



A STUDY ON POWER OF THE GOVERNOR IN BRITISH INDIA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Abstract:

The status of governors in British India experienced some transformations after the First World War due to the changes in political situation, social structure, and the administration in British India. Prior to the war, governors stood in a comparatively central and uninhibited category of power since they were representative of the British Crown (Porter, 2022). It was largely non-consultative decision making, where very little regard was paid to consulting Indian authorities or considering Indian preferences. Despite that, governors were superintending the affairs of the Indian population as subordinates of the imperial authority and their main interaction did not involve political discourse. Other than that, legislative control was largely in the hands of the British officials, while the involvement of the Indian governors was very much restricted. There was almost absolute economic power with governors enjoying a significant level of autonomy when it came to fiscal and economic decisions concerning the provinces (Cooper, 2021).

Key Words: British, Legislative, Political, War, Power

Introduction:

Public opinion rarely influenced administrations and was not an important factor in governance. Accountability was to the British administration and not the locals. However, the post war period gave a completely different picture of the governor's status. The emergence of the nationalist movements was a sign that their right to rule was more and more challenged due to the need for a greater degree of management in their exercise of power. There was a shift to the decentralisation of power, which required the governors to be in consultation with the Indian representatives in the enlarged legislative councils (Cooper, 2021). This relationship changed from a mere bureaucratic level to a more political level because governors had to deal with the rising politics of nationalism and communal politics. Despite that, during the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, dyarchy was introduced and it led to a change in the administration where several subjects were made over to Indian ministers (Prasad, 2021). This partial devolution of power meant that governors had to be more attentive and responsive to the elected Indian representatives and their demands while serving the Imperial agenda at the same time (Prasad, 2021). Their economic dominance was different in comparison to the time when Indian ministers were given some measure of control over provincial finances.

Popular sovereignty played a more significant role by the middle of the 18th century. It was found that governors started assuming responsibility based on the sentiments of the people and political activism. They discovered that they were answerable to local councils, apart from the British government, which they had always been answerable to (Cooper, 2021). Action against dissent became more subtle, which involved both repression and appeasement. Despite that, mere brutality was no longer sustainable when faced with nationalism. The post-war period also witnessed this function of governors becoming more participative in matters of social reform and educational policies in India mainly due to pressures from the Indian political leadership (Cooper, 2021). Education also underwent a change during this period. The educational system adopted Indian languages and culture instead of the British system. Infrastructure development continued to be for the needs of imperial power while it started to take cognizance of local needs. Interactions between governors and the princely states also underwent changes suggesting a shift to diplomacy and bargaining as these states became more active politically in the context of India (Shankar and Srivastava, 2021). At the international level some of the governors realized that they were now expected to support Indian interests in the international forums, which was almost negligible before the war.



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Objectives

- i. To investigate power of Governor in British India.
- ii. To find out the effect of British ruling.
- iii. To analyze the First World War

Significance of the First World War:

The governor of British India ruled the nation based on the regulations formed in Britain. The governor had the power to bring changes in the regulations in India. Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter of the thesis is to present the power of the governor. Despite that, it is effective in bringing of the role played by the governor to rule India and deal with the war situation.

The Governor in the context of the First World War became significant as Britain transformed the colonized India into its strategic asset in the ongoing conflict. Governors were the most senior British officials in their provinces, which led them to maintain the responsibility of maintaining stability, rallying the resources and keeping India supportive of the war. They increased their roles from mere administrative tasks to the factors that involve meeting war-related requirements and addressing concerns from locals. Governors were instrumental in policy implementation through the encouragement of the enlistment of Indian soldiers, supply acquisition and the resource reallocation for the war front (Uyar, 2020). They also had to manage conflicts of interest between implementing the wartime policies of the British regime and the increasing nationalism among the Indian population. During the war period, the Governors assumed more sovereign powers in decision making since they had to respond to arising incidents that required immediate intervention rather than wait for instructions from London. Apart from that, maintaining a balance between the allegiance of Indian princes and elites required diplomatic fitness. It was also necessary for managing potential rebellion. In essence, the ability of the Governors to address these complex problems was central to maintaining India's support for the Allies. It further had a bearing on the outcome of the war as well as shaping the political destiny of India in the post-war era.

