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INTEREST GROUPS AND MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT IN CALCUTTA, 1875-1890*

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It has been suggested that the multiplication of interest groups is characteristic of modernizing societies.[1] Late nineteenth century Calcutta would seem to illustrate this assertion. The capital of the British Indian Empire, the sub-continent's chief port and commercial centre, possessed more voluntary associations per head of literate population than most European cities of comparable size. There were commercial, trade and professional associations, literary and scientific associations, ethnic organizations and caste associations, charitable societies, sport and recreational clubs and property owners' and citizens' groups such as ward associations and rate payers' committees.[2] Each contributed something to the urbanism of the modernizing city.

The concern of this paper is with those interest groups which might be expected to take an immediate interest in urban development and city management. Considerable research has now been done on Indian interest groups in Calcutta, especially on their role in provincial and national politics. But very little attention has been paid to the organization of Anglo-Indians (that is, Britishers resident in India) in the place where they were most numerous and influential. Hence this discussion is confined to a consideration of the Anglo-Indian groups which became involved in municipal affairs in the period 1875 to 1890.

The nature of presently available data on the Anglo-Indian interest groups of Calcutta limits the range of questions which may be asked in relation to these groups. It is not possible to determine, for instance, the individual motivations of group members, while a discussion of the influence of representatives on policy decisions within the Calcutta Corporation must await a detailed analysis of the Corporation's proceedings. We can, however, consider the general pattern of interest group involvement in the public arena of the municipality. What issues propelled the Anglo-Indian interest groups to seek representation upon the municipal corporation or to take action to influence municipal affairs? When did they attempt to exert pressure upon the British

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administration to alter municipal legislation? What was their role in creating and sustaining public interest in municipal matters? Answers to such questions should aid our understanding of local level politics in the metropolis.

Four Anglo-Indian interest groups are significant in the municipal affairs of Calcutta in this period. Two — the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Calcutta Trades Association — were registered business associations representing commercial and retail trading firms. Another, the European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association, was created as a pressure group to oppose a piece of imperial legislation, but remained as an influence in local affairs. The fourth group, the Public Health Society, (founded in 1885) was the only local voluntary association formed with the specific intention of monitoring municipal affairs. The groups varied greatly in their purposes, status, size and organization, while their specific interests were in conflict at times, but circumstances in the political life of Bengal and its capital city in the 1880's led them to act, for a time, in concert in municipal affairs. Such cohesion within the Anglo-Indian community had rarely been known and was not to be experienced again until the end of the century.

Status Groups and Interest Groups

The nature and role of these groups in Calcutta should be assessed in relation to the status groups which spawned in them. The British in Calcutta — numbering about 12,000 in 1880 — are often treated as a homogeneous group, but, in fact, they had always been a varied collection of people. By the late nineteenth century a relatively complex, subtly stratified elitist society had evolved in which the social distinctions of mid-Victorian Britain had been adapted to the peculiar circumstances of a colonial administrative and commercial centre.

Rudyard Kipling, in his description of this society in the 1880's, distinguished the status groups of "Bengal Civilians" (i.e., members of the Bengal Civil Service), "Government of India Men", the "Men of the Firms", and the "Tradesmen".[3] For our purposes, the significant distinction was between the commercial elite — the owners and directors of the large managing agencies which controlled international trade in Bengal's tea, jute and resource industries — and the retail tradesmen.

The absence of a white landed gentry and the importance of commerce to Calcutta's prosperity both contributed to the commercial men's dominance of non-official Anglo-Indian society. They were not, however, leaders of this society in the sense of having a deep involvement in the city as a whole. Although many of the managers and

directors of commercial firms made long careers in Calcutta they were still regarded as temporary citizens only. Preoccupied with their business interests, which did not involve them closely with the subordinate levels of the Calcutta social system, living in the elegant European sector, well served by exclusive social clubs, they remained insulated from many of the realities of life in the city. They showed little inclination to assume the role of a surrogate British gentry for Calcutta by providing leadership in public affairs. It was a constant complaint of the Bengal government that the "big" commercial men would not readily come forward to serve as honorary magistrates, justices of the peace, municipal commissioners, members of the legislative council, or fellows of the university.[4] When asked to fill such offices most commercial men replied they simply did not have the time. Their lack of "public spirit" did not however diminish the respect which they were accorded as embodiments of Victorian enterprise, business expertise and financial success.

Intense competition and jealousy among the commercial firms inhibited efforts to sustain a business association to protect their interests. But by the early 1880's the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1853, had developed a complex and efficient organization which coordinated the common interests of a variety of specialized commercial associations. The Chamber was not confined to European firms, but only the most select of Indian firms gained entry. The Chamber was accepted as a mouthpiece of the commercial establishment.[5]

In the early years of its existence, the Chamber was extremely careful about what opinions it collectively voiced, limiting itself to strictly commercial matters. There was a strong feeling that the Chamber should not become involved in "political" controversies. However, the distinction between strictly commercial matters and others became increasingly difficult to draw, especially when the commercial elite began to demand that their economic power be acknowledged by the award of symbols of political status.

