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British Diplomatic History in Indian Princely States: Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Tanjavore

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Although a multitude of philosophers have researched British diplomacy over the years, the element of British colonial diplomacy in India remains unexplored. The research on British policy in princely states in India is also marginal. This paper aims to analyse the historiography of British diplomacy in India during colonial rule, focusing on princely states as the unit of diplomacy. The paper extensively scrutinizes the British diplomacy and administration of three princely states: Hyderabad, Tanjavore, and Kashmir. Hyderabad was one of the most prominent princely states or a Mohammedan state in India, which had a unique semi-autonomous status compared to the rest, providing details of diplomatic relations with the British. In contrast, Tanjavore and Kashmir are two small princely states affected by domestic and international conflicts, leading them to be more constrained under British rule. This study concludes that the British diplomatic strategies varied significantly based on the political importance and internal conditions of each state. The methodology utilized in this research is an archival analysis of alliances, treaties, and interactions between the princely states and the British. Overall, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of colonial governance by highlighting the differentiated and pragmatic nature of British diplomacy in India.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Diplomatic history, British, Princely states, Sovereignty, Hyderabad, Kashmir, Tanjavore

Introduction

The British were one of the colonizing powers around the world during the 16th to 19th centuries. Their reign was considered the most significant years of transformation in Indian history, which was both beneficial and exploitative. The contact of Britain across the world happened in both direct and indirect ways. Concerning India, they primarily engaged indirectly through the East Indian company, and later on, the Crown of Britain took over the rule in India, specifically the administrative section. There were two Indias under British rules, the 'British India' and the 'non-British India', the native states (Groenhout, 2006). The British first came to India as traders and maintained a distance from princely states. They were primarily in contact with the Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay provinces. Their interactions were initially trade-oriented. It was when they transformed themselves into corporations that significant political developments in Britain led them to urge for territorial control. It was in 1639 that they acquired the first territorial possession, which was that of Madras, marking their departure from mercantile policy to territorial interests (K Rajayyan, 1969). This deepened their communication and trade with all the parts of India, including princely states. To properly date this transformation, the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar transferred the East Indian company, only to focus on trade, and the administrative wing of Britain was formed officially.

This transformation of trade interest to territorial interest of the British is where diplomacy becomes crucial for both the princely states as well as the British. Here, we will analyse in detail three princely states: Hyderabad, Thanjavur, and Kashmir. Hyderabad is a 21-gun saluting state¹, which represents its high rank and significance to the British. The geography, polity, as well as religious prominence of Hyderabad have always made it a frontline contact of the British in India. Jammu and Kashmir is also a 21-gun salute state, but a small princely state with great international significance for the British. Tanjavore was not a prominent state in itself, but under the Madras

council, being a centre of the Circar region, its diplomatic interaction with the British was important. All these states have provided their contribution to the diplomatic history of India in the colonial period, but with a differentiated polity and environment. The focus of colonial scholarship on Britain as a paramount power has undermined the significance and existence of native states in the study of modern South Asia (Groenhout, 2006). This paper provides a more nuanced understanding of colonial governance in princely states by highlighting the differentiated and pragmatic nature of British diplomacy in India. The methodology used here is archival research that included targeted analysis of treaties, letters, and alliances between the princely states of India and the British.

Diplomatic History

Diplomacy is the interaction between two entities with a mutual interest in achieving a collective goal of peace or war. Although diplomacy has existed since time immemorial, the terminology in use is relatively new. The long history of diplomatic activity dates back thousands of years. The earliest record of diplomacy is a tablet discovered in Iran dating back to 2500 BC. The concept of diplomatic history has been diverse and has been interpreted differently by various researchers. For D.C. Watt, Diplomatic history is synonymous with international relations history that contains treaties and agreements. And the focus on international relations history came up as a counter-narrative to the nationalist historiographies by Britain. This was certainly followed by other European countries. This further developed into studies outside Europe at the International level and brought socio-economic aspects to it. But for Simon Adams, diplomatic history is an artificial construction that can be described as the analysis of relations between states, using diplomatic archives like the treaties, reports of ambassadors, accounts of negotiations, policy memoranda, and more (Gardiner, 1988).

