

Chapter 3

Indian Aristocrats, British Imperialists and “Conservative Modernization” after the Great Rebellion

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On the 22nd of September 1892, the tiny princely of state of Ramnad, in Tamil Nadu, began the customary *Mahanavratni* [nine nights] festival. The core of this nine-day ritual dated back to the sixteenth century and was, in essence, both a symbolic celebration and renewal of Hindu kingship. During the festival the king (known as Setupati), H. H. Raja Bhaskarasamy Avargal, ritually re-enacted his conquest of the state by shooting a ceremonial arrow, demonstrated his virtue as a “dharmic” [Hindu moral] ruler by feeding thousands of Brahmins, and demonstrated his potency as pivot of the universe by symbolically slaughtering the demon goddess.¹ All the while “many Vedic [Hindu] scholars, dancers and musicians, artists, artisans and other deserving persons were liberally presented with shawls, Benaras cloth, jewels, money gifts and so forth.”²

1 “Celebration of the Navaratri at Ramnad in 1892,” *The Miniature Hindi Excelsior Series*, vol. 4, Adyar Philosophical Society, Madras, originally serialized in the *Madras Times* throughout October 1892 and cited by Carol. A. Breckenridge, “From Protector to Litigant: Changing Relations between Hindu Temples and the Raja of Ramnad,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14 (1977), pp. 75–106.

2 “Celebration of the Navaratri” in Breckenridge, “From Protector to Litigant,” p. 79.

As usual the principal venue was the main hall of the old palace—the Ramalinga Vilas—which for these purposes was draped with various heraldic artefacts including prominently displayed portraits of various British dignitaries. For most of the ritual the king sat on his *gaddi* (ceremonial throne-cushion) facing a life-size portrait of Queen Victoria, Queen-Empress of India. Of more interest to attendees in 1892, however, was the recently completed Bhaskara Vilas—an extraordinary baroque confection of British gothic and Hindu architectural style built especially for this festival in 1892. Octagonal in shape with pillars adorned with images of various gods and goddesses, at its center stood a wrought-iron bandstand over which a British-imported cut-glass chandelier glittered.

The first ten days of the Mahanavratani followed their traditional course—a highly complex set of rituals enacting notions of victory, kinship and authority, sacrifice and honor. But this particular year an additional five days were added in honor of the opening of a new wing of the Setupati's palace. And on days eleven and twelve a grand *darbar* [assembly] took place. The king now moved from his *gaddi* to a western-style high-backed chair to observe gymnastic displays, fireworks, and feasting.

The thirteenth, and last day, took the form of a dinner party for British officials and leading Indian notables from the state. But the British imperial presence was not confined to the thirteenth day: it had been there all the time in the style of the new palace, the heraldic devices in the halls, the prominently-displayed scientific instruments, the photographers and the military band. Thus the British and their culture were guests at the ceremony—almost as important as the state's tutelary goddess and other visiting gods.

In the official court report of the festival later that month, the *Madras Times* soberly recorded that the “major portion” of the exceptional expenditure incurred had been “for the encouragement of science and learning, as well as for various acts of piety and devotion.” Here, at the heart of centuries' old rituals of Hindu kingship was a very clear acknowledgment of the concerns of the Setupati's British imperial overlords.

So how should we interpret this artfully choreographed event? There are two plausible responses: that the trappings of western culture

and the extra days of celebration suggest that the Setupati's interest in the "modern" was largely superficial. Or that the pursuit of modernization had been profoundly internalized by the Setupati and his advisers, as demonstrated by this striking remodeling of both the environment and content of the ritual.

Tradition, Modernity and "Conservative Modernization"

The question of the relationship between the British Empire in India and modernity remains highly contentious, and in some ways has become even more so in recent years. An older intellectual history approach tried to deal with the question by focusing on the conflicting and changing political projects of the British at the highest levels. It argued that the British were divided between liberal modernizers and conservatives, and the nineteenth century saw a fundamental change in British policy: between the 1820s and the 1850s, the British, inspired by utilitarian and evangelical political thought, promoted a confident liberal modernization—involving, among other things, the Anglicization of elite education, the introduction of liberal legal codes, and the annexation of the remaining Indian princely states; however, after the Rebellion of 1857–58 the British reversed many of these policies to a substantial degree, and increasingly relied on "traditional" modes of rule—that is through elites at the top of old status hierarchies, such as aristocrats, and by means of paternalistic methods.³

However, this approach has been much less popular in recent years. From the 1970s, the "Cambridge School" argued that British ideological projects—whether of modernization or support for traditional rule—had very little impact on local society and politics, which was largely deter-

3 Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959); Ainslee Embree, *Charles Grant and British Rule in India* (New York, 1962); Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (Paris, 1963); Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire* (Delhi, 1986); Louis Dumont, "The 'Village Community' from Munro to Maine," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 9 (1966), pp. 68–89. These approaches have been helpfully summarized in Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1994).

mined by local factional conflicts. For some, there was no real developmental project underpinning British imperialism in India, over and above what was necessary to secure certain “imperial interests”—markets for British goods, access to cheap military manpower in the form of the Indian Army and prompt and predictable payment of Indian financial liabilities to both the British state and the private financial sector; British policy was largely pragmatic and relatively unaffected by ideology or party-political divisions in either London or Calcutta-Delhi.⁴ Others argue that while the raj may have undertaken some kind of liberal ideological project (the universalization and codification of law, the imposition of a free market and liberal individual property rights), it soon ran into the sands of collaborator machinations and resistance.⁵

In more recent writings, however, some members of the Cambridge School have argued that the British did have more of an impact on India, but by accident rather than design. Chris Bayly and others argue that the effect, if not necessarily the intention, of raj policy and administration was the traditionalization of Indian culture, economy and society, while the deliberate demilitarization of Indian society between c. 1790 and 1840 had the effect of deurbanizing and deindustrializing India.⁶ Meanwhile for Washbrook, traditionalization was the inevitable consequence of “collaborator” strategy, for under British rule certain groups such as high-caste Brahmins and dominant peasants, and certain practices, such as customary personal law, attained greater purchase over Indian society than they had previously enjoyed.⁷

4 John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1982); Brian R. Tomlinson, “India and the British Empire Between the Wars, 1880–1935,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 12 (October-December, 1975), pp. 338–377.

5 David Washbrook, “Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15:3 (1981), pp. 649–721.

6 Christopher A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1989), chap. 4.

7 David Washbrook, “Economic Depression and the Making of ‘Traditional’ Society in Colonial India, 1830–1855,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series 3 (1993), pp. 237–263.

