

FROM AKBAR TO AURANGZEB



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FROM AKBAR TO AURANGZEB

A STUDY IN
INDIAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

BY

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PREFACE

IN this book I have carried a stage further the study in Indian economic history of which the first portion was offered to the public in *India at the Death of Akbar*. I there sketched the economic position at the opening of the seventeenth century: I now examine the changes in that position which took place in the course of the next fifty or sixty years, the period covered by the reigns of the Mogul Emperors Jahangir and Shahjahan. Apart from chronological or dynastic considerations, this period has a unity of its own. In the region of commerce it is marked by the practical elimination of the Portuguese, the establishment of Dutch and English merchants in the country, and the first experimental phases of the newcomers' activities; while in the wider economic sphere it covers the most significant stages in the deterioration of Akbar's administrative institutions. These topics call for somewhat detailed examination, and it is convenient to treat them by themselves, without extending our survey to the new conditions which marked the reign of Aurangzeb—the further administrative changes, the rise of the Maratha power, and the increasing interest of foreign merchants in territorial questions, evidenced by the settlements of the Dutch in Malabar, the English in Bombay, and the French in Pondicherry.

The order of study has been determined mainly by the nature of the materials which are available. The Dutch and English records of the period, while they are incomplete, are sufficiently copious to render possible a tolerably precise treatment of the commerce with which they are primarily concerned, while their examination for this purpose furnishes

a large mass of incidental observations, which enable us to interpret with some degree of confidence the fragmentary information supplied by Indian sources regarding the economic life of the country as a whole, and its domination by the activities of the various administrations. I have thus found it convenient to begin with the subject of external commerce, and then to use the knowledge so obtained to throw light on topics of greater internal interest. From the outset I have attempted to exhibit the activities of the English commercial pioneers in what I take to be their true relation to the earlier, more extensive, and more profitable operations of the Dutch, operations which are almost ignored in some current textbooks of Indian history. It was the Dutch, not the English, who succeeded to the Portuguese mastery of the Asiatic seas, and for the greater part of a century it was the Dutch who took the largest share in the external commerce of India. That few students have hitherto given their attention to influences of such importance is in my opinion unfortunate, but the omission finds adequate explanation in the inaccessibility of the sources from which information regarding them must be drawn. In the first place, Dutch scholars have very naturally devoted their energies to the history of their great island-empire rather than to the affairs of a mainland on which their nation has retained no footing, and, apart from Dr. Terpstra's two volumes, which I have quoted so frequently, I know of no attempt to utilise the materials at their disposal for a study of any definitely Indian question. In the second place, ignorance of the language has prevented most Englishmen and nearly all Indians, from making use of even the published materials available in Dutch; and the result may be seen in various popular works, which praise, or censure, the English pioneers for their daring initiative, or their brutal misconduct, as the case may be, when, in fact, they were merely following a road already worn by their predecessors' feet. The neglect of Dutch sources for this period is all the more to be regretted, because in some respects they are definitely superior to the English. The Dutch merchants were careful to set down in black and white many things which

the English were content to take for granted: their more extensive operations gave them wider views; and the discipline enforced by the authorities at Batavia produced detailed and precise records of transactions carried out in distant places. English-reading students will naturally continue to rely mainly on the English sources, but they are likely to form inaccurate or distorted views on many important questions if they fail to take account also of the information furnished by the Dutch.

Regarding unpublished sources of information for the period, it may be said at once that there is now little to be found in the records of the India Office. The calendars prepared by Mr. William Foster, or issued under his supervision, are sufficiently detailed to meet all the needs of ordinary students; I have gleaned among the original records, but have gathered very little indeed that was not already in print—some figures from commercial documents, and occasionally a few phrases throwing additional light on some minute point—so that Indians unable to visit England may be confident that the printed calendars tell practically the whole story. No similar calendars exist for the voluminous Dutch records, and it is not possible to speak of their contents with certainty. I have not been able to undertake their systematic examination, and, so far as I know, the only study of them from the Indian point of view has been that which resulted in the preparation of the Transcripts from Archives at The Hague, which are available at the India Office. This series is invaluable to students working in England, but it is very far from being complete on the economic side. When I have applied to the Dutch Public Record Office for information on specific points, I have usually been furnished with photographs of important documents not included in the Transcripts, or hitherto quoted in English; and the existence of this large store of unexplored materials should be borne in mind by all students of the period. Its complete exploration would probably be a task too great for any individual, but the undertaking deserves the attention of societies or organisations interested in Indian historical research.

As to Indian sources, I have not had an opportunity of examining contemporary MSS. other than those which are available in this country, and I have little doubt that much additional information on the subjects dealt with in the later chapters of this volume could be obtained by study of the collections in Indian libraries. The present volume therefore is, like the former, a sketch rather than a definitive treatise; it reviews all, or almost all, the evidence which is now in print, but scattered through a large number of works, not all of which are readily accessible to students in India; and it takes account of some sources not yet published, but it does not claim to exhaust them. There is still a wide scope for research in the history of this period, not only among the Dutch records, but in literature which is within the reach of Indian students, and which they are in the best position to interpret.

I have tried to arrange the book in such a way that, while it should be intelligible to ordinary readers, it should serve serious students as an introduction to the original literature. Authority for, I hope, every assertion of fact will be found in the notes at the end of each chapter, while in the Appendices I have brought together a large amount of detail, some of it not very readily accessible, regarding the course of Asiatic commerce, which may help students in the early stages of their reading before the technical language of the literature has become familiar through experience. In making quotations from old writers and documents, I have usually modernised the spelling and punctuation. In regard to Indian words, I have as a rule followed the system of transliteration adopted in the *Imperial Gazetteer*, but an exception has been necessary in the case of the descriptions applied to Indian cotton goods. The nomenclature of these offers a wide field of study; the derivation of many commercial terms is still an open question; and precise transliteration is impossible so long as the derivation remains obscure. In such cases I have thought it best to select common contemporary forms of the names, and thus avoid the appearance of prejudging linguistic questions on which I am not qualified to pronounce.

It remains only to acknowledge the generous assistance which I have received from scholars in this country and in India. For information or help on particular points I have to express my thanks to Miss L. M. Anstey, Dr. W. R. Bisschop, Mr. R. Burn, Mr. C. T. Carrington, Sir Robert Gillan, Sir Wolseley Haig, Professor Jadu Nath Sarkar, Professor Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Professor G. W. Daniels, and the officers of the Departments of Coins and Medals, and of Oriental Manuscripts, at the British Museum. Professor P. Geyl, of the University of London, has given me most valuable assistance in getting at the full meaning of some of the Dutch records; Dr. J. de Hullu, of the Rijksarchief, has been most generous in searching for, and supplying me with information from the records in his charge; and finally, Mr. W. Foster, of the India Office, has again allowed me to draw continually on his unique knowledge of the period.

April 1923.

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