The British tradesmen of Calcutta were regarded, on the whole, as a "different class" of men, although the heads of large local trading firms, building and engineering companies are sometimes found to have close connections with the commercial elite. As in nineteenth century Britain, "trade" was an ambiguous term which was applied to "lower professions" such as journalism as well as to retail trading, small manufacturing and dealing.[6] The extent of a man's liberal education and the scale of his business in Calcutta were important factors in determining whether a tradesman was accepted as a gentleman in Calcutta society.

The total fortune of the tradesman depended on metropolitan Calcutta and they consequently had much closer ties with the life of the local community than the big commercial men. The heads of retail enterprises were more likely to have been recruited from the permanently domiciled British community than to have been "sent out" from Britain. Hence they were more likely to regard India rather than England as home and to consider themselves permanent citizens of Calcutta. The leaders among the tradesmen — drawn mostly from the publicist stratum — prided themselves on their more-than-exploitative interest in the city, for they saw themselves as the custodians of British local traditions in the colonial environment. They avidly promoted the traditions of freedom of the press, local self-government, resistance to overbearing central authority and protection of civic liberties.

The greater stability and harmony of the retail trading group as compared with the commercial establishment was reflected in the foundation of the Calcutta Trades Association in 1830, a few years before a Chamber of Commerce was even mooted.[7] Members of the Association included small manufacturers, owners of retail stores, publishers and printers, newspaper proprietors and editors, hoteliers, and local service providers. The Association exchanged information on quantities and quality of merchandise, standardization of weights and measures, and prices. It also represented the views of retail traders to the local and imperial governments. The structure of the body with its master, past masters, senior and junior wardens, fellows, foremen and apprentices, was modelled upon trade associations in Britain. The Association was quickly accorded status, being recognized as a public body by the governor-general in 1834. It became standard for the Bengal government to refer local legislation to the Calcutta Trades Association for comment. Unlike the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the Calcutta Trades Association did not hesitate to put forward views on local matters. In 1837, 1840, 1846 and 1850 for instance the Association memorialized the local government suggesting schemes for the introduction of an elective system in the municipality, with recommendations for local improvement and comments upon municipal taxation.

There were thus may points of difference between the two main strata of the non-official community. Socially a very distinct line was drawn between them and few tradesmen were granted entry into the clubs of the elite. The economic affairs of the two groups were not closely intermeshed as local traders were little affected by the fortunes of international commerce.

There were few Anglo-Indian professional men in Calcutta to bridge the gap between these two main groups. The only occupational groups of any size were lawyers — a diverse group within themselves — and doctors. Like the commercial men, these men were largely preoccupied with their personal careers and generally did not play a large role in community life. They were, however, to provide the leadership and active support of the Anglo-Indian Defence Association and the Public Health Society in the 1880's.

Thus the Anglo-Indian status groups of the non-official community had distinctly different interests in the city which were likely to be expressed in different approaches to the city's management. An additional factor which was to be significant in Calcutta's municipal affairs was their different relations to the Bengali urban elite. The commercial men were relatively isolated from contact with the Hindu upper classes, for Bengali Hindus in the later 19th century had little involvement in the province's internal and international commerce. The commercial men were even further removed from the emergent Bengali middle class of lawyers, teachers, and civil servants. The legal profession provided one of the few institutional spheres in Calcutta where Anglo-Indians and Indians could meet as equals. The Attorneys' Association had no colour bar. But the increase in competent Indian barristers, attorneys and solicitors in the late 19th century introduced an element of racial competition so that Anglo-Indians came to feel that "the black bar in Calcutta is pushing out the white which has a pretty hard struggle for existence".[8] The same professional competition was beginning to take place among Anglo-Indian medical men and their Western-trained Indian counterparts. Although this it has not been explored by scholars, it is also likely that the Anglo-Indian retail traders were begining to feel pressure from Indian tradesmen, especially as Gujarati and Marwari migration to Calcutta increased.

Economic pressures from rising Indian middle-class and trades groups were subtle and diffuse. The demand of Indian groups for a larger share in political power at the local level was more explicit and dramatic. Thus, by the 1870's, a situation was developing where the divisions among the Anglo-Indians in Calcutta could become less significant than the bonds of race and a common political situation vis-à-vis the politically conscious Indian groups who were seeking a place in the power structure of the city.

Socio-Economic Interests in the Municipality

Most 19th century cities experienced bitter controversies over local improvements and the structure of local government, in which

interest groups aligned themselves according to perceptions of the needs of their memberships. The three basic issues which became points of controversy in the management of British towns in the 19th century — taxation, representation and sanitation — were also the bases for confrontations in Calcutta. Here, however, the probability of conflict was enhanced by the segmentation of economic interests in the municipality largely along racial (or in the terminology of time, "communal") lines.

Anglo-Indian residents had little investment in house properties; they lived for the most part in rented accommodation. The European residential area had, by the 1870's, acquired most of the amenities for a comfortable and relatively healthy life.[9] The Anglo-Indians were thus little affected by house rates, while their horse, carriage and licence fees were not heavy charges. The real estate owned by the commercial elite lay outside the municipal boundaries, for the port area and the Strand Bank with its docks, warehouses and railways fell under the jurisdiction of the Port Trust. (The Trust had been established by the commercial men precisely to keep control of the port out of the hands of the Calcutta Corporation).

