

INDIA
AT THE DEATH OF AKBAR



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INDIA
AT THE DEATH OF AKBAR
AN ECONOMIC STUDY

BY

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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to present a sketch of the economic life of India at the opening of the seventeenth century, that is to say, at the period immediately antecedent to the first appearance of those new forces which were destined to exercise an increasing and eventually predominant influence on the development of the country. If it be permissible to assign a precise date to what is essentially a gradual transition, we may say that the medieval history of India ended, and the modern history began, in the year 1608, when the English ship *Hector* reached Surat. Starting from this date, it is possible to trace the economic story of the next three centuries, first in the narratives of travellers and the early Letter-Books of the East India Company, and then in the more copious official records and publications of later times, so that a well-defined period for study is within the reach of our schools and universities, provided that a suitable beginning can be made. This book attempts to supply such a beginning, by furnishing an account of the economic position at the close of Akbar's reign; there is, I fear, little prospect that adequate materials for a similar study of earlier periods will ever become available, but our knowledge of the closing years of the sixteenth century appears to be sufficient to justify the attempt which I have made.

Whether the attempt is successful is a question for the reader. The materials which I have used seem to me to provide the basis for a coherent and consistent account of the main currents of the economic life of India, but I cannot claim that the account now offered is definitive. It is a sketch

rather than a finished picture ; there is room for more intensive study of some of the authorities, and there is a reasonable prospect of the discovery of additional facts among sources to which I have not at present access, such as the records of the Portuguese administration and of the Jesuit missionaries, or the vernacular literature of the East and South and West. The period thus offers opportunities for further research, much of it of a kind well suited to the schools of economics now growing up in the Indian Universities, and while there are obvious arguments for deferring publication until the sources have been more fully explored, it seems to me that the balance of advantage lies in offering the sketch for use until the schools have got to work ; it will serve at the least as a frame-work on which additional results can be arranged, and as an index to the topics on which further information is required.

A few words are necessary regarding the point of view. I have tried to write from the standpoint of readers who have a general knowledge of recent conditions in India, and to state the past in terms of the more familiar present, or, to speak more precisely, in terms of the years between 1910 and 1914, before the occurrence of the sudden economic disturbances resulting from the war. Comparisons are, however, difficult to draw when the earlier period is described in superlatives ; the wonderful capacities of India could not fail to stir the imagination of visitors from the West, and the exuberant language of the sixteenth century may give a very misleading impression if the adjectives are taken at their modern value. The only possible corrective is to fix the attention on quantities, and I have attempted throughout to arrive at numerical estimates, actual or relative as the available data permit, of the various factors which composed the stream of economic life. The dangers attendant on this form of political arithmetic can best be realised by those who have practised it, and I am not so sanguine as to hope that I have escaped them all ; the justification for offering such estimates is that they may assist the reader to see the past more nearly in its true perspective, and while

they may be at variance with the facts, they will usually indicate the order of magnitude of the quantities under consideration, and will at any rate direct attention to an aspect of the subject which is almost wholly neglected by popular writers on the period. I ask only that these estimates should be regarded as first approximations, and that readers to whom they may appear to be improbable should test them in the light of the original authorities.

It would be unfair, however, not to add a word of warning for the benefit of any one who may accept this invitation. One of the difficulties surrounding this period is the diversity of language employed by the authorities. I have worked on them in English, French, Latin, Persian and Portuguese, and I have found that translations (where they exist) must be used with caution; they may be sufficiently accurate for all ordinary purposes, and yet miss the technical sense of words in which economists are specially concerned, while even standard dictionaries may fail to indicate the precise shade of meaning intended by a writer of the sixteenth century. It is advisable, therefore, to go to the original text wherever possible, and if I have myself failed to do this in the case of the Italian, Spanish and Russian travellers, I can offer only the plea that I am ignorant of those languages. What I have said regarding translations applies particularly to the English versions of the *Ain-i Akbari*, in which the technical force of many expressions is lost, and I fear that some knowledge of Persian must be regarded, for the present at least, as indispensable for the detailed study of this particular period.

The subject which I have treated is extensive, and has involved a certain amount of exploration in unfamiliar by-paths of literature and science. I have received cordial assistance from almost every one to whom I have applied, and I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the friends and the strangers on whose resources I have drawn,—to Mrs. C. M. Knowles of the London School of Economics, Sir David Prain and Dr. Stapf of Kew, Dr. Barnett of the British Museum, Mr. P. S. Allen of Merton College, Oxford, Mr. R. W. Dana, the Secretary of the Institution of Naval

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