

The East India Company Raj,

1772-1850

In 1772, determined at last to put an end to the chaos and fiscal disorder its intervention had precipitated in Bengal, the Company's directors appointed Warren Hastings, a man with a distinguished record of diplomatic and commercial service in India, as the first governor-general of the company's Indian territories. Subordinating the other presidencies to a new capital established in Calcutta, Hastings set about the task of creating an ordered system of government for British India. Hastings's thirteen years at the helm of government were far from untroubled. Indeed, throughout his years in office he had to contend with a divided council in Calcutta whose majority opposed his every move, while after his return to England his actions were made the subject of an embittered impeachment trial in the House of Commons. As a spectacle, for Hastings was ultimately acquitted, the trial dominated British public life for years. Nevertheless, Hastings laid an enduring foundation for the British Raj in India. This chapter will begin by examining the structures of governance established by Hastings, and his successor Lord Cornwallis (1785-93), in British-ruled Bengal. It will then ask how and why the British went on to conquer the entire Indian subcontinent in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and it will conclude by assessing the relationships that grew up between what was known as the 'Company Bahadur', as though it were a Mughal grandee, and its Indian subjects in the years up to 1850.

FOUNDATION OF COLONIAL RULE

When Hastings took office, the East India Company's agents knew nothing about India apart from the requirements of trade, and they almost never ventured outside their coastal enclaves. With rare exceptions, among them Hastings himself, they knew no Indian languages. Within the existing British Empire, furthermore, rule over a vast indigenous population such as that of India was unprecedented. With the partial exception of Ireland, Britain's previous imperial expansion, in the West Indies and North America, had involved the dispossession of the native peoples in favour of settlers from Europe and Africa. Hence, as they confronted their new responsibilities in India, the British found themselves sailing in wholly uncharted waters. Their difficulties were further enhanced by the reluctance of the Company's agents in India to abandon their profitable trading activities for the uncertain advantages of government. Linked to the appointment of Hastings as governor-general, therefore, was the first of a series of Regulating Acts, which endeavoured to subordinate the Company to the British Government, and to impose upon its agents the obligation of ruling, as Edmund Burke, the Whig statesman and political philosopher, put it in the debates over Hastings's impeachment, as 'trustees' for the people of India. This subordination took institutional form in 1783 with the creation of the Board of Control, whose president sat in the British Cabinet.

From the outset the British rejected, as inappropriate for a conquered land, their own system of government, or even that of the American colonies, which had representative assemblies under a royal governor. This decision was reinforced by a conviction of India's enduring cultural difference from Britain. As Hastings described his 'plan' to the directors in 1772, the objective should be to 'adapt our Regulations to the Manners and Understandings of the People, and the Exigencies of the Country, adhering as closely as we are able to their ancient uses and Institutions'. This was, however, easier said than done. Were the English meant to rule India 'despotically' as they believed was customary practice in the 'Orient'? Were they arduously to reconstruct the administrative system of the Mughal Empire? Were they to search out supposed legal principles which had 'continued unchanged from remotest antiquity'; or were

they to follow in the footsteps of their immediate predecessors, the Nawabs of Bengal? Both principle and practice were at stake as the British debated these questions. On one thing, however, the British were agreed. They could not avow a preference for 'despotism', for a commitment to the 'rule of law', in their view, defined them as a 'civilized' nation, and so alone could give legitimacy to their Raj. Yet colonial rule by its very nature could not help but create its own version of the 'despotic'.

Two fundamental convictions shaped Hastings's jurisprudence. One was that, as the historian Bernard Cohn has written, there existed in India 'a fixed body of laws, codes that had been set down or established by "law givers" and that over time these had become corrupted by accretions, interpretations, and commentaries'. Hastings saw his task as that of restoring these 'original' texts in all their purity, and so freeing the British from dependence upon Indian legal scholars trained in Sanskrit or Arabic. Hastings further believed that there existed distinct and separate codes of law for Hindus and for Muslims. In civil suits regarding marriage, inheritance and the like, he wrote, 'the Laws of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans, and those of the Shaster with respect to the Gentoos [Hindus] shall be invariably adhered to'. This insistence on a fundamental difference between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' reduced a variety of sectarian communities characterized by distinct customs and practices to two, each defined through its textual tradition. In so doing Hastings inaugurated the practice of seeing these categories as central to the organizing of Indian society; and this, in turn, helped shape how Indians constructed identities for themselves in subsequent years.

The 'recovery' of these so-called 'ancient' usages was no easy task. Indeed, the arduous process of compilation made clear the artificially contrived nature of the whole enterprise. In 1776 Hastings convened a panel of Sanskrit legal scholars (*pandits*) to compile a 'Code of Gentoo Laws'. The *pandits*, as N. B. Halhed described their work, first 'picked out sentence by sentence from various originals in the Shanscrit [*sic*] language' legal decisions on different topics. Then, as no Englishman at the time knew Sanskrit, these passages were 'next translated literally into Persian' and from that tongue they were rendered into English by Halhed himself. Within a decade the jurist Sir William Jones had mastered the Sanskrit language and so set in

motion the 'Orientalist' scholarship which was to make accessible to all the ancient past of India. The insistence upon a 'fixed' body of law, necessary if the British were to administer Hindu law, inevitably privileged Brahmanical texts over local usages that varied by caste and region, and gave Brahman *pandits*, attached to the courts as 'law-finders' until 1864, an unprecedented role in decision making. The whole, complementing the earlier growth of Brahman political power, brought about the 'Brahmanization' of Indian law. Legal procedure was further transformed by the introduction of English case law, in which individual suits were brought to trial before a judge, in place of traditional procedures based on mediation and consensus.

Hastings also took the first steps towards the establishment of a distinctively colonial form of executive governance – that of the 'Collector' in charge of a district. Mughal precedents existed for such an administrative structure, which made it attractive in Hastings's eyes, but the Mughal system had ceased to function under the Bengal nawabs. Hastings was further hampered by the lack of trained British personnel. As Clive had observed as early as 1765, when the British first took over the diwani, 'To trust these collections upon which our security and credit depend to the management of the Company's servants totally unacquainted with the business would have been a dangerous and at this time would have been termed a criminal experiment.' Hence revenue administration during the Hastings era had to be left, for the most part, to the old Indian officeholders. Change was to come only under Lord Cornwallis, who, untainted by his defeat in America, came to India with a mandate for reform. Frustrated, baffled, and angry at the 'intricacy and confusion' of the district accounts left in Indian hands, Cornwallis displaced all senior Indian officeholders. Making the Indians scapegoats for the credulity and complicity in misrule of the English, Cornwallis averred that, 'Every native of Hindostan, I verily believe, is corrupt.' Formalized by the Company charter of 1793, all civil appointments above a certain level of pay were to be held by 'convenanted' servants, all of whom were to be of European British origin. This was to be the start of a policy of racist exclusion in employment that was to characterize the Raj almost to its end.

As the name makes clear, the collector's primary function was the collection of taxes. His reputation depended, in large part, on his

ability to bring in regularly the full amount of his district's assessed demand. However, the collector also, as magistrate, controlled the police, and often, as judge, decided cases in court. The hinge figure at the heart of the government, the district collector was responsible to a hierarchy of British bureaucrats above him, and supervised the work of an array of Indian subordinates below. These men, while responsible for the actual work of revenue collection, and sometimes able to manipulate for their own advantage naïve or inexperienced collectors, exercised no independent authority, and had no opportunity for promotion. The Cornwallis reforms, by the payment of high salaries, a monopoly of senior positions, and guaranteed pensions, secured for the Company's civil servants, now debarred from private trade, a reputation for incorruptibility and impartiality. The last reform was that of Lord Wellesley (1798-1805), who founded the College of Fort William at Calcutta (1802) as a place where incoming civil servants were taught local languages prior to taking up their appointments. At the same time, the Company directors established a college at Haileybury in England (1804) to provide fledgling civil servants, required to spend two years there, with the rudiments of a general education before going out to India.

Together these reforms created the famed 'steel frame' of Indian administration, the Indian Civil Service, in which the British, and many Indians, took great pride. A further reform was to come in 1854, when nomination by Company directors was replaced by examination. As the Indian Administrative Service, it survived the Raj, though with its powers reduced to accommodate a democratic politics. Plate 3.1 shows a district magistrate during a tour of the countryside in 1965 as he reviewed, village by village, rights to land still recorded on a cloth map of holdings.

