The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan and Burma

by
HUGH TINKER

with a Foreword by
The Right Hon. LORD HAILEY
G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E.



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For Jonathan and Mark

Tireless protagonists of self-government

FOREWORD

I HAVE often wished that I had the industry to make a study of the process by which some of the most familiar of our political institutions have acquired the designations by which we now know them, for it would often, I am convinced, provide an interesting sidelight on history. The term Local Government is a typical case in point. It seems to have sprung into general currency shortly before 1871, as a convenient way of describing the variety of services provided or managed on the public behalf by a medley of local authorities, some of which were modern and some whose origin went far back into our history. So far as these authorities were statutory, probably the earliest legislation was that of Edward III, which made provision for regulating local affairs in the counties by conferring administrative powers on the squires and clergy sitting as justices of the peace in petty and quarter sessions. The next step followed when the affairs of the civil parish were placed by an Act of Elizabeth under the vestry and the overseers of the poor. The towns meanwhile had been obtaining authority to control their affairs under their own corporations by virtue of royal charters dealing with each of them individually; there were, early in the nineteenth century, as many as 246 municipal boroughs in England and Wales. The pace of legislation grew warmer in the middle of the century, and a series of Acts, including a Poor Law Amendment Act, a Public Health Act, a Municipal Corporations Act and an Education Act made provision for regulating the constitutions or the powers of the local authorities as then existing, or for conferring powers of control on different departments of the central government.

The most noticeable of the local services dealt with by this legislation were those bearing directly or indirectly on public

health, and there was established in 1848 a General Board of Health, which continued in existence till it was allowed to expire in 1858, its functions for the prevention of disease being transferred to the Privy Council, while those relating to the supervision of local authorities passed to the Home Department. This state of affairs continued till a Royal Commission of 1869–71 emphasized the need for a central supervisory body, and it was then that this body was created under the designation of the Local Government Board, its statutory powers being derived from the Local Government Board Act of 1871. The primary object of the Board was to co-ordinate the work and to modernize the character of the many authorities concerned, but it may be doubted whether anyone recognized at the time how large a part these authorities were destined to play in the social and, so to speak, the domestic life of the nation, nor the extent to which they were subsequently to be integrated with the activities of one department or another of the central government.

In one sense this integration may be said to be the result of the succeeding Local Government Act of 1888, which reorganized the entire system of the local authorities in counties, districts and parishes. In another sense however it is due even more to the wide extension of the system of grants-in-aid from the central government, which have enabled the local authorities to provide the physical improvements or the social amenities demanded by our rising standards of life, but which the revenues derived from the local rate have been unable to supply. This process has continued until today the local authorities draw no less than 55 per cent of their revenues from central government grants-in-aid. There is here a characteristically British development. The local authority of the present day is not, as it might be in other countries, a direct projection of the central government, though there is probably no part of the organization of our modern state which more closely affects the daily lives of the great majority of its citizens. In Great Britain the local authority is in its constitution a fully representative institution with a considerable measure of autonomy in its day to day work. That is part of a tradition carrying back to its place in history. But the effective power of control has

passed into the hands of the central departments of government. As the Indian Statutory Commission of 1930 pointed out:

> The present state of efficiency of Local Government services and administration in Great Britain has been largely due to an ever increasing pressure by the departments of the Central Government. By numerous administrative devices, by inspection, by audit, by the giving of grants-in-aid on conditions of efficiency, and by an insistence on standards of competence in the municipal staff, the Local Government Board and its successor, the Ministry of Health, have steadily raised the standard of administration in all local authorities. Indeed the history of local government in Great Britain during the nineteenth century might be described from one angle as the steady invasion by the Central Government of a sphere formerly left entirely to local authorities.[1]

These observations are, I think, very relevant to a consideration of Dr. Tinker's comprehensive study of the operation of the system of local government in India, Pakistan and Burma. As an organized system it represented in effect the deliberate introduction to India of an institution of a purely western type. Hitherto there had been little conscious innovation of this character, at all events on so conspicuous a scale. Many of the features of British rule must have conveyed little sense of novelty to Indians. The system of control through the appointment in each district of a representative of the ruling authority was akin to a procedure which had become familiar during Mogul rule. The administration of justice by a regularly constituted judiciary was no less an adaptation of a standing feature of the Mogul system. Though the British codes systematized the civil and criminal law and regulated judical procedure, the Courts continued to administer the personal law of Hindus and Muslims. Most characteristic of all, there was no radical alteration of the indigenous system of land tenure, and the major source of revenue continued to take the traditional form of a tax on the produce of the land.

That so many of the features of British rule had no great appearance of novelty must have heightened the impression

[1] ISC, i, 310.

of innovation created by the introduction of the system of local government heralded by Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882. There existed in this particular field of activity no institution, if we except the village *panchayat*, which could be said to have formed an integral part of Indian custom. But though there may have been between the sixth and ninth centuries A.D. some period when the *panchayat* was a live institution with a definite function, this applied only to certain areas, and throughout the rest of India the *panchayat* was little more than a committee of village elders whose functions varied widely in proportion with the status of the village concerned. The *panchayat* had in any case ceased to be operative in most parts of India for a considerable period before the advent of British rule, and though attempts had been made to revive it by some of the more liberal minded of our early administrators—Munro in Madras, Mountstuart Elphinstone in Bombay and Malcolm in Central India—their efforts had met with little success.[1] It was not until relatively recent times that its use was effectively revived, as described by Dr. Tinker in his Chapter XI. For the rest, the town Kotwal, who became a prominent figure in Mogul times, and the caste committees which on occasion interested themselves in the affairs of their town wards, had little of the true character of local government authorities. Such services as they could provide were at the best sporadic and were hardly ever regular in operation.

But the inauguration of an organized system of local government by the Resolution of 1882 was more than an innovation; it was deliberately designed to exercise a new and formative influence on the relations between the ruling power and the people of India. On a more immediate plane, it was intended to secure the increased assistance of Indians in the administration of the country; on a wider plane, it was to be an instrument of political and popular education in the use of self-governing institutions. It is noteworthy that not only was the measure introduced under the title of Local Self-Government, but that it continued to bear this significent title for many years. It was to the working of a system of local self-government that the Montagu-Chelmsford Commission, writing in 1918, looked as

[1] L. S. S. O'Malley, *Modern India and the West* (London, 1941), pp. 57–8.

the sphere 'in which steps would be taken first and furthest in the direction of the progressive realization of responsible government in India.' It was under the title of local self-government that the Indian Statutory Commission wrote of the system in 1930. The title, it is interesting to note, has survived in a recent study made for the benefit of students of Colonial constitutional developments.[1]

Dr. Tinker has given in the present work a balanced and well-documented history of the evolution of the system in India from the earlier days when it worked under the close tutelage (and as some might have been inclined to say, under the shadow) of the official administration, up to the time when charge of the working of the system was transferred to the care of Indian Ministers and the local authorities were given larger opportunities and greater freedom of action. His work will furnish valuable material to the future historian of the British period of rule, for whom the operation of the system of local government will probably have an importance that has tended to be obscured in our own times by the stronger light directed to the field of higher politics. Though the work of the local government bodies may not have counted for as much in the life of India as it has in the domestic life of Great Britain, it nevertheless constituted a very wide field for non-official activity on the part of Indians.[2] As such, it acted as some kind of counterpoise to the apparently all-pervading influence of the official administration. Though the system was an importation from the West, owing nothing to indigenous custom, it became in some measure a specifically Indian field of activity, as contrasted with the official administration, which even up

[1] C. P. Lloyd, 'Local Self-Government in India', *Journal of African Administration*, April 1952.

[2] Some indication of the quantitative influence of local government in the creation of political leadership may be gained from a summary of the total number of members of local bodies. Figures cited relate to the 1920's, but the variations between 1890 and 1947 were not of major importance, except perhaps in Burma.

Corporations of the Presidency towns and Rangoon: 276
Members of the 745 municipalities: 12,854
Members of the 224 district boards: 6,784
Members of the 857 sub-district boards: 8,548
In addition, some 10,000 union boards and village authorities were constituted in the 1920's, with a membership of approximately 100,000 persons.

to the end remained strongly under influences which, to the mind of Indians, reflected its foreign origin.

An assessment of the value of the local government system to India may be approached from two different standpoints. It may be asked in the first place how far it succeeded in providing the public with services of various kinds (such as schools, hospitals, roads, sewerage, lighting, water-installations or the like) on a more liberal or efficient scale than might have been secured by an extension of the activities of the official administration? Or it may be asked, from another point of view, how far the system did actually afford an education in the principles and practice of self-government, as had been envisaged in 1882?

As regards the first question, there are always likely to be those who have been impressed by the less satisfactory side of the work of the Indian local boards of various kinds. That is not entirely because the critics of these bodies have shared the feelings of the District Officer of an early date who complained in bitter verse that it had become his lot

> To penetrate the city's slums and sinks
> Concocting bye-laws subtler than the stinks

There has been a natural resentment of the lack of efficiency and business sense in the conduct of the proceedings of many of the boards. Faction feeling and communal hostility have been much in evidence. In regard to some of the boards there has been a widespread charge of partiality and corruption. The Statutory Commission of 1930, after making due allowances for the inexperience of the members of the boards, for the early shortage of finance, and for the failure to give them a due measure of official guidance, finally expressed the view that the transference of power from official hands had been followed, on the whole and as a general rule, by a fall in the previous level of efficiency. How far this judgment has been generally accepted, has depended on the experience of different observers; opinions have differed widely; no one who knew the Corporation of Bombay in the palmy days of its civic pride would accept a verdict based only on experience of Calcutta. There has been an equal diversity of experience in regard to

the large body of urban and rural boards of different grades throughout the country.

But even if the more general verdict should be that of the Statutory Commission, that is not the last word, for if the local government system did in fact provide a liberal education in the principles and practice of self-government, that might well be judged to outweigh any other consideration. How far the system did actually meet this test has been discussed by Dr. Tinker in his last chapter. The question might admit of a simpler answer, if it could be put in another form; how far did the experience of the organization of local government help to produce a level of political capacity in India which resulted in the concession to her of a status of self-government? But events have put that question out of court. India did not attain this status as the result of a judgment regarding the political capacity of her politicians or her people. Self-government was conceded because Great Britain was persuaded that a great body of people in India desired it so ardently that it was not practicable (or as some prefer to say, neither practicable nor equitable) to defer any longer the concession of a status to which Great Britain had been firmly committed. How far the system of local government actually contributed in any wide measure to the political education of the Indian people may well be debatable. I will confine myself to two observations. In the first place, events may show that the British scheme of local government, with its system of controlled grants-in-aid, and its insistence on definite standards of performance, was actually a better form of political education than the Indian system, with its lack of regular supervision over the standards of services supplied to the public and its flow of free subsidies unconditioned by any guarantee that the boards would secure an increase of their revenue from the rates. The first lesson in the code of political education should be the acceptance of responsibility for the use made of political rights.

My second point is this. There can be no question that the membership of this great network of local authority bodies, increasingly encouraged to regard themselves as independent of the official organization of the government, must have helped materially to foster the ambition for self rule, and given

many recruits to the campaign for its attainment. To this extent at all events the results must be held to have justified the intentions set forth in the Resolution of 1882. They may in truth have gone somewhat further than the authors of the Resolution ever contemplated.

HAILEY

PREFACE

MANY are the debts of gratitude which I have acquired during the preparation of this book, the following being perhaps the most notable. My first obligation is to Lord Hailey who, amid his many duties, kindly found time to contribute a foreword. Then I wish to remember the Governing Body of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, for electing me into a B.A. Scholarship; in particular I must thank Dr. David Thomson (formerly Senior Tutor of Sidney) whose wise and generous encouragement first led me into historical research. Professor D. G. E. Hall of the School of Oriental and African Studies expended many hours on my problems as supervisor of the Ph.D. thesis from which this book originated; I am most grateful to him. I must record my sense of the consideration I received from the Publications Committee of the Board of Studies in History of the University of London, who selected this work as their first publication: Professor C. H. Philips, Head of the History Department at S.O.A.S., especially, has watched over the progress of my book and helped me in many ways.

I am indebted to Dr. Hla Pe of S.O.A.S. and Captain M. S. Bajwa of the Pakistan Army for contributing much, in their reminiscences and stories and answers to my questions, towards such understanding as I have of the feelings of their countrymen regarding problems discussed in this book. Mr. Bindeshwari Prasad Joshi of the U.P. Civil Service, by his example taught me the old Indian tradition of faithful public service. Sir Tennant Sloan, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., and Messrs. C. W. Dunn, C.I.E., and B. Swithinbank, C.B.E. were good enough to read certain draft chapters, proffering valuable criticism and additional information. None of these gentlemen may, of course, be held responsible for any of the conclusions which follow.

During my researches I was compelled to make unusually heavy demands upon libraries, especially the old India Office Library and Records, the Library of the High Commissioner for India, the Periodicals Room of Cambridge University Library, and the S.O.A.S. Library. I have to acknowledge the courtesy of their staff who imperturbably regaled me with several thousand letters, reports, returns, minutes of proceedings, etc.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to my wife, for preparing much of the statistical material, for scrutinising my manuscripts, typescripts and proofs—and for much else beside.

23 March 1954 H.T.

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NOTE

Different terms gained currency in different provinces of the old Indian Empire for many of the offices and institutions of local government. For instance, a local representative was variously styled 'councillor', 'commissioner' and 'member'; rural bodies were 'District Boards', 'District Local Boards', and 'District Councils'; urban bodies were 'Municipal Boards', 'Municipalities' and 'Municipal Committees' in the United Provinces, Bombay and Burma respectively. In order to avoid confusion, in general, representatives of the public are referred to in this work as 'members', and their Head as 'chairman'; urban bodies are called 'municipalities' and the major rural bodies 'district boards'; local authorities in general are often referred to as 'boards'. The phrase 'local government' has been preferred to 'local self-government'; 'provincial government' has been substituted for the phrase 'local government' or 'local administration' which are misleading to those not versed in the official jargon of British India.

When comparing money values, the reader should recall that until the late nineteenth century one rupee was worth two shillings, a lakh (Rs. 1,00,000) was worth £10,000 and a crore (Rs. 1,00,00,000), worth £1,000,000. In the present century the value of the rupee has been stabilized at 1s. 6d. A lakh is now worth £7,500 and a crore £750,000.

Certain abbreviations are employed in the text, such as P.W.D. (Public Works Department), D.P.I. (Director of Public Instruction), and D.O. (District Officer). Works to which frequent reference is made are cited in the footnotes in abbreviated form. Thus:

DCR Report (and memoranda) of the Royal Commission upon Decentralisation in India

M/CR Joint Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms (The Montagu-Chelmsford Report)

ITEC Report (and volumes of evidence) of the Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee

Hartog Report Interim Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (the review of education)

ISC Indian Statutory Commission (Report, memoranda, evidence, etc.)

The annual provincial 'Reports' and 'Resolutions' reviewing the work of municipalities and district boards are cited in footnotes as 'District Board Reports' or 'Municipal Reports', prefixed by the name of the issuing government, and followed by the year of issue. Thus the Government of Bengal's 'Resolution reviewing the reports on the working of Municipalities in Bengal during the year 1937–38' would appear as: 'Bengal, Municipal Reports, 1937–38'.

INTRODUCTION

Problems of Local Government in East and West

IT is almost impossible to write a study of any aspect of recent events in India, Pakistan or Burma, without betraying some sort of bias or hindsight. Very few full-length accounts of local government in India are to be found, but almost all, such as there are, betray a conscious or unconscious bias. For this somewhat humdrum subject has become a source of heat through becoming involved as an issue—though in an artificial form—in the polemics of the struggle for national independence.

English die-hards would argue that it was inconceivable to give self-government to Indians when they could not even run their municipal boards efficiently; Indian publicists would retort that it was impossible to trust British promises of dominion status, when they were not even permitted to manage their municipal boards without being subject to all sorts of unnecessary controls, and constant interference by officials. Now that the irrelevance of both arguments has been demonstrated, it may be an opportune moment to attempt an assessment of the rôle of local government institutions in the national development of India, Pakistan and Burma. But certain common misunderstandings remain, which the writer would first like to examine.

Many estimates of local government in India and Burma have (at least, in the opinion of the writer) suffered from a lack of understanding in two respects. First, in assessing local bodies in the Indian Empire, critics have often measured their shortcomings against an imaginary 'ideal' form of local government, and not by the commonly imperfect standards of local democracy in action. And secondly, critics have frequently commented upon defects which they take to be peculiar to local bodies,

whereas these same defects are to be found in greater or less degree in almost all the institutions of Indian or Burmese society.

Many I.C.S. officers in giving evidence before commissions and committees have shown only a sketchy knowledge of the English system of local government. For instance, a Secretary to the Bombay Government was unaware of the responsibilities of a Town Clerk; an officer deputed to survey Burma's municipal finances was unable to distinguish between local government services of 'national' or of 'local' significance. More important, there seems to have been a general impression among Indian administrators that English local government is efficient, actuated entirely by a spirit of public service, and answerable to the verdict of an alert and critical public opinion; such concepts colour many official reports and recommendations upon local government.

These assumptions are highly questionable, yet they have also been made—or at least not questioned—by many students of local government in England. The literature of the subject has very largely comprised studies of the administrative framework, such as the distribution of powers, the reform of the structure of government, or the relation of technical requirements to local units. Few students have followed Graham Wallas who in *Human Nature in Politics* (1908) realistically examined the actual working of representative government in the light of his experiences upon the London County Council. It may not therefore be entirely irrelevant to examine some of the characteristics of English local bodies at work.

The English public are in general indifferent to the way local councils are managed. They frequently submit to anomalies and anachronisms in services such as public libraries in which no 'national minimum' is enforced. Local elections arouse only tepid interest—the poll is usually low, 30 to 50 per cent—and among minor authorities such as Rural District Councils, it is the exception for a seat to be contested at all. Even under the London County Council it was common between the world wars for one councillor in ten to be returned unopposed. In the Surrey County Council elections of 1934 only one-quarter of the seats were contested. Only in cases where the major political parties

have deliberately taken up local government for reasons of policy does interest really become aroused.[1]

Persons elected to local councils do not on the whole possess a degree of administrative or intellectual ability greater than that of the general public. Many seek office in some part for personal or sectional reasons: most councils contain a very high proportion of builders, contractors and shopkeepers, or of trade-union and staff-association officials amongst their members. Amongst councils controlled by the more prosperous ratepayers, an attitude of parsimony long prevailed; in the nineteenth century even necessities like sewers and water supplies were only introduced after epidemics of cholera had scared the wealthy citizens into action. In the present century while profit-making services such as tramways or public baths have recommended themselves to the councillors, other 'onerous' services, such as the school medical service, have remained at a 'poor law' level. In the opposite direction some socialist councils have been so keen to extend welfare services as to thoughtlessly waste public money (one northern city gives its council-house tenants an annual fortnight's 'holiday' from rent-paying). Graham Wallas, no adverse critic, writing in 1908 of Labour councils, detected

> indications of that good-humoured and not ill-meant laxity in expending public money which . . . lends itself so easily to exploitation by those in whom the habit of giving and taking personal favours has hardened into systematic fraud.[2]

Discussions in committee are sometimes conducted in terms of prejudice rather than of reason. Members frequently fail to grasp the implications of major proposals, yet jib at a detail which is within their own experience (a £25,000 school plan may be passed in a few minutes, while an hour will be spent in deciding how many wash-basins are needed in the teachers' cloak-room). Towards the end of a long committee meeting, members grow dazed by detail and (in Graham Wallas' phrase) fall into a 'waking trance' in which they will assent to almost any proposition put forward by heads of departments—or contrarily they

[1] Early in this century the Labour Party encouraged rising Trade Unionists in industrial areas to enter local councils as a means of training for parliament; after 1945 the Conservatives intervened in local government as a method of combating Socialism, to reinforce their weak position at Westminster.

[2] *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1908), p. 238.

will decide 'they must put their foot down somewhere' and refuse to pass some proposal, having previously agreed to similar proposals without demur.

As local government becomes more complex so the system becomes increasingly dependent upon the paid administrative and technical staff. Most studies of local government devote very inadequate attention to the conditions of service of local government officers. Under some authorities conditions approximate to those obtaining in the civil service before the Trevelyan-Northcote reforms. Although the appointment of some officials (such as the Medical Officer of Health) is dependent upon ministerial approval, and in the case of others (such as Sanitary Inspectors) a national standard qualification is prescribed; in general local bodies make appointments and promotion just as they please, and (to a great extent) grade posts as they think fit. As a rule, initial appointment is decided by arbitrary selection, in which the personal preference of individual councillors is the deciding factor. Promotion goes by seniority, or by favour; there is very little blatant nepotism, but the official who makes himself useful or agreeable to councillors is usually not wasting his time. Most of the various local government services have professional associations which within recent years have instituted professional or technical examinations. Many of these exams are by no means guarantees of high, or even uniform, standards of attainment. They receive only lip service from most councils.

As a result many local government services operate in an uninspired routine fashion. Most of the men and women who enter this sphere of work are looking for security and regular hours; they look upon local government employment as a sort of second-best to the executive or clerical grades of the civil service. Most local government officers are characterised by an absorption in the minutiae of procedure, rather than by imagination and drive. There is a good deal of parochialism and some not very serious inefficiency.

There are a number of checks upon local officials, the most important being that of audit. But cost-accounting is unknown, and no detailed attempt is made to ascertain how public money is spent. The statistics published by local bodies are usually presented in such a way as is favourable, and it is very difficult to

make exact comparisons between the expenditure of different authorities, or to estimate the value received by the public. Undoubtedly a good deal of waste and mediocrity remains undiscovered. Robert Sinclair's sensational *Metropolitan Man* does (in a somewhat one-sided manner) show up some of the mismanagement of London; he draws a picture of the city's rubbish being shuttled all round the metropolis (p. 192)—'the refuse from Hampstead is sent to Paddington. Kensington sends its garbage to Hammersmith, and the garbage of Hammersmith is sent to Fulham' and so on. Lack of co-ordination between authorities or even between departments is a common failing (Surrey County Council used to buy forty different makes of soap!), but perhaps the greatest defect of English local government is the slowness with which it moves. The story of Waterloo Bridge, which started to fall down in 1923 and was not replaced by a new bridge for over twenty years, is only an extreme example. Delay is partly caused by the elaborate procedural machinery through which any important measure must fight its way: sub-committee, committee, full council, ministry; plans, appeals, purchase orders, bills of quantity, tenders—before any move can be made. It is also enhanced by the caution with which officials and councillors (often quite rightly) regard innovations or wider commitments in any form.

Now all these defects—public apathy, the election of interested parties, exaggerated regard for economy or careless extravagance, an inability to think in terms of large-scale expenditure, lack of foresight, prejudice, unregulated recruitment of officials, mediocre quality of staff, inefficiency, delay—all are qualities which are frequently alluded to in official reports from India and Burma, as if they were peculiar to those countries. But local representative bodies almost everywhere suffer similar shortcomings in greater or less degree; they are part of the price of democratic government.

Yet although English local government is so imperfect, it has many achievements to its credit, and as the intervention of the central government into every corner of national life intensifies, local authorities become one of the most important and effective checks upon an overtaxed bureaucracy, and the means whereby local traditions and needs can be safeguarded. English local

government has certain saving characteristics which have prevented it becoming a real failure; some of the more important of these may be briefly examined.

Firstly, in Professor Laski's words 'the system like most things British depends for its successful working on the ability to compromise at pivotal points'; this spirit of compromise operates in many directions. In committee work, it is not usual for matters to be decided by a vote (except in authorities—till recently few—in which there is a definite party line-up, as in the L.C.C.)—almost always the committee will work towards the 'general will', through the framing of proposals broadly acceptable to all shades of opinion. In most councils a balance is kept between the ideas of departmental chiefs based upon 'technical' considerations, and the local knowledge and wants of elected representatives, which usually ensures that an overall programme takes local interests into account, without being overridden by them. In carrying out development schemes (a housing estate, a new school), local authorities usually attempt to reconcile the needs of public interest, and the claims of private property. In these and other ways English local bodies have been saved from excesses; even in councils where one interest is predominant, other interests have (till recently) been respected, and in general public services have advanced in conformity with the needs and capabilities of different sections of the English people.

Modern English local government has been fortunate in developing in an expanding economy. National wealth has kept pace with the growing consciousness of social needs. Local government has, as it were, been maintained out of a continual national surplus. During the first thirty-five years of this century, the annual cost of the country's social services (very largely under local management) was thus expanded from £20,000,000 to £350,000,000. Such an increase was ample enough to cover a good deal of unwise or unnecessary spending. A certain amount of inefficiency was possible, without fatal effects upon social services.

Then although persons engaged in local government both as representatives and as council servants are in general only of average ability, very many authorities have been energised by exceptional individuals or pressure groups. Local government

was the field in which the two most potent groups of modern English political theorists—the Utilitarians and the Fabians—chose to put their ideas into practice. Twice within a century local institutions have been subject to vigorous spring cleaning. In Victorian industrial towns many manufacturers led the long campaign to create communities out of these haphazard urban conglomerations: it was Joseph Chamberlain with his slogan of 'High rates—and a healthy city' who first put into practice modern standards in municipal services. In the countryside the old tradition among the gentry and clergy of service to the community has been maintained into the present century, most often by humbler persons. Upon almost every borough or county council there is somebody—doctor, schoolmistress, or non-conformist minister—with imagination and drive to quicken the more solid qualities of the average run of members. A parallel stimulus is provided by the continual and unexpected emergence of remarkable officials such as John Simon in public health, and Kay-Shuttleworth in education. These men battled valiantly with apathy or entrenched interests to bring about reform. On a less heroic scale, each local authority is moulded by the influence of the Clerk to the Council. Some Town Clerks are bullies, a few are subservient to powerful councillors, but the great majority contrive to guide local affairs effectively without departing from the rôle of senior public servant. The Clerk will sit at the Chairman's right hand, he will review the factors in a situation, explain the powers and restrictions which the law provides, and indicate the courses which are open. By a few apt words he can exclude irrelevancies from debate and recommend a particular line without in any way restricting freedom of discussion. Bagehot's 'government by a public meeting' is in this field successful largely because given direction by the Clerk, possessed as he is of standing, integrity and responsibility.

If a comparison is again made with conditions in India and Burma, i becomes apparent that most of these favourable factors are lacking, although the system in these lands was supposedly adapted from the English model. A spirit of compromise has been notably wanting. In the early days of local self-government the benevolent despotism of the District Officer paid little heed to the representations of non-officials; as years wore on there was no

great attempt to meet the aspirations of Indian politicians; administrative efficiency remained paramount. When at last local bodies were handed over to popular control, many new boards misapplied democracy, and conducted affairs strictly upon party or personal lines of cleavage with little consideration for their opponents' views, and small respect for government advice. A spirit of compromise and co-operation was present in few boards, but it was in these few (of which Bombay Corporation was one) that the greatest measure of success was obtained.

The buoyancy in the British national income which permitted a rapid expansion of public services had no parallel in India or Burma. Although there was a rise in their national incomes, the increase was absorbed by a simultaneous rise in population, creating even bigger problems for local authorities. In particular there was an ever greater volume of rural unemployed drifting into the cities in search of work, so that urban public health measures or housing regulations came under ever greater strain. Indian and Burmese local authorities never enjoyed the advantage of (genuinely) greater resources: improvements could only be provided by a redistribution of national income, which local bodies were neither competent nor willing to carry out.

Indian and Burmese local government has lacked the guidance of public men or devoted servants which has enlivened English authorities. Indian Liberals with their warm interest in social problems did show keen enthusiasm for local self-government in the early days, but in common with other political groups they have since become immersed in the drama of national politics. All too often local worthies (for reasons which will be examined in detail) have failed to play their proper part on local boards. And in almost every direction India, and more particularly Burma, has suffered from a shortage of public men. As the higher administration, or ministerial office in national or provincial politics offered new opportunities to the leading men of affairs, so the numbers interested in local matters fell away.

Moreover no class of officers with the standing or integrity of the English 'clerk to the council' grew up. In the pre-Dyarchy boards the District Magistrate was both chairman and head of the executive in one, a dominant personality beside whom the secretary was a mere factotum. Under 'popular' rule the mem-

bers of many local bodies have themselves attempted to take over the functions of the District Magistrate as head of the executive, confining the authority of the secretary to trivial matters. When Government has attempted to remedy the resulting confusion by recommending the appointment of a responsible Chief Officer, this has usually been resisted by members as the return of official control.

It is perhaps more apparent now than it was in the days of Victorian Liberalism, that attempts to endow other nations with an English system of representative government run the risk of passing on all the failings and temptations of democracy, while there is no guarantee that other nations will evolve the same safeguards which have emerged from the English social system.

Indian and Burmese local government has suffered from other defects common to the institutions of these countries in their transition from a static traditional order to a modern society of expanding ideas and new techniques. Custom and tradition, full of meaning and importance in the world of Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam, become irrelevant or even obstructive in the new world of western political thought and technical invention. If a clash between old and new results, the onus of blame does not rest upon the structure of local government.

Just before 1914, in certain U.P. municipal elections 'the various candidates preferred to substitute for open election the more simple process of casting lots in a temple',[1] a procedure hallowed by tradition. In Rangoon 'large numbers of crows collect [near the General Hospital] and cause a great deal of annoyance to the patients' but 'a majority of the Municipal Committee representing the Buddhist and Hindu communities have taken exception to the killing of the crows' because the taking of life is abhorent to their religions.[2] The objection was long sustained but in time these groups came to realise that the nuisance could not be tolerated. When electricity supplies were being extended to U.P. towns in the 1920's and 1930's, considerable opposition was voiced by orthodox Muslims on the grounds that the tazias carried in Mohurrum processions would be interfered with. These great ceremonial emblems of mourning may never be lowered; at the same time no deviation from the

[1] U.P., Municipal Reports, 1913–14. [2] Rangoon, Municipal Report, 1920–1.

traditional processional route is tolerable. In some small municipalities such as Sikandrabad and Chandpur, electrification was brought to a halt by the volume of protest, but in the end the provision of high cables or underground wires got round the problem almost everywhere.

Such obvious clashes between the ideas of East and West will be recognised by the most impatient advocate of reform as unavoidable in the epic readjustment from old to new. But there is a twilight area of discord in which the attitudes of Indians or Burmans are by no means clear. Asians who are concerned in the running of new western institutions may outwardly conform to western standards, and yet cling to traditional beliefs in their hearts. On the other side radicals who have mentally discarded the rules of the past as cumbersome and out-of-date, may still find it prudent or convenient to give lip-service to ancient customs.

In the chapters that follow there are accounts of members of boards and local government staff who appear to be abusing their position by accepting bribes, evading their own obligations as ratepayers, and passively or actively promoting nepotism—the appointment and preferment of relations or caste-fellows. Is this evidence of a feeble or corrupt approach to public life, or a part of the custom of India and Burma? And are the practices of the past gradually ceasing to be considered valid so that sometimes the sanction of custom is exploited to cover deliberate malversation? Indian and Burmese attitudes to public office have begun to change, and may be expected to change more. The description which immediately follows of aspects of the 'climate of opinion' which governed local bodies was probably applicable to the great majority of persons connected with local government forty years ago. By the 1930's many of the more conservative, the less educated and the rustic members of local bodies were still thinking in these terms, but rising leaders of the 'left' had rejected such values.

Both in Burma and India, the traditional attitude to public office, high or petty, permitted the holder to make a profit from the discharge of his public duties. Governor or Judge, peon or constable, to each and all, members of the public who required their services or desired their favours would give presents upon

the scale laid down by custom. An upright official would demand or accept no more than was customary, and would discharge his duties for the common good; a less honourable man would deliberately exploit his powers to exact the maximum bribe, and might even auction his favours to the highest bidder. If public money went through an official's hands, be he Bakshi—paymaster of a royal army, or toll-gate attendant, then (as in eighteenth-century England) if he used the money for his own profit no evil was thought, providing that he could show proper accounts and a convincing balance when required. In the making of appointments, a superior official (particularly a Hindu) would provide for all the members of his family (using the word in its broadest sense), and then for his fellows in tribe or caste. Any official who did not provide positions for his own folk would have been stigmatised as ungrateful and unnatural.

Many of these customs were carried over into British administration. Memoirs of pre-Mutiny days frequently record sensational frauds perpetrated by the Company's British and Indian servants, but as the century went on the bribery and manipulation of previous days was largely confined to officials of, or below, the rank of tahsildar, mamlatdar or myook. The custom of regard for family interest flourished exceedingly under the Company; the introduction of open examinations for 'covenanted' appointments let in outside candidates, but many British 'service' families still looked upon an Indian career almost as a right, up to the transfer of power. The nomination of Indians to the provincial services whereby members of Indian 'service' families kept up their numbers lasted until very recently. If the old customs lingered on, muted and made respectable, in Government service, it was not surprising that they re-appeared in a somewhat crude form when local bodies were freed from official control.

Sometimes the new corruption seemed to go beyond the limits permitted by custom, and local feeling would be disgusted. But Indians (and to a lesser extent Burmans) are patient, and regard the government as absolute: 'Sirkar manbap hain'. The public acquiesces in the immutable vagaries of authority—but also expects authority to take the lead when anything requires to be done. The ordinary Indian or Burman is often characterised in

official reviews of local government as 'apathetic' because of a failure to dislodge corrupt boards or individual members, or to use initiative in developing schemes of self-help. But this so-called 'apathy' (rather, acquiescence in the workings of fate) is an accepted part of the life of the East. It is true that village opinion does operate on a limited scale and mainly in respect of social and quasi-religious matters which are ceasing to be of vital importance; but public spirit, in English terms of service to a wider community, could only arise after much education and contact with a wider world.

A history of modern local government in India and Burma is not a record of bold development or striking achievement. Some English critics have been led to conclude that western local institutions cannot be made to work in an eastern environment through a lack of local public spirit; Indian apologists have often spoken of the structure of local government as a hollow sham, hamstrung by bureaucracy, providing no outlet for popular activity. There is some truth in both these view-points, but they are not conclusive. The chapters that follow have to record delays and shortcomings—and often in the end frustration and disillusionment. But in so many cases these defects arise out of the difficulties which have been rehearsed in these opening pages: the pinch of poverty, inadequate leadership, the failings common to that most delicate system of government—democracy, and maladjustment between the custom of the East and the innovations of the West. It would be tedious to be continually reminding the reader of these factors throughout this work, but local government in India and Burma can only be judged with equity if allowance is made for the restrictions which have cramped its progress. In the full perspective of historical development, the period covered by this study can only be judged with real finality when the years unfold the future course of political evolution in independent India, Pakistan and Burma.

Part I

THE YEARS OF OFFICIAL TUTELAGE

CHAPTER I

Indian and Burmese Systems of Local Government

LOCAL government in present-day India, Pakistan and Burma has inherited but little from indigenous local institutions. A good deal of indigenous taxation has been retained in modern local finance: the 'changi' of Muslim rulers, the Sikh 'dharat', the 'muhtarafa' of Maratha towns have a descendant in today's octroi; the 'thathameda' of the Burmese kings is still levied for local purposes; 'rahdari', the tolls and fees which proliferated with the decline of the Mughuls have modern counterparts. But from the structure and procedure of earlier local institutions almost nothing has been incorporated into modern local government.

Throughout wide areas of India a period of anarchy or military despotism intervened between the breakdown of Mughul rule and annexation by the East India Company. In this interregnum the ties of the social framework were loosened, and in many places local institutions had been perverted or sapped before British officials had any opportunity to assess their value. In Bengal almost all traces of village autonomy were obliterated; in the ceded districts of Oudh only the shell remained of the centralised municipal organisation of Mughul times.

Indian society in the eighteenth century was predominantly rural in character; if today eight out of nine people live in the countryside, the proportion then was even higher. Most of the 'towns' were small market places of perhaps 5,000 to 20,000 souls. Their merchants, landlords and artisans were all a part of the economy of the surrounding fields and hamlets; sometimes—as with the 'karba' of Oudh, the market town and its associated villages formed a distinct social unit.

The few genuine urban communities arose out of political and

religious factors. The headquarters of government were chosen for administrative or strategic reasons, and grew in size as the centres of court life and the cantonments of the royal troops, attracting a multitude of 'camp followers'. Delhi, the Imperial capital, was the greatest, comprising altogether about half a million citizens in the eighteenth century; Lahore, Multan and other headquarters of Mughul provinces were smaller but similar in character. As independent rulers stood forth from the ruins of Aurangzeb's empire, their courts also developed into important urban centres; thus Murshidabad, Lucknow, Poona, Hyderabad, Lahore became important cities.[1] Their citizens included makers of luxury goods, great bankers, poets, entertainers, soldiers of fortune; around them grew up palaces, many-storied dwellings in narrow streets, bathing places, and busy bazaars. The population of some of these cities was a quarter of a million, or even more. The only other distinct urban areas were the temple cities of Hinduism; such as Kashi, Madura, Prayag, and Mathura, as well as the holy city of the Sikhs, Amritsar. These towns included schools and colleges, societies of dedicated persons, eating-houses and other establishments catering for pilgrims, as well as merchants, craftsmen, scribes and others who were essentially city dwellers. Of these temple cities the largest was Kashi, or Benares, with a permanent population of some 180,000. In between the great cities and the little market centres there were very few towns of middling size; these, like Gwalior, Seringapatam and Najibabad, were mainly the headquarters of lesser princes or military adventurers.

The fall from power, or the departure of a ruler would often condemn a city to gradual extinction. Fathpur Sikri is the most dramatic example; Fyzabad became nothing when the Nawabs of Oudh moved their court to Lucknow; Murshidabad gradually declined with the political eclipse of its Nawab, from a city of 150,000 inhabitants to the 10,000 of today.

It can be said of eighteenth-century India that 'the town attracts the trade, and not the trade the town'. Apart from the Company's Presidency towns, no city was built upon industry or commerce; rather trade gravitated to the court or camp which

[1] As in modern Indian municipal practice, 'city' will be used for towns of over 100,000 population.

promised a rich market. Partial exceptions were Surat, Patna, Ahmadabad: these were in origin Mughul provincial capitals, but their growth was largely stimulated by their importance as entrepôts, centres of trade and industry. Municipal government reflected these urban origins—official and administrative rather than commercial and bourgeois; it was autocratic in form, especially as it developed in the Muslim period.

In the words of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, 'the Mughuls were essentially an urban people in India', and their most distinctive achievements in the sphere of local government were in urban administration. The office of Kotwal was developed as the keystone of municipal organisation; appointed under the sanad of the Emperor, the kotwal was a person of high status. Law and order was his first responsibility, and he maintained a body of horse, city guards and an army of spies. Almost every aspect of city life came under his charge; he appointed a headman or 'mir muhalla' for every ward, he kept a register of houses and roads, and directed the location of cemeteries, slaughter-houses, and sweeper colonies. He controlled the markets, checked weights and measures, supervised local prices. He levied the local taxes, market dues, tolls and transit duties.[1]

It was a centralised autocratic régime, but usually responsive if not responsible to local opinion—that is, to the separate feelings of the different 'interests', for medieval India was a *communitas communitatum*. The Hindu caste system divided society into separate closed social units, and through the authority of the caste panchayat accustomed a man to regard himself first as a member of a hereditary caste group, and only second as a dweller in a particular area—although often of course the two loyalties coincided. The Muslims also belonged to non-territorial trade or tribal groupings, but except in the north-west, their position as a minority—even though they were often the conquerors—led them to emphasise their unity in their faith, rather than to make much of their divisions. Each ward or muhalla of a city would usually comprise a separate caste or trade group, and would have its own social organisation or 'biradari'. Usually the head of the community or guild would

[1] Cf. P. Saran, *Provincial Government of the Mughuls* (Allahabad, 1941), pp. 231–5. The Kotwal was also the instrument of town government in south India.

also be head—mir—of the muhalla. In any event the trading classes were sufficiently important to have the ear of the kotwal, and the sweepers and other humble folk had their own effective methods of obtaining recognition of their meagre customary rights and practices.