The diplomatic history studies can be divided into two branches: one is early diplomatic history, which has focused on the relations between states or with equal entities, which was primarily based on the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which redefined states

and sovereignty. While the new diplomatic history is different, the focus of diplomacy has shifted with the transformation in the international system; various other entities have become units of research. This has widened the scope of research to states beyond the territorial divisions (Amirell,2022).

British Diplomacy in Indian Princely States

The research on British diplomacy is an age-old topic, but the focus on their policies and diplomacy towards princely states is a post-colonial narrative that is yet to be explored. The main reason for this was the limited narratives and descriptions surrounding the term sovereignty. The term sovereignty was more attached to the territorial divisions of post-colonial states, while ignoring the pre-colonial divisions within the states. There is an ongoing debate regarding this, and the international lawyers, British politicians, officials, rulers, bureaucrats of princely states, and anticolonial nationalists have continuously tried to redefine the concept of sovereignty (Saksena,2023). The most prominent reason for these debates is the focus on sovereignty from a European context rather than the ‘out of Europe’ thought. This conceptualization of sovereignty can be changed by viewing the global account of modern sovereignty not from Europe but from the complex arrangements of “distributed sovereignty” that emerged from the colonized territories in the world (Hansen,2021). This has gravely limited the studies in British diplomacy from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

These princely states are also often termed as ‘minor sovereigns’. These minor states are neither dominant nations nor colonial possessions. They were highly productive political spaces in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which makes them a unique box of study. In British India, such minor sovereigns are called ‘princely states’ or ‘Indirectly ruled’ polities (Beverly,2015). Indian princely states were semi-sovereign territories mainly in a subsidiary alliance with the East India Company, upholding limited sovereignty after the dissolution of the Company in the aftermath Revolt of 1857, with the British Crown. They were nominally independent under varying degrees of indirect British control that included strict restrictions on

establishing diplomatic ties. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the subcontinent contained about 500 such states, like Travancore, Baroda, Mysore, Bhopal, etc. These states covered one-third of the subcontinent, some with strong precolonial roots and wealth (Segura-Garcia, 2022). One such minor sovereign is Hyderabad, which is a unique semi-autonomous princely state in India. This was one of the prominent princely states that always struggled to keep its sovereignty intact, which led to numerous occasions of diplomatic interactions with the British. Furthermore, the British were concerned about the international political awareness of the officials in Hyderabad, which could sabotage their power. The Tanjavore and Kashmir are two minor princely states, where Kashmir shares the international border, which has brought it a central point of British exploitation. On the other hand, Tanjavore, being a minor princely state, posed a serious threat to the British in the Carnatic region. Their diverse political identities, administration, and varying degrees of autonomy during the British period represent the diversity of Indian history and colonial impacts.

Though there is no substantial work on the interaction or diplomacy of the British with these princely states, we can draw indirect works that relate these princely states to the British through a diplomatic lens. This paper is an attempt to provide an overview of the diplomatic relations of the British with the princely states of Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Tanjavore.

Hyderabad

Hyderabad is a semi-autonomous princely state situated in southern India with an enormous Muslim population. This princely state is considered a 21gun salute state, having the closest relationship with the British. The founder and the first ruler of Hyderabad was Nizam Asaf Shah. The relationship between the Nizam and the British can be found to be dramatic on the surface, but it is deeply intertwined. Every step of the British to control Hyderabad was highly calculated and involved diplomacy. One such instance is that of the rewards provided by the British to the Nizam for the help the princely state rendered to the British during the 1858 revolt. The reward was not indeed a reward but rather a bait to trap the Nizam into agreeing to

the Treaty of 1860, favouring the paramountcy of the British. Lord Canning was a strong diplomat behind this achievement for the British. After receiving rewards and erasing his debts, Nizam was forced to agree to the conditions of the British, which resulted in the British allocating his land to him, such as Shorapur, as a benefit under the treaty. As a result, the power of the British in Berar has increased, and inland water navigation has benefited their trade.