In complete contrast to this approach, however, is a recent literature that stresses the powerful transformational effects of the British in India through their use of new ideas and techniques of colonial “governmentality.” These historians argue that the British sought to know, order and control Indian society through such modern technologies as the census, ethnography, cartography, western medicine and education. However, there is some controversy amongst these historians as to both the intentions of governmentality and its consequences. Some see these new methods as producing a colonial form of modernity through the racial, caste and medical categorization of populations. They also argue that these new ideologies and technologies of government promoted cultural homogenization through the codification of regional languages or the imposition of English, and, to some extent, economic transformation and capitalist integration.⁸ Yet other historians who stress the

8 For an overview of these approaches see Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London, 2004). For the impact of modern cartography see Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago, 1997); Ian J. Barrow, *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping in India, c. 1756–1905* (New Dehli, 2003); Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, 2010). For the impact of British on shaping a modern developmental imaginary see Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (New York, 2004). For the census, categorization and ethnography see Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination” in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia, 1993). For medicine see David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State, Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (Cambridge, 1993). For language see Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Columbia, 1989); Bernard Cohn, “Command of Language and the Language of Command,” *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 276–329; Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley, 1997). For the role of liberal ideology in these projects, see, Udhay Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

importance of colonial governmentality argue that the British were using these “scientific” techniques to promote not a modern but a new form of traditional, or “neo-traditional” India.⁹ From the 1870s and 1880s, scholars such as Dirks argue, many raj policy-makers began to demand the preservation and even recreation of a pre-modern India, in accordance with notions of Indian history and social structure prevalent among late nineteenth-century European constitutional historians, political theorists and anthropologists.¹⁰

In this chapter, I will argue that the intellectual history, Cambridge and “Governmentality” schools all fail adequately to capture the nature of the British imperial influence in India in the post-Mutiny era. The intellectual historians exaggerate the dichotomy between liberal modernizing and traditionalizing strategies, and the disjuncture marked by 1857–58. Meanwhile the Cambridge school goes to the other extreme: while undoubtedly right in stressing the importance of collaborator networks as crucial to the nature of the British raj, it neglects the role of competing British ideological projects and internal debates over what kind of society and economy India should be. These controversies can be seen not only in the rhetoric of politicians in Britain and India, but, perhaps more importantly, in the actions of many of the administrators, district officers and other “men-on-the-spot” who actually manned the civil bureaucracy of the raj. It is also impossible to ignore the links between these ideological debates and often quite drastic shifts in policy—for example, in attitudes to land distribution and shifting alliances with particular collaborator groups.

However, I shall also take issue with the Governmentality school for their tendency to exaggerate the coherence of British ideas and

9 For the concept of neo-traditionalism see Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54:4 (2006), pp. 535–555.

10 Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (New Jersey, 2001); Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and Liberal Imperialism* (New Jersey, 2010); Clive Dewey, “Images of the Village Community: A Study in Anglo-Indian Ideology,” *Modern Asian Studies* 7 (1972), pp. 291–328.

their effects. It is difficult to see British policy and the political culture it engendered as one driven by a project of Enlightenment modernity. Equally unconvincing are Dirks and others, who argue that the later Raj promoted a cogently conservative anthropological vision of village, caste and community.¹¹

Rather, I shall argue that central to British post-Mutiny ideas and political projects was a highly contradictory strategy of “conservative modernization.” This term was originally used by the historical sociologist Barrington Moore to describe a political strategy which aims to promote “modern” aspects of society and the economy—through the promotion of some achievement-oriented bureaucratic and/or capitalist social relations—while preserving elements of the “traditional” social order, such as aristocracies and status-based hierarchies founded on paternalism or coercion.¹² Moore used the term to describe elite strategies in nineteenth-century Germany and Japan, and scholars of Meiji Japan still use this approach.¹³ It has also been used by scholars of other countries to analyze similar strategies elsewhere, but it has rarely been employed in the case of British India.¹⁴ However, this concept captures several aspects

11 So, for instance, in 1920, the Government of India called for the census to de-emphasize caste and other ethnological data and give more attention to the categories of industry and occupation. Richard B. Martin, “Bibliographic Notes on the Indian Census” in N. Gerald Barrier, *The Census In British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 63.

12 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), chap. 8.

13 Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

14 See, for instance, Miguel Cabo and Antonio Miguez, “El Maurismo en Galicia. Un Modelo de Modernización Conservadora en el Marco de la Restauración,” *Hispania. Revista Espanola de Historia* lxxix (2009), pp. 87–116; Fernando Filgueira, Luis Reygadas, Juan Pablo Luna, and Pablo Alegre, “Shallow States, Deep Inequalities, and the Limits of Conservative Modernization: The Politics and Policies of Incorporation in Latin America,” in Merike Blofield, ed., *The Great Gap: Inequality of the Politics of Redistribution in Latin America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), chap. 8.

of British policy well, and especially its promotion of aristocratic groups and values among both colonial officials and Indian rulers in the hope that they would act as agents of economic, technological and capitalist development. The concept also draws attention to the internal contradictions of British policy, which was simultaneously promoting two very different value systems—aristocratic and technocratic.

Conservative modernization was not the only British strategy, and some liberals remained opposed to it; nor was it systematic or coherent. Indeed there were endless differences among its advocates as to which elite groups (Indian kings, landed aristocrats, “native gentlemen” or a gentrified English bureaucracy) were best suited to be the principal agents of development, as to how they themselves should be “improved,” and what precisely should be their relationship with the raj itself. However, much British policy after the Mutiny makes more sense if seen through this prism.

This strategy, of course, did not transform Indian society as a whole, but it did have an important effect on two important spheres which the chapter will focus on—the methods of rule employed by British administrative officials, and by India’s “princes.” And while the policy was more successful in princely-ruled than in directly-ruled India, its internal contradictions ultimately rendered it unsustainable in both cases.

The “Modernization” of Indian Aristocratic Elites

Historians are agreed that the early to mid-nineteenth century saw the development among British administrators in India of two broad approaches to governing their new dominions—the Romantic and the Liberal.¹⁵ Romantics such as Thomas Munro, John Malcolm, Colin Mackenzie and Charles Metcalf (all of whom were senior regional administrators in India between 1790–1830) were influenced by Burkean notions of organic conservatism and saw it as their role to revive Indian

15 Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 25–51; Stein, *Thomas Munro*, pp. 352–353; Stokes, *The English Utilitarians*, pp. 1–25; David Washbrook, “India 1816–1869: The Two Faces of Colonialism,” in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999).

laws, customs and practices as most suited to the good government of the people. Though sympathetic to old aristocracies they did not believe that the British should govern through them, believing rather that the paternalistic British district collector should be the chief agent of this renovation.¹⁶

Opposing them were the Liberals, influenced by British Utilitarian legal philosophy and economic development driven by the spread of free markets and free trade. They included William Bentinck (Governor-General, 1828–35) and Lord Dalhousie (Governor-General, 1848–56). Also influential were John Stuart Mill (Examiner at the India Office between 1823–58), and Thomas Macaulay, first Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, who strongly influenced India policy and sought to develop a codified and universalist legal system, to challenge aristocratic privilege and caste discrimination, and to promote education in English for what they hoped would be a new Indian middle class state bureaucracy.¹⁷ However, as a number of recent writers have pointed out, this kind of liberal project was often combined with a pessimistic attitude to India's cultural suitability for liberal institutions and self-government—except in the very long term—and hence often embraced an authoritarian politics.¹⁸

The Rebellion of 1857–58 saw a major change in policy, as the British decided that liberal attacks on traditional elites and paternalistic forms of government had alienated many Indians and precipitated popular unrest. As Metcalf has argued, the result was a loss of faith in a more optimistic liberalism, and by the late 1860s there was broad agreement among liberals and conservatives that radical social and cultural change in India was both dangerous and inappropriate. However, he exaggerates the extent to which the British reverted to a Burkean conservatism.¹⁹ Rather, official policy increasingly adopted a conservative

16 Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 25–27.

17 Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp. 28–39.

18 Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 2.