An important element in urban life was the Indian tradition of public charity. Much that is now the corporate responsibility of the community, such as the provision of wells, tanks and gardens, or the endowment of schools, was provided by individual piety. No doubt the city streets were filthy, with casual obstructions at every turn, sanitation and drainage were non-existent, pestilence and fire frequent; but these were also common to contemporary European cities, and the absence of large scale industry excluded the worst problems of overcrowding and waste disposal.

The market towns had no elaborate system of municipal government; a revenue official might with the assistance of the heads of trade or caste panchayats see to simple civic requirements, such as the provision of night watchmen, a few wells, and perhaps a dharmasala, or rest-house.

But in estimating the character of the old Indian local government, the town is of little importance beside the countryside where lived the great majority of the people. The countryside in the eighteenth century was at first glance not unlike the familiar rural scene of today, but village life was both more isolated and more vulnerable. Indian country by-roads are few and bad today, but then they were non-existent; even the Mughul trunk-roads had become impassable and hazardous. Transport, dependent on the pack-horse or the runner, was nowhere developed. Each village was isolated—often separated from neighbouring hamlets, by scrub jungle or waste-land. Village life was a little world of its own: village society made its own laws, and its own decisions. There was the occasional threat of the tyrannical landlord, the robber or even the invader who would strike without provocation, and without mercy. Often these dangers served as a further stimulus to village organisation and unity.

Agricultural communities of perhaps five hundred souls were the 'normal' in the Ganges plains, and much of central and southern India, but there were many other kinds of rural

organisation of widely differing types. One may instance the aboriginal forest folk, mainly hunters, some half-dozen families dwelling together. In contrast to such narrow social units, there was the tribal society of much of the western Punjab and Sind, whose peoples had certain affinities with the nomads of central Asia. The barren undulating lands beyond the Jhelum shaped a distinctive way of life; a pastoral economy, with wider horizons based on tribal groupings, rather than a close-knit village life.

Agricultural villages were of many kinds: there were villages consisting of caste or tribal groups, villages where a ruling minority of the cultivators were descendants of the original landholders, villages under the rule of one powerful headman, and others controlled by the agent of some distant landlord. These differences were reflected in various kinds of social organisation.

The Mughuls had interfered very little with the ancient customs of village government; they incorporated the village into the administration as a unit for revenue and police purposes only. The state dealt through the headman or muqaddam who was held responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the restitution of theft within the area of his authority. The judicial powers of the village council, the panchayat, were considerably curtailed under the Mughuls, otherwise local affairs remained unregulated from above, and the village officers and servants were answerable primarily to the panchayat.

This body was only rarely representative of the village as a whole: it might be drawn from the members of the founding-families, or from the Brahmins and superior cultivators. The menials and landless men had almost no say in its affairs, except perhaps in south India where panchayats were often made up of a representative of each of the constituent communities of the village including the sudras, but probably not the pariahs. Panchayats supervised almost all the affairs of the village, decided disputes, and apportioned taxes. They were conservative bodies, often 'dilatory, unenterprising and far from impartial';[1] but they gave dignity and order to village life, and their deliberations had the great weight of religion and custom—'In the panchayat is God'.

An authentic picture of the old panchayat is given in this

[1] J. H. Drummond, *Panchayats in India*, pp. 5–6.

transcription of the statement of an Oudh villager recorded by Sir W. H. Sleeman:

> When a man suffers wrong, the wrong doer is summoned before the elders or most respectable men of his village or clan; and if he denies the charge or refuses redress, he is told to bathe, put his hand upon the peepul tree and declare aloud his innocence. If he refuses, he is commanded to restore what he has taken, or make suitable reparations; and if he refuses to do this, he is punished by the odium of all and his life becomes miserable. A man does not put his hand upon the sacred tree and deny the truth—the gods sit in it and know all things.[1]

The primacy of the panchayat was far from universal even in Mughul times: many villages were under the rule of a landlord or his agent. Even in so-called ryotwari provinces this was so; in parts of Gujarat and Khandesh for instance, the descendants of leading Thakur families exercised quasi-feudal authority. Although Indian village government has never been 'democratic' in western terms, there was a sense in which the whole body of the villagers took their part in affairs. The old panchayat, whether as a caste tribunal or as a judicial or administrative body, normally conducted its deliberations in the presence of all who cared to attend. The onlookers although having no direct share in the proceedings formed a sort of 'chorus'; decisions were eventually reached under the stars after the interested parties had been heard, and the elders had given their views at great length. All the time the reactions of the listening crowd would be registered, and would have their influence. The evening would become part of the history of the village; if one of the elders showed partiality or foolishness, this would be remembered by his friends—and by the village menials. If the village was under the rule of a feudal lord, this tacit submission to public opinion would still operate to some extent in his darbar. The attendant crowd in its respect for authority would confine its observations to an occasional 'shabash', but everyone present considered that he was playing a part in the proceedings. In such ways the inhabitants identified themselves with the life and government of their village.

[1] Sir W. H. Sleeman, *A Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–50* (London, 1858), ii, 66–7.

The 'time of troubles' which preceded British rule carried widespread instability into the social framework of town and countryside. The collapse of a central authority meant the disruption of trade, and the fall of thrones meant the disappearance of court patronage. Cities lost their *raison d'être*, and their prosperity and numbers dwindled. The despotic powers of the kotwal lent themselves to extortion and petty tyranny once the Imperial authority became insecure; trade was mulcted by innumerable transit duties for private gain, while the public services were neglected. Sometimes pressure came from outside: invading armies debouched into northern and central India, looting as they passed, ravaging town and countryside.

The response of the village community was varied: a microcosm of eighteenth-century India may be seen in events in Oudh and Hindustan. The sturdy yeomen who live in Hindustan (in the country between Delhi and Agra)—Jats, Ahirs and Gujars—stood up to the successive waves of invasion. They gathered in large central villages behind strong walls and brass cannon to resist the Imperial tax-gatherer, the Pathan, Maratha and Sikh alike. The village actually gained in strength and cohesion, and the echoes of this challenge are evident in the populous communities and flourishing panchayats often found in this area today. From his Delhi experiences, Metcalfe drew his famous picture of the 'little republics' which has often been loosely applied to the whole of the sub-continent; had Metcalfe's service lain some leagues to the east, he would have written otherwise.

In Oudh the village community was more often broken by these trials. There was the tax-gatherer from Lucknow with his alien mercenaries, pillaging and burning, hauling loot and prisoners back to the capital. And there was the taluqdar overlord, who might order his peasants to leave their fields unsown, and march away with their beasts into the terai jungle until the tax-gatherer in despair of ever collecting his revenue would accede to the taluqdar's terms. Amid these violent disruptions the voice of the panchayat went unheard. But a few miles away in a district isolated by malarial rivers or forest, village autonomy might still flourish; there are still many deserted village sites in Oudh upon raised ground in unapproachable positions, evidence of a successful stand against oppression.

Such conditions prevailed in many parts of India. Under the protection of a central fortified village the stouter rural communities would assert their independence. When the pressure was too great, the countryside fell under the domination of some short-lived adventurer; sometimes fields and cottages were abandoned, and the jungle resumed its sway; elsewhere natural barriers might allow the people to follow undisturbed their immemorial toil. All these different developments could be seen in the eighteenth century in Punjab, Maharashtra, Malwa and smaller areas elsewhere.

Burma under the rule of the Konbaung dynasty was immune from social breakdown until the nineteenth century. It was, and is, a country with a great variety of modes of living. There was but one big city, the capital, 'The City of Jewels', 'The Immortal City', 'The Cluster of Gems'. The prosperity of the capital depended entirely upon the fortunes of the royal court and administration; under Mindon Min its numbers rose to about 200,000. Outside the inner moated city with its palaces and temples, Mandalay still retained the character of an enormous village, without municipal services of any kind.

The only other town of importance at the beginning of the nineteenth century was Rangoon. The population could not have exceeded 30,000, but these included a mercantile community of Armenians, Chinese, Indians and a few Europeans. All the remaining 'towns' were market centres of a few thousand souls. Town administration was less detailed and uniform than in Mughul India. The principal towns were placed under governors (myo wuns) assisted by so-called 'town scribes' (myo sa ye) who were in effect head constables. Towns were divided into wards—ayats (Rangoon in 1826 comprised eight such ayats); each ward was under the ayat gaung who combined the rôles of police officer and revenue collector—and in a sense, local representative. There are references to 'town elders' who were consulted by the myo sa ye in important matters, but it seems probable that town government was generally autocratic, and municipal services undeveloped.

Rural Burma contained as much variety, relative to its size, as India. Most Upper Burma villages were stable communities, some having ancient histories; some Lower Burma villages con-

sisted of indigenous communities like the Mons, others were direct off-shoots of villages in Upper Burma—groups who had migrated together to find new homes. Some villages were organised on a craft basis, and others were composed of individuals of varied origins united only in a desire for new land. Communications down the Irrawaddy were good, and the river villages were much under the eye of the central government. Elsewhere society was dominated by the provincial governor—and above all by the hereditary 'squires', the myo thugyis. When the hills began, the king's suzerainty faded to a shadow; the Shan Sawbwas, or the petty chiefs of the Kachin and other tribes, were all the government the hill people knew.

The social organisation of Upper Burma was simple, but vigorous and healthy; Lower Burma with a higher civilisation to draw on, was widely disorganised. Arakan, Tenasserim and Pegu had been the scene of constant warfare in the eighteenth century. Many of the indigenous peoples, particularly the Mons and Arakanese, had been driven from their homes, squeezed of men, money and materials. Local society had been disrupted, roads were neglected, hereditary village leaders had lost their authority and had been largely displaced by Burmese thugyis (headmen) appointed from Ava.

The traditional organisation of local government as found in Upper Burma, was in the hands of the village headman (ywa gaung or ywa thugyi) underneath the myo thugyi. The headman's office was hereditary; he was usually well educated and acted as village accountant, sometimes as a judge. He saw that the village stockade was maintained for defence, and he organised watch and ward. As in Mughul India, the headman was held responsible for robberies within his jurisdiction and had to make good stolen property. He directed the maintenance of local communications and village works, being entitled to call upon the labour of the whole village; he administered summary justice, and presided over the apportionment of village taxation along with the village elders (ywa lugyis). In the more outlying parts of Burma village autonomy would be all the greater, the payment of annual tribute and the liability for war service more uncertain.

As in India, religion and custom reigned over village affairs;

the dhammathat, the four rules of the Buddhist law, were universally acknowledged. Disputes were frequently settled by the method of abhidhama chi—the taking of a ceremonial oath among the assembled villagers. Public opinion was the sanction of this concept of law. Similarly the corporate activities of the village, such as the organisation of defence and road-building, were founded upon a public opinion which soon made life unpleasant for the man who shirked his obligations. The provision of extra amenities—pagodas, rest-houses, bridges, ferries and the beloved 'pwes' or drama shows—was usually made by a wealthy villager. The tradition of public charity was even stronger in Burma than in India. Education, the prerogative of almost every Burmese boy, was entirely the province of the phongyi (the monk), who accepted no advice from the laity.

The difference between the stable vigorous village life of Upper Burma, and the fragmented society of Lower Burma is underlined by the nature of the principal local taxes—thathameda, and the capitation tax. In Upper Burma the corporate capacity of the village was recognised, the whole village being responsible for a joint sum; this was apportioned amongst households (not individuals) according to their varying capacities to pay. The work of assessment was done by the ywa lugyis, the elders, acting as 'thamadis'. The thamadis were chosen by the people as a whole, and their decisions were always accepted without question.[1] In Lower Burma the capitation tax was first instituted as a means of compiling a roll of a conquered race: it was levied at a flat rate as a poll tax first on the Karens, and later on the Mons; it was always bitterly resented as a mark of subjection. The village had no share in its collection, which was made by the Burmese thugyi.

Both in India (in Bengal and Bihar), and in Lower Burma, the first British apprenticeship in administration was served in provinces where the most typical indigenous institutions had already been submerged by a super-imposed system, whose sole purpose was the collection of revenue. Continuity between the new forms of government and the local institutions of old was therefore almost impossible.

[1] The village elders also met to decide matrimonial disputes, but there was no established conciliar form of village government like the Indian panchayat.

CHAPTER II

The Foundations of Modern Local Government, 1687 to 1880

FROM the earliest days of the English East India Company, the Directors gave their servants in the East far greater local freedom than was enjoyed by the officials of Portugal and Holland in the Indies. In some periods the little settlements were dependent on their own resources for months or years on end.

In the late seventeenth century the Company's Presidencies each consisted of an English town-centre with Indian suburbs (the 'White Town' and 'Black Town') and were at first directly governed by the President and Council. In writing to the Madras Council on 28 September 1687, the Directors, with the consent of the Crown, advised the setting up of a municipal corporation for Madras; observing that

> the people would more willingly and liberally disburse five shillings towards the public good being taxed by themselves, than sixpence imposed by our despotical powers (notwithstanding they shall submit when we see cause) . . .

The Directors forwarded a copy of the charter granted to the Borough of Portsmouth to serve as a model; Sir Josia Child, Governor of the Company, being Mayor of Portsmouth. They laid down that the Town Clerk and the (judicial) Recorder must be Englishmen, but that the Court of Aldermen should consist of three English freemen, three Portuguese, and seven 'Moors and Gentoos'—all to be chosen by a general body of 'burgesses'. The aldermen were to elect one of their number to serve as Mayor, and in deliberately creating an Indian majority in the Court of Aldermen, the Directors seem to have been quite willing that the Mayor should be other than an Englishman. The Corporation was to be responsible for a number of public services, including

the upkeep of a town-hall and a school. Like English boroughs of the day, the Corporation was a judicial body, constituting a court of record in civil and criminal causes. The Corporation came into being in September 1688, but the expectations of the Directors that local self-government would stimulate greater taxation were sadly disappointed. The inhabitants objected strongly to new taxes, and municipal institutions did not prosper.

In 1726 a second municipal charter was issued, setting up municipal bodies for Calcutta and Bombay, and re-constituting the Madras municipality. The new Corporations were each to consist of a Mayor and nine Aldermen, seven of whom must be British-born. Each year the aldermen were to submit the names of two candidates for mayoral office from among their number to the Governor in Council for a final selection. The charter represented a set-back in political development: in contemporary parlance, the earlier 'open corporation' of Madras had been succeeded by 'closed corporations'. The new bodies were largely confined to the exercise of judicial functions. In Bombay there was an attempt to exercise control of nuisances, and a town constabulary maintained some sort of order, but all those who write of Calcutta in the eighteenth century combine to deplore the lack of civic order in this 'undrained swamp'; filth lying in profusion everywhere, a cemetery in the very heart of the capital, and dacoities within hark of Government House.

The renewal of the Company's charter in 1793 was the occasion for a new attempt to provide municipal organisation for the Presidency towns. The Justices assembled at general or quarter sessions were authorised to appoint scavengers, to repair the streets and to assess households for the payment of rates. The J.P.s were largely senior Company's servants, but in due course they included the leading citizens, Indian as well as British. The Justices' régime lasted for many decades. In Bombay the leading citizens, and notably the great Parsee shipbuilders and merchants soon gave evidence of civic qualities of acumen and generosity, and yet the Bench of Justices was continually at odds with the Government, and sometimes with the Courts. The English mercantile community of Calcutta somewhat conspicuously failed in their civic obligations and even protested at increased taxes, so manifestly necessary for municipal improve-

ments. The Madras Corporation was too often timid and dilatory in tackling the town's problems. In each city there was a gradual accumulation of questions which a quasi-judicial administration was clearly unfitted to solve.

The first attempts to provide machinery more capable of directing civic affairs came in the 1840's, when the principle of election was introduced to a very limited extent. In 1845 the Bombay J.P.s were compelled to hand over direct responsibility for municipal services to a Board of Conservancy composed of seven members, to which the J.P.s elected five of their number (three Indians and two Englishmen).[1] A similar system was introduced into Calcutta in 1847. Seven 'commissioners for the improvement of the city' were given executive power, and of these four were elected by the substantial ratepayers.[2] These measures did not produce a system of management capable of solving the growing problems of sewage disposal, overcrowding, and the need for proper water supplies. Legislation passed in 1856 and 1858 introduced more or less similar systems in each of the three cities. Municipal administration was entrusted to 'a body corporate' of three salaried Commissioners, appointed by the Presidency Government. Public control was almost entirely excluded, though in Bombay the J.P.s were permitted to elect two of the commissioners. But once again the solution involved a division of power which soon served as a brake on progress.

Meanwhile British rule had been transformed from the management of a few trading posts into the government of a sub-continent. In the realm of local government, the first changes came in the towns. The absolute powers of the kotwal could not be given to a Pathan soldier of fortune or a Bengali pandit within the framework of Pitt's India Act and the Regulations. Warren Hastings appointed the able Ali Ibrahim Khan to be Kotwal of Benares, but under Cornwallis he was replaced by a British magistrate. The office of kotwal declined into that of a modern Deputy Superintendent, in charge of the city police.

A new municipal system grew up haphazard without legislative sanction or centralised direction. In the North-Western

[1] A Board of Conservancy, largely composed of officials, was constituted in 1846 to manage the municipal affairs of the new port of Karachi.

[2] At the first election three Indians and one Englishman were returned.

Provinces (now U.P.), almost as soon as the civil government was established, committees known as 'local agencies' were appointed in the larger towns to assist the District Magistrate in the raising of funds for purposes of police, conservancy and road repairs. Rents from government property—'nazul'—were sometimes available to finance hospitals. A house-tax was imposed in the principal cities to provide for police and watchmen; any surplus was used for sanitary measures. The magistrate often found considerable difficulty in realising the tax; it was usually easier to persuade the leading citizens to arrange for the construction of drains or other works themselves. They would co-operate if they could see their money laid out in bricks and mortar, whereas they would resist strongly a tax whose purpose they did not understand. In Bareilly the inhabitants rose in revolt against the tax proposals, and had to be put down by the military.

An early plea for proper municipal organisation was contained in Charles Trevelyan's 'Report on Town Duties', of 1833. In recommending the abolition of these levies on trade, Trevelyan suggests that the financial relief afforded will encourage the citizens to submit voluntarily to municipal taxes and 'will induce the societies of towns to associate themselves in regularly constituted bodies for the accomplishment of civic objects'. But these sentiments were somewhat premature. It was not till 1835 that England saw the Municipal Corporations Act whereby, in Sir Ivor Jennings' phrase, 'municipal corporations ceased to be forms of property and became instruments of government'. However, in the 1830's and '40's the ideas of Bentham, and the Evangelical conscience, rapidly grew in influence among the rising generation of Anglo-Indian officials. There was a new emphasis on efficiency in administration, and a concern for the welfare of India.

Act X of 1842 provided the first formal measure of municipal organisation; it applied only to the Bengal Presidency. A Town Committee could be set up for sanitary purposes upon application by two-thirds of the householders. The act was practically inoperative in Bengal proper: it was introduced in Serampore and there the townspeople not only protested, but prosecuted the District Magistrate in the Supreme Court and won damages

against him. The act was introduced into two hill-stations at the request of the European residents—first in Mussooree in 1842, then in Naini Tal in 1845, but it was not a success in either place.

Meanwhile Bombay Presidency was making a beginning in municipal affairs. Taxes for municipal purposes were levied in seven towns (including Ahmadabad, Surat and Belgaum) from the earliest days of British rule. In 1840, when replying to the Government of India on the abolition of transit duties—the 'muhtarafa'—the Bombay Government suggested they be converted into a municipal tax. The central government refused this proposal, and experience in Belgaum from 1848 seemed to demonstrate that people would be willing to pay taxes for municipal 'improvements'. This encouraged the Government of India to draft a new measure, Act XXVI of 1850. The setting up of a municipality was still dependent on the wishes of the inhabitants; municipal functions included conservancy, road repairs and lighting, the framing of by-laws, and their enforcement by fines. Powers of taxation (in contradistinction to the 1842 Act) included the levy of indirect taxes.

In Bengal Presidency this measure was first employed to regulate the development of growing hill-stations such as Simla and Darjeeling. Altogether it was introduced into four towns in lower Bengal, four in Punjab and about twenty in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (see Table 1). In Madras Presidency, Vizagapatam launched a successful municipal system in 1858 which rapidly carried out many improvements; six other towns started so-called 'Voluntary Municipal Associations', but in general the act remained inoperative. Activity in Bombay completely outpaced all other provinces: by 1858, the Municipal Act had been applied in 352 towns and villages. A large number of these were in the Konkan: no less than 292 municipalities were established in the Satara District alone. Many of these 'municipalities' were villages with two or three thousand inhabitants, and were able to support only the most rudimentary municipal institutions. But in the larger Bombay towns the foundations, at least, of civic government were laid in the 1850's and '60's. In the great majority of towns the 1850 Act was never formally introduced. 'Local funds' provided a few sketchy public

TABLE 1

DATES OF ESTABLISHMENT OF SOME EARLY INDIAN MUNICIPALITIES

	Bombay	Madras	Bengal	North-Western Provinces	Punjab	Central Provinces
1842			← ACT X (BENGAL) → Mussooree[1]			
1845			Hooghly	Naini Tal[1]		
1846	Karachi: Board of Conservancy		Serampore (dissolved 1849)			
1850	← ACT XXVI → Darjeeling					
1851	Belgaum				Simla	
1852	Surat, Broach, Karachi (re-constituted)				Jullundur	
1853	Sholapur, Satara, Athni					
1854	Ahmednagar					
1855	Balsar, Kalyan					
1856	Poona, Jambusar		Nasirabad (E. Bengal)			
1857	Kaira			Dehra Dun		
1858	Ahmadabad	Vizagapatam		Bareilly		
1859						
1860						

[1] Reconstituted under Act XXVI in 1850.

	Bombay	Madras	Bengal	North-Western Provinces	Punjab	Central Provinces
1861		Vizianagram,[1] Bimlipatam[1]	Sherpore (E. Bengal)	Cawnpore		
1862	Thana		Howrah	Lucknow, Budaun, Bisalpur	Ambala	
1863				Agra, Allahabad, Moradabad, Chandausi	Delhi	
1864	Nasik		*Municipal Act* Dacca, Chittagong, Patna, Comillah	Meerut, Almora, Etawah		Jubbalpore
1865		*Municipal Act*	Burdwan, Gaya, Serampore, Arrah, Midnapore, Hooghly			
1866		Trichinopoly, etc.				
1867				Saharanpur	*Municipal Act* Lahore, Rawalpindi Ferozepore	
1868			*Municipal Act* Brahmanbaria	*Municipal Act* Benares	Amritsar	
	Total numbers of municipalities by 1870					
	(about) 200	44	65	67	127	(about) 40

[1] 'Voluntary associations'.

services, relying on a house tax of doubtful legality, or the levy of 'changi'—the old tax on commodities—as in Punjab. The Town Police Act of 1856 sanctioned the imposition of local taxes under the District Magistrate's order, thus avoiding any need to secure the assent of the inhabitants. This act was widely introduced in the North-Western Provinces and in many Bengal towns.

The origins of municipal life in Malaya also date from the 1850's. The setting up of Municipal Committees for Malacca and Singapore was authorised by Act XXVII of 1856. The committees were to consist of five members: the Resident Councillor, another Government nominee, and three persons elected by the ratepayers.

Government activity in the Indian countryside in the early nineteenth century was almost entirely confined to the work of revenue settlement. The first officials had to work, like Warren Hastings, by 'rule of false', often with harmful effects to village community life. Throughout Bengal, Bihar and part of Madras, village society was subordinated permanently to landlord rule. Elsewhere, different ideas prevailed: throughout much of Bombay and Madras, the cultivator was recognised as proprietor, while, in the Upper Provinces, the joint-village form of tenure was usual.

In Bombay and Madras, the ancient village system was known and commended by Munro, Elphinstone and others; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, panchayats were awarded statutory recognition as petty courts in both presidencies. But they received insufficient encouragement from either the revenue or judicial heads of districts. Their functions in the allotment and collection of the land-revenue lapsed (despite the protests of Elphinstone) in favour of direct dealings with each tenant; their influence in matters of arbitration was enfeebled by the overbearing daroga, and the dreaded power of the Sadr courts. In the upper provinces in the early days, panchayats were consulted in cases of disputes between villages over land questions, but here too the influence of both revenue and judicial administration was to destroy village solidarity and emphasise the individual in society. Nowhere was the corporate life of the village deliberately undermined, but the old order was slowly weakened by the mere fact of contact with the new government

with its uniformity, its centralisation and its alien courts of law. As Dr. Spear has observed, 'the Indian village had survived down the ages *because* of constant neglect by governments'.[1] Here and there the old panchayats retained their vitality, but over most of India they were dying and had ceased to have any real importance by the 1850's or '60's.

The new systems of rural local government were artificial inventions, having no connection with the old ways. As the District Magistrate was the keystone of the revenue system, so the district became the unit of local government. In Bengal proper where government officials were almost entirely out of touch with daily life, the only development towards rural local government was the setting up in 1823 of a provincial Committee of Public Instruction with local district committees. But this arrangement did not gain public support, and the committees were condemned as useless and abolished in 1844. Up country, ferries and bridges of boats were provided by Government on the route from Calcutta to the Punjab frontier. Tolls were levied on all passengers, and considerable sums were realised. Some of these were distributed in the 1830's and '40's to 'local funds' administered by District Officers, for the upkeep of local roads and bridges. In Bombay local tolls were levied to maintain the ghat roads.

Local taxes began to be levied as 'cesses', or additional percentage levies upon the land revenue, in the North-Western Provinces and the Trans-Jumna territories. A dak cess was instituted in 1838 to maintain the district post, and the obligation of landowners to maintain roads and ferries within their lands was, in 1840, commuted for a cess of one per cent on the revenue. It seems that by the beginning of the 1850's these rural funds were managed by District Committees, headed by the District Magistrate. Landlords were not as yet keen to serve on these committees, whose most active non-official members were often European indigo planters.[2] In other provinces, rural boards were a much later development.

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, British rule had made virtually no mark on the towns and villages of India in the

[1] P. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls* (London, 1951), p. 114.
[2] Cf. G. Campbell, *Modern India* (London, 1852), pp. 399–400.

sphere of public works and social services; the appearance of the country remained largely the same as it had been a hundred years before. In 1836, Sleeman recorded the jibe of an old Mussulman trooper: 'the British have no pleasure in building anything but factories, courts of justice and jails'. But from the time of Dalhousie the 'engines of progress' of the West began to move. Trunk-roads and then railways spanned the country, the one anna post came to the village, Government departmental officials appeared—the schools inspector, the vaccinator, the agricultural expert. Gradually the closed village economy succumbed to the solvents of the wider world.

New kinds of urban communities evolved as a result of the revolution in transport, the entry of India into the world market and the introduction of large-scale industry. The cotton boom of 1861 to 1865 brought new wealth to the city of Bombay, and much of it was invested in building, in speculative development, and in the setting up of the first cotton mills. A new jute industry grew up in Bengal, and quiet river villages on the Hooghli above Calcutta were transformed by the erection of jute mills, and the influx of coolie labour. The railway awakened many a quiet town into noisy life. Thus Cawnpore was an unknown village in 1775; it acquired some importance as a frontier cantonment, then in 1863 the railway arrived and the town became a junction of five main lines. Government ordnance factories and cotton mills followed; within fifty years the population increased fourfold. Today Cawnpore is the leading industrial city in upper India, and its sprawling mills and foetid tenement slums are unlovely examples of hasty industrial expansion. The opening of the Suez Canal, and the exploitation of far eastern markets gave impetus to the development of new ports. After 1869, Karachi was nearer to Europe than Bombay; the building of the North-Western Railway, and the transformation of arid Punjab into the granary of India started the port on the journey towards its present-day greatness. Rangoon underwent an even more remarkable expansion. In 1855 the beautiful Shwe Dagon pagoda towered over derelict bamboo huts, and deserted creeks. Within a few years Rangoon ranked immediately behind Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, its population growing from 36,000 in 1856 to 82,000 in 1872 and 134,000 in 1881.

However, the immediate stimulus to the development of local institutions in the 1860's arose out of the post-Mutiny financial embarrassment of the Indian government. Indian finances had been in an uneasy condition throughout the century. Income depended largely on the inelastic land revenue, and a succession of wars had caused constant deficits, only filled by borrowing; in 1858, the Indian debt stood at ninety-eight million pounds. James Wilson was sent from Whitehall to be Finance Member, with the herculean task of bringing Indian finances into equilibrium. One of his remedies was financial decentralisation; he proposed to transfer responsibility for roads and public works to local bodies, declaring in his budget speech of 1861,

> It is of the first importance to break through the habit of keeping everything in dependence on Calcutta, and to teach people not to look to Government for things which they can do far better themselves.

The Government of India decided to leave the working out of draft proposals to the newly created provincial legislatures.

The first response to these proposals came from Punjab. Municipalities were started without proper legal warrant, by a Resolution dated 1862 issued by the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Robert Montgomery. Municipal Committees were to be composed of citizens chosen by trade panchayats or selected for their public spirit.[1] District officials seem to have remained entirely in the background. The committees were principally concerned with the collection of octroi (the tax on commodities), road repairs and conservancy. Forty-nine such committees were constituted between 1862 and 1864. The Lahore municipality was notably successful, and in its first year the members raised a loan of Rs. 40,000 (mostly from among themselves) in order to dig a canal to divert the River Ravi back to its original course hard by the city walls, and thus provide a much needed water supply. The banks of the canal were laid out with gardens at the private expense of the members. The records give no hint that any British official had even an indirect share in these transactions.

Perhaps the promising reports from Punjab encouraged Lord Lawrence, no great friend of 'native politicians', to renew the

[1] In 1864, of the forty-nine municipal committees, twenty-eight were elected by trade or caste panchayats.

call for local self-government. Or perhaps he was stirred by the receipt of despatches from the Secretary of State proposing the development of education and of municipal institutions; or by the report of the Royal Army Sanitary Commission which, at the instigation of Lawrence's friend Florence Nightingale, had turned a searchlight on the appalling dirt and disease of many Indian towns.

The motive which figures largest in the Resolution issued by Lord Lawrence's Government in August 1864 was, however, again that of finance. The new 'temporary' income tax was to be abolished in 1865, and the Imperial funds urgently needed relief. It was therefore decided that the cost of town police forces must in future be directly borne by the townsfolk themselves. All towns laid under this new burden were to be permitted to enjoy municipal institutions, and (within the framework of government rules) were to raise the necessary revenues as they desired; any surplus funds were to be devoted to 'improvement, education and other local objects'. Once again the manner in which municipal institutions should be created was left to the provincial governments to determine. The Resolution closed with a declaration in the best mid-nineteenth-century Liberal spirit:

> The people of this country are perfectly capable of administering their own local affairs. The municipal feeling is deeply rooted in them. The village communities . . . are the most abiding of Indian institutions. They maintained the framework of society while successive swarms of invaders swept over the country. In the cities also, the people cluster in their wards, trade guilds and panchayats and show much capacity for corporate action. . . . Holding the position we do in India, every view of duty and policy should induce us to leave as much as possible of the business of the country to be done by the people . . . and to confine ourselves to . . . influencing and directing in a general way all the movements of the social machine.[1]

This Resolution was vastly more effective in stimulating activity than the earlier actions of the Government of India. During the next four years, legislation was enacted for almost every major province;[2] in the late 1860's every town of importance in India became a municipality. In Burma alone no start

[1] *Gazette of India*, 14 September 1864.

[2] *Municipal Acts*: 1864, Bengal, Oudh; 1865, Madras; 1867, Punjab; 1868, North-Western Provinces and Central Provinces.

was made. The functions of the new authorities were however closely restricted. Although several acts were framed to allow the Lieutenant-Governor to permit the election of members of boards by the ratepayers, in fact the elective principle was held in abeyance, except only in the Central Provinces where elections in a majority of the towns were held from 1868. In general, boards were formed by the District Magistrate from among his mulaqatis and other 'respectable' citizens. The official influence was almost overpowering. The police charges formed the heaviest expense for the municipal funds, and in the management of the town police the boards had no say whatsoever. The other services were subject to the control of the provincial government, and to the Imperial Government, if they were big new projects.

A small measure of reform was introduced by the Liberal viceroy Lord Mayo. The dominant motive was, as ever, the relief of the Imperial finances; money was needed to develop public works and social services (for which Mayo was an enthusiast), and to pay for recent famine charges.[1] The proposed remedy was to endow the provinces with a share of the revenues, and to make them responsible for education, roads and medical services. In turn, local authorities were to be liberalised and to accept enlarged responsibilities.

Once again a burst of legislation followed the Imperial Government's proposals, including the first municipal act for Burma.[2] Many of the new acts allowed provincial governments to permit the election of members of municipal boards; however, as before, this 'permissive' legislation was but little applied in practice.

Only in the North-Western Provinces[3] and the Central Provinces was the right of election freely granted. In C.P. out of a total number of 629 members of municipal boards, 390 were elected; and in N.-W.P., 691 out of 1,354 were elected. In the remaining provinces, even in the few 'progressive' towns in which elections were permitted, there was only a bare 50 per cent of elected members. When a municipal committee was first con-

[1] The famine of 1866 demonstrated the isolation of rural districts (especially in Orissa) where country roads were non-existent.

[2] *Municipal Acts*: 1871, Madras; 1873, Bombay, N.-W.P., Punjab, C.P.; 1874, Burma; 1876, Bengal.

[3] Elections first took place in N.-W.P. in 1873, development 'was not systematic'.

stituted for Rangoon in 1874, it was an entirely nominated body in which the non-officials formed a minority, despite the great importance of the big commercial houses in city life.

TABLE 2

COMPOSITION OF MUNICIPAL BOARDS, 1881

	Total number of municipalities	With members partly or wholly elected	Members all nominated
Bengal	138	3	135
Bombay	162	10	152
Madras	47	12	35
North-Western Provinces	107	75	32*
Punjab	197	5	192
Central Provinces	61	61	—
Burma	7	—	7

* The Oudh municipalities.

Lord Hobart as Governor of Madras summed up the position in 1874 as follows:

The population of a municipality does not in any sense govern itself, except that some of its leading men, nominated by Government, are placed upon the board. The Government of a Municipality is in fact an oligarchy dependent upon a superior power which may control its action to almost any conceivable extent.[1]

Most of the members were re-appointed year after year; if any principle of representation was adopted, they were chosen to represent the leading castes or classes—there was no territorial basis for membership. Quite often appointments were made as a mark of social status, just as a gentleman would be given a seat in the district durbar, as a token of his 'loyalty' and his standing in the district.

About 20 per cent to 25 per cent of municipal income was absorbed by the police charges; between 15 per cent and 20 per cent by conservancy charges, and a similar figure by the upkeep of the roads. Income was very largely derived from octroi in northern and central India; in Bengal and Madras, direct taxes

[1] 'Report of the Committee on Local Self-government in Madras, 1882', i, 9. The first Madras municipal elections took place in 1879.

formed the mainstay of the revenue. To the great majority, local self-government meant only the imposition of new regulations and new taxes—and in consequence the boon was often little appreciated. In 1879 a section of the British community gave a poor exhibition of civic duty in the matter of tax payment. The officers of the Madras Army flatly refused to pay the Tax on Trades and Professions, and some of the most senior officers took the lead, defying prosecution in the courts. Their recalcitrance was rewarded when the Viceroy's Legislative Council specially exempted military officers from the tax. As with the Ilbert Bill, the lesson may have been learnt in unexpected places.

Rural self-government also gained a small impetus, after the watershed of 1857. Officially controlled 'district funds' were instituted in Bombay in 1860, with power to levy a cess of one anna for every rupee of land revenue. These funds were of doubtful legality, and were soon discontinued. Legislation in 1865 set up similar funds for Sind and Lower Burma. Madras statutes of 1863 and '66 authorised the levy of education and road cesses. The Bombay Local Fund Act of 1869 introduced the principle of representation into the rural life of the Presidency; District and Taluka Local Fund Committees were set up as advisory bodies; each consisted of six officials, an Imamdar, and six other nominated landlords—all men of substance. Legislation followed in all the major provinces.[1] District committees were formed under the presidency of the District Magistrate to administer the land revenue cesses—spent largely on the building of roads. Some statutes envisaged election, but no members were in fact elected. The committees were nothing more than a convenience for the District Magistrate to supply him with information or to carry out miscellaneous duties. Moreover the funds available were so minute that no proper public services were possible.

Village life was hardly touched by the new district committees; only in Bengal and Madras was there any attempt at a smaller unit of government. The Bengal Village Chaukidari Act of 1870 divided the countryside into 'unions' comprising about ten or twelve square miles. These areas were placed under 'panchayats'

[1] *District Committee Acts*: 1869, Bombay; 1870, Madras; 1871, Bengal, North-Western Provinces, Punjab.

which raised funds to pay for the village police. These so-called panchayats led only a formal existence, and were popularly regarded not as the representatives of the village folk, but as servants of the 'sarkar', the government. During the 1870's, village sanitary associations were set up in Madras; they had no legal status and could only levy 'voluntary' rates; they were kept up only through cajolery and bullying by the tahsildars.

But these years from 1860 to 1880 were not altogether barren: the Presidency towns at least attained a system of responsible government. The restoration of legislative powers to the Bombay and Madras Governments enabled them to work out their own remedies for the problem of executive control posed by the failure of the triumvirates of 1858. The first change was made in 1863 for Calcutta, where authority was handed back to the J.P.s as a body corporate, with a large measure of freedom from government control. The actual executive power was placed in the hands of an official salaried chairman, a senior Civilian appointed by Government, who also acted as Commissioner of Police for the metropolis. The Bombay Act of 1865 was similar; the Bench of Justices became the Corporation, but the management of the municipal machine was given to a senior official, designated Municipal Commissioner; he was head of the executive, but not chairman of the Corporation. The chairman was a non-official elected by the J.P.s, and was more of a constitutional monarch than a prime minister. This arrangement sometimes led to friction, but it gave municipal government a more liberal character in Bombay than in the other two great cities. Madras delayed making any change till 1867. The administration was then transferred to a paid official President, with thirty-two Honorary Commissioners forming a committee. These gentlemen were not J.P.s, but representatives of the ratepayers; all, however, were appointed by the Governor in Council.

The new régimes proved reasonably efficient. Calcutta and Bombay were fortunate in the appointment of some notably successful Commissioners, and the foundations of the public services of the two cities were most of them laid out in the late 1860's and '70's. But administrative efficiency was not local self-government, and the representation of the public by dignitaries appointed by Government as custodians of law and

order had long become an anachronism. The numbers of J.P.s constituting the corporations—129 for Calcutta, and 400 for Bombay—made any organised expression of the public will almost impossible.