The overwhelming majority of substantial property owners in the city were Hindus, who had little investment in trade and commerce. Below them ranged a variety of Hindu and Muslim small property owners, owning a family home or shop and residence, all of whom felt the weight of house and service rates. These rates were indeed weighty, since the city derived almost four-fifths of its municipal income from direct taxation in the form of house, water and lighting rates and service rates. This amounted to about 12 per cent of value, while licence fees upon trades and professions and some special taxes added a further 3 per cent.

Domestic and international commerce were the main factors in Calcutta's growing prosperity, but the commercial interest contributed only indirectly to municipal revenues. Commercial prosperity contributed to rising urban property values, but the municipality could derive benefit from this only by further taxing the largely Hindu property owners. At the same time Calcutta's commercial system made heavy demands upon municipal revenues: for roads, communication facilities, sanitary controls, and facilities to cope with the ebb and flow of migrant labour to the city. Small wonder, then, that the major confrontations in municipal politics occurred between the Anglo-Indian commercial interests and the Hindu landed and professional interests.

Interest Groups and Municipal Issues

The municipal Corporation of the city was designed to represent the major interests in the municipality. Before a ward-based elective system was introduced in 1876, the Bengal government had attempted to appoint as Justices of the Peace, (who served as municipal commissioners) representatives of the Civil Service, Anglo-Indian trade and commerce, and Hindu and Muslim property owners. The new elective system was hedged with a number of devices designed to achieve a fair representation of major communities and interests. But these interests and their interest groups had varying practical needs for representation upon the municipal Corporation. In particular, the commercial elite could afford to stand aloof from the Corporation because, after the institution of the Port Trust, their interests were not directly affected by the normal course of municipal business. If it became necessary, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce could act to protect commercial interests in the municipal arena. This point is well illustrated by one incident in the series of debates over municipal taxation.

Friction over municipal taxation runs as a strong and continuous thread through Calcutta's municipal history. From the beginning of a house rate as a form of municipal taxation in 1795, Hindu property owners pressed for its reduction and the institution of supplementary forms of local revenue. Although suggestions were periodically raised for light income tax, the major alternative sought by property owners was *octroi* or town duties. The British administration early discouraged *octroi* levies arguing that they constituted a possible impediment to both internal and international trade. This view was supported by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce which continued to oppose any proposal for local taxation which might conceivably operate as a transit duty.[10] In most cases, such proposals hardly got to the drawing boards. In the early 1880's, however, the Calcutta Corporation was in severe financial difficulties. Increased expenditures on improvements without any substantial increases in municipal revenue had depleted the municipal reserve fund. The municipal commissioners resisted the solution of an increase in the house rate and revived the alternative of some form of town duties.[11] As soon as the commercial community got wind of this proposal, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce memorialized the government of Bengal. If the matter was left to the determination of the Calcutta Corporation there was little doubt that some form of town duties would be agreed upon, for Hindu property owners and professional men formed the solid core of active municipal commissioners. Hence the Chamber requested that the matter be

referred to a separate committee so structured by the government to ensure "proper representation" for the commercial community. The Bengal government promptly complied. The Octroi Committee, on which two municipal commissioners were outnumbered by representatives of the Port Trust, the Chamber, the Trades Association and the government, was soon completely deadlocked. The Committee disbanded without agreement and the *octroi* issue was effectively shelved once more.[12]

While the Bengal Chamber of Commerce was not entirely responsible for the deadlock in the committee, it was clearly understood that the principal stumbling block to *octroi* in Calcutta was the objection of the commercial community. In Bombay and Madras, for instance, which did not contain such a powerful Anglo-Indian commercial interest, both municipal corporations were able to institute forms of local dues.

The commercial men of Calcutta were confident that they could gain an immediate and sympathetic hearing from the provincial and imperial governments on issues of commercial interest. In many cases this hearing was obtained initially through the informal but close social networks established between commercial men and high government officials at the prestigious Calcutta clubs. But personal exchanges on matters affecting commercial policy were always backed by memorials from the Chamber of Commerce to the provincial, or, if necessary, the imperial government. Again and again the Chamber was assured that the commercial interest, "upon which the prosperity of Calcutta depends" would not be neglected.

Thus the commercial community could affort to ignore the Calcutta Corporation for all practical purposes. Rudyard Kipling aptly depicted the typical Anglo-Indian view of the Calcutta Corporation in *City of Dreadful Night:*

> The whole thing is a farce. Time is money to us. We can't stick out those everlasting speeches in the Municipality. The natives choke us off, but we know that if things get too bad the Government will step in and interfere, and so we worry along somehow.[13]

Although the issue of property rates versus *octroi* remained a source of intermittent bickering between the commercial elite and the Hindu property owners into the next century, taxation did not provoke the major confrontations in municipal affairs in the period to 1875-1890. The property-owning commissioners accepted their inability to alter the basic structure of municipal finance and concentrated on resisting increases in the house rate. The large conflicts pertaining to

municipal affairs which actively engaged both Anglo-Indians and Indians were those of representation and sanitation, which in the 1880's, became closely intertwined.

