so long not to desert it in the hour of trial but to sacrifice all personal consideration to the necessity of fighting its battles." But was it merely duty that impelled Curzon, but also another chance to prove that he could battle on with constant challenges and emerge superior? As a boy at Eton he confessed to experiencing 'sweet revenge' by 'scoring off' against the school masters. He defied them, broke rules, got thrown out of class and yet triumphed over them by winning the prizes. Was he trying to carry these infantile power games into adult life? To prove to others and to himself that George Curzon could break the rules, take on hazards and yet triumph?

The 'superior person' label had stuck to him since his Oxford days. He had laughed it off then, full of the serene confidence of one who feels he is superior because he thinks he is. He was heir to Kedleston Hall which by a coincidence of fate was the model for Calcutta's Viceregal seat, a fact which first turned his thoughts to the Viceroyalty. His family, though not wealthy, traced its descent in an unbroken line to the Norman conquest. At Eton he had won an

extraordinary number of honours and while he was still at Oxford his speeches were being quoted in Parliament. As a young M.P., he undertook journeys to far-flung outposts of the Empire. The books he wrote on his travels earned him the reputation of one of the best informed men on the Empire.

On becoming Viceroy at 39, Curzon seemed to have gone a long way to fulfil the great expectations both of himself and of his admiring coterie of friends and relations. In India, the ego was fed further. Everywhere the Viceroy went he was treated like a God descended from the skies. He soon began to believe that he was indeed the monarch he was made out to be. He put hackles up of senior civil servants scolding them for apathy and then refused to delegate any work. He infuriated the powerful interests in the British Army by exposing soldiers' attacks on natives. But the idea was hardly to win favour with natives, for simultaneously the Viceroy was busy putting up memorials to fan memories of Indian outrages on the British. Eventually he took on the mighty machinery of the Home Government itself, acting as though his was the final word on Indian affairs. When the Secretary of State tried to protest, the Viceroy threatened resignation. On more than one instance he even went over the Cabinet to wire directly to the King himself.

The question that needs to be asked is why did the Viceroy allow the ego to swell to such extraordinary dimensions where he lost control of himself? On June 17, 1904 A.C. Godley from the India Office wrote to Ampthill about Curzon saying, "He seems almost to have lost sight of the merits of the various questions, in which he has differed from the cabinet or from our Council(or they from him), and to be absorbed in a struggle for prerogative, control,

independence. In any of these disputed matters, the thought that seems to rise in his mind is that...'I have given my opinion, I have even reiterated it in two or more despatches, I am the Viceroy of India, and, confound you, how do you dare to set your opinion against mine?'"

On one hand the Viceroy had declared it was "not statesmanship to ignore public opinion" in India and, on the other, in Gokhale's words, ended up "trampling more systematically upon that opinion than any of his predecessors". He hailed the Indian princes as colleagues and partners and then humiliated them by publicly scolding them in terms that would make a schoolboy squirm. He made Indians aware of their glorious heritage by setting up the Archaeological Survey and then wounded their feelings by telling them in a speech that the ideal of truth was a Western conception. He could calmly survey the prodigious outcry raised over the Partition of Bengal and declare that he found in the piteous overtones not one single line of argument. Why? Was it because he had begun to believe that he was omnipotent? Had the metamorphosis from an Under Secretary in Britain to Queen Victoria's representative on the Indian subcontinent been too much for him?

Such irrational, self-damaging behaviour cannot be explained by normal, tangible data. One has to delve beyond to the motivating imperative. What were the influences of his formative years and to what extent did they define the adult before us? To find an answer I decided to attempt a sort of psycho-historical study of Curzon's complex personality.

Historians increasingly recognise the necessity of studying human beings as products of a dynamic interplay between the psyche,

the body and environmental influences. It is believed that human beings try to fashion a pattern of behaviour for themselves based upon their own environment, childhood and expectations. They try to achieve a balance between their own and other people's expectations of themselves.

In Curzon's case it is generally accepted that the early influences were very powerful and helped in no small way to shape his subsequent life and career. As though conscious of his special destiny, Curzon has left for biographers notes on various periods of his life. Based on this and on other research, biographers have noted that his childhood was clouded by an indifferent mother, a stern father and a savage governess. This was the premise upon which I started my work. I was prompted to do so because I felt that no one had tried to adequately relate the effect of the infantile influences upon his adult behaviour.

