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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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ANGLO-INDIA AND THE DEFENCE OF AUTHORITY: THE CHALLENGE OF THE WESTERN-EDUCATED INDIAN

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In 1905, as the last important act of his Viceroyalty, Lord Curzon had partitioned the great province of Bengal. It was an unpopular act, but, Curzon argued, essential for the efficient governing of so large a population. In the application of his principles of government to the problems of India, however, he had driven into temporary alliance the diffuse elements of a nationalist movement which had previously lacked a central issue powerful enough to surmount the natural divisions of language and geography. The announcement of the partition of Bengal seemed to change everything. In the context of the ensuing period of crisis, the Anglo-Indian[1] was forced to defend his position and status within the Indian polity. He had done this in the past, but by 1905, a new urgency was apparent in his consciousness of imminent disaster as the inevitable result of the decline of British power in the sub-continent.

One of the most consistent policies of the British government in India had been its support of western education and the spread of western culture. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, even this civilizing mission was being challenged by the civilizing race itself. A western education had become increasingly associated with political opposition, and many Anglo-Indians were convinced that a monumental error had been made. The educated Indian had accepted the new learning with alacrity but was far less cooperative in accepting guidance as to its proper application. This paper will deal primarily with the attitudes of the Anglo-Indian toward western education in India as the products of that liberal policy began challenging overtly the fundamental bases of Anglo-Indian authority and power.

English had become the official language of British India on March 7, 1837. The decision had not been taken quickly or without a great deal of forethought. Since the early days of company rule, the languages and literature of the sub-continent had not only been tolerated but encouraged. Since 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction had been concerned with the problem of an education policy for the *Raj*. Here, the anglicists, who advocated education along western

[1] The term "Anglo-Indian" is used here in its most inclusive sense, i.e., any Englishman who went out to India for an extended period of time in either an official or unofficial capacity.

lines in the English language, and the orientalists, who would protect the indigenous languages and traditional educational institutions of the sub-continent, fought the battle which "culminated in Macaulay's famous Minute, and the initiation of a policy which was to have such a profound effect on the future of India." [2] Macaulay had no doubts as to the proper policy for the Governor General in Council to endorse. The problem was clear and the solution equally clear :

> The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which by universal confession there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which by universal confession whenever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse. [3]

In a spirit of optimism regarding the benefits of western institutions in India and the goal of eventual separation and independence, the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck, endorsed the anglicist position.

Fifty years before, Lord Cornwallis had arrived in India to institute reforms under Pitt's India Act. Cornwallis believed that the administrative problems with which he was confronted concerned only Englishmen in India, and might be solved without reference to the indigenous population. By his exclusion of all Indians from the higher governmental posts, he created a new and alien governing class. [4] The new Governor General had thought that reasonable salaries would solve the Company's problem of corruption among its English servants. He made no attempt to achieve the same end among Indians. "Corruption was stamped out at the cost of equality and cooperation. In his own mind, as in the commonly accepted view, there was a necessary connexion between the two measures; 'every native of Hindustan', he said, 'I verily believe, is corrupt'." [5] The very factors which improved the tone of English life, Percival Spear concluded in his analysis of Anglo-Indian society in the eighteenth century, "widened the racial gulf." [6] Macaulay had denounced the whole cultural tradition of India but unlike Cornwallis his reforming energies were motivated by a desire to bring the people of India into the mainstream of the political life of their country. He considered the use of the English language as the key to the cultural heritage of the West. Western

[2] Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrat, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1962), p. 314.

[3] Macaulay's Minute on Education, 2 February 1835, quoted in Syed Nurullah and J. P. Naik, *A Student's History of Education in India* (Calcutta : Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1956), p. 60.

[4] Percival Spear, *The Nabobs* (London: Oxford Paperbacks, 1963), p. 137.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

education would close the gap that separated the rulers from their subjects and result one day in responsible government for India.

In the early years of the twentieth century, however, a new generation of anglicists and orientalists [7] were still debating the question to which Macaulay had so readily provided an answer. In the intervening years the separation of the races which had been defined and incorporated in Cornwallis' Code was slowly challenged by the products of that system of education inspired by Macaulay's Minute. But the spirit as well as the custom of the Code were difficult to overcome. The twentieth century anglicists were able to point to a system of education which had already produced generations of Indians well prepared to take leadership roles in the administration of their own country. For the anglicists, Britain's greatest achievement in her eastern empire had been the introduction of the language and culture of the Western world. After a long and distinguished administrative career in India, Alfred Lyall firmly believed "the moral and material civilisation of the Indian people has made more progress in the last fifty years than during all the preceding centuries of their history." [8]

