VII. Industrial Devastation of India

"We have swept away their manufactures; they have nothing to depend on but the produce of their land."—Sir Charles Trevelyan, report to the House of Commons Select Committee in 1840.

In 1813 the offensive of the industrialists and other trading interests was at last successful, and the monopoly of the East India Company in trade with India was ended. The new stage of industrial capitalist exploitation of India may thus be dated from 1813.

Prior to 1813 trade with India had been relatively small. Seeley, in his *Expansion of England*, published in 1883, noted the transformation that had taken place in the nineteenth century:

> "Macculloch, in the Note on India in his edition of Adam Smith, speaks of the trade between England and India about 1811—that is, in the days of the monopoly—as being utterly insignificant, of little more importance than that between England and Jersey or the Isle of Man....
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> "But now instead of Jersey or the Isle of Man we compare our trade with India to that with the United States or France.... India heads France and all other nations except the United States as an importer from England." (J. R. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 1883, p. 299.)

Similarly the official Report of the Company in 1812 made clear that the value of India at that time was as a source of direct tribute or spoliation, not as a market for goods:

> "The importance of that immense Empire to this country is rather to be estimated by the great annual addition it makes to the wealth and capital of the Kingdom, than by any eminent advantage which the manufacturers of the country can derive from the consumption of the natives of India." (Report of the East India Company for 1812, quoted in Parshad, *Some Aspects of India's Foreign Trade*, p. 49.)

The proceedings of the parliamentary inquiry of 1813, preceding the renewal of the Charter and abolition of the monopoly, showed how completely the current of thought was now directed to the new aim of the development of India as a market for the rising British machine industry. It was further notable how the replies of the representatives of the old school, like Warren Hastings, denied the possibility of the development of India as a market.

At the time of this inquiry the duties on the import of Indian calicoes into Britain were 78 per cent. Without these prohibitive duties the British cotton industry could not have developed in its early stages.

> "It was stated in evidence (in 1813) that the cotton and silk goods of India up to the period could be sold for a profit in the British market at a price from 50% to 60% lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70% and 80% on their value, or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacture." (H. H. Wilson, *History of British India,* Vol. I, p. 385.)

This tariff discrimination against Indian manufacturers to build up the British textile industry was carried on in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the parliamentary inquiry of 1840 it was reported that, while British cotton and silk goods imported into India paid a duty of 3½ per cent and woolen goods 2 per cent, Indian cotton goods imported into Britain paid 10 per cent, silk goods 20 per cent and woolen goods 30 per cent.

Thus it was not only on the basis of the technical superiority of machine industry, but also with the direct State assistance of one-way free trade (free entry, or virtual free entry, for British goods into India, but tariffs against the entry of Indian manufactures into Britain, and prevention of direct trade between India and European or other foreign countries by the operation of the Navigation Acts) that the predominance of British manufactures was built up in the Indian market and the Indian manufacturing industries were destroyed.

This process was decisively carried through in the first half of the nineteenth century, although its effects continued to operate

right through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century. Alongside the headlong advance of British manufactures went the decline of Indian manufactures.

Between 1814 and 1835 British cotton manufactures exported to India rose from less than 1 million yards to over 51 million yards. In the same period Indian cotton piece-goods imported into Britain fell from one and a quarter million pieces to 306,000 pieces, and by 1844 to 63,000 pieces.

The same process could be traced in respect of silk goods, woolen goods, iron, pottery, glass and paper.

The effects of this wholesale destruction of the Indian manufacturing industries on the economy of the country can be imagined. In England the ruin of the old hand-loom weavers was accompanied by the growth of the new machine industry. But in India the ruin of the millions of artisans and craftsmen was not accompanied by any alternative growth of new forms of industry. The old populous manufacturing towns, Dacca, Murshidabad (which Clive had described in 1757 to be "as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London"), Surat and the like, were in a few years rendered desolate under the "pax britannica" with a completeness which no ravages of the most destructive war or foreign conquest could have accomplished.

It was not only the old manufacturing towns and centers that were laid waste, and their population driven to crowd and over-crowd the villages; it was above all the basis of the old village economy, the union of agriculture and domestic industry, that received its mortal blow. The millions of ruined artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners, smelters, smiths, alike from the towns and from the villages, had no alternative save to crowd into agriculture. In this way India was forcibly transformed, from being a country of combined agriculture and manufactures, into an agricultural colony of British manufacturing capitalism. It is from this period of British rule, and from the direct effects of British rule, that originates the deadly over-pressure on agriculture in India, which is still blandly described in official literature as if it were a natural phenomenon of the old Indian society, and is diagnosed by the superficial and ignorant as a symptom of "over-population." In fact the increase in the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture has developed under British rule, continuously extending, not only throughout the nineteenth century, but even in the twentieth century.

