

## A WIND OF CHANGE: THE NEW BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY IN POST-REVOLT INDIA

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Up to the nineteenth century, nothing had ever seriously threatened British rule in the Indian Sub-continent the way the happenings of 1857 did. In fact, the East India Company officials there were caught unawares and unprepared for such an unexpected ordeal. As a result, shortly after the end of the hostilities, the British Government decided to rethink its policies in the region in order to avoid another similar catastrophe. This could be seen in the profound changes that London effected in the Sub-continent, mainly upon the request of Queen Victoria, who explicitly urged the Government of India, in her historic Proclamation of 1858, to adopt a different approach in governing her colonial subjects. Hence, the task in this article is to analyze the impact that the Great Revolt of 1857 had on British Raj.

Keywords: Great Revolt, British India, Queen Victoria's Proclamation, Sepoys, East India Company, Evangelicals, Lord Dalhousie, British Empire

Most scholars dealing with British India believe that the events of 1857 came as a bolt from the blue that shook the very foundations of the British Empire in the Indian Sub-continent, and left a deep wound in the psyche of the British officials, both in London and Calcutta. News of terrifying atrocities being perpetrated by the Indian insurgents was reported by British newspapers (James 1997: 279). For instance, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote in February 1858: "Belief in horrible stories of torture, mutilation and dishonour worse than death, inflicted on our own countrymen and countrywomen in India, has been universal" (Judd 1996: 74).

As a result, the pre-Revolt image of India, as being a "fairy-tale land where sultans sat on ivory thrones, 'fanned by peacocks' wings in palaces", was turned into a slaughterhouse where every white man could be murdered (James 1997: 279). Moreover, Indians, who had hitherto been looked upon as "a simple race, little inclined to war and unconcerned as to who ruled them", became murderous fiends and bloodthirsty in the minds of the British (1997: 280).

Yet, despite such an unwelcoming atmosphere, the British Government was not willing to forsake India, for the simple reason that Britain could not afford to lose such an important colony (Judd 1996: 77). In fact, India constituted a significant source of wealth to Britain and, consequently, British economy depended heavily on it. Lending support to this statement, Lawrence James quoted a contemporary saying that “without India, Great Britain would subside into a third-rate state” (1997: 278). Besides, unlike other British dependencies, India was the only one that needed no subsidies from London, owing to land taxes (1997: 280).

Apart from that, probably the most important outcome of the Great Revolt was the realization by the British Government that their pre-1857 rule in India was not free from defects. The latter had been serious and had to be rectified. For this reason, the post-1857 period was going to witness a metamorphosis in the way India was to be governed. In fact, the events of 1857 came as a shock to the British complacency and self-confidence there. They realized how vulnerable their position was in the Sub-continent. Thus, security took precedence over the major reforms that were going to be introduced. This could be seen in the reorganization of the army shortly after the end of the hostilities.

Indeed, the issue of reforming the Indian army was first brought up in July 1858, during the height of the Great Revolt, when a royal commission of inquiry was set up in London to investigate the root reasons behind the sepoys’ – i.e. native regiments in the service of the East India Company – discontent as well as those defects related to the army organization which contributed significantly, in a way or another, to the outbreak of the uprising. This royal commission, known as the Peel Commission, was required to put forward some recommendations regarding the post-Revolt organization of the Indian army (David 2002: 399).<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this investigation, the Peel Commission submitted a number of recommendations and regulations by March 1859.<sup>2</sup> Coming at the top of these recommendations was the number of European troops to be stationed in the Indian Sub-continent. In fact, it was recommended that the number of European troops necessary for the security of the British Empire in India should be about 80,000 (Chopra 1973: 522). Furthermore, it was reckoned as an obligatory measure to decrease the proportion of native troops, which should be set at two to one in the Bengal army, from which the uprising of 1857 was sparked off, and three to one in the armies of the other Presidencies, namely Madras and Bombay (1973: 522). In this respect, Percival Spear pointed out that in the aftermath of the Great Revolt the army of Bengal consisted of 65,000 Europeans as opposed to 14,000 natives (Spear 1990: 146).