The Governor in British India was an official who had large authorities as the monarch's deputy at the provincial level. The Governor was also an official selected by the British government and who had full executive, legislative and financial powers. They dictated provincial government and policed the provinces as well as had the ability to summon or dissolve legislative councils (Elkins, 2022). Governors could sign or not sign bills into law, approve or reject expected expenditures and could act independently on matters which they considered important. They acted as the intermediaries between the provincial and central governments where they ensured that the imperial policies were executed while protecting the British interests. Despite gradual integration of elements of accountability via reform, Governors still possessed stark reserve powers thereby maintaining direct Britons' control over other pertinent aspects of colonial provinces throughout the colonial period.

The position of the Governor in British India was crucial during the First World War, with the Governor impacting the course of the war and the social and political conditions of the subcontinent. The Governor was the Chief British representative in their respective provinces and had a challenging duty of fulfilling demand during the war (Uyar, 2020). It was also significant for managing provincial administration and increasing nationalist activities. This is because their impact was not only limited to administrative chores rather shaped the role of India during the war.

Governors actively participated in undertaking and monitoring the recruitments that culminated in over 1.3 million Indian soldiers that were deployed in various front lines of the war. They devoted much effort to requisitioning local chiefs and appealing to patriotism (Uyar, 2020). Governors were active in the mobilisation of supplies, money and raw materials which were crucial to feeding the Allied war effort. It was necessary for the British to strengthen their export efficiency and capability to mobilise economic resources toward war-related sectors.



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The war period also had an effect on Governors and it was found that they preferred to make their own decisions. Despite that, wartime situations created the pressure for action and allowed the Governor to act independently without waiting for instructions from London (Uyar, 2020). This reflected that at the peacetime the governor acted as a policymaker executor. While this expansion of authority empowered Governors to address local circumstances and new situations more effectively. It also created enormous pressure on the Governors to keep social order in the provinces by meeting the demands and requirements of the wartime.

This made governors to be at crossroads of imperial forces and emerging Indian nationalist sentiments. Several movements towards independence were observed during the war years, and Governors had to stay alert with such situations. Apart from that, they were responsible to shape the political opposition and ways of dealing with the mix of appeasement and repression. On the other hand, the Defence of India Act was passed in 1915, which assisted in bestowing extraordinary powers to tame civil liberties and disenfranchise anti-war sentiments. This factor was also overseen primarily by the Governors of British India. Some of these measures were applied with discretion, which further influenced the political stability of their provinces. Moreover, governor were responsible to follow different responsibilities. They were charged with the role of keeping Indian princes and elites on their side. Despite that, they took initiative to control the knowledge and perceptions of their populace through propaganda and censorship. This further assisted to keep the support and morale for the war high among the Indians. During the First World War, the Governor influenced the future of Indian politics. This led to their management of the war effort and modulation of nationalist feelings that formed the foundation of the post reform in India under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 (Prasad, 2021). The facts and issues of this period made the British realise that there was a need to incorporate more Indians in the administrative system and the politics of the country to determine the course of the country's independence. Thus, the Governors of British India during the First World Not only ar had substantial powers, which significantly transcended their pre-war responsibilities. The choices they made in seeking funds, moderating political tensions and attending to the practicalities of wartime administration. It was effective to bore a direct and lasting influence on the amount and duration of Indian participation and increasing degree of interdependence between Britain and India. The war is an important period as the Governor's contribution played a role in determining the further development of the British Raj in India and the Indian Movement towards independence.

It is noteworthy that during the First World War, the Governors of provinces of British India had a rather vast list of obligations to the people. Governor had to manage an active war effort and they had to ensure that the people remained calm. It was also necessary for the governor that the needs were also being addressed. These responsibilities were usually a pressure and sometimes even conflicting, where the actors had to balance regional realities and imperial expectations (Uyar, 2020). Apart from that, one of the most important and significant roles of governors was to be in charge of security and law and order in their respective provinces. This was done by actively participating in the Defence of India Act meant to curb dissent and regulate civil liberties. Other than that, governors faced a dilemma on how to implement these measures effectively while not sparking massive rebellions. Their roles included observing and suppressing all forms of political activities or any acts deemed as detrimental to the war or British colonial rule. This often meant curbing nationalist movements and showing concern to local sentiments without increasing tension.