The establishment of the civil administration on 'a most equitable, solid and permanent footing' was complemented by the organization of an efficient military. Britain's initial campaigns, ousting the French and toppling the Bengal nawabs, required but little military force. Defending Bengal against attack, and subsequently conquering the whole of India, was another matter. A force sufficient for this task could not be composed of scarce and expensive Europeans. Hence Clive himself, in the aftermath of Plassey, dramatically increased

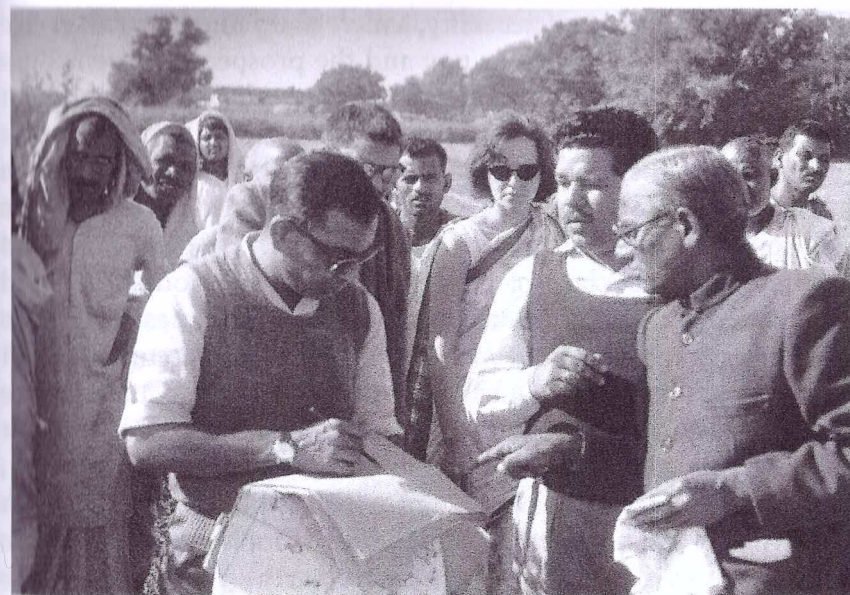


Plate 3.1 District magistrate reading out to assembled villagers, and one of the authors, owners' names written on a cloth map of village holdings to confirm property rights, Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, 1965.

the recruitment of Indian soldiers, known as *sepoys* from the Persian *sipahi*, to fight for the Company. Rejecting as unreliable those who had served the nawab, Hastings established the Company's recruiting base among the high caste Hindu peasantry, primarily Rajput and Brahman, of the eastern Gangetic plain, from Awadh to Bihar. Anxious to avoid social upheaval, Hastings, and his successors, took care to accommodate caste and religious sensibilities in the army. Common messing was avoided, overseas service was not required, and Hindu festivals such as the Ram Lila secured official recognition in the cantonments. This encouragement of high caste ritual status, however, left the government vulnerable to protest, even mutiny, whenever the sepoys detected infringement of their prerogatives. During the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the army grew rapidly in size. Some 100,000 strong in 1789, the Indian Army expanded during the Napoleonic wars to 155,000 men, with a cavalry arm as well as infantry, making it one of the largest European-style standing armies in the world.

The sepoy army was, of necessity, a mercenary force. Loyal service was secured in part by regular pay and the prospect of a pension – uncommon in other Indian armies – and in part by the development of regimental pride. Such pride, fed by victory in the field, took visible shape in the sepoy's red coat and the discipline enforced on the army. The autobiography of one soldier, Sita Ram, tells how he was inspired to enlist by a visit from his uncle. 'He [the uncle] had such a splendid necklace of gold beads, and a curious bright red coat, covered with gold buttons; and, above all, he appeared to have an unlimited supply of gold *mohurs*. I longed for the time when I might possess the same.' Once enlisted, Sita Ram encountered the drill field. 'The parade ground was covered by parties of six or eight men, performing the most extraordinary movements I had ever seen, and these to orders of a language of which I did not understand a single word. I felt inclined to laugh, and stood astonished at the sight. However a violent wrench of my ear by the drill havildar [sergeant] soon brought me to my senses.' Sita Ram served faithfully in the army for over forty years, but, like all sepoys, he had no hope of rising into the officer corps, a jealously guarded European preserve.

Along with restructuring the government, Hastings set in motion what was to become a decades-long enterprise of mastering India's geography, history, and culture. Driven in part by an Enlightenment enthusiasm to know, and thus to classify and order, everything under the sun, a study of India also advanced the interests of India's new rulers. As Hastings explained straightforwardly to the directors in 1784, 'Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state... it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence.' Hastings's major institutional creation was the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Founded in 1784, under the leadership of Sir William Jones, the society dedicated itself above all to study of the religious and cosmological texts of Indian antiquity. In so doing these British scholars, working closely with the Sanskrit pandits to whom they were always deeply indebted, elaborated a history for

India, much as was being done for the nations of Europe itself at the same time.

Central to this history was the momentous discovery of a past, through shared 'Aryan' linguistic ties, that linked India with Britain itself. As Jones wrote, between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin there existed 'a stronger affinity than could possibly have existed by accident'; hence all three had 'to have sprung from some common source'. Thus there came into view the widely dispersed family of related languages, known as Indo-European, that had spread outwards from central Asia in prehistoric times. More generally, by their studies Jones and his successors made of 'Hinduism' a great religion and repository of ancient wisdom, while India itself was given a glorious past comparable to that of Greece and Rome. Archeological discoveries in the first decades of the nineteenth century reinforced this conviction of India's ancient greatness. The decipherment of the Brahmi script, for instance, revealed that India had enjoyed a long period of Buddhist predominance under such rulers as those of the Mauryan dynasty. The history of the pillar shown in plate 1.2 is instructive. As indicated in chapter 1, the fourteenth-century sultan Feroz Shah erected it at his court. But he had no idea what the column signified or who had carved it. Only after the discoveries of the early nineteenth century was this pillar, with others like it across northern India, associated with the hitherto unknown Buddhist emperor Asoka Maurya (c. 268–33 BC). Asoka's rule was subsequently imagined as an era of amity and non-violence, and in the twentieth century was celebrated by Gandhian nationalists.

Such a sympathetic approach to Indian learning, though inspired by an Enlightenment search for correspondences and connections between cultures, should not be allowed to obscure British belief in the superiority of their own civilization. Unlike European histories of 'progress', the arc of India's history, as even Jones described it, declined from ancient greatness into 'sordid priestcraft' and 'superstition'. Such a trajectory not by chance helped legitimate Britain's conquest. Jones too, despite his belief that India had much to teach the West in literature and philosophy, still conceived that in scientific reasoning the Indians were 'mere children'. The tension between the supposedly pristine Hinduism of the past and the 'corrupt' present can be sensed in these lines by Halhed:

Ages have been, when thy refulgent beam
Shone with full vigour on the mental gaze:
When doting superstition dar'd not dream,
And folly's phantoms perish'd in thy rays.

Hence it is not surprising that, as Britain's self-confidence grew through the era of the Napoleonic wars, the sympathetic 'Orientalist' assessment of India's civilization slowly withered. As a result, as the years went by, Jones's ties of language gave way to a theory of biological race in which those of presumed Aryan descent in India, regarded as degenerate from long centuries of mixing their blood with that of the land's indigenous peoples, shared little with their European 'cousins'.

In the more mundane realm as well there existed a tension between the abstract categories that the British brought to India with them, and the incorporation of Indian systems of information. As the historian David Ludden has written, for men like the late eighteenth-century map maker James Rennell, 'the real India experts were those scientists and trained administrators who worked and travelled in the countryside and observed local conditions'. Local knowledge, and local ways of understanding, from the outset shaped how the British made India their own. The British inserted themselves into the networks of Indian newswriters and postal services; placed agents in princely courts; and collaborated, as they surveyed the countryside, with locally influential landholders and informants. Village boundaries were demarcated, for instance, not by the British alone but by 'treaders' under the watchful eye of the community. As C. A. Bayly has argued, 'the colonial information order' was erected 'on the foundations of its Indian precursors'.

The insistent demand for a more 'scientific' understanding of India, however, meant that over time abstract institutionalized knowledge increasingly displaced the earlier 'indigenous networks of knowledgeable people'. The detailed surveys of Colin Mackenzie and Francis Buchanan in the years after 1800 visibly marked out the new order. Though remaining dependent on native assistants, both men voraciously inquired into all aspects of Indian life. From the sketch of the ruined temple depicted in plate 3.2, to lists of crops and castes, and histories of local families, the work of these men, though unsystematic, presaged the authoritative gazetteers and censuses of