19 For this view, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857–1870* (Princeton, 1964); Bernard Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 165–209. However, in disagreeing with Met-

modernizing approach—in effect combining a Romantic paternalism with an authoritarian liberalism. This, in turn, was legitimized by intellectual and scholarly writings, which queried conventional assumptions that India (especially its village social structures) was some kind of analogue of Western Europe’s medieval past, and that India might simply follow the same path of British economic and political development.²⁰ The Rebellion, therefore, was crucial in driving these developments, but they also took place in a broader context of international economic and geopolitical change, and the increasing interest in conservative projects of modernization stimulated by the example of Bismarckian Germany and Meiji Japan.²¹

The Rebellion had a particularly dramatic effect on British policy towards Indian aristocratic elites. It was read by many Tories as a revolt against liberal policies—the “destruction of native authority” and “disturbance of property rights” as Disraeli put it. And several British liberals agreed with the conservatives that Indians were demanding a more conciliatory approach to aristocrats and princes.²² The result was the abandonment of the policy of annexing India’s remaining semi-autonomous “princely” states, and of breaking-up the large landed estates of aristocrats in British India. However, at the same time, the British insisted

calf, I am not agreeing with those who emphasize continuities and assume a dominant authoritarian liberalism. See Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005). For a critique of this view of liberalism, see Andrew Sartori, “The British Empire and its Liberal Mission,” *Journal of Modern History* 78:3 (2006).

20 John W. Burrow, “The Village Community and the Uses of History in Late Nineteenth-Century England,” in Neil McKendrick, ed., *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society* (London, 1974); Clive Dewey, “The Influence of Henry Maine on Agrarian Policy in India,” in Alan Diamond, ed., *The Victorian Achievement of Sir Henry Maine: A Centennial Reappraisal* (Cambridge, 1995).

21 See Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 395–431; Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, p. 27.

22 See Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt*, pp. 72–79.

that earlier policies of “improvement” should continue, promoted by the aristocrats themselves.

Some of the first efforts to transform aristocrats into developmental leaders took place in the parts of the raj under direct British rule, and the taluqdars [landowners] of Oudh were typical examples of the type of “little king” seen as promising material.²³ Restored to the land they had been stripped of just before the Rebellion, this group became cherished allies of the raj and recipients of manifold privileges, including forgiveness of their debts and over-representation on the raj’s late nineteenth-century consultative councils. Numerous officials celebrated these aristocrats, from C. A. Elliot in his *Chronicles of Oonao*, in 1862, to W. C. Benett’s in his famous introduction to the 1877 *Oudh Gazetteer*, to Harcourt Butler in his *Oudh Policy: The Policy of Sympathy* (1906).²⁴ Though these writers initially took a deeply pessimistic view of Indian society—Benett, for example, insisted that Hindu society was “equally incapable of development and impervious to decay”²⁵—they were soon encouraging the taluqdars to emulate the supposedly reformist English gentry, and take an interest in agricultural improvement, education, charitable works and local justice. And though the taluqdars themselves proved rather resistant to modern education, this did not stop the British from trying to persuade them.

In 1892 the British opened the Colvin School and efforts were made to force the sons of taluqdars to attend.²⁶ While much of the curriculum at these schools involved inculcation of the manners of an English gen-

23 For comparable examples from the Deccan and South India see, Margaret Franz and Georg Berkemer, “Colleges and Kings: Higher Education under Direct and Indirect Rule,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41:13 (April 1–7, 2006), pp. 1261–1268.

24 Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 191, 197–199.

25 *Oudh Gazetteer* 1 (1877), pp. xxv–xxvii, cited in Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, pp. 191–192.

26 The examples from this paragraph have been drawn from Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, pp. 306–319.

tleman, M. J. While, the head of Canning College, argued that practical rather than purely academic subjects were more appropriate, in order to ensure “quick and accurate calculation of interest rates.” He also suggested that they should eschew standard academic exams and concentrate on subjects “specially adapted to their circumstances.” In 1893 the government announced that plans were mooted to open an agricultural college attached to the school.²⁷

While it would be difficult to see the Oudh taluqdars as ideal developmental leaders from the British point of view, but, there is some evidence that they felt the need to pay obeisance to British exhortations that they should be “improving.” In the 1890s the Maharaja of Balrampur would take the opportunity, during his hunting trips, to “educate” his tenants on the benefits of crop rotation, the proper matching of seed to soil and new techniques of manuring, ploughing and irrigation. Meanwhile the Raja of Deotaha claimed (though this was disputed) that he had cleared jungle, and built wells and houses on his estate. The most conspicuous improver was Raja Rampal Singh of Kalakankar who opened schools and dispensaries for his tenants and experimented with cattle breeding, and in 1881 the *Oudh Akbar* newspaper praised the taluqdars for organizing a state-wide agricultural exhibition which it fulsomely described as “a successful beginning of the great task of developing the country.” In education too, it seems that British calls for them to assume the cloak of enlightened aristocracy did not fall on entirely deaf ears. The Maharaja of Balrampur opened ten schools for the children of his estates in the 1860s—though they did not last long. A number of the taluqdars acted as patrons to the Anglo-Vernacular school movement, often built near their palaces. They also sponsored a number of English language schools and Canning College, which subsequently became the University of Lucknow. Its principal sponsor, Maharaja Man Singh declared to an assembly of fellow taluqdars that such a college would “so educate our children as to enable them to develop the material resources of our country, to eradicate the baneful effects of error, to excel in political wisdom and learning and to . . . walk in the paths of virtue.”²⁸

27 Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, p. 326.

28 Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, pp. 308–319.

But perhaps the principal objects and beneficiaries of the aristocratic turn in colonial policy were the Indian so-called “princes.” Under the British raj nearly two-fifths of India’s landmass and nearly 20 percent of its population was not “British” at all, but comprised nearly 600 individual states governed by hereditary aristocrats of various kinds. Of these only 28 were of significant size—with populations of over 500,000; 8 of which counted for 50 percent of all revenue and population in these 28. The largest, Hyderabad, was the size of Italy and stretched across the central Deccan. Other very sizeable states in the south included Travancore and Kochin (now Kerala), and Mysore (now incorporated into the state of Karnataka). Meanwhile in the north there was a cluster of nineteen substantial states in Rajputana (now Rajasthan), and another cluster lay in the west, of which the greatest was Baroda (now incorporated into Gujarat). Most of these states were governed according to Mughal practice: their lands were divided into those centrally administered by the ruling king or Maharaja, the rest allocated to martial nobility or Jagirdars who possessed judicial, police and revenue gathering powers.²⁹

Theoretically, at least, these states enjoyed some degree of internal autonomy from the raj. Thirty nine of them had entered into treaty arrangements with the British in the early nineteenth century. But during the Liberal-Utilitarian years before the Great Rebellion several of these states had been absorbed into British India supposedly on grounds of poor government or lack of legitimate heirs. After 1860, though, the policy was reversed and a number of princes were “restored” and permitted to adopt heirs if none had issued naturally. By the turn of the twentieth century 20 of them had assurances from the British of absolute power over their subjects, and the British themselves understood this to mean not absolute autonomy but only that princely power should not be encroached upon without good reason.³⁰

Even so, the princes were not left alone: after the 1857 Rebellion they found themselves the objects of British “improvement.” Most notable in this respect was the initiative of Viceroy Lord Mayo who in 1870

29 For further details see Stephen R. Ashton, *British Policy towards the Indian States, 1905–1939* (London, 1982), pp. 1–4.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

established the first of several “Chiefs” Colleges. Modeled in some, but by no means all ways, on British public schools, the intention was to train young princes and sons of gentry in the principles of sound administration, to induce a sense of developmental duty and create a new kind of Indian “gentleman.”

For Alfred Lyall, the Governor-General’s agent in Rajputana 1874–78, the ideal was the Rajput warrior-king. Rajputs, he argued, followed a clan rather than feudal social structure, and thus, while not likely to develop from a medieval aristocracy into a parliamentary gentry, as their British counterparts had done, they were nevertheless by no means oriental despots. Lyall himself ridiculed liberal solutions to development—“ardent ideologists,” he called them, who “avoided the extremely difficult business of discovering exactly what suited the very special circumstances of modern India.”³¹ “Rajput societies,” he wrote, “held together by cumbrous bonds and stays of a primitive organism, present far more promising elements of future development than powerful and well-ordered despotisms of the normal Asiatic type . . .”³² Lyall was, however, also insistent that these Rajput societies should not be altered too extensively by an English education which would simply breed middle-class “native ideologists”; for Lyall westernizing “natives” would become too alienated from the rest of society and have little moral legitimacy or developmental agency.³³ This was, of course, a very sharp departure from the liberal ideas of Macaulay and Mill, who in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s had seen the western-educated middle-class Indian as the chief amanuenses of the British in the project of improvement.