No anglicist was ever hard pressed to find the influence for good of this cultural and imperial conjunction. They not only saw much value in maintaining the present education policy of the *Raj*, but in fact saw in it the answer to many of the problems still confronting the administrators. "It is to education that we must look to dispel many of the misapprehensions which go so far to create discontent in this country," declared G. F. Wilson, Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council. "Education dispelled the 'money drain theory' and we must use it to dispel the idea that British rule has reduced India to poverty and its people to starvation. The exact opposite is the case." [9]

In the end, however, the warmest Anglo-Indian anglicist had doubts about this fantastic educative undertaking in which he was so intimately engaged. "No one can as yet venture upon any prognostic," cautioned Alfred Lyall, "of the course which the subtle and searching mind of India will mark out for itself amid the cross currents of Eastern and Western influences." In the past, he believed, the English in India had been too zealous in their allegiance to education, too confident in its powers of antidote for India's problems. [10] It was now

[7] These new "orientalists" were quite different from their eighteenth and early nineteenth century predecessors. While the latter were motivated by a keen professional interest and appreciation of classical Hindu Culture, the former were primarily interested in the political significance of their ideas.

[8] Sir Alfred Lyall, *The Rise and Expansion of the British Dominion in India* (London : J. Murray, 1898), p. 388.

[9] Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson, *Letters to Nobody 1908-1913* (London : J. Murray, 1921), p. 206.

[10] Sir Alfred Lyall, *The Rise and Expansion of the British in India*, p. 390.

apparent that the interaction of western ideas and ideals — superimposed on an oriental base had produced far too abrupt a transition, and an uneasy restlessness now common to all of Asia. "Its equilibrium has been disturbed by the high speed at which Europe has been pushing eastward; and the principle points of contact and penetration," Lyall noted, "are in India." [11]

By the nature of his situation and occupation, the Anglo-Indian, official and non-official, was both orientalist and anglicist. The emphasis depended upon the question with which he was confronted. As an Englishman, the value of his language and the significance of his own cultural tradition seemed in this oriental setting even more necessary for civilized existence. He would certainly be forfeiting his argument and denying his mission if in any way he tampered with the opportunity of the people of India to enlighten themselves in the classic literature of western civilization. But to do what was best for India was a complicated question which defied simple allegiance to familiar standards.

For John Morley, the Secretary of State, "... the thought of all this mental activity in Indian gentlemen," was not altogether "reassuring for our stability..." [12] In India, the practical experience of an officer of the Civil Service provided enough insight into the often exotic problems of the people to necessitate in his mind some compromise with the goals and ideals of his mission, some attempt to meet the realities of the political, social, and economic problems of the moment. There was a close association of western education and advanced political ideas which envisaged an independent India far more quickly than the most optimistic Anglo-Indian, as well as social ideas which demanded the overthrow of those racial barriers which separated the Indian from his English governors. Both provided the basis for a growing demand for re-evaluation of the anglicist argument among an increasingly vocal orientalist opposition. It had become "almost a truism among those who know India," noted *The Pioneer*, an important Anglo-Indian newspaper, "that the pressure for more self-government comes from men who have been touched by western thought, through misdirected forms of western education..." [13]

For the good of India, radical change was obviously necessary. Poverty, plague, floods, under-development in the industrial field and faulty practices in agriculture — all required tremendous overhaul. It was assumed that change meant moving in a westerly direction. There was apparently no basis within the sub-continent to provide for

11 Sir Alfred Lyall, Introduction to Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (London : Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1910), p. ix.
12 Morley to Minto, 1 June 1906, Minto Papers.
13 *The Pioneer*, 23 July 1906.

the implementation of the type of reform necessary to bring India into some meaningful relationship with the modern technology of the West. In order to compete, in order to survive, India would have to borrow. There were few educated people in India — either English or Indian — who would have denied the truth of this line of reasoning. But the Englishman generally concentrated on technology, while the Indian looked to politics. "Education is the greatest problem we have to face in India today," the Viceroy, Lord Minto, declared to a deputation of orthodox Hindus in March of 1908. "Upon its solution the future of this country largely depends. The dangers of educational maladministration, and of the misappropriation of educational advantages, stare us in the face. It would seem that, as in many other things in India," Minto concluded, "we have reached the parting of the ways. Is the intellectual current to flow for good or for evil?" [14]