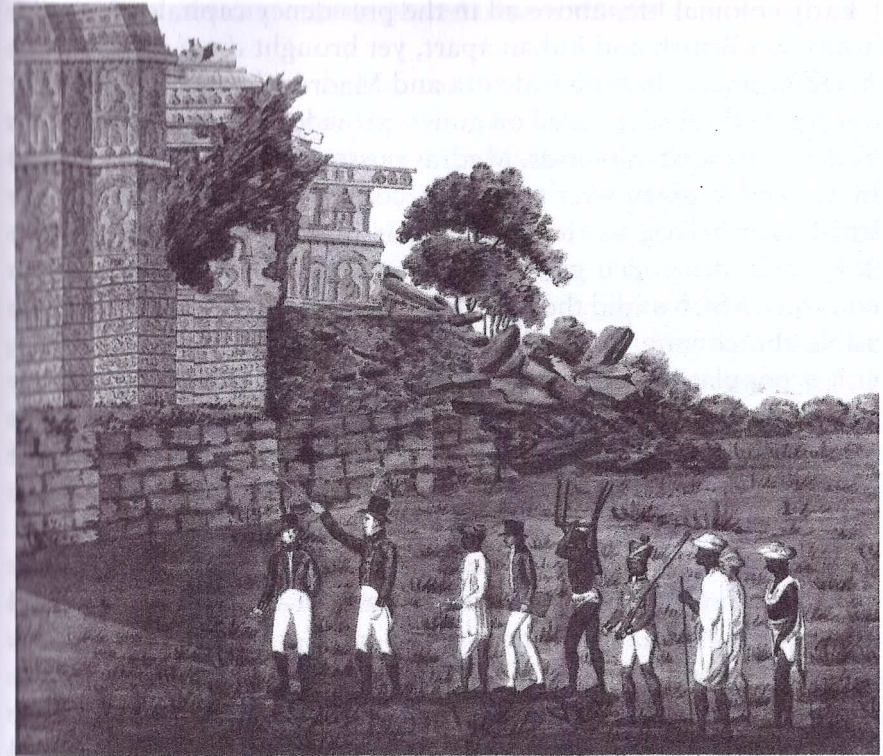


Plate 3.2 Detail from *A Company Officer about to Sketch a Ruined Temple*, c. 1810. Note servants carrying chair, writing instruments, and easel.

the later Victorian era. Exemplary of the new information order was the Great Trigonometrical Survey. Begun in 1818, this survey sought to map the entire country on the basis of a detailed triangulation, using baselines measured with steel chains. The 'great meridional arc' that resulted, 1,500 miles from south to north, by far the most extensive geodetic survey undertaken anywhere in the world at the time, vastly exceeded any military or revenue requirements of the Company. Its achievement, as Matthew Edney has noted, was a triumphalist articulation of British mastery, at once scientific, rational, and imperial, over India's landscape. Such a reliance on maps and statistics, however, as they isolated the British from informed Indian opinion, left them vulnerable to panics, fear, and, in 1857, a massive uprising that took them by surprise.

Early colonial life, above all in the presidency capitals, in similar fashion set British and Indian apart, yet brought them together in a shared intimacy. In both Calcutta and Madras the fort – a reminder that colonial rule depended on guns – provided the core from which the city expanded outwards. Madras possessed a clearly demarcated 'Black Town' given over to Indian commerce and residence. The British themselves, as they spilled out of the confines of the fort after 1770, developed garden suburbs dotted with large Palladian mansions. Much as did the fort itself, this pattern of settlement made visible the coming into being of a new colonial order. Calcutta, with a population of some 200,000 by the 1780s, including over 3,000 European residents, by the end of the century was sharply divided between the pillared and porticoed European mansions of Chowringhee and the densely settled Indian sectors of the city to the north.

Although the English residents of these cities, often wealthy nabobs, elaborated a lavish lifestyle, lack of resistance to tropical disease brought many of them to an early grave. In such sites as the Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta, they erected towering monuments to announce their claim on immortality. The modern-style cemetery open to all, as it came to replace the old parish burial grounds, provides another instance of an institution pioneered in India, and then later adopted in Europe. During the late eighteenth century nabobs and common soldiers alike customarily lived openly with Indian mistresses, called *bibis*. These relationships defined a domesticity at odds with that of Britain, though common in distant colonial lands. Unlike those of the Dutch East Indies or Portuguese Goa, however, by the 1790s, with the Cornwallis reforms, in India such relationships came increasingly under attack for their presumed immorality, and their complicity in what were seen as the 'corrupt' practices of the Hastings era. The nabobs themselves always confined their adoption of Indian customs and clothing to their private lives. They never allowed the pursuit of pleasure to challenge their conviction of their own racial superiority. As a result they rarely accepted as fully 'British' the children born of their Indian *bibis*. Stigmatized as 'half-castes' or Eurasians, those of mixed race were denied entry into government service by Cornwallis in 1793. Over time they came to form a community, unlike the mixed 'indische'

elites of Java, uncomfortably placed between British and Indian, and disdained by both.

With moral reform came racial estrangement. Increasingly, though with a time lag in more distant areas, British men in India were expected to live modestly in a bungalow with a British wife, wear British dress, and refrain from social intercourse with Indians outside their official duties. Historians have sometimes alleged that this estrangement was the product of the appearance in India of large numbers of English women, called *memsahibs*, who enforced a bourgeois domesticity upon their men. In fact, British racial distance fed upon the arrogance bred by conquest, as well as the spread from the early nineteenth century of evangelical religion and a moralizing liberalism. British women, as the embodiment of British racial purity, simply made visible in the domestic realm this new racial order.

In recent years historians have sought to minimize the extent of the changes brought about by the imposition of colonial rule in eighteenth-century India. Between the Company's state in Bengal, it is said, and other post-Mughal 'country' powers, there was little to choose. Much, certainly, of the old persisted. The British had long insisted, in the writings of men like Alexander Dow, that despotism, or the unchecked will of the ruler, defined the Mughal-Indian political system. Despite their repudiation of despotic rule, the British from the start found themselves caught up in it. At the heart of the charges brought against Hastings by Edmund Burke, for instance, as exemplified by his rough treatment of the Begams of Awadh and the Raja of Benares, was that as governor-general he had acted the part of an Indian rather than a proper British ruler. In later years, especially in the person of the district collector, the ideal of the benevolent despot, imagined as someone ruling Indians in their own best interest, remained attractive. In other ways too the Company embraced indigenous practice. Throughout its years of governance, the Company acknowledged the suzerainty of the Mughal king in Delhi. Their coins bore his profile, while Mughal Persian remained the official language until 1835. The Company also actively patronized Hindu and Muslim religious institutions as their predecessors had done.

Still, by 1800 the foundations had been laid for a new political order. Hastings's reforms looked ahead to the novelty of what

Radhika Singha has called 'a despotism of law', while the new Oriental scholarship gave Indians a new perspective on their country's past. From the management of Hindu temples to the precepts of the criminal law, everyday practices became increasingly rule-bound, and so lost their previous flexibility in application. Above all, the British had created an army of unprecedented size. The range of the Company state, its monopoly of physical force, and its capacity to command resources, as C. A. Bayly has written, 'set it apart even in its early days from all the regimes which had preceded it'.

CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT

The arrival of Lord Wellesley as governor-general in 1798 ended a quarter-century during which the British had existed as one among several Indian 'country powers'. Spurred on by a new vision that saw the British Empire encompassing the entire subcontinent, Wellesley inaugurated twenty years of military activity that made the Company by 1818 master of India. Complementing Wellesley's conquests-at-arms was the elaboration of an aggressive imperial enthusiasm. Much of this was the product of events in Europe. Throughout these years an embattled Britain confronted Napoleon, whose armies triumphed not only in Europe but in 1798 in Egypt, the gateway to India; and the patriotism stirred up by this desperate struggle easily spilled over into a conviction of Britain's right to rule whatever territories its armies might conquer. Something of this defiant spirit may be found in Lord Valentia's defence of Wellesley's magnificent new Government House in Calcutta, criticized for extravagance by the Company's directors:

The Head of a mighty Empire ought to conform himself to the prejudices of the country he rules over; and the British in particular ought to emulate the splendid works of the Princes of the House of Timour, lest it should be supposed that we merit the reproach which our great rivals the French have ever cast upon us, of being alone influenced by a sordid mercantile spirit. In short, I wish India to be ruled from a palace, not from a counting-house; with the ideas of a Prince, not with those of a retail-dealer in muslins and indigo.