A strong demand for change came from middle-class liberals, both Indian and British. The lead was taken by Pheroze Shah Mehta, about to assume that dominant rôle in Bombay's civic affairs which he maintained during the next forty years. Lord Mayo's devolution measures of 1870 encouraged the Bombay city reformers to press on with their claims. A draft bill was introduced into the provincial legislature during 1872, providing for a corporation of which only 10 per cent were to be elected by the ratepayers, and over which Government would exercise a close control. During its committee stage, the bill was belaboured by official and non-official members of the Council, from public platforms, and in the press. As a result, the representative principle was widely extended: half the members of the corporation were to be elected by the ratepayers (under a limited franchise), one quarter to be elected by the J.P.s, and the remainder nominated by Government. Substantial powers were delegated by the corporation to a 'standing committee' of twelve members called the Town Council who supervised the actions of the Municipal Commissioner, and to whom all questions involving large expenditure had to be referred. Government control was largely limited to the appointment of the Commissioner, to auditing accounts, and to sanctioning the raising of loans.[1]

A similar reform ensued in Calcutta in 1876 when two-thirds of the Corporation became the ratepayers' elected representatives. During their consideration of the municipal bill, a Select Committee of the Bengal Legislative Council proposed that representation should be based upon communal electorates (which would return twenty-seven Hindu members, nine Muslims and eighteen Europeans); this scheme was dropped, largely because of the opposition of Babu Kristo Das Pal. The citizens of Madras were awarded a much smaller degree of freedom under the Act of 1878. The Corporation was to consist of thirty-five commissioners; the President and two Vice-Presidents were

[1] For a full account, *see* R. P. Masani, *Evolution of Local Self-Government in Bombay* (Bombay, 1929), chs. xx to xxi.

salaried heads of the executive, sixteen members were nominated non-officials, and sixteen were elected by the ratepayers.

Thus by 1880 the principle of local self-government had been put into practice only in the cities of Calcutta and Bombay, and in a few of the towns of the Central Provinces and North-Western Provinces. Elsewhere, although a framework of local administration and local taxation existed, control was firmly in the hands of the servants of the government.

Conditions in contemporary England were not so completely different. Municipal status was confined to a relatively small number of chartered towns—and some of these were villages living on past importance. Many of the industrial and residential urban areas were without any adequate system of public services, and had to look to a multiplicity of jealously exclusive 'boards' and 'vestries' for remedy. In the counties, in urban as well as rural areas, the Justices sitting in quarter sessions were the only local authorities—crown nominees all. The upkeep of roads was still supervised by medieval 'way wardens'. Indeed the very term 'local government' with all its associations and implications was not coined until 1858.

Much of the mechanism of modern English local government was evolved in the 1880's. In India also the 1880's saw the dawn of representative local institutions; but time was to prove this a false dawn.

CHAPTER III

Lord Ripon's Reforms and their Aftermath, 1882 to 1907

LORD RIPON has an honoured place in Indian affections as almost the only Viceroy who did not automatically assume that an olympian hauteur and omniscience was an essential part of his office. Ripon brought an open liberal mind to political and social questions instead of the 'two nations' attitude which was an almost inevitable component of British-Indian relationships in the late nineteenth century.

Ripon came to India from an unusually full public life in England: early association with F. D. Maurice and Christian Socialism, an apprenticeship under Sidney Herbert the army reformer, thirty years' experience of politics and of the great departments in Whitehall. All this was more than most Viceroys could show. But a wide experience of affairs, sensitivity and intellect, were unfortunately accompanied by a lack of stamina, an inner uncertainty, which prevented Ripon from fully carrying through the large schemes of his imagination.

Lord Ripon regarded the reform and rejuvenation of local self-government as the greatest achievement of his Viceroyalty, but even in this sphere he was not able entirely to press through his plans to a successful conclusion. A major element in this partial failure arose out of the logic of the political reasoning of Ripon—and of most Englishmen in India—which argues that if local government is to have any vitality, then it should evolve out of local circumstances; if it has to be created artificially, at least it should be planned in detail by local administrators, and not be imposed ready-made by the central government. But in the India of 1882, the Viceroy was almost alone in his liberalism; the vast majority of local Anglo-Indian officials were conservatives, supporters of a 'paternal' administration, so that the

reforms projected by Ripon were attenuated, or even ignored by the provincial governments and district officers who were responsible for putting them into practice.

The general principles which were to govern the future development of local representative institutions were set out in the famous Resolution on Local Self-Government of 18 May 1882. Paragraph 5 reads as follows: 'It is not primarily with a view to improvement in administration that this measure is put forward and supported. It is chiefly designed as an instrument of political and popular education'. Paragraph 6 goes on: 'As education advances there is rapidly growing up all over the country an intelligent class of public spirited men who it is not only bad policy, but sheer waste of power to fail to utilise'. L. S. S. O'Malley has observed:

> there is a somewhat remarkable similarity in the language used by Lord Ripon and by A. O. Hume to describe the situation caused by the impact of western civilisation. . . . It was necessary to provide an outlet for the ambitions and aspirations which had been created by the education, civilisation and material progress introduced by the British.

The new middle class so created 'must be prevented from becoming either through blind indifference or stupid repression a source of serious political danger'. The remedy of both men was 'a training in the working of representative institutions'.[1] A. O. Hume, grandson of Joseph Hume the Radical politician, was a retired Indian official who devoted his private wealth and his abundant energies to ornithology, theosophy, and the encouragement of Indians towards a *political* expression of their national feelings, in place of the militant activities of the past. Hume founded the Indian National Congress to discuss and direct public opinion towards social and political problems;[2] Ripon

[1] See *Modern India and the West*. Ed. O'Malley (London, 1941), pp. 745–6.

[2] A glimpse of Hume's own view of local self-government is given in a minute written in August 1882 upon a proposal to give Simla Municipality (of which he was a member) a wholly elected Committee. Hume opposes any sudden change; he would prefer a two-fifths elected minority. But he acquiesces in the proposal, providing that 'all parties reconcile themselves beforehand to a very great decrease in efficiency'. Simla Municipality was entirely composed of Europeans, so no disparagement of Indian capabilities was implied: indeed Hume advocated a much wider franchise, based upon 'class as well as ward representation'.

carried on the Durham tradition of political development from the parish council to the legislative assembly.

Ripon was further concerned at an apparent confusion by British administrators in India of 'means' with 'ends', producing a cult of efficiency for its own sake: efficiency being equated with good, 'politics' with evil. He was determined that the new local government machinery should not be constructed only to suit administrative requirements; determined that political education and administrative efficiency should be put into perspective.

The Resolution laid down certain principles which were reproduced with varying shades of conviction in official statements for the next thirty years, and for almost as long served as a yardstick for Indian political aspirations; they may be summarised as follows:—Political education is the primary function of local government, of greater importance than administrative efficiency. (Paragraph 5.) Rural boards are to be set up, similar to municipal boards: the unit of administration to be small—the subdivision, tahsil or taluka. (Paragraph 10.) All boards should contain a two-thirds majority of non-officials; these should be elected whenever possible. Elections to begin immediately in more progressive towns; gradually and by informal experimental methods in smaller towns and the countryside. (Paragraphs 12, 13, 14.) 'Control should be exercised from without rather than within.' (Paragraph 17.) The chairmen of all local boards should accordingly be non-officials whenever possible. (Paragraph 18.) Finally it was accepted that each province should interpret the general directions of the Resolution according to local conditions.

The Resolution was cast in realistic terms: the Viceroy recognised that the new freedom would mean a sacrifice of efficiency, but he believed that this need not be permanent; he emphasised that the co-operation of the official world was essential in fostering the growth of a responsible spirit in local boards. Ripon was no doctrinaire disciple of the ballot box, he was desirous in fact 'to revive and extend the indigenous system of the country', and 'to make full use of what remains of the village system'.[1] To this end he was ably supported by Sir Charles Bernard, Secretary to Government in the Home Department, who as Secretary to the Indian Famine Commission of 1880 had

[1] L. Wolf, *Life of Ripon* (London, 1921), ii, 100.

been deeply impressed by evidence of the disintegration of rural society, and the need to re-establish contact between the administration and the village.

The reception given to Ripon's proposals by British officials varied in different provinces, and in some cases was artificially influenced by the attitude of senior officials to the contentious Ilbert Bill. The Governor of Bombay, Sir J. Fergusson and the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Rivers Thompson were violent opponents of Ripon; Sir Alfred Lyall, the Head of the North-Western Provinces was his warm supporter. The legislation[1] which followed the 1882 Resolution in a sudden spate reflected the prejudice of these and other administrators, rather than the different levels of development of different provinces.

Writing to a friend, Lord Ripon declared:

> The point of the resolution to which I attach most importance, is that which relates to [the District Officer and the Chair]. . . . If the boards are to be of any use for the purpose of training the natives to manage their own affairs they must not be overshadowed by the presence of the Burra Sahib.[2]

Yet in this 'most important' matter there was the greatest departure from the terms of the resolution. The Heads of all the major provinces expressed themselves strongly in favour of the District Officer as president. Firstly a local body acquired 'prestige and importance in the eyes of the people' when the D.O. was a member; secondly local bodies gained greatly in influence, when supported by the D.O. and his staff throughout the district; thirdly 'the D.O. is the mainspring of the administration, and it is absolutely essential that his position shall be upheld in its integrity'—and so the reasoning went on.[3] Only in the Central Provinces was the resolution adhered to; elsewhere the District Magistrate remained dominant in local government.

The towns were somewhat ahead of the rural boards. In the Central Provinces the great majority of chairmen of municipalities were non-officials, as were a substantial and increasing minority in Bengal and Madras. In some other provinces (e.g.

[1] *Municipal Acts*: 1883, N.-W.P.; 1884, Madras, Bombay, Bengal, Punjab, Burma. *District Board Acts*: 1883, N.-W.P., Punjab, C.P.; 1884, Madras, Bombay, Burma; 1885, Bengal.

[2] Wolf, ii, 99.

[3] Opinions of Heads of provinces quoted, 'Report of the Committee on Local Self-government in Madras, 1882', i, 58–60.

Punjab and the North-Western Provinces) municipalities were permitted to choose their chairmen, but the still unchallenged prestige of the District Magistrate reduced the election to a formal invitation to the Head of the district, or to one of his subdivisional officers.

The chairmen of rural bodies were almost all officials. Only in C.P. (not including Berar) were the chairmen of district councils all non-officials; the chairmen of two Punjab district boards (Sialkot and Amritsar) were for some years non-officials. The remaining district boards in British India, almost two hundred in number, were presided over by the District Magistrate as the unchallenged head of rural affairs.

All the provinces created the required two-thirds majorities of non-official members both for urban and rural boards, but as a large majority of these non-officials were still dependent upon the district magistrate's favour for nomination, the change was more formal than real. The extent to which election was introduced depended more upon the attitudes of Heads of provinces than upon the aptitude of their peoples.

Municipal boards were of course far ahead of the new district boards. Three-quarters of the members of municipalities in Madras and the North-Western Provinces might be elected by the ratepayers, and Burma followed suit by adopting the N.-W.P. Act with its elective provisions. Bengal towns might elect two-thirds of their members, Bombay towns one-half. But the new legislation was only partially put into practice. Only in three provinces were elected members in a majority; in Bengal they formed little more than half the boards, while in N.-W.P. over three-quarters and in C.P. almost two-thirds were elected. Elsewhere the majority of members were still found by nomination. (See Table 3.)

During the following twenty years the number of municipalities remained fairly constant: some towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants were excluded, especially in Punjab, and some new boards were created, mostly in Burma and Madras, but the franchise and the proportion of elected members remained static, and there was no further extension of the representative principle. Twenty years later there were elected majorities only in three provinces, as in 1885.

Paragraphs 14 and 15 of the 1882 resolution proposed that systems of election should be adopted to suit 'the feelings of the people'; and in a private letter Lord Ripon wrote: 'I am inclined to think that election by caste or occupation would in many cases be more consonant with the feelings of the people'.[1] It is well known that Sir Sayyid Ahmad put forward a cogent demand for the separate representation of Muslims, during the debate in the

TABLE 3

COMPOSITION OF MUNICIPAL BOARDS, 1885

	Total number of municipalities	Percentage of elected members	Boards wholly or partly elected	Wholly nominated boards	Chairmen	
					Official	Non-official
Bengal	147	50·4%	118	29	130(?)	17(?)
Bombay	162	10·8%	40	122	152	10
Madras	54	24·6%	33	11	26	28
N.-W.P.	109	79·8%	101	8	103	6
Punjab	197	42·6%	122	75*	120(?)	77(?)
C.P.	58	60·2%	58	—	18(?)	40(?)
Burma	13	45·8%	8	5	13	—

* Includes all Frontier municipalities.

Imperial Legislative Council upon Ripon's proposals.[2] However, in acceding to this demand the Government of India were not so much accepting a new principle of separate Hindu and Muslim representation, as maintaining the old idea that society consisted of 'interests'—social groups or hereditary trades—rather than of territorial areas. This idea still had some force for a generation of Englishmen who retained some links with the age of the unreformed House of Commons, and it was an entirely natural concept to Indians who still acknowledged the power of caste. The selection of the leaders of different communities within a town, rather than of representatives of residential areas, was common practice in the earlier municipalities. The first elections held in the North-Western Provinces in the 1870's were said to have demonstrated the artificiality of a ward system, and the representation of trades or castes was substituted—although

[1] Wolf, ii, 98.

[2] Imperial Legislative Council: Proceedings, ch. xxii, 1883, p. 13.

not provided for under the 1873 N.-W.P. Act. When the draft Calcutta Municipal Bill of 1876 was presented to the Bengal Legislature it provided for the separate representation of Hindus, Muslims and Europeans.

In consequence of Lord Ripon's reforms, Rangoon Municipality became a two-thirds elected body in 1882. The Chief Commissioner of Burma directed that the elected members should represent 'interests' rather than areas, and they were to comprise five Burmese, five Europeans, Armenians, etc., two Chinese, two Hindus, two Muslims, one Karen, and one member for the Chamber of Commerce.[1] This resembled, in a new guise, the old custom whereby the various nations trading in Eastern ports appointed 'captains' to mediate between their communities and the authorities.

The elected representatives on the city boards in Sind were chosen by caste panchayats; this had advantages over ward election, as followed in Bombay proper, where, as in Ahmadabad for instance, the wards always elected 'respectable' Brahmins or Parsees, never artisans, Kunbis or Muslims. Representation on rural boards in C.P. was avowedly designed on the basis of 'interests'; they consisted partly of the 'muqaddam' members drawn from the landlord proprietors and of members elected by the trading community. In many towns the basic division of interests was between Hindus and Muslims, and thus 'communal' seats came into being. For instance, in 1883 at Sibsagar, a small town in Assam, the seats were divided, three to Hindus, and two to Muslims, as the ward system seemed to have proved unfair to Muslims.

The communal principle was most widely adopted in Punjab. In many towns, especially in the western districts of the province, Hindus formed a minority of the inhabitants, but as lawyers and merchants they were in a powerful position and were able to secure political control.[2] This predominance was often bitterly resented by the Muslims who, however, frequently lacked western-educated leaders or any machinery for municipal organisation. In some

[1] The 'first elections in British Burma' took place in June 1882: a feature was the number of Burmese ladies who came forward as voters or canvassers. Burmans elected included Maung Ohn Ghine.

[2] As in Lahore (60,000 Muslims, seven members; 35,000 Hindus, nine members); also in Multan, Amritsar and Sialkot.

towns the two communities were able to come to an amicable understanding; as an example, in 1884 by mutual agreement Wazirabad board contained three Hindus and three Muslims, but sometimes the development of municipal activities, and the extension of the elective principle, served only to increase communal discord. In some towns the practice of 'reserving' seats for interests inadequately represented by a general election grew up. In 1886, certain seats on the Lahore board were reserved for shopkeepers, traders and house-owners respectively. Then in 1888, following considerable agitation at Amritsar, rules were issued directing that the municipality should consist of ten Hindus and eight Muslims—though they were to be chosen by a common electorate. Lahore in 1891 adopted the opposite course of placing Hindus, Muslims and Christians on separate electoral rolls to vote for separate members, but making no stipulation that the communities must elect persons of their own faith. In 1895 Amritsar changed to a fully communal system—separate electorates, separate communal members. Four other Punjab municipalities were similarly re-constituted in the next twelve years;[1] but communal electorates were adopted only to meet peculiar local circumstances, or to satisfy local demands—in general Muslims followed Sayyid Ahmad's policy of relying on Government support, and accepted representation by nomination.

The elective system remained at a rudimentary stage. The municipal electorate was minute: in most provinces it comprised less than two per cent of the urban population. In Bengal it was somewhat higher (perhaps five per cent), and embraced most of the 'bhadralok' or middle and clerical classes. There were seldom more than four or five hundred voters, even in large towns, and many voters avoided going to the polls, because in most provinces there was no secret ballot and the recording of a vote might mean incurring the enmity of a powerful citizen. Candidates were often returned unopposed—even in the Presidency towns and Rangoon. The elected members of municipal boards were mainly composed of the most westernised classes; lawyers predominated, with some teachers and journalists and a few doctors. Men of rank, old-fashioned landlords and raises, objected

[1] Multan, 1899; Murree, 1904; Ambala, 1906; Shujabad, 1908.

to electioneering, as this entailed being placed under obligations to the electors.[1] In the more advanced provinces—especially in Bengal—this aversion to election was less common among merchants and landlords; indeed by the 1890's the nominated members were coming to be looked upon as the District Magistrate's 'yes-men'. An analysis of the total membership of Bengal municipalities made in 1894 reveals: government servants, 17 per cent; landlords, 25 per cent; pleaders, 22 per cent; planters, 1 per cent; doctors, 4 per cent; school masters, 4 per cent; and pensioners, 3 per cent.

The extent to which municipal life was a reality varied tremendously from one province to another. On the North-West Frontier where western ideas were unknown, municipal feeling was almost non-existent: in 1889 none of the municipalities in the Dera Ismail Khan District held any meetings at all, because the Deputy Commissioner was too busy with tribal affairs to convene meetings. People could barely be persuaded to accept membership of municipal boards in Burma, feeling that Government was 'getting at them in some way'. But in the large cities, and in most towns in Bengal and Madras the artificial hot-house stage of development was over by the 1890's, and administration by an elected committee was regarded as the natural—almost as the inevitable—form of municipal government.

Municipal income was doubled over the period 1882 to 1908, but this large increase did not bring any notable expansion in the scope of the public services, which were confined to the bare essentials. Conservancy continued to account for about 20 per cent, and the upkeep of roads for 10 per cent to 20 per cent of expenditure. Lord Ripon had ordered provincial governments to relieve municipalities of the police charges, but although his directions were generally followed, in Punjab and the North-Western Provinces these charges continued to absorb 10 per cent to 15 per cent of income. In the '90's a few of the leading cities undertook water-works and other modern public utilities, but the majority of municipalities still lived in the era of the oil lamp, the open well and the sweeper.

[1] Cf. Ahmadabad, 1882: elected members were four lawyers, four education officials, three Parsee business men, one trader. Amritsar, 1884: eighteen elected members included nine lawyers. Calcutta, 1897: fifty elected members included twenty lawyers.

The Presidency towns did not undergo any radical change as a result of Ripon's viceroyalty, but nevertheless some important legislation followed: an act for Madras in 1884, and acts for Bombay and Calcutta in 1888. Most influential was the Bombay Act which was evolved after protracted drafting and discussion. This measure was notable as consolidating a municipal structure which by general agreement was the most successful in the East, and was subsequently imitated by the other great cities. The kernel of the system lay in the recognition of the Corporation as the supreme governing body of the city, and in the recognition of the Municipal Commissioner as responsible for carrying out the will of the Corporation with full authority over staff, installations and all routine municipal activities. The scope of the Standing Committee—the supervisory body through which the Corporation exercised control over the Commissioner—was also carefully defined. Government control was almost completely abrogated; the Commissioner was appointed by Government, but might be removed by the Corporation; fiscal autonomy was complete although loans could not be raised without government sanction.[1] This measure fully satisfied Pheroze Shah Mehta and the other public men of Bombay, and apart from further extensions of the franchise and certain changes of detail, the 1888 Act proved its permanent utility and remains in force to this day.

The most remarkable innovation proposed by Lord Ripon in 1882 was the establishment of a network of rural local bodies—six years before there were any rural councils in England. The provincial legislation of 1883 to 1885 had one common feature: the creation of a 'two tier' system, with district boards, and sub-district boards based either upon the sub-division or the tahsil.

Ripon's Resolution had stated that the 'sub-division, taluka or tahsil shall ordinarily form the maximum area to be placed under a local board'; the district board was envisaged as a supervising or co-ordinating authority only. However every province except Assam, Burma, C.P. and Madras entrusted the district board with all the funds and almost all the functions of local govern-

[1] For details, *see* Masani, chs. xxv to xxviii.

ment. Most of the acts made provision for the delegation of money and powers to the smaller bodies—at the discretion of the district boards, but as the latter were themselves starved of money and narrowly restricted in the exercise of their functions, they passed only scraps of routine work on to the sub-district boards who never therefore awakened into life.

Bengal and Punjab set up sub-district boards in 'advanced' districts only; in Bombay and the North-Western Provinces taluka or tahsil boards were created in all districts. In all four provinces these bodies were only shadows with little more than a nominal existence. Assam with its mountains and isolated valleys has never started district boards, but has built up sub-divisional boards as the unit of rural administration; the short-lived rural boards of Lower Burma in the 1880's were also based on the township (i.e. sub-division). The Central Provinces, which carried out Ripon's instructions throughout the whole field of local government, constituted tahsil boards as executive authorities, with district councils as supervisory bodies; some district councils, however, disobeyed the plain intentions of the act, and usurped the functions of the smaller bodies. Only the Madras Act specified a statutory division of powers and resources between district boards and the 'taluk' boards. Taluk boards received one-half of the land cess as well as other independent income, and were allotted a large field of responsibility: minor roads, elementary schools, hospitals and dispensaries, etc. In most of the provinces, sub-district boards were allotted one important function; they acted as electoral colleges, providing one-half (three-quarters in Madras) of the membership of district boards, the remainder being nominated by Government. The sub-district boards were in turn partly nominated and partly elected upon a very narrow, and often arbitrary franchise.[1]

The idea of election was viewed with even greater distrust in the countryside than in the towns. The great landlords would have nothing whatever to do with elections; indeed on many of the district boards in such provinces as Punjab where older traditions still prevailed, the elected members held a distinctly lower status than the nominated gentlemen. Once appointed, many nominated members continued in office for years on end

[1] The members of sub-district boards in Madras and Burma were all nominated.

as a matter of course. For example, in 1893 it was found that Ludhiana District Board had ceased to have any legal existence, the term of office of most of the members having long expired; some had 'served' for six years without re-appointment! The elective system was most advanced in Bengal, particularly in the Burdwan and Presidency Divisions.[1]

District boards were at best little more than petty departments of the district administration. They met infrequently, sometimes not for twelve months together; the zamindar members did not even attend meetings however rare, as they were usually unable to follow the unfamiliar procedure. A small group of lawyers from the district headquarters usually provided the only vocal element, but many District Officers gave scant consideration to their suggestions. Rural boards were responsible for an imposing number of public services: for education, public works, medical services and public health, and sometimes veterinary work. But very often the boards' share in these services was restricted to paying the bills; often with no say as to how the money was spent, or divided between major services. Similarly the district boards had almost no control over the raising of their funds; the land revenue cess was levied and disbursed by Government.

Rural local government was least successful in Burma. The boards were peculiarly unfortunate in the date of their birth; they were established in 1884 just before the annexation of Upper Burma, whereafter almost every district was paralysed by banditry and disorder. District Officers, many themselves novices, were fully occupied in military police activity. The infant township boards were starved of funds and of proper supervision, and all had 'faded out of existence' by 1891. There remained only the District Cess Funds established in 1880 under the sole control of Deputy Commissioners. The maintenance of a rural police absorbed half their petty income; the remainder being doled out for roads, schools and a district post.

In other provinces the rural boards followed an uneventful course through a quarter of a century. The best record was that of the Madras Presidency. There was no expansion of income

[1] An analysis of the occupation of members of Bengal district boards in 1888 showed 30 per cent as landlords, 26 per cent pleaders, 18 per cent government servants, 2 per cent mukhtias (rural magistrates), and 1 per cent as traders.

comparable to that of the municipalities, from one-half to three-quarters of their income was derived from the land cess whose yield was practically static. From one-third to three-quarters of expenditure went upon the building of roads, and the remainder was largely divided in varying proportions between education and medical relief. No doubt the meagre funds were spent advisedly, but a generation of villagers must have passed away without the great majority ever in their lives coming into contact with any of the activities of rural authorities. Both in his resolution, and in his correspondence Lord Ripon had laid great emphasis on the need to raise the superstructure of local government upon the ancient foundation of the village system, but in fact rural local government was imposed from above, and the village was the last place to feel its influence.

Any attempt to revive the traditional institutions of village government was anyhow too late by the 1880's. The village folk had become powerless under the grip of local bosses and bullies: the agent of the landlord, the local daroga and the bania were the real power in village life. A few virile village communities only, survived into the 1870's and '80's, such as the Jat bhaiyacharas of Hindustan, the rural societies of the Rajput and Maratha states, many villages in southern India, and the hamlets of the Assam valleys with their 'melkis' as arbitrators. Most provinces tacitly ignored the village in their new rural organisation; district board resources were slender enough; they might suffice for building a road to link up a market town with the railway, or to establish a hospital at district headquarters, but they would vanish without anything to show, if frittered away among hundreds of little villages.

The Bengal Government drafted a scheme whereby the local unit would be the sub-district board closely associated with popular village committees; there was to be a provincial Local Self-Government Board to exercise general control. The first village committees were chosen by the villagers, but before they could operate, the Secretary of State, Lord Kimberley, vetoed the entire plan. Bengal local government was thereafter forced into the standard mould.

Both the Bengal and the Madras Acts provided for village unions administered by panchayats; the plan was to combine

neighbouring villages for sanitary and other purposes, with power to impose house taxes. Neither Act had any effect and although there were 50,000 villages in Madras only some 130 unions (later increased to 390) were set up. Up to 1914, Bengal with 70,000 villages never possessed more than 60 union committees. Between 1885 and 1892 legislation was passed to create village sanitary boards in Bombay, C.P. and the N.-W.P.;[1] these measures were also entirely fruitless. This widespread failure betokens a fundamentally wrong approach. Village wants and obligations were visualised in artificial terms of money, as an extension of modern local government, instead of in traditional terms of personal effort in corporate activity. The attempt was made to create village leadership by administrative fiat in the provincial secretariat, rather than by consultation with the village elders in the village street.

A somewhat more successful attempt to revive corporate village life was made in Burma in the 1880's. When Lower Burma passed to British rule in 1852, the Burmese taik thugyi, or circle head-man, of Ava origin was retained as a subordinate revenue official. Village leadership almost disappeared: 'we had a head-man called the Kyedangyi, he was the greatest butt of the village, the hewer of wood and drawer of water, a man of no authority'.[2] So matters remained until the Third Burmese War when the whole country was submerged in disorder, and the administration was seen to be isolated from the people. Sir Charles Crosthwaite who became Chief Commissioner in 1887 sought means to restore order and public confidence; his solution was the Upper Burma Village Regulation of 1887, an attempt to deal with 'the universal disorder' by 'enforcing the joint responsibility of the village community'. His measure was admittedly based on 'very general and vague information' as to Upper Burma society. Two years later village headmen replaced the taik thugyi in Lower Burma. Unfortunately the new scheme reproduced many of the old errors: the revival of village life was subordinated to revenue and security needs. The original 'unmistakable orders' were to appoint a head-man (ywa thugyi) for 'every village',[3]

[1] For details, *see* J. Matthai, *Village Government in British India* (London, 1915).
[2] DCR, iii, 79.
[3] Quotations from Crosthwaite's minute dated 6 October 1890.

but as the head-man was remunerated by a fixed percentage of the land revenue, the jurisdiction of the thugyi usually embraced several hamlets. The average population of a village was 180 souls: the population of the average 'administrative' village numbered over 500. Moreover according to the Census of India[1] it was usual for a large village which formed a market centre to be divided between several village tracts. Once again an attempt to encourage village life was made from above, and succeeded only in creating an artificial uniformity. However in Burma the system did acquire some vitality because the head-man was held responsible for the upkeep of village tracks and other works, and was entitled to call upon village labour to keep up these undertakings. But these activities came under the head of 'district administration' and not of 'local self-government'!

In general it must be admitted that the reforms projected in May 1882 failed in almost every direction to evolve as their author had desired. G. K. Gokhale, a leading figure in public life in the early 1900's—Congress president, educationist, fiscal expert and tireless advocate of local institutions—observed in 1906 that local government 'still remains all over the country where it was placed by Lord Ripon a quarter of a century ago, and in some places it has even been pushed back'.[2] In the early 1900's there were even fewer non-official chairmen in U.P. and Punjab than in 1882: there were two in U.P. and twenty-nine in Punjab, all presiding over petty municipalities. There were no non-official chairmen in Burma, and only ten non-officials—all nominated—as chairmen of 'city' municipalities in Bombay, right up to 1910.

Among the great majority of Indians and Burmans, interest in the new local bodies was very uncertain. In the Indian countryside the leading families and the 'safed posh' or white-robed small gentry still looked to government service or the army to provide fields for the tradition of public service which many of them inherited. In Burma too, many of the leaders of rural society belonged to 'official' families who had served the Burmese kings, and who now sought service under the British administration.

There were some cases of active opposition to the new ways.

[1] Census of India (1911), ix, part I, 22.

[2] Collected speeches of the Hon. G. K. Gokhale (Madras, n.d.), Appendix, p. 149.

When a water supply was being installed at sacred Benares in 1892, there was a campaign to stop the work, led by the orthodox Gujarati Brahmins: it culminated in a riot. Less violent was a petition in 1893 from Kyaukse Municipality in Burma asking Government to abolish their municipality. The Gurgaon District Board in Punjab ceased to be an elected body in 1906, following a petition of the majority of the electors. Many of the village sanitary boards lapsed altogether, because no one would accept membership. This aversion to the new institutions was often due to a natural unawareness of any need for an unfamiliar public service: 'Government had first to supply advantages, e.g. roads, which the people did not know they wanted. . . . [Later] they begin to appreciate them . . . and even to feel their absence in other places'. The upkeep of these services was a tedious business, making no direct appeal to public spirit: 'the people all combine to save a bursting tank which is about to inundate their fields; it is with much more difficulty that they will co-operate in the construction of a new irrigation tank'.[1] But such obstacles to the success of local government are of course not peculiar to India or Burma.

The Ripon reforms were accorded a warm welcome by that stratum of Indian society which was active in politics. Leaders of the stamp of S. N. Banerjea,[2] G. K. Gokhale, Pheroze Shah Mehta, and Raja Peari Mohan Mukerji were in full accord with a policy of approaching national self-government through the education of the Indian electorate and of their representatives in the school of local politics and administration. The Indian Councils Act of 1892 seemed to indicate the future line of development; in the House of Commons debates on this measure, Mr. Gladstone re-affirmed the hope that from the training school of local government might emerge the future leaders of India. The elected members of the new provincial legislative councils were in fact drawn from local government: delegates of local authorities met as electoral colleges to choose their representatives.[3] The western-educated classes grew increasingly

[1] DCR, vi, 132–138. Note by Sir R. H. Craddock.

[2] Founder-member of the Congress, editor of *The Bengalee*, and for years chairman of the North Barrackpore Municipality.

[3] Of the forty-three members elected by municipalities from 1892 to 1909, forty were lawyers; almost none were Muslims.

dissatisfied with their share of responsibility in local government, and official proposals to further diminish municipal powers in Bengal in the 1890's brought a volume of protest—much of it derived from study of developments in English local government. Those boards whose political ideas were most advanced in Bengal, Madras and Bombay were already in the 1890's developing characteristic features which were to be general in the twentieth century: resentment of official interference, the intensification of party politics and divisions, and the organisation of petitions and hartals in protest at unpopular official measures.

A considerable check upon the enthusiasm of the 'advanced' minority lay in the very limited funds available, and in the perpetuation of elaborate official control. To some extent these two factors were related, and arose out of the continuation of conditions of financial stringency. Prices of export goods had fallen in the 1870's, the value of silver sank steadily, and the Indian national income fell to a low level, while the expenses of the Government of India were constantly rising; the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 proved a particularly costly luxury. Only at the very end of the nineteenth century did the Indian Government manage to restore financial equilibrium. It was not therefore possible for Government to dispense much financial assistance to local bodies and it was deemed necessary to maintain extensive control over local budgets to extract the best value out of their expenditure. It may be doubted whether this control was either necessary or beneficial. Indian administration in the late nineteenth century seems to have worn into a groove, to have adopted a cult of efficiency without any attempt to define the purpose of government, and as communications improved, to have elaborated the numbers of reports and returns and the whole machinery of secretariat administration as a substitute for tackling the mounting problems of the day. A new hierarchy of 'experts' was growing: the Public Works Department, the Education Department, the Sanitary Commissioner, the Accountant General, and later the Agricultural Department. In time all came to have a say in local government affairs. As a result, a rigid system of supervision was created, which ran from the smallest municipality up to the Secretary of State. For instance Calcutta Corporation could not give their official

chairman an extra allowance in 1888, without the sanction of the Secretary of State. District boards were treated exactly as a minor branch of the administration. In most provinces the district boards' budgets were incorporated in the provincial budget at the beginning of the financial year, and thereafter might not be modified in any particular. U.P. district boards did not have any independent financial existence whatever: the provincial government collected the land revenue cess and apportioned it annually among the boards, who could never be sure of any fixed income.

This system of tutelage was in no way relaxed during the next twenty-five years. The Government of India gave no further encouragement to reform. Of the successors to Ripon, Lord Dufferin had political imagination but was largely absorbed in external affairs, Lord Elgin was a dull and solid Gladstonian, Lansdowne and Curzon were high Conservatives. Local self-government received only routine departmental attention, and any account of local government in the 1890's and early 1900's must deal with anti-climax and inertia. The only changes carried through by the Imperial Government and the provinces were designed to improve administrative efficiency, and the imaginative plans of Lord Ripon found no echo in these shifts and contrivances. For instance, in March 1888, the Bengal Government asked the Imperial Government for permission to reduce the numbers of nominated members of municipalities to two only; the Imperial Government replied in July refusing to consider any modification of the existing provisions of the law. New legislation was largely devoted to remedying the drafting of earlier acts by more exactly defining, and in some cases enlarging, the functions of local bodies.[1]

Although Ripon had specifically planned his reforms to provide an outlet for the new western-educated middle classes, the domination of the non-official element in local government by the middle classes was continually deplored by officials who looked —unavailingly—to the 'natural leaders' of society, men of good family, the landed gentry, for a lead in local affairs. In 1892 the Bengal Government put forward a scheme to restrict the powers

[1] *Municipal Acts*: 1891, Punjab; 1894, Bengal; 1898, Burma; 1900, N.-W.P.; 1901 Bombay. *District Board Acts*: 1906, U.P.

of municipal boards, to tighten government control, and to raise the qualifications for the franchise. A considerable campaign was waged, led by S. N. Banerjea in which the political associations and newspapers of the province joined in unison. It was said that the new proposals would reduce the electorate to about 0·3 per cent and disfranchise the great majority of Muslims. The proposals were completely re-written as a result of the protest.

The working of Calcutta Corporation came under criticism in the late '90's. The everyday decisions of the chairman and of senior corporation officials were constantly reversed by the members. Municipal business had lapsed into the hands of numerous committees, including a Complaints Committee which constituted a court of appeal on purely executive matters such as the enforcement of building regulations. Affairs were dominated by a small group of professional politicians, a situation which was partly occasioned by what a Bengal Government Letter of June 1897 described as the 'cynical disassociation' of leading Europeans from civic affairs. Urgency was added to the situation by a particularly alarming report by the Medical Board on the foul conditions of city life. A new Act of 1899 reduced the elected element in the Corporation from 66 per cent to 50 per cent, gave increased power to the I.C.S. chairman, and vested many of the Corporation's functions in a Managing Committee (similar to Bombay's Standing Committee)[1] on which government nominees formed an effective majority. It was hoped to induce the European commercial magnates to take more interest in municipal affairs by offering them places on the Managing Committee; but with the exception of a few men like George Yule, merchant and patron of the Congress, the Europeans preferred to stay outside the municipality—and criticise it.

Typical of the pedestrian post-Ripon period were the two Resolutions issued by Lord Elgin's Government in 1896 and '97, reviewing the work of urban and rural boards. The Governor-General professed satisfaction with the 'marked advance' achieved in the previous ten years, but made no fresh proposals for future lines of development. The only dynamic influence in these years was directed *against* the extension of local authority:

[1] An amending Act of 1904 gave Madras Corporation a similar Standing Committee.

Lord Curzon's memorable viceroyalty left its own distinctive mark upon local government. He insisted on the need for centralised control, and on a uniform policy of development. Primary education was encouraged by liberal grants-in-aid, coupled to constructive planning. Curzon's ascendancy undoubtedly effected a further attenuation of the 'political education' policy, and reinforced the dominant position of district officers and departmental experts.[1]

If time stood still in the Home Department of the Government of India, the world outside its portal was greatly changing. With the new century India entered a period of prosperity. Both the Imperial revenues, and the purses of the merchant and the professional man were better filled. Movements for political emancipation were entering a new phase. The use of violence and mass emotion as political weapons had been discovered; but the great majority of the national leaders still adhered firmly to constitutional methods, and valued local government as a bridge to national self-government. The call for change had taken on a more insistent tone, however.

Mr. Gokhale was perhaps the outstanding national figure, and his liberal idealism is typified in these words spoken in the Bombay Legislative Council: 'we value local self-government for the fact that it teaches men of different castes and creeds, who have long been kept apart to work together for a common purpose'.[2] For Muslims, such speeches could not outweigh their fear of a Hindu renascence, and what appeared to be the growing power of Hindus in business, the law, the administration—and in local bodies. For instance in Muslim Sind, they had almost no representatives among the members or officials of the municipalities—Karachi, Hyderabad, etc. In 1906, the Agha Khan with a strong Muslim deputation waited upon the Viceroy, Lord Minto, with their grievances. Among their demands were proposals for separate Muslim electorates and seats on local bodies. Minto stated in his reply, 'I am entirely in accord with you', and a committee was appointed to work out a scheme to meet these claims.

[1] A review by the Madras Government of municipal administration in 1905 concluded with the decision that the existing system required no reform.

[2] J. S. Hoyland, *Life of G. K. Gokhale* (Calcutta, 1933), p. 78.