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<sup>1</sup> This royal commission was named so because it was presided over by Major-General Jonathan Peel, then secretary of State for War in London (David 2002: 399).

<sup>2</sup> According to Chopra (1973: 522), some British historians keep insisting on the fact that one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the uprising of 1857 among the native army was the faulty disposition of the Indian troops, as well as the significant disparity in numbers between European and Indian troops.

In addition to the number of soldiers, the Commission stated that the artillery and ‘scientific branches’ should strictly be reserved for the British units. It also advised that sepoy troops, or native regiments, should be recruited from distant parts of the country, mainly from those areas which either were neutral or sided with the British during the events of 1857, and preferably speaking different languages (Read and Fisher 1998: 58-59).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, to avoid unity among the sepoys, the Commission recommended that the native regiments should be composed of different nationalities and castes (David 2002: 400).

Another important area of military reform was that the power of the commanding officers to punish should be increased. Actually, most of those who gave evidence to the Peel Commission were of the opinion that Bengal officers, in particular, needed more authority over their men (2002: 402). In fact, the weakening of commanding power of British officers during pre-Revolt India was attributed to Lord Bentinck who abolished corporal punishment of the native regiments. As a justification to this move, he stated that “flogging deterred ‘young men of respectable connections’ from joining up and produced ‘a baneful influence upon the pride, the manly feeling and the character of the whole service’” (2002: 42). From another standpoint, many British officers regarded this abolition as a serious mistake that could have serious consequences on the discipline of the native troops. One British senior officer in the Bengal army, Lieutenant-Colonel Drought, remarked on the eve of the Revolt:

I saw very great laxity in the ranks . . . The authority of the commanding officer had become less than mine was as a subaltern<sup>4</sup>, as regards punishment drill to . . . officers, owing to army standing orders being set aside by circulars, and by station orders issued by officers perfectly ignorant of the proper method of keeping sepoys in subjugation, and thereby interfering with the commanding officer’s authority, and rendering him a mere cipher in the eyes of his men . . . (2002: 42)

According to Saul David, the reduction of the power of the commanding officers was interpreted by the native soldiers as a sign of weakness, and consequently, this did much to inflate their sense of power and self-importance (2002: 42). To back up his statement, Saul David reported on Sitaram Pandey, a native soldier in the Bengal army, as saying that the principal cause of the rebellion was “the feeling of power that the sepoys had, and the little control the *sahibs* (Europeans) were allowed to exert over them” (2002: 42).

As far as the sepoys’ professional grievances were concerned, the Peel commission put forward only a couple of recommendations: one dealing with their uniform and the other dealing with promotion. Regarding the former, it was recommended that a modification should be made in the uniform of the Indian troops, thus “assimilating it more to the dress of the country” and making it more suitable to the climate (2002: 403).

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<sup>3</sup> According to Denis Judd, post-Revolt Indian army relied heavily on Sikhs (natives of the Punjab), Ghurkhas (natives of the neighbouring Nepal noted for their military prowess), and the frontier tribes of the northwest (Judd 1996: 75).

<sup>4</sup> A ‘subaltern’ is a lower rank than a captain in the British army.

About the second recommendation, the Commission advised that the promotion of the native officers should be regulated on the principle of efficiency, rather than of seniority (2002: 400). As a matter of fact, before the events of 1857, rarely did the British allow an Indian soldier to rise in the military hierarchy, however clever and strong he might be.<sup>5</sup> To add insult to injury, he was always kept in the background and, according to Bisheshwar Prasad, subjected to the authority of the youngest and most inexperienced European soldiers in the regiment (Prasad 1981: 545).

Besides military reform, the British took other measures to ensure their security in post-Revolt India. This could be reflected in the passing of the Indian Police Act of 1861. The latter introduced a uniform police service throughout the whole Sub-continent and decreed that each Indian district should have a British superintendent of police, to be assisted by a deputy superintendent and inspectors, who could be recruited from the natives (Read and Fisher 1998: 61).