Wellesley first moved against Tipu Sultan in Mysore. Implacably hostile to the British, backed by a powerful army of infantry and

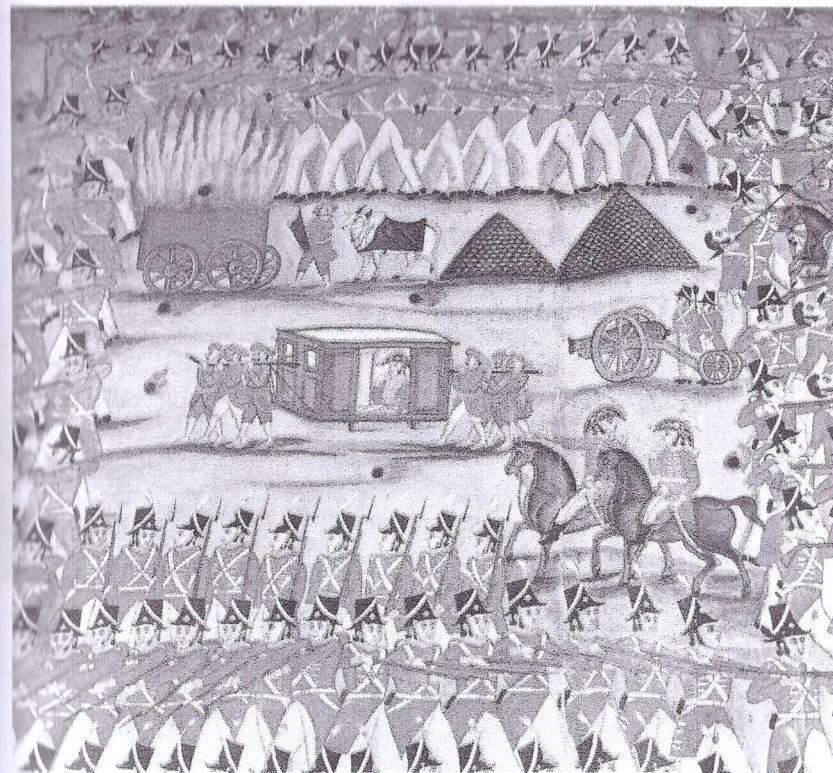
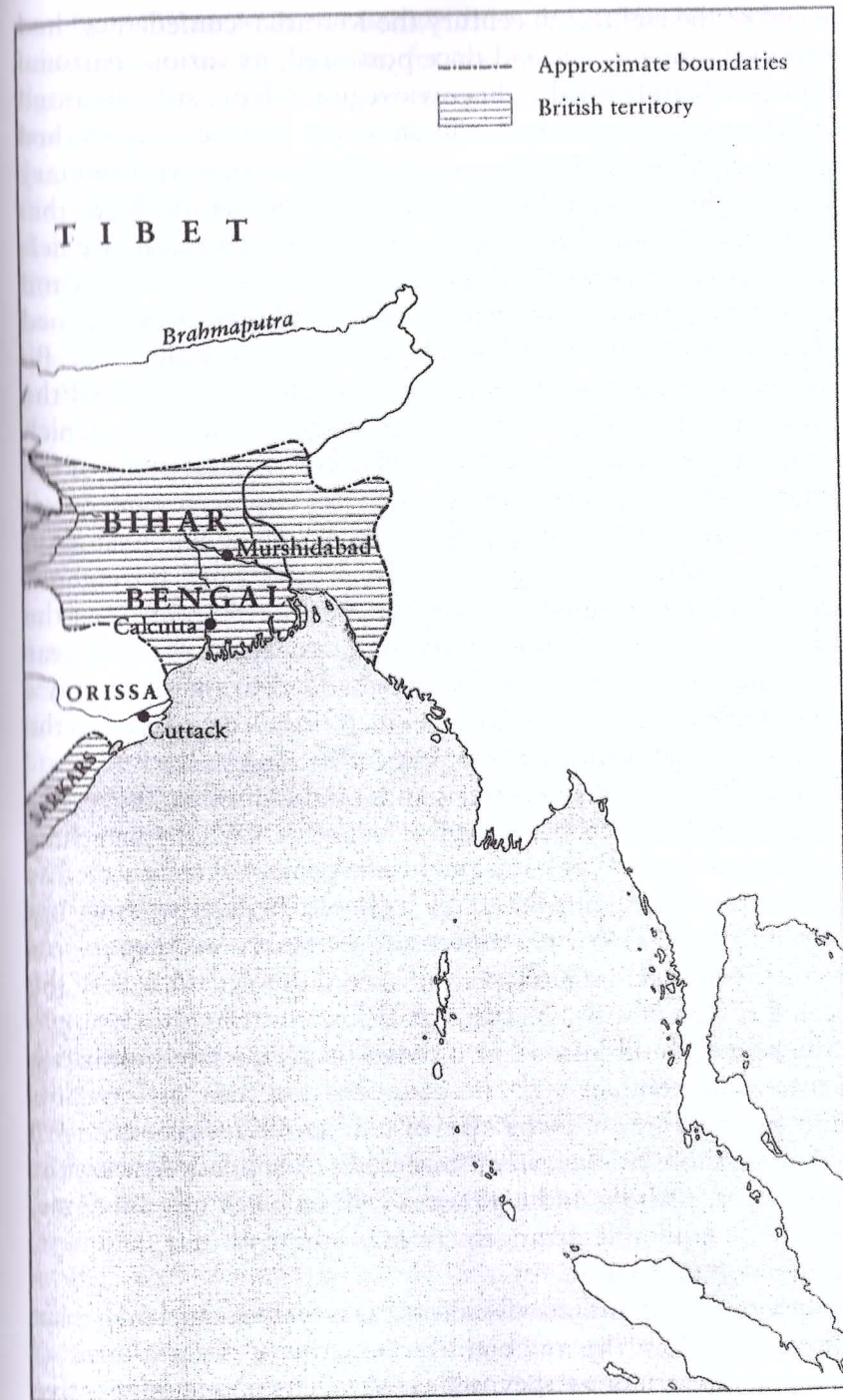
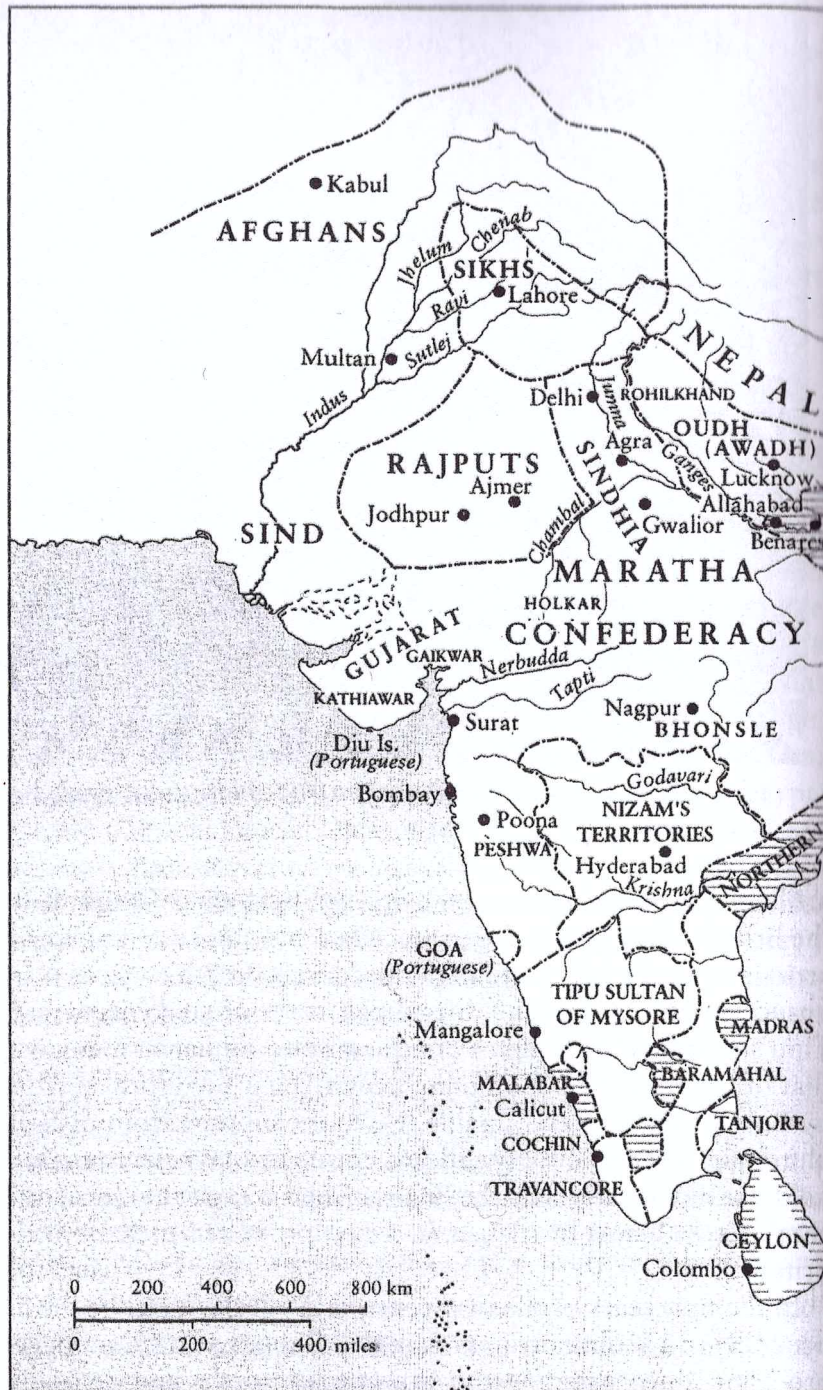


Plate 3.3 Detail from *The Battle of Polilur 1780*, by an unknown Indian artist, c. 1820.

artillery supported by an extensive light cavalry, Tipu had fought the British to a draw in the 1780s. Plate 3.3, by an unknown Indian artist, shows the last stand of a beleaguered British force as it sought unsuccessfully, despite its disciplined rows of soldiers, to hold off Tipu's troopers. Although a conquest state similar in many ways to that of the East India Company's own, Tipu's Mysore, surrounded by British territory and unable to secure support from distant revolutionary France, simply did not command sufficient resources to hold out indefinitely. For the British, Tipu was the model of an 'Oriental despot', and his defeat in 1799 provoked great rejoicing in Britain.