Both Morley, the Secretary of State, and Minto were impressed by the urgent need to stop the drift in Indian affairs which was creating a widening gap between political leaders and British administrators.[1] If Minto was concerned to associate Indian leadership with the government on a basis of wider interests, Morley thought in terms of the development of political institutions, in accordance with the faith of his old leader. When Morley and Minto were exchanging their views upon constitutional progress in India, Lord Morley was concerned to emphasise[2] that political advances must include 'an effective advance in the direction of local self-government'. Morley commended again the views of Lord Ripon; he deprecated the manner in which official control continued to guide local bodies' every action, and he reiterated in the words of the 1882 Resolution that 'the fullest possible liberty of action should be given to local bodies'. The Governor-General was further directed to consider means whereby the village 'the fundamental and indestructible unit of the social system' should be made 'a starting-point in public life'. In the preparation of future local government policy, the proposals of the Royal Commission upon Decentralisation in India (then still unpublished) were to be taken as a guide.

[1] Cf. A missionary working in Madras stated in 1908: 'the impression exists that administration is for the Government rather than the people . . . revenue matters rule rather than the needs of the people'. DCR, ii, 258.

[2] In his dispatch No. 193, dated 27 November 1908, paras. 33 and 34.

CHAPTER IV

The Royal Commission upon Decentralisation, 1907 to 1909

I

THE Decentralisation Commission was set up in 1907 by the Liberal Government to enquire into the financial and administrative relations of the Government of India and the provincial governments—and of 'authorities subordinate to them', and to report 'whether by measure of decentralisation or otherwise', the system of government might be 'simplified and improved'. Once again the development of local self-government was considered as an aspect of administrative devolution.

The Commission was presided over by C. E. H. Hobhouse, Under-Secretary of State for India (later a member of Asquith's cabinet). The other five members were senior I.C.S. officers—all from Bengal, Madras and Bombay: Romesh Chunder Dutt was the only Indian member. The commission plodded after information in a curiously haphazard fashion; but in its rambling it unearthed a mass of evidence which, when sifted and sorted, presents a very complete picture of administration on the eve of the Morley-Minto reforms.

In the sphere of local government there was an obvious contrast between urban and rural conditions. The conditions of town life had altered a good deal in the nineteenth century, but there was still the basic pattern of great cities and petty market towns. First of all came Calcutta and Bombay, whose inhabitants were in both cases approaching a million in numbers. These two metropolitan giants were different even from their nearest rivals, Madras and Rangoon, by reason of their wealth, their 'concentrated thinking-power', their population, and the com-

plexity of their problems.[1] Then came cities of over one hundred thousand population, twenty in number. There were some cities like Lucknow and Hyderabad still flourishing on a past greatness; others like Cawnpore or Karachi were rapidly expanding under the stimulus of trade or industry. Both old and new cities had acute problems, of which the worst was over-crowding: 62 per cent of Cawnpore families lived in one room; Lucknow with 50 per cent in one room was little better. But none of the slums of these provincial cities were so congested as the 'chawls' and 'bastis' of the metropolitan centres: thus the density of population in the central area of Rangoon was 172 per acre; in central Calcutta, 281 per acre, and in Bombay centre, 598 per acre.[2] As a result, municipal expenditure was necessarily much higher per capita in Bombay and Calcutta than in other cities—and proportionately much higher in these cities than in the market towns. A small town could rely on existing wells, and as for sanitation—the habits of the village are still possible. Fire brigades, markets, municipal buildings are all luxuries. But the city must have a piped water supply, some sort of drainage system, and some control over the erection of buildings, or else the steady toll of typhoid, tuberculosis and cholera will turn into a raging epidemic. As the city grows, and the countryside is pushed further away, so the machinery of rubbish disposal, of water supply and storage, etc., becomes more complicated; it becomes necessary to regulate the sale of foodstuffs; city travel ceases to be a matter of walking or cycling, private enterprise proves unequal to the provision of housing. And so the graph of municipal activity and expenditure curves ever steeper as the size of the urban community increases.

Most of the big cities were growing, and some were growing very rapidly; but the little market towns remained static or very often declined in numbers. A population of 20,000 was quite large for Indian and Burman municipalities; indeed out of a total of 737 municipalities in 1908, 327 were of less than 10,000

[1] The income of Bombay City was, and is, considerably larger than that of all the other 160 municipalities in Bombay Presidency put together (1910: 122 lakhs, city; 75 lakhs, mofussil). The income of the next largest city—Ahmadabad, population 120,000, was only 5 per cent (6¼ lakhs) of the Bombay City total.

[2] Census of India (1911), ix. part I, 21. 21·7 per cent of Bombay 'homes' were one-roomed tenements.

inhabitants. The 'typical' municipality then, would consist of one main street with traders and bankers, and a market place; from this, narrow lanes would wind away into a huddle of small dwellings. Perhaps there would be a railway station, a dispensary and a 'middle' school. Bulls, goats and chickens would wander about the dusty lanes, and fields were not far away. The members of the municipal board may be pictured thus: a contractor in the transport or building line, a dignified but not very coherent landlord, an idealistic doctor, several pleaders with reputations to maintain as champions of the people's rights, and a silent dark little man in a worn neat coat, very conscious that he is there on sufferance, the representative of the depressed classes. This is the 'typical' municipality, rather than the big cities– and official control was geared to this level. Rangoon, or Karachi or Ahmadabad was 'within the meaning of the act' treated as equal to sleepy little sub-divisional headquarter towns or villages.

The extent to which urban bodies were subject to official control was assessed by a contemporary in these terms:

> it is the generally received opinion that in North India and Burma official influence is the predominant factor; that in Bengal it is decidedly weaker than the non-official influence, and that in Central and South India the two influences are more or less evenly balanced.[1]

This statement was based on statistics of non-official chairmen, and requires certain qualifications, but it serves as a rough guide to 1909.

As regards the criterion of election, the leading province was U.P. where three-quarters of the members were elected. At the other extreme was the N.-W.F.P., where the municipal boards were wholly nominated.[2] In general the percentage of elected members was larger or smaller according to the size of the town. For instance, in U.P. the Cawnpore board consisted of twenty-seven members of whom twenty-one were elected by wards (city

[1] H. T. S. Forrest, *The Indian Municipality* (Calcutta, 1909), p. 6.

[2] *Municipalities, proportion of elected members*: U.P., 76·5 per cent; C.P., 60·2 per cent; Bengal, 51·7 per cent; Assam, 49·5 per cent; Punjab, 49 per cent; Madras. 44 per cent; Bombay, 39·9 per cent; Burma, 11·7 per cent; N.-W.F.P., nil. Cf. Bombay City, 77·7 per cent; Madras City, 54 per cent; Calcutta, 49 per cent. *See* ISC, v, 1109-12.

population: 180,000); at Partabgarh (population: 12,000) of thirteen members only one was elected! Bombay Presidency showed similar differences; Ahmadabad with a population of 190,000 had a committee of thirty-six members, eighteen being elected; but the members of the forty-four smallest Bombay municipalities were entirely nominated.

Even boards with a high proportion of elected members drawn from the advanced professional classes often did not constitute an effective counterweight to the official chairman. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya declared of the Allahabad board (twenty-one elected, six nominated members), of which he was for three years vice-chairman, that 'the Chairman's opinions predominate to a great extent', for he could always rely upon the nominated members, and upon would-be honorary magistrates for a majority.[1] There was more freedom of opinion in Madras, Bengal and C.P., where a large proportion of chairmen were elected non-officials. Indeed J. C. Jack (author of *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*) averred that in Bengal, municipal boards would reject suggestions from the District Magistrate 'as a matter of course'.[2] In all other provinces the official chairman was a power in municipal life. Even in Bombay, only one municipality was permitted to elect its own non-official chairman; this was Poona, where G. K. Gokhale filled the office with distinction for several years.

The working of a municipality hinged upon the annual budget, which decided such things as new taxation, the allocation of funds to different heads, the launching of new projects. The manner of its preparation varied; in large towns it was usually first drafted by the Finance Committee, whose members might or might not exercise independent judgment. At Allahabad it was 'prepared by the secretary under the direction of the chairman'. In smaller towns, the budget was usually framed in the office of the District Magistrate and presented to the board as a *fait accompli*. Many Upper Burma municipalities never saw their own budget at all! In all provinces except Bombay, the budget had to be sanctioned by higher authority. It went to the Commissioner, or in Madras to the provincial government. In U.P. and Punjab the budgets of 'cities' and of loan-owing

[1] DCR, vii, 71. [2] DCR, iv, 74.

municipalities (probably the most progressive authorities), had to pass the scrutiny of Government. Frequently very considerable alterations would be made to a board's appropriations. The education budget, in addition, went on to the Director of Public Instruction, to ensure that the legal minimum of 5 per cent of total expenditure was applied to education. In Burma, the municipal education estimates were even drawn up in the first place by the government Inspector of Schools.

Higher sanction was also required for many routine administrative decisions. When the Nagpur Municipality desired to raise the monthly salary of the executive officer to Rs. 350, it was necessary to obtain the prior sanction of the Government of India.[1] In Bombay Presidency, a city like Karachi 'cannot raise the salary of a peon without the sanction of the Commissioner'.[2] Even the Corporation of Madras was held in official leading-strings: the four senior corporation officials were appointed by Government without reference to the municipality. Government frequently accepted the views of the official president in defiance of the wishes of other members, and when the municipality planned a water supply and drainage scheme, the choice of a firm of engineers, and of the programme of works was made by Government.[3] Of the other municipalities in Madras, the provincial Director of Public Instruction concluded that they had to write to Government about everything pertaining to education: 'if they want to alter the pay of a teacher . . . , or to have an additional class, or to purchase a book'.[4]

In 1908, rural authorities were emerging from a period of financial depression. The scourge of bubonic plague had entered India with the twentieth century, and had been particularly severe in Bombay. From 1906–7, U.P. suffered from famine. Under the compulsion of these calamities a large proportion of local funds had been diverted to relief work. Now, however, India was entering a period of relative prosperity and of budget surpluses. The financial position of 1908 then, reflects past stresses but forms the threshold to better times.

From 1905 the Government of India made annual grants, through the agency of provincial governments, equivalent to one-quarter of the boards' income; and in addition allotted large

[1] DCR, vi, 89. [2] DCR, viii, 173. [3] DCR, ii, 156–7. [4] DCR, ii, 61.

sums for primary education. Provincial governments distributed the annual grants on a 'per capita' basis with a 'weighting' in favour of poor boards. Thus, in U.P. some penurious boards received over one lakh each in grants, while relatively wealthy districts drew little in addition to the cess: Aligarh received a grant of only Rs. 2,400, Etawah one of Rs. 5,100. A 'contract' was made for three years, in which the grant remained unchanged, thus permitting some freedom for advance planning. Additional 'non-recurring' central grants were usually allotted to deserving boards for specific purposes. In 1903, the Bombay Government had, as a measure of relief from plague burdens, undertaken to meet half the rural bodies' expenditure on education—in addition to the central grants.

New major projects such as drainage schemes had to surmount a formidable barrier of higher control before they might be put into practice. Proposals for new drains would have to go from the Municipality to the (Government) District Engineer—up to the Provincial Sanitary Board—back to the divisional Commissioner —to the Finance Department of the provincial government—across to the Municipal Department—then to the Public Works Department—to H.E. the Governor, and finally to the Government of India, where the departmental merry-go-round began again.[1]

This 'elaborate system of guardianship' had many deleterious effects. One of the most damaging was a lack of continuity: at this period officials did not remain in one post long enough to see through any major project. In Burma, the average stay of a Deputy Commissioner in one district was ten or eleven months: the office of President of the Rangoon Municipality (an I.C.S. appointment) changed hands five times between May 1910 and December 1913. Each new officer would attempt to further his own schemes for improvement—and then be posted away before anything had emerged from the drafting board. This was particularly unfortunate at a time when local self-government was a very tender plant (especially in Burma) and so much depended on personalities—the system had not yet reached the stage where routines and conventions would carry it over a period of uncertain leadership. This lack of continuity was equally unfortunate

[1] DCR, viii, 129.

at the provincial level: one Governor would be an enthusiast about water supply; the next a champion of sewer drainage—and so the water works scheme would be abruptly terminated![1]

There were equally unhappy effects in 'political education' from this official domination. In 1908, Curzonian efficiency was predominant: the successful I.C.S. officer was the one whose reports and statistical tables looked the most impressive. This meant results, and—a new element in Indian administration—long hours at the office desk. In consequence, the District Magistrate was always overworked, and in local board matters was under the temptation to rush through the agenda of a meeting, to force through his own solution, and to cut short apparently pointless discussion. The contemporary Commissioner of Lucknow summed the situation up succinctly:

> Local self-government is the branch in which District Officers are most interested, but Government are watching their success. There is the temptation to push through schemes regardless of the Board. If the District Officer makes a new road, the result is obvious; if he consults the wishes of the Board no-one knows anything about it.[2]

As a result, many members of municipalities made no contribution whatever to local affairs: the boards were often 'simply a roundabout way of doing what the District Magistrate can do much better direct'. The concern of the non-official members in local matters was confined to the resistance of fresh taxation, and to furthering the interests of their own protégés amongst the employees.

Indian local self-government was still in many ways a democratic facade to an autocratic structure. The actual conduct of business was carried on by district officials, with the non-official members as spectators, or at most critics. No proper system of local management over local affairs had evolved; in particular the English technique of giving elected members a share in everyday administration through the committee system, was still at a very elementary stage.

The committee is the kernel of English local government; Professor Laski calls it the 'pivot' of the system. Thereby the representative's local knowledge and influence, and the official's technical skill and resources are synthesised. In the India of

[1] DCR, vii, 63. [2] DCR, vii, 104.

1908, even an elementary division of the work into such heads as Education, Sanitation, and so on, was frequently not attempted.

The public men of Bombay City had deliberately maintained a separation between the 'executive' and the 'legislative' functions. Even the Standing Committee did not operate as an administrative body, but as a sanctioning and confirming authority; special questions of policy and planning were referred to *ad hoc* committees from time to time. The Madras and Calcutta Corporations also functioned only through standing committees; Rangoon Municipality worked through three standing committees for Finance, Public Works, and Health.

Among the remaining municipalities, the constitution of committees was somewhat haphazard. The system was not employed in Madras, and was almost unknown in Burma. In Bombay most municipalities functioned through three or four committees. A 'typical' U.P. district contained four municipalities, only one of which had set up committees.[1] The other provinces stood somewhere between Bombay and U.P. When, as in a large number of towns, there was an attempt to conduct all municipal business at full board meetings, there were two possible results. In order to conclude the swollen agenda, the chairman might ruthlessly steamroller his way through the business. Or if the chairman was weak or believed in free discussion, 'lengthy and acrimonious debate' must result. To add to the difficulties of the proceedings, discussion was normally conducted in English, which was only imperfectly understood in the smaller Indian towns, and was completely unknown in Burma; even on Rangoon Municipal Committee some members had to speak through an interpreter.

In the absence of a proper system of procedure, successful administration usually depended upon an able chairman or vice-chairman. When the District Magistrate was chairman, the bulk of the work devolved upon the vice-chairman, who might devote several hours a day to his duties, although this was invariably an honorary appointment; it might be held by a member of the district revenue staff, or by a non-official member—this being usual in Madras and Bengal.

At the head of the municipal staff was the secretary; in a large

[1] DCR, vii, 128.

town he would be paid about Rs. 500 per mensem, and was usually a retired tahsildar; a small board could only pay Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 a month for a secretary of the head-clerk type. Large cities needed a more responsible chief officer, particularly where the growth of trade or industry presented problems of town-planning or the need for public utilities. There were two usual solutions. The first, to make the post of chairman or president a full-time I.C.S. appointment, on the Calcutta model, as was done in Rangoon, Cawnpore and Allahabad. The second was to adopt the Bombay City system of a responsible municipal commissioner; this solution was embodied in the Bombay Municipal Act of 1901 and was to apply to 'city' municipalities in that province.

Municipal service attracted few Indians of ability. It offered neither the prestige nor the security of government service, and was more poorly paid. Only the Presidency towns and Rangoon could entertain reasonably paid and qualified senior staff, such as much needed medical officers, engineers and surveyors; in 1907, all these senior appointments were held as a matter of course by Europeans. In the remaining towns there was no proper municipal service. Retired government servants filled the senior posts, a few technicians held temporary contracts, and the great majority of municipal employees were poorly paid clerks or coolies.

No convention of 'correct' relations between members of boards and staff had developed. Municipal service sometimes provided a useful standby for the members' dependants. Members continually interfered in staff questions, and employees actively canvassed their interests amongst the members. There was an intense interest in the making of appointments and transfers, even amongst normally apathetic boards. As a result, control over municipal staff was generally lax. There was no staff discipline, no code of procedure—the making of applications and appeals 'through the proper channels', and so on. Members were accustomed to the 'bhaibandi' of the caste or occupational group; there was 'a tendency to habitual mercy and liberal forgiveness, which militates very effectively against the efficiency of the staff'.[1] Many municipal employees augmented their miserable pay with the customary 'commission' of the East for

[1] See 'Report of the Municipal Taxation Enquiry Committee, 1908–9', U.P., p. 61.

trivial services rendered or trivial offences condoned. In particular, octroi staff, the bulk of whom were 'mohurrirs' or tallymen employed at Rs. 10 a month, used their position to levy a regular scale of irregular tolls.

The basic function of municipal government remained, as for fifty years past, sanitation: the disposal of night soil and other rubbish, together with a sketchy street-cleaning service. The work was carried out in the age-old manner; sometimes the department was farmed out to a contractor. Only in Madras Presidency was there supervision by trained sanitary inspectors. The upkeep of roads absorbed much of the funds. Municipalities were permitted varying degrees of freedom of action; C.P. boards were most restricted, having to obtain official sanction for all works costing over Rs. 500. Water-supply was in general an unsolved problem. Only a few of the larger towns had water works (e.g. 8 of the 87 U.P. municipalities, and 10 of the 157 Bombay municipalities). One of the major discoveries of sanitary science in the nineteenth century was the connection between pure water and public health: the contemporary vital statistics formed a grim demonstration of Indian inadequacy in this matter. In the big Indian industrial towns and in Rangoon, death claimed one infant in every two or three, within twelve months of birth.

In general the public was not much interested in the promotion of public works and sanitation: unfamiliar western methods seemed to be opposed to all the teachings of religion and custom. Only in Bengal was there a real demand for these services, and some willingness to pay for them. Elsewhere public health services were developed only because officials fostered them. Almost the whole range of municipal services was evolved in response to pressure from British officials rather than as a result of the desires of the people. Education formed something of an exception: there was a definite middle-class demand, particularly for secondary schools, but in this post-Curzon era, municipalities were in many cases having to relinquish control over education to the district boards or to Government, often the only function of the municipality was to act as pay master. Similarly, hospitals and dispensaries received municipal support—but were managed exclusively by the Civil Surgeon.

The outstanding factor governing municipal services was of course the remarkably low income, reckoned per head of population, which limited even the largest towns. The average incidence of taxation, both direct and indirect, was about Rs. 1/8 as. per head, per annum. There were enormous differences in the rates at which taxes were levied—in the leading cities the incidence was as much as Rs. 10 per head, whilst in many little market towns it was only a few annas. Yet in almost every case, in relation to the size of municipal problems, the amount was inadequate. Direct taxation was never imposed without resistance; in 1909 only the Bengal and Madras municipalities drew the major part of their income from 'rates'—in the English usage. Throughout northern India, the Central Provinces and Bombay, octroi was the foundation of municipal finance, while the largest item of Burmese municipal income was the profit made from markets. (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4

PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF MUNICIPAL INCOME: 1908[1]

	Taxes				Total income	
	Octroi	Houses and lands tax	Professions and trades tax	Water and conservancy rates	Percentage from taxes	Percentage from grants
Bengal	—	39%	—	28%	75%	8%
Bombay	47%	17%	—	34%	56%	5%
Madras	—	46%	10%	14%	63%	6%
U.P.	72%	5%	3%	7%	76%	2%
Punjab	90%	7%	—	2%	66%	1%
C.P.	57%	5%	—	24%	67%	3%
Assam	—	30%	—	31%	53%	16%
Burma	—	48%	—	18%	36%	9%

Octroi = 98 per cent of taxation in N.-W.F.P.
Market receipts formed 44 per cent of total Burma income.

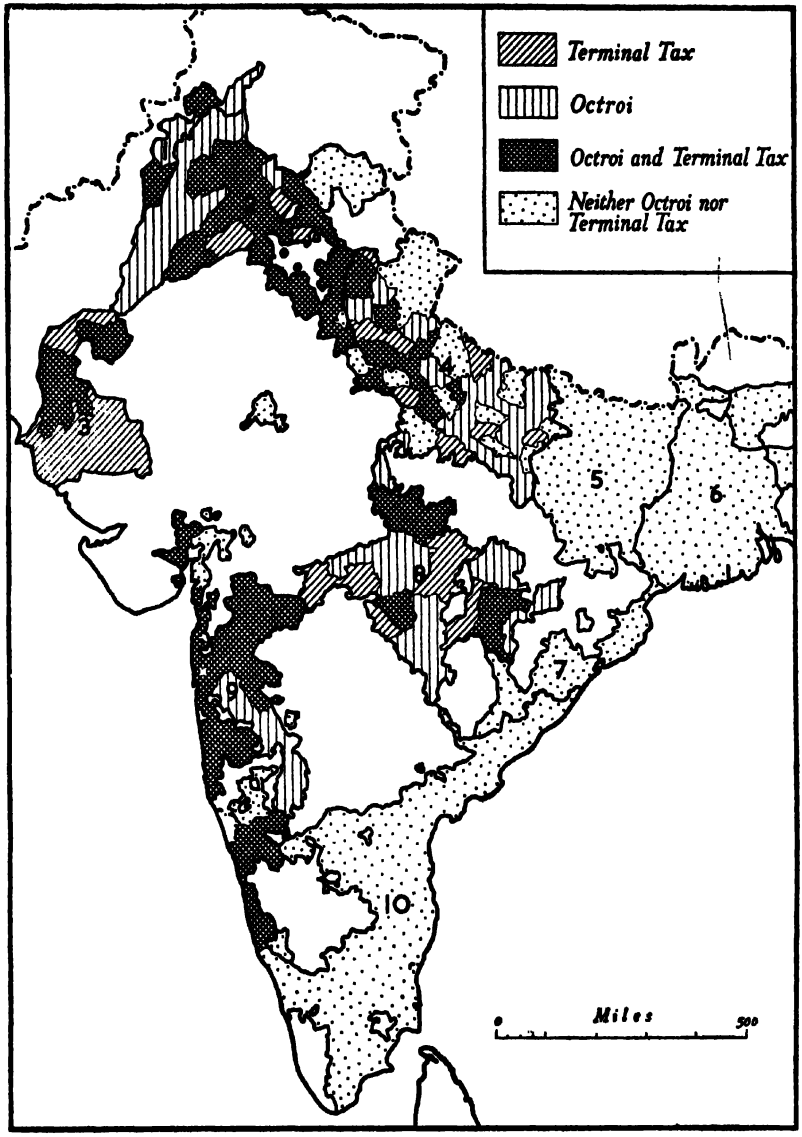
[1] I.e. figures for the financial year 1 April 1908 to 31 March 1909. For simplification, all figures quoted in this work, based on the financial year, are shown as for the calendar year.

Indirect taxes comprised nearly the whole of the Punjab tax-income, three-quarters of the U.P. total, and half of the taxation of C.P. and Bombay. The other taxes were based upon some sort of property or occupational assessment, apart from a few minor licence fees imposed on transport or trading. The proportion of taxation to total income varied from three-quarters in Bengal to one-third in Burma. The rest of the income came from rents of property, government grants (usually given for capital works, such as drainage or water systems), and payments received for municipal services (school fees, water-charges, market receipts, etc.).

The two principal systems of taxation were the octroi, or alternatively some form of property tax, and neither was a wholly satisfactory method of raising revenue. Octroi represented a tax on the staple necessities of life. In U.P. the schedules were as follows: I, Foodstuffs; II, Animals for slaughter; III, Fuel; IV, Building materials; V, Drugs and spices; VI, Tobacco; VII, Cloth; VIII, Metals. In some cases the schedules included over seventy items liable to octroi. The system pressed hard on the poorer classes, taxation was based on no general principles and was arbitrary in operation, collection costs were high, and the unofficial levies by the mohurrirs might be more than the amount realised by the municipality. Yet this system was preferred, at least by the middle classes, as being familiar through ancient usage. Property taxes were disliked very largely because none could be sure that they were distributed fairly between different householders. When a house tax was first introduced in U.P. it resulted in riots. It was disliked both by boards and by the public: 'assessees complain that favouritism is rife, the boards of the odium to which taxes expose them, and of their difficulty in collecting them'.[1] Only the Presidency towns and Rangoon employed qualified staff to assess property for 'rating'; elsewhere assessment was undertaken by the chairman, or more often by a committee of members. This system was subject to laxity and favouritism, as a Bengal report observed a few years before: 'we have the local toddy-vendor taxed at the maximum, followed at a long interval by the leading local rais'.[2] The collection of rates was not enforced with the

[1] ITEC, iv, 472.

[2] Bengal, Municipal Reports, 1894–5.



Municipal taxation: provinces and districts in which Octroi and Terminal Taxes were levied in 1937. 1. N.W. Frontier Province. 2. Punjab. 3. Sind. 4. United Provinces. 5. Bihar. 6. Bengal. 7. Orissa. 8. Central Provinces. 9. Bombay. 10. Madras.

necessary strictness: warrants for non-payments were hardly ever proceeded with, and most municipalities had arrears of rates not collected. To some extent these weaknesses in the systems of taxation were the legacy of past policy: boards had become used to receiving orders and drawing grants from the provincial and central governments, and they automatically looked thither for the funds to bolster up their balances. But to a greater extent this financial incapacity reflected the gap between the mental attitude of the members, and the machinery of western representative institutions.

The general picture of municipal administration which takes shape in 1908, is of a system still largely bound by official control, and with public opinion operating, with some few exceptions, as a negative rather than a positive influence. The large towns showed most promise: the little market centres ignored any need for public services.

II

Rural local government remained at an even more elementary stage: in Burma local opinion was still not formally associated with local administration at all. If the (somewhat artificial) test of elective representation is made, as an indication of political development, then rural affairs reveal a state of immaturity far exceeding that of the municipal boards. In most provinces district boards continued to be composed partly of nominated members, and partly of the representatives of sub-district boards. Only in U.P. and Punjab was there direct election to district boards.

After 1906 the U.P. district boards were three-quarters elected but progress was more nominal than real. The electorate was selected by the tahsildar from 'fit persons' and numbered only fifty or sixty persons in each tahsil. Elections attracted little interest. In 1909 there were elections in Gorakhpur District; of its three million inhabitants, four hundred were on the electoral roll; sixty-two actually voted! Under such conditions it was certain that members would be 'loyal' supporters of the district magistrate. Of the Punjab district boards, thirteen were partly nominated and partly chosen by an electorate of landlords and village headmen; two were still composed largely of 'delegates'

from the tahsil boards; and twelve boards—including all those west of the Jhelum, were wholly nominated. The franchise for sub-district boards in other provinces was usually equally restricted:[1] with reference to voters' qualifications in C.P., the Decentralisation Commission was told that the rural boards 'do not profess to be popular representative bodies',[2] and this was said of a province where a relatively liberal policy had prevailed.

The sub-district boards had lost most of even that limited importance which they enjoyed in the 1880's and '90's. In U.P. they had 'only very petty powers' and 'their members would never meet': in 1906 they ceased to have even a nominal existence. The Punjab tahsil boards had also gradually been abolished since 1893, and by 1908 only two remained—in a state of 'suspended animation'. In some other provinces, districts were vast areas (cf. Mymensingh—6,300 square miles, and five million inhabitants), so that local circumstances made some smaller unit of administration imperative. But sub-district boards were considered useful only as inspecting agencies; they were denied any real financial independence (for instance, in Bombay about one-quarter of the district board funds was given to the taluka boards); only in Madras did the detailed provisions of the 1884 Act ensure for the taluk board a higher status.

Official control over rural bodies was more directly imposed than over urban boards. The proportion of official members was high (e.g. one-quarter in U.P., or one-fifth in Bombay), and the sway of the District Magistrate was absolute. Even in C.P., one district council was now presided over by an assistant commissioner, while all the presidents of the tahsil boards were tahsildars; as the tahsil boards were entrusted with most of the funds, and with executive responsibility, it was necessary even in C.P. to characterise rural self government as a 'farce', a 'government department'.[3] Rural public opinion was most articulate in Bengal; the rural bhadralok and the great zamindars were alike much more interested in political questions than the vast majority of rural India; yet in Bengal both official and

[1] *Proportion of elected members on rural boards*: C.P., 73·6 per cent; U.P., 69·5 per cent; Bombay, 44·6 per cent; Assam, 41 per cent; Punjab, 40 per cent; Bengal, 32·8 per cent; Madras, 5·7 per cent; N.-W.F.P., nil. *See* ISC, v, 1113–15.

[2] DCR, vi, 106.

[3] Opinion of Chief Secretary, C.P. *See* DCR, vi, 52.

landlord agreed that the district board was 'a government office': 'official control . . . is so close that there is no sense of local responsibility'.[1]

A few of the great landlords (for instance Malik Umar Hyat Khan or the Maharaja of Burdwan), had been brought into contact with the political life of the Council Chamber, and some of these gentlemen took a lead in rural board affairs; but the great majority held aloof. Two leading taluqdars of Oudh appeared successively at sittings of the Decentralisation Commission: both plainly expressed the dislike of 'influential people' for the district boards.[2] Those landlords who did become members often failed to represent agricultural interests effectively. Two of the most important Khans of the North-West Frontier informed the Decentralisation Commission that they had been members of district boards for over twenty years; one Khan attended meetings 'about once a year'; the other had only been to five meetings in the whole twenty years![3] Landlords were ill-acquainted with both the English language, and with government by committee. They desired to stand well with Government so as to retain their privileges. Their normal attitude of courteous aloofness fitted them ill for debate: one taluqdar member expressed his 'hesitation in speaking frankly to the official chairman';[4] the feudal zamindars and jagirdars of Sind were almost complete cyphers in the board room. Apart from the landlords, and the lawyers residing at district headquarters there were no men accustomed to playing a part in district life. The mass of the peasants, and of course the minorities and the depressed classes, were virtually unrepresented.

Although the District Magistrate held undisputed sway over the district board, apart from the criticism of a few lawyers, there was an elaborate machinery of further official control. Public works schemes had to be sent away for the approval of the government engineer in all but the most petty cases. In Bengal and Bombay outside permission was necessary for all schemes costing over Rs. 500; in U.P. the figure was Rs. 1,000; in Madras, Rs. 2,500.[5] These meaningless variations form a commentary on the arbitrary and artificial manner in which

[1] DCR, iv, 44 and 111.
[2] DCR, vii, 146 and 151.
[3] DCR, ix, 38 and 49.
[4] DCR, vii, 48.
[5] DCR, i, 252.

local government machinery was fabricated. In the sphere of education U.P. boards were perhaps the most emancipated. They decided the location of schools and exercised control over teaching staff, school buildings and equipment; the provincial education department's authority was confined to teaching methods, examinations, etc. Schools were amenable to departmental inspection, but routine supervision was left to district board inspectors—who were however appointed and promoted under the auspices of the education department. In C.P. and Bengal the district boards also had a material share in school management, but in most provinces their power had been surrendered to the education department. The Bombay district boards had no say in education matters whatsoever, except a share in decisions as to where schools should be located, and whether a school should be abolished. Similarly in the sphere of medical relief, boards in all the provinces were only consulted as to the setting up of dispensaries; their subsequent management was the Civil Surgeon's concern. Vaccinators were nominally in district board pay, but their master was again the Civil Surgeon.

The financial limitations imposed upon rural boards were far more stringent than those affecting municipalities. Up to 1906 the U.P. district boards had no independent financial existence: their income came from a provincial pool. Most of the provinces had to submit to compulsory deductions from their cesses; in some provinces 25 per cent to 30 per cent of the local cess was taken by Government for the upkeep of village police. Over two-thirds of the road cess in C.P. was transferred to the provincial P.W.D. without ever coming onto the district councils' books. Members of rural boards had even less influence on the drafting of the annual budget than did their brethren in the towns. They were required to pass the budget at a formal meeting; it was then sent up through the Commissioner to Government, where it was scrutinised in detail by the Director of Public Instruction, the Sanitary Commissioner and other officials who were authorised to compel the boards to revise their proposals. In Madras, Bombay, and Punjab the boards were obliged to allocate fixed proportions of their funds to specific heads (roads, education, etc.), thus severely restricting the range of financial planning. Up till

1908, district board budgets were incorporated in the provincial budget and submitted to the Government of India, and thereafter no departure whatsoever from the budget allocations was permitted. The zamindars of Moradabad in U.P. subscribed funds to build a new hospital, but any further action had to be delayed for twelve months because the donations had not been included in the budget.[1] In 1907 when the Madras Government submitted its budget, the Government of India reduced the provincial public works estimates by four lakhs, and those for education by two lakhs; as a result the district boards throughout Madras had to re-cast their entire financial arrangements for that year.[2] Any money not spent by district boards at the end of each financial year lapsed to Government, so the closing months saw a scramble to expend the remaining balances. The allotment of government grants constituted a powerful weapon of control, as grants formed between one-third and one-half of local bodies' total income.[3] Grants were employed for specific purposes laid down by Government, and might therefore be utilised as Government, not the boards, thought most desirable.

Altogether the share of the members in the affairs of their own countryside was meagre. The Commissioner of Lucknow, calling for a more liberal system said,

> I have been at a meeting where the only business has consisted in the formal reading through and passing of twenty resolutions: and the members have complained that they have been brought forty or fifty miles for that simple purpose.[4]

Meetings usually took place in the District Magistrate's office, and they were held only at infrequent intervals. Attendance was often thin, particularly in the provinces where districts were vast, and means of communication bad. The agricultural members were largely absentees; Malik Umar Hyat Khan declared that there was only a good number at the Shahpur District Board when a horse-fair was being held in town![5] The committee system was naturally non-existent, except in U.P., Bengal and C.P. where some finance, roads, and dispensary committees had

[1] DCR, vii, 84. [2] DCR, ii, 228.
[3] *District Boards: Grants from Government* 1908: Bombay, 36 per cent; Bengal, 11 per cent; Madras, 18 per cent; U.P., 30 per cent; Punjab, 22 per cent; C.P., 31 per cent; Assam, 33 per cent. [4] DCR, vii, 103. [5] DCR, ix, 108–9.

been set up. But, in the traditional manner of Indian administration members responded better if some specific responsibility was delegated to them individually.

A large portion of the district boards' functions was discharged by an honorary secretary in U.P., Punjab and C.P. In the first two provinces he was usually a member of the revenue staff, and in many cases this official had 'so much of his own work to do that he could not devote much time to board work'. The C.P. secretaries were non-officials, and many of them put in much unpaid labour on local business. A few U.P. boards employed paid secretaries. In the other provinces, executive work was usually performed by the vice-chairman, usually a deputy collector, but a non-official in about three-quarters of Madras and Bengal districts. The actual office staff of a district board might consist of an accountant and two clerks. The task of preparing estimates, and of supervising roads and schools devolved largely upon the revenue officials when touring the district. The 'outside' staff of the boards was also small and poorly paid, except in Bengal where thirty-two district boards employed engineers on salaries of Rs. 500 to Rs. 700 per mensem. Elsewhere public works were supervised by overseers or sub-overseers paid from fifty to one hundred rupees a month. Teachers were often unqualified, and almost all received monthly salaries of less than ten rupees, with virtually no prospect of promotion. District boards had to submit to outside official control when appointing or dismissing their senior officials.[1]

The range and scale of district board services was of course governed by the limited nature of their resources. Boards were beginning to express some enthusiasm for education, but poverty severely restricted expansion. G. K. Gokhale said in 1901, that four of every five Indian villages had no school. This 'average' concealed much graver deficiencies: for instance in C.P., a subdivision of five hundred villages might contain only forty schools. Medical and veterinary services were usually provided only at district headquarters. Similarly communications did not extend beyond the main administrative centres of the district. The sub-district boards' activities were even more severely restricted to the upkeep of a few wells and cart-tracks, and not

[1] For details, *see* DCR, i, 262.

surprisingly, there was no stimulus to that 'local interest and local knowledge' which Ripon had desired to foster.

The basis of district board income remained the land revenue cess, which provided between one-third and one-half of the total. (See Table 5.) The land cess was almost incapable of expansion, no increase was possible during the period between one revenue settlement and another—usually at least thirty years. In the area of the permanent settlement, the cess was

TABLE 5

PROPORTION OF LAND CESS TO TAXATION, AND OF TAXATION TO TOTAL INCOME

	Percentage of cess to total taxation	Percentage of taxation to total income
Bengal	91%	54%
Bombay	86%	50%
Madras	83%	46%
U.P.	88%	45%
Punjab	94%	55%
C.P.	95%	38%
Assam	85%	49%

based upon rental values, which in the case of many tenants were static. The land cess was of course dependent on the unreliable monsoon, and liable to disappear should there be a failure of the crops, followed by remission of the land revenue. The cess was financially inconvenient: revenue came in altogether in one sum (from Government) at the *end* of the financial year, so that many services had to be paid for out of a board's balances. Under this system local government was dependent on one economic activity only—agriculture. When, as in C.P., large areas were entirely jungle, the district boards were very poor indeed. Other pursuits—mining, fishing, rural industries and trade escaped any contribution to local funds, although traders and industrialists might well obtain more from the district board services than the agriculturalist.

The remainder of the income came from tolls on roads and ferries (about 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the total), government grants, fees, and the 'voluntary' contributions of land-

lords and merchants for the endowment of dispensaries, schools, etc.

In every direction rural boards had to function within the most narrow restrictions, and it was not therefore surprising that they had acquired no genuine 'local' or 'popular' character by 1908. Village life was still not associated in any way with the 'training in government' supposedly represented by local institutions: village opinion was expressed chiefly in a chorus of complaint, that while they were taxed by the district board, no benefit ever descended to them.[1]

Altogether, the Decentralisation Commission's enquiries uncovered evidence, which seemed to convince even their conservative minds that local bodies had not developed as had been hoped in Ripon's day, yet at the same time they had noticed much that was not discouraging in the existing situation. Both Indian politicians and English officials were reasonably in agreement on future development. G. K. Gokhale asserted

> We want an interest in the administration around us. The educated classes are only critics of the administration today because the Government does not realise the wisdom of enlisting their co-operation. . . . The problem of bringing the administration into closer relation with the people is essentially a problem of associating the educated classes with the actual work of the administration. With village panchayats at the bottom, District Councils in the centre and reformed Legislative Councils at the top this problem will have been fairly faced.[2]

Even B. G. Tilak (himself a member of the Poona Municipality for three years) at this time on the eve of his prosecution for sedition, was still asserting the virtues of 'gradualism':

> The only way to restore good relations between the officers and the people is to create *by law* the necessity for consulting the people . . . we must begin with the village system . . . it should be the aim of the British administration to educate the people in the management of their own affairs.[3]

The more discerning among British officials were for their part urging the need for a greater degree of administrative and political emancipation. Thus, A. C. Saunders, Commissioner of Lucknow: 'We are less advanced in local self-government than

[1] Cf. DCR, viii, 35, 37 and 41. [2] DCR, viii, 61. [3] DCR, viii, 84.

we were twenty years ago', local bodies 'should be conceded in fact what they are allowed in name'.[1]

But there was a need for actions to supplement words: existing local institutions were not encouraging, there was a long record of official control and tutelage. The objects of Lord Ripon's resolution had been almost entirely lost to sight. Indeed, when the Secretary to the Government of Bombay, responsible for local self-government throughout the Presidency, was asked whether 'it would be more in conformity' with the principle of political education laid down in post-Ripon legislation to allow local authorities to exercise powers of school management, he could only reply 'I cannot say what the idea of the Local Self-Government Act was'.[2]

III

The Decentralisation Commission presented its report in 1909. There was little in the Commission's conclusions to show that they recognised the challenge implicit in the contemporary situation. Their proposals were sound but cautious; conceived in terms of administrative improvement, rather than of national political aspirations.