The British paramountcy or indirect rule, though it existed before 1858, was not declared officially; rather was a hidden nomenclature. It was in a foetal stage during Wellesley. After the declaration in 1858, paramountcy turned out to be a legal principle that could be employed and interpreted. The main element of British paramountcy can be identified in the native states. As Canning and others realised India, being a vast country, it is diverse, and further territorial expansion will only bring chaos to themselves, they diverted focus on native states and planned to establish a 'native aristocracy' which made the princely states beholden to British imperialism. The British provided leniency and grants during this period of time to build trust and resilience, as they feared the native princes might support a foreign power, as well as a foreign power might take advantage of this position during war.

Another aspect of British diplomacy is the connections they build with the ministers of the princely states rather than with the ruler himself. One such example is that of the minister of Hyderabad, Salar Jung, who had an annoying reaction with the Nizam but a close relationship with the British resident, who had benefited the British to fulfil many of their needs as the minister convinced the Nizam for such. As a result, Stanley repeatedly asked Lord Canning to send various rewards to the minister. Moreover, at a certain point, when the minister was about to resign because of the strained relationship with the Nizam was prevented by the British. One particular scenario of the diplomatic channel of ministers is the Nizam's proclamation of removing all transit duties, as well as the prohibition against the export of grain.

Other than this, though imperialistic in attitude, the British intended to provide good governance to the princely states. The founder of this policy was Lord Canning, but it was transformed later by Lord Mayo, foreseeing the future of the role of Indian chiefs in British paramountcy. He established Mayo College at Ajmer for the princes of Indian princely states, intending to familiarize them with Western culture, teaching, and customs. When situations were getting complicated, the death of Nizam Afzal - Ud -Daula allowed them to firm their grip over Hyderabad. As the successor was the Nizam's 2 year old and 8 month old infant son, the British offered guardianship to the new ruler. The British resident accompanied the new ruler to Musnud, which symbolised British assistance and protection to the ruler.

The divide and rule policy of the British was a hallmark of their administration in India. The same has been employed in the Hyderabad administration. As the successor was an infant, the obvious power fell to nobles and Salar Jung, already being powerful and unpopular among people, the British hesitated to appoint him as regent to the council of regency. Moreover, the ultimate power in the hands of Salar Jung is a threat to their paramountcy. Thus, they appointed Amir-I-Akbar, Khurshed Jah, as regent, and the administration of Hyderabad was shared between the two. Diplomatically, the British found it a short-term solution as well as a check on the power of two people among themselves, leading to securing their paramountcy without challenge.

Tanjavore

The kingdom of Tanjavore is reputed for its age-old civilizational richness and culture, which has a chequered history with the British during the eighteenth century. For many decades, the region of Tanjavore or Carnatic was unstable because of the projecting claims on Mysore, Arcot, and Tiruchirappalli. This was settled in 1730 around the river Kaveri, which is surrounded by rich soil and fertility. They were also occupied by the Marathas, which invited the involvement of European powers like the Dutch in the region. Though the Nayaks, as well as the other rulers, did have foreign relations with the

Portuguese and Danes, they were devoted to their overlord, and they were more restricted to commercial and trade exchanges.

