13. Viceroys I Have Known

When I was born (in November, 1871) the Earl of Mayo was the Viceroy of India. It was not long, however before he was assassinated at Port Blair, in the Andamans. The Governor of Madras, as the senior of the two Governors at that time (namely, of Madras and Bombay), sailed for Calcutta to assume the reins of administration as Viceroy. But a journey by boat between Madras and Calcutta used to take several days in the early seventies of the last century; and as someone had to step into the shoes of the deceased Viceroy immediately, Sir John Strachey, the senior Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council, was proclaimed the Governor-General and Viceroy of India, pending the arrival of Lord Napier, the then Governor of Madras. Even when Sir John Strachey retired, in 1880 (owing to the dispute about his serious underestimate, a Finance Member of the cost of the war in Afghanistan) I had just heard his name mentioned in the course of conversation between my father and his friends; but knew nothing about him or his work as an administrator. On his retirement, however, he was a member of the Council of India from 1885 to 1895, and I was frequently brought into contact with him in the Northbrook Indian Club, in London, during the years I was a law student in the early nineties of the last century. He introduced me to his elder brother, Sir Richard Strachey. Both the brothers were truly remarkable men, so far as experience of Indian administration was concerned. Sir Richard was born in 1817 and died at the age of 92, in 1908, while his younger brother, Sir John, who was born six years later, in 1823, predeceased him by one year.

Sir John Strachey had mainly served in the then North-Western Provinces, of which he was Lieutenant-Governor from 1874-1876. His elder brother, Sir Richard, who had joined the Bombay Engineers in 1836, maintained his connection with India till the end of the nineteenth Century. Both the brothers jointly produced a book, called the *Finances and Public Works of India*, which though issued so far back as 1882, is nevertheless highly informative even now, in regard to the administration of the country in these important departments in the earlier years of administration of the country under the Crown.[68] By far more valuable and important than that earlier work by the brothers Strachey was the course of lectures delivered in 1884, by Sir John, before the University of Cambridge, which was published, in 1888, under the title of "India"; and a second revised edition of which appeared in 1894. In 1903 he made final

[68] Sir John Strachey, Lt.Gen. Richard Strachey, The Finances and Public Works of India from 1869 to 1881, London: Kegan Paul, 1882.

revision of the book, and a fourth edition was edited, after the author's death, by Sir Thomas Holderness, in 1911.[69]

The Strachey brothers, as I knew them during my student days in London, were typical of the old school of 'Indians' (as they were called), graphically depicted by Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*[70], and some other works dealing with Anglo-Indian life. As an expression of their views and sentiments toward India and Indians, Sir John's book is frankly hostile to our aspirations for economic and political freedom. But in spite of the long period that has elapsed since its first appearance, even in its revised form, the fact remains that the statement of the London Times, which appeared on the day after the death of Sir John Strachey, that the book was still "the most concise and informed of detailed expositions of the principles and methods of British rule in India" is quite correct. The reason is nor far to seek, for, as Sir John himself put it in the preface to his book, "there is hardly a great office of the State which one or other of us has not held, and hardly a department of the administration with which one or other of us has not been intimately connected". That is perfectly true, and it is, therefore, that I have never failed to recommend strongly to students of Indian Administration- and I do so still-a careful study of Sir John Strachey's book, which appeared in its last edition under the title of *India: Administration and Progress*.[71] His views are his own, but the vast array of sound and useful information in the book is there for the advantage of all students of the subject.

The connections of the Strachey family with India, which had begun in the 18th century with Sir Henry Strachey, who was the first Baronet; and Private Secretary to Clive, in 1764, was maintained till the 20th century by Sir Arthur Strachey, a son of Sir John Strachey. The latter was called to the English Bar in 1883. Soon after he started practice in the Allahabad High Court, where he rose to be the Government Advocate, and in 1895, was elevated to the bench of the High Court at Bombay. He remained there for four years, and returned to Allahabad as the Chief of the High Court in 1899. I used to know him well, since I had been practising in the Allahabad High Court since 1896. He was a man of amiable disposition, and was liked by everyone who was brought into contact with him. He died prematurely at Simla, in 1901, since which time the direct connection of the Strachey family with this country ceased to exist. His term of office, as a Judge of the Bombay High Court, is still recalled in legal and political circles in this country for his having tried, in 1897, the late Shri Bal Gangadhar Tilak, on a charge of sedition. His charge to the jury

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69 Sir John Strachey, India: Its Administration and Progress, London: Macmillan, 1903 (third edition, revised and enlarged). It is quite likely that Sinha had access to the fourth edition, but the avid book collector and reader that he was, he might have all four editions.