Already in 1840, at the parliamentary inquiry previously quoted, Montgomery Martin gave warning of the dangerous transformation that was taking place to turn India into "the agricultural farm of England":

> "I do not agree that India is an agricultural country; India is as much a manufacturing country as an agricultural; and he who would seek to reduce her to the position of an agricultural country seeks to lower her in the scale of civilization. I do not suppose that India is to become the agricultural farm of England; she is a manufacturing country, her manufactures of various descriptions have existed for ages, and have never been able to be competed with by any nation wherever fair play has been given to them. . . . To reduce her now to an agricultural country would be an injustice to India."

But the manufacturing interests were determined to press forward. "I certainly pity the East Indian laborer," declared Mr. Cope, a Macclesfield manufacturer, to the 1840 parliamentary inquiry, "but at the same time I have a greater feeling for my own family than for the East Indian laborer's family; I think it is wrong to sacrifice the comforts of my family for the sake of the East Indian laborer because his condition happens to be worse than mine."

The industrial capitalists had their policy for India clearly defined; to make India the agricultural colony of British capitalism, supplying raw materials and buying manufactured goods.

The indication of the new stage of policy was the decision in 1833 to permit Englishmen to acquire land and set up as planters in India. In that same year slavery had been abolished in the West Indies. The new plantation system, which was nothing but thinly veiled slavery, was immediately developed in India, and it is significant that many of the original planters were slave-drivers from the West Indies ("Experienced planters were brought from the West Indies. . . . The area attracted a rather rough set of planters, some of whom had been slave drivers in America and carried unfortunate ideas and practices with them"—Buchanan, *Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India*, pp. 36-37). The horrors that resulted were exposed in the Indigo

Commission of 1860. Today there are more than a million workers tied to the tea, rubber and coffee plantations, or more than the total number of workers in the textile, coal-mining, engineering, iron and steel industries combined.

The export of raw materials leaped up, especially after 1833. Raw cotton exports rose from 9 million pounds weight in 1813 to 32 million in 1833 and 88 million in 1844; sheep's wool from 3.7 thousand pounds weight in 1833 to 2.7 million in 1844; linseed from 2,100 bushels in 1833 to 237,000 in 1844. (Porter, *Progress of the Nation*, 1847, p. 750.)

Between 1849 and 1914 exports of raw cotton rose from £1.7 million in value to £22 million. In weight raw cotton exports rose from 32 million pounds in 1833 to 963 million in 1914, or thirty times over. Jute exports rose from £68,000 in 1849 to £8.6 million in 1914, or 126 times over.

Even more significant was the rising export of food grains from starving India. The export of food grains, principally rice and wheat, rose from £858,000 in 1849 to £3.8 million by 1858, £7.9 million by 1877, £9.3 million by 1901, and £19.3 million in 1914, or an increase twenty-two times over.

Alongside this process went a heavy increase in the number and intensity of famines in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were seven famines, with an estimated total of 1½ million deaths from famine. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were thirty famines (six between 1851 and 1875, and twenty-four between 1876 and 1900), with an estimated total, according to official records, of over 20 million deaths. "Stated roughly, famines and scarcities have been four times as numerous during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century as they were one hundred years earlier, and four times more widespread" (W. Digby, *Prosperous British India*, 1901). W. S. Lilley, in his *India and its Problems*, gives the following approximate figures on the basis of official estimates:

Years	Famine Deaths
1800-25	1,000,000
1825-50	400,000
1850-75	5,000,000
1875-1900	15,000,000

In 1878 a Famine Commission was appointed to consider the problem of the growing famines. Its Report, published in 1880, found that "a main cause of the disastrous consequences of Indian famines, and one of the greatest difficulties in the way of providing relief in an effectual shape is to be found in the fact that the great mass of the people directly depend on agriculture, and that there is no other industry from which any considerable part of the population derives its support."

> "At the root of much of the poverty of the people of India, and of the risks to which they are exposed in seasons of scarcity, lies the unfortunate circumstance that agriculture forms almost the sole occupation of the mass of the population, and that no remedy for present evils can be complete which does not include the introduction of a diversity of occupations, through which the surplus population may be drawn from agricultural pursuits and led to find the means of subsistence in manufactures or some such employments." (Indian Famine Commission Report, 1880.)

With these words Industrial Capital passed judgment on its own handiwork in India.