The Commission dealt separately with village organisation, rural bodies and municipal boards. Once again, it was insisted that 'the foundation of any stable edifice which shall associate the people with the administration must be the village'. Having heard a mass of evidence which tended to confirm that the ancient 'solidarity' and community-bonds had long disintegrated, the Commission affirmed 'We do not think it possible to restore the ancient village system'. But they considered that the panchayat should be re-established as the vehicle of new types of village government. The new system should be introduced 'gradually and cautiously'. The village head-man should become sirpanch (leader), the other members to be informally elected'. Their functions should include petty civil and criminal jurisdiction, village sanitation, the construction of minor public works, and the building and management of village schools. They should not be saddled with taxation (the onus of extra taxation had left the village sanitary boards stillborn). They should be

[1] DCR, vii, 100. [2] DCR, viii, 139.

supervised by district officers, not district boards, and they should not be subject to the petty tyranny of petty officials.[1]

The Commission diagnosed the causes of the indifferent health of the existing structure of rural boards as largely due to inadequate funds, and an insufficient share in the management of services which were theirs in name. It was urged that district boards should receive the whole of the land revenue cess, and that boards should be at liberty to raise this cess to two annas in the rupee. The poorer boards should receive 'block' grants on a long-term basis, and no longer be compelled to devote specific sums to specific heads. A number of 'non-local' district board duties, such as plague and famine relief, or the upkeep of trunk roads, should now become charges on provincial revenues. Regarding the boards' functions, a 'freer hand' was envisaged in education, the construction of public works (by a board engineer and staff), and control over medical services.

A feature of the section concerning rural bodies was the insistence that taluka and tahsil boards should again be 'universally established' as the 'principal agencies of local government', in order to ensure a return to that 'local knowledge and local interest' upon which Ripon had laid such store. Past failures were attributed to a paucity of funds and responsibilities; so now these sub-district boards should enjoy 50 per cent of the district boards' income, and be assigned definite duties: the management of minor roads, primary education and rural dispensaries. Upon this portion of their proposals the Commission was most insistent.[2]

The Commission was not disposed to agree to the District Magistrate relinquishing the presidency of the district board as Ripon had recommended, twenty-five years before. The D.M. should continue as chairman of the district board, in view of his unrivalled opportunities of knowing the district, but he should be a 'constitutional ruler' abiding by the feelings of the board.[3] Control from above must be strictly limited; the provincial government should intervene only to suspend or abolish a board; the Commissioner should only take action when a board failed to discharge its statutory obligations.[4]

Urban authorities, it was proposed, should be released from

[1] DCR, i, 238–40. [2] DCR, i, 307. [3] DCR, i, 266. [4] DCR, i, 307–9.

official leading strings almost entirely. It was stated squarely that 'the chairman should be an elected non-official', and a majority of members should likewise be elected non-officials. Committees should be set up to take over the routine supervision of different services. A municipal board should be free to increase any branch of taxation as it thought fit, and should have full control over its budget. Boards should be relieved of 'non-local' duties; famine relief, the town police, even maintenance of the district headquarters hospital. Government grants should be given only for major projects. Government control over the floating of loans should continue. As a necessary condition to this liberty of action, the Commission stipulated that the municipal executive must be strengthened by competent chief officers. An Executive Officer, with a position analogous to that of the Commissioner of Bombay City, should be compulsory for all cities with a population of 100,000 or above. A qualified Medical Officer of Health should be appointed in all towns of 20,000 souls or more. The appointment of an Engineer was also recommended.[1] Higher control was to be on lines similar to that over district boards: Government was to retain powers to suspend or abolish unsatisfactory municipalities, the Commissioner was to be empowered to enforce a neglected service, and the District Magistrate to be given powers of emergency action.[2]

These proposals did little more than echo the resolution of May 1882, yet even such entirely conservative reforms were postponed for a further ten years: the last of the years of opportunity for British statesmen and officials—and they passed away unused.

[1] DCR, i, 271, 279. [2] DCR, i, 310.

CHAPTER V

Years of Promise and of Disappointment, 1909 to 1917

FOR India, the year 1909 marks the watershed between nineteenth-century paternalism, and the national self-government of today. The torrent of nationalism began as a trickle, and the change was certainly not discernible to the Indian Government of 1909, when it initiated the Morley-Minto reforms; the first modest step towards independence. In Burma, paternal rule continued virtually unchanged until after the 1914–18 War.

The composition of the expanded Legislative Councils of 1909 illustrates the various stages of political development reached by different provinces. For instance, the new legislatures of the United Provinces and Bombay consisted of forty-eight and forty-nine members respectively, with twenty-one elected non-officials in each council. By contrast, in the Punjab Council, of twenty-four members only five were elected. In the Burmese legislature, out of a total of seventeen members there was only one non-official who was chosen by the Burma Chamber of Commerce, a European organisation.

In Bombay, of the twenty-one elected members, nine were elected by local bodies: one by the Corporation of Bombay, four by the municipalities, and four by district boards. In U.P., of the elected members, a majority—thirteen, were elected by local bodies: nine by district boards and the smaller municipalities, and four chosen by the large cities in rotation. Of the five Punjab elected members, three were chosen by the municipal committees.

The remaining elected non-official members represented special interests, in particular the Muslims and the landlords. Thus, in order to make his mark on national or provincial public

life, the Indian politician of the time had to begin by standing as a member of a local board, and then had to secure sufficient prestige amongst his colleagues on the local bodies of his division to ensure further election to the provincial council. In the neighbourhood of the Presidency towns, some of the politicians chosen for the provincial councils owed their selection entirely to their reputation in the Indian National Congress; but in general the members of the first Morley-Minto Councils were men who had made their name in local government.

However, the watershed in the history of Indian local government starts not so much from the reformed Councils as from the Report of the Royal Commission upon Decentralisation.

Its new proposals met with the general approval of the Government of India, but, as was the case with the reforms of Mayo and Ripon, the working out of detailed schemes for their fulfilment was delegated to provincial governments. This dichotomy had been partly responsible for the manner in which the Ripon policy had been nullified in practice: it was to be so again. As the Montagu-Chelmsford report was to observe later, the involute structure of the Indian Government was itself a bar to political progress.[1]

The Imperial Government was responsible for initiating policy, and as it controlled the major sources of revenue, it effectively held the purse strings. This could create both lack of continuity, and an unnatural uniformity. In routine matters, the provinces were compelled to submit all proposals to Simla—sometimes for elaborate investigation, more often for meaningless assent. The pace was always set for the provinces by the Viceroy's Council and by the Secretary of State.

The implementing of every scheme devised by the centre however, rested upon provincial governments, and at last upon the district staff. The central government had to submit to the interpretation placed upon government resolutions by district officers, and only knew how a scheme was shaping from their reports. Between the inability of the provinces to go ahead without direction and resources from the centre, and the inability of the centre to act except through provincial agency, there was ample reason for a lack of effective progress.

[1] M/CR, p. 11.

In 1909, the Government of India instructed the provinces to ascertain the views of their senior officers upon the Commission's proposals, to implement them to whatever extent they thought fit; and wherever existing legislation was inadequate to meet fresh responsibilities, to promote new draft bills. Meanwhile the centre took such steps as it could to further local government and social progress. In 1911, a new member joined the Viceroy's Executive Council holding the portfolios of education and local self-government. Sir Harcourt Butler was the first to hold this office.

The Coronation Durbar was the occasion for the announcement of a five-year scheme for the expansion of primary education under local authorities, together with a new programme of sanitary works and road construction. A budget surplus enabled the Government of India to provide generous grants to finance these schemes. Two years later this assistance was further amplified: large grants were given to the rural boards equivalent to the deductions which provincial governments made from the product of the one anna cess. All these measures reflect the Decentralisation Commission's insistence upon the need to arouse interest in local government, by increasing the resources of local bodies, thereby increasing the opportunities of the members. As an instance of the results of the 1913 assistance, in U.P. this had the effect of raising district boards' income from 80 lakhs in 1912 to 121 lakhs in 1913—a 40 per cent increase, making possible entirely new standards in education, medical relief and rural roads.

The response of politically active India to the policy of the central government seemed favourable. The leadership of the 'Moderates' held firm, and men like G. K. Gokhale, Pheroze Shah Mehta and S. N. Banerjea still dominated Congress. They accepted—indeed strenuously advocated—a policy of political progress based on local self-government; stipulating only that local bodies should come under popular control without further delay.[1] A new factor in Indian politics was the Muslim League. In its session at Delhi in 1910, the League demanded separate electorates in local bodies. The pressure for Muslim electorates was particularly strong in Punjab, and by 1917 ten

[1] Cf. Sir Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making* (1925), pp. 295 and 297.

municipalities had been reconstituted on communal lines. Moderate Congressmen under Gokhale's lead were prepared to consider these demands; however in 1911 a Hindu member of the Imperial Legislative Council moved a resolution calling for the abolition of separate electorates, herald of things to come.

Despite the prevailing atmosphere of optimism and co-operation, sinister elements were latent. In retrospect the period immediately after the Morley-Minto reforms seems one of lost opportunity: both the Government of India, and the national leaders were unable to surmount the obstacles which arose. Local bodies were linked inseparably with their past: twenty-five years of elaborate tutelage could not be shaken off, an emancipated régime could not be created overnight. Then—almost before the reforms began to take shape, all progress was overshadowed by the deadly negation of war. And finally, Indian political life, just as it was attaining maturity, quitted the path of social reform and of Gladstonian faith in representative institutions for the tortuous track of direct action and non-co-operation.

In the six years 1909–15, the pace was set by official policy, but in the next crowded years the rush of events wrested control from the hands of careful administrators. A vague consciousness of the strength of combined action was spreading from the politically educated few to the illiterate urban mob. This consciousness of the power of numbers developed real effectiveness only in 1919, but during the previous ten years it was imperceptibly growing. There was no dramatic change in Indian politics in 1915 or 1916; yet in those years Indian nationalism shed its debating society atmosphere, and raised its voice in the bazaar, in the stock exchange and in the council chamber. Symptoms, rather than causes, of this change were the succession of Tilak to Gokhale's national leadership, and the political programme which emerged from the Lucknow meetings of Congress and the League.

Meanwhile, provincial governments were proceeding to carry out their interpretations of the Decentralisation Commission's proposals. The principle of political education was accepted by the majority of the Heads of provinces, but they were not prepared to hurry up public opinion by 'hot-house' methods. Their

new measures were drafted strictly in accordance with the existing state of political life in village and market-town. The action taken by different provinces reflected the varying state of public opinion, as well as the attitude of Heads of provinces: Lord Willingdon as Governor of Bombay was to prove considerably more 'politically conscious' than any of his fellows. In general, while rural boards remained 'so many petty government departments',[1] there was some progress in the towns. As the keystone of their recommendations for municipal advance, the Decentralisation Commission had stipulated that the chairman of a municipality should be an elected non-official. Development in this direction provides a rough index to progress in different provinces. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6

CHAIRMEN OF MUNICIPAL BOARDS

	1908		1917	
	Official	Non-official	Official	Non-official
Bengal	27	85	16	99
Bombay	143	14	61	92
Madras	10	50	8	54
U.P.	85	2	21	62
Punjab	101	37	86	16
Burma	43	—	42	3

In 1908, a little less than a quarter of the chairmen were non-officials, whereas by 1917 over one-third were non-officials. This modest advance conceals considerable variations. Bengal, C.P. and Madras slightly increased the already large majority of non-official chairmen; in Bombay and U.P. the balance swung decisively from official to non-official predominance; and in some other provinces, such as Punjab and Burma, there was virtually no advance whatever.

There was no significant change of policy anywhere. The Heads of provinces conferred with their subordinates, and gradually, piecemeal, the right to elect their own chairmen was extended to the cities and then to smaller towns. At the same time, in some

[1] ISC, ix, 442.

provinces the municipal franchise was made more uniform, and usually more liberal. The reluctance of the Burma Government to embark upon any change bore hard upon Rangoon. It had long been a complaint that the 1898 Burma Municipal Act was designed for 'mere district villages'. In 1911 the Municipal Committee of Rangoon asked for a special act for the city, whereupon the Burma Government invited the municipality to prepare a draft bill. The Decentralisation Commission had recommended that Rangoon's constitution should be modelled on that of Bombay Corporation, and after some study of the latter's system at first hand, a bill was prepared embodying the Bombay relationship of executive and corporation. The Bill went up to the Burma Government in 1915—and disappeared for five years, because Government refused to consider any enhancement of existing municipal powers.

The Decentralisation Commission had insisted that with increased municipal autonomy should go a strengthening of the Executive. In 1912, at the direction of the central government, the appointment of a Health Officer was made obligatory in large towns, while Sanitary Inspectors were compulsory for smaller towns. In Bombay, legislation passed in 1914 created the post of Municipal Commissioner, similar to the head of the Bombay City administration: two such commissioners were appointed at Ahmadabad and Surat in 1915.

That portion of the Decentralisation Commission's Report which dealt with rural authorities, was taken up by provincial governments with great caution. Rural bodies continued to be largely managed by the district staff, and the District Magistrate remained chairman, in all but the C.P. boards.

The Commission had laid greatest stress upon the importance of making sub-district boards 'primary units' of local administration. The response of one of the provinces to this radical proposal is of some interest. The U.P. Government had only just abolished tahsil boards (in 1907) after long experience of their fatal lack of vitality. In 1909 the provincial government studied the desirability of such sub-district boards, and urged district officers to give a 'careful trial' to the experiment of devolution of duties to tahsil committees. The following year Government insisted that 'certain definite powers' must be handed over to

these committees; they could not hope to prosper as 'mere inspection agencies'. Then, in 1911, Government decided that the existing system was preferable to one of autonomous sub-district boards. Next year provincial policy completely changed round: sub-district boards with partial financial independence were to be formed. The failure in most districts, particularly in Oudh, to make any headway at all with tahsil committees had apparently convinced Government of the need for bodies with real powers. Despite the new rules, little progress in devolution was recorded during 1913. The Lieutenant-Governor concentrated his arguments upon those districts containing smaller areas 'of a distinctly separate character'; in these, complete delegation of power was anticipated. Next year, progress was reported only from three districts. 1916 saw the story of immobility repeated; only from Allahabad division, where local committees had powers to sanction petty repairs and exercised control over 'kachcha' roads, was a tale of achievement forthcoming. Sub-district boards were thereafter permitted to relapse into torpor. In other provinces there were enquiries into the possibility of building up sub-district boards, but the reports were all negative. Punjab even proceeded to abolish the last of the taluka boards in 1919.

The Decentralisation Commission had insisted that local government must be based in active village councils; the first attempts to meet this proposal were unhappy illustrations of the prevailing malaise in rural affairs. When instructions for the 1911 Census of India were issued, staff were particularly ordered to ascertain whether the ancient village panchayat survived anywhere. The Bombay report stated baldly,

> There is no evidence that such an organisation as a village panchayat ever existed . . . the myth has probably arisen from the fact that a village is generally if not invariably formed by several families of one caste.[1]

For the U.P. it was similarly asserted that the panchayat was almost entirely an organ of caste government.[2] The Government of India accepted this evidence, but considered that caste panchayats could act as a basis for village government.

[1] Census of India (1911), vii, 200.

[2] 1911 Census, xv, 333.

Pending the setting up of panchayats as over-all units of village government on the lines indicated by the Decentralisation Commission, a 'pilot' scheme was launched by the Government of India in 1912. Grants were allocated to provinces to be handed over to selected village sanitary boards who, it was hoped, would then have adequate funds to make them a reality in village community activity. The experiment was put into effect in 1912. In U.P., an annual grant of Rs. 50 was given to selected villages, which had to find another Rs. 50 themselves. The people were encouraged 'to keep the villages clean in their own way', and panchayats were formed from the leaders of village life; for instance in Ghazipur the co-operative societies were utilised as units of administration. Nevertheless, despite the very easy terms on which the experiment was made, results were in general most discouraging. It was noticeable that in Meerut division, home of the sturdy Jats and Gujars with their traditions of village independence, sixty 'fairly successful' panchayats were established.

By 1916 it was apparent that the scheme was a failure; in Rohilkhand, even when the condition that the village should raise 50 per cent of their revenue was waived, the villagers' attitude was characterised as 'apathetic and even hostile': often villages refused to accept the provincial grants. As a result, the experiment was abandoned everywhere in U.P., except in the Meerut division. The results in other provinces were strikingly similar: only under the impetus of individual district officers' enthusiasm, or in particularly active communities, was some good work done. In Bombay one village built and endowed a dispensary from its own resources; in others, schools and houses for teachers were constructed by voluntary labour. But in general villages were loath to tackle any projects themselves, and village committees were often even apathetic in supervising works done by a contractor, for which they did not have to pay. After a few years, the Bombay Government also allowed the scheme to die out.

The traditions of nineteenth-century paternalism, of looking to the district officer as Man-Bap, could not be discarded easily, either by British officials or by their Indian charges. The shadow of the past lingered over local government in many ways. Local machinery, long-geared to elementary functions, was unequal

to the increased tempo of enlarged responsibilities. Trained staff could not be produced overnight: in many cases, the municipal health officer or engineer called for in new legislation, could not be found. There was a shortage of trained teachers for the new education programme. School buildings and equipment were gravely lacking. The new increased allocations for the roads could not be spent, because provincial P.W.D. resources were quite inadequate for the new scale of operations.

The outbreak of war further endangered the hoped-for advance. Engineers, doctors and administrators, stores and machinery, were diverted to war purposes; further recruitment of qualified technicians or replacement of plant was almost impossible. Prices rose steadily, income remained almost stationary. The Imperial Government found itself unable to complete the ambitious programmes of 1911 and 1912. The fate of the Coronation Durbar primary education scheme is typical. The ambitious education programme of 1912 had come as an almost complete surprise to the provinces. In the following three years, grants were received on an unprecedented scale, and a rapid expansion of schools and teaching staff followed everywhere. Such a hasty expansion inevitably encouraged waste, and made detailed planning impossible. In 1915, the growing demands of war forced the Government of India to institute an economy campaign; grants were cut down, provinces and local bodies were left to carry the programme through as best they could from their own resources. As a result, in the poorer provinces schools had to be closed arbitrarily for want of funds, and the activities of local authorities were thereby discredited in the public eye.

As the war continued, the Indian 'climate of opinion' darkened. Shortages of shipping, and controls over imports and exports brought semi-slump conditions to areas dependent on outside markets. To economic instability were added political indecision in the Government of India and a nation-wide uneasiness following the disasters in Mesopotamia. Lord Hardinge's Administration seemed to make little effort to attract popular support for the prosecution of the war, either by associating Indians with the government, or by indicating what share India might expect in the new world of democracy. Initiative

was passing from the Government to more extreme elements among Indian nationalists who were quick to sense that the old pre-1914 order was gone for ever.

In April 1915, Lord Hardinge's Administration issued a statement of policy on local government which clearly reflects this indecision. The new resolution reviewed the reports of provincial governments upon their 'follow-up' of the Decentralisation Commission's proposals, and went on to propound the attitude of the Government of India. Past obstacles to the success of post-Ripon local authorities were tabulated:

> The smallness and inelasticity of local revenues, the difficulty of devising further forms of taxation, the indifference still prevailing in many places towards all forms of public life, the continued unwillingness of many Indian gentlemen to submit to the trouble, expense and inconvenience of election; the unfitness of some of those whom these obstacles do not deter, the prevalence of sectarian animosities, the varying character of the municipal area.

There was no mention of the rigid centralised control, or the divided concepts of East and West concerning social problems for which ample evidence was also available. The Imperial Government still hoped for 'further progress'. There was to be no attempt at uniformity, each provincial government was to be free to progress at the speed it judged best; the policy laid down in the resolution was to serve only as a guide.

Municipal boards should have an elected majority and an elected non-official chairman combined with a strong executive, enjoying secure terms of service. Greater powers of taxation should be open to boards, and the classic principle 'whoever pays for a service should be in control', was reaffirmed. There was no such clear directive for the rural boards; the practice of different provinces varied so much that any synthesis was impossible. Whether the unit of administration was to be the district or a smaller area, whether a majority of the members should be elected; these questions remained undecided. Official opinion in the provinces was still unanimous in insisting that the District Magistrate should remain chairman of the district board; however the Government of India did suggest that, in selected districts, non-official chairmen might be installed as an experiment. No increase in the one anna cess was contemplated, and

existing instructions on spending were generally to be retained. The setting-up of panchayats was urged despite the 'practical difficulties'. At first, villages were to be carefully selected for the experiment, panchayats were to enjoy both judicial and administrative powers, and their operation should not depend upon the raising of extra village taxation. Both Burma and the Central Provinces rejected the whole idea of panchayats as 'alien to the customs of the people'.

In conclusion, the Viceroy hoped that the declaration would be interpreted by provincial governments 'in a spirit of prudent boldness'.[1] Provinces were to show themselves more concerned with prudence than boldness. The Resolution held little promise of further progress; it hardly went further than to suggest that Lord Ripon's intentions should at length be put into practice. But a programme that was daring in 1883 was hopelessly outdated in 1915. The new note in Indian politics sounded by the Madras 'parliament' and the Lucknow scheme called for a more imaginative response from the British and Indian Governments.

In 1916 Lord Chelmsford became Viceroy and, together with his Executive Council, cautiously began to study future constitutional development. Proposals for local self-government were formulated in May 1916, but were not communicated to provincial governments until May 1918. However a directive on education issued in a Department of Education circular (No. 873 of September 1916), reflected the somewhat bolder attitude adopted by Lord Chelmsford's government. The forebodings of departmental officials were deliberately ignored; local authorities were to receive very wide powers of control, including 'very considerable latitude' in the management of school buildings, hours of attendance, holidays and the allocation of grants. Teaching staff's terms of service were to be subject to Government supervision but the boards were to have 'a free hand in the creation and filling of appointments and in the punishment and dismissal of the occupants' as well as in the opening and closing of schools. Local authorities were to be autonomous in matters of finance and budget policy, the only conditions which Government stipulated were, first that education grants should be spent on education [*sic*]; and second, that

[1] Quotations from Governor-General's Resolution, dated 28 April 1915.

the previous level of expenditure should be maintained. The practical effect of these innovations was however muted by the usual qualification, leaving the formulation of detailed proposals to provincial governments, to act according to local conditions.

An event of some importance in 1916 was the passing of the U.P. Municipalities Act, which was memorable as the first Indian measure to be substantially modified under non-official pressure. Its principal feature (Muslim representation) was drafted entirely without official participation. A committee of the provincial Legislative Council had been working on a draft measure since 1909: in 1914 it went to the Government of India; in 1915 the bill was returned to the provincial legislature and referred to a select committee. So far there was nothing unusual about its progress; its terms reflected the pattern imposed by the Decentralisation Commission: provision for a representative body with an elected majority and extensive powers, balanced by a strong executive. However, on going to a select committee, the Bill was changed 'out of all recognition', and in Council twenty-eight non-official amendments were carried—one over the opposition of the government bloc.[1] The crisis of the Bill came over the question of Muslim representation. The U.P. Muslims, led by men of position and ability, had played a dominant rôle in the national development of the League, and were the best organised group in the provincial council. Their support was essential to the success of the other non-official amendments. The time was auspicious: the Lucknow pact had just recognised the principle of additional Muslim 'weighting' in U.P. A conference was called consisting of non-official members only, and eventually most of the Muslim demands were conceded. An amendment to the bill moved by a leading Muslim taluqdar, the Raja of Jehangirabad, gave Muslims an assured position upon all municipal boards.[2] Under Act II of 1916, three-quarters of the members of a municipal board had to be elected, and only two nominated members might be appointed

[1] M/CR, p. 82.

[2] Under sections 11 and 12 of the Act, it is provided that when Muslims form less than 25 per cent of the municipal population, they receive 30 per cent of the seats; when forming 25 per cent to 38 per cent of population they receive 38 per cent of the seats: above 38 per cent, according to numerical strength. *See* 'U.P. Municipal Manual', p. 11.

by Government. An Executive Officer might be appointed, and would be responsible for routine administration: all staff were expressly subordinated to him. A city municipality was compelled to appoint an Executive Officer, qualified Health Officer, Municipal Engineer, and Water Works Superintendent. The chairman was expressly designated head of the executive, appointing and dismissing municipal staff, and fixing their terms of service. It was envisaged that boards would delegate most of their duties to committees. Boards were given freedom to fix levels of taxation within the range of taxes currently operating in the province; new forms of taxation required the assent of the Commissioner. Government control was restricted, partly as a result of non-official amendments in the legislature. The provincial government could dissolve or supersede a board, and remove a chairman 'for habitual failure to perform his duty', or at the request of the board. The Commissioner might compel a board to perform a statutory duty, the District Magistrate might inspect municipal property; the Commissioner or the District Magistrate could stay an order of a board, if this became necessary in the public interest, or take action in an emergency at board expense.

Such measures of control were to become standard as provinces overhauled their legislation. A conspicuous omission from the list of controls, was any provision for audit of boards' accounts and property or for 'surcharge' upon members guilty of abusing their office. Section 81 of the Act made members liable for 'loss, waste or misapplication which is a direct consequence of neglect or misconduct', but this could only be enforced by an elaborate process in the courts, and was moreover subject to a time bar.

In a few towns, notably Allahabad and Bijnor, the newly constituted boards were boycotted by the Hindu community who opposed the new communal representation. More serious were the factions and personal ambitions which, long concealed under official leadership, frothed up now in the emancipated boards with their large numbers of new members.

There was no other important legislation during the war years, but the increasing political momentum of the times was reflected in a number of changes. Committees were set up in several of the provinces to work out local applications of the Decentralisation

Commission's proposals; of these perhaps the most vigorous was the Lawrence Committee in Bombay. Its principal recommendations were in the sphere of rural administration: it suggested that nominated members should be limited to one-third of the total, and that a few non-officials should be appointed as chairmen of district boards. These proposals were adopted by Lord Willingdon's Council, although political leaders condemned them as inadequate. By 1917 six district boards had non-official chairmen, and four had been re-constituted with a two-thirds elected majority. Some twenty more Bombay municipalities were also permitted to choose their own chairmen. At the same time, Bombay Muslims were pressing for more adequate representation; they claimed that under any system of 'mixed' electorates they would be permanently under-represented. The provincial government accepted their demands in part, and in 1917 all Sind municipalities except Karachi were re-constituted with communal electorates.

Bengal local government was further emancipated during the mid-war years. In 1916 eleven more municipalities became free to elect non-official chairmen, then in 1917 five district boards were permitted to choose non-officials as chairmen. Sir Michael O'Dwyer also offered to allow the Punjab district boards the right to elect non-official chairmen in 1917, but no board seems to have requested the change. The first step towards rural self-government was taken in Burma in 1917. The working responsibility for primary education was transferred from the Education Department to eight nominated divisional boards, partially composed of non-officials; this devolution came partly because the education department was overworked. The new system was not a success; the boards were not given sufficient funds even to support existing schools, and the divisional area was so huge that members found it difficult to attend meetings, and could not hope to have a local knowledge of more than a minute corner of their area. After early enthusiasm the frustrated members gradually lost their interest.

Altogether, neither the Decentralisation Report of 1909 nor the Government of India Resolution of 1915 had stimulated any radical reform in the world of local government; almost everywhere the old hierarchy of control remained intact.

In the financial, as in the political sphere, the years 1909 to 1917 were largely a time of disappointment. There were considerable increases in the revenue of local bodies, but these only came in time to be absorbed by the wartime price rise. (See Table 7.)

TABLE 7

MUNICIPAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 1908, 1918

1908	Income Rs.	Grants: proportion to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	46,22,166	7·57%	45,94,779
Bombay	79,92,502	4·86%	59,91,547
Madras	37,24,678	5·75%	36,80,181
U.P.	66,07,058	1·69%	74,15,485
Punjab	60,76,030	1·48%	55,17,554
Burma	37,38,055	8·52%	35,49,678
Calcutta	79,17,636	0·83%	90,18,821
Bombay	95,73,706	—	1,02,30,048
Madras	25,63,882*	21·6%*	17,92,086
Rangoon	34,99,022	0·19%	35,49,679
Karachi	13,95,000	1·4%	12,68,000

1918	Income Rs.	Grants: proportion to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	64,52,693	3·89%	60,58,439
Bombay	1,23,81,637	7·99%	1,17,28,250
Madras	82,98,543	16.25%	80,32,104
U.P.	1,19,00,583	10·05%	1,04,50,482
Punjab	84,55,333	9·97%	70,85,852
Burma	50,57,349	15·21%	42,58,181
Calcutta	1,42,04,835	0·89%	1,23,19,816
Bombay	1,74,77,683	0·32%	1,90,74,887
Madras	38,08,283	4·21%	44,15,679
Rangoon	48,92,034	0·78%	43,22,000
Karachi	25,08,000	2%	26,98,000

* Abnormally high: special capital grant.

Municipal income increased by about one-half during the years 1909–17, and an appreciable proportion of this increase

was due to the grants which the central government provided; from 1911 to 1915, Rs. 5,98,17,000 (nearly four million pounds) was disbursed. Some were 'non-recurring' grants for specific purposes, such as a new water-works or a storm-drain; some were 'recurring', for example, grants to improve primary education. Municipal boards were also finally relieved of police and famine charges. As new public utilities were developed, so the income from service taxes (water rates, etc.) expanded. The yield from octroi remained almost stationary; indeed the financial panic of the first weeks of the war, when many orders were cancelled, crippled the octroi revenues for 1914–15. Bombay octroi income fell by four lakhs; U.P. income by six and a half lakhs. As a result of the prosperity of India during the pre-war decade, there was a general rise in property values, and a corresponding increase in the yields of house taxes.

As regards municipal expenditure there were two clearly defined periods; the first a time of activity; the second of arrested development or even stagnation. During the years 1909 to 1914 many of the larger or more progressive municipalities started water-supply schemes, drainage programmes and other projects. As an example, activities in U.P. may be cited. Only eight of the eighty-four municipalities possessed water-works in 1909; new projects were launched in thirteen other towns in these years. Not one town in the province had a proper drainage system in 1909; some twenty sanitary schemes were now set under way with assistance from the central government. Only Cawnpore was lit by electricity in 1909; then just before the war Messrs. Martin & Co., a 'managing agency' house with big interests in the upper provinces, was given contracts to supply electricity to Allahabad and Lucknow, while in Dehra Dun and Mussoorie work started on a hydro-electric scheme under direct municipal management. But many municipal plans of the pre-war period never left the drawing board, thanks to the delay which the hierarchy of control imposed. Grants received in 1911 were only just beginning to materialise into schools or bridges in 1914. Most programmes developed amid war-time difficulties which made increasing havoc with peace-time estimates.

The cost of living rose steeply in the last two years of the

war,[1] and municipal revenues failed to keep pace with the rise.[2] By 1917, technicians, plant, and materials were all scarce or unobtainable, so that municipal services were at best marking time, while many services, especially roads, deteriorated through neglect.

TABLE 8

DISTRICT BOARDS' INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 1908, 1918

1908	Income Rs.	Grants: proportion to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	63,40,046	10·83%	66,33,751
Bombay	63,09,148	35·83%	62,16,811
Madras	1,56,70,506	18·14%	1,47,27,450
U.P.	78,54,563	30·35%	74,81,076
Punjab	45,54,322	33·69%	47,75,371

1918	Income Rs.	Grants: proportion to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	1,06,87,564	25·39%	1,02,37,988
Bombay	1,06,12,595	54·63%	1,04,33,813
Madras	2,52,90,286	32·18%	2,10,04,904
U.P.	1,34,94,616	31·54%	1,15,96,823
Punjab	94,90,888	39·11%	81,42,719

Any expansion of rural boards' income was possible only because of central government assistance. (See Table 8.) Up to 1913, district boards in all provinces except Bombay and Madras received only a portion of their land cess. In 1913 the Government of India relieved provincial governments of financial liabilities to an annual extent of Rs. 82,33,000 (over half a million pounds), on condition that rural boards received the cess in future without deductions. This had the effect of increasing the income of the boards by amounts equal to one-third or even one-

[1] Cf. Bombay Labour Gazette figures, 1914 = 100, 1916 = 110, 1917 = 119, 1918 = 154.

[2] 1914 = 100, 1917 = 119. Cf. 1917: *Bombay*, municipal income = 136, expenditure = 117. *U.P.*, income = 117, expenditure = 100. *Burma*, income = 90, expenditure = 91.

half (thus, U.P. boards received thirty-seven lakhs from the cess in 1913, and nearly seventy lakhs in 1914). Some provincial governments (notably Bombay) also increased their own grants. But the control exercised by Government over district boards was even greater than over municipalities—and the time-lag between the financial decision and practical action was even more prolonged. Boards were able to do little more than enable education to hold its ground during the war, while standards in medical services and public works fell away notably.

By 1917 local bodies everywhere were marking time—new development was impossible, and the problem of maintaining existing services was itself one of acute difficulty. It so happened that the experimental transfer of control from official to non-official leadership began at this time when resources were strained, and opportunities severely limited.

Into this atmosphere of political stalemate and financial stress came the British Government's declaration of August 1917, promising 'responsible government' to India through 'the gradual development of self-governing institutions'.

CHAPTER VI

Edwin Montagu and the Reforms of 1917 to 1923

I

THE August declaration touched off a fury of comment and anticipation. Politicians and public bodies sponsored schemes to implement the bald promise of self-government. The first official comment on the means to this end was made in the Imperial Legislative Council by the Viceroy in September 1917. He declared

> The domain of urban and rural self-government is the great training ground from which political progress and a sense of responsibility have taken their start, . . . it is time . . . to accelerate the rate of progress and thus to stimulate the sense of responsibility in the average citizen and to enlarge his experience.

It soon became apparent that the Government of India was planning, as the main instalment of political reform, to hand local bodies over to popular control, and for the rest to enlarge and liberalise the legislative councils as deliberating bodies, while retaining effective powers of government firmly in official hands.

This policy was endorsed by the Heads of provinces when their opinions on political reforms were sought. Similarly, European opinion in India as expressed by the powerful Chambers of Commerce in the big cities, and by journals such as *The Pioneer* and *The Times of India* was unanimous in extolling the wide field for political education and activity offered by rural and urban local government. The unexpressed opinion underlying most of these pronouncements was that, until Indians had shown themselves capable of making a success of local government, they should not be entrusted with power in a wider field. It was

assumed that mistakes could be made in local government with only limited consequences.

As it became apparent that the Government of India, with the concurrence of domiciled European opinion, was planning thus to limit political advance, so political leaders, already discontented and suspicious, reacted violently from this policy. Strongly resenting the implication that Indians were unfit to take their place in government at a provincial or all-India level as an arrogant assertion of Indian inferiority, they saw the offer of local autonomy as a poor second-best. Along with such concessions as the granting of the King's Commission to Indians, or an increased share in superior civil service appointments, it was seen as an attempt to fob them off with non-essentials, while real power as exercised by ministers and a sovereign legislature was denied. Former concentration on political training through local government had faded away with the passing of G. K. Gokhale. Now it was discarded as irrelevant or even delusive: the attention of Indian politicians of every degree was focused upon the attainment of self-government at a national level.

The Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, had decided himself to come to India to meet political leaders and, along with the Viceroy and his Council, to work out a programme for implementing the August declaration. The Secretary of State shared his task with a small committee, but the final terms of the pronouncement known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Report largely bear the impress of Montagu's mind. A vivid self-portrait of Edwin Montagu is drawn in his published diary,[1] and provides a key to the shape of the reforms linked with his name.

Montagu was a Radical, a passionate believer in parliamentary democracy as the bedrock of a healthy society. He was temperamentally subject to sudden emotional changes, touchy, and firmly convinced of his own intellectual superiority. He had a great love for India and felt he had a personal 'call' to solve its problems but his diary reveals a curious lack of understanding for Indian customs and manners. His approach to the Indian problem was imaginative and bold, but he was capable of fatuous errors of judgment (as for instance when he dismissed Motilal Nehru and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru as 'lesser men', 'not of course

[1] *An Indian Diary*, by E. S. Montagu (London, 1930).

leaders'). Considerable insight into his mind and his methods is offered in this entry in his diary, dated 30 November 1917:

> In my opinion the root cause of the whole problem is the profound distrust . . . shown by the civil servant of the Indian, and the Indian of the civil servant. The consequence is that in making any proposal or in carrying out anything, the civil servant, rather than trust to his own authority and to the righteousness of his own cause, ties himself up and everybody else with what he calls safeguards—rules, regulations and statutes. The Indian then sees that he is not trusted, and uses his powers quite irresponsibly, knowing that the civil service has guarded itself by its regulations. On the other hand the Indian irritated by this, demands powers over the bureaucracy which he does not really require, simply in order to get rid of these difficulties. I feel half inclined to suggest that we should sweep away all regulations and statutes . . . and say: 'Now we trust you to help the Government' . . .[1]

This entry—acute in its analysis of the problem, dramatic and over-simplified in its solution, and presented with half an eye to the plaudits of posterity—exactly demonstrates Montagu's approach to new reforms. He was met by the cautious, realistic, pedestrian attitude of the Viceroy and his Executive Council.

The Governor-General in Council had drafted a programme for advances in local government in 1916, but this had never emerged from the Council chamber. The formula—which converted local authorities into popularly elected bodies—was accepted by Montagu as a basis for future development, but, in conjunction with loose ministerial supervision, in place of the hierarchy of official control visualised by the Government of India.

The Government of India's proposals were issued as a Resolution in May 1918. In contra-distinction to previous declarations of policy, it was laid down that while provincial governments 'may modify the application (of these recommendations) in specific cases and for specific reasons', it is insisted that 'substantial advance should now be made on the lines laid down'.[2] At last the plea of local circumstances was not permitted to cover cautious delaying tactics. Once again the Government of India took the Decentralisation Commission's proposals as the

[1] Diary, pp. 70–1.

[2] Government of India Resolution, May 1918, p. 2.

basis for its programme, and venerable phrases such as 'political education . . . must take precedence of departmental efficiency' came forth again as new.