70 William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair, London: Smith Elder & Co., 1868 (1848).

71 Sir John Strachey, India: Its Administration and Progress, London: Macmillan, 1903 (third edition, revised and enlarged).

roused considerable controversy, because of his having said in the course of it that "disaffection was absence of affection". The matter went in appeal before the Privy Council, which was presided over by no other than Lord Halsbury, the then Lord Chancellor; while Shri Tilak's leading Counsel was the future Prime Minister of Britain, Mr. Henry Herbert Asquith. In the end, the Privy Council held that, taking the charge as a whole, there was nothing which could reasonable be urged against it. The appearance of Lord Halsbury as a Judge of the Privy Council, while he was also a member of the British Cabinet, which is believed to have approved Shri Tilak's prosecution, roused great acerbity of feeling in this country, at that time.

In due course Lord Mayo's successor was found in Lord Northbrook, who assumed office in May 1872, and retired in April 1876, before putting in his full term of five years. Of course, I have no recollection of the incidents briefly mentioned above which I have jotted down for the sake of the continuity of the narrative, but by the time Lord Lytton succeeded Lord Northbrook in 1876, and continued in office till June 1880, I was precocious enough to learn and understand many things which my father used to read out to me from the newspapers in Hindi and Urdu, which he used to get regularly. But though I do not remember the incidents of Lord Northbrook's administration it fell to my lot to know the ex-Viceroy rather well during the years that I spent in London, as a law student, from 1890-93. Lord Northbrook was deeply interested, according to his lights, in the welfare of India; and his great hobby was to bring together Indians and Anglo-Indians, who might be staying in London. With this object in view, he started, soon after his return to London, a very fine Club, known after him as the Northbrook Indian Club. It was situated in Whitehall Gardens, close to the India Office, and the other public offices of the British Government.

The Club, though small, and non-residential, had almost all the appointments and conveniences of a high-class institution of its class and kind. It had a very good collection of books, in general, and on India, in particular. Interested as I was in acquiring general knowledge by study of books, I welcomed the opportunity which Lord Northbrook gave me, soon after my arrival in London, to take up the librarianship of the Club. I continued as Honorary Librarian of that Club until my return to India in 1893. The club afforded a pleasant meeting ground for retired Anglo-Indian officials and also for those in service in India but on leave in London. It also enabled the Indians (mainly students) to meet their fellow countrymen from various parts of India. For these reasons, and also for its hot but excellent Madras curries, the Club was very popular, and had a large number of members on its rolls. Lord Northbrook who was President of the Club, took considerable interest in its fortunes, and made it a point to attend regularly the meetings of its Executive Committee, of which I was an ex-officio member as the Honorary Librarian. I thus used to meet Lord Northbrook pretty frequently, and I came to conceive high regard and esteem

for that ex-Viceroy. The Northbrook Indian Club flourished while its founder was alive, but after his death it languished and ceased to exist as a separate institution, it having been merged in the Northbrook Indian Society, which may still be in existence for ought (sic) I know.

Before concluding my references to Lord Northbrook, I may record an incident which is justly regarded as a memorable scoop in journalism. After Lord Mayo's tragic death in the Andamans, Lord Northbrook was offered the Viceroyalty; but the matter was kept, for obvious reasons, a profound secret. Lord Northbrook did not feel justified, however, in accepting the Prime Minister's offer until he had made sure that his health would stand the strain of the high and exalted office, in the tropical climate of India. Accordingly, he paid a visit to his family doctor, who was the most famous physician at that time in London. The same evening Lord Northbrook was dining at a place where the Editor of the *Times* was also a guest. In the course of conversation Lord Northbrook mentioned to him that he was rather concerned about his health, and had consulted that very day his family physician who had assured him, after careful examination, that there was nothing particularly wrong with his health. Early next morning the whole of Britain was agreeably surprised to find published in the *Times* that Lord Northbrook had been offered and had also accepted the office of the Viceroyalty of India. This news could not be contradicted either by Government or by Lord Northbrook, as it happened to be true, for after receiving his physician's assurance about his health Lord Northbrook had sent in, on the previous evening before he went to dine with his host, his acceptance of the Prime Minister's offer.

Lord Northbrook's successor was Lord Lytton, the First Earl, of whom I have recollections which are not quite hazy. The first important incident of his administration which I may recall here is the memorable Darbar, held by him at Delhi on the 1st of January, 1877, at which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. I have special reasons to remember it. As my father was one of the invitees to the Darbar at which he was awarded a *Sanad* in appreciation of his services to the cause of social reform, in the matter of the abolition of the system of exorbitant dowries in marriage. I distinctly remember that I was most anxious to accompany my father to Delhi and tried to create great trouble by my obstreperousness, from day to day, for weeks preceding the Darbar. The nearer the date of my father's departure for Delhi approached the more obstinacy and refractoriness I displayed, but it was all of no avail, as my father was advised by doctors that in the last week of December and the first week of January Delhi was likely to be so intensely cold that it might seriously affect my health. And so, although I cried myself hoarse on the date my father left for Delhi and refused to take any food-in the language of today I was an incipient *satyagrahi*- I was left at home with the consolation of receiving on my father's return from there, sweets and toys galore. The only privilege that the *Sanad*, which my father

received, carried with it was that he was to be exempt for life from certain provisions of the Arms Act. It bears the signature of Sir Richard Temple, the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