The great classics of western literature not only required a reader with a sure grasp of the English language, argued the Anglo-Indian, but equally important was an ingrained cultural and spiritual foundation that would provide a proper perspective for understanding newly gained ideas. Otherwise the reader might too easily be led astray in a direction that had no relationship with that which was intended. Western education in England did not turn large numbers of her citizens into political revolutionaries. Obviously the situations in India and England were quite different. The means and ends of Englishmen in India had to be tempered by the needs and abilities of the Indian people. The French traveler and historian, Joseph Chailley, was far more direct. He believed that the policy of education leading toward the end of British domination was no longer held by most Englishmen. There were of course a few who remained enthusiastic, but for the most part, "British opinion, whether in India or in the mother country, would now no longer consider a policy of evacuation; the ties which bind India to England are too strong." [15]

Another contemporary traveler, Sidney Low, supported the orientalist critics of British education policy. Higher education had obviously been predicated upon "the wrong lines from the outset." The decision had been made in the sultry days of Manchester and middle class Liberalism "when things ancient and things unfamiliar were treated with contempt." The results had been the production of native graduates nurtured on the literature and language of the West as well as a "hotch-potch of superficial ethics and controversial politics . . ." [16] Those

[14] Earl of Minto's reply to an orthodox Hindu deputation, Enclosure, Minto to Morley, 12 March 1908, Minto Papers, no. 15.

[15] Joseph Chailley, *Administrative Problems of British India*, trans. Sir William Meyer (London : Macmillan and Co., 1910), p. 166.

[16] Sidney Low, *A Vision of India* (London : Smith, Elder and Co., 1911), pp. 351-352.

who were most critical of the education policies which had been followed for almost three quarters of a century felt that the system had been superficially imposed from the top without any attempt to accommodate it to the real life and culture of the people. The Anglo-Indian had been content to receive the graduates into the various services of the *Raj*, but he was equally content to have the great mass of the people untouched by this logical goal of his civilizing mission. In short, by the turn of the twentieth century, the growing association of advanced political ideas with advanced western education caused many Anglo-Indians to look with favor upon the reticence with which their predecessors tampered with tradition. Walter Lawrence insisted that:

> their standards of conduct and our standards are poles apart, and the sage men of old who founded the great business of John Company, were wise, or at any rate prudent, when they left the religions, the customs, and the superstitions of the Indians severely alone. [17]

Britain had been developing her constitutional ideas and political institutions for centuries and many Anglo-Indians were quite willing to accept the proposition that India would require at least an equally long exposure to evolutionary practice in the use of these institutions. Of course few who held such ideas were optimistic enough to believe that British administrative domination would be counted in centuries. But an appeal to longevity of tenure, to the necessity for a long trusteeship was continuously part of the rationale of the Anglo-Indian. One essayist called upon the Government to cease pandering to "... such plausible and long exploded shibboleths as 'the equality of men', 'liberty of the subject', and 'freedom of the press'. Indians," he insisted, "with their present limited range of political thought, do not understand such altruistic ideas..." [18] Like so many other critics of India at the turn of the century, he centered his attack upon the Bengali, who was "... now suffering from a surfeit of European education." [19]

Increasingly after 1905, when the Anglo-Indian laughed, he laughed at the Bengali; when he was frightened or frustrated, the situation in Bengal was at fault. It was the Bengali Baboo who had adapted himself most readily to the language and culture of his latest rulers. Of all Indians, the Bengali assimilated best the tools and goals of western culture. "Men of genius scatter their ideas broadcast," wrote S. N. Banerjea, the leader of the anti-partition movement in Bengal. "Some of them fall on congenial soil. Time and the forces of nature nurse them. They ripen into an abundant harvest fraught with unspeakable good to

[17] Sir Walter Roper Lawrence, Bart., *The India We Served* (London : Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1928), pp. 279-280.

[18] Action Front, "Regeneration on a Racial Basis," *The Political Future of India* (London : Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), p. 251.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

future generations." [20] The soil of Bengal had been fertile, and the Anglo-Indian shared in the labor of the harvest, but more often than not, for him the fruit was bitter or under-ripe. "It is the future of Baboodom I tremble for," wrote George Aberigh Mackay in his satirical twenty one day romp through India:

> The patent-leather shoes, the silk umbrellas, the ten thousand horse-power English words and phrases, and the loose shadows of English thought, which are now so many Aunt Sallies for all the world to fling a jeer at, might among other races pass into *dummy soldiers,* and from dummy soldiers into trampling, hope-bestirred crowds . . . [21]