Both urban and rural boards were to contain a majority of elected members; nominated members should not exceed a quarter of the total. As an essential condition of the increase in elected members, the franchise should also be extended to include 'the body of the ratepayers'. In 1918 the vote was enjoyed by only 6 per cent of townspeople and 0·6 per cent of the rural populations.[1] In the matter of the chairman, the resolution noted that two-thirds of municipal boards were presided over by officials; while of the 191 district boards, in 1916 only thirteen had non-official chairmen (twelve of these being in C.P.). In cities and towns, a 'general replacement' of officials by non-official elected chairmen was called for. From the brief experience of elected non-official chairmen of district boards in Bengal and Bombay since 1916, the Government of India felt able to 'urge' the provinces to permit non-officials to preside over district boards. In this one particular it was considered possible to go beyond the 1909 standards of the Decentralisation Commission, as far as the proposals of May 1882. As a necessary corollary of this abdication of official leadership, the boards' executive must be strengthened. Large towns should appoint an Executive Officer (who need not be a government official), and district boards should also leave the supervision of routine administration to an Executive Officer appointed subject to government approval.

As regards the extent of outside control to be exercised by Government, the Decentralisation Commission's proposals were now accepted almost without modification. Boards should be free to raise or lower taxes within statutory limits; the only condition to be imposed on local budget policy should be the insistence on a minimum balance. Grants should not be allocated to specific items of expenditure, and government determination of fixed percentages to be allocated to the different heads should cease. If a service is paid for locally then, the Resolution declared, a board 'should not be under the constant dictation of government departments'. The construction of public works should still be amenable

[1] Resolution, May 1918, pp. 3 and 4.

to outside sanction unless a board employed competent technical staff. Senior appointments, such as those of Executive Officer, Secretary, Engineer or Health Officer should be subject to government approval. In general, outside control was cut down to the degree suggested by the Decentralisation Commission: the suspension or supersession of grossly incompetent boards, and certain powers to Commissioner or District Magistrate to act in an emergency should a local authority fail to take the necessary action.

The Resolution devoted some pages to a consideration of the functions of village councils. It was now stated that the Decentralisation Commission did not intend the proposed panchayats to be 'an extension of local self-government in Ripon terms'; they must not be yet another artificial area, nor devolve from the district boards as subsidiaries—as the ill-fated sanitary committees had done. They must be living units, natural expressions of 'the corporate life of the individual villages', and they should be composed of members of communities 'who habitually act together'. The 1918 Resolution accepted the terms proposed by the Decentralisation Commission, and the 1915 Government of India Resolution for the setting-up of 'pioneer' panchayats; they should be given a portion of the district cess and equipped with 'voluntary powers of supplementing taxation'. Panches should be informally elected, and village officers should be associated with them—but the headman should not necessarily be chairman.

The concluding paragraph of the Resolution made two points; one written for the Indian politician, one for the British administrator. The administrator received orders:

> a large part of the suggestions . . . can be brought into effect without any change in existing legislation, and so far as this can be done action should be taken without further delay.

The politician was reminded of the scope of local self-government:

> The duties of local bodies cover most of the activities upon which the essential welfare of the country depends. . . . In the development of these interests the self-government of the country will secure a very real and important advance, and it is on the increased experience to be gained in the administration of local civic affairs that the country

must to a large degree rely for the expansion of its self-dependence in the sphere of central government.

Excellent sentiments, but to the Indian politician, merely the confirmation of his fears that he was to be offered local authority as a bait, to induce him to relinquish his national aspirations.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report issued in July 1918 did indeed fall short of Indian Nationalist demands. In the sphere of local government, the propositions contained in the May 1918 Resolution were endorsed; some of the paragraphs of this section of the Report reveal Montagu's impatience with both administrators and politicians. In surveying the past a due share of responsibility for shortcomings is laid to officials. It is emphasised that the Ripon policy had been sacrificed to administrative expediency, 'the presence of an official element on the boards has been prolonged . . . up to a point at which it has impeded the growth of initiative and responsibility'.[1] Such strictures on officials were a new development. The Indian political world was reminded that all the Report's proposals for national progress depended upon educating the unlettered voter—who could best learn to approach wider issues through a realisation of the mutual responsibility of voters and representatives in local affairs. The Report rebuked the 'clever men . . . in provincial politics' who ignored all this.

> Few of the political associations that addressed us seemed adequately to appreciate the importance of local affairs, or the magnitude of the advance which [emancipation of local bodies] involves. But the point has been made time and again by their own most prominent leaders.[2]

While endorsing the Government of India's instructions to the provinces to press on with local government reform, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report envisaged that all fundamental changes in the law would be left to the provincial legislative councils who, in future, were to be autonomous in respect of 'nation building subjects', including local self-government and education.[3] Paradoxically the Report dealt a heavy blow at local government by its decision to substitute direct election by the general public on an enlarged franchise, for the existing

[1] M/CR, p. 103. [2] M/CR, pp. 157–8. [3] M/CR, p. 161.

method of election to provincial legislatures through local bodies as 'electoral colleges'. Indian politicians were thus further encouraged to withdraw from local bodies, and to concentrate their efforts on campaigning in village and bazaar to win over the new electorate.

The Report's recommendations were summarised in four major 'Points',[1] and it was upon these four Points that Indian political opinion particularly dwelt. The first of these paragraphs was as follows: 'There should be as far as possible, complete popular control in local bodies, and the largest possible independence for them of outside control'. This declaration, however narrowly interpreted, is liberal enough. In 1918, Indian politicians of all shades assumed that it meant that British government policy was wedded to the complete liberation of local bodies from any form of control, an interpretation typical of the hour. Throughout the world there was a belief in democracy as the vital secret of world progress and happiness. The exultant mood soon faded in the shadow of post-war experience but in the first few years after the Armistice this faith shone bright. The 1914–18 War in all its facets was seen as a victory for democracy over autocracy; the triumph of free institutions over absolute rule and bureaucracy. It was a faith in which victors and vanquished could share. It was against this background that local government in India and Burma suddenly came to maturity. The spirit of the age was calling irresistibly for freedom and popular control: officials or technical experts who protested were swept aside as by a flood.

Even Burma was caught up in the new movement. In a particularly inept estimate, Edwin Montagu had summed up the Burman leaders who came to see him as 'nice, simple-minded people with beautiful clothes. Complete loyalty; no sign of political unrest'.[2] Neither he nor his committee visited Burma; the Viceroy's Executive Council contained no member with Burma experience, and the province was excluded entirely from the scope of the recommendations for reform. It was observed, not unreasonably in view of the record of the Burma municipalities, that 'the desire for elective institutions has not developed in Burma'.[3] But there was a definite implication in the Report

[1] M/CR, paras. 188–98. [2] Diary, p. 86. [3] M/CR, p. 162.

that Burmans were more backward than Indians, and this was sharply resented by a race priding itself on its infinite superiority to the 'Kalas'. Burman national consciousness, always strong but for twenty years acquiescent, now flared up in anger and wounded pride. The British Government found itself unable to stem the spirit of the age in Burma also, and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were applied with only minor modifications to Burma, although a time-lag of three years intervened.

The new note of urgency in the 1918 Government of India Resolutions stimulated all the provinces to prepare for radical changes in local government. During 1918 and 1919, most Heads of provinces appointed committees to make proposals for reform. Some committees were largely composed of I.C.S. officers (as in Bombay and Punjab), others included representatives of national interests (like the U.P. Committee of the Legislative Council), while Bengal convened a conference of representatives of district boards. Most of these committees recommended the lowering of the franchise, an increase in the elected strength of the boards and the withdrawal of officials from their counsels.

These proposals were implemented in some cases by framing more liberal rules on the basis of existing legislation (as in Bombay), in others by passing new legislative measures (as in Madras). Many provincial governments went no further than to lay down general principles, and action was delayed until the coming into office of the new ministers. The Madras legislation of 1919 and 1920 had the effect of creating a 75 per cent elected majority in all local institutions with the right to elect their own chairmen, except in very exceptional cases. The Madras Corporation was re-constituted almost entirely, on the lines of Bombay Corporation. The Bombay municipalities were largely emancipated in 1920 merely by drafting new rules: nominated members were reduced to 20 per cent of the total, the president was to be elected, the franchise was reduced, and municipalities were formed into multiple constituencies, with a system of 'cumulative' voting, designed to give the minorities a means of securing representation.

A by-product of the revision of electoral rules in Punjab was the rapid extension of the communal system. The Government of India in the resolution of May 1918 had indicated that

minorities should be represented through nomination rather than by separate electorates. The Punjab Government endorsed this policy, but it soon became apparent that it would be impossible to create elected majorities without adversely affecting Muslim representation, unless they were allotted separate seats. Accordingly from 1918 to 1920, communal representation was introduced in twenty-eight more Punjab towns. As a result the number of elected Muslim members increased from 40 per cent to 44 per cent of the total. (Muslims formed 53 per cent of the population in these towns.)

Whereas in India, elected Ministers took over responsibility for local government late in 1920 or early in 1921, in Burma the introduction of Dyarchy was delayed until January 1923. Local government reform was therefore carried through under the old 'official' régime. In 1921, the Burma municipal election rules were revised, and in future all members of municipal boards were to be elected, with the exception of technical experts who were henceforth to be co-opted at the boards' will. For the countryside a complete system of rural local authorities was created—almost overnight—by the Rural Self-Government Act of 1921. The new structure was composed of District Councils and Circle Boards. At the base of the system, groups of village tracts were combined to elect members of the circle boards; these boards in turn acted as electoral colleges for the district councils. The franchise was extremely wide, men becoming eligible to vote at 18 years. Membership was entirely non-official and elected, although if they chose, district councils could co-opt as specialists officials of the Medical, Sanitary, Veterinary or Public Works Departments, whose number must not exceed one-sixth of a board's membership. It was envisaged that a large measure of these powers would be delegated to circle boards. District councils' educational functions were discharged through District School Boards whose members were appointed by the district councils. Once appointed, these school boards were autonomous in education matters, although the parent councils retained a measure of control as the source of the boards' income.

In shaping the Rural Self-Government Act, non-official opinion played only an incidental rôle; in fashioning the City of Rangoon Municipal Act of the following year, non-official

opinion was dominant. The question of new legislation for Rangoon was re-opened in 1920. The Burma Government introduced a bill into the legislature which bore very little relation to the draft bill of 1915. It provided for an almost independent Municipal Commissioner in whom most of the powers of the Corporation would be vested, and it was proposed that in many matters Government should deal direct with him. A single standing committee was to be appointed on the Bombay model.[1] In the provincial legislature, almost all non-official elements, Europeans, Burmans and Indians, combined to oppose the terms of this bill, led by a veteran member of the Municipal Committee, Dr. A. M. Murray. He urged that all the Corporation's powers should be vested in the Municipal Committee as a whole. Many powers would be delegated to the executive, but the latter must not exist as a separate authority. Further he argued that with a single standing committee, any thorough supervision of municipal finance would be impossible. 'Dr. Murray declared that the last budget was passed by the Municipal Committee in three minutes, and that is what would happen under the new constitution'. Also with a single committee, members would 'either have no share in municipal affairs or will be hopelessly overburdened'.[2] These views were endorsed by resolutions of the Municipality and by public meetings.

The Burma Government bowed to the storm and asked the Municipal Committee to submit further draft legislation. As finally entered on the Statute book, the City of Rangoon Municipal Act was the product of the municipality itself. Under the new dispensation the Municipal Corporation was to consist of thirty-four members, of whom one was elected President. Twenty-nine of the members were elected: five by the European and allied communities, ten by the Burmans, four by Muslims, four by Hindus, two by Chinese, and four by industrial organisations; thereby, the representation of the Burmese community was increased, while the European members were reduced. The full Corporation was divided into four standing committees of twelve members each, for the following subjects: Finance, Roads and

[1] B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon* (Rangoon, 1939), pp. 292–4.
[2] Rangoon, Municipal Report, 1919–20.

Buildings, Water and Sewerage, Public Health and Markets; in addition a Rangoon Education Board was set up. The new corporation was expressly endowed with over-all municipal powers, and the new Municipal Commissioner (late official President, and head of the executive) was subordinated to the Corporation and excluded from all committees. Government retained only very general powers of control.

The most important feature of the last two years of the official régime in India was the constitution of village authorities in five of the provinces.[1] These new authorities may be divided into three main types. The first was the village council, constituted to carry out simple 'improvements' within the village, perhaps to organise a school, and in some cases with power to act as a judicial tribunal; a body inheriting something from the traditional panchayat, and calculated to give expression to corporate village feeling. The second form was a sort of embryo municipality; an organisation to provide the machinery for elementary urban public services in large villages or small towns. The third type was a rural authority, smaller than the sub-district board so as to be in touch with local feeling, but large enough to be 'viable'; to employ some technical staff, and to cater for the needs of the countryside over a substantial area.

The 'village council' type was planned under the U.P. and C.P. Acts of 1920. Bombay was the only province to adapt the panchayat form into 'embryo municipalities' by means of Act IX of 1920. The most complete system of 'rural authorities' was established in Bengal by the Village Self Government Act of 1919. The Madras countryside was to enjoy both the first and third types of authority: the Village Panchayat Act of 1920 was designed to create a basic village organisation, while under the local Boards Act of 1920, there was a new version of the 1884 union boards—'union panchayats'.

Some analysis of legislation in different provinces will serve to differentiate these various types of new organisation. The U.P. Village Panchayat Act of 1920, set up panchayats of five to seven

[1] For a review of provincial legislation, *see* J. E. Drummond, *Panchayats in India* (Bombay, 1937), p. 14.

persons having authority over a 'circle'—usually the village and its environs. The chairman and members might be either elected or nominated (the distinction was blurred in practice). The principal function of the panchayat was to act as a petty court; procedure was informal, professional lawyers were excluded. In civil suits to a value of Rs. 25, panches were to have exclusive jurisdiction: all cases triable by panchayats had to be transferred to them if brought before a magistrate. Cases originating before panches might not be transferred to the regular courts, although the District Magistrate had power to quash their proceedings. The powers of a panchayat in criminal cases were normally limited to a fine of Rs. 10 for petty offences such as cattle trespass. Panchayats were also to form the agency for village sanitary improvement and education, and to be responsible for maintaining tanks, wells and village tracks. These activities were to be financed by grants administered by the District Officer, and by fines and fees received in judicial work. In all its activities, the U.P. panchayat was insulated from contact with other local government institutions, and supervision was exercised by the District Magistrate and the revenue staff. Altogether the U.P. panchayat legislation conformed very closely to the terms of the Government of India Resolution of May 1918.

The Bombay Village Panchayat Act of 1920 although broadly similar in purpose was quite different in detail. Members of a panchayat were elected, all men of twenty-one and above having the vote. The village head-man was to be ex-officio a member, while imamdars and other landlords of status had the right to a seat. The chairman was to be elected by the members. This body was much more like a municipal board than a gathering of the 'rude forefathers of the hamlet'. The Bombay panchayat was almost entirely an administrative body, with considerable responsibilities, which included village sanitation and lighting, and the construction and maintenance of village tanks, wells, minor roads, drains and bridges. In addition the district board might transfer to panchayats, control over village schools and village works, and the management of cattle pounds. District boards were to frame sanitary by-laws for panchayat execution, and to fix the rates at which panchayats might levy additional taxes;

they were to supervise the village budget, accounts, staff, orders, etc., and were empowered to take emergency action or discharge a duty should a panchayat default. The District Officer was excluded from any share in the guidance of panchayats, and the only power reserved to Government was that of superseding a panchayat 'which exceeds or abuses its powers'. Bombay panchayats had only minor jurisdiction as courts: their sole powers were in respect of offences against their own by-laws.[1]

A union board in Bengal was established for an area of about ten square miles, and a population of about 8,000. Boards were two-thirds elected (by males paying one rupee local cess), and the remainder were nominated; the board elected its chairman. Over one-half of the boards' income was absorbed in payment of police daffadars and chaukidars, over whom the boards had only very limited authority. Their other functions included the upkeep of schools, by-roads and pounds, and the provision of elementary sanitary and medical services. Selected members of boards might also be formed into judicial benches to try petty criminal and civil cases. In all matters the boards were to act 'under the supervision and with the advice of the Circle Officer as representing the District Magistrate'.[2] These circle officers were junior members of the subordinate civil service who each had charge of some thirty or thirty-five unions.

Out of all the provinces, only in Bengal did the new village government begin to operate before the commencement of Dyarchy. There had been a big increase in Bengal in the numbers of the old union committees during the later war years. By 1918 there were over four hundred of these nominated bodies, but they still only covered a mere one-twentieth of rural Bengal. During 1920, 295 of the new union boards were formed, and in the following year the total rose to nearly 1,600; some of the most vigorous of them were in Dacca District.

In general, however, the years 1918 to 1920 seemed to yield little achievement: the reports of committees, even the new legislation, did not at once bring a transformation. The transitional state of local government was reflected in the make-up of the various local bodies: some now largely elected under an extended franchise, others continuing under the old 'official'

[1] *See* ISC, vii, 139–42.

[2] *See* ISC, viii, 64–5, and 80–1.

régime. The position of the chairman forms a guide to the progress made in different directions. (See Table 9.)

TABLE 9

CHAIRMEN OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, 1918 and 1921

	Municipal Boards				*District Boards*			
	1918		1921		1918		1921	
	Official	Non-official	Official	Non-official	Official	Non-official	Official	Non-official
Bengal	16	99	4	113	20	5	6	19
Bombay	61	92	31	128	20	6	10	16
Madras	8	64	3	70	24	—	24	—
U.P.	21	62	12	72	48	—	47	1
Punjab	86	16	70	34	29	—	29	—
Burma	42	3	39	8	—	—	—	—

By 1920 the great majority of municipal boards were 'popular' non-official bodies, but only in Bengal and Bombay had district boards been freed from the control of the District Magistrate.

II

The years 1918–20 were a time of waiting in local government, and in national affairs. The whole machinery of administration, finance and trade was laboriously changing from a war to a peace economy. The implementing of the Montagu-Chelmsford programme was delayed by fierce debate in Parliament, and any new approach to local government affairs by Indian ministers was consequently postponed. 1919 was a year of epic portents of disaster: the epidemic of Spanish influenza which doubled the death rate, the hasty, bungled demobilisation of a million men, the Khilafat movement, Gandhi's first Swaraj campaign, Amritsar. An unhappy, violent year. The steadily mounting cost of living reached its peak in the years 1919–22.[1] In spite of sky-high prices, local authorities could not much longer postpone essential repairs to public works and services which had deteriorated in the war years. In particular they had to face the problem of road

[1] In 1920, on a 1914 base of 100, the cost of living was 183. *See Bombay Labour Gazette*, viii, 1928–9, 436.

repair and construction, newly exacerbated by motor transport. The sub-continent was suddenly invaded by over-loaded lorries and packed buses, penetrating to the most remote villages and literally tearing up the roads. And overshadowing everything was the growing political ferment, the new wide-spread defiance of law, the infiltration of Nationalism into every variety of situation or problem.

This 'official twilight' was a time of uneasy suspense. Local authorities feebly struggled with an ever rising tide of costs, lacking power or inclination to meet their problems with new taxation; complaints of financial embarrassment are almost universal in the reports of municipalities and rural boards. The staple of the rural boards—the one anna cess—was entirely inadequate; under the system prevailing in most provinces, a period of thirty years between settlements was general, so that many boards' revenues had remained pegged at pre-war figures. In 1920 the Lieutenant-Governor of U.P. condemned the whole financial structure of rural boards as 'archaic'. Progress was entirely restricted to projects or services for which the provincial government would provide special grants. When money was available for public works it often could not be usefully employed: costs were so uncertain that contractors were unwilling to enter into contracts when profits were so speculative. In many municipalities, financial problems were only aggravated by their new liberty. The wide public dislike of increased taxation was now unbridled; even the collection of existing taxes was conducted with less vigour, and the amount outstanding at the close of the financial year began to grow and grow. In some cases, members of municipal boards were themselves an example to the rest of the community in the non-payment of taxes.

In most provinces the withdrawal of officials from municipal activity was not complete till 1923 or 1924, whilst the old narrow district boards were in general not dissolved till 1923. Thus although local government *policy* became amenable to popular control in 1921, local government practice was still bound up with the old ways till 1923, and it is convenient to narrate here the actual working of the boards from 1918 up to 1923.

There were large increases in the income and expenditure of both urban and rural boards, especially in Bombay, but there

was no real expansion of public services, except in the field of education. (See Table 10.) Municipal income rose by 40 per cent in Bombay, and by lesser amounts in other provinces. The increase was a reflection of the post-war boom: property taxes rose, following higher assessments of property, made possible by the rise in house values; and there were increases in octroi and other levies on trade, consequent upon the feverish wave of

TABLE 10

MUNICIPAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 1918, 1922

	1918		1922	
	Income Rs.	Expenditure Rs.	Income Rs.	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	64,52,693	60,58,439	81,47,348	76,75,726
Bombay	1,23,81,637	1,17,28,280	1,80,20,69	1,75,98,958
Madras	82,98,543	80,32,104	1,04,33,571	99,53,717
U.P.	1,19,00,583	1,04,50,982	1,41,77,781	1,54,69,382
Punjab	84,55,333	70,85,852	1,19,44,441	1,27,50,162
Burma	50,57,349	42,59,181	58,51,215	56,58,960
Calcutta	1,42,04,835	1,23,19,816	1,67,28,280	1,67,66,305
Bombay	1,74,77,683	1,90,74,887	2,67,53,000	2,61,61,000
Madras	38,08,283	44,15,679	53,14,530	48,75,431
Rangoon	48,92,034	43,22,000	63,29,000	63,27,000
Karachi	25,08,000	26,95,000	35,12,000	33,80,000

buying and selling. But municipal income only partially benefited from this brief period of prosperity; there was a notable trend towards slackness in the collection of municipal dues. The increased revenues did not allow any notable development of municipal services, except in the field of education: as early as 1920 and 1921, a few municipalities introduced pioneer schemes of free compulsory education.

Rural boards also enjoyed an increase in their incomes during the same period of up to 50 per cent; the increase was largest in Punjab and Bombay. (See Table 11.) The yield from the land cess was no greater than in 1914, but in most provinces there was a continuing rise in the grants received from Government. One source of income which almost completely dried up was the subscriptions and gifts of wealthy merchants and great land-

lords; as the power of the District Magistrate was diminished so these 'voluntary donations' ceased.

Education was the brightest feature of the post-war rural scene; the roads, previously the first charge on district board income, were now left neglected, and other services remained at

TABLE 11

DISTRICT BOARDS' INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 1918, 1922

1918	Income Rs.	Grants: proportionate to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	1,06,87,564	25%	1,02,37,988
Bombay	1,06,12,595	59%	1,04,33,813
Madras	2,52,90,286	32%	2,10,04,904
U.P.	1,34,94,616	31%	1,15,96,823
Punjab	94,90,888	39%	81,42,719

1922	Income Rs.	Grants: proportionate to total income	Expenditure Rs.
Bengal	1,15,38,090	23%	1,12,43,117
Bombay	1,46,22,679	65%	1,45,15,396
Madras	2,70,14,637	31%	2,61,07,275
U.P.	1,56,60,398	35%	1,83,50,054
Punjab	1,35,10,129	43%	1,32,60,605

an elementary level. The 1918 programme of education expansion, with emphasis on rural schools, was the last of the local government schemes planned on an all-India basis. It stemmed from the 1916 education decisions and was conceived in terms of centralised direction and official control. It was a 'hangover' from the days before Edwin Montagu's 'revolution in principle' (in Sir Reginald Coupland's phrase), an unfortunate illustration of the hiatus between decision and action which the old system made inevitable. The scheme was pressed with greatest energy in U.P., where the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Harcourt Butler (1917–22), had formerly held the portfolios of education and local self-government in the Viceroy's Council. The 1918 'Butler' scheme proposed to double the number of primary

schools and of scholars within five years at an additional expenditure of thirty-two lakhs. The expansion of schools and teaching staff went ahead, but the anticipated new enrolment of pupils did not follow. District board expenditure leaped up: from forty lakhs in 1918 to eighty-two lakhs in 1921, far outstripping the original estimates. But the figures for scholars showed only a small and fluctuating rise, and in 1921 the numbers actually fell. Among the reasons which contemporary reports cited for this depressing story were the post-war epidemic, the wages which juvenile labour could command, and the non-co-operation movement—which promoted a boycott of all local authority and government educational institutions. But it was recognised even in official reports that 'the roots of the trouble strike deeper'; it was not possible in 1920 for a scheme relying only upon official support to command success; it was imperative to enlist public opinion in the cause of education.

The story in other provinces was similar: a considerable effort was made everywhere (except in Bengal) for disproportionately small results. All-India expenditure rose from three to five lakhs in the three years 1918–21, but the number of pupils at primary schools, after showing an increase, even fell away below the earlier figures (1917 = 6,404,200 pupils; 1921 = 6,328,031 pupils).

In Burma the same pattern was followed a year or so later. The Burma divisional school boards were still engaged in 1918 in revising the structure of primary education following the over-hasty increase in numbers of schools from 1914 to 1917. Plans for post-war expansion did not develop until 1920, when educational development was suddenly halted by the December boycott of all 'government' educational institutions. Thus although there was a 50 per cent increase in education expenditure from 12·48 lakhs in 1920 to 17·60 lakhs in 1922, there was a fall in attendance at primary schools from 322,892 scholars in 1920 to 310,074 in 1922.

The all-India scheme was abandoned following the transfer of education to provincial ministries (in India) in 1920.[1] The principal permanent effect of the 1918 education drive was to tie up all provincial surplus revenue, depriving local authorities

[1] Hartog Report, pp. 275–6.

of any hope of grants to rehabilitate their other services. (See Table 12.)

The mental and financial malaise which overshadowed the 'official' district boards was frankly recognised by at least one governor, Sir Harcourt Butler. He wrote in 1920: 'Boards show few signs of vitality and it is only too clear that the majority of members display little interest in their duties.' He recognised that there was ample reason for this, in particular 'their financial impotence . . . the routine nature of their duties and the paucity

TABLE 12

DISTRICT BOARDS' EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

	1918	1921
Bengal	26,58,047	28,42,673
Bombay	53,49,028	78,64,963
Madras	37,51,242	55,62,515
U.P.	39,99,001	82,88,392
Punjab	28,80,846	49,39,067

of questions of importance calling for discussion'. Butler emphasised that the solution must be left for the new Legislative Council to work out; he concluded: 'Changes are necessary, and the sooner they are effected the better.'[1]

It was with something like relief that officials finally withdrew from local government activity in 1923. The centralisation and delay which were part of the old 'official' system had not proved very adaptable to the difficulties of the early post-war years. The completeness of the change-over is well illustrated by the figures relating to chairmen, after the elections of 1923. (See Table 13.)

The transformation was dramatic and complete. In most provinces officials only retained control in a few backward areas, or in towns with some special character, such as the frontier trading post of Bhamo in Burma, or some of the hill-stations with their hot-weather invasions. Only in Punjab with its narrowly balanced communal rivalries, and its tradition of close association between district officials and rural life, did the Deputy Commissioner continue as chairman of the district board.

[1] U.P., District Board Reports, 1919–20.

This revolution in local government was another 'leap in the dark'. Success might be expected, only if the newly emancipated boards were able to tackle their work with vigour against a background of relative calm and prosperity. But popular local

TABLE 13

CHAIRMEN OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, 1923

	Municipal Boards		*District Boards*	
	Official	Non-official	Official	Non-official
Bengal	11	113	1	25
Bombay	12	144	1	26
Madras	2	78	1	23
U.P.	4	81	—	48
Punjab	23	81	29	—
C.P.	2	63	—	18
Burma	3	53	—	28

government began and continued in an atmosphere of political dynamism; within a few years it ran into an economic frost; and all the while the management of local affairs was largely conducted in terms of personal or party antagonisms. This combination of adverse factors, external and internal, was to make the Dyarchy years fall almost as short of early plans and hopes as the official period now closed.

Part II

LOCAL BODIES UNDER POPULAR CONTROL

CHAPTER VII

The Dyarchy Provincial Councils and Local Government

SINCE the first World War, every aspect of life and thought in India and Pakistan has been touched by the influence of nationalism and of politics; and although local government institutions played only an incidental rôle in the struggle for independence, they continually felt the backwash of national events.

As a 'transferred' subject, local self-government was entirely the department of elected ministers, responsible to provincial legislatures with large elected majorities. The Secretary of State and the Government of India were wholly excluded from any form of control. Ministers were concerned with the introduction of new legislation, the distribution of grants-in-aid, approval of nominations to local bodies, the exercise of disciplinary control and in general with the determination of policy. Consequently changes in the political make-up of provincial legislatures, and the personalities and performances of ministers could have a potent effect on local government policy and practice. The influence of contemporary political ideas and activities also operated directly in, and around local institutions. Different parties and interests contended for power upon the boards, and left their mark upon the public services; while the two 'non-co-operation' campaigns of 1920–1 and 1930–1, directed as they were towards the overthrow of the administration in its different forms, included local authorities among the objects for attack.

It is difficult to describe the development of provincial Dyarchy politics in a short space. Parties were rudimentary, groups were formed around dominant personalities or in pursuit of class or caste advantage; Congress was the only real party, enforcing discipline upon its members, and pursuing national

lines of policy. In 1920 a majority of the Congress followed Gandhi's leadership under the name of Swarajists. Their dissatisfaction with the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms was expressed in a boycott of the 1920 provincial elections and their subsequent absence from the Legislatures, whilst they attempted to force the Government of India to hand over power by a campaign of direct action. A minority of Congress-men decided to try and work the Dyarchy experiment. At the time they were called 'Moderates' but they are better described as Liberals, for their leaders were later almost all associated with the [Indian] National Liberal Federation.

The Liberal ministries which held office from 1920 or 1921 to 1923–4 provided the most distinguished and forceful ministers of the whole Dyarchy period. They were primarily responsible for the pattern of local government in the following years, through their programmes of development and their legislation.[1]

Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea, the veteran of Congress and of Bengal public life, became the first Bengal Minister for Local Self-Government, with a Hindu colleague in charge of education, and a Muslim Minister of Public Works. The Muslim members of the Bengal legislature largely supported the Muslim minister, and Banerjea was able to rely upon a majority of the Hindu members, so that the ministry could count on a wide measure of support for its programme. The most important item was the Calcutta Municipal Bill, which Surendra Nath Banerjea regarded as one of the most important achievements of his political life, creating 'a veritable Swaraj in the government of the second city of the Empire'.[2] The franchise qualification was halved, with equality for women as voters. Four-fifths of the members were elected, while the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer were in turn elected by the members. Government control was strictly limited; government approval was needed for the appointment of the four chief officials, for expenditure of over 2½ lakhs, and for the raising of loans, but for nothing else. Altogether the bill contained over five hundred sections, and its passage through the legislature was at times hotly contested; eighteen months were consumed in

[1] A comprehensive list of provincial legislation, 1919–25 is given in Hartog Report, pp. 310–11.

[2] *See* S. N. Banerjea, *A Nation in Making*, p. 259.

debate. In order to ensure Muslim support, without which the bill must have been defeated, Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea was obliged to insert provision for communal representation: fifteen wards returned Muslim members, and forty-eight, non-Muslims. This concession antagonised some of his following, and he was sometimes obliged to rely on European and official support to carry through the bill, which was finally enacted in 1923.

In the United Provinces and Bombay the first ministries were Liberal, and the leading ministers Dr. (later Sir) R. P. Paranjpye in Bombay and Mr. (later Sir) C. Y. Chintamani in U.P. were men of similar calibre. Both were ardent Liberals, men who had absorbed the Mill-Gladstone-Bryce ethic until it formed an inherent basis for their thoughts and actions. Both men were firm believers in representative institutions and in education as the twin pillars of Indian progress—both were ardent followers of G. K. Gokhale and inherited his constructive interest in local government. Paranjpye, some-time Senior Wrangler of Cambridge University and Gokhale's chosen disciple, was a college professor. Chintamani was editor of the influential Allahabad *Leader*, then noted for its progressive social policy. Opposition to these Liberal ministries within the Legislative Councils, in the absence of the Swarajists, came in U.P. from the powerful landlord group, and in Bombay from miscellaneous interests, including landlords, Muslims, and the 'backward' communities.

The U.P. District Boards Act of 1922 was drafted personally by Pandit Jagat Narain, Minister for Local Self-Government, in association with Mr. C. Y. Chintamani.[1] They believed wholeheartedly in the need to emancipate local authorities from official control, and their bill, although professedly modelled on the 1916 U.P. Municipal Act, was in fact a new departure. Under the 1916 Act, municipal boards were 'advisory and controlling bodies working through an executive', but under the 1922 Bill, district boards were to be 'units for direct administration'.[2] Hence there was no provision for an executive officer, and few powers were to be delegated either to the chairmen or to committees: the Board itself was to be the 'normal' unit of administra-

[1] For instance, the provincial education department was not informed of the education provisions of the Bill, until it had become law: *see* Hartog Report, p. 320.

[2] ISC, ix, 442.

tion. The powers of Government over rural authorities' activities were even less than those enjoined under the 1916 Act.

The Bill had a troubled passage through the Legislative Council. The Liberal ministry was not supported by an organised party in the legislature, it relied upon the official bloc, and even upon official 'influence' with the opposition. The terms of the new bill aroused hostility among the most powerful interests in the Council—the landlords and the Muslims. As originally drafted, the bill contained no provision for separate representation for Muslims. An amendment providing for communal representation, by means of a 'weighting' formula, was passed against the ministers' advice. The occasion produced a constitutional curiosity, in that all but one of the official members voted for the amendment and against the ministers.[1] As a result, Muslims secured very generous treatment.[2]

In the new bill, powers were given to district boards to raise the land revenue cess from the old rate of 5 per cent of the annual value of land to 6¼ per cent. In fact the old cess was everywhere confined to one anna in the rupee: the new rate would be two annas in the rupee. There was very determined opposition to this measure from rural members in the legislature. To avert the wrecking of the bill, the Governor held a conference of the leading members of the Legislative Council, and a formula for agreement was reached. The landlords accepted the new cess increase, subject to an amendment which introduced a tax on circumstances and property to be levied upon non-agricultural incomes only. It was specifically stipulated that the land revenue cess might not be increased by a board, unless the circumstances and property tax was simultaneously introduced. As a result of this amendment, the landlords ensured that a chance majority of lawyers and traders upon a board could not

[1] ISC, ix, 24. Justified on the grounds that as officials they must protect the rights of minorities.

[2] Muslims formed only 13 per cent of the rural population of U.P., dwelling largely in Meerut Division and in Rohilkhand, yet they were ensured a voice in rural government everywhere. When the community formed less than 1 per cent of population they were to receive 10 per cent of seats; when from 1 to 5 per cent of population, to receive 15 per cent of seats; when 5 to 15 per cent of population—25 per cent of seats; when 15 to 30 per cent—30 per cent of seats. Where Muslims formed over 30 per cent of the population (in three districts only), they were to receive seats in strict proportion to their numerical strength.

impose additional taxation upon agriculture, without themselves incurring the onus of additional obligations. The effect of this amendment was in general to nullify the new permissive powers.

Altogether the U.P. District Boards Act bore the impress of the new factors in politics—it reflected the Liberal faith in democracy, a conservative dislike of increased taxation and Muslim determination to safeguard their identity. Further, product as it was of the early days of 'popular' government, it was not a well-constructed measure: only the communal electorates and taxation clauses received discussion, otherwise it was rushed through without debate. The Act's loose and ambiguous drafting was often to be exploited and perverted when put into operation in the coming years.

The Bombay situation was similar. The 1920 municipal reforms did not satisfy Muslim demands; they claimed that the cumulative voting system further favoured the politically advanced Brahmins, and not the poor, backward Muslims, as intended. In 1921 the rules were amended. The municipal franchise was extended to include all tax-payers and all voters for the provincial legislature. The representation of minorities also underwent radical change; amid the numerous political groups and the uneasy alliances of the Bombay legislature, the Muslims were able to enforce their claims, and in 1921 the principle of separate Muslim wards was accepted. The depressed classes continued to depend upon nomination to represent their interests, until 1925.

In 1921, 'almost all' Bombay district and taluka boards were given a two-thirds elected majority, but existing legislative machinery for rural authorities was deemed inadequate and in 1923 was overhauled. A new District Local Boards Act and a new Primary Education Act were introduced; both reflect the determination of Dr. Paranjpye to transfer the social services from provincial departmental control to local authorities. Both in principle and in methods, his work was the completion of policies advocated by G. K. Gokhale.[1] The new district boards were to include at least 75 per cent elected members; they were to be directly elected (and not as heretofore indirectly, by taluka boards); the franchise was widely extended—to all

[1] Cf. 'Report of Local Self-Government Committee' (Bombay, 1939), p. 90.

tenants paying Rs. 32 land revenue, or any direct local tax, while the taluka board franchise was based on payment of Rs. 8 land revenue. Separate Muslim representation was again conceded, as a result of pressure by the community in the legislature.

The changes proposed in the functions of the rural boards were even more radical: from being mere channels for the implementing of government departments' instructions, they were to become the masters of almost all local services. District boards received corporate status; as genuine administrative bodies they were to employ qualified staff—a Chief Officer, Engineer, Health Officer, and Administrative Officer for education. Their powers included almost complete control over primary education with permission to levy an additional one anna education cess, and if a district board employed an Engineer it was permitted to sanction and execute the building of roads and other public works. In every direction official control was pared down to almost nothing.

The Punjab ministers, Fazl-i-Husain and Harkishan Lal, were also Congress leaders who had decided not to follow the Gandhi policy. They were men who might be described as liberals—firm believers in democracy, education and local self-government; but in Punjab, political labels and alignments were somewhat different. Of the seventy-one elected members of the first council, thirty-nine were zamindars and twenty-four were lawyers: the ministerial party came to identify itself with the countryside, while the opposition consisted largely of the urban representatives. Fazl-i-Husain, as well as having been a Congress leader was also a dominant figure in the Muslim League. His opponents called him a Muslim bigot; he always claimed that he stood above communal politics—but that before all the communities would work together in harmony in Punjab, it would be necessary to remove the grievances of the Punjab Muslims, arising from their backwardness in education and economic activities. But Fazl-i-Husain had to face an intensely communal-minded legislature, in which any measure was a communal measure. For instance, a bill to legalise the terminal tax at Lahore was made the occasion for an attack on the ministry regarding the representation of Hindus on the municipality.

Fazl-i-Husain attempted to settle the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh

imbroglio, by prescribing fixed percentages for places in the public services, and in educational institutions, for the three communities. He then revised municipal representation on the basis of the formula: 'elected seats should be distributed among the communities in proportion to their population as modified arithmetically by their voting strength'. In these terms he reformed those municipalities in which elections were already held so as to increase Muslim representation, and he introduced separate electorates in three more towns. Twenty-one hitherto nominated municipalities were reconstituted so as to introduce the elective system and of those, seven were to be communal bodies. Altogether,of the one hundred municipalities now mainly elected, fifty comprised communal electorates. These changes did no more than rectify previous inequalities. Muslims formed 53 per cent of the municipal population and from 1920 to 1923, the proportion of Muslim members was increased from 44 per cent to 49 per cent. This programme was carried through against the opposition of the Hindu and Sikh members of the legislature, who presented a memorial of protest to the Government and introduced a vote of censure in the 1923 budget debate which was defeated by fifty votes (the official bloc and the Muslims) to twenty-three votes (Hindus and Sikhs).