As Lyall had understood, before the arrival of the British, Rajput kings had shared their sovereignty with their clan nobles, and in the early to mid-nineteenth century the British residents had tended to uphold clannish limits on kingly power. After the Rebellion, however, while

31 Alfred C. Lyall, “Life and Speeches of Sir Henry Maine,” *Quarterly Review* 176 (April 1893), p. 290, cited in Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, p. 166.

32 Alfred C. Lyall, *Asiatic Studies: Religious and Social* (London, 1882), p. 224, cited in Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, p. 167.

33 Alfred C. Lyall, “Government of the Indian Empire,” in *The Edinburgh Review* 325 (1884), pp. 15–16, cited in Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, pp. 167–168.

claiming to defend clan power, the British political officers in the Rajput states generally encouraged greater centralization and integration in pursuit of efficient administration and fiscal systems. As he noted, “the inclination of an English government was naturally toward the support of central administration in the Rajput states” which meant that Rajput princes who had originally been merely clan chiefs “had modernized their status towards the likeness of territorial kings.”³⁴ So, for example, the princely state of Kotah reduced the independent territorial power of the nobility by making them dependent on the crown. Princes were pressed to convert their courts into more public institutions—that is to orient their rule toward state rather than personal and familial benefits. The differentiation of the princes’ privy purse from the public revenue, and reports on administration that provided a rudimentary accounting of how government had discharged its task were the chief manifestations of this shift. The same influences affected the bureaucracy, which was urged to reform itself into a professional service, not a body of private retainers.³⁵

By the mid-1870s this set of ideas about aristocrats and modernization was beginning to crystallize into a more coherent policy of conservative modernization. An early proponent was Viceroy Lytton (1876–80), appointed by the Conservative Prime Minister Disraeli, who united a romantic love of India’s old aristocracy, with a strong commitment to liberal markets and the creation of efficient bureaucracies to promote economic development.³⁶

34 Alfred C. Lyall, “Introduction,” *Gazetteer of Rajputana*, 1879, cited in R. W. Stern, “An Approach to the Politics of the Princely States,” in Robin Jeffrey, ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in Indian Princely States* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 361–362.

35 Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Rajputana under British Paramountcy: The Failure of Indirect Rule,” *Journal of Modern History* 38:2 (1966), p. 143.

36 Lytton to Marquis of Salisbury, May 11, 1876, cited in Betty Balfour, *The History of Lord Lytton’s Indian Administration, 1876–1880* (London, 1899), p. 109.

Lytton is most famous for the inauguration of the Great Assemblage of 1877 to mark the visit of the Prince of Wales to India, and, belatedly, the installation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India in 1872. In explaining the idea behind this British version of a Mughal Durbar, Lytton observed:

I am convinced that the fundamental political mistake of able and experienced officials is the belief that we can hold India securely by what they call good government; that is to say, by improving the condition of the ryot [peasant], strictly administering justice, spending immense sums on irrigation works etc. Politically speaking, the Indian peasantry is an inert mass. If it ever moves at all, it will move in obedience, not to its British benefactors, but to its native chiefs and princes, however tyrannical they may be . . . They are a powerful aristocracy. To secure completely and efficiently utilize the Indian aristocracy is, I am convinced, the most important problem now before us.³⁷

Lytton's solution was to incorporate the Indian aristocracy into an integrated hierarchy with the Queen Empress at the top. This unified rank order, connected through a system of rituals, honors and ceremonies mirroring that of England, would counsel and advise the Queen Empress (though in practice Lytton had to settle for a rather less prestigious association of leading princes who would be "councilors of the Empress").³⁸ Lytton also hoped to create an entirely autonomous "Native" Civil Service which would be the equal of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), recruited from among India's "gentlemanly" rather than middling classes and trained in a very similar way to its British counterpart.³⁹ It would therefore be very different to the existing "uncovenanted" service, which was largely composed of middle-class Indians and lower in prestige to the British-manned ICS.

But the high point of this British strategy of conservative, aristocrat-led modernization was reached under the vice-regency of George

37 Balfour, *The History of Lord Lytton*, p. 109.

38 Balfour, *The History of Lord Lytton*, p. 111.

39 Bradford Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy in India: Status, Policy and the I.C.S., in the Late 19th Century* (New Delhi, 1976), p. 44.

Curzon (1899–1905). Curzon, a minor aristocrat himself, was also convinced of the need to use old elites to establish centralized and efficient administrative structures, who had travelled twice to Japan in 1880s and 1890s and been impressed with its example of elite-led development.⁴⁰ Disheartened by what he saw as the inertia and lack of creativity in the ICS, castigating its “torpor . . . crassness . . . absence of initiative and worship of the status quo . . .” and observing that, “the wants of India seem to have outgrown and over-weighted the administrative machine we have set up for government.”⁴¹ He saw the reanimation of princely India as an important part of his project of executive-driven reform. He enjoyed his tours round the princely states and claimed to find there signs of positive British moral influence along with the picturesque: “I was delighted with Kathiawar. There is a flavor about it of an old-time semi-feudal society, which has crystalized into a new shape under British protection.”⁴²

In particular, Curzon sought to spread the example of the Maharaja of Gwalior, calling him: “much the most remarkable and promising of all native chiefs . . . he practically runs the whole state himself . . . In his remorseless propensity for looking into everything, and probing it to the bottom, rather reminds me of your humble servant.”⁴³ And it was in Gwalior that he made a notable policy speech to the assembled princes:

The Native Chief has become, by our policy, an integral factor in the Imperial Organization of India. He is concerned not less than the Viceroy or the Lieutenant-Governor in the administration of the country. I claim him as my colleague and my partner. He cannot remain . . . a frivolous and irresponsible despot. He must justify and not abuse the authority committed to him; he must be the servant as well as the master

40 David Dilks, *Curzon in India*, vol. 1, *Achievement* (London, 1969), pp. 28, 36; David Gilmour, *Curzon* (London, 1994), pp. 89–90.

41 Quoted in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, pp. 2–3.

42 George Curzon to Mary Curzon, November 4, 1899, Mary Curzon Papers, cited in Nayana Goradia, *Lord Curzon and the Last of the British Moghuls* (Delhi, 1993), p. 150.

43 George Curzon to George Hamilton, November 26, 1899, Curzon Papers, vol. 158, cited in Goradia, *Lord Curzon*, p. 153.

of his people . . . his *gaddi* is not intended to be a divan of indulgence, but the stern seat of duty. His figure should not merely be known on the polo-ground, or on the race-course, or in the European hotel.⁴⁴

For Curzon, it was therefore essential that the princes needed be “improved” for, as he observed to Hamilton, Secretary of State for India: “What they want more than anything else is to be schooled by a firm, but not unkindly, hand . . . We do so not so much in the interests of the princes themselves, . . . as in the interests of the people, who are supposed to like the old traditions and dynasties and rule.”⁴⁵

As one might expect, Curzon was also keen to promote Indian aristocratic presence in the army and joined debates on establishing the rank of Indian King’s Commissioned officer which had been on-going since the 1880s.⁴⁶ In 1901 he founded an Indian Cadet Corps (ICC) with a view to the “modernization” of the princes themselves, a group he saw as generally dissolute and indolent. The ICC seems primarily to have been a residential camp devoted to inculcating British notions of modern self-discipline with much emphasis placed on the development of good physical bearing and the formation of “character.”⁴⁷ Curzon’s ICC was to consist of 20 to 30 young men aged between 17 and 20 who would be selected according to family pedigree, personal conduct and command of the English language. Each cohort would be brought to Calcutta and placed under the tutelage of a prince of exemplary character and military attainment. They would be taught to dress, ride and perform other physical activities and would then go on to Delhi for basic military drill. They

44 November 29, 1899, *Indian Speeches of Lord Curzon*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1900–1906), vol. 1, p. 168, cited in Goradia, *Lord Curzon*, p. 155.