Another significant step taken by the British that would ensure their domestic security in India was the passing of an Act in 1859 that would disarm the local population on a permanent basis.<sup>6</sup> This Act gave the local Magistrates *carte blanche* to enter homes in search of arms, and if the presence of hidden weapons was suspected in any village, the latter's possessions were to be confiscated until all arms were handed over to the authorities (Metcalf 1965: 306). Here, it is to be noted that following the passing of this Act, those who were found in possession of arms without a licence were fined Rs.500, and in addition, were either sentenced to seven years' imprisonment or corporal punishment (1965: 306).

This move on the part of the Government of India to disarm the local population mirrored the atmosphere of distrust that prevailed between the British and Indian subjects in India in the aftermath of the Revolt. In reality, as has been previously observed, the Great Revolt came as a shock to the British complacency and self-confidence in the Indian Sub-continent. They had never thought that one day, these so-called 'docile' and 'submissive' natives would rise against them. According to Denis Judd, after the events of 1857, the British started looking at the natives with caution and suspicion, if not fear, and this contributed to a growing gulf between both races (1996: 73-74). Corroborating this fact, A. Read and D. Fisher state that in the wake of the Revolt, the British citizens in India began building new suburbs for themselves on the outskirts of towns and cities, "'civil lines' consisting of spacious bungalows set back from broad, tree-lined roads which could be defended more easily in the event of trouble. At their centre was the club, strictly for Europeans only, a secure haven where the only native faces belonged to servants" (1998: 57).

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<sup>5</sup> In this respect, Saul David states that due to the principle of seniority in promotion used by the British in the native regiments, it was almost impossible for a sepoy to reach the rank of subedar-major (the post of a senior Indian officer in the army) before he was sixty (2002: 31).

<sup>6</sup> Actually, the passing of this Act was but an enactment of the one already passed at the height of the Great Revolt (Act XXVIII) in 1857. Yet, unlike the latter, the 1859 Act meant to disarm Indians on a permanent basis (Metcalf 1965: 305).

It is interesting to note that a profound distrust was reserved for the Muslim community. Actually, as the events of 1857 ended, the British chose to throw the cover of responsibility on the Muslim aristocracy alone, notwithstanding the fact that the latter were not the only 'culprits'. This is because the British assumed that the Indian Muslims were the *bona fide* fomenters and the main beneficiaries of the uprising. Commenting on this fact, Thomas R. Metcalf wrote: "As the former rulers of Hindustan, the Muslims had, in British eyes, necessarily to place themselves at the head of a movement for the overthrow of the British Government" (1965: 301).

The happenings of 1857 made the British realize how defective their security system in the Indian Sub-continent was. For this reason, they decided to revolutionize the organization of their army, as well as other security institutions, in such a way as to be more efficient in facing up to any possible domestic emergency in India. This could be seen in the number of British troops in India during the 1860s, which, according to Lord Strang, was said to have cost more than the armed forces of any European monarchy (1961: 171).

On the other hand, on the heels of the Great Revolt, the British Empire in India entered a new chapter in its history and many changes took place, mainly on the political scene. To begin with, the last vestiges of the Mughal Empire were done away with. In fact, shortly after Delhi was retaken, the British captured the ageing Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah II, with his three sons and tried them for complicity in murder. Found guilty, the sons were executed, and the ageing Mughal was sent into exile with his wives to Burma, where he died in 1862 (Meyer and Brysac 2001: 147). Thus, with the departure of the last Mughal Emperor, Delhi, the last foothold that remained of the Mughal Empire came under British hegemony (2001: 146-47).