Fazl-i-Husain's efforts ranged beyond matters of communal representation: his policy was centred on a conviction of the virtues of democracy. The local government franchise was extended in town and countryside, increasing the electorate by about 75 per cent. After 1922 only five municipalities remained wholly nominated: the elected municipalities increased from seventy-nine to one hundred, and the elected element formed at least three-quarters of the total. District boards were also reconstituted in 1922 with two-thirds elected majorities, except for Mianwali, Attock and Dera Ghazi Khan (previously wholly nominated) whose members were one-third elected. In 1925, district boards were offered the choice of electing non-official presidents if they wished; two boards made the change in the 1920's and two more in the '30's. Fazl-i-Husain also sponsored a Town Improvement Act; the Punjab Small Towns Act, designed to provide machinery for a hundred little market towns; and the Panchayats Act of 1921. Punjab panchayats were to be

small 'one village' bodies, consisting of three to five members, all elected. Their functions included those of a minor court, the supervision of village roads and wells, and the organisation of the village watch and ward. Those who argue that Fazl-i-Husain's policy was not communal in spirit can point out that in his new local authorities, the small towns and the panchayats, and in the reform of district boards, communal representation was entirely excluded. Nevertheless, between 1920 and 1923 Punjab politics seemed to be hardening into Sikh-Hindu-Muslim lines.

Madras politics were at first dominated by an avowedly communal party—the 'Justice' or non-Brahmin party. The struggle of non-Brahmins against Brahmin domination had been developing in Madras for many years, particularly as a feature of district board affairs.[1] After the 1920 elections, the Justice party were returned with a clear majority over all other groups in the provincial legislature, including the officials. A ministry led by a 'Chief Minister' was able to carry through their programme irrespective of official support or non-official opposition. In the field of local government the ministry carried on the policies which the pre-Dyarchy legislation had initiated; particular stress was of course laid upon the favourable treatment of non-Brahmins in the matter of appointment to government services and to local bodies.

All over India the 1923 elections brought great changes. Under the influence of Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, Congress policy towards Dyarchy was reversed. The Swarajists now announced that they would contest elections and enter the provincial legislatures for the purpose of wrecking Dyarchy, by paralysing the work of administration through constant opposition, particularly to financial measures. The principal victims of these new tactics were the Liberals; between the lukewarm support of the bureaucracy and the hostility of the extremer nationalists the Liberals found themselves, in Sir C. Y. Chintamani's words, 'in the unenviable position of the proverbial earthen pot between two brass vessels'.[2]

In almost all the second legislatures, the Swarajists formed a

[1] Cf. DCR, ii, 268, 291.

[2] C. Y. Chintamani and M. R. Masani, *India's Constitution at Work* (Bombay, 1940), p. 7.

compact and energetic pressure group. In the Central Provinces they obtained a clear majority, and their refusal to take office, combined with their reduction of ministerial salaries to two rupees, led first to the collapse of ministerial government and then to the formal suspension of Dyarchy.

The situation in Bengal developed on lines hardly less negative. In the second Council, of 114 elected members only seven were Liberals, while the Swarajists numbered forty-seven (including twenty-one Muslims), and nineteen other independent Nationalists gave the Swarajists 'general' support. Two Muslim ministries managed to keep in office from January to August 1924, but thereafter, apart from a landlord ministry which lasted ten days, the 'transferred' departments were managed by the Members in charge of the 'reserved' departments throughout the term of the second legislature: and so there was no popular control whatsoever over local government policy from 1924 to 1927. C. R. Das had secured Muslim co-operation in Bengal politics by means of a pact, whereby, on the attainment of Swaraj, separate electorates were to be constituted both for the Legislative Council and for local bodies, based on the comparative numerical strength of Hindus and Muslims. In December 1925 a municipal bill (originally drafted by S. N. Banerjea) was again brought forward, but was defeated on its first reading by Swarajist and other Hindu members because (among other reasons) the bill provided for communal electorates. Here was a sign of the breakdown of Hindu-Muslim understanding, which was soon translated into ugly reality in the 1926 riots in Calcutta and other towns.

The 1923 elections in the United Provinces produced a legislature of fifty landlords, twenty Liberals and a disciplined unified group of thirty Swarajists. The ministers were all landlords relying upon a personal following, and upon official support. The second Bombay Council included among its eighty-six elected members a party of thirty Swarajists, who were however somewhat divided upon the issue of 'non-co-operation'. Ministers came from sectional groups, such as Sindhi Muslims, or Deccani Marathas and Lingayats; most of them representing rural interests as opposed to the urban, largely Brahmin, Swarajists. In Punjab, out of seventy-one elected members, twelve

were Swarajists and three allied Khilafatists, but they could not shake Fazl-i-Husain's ministry which was supported by the great majority of Muslim members, together with some Jats led by (Sir) Chhotu Ram, under the banner of the National Unionist Party, pledged to uphold rural interests. The Justice party were again returned to power in the second Madras Council, but with a reduced majority, and they were confronted by a small Swarajist party and a loosely termed 'anti-ministerial' group who formed a formidable opposition. The Justice party now depended on official support for a majority, and somewhat lost their freedom of decision.

Altogether the ministries of 1924–7 were not so fruitful in the local government sphere as their predecessors. There was more preoccupation with party manœuvres, and less constructive effort. Legislation to liberalise local bodies had been largely completed in the first councils, but a few new measures may be noted. A non-Brahmin *cum* Muslim ministry in Bombay introduced the City Municipalities Act of 1925 whereby in the larger towns the separate representation already enjoyed by Muslims was extended to the depressed classes. In Assam, an amending act of 1926 constituted separate electorates for Muslims for the local [sub-district] boards, although there was no such feature in Assam municipal life.

The political atmosphere at the time of the third elections was very different from three years before. Relations between Hindus and Muslims had deteriorated in many areas, and the Swaraj-Khilafat alliance had broken down: almost all the remaining Congress leaders were Hindus. The Muslim League still had no popular national appeal, but in most of the provinces Muslims were uniting for political purposes. Within Congress there were divisions. One party led by Mr. Jayakar and Dr. Moonjee desired to take office and work the Dyarchy machinery upon progressive Nationalist lines. The Gauhati session of Congress in December 1926 decided that Swarajists would contest elections but would not form ministries or allow others to form them. A minority thereupon broke away from Congress and called themselves the party of 'Responsive Co-operation'.

The third Councils met in the cold season of 1926–7 and in most provinces the party system appeared to have suffered fur-

ther set-backs. Even in Madras the Justice party was partially broken up as a result of disputes over appointments; Congress emerged as the strongest party but refused to take office, and ministers were chosen from among the large number of independents. (See Table 14.)

TABLE 14

PARTIES IN THE MADRAS COUNCIL

	Justice	Congress	Independents	'Anti-ministerial'
1st Council	81	0	18	17
2nd Council	61	11	7	37
3rd Council	22	41	58	0

Dr. P. Subbarayan, a progressive Nationalist, became Minister for Education and Local Self-Government. The Unionist party in Punjab emerged virtually as a Muslim group, without a majority, in the third Council. The Governor therefore chose his ministers from the major 'interests': Malik Firoz Khan Noon (Unionist) as Minister for Local Self-Government, Manohar Lal (Hindu Mahasabbha) as Minister for Education, and Jogendra Singh (Sikh, non-party) as Minister for Agriculture. The Congress or 'Nationalist' group now mustered only ten or twelve members and exercised little influence. In other provinces the Swarajists returned to the third Councils in reduced numbers (as in U.P. and Bombay). In the Bengal legislature there were thirty-seven Congress supporters, including only one Muslim. Sixteen Hindu members decided to co-operate with the government as 'Responsivists' and thirty-eight Muslims were also ready to take office. These two groups produced coalition ministries which somehow functioned in the face of Congress opposition in the shape of no confidence motions, and financial cuts. For a time the breakdown of Dyarchy in the Central Provinces was repaired, a 'Responsivist' being induced to form a ministry.

The marching and counter-marching in the legislatures was pushed into the shadows by the civil disobedience campaign of 1930–1. The whole of Indian society became involved in Gandhi's great struggle. Thereafter political interests were lifted

out of the Council chamber into the conference room—and the Houses of Parliament. The remaining ministers held power by reason of personal or sectional support, and the party system declined into sectional bargaining and lobbying. The Justice party remained in eclipse, and in Punjab the Unionist party lost much of its early 'yeoman' character. Muslim-Hindu antagonism became the basic division in many provinces, with Muslims increasingly asserting their rights. In Bengal a new municipal act of 1932 gave separate electorates to Muslims, as they had long desired.

In general the Dyarchy ministers did not initiate any fundamental new contribution to the development of local government; they adhered to the broad lines of change laid down from 1918 to 1920. Critics of Dyarchy have dwelt upon an alleged financial impotence restricting the elected ministers, but in the 1920's they were able to command resources which compared favourably with those allotted to the reserved side. Between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of revenue went to the transferred departments, and any financial 'windfalls' were allotted to them. Thus there was a substantial increase in the amounts devoted to education.[1] Grants were later restricted as a result of the slump and the severe fall in provincial revenues—but the cuts were felt by reserved as well as transferred departments.

A notable feature of Dyarchy legislation was the widespread adoption of communal representation in local bodies. This was a long-standing feature of a few special municipalities, but now communal seats were accepted as the general rule in five out of the eight provinces (the number before 1936, excluding Burma).[2] And yet, apart from Fazl-i-Husain in the Punjab, it is difficult to suggest that any ministers deliberately adopted the system. Indeed, after the Liberals of the first Councils, few ministers exerted any definite and positive influence over local bodies' activities. Often the ministry would change hands every few

[1] In 1927, the proportion of total provincial revenue spent on education was 17·2 per cent in U.P., 14·2 per cent in C.P., 14 per cent in Bengal, 13·9 per cent in Punjab, 13·6 per cent in Bombay, 13·3 per cent in Madras.

[2] Perhaps the most extreme form of communal representation was that introduced into Bombay district boards in 1938. Separate seats were allotted for Muslims, women, the depressed classes, backward tribes, and Christians. Nomination was entirely abolished.

months, while in Bengal and C.P. the office was most often a vacancy. There was seldom the opportunity for a man to lay down a policy and see it carried through.

The first ministers as a matter of deliberate policy desired to give local authorities complete freedom from outside control, and deliberately refrained from interference. For instance, Fazl-i-Husain 'maintained that to prevent local bodies from learning by making mistakes was to rob the country of essential training for higher political and public life'.[1] However, Fazl-i-Husain was obliged to modify his views after a few years in office. In 1925 he issued a resolution in which members of local bodies were reminded of their high responsibility as custodians of public money; he went on to warn members that if they continued to misuse public funds they could be made liable to surcharge. At the same time Commissioners and District Officers were reminded of their statutory duty to supervise local bodies' expenditure, and to insist on conformity to proper financial practices. If officials had thought the minister did not wish them to interfere in local board affairs, that impression was now forcibly corrected.[2] In 1926 the minister had to supersede Ludhiana Municipality for corruption and inefficiency. At the same time Fazl-i-Husain asserted his authority as minister over district officials in the local government sphere; in 1924 he set aside the two names recommended by the Deputy Commissioner of Montgomery for nomination to the district board, and when the D.C. protested, Fazl-i-Husain replied that he was not prepared to recognise nomination as a reward for 'loyalty' or support for the district administration. Next year this ruling was promulgated in instructions for general observance.[3] Similarly in Bombay Dr. Paranjpye, who ardently desired that local bodies should be genuinely free agents, was forced by the non-co-operation policy of Ahmadabad, Surat and Nadiad to intervene in their affairs, and finally to supersede the three boards.

The later ministers, lesser men, intervened very little in the affairs of local bodies even when grave mismanagement was

[1] Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain* (Bombay, 1946), p. 139.
[2] *See* ISC, x, 157–60.
[3] *See* Azim Husain, pp. 167–8 and ISC, x, 145–6.

apparent. This non-interference was not so much a matter of consistent policy as of party tactics or personal considerations. Sometimes when they did take action their particular sectional bias was apparent. One U.P. minister insisted on making all nominations to municipal boards himself, in the landed interest; another deprived the depressed classes of (nominated) representation upon rural bodies.

The allotment or witholding of financial grants was potentially a powerful instrument of ministerial control over local bodies, but few ministers were able to formulate an effective grants policy. Grants were used to assist the poorer boards, to promote a 'minimum standard', to foster certain causes such as compulsory or free education—and sometimes to benefit interests which a particular minister supported, such as the rural boards' services at the expense of urban authorities. But in very few cases was a minister's authority over the distribution of grants employed to exercise pressure for greater efficiency in local services. Local bodies resented the supervision of their activities by departmental officers such as inspectors of schools, or government engineers, and under the new legislation these officers were not now able to enforce their views. Yet while rejecting control, boards continued, as in the past, to expect Government to provide the money for schemes of expansion. They hardly ever attempted to enlarge their own financial resources.

The enactments of the new Legislative Councils had done much to restrict ministers' power to influence local boards' policies. Provincial governments and their officials were left with disciplinary powers only, exercisable when local boards were in utter chaos. The Simon Report aptly summarised the situation thus: 'Where spur and rein were needed, the ministers were given only a pole-axe.'[1] Somewhat naturally, ministers whose tenure of office depended upon very insecure majorities, were reluctant to take any drastic step which would provide political opponents with an opportunity to raise the ever popular cry of 'government tyranny'.

Most ministers fell into a policy of *laissez-aller*; government servants often followed this lead and held aloof from local politics: the 'emergency' powers of Commissioners and District

[1] ISC, i, 310–11.

Magistrates were only seldom applied.[1] However towards the end of the 1920's the march of events compelled ministers to adopt more drastic measures, and in almost every province one or two boards were superseded as a form of warning. By 1930 and '31 a critical position had been reached as a result of the rise in the political and communal temperature, and of the financial crisis threatening many boards. The instrument of supersession was used much more freely after 1930,[2] and this had the effect of making local authorities more amenable to the suggestions of Government in the later years. In Madras an Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Bodies with a small inspecting staff was empowered to inspect and report to Government upon the activities of local bodies. Sir G. C. Narang (Mahasabbha), Minister for Local Self-Government in Punjab, placed two measures on the statute book which had the effect of re-asserting official and government control: the Municipal Executive Officers Act of 1931, and the Municipal Amendment Act of 1932. An Inspector of Local Bodies was also appointed to watch staff matters. But the lesson that the expert knowledge of the centre is a necessary counterpoise to local initiative, was one which most provinces were slow to learn.

Having surveyed the influence of the Dyarchy legislatures upon local government, it may be useful to estimate the contribution of local government to the working of Dyarchy. The only nation-wide party, Congress, to an increasing extent drew its adherents, and particularly its leaders, from among men who were politicians first and last. They might be lawyers or journalists, but their reputations were made in politics. Among the smaller political groups, and especially among the 'independents' who were important in this period when parties had not fully developed, many of the leaders were men who had received their political training in the local government school. For instance, among the members of the third Madras Council, over one-third (forty-three) were members, while seven were former members of local bodies; and of these, twenty-nine were chairmen or

[1] For instance, it is stated that these powers were never invoked in U.P. *See* Panna Lall, *The Junior Collectors' Handbook*, p. 133.

[2] Number of municipalities superseded, 1931–7: Bombay, 10; Madras, 9; Bengal, 1; U.P., 6; Punjab, 8.

presidents of boards. Similarly in Bombay politics many of the leading men such as Rao Bahadur Chitale and Sir Sheikh Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah had served an apprenticeship in local government. In Bengal, politicians often had a different background, but the Calcutta Corporation was the stage for many political leaders to develop their ideas, while Khwaja Nazimuddin first made his reputation as chairman of Dacca Municipality (1922–9). Most of the members of the Punjab legislature came from district or municipal boards; as an example, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan had been president of Hassan Abdal Municipality.

Altogether, narrow as was the scope of Indian local government, a large proportion of political leaders gained their promotion from its ranks (a much larger proportion than in English public life). But as time went on it was noticeable that the younger men sought no such training; their apprenticeship was served in propaganda work, perhaps in the cause of violence and destruction, perhaps in prison. It was certainly unfortunate for Indian local government that so much idealism and energy should remain outside its service, and that the boards should often be abandoned to the self-seeker and the jack-in-office.

CHAPTER VIII

Local Boards and National Politics, 1920 to 1937

ALTHOUGH the control exercised by the Dyarchy ministers over local authorities was small (smaller far than ministerial control in Great Britain, infinitely less than the control of the prefect in France), by contrast the influence of provincial and national politics upon local bodies was continuous and all-pervasive.

The new dynamic in politics, Gandhi's appeal to the masses, first began to affect local government in Gujarat, which formed the focus of the national campaign of 1919 to 1921. Members of the Ahmadabad Municipality had a long reputation for independence, and when in 1919 the first 'passive resistance' campaign led to clashes with authority, a minority of the board adopted 'non-co-operative' tactics. These members refused to assist with municipal business, and constantly moved the adjournment of the meeting 'to discuss . . .' such and such an outrage by Government. The enormous number of 120 meetings was held by the municipality from 1919 to 1920, and of these eighty-four were adjourned—almost all for political purposes.

Gandhi's campaign came to a climax in June 1921; the greater part of Bombay Presidency was not affected, but in a few towns in Gujarat and Deccan there was intense feeling. The storm centred round Ahmadabad, Surat, and Nadiad (population: 31,939)—the home of the brothers Patel. In 1921, Ahmadabad Municipality, whose board was predominantly Swarajist in sympathies, associated itself with Gandhi's 'Swaraj within one year' programme, and adopted a 'non-violent, non-co-operative' policy. The board repudiated government authority over its schools, rejected education grants, and refused to admit government inspectors into the schools. The Government (that is, the

Liberal ministry of Dr. Paranjpye) attempted to re-assert control over education in Ahmadabad by setting up a nominated schools committee, but the municipality refused to recognise its authority. The municipal board was accordingly superseded in February 1922. Similarly, Surat Municipality rejected government grants and handed over education in the city to a 'Nationalist' schools organisation to whom the sum of Rs. 40,000 was paid from municipal funds. When Government passed orders to stay this action, the municipality threatened to repudiate all government authority over municipal affairs, and made no attempt to collect the municipal taxes. Surat Municipality was therefore also superseded in February 1922.

The defiant attitude of these two leading cities encouraged Swarajist sympathisers in towns throughout the Presidency. In the year 1921–2, a total of 3,509 municipal board meetings were held; of these 948 were adjourned, almost in every case as a political gesture, while 574 were abortive—many through a boycott by extremist members. In Kaira there were eighteen resignations from the board as a gesture of protest. At Poona, a large Swarajist party was active, although they failed to win control of the municipal board. In Karachi, Broach and Nasik, the Swarajists kept up sniping tactics, without seriously interrupting the work of the municipalities. The town of Nadiad proved the extent to which municipal affairs could be paralysed by para-legal means. In 1921, Nadiad Municipality replaced their teaching staff by Nationalist volunteers; Government intervened, and eleven of the eighteen members resigned in protest. After a second election, and a further clash with Government, seventeen members resigned. At the next election only eight candidates presented themselves, and nine vacancies were filled by government nomination. A suit was entered, challenging the legality of this procedure, and a Sub-Judge issued an injunction restraining any of the nine nominated members from acting. The chairman of the board moreover refused to convene any meetings for four months, thus making any but the most routine municipal activity impossible. He was eventually, in 1922, removed by Government. Once again a suit was filed and a temporary injunction was obtained, but this time the order was quickly set aside by the District Court. A reconstituted municipal board

finally commenced work once again in January 1923. The affairs of Nadiad Municipality were thus in chronic disorder for twelve months—and completely paralysed for six months.

The stand taken by the Liberal ministry in superseding the three recalcitrant boards had the effect of preventing any other municipality from going to such extremes. In general, non-co-operative activity was symbolic rather than thorough-going, and was confined to gestures, such as 'a few cases of voting of municipal funds either for total abstinence propaganda or for receptions of prominent extremist politicians'.[1] A more serious effect of the attitude of such boards and of the current political philosophy was a defiance of municipal authority. The public disregarded by-laws and refused to pay their taxes; the municipal staff defied the orders of their chief officer, and discipline, always lax, became worse.

The Swarajist movement mainly affected Bombay rural boards externally; for instance in Bardoli at the core of the non-co-operation movement, persons who took part in district board activities were ostracised or intimidated. Only in certain areas of Gujarat did the Swarajists begin to secure a footing within the district boards. In the elections of 1921, Swarajists intervened in Panch Mahals District, but with only partial success: they secured seven of the twenty-two district board seats. In 1922 they captured four of the twelve seats of Thana District Board and from 25 to 50 per cent of the seats on taluka boards in the same district. The immediate effect of these moves was slight, although Thana District Board spent some money on political gestures.

In Bengal also, the political fervour of 1921 had its echoes in local government—at first indirectly, in the withdrawal of thousands of pupils from board schools to enter the short-lived 'National' schools; and then directly in the Swarajist campaign against the new Village Self-Government Act. The new union boards were represented as an excuse to impose fresh taxation, and so much was public feeling aroused, that Government was forced to dissolve the 227 union boards established in Midnapore District, whilst elsewhere the campaign prevented the formation of new boards for a considerable time.

[1] Bombay, Municipal Reports, 1921–2.

There was no absolute ban on Swarajists entering local boards, as there was on the first Councils, but the party only contested elections in any numbers in 1923, when most of the provinces held their first local elections under the new extended franchise. The electorate was still narrow, but it was a great advance on pre-Reform days; on an all-India basis the municipal electorate was doubled (an increase from 6 per cent to 14 per cent of the population), while there were now five rural voters for every one before (3·2 per cent of the population, compared with 0·6 per cent previously). The qualifications for the vote varied from province to province, and often from town to town: those qualified included most service pensioners, persons with high educational qualifications, most ratepayers, and in the countryside most raiyats or tenant cultivators. The 'masses'—coolies, landless labourers and many artisans, were unenfranchised. In the Presidency towns the vote was more restricted; it was accorded (among others) to heads of households of a monthly rental value of Rs. 25 in Calcutta, Rs. 10 in Bombay and Rs. 5 in Madras. In the 1920's these requirements gave the vote to some 10 per cent of the population of Bombay, 4·8 per cent of the people of Madras, and about 4·5 per cent in Calcutta.

Congress scored its greatest success in Calcutta where an overwhelming Congress majority assumed control of the reconstituted corporation in 1923. They went on to elect C. R. Das as Mayor, and Subhas Chandra Bose as Chief Executive Officer, while the five aldermen were also leading Congress personalities. Neither Mr. Das (then the national leader of Congress), nor S. C. Bose, the storm-bird of Indian politics, had any previous experience of local government. The Swarajists ran the municipality on rigid party lines, all policy decisions were made by the party caucus and all other interests upon the Corporation were ignored. There was no radical change of policy, but a new spirit was felt in education, and a large number of new primary schools were opened, while medical and public health work was directed into new channels. The sudden change from the management of an official chairman, to that of elected mayor and executive officer, almost inevitably led to a loosening of discipline within the municipal staff and some deterioration of certain services—the increasing dirtiness of the streets in these years was

often remarked upon. The powers which the 1923 Act bequeathed to Government, when put into practice were negligible: it was found impossible to refuse loan sanction or to enforce compliance with audit observations. The Corporation repulsed any attempt at control.

The next election in 1927 saw the parting of the Muslims from Congress in the Corporation, as in national politics. However the Swarajists were still the only organised party, and they succeeded in obtaining the election of their nominee J. M. Sen Gupta (the successor to C. R. Das as the leader of Congress in Bengal) as Mayor, and in securing majorities on the all-important standing committees. Following the third Calcutta elections the Muslims, with European support, were successful in electing their candidate as Mayor, and in wresting control of the standing committees from the Swarajists. During the remaining years of this period, the Corporation was divided into three or four groups, and there was rarely sufficient general agreement to allow the steady development of policy; the Corporation was always liable to be plunged into the morass of political controversy.

In Madras also the provincial political pattern was reproduced in the proceedings of the capital city's Corporation. The Justice party and the Swarajists formed two well-organised parties within the municipality; there were also a number of independents, and occasionally a member from the poorer wards pledged to the cause of labour. The Justice party commanded a majority during the period 1920–7, but did not bring great changes in municipal life; the number of non-Brahmins on the staff was increased, and primary education received keen support.[1] As in Bengal, the Congress leader in the provincial legislature (S. V. Chetti) was also leader of the party on the Corporation. A Justice member remained president of the Corporation till 1930, as a result of a series of inter-party manœuvres, but thereafter municipal affairs were conducted less on rigid party lines. As in Calcutta in the '20's, the Madras Corporation was in no mood to accept the longstanding paternal guidance of the provincial government, and the controls written into the 1919 Act were largely a dead letter.

[1] In 1927, members elected by wards consisted of seven Brahmins, eighteen non-Brahmins, two Muslims, two Indian Christians, and one European.

Party politics were no novelty in the City of Bombay. There had long been 'conservatives'—identified variously with the J.P.'s, Bombay Castle, and the landlords; and the 'popular' party calling for reform and freedom from superimposed restrictions. After 1922 the Bombay City franchise was considerably wider than in other Presidency towns. There was no system of communal representation: for instance in 1927, the general wards returned twenty-five Brahmins, ten non-Brahmins (none from the depressed classes), fourteen Muslims, ten Europeans and other Christians—and twenty-one Parsees. These figures bore little relation to the strength of the communities; Muslims formed 16 per cent of the population and Parsees only 4·5 per cent. No doubt Parsee strength on the Corporation was well justified by their fine civic record, but their predominance was more probably due to their owning almost all the property in the city.

From 1923, the quondam 'popular' party, the Progressives, who included many outstanding Bombay public figures (such as Sir Cowasji Jehangir, 1919 Corporation president and Liberal statesman), found themselves identified with Government and officialdom; while the [Congress] National Municipal Party was now the 'popular' party. In the 1920's Bombay Corporation was the forum for several leading Congress personalities, including Sarojini Naidu, M. S. Aney, V. J. Patel (then President of the Central Legislative Assembly) and Roy Horniman. The Swarajists formed a vigorous minority—a pressure group in municipal affairs; their policy was constructive and realistic, and they did much to inject new life into a body which had often come to regard civic affairs from the landlord point of view. The national leaders of Congress mostly ceased to be members of the Corporation after the return to 'direct action' in 1929. Bombay affairs were never stultified by political side-issues as in Calcutta; for example, the long established convention that the president of the municipality should be chosen in turn from the Hindu, Muslim, European and Parsee communities still continued.

Outside the Presidency towns, national politics were sharply reproduced in local affairs in some big towns, less sharply in others, and hardly at all in the countryside. Very often a struggle between communal interests, or between rival factions, or per-

haps between the local 'boss' and his opponents, formed the basis of local politics.

Bombay was perhaps the most advanced province both in the development of a civic spirit, and in political awareness, and yet the prevailing note here was of sectional struggle. Local politics in Bombay increased their predominantly communal character in 1923 when the considerable increase in the franchise added many 'underprivileged' voters to the lists.[1] In the rural areas especially, a fierce struggle followed between Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Yet public interest was aroused only in limited areas; in 1928 less than half the rural voters went to the polls (as an extreme example, in Karachi District where the electorate was 4,217, only 294 of them voted). Many seats were uncontested, and in 1931, partly as a result of the Congress boycott, the number of electoral contests was further reduced: for instance there were no contests whatever for the twenty seats on the Surat District Board in the heart of the agitation. There was a revival of interest in the 1935 elections, but there remained great areas of indifference particularly in Sind and Deccan.

Municipal elections in the Presidency were also largely fought on communal or caste lines. In 1923, three untouchables secured election to two small municipalities; elsewhere Brahmins and Marwaris were able to put pressure on the electorate to exclude candidates not of the 'advanced' castes.[2] There was separate representation for Muslims, and (after 1925) for the depressed classes in the larger towns. These 'class' constituencies were based upon the communities' total strength, but among the depressed classes, the numbers qualified as electors were very few. There was little active public opinion to which members might be made responsible,

> the electorate is apt to be capricious. An elected member who has given a perfectly good account of himself may be cast aside if opposed by a more vocal candidate, especially if he has shown any tendency to favour any increase in taxation.[3]

Muslims were more faithful to their representatives; as the community became more politically organised, so contests in Muslim

[1] By 1937, 21 per cent of the urban population, and 9 per cent of the rural population had the vote in Bombay local elections.

[2] Bombay, Municipal Reports, 1924–5.

[3] ISC, vii, 156.

wards became fewer—the selection of candidates was made in advance by the leaders of the community.

A study of election returns shows a moderate interest in local

TABLE 15

BOMBAY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

AHMADABAD: Population, 1921—270,755; 1931—313,789.
Seats: General Wards, 35; Muslim Wards, 10; Depressed Classes, 3.

	Electorate	Actually voted
1927	68,459	39,400
1930	82,544	43,228
1933	84,931	34,658
1936	103,275	52,632

SURAT: Population, 1921—118,193; 1931—118,000 (estimated).
Seats: General Wards, 30; Muslim Wards, 8; Depressed Classes, 2.

	Electorate	Actually voted
1927	29,759	12,022
	(superseded— 1931–3)	
1934	23,619	11,518
1937	38,523	11,354

POONA: Population, 1921—133,931; 1931—163,346.
Seats: General Wards, 38; Muslim Wards, 5; Depressed Classes, 2.

	Electorate	Actually voted
1928	43,701	18,893
1931	43,343	22,918
1934	44,342	29,862
1938	66,175	40,309

contests. Three leading towns have been selected as representative, although not necessarily 'typical': in smaller towns voting was sometimes apathetic, or by contrast, sometimes three-quarters of the electorate might go to the poll. (See Table 15.)

It will be seen that votes cast varied between 40 per cent and 60 per cent of the electorate—evidence of a fair degree of interest

(local elections seldom call forth more than a 50 per cent vote in Great Britain).

Most of the leading municipalities had influential Congress groups on their boards after the party's decision in 1923 to seek the mandate of the electors. Many of the Gujarati boards came under the rule of Congress majorities. There were wide variations in policies, typified in those adopted by Ahmadabad and Surat. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel entered municipal politics in 1924 to preside over the newly re-constituted Ahmadabad Municipality which he led till 1928. He launched a vigorous constructive programme of civic development, and deliberately jettisoned many features of previous Congress policy. For instance, municipal support for National schools was discontinued, although these had formed the core of Congress agitation from 1921 to 1923. *Per contra,* Surat's municipal administration was rendered impotent by the 'non-co-operative' members whose activities included a 'no tax' campaign directed against payment of municipal taxes, and endless wrangles with the local School Board.

Outside Gujarat, members were actuated by communal rather than by political interests.[1] In Sind 'advanced' Hindus of the professional classes had monopolised the municipal boards since their beginnings; now, following the extension of the franchise, they had to share power with the Muslims.[2] In Deccan many small towns passed under the control of non-Brahmins. Similarly in rural affairs; Congress influence was felt in the Gujarat district boards, but elsewhere divisions were on social, not political lines. Brahmins remained firmly established in most districts in Gujarat and Deccan, but lost control of four or five district boards. In the Sind district boards, Muslims gained a great accession of power.

These changes were reflected in the class-composition of the boards. Lawyers and politicians continued to form the great

[1] The Gujarat Congress Boards were also solidly Brahmin. Members of municipalities in Ahmadabad District were composed in 1927 as follows: Brahmins, 113; other Hindus, 4; Muslims, 18; depressed classes, nil. ISC, vii, 194–5.

[2] Cf. Hyderabad District, where Muslims form three-quarters of the population. In 1908, 92 per cent of members of municipal boards were 'advanced' Hindus, and 8 per cent Muslims. In 1925, 'advanced' Hindus still retained 53 per cent of seats, 'backward' Hindus held 2 per cent, and Muslims had acquired 45 per cent. *See* ISC, vii, 154.

majority of members, particularly upon urban boards; wealthy men of the old school withdrew even more from government under the new franchise. The new Muslim members in Sind came from classes which had hitherto played no part in public affairs, and were for the most part, men of little or no education. Maratha and Lingayat members were often endowed with plenty of sturdy common sense but they were narrow in their outlook, untrained and ill-qualified for public administration. Caste alone often determined staff appointments. Maratha and Lingayat boards retired many senior Brahmin officers, and those who replaced them were often inexperienced or ill-qualified. In Sholapur, the education administrative officer was forced to retire 'to escape from an impossible situation', while in Nasik the non-Brahmin board appointed three non-qualified administrative officers within six months. During the late 1920's, the non-Brahmins consolidated their position, and many Deccan district boards were split into two opposed camps: divisions were particularly acute in Nasik, Poona, Ahmednagar and Sholapur. The situation in Sholapur District Board became impossible as a result of caste wrangles, and the board was superseded for three years. A similar tension between Hindus and Muslims was endemic in the Karachi and Hyderabad districts in Sind.

The 1930 civil disobedience campaign temporarily masked these communal disputes. Centred in Gujarat, the agitation spread into the Deccan. Local authorities, still associated in the public mind with Government, were singled out for attack by politicians; at the same time some members of boards identified themselves with the campaign. Municipalities took the lead, and meetings were constantly adjourned as a political gesture; there were altogether 4,404 municipal board meetings in Bombay Presidency during 1930–1, and 1,794 of these were adjourned. In Ahmadabad, 180 meetings out of a total of 218 were so adjourned, while 'the Surat Municipality adjourned its meetings continuously over a long period and refused to transact any business in consequence of [Congress] party feeling'—the administration was hamstrung and the board had to be superseded.[1] Poona, Broach, Sholapur and other large towns were much the same:

[1] Bombay, Municipal Reports, 1930–1.

resolutions were passed concerning national issues, public addresses were presented to Congress leaders, Congress flags were hoisted over municipal buildings, children and teachers at municipal schools were constantly exhorted to take part in political processions and demonstrations, government measures of 'repression' were loudly condemned, and government activities (such as the 1931 Census) were placed under boycott. Rural authorities in Gujarat, and some in Deccan, followed suit: persons in government employment were urged to resign—in particular patels and village servants were pressed to leave their posts. Some rural members resigned in sympathy; the Bardoli Taluka Board resigned *en bloc*, which was scarcely surprising, for Bardoli was a political vortex, and all persons connected with government institutions were subject to social ostracism, intimidation or physical force.

The subordination of local government to national politics continued throughout 1931, especially in the towns of Ahmadabad (130 meetings, 90 adjourned) and Poona (91 meetings, 70 adjourned), but Government saw that chaos was at hand, and a firmer stand was made. The minister made it plain that Government would not tolerate the perversion of municipal administration for political ends. A few boards defied this warning and were superseded, but the mass of local authorities accepted the position. Perhaps members were becoming tired of the negation of progress in the name of national politics.

Political and communal influences were intertwined in Bengal local activities. After 1923 Congress supporters secured control of a number of municipalities and district boards in the Burdwan and Presidency Divisions. An official report noted that, in some cases

> the District Congress Committee controls the policy; offices are closed on hartal days, and at elections not only subordinate officers but even contractors, village school-masters, vaccinators and medical officers of dispensaries are expected to canvas for the Swarajist candidates. On the other hand, cases are noted by officers in which a Swarajist chairman has excluded politics from local affairs and there has been a marked improvement in administration.[1]

In the late 1920's the district magistrate was restored to the chair

[1] ISC, viii, 190–1.

of Bankura and Midnapore district boards, after those bodies had launched a head-on attack upon government policy, and some years later Jessore and Nadia district boards were superseded for their politics, but in general Congress intervention in Bengal local government lessened in the 1930's.

Divisions upon communal lines were dominant; in the early 1920's Hindus controlled almost all local bodies, even in East Bengal, but after 1930 Muslims began to be of more importance. The chief reasons for their earlier inferior position were their economic and educational backwardness which disqualified a majority of Muslims from membership of local bodies, or even from exercising the vote; the widening of the franchise made a great difference to this position. In 1920, Muslims formed less than 32 per cent of district board members and they were in a minority on all the boards, including those of East Bengal. By 1937, they had increased their membership to 43 per cent of the total, with actual majorities in ten of the twenty-six districts. Upon the local (sub-district) boards they improved their representation from 37 per cent to 50 per cent in the same period, being in the majority upon eighteen out of seventy-three boards in 1920, and upon forty-five out of eighty-four boards in 1937. And whereas Muslims formed only 27 per cent of the members of the old union committees in 1920, they had secured 55 per cent of union board membership by 1937.

In the towns Muslims were everywhere in a minority, and as trade and the professions were almost entirely in Hindu hands, this situation was naturally reflected in municipal life. Even after the introduction of communal representation there were Hindu majorities almost everywhere—even a precarious majority upon Dacca Municipality. Whereas some boards were able to rise above communal bickering, the majority of local bodies could not avoid the incubus of Hindu-Muslim rivalries; Dacca Municipality was particularly affected by these divisions. In many union boards however, this factor was less potent for evil.

Madras was largely free from the blighting influence of political negation and communal discord. The struggle between the Justice party and Congress was reflected in town and countryside in a growing assertion of the rights of non-Brahmins, but the struggle did not proceed to extremes. The extent of the shift

in power is well illustrated by a comparison of the representation of communities upon Madras local bodies, before and after the introduction of the wider franchise. (See Table 16.)

TABLE 16

COMPOSITION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN MADRAS

	Brahmins	Non-Brahmins	Depressed classes	Muslims	Indian Christians
District Boards					
1922	132	486	1	42	13
1927	78	545	2	40	13
Municipalities					
1922	267	739	3	138	57
1927	240	813	7	171	47

During the civil disobedience campaign of 1930 a few Madras municipalities—notably Guntur, Nellore and Chirala—under Congress boards, threw themselves into the struggle; but there was not the rancour shown elsewhere.

The United Provinces was predominantly an agricultural land of conservative landlords, and peasants dwelling in a world of legends of the past; but local bodies in U.P. were much affected by the political issues of the day. In the 1923 local elections the Swarajists gained complete control of nine municipal boards; these included the five leading cities, and amongst their members were Jawarharlal Nehru (1923 Chairman of Allahabad Municipality), S. P. Tandon (1950 President of Congress) and Mohan Lal Saksena (later Secretary of Congress). In nine other towns Swarajists and other groups were evenly matched, while in most municipalities they formed an eloquent minority. Several 1923 district boards were dominated by Swarajists, as politicians and residents of district headquarters, they monopolised debate, and talked down the rural members.

