

THE WORLD AT WAR
THE STORY OF THE
INDIAN MUTINY



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CHAPTER I

INDIA: ITS PEOPLES AND RULERS

A troubled history has all along been that of the great tongue of land which, occupying the same position in Asia as Italy in Europe, is equal to half our continent, with a population growing towards three hundred millions. Far back into fabulous ages, we see it threatened by mythical or shadowy conquerors, Hercules, Semiramis, Sesostris, Cyrus; whelmed beneath inroads of nameless warriors from Central Asia; emerging first into historical distinctness with Alexander the Great's expedition to the valley of the Indus, from which came that familiar name given to dark-skinned races on both sides of the globe. Our era brought in new wars of spoil or of creed; Tartars, Arabs, Turcomans and Afghans in turn struggled among each other for its ancient wealth; and India knew little peace till it had passed under the dominion of a company of British merchants, who for a century held it by the sword as proudly as any martial conqueror.

This rich region having always invited conquest, its present population is seen to consist of different layers left by successive invasions. First, we have fragments of a pre-historic people, chiefly in the hill districts to which they were driven ages ago, whose very tribe-names, meaning *slaves* or *labourers*, sometimes tell how once they became subject to stronger neighbours; but behind them again there are traces of even older aborigines. Next, the open parts of the country are found over-run by a fair-skinned Aryan race, of the same stock as ourselves, whose pure descendants are the high-caste Brahmins and Rajpoots of our day, while a mixture of their blood with that of the older tribes has produced the mass of the Hindoo inhabitants. Over them lie patches of another quality of flesh and blood, deposited by

the fresh streams of Moslem inroad, as in the case of our Saxons and Normans. But whereas with us, Briton, Saxon and Norman are so welded into one nation, unless in mountainous retreats, that most Englishmen hardly know what blood runs mingled in their veins, here a very imperfect fusion has taken place between varied peoples, held jealously aloof by pride of race, by superstition, by hatred of rival faiths, and still speaking many different languages, with the mongrel mixture called Hindostani as the main means of intercommunication. The peculiarity of the latest conquest, our own, is that the dominant strangers show small desire to settle for life in the country subject to them, yet we have added a new element in the half-caste or Eurasian strain, through which, also, and but slightly by other means, have we been able to affect the religious belief of this motley population.

Religion may be taken as the keynote of Indian life and history. While our ancestors were still dark-minded barbarians, their Aryan kinsmen, migrating to Hindostan, had developed a singular degree of culture, especially in religious thought. Before Greece or Rome became illustrious, the hymns of the Vedas bespeak lofty ideas of the unseen, and the Brahminical priesthood appear as philosophers, legislators and poets of no mean rank. The first historical notices of India show a high level, not only of material but of moral civilization, as well as a manly temper of warriors well able to defend the soil they had won.

This enervating climate, however, with its easy efforts for existence, has proved an influence of degeneracy, and most clearly so in the matter of belief. Good seed, which here sprang up so quickly, was always apt to wither under a too scorching sun, or to run to rank foliage rather than to fruit. Early Brahminism, itself a marked growth in thought, after a time began to be choked by the heathenism it had overshadowed. It sent out a new shoot in Buddhism, a faith

of noble ideals, which to this day surpasses all others in the number of its adherents. This, in turn, became a jungle of sapless formulas, and after a thousand years died out on the land of its birth. Then grew up modern Hindooism, a union of Brahminical dreams of divinity and Buddhist love for humanity, interwoven with the aboriginal superstitions, the whole forming a tangled maze, where the great Hindoo trinity of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer, take Protean shapes as a pantheon of innumerable gods, amid which higher minds may turn upwards seeking one Almighty Spirit, but the vulgar crowd fix their attention rather on grotesque idols, base fetishes, symbols of fear and sensuality, fitly adored with degrading rites and barbarous observances. All efforts have hitherto little availed to clear this deeply-rooted wilderness of misbelief. Enlightened Hindoos, who see the errors of their religion, yet find it difficult to shake off the mental slavery of the "unchangeable East." Our missionaries have to deplore the little real success that attends their efforts. Beneath the sweltering sky of Hindostan, spiritual life remains a day-dream or a nightmare; reformers are ever silenced by fanatics; virtues are frittered down into foolish scruples; harmful customs cumber the ground, hindering the growth of progressive institutions.