Representation

The passing of the Municipal Act which gave Calcutta a largely ward-based elective system in 1876 (two-thirds of the 72 commissioners being elected to represent municipal wards and one-third being nominated by the Bengal Government) altered the balance of interest representation on the Calcutta Corporation. This was partly an explicit intent of the Act, for the Bengal Government had decided to meet the demands of the Bengali Westernized professional men for representation, and the elective system brought into the Corporation lawyers, journalists and teachers who were not substantial property owners.[14] Equally important for the municipal system was the withdrawal from the Corporation of Anglo-Indian tradesmen who had played a large role in municipal affairs in the 1860's. Together with a small group of influential Hindu notables, members of the British Indian Association, the tradesmen had formed the core of about 15 active municipal commissioners among over 100 Justices of the Peace. These men were almost invariably leaders of the Calcutta Trades Association. In Calcutta such men found an opportunity for public service and local prominence which few tradesmen had gained in English towns. A unique combination of circumstances gave them their chance in Calcutta: their identification with the ruling power, the lack of British local aristocracy, and the disengagement of the commercial elite from local affairs. But there were few institutions in the city in which they might display what talents they possessed for politics and administration. In fact, their professional associations such as the Calcutta Trades Association, and the Calcutta Corporation provided the only significant outlets for their energies.

Within the Corporation the tradesmen found common cause with the Hindu *zamindars* in scrutinizing schemes for municipal improvement, resisting increased taxation, and demanding greater powers for the body of commissioners as against the government-appointed executive. This group called themselves "the independents" in contradistinction to the "government men" on the Corporation. They jealously protected a municipal constitution free of any control clause which would have allowed external interference in municipal affairs, and were constantly on the lookout for official encroachment on the preserve of the municipal body.

It was largely on the last count that the Calcutta Trades Association objected to the municipal reform of 1876. While the government of Bengal liberalized the municipal constitution by opening it to rate-payer election, they instituted the potential for greater governmental intervention in municipal administration by way of a control clause which allowed the Bengal government to suspend the municipal commissioners and raise taxes to pay for municipal improvements. At the same time, the duties of the municipal body were increased, (which had to result in higher taxes) while the commissioners had less power than previously over municipal finances. To the Calcutta Trades Association, the Act was inimicable to "real local self-government".[15] The Association opposed the Bill to the end through memorials to the Bengal government, protest meetings, speeches in the Bengal Legislative Council, and dissension from the report of the Council committee in charge of the Bill.

All the leading Trades Association Justices declined to stand in the first elections or even to register as electors.[16] They also refused to accept the nominated seats on the new Corporation offered them by the government of Bengal.[17] Thus a small but effective sphere of cooperation between Anglo-Indians and Westernized Bengalis in Calcutta was closed off, at a time when another sector of the Anglo-Indian community was moved to strong opposition to the recognition of Bengalis' desire to play a real role in urban politics.

The commercial elite made no secret of their major objection to the elective reform: it would swing the balance of power in the municipality to younger Hindu professional men — the "babus", as they were often called. In an elective system, Europeans would be outnumbered in the electorate and subjected to undignified contests with natives. Even with the government nominating one-third of the commissioners, Indians would preponderate on the Corporation and would quickly bring municipal progress to a standstill.

The partner of one of the city's leading managing agencies wrote to the lieutenant-governor:

> I have seen enough of the Natives of Calcutta to feel sure that the Chairman and his supporters would always be outvoted on occasions on which motions had to be carried involving an increase of rates and consequent tax upon householders and I would incline strongly to the opinion that despotic municipal government under one, two or at the most three commissioners is much better suited to Calcutta than the late or any elective system.[18]

The commercial men followed up their private and public protests by boycotting the municipal elections and refusing to accept nomin-

ation to the Corporation. They were then able to argue that their predictions regarding the results of the reform had proved correct:

> It is impossible that [the lieutenant-governor] can consider it a fair share of representative power that gives only four out of 48 of the Municipal Commissionerships of Calcutta to the race who founded it, who have made it the wealthiest city in the Empire, and who, to leave out of consideration the fact that they are the ruling race, are, in point of general intelligence and administrative capacity, *distinctly at the head of the community*. . . . We simply protest at the entire exclusion of the European community from the Government of the City, in which the new constitution has resulted, as an insult to that community and to common sense.[19]

Such comments were woven into the commercial elite's interpretation of municipal history. In later years they never referred to the fact that commercial men had not readily accepted municipal office before the elective system, or, when appointed, rarely served upon committees and were irregular in attendance at meetings. They now explained their absence from the municipal arena, not in terms of business pressures, but because they had been "driven out", excluded and "choked off" by the elective system and the "babbling babus" it had let into the council chamber.[20]

The institution of a ratepayer elective system in Calcutta need not necessarily have greatly altered the proportional representation of communities upon the municipal Corporation. But the refusal of most Anglo-Indians in Calcutta to cooperate with the new system by regularly attending allowed the men of the Hindu contingent to preponderate in municipal committees. They assumed the role previously played by a coalition of Hindus *zamindars* and Anglo-Indian tradesmen by constituting the "independents" in the Corporation who resisted municipal spending and the free exercise of executive power. The fact that the new "independents" were solidly Hindu, however, enhanced racial tension in the city. It was easier for critics of the new municipal system to blame any problems entirely upon the young Hindu commissioners and the elective system.[21]

For the next five years, until 1882, the Anglo-Indian press consistently grumbled about the municipal system, the conduct of the Bengali commissioners, and the "under-representation" of Anglo-Indian interests on the municipal body. However, neither the Calcutta Trades Association nor the Bengal Chamber of Commerce made any formal complaint to the Bengal government or suggested changes in the system of representation embodied in the Municipal Act. The tradesmen found that their economic interests did not suffer from their withdrawal from active participation in municipal affairs, for the Hindu intellectuals followed the lead of the older *zamindars* in municipal

policy. The commercial elite's relation to the Calcutta Corporation remained much as it has been in the past. The *octroi* dispute clearly indicated the strength of their alternative channels of power.