To those in responsible office there seemed little to laugh about. The agitation over partition had been only the beginning. By 1907, Lord Minto was convinced that Calcutta was the "source from which every evil influence is circulated throughout India. It is from there that the machinery of sedition is worked, not only in East Bengal, but in the Punjab and on the frontier . . ." [22] In large measure, those who were confronted each day with additional threats of violence and actual incidents of unrest and sedition, would have agreed with one of Kipling's Russian agents in *Kim* who pointed out to his comrade that Hurree Babu represented "in petto India in transition—the monstrous hybridism of East and West." [23] One Anglo-Indian writer wondered that there were "any level-headed men left amongst the so-called educated." The system of education endorsed by the Government of India filled the young Indian scholar with Macaulay, Rousseau, Kant, and Herbert Spencer, but no attempt was made to teach religion and instill moral principles. [24]

The Pioneer agreed and assured its readers that the secularization of education was responsible for most of the unhappy consequences of the Government's policy. Those institutions in which a western education might be received were generally completely divorced from the traditional religious training of the Hindu or Mohamedan. The Government quite naturally had assumed that religion might be properly left to parents and the home, realizing the great potential difficulties of such involvement on its part and desiring to be absolutely impartial in its attitude toward all the religions of India. The British *Raj* suffered from a peculiar disadvantage, *The Pioneer* concluded. " . . . It cannot inculcate duty to itself, because duty must rest upon religion, and it is precluded from touching religion in the slightest degree." [25]

[20] Sir Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making* (Calcutta : Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 192.
[21] George Aberigh Mackay, *Twenty-One Days in India Being the Tour of Sir Ali Baba,* K.C.B. (London, 1902), pp. 53-54.
[22] Minto to Morley, 26 September 1907, Minto Papers.
[23] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (New York : Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1959), p. 239.
[24] Action Front, p. 256.
[25] *The Pioneer,* 19 January 1907.

The Anglo-Indian novelist, Flora Annie Steel, was convinced that the cause of the growing gulf between the rulers and the ruled was undoubtedly education. In the hands of scientific experts, education was becoming "the curse of humanity". To these people, lacking other responsibilities to temper their ideals, a scholar was a scholar, "whether he be Esquimaux or Hottentot," and it made little difference to what use he put his newly gained ideas as long as he had taken the prescribed course of studies for the well rounded gentleman. These educators did not realize that "not until many many generations of slowly acquired mental and physical deviation from the type have come to obliterate much that lies at the back of the Eastern brain, can we hope to educate it on Western lines to a Western ideal." [26] In her autobiography, Mrs. Steel told a story of an experience she had while teaching English in a small Indian town. A boy of about thirteen was consistently doing poor work in the simple home assignments she had given out. When asked the reason, the boy burst into tears and told her that his baby was dying. She tried to help but nothing could be done. The baby died. "But give an instant's thought to the poor lad," she challenged her readers, "who was trying to mix up English grammar with fatherhood and will there not be a heartwhole condemnation of trying to put new wine into old bottles?" [27]

The "new Indian" might have been educated in western schools, and in fact, spent considerable time in England and on the continent. He might use the English language better and more vigorously than his rulers. But many Anglo-Indians insisted that he was still an oriental at heart and his western breeding was merely a veneer. He had not as yet had time to absorb the spirit of the new culture in depth. This would take generations and in the meantime the British must provide the guiding hand and the protective force. Thus the westernized Indians, the Gokhales, the Banerjeas, the Mehtas were not generally applauded for their flexible adaptability to the new culture, nor were they admired for their prowess with the English language. They were not much more socially acceptable in their morning coats and top hats than the most traditionally minded *dhoti* wearer. Rather the firm foundation of the oriental was duly searched for, and when discovered — as it always was — the rest was declared superficial and certainly no basis for western confidence. *The Pioneer* pointed out:

> the curious and interesting phenomenon of the Indian who spends long years in Europe, wears European costume with admirable aplomb, acquires the niceties of European social customs and arrives at some understanding of the workings of the modern Christian mind and yet

[26] Mortimer Menpes, *India*, text by Flora Annie Steel (London : Adam and Charles Black, 1905), pp. 199-200.

[27] Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (London : Macmillan and Company Limited, 1930), p. 63.

> remains a convinced Hindu all the time. No doubt he undergoes some such change as makes the Anglo-Indian distinguishable from the untraveled Englishman. But that is all, and more than that we could hardly expect.[28]

Although *The Pioneer* was willing to compare the mildly exotic state of the "new Indian" with that of the Anglo-Indian, it still concluded that the Anglo-Indian's peculiar experience had provided him with a singular *rapport* with the East to which the Indian's westernization could not be compared. In fact, not only had the "new Indian" not made for himself a place among the English; he had also lost his old connection with his own people.