45 Curzon to Hamilton, August 29, 1900, Curzon Papers, vol. 159, cited in Goradia, *Lord Curzon*, p. 156.

46 For these debates see Pradeep P. Barua, *Gentleman of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps 1817–1949* (London, 2003).

47 For an account of this training see Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, and Mohan S. Kanota, eds., *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh’s Diary: A Colonial Subject’s Narrative of Imperial Rule* (Boulder, 2002), pp. 468–473.

would then go back to their states or estates for the summer and, if still keen, would return for a more formal course of military training.⁴⁸

Curzon's commitment to this strategy of conservative modernization was reaffirmed when he opposed the introduction of liberal representative reform. In 1908 he argued that what was more important was "purging the government of its many abuses . . . carrying out an exhaustive program of reforms in . . . every branch of administration [and] stimulating the loyalty of the chiefs."⁴⁹ In 1917, on the eve of limited democratization in India, he advocated establishing an advisory council of princes, and in his book, *British Government in India* he argued that India's stability depended largely upon the continued existence of the Native States as "connecting links with the past, and as representing a standard of life and government which is in harmony with the traditions and the tastes of the people," calling for "the adaptation of western experience to the genius of the eastern mind." He prided himself on being the first to describe the princes as "partners in the British administration of India," noting that the major princes were now ruling with "credible efficiency" while directly-ruled British India was "seething with the commotion produced by the attempt to introduce parliamentary institutions and modified forms of self-government into the archaic fabric of the Indian Commonwealth."⁵⁰

Meritocracy and Aristocracy in the ICS

Curzon and the conservative modernizers, however, were not satisfied with renovating princely rule. They were also determined to aristocratize the predominantly British covenanted (elite) ICS. From the middle of the nineteenth century, liberals had made successful efforts to turn the ICS into an examination-based meritocratic organization. In 1855 an examination system had finally replaced patronage as the means of recruit-

48 Ibid., p. 11.

49 Curzon to Arthur Balfour, December 11, 1908, cited in Robin J. Moore, "Curzon and Indian Reform," *Modern Asian Studies* 27:4 (1993), p. 725.

50 George N. Curzon, *British Government in India: The Story of the Viceroys and Government Houses*, 2 vols. (London, 1925), vol. 2, p. 112.

ing candidates into the ICS, with the examination created by the great reforming liberal Macaulay. In fact, aristocrats had never constituted a large proportion of ICS recruits, even at the height of the patronage system, but their numbers had fallen from around 27 percent immediately preceding the 1855 reforms, to only 10 percent by the 1870s.⁵¹ Liberals like Fitz James Stephen and John Strachey shared Lytton's and Curzon's preference for authoritarian development, but their favored agents of such development were not Indian or British aristocrats but middle-class professionals.

Even so, this apparent liberal victory proved short-lived, as the battle commenced for the soul of the ICS officer: would he be a middle-class "examination-wallah," or would he be a paternalistic gentleman? From the 1870s onwards the ICS came under constant criticism from conservatives, who insisted that there had been a loss of caliber under the examination system owing to the paucity of aristocratic recruits. So, for instance, Secretary of State Hamilton wrote to Viceroy Elgin that "giants are nowadays not easily to be found in the ICS . . . You get fewer bad bargains and fewer geniuses." Hamilton thought that the real problem was that "class" recruitment had been degraded by competition.⁵²

This criticism of the consequences of non-aristocratic recruitment was most clearly expressed in an anonymous article published in the April 1874 edition of the *Edinburgh Review*. The author, who many believed was the Tory leader Lord Salisbury, argued that men of inferior social origins were "degrading the ICS." Their lack of an Oxbridge education, and their training for the exam at special "crammers" was "not the way in which rulers of the nation should be prepared for their great duties as men who govern as much by force of the implacable qualities which make up the English gentleman . . . as by mere ability."⁵³ He argued that some effort should be made to imbue recruits with the values, attitudes

51 Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 19.

52 Hamilton to Elgin, April 1, 1898. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 36.

53 *Edinburgh Review*, April 1874, p. 337. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 24.

and attributes of the aristocracy through short-term courses at Oxford and Cambridge—the traditional finishing schools of upper-middle class and aristocratic British males.⁵⁴

The supposedly déclassé ICS was blamed for various ills thought to be afflicting the British raj. Racism was allegedly one of the consequences of recruiting the wrong kind of civil servant. Lytton spoke of “the crystallized official formality towards natives of the highest class,” which led him to the idea that “it really is a wonder our rule is not more unpopular than it is.”⁵⁵ He continued: “I fear the danger to British rule is aggravated by the results of the present covenanted system.”

Another alleged drawback was careerism: Lytton noted that “competition-wallahs appear to regard work in India as a disagreeable condition of emoluments attached to them, and to deem the interests of the empire altogether secondary to their own. I am told by the older generation that formerly this was not the pervading spirit of the Indian public services.”⁵⁶ Curzon also argued that men with ‘a high sense of duty and an interest in the people are declining in the service’.⁵⁷ Finally, ICS officials were charged with a fundamental lack of *élan* and creativity—the qualities allegedly needed to transform India. Hamilton mused that officials had lost “that vigour and originality which alone can produce change.”⁵⁸

Even the Liberal Secretary of State John Morley denounced the “wooden-headedness of the mere bureaucrat.”⁵⁹ And several other liberals echoed the conservative line. Fitz James Stephen, for instance, wrote

54 *Edinburgh Review*, April 1874, p. 336. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 18.

55 Lytton to Salisbury, September 28, 1876. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 39.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Curzon to Hamilton, May 2, 1902. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 40.

58 Hamilton to Curzon, August 27, 1902. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 40.

59 Morley to Minto, September 10, 1908. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 44.

to Lytton that the new Viceroy's greatest challenge was having to do "first rate work with second, third, fourth and even fifth-rate tools."⁶⁰

These complaints brought twenty years of tinkering with the recruitment, examination and training of the ICS. They culminated in 1895 with the merging of the ICS exam with the Home Civil Service exam, which was thought to attract more prestigious Oxbridge candidates. A number of other changes were also made to gentrify recruitment into the service—including the weighting of Oxbridge-taught subjects in the exam; increased marks for interview performance; a very low age limit; and a horse-riding test.⁶¹ ICS exams now tested explicitly for gentlemanly qualities. The following question, from an 1870 exam paper, became typical:

Fortitude, Courage, Endurance, Valour, Virtue. Show by the help of sentences in which these words occur, how they differ in meaning.⁶²

Political leaders' insistence that ICS officers should have aristocratic attitudes and a gentlemanly bearing (if not origin) seems to have been embraced by aspirant recruits from the middle-middle-classes. An entire sub-set of schools developed largely to cater to this class who could not afford an education at elite institutions like Eton and Harrow, but craved the ethos and valued a curriculum tailored to prepare them for the Indian Civil Service exam.⁶³ A worrying interruption in the flow of good candidates immediately following World War I was eased by a large salary rise in mid 1920s; a young member of the Service "could afford to keep

60 Lytton to Fitzjames Stephen, March 15, 1876; Fitzjames Stephen to Lytton, May 29, 1877. Cited in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, p. 35.