Over the years the impression has been built up that Curzon's parents were callously indifferent to him. His mother Lady Blanche Scarsdale has been particularly singled out for her rejection of her son. Biographer Leonard Mosley says that when Blanche was first shown her new-born son and heir, she had looked upon him with, "...the cold surprise that was to be the quality of her attitude towards her son for the rest of his life. She handed him back to his wet nurse and asked that he should be brought back for further inspection the following morning." Kenneth Rose is less harsh than Mosley but he too does not absolve Blanche of her disregard to her son. He says:

Lady Scarsdale too kept a diary during succeeding years. It contains details of family comings and goings, the weather, texts of sermons, the clothes she wore each day and successive winners of the Derby. But there is nothing of her intimate thoughts, not a word to suggest that her children ever caused her anxiety or brought her pride. She remains an elusive figure.

All this had initially led me to trace Curzon's authoritarian behaviour in adult life to the ego-diminishment he had been subjected to in childhood. The compulsive determination to have his own way, it seemed, stemmed from those childhood tussles when the authority in command had won out while he had been left mangled and bruised. I concluded that this was why, when Curzon reached a position of command, he was determined not to let others win. The repressed hostility engendered by parental neglect and Miss Paraman's cruelty had sought and found an outlet in rebelling against authority in general. It could have also been a cause for his vaulting ambition taking the form of dreams that destiny had chosen him for some great purpose.

But to my amazement, while digging up the Curzon archives in England, I came across evidence to show that Blanche Scarsdale was in no way indifferent to her children and certainly not to her eldest son. Among the recently acquired Curzon Additional papers at the India Office Library, I came across a 15-page handwritten note by Blanche which is very modern in its expression of anxiety. It makes nonsense of any theory that she was not intensely concerned with her eldest son. Contrary to Mr. Mosley's claim that Blanche handed her son to a wet-nurse, we have clear evidence that she breast-fed him.

I went to Kedleston to learn more about the sadistic and vindictive governess Miss Paraman. Leonard Mosley has said that there is no doubt that Curzon was "permanently damaged" by the treatment he received at the hands of Miss Paraman. Kenneth Rose claims "to the end of his days Curzon believed that he had

passed a miserable childhood". Lord Ronaldshay endorses that Curzon's ". . . early years were not a time of unmixed happiness because they were dominated by a strange and forceful influence in the person of the lady who for ten years had charge of the upbringing of George Curzon and the four members of the family next to him in age". David Dilks claims "Lord Scarsdale appears to have been so entirely detached from his children's upbringing that he did not realise their plight. Nor did his wife, whom George worshipped but from afar."

In the light of new findings on Blanche Scarsdale, I felt Paraman's role in her children's life must come under renewed scrutiny. The question was whether the mother who took tender pride in her son could have given blanket control over him to a woman without having made proper inquiries about her nature. Aware of the role a Victorian governess played in a child's life, surely Blanche would not have blindly entrusted her son to a mother surrogate? Supposing for a moment, that Paraman had made a condition that there was to be no interference in her management of the children, even then the very physical constraints of the family wing at Kedleston would have made it impossible for her to embark upon or perpetrate a reign of terror. Curzon has said not one of the children summoned up courage to go upstairs and tell their father and mother of their plight.

I had taken cognizance of the fact that all the biographers had based their conclusions on Curzon's account of Miss Paraman. According to Mr. Kenneth Rose who had access to the Kedleston archives, Miss Paraman left all her money to Curzon's older sister, Sophy which points to the fact that she could not have had anyone

else whom she held dearer. In fact it was Mr. Kenneth Rose who first started me thinking about the authenticity of the Paraman phenomena. In course of a conversation he hinted at the possibility of the Curzon account being exaggerated. Though there is evidence to show that Paraman wrote several letters to Curzon while he was at his first prep school at Wixenford, not one of them survives. We know that Blanche left a gold necklace in her will to Miss Paraman. Curzon's brother Alfred's diary, soon after their mother's death in 1875 records, "Tuesday, 20th April. Very fine day. Papa gives Miss Paraman a gold necklace of dear Mama's which she said she wished Miss Paraman to have." The 3rd Viscount Scarsdale also gave me access to this excerpt from Alfred's diary.