In 1882 an event occurred which electrified the non-official European community of Calcutta and revived their interest in representation upon local institutions. It was to have immediate repercussions upon the politics of the Calcutta municipality.

The Ilbert Bill Agitation

This event was the Ilbert Bill controversy. Since it has been often dealt with in analyses of this period of modern Indian history, it is only necessary to note that the legislation proposed by the government of India (Sir Courtney Ilbert being the law member of the Indian Legislative Council) would have given Indian magistrates and judges jurisdiction over Europeans in rural areas. Anglo-Indians believed the legislation would destroy the special status of the non-official community and took it as symptomatic of the tendency of the liberal viceroy, Lord Ripon, to grant Westernized Indians' demands for equality in the imperial system.[22] Openly supported by members of the provincial services, Anglo-Indians mounted a vociferous and far-reaching campaign to defeat the legislation. The headquarters of the India-wide agitation was Calcutta. It was here that a new Association was formed — the European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association — which for the first time brought together representatives of all European groups in Calcutta — British commercial and trading men, Eurasians, Armenians and Jews — in an avowed pressure group.

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Calcutta Trades Association also supported the agitation. There was considerable cross-linking membership among the three interest groups. The president of the Defence Association was the vice-president of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and members of the council included the master of the Calcutta Trades Association and several past masters. Another large complement was supplied by Anglo-Indian lawyers. But it was the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, which, initially at least, contributed most to the agitation in Calcutta by way of angry memorials to the administration, mobilization of citizens' meetings and financial support. The Chamber abandoned its hitherto carefully preserved non-political stand, committing themselves to near-racist statements about Indians' capacity for justice and administration.[23] In their representations to the administration, the Chamber stressed the supposed effect of the legislation upon trade and commerce in India. They argued that the "sense of insecurity" which would be created by the legislation would

"paralize capital" in India and stem its flow into the country; the results would be financially disastrous for India.[24]

Their tactics were successful; the legislation was substantially amended. The Anglo-Indians of Calcutta regarded the retreat of the imperial government as a triumph for the efforts of their well organized pressure groups. The leaders of the agitation were anxious to underline the lessons they drew from the affair. Their community had been too complacent and careless of their interests, assuming that the administration would ultimately protect them from encroachment by Indians. But the government of India, especially under a liberal Viceroy was clearly not to be trusted. The non-officials must in the future look after themselves by acquiring a greater share of power in India's expanding local government institutions, and interest groups should be maintained to sustain the permanent organization of the community.

During the Ilbert Bill agitation the president of one of the Anglo-Indian interest groups reprimanded a protest meeting of business men, lawyers and tradesmen for failing to build a political entity out of the physical city they had created and sustained:

> We are selfish as a political body. We have left our traditions as citizens behind us. There is no Calcutta. There are here and there institutions — here a Chamber of Commerce, there a Trades Association. But where is Calcutta?[25]

Such men urged that the unprecedented unity of all sections of the non-official British community should not be allowed to dissipate when their immediate end was secured. The European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association was perpetuated as the mouthpiece for the community. It is not surprising that, after the all-India issue had been disposed of, the Calcutta agitators turned their attention to the city's affairs. They were itching for an issue, and they found one in the cholera statistics for the town in 1884.

The Sanitory Commission Incident

Although the Anglo-Indian press regularly complained about the management of Calcutta the non-official community showed little real concern for the fate of the town as a whole in the 1860's and 1870's. In the early 1860's many improvements had been carried out in the European wards, which were as healthy and sanitary as the central residential areas of most European cities.[26] Although cholera was endemic in Bengal it had been relatively under control in Calcutta, at least for the British residents, since the great epidemics of the 1840's. In 1884, however, the report of the Health Officer of the town

noted a sharp increase in deaths attributed to cholera, after a few years of steady increase. The report sparked a panic-like reaction in the Anglo-Indian community. For the commercial community there were special considerations. An epidemic of cholera, derived mainly from Egypt, had broken out in southern Europe. A series of international sanitary conferences was considering quarantine regulations against disease-carrying ships from the Orient. The Calcutta merchants feared that Germany, now openly jealous of Britain's great trade with Asia, would sieze upon the cholera outbreak as an excuse to ban the entry into European ports of ships from Calcutta, or at least to enforce upon them lengthy and cumbersome quarantine procedures.[27]