It was only at the beginning of the eighteenth century that the British and French got a foothold in the region. In 1639, when the British acquired their first territorial possession in Madras from the Rajah of Chandragiri, the British transformation from mercantile interest to territorial interest began (K Rajayyan,1969). The two important factors that drove Europeans to Tanjavore were commerce and competition. The English established their relationship in 1749 in Tanjavore. Since then, two factors drove them with the need to maintain diplomacy: the civil conflict in Tanjavore and the other was the Moghul invasion, as both led to European intervention in the region. The role of the British in Thanjavore is also considered a transformation of the company from an arbiter to a protector and a spectator to a participant. The English helped Tanjavore to regain its sovereignty at least in form, not in substance, as the British controlled Tanjavore militarily and secured their access to the economic resources of Tanjavore. They also restricted the relations of Tanjavore with other princely states as well as foreign entities.

In detail, the fertile kingdom of Tanjavore tried to remain independent during the European intervention in the region. The Raja of Tanjavore never submitted formally to the Nawab of Carnatic. During the Anglo-French wars, they were independent under Pratap Singh, as the region was not stable. Here, the kingdom of Tanjavore is a subsidiary kingdom. After the wars, the king of Tanjavore was the most powerful among the princes who dreamed of complete independence. But this did not exist long. As the region became stable, the Nawab of Carnatic saw an opportunity to gain complete control of the region, which led to Tanjavore isolation as it lost its allies. On the other hand, the British were exploiting the region to obtain maximum financial resources. The Nawab created a list of tribute to be collected from Tanjavore and for this sought support from the British, which they found reasonable as the Nawab preserved Tanjavore, threatening the raja, who was a 'sovereign independent' according to Lord Pigot. To reach an agreement amicably, the Lord

Pigot intimidated the Raja, involving Pratap Singh also, which finally led to the Treaty of 1762².

The British found the involvement in finalising the treaty as an opportunity for them to spread their influence in Arcot and Tanjavore, making the Nawab an arbitrator, but the English as a guarantor and guardian. After various invasions and internal conflicts, the Nawab wished to annex Tanjavore and sought British assistance. But the British advised retaining the sovereignty of Tanjavore as per the political situation of the region. Later on, in 1773, when circumstances turned in support of the Nawab, he again tried to annex Tanjavore with the help of the British, providing the reason that if Tanjavore was not suppressed, the Marathas and French could turn them against Wallajah and the British. As Britain was determined to transform itself into a territorial expansion, it found the annexation appealing, but it was marked as a grave error of British diplomacy, of unjust war, and injustice. The British foresaw this as a success and expected the Nawab to be a subsidiary, but the Nawab was moving in the opposite direction; he created enough commotion and stood firmly on the sovereignty of Tanjavore. This backfired on the British, which made them reconsider the decision and restore the status of Tanjavore to Tulijaji. For this, they isolated Tanjavore from Maratha powers and deprived Tanjavore of foreign relations. They also abandoned their principle of legitimacy and other alliances and militarily controlled Tanjavore.

Another point of British intervention is in the succession issue in Tanjavore. As Tulijaji died, his adopted son was entitled to power as well as appointed his half-brother, Amir Singh, as regent, which was not agreeable to the British. The British resident was ordered not to allow the succession to happen, while the Nawab insisted on returning Tanjavore to him as he was sovereign. Sir Archibald Campbell reached Tanjavore and examined the irregularities of adoption, for which he also rendered religious rules. The examination proved it irregular; hence, the British decided to appoint Amir Singh as the ruler after numerous discussions and deliberation, as he was also a person of imperialistic ambitions. This was an incredible move by the British to completely

obtain the loyalty and alliance of Tanjavore without resorting to violence.

Kashmir

Kashmir was a princely state during British rule, with a Hindu ruler and a Muslim population covering one-third of the valley, which is still one of the Muslim majority states in India. The British were attracted to the geography and positioning of Kashmir; more specifically, they feared the invasion of Russia (Hasnanin,1974). Although the rulers of Kashmir had interactions with Russia, it declined after the revolution. This relation has made the British suspicious of the rulers in Kashmir, driving them to control the region. The British interests in Kashmir were also significantly influenced by its strategic positioning, as a buffer zone against potential unrest in the northwest of India, as well as bordering Afghanistan (Ankit, 2013). The region of Kashmir was initially ruled by the Sikhs, which was later taken over by the Hindu ruler Raja Ranjit Singh. During Ranjith Singh's rule, the British were so much influenced by the resources of the region that they waited for his death to establish Kashmir by entrusting Gulab Singh as the ruler (Huttenback, 2004). Diplomatically, it had two benefits: one was to constrain the influence of Dogras and restrain Gulab Singh in the region, preventing further expansion of his power. Another way to control the region is as a buffer zone to Central Asia.