Additional responsibilities included resource mobilisation for the purpose of the war was another significant task. Some governors were directly involved in recruitment campaigns for the army. Apart from that, mobilising people to join the force was also a responsibility of the governor. It was done in consultation with other local authorities to ensure that the numbers were met. They also established a war supply committee to oversee the procurement of necessities such as food, raw materials and other resources within the civilian population (Uyar, 2020). This responsibility sometimes placed Governors in a fix by being expected to meet the needs of the war and food plus economic requirements of the population. Other than that, during the war, economic management emerged as an important responsibility for the Governor. They also became involved in managing prices of goods, rationing where necessary and the oversight of local industries for the purposes of supporting war efforts (Uyar, 2020). They faced problems of wartime inflation, scarcity and the distortion of normal business



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conditions. In this sphere, their decisions concerned the lives of ordinary people and influenced the availability of food and goods, as well as work.

The area of public health became one of the most important issues, especially with concerns over the possibility of epidemics due to the warfare conditions. During war, governors had the duty to sustain healthcare, prevent the spreading of diseases, and provide medical care to military individuals and their dependents. Among them, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 proved to be most challenging to the provincial administrative management of public health (Sharma *et al.* 2021)). It was always crucial to feed the nation. Provincial leaders had to balance the allocation and rationing of food in the light of ration scarcity and demands from both the military and civilians. They supervised grain procurement activities and embarked on procedures aimed at combating famine which was rife in many parts of the country. The task was to support the warfare needs without putting unnecessary burdens to the civilian inhabitants of the occupied territories. Governor was made responsible for what kind of information needs to be provided to the public and how the morale of the people should be maintained during the war (Uyar, 2020). This included the supervision of news, propaganda, as well as distribution of information within the context of the war. On one hand, the governors had to uphold the image of the war and ensure support was sustained, besides handling people’s complaints and agitation for change.

The sustaining of civil administration and vital populace interests was paramount. There existed centralised and local governments which offered a wide range of governance responsibilities to the war crisis. This involved controlling the delivery of education, upkeep of buildings, and the control of Transport, all of which were essential, not only for the war but for the people as well.

Responsibility for social welfare occupied a more significant position as the war continued. They were also responsible for assisting the family of a soldier, or helping the poor who were in distress, and dealing with refugees. Strain on the social fabric of India due to the war made Governors take appropriate actions and address problems affecting sections of the society.

The Governor had the power to establish diplomatic relations. It entailed as part of the task of British agents the negotiation of power sharing arrangements with the princes of the subcontinental states, the regulation of British contact with indigenous elites and notables, and the articulation of the colonial provincial voice before the colonial centre. This meant that ability to manage these multifaceted relationships became a necessity in order to sustain the stability and compliance on matters concerning the war. Therefore, During the war, Governors were in a position where they had to meet these multifaceted demands and at the same time manage for the post-war era (Uyar, 2020). The rise of nationalist sentiments and the political changes, including the issues of political reforms, was another factor that put Governors in a position whereby they had to understand and account for the changes in the political environment that might impact on their functioning.

The status of governors:

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Conclusion:

Popular sovereignty played a more significant role by the middle of the 18th century. It was found that governors started assuming responsibility based on the sentiments of the people and political activism. They discovered that they were answerable to local councils, apart from the British government, which they had always been answerable to (Cooper, 2021). Action against dissent became more subtle, which involved both repression and appeasement. Despite that, mere brutality was no longer sustainable when faced with nationalism. The post-war period also witnessed this function of governors becoming more participative in matters of social reform and educational policies in India mainly due to pressures from the Indian political leadership (Cooper, 2021). Education also underwent a change during this period. The educational system adopted Indian languages and culture instead of the British system. Infrastructure development continued to be for the needs of imperial power while it started to take cognizance of local needs. Interactions between governors and the princely states also underwent changes suggesting a shift to diplomacy and bargaining as these states became more active politically in the context of India (Shankar and Srivastava, 2021). At the international level some of the governors realised that they were now expected to support Indian interests in the international forums, which was almost negligible before the war.

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