Furthermore, shortly after the British were declared victorious, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1858,<sup>7</sup> whereby British power over India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown. In reality, it was the East India Company which took the brunt of the Great Revolt (James 1997: 292). After all, the latter broke out as a result of the Company's reforms, mismanagement of local affairs and excessive abuses by its officials. In this regard, Lawrence James observes:

Reforms had been thrust upon the Indians, irrespective of whether they needed or wanted them. The authority of the princes had been devalued and their lands and privileges had been snatched from them by Dalhousie's policies of lapse and annexation.<sup>8</sup> Having trampled on the rights of property, the reformers tampered with religion and had offended the sensibilities of Hindus with laws which overturned their customs of inheritance. (1997: 291)

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth mentioning that although the Great Revolt was officially ended in July 1858, it actually lasted until January 1859 due to the presence of pockets of resistance mainly in rural areas (James 1997: 295).

<sup>8</sup> Dalhousie's 'policy of lapse' was a formula devised by Lord Dalhousie (1812-1860), Governor-General of India between 1847 and 1856, to deal with questions of succession to the remaining semi-autonomous Indian princely states. According to L. James, between 1847 and 1856, more than five states fell to British rule under this stratagem (Ballhatchet 1973: 438).

To put it in a nutshell, the reputation of the East India Company was indelibly tarnished beyond repair and as a result, it forfeited its right to rule the Indian Sub-continent for good (1997: 291).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the happenings of 1857 were not the only reason for bringing an end to the English East India Company. In fact, according to some scholars, there had been a growing popular outrage in Britain itself against the Company's misrule as well as the malpractices of its agents in India prior to the uprising. This made the British Government try to find a way to take such a 'big empire' from the hands of a 'trading company'. Thus, the Revolt of 1857 came as a godsend to the authorities in London to take the right action against the East India Company (Spear 1990: 148). In this respect, Percival Spear points out that the English Company "was held to have failed to gauge Indian opinion, to be inert and backward-looking. The occasion of the Revolt was thus a convenient one to end an administrative anomaly which had become an anachronism" (Spear 1990: 148).

After ending the East India Company's rule, the British Government came up with a new system to rule India. Thus, a post of Secretary of State for India was created, which was in charge of overseeing Indian affairs from London, hence replacing the Company's Board of Directors there. In turn, the Governor-General of India in Calcutta, who kept the same prerogatives, acquired the title of *Viceroy of India*, hence, a personal representative of the Monarch. In fact, the latter was so important a position that, by the end of nineteenth century, it was held by the most prominent political leaders in Britain (Wolpert 1973: 410). This reflects how important India was to London. In this respect, Colin Cross contends that "one of the most glittering prizes a political career in Britain could offer was to become Viceroy, the ruler of one sixth of the human race" (1970: 44). To back up his statement, Cross adds that the salary of a Viceroy of India was between £20 000 and £25 000 a year, the highest salary of any British public official during the nineteenth century (1970:44).

Apart from that, in the wake of the Great Revolt, several measures were taken by the British Government to avoid the recurrence of any similar event. This was characterized by Queen Victoria's Proclamation, issued on 1 November 1858, which was addressed to the princes and peoples of the Indian Sub-continent. In her proclamation, drafted by the then Prime Minister, Lord Stanley Derby, Queen Victoria promised that her Government would no longer treat Indians as it used to (Feiling 1972: 929). Thus, the pre-1857 abuses were to be superseded by reform measures that would be beneficial to the British as well as the Indians, at least in the period immediately following the uprising.

To begin with, the Queen vowed that the British Government would no longer interfere in the local affairs of the Indian population, and that the latter's traditions and customs, however 'abhorrent' and 'primitive' they might be, should be respected. As she plainly put in her Proclamation:

We declare it Our royal will and pleasure that . . . none be molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and We do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under Us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of Our subjects on pain of Our highest displeasure . . .<sup>9</sup>

Thus, as a sign of its willingness to refrain from interfering in the natives' social and religious affairs, the post-Revolt Indian Government, under the leadership of the Governor-General, or rather the Viceroy, Lord Canning, took prohibitory measures against Christian missionaries in order to curb their activities in the Sub-continent (Judd 1996: 76). In fact, after the end of hostilities, the fingers of blame were mostly pointed at the Evangelicals,<sup>10</sup> whose 'aggressive' proselytising was said to be responsible for the uprising (Metcalf 1965: 96).