In the first years of the new century Wellesley extended the frontier of British India northwards in the Ganges valley, and began the process of incorporating the Marathas into the empire. Although



Map 2 India in 1798.

by the end of the eighteenth century the Maratha 'confederacy' had lost whatever coherence it had once possessed, its various baronial chieftains, each embedded in his own regional base, still possessed substantial resources. Mahadji Sindhia, for instance, established at Gwalior near Agra, built up in the 1780s a powerful military machine supplied with ordnance from his own factory. Nevertheless, far removed from their home base in Maharashtra, these chieftains were wholly dependent on fragile alliances with local elites and European adventurers, while their divisions and dissensions opened up opportunities for the British to play one off against the other. By negotiating the treaty of Bassein (1802), Wellesley neutralized the peshwa at Poona (Pune); and by his campaigns in the north, which led to the 1803 conquest of Delhi, he checked the ambitions of the Marathas in that region. But the struggle for supremacy in central India was not resolved. Only in 1817, as the British sought to contain the Pindaris – bands of irregular cavalry who roamed throughout central India levying plunder – was the final battle joined, as the Marathas were seen as the Pindaris' patrons. The following year much of Gujarat and Maharashtra were added to the Company's domains, while the defeated Maratha chieftains were reduced to the status of 'protected' princes wholly dependent on the British.

Substantial further acquisitions came about through the working of the subsidiary alliance system. Devised in Clive's time, these alliances, between the Company and Indian princes, were justified as a way of securing Bengal from attack by deploying its troops within states friendly to it. The prince on his side secured protection against his enemies, external and internal, and agreed to meet the cost of the troops and to accept a British resident at his court. By this arrangement the prince could be sure of a powerful ally, while the British could meet their enemies at a safe distance from their own territories, and share with others the cost of maintaining their expensive army. Among those drawn early into this net of obligations were the rulers of Arcot, Awadh, and Hyderabad. In its workings, however, this seemingly equitable arrangement led only to British conquest, and to Indian bankruptcy.

The imperatives of 'military fiscalism', as we have seen, had driven India's princes, from the mid eighteenth century, into the arms of bankers and financiers as they endeavoured to finance expensive

armies. Alliance with the British did not resolve, but only exacerbated, this financial squeeze, for the British demanded large sums rigorously and relentlessly every year. As they sought revenue to meet these subsidiary payments, princes were driven to ever more desperate expedients. The classic case is that of Awadh, allied with the British from 1765. There the incessant demand for revenue, by pitting nawab and Rajput chieftain against each other, destroyed the fragile political system in which the mutual weakness of each had secured a certain stability. Impoverished local chieftains found themselves driven into revolt, while great revenue contractors, such as Almas Ali Khan, enriched themselves at the expense of the state. Attempts to ratchet up the revenue inevitably brought down upon the hapless nawab British complaints of misgovernment and oppression, while, deprived of funds for his own purposes, his own soldiers in arrears, he was drawn ever deeper into debt.

Outright defiance, such as that of the Awadh Nawab Wazir Ali in 1798, only led to even more forceful intervention as the British manipulated court factions to secure a more pliable ruler. Wellesley secured a temporary resolution of the crisis in 1801 by the drastic expedient of annexing half of Awadh to British India, which brought an end to the subsidy demands. This cession, of rich lands to the west and east of Awadh's central core, however, left its rulers more strapped for funds than ever, and increasingly at the mercy of armed landholders (*taluqdars*), who defiantly consolidated power in the countryside. From 1815 onwards, abandoning all attempts at government, the nawabs retreated into their courts, where they patronized literature, music, and dance with a refined luxuriance that won for them only the contempt of the British. The elephant procession and ornate architecture of Lucknow shown in plate 3.4 illustrate something of the princely style of life, as does Satyajit Ray's compelling film, *The Chess Players* (1977). The 'decadence' and anarchy of which the British so frequently complained, and which they used to justify Awadh's annexation in 1856, were, in large measure, their own creation.

With the final defeat of the Marathas in 1818, the subsidiary alliance system ceased to serve its original purpose, that of buffering the British from their enemies. A large number of states nevertheless remained in existence, among them the sprawling domains of the



Plate 3-4 City of Lucknow, 1824, by J. Ackerman.

nizam of Hyderabad, and more were formed from among defeated rulers who were allowed to retain their thrones. Even in the changed conditions of uncontested supremacy these states served useful purposes. Dry and hilly areas that produced little revenue, from the Rajasthan desert and Himalayan foothills across central India, were more economically administered by local rajas than by an expensive British staff. Loyal princes could help dampen discontent in British India, as was to be demonstrated by the assistance of India's princes during the crisis of 1857. The continuation of princely rule also helped the British veil their power behind that of rulers whose ceremonial and ritual authority remained visibly intact. The magnificence of princely courts, with the gifting and patronage activities that they sustained, kept alive ties between prince and subject, and obscured from both the loss of the state's former independence.

The system of 'indirect rule' was carefully patrolled by the British. States were not allowed to possess an independent military force, nor to engage in diplomatic relations with each other. Central to the system's functioning was the 'Resident' posted at the prince's capital. Residents actively intervened in succession disputes; they formed alliances with state diwans, or prime ministers, often outsiders but men close to the state's bankers and revenue officials; and, as time went on, through the appointment of carefully selected tutors, they endeavoured to train heirs to adopt Western notions of 'progressive' government. To the frustration of the British, efforts to reform princely governance rarely met with much success. Disdaining the innovations of their rulers, which brought them no benefit, princes preferred instead the solace of indigenous music and the arts.

The first two decades of the nineteenth century also saw the beginnings of a fundamental transformation in India's economy, and in Britain's relationship to it. Throughout its first decades of rule the Company continued still to see itself as primarily a commercial body, purchasing its 'Investment' of Indian piece goods for the British market and developing new markets for such commodities as raw cotton and opium in China. The opium trade, in particular, was to prove highly remunerative. Its production tightly regulated by advances to growers, the opium was sold by the Company to British traders who smuggled it into China. The profits from its sale at once sustained the Company's always precarious finances and

relieved Britain from the need to export bullion to pay for Chinese tea, in increasing demand, with other luxury goods, like sugar and chocolate, in Britain's burgeoning consumer market. By the 1830s opium provided up to 15 per cent of the Indian Government's total revenue. Although the Company from the 1790s endeavoured to insure that Indian marketplaces and fairs were open to all-comers, free trade was always subordinate to the fiscal and military needs of its burgeoning empire.

As the new century proceeded, British private merchants, spurred on by the industrial revolution and the hope of new markets in the East, challenged the Company's trade monopoly. A responsive Parliament ended its Indian monopoly in 1813, and that to China in 1833. At the same time the balance of trade between Britain and India began to shift. By 1815 Indian textiles and other artisanal commodities could no longer compete in Britain, or on the world market, with British machine-made goods. Within a few years British textiles began to penetrate the Indian market, initiating the development of a classically 'colonial' economy, importing manufactures and exporting raw materials, that was to last for a century, until the 1920s. Yet the integration of India into the world capitalist order remained halting and incomplete. The fate of indigo, a blue dye popular in Europe which generated substantial export income for India throughout the later Company period, is revealing. Grown by European planters, who secured the crop by cash advances to peasant cultivators, often supplemented with coercion, indigo remained always a precarious source of wealth. Markets in Europe were unpredictable, and subject to boom and bust fluctuations, to which planters in distant India were acutely vulnerable. The creditors who sustained production were equally at risk. Market crashes in 1827, and again in 1847, precipitated massive banking failures that reduced funds available for years afterwards.

Although new opportunities in commercial agriculture brought advantage for some, the loss of overseas markets for artisanal produce was devastating, especially for skilled weavers in the great weaving centres, such as Dacca and Murshidabad. In the countryside weavers managed to survive by taking advantage of cheap imported thread, but those who had relied on hand spinning for subsistence were often driven back into agriculture. At the same time the rapid

decline in the number of Indian courts, lavish spenders on luxury goods and armaments, reduced demand for many commodities. The disbandment of these courts also forced on to the land large numbers of former militiamen and retainers, which in turn further adversely affected artisanal production.

Overall, although the period of straightforward plunder of the country's riches had come to an end, the East India Company during the early decades of the nineteenth century did little to set India on a path of economic growth. To be sure, many of the obstacles were structural. Unlike contemporary Britain or the United States, where canal networks were built to provide easy access to the interior, India could rely only on its rivers, and primarily on the Ganges, for the transport of bulk commodities. While this generated wealth for river towns such as Mirzapur, it left the rest of the country outside the orbit of the export economy. The lack of infrastructure, of banks as well as roads, deterred direct overseas investment, with the result that the only available British capital was that provided by the accumulation of private wealth within India. Indeed, far from investing in India, the resident British commonly took their money home with them by investment in secure Company bonds. This 'drain' of wealth was complemented by the Company's withdrawal of funds to cover what it called the 'Home Charges', including pensions, debt service, and the cost of maintaining the Company's offices. In later years, these payments were to provide a highly visible target for nationalist accusations of British economic exploitation.

