

CHAPTER XI
CLIMATE OF OPINION



In order to see the problem in historical perspective, I have consulted a cross-section of opinion about the British in India in the years when India was occupying a central place in the English consciousness and the controversy was raging. An unavoidable conclusion is that a large number of intelligent Englishmen sensed that something was out-of-order. This conclusion was alarming and disquieting because nothing ought to be wrong; the British were on the subcontinent to bring efficiency and progress to the Indians and there should not be any doubt or uneasiness about it. The contemporary opinions about the future of the English in India form a broad spectrum. In setting some of them down here, I hope to lay the groundwork for discussion of the work of fiction that grew out of the same problem.

At the beginning of the Indian-English relationship, there was only a little consciousness that problems existed between these two peoples because of prevailing attitudes. As British colonialism developed, peace was rendered and administration was made more secure, it became altogether clear that there was no real intimacy, understanding, nor close relation between these two peoples. Instead, an

nationalism and the movement toward independence accelerated, the hostility against the British intensified. This hostility may seem perplexing in light of England's success in improving productive commerce, communications, western education and liberal thought; but it is of course not a situation of cause and effect. The pressure simply built up for India to be ruled by Indians. Two of the most divisive factors were race and religion.

Many articulate Englishmen discussed the role of the English in India and among them many points-of-view were expressed. The writers interested in the question can be divided into three main groups: the imperialists, the anti-imperialists and the spectators. The opinions of the first two groups were of course highly subjective. They were prone to generalize their own circumstances and emotions, yet their views certainly cannot be overlooked.

✓ The imperialists believed that the British Empire was founded in India for the sole purpose of improving and benefitting India. The British came first to India to trade, but their commerce inevitably developed into conquest. The Indians were weak and disorganized ^{and the} British could play the quarrels of the princes off against one another. Finally conquest proceeded by open aggrandizement. The aggrandizement tended to be underemphasized by the imperialists because they believed that the British Raj was established solely on the disinterestedness of the English presence in India. They regarded

the British military and administrative control over India as disinterested and beneficial supervision to give India strength, unity, and knowledge until it could stand by itself. They also regretted that the result of the British attempt to improve India was a historical irony because the only thanks they received for the unselfishness that was at least partly involved was unpopularity among Indians and criticisms by other Englishmen. A little blinded by their imperialistic attitude, they overlooked the fact that no people were content to be ruled by other people no matter how beneficial it might be for them. And at that, this disinterestedness was a matter of opinion.

The anti-imperialists, who were mostly Indians, looked at the problem on an entirely different level. To them, the British came to India to rule and to act like masters. They took everything for their own benefit from India and had no real interest in the country or its people. The British wanted to make their Raj a showpiece of progress only for their own prestige, and they completely disregarded the people of their Empire and refused to treat them as equals or even as human beings. The only relationship the British could have with the Indians, the anti-imperialists thought, was that of the "conqueror-conquered" (a phrase used by Chatterji in his article entitled "Racial Animosity" published in Bengali in 1873)¹, which made the Indians feel they were being treated as inferiors in their own home. The anti-imperialists also put the

blame on the British for the friction because they exposed to the Indians western customs and civilization, yet did not allow them to join. The causes of division were many, and the atmosphere was one of hostility. Chatterji in the same article pointed out a number of the outstanding sources of tension:

...Race pride and sense of superiority; segregation of the conflicting elements; aggressive self defence; suppression and unconscious ill-treatment of the indigenous population; unwillingness to share culture; and continual mental strains.²

These things not only prevented the British from mixing with the Indians, but also created contempt and anger toward the British. And finally the anti-imperialists came to believe that "the less there was personal relation the better for both."³ Thus both imperialists and anti-imperialists held beliefs which made communication difficult.

The spectators did not blame either the British or the Indians because they thought that the main causes of the failure of relation were, as Joseph Chailley, the French official, in his book about the British in India, Administrative Problems of British India (1910) stated, "essential differences and mutual ignorance."⁴ Yet they felt that neither party was less guilty. They tried to maintain a balanced point-of-view. The British at first did not disdain Indian society or the Indians themselves since they came to trade, and making themselves well-liked was a means to achieve their purpose.