Amongst the most significant of these measures was the curtailing of Government subsidies to the missionaries. Actually, this government financial support to the missionaries was most of the time interpreted by the natives, mainly the Orthodox, as a way to indirectly help missionaries in their campaign to Christianize them (1965: 94). This punitive move on the part of the Government led to a remarkable decline in the number of missionaries working in India. According to Thomas R. Metcalf, whereas the number of missionaries in pre-1857 India was 262, it fell to 234 during the decade 1861-1871 (1965: 97).

The Evangelicals, on the other hand, saw things differently. For them, the Great Revolt came as a chastisement from God for not having done enough to free Indians from their "benightedness" (1965: 99). As a Scottish missionary in India, Alexander Duff, put it: "God has, in a strange way, given us India in trust for accomplishment of His grand evangelizing designs concerning it. In the discharge of this solemn trust, we, as a people and a nation, have been shamefully negligent. Hence it is . . . that the Lord has admonished us in the way of sore judgments" (1965: 99).

Duff then added that having weathered this ordeal safe and sound, thanks to the Lord's forgiveness, it is now incumbent upon the British officials to make a great deal of effort to realize the objective for which they had come to the Indian Sub-continent: the "subversion of Satan's empire" (1965: 99).

Therefore, in an attempt to concretize their opinion, the Evangelicals came up with a set of measures and applied pressure on the British Government in India to fulfill them. The most significant of these measures was that the Bible should be introduced as a class book in schools. Another proposal was that the Government should employ all legitimate means for the spread of Christian teachings among the so-called 'benighted population of India' (Metcalf 1965: 100).

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<sup>9</sup> 'Her Majesty's Proclamation (1858)' India Office Records, Africa, Pacific and Asia collections, British Library, London: L/P&S/6/463 file 36, folios 215-16.

<sup>10</sup> The Evangelicals were members of a Christian religious group who went preaching the Gospel all over the globe (Metcalf 1965: 8).

Furthermore, the missionaries went a step further by asking the Government to disregard all distinctions of caste among the Hindus, as well as to put an end to all caste connections with the rites and customs of the Hindu religion (1965: 100), to which the Government's response was a swift 'no way'. Thomas R. Metcalf corroborates this statement by pointing out that the British officials in India as well as back in London, who were very concerned with restoring the confidence of the local population in the British Government, were well aware of the fact that this proselytizing enthusiasm was very dangerous and constituted a real threat to the very foundations of the British Empire in India.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, from Alexander Duff's point of view, it is clear that the experience of the Great Revolt served as a lesson, as well as an incentive, for the Christian missionaries to make a greater effort than before to spread Christian teachings among Indians.

Meanwhile, in another sphere, the new policy of live-and-let-live, as decreed in Queen Victoria's Proclamation, could also be noticed in the post-Revolt legislation of the Government of India. Actually, the British officials, who were still haunted by the events of 1857, were very reluctant to take any measures that could directly challenge the social and religious affairs of the local population. In this regard, Denis Judd writes: "Fearful to set in motion an Indian reaction similar to the one that had precipitated the great uprising of 1857, the Government avoided drastic political and social change" (Judd 1996: 76). Probably the best example illustrating this was the passing of an Act in 1863 (Act n° XX) that called for the handing over of the entire superintendence of the Hindu temples and their endowments to local communities headed by natives themselves (Metcalf 1965: 111).

Another example depicting the British determination to distance themselves from all matters related to local social traditions and religious beliefs was the passing of an Act, in 1866, which allowed Indian converts to Christianity to remarry. In fact, contrary to Lord Dalhousie's Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act of 1856, which in a flagrant breach of Hindu customs had legalized the remarriage of Hindu widows, the recent Act involved no attack upon the latter, since it concerned only Christian converts (Metcalf 1965: 111).