61 The amalgamation of the ICS with the Home Civil Service tests was only partially successful as those who passed highest almost always chose the Home over the Indian service. Bradford Spangenberg, "The Problem of Recruitment for the Indian Civil Service during the Late Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1971), pp. 347–350; C. J. Dewey, "The Education of a Ruling Caste: The Indian Civil Service in the Era of Competitive Examination," *The English Historical Review* 88, no. 347 (1973), pp. 268–274, 279–280.

62 A. C. Ewald, *The Guide to the Indian Civil Service* (London, 1870), p. 116.

63 Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperialism* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 163–180.

two polo ponies, a car and six servants,” while the salaries of collectors provided for a “way of living not only comfortable but impressive.”⁶⁴

This form of recruitment continued throughout the inter-war period, and Oxbridge training ensured at least a patina of gentlemanliness. In 1928, 32 of 36 recruits had attended Oxbridge, and of these, 19 read Classics and 12 History. And at the end of their probationary year, they were still obliged to take a riding test.⁶⁵

Given this aristocratic training, it is no surprise that most of the recruits absorbed the gentlemanly ethos. Many overwhelmingly preferred appointments in those provinces seen as the most paternalistic and aristocratic in administrative style—the Punjab and the United Provinces (in 1928, for example, 18 of 36 recruits put the Punjab as their first choice and 9 put it second; 8 put U.P. first, and 16 second).⁶⁶ Bengal, alleged home of the hated educated Indian middle-class “baboo,” was the least popular.

This carefully-crafted system of recruitment unsurprisingly did not generally produce ICS officers interested in modern “governmentality.” Rather, it engendered, as was intended, a highly personalistic and unsystematic attitude to government, captured by the concept of *noblesse oblige*. This is well-illustrated in Robert Carstairs’s memoir *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*. He saw himself as a beleaguered paternalist with an innovative and individualistic mind thwarted by bureaucratic interference from above, as bitterly sketched in his chapter “The Departmental Mind.”⁶⁷ Carstairs’s self-perception was not so much that of a bureaucratic quantifier and categorizer but that of an all-powerful improving Whig landlord.

This distinctly paternalistic but nevertheless self-consciously “improving” and developmental approach to government is strikingly illustrated in the Chenab colony in the early twentieth-century Punjab.

64 Thomas Beaglehole, “From Ruler to Servants: The ICS and the British Demission of Power in India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 11:2 (1977), pp. 239–241.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

67 Robert Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer* (London, 1912), p. 74ff.

Chenab was seen by its creators as a model for the rest of the province. Peasants were granted land on the condition that they paid rent and fulfilled strict conditions, including maintaining a clean compound, and arrangements for sanitary disposal of night soil.⁶⁸ The Colonization Officer and his staff supervised all the details of colony life, and his word was final in all disputes over revenue or conditions, not civil courts which had been expressly barred from interfering with executive orders. Curzon and his Council strongly backed the project, and the India Council in London grudgingly accepted it.⁶⁹ The peasants themselves soon rebelled, and the revolt was both unexpected and poorly handled by the Punjab administration, which heavily relied on prominent Muslim or Hindu aristocrats in the district for information.⁷⁰

New Model Princes

By 1914, therefore, under both Conservative and Liberal administrations a highly aristocratic form of rule had emerged which included both Indian princes, British aristocrats at the top, and an ICS recruited from the middle class, but carefully gentrified. Serious efforts were made to exclude middle-class Indians and professional, bureaucratic cultures. In part, such moves reflected anxiety about the emerging political challenge from middle-class western-educated Indians. But it was also the consequence of a conservative modernizing ruling ethos.

In directly-ruled British India, this conservative modernization strategy may have been at the center of British ideas of rule, but it was not very effective. The failure can be traced to a number of causes: lack of funds; continuing conflict between liberals and conservatives over which Indian groups made the best collaborators; and disagreements over the relative power of center and localities. But the central flaw was a reliance on white middle-class, albeit gentrified, administrators as the principal agents of this policy. It was implausible that alien officials could have

68 N. Gerald Barrier, "The Punjab Disturbances of 1907," *Modern Asian Studies* 1:4 (1967), p. 357.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 369.

sufficient insight into Indian society, or enough support among Indians, to promote a serious program of modernization.

The policy, however, was less of a failure where the British were not in direct control—in princely India. There, the approach had some genuine affinity with traditional ideas of moral kingship—*rajdharma*—which saw the king as provider of welfare, warrior-protector and manager of social equilibrium.⁷¹ And crucially, Hindu political thought, in which there was much interest in the early twentieth century (with the rediscovery of the *Arthashastra*, an early manual of Hindu statesmanship) stressed the partnership of warrior-aristocrat (Ksatriya) and bureaucrat-sage (Brahmin).⁷² This was very different from the British denigration of bureaucracy and more exclusive reliance on aristocratic models.

This strategy enjoyed a certain limited success where the British were able to control the education of princes during their so-called “minority”—that is where the prince became ruler before the age of eighteen and was effectively given over to the British resident, Political Agent or specially chosen Indian reforming regent for his upbringing (such cases were remarkably frequent).⁷³ The results of such anglicizing education were soon evident. Travancore, which had a series of English-educated rulers after 1860 underwent the centralization and professionalization of administration, land and legislative reforms for tenant farmers, and a program of road-building—though all under the auspices of the monarch and his court.⁷⁴

71 For more details see Jan Gonda, *Ancient Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden, 1969) and Ronald Inden, “Ritual Authority and Cyclical Time in Hindu Kingship,” in John F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1978), pp. 28–73.

72 Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthashastra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text* (Leiden, 1971).

73 See David Hardiman, “Baroda: The Structure of a ‘Progressive’ State,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, pp. 113–114; Terence Creagh Coen, *The Indian Political Service* (London, 1971), pp. 69–70.

74 Robin Jeffrey, “Introduction” and “Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1860–1940,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, pp. 20, 140.

Neighboring Mysore, where the British effectively restored kingly powers in 1881, was ruled by another English educated maharaja whose son came to the *gaddi* [throne] at the age of ten.⁷⁵ By the late 1890s it had acquired a reputation as “the best administered native state in India.”⁷⁶ It boasted a Representative Assembly, founded in 1881 as the first of its kind in India; and after 1900 it successfully developed hydro-electric projects that brought electrification to Bangalore before Bombay and Calcutta and fueled various innovative public and private sector industries. In 1914 Mysore secured its status as a progressive modernizing princely state with introduction of compulsory mass education—again a first in India.⁷⁷

In North India, Baroda held the laurel as most “progressive” state. Here the British effectively imposed a minor, Sayajirao III, as prince in 1871 and took charge of his education until his accession in 1875. His reign (1875–1939) brought land reform, the introduction of a semi-bureaucratic form of administration, an advisory legislative council and free primary education introduced in 1907. By 1931 literacy rates in Baroda outstripped those of neighboring British-governed Gujarat. Efforts were also made to stimulate economic development: in the 1870s tax-farming was abolished to encourage investment in industry; in the 1880s the state itself became a pioneer of a new sugar mill; in the 1890s it made loans to industrialists wishing to establish new factories; and in 1909 import and export duties within Baroda state were abolished in a further effort to promote industrial growth. In the 1930s this bore fruit with the success of industrialization, encouraged by tax concessions, subsidized access to natural resources and state-funded technical assistance, and such policies finally began to attract big Indian industrialists such as Tatas and

75 Made Gowda, *Modern Mysore State 1881–1902: A Study of the Elite, Polity and Society* (Mysore, 1997), pp. 13–19, 31.

76 William Lee-Warner to *The Times*, August 18, 1897, Lee-Warner papers, file 31 Mss. Eur. F. 92, India Office Library, London [IOL], cited in James Manor, “Princely Mysore before the Storm: The State-Level Political System of India’s Model State 1920–36,” *Modern Asian Studies* 9:1 (1975), pp. 31–58, esp. 35.