From the later 1820s into the 1840s India was also hammered by economic depression, involving a fall in the value of the rupee, and a contraction in the supply of silver. Although partly the result of a worldwide silver shortage, the situation was exacerbated by the Company's policy of deflationary finance, as it sought to trim its budget deficits. Throughout, the heaviest burden India had to bear was that of the land revenue demand. Essential to the support of the army and the administration, these payments, rigorously collected in cash, lay at the heart of the British impact upon the Indian countryside.

As the British initially knew nothing of Indian rural society, their first attempts at revenue management, under Hastings, involved a series of disastrous experiments in leasing and auctioning the right

to collect taxes. These chaotic experiments, along with British ignorance, dramatically worsened the impact of a famine that struck usually well-watered Bengal in 1770. Up to a quarter of Bengal's population may have died, and the province's available assets were reduced for decades to come. By the eighteenth century the British had come to believe that private property in land alone ensured stability and progress in society. At the same time the physiocrats in France were arguing that land was the basis of all wealth. Hence in 1776 Philip Francis, on the Bengal council, put forward a plan for a 'rule of property' for Bengal. As Francis wrote, 'if private property be not once for all secured on a permanent footing, the public revenue will sink rapidly with the general produce of the country'. Such ideas conformed with the eighteenth-century Whig belief in the importance of a hereditary landed aristocracy. The zamindar, according to this vision, was an Indian version of the English gentleman-farmer; once his property rights were secure, he would be as enterprising as his English counterpart. The scheme took legislative shape in 1793, under the Whig grandee Lord Cornwallis, when the Bengal Permanent Settlement, with enduring consequences for the region, vested in the province's zamindars a full proprietary right in their estates with a revenue assessment fixed in perpetuity.

Unfortunately, the Cornwallis settlement wholly misconceived the position of the zamindar, with the result that its outcome bore little resemblance to Francis's expectations. In India, prior to the coming of the British, the bundle of rights associated with property were not concentrated in a land 'owner', but rather dispersed among all those, among them the peasant cultivator, the zamindar, and the government, who had an interest in the land. For his part, the zamindar collected 'rent' from the peasantry, and, after deducting a share for his own maintenance, passed on the remainder as 'revenue' to the state. He could sell or transfer only his own revenue collecting rights, not the land itself, for that did not belong to him. Under the new land system, by contrast, the peasantry found themselves reduced to the status of tenants without rights, while the zamindar as proprietor found his entire estate liable to sale in case of default in paying the taxes assessed on it. As the high and inflexible British demand could not at first easily be met, estates rapidly came on to the market. It has been estimated that up to one-third of the

estates in Bengal changed hands in the twenty years after the 1793 Permanent Settlement. The purchasers were those familiar with the institutions of the new regime and who had prospered under it, especially Brahman and Kayastha employees of the Company and of the old zamindars.

Neither the old owners nor the new, however, had much interest in acting the part of the 'improving' English landlord. It was never feasible to sweep away the existing cultivators in order to introduce costly 'improvements'. Hence the Bengal zamindars rapidly became a class of rentiers, who, as the rural population rebounded from the period of famine, lived increasingly comfortably from the rents they extracted from their tenants. These they often had to share with intermediary tenure holders, such as *jotedars*, who directed agricultural activity in the villages. But cultivation remained, as before, a matter of subsistence cropping across a myriad of tiny paddy fields, in contrast to the consolidation of holdings characteristic of the contemporaneous 'enclosure' movement in Britain.

Discouraged, the British after 1800 sought an alternative to reliance upon zamindars. This took the form of the *ryotwari* settlement pioneered by Thomas Munro in the lands taken from Mysore. Under this form of settlement property rights were awarded to the peasant cultivator (*ryot*). This change of policy was not wholly a matter of choice, since the Mysore wars had effectively destroyed the class of agrarian magnates across large areas. Still, Munro, a product of the Romantic movement then spreading across England, idealized the simple life of the peasant, whom he wished to rule with as little disruption of his old ways as possible. Implemented throughout most of Madras and neighbouring Maharashtra during the 1820s, much in the *ryotwari* system was nevertheless an exercise in self-delusion. Dominant village elites often intercepted settlement rights, and so denied tenurial protection to the lowly cultivator with the plough. The British at the same time abandoned the idea of permanency in assessment. Anxious to secure a share of the increased produce as the country prospered, everywhere outside Bengal they retained the right to revise assessments every twenty or thirty years. Its demands pitched always at the highest level society could bear, the land revenue system generated an enduring discontent that erupted into rebellion throughout much of the north in 1857.

With the settlement of the revenue demand went a larger determination to 'settle' all of India's people in a visibly fixed location on the land. The eighteenth century, as we have seen, was an era marked by incessant movement – of herders and pastoralists, of armies and yogis. This process continued into the early nineteenth century, as raiding groups such as the Pindaris moved through the undefined and unpatrolled borders of India's states. In the Company's view, such activities posed a political threat to its own monopoly of coercion, and brought economic loss as well, for these wanderers eluded its network of taxation. Much of this effort of 'sedentarization' was directed against the tribal people of central India. Forest dwellers, often hunter-gatherers who periodically raided into the areas of settled agriculture, these tribals, such as the Bhils of Khandesh, were subjected to a series of armed incursions during the 1820s. Bhil raids, as the historian Ajay Skaria has written, 'were treated by British officials not as occasions for negotiations but rather as acts of aggression on territory on which they had exclusive sovereignty'. The tribal peoples were subsequently either confined to the forest, but deprived of control of its resources, which were now to be 'scientifically' managed, or encouraged to abandon their 'wild and wandering ways' for cultivation. One of the tasks of the Khandesh Bhil Agency was to extend loans to tribes in order to make them take up settled agriculture.

In similar fashion, groups such as the Banjara carriers, whose pack animals had accompanied eighteenth-century armies, together with herders such as Gujars and Bhattis, found their grazing grounds restricted by assessment of waste lands and the creation of private property rights, while their employment opportunities declined with the disbandment of armies. Those who persisted in wandering found themselves the objects of suspicion, and began to be stigmatized as 'criminal tribes'. Such suspicion fuelled one of the most famous episodes in the history of British India – the campaign against *thagi* (thuggee), which gave the English language the word *thug*. Notorious for their secrecy, their presumed devotion to the blood-thirsty goddess Kali, and their custom of ritual murder of travellers by strangling, thags fed British fears, and fantasies, of an exotic India beyond their reach. Hence the British created an imagined conspiracy, in which diverse bands of highway robbers were forged into a

fraternity of criminals by birth and profession, and the force of the colonial state was then unleashed upon it. In the sweeping arrests that followed, the ordinary procedures of the criminal law were set aside. But the 1839 announcement of the 'extirpation' of thagi set off an orgy of self-congratulation. The British could now conceive of India as a pacified land, composed of a law-abiding, tax-paying peasantry.

TRADITION AND REFORM: INDIAN SOCIETY UNDER THE COMPANY

Thomas Macaulay, law member of the governor-general's council, wrote in 1834 of the young Charles Trevelyan, his future brother-in-law:

He is quite at the head of that active party among the younger servants of the Company who take the side of improvement... He has no small talk. His mind is full of schemes of moral and political improvement, and his zeal boils over in his talk. His topics, even in courtship, are steam navigation, the education of the natives, the equalisation of the sugar duties, the substitution of the Roman for the Arabic alphabet in the Oriental languages.

These sentiments expressed the expansive optimism of an era in which it seemed that the barriers of custom and tradition everywhere would give way easily before the power of British liberal ideals. Britain, after all, had vanquished Napoleon; and, the only industrialized nation, it had made itself the 'workshop of the world'. In evangelical Christianity it believed itself the possessor of a 'saving' religion to be shared with all people. For its advocates – from Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham on to James and John Stuart Mill – liberalism was not just a philosophy of governance suited to England. Its precepts denned not 'Western' civilization but civilization itself. In India, liberals confidently saw their task as that of stripping off the shackles of 'despotism', 'priestcraft', and 'superstition' that left its people, as James Mill wrote in his *History of British India* (1818), 'the most enslaved portion of the human race'.

Inevitably, liberals did not join Orientalists in venerating the achievements of India's ancient past. As Macaulay wrote, in a phrase that has reverberated down the years, 'the entire native literature of

India and Arabia' was not worth 'a single shelf of a good European library'. For the liberal, England's superiority was unquestioned. Yet it was not racial or even environmental in character. Indians, like anyone else, could be transformed through the workings of law, free trade, and education. As Macaulay insisted in his 1835 'Minute on Education', Britain's mission was to create not just a class of Indians sufficiently well versed in English to help the British rule their country, but one 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. In time – though not, of course, in the near future – an India so transformed would become independent, but it would embody 'an imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws'.