On the other hand, the British Government was convinced that Lord Dalhousie's policies of annexation were an important drive behind the participation of dispossessed princes in the Great Revolt. Moreover, even most of those who had not been victims to Lord Dalhousie's policies were tempted by the rebels' cause, as they felt that they, too, could be the next prey (Metcalf 1965: 220). As a result, Queen Victoria's Proclamation put an end to Lord Dalhousie's doctrine of lapse. In her Proclamation, the Queen stated that the British "desire no extension of Our present territorial possessions" and they

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<sup>11</sup> About the introduction of the Bible as a class book in schools, as put forward by the missionaries, Sir Henry E. Frere (1815-1884), a British official in post-1857 India, stated that it would convince the natives that the British were in India to convert its people, and this could provoke a full-scale rebellion (Metcalf 1965: 105).



“would respect the rights, dignity and honor of the native princes as Our own”.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, no more lands and possessions would be confiscated by the British in the future on the basis of this doctrine.

In addition to that, the Proclamation stated that princes should be left free to adopt any heirs they desired, and to manage their states as they wished, so long as they remained loyal to the British Crown (Duff 1957: 122). In other words, following the experience of 1857, the British decided to treat the native rulers as friends and allies, rather than as foes, hoping to gain their support. Describing this switch in British policy towards the native princely states, A. R. Desai writes:

Till 1857, the aim of the British was to liquidate the native states and convert entire India into a British territory directly governed by the East India Company. In light of the experience of the revolt of 1857, this aim was relinquished in favour of a decision to perpetuate those states, which were still unannexed. The new policy of Britain aimed at transforming the rulers of these states into ‘allies’, so many loyal supporters of the British rule in India. (1959: 288)

According to S. A. Wolpert, more than 560 “enclaves of autocratic princely rule” survived in the aftermath of the Revolt (1973: 413). In this respect, some scholars provide conflicting data as to the actual number of princely states that existed in post-Revolt India. For instance, whereas A. Read and D. Fisher state that there were about 601 Indian states, some as large as France, others only covering a few square miles (1998: 59), Lawrence James points out that there were about 675 covering an area of 822,000 square miles (1997: 326).

The Indian Great Revolt also made the British realize how influential the *talukdars*, or the landed gentry, were among their communities. Thus, an effort was made to conciliate them. This took the form of giving them back their lands, which had been confiscated before 1857, to hold in perpetuity. Moreover, the landed gentry were made into local magistrates (Read and Fisher 1998: 53). Thus, these dispossessed *talukdars*, hitherto bearing a grudge against British rule in India, became part and parcel of it overnight. The objective behind this shrewd move on the part of the British Government was to have the support of the Indian masses through this influential class of Indians (Spear 1990: 149).

Another important element in Queen Victoria’s Proclamation was that Indians should have the right to take part in the management of their country (Feiling 1972: 929). As the Queen stated: “... in so far as may be, Our Subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and partially admitted to office in Our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity duly to discharge”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Her Majesty’s Proclamation (1858)’ India Office Records, Africa, Pacific and Asia collections, British Library, London: L/P&S/6/463, file 36, folios 215-16.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Her Majesty’s Proclamation (1858)’ India Office Records, Africa, Pacific and Asia collections, British Library, London: L/P&S/6/463, file 36, folios 215-16.

Thus, as can be seen from this quotation, the Queen took an unprecedented move by stating unequivocally that the natives, hitherto marginalized in the management of their local affairs, were thenceforth to be allowed to work, as well as hold responsibility, in the Indian Civil Service, provided that they met the required criteria.

While on the subject, it is important to refer to the fact that Indians had been recruited in the British administration in India ever since the days of the first Governor-General, Warren Hastings. This was due to the fact that the English East India Company could not afford to 'import' a significant number of British citizens to run the day-to-day administrative affairs of a country almost as big as Western Europe. As a result, they had no alternative but to resort to the co-operation of the natives. Confirming this statement, Thomas R. Metcalf states that it was as impossible to run the Indian administrative machinery without the natives as to wage a war in India without sepoy troops (1965: 268). Nevertheless, it was out of the question that a native, who was usually assigned to a subordinate position, should hold a higher post of management and responsibility. In fact, the latter was often made off limits to the Indian recruit (1965: 268).