As a first mission, Gulab sent a letter of request to provide help to the British in their war with the Sikhs, which deeply impressed the British. Gulab Singh, for the British, became a loyal ally and supporter. When the Sikh war ended with the Treaty of Lahore, Gulab Singh received gifts as territory, and was also recognised as a completely independent ruler of Kashmir. The Treaty of Amritsar finalised these mutual agreements and marked the sovereignty of Kashmir as a princely state. The East India Company did not guarantee the internal security of the state, so it could not interfere in its affairs freely. This was also a diplomatic move by Lord Hardinge, as keeping a border territory under British control was more disadvantageous, unproductive, and expensive. Hence, it was beneficial to keep the region as an ally. Even the enthronement of Gulab Singh to sustain in

rule by the British was a preconceived move to use him to attain power in Tibet and ensure restrained trade from Central Asia.

The relationship between the British and Gulab Singh weakened later on, as the British were planning to annex Tibet as well, and their measures created internal hostility towards Gulab Singh. Moreover, being a Hindu ruler in a Muslim majority state was also challenging. Gulab Singh was aware of his importance to the East India Company and the British Crown. Thus, he consciously managed to rule Kashmir according to his own rules, which led to the violation of the British standards of good governance and disturbed the East India Company in its attempts to use him and his territories to further their commercial interests in Tibet and Central Asia. Even after the death of Gulab Singh, the British maintained their degree of influence. This allowed the successive rulers to have the sovereignty to rule. His successor, Raja Ranbir Singh, was also a strong independent who posed significant threats to the British; hence, the British maintained a policy of 'non-intervention'³³ but as soon as his death, the British installed a residency in Kashmir with the aggravated tensions on the border. This restrained the powers of the successor Raja Pratap Singh. During this period British sent multiple envoys with missions of getting information about Kashmir, its people, and surroundings. Giving extraordinary powers to the bureaucrats slowly reduced the power of native rulers.

Conclusion

British diplomacy in India is complex and nuanced, as it differs across the country. Although the basic principles of diplomacy were similar, their approaches differed across India, depending on the political consequences and internal environment. For example: - In Tanjavore, the interference of the British was limited, and they restrained themselves from fanning the opposition in the Carnatic region. On the other hand, they were actively involved in Hyderabad as well as Kashmir, which led to the long occupancy of residents as well as a struggle for sovereignty. Both Kashmir and Hyderabad were Muslim majority states, which further elevates their international importance. The British considered them an obstacle to their presence in the

international community. This proves that British diplomacy in India is pragmatic and needs to be understood from multiple perspectives.

End note:

1. The princely states in British India were divided into various gun saluting states according to their size, resources, and prominence. In detail, it is the number of guns used in saluting a state, referring to its prominence. There were 21, 19, 15, etc gun saluting states in India where the 21-gun saluting is of the highest rank.
2. The Treaty of 1762 is a tripartite treaty signed between Tanjavore, Carnatic, and the British East India Company by which the Raja Pratap Singh of Tanjavore became a vassal of the Nawab of the Carnatic.
3. The policy of non-intervention was passed by Parliament in the Act of 1784 as a prohibition to intervene in the affairs of independent native States, which can also be followed towards the States under the Company's protection. It laid down explicitly that the policy of the Company was not to aggrandise its territory and therefore campaigns of conquest were repugnant to the British people.

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