77 Manor, “Princely Mysore,” p. 36.

the Sarabhais into the state.⁷⁸ Similarly, in Bangalore, capital of Mysore, state-led industrial development was heavily promoted, and by 1947 had outgrown Bombay as the second-largest industrial center in India; it was also regarded as having the best universities in India and was home to the first Indian Institute of Science.⁷⁹

It is clear that for many maharajas there was no contradiction between their traditional role as promoters of *rajdharmā* and British understandings of “good governance” and “improvement.” So, for example, such indubitably “modern” tasks as holding a population census to gather information on the caste composition of a state could be seen as simply a continuation of the old kingly task of managing caste relations. Similarly, the planning, reorganizing and rebuilding royal cities in accordance with modern ideas of sanitation, but which also re-sited groups by caste (as was done in Mysore), could also be presented as part of a traditional kingly duty of fostering social harmony and caste equilibrium.⁸⁰

Meanwhile in Travancore the maharaja could appear both the ideal “westernizing” reformer, bringer of “good government” and “sound administration,” while presenting the same policies to his people as simply the continuation of traditions of kingly management. Thus old notions of *rajdharmā* could also be invoked to justify efforts to create more integrative “national” identities intended to transcend sectarian divisions as a furtherance of orthodox kingly protection and patronage to all religions.⁸¹ In 1922 the Hindu Maharaja Krishna Wodeyar IV of Mysore made this connection explicit in a speech for the opening of a mosque:

It will give me great pleasure if the Musalman community makes full use of the mosque and if they constantly resort to it for prayer and meditation. This mosque is situated on one side of the lines; the Hindu temple

78 Hardiman, “Baroda,” pp. 114–122.

79 Bjorn Hettne, *The Political Economy of Indirect Rule: Mysore 1881–1947* (London, 1978), pp. 233–234.

80 Aya Ikegame, “Royalty in Colonial and Post-Colonial India: A Historical Anthropology of Mysore from 1799 to the Present” (unpublished Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 255–257, 264.

81 Frenz and Berkemer, “Colleges and Kings,” p. 1266.

is on the other side . . . Each is symbolic of that unity in diversity, which will, I hope, become in an increasing measure a pleasing characteristic of the motherland, with all its diverse castes and creeds. *To a devout Hindu they represent but one of the paths leading to the same goal . . .* I hope that you will bear mind the fact that you are Mysoreans first and all the rest next, owing a duty to the state, and that you will always work together for the common benefit and for the prosperity and the advancement of the state in all possible ways.⁸² [My italics]

Such a synthesis of integrative and traditional kingly practice also influenced Baskara Setupati, the Raja of the state of Ramnad. In 1895 in a speech to announce his endowment of school for untouchables he explicitly referred to this as fulfilment of his kingly dharmic duties. He noted that some would consider such an endowment “adharmā” [i.e., contrary to dharma], but insisted that for a modern king this was actually a dharmic act for:

Her most gracious majesty looks on subjects equally and makes no distinction in governing them. So also I, being blessed with a large estate, feel it a duty to treat all the subjects of this Samasthanam (state) also alike and without distinction.⁸³

Baskara went on to bankrupt himself and his state in pursuit of the Rajdharmic duty of benevolence donating tens of thousands of rupees to American Mission hospitals, Masonic lodges and various modern colleges.⁸⁴ This extreme generosity to improving causes was part of a strategy to regain the “name and fame” of the “ancient” dynasties—the acquisition of renown being another duty of traditional kingship.⁸⁵ This motivation was also clear in Jaipur, where Maharaja Ram Singh’s patronage of modern schools, colleges and libraries was not interpreted as westernizing, but as an acknowledged obligation of a Hindu king. As

82 Speech by Krishna Wodeyar IV, originally given in Urdu, cited in Ikegame, “Royalty,” pp. 265–266.

83 Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 171–172.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

the contemporary historian Hanuman Sharma of Chomu noted in 1919, “Whatever progress is seen in Jaipur today was established by Ram Singh . . . he took care of his people and was very famous, like [the ancient Hindu king] Vikramaditya.”⁸⁶

Though “improvements” were made under the guise of traditional *rajdharmā*, the main agents of such change were often not the maharajas themselves, but of their diwans [chief ministers]. In many cases these reformist diwans were actually imposed by the British as part of the machinery of minority government, and in the early days, at least, could be seen as a “fifth column” of westernized, anglophile administrators, who had been educated in the raj’s new universities in Bombay and Madras, but found it difficult to get jobs in the ICS in British India. Many, though not all, were Brahmins.⁸⁷ In the 1860s and 1870s these British-imposed diwans pursued policies of Benthamite or Gladstonian improvement, confining themselves to regularizing and, if possible, reducing the states’ revenue demands on their populations and modernizing their administrations. This latter task involved reducing the influence of the aristocracy (Jagirdars) over administration, revenue and judicial functions and replacing it with that of professional, westernized bureaucracies supposedly legitimized by the presence of the princely head of state.⁸⁸ Many of these early modernizing diwans also fostered projects intended to develop agricultural “improvement” and industrial advancement—though very much within the limits of late nineteenth century *laissez-faire* economic orthodoxies.

86 Cited in Giles Tillotson, *Jaipur Nama: Tales from the Pink City* (New Delhi, 2006), pp. 124–125.

87 See Coen, *The Indian Political Service*, p. 69; D. A. Low, “*Laissez-Faire* and Traditional Rulership in Princely India,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, p. 378; Ikegame, “Royalty,” p. 211.

88 See Edward Haynes, “Alwar: Bureaucracy versus Traditional Rulership: Raja, *Jagirdars* and New Administrators, 1892–1910,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, pp. 35–39; Robin Jeffrey, “The Politics of ‘Indirect Rule’: Types of Relationships among Rulers, Ministers and Residents in a ‘Native State,’” in *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 28:3 (1969), pp. 261–281.

So, for instance, in Jaipur the Babu Kanti Chander Mukherji, a western-educated Bengali Brahmin had come to the state in 1865 to head the newly established Maharaja's College, and in 1881, one year after the accession of a very young maharaja, he became diwan.⁸⁹ With the assistance of the British Residency surgeon, he built the state's famous Economic and Industrial Museum, which, as the maharaja explained in a speech written by Mukherji, was intended to further the education of youth and "to promote trade and lead to the increase in manufacture of rare and beautiful objects."⁹⁰ Similarly in Mysore the diwan, C. V. Rangacharlu, launched a project of industrial development in 1881; under his successor, K. Seshadri Iyer, spending on education was increased and in 1892 a number of industrial schools were founded.⁹¹

However, in the 1900s and 1910s this relatively passive, British-influenced interest in economic development through exhibitions and education, began to give way to a more ambitious, activist and state-led projects of development, influenced by the example of Japan. In 1908 the Gaekwad (maharaja), influenced by his sometime diwan, the western-educated economist R. C. Dutt, authorized the establishment of the Bank of Baroda Ltd. At its opening ceremony the Gaekwad observed that the adoption of such "western" institutions reflected "the obvious moral . . . that India, after the noble model of Japan, must set herself diligently to the mastery of western science and western industries in all that concerns finance and industries."⁹² The most famous example

89 Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, Lloyd I. Rudolph, and Mohan Singh, "A Bureaucratic Lineage in Princely India: Elite Formation and Conflict in a Patrimonial System," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34:3 (1975), pp. 730–732.