The great encumbrance of Indian life is the system of caste, doubly fostered by religion and pride of race. Originally the conquering Aryans became divided into *Brahmins* or priests, *Rajpoots* or warriors, and *Vaisyas* or husbandmen, still distinguished as the "twice-born" castes, who wear the sacred thread, badge of this spiritual aristocracy; while under the common name of *Sudras* or serfs, were included all the despised aboriginal tribes. Then the mixed population, formed by amalgamation between the latter and the lower ranks of their masters, went on splitting up into other recognized castes, as the superior classes, who took a

pride in keeping their stock pure, grew themselves divided among separate tribes or castes; and thus arose a complex segregation of society into countless bodies, cut off from each other by almost impassable barriers of rank and occupation. There are now thousands of these castes, marked out by descent, by calling, or by locality, the members of which cannot intermarry, may seldom eat together, and must not touch food cooked by an inferior; even the shadow of an outsider falling upon his meal might cause a high-caste Hindoo to throw it away and go fasting. Each trade is a separate caste, each order of servant; and the man who makes his master's bed would shrink from the touch of the sweeper who cleans out his bath-room. Yet caste does not always coincide with social position; a powerful prince may be born of a low caste, and the native officer who gives orders to a high-caste Brahmin in the ranks, must bow before him when his sacred character is to be enlisted for the services of a family festival.

The origin of this organized exclusion becomes illustrated by the conduct of our own countrymen in India, among whom any penniless subaltern is apt to display at the best a haughty tolerance for the high-titled descendants of native kings, while he holds aloof from Englishmen of inferior station, and openly despises the half-caste Eurasian, who in turn affects contempt for the heathen Hindoo. We, indeed, have common sense enough, or at least sense of humour, not to let our prejudices degenerate into the ridiculous scrupulosity which forbids a Rajah to dine in the same room with his guests, or a coolie to set profane lips to his neighbour's drinking vessel. Railway travelling, military service, association with Europeans, cannot but do much to break down these burdensome restrictions; and enlightened natives, in public or in private, begin to neglect them, though it is to be feared that they too often copy the worse rather than the better parts of our example. But among the

mass of the ignorant people, the least infringement of the rules of caste is looked upon with horror, and to become an outcast *pariah*, through any offence against them, is the ruin in this world which it seems in the next.

Another main barrier to progress here, has long been the slavish condition of women, not improved by the next creed which came to modify Hindoo institutions. Buddhism was hardly extinct in India, when Mohamedan incursions began to put a strain of new blood into the physical degeneration of the Hindoos, and though the Crescent, except in parts, has never superseded the symbols of the older religion, these two, dwelling side by side, could not be without their reaction on each other's practice. It was the north of the peninsula that became most frequently overflowed by inroads of its Moslem neighbours, while Hindooism was left longer unassailed in the south, where also the aboriginal fetish worships had of old their citadels. Even in the north the conquests of Islam were long temporary and partial, irruptions of pirates or mountain-robbers, able to prey upon the wealth of India only through the want of cohesion among its Rajpoot lords. These early invaders either returned with their booty, or remained to quarrel over it between themselves, or were spoiled of it by fresh swarms from beyond the Himalayas.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, we find a Mohamedan empire set up at Delhi by a dynasty known as the Slave Kings, who, before long, gave place to rival adventurers. The power of the Crescent now began to extend into Southern India, yet revolts of vassals and viceroys kept it continually unstable. At the close of next century, the redoubtable Tamerlane captured Delhi, giving it up to an orgy of slaughter; but this devastating conqueror retired beyond the mountains and left India divided between warring princes, Hindoo and Moslem. Four generations later, Tamerlane's descendant Baber returned to make more

enduring conquests; then it was by his grandson, Akbar, that the Mogul empire became firmly founded.

Akbar the Great, whose long reign roughly coincides with that of our Queen Elizabeth, was rarely enlightened for an Oriental despot. By a policy of religious toleration, he won over the Hindoo princes, while he reduced the independent Mohamedan chiefs under his authority, and did much towards welding Northern India into a powerful union of provinces, ruled through his lieutenants. His less wise heirs, cursed by self-indulgent luxury and by family discords, added to the splendour rather than to the strength of this dominion. Its last famous reign was that of Aurungzebe, covering the second half of the seventeenth century. A bigoted Mohamedan, he alienated the Hindoos by persecution, while he spent many years in conquering the independent Moslem kings of the south, only to ripen the decay of his vast empire. After his death, it began to go to pieces like that of Alexander the Great. His feeble successors dwindled into puppets in the hands of one or another artful minister. Their satraps at a distance, under various titles, asserted a practical autocracy. And now had sprung up a new Hindoo power, the warlike hordes of the Mahrattas, whose great leader Sivajee, from his hill-forts among the Western Ghauts, began to make these ravaging horsemen feared far and wide, till their raids were the terror of all India.