But, the events of 1857 served as a lesson for the British officials in the Sub-continent. They actually realized how dangerous it was to marginalize that category of educated Indians who could be relied on in the Civil Service. In this respect, T. R. Metcalf comments: "The Government was well aware of the frustration and resentment which this exclusion produced in the heart of the educated Indian, and the experience of the Mutiny had taught the British, if nothing else, the discontented and unhappy men were a fertile breeding ground for sedition" (1965: 274).

Yet, notwithstanding the fact that the Great Revolt paved the way, for the first time in the history of British India, for the Indian population, regardless of their faith or social class, to take part in the administrative management of their country alongside the British, only few managed to do so. This was due to linguistic and financial factors, which served as serious hurdles. In other words, competitive examinations were done in English, which required good mastery of this language on the part of the Indians (Lloyd 1989: 178). Furthermore, very few Indians could afford to make a trip to London in order to sit for these examinations. Colin Cross corroborates this fact with the following statement:

In theory it was possible for an Indian to join the Indian Civil Service and a handful actually had done so; there was no racial bar. But the competitive entry examination was held in London and an Indian candidate had to gather £100 to pay his fare and living costs. Moreover, he was unlikely to do well in the examination unless he had spent years in Britain at public school and university which alone could provide suitable preparation; this would cost £2,000, a sum beyond the reach of 99 per cent of Indian families. (Cross 1970: 44)

It is to be noted that even most of those who could afford such a trip to Great Britain faced another type of obstacle: the Hindu religion. In fact, crossing the sea, or the 'black water', was considered as a sinful act in the Hindu faith, and thus, it was impossible for the devout Hindus to do so (Lloyd 1989: 178).

Further positive changes effected by the British reflecting their willingness to allow Indians to take part in the management of their country could be noticed in the passing of the Indian Councils Act of 1861 – already mentioned above. In fact, the latter divided the old advisory council of the Governor-General into two separate bodies: the Executive and the Legislative Councils. The first body was an inner cabinet consisting of five British officials, and each of the latter was responsible for a department, namely home affairs, revenue, finance, military and law, with the viceroy in charge of the foreign affairs department in person, besides being the Commander-in-Chief of the army (Read and Fisher 1998: 61). These officials were also important members of the second body, namely the Legislative Council, which consisted of up to twelve handpicked nominees, among whom there were, for the first time, two Indian subjects (Judd 1996: 75).

Nevertheless, in the eyes of many critics, and to the Indians' dismay, this reform was worthless since the function of the new legislative body was purely consultative (Read and Fisher 1998: 61). In fact, according to Bipan Chandra *et al.*, besides being overwhelmingly outnumbered by Europeans, the Indian members were not allowed to discuss certain important issues, such as budget and financial matters, without prior *carte blanche* from the British Government (1989: 113).

Moreover, the British were implicitly determined, out of caution, to keep the upper hand in all matters. Indeed, it was a *sine qua non* for the maintenance of their Empire in India to retain power in their hands, as T. R. Metcalf puts it: "No matter how far Indian employment might be extended, the ultimate controlling power had always to remain in British hands" (1965: 287-88).

Yet, despite these setbacks, the decision of the British Government to allow members of the local population to participate in the management of their country was the first step of its kind that was going to set a precedent for further concessions by the British later on. Commenting on the significance of this legislative reform, Percival Spear writes: "Such a body may be regarded as the proverbial mouse emerging from the travail of the mutiny mountain. But it had a significance, for it marked the beginning of Indian participation in government at the top. After years of dwarfdom, the house was to grow into [sic] elephant" (1990: 177).

The British were well aware of the fact that the economic grievances of the native population were a significant driving force behind the outbreak of the happenings of 1857. After all, most of the rebels had been, in a way or another, affected by the new exploitative measures imposed by the East India Company. Consequently, post-Revolt India witnessed a major step towards development, ranging from economic infrastructure to social care (Lloyd 1989: 177). As stated in the Proclamation: ". . . it is Our earnest desire to stimulate the . . . industry of India, to promote works of public utility and improvement . . . for the benefit of all Our subjects resident therein".<sup>14</sup> The best example of such progress could be noticed in the railway industry. In fact, the

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<sup>14</sup> 'Her Majesty's Proclamation (1858)' India Office Records, Africa, Pacific and Asia collections, British Library, London: L/P&S/6/463, file 36, folios 215-16.