90 Cited in Tillotson, *Jaipur Nama*, pp. 154–155.

91 M. Shama Rao, *Modern Mysore: From the Coronation of Chamarajya Wodeyar X in 1868 to Present Times* (Bangalore, 1936), pp. 128, 135, 138.

92 On Dutt's influence see Anand Chandavarkar, "Modern India's Pioneer Economic Advisor," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42:51 (December 22–28, 2007), p. 66; Gaekwad Sayaji Rao III, address at opening ceremony of Bank of Baroda, *Speeches and Addresses of His Highness Sayaji Rao III, Maharaja of Baroda*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 222–224, cited in Manu Bhagavan, "Demystifying the 'Ideal Progressive': Resistance through Mimicked Modernity in Princely Baroda, 1900–1913," *Modern Asian Studies* 35:2 (2001), p. 393.

of the more activist type of diwan was Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, who became senior minister of Mysore in 1912. A Telugu Brahmin, he had gained a BA degree from Madras University, and a further degree in Civil Engineering from the College of Engineering, Pune. In 1900 he retired from the Public Works Department, Bombay, after he was passed over for the post of Chief-Engineer.⁹³ Initially brought to Mysore as an advisor on the state's dam projects and made diwan in 1912, he began to develop and implement a project of state-backed industrialization strongly influenced by Japan, where he had been on a three-month study tour in 1898.⁹⁴ In his book *Reconstructing India*, published in 1920, he drew heavily on Japan's example as one that India as a whole, not just princely states, should follow.⁹⁵ In 1923 Syed Ross Masood, who had been sent to Japan by the state of Hyderabad wrote a highly appreciative report of its educational system.⁹⁶

Such innovation inevitably attracted the attention of Congress nationalists. The Chairman of the Congress Reception Committee at the Madras Provincial Conference of 1906 suggested that more attention should be paid to the princely states as "object lessons of efficient administration."⁹⁷ After World War I some of the diwans became overt supporters of Congress and Pattani, the diwan of the small state of Bhavnagar, made no secret of his support for Gandhi, visiting him on the eve of the Dandi march.⁹⁸ Meanwhile Gandhi himself famously described the state of Mysore under its Hindu king and Muslim diwan (Mirza Ismail) as Ram Rajya (the mythical utopia of king Ram).⁹⁹

93 Dhru Raina, *Visvesvaraya as Engineer-Sociologist and the Evolution of His Techno-Vision* (Bangalore, 2001), pp. 14–15.

94 Arvind P. Srinivasamuthy, *Sir M Visvesvaraya: A Brief Review of His Services* (Bangalore, 1984), pp. 10–11.

95 Mokshagundam Vivesvaraya, *Reconstructing India* (London, 1920), pp. 3, 51.

96 Syed Ross Masood, *Japan and Its Educational System: Being a Report Compiled for His Exalted Highness the Nizam* (Hyderabad, 1923).

97 Cited in Price, *Kingship*, p. 171.

98 John McLeod, *Sovereignty, Power, Control: Politics in the States of Western India, 1916–47* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 199–200.

99 Rao, *Modern Mysore*, p. 460.

But in truth the “progressive” princely states presented a vision of modernity radically at odds with that associated with the mainstream of Congress nationalism. Despite the creation of representative assemblies in a few of them, and even the introduction of a limited franchise, few were in any sense democratic. They had been, to a limited degree, bureaucratized, but not democratized.¹⁰⁰ Moreover even reformist diwans such as Baroda’s Manubhai Mehta, was increasingly associated with the highly conservative social and religious ideas of the Hindu Mahasabha.¹⁰¹ And while education—especially higher education—was a great strength of the reforming states and their diwans, reform was often accompanied by religious revival and interest in Vedic learning, of which many nationalists would not have approved.¹⁰²

By the eve of World War I the British policy of pushing conservative modernization through reforming diwans was in retreat. In part this was because the British became mistrustful of the nationalist leanings of some of the diwans.¹⁰³ They were also concerned that in centralizing and bureaucratizing the states they had succeeded too well in drawing the princes away, politically, culturally and even spatially, from their subjects and thus reduced their efficacy as imperial “collaborators.” Curzon considered some of the princes “thoroughly anglicized in tastes and habit, almost too much so for my conception of what a Native Chief should be.”¹⁰⁴ Fears that the princes had been too “modernized” to be useful were confirmed in 1915 when Madhao Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior, told Viceroy Hardinge that the practice of using periods of

100 Jeffrey, “Introduction,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, pp. 21–22.

101 Ian Copland, *State, Community and Neighbourhood in Princely North India, c. 1900–1950* (New York, 2005), p. 110.

102 Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir* (Delhi, 2004), pp. 80–127; Manu Bhagavan, “Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 67:3 (2008), pp. 892–893.

103 Gaekwad Sayaji Rao of Baroda was almost deposed on suspicion of sedition. See Bhagavan, “Demystifying,” pp. 395–408.

104 Curzon to Hamilton, May 10, 1899, Curzon Collection, No. 158, cited in Ashton, *British Policy*, p. 46.

minority to introduce reforms had “shaken the adherence of the people to their traditional customs and ways.”¹⁰⁵ Hardinge was sufficiently concerned to establish a committee of inquiry composed of three princes and three British Political Officers, and from 1916 the British adopted a tacit policy of permitting princes to revoke any measure passed during their minorities.¹⁰⁶

Many of the princes were pleased to finally be free of external pressure, not least because there was increasing opposition to the staffing of state bureaucracies by “outsiders” among newly educated indigenous groups.¹⁰⁷ But others were rueful about the ultimate consequences of the removal of British pressure on them to “modernize.” In an interview with Viceroy Linlithgow in 1938, Krishnaraja Wodeyar of Mysore observed that the Princes had no chance of survival alongside the democratizing provinces of British India unless they were “compelled to learn and apply the principles of good government” as he had been during his minority.¹⁰⁸

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The British project of conservative modernization then was therefore ultimately limited by its own internal contradictions, which both undermined its efficacy as a British tool of rule through influential “collaborators,” and also began to generate destabilizing intra-elite tensions within those states which had relied on “outsiders” to staff their new bureaucracies. It may, however, have had long-term consequences. It is now widely accepted that the economic reforms of the post-1991 era have flourished most in the southern and central parts of India, of which

105 GOI, FPD, Letter no. 15 to Secretary of State, cited in Ashton, *British Policy*, p. 48.

106 Ashton, *British Policy*, pp. 48–49.

107 For accounts of these tensions see Manor, “Princely Mysore,” pp. 31–58 and K. Leonard, “Hyderabad: The Mulki – Non-Mulki Conflict,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, pp. 65–106.

108 Cited in James Manor, “The Demise of the Princely Order: A Reassessment,” in Jeffrey, *People, Princes*, p. 309.

large parts were former princely states.¹⁰⁹ It is surely no coincidence that Bangalore, the capital of the former state of Mysore, has a tradition of high-tech and modern industrial development dating back to the early twentieth century. There are many complex reasons for this, but part of the explanation may lie in the policy of conservative modernization pursued there in the high colonial era.

109 David Washbrook, "Intimations of Modernity in South India," *South Asia History and Culture* 1:1 (2009), pp. 125–148, esp. 126.