The spectators pointed out that as the government took over India more and more, the English increasingly had less real relations with the Indians, and their purpose for being there seemed less disinterested; however they still tried to justify their relations with the Indians. Finally, blinded by their jingoism, the British did not care to understand that more was necessary in the administration of an overseas colony than efficiency, improved communications, and modernized education. As for the Indians, the spectators pointed out that the Indians, vexed by the modern trends that the British brought with them, could not help feeling irritated and confused because they could not adjust to these things, completely different from their own traditional pattern of life. Uncertain of their position, they were frustrated and emotion tended to replace reason.

Both the British and the Indians, then, according to the spectators, were responsible for the chasm between the two peoples.

The main elements which in fact divided these two peoples were race and religion.

Race

Because of ideas of racial superiority and inferiority prevalent at that time, the British and the Indians could not carry on cordial relations. There were always feelings of masters and dependents, of rulers and ruled. The British missions which were at first liberal became

imperialistic with the end of the century and the Victorian period. With the growth of white racialism within the Empire rose a corresponding growth of Indian racial arrogance.

Other factors contributed to the growing separation between the communities at the turn of the century. The British no longer saw any importance or necessity to mix with the Indians, to understand them or to attach themselves to them personally because easier communications enabled them to reach home, their family and society with less fuss and inconvenience. Besides, the British officials worked so hard that they regarded personal relations with the Indians a sacrifice and they preferred relaxing among their own people. The Indians, on the other hand, were of course hurt by the resistance of the British to accept them or their society. Thus they turned to find places for themselves in politics.

Neither of the peoples wanted to adjust to the other finally because they became conscious that they were too different. Although the Indians appreciated the science and civilization of Europe and wanted to have a share of it, they still wanted first of all to be pure Indians, "imbued with the civilization, religion and morality of India."⁵ The British considered it equally essential to be Englishmen in heredity as well as education. Thus, since they both were overwhelmed by race pride, close relations between them, as Chailley pointed out, became impossible because they had become useless.

Religion

The British were absolutely ignorant of Indian

religious. They found in them only irrationality, contradiction and confusion. Coupling ignorance with indifference and contempt, they accused the whole religious system as "heathenism or idolatry."⁶ They paid no regard to the caste system and its rules, which was an offshoot of religious faith. Considering caste to be a hindrance to progress, they tried to abolish it overnight, paying no attention to its roots in the ancient past, in Hinduism, and in the whole structure of Indian life. In the effort, they inevitably caused contempt and anger among the Indians.

Yet it was not the fault of the British alone. One must never fail to keep in mind the enmity of the pretensions confronting the English. Chailley at the time sounded an apt lament about India:

...how can one approach it without shocking it, govern it without wounding it, and endeavour to reconcile its numerous and complex interests with those of the governing people?

Many discussions of the possibility of mixing between the two communities were made among politicians, scholars, and writers at that time, revealing many different attitudes and ideas.

Henry W. Nevinson worked as correspondent for British newspapers in India during the time. The New Spirit in India (1908) was the reflection of his thought and ideas about the British Raj. He suggested that the British should put more emphasis on liberal education to prepare India for "self-reliance"⁸ which was an important element in order

to be independent. Besides, the British attitude toward India and the Indians should be changed too. The Indians should be treated as equals. And after the love of freedom, courage, and devotion were cultivated in every Indian's mind, political suppression should be ended and finally freedom should be given to India. The internal problems—the gap between people of different castes and religious creeds—should be solved by the Indians themselves. After this hard task, the British and the Indians could meet at a point where hostility and frustration did not exist. Robinson's liberalism was extraordinary for the time and is refreshing to come upon even at this later date. His ideas had a clarity and balance that most writers of the time who wrote about India were unable to achieve.

G. F. Stevens is a British writer who visited India. His book, In India (1893) is more a travel book than serious political analysis. He did not see any possibility of reconciliation with such large contradictions existing between the British and the Indians. And yet he was still optimistic enough to hope that time would heal all and a good solution would be achieved if the British were patient enough to import in India "a new morality"⁹ which would encourage "public spirit, ...public integrity, ...and devotion to public duty,"¹⁰ the qualities Stevens thought the Indians lacked which would prevented them from standing on their own. Stevens' argument in this way was typical of the arguments of the time. One can speak of a "new morality,"

but it really does not solve many problems. It is the sort of solution advanced because no real solution is available. Stevens went to great lengths to be cheerful about the Raj, but the end result was something very much like whistling in the dark.