Lord William Bentinck as governor-general (1828–35) began the process of implementing the reform agenda. This was not to be an easy task. Funds were always scarce, while Bentinck was anxious not to antagonize Indian opinion by moving too fast. Among his first acts was the 1829 abolition of *sati*. With its immolation of a living woman on her husband's funeral pyre, this act, rather like British public executions, catered to an English obsession with death as spectacle. Although English observers in the eighteenth century had valorized *sati* as an heroic act of romantic self-sacrifice, by Bentinck's time it was seen as emblematic of India as a land of a barbarous and blood-thirsty faith. Above all, for the British, *sati* testified to the moral weakness of Indian men, who lacked the masculine strength to nurture rather than to degrade their women, and so to the consequent need for Britain to stand forth to protect them.

Although responding to outraged liberal and evangelical opinion, Bentinck nevertheless took care to solicit Indian support, above all from a panel of Brahman pandits whom he enlisted to assure him that the practice was not required by 'scripture'; and he represented his action as that of an enlightened Hindu ruler. Despite its visibility, *sati* was not in fact, with at most some 800 cases annually throughout Bengal, widely practised. Indeed, one European resident of Calcutta in 1780 wrote vividly about the horrors of *sati*, but then reported that she had 'never had the opportunity of witnessing the various ceremonies, nor have I ever seen any European who had been present at them'. Hence prohibition of *sati* could satisfy the

liberal reforming impulse without risk of triggering an upheaval. Other, more widespread practices, such as that of female infanticide among the Rajputs of northern India, the British tiptoed gingerly around.

Central to the liberal credo was education. From Hastings's time, the Company had supported Sanskrit and Arabic education, through colleges established in Benares and Calcutta. As opinion began to shift, this policy came under attack from the so-called 'Anglicists', who insisted that Western subjects and the English language should form the basis of study. The Anglicists' victory, in 1835, propelled by the powerful rhetoric of Macaulay's 'Minute', was followed by the establishment of government schools in India's major cities, though not in the countryside, and no attention was given to primary education. No government-run schools existed at the time in England, where education was controlled by religious denominations. Here, as with the contemporaneous trigonometrical survey, the separate cemetery, and the subsequent introduction of competitive examinations for the Indian Civil Service, the institutions of the modern state took shape in the colony, which can be seen as something of a laboratory of administrative practice, before making their way back to England. That education was not meant only to produce clerks is visibly represented in such structures as the college at Patna shown in plate 3.5, whose elegant neoclassical architecture represented a British vision of the civilized modern world.

Even before Bentinck's arrival Indians had begun the process of coming to terms with the new Western culture associated with British rule. Private European and Indian initiative had in 1817 led to the foundation in Calcutta of India's first English-language institution of higher learning, the Hindu College. By the 1830s several thousand Indians were studying English in that city alone. Few, however, were prepared to adopt as their own the ideas associated with men like Macaulay, for that would have involved the wholesale repudiation of their culture. Most famous of those who did so were the Young Bengal group, based in Hindu College, and associated with the enthusiast Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–31). Defiantly eating beef and drinking whiskey, these young men derided 'irrational' Hindu customs; some few among them, including Derozio, converted to Christianity.

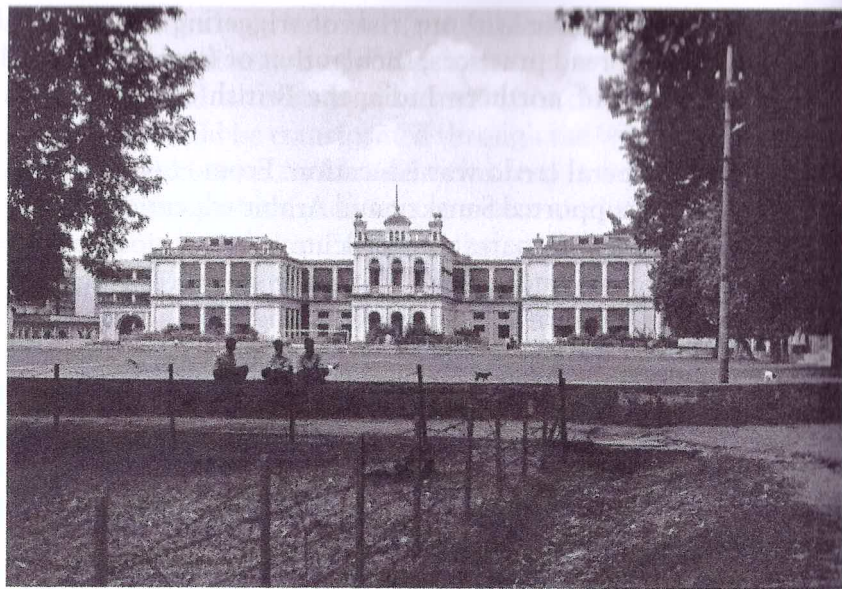


Plate 3.5 Façade of Patna College, c. 1837.

Most Indian thinkers, as they confronted the powerful ideas of the 'West', sought to achieve some balance between 'tradition' and 'reform', between a richly textured culture that still sustained them and the excitement of new ways. In assessing the various movements which grew up it is essential to avoid simplistic dichotomies. 'Tradition', in both Hinduism and Islam, as we have seen in chapter 1, possessed its own vitality; while 'reform' could take many shapes. In areas away from the immediate environs of the presidency capitals, movements of reformed practice were little influenced by the West, and so followed customary channels into the colonial period. Hindu devotionism remained attractive, especially to upwardly mobile groups seeking to distance themselves from tribal or low caste origins. Most prominent, perhaps, was the movement founded in Gujarat by Swami Narayan (1780–1830). Rejecting much of Brahmanical ritualism in favour of a Vaishnavite devotionism, Swami Narayan drew followers from displaced nomadic and warrior communities, and so helped further the process of agricultural settlement.

The most significant Islamic movement of the early nineteenth century was that associated with the reformist ideas, discussed

above, of Shah Waliullah. Expounded by his son Shah Abdul Aziz, who translated the Koran into Urdu, Waliullah's ideas spread widely among the Muslim elite of northern India. For many Muslims, a reform of Islamic practice, with a closer adherence to the precepts of the Koran and hadith, and the purging of much saint worship from sufism, was coupled with the aim of restoring an ordered political and social life. Although Western knowledge, usually through Urdu translations of scientific works, found a home in the Delhi College, founded in 1792, Western learning had little role to play in a regeneration which sought its principles from within the Islamic tradition. The most charismatic of these reformers was Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786–1831). During the 1820s Sayyid Ahmad preached throughout the Gangetic plain, drawing supporters from among hard-pressed Muslim weavers and artisans. In 1829, drawing on his earlier experiences as a trooper in the army of the Afghan ruler of Tonk, he set out to establish a state of his own. To do so he organized, from the Afghan frontier, a campaign against the Sikh state of Ranjit Singh. Unable to secure support among Afghans little interested in Islamic reform, Sayyid Ahmad's small band of followers proved no match for Ranjit's army, which drove him into the Himalayan foothills, where he died fighting. Sayyid Ahmad's memory lived on, however, to inspire subsequent Islamic uprisings along the frontier, and to frighten the British with imagined 'Wahabi' conspiracies.

A range of other revolts unsettled British India during the years of Company rule. Some joined religious rhetoric with class antagonism. In 1821 Shariat Allah (1781–1840) returned from two decades in Mecca to preach a purified Islam. By the 1830s he had gained a large following among the rural population of eastern Bengal for what became known as the Faraizi movement. His followers' refusal to pay customary levies to support Hindu temples and festivals gained for the movement the enmity of the province's Hindu zamindars. Shariat Allah's son Didu Miyan organized the Faraizis to assert directly the rights of cultivators and artisans against Hindu landowners and moneylenders and British indigo planters. For several decades the Faraizis took a leading role in organizing agrarian protest activities throughout eastern Bengal.

A number of revolts sought to contest the monopoly of coercive force that the British determined to secure for themselves. These

were usually led in the plains by zamindars and by tribal chieftains in the hills and jungles. The poligars of the far south, for instance, put up a fierce resistance to the Company's forces during 1800–1, while such forest peoples as the Bhils in the 1820s, noted above, and the Santals of western Bengal in 1855, fought to preserve their tribal ways. These revolts did not succeed against the might of the Raj, but they testify to the depth of enduring, if rarely effectively organized, discontent that accompanied the imposition of British rule over India.