Among the quickly-fading glories of the Mogul Empire, almost unnoticed came the appearance of the new strangers who would inherit it. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when all the gorgeous East was still a wonderland of wealth in Christian imaginations. Then followed the Dutch, who, however, fixed their chief attention upon the spice islands of the Archipelago. On the last day of A.D. 1600, the East India Company was incorporated by royal

charter at London, none yet dreaming to what greatness it would rise. A few years later, an English ambassador, sent by James I., made his way to the Court of the Great Mogul, and received assurances of favour and encouragement for trade. About the same time, our first settlement was made on the Coromandel coast. In 1615 a factory was established at Surat, on the other side of India; then, half-a-century later, the head-quarters of the enterprise were shifted to Bombay, ceded by Portugal in 1661, which, being an island, seemed safe from Sivajee's plundering horsemen.

In the meanwhile, other trading stations had been acquired in Bengal. At the end of the century, the Company is found taking a more independent stand, purchasing land, erecting fortifications, and arming its servants to resist the dangers which threatened trade in this disordered region. Such was the humble origin of the three Presidencies of Madras, Bombay, and Bengal, the last of which became the most important, and its chief station, Calcutta, the residence of the Governor-General.

Other European nations appeared in the field, but our only formidable rival here was France, the Portuguese making little of their claim to monopoly, now represented by the settlements of Goa, best known as the breeding place for a mongrel race of servants. One more stock of emigrants must not be omitted from mention. Centuries before a European ship had touched India, a remnant of Persian fire-worshippers, flying from Mohamedan persecution, settled upon the west coast, where, though few in numbers, by their wealth, intelligence, and commercial enterprise, these Parsees have grown to be an influential element in the population, excelling, like the Jews in Europe, as traders and men of business.

The eighteenth century saw the ruin of Aurungzebe's empire going on apace. Sikhs and Rajpoots threw off its yoke;

hereditary kingdoms were clutched for themselves out of the wreck by its ambitious viceroys; in 1739 the Persian Nadir Shah plundered the treasures of Delhi; after him came fresh hordes of Afghan horsemen. The greatest power in India was now the Mahratta Confederacy, under hereditary ministers bearing the title of Peshwa, who, like the Mayors of the Palace in Old France, usurped all real power, keeping Sivajee's unworthy heirs in sumptuous seclusion; a form of government that has often been brought about in Oriental States. The Peshwas, with their capital at Poona, ruled over the Deccan, the great tableland of the south; but the Mahratta incursions were carried as far as Delhi and Calcutta; and throughout India reigned a lawless disorder, inviting the interference of any hand strong enough to seize the opportunity.

It was the French who, having failed as traders, first sought to make political profit out of this confusion. Dupleix, Governor of Pondicherry, conceived lofty ideas of founding a new empire under the shadow of the old one, and to this end, began by trying to get rid of his English neighbours. In 1746 Madras was captured by the French, to be restored indeed at the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle; but though there came peace in Europe between the two nations, their East India Companies remained at jealous war. Dupleix, mixing in the intrigues of native ambition, made himself, for a time, predominant in the south; and we seemed like to lose all hold here, but for the appearance on the scene of one who was to prove arbiter of India's destinies.

Every one knows how the young subaltern Robert Clive, by his gallant defence of Arcot, suddenly sprang into fame, and at once turned the scale of prestige in favour of his countrymen. The French went on losing influence, till, in 1761, it was the turn of their settlements to be conquered. Dupleix died in disgrace with his ungrateful sovereign, while

Clive was heaped with honours and rewards, soon earned by services in another field of action.