Sir Valentine Chirol, a member of the Royal Commission on the Indian Public Service (1912-15), in his book India (1926), called for "a new stage in the great experiment"¹¹ as solution of the problems. His tone in the book shows the utter insecurity of the British-Indian Government. He objected to British imperialism but he wanted the British to continue being "a great agency of permanent progress"¹² in India. The Raj without imperialism is a rather difficult concept to grasp. Again it is the case of a solution offered to disguise the fact that there is no real solution.

Sir C. Chaudhuri, an Indian writer of our time, refers to the past in his article, "On Understanding the Hindus" (1965). Chaudhuri is overwhelmed by bitterness in expressing his emotions and ideas. He blames the British for the problem because they failed even to try to understand the Indians. Also in his article, Chaudhuri gives the advice that in order to understand India, one should first understand the Hindus, since they constitute the majority. Hindus should be accepted and respected as they really are with their own characteristics and mentality.

Sir Monier Monier-Williams, professor and specialist on India, seemed to have the same idea as Chaudhuri. In

his book, Modern India and the Indians (1878), he suggested "promotion of goodwill and sympathy"¹³ between England and India. His keynote was that these two peoples had to labor for "a systematic organization and concentration"¹⁴ in order to get a better knowledge of England in India, and of India in England. He believed that this work would draw the peoples closer together,

...by promoting mutual knowledge, by furthering interchange of ideas, by encouraging reciprocity of feeling, by fostering goodwill and sympathy between the two communities.¹⁵

Sir Denier was a man of goodwill and good intention, but goodwill is rarely sufficient for the solving of problems. We shall meet a man of similar temperament in our discussion of the most interesting novel to grow out of the problem.

The last writer to be examined is Joseph Chailley, member of the French Deputies. Chailley was distinguished also as a student of Oriental problems and the methods of administration in British dependencies were his special study. As he did not belong to the British Empire and could view it as an outsider, his opinions should be given more detailed consideration than the others' because he could be objective, judicious, and balanced in seeing the situation as those more directly and painfully involved could not.

In his book, Administrative Problems of British India (1910), Chailley admired the "Native Policy"¹⁶ which

the British had used successfully in governing India, the imposing of "their own religion, laws, justice and administration."¹⁷ This was effective among the lower groups of Indians who received security, order, and justice from the British Raj and felt that if the British were driven out, it would only be a change of master and perhaps for the worse. Yet problems appeared because the other group of Indians, the educated, were not satisfied with what they were given. They claimed far more rights and privileges. Hatred and animosity between the British and the Indians inevitably resulted.

Chailley's first suggestion for the British-Indian Government was the improvement of education. A new educational system should be introduced in order to give the Indians real education and to give them ^{the} chance to develop their intelligence freely and completely. The British themselves should also be more interested in the study of Asian mind.

In administrative affairs, Chailley suggested that the British maintain their position but gradually give the Indians practice in ruling their own country. Educated and intolligent as they were, it was still dangerous for the Indians to immediately change their role because they lacked experience which was greatly needed there. The British should train them by forming "uniform rules"¹⁸ for all India in which the Indians could participate. These suggestions, and other suggestions Chailley made, have the ring

of much real experience and careful thought.

When the writers are examined all together, it can be seen that problems between the British and the Indians started basically because they did not understand each other or even try to. This was accepted by all writers discussed in spite of differences in details. All agreed that the British should not stay in India forever but leave India to its own people after some changes and improvements, personal, social, and/or administrative. Some of the suggestions given at the time were clearly too optimistic, notably Nevinson's and Tonier-Williams'. Some, like Shelley's, gave promise of being more effective. Whatever the solutions offered, they were not solutions that could be accomplished overnight. All writers agreed that the British must remain in India for some time because India was not yet ready to stand on its own. And during this stay, the British should develop in the Indians the capacity to rule India by themselves. The climate of opinion seems to convey that it was best for the British to stay in India because as Chirol said:

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...There is still much work for England to do in India, ...just now in a state of more than ever unstable equilibrium between new forces of attraction and repulsion, of appeasement and of conflict. For it is in India, if anywhere, that, unless civilization is to be brought to shame, a synthesis must be found and can be found unless British rule endures between the East and the West, if an irrevocable clock is to be averted in which neither could escape disaster.¹⁹

In a world in which the new center of conflict is Asia, Sir Valentine Chirol's words ring all too true.