Among those who sought to come to terms with the new Western learning, by far the most influential was the Bengali scholar Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). Learned in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and English, employed for some years at the turn of the century by the Company and its officers, Ram Mohan endeavoured to create from the ancient Upanishadic texts, with their monistic philosophy, a vision of a rationalist and monotheist 'modern' India. Breaking with devotional Hinduism, he responded sympathetically to the monotheism of Islam and the ethical idealism of Christianity. Ram Mohan found Christian doctrine, however, especially the divinity of Christ, incompatible with his search for a 'rational' religion. Such speculative reasoning confounded the Christian missionaries who, with the end of restrictions on missionary preaching, were now arriving in India to convert the 'heathen'. Ram Mohan's faith was close to that of the deistic Unitarians with whom he corresponded in Bristol and Boston. To propagate his beliefs he founded a society called the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Something of the dignity and confidence with which he approached the English is evident in the portrait, shown in plate 3.6, painted at the end of his life in England, where he was received with honour.

Ram Mohan's social and political programme, whose central values he described as 'improvement' and 'enlightenment', drew him to the liberals clustered around Bentinck. With them he supported English education and the abolition of sati. Indeed, calling upon the government in 1823 to promote 'a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences', Ram Mohan provided arguments Macaulay was subsequently to adopt. But, unlike English liberals, he did not repudiate the Hindu past. To the



Plate 3.6 Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833).

contrary, rather like the Orientalists of an earlier generation, he saw in the ancient 'scriptures' a 'pure' Hinduism upon which he could ground his rationalist faith, and from which he could challenge, as not 'properly' Hindu, the latter-day practices of idolatry and sati. Such a return to the earliest texts to provide a secure

footing for reform was to be a continuing feature of Hindu reform movements.

With such views went also an acceptance of Orientalist notions of India's 'decline' from a glorious past, and the singling out of the medieval Muslim rulers as prime agents of that decline. Such a theory of India's past inevitably exacerbated the emerging divide between Hindu and Muslim. Even the liberally minded Ram Mohan described the centuries of Muslim rule as a time when 'the civil and religious rights' of India's 'original inhabitants' were 'constantly trampled upon'. For writers not steeped in these notions, by contrast, such as Mrityunjay Vidyalkar, whose 1808 history of Bengal was commissioned by Fort William College, changes of dynasty spoke only of the failings of individual rulers, whose replacement, when they ceased to follow *dharma* (good conduct), no matter whether by Muslim or even by Briton, could not but be for the common good. The protagonists of such a history were gods and kings, not peoples or nations.

Ram Mohan Roy attracted the support of the influential Tagore family, headed by one of India's first capitalist entrepreneurs, Dwarkanath Tagore; his son Debendranath (1817–1905) refounded the Brahmo Samaj after Ram Mohan's death. Still, Ram Mohan's radical views provoked intense controversy among Calcutta's educated elite. Known as the *bhadralok* (respectable people), these were merchants, clerks, government employees, rentiers, and the like, mostly of upper castes, who had prospered under the British. Among their number, especially as patrons of the new learning, were the monied purchasers of estates sold during the upheaval surrounding the Permanent Settlement. For the most part these men were unwilling to follow Ram Mohan Roy in repudiating so ruthlessly so much of contemporary Hindu devotional practice. The conservatives led by Radha Kanta Deb, who founded the Dharma Sabha (1830) to rally support for Hinduism, have often been denounced as hide-bound reactionaries opposed to progress. Yet these men shared much with Ram Mohan Roy. Deb, for instance, was an active patron of the Hindu College, and supported English education. They opposed Bentinck's abolition of sati not simply from a desire to see the practice continue, but out of an objection to the colonial government's interference in Indian domestic and family life. Such

objections to British-sponsored reform were to recur, with increasing vigour, among nationalists at the end of the century.

Bhadralok opinion was shaped not only by principled disagreements, but by social factions, called *dals*. These linked various caste groupings together under leading figures such as Tagore and Deb, who adjudicated disputes among their members on issues of caste status and pollution. Membership in a dal, as S. N. Mukherjee has shown, often influenced positions taken on the issues of the day. Another distinctive Bengali forum for discussion was that provided by *adda*, informal gatherings for conversation in the homes of patrons of culture and literature and subsequently in new public spaces such as coffee shops.

Public debate was a new dimension of sociability in early nineteenth-century India. Translation and publication of texts in Indian languages, as well as support of local scholars, had been a feature of Fort William College from its establishment. The result was a 'print culture' not so different from that which was growing up in Europe at the same time. As tracts were printed and texts circulated, educated Indians, even though excluded from the government of the country, created for themselves a public arena where the issues of the day were discussed. Regardless of the positions taken by their organizers, the existence of public meetings, pamphlets, and voluntary societies announced the coming of a new 'modern' India. From its origins in Calcutta, this style of public activity spread to the other presidency capitals, and then, more slowly, into the interior, where debates with Christian missionaries provided some of its liveliest moments. Nevertheless, especially by comparison with the freer climate in Britain, the reformist vision remained always constrained by its colonial context.

The governors-general who succeeded Bentinck, the Whig Lord Auckland (1836–42), the Tory Lord Ellenborough (1842–4), and the old general Lord Hardinge (1844–8), were less committed to reform. Auckland restored support to Oriental learning, while in the final settlement of the upper Ganges valley in the 1840s such men as James Thomason sought to temper the British commitment to individual ownership by a policy of joint settlement with village communities. Such settlements rarely included all residents of the village, and partition of holdings was permitted, but their adoption,

accompanied by an idealization of the self-sufficient Indian village community, marked a backing away from the universal enforcement of individual property rights.

During these years slowly unfolding events on India's north-western frontier triggered the Company's last conquests. Through the first four decades of the nineteenth century, as the Company expanded its territory up to Burma in the east, and Nepal in north, the frontier to the west remained stable. Pulling together the disparate Sikh tribes, and incorporating Muslims as well as Sikhs, Ranjit Singh created in the Punjab a prosperous state with a disciplined army of some 20,000 infantrymen and 4,000 cavalry. As the British had no wish to tangle with this powerful force, and Ranjit carefully avoided attacks on British territory, only with Ranjit's death in 1839 did the Company become involved in the lands along and beyond the Indus.

The first step forward was in the lower Indus. Attractive both for its control of the trade along the river, which British fantasies imagined as a 'highway' to Central Asia, and the access it provided to Afghanistan, Sind was conquered between 1839 and 1842 by the headstrong Charles Napier. The first Afghan War followed, as the British sought to make this mountainous region a 'buffer' state to counter the growing Russian advance towards the Hindu Kush from the north. The opening gambit in what was to become the 'Great Game', the war was a disaster for the British. Trapped in Kabul, the British Indian force was wiped out, with only a single survivor, out of some 15,000 men, left alive to tell the tale. Abandoning the attempt to subdue Afghanistan, the British next turned to the Punjab. Disputes among the Sikh chieftains, and within its army, opened up opportunities for intervention which led to the first Sikh War in 1845 and the installation of a British resident in Lahore. Among those who sought advantage by supporting the British was the Hindu raja of Jammu, Gulab Singh. His reward was the lush mountain kingdom of Kashmir, with an almost wholly Muslim population. Thus was the stage set for what was to become, a century later, the most embittered and enduring conflict between successor states of the Raj.

The years from Hastings's time to the mid-nineteenth century brought about a momentous set of changes for India. Above all, the East India Company, in the 1770s a fledgling state among other equally powerful regional states, had by 1850, with the conquest of

the Punjab, brought the entire Indian subcontinent under its control to form a vast Indian Empire. Under the Company's government a beginning had been made, especially with the encouragement of commercial agriculture, towards transforming India's economy to serve the needs of the larger world-capitalist order. A system of law and property rights had been instituted. Various plans for social reform had been enunciated. New ideas, of India's past and of its possible futures, began to circulate among the educated. Yet in no way was this a straightforward process of 'modernization'. Many 'reforms' existed only on paper or were confined to tiny urban elites. Others had the effect of binding Indians more tightly to the soil, as warrior aristocracies were turned into landlords and wandering pastoralists forced to become peasant cultivators. Indian commercial and banking elites had profited with the British from the new opportunities of the colonial era, as exemplified by such collaborative ventures as Carr Tagore & Co. Yet they found themselves by mid-century, with almost the sole exception of the Parsis in Bombay, driven out of the export sector into less remunerative inland trade or on to the land. South Indian temples, once great sources for the redistribution of wealth, found their assets taxed and, shorn of government patronage, their management constantly scrutinized for 'corrupt' practice.

Other changes tied Indians more closely to rigidly defined notions of what was taken as their own 'tradition'. Texts, not local custom, now mattered, with the result that Brahmans lengthened a growing dominance over a society increasingly stratified by the prescriptions of caste, which alone the law recognized. Thus new property laws sought to release individual energies, only to be immediately hedged round with concessions to British-defined 'customs' of caste and tribe. Women, once able to inherit property, found themselves excluded by a British determination to uphold 'Hindu' law. These various 'traditions', of hierarchy and ritual distinction, were, to be sure, not invented by the British. But they now began to press upon Indian society in rigid and unaccustomed ways. Significant further changes would come with the arrival, in 1849, of a more energetic governor-general, and, a decade later, of Crown rule.