A public meeting of Anglo-Indians organized by groups of doctors and the Defence Association charged that the municipal Corporation was responsible for the cholera outbreak.[28] The Corporation's subsequent measures to control the disease did not satisfy the Anglo-Indians who called upon the government of Bengal to appoint a Commission of Inquiry under the control clause of the Municipal Act. The Bengal government finally yielded to the Anglo-Indian's request, in spite of the mass protest resignation of the Indian "independent" commissioners from the Corporation. The Sanitary Commission only heightened the controversy and ill-feeling in the city, for the three government-appointed I.C.S. commissioners could not agree on their procedures and findings. Two of the commissioners were known to be hostile to the elective system. During the hearings they criticized the record of the Indian commissioners, while the third Civilian commissioner defended it and dissented in the final report.[29] Nevertheless, the report did not conclude that Calcutta's sanitary conditions warranted the suspension of the Corporation, as the Anglo-Indian pressure groups had demanded. This gave no satisfaction to those who had hoped to precipitate constitutional change in the municipal act through the sanitary incident. The "Sanitary Party" as they were now called, determined to keep up pressure upon the local government to make changes in the structure of the Corporation. Yet another interest group was formed to forward this aim, the Public Health Society.

The Society was modelled upon the Health of Towns Association founded in England in 1844 to mobilize support for Edwin Chadwick's Public Health Reform proposal. The English Society was an "avowed propagandist body" and its Calcutta counterpart echoed its aims almost to the word.[30] The Public Health Society also brought together gentry, clergy, merchants, tradesmen, doctors and publicists and, in this case, the organizers were the men who had taken a leading role in the Ilbert Bill agitation in Calcutta.

The Society was organized explicitly as a pressure group, the pressure being exerted both towards the Corporation for remedial action and the Bengal government for amendment of the municipal act. But the founders conceived of their roles in larger terms. They would "strengthen the hands" of those concerned with "promoting sanitary reform" by creating an "enlightened public opinion" in Calcutta and making available information about disease and sanitation in "an accessible and trustworthy form".[31]

The Society secured the lieutenant-governor of Bengal as its patron and the support of influential Europeans in Calcutta. It was instrumental in circulating a petition calling upon the lieutenant-governor to castigate the Corporation for its neglect of sanitation.[32] The Society claimed to have the support of "almost the entire European community" for its proposal.[33] It was not so successful in recruiting Indian members. The *Hindoo Patriot* dismissed the Society as a "crystallization" of those who were determined to destroy the municipal system.[34]

Amendment of the Municipal Act

The Government of Bengal had its own reasons for wishing to amend the municipal constitution. A number of Bengal Civilians held that the control clause was unworkable, since any commission of inquiry was bound to provoke public controversy. They urged that governmental control over the Corporation be made more direct. The lieutenant-governor, moreover, was sympathetic to the Anglo-Indians' demands for representation on the Corporation. The necessity of amalgamating urbanized portions of the suburbs with the old town provided the excuse for thoroughly overhauling the municipal act.

Once the municipal constitution was on the drawing boards, Calcutta's interest groups shaped up for a confrontation. The focus of attention was, as ever, the elective system which had given a place in the Corporation to young Hindu lawyers and publicists.[35]

A letter written by an Anglo-Indian to the *Englishman* in 1884 typifies many statements emanating from the community at the time. It well illustrated the mixture of status considerations, racial prejudice and commercial concern which propelled the Anglo-Indian interest groups into action:

> "Calcutta" [the writer declared] "is a purely English city. The city belongs, and has always belonged, to the English, and the native community in it is simply a foreign and parasitical community which would cease to exist if the English were to abandon it. . . . The Government of India has, however,

> taken out of the hands of the English race the management of their own city, which they built for themselves, and which they support by their own exertions, and have handed it over to their native followers, who live by them, and who are notoriously unfit for the discharge of such functions . . . I am strongly in favour of self-government, and for that reason, as Calcutta is an English city, I would have the English govern it . . . The end, however, is not far off. The nations of the world will refuse before long to be done to death by cholera and other loathsome diseases which are diffused from Calcutta over the surface of the globe, in order that Bengali babus may hold places of importance for which they are unfit and in which all they can do is exercise their talents for chatter, and enable the government to say, "see how liberal our administration is in India to the natives". . . . The only way of avoiding these impending misfortunes is to abolish at once the present senseless non-organization, instead of waiting until it is forced upon us by the united exercrations of every nation on the earth.[36]

The more realistic the Anglo-Indian activists realized it was futile to expect that the Imperial government would abolish the elective system at a time when the viceroy, Lord Ripon, was advocating extensive liberalization of local self-government throughout India. They advocated less radical measures designed to secure for the Anglo-Indian community a dominant voice in the municipal system. There were among them those who believed that election should be retained, and that the Anglo-Indians should challenge the Hindus by vigorously contesting the municipal elections.

The election which occurred in the middle of the debate, in 1885, provided these men with their opportunity. Their instruments were the interest groups mobilized during the Ilbert Bill and sanitary agitations. The Defence Association and the Public Health Society acted as electoral associations, encouraging Anglo-Indians to register as voters and helping to get out the vote on election day.[37] Thirteen Anglo-Indians out of a total of 17 candidates were returned despite the fact that European voter registration was lower than that of Indian ratepayers. The 1885 election clearly demonstrated that Anglo-Indians could effectively compete with Hindus for election and could attain a fair share of the elective seats. The Anglo-Indians, with 9 per cent of the total voting power, and only a fraction of this used, returned 26 per cent of the elected commissioners.