Blanche Scarsdale's paper called for a fresh examination of existing papers relating to Curzon's early years and they clearly show that Curzon's parents cared deeply for their children and particularly Curzon. For one whole year before sending Curzon to his school in Wixenford the parents correspond with another parent, a Mrs. Phillips, who had a son there. Blanche Scarsdale even seems to have conveyed some of her anxiety for her son's well-being to Mary Powles, the Headmaster's wife.

For a moment let us go back to the premise that Paraman was the Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde Curzon has made her out to be. If so, even normal restorative energy of youth could hardly hope to wipe out the scale of humiliation he was made out to suffer. The actuality of the past would always remain undiminished. But strangely, the ten-year-old Curzon, emerging from a three-year reign of terror, appears apparently unscathed. The letters written

from Wixenford show that his spirit is buoyant and his confidence boundless. Soon after reaching school he drops and breaks his watch, a very precious commodity in those times. But, unlike a child fearing harsh punishment, he casually informs his mother of the damage.

The thought must then arise why did Curzon take recourse to such myths about his childhood? These are some of the questions, I have tried to answer in my thesis.

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This work is a study of the first two phases of Curzon's life. It is primarily concerned, as the title suggests, with Curzon the man rather than Curzon the administrator. I have not sought to deal with every development in India concerning his Viceroyalty. That would have been not only impractical but also unnecessary. I have attempted to follow the main events and tried to study the effects of the infantile influences upon them.

Curzon's life falls into three phases: the early years as a preparation for the high office he felt Destiny had demarked for him, the Indian Viceroyalty and the final twenty years of his life from 1905 to 1925 when he came tantalizingly near to achieving the British Prime Ministership. I have restricted my study to the first two phases believing them to be adequate for my purpose of reconstructing the man: the early years dealing with the circumstances of birth, childhood and adolescence and the second with how their dynamic interplay shaped the adult. I have not sought to deal with the last phase of Curzon's life. That would have been ambitious and not strictly necessary.

Even in the first 46 years of Curzon's life that I cover, I follow an episodic and selective treatment, concentrating on events which show how the adult was defined by the child within.

As the focus of my study is on the man rather than the administrator, I have relied more on private papers than on official records. I have gone through the fourteen reels of microfilms of the Curzon Papers at the National Archives, New Delhi, containing demi-official correspondence relating to the years of his Viceroyalty. In England I consulted the Curzon Additional Papers deposited by Kedleston Trustees at the India Office Library in 1977. These are papers of a family and personal nature and include letters written during his years in the Kedleston nursery, Wixenford, Eton, Oxford and beyond. They include Curzon's correspondence with his second wife Grace, Lady Blanche Scarsdale's paper describing Curzon's birth, various notes by Curzon for his biographers, personal diaries, scrap-books, note-books on early travels, private cash-books, servants' wage-books, social engagement books etc. I also consulted the Walter Lawrence Papers for a further dimension on the Viceroyalty.

The Mary Curzon Papers are with her only surviving daughter Lady Alexandra Metcalfe and not generally available. They are being edited for publication by Professor John Bradley and were kindly loaned to me by Mr. Nigel Nicolson with permission from Lady Alexandra Metcalfe.

I consulted Curzon's and Lord Scarsdale's letters to Oscar Browning which are among the Oscar Browning Papers currently lodged in the Eastbourne Central Library and Kitchener's

letters to Major Marker (written at the height of his controversy with Curzon) which are at the British Museum.

To understand something of the manners and mores of the period, I read biographical accounts of Curzon's contemporaries, associates and other Victorians who dominated the upper-class scene to which he belonged. I have gone through sociological and psychological accounts of Victorian life, particularly those dealing with sex, family, marriage and public schools. I have also tried to dip into accounts by British civil servants and Indian nationalists, both Curzon's contemporaries and those who went before but shaped his imperialistic thinking.

Though the thrust of my study is on the psyche, I have taken into account official records of the Government of India, consulting the relevant Educational, Municipal and Public series in the Home Department and the Secret and Political series in the Military Department of Curzon's Viceroyalty.

I have had a series of interviews with a psychiatrist and talked to Curzon's relations and associates, the 3rd Viscount Scarsdale, Mr. Nigel Nicolson, Sir Brandon Rhys-Williams and Mr. Kenneth Rose in an attempt to go to the psychological roots of this extraordinary man.