Two other things which I recall distinctly were the Second Afghan War, in which Lord Lytton and his Finance Member, Sir John Strachey, had taken a very prominent part, and the enactment of what is still popularly called the Vernacular Press Act. The Afghan War, of 1878-79 created great indignation in politically minded circles in the country at that time, and there continued to be great dissatisfaction in the public mind until the war was brought to a close during the regime of Lord Lytton's successor, Lord Ripon. But much more than the Afghan War, what evoked considerable feeling of acerbity against Lord Lytton's Government was the enactment of the Vernacular Press Act. It was the first attempt, after India had passed from the administrative control of the East India Company to that of the Crown, in 1858, to place the Indian languages Press in the country under official restraint, by means of legislation, which authorised the Executive to take action with the authority of a Court. That Act caused profound dissatisfaction throughout the length and the breadth of the country. The agitation against it spread abroad from India to Britain and the cause of the Indo-Vernacular Press (as it was then called) was taken up in right earnest by none other than William Ewart Gladstone, Ex-Prime Minister, and Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition at the time There were some memorable debates on the subject in the House of Commons, led by Gladstone himself. The translations of those speeches, which appeared in the Indian press, roused great enthusiasm for the repeal of that Act, which was ultimately carried out by Lord Lytton's successor, Lord Ripon. For these reasons the administration of Lord Lytton was regarded by Indian public as a disastrous failure. He retired in 1880, to the great relief of the educated classes in the county.

The administration of Lord Ripon had been the most popular with the people of India since the country passed under the Crown in 1858. He redressed almost all the grievances which the country had laboured under during the regime of his predecessor, Lord Lytton. He brought the war in Afghanistan to a speedy close, repealed the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, introduced Local Self-Government, both in urban and rural areas, and above all sought to remove the racial distinction which existed till then in the Code of Criminal Procedure in the matter of trial of European British subjects by Indian Magistrates, except by Indian Presidency Magistrates in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. It is this last act of his which made Lord Ripon immensely popular with the people, but it also evoked tremendous racial excitement, both amongst the British and the Indian people. Its repercussions spread like wild fire throughout the length and breadth of India and its echoes reverberated in British Parliament as well in the course of more than one debate on the subject. As it was a legal matter, my father and his friends were deeply interested in it, and used to talk

frequently about it during the whole period of the agitation that the measure had evoked. My father used to read out to me the news and comments in various news-papers which he subscribed, and used to explain them to me as to why the Government's attitude had raised such a tremendous storm from the British public in the country.

The Government Bill had originated as the result of a note submitted by Mr. Bihari Lal Gupta, of the Indian Civil Service (afterwards Mr. Justice Gupta, of the Calcutta High Court), who was at that time a Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta, and was as such, qualified to try European British subjects, and was doing so every day. He had, however, reached a stage in service when he was likely to be promoted as District and Sessions Judge in which higher capacity he would have become disqualified to try European British subjects under the law as it then stood. He had, accordingly, submitted a note on the subject, in January 1882, and the then Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Ashley Eden, had supported the change in the law in a note submitted to the Government of India, in which it was stated as follows: "Sir Ashley Eden is of opinion that the time had now arrived when all Indian members of the Civil Service should be relieved of such restrictions on their power as are imposed on them by the Code of Criminal Procedure, or when, at least, they have attained the position of District Magistrate or Sessions Judge, should have entrusted them with full powers of all classes whether European or Indian within their jurisdiction".

The Government of India, after consulting the other Local Governments and administrations, and on receipt of their replies, introduced a Bill to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, and in the course of the statement of objects and reasons there appeared the following declaration: "The Government of India has decided to settle the question of jurisdiction of European British subjects in such a way as to remove from the Code, at once and completely, every judicial disqualification which is based merely on race distinction. With this object in view the present Bill had been prepared". The then Law member, Sir C.P Ilbert moved for leave to introduce the above Bill. The leave was accordingly given, and the Bill introduced in February 1883. But Lord Ripon's government quailed before the storm raised by the British in India and their supporters in Britain, and they could not carry the measure through. Accordingly, a compromise was arranged which in a sense made matters worse. But it is useless to recall these facts now since all that legislation in the Code of Criminal Procedure had been repealed some years back even before the British transferred power to India. In spite of the failure of Lord Ripon's government in this particular matter there was an immense upheaval of Indian feeling at the time of his departure from the country. This upsurge was on so tremendous a scale that Sir Auckland Colvin was believed to be the writer of a special article in the Allahabad *Pioneer* under the caption "If It be True What Does it Mean". The pith of the article was that Lord Ripon was leaving India much more conscious politically than he had

found it to be when he had assumed the reign of administration. The writer's estimate was correct, as but one year later (in 1885), the first session of the Indian National Congress was held at Bombay, in the last week of that year.