Most of the Anglo-Indians who entered the Corporation were members of the Anglo-Indian Defence Association, the Health Society and the Calcutta Trades Association. They clashed immediately with the Hindu commissioners over the appointment of a health officer.[38] It was a protracted fight and, though the "Sanitary Party" gained the position for their candidate, the tussle discouraged them from attempting to reform the Corporation from within. In February 1886 the Health

Society called upon the Bengal Government to intervene in municipal affairs and in the following months the Anglo-Indian interest groups stepped up their pressure for formal reform in the structure of the Corporation.[39]

For the purposes of this analysis the most significant demand was that Anglo-Indian interest groups should be assured representation upon the Corporation by means of reserved seats which they would fill by direct election from their associations.

The award of special elected seats on local bodies to particular interest groups was not unknown in India, but this arrangement was frowned upon by British local government theorists. It was thought best to keep the principles of nomination and ward election distinct. It was the latter principle that the Anglo-Indian interest groups now attacked. George Irving, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce representative on the Council announced:

> No system of representation is admissible which does not give full effect to the circumstances that the very existence of Calcutta depends upon its commerce and on the class that has established it. No argument drawn from mere area or population should have any weight in the matter.[40]

A compromise solution put forward by Sir Henry Harrison, municipal chairman and member in charge of the bill, would have preserved the system of ward elections and provided for the systematic representation of interest groups through the nominated seats.[41] In the long and factious debate on the amendment bill this suggestion was swept aside and the Chamber of Commerce, the Trades Association and the Port Trust gained reserved elected seats.

The irony of the whole affair, which disrupted the administration of the city for nearly four years, was that Anglo-Indian interest groups made no effective use of their newly-won power in the municipal system. The Trades Association and the Chamber of Commerce soon found that they had difficulty in filling their reserved seats. When it came to the point few of the leading men of the commercial or trading communities were willing to serve as municipal commissioners. By 1895, three of the four Chamber of Commerce seats were held by Indian merchants although Indian firms were a tiny minority of members of the Chamber. Thus the provision in the municipal act designed to ensure Anglo-Indians of seats on the Calcutta Corporation became, through their default, another avenue for ambitious Indians.

The affairs of the municipality for the next decade represent a rather extraordinary anti-climax to the clamour of the Anglo-Indian interest groups between 1884 and 1888. The routine business of the

municipality was managed, as before, by the Indian professional men who were eager to work on municipal committees and in the wards. The Public Health Society continued, for a few years, to discuss sanitation and related matters but it never developed as a permanent pressure group able to awaken public interest in municipal affairs. The Anglo-Indian press settled down to intermittent attacks upon the Corporation, while the commercial men withdrew into their business affairs until an outbreak of plague in India at the end of the century stirred them again to fear that poor sanitary conditions in the Indian sectors of urban centres might endanger their commercial transactions.

Conclusion

The failure of the Anglo-Indian community to use the power they fought to attain in the Calcutta Corporation suggests that it held for them a symbolic rather than real significance. The municipal constitution became a prize in a subtle status context between the Anglo-Indians and westernized Bengali urban leaders. It became important for Anglo-Indians to have their status as "the ruling race" graphically denoted in the structure of the municipal body. But, since their financial interests were not closely affected by the Calcutta Corporation (except when disease threatened trade), they were satisfied with the symbol rather than the exercise of power.

Many of the issues of municipal affairs in Calcutta were those of municipalities in Europe and America in the 19th century — debates between "improvers" and "economists", concern over the representation of interests, competition among interest groups, complaints that commercial men would not involve themselves in local management and that "good men" were being displaced by elected upstarts.[42] The situation of Calcutta as an imperial capital and a plural society produced peculiar variations on these general themes.

The British conception of their imperial role as adjudicator among conflicting communities led the administration to encourage the articulation of distinct interests. In the absence of popular representative institutions of government, they used interest groups as channels of public opinion. The over-burdened administration also looked to interest groups to fulfill educative and organizational functions for a population relatively unfamiliar with Western institutions.

These factors encouraged the formation of interest groups and legitimized their mobilization as pressure groups. But, since ultimate responsibility and power rested with the colonial bureaucracy, interest

groups could lobby for administrative action without having to share the burden of the routine of local management.

The division of economic interests along communal lines added an explosive element to the conflicts of improvers and economists in the Calcutta municipality. The Anglo-Indian elite, since they were not large property owners could afford to urge greater municipal spending, while the Indian ratepayers naturally sought to keep property taxes down. As racial tension heightened in India, disagreements over municipal policies in Calcutta were more readily conceived totally in racial terms: Anglo-Indians versus Indians. This had a peculiar effect upon the interest groups which might be expected to take a part in municipal affairs. Bodies such as the Calcutta Trades Association and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce found themselves standing not simply for strictly occupational interests; they saw themselves in the role of protectors of British prestige at the grass-roots of the imperial power structure. The different economic interests of the local traders and the big commercial men were submerged by the strength of their common identity as alien Europeans competing for power with the Indian middle class groups in the city.

A general pattern emerges in the involvement of Anglo-Indian interest groups in Calcutta's municipal affairs. There were periods of "crisis" when they were mobilized for action to protect their status interests; these episodes were followed by long periods of relative apathy as regards municipal issues. For all their concern with representation on the Calcutta Corporation, the Anglo-Indian interest groups had no deep interest in municipal management. These attitudes were not conducive to the creation of general public interest in the welfare and development of the city as a whole.