> If they have undergone a sea change, not all India has followed their example. We do not believe that the Anglo-Indian is less kindly or less considerate than he ever was. But he has been 150 years in the country and he has picked up some of the natural conservatism and cautiousness of an ancient and much tried race. He is more Indian in many ways than the new Indians and, therefore, perhaps more in sympathy with the millions over whom the new Indian naturally enough aspires to rule.[29]

With paradoxical enthusiasm far too many Englishmen involved in the governing of India encouraged their protégés to seek the tools of western ideas and goals, but in large measure denied them their use. They wished to bring India into the mainstream of western civilization, but they insisted upon the limitations of mere formal education not apparent to many Indians. They believed that the mind of the West might be recreated here, but not its heart and soul. The English in India were not merely bureaucrats, they insisted. They were representatives of a culture, the products of centuries of spiritual and intellectual development. The Indian was no less a representative of his own culture and a few years in an English college made little real difference. Perhaps some day it might, but not yet.

While there were many Anglo-Indians who encouraged these "new Indians" in their quest for office and power in the *Raj*, far more were opposed and sought to direct these energies into areas they considered more appropriate. When Lord Minto requested opinions from the Government of Madras regarding the appointment of a native Member to its Executive Council, Mr. Forbes, a Member of that Council, emphatically declared that the administration of government in Madras would remain good only as long as it remained essentially British. He felt "that no intellectual or educational attainments will ever endow the Indian with the qualifications necessary to govern wisely and well — qualifications of which the Englishman in India has shown himself to be possessed; and

[28] *The Pioneer*, 28 June 1908.
[29] *The Pioneer*, 10 May 1906.

that the Indian will fail in *character,* however brilliant he may be in intelligence and erudition." [30]

R. H. Craddock, the Chief Commissioner in the Central Provinces, pointed out that there were "numerous individuals of every race who failed to recognize their own limitations, but among Indians of the educated classes the failure is unusually common...." [31] They were making demands, both socially and politically, which would have seemed impossible to their grandfathers' generation. [32] But the distance in time had not been long enough, not nearly long enough. The average Hindu, passing through Anglo-Indian colleges, declared William Lilly, was stuffed and crammed with information for the purposes of examination. He was able to repeat glibly the words of western wisdom, but to "repeat their words is one thing: to think their thoughts is quite another." [33]

It was where the differences seemed the greatest that the Anglo-Indian and Indian had gotten along best with each other. In the day to day relations of the district official with the people of the villages, in those situations where the problems were obvious to all parties — easily definable and often immediately correctable; the *rapport* between the races edged closest to the ideal. A canal that would help the producers of one village get their goods to market, a difference of opinion over boundaries, a momentary disturbance between members of different communities — these might be dealt with forthrightly, with all parties cooperating. Here the Anglo-Indian official as the focus of objective reasoning, the great compromiser, could set things right in a proper spirit of disinterest. In contrast, in the great questions which concerned all India, questions of national goals and plans for the future, where the argument turned to abstractions and the parties to the dialogue were closer together in language and education, often in dress and social habits, the discussion foundered and those differences that remained were magnified. The increase in the amount of common knowledge and background, rather than establishing a new and different meeting ground between the Anglo-Indian and the educated Indian, only produced in the main greater divisiveness.

That relationship, which had for generations been accepted as right and correct, was founded primarily upon a mutual appreciation of a difference in status which separated the Indian from the Anglo-Indian. This difference was fundamental to the Englishman's peculiar position in the sub-continent, and it was upon the basis of this difference that he built up the body of custom and tradition with which he defended his

30 Lawley to Minto, 17 September 1906, Minto Papers.
31 Craddock to Dunlop Smith, 24 January 1910, Minto Papers.
32 *The Englishman,* 15 November 1909.
33 William S. Lilly, *India and its Problems* (London : Sands and Co., 1902), pp. 243-244.

place in the Indian polity. The western educated Indian, equipped with training similar to his own began pressing, more and more urgently, western arguments, not based upon the difference but rather upon the increasing amount of common ground between them. Confronted with this mirror image of himself — seemingly the same in outlook, manner, and education, but in some obvious although often undefinable way oddly backward and beside the point, the Anglo-Indian searched out the bases for the old *rapport*. In many cases he turned back to the orientalist argument that had fallen seventy years before, beneath the attack of Macaulay's progressive rhetoric. Both the western educated Indian and the Anglo-Indian were exotics in their own way — each with a preponderance of his own history and culture — but often with far more than a thin veneer of the civilization of the other. Each saw the necessity of mixing his bicultural experiences in order to achieve a goal held in common; but the formula of the mixture — how much of the East, how much of the West — was almost as varied as the number of participants. The obvious conclusion came late, and often more quickly to the poet than to the politician: "That East should be as West is but a dream."