Indian railway network, which did not exceed 200 miles on the eve of the Great Revolt, had reached 5000 miles by the 1860's (Lloyd 1989: 177).

This had, to a certain extent, a positive impact on the growth of the local economy and, eventually, on the local population. Probably the best indicator of this positive outcome was the rapid growth of the Indian population, as confirmed by T. O. Lloyd who pointed out that "there was general surprise when the first Indian census, held in 1872, showed that the population had reached at least 206 million" (1989: 177).

Another move on the part of the Government of India featuring its attempt to alleviate the economic hardships of the local population was the reviewing of the Permanent Land Settlement Act of 1897, which had aroused much disaffection among the peasantry.<sup>15</sup> Now, contrary to the fixed cash payment that cultivators had to offer to the Company, regardless of how much the land yielded, in post-1857 India this payment was to be made proportionate to the amount of the produce, without causing any damage to the cultivators (Metcalf 1965: 242).

However, the new land settlement scheme did not go beyond the 1870s. This was due to the shortage of revenue that was engendered by the application of such a scheme, which proved to be very costly for the British treasury in India (1965: 248). To put it differently, the land revenue constituted a major source of income to the Government of India, and the latest reform meant a sharp decrease in revenue that could cripple the British establishment in the Sub-continent if it were to last longer. Therefore, once stability was restored to the region and the events of 1857 became a mere memory, this scheme was discarded as the British could no longer afford to maintain it. Commenting on this statement, Thomas R. Metcalf writes: "Peace and security had now been secured, and the fears of the Mutiny era were little more than a memory. Fiscal considerations took on a new importance. What had appeared a political necessity in 1862 was, a decade later, an expensive luxury the Government could not afford" (1965: 248).

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the post-Revolt reform measures were, most of the time, short-lived, and were seen by some contemporaries as half-measures which 'fizzled out' as soon as the events of 1857 were forgotten, the Indians became convinced that in a time of crisis, the British colonizers could make a great deal of concessions.

Moreover, though the Revolt of 1857 fell short of expelling the foreign rulers from the country, it was regarded by many Indian contemporaries as a patriotic act and a progressive step. In fact, the Great Revolt would, in the future, serve as a source of inspiration that the young Indian nationalists of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century would resort to in their struggle for freedom. As Bipan Chandra *et al.* claim: "If the importance of a historical event is not limited to its immediate achievements, the Revolt of 1857 was not a pure historical tragedy. Even in failure it served a grand purpose: a source of inspiration for the national liberation movement which later achieved what the Revolt could not" (1989: 40).

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<sup>15</sup> It was Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India from 1786 to 1793, who introduced the Permanent Land Settlement Act. By this Act, the British destroyed the old system of collective ownership of land in the Indian Sub-continent and replaced it with the system of individual proprietorship (Chandra, Amal and De Barun 1983: 17).

In a word, following the Great Revolt, the British realized how vulnerable they were in India. The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 was but a set of preventive measures taken by the British Government to avert another similar event. This Proclamation was a historic one, because, for the first time, it made the British Crown take Indian affairs seriously.

Moreover, the Indian Great Revolt made the British officials wake up to the gravity of the situation in India, and reminded them of their vulnerability there. Indeed, Queen Victoria's Proclamation, in which she implicitly deplored British misbehavior in the Sub-continent and called for better treatment of Indians, reflects how tremendous British apprehension was. This was an unprecedented move from the British Crown. In fact, never before had the latter officially intervened to 'defend the rights' of the indigenous populations in the colonies. As Robert A. Huttenback puts it: "It was the first imperial paper in which the British government admitted the right of an indigenous colonial population to have a part in the shaping of its own destiny" (Huttenback 1966: 68).

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