NOTES

[1] Raymond Owens and Ashis Nandy, "Voluntary Associations in an Industrial Ward of Howrah, West Bengal, India". Paper presented at Association for Asian Studies meeting, March 29-31, 1971, p. 64, referring to a paper of D.H. Smith "Modernization and the Emergence of Voluntary Organizations" (unpublished mss, 1970).

[2] The registered associations were listed in Thacker's Calcutta directories for the period. To mention some examples: Asiatic Society of Bengal (estab. 1784), Bengal Social Science Association (estab. 1867), Calcutta Literary Society (estab. 1875), Mohammedan Literary Society (estab. 1863 and, until the rise of the Central National Mohammedan Association in the 1880's, considered *the* Muslim interest group), the British Indian Association (B.I.A.) (est. 1851, the club of the Bengali Hindu propertied elite), the Indian League and the Indian Association (estab. 1875 & 1876, challenged B.I.A. in leadership of the middle classes), the Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association (estab. 1876), Marwari Association (estab. 1892), Zamindars' Association, Bengal

National Chamber of Commerce (estab. 1887 as the Bengali counterpart to the British-dominated Bengal Chamber of Commerce).

[3] Rudyard Kipling, *City of Dreadful Night*, (New York, 1890), p. 13.

[4] See comments of Sir Henry Harrison (I.C.S.) in *Calcutta Municipal Administration Report*, 1872, pp. 25-26.

[5] Geoffrey Tyson, *The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, (Calcutta, 1952).

[6] W.J. Reader, *Professional Men, the Rise of the Professional Classes in 19th Century England*, (London, 1966) pp. 24-45.

[7] *Report of the Proceedings of the Calcutta Trades Association*, 1830-1850 (Calcutta, 1852).

[8] Sidney Low, *A Vision of India*, (London, 1910), p. 225.

[9] Calcutta Municipal Administration Report, 1881, pp. 103-105.

[10] Tyson, *ibid.*, pp. 36 & 44.

[11] Calcutta Municipal Administration Report, 1884, p. 2

[12] Report of the Octroi Committee, Government of Bengal Municipal Procs., vol. 2492, April 1883.

[13] Kipling, p. 38.

[14] Of the 42 Indians elected in the first election, 17 were lawyers and six more were intellectuals.

[15] *Englishman*, August 8, 1876.

[16] *Hindoo Patriot*, July 3, 1856.

[17] S. Hogg to Sir Richard Temple, August 19, 1876, Temple Papers (India Office Library).

[18] J. Ogilvy to C.E. Buckland (secretary to lieutenant-governor) 19 September, 1876, *Ibid.*

[19] *Englishman*, 6 September, 1876.

[20] See *Hindoo Patriot*, 6 August, 1877, 14 October, 1889.

[21] Electoral provisions ensured Europeans of a fair chance in electoral contests in European wards, and nomination could be used to bring in further representation.

[22] C.E. Dobbin, "The Ilbert Bill, A Study in Anglo-Indian Opinion in India in 1883", *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand* XII, no. 45, October 1965, pp. 87-102.

[23] B.C.C. to Government of India 6 March 1882, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, LX, 1884, p. 557.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 713.

[25] Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Vol. LX, 1884, p. 713.

[26] See Ira Klein, "Death in India," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, no. 4, August 1973, pp. 639-659.

[27] Memorial of Ratepayers and Inhabitants to Sir Rivers Thompson, May 1886, Indian Legislative Proceedings, Vol. 3262, Sept. 1888, App. A8.

[28] Municipal Administration Report, 1884-85, p. 24-26. Brief reference to attitudes towards cholera is made by Ian Catanach, "Plague in India in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." Paper delivered at ANZAAS Conference, July 1972.

[29] *Report of the Commission to enquire into Certain Matters in Connection with the Sanitation of the Town of Calcutta.* (Calcutta, 1885).

[30] S.E. Finer, *Life & Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick*, (New York, 1970), pp. 237-238.

[31] *Hindoo Patriot,* 8 December, 1884.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Report of Committee to Prepare Scheme for Amalgamation of Calcutta with Urban Portions of the Suburbs,* (Calcutta, 1885), (Amalgamation Report), p. 27.

[36] *Englishman* 16 July, 1884.

[37] *Hindoo Patriot,* 21 December, 1885.

[38] The Anglo-Indians supported a Scottish candidate whom they hoped would push through sanitary reforms; the Hindus supported a Hindu doctor. *Hindoo Patriot,* 3 January, 1887.

[39] Public Health Society to Gov't of Bengal, 22 November, 1886, Indian Legislative Proceedings, Vol. 3262, 1888.

[40] Indian Legislative Procs., Vol. 3262, 1888, App. A19.

[41] "Note on the Constitution of the Proposed Metropolitan Municipality," *Amalgamation Report,* p. 31.

[42] See Brian D. White, *A History of the Corporation of Liverpool 1935-1914,* (Liverpool, 1951). Robert Newton, *Victorian Exeter 1837-1914,* (Leicester, 1968); G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics, Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964,* (Glasgow, 1969).