Before the French were fully humbled in the south, he had been summoned to Calcutta to chastise the despicable Nawab of Bengal, Surajah Dowlah, for that notorious atrocity of the "Black Hole," where nearly a hundred and fifty Englishmen were shut up in a stifling den not twenty feet square, from which few of them came out alive. Following Dupleix's example, Clive plunged into political intrigue, and undertook to supplant Surajah Dowlah by a prince of his own choosing. At Plassey, with three thousand men, only a third of them Europeans, he routed the tyrant's army, fifty thousand strong—a momentous battle that counts as the foundation of our sovereignty in India. A new Nawab was set up, nominally under appointment from Delhi, but really as the servant of the English Company, who now obtained a considerable grant of land as well as an enormous sum in compensation for their losses by Surajah Dowlah's occupation of Calcutta. A few years later their nominee was dethroned in favour of a more compliant one, who also had to pay handsomely for his elevation. He ventured to rebel, but to no purpose. Lord Clive pushed the English arms as far as Allahabad; and henceforth, with whatever puppet on the throne and with whatever show of homage to the high-titled suzerain at Delhi, the Company were the actual masters of Bengal.

All over India spread the renown of Clive's small but well-trained Sepoy army. His subjugation of the effeminate Bengalees, Macaulay may well compare to a war of sheep and wolves; but this young English officer went on to defy the more warlike levies of the north-west. He seized the Dutch settlements that threatened armed rivalry in Bengal; he almost extinguished the French ones. A harder task he had in curbing the rapacity of his own countrymen, who, among the temptations that beset such rapid ascendancy,

bid fair to become the worst oppressors of their virtual subjects.

The next great ruler of Bengal was Warren Hastings, who organized a system of administration for the territory conquered by Clive, and began with collecting the revenues directly through the hands of English officers. Private greed was now restrained; but the Governor must justify his policy and satisfy his employers, by sending home large sums of money, which in the long run had to be wrung from the unhappy natives; and this necessity led the agents of the Directors into many questionable acts. It was a great step from the fortified trading posts of last century to levying taxes and tribute, maintaining an army and navy, selling provinces and dictating to princes. But by this time the conscience of the English people was being roused, and it began to be understood how India, for all its princely treasures, was the home of a poor and much-enduring population, which our duty should be to protect rather than to spoil. Returning to England, Warren Hastings was solemnly impeached before the House of Lords for his high-handed oppression. That famous trial, in which more than one English Cicero denounced our pro-consul as a second Verres, dragged itself out for seven years, and ended in a verdict of acquittal, which posterity has not fully confirmed, yet with the recognition of extenuating circumstances in the novelty and difficulty of the criminal's office.

We now held the valley of the Ganges up to Benares, and were soon making further acquisitions in that direction. In the Bombay Presidency we came into collision with the Mahrattas, in Madras with Hyder Ali, the tyrant of Mysore. The result of these wars proved our arms not so invincible as in the case of the timid Bengalees, but more than one gallant action made native princes cautious how they trifled with our friendship. Fortunately for us, the mutual jealousy of neighbour potentates prevented them from combining to

drive our small armies out of India, and we were able to deal with them one by one. We had now no European rival to fear, though more than one Indian despot kept French troops in his service, or natives trained and officered by Frenchmen. Napoleon Bonaparte, most illustrious of French adventurers, had an eye to romantic conquest in the East; but we know how he found occupation elsewhere, and did not come here to meet the adversary who in the end proved his master. For it was in India that Wellington won his first laurels, under his brother, Lord Wellesley, a Governor-General resolute to make England paramount over the ruins of the Mogul Empire. The Nizam of Hyderabad was persuaded to dismiss his French guards, and become the vassal of England, as his descendant still is. Tippoo, Hyder Ali's son, fell at the renowned storm of his stronghold, Seringapatam, in the last year of the century. The Mahrattas were attacked in the Deccan, where Wellington gained the battle of Assaye, while in the north Lord Lake mastered Delhi and Agra. But the princes of this great confederacy were not fully humbled till the third Mahratta war in 1818, under the Governorship of Lord Hastings; before which the Goorkhas of the Himalayas, and the Pindaree robbers of Central India, had also been taught the lesson of submission. Presently we were carrying our arms across the sea, and wresting Assam from the Burmese. The crowning exploit of this victorious period was the siege of Bhurtpore, a fortress believed in India to be impregnable, from which in 1805 an English army had fallen back, but now in 1827 its capture went far to make the natives look on us as irresistible. The once-dreaded name of the Emperor was a cloak for our power, as it had been for the Mahrattas', while Calcutta had taken the place of Delhi as capital, through the primacy of Bengal among the three Presidencies, whose bounds had stretched to touch each other all across India.

Lord William Bentinck, who now became Governor-General, earned a different kind of glory by his sympathetic labours for the true welfare of the millions whom those wide conquests had placed under our rule. He began to make war on the crimes of barbarous superstition—the burning of hapless widows, the murders of infants, the secret assassinations by fanatical devotees. But with his successor opened a new series of campaigns that were not always illustrious to the British arms. Russia had taken the place of France as the bugbear of our Indian predominancy. Alarmed by Muscovite intrigues in Afghanistan, Lord Auckland entered upon a course of unwise and disastrous interference with the politics of that country. We succeeded in dethroning the usurper, Dost Mahomed, of whom we could more easily have made an ally. But in 1841 the people of Cabul rose against us; our army of occupation had to retreat in the depth of winter; assailed by hardy mountain tribes, they perished miserably among the rocks of the Khyber Pass; and out of thousands only one man reached Jellalabad to tell the tale. Sale's brave defence of that poor fortress did something towards retrieving our disgrace, and next year an avenging army returned to work bootless destruction at Cabul, leaving a legacy of ill-will that has been dearly inherited by our own generation.

More substantial conquests followed. Scindia, one of the old Mahratta princes, was brought more effectively under British control. At the same time, the Moslem Ameers of Scinde were overcome by Sir Charles Napier. We then stood face to face with the last great independent power of Hindostan, and the foeman who proved most worthy of our steel. The Sikhs, a manly race, originally a sect of Hindoo reformers, had risen from Mogul persecution to become lords of the Punjab, "country of the five rivers," which all along has been the great battle-field of Indian history. Runjeet Singh, their masterful ruler for forty years, had carefully avoided a

struggle with the British, which soon after his death was brought on by the turbulent bellicosity of the people, made audacious through our Afghan reverses. The two Sikh wars of 1845 and 1848 were marked by long and desperate battles; Sobraon, Chillianwallah, and Goojerat are remembered for the bravery and the slaughter on both sides, but finally the Punjaub was over-run, disarmed, and turned into a British province.

Several smaller states also were annexed about this time, through the failure of legitimate heirs, and our Government's refusal to recognize the Hindoo custom of adoption. A second Burmese war resulted in the acquisition of another province beyond the Gulf of Bengal. Lastly, the King of Oudh, whose incapable tyranny seemed beyond cure, had to submit to be pensioned off and see his ill-governed dominions pass under British administration. This signalized the end of Lord Dalhousie's term of vigorous government, who, while carrying out a policy of somewhat high-handed annexation, had shown himself not less active in the construction of roads, canals, railways, telegraph lines, and in all ways accomplished much to extend, consolidate, and develop what, partly by accident, partly by force of circumstances, and partly by far-seeing design, had in less than a century become a mighty empire. There might well be elephants then alive that had served us when we were struggling to keep a precarious foothold on the coasts of India.

Such great and rapid changes could not be worked without leaving sore grudges and dangerous cankers of discontent. Our policy had been so much dictated by selfish strength, that it is no wonder if the natives should conceive respect rather than love for us. Even after higher motives began to come into play, our best intentions were apt to be misunderstood by those placed under us, or to be foiled by our own want of sympathy with and our ignorance of their

feelings. The strong points and the weak ones of the two races are almost poles apart, and neither has proved ready to learn from the other. Our characteristic virtues of truth and honesty are hardly comprehensible to the slavish Oriental, who for his part displays a flattering courtesy and gentle kindness, with which appears in harsh contrast our frankly blunt masterfulness, often degenerating into insolence of manner and foolish contempt for all that is not English. While many of our best officers have shown a spirit of enlightened and conscientious interest in their duties, the average Briton, who goes out to India merely to gain money more easily than at home, is unhappily too seldom the man to conciliate the prejudices of those whom he treats as contemptible "niggers," knowing and caring little about their ancient civilization. The very pride of our superiority seems against us: other conquerors, more willing to let themselves down to the level of the conquered, have proved less unsuccessful in winning their good-will. Still, these natives cannot but come to see the advantage of having rulers whose word may be trusted. For long, honest efforts have been made to exercise among all sects and classes an even-handed justice, hitherto little known in India, the chief hindrance to which lies in the corruption of the native subordinates, on whom our magistrates have largely to rely for the details of their administration.

At all events, the mass of the population, broken to the yoke of many masters, had accepted ours with apparent resignation, even if they might soon forget the grinding tyrannies from which we had delivered them. Some fiercer spirits muttered their hatred, but kept silence before our authorities. Some real grievances, here and there, passed too much unnoticed, and sufferings brought about by over-taxation or other injustice worked through the hasty inexperience of officials. In certain large towns, the suppressed rage of hostile believers was not always