The outlook of the Congress boards varied considerably; for instance Allahabad and Lucknow municipalities laid down a constructive programme, but in Cawnpore the Swarajists were concerned only to utilise the board as a platform for propaganda. Congress boards encouraged the wearing of Khaddar, promoted

'national' text-books and songs, and observed 'national' holidays —but there was no widespread attempt to wreck the administration. As early as 1923 the sinister influence of inter-community discord was at work in many municipalities, and following the elections of 1925 and '26, divisions within the boards on communal lines intensified. Muslims retained control of some of the smaller municipalities where they were in a majority, but by 1927 all the forty-eight district boards had Hindu chairmen and majorities, except for Aligarh, where a Muslim landlord of exceptional influence and personality retained the chair. Communal bias was frequently shown in such matters as the closing of slaughter-houses and in disputes over the use of Urdu or Nagiri script. Staff matters formed the most potent stimulus to communal discord. Prolonged wrangling on Hindu-Muslim lines over the appointment of a water-works superintendent for Meerut Municipality led to the breakdown of the plant, and a water crisis. In general Muslims were the losers in this struggle: for instance whereas Muslim teachers in primary schools formed 16½ per cent of the U.P. total in 1922, their numbers had fallen to 11 per cent in 1937. Many of the Hindu dominated municipalities were also Congress strongholds, and joined enthusiastically in the 1930 civil disobedience campaign. Allahabad formed 'the centre of the political maelstrom' and the board actively supported the boycott of foreign goods, and even a 'no tax' campaign which hit its own revenues. Many district education committees gave support to the campaign—Congress flags were hoisted over school buildings, holidays were given to celebrate political events and teachers were encouraged to participate in agitation, teachers' conferences being organised for political purposes. There followed the communal reaction of early 1931, with riot and arson, and the elections of December 1931 were fought in an atmosphere of fierce Hindu-Muslim bitterness.[1] There was a barrage of election petitions, injunctions against officials, and suits in the civil courts. In Shahjehanpur Municipal Board, thirteen Muslim seats stood vacant for two years, while

[1] During the 1931 Census, both communities in Najibabad (where the Muslims had a small majority) attempted to obtain greater municipal representation by increasing their respective numbers. Hundreds of country folk were brought into the town on census night for inclusion in the registration; as a result there was an 'increase' in the town's population from 22,000 to 28,000! *See* 1931 Census, xviii, 125.

litigation raged. In towns where communal interests stood evenly matched, as in Lucknow and Benares, deadlock ensued.

City elections often continued to be fought on national rather than local issues. Divisions within Congress in 1935 concerning acceptance of office under the forthcoming constitution, led to the formation of a number of splinter groups to contest local elections—the 'Congressmen's Party' in Allahabad, the 'Independent Congress Party' in Jhansi, and others. As a result of these divisions Congress failed to score much success in the municipal elections of December 1935. In the countryside, 'personal considerations' remained paramount with the public, within the cloak of communalism. Certain ephemeral organisations such as the 'National Agriculturalist Party' did contest elections, but there was almost no development of rural public opinion.

Punjab local government was conducted in the same terms of Hindu-Muslim-Sikh rivalry as in the legislature. By 1930 there were fifty-two municipalities with separate communal representation, and in the other forty-seven municipalities wards 'were so arranged as to secure that the communities shall be correctly represented, and it is very rare that voting is not on communal lines'.[1] As a result of the changes, the Muslim position was much improved; for instance they now controlled Lahore and Ambala municipalities where they had previously been in a minority; for some years the Hindus boycotted Lahore and Ambala local affairs. In certain towns the balance was held by the Sikhs (as upon Amritsar Municipal Board where there were ten Muslim, nine Hindu and four Sikh seats). In the late 1920's the big towns became immersed in communal struggles, and in the '30's municipal life had to be entirely suspended in Lahore and Sialkot. The 1930 civil disobedience campaign drew a response from a few Punjab municipalities, especially Gujranwala, Rohtak and Jullundur, where Congress flags were flown, and many meetings were adjourned as political gestures; but the majority of municipalities remained unaffected.

There was no communal representation upon the Punjab district boards, but electoral circles roughly followed clan or community lines. The peasants still supported their tribal or

[1] Punjab, Municipal Reports, 1929–30.

territorial magnates; the great Muslim families of West Punjab, and the Sikh chieftains of the Manjha, remained the autocrats of the district boards. Communal divisions were by no means so acute as in the towns.

Among the smaller provinces, Bihar and Orissa contained several boards who followed an extreme 'wrecking' policy, and progress in local government was much disturbed by political activity. In C.P. some local bodies adopted certain symbols of nationalism, such as the flying of the national flag, but most Congress régimes differed little from the previous administration. In Assam there was very little politics in local government. The North-West Frontier Province was excluded from the Dyarchy reforms, and local government institutions remained firmly under official control. Even when in 1928 the elective system was partially introduced in Peshawar Municipality, official tutelage remained. It has been suggested that the energies of the Frontier political leaders which might have been canalised in provincial and local self-government were, through lack of opportunity, directed towards mob politics, and the 1930 campaign of violence.

Although the years 1920 to 1937 produced so much political and communal activity in local board affairs, this led to no radical change in the pattern of local government. The electorate gradually manifested an increasing interest in local elections, particularly in the towns, but they frequently returned the same candidates year after year, on the very reasonable basis of 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't know'. Members of boards continued to be drawn overwhelmingly from the middle classes with lawyers everywhere taking the lead. Landlords and the gentry withdrew even more from board activities, and only a very few representatives of labour were returned in industrial towns.

The principal effect of the political repercussions of the 1920's and '30's was to distract local authorities from the steady development of public services towards the exploitation of local activities for the ends of national politics, and frequently to accentuate ancient divisions of caste and religion. In a few instances, the enthusiasm generated by new ideas and new personalities in politics, did shake local bodies out of their

accustomed routine, serving to infuse them with a more active social-service policy. But in general the energy of the nation's leaders, at all levels, was concentrated on the attainment of national independence, to the inevitable detriment of local government. To be a success the new idea of local responsible government needed the best energies of public men, but instead —almost inevitably—the first years of the new system were entirely overshadowed by the parallel building up of the mass movements for national emancipation. Local leaders, who in Gokhale's day might have devoted their time to the local board, now gave their allegiance to the District Congress Committee, or to some other semi-national organisation. Instead of serving as the school of political education, local government became a mere annexe to the national political stadium, where the struggle for independence was moving towards its climax.

CHAPTER IX

Economic Factors and Local Revenues

MODERN Indian local government has always sharply reflected the prevailing economic state of the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century little progress was possible owing to the straits from which the Imperial finances never emerged; better years in the first decade of the present century led to expansion in local government, and the post-war boom brought unprecedented civic activity. Then in 1930, India fell a victim to the world slump, and almost immediately local government was plunged into difficulties from which it only began to emerge again in the late 1930's.

The 1920's were a time of comparative wealth for India. Her primary export products such as jute, raw cotton and wheat were commanding a good price in the world market, while the nation's industries, greatly stimulated by the 1914–18 War, were expanding with remarkable speed. Nevertheless, the national wealth was very unevenly distributed. It was concentrated in the great manufacturing and trading centres, and in particular areas. Bombay Presidency with its cotton towns had perhaps the largest cash income. Punjab, enjoying the benefit of an expanding canal system was rapidly changing from the poorest province in India to one of the richest. Within a province there could be great differences; Lyallpur with its rich canal-fed wheat fields was infinitely wealthier than the scrub and sand of Mianwali one hundred miles away.[1] But prosperity was sufficiently wide-spread; provincial treasuries were well filled, and a fair proportion of any surplus was devoted to the nation-building services.

The great depression hit India's public finances particularly

[1] The difference in district board income may be compared: Lyallpur, total income, 15·88 lakhs; land-cess, Rs. 9,39,976. Mianwali, total income, 4·86 lakhs; land-cess, Rs. 55,146.

hard. Its principal effect was to cause a sudden fall in the prices of primary products. This did not drive the cultivator to reduce his activities—except in cases of purely cash crops—but it did induce a shrinkage in the amount of money in circulation and an increase in peasant indebtedness. At the same time, India's industries, protected now by tariffs, did not suffer such a contraction of business as in most industrial countries. The manufacture of consumer goods, such as textiles, was affected, but there was a continuing expansion of the basic industries. Thus, in slump as in boom, provincial finances were variously affected; so too, different local taxes showed different trends—some, like the land cess, showed no falling off, whereas others, particularly the taxes on trade, underwent a serious, if temporary, setback. Octroi and terminal-tax returns fell in U.P. by four and a half lakhs, between 1930 and '31, while at the same time in Bombay income from these heads continued to rise!

The effect of this economic zigzag in the 1920's and '30's was to subject the local services to alternate sudden expansion and contraction. At first, in the early 1920's, large-scale activity was hampered by the disparity between the financial forecasts made in provincial secretariats as to the revenues to be released for nation-building activities under the Meston Award, and the lesser amounts which were available in practice under the working of the Award. Boards were also held back by a reluctance to undertake large-scale capital works at a time of high and unstable prices. The cost of living was at its peak in 1920; thereafter it fell considerably, but remained comparatively high from 1923 until 1927, when costs fell decisively.[1] At this time provincial revenues also reached their fullest prosperity, and from 1927 to 1929 local government activity was at its highest. Authorities were encouraged to expand, especially by the provincial education departments, and to enter into lavish schemes of new development by the promise of substantial percentage grants. Then, in 1930, came the sharp reaction; local services were forcibly contracted, and were only slowly restored with the partial return of prosperity in the late 1930's.

These experiences led local authorities to visualise their

[1] Cf. *cost of living*. 1914 = 100, 1920 = 183, 1923 = 154, 1927 = 156, 1928 = 147. *Bombay Labour Gazette* figures.

activities as dependent upon the wealth of the provincial revenues, and even upon the prosperity of the nation and the world, rather than upon their own determined efforts to increase their own incomes and to utilise their own resources to the best advantage. As an extreme example; in 1933, the Ambala municipal budget was prepared upon a very optimistic estimate of the yield of the existing taxes, on the ostensible ground that the London World Economic Conference 'will bring prosperity to the whole world and especially to Ambala'.[1]

The 1920's saw a definite downward trend in local financial responsibility. Grants were easily come by, and were spent without the most careful attention to their proper application. Little effort was made to increase the local authority's own revenues—indeed over wide areas there was a decline in the collection of taxes, which was directly attributable to the lax attitude of many members.

The revenues of almost every local board in every province were increased during the 1920's. (See Table 17.)

There are striking differences between the increases in different provinces, particularly when account is taken of the relative size of the populations served. Bengal had the most inadequate resources both in town and country partly because the provincial revenues, dependent on the permanent settlement, could give little relief to local bodies. U.P. was only a little better off. Madras had the third largest urban and rural population, but had a higher income level than either of the larger provinces. Both Bombay and Punjab were relatively small provinces (although the former had a high proportion of urban residents), yet their municipal and district boards were much richer than those of the larger provinces. These figures have an obvious importance in any estimate of the relative development of local government in the different provinces, and warrant close study. In every case the newly emancipated boards had much larger resources than had their predecessors. In the new atmosphere of freedom from official control, and of enthusiasm for the nation-building services, there was much to encourage careless financial methods and free spending, while members conscious of the naive ideas of the raw electorate did not feel much incentive to raise local

[1] *See* M. Muggeridge, *The Thirties* (London, 1940), p. 192.

taxes. The 'easy come, easy go' attitude which developed was, of course, most dangerous in those provinces where money was shortest.

In Bihar and Orissa for instance, in 1925–6, the assets of ten of the fifty-eight municipalities were exceeded by their liabilities,

TABLE 17

INCOME, 1920 AND 1930

(Provinces placed in order of size of population)

	District Boards			
	Population covered (1921 figures)	Income		Percentage increase
		1920	1930	
Bengal	42,698,972	Rs. 1,08,48,992	Rs. 1,40,90,873	30%
U.P.	42,103,866	Rs. 1,52,81,728	Rs. 1,97,13,000	28·9%
Madras	37,796,095	Rs. 2,25,44,457	Rs. 3,77,80,918	67·9%
Punjab	18,536,392	Rs. 1,12,73,464	Rs. 2,07,20,475	83·3%
Bombay	15,277,656	Rs. 1,23,64,906	Rs. 2,02,68,000	64·7%
	Municipal Boards			
	Population covered (1921 figures)	Income		Percentage increase
		1920	1930	
U.P.	2,896,134	Rs. 1,12,18,446	Rs. 1,62,37,000	45%
Bombay	2,678,542	Rs. 1,80,16,686	Rs. 2,32,60,000	29·2%
Madras	2,517,328	Rs. 1,22,14,610	Rs. 1,93,61,000	58·1%
Bengal	2,180,038	Rs. 71,06,492	Rs. 97,91,122	27·5%
Punjab	1,845,504	Rs. 1,11,51,086	Rs. 1,39,23,431	25·4%

many Bengal boards were in low water by the end of the 1920's, especially the smaller municipalities,[1] but the most striking instance of this trend is provided by U.P.

First there was a large increase in (U.P.) government assistance: from thirty lakhs, or 25 per cent of total income, in pre-Reform days (1918) to eighty-seven lakhs, or 45 per cent of total income, in 1926. The drawbacks of this dependence upon outside support were grimly demonstrated in 1930 when grants were, without warning, slashed by ten lakhs—mainly at the

[1] Balances, Bengal municipalities, 1930. South Dum Dum, Rs. 858; Debhatta, Rs. 323; Bhola, Rs. 438; Serajganj, Rs. 21.

expense of education, causing grave disorganisation. The yield from the land cess remained almost unchanged from 1918 to 1938—district boards had powers to increase the rate of levy, but no such increase was made. During the years 1923 to 1931, the U.P. district boards only twice covered their expenditure by their income; in the other six years there were dangerous deficits, and closing balance fell from 44·72 lakhs in 1923 to 24·92 lakhs in 1930. In 1930 the boards were suddenly jolted out of their confidence in the limitless supply of government aid, into a realisation of the imminence of bankruptcy. Twelve boards had no investments, another seven had savings of less than Rs.10,000 (£750). Of their balances of twenty-five lakhs, the greater part was earmarked for specific purposes; the true position was much worse: only 1·68 lakhs was at the absolute disposal of the forty-eight U.P. district boards. Among the more embarassed authorities were Dehra Dun with Rs. 547 in hand, Bijnor with Rs. 18, Budaun with Rs. 514, Farrukhabad with Rs. 31 and Garhwal with a deficit of Rs. 3! Most boards somehow maintained a doubtful solvency by robbing the education funds to pay pressing bills, by drastically cutting salaries, or by allowing arrears of pay to accumulate, but Rae Bareli went bankrupt, and had to be superseded. The crisis passed, and was not without fruit. Boards did not attempt to increase taxation (slump conditions made this impracticable) but they did frame budgets in line with realities. From 1931, the financial position of the U.P. district boards improved; by 1937 their closing balances were up to thirty lakhs, and their investments had risen by six lakhs.

Even the more prosperous provinces did not escape the financial débâcle. The Punjab district boards, encouraged by bumper years from 1926 to 1928 and 'fascinated by the Government's system of [education] grants from which they stood to gain a lot for a little, and sometimes for apparently nothing, pushed on with a firm reliance on chance and government generosity'.[1] In 1930, the latter failed and the boards tried to keep going for a time from hand to mouth, halting school building programmes, and even withholding increments from teachers; but eventually they were obliged to reduce the scale of their operations. Similarly in Madras, the enthusiasm of district boards ran them

[1] Punjab, District Board Reports, 1929–30.

into a situation where recurring liabilities exceeded income, and the only remedy was economy.

A disturbing feature of the period was the fall in the proportion of the tax demand which was actually collected. Year after year a section of the public evaded the demands of municipal and district boards, yet in most cases, instead of enforcing their claims by legal action the boards either tacitly allowed the demand note to be ignored, or else formally acknowledged their inability to collect, by granting wholesale remissions of payment. Whereas the greater portion of district boards' income was safeguarded, because collected and distributed by Government through the land revenue cess and grants-in-aid, the municipalities were responsible for collecting almost all their own income, which was therefore very vulnerable. The Simon Report observes that, in Great Britain a 98 per cent or 99 per cent collection is usual, 'a drop in collection to 95 per cent would be the subject of a very close enquiry'.[1] Although it would be unrealistic to apply such a standard to budding Indian local authorities, the Commission was right to emphasise the importance of collection figures as a touch-stone indicating the success or failure of local bodies. (See Table 18.)

TABLE 18

PERCENTAGE OF COLLECTIONS TO DEMAND
(Average provincial municipal figures)

	1924–5	1929–30	1937–8
Bengal	95%	93%	76%
Bombay	85%	82%	81·25%
Madras	86%	86%	92%
U.P.	78·5%	82·75%	76%

The figures show that, among the provinces under review, only Madras maintained and even improved its collections. Whereas in 1920 only sixteen Madras municipalities collected 95 per cent of their demands, in 1937 the number was thirty-seven and the collections of two towns were 100 per cent. The worst falling-off was seen in Bengal; in pre-Reform days Bengal was easily the most advanced province, with collections which

[1] ISC, i, 313.

often averaged 98 per cent, with perhaps one-quarter of the municipalities realising their full demand. Collections were kept up well until the slump (even in 1930, nine municipalities had 100 per cent figures), but thereafter a rapid decline set in. U.P. municipal boards had never possessed a first-class financial record, and their figures now became somewhat worse, although (as in many provinces) the average conceals boards which continued to collect 99 per cent of their demands (as at Naini Tal and Hardwar) and others—including the city of Agra—which failed to collect even one-half of their taxes. The Punjab figures are not available in detail, but—with the same discrepancies between good and bad municipalities—the average figures seem to have been somewhat better than those of U.P. Many of the larger Bombay boroughs (in particular Ahmadabad) had good collection records, but the final average is marred by the indifferent manner in which the smaller towns managed their collecting agencies; the Southern Division with its many petty municipalities failed to realise over 35 per cent of the demand in 1937–8.

In all provinces the slump was a bitter testing time, and after 1930, the best conducted authorities were hard pressed to collect their dues; even the great Bombay Corporation's figures—usually around 95 per cent, fell to 91 per cent in the 1930's. By 1937, the accumulated arrears of uncollected taxes represented sums equal to one-quarter or one-third of the annual demand in several provinces. The Bombay arrears stood at over thirty-two lakhs in 1933 (before the cession of Sind); in 1937 the Madras municipalities' arrears were fifteen lakhs, U.P. outstandings totalled twenty lakhs, and the Bengal arrears stood at more than thirty-three lakhs, even after eight-and-a-half lakhs had been remitted. In Calcutta, more than thirty-five lakhs of taxes were outstanding in 1937, and in Bombay City, the unpaid taxes amounted to sixty-one lakhs.

An unhappy feature of this financial regression was the participation of some members of municipal boards in the non-payment of taxes; reports from almost every province, except Madras, drew attention to this failing. The situation was often worst in small, backward towns, but sometimes city boards (e.g. Allahabad, 1933; Lahore, 1937) had members who were

defaulters. In 1930 the Bombay Government took the extreme step of publishing the names of defaulting members in its annual review of municipal administration. Whereas large towns had few offenders, in many of the smaller municipalities they formed a majority of the members.[1] In 1929, 7 per cent of municipal councillors were defaulters; in 1930 over 9 per cent defaulted, and in 1931, 8 per cent. Thereafter Government ceased to print this black-list as publication of their names seemed to have no shaming effect upon members. In several provinces, sanctions against defaulting members had been written into municipal legislation (e.g. the Bombay City Municipalities Act, 1925: members whose municipal taxes were unpaid were disqualified from serving), but these sanctions were nowhere invoked.

Altogether, the boards' handling of money matters was the weakest aspect of their administration. Every year the annual audit disclosed irregularities indicating lax supervision or no supervision at all, an indifference to rules of procedure and a general absence of financial foresight. Chairmen and members omitted to demand and check the accounts, contracts were improperly concluded—the lowest tender not being accepted, payments were made above the agreed contract rates, and so on. Boards sometimes ignored their own budget allocations, and applied funds to purposes other than those for which they were earmarked. This was often the case with government grants; for instance, in 1914 the Punjab Government allotted nine lakhs to Lahore Municipality for a drainage scheme, on condition that the municipality raised the remainder (some six lakhs) itself; nothing was done to raise the six lakhs for over twenty years—but the municipality annually spent the interest on the nine lakhs on other undertakings!

It was an easy path from carelessness and indifference to the actual misappropriation of funds; most of these defalcations were on a small scale, but periodically a major scandal came to light. A Bombay committee of Nationalist politicians who were deputed to enquire into such abuses in local government, decided that 'it would be idle to deny their existence in the working of local

[1] Cf. Indapur: of 15 members, 9 were defaulters, 1927. Athni: of 20 members, 18 were defaulters, 1929. Nandgaon: of 15 members, 12 were defaulters, only 5 per cent of municipal taxes collected. Superseded (1931).

bodies', but, it was added, these abuses 'only reflect the common standard of public life one comes across generally . . . it is not to be supposed that the evils have assumed an abnormal magnitude in local bodies'.[1] This should be emphasised: so many writers presume that local government was a particular breeding ground for corruption.

What was wanting was a corporate feeling among members that they, as the representatives and guardians of the public, owed a duty to themselves to manage public money as a trust, and to feel a special personal responsibility for its proper getting, and spending, and saving. But there was very little in public opinion, or in the attitude of ministers, or in local government legislation, to encourage such a feeling. Several writers have drawn attention to the omission from Indian statutes of provisions for making audit observations effective, for surcharging the rates for any illegal expenditure, or for holding members pecuniarily responsible for mis-spending public money (other than through an elaborate and rarely successful process in the courts). But these omissions may be regarded as *symptoms* rather than as *causes* of financial irresponsibility. There was not sufficient pressure from public opinion to ensure that members would enforce economy and wise spending; just as there was not in the English eighteenth-century municipal corporation—and as, increasingly, there is not, in British public life today.

In view of the very low incidence of local taxation both in town and countryside it would have been desirable if taxes could have been increased, especially those direct taxes which bore upon the richer section of society. But the middle-class members of municipal and district boards were, in the main, quite unprepared to tax themselves more heavily.

A forcible example of this resistance to additional taxation is seen in the financial history of the district boards in the 1920's and '30's. The staple of rural finance remained the land cess, which was almost static; the rate of levy was slightly varied in some provinces by post-war legislation, but thereafter no expansion was possible. Government grants provided a facile means of increasing income, but these were tied to specific activities, and were not infinitely expandable. (See Table 19.)

[1] Local Self-Government Committee, Bombay, 1938, p. 63.

TABLE 19

DISTRICT BOARDS

Income

	Land-cess	Government grants	Total
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1923:			
Bengal	73,98,081	26,99,027	1,16,72,500
Bombay	42,11,803	1,01,25,433	1,57,91,026
Madras	1,18,81,082	1,00,09,859	3,03,05,401
U.P.	70,88,170	73,79,251	1,73,54,535
Punjab	50,38,521	57,50,000	1,38,21,675
1929:			
Bengal	80,08,090	42,50,000	1,40,90,873
Bombay	50,49,000	1,23,28,000	2,02,68,000
Madras	93,78,710	1,40,13,000	3,77,80,918
U.P.	73,82,000	87,84,000	1,97,13,000
Punjab	61,14,638	1,15,30,000	2,07,20,475
1937:			
Bengal	93,04,944	49,30,000	1,61,88,346
Bombay	35,08,000*	1,11,26,000*	1,69,77,000*
Madras	1,10,32,828	1,28,43,000	3,77,40,231
U.P.	74,28,000	82,55,000	1,94,15,000
Punjab	66,22,001	1,03,00,000	2,00,18,396

Expenditure

	Education	Public works	Total
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1923:			
Bengal	29,43,552	60,40,502	1,18,45,811
Bombay	88,67,389	39,91,000	1,51,62,167
Madras	67,47,757	1,14,03,000	2,70,11,405
U.P.	85,81,529	54,79,000	1,80,67,913
Punjab	57,15,579	46,32,580	1,35,49,147
1929:			
Bengal	37,49,425	58,52,443	1,43,4,9155
Bombay	94,65,000	50,54,000	1,98,91,000
Madras	1,17,61,975	1,98,36,000	3,71,00,811
U.P.	1,09,11,000	39,25,000	1,99,71,000
Punjab	1,06,77,912	21,24,551	2,09,37,037
1937:			
Bengal	29,87,291	74,28,327	1,62,63,527
Bombay	1;11,01,000*	37,65,000*	1,72,34,000*
Madras	1,31,66,477	1,52,00,924	4,41,65,000
U.P.	1,13,10,000	34,69,000	1,96,11,000
Punjab	1,14,31,163	32,34,362	1,97,24,663

*Sind separate.

Provincial governments sought to create a new source of revenue by instituting local taxes on professions or trades, that is to say, on all rural incomes not derived from land, such as those of traders, contractors and professional men, who extracted full advantage from local services, but contributed nothing to their upkeep. District boards, with their new-found financial independence, were left to make the actual decision as to whether to introduce these taxes. The predominance of members with an urban middle-class origin (such as lawyers), as compared with the farming and landlord interests, was shown by a widespread refusal to introduce the new taxes, or to enforce an adequate collection of dues, when they were instituted.

No trades or professions tax was introduced anywhere in Bengal; proposals to assess non-cultivators' incomes for payment of an education tax were effectively defeated by the bhadralok. The Bombay Government drafted rules in 1930 for the introduction of a professions and trades tax, but only in one district, Nasik, did a board with a non-Brahmin agriculturalist majority introduce the tax, and even in this district the yield was negligible. A similar tax was introduced in Madras Presidency in the 1920's; it was operated by many taluk boards, but at first by only one district board, and the annual yield was under three lakhs. By 1930 seven boards levied the tax, but the total yield had fallen to less than two lakhs. The tax was entirely abolished in the course of the 1930's, as no satisfactory method of carrying out its assessment and collection had been evolved.

A 'tax on circumstances and property' was introduced in 1925 in two U.P. districts, and was gradually adopted by one half of the boards. It was imposed in a very half-hearted manner, and in some districts the yield barely sufficed to cover the costs of collection. At its peak the tax only produced three per cent of district board revenues. By 1937 arrears of this tax had risen to 13·41 lakhs—almost equivalent to three years' assessment of income from the tax. A similar tax known as the 'haisiyat' was imposed in Punjab from about 1917 onwards. By 1924 it was in operation in fourteen districts and yielded two and three-quarter lakhs; three years later it had been introduced in nine more districts and was bringing in five and a half lakhs annually. In 1927 its legality was challenged, and the Punjab High Court

ruled that as a form of income tax, the haisiyat might not be introduced without the sanction of the Governor-General. The tax was later re-imposed, but not in such an effective manner: in 1930 it operated in twenty-five districts, yielding one and three-quarter lakhs; by 1937 it was retained in only twelve districts, but its yield was up to two and a half lakhs.

These failures to exploit the taxes on trades and professions have an interest beyond their financial implications, they show that only in Punjab and the United Provinces were the agricultural interests a major force in district board administration, and even in these two provinces the 'urban' interests were sufficiently strong to provide an effective opposition to policies they disapproved. As a result of this opposition, district boards were left without any means to augment their revenues. The yield from minor heads such as tolls on roads and ferries, or receipts from cattle-pounds, remained static or even declined. The only possible prescription for financial stability was strict economy, and on this somewhat depressing note the period concluded. District boards carried on by 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. In general, education services were built up by neglecting public works. In Bombay, the proportions for education and public works were 58 per cent and 27 per cent in 1923, and 62 per cent and 21 per cent in 1937; while the total Bombay district board expenditure was trebled between 1909 and 1937, education expenditure increased six-fold (21·55 lakhs to 121·28 lakhs), yet public works costs remained almost stationary (36·01 lakhs and 41·89 lakhs). Whereas in 1923, the U.P. district boards allotted 47 per cent of their resources to education, and 30 per cent to public works, by 1937 the proportions were 56 per cent and 18 per cent: four times the sum spent on education in 1909 was now incurred (29·91 lakhs to 113·10 lakhs) but *less* was spent on public works in 1937 than in 1909 (36·05 lakhs, and 34·69 lakhs). In general the neglect of public works in order to foster education was more pronounced in the poorer provinces than in those with greater resources.

Municipal income was also largely tied to the same sources as in pre-Reform days. (See Table 20.)

Whereas in the first decade of the twentieth century grants had been freely given for urban capital works, in the Dyarchy

TABLE 20

MUNICIPAL BOARDS

INCOME†

	Octroi and terminal tax	House and water rates	Total
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1923:			
Bengal	—	35,44,604	83,28,730
Bombay	59,16,000	49,41,000	1,95,00,317
Madras	—	37,70,000	1,38,83,000
U.P.	62,26,000	21,36,000	1,43,36,954
Punjab	64,32,148	6,72,000	1,24,33,590
1929:			
Bengal	—	39,68,145	97,91,122
Bombay	63,83,000	65,45,000	2,32,60,000
Madras	—	49,07,350	1,93,61,000
U.P.	63,43,000	27,14,000	1,62,37,000
Punjab	69,47,958	7,48,000	1,39,23,431
1937:			
Bengal	—	54,14,702	1,01,39,004
Bombay	52,85,000*	62,25,000*	2,03,66,000*
Madras	—	63,46,723	2,28,97,000
U.P.	76,67,000	30,05,000	1,78,07,000
Punjab	79,88,915	11,04,000	1,72,63,691

EXPENDITURE†

	Education	Water-supplies	Total
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1923:			
Bengal	3,20,929	9,41,331	80,01,405
Bombay	40,83,672	27,38,000	1,92,49,706
Madras	16,80,165	19,34,443	1,33,83,000
U.P.	12,40,315	26,10,000	1,35,70,850
Punjab	15,05,326	28,90,246	1,39,27,330
1929:			
Bengal	4,80,695	17,25,18	92,92,327
Bombay	48,04,000	21,27,000	2,35,44,000
Madras	27,67,396	17,02,484	2,07,98,000
U.P.	19,36,000	29,75,000	1,75,37,000
Punjab	18,06,306	15,10,628	1,40,71,172
1937:			
Bengal	7,31,123	14,65,984	1,03,83,300
Bombay	42,79,000*	17,45,000*	1,86,23,000*
Madras	32,33,137	20,64,868	2,36,09,000
U.P.	26,71,000	26,02,000	1,89,35,000
Punjab	24,98,426	13,74,614	1,70,97,706

*Sind separate. †Excluding Calcutta, Bombay, Madras Corporations.

period a majority of the ministers, and of permanent officials, were more in sympathy with rural needs, and applied their financial assistance largely towards rural services. This policy meant that municipalities which promoted large undertakings had to rely upon loans for capital expenditure and had to impose service-taxes (such as water-rates) to cover their costs.

The raising of loans was only undertaken to any serious extent by the largest municipalities. Once again, the scale of operations of the Presidency towns dwarfs the activities of all others: in the 1930's, the aggregate loans of the Corporation of Bombay amounted to about eighteen and a half crores (or nearly fourteen million pounds), which may be compared with Ahmadabad's debt of Rs. 33,70,000 (or less than a quarter of a million pounds). The more progressive towns negotiated loans on the big stock-exchanges, or in the open money market, but bankers were unwilling to lend to the average municipality whose credit and reputation for financial reliability would not be reassuring and the majority of municipal loans were obtained direct from provincial governments. Madras Presidency led the field with loans amounting to nearly 150 lakhs in the 1930's (exclusive of Madras City). These loans were largely applied to remunerative enterprises such as markets, water-works and electricity plant, but some were also utilised to finance the building of schools, roads, sweepers' dwellings, etc. The U.P. loans totalled some 130 lakhs in the 1920's but much of this money had been borrowed to finance undertakings in the large cities back in the 1890's and the early 1900's. Activity in the Dyarchy years was on a more modest scale, and by the 1930's some boards were facing the problem of repaying their earliest loans at a time when money was scarce. The Bombay mofussil municipalities had a total indebtedness of eighty-three lakhs in 1937 (after the separation from Sind); but only twenty-five of the one hundred and thirty municipalities had loan accounts, and out of these few, Ahmadabad and Poona together accounted for two-thirds of the total. Karachi also undertook many civic enterprises through loans, in 1923 thirty lakhs were raised in the money market, and other loans followed. The relative ease with which Karachi, Ahmadabad and Poona raised money in the open market, was proof of a wide measure of public confidence in their

stability. The loans contracted by Punjab towns amounted to only thirty-three lakhs in the 1930's (against an annual expenditure of over 140 lakhs); all these loans were provided by Government. Bengal was the least enterprising of the major provinces, the total indebtedness of municipalities outside Calcutta amounted to twenty-six lakhs in 1937; Howrah and Darjeeling were the only towns with loan accounts greater than four lakhs.

TABLE 21

NUMBER OF MUNICIPALITIES ENFORCING SERVICE TAXES

	Total number of municipalities	1923–4		1929–30		1937–8	
		Property rates	Water rates	Property rates	Water rates	Property rates	Water rates
Bengal	118	114	28	114	32	116	38
Bombay	156	110	18	120	30	125	36
Madras	82	80	30	81	34	82	42
U.P.	85	31	9	32	12	31	17
Punjab	123	17	6	30	9	38	30

The employment of borrowed money was, then, a minor factor in municipal development. Increases in direct taxation were very unpopular with the boards; property taxes were the staple of municipal finance in Bengal and Madras, but the yield under this head was minute in some of the smaller Bengal towns. The introduction of service taxes to cover the upkeep of municipal undertakings was a very gradual process, which the boards took up with reluctance in many instances. In the enforcement of rates, as charges for municipal services rendered, Madras was the most progressive province, and the U.P. certainly the most backward. (See Table 21.) The provinces of north-west India continued to rely upon octroi almost as much as in the past. In Bombay, octroi and later the terminal tax, formed 29 per cent of total income in 1909, 30 per cent in 1923 and 26 per cent in 1937: the U.P. percentages were 1909, 50 per cent; 1923, 43 per cent; and 1937, 43 per cent: and those for Punjab, 1909, 60 per cent; 1923, 48 per cent; 1937, 50 per cent of total income. To an increasing extent, the old system of

levying octroi at road barriers was replaced by terminal tax levied at the railway station on goods consigned for actual consumption in the town.

In the financial history of the district boards it is apparent that the changeover from the 'official' to the 'popular' régime had a decisive, if negative, influence both in fiscal policy and in its application to the different services. By contrast, there was no significant change in the fiscal policy of municipal boards, as they (more gradually) shook off their official leading-strings, nor was there any important change in their allocation of resources to different services. There was, however, a substantial increase in the amounts devoted to education. Public utilities, water, and more particularly electricity supplies, were extended, although the process was almost completely halted by the slump.

The general pattern which emerges out of local authorities' figures of income and expenditure, is one of development in these Dyarchy years—strong and confident in some provinces, especially Madras; hesitant and unbalanced elsewhere. Contemporary reports, however, dwelt mainly on the shortcomings of the boards and of their staff, but such criticism does not allow for the magnitude of the trial which Indian local government underwent in the 1920's and '30's.

The men who made up the membership of local authorities came to their charge with no previous experience in the management of large sums of money, and no acquaintance with the procedure of public business—the forms and the safeguards required for the proper disposal of public funds. Goodwill was not a sufficient substitute for administrative experience. Moreover, many members brought to their work an attitude of mind which was quite attuned to the practices and customs of their own ancient society, but which was maladjusted to the wholly different conventions of this alien system of social services; so that the proceedings of some local authorities appeared to be conducted with little real understanding of the implications of civic responsibility in its new and wider aspects.

The mistakes which were an almost inevitable part of the local boards' apprenticeship, became more grave because accentuated by the uncertainties of the economic background. The high prices, and the accumulated problems of the war-time

years delayed development in the early 1920's. There followed a misleading prosperity—lavish grants from governments, and hasty ill-planned expansion. And then—unforetold, a world slump of unprecedented calamity, necessitating painful adjustment towards the rehabilitation of the services. All this did not provide a very stable foundation for the new boards to try out their paces. Many boards came to regard this press of outside events as sufficient reason for not attempting to reorganise their own limited revenues. Some, especially the minor boards, got into the habit of accepting a condition of financial muddle as normal. In such circumstances competent management of local funds could only be obtained by creating an iron frame—efficient senior local officials, and a comprehensive code of financial procedure. Such a reform could not hope to receive consideration, however, while the larger questions of national independence still absorbed the attentions of public men, civil servants and political-economists throughout the land.

CHAPTER X

Local Authorities at Work

THE change wrought in the early 1920's by the new legislation, and by the disappearance of the district officer and his assistants from district and municipal boards, is described by the Simon Report as 'little less than the introduction of a new system'[1]—the substitution of democratic for autocratic rule.

Under the 'official' system, the District Magistrate had made the policy decisions himself, and carried them out largely through the agency of his district officials; the new 'popular' boards had to evolve a fresh technique both for deciding policy and for the day-to-day management of their services. English local government, which was their ostensible model, attempts to solve these needs by delegating responsibility for supervision in detail to committees for education, public health, etc., and by handing over the actual management of the public services to departmental officers who are under the general direction of a 'clerk to the council', an official of recognised standing who acts as the link between representatives and staff.

The legislation under which the Dyarchy local bodies were reconstituted did not, in general, recognise that a new situation had arisen, and there was no statutory provision of new administrative machinery. The whole board was usually recognised as the effective governing body, while only in a few cases was statutory provision made for managerial staff for the various public services. No official of the status of the 'clerk to the council' was envisaged except only in the Presidency towns and a few other cities, and only the executive officers (commissioners) of the corporations of Bombay and Madras were given guaranteed security of tenure. Few among the new boards were disposed voluntarily to restrict their own authority by delegating specific

[1] ISC, i, 308.

powers to committees, or by appointing officials who would possess a recognised area of independent control; the boards had lately seen the departure of one despot, they were not disposed to welcome others.

In the absence of new administrative machinery, the system relied upon taking over previous practices. As before, the chairman was still the lynch-pin—the hinge—of local government, both in co-ordinating the deliberations of the members, and in supervising the operation of the public services. But whereas the District Magistrate as chairman relied upon his enormous 'influence', together with the steady support of the nominated bloc to secure assent to his policy, the new non-official chairman was obliged to exert his greatest efforts in order to make sure of a majority for his programme from among members elected by constituents—often fickle—whose only guiding principles might be the promotion of themselves, their class or community. Only when a chairman was able to command a steady majority by reason of unusual powers of personality, by the possession of wealth or territorial influence—or in the case of Congress boards only, by reason of unquestioning party support—only then could there be continuity and efficiency in local board affairs.

The chairman was still the active head of the executive, and this meant that a candidate for the office must be prepared to devote several hours daily to office work, inspection, and the hearing of complaints and appeals. In addition, the chairman of a district board must spend many months every year touring throughout his district; this would be an area of about 2,200 square miles in U.P., 3,400 square miles in Punjab, or 5,200 square miles in Madras. The proper discharge of a chairman's duties had been irksome to the District Magistrate; it was quite beyond most private gentlemen. Lawyers were still the most numerous—and the most prominent members of local bodies, and they are certainly the busiest people in India; merchants and teachers are kept only little less busy. Retired officials would not recommend themselves to most boards, and few landlords would have either the qualifications or the inclination to take up the task. Only very rarely would a liberal gentleman of independent means, or a politician supported out of party funds be available, both qualified and desirous to assume this onerous and

thankless task. The great majority of chairmen were honest and well-meaning men, but only partially equipped for their duties and, out of necessity, not prepared to place civic service before personal livelihood. A minority of chairmen quite frankly bought their way into office in order to further their own ends.

Among the chairmen of the early 1920's there were many 'men of experience and sound common-sense' who brought real leadership to their task. Among the most successful régimes was that of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as Chairman of Ahmadabad Municipality from 1924 to 1928. Although presiding over a thorough-going Congress board he won the unqualified admiration of British officials.[1] Departmental committees were conducted efficiently, the basic problem of inadequate resources was tackled, direct taxation was raised by 70 per cent, collections were improved and payments enforced, public utilities such as the water-system were made to give an efficient service and also to yield a profit. Policy was evolved in accordance with unfolding needs, and not predetermined by political shibboleths; for instance the 'National schools' experiment was wound up, and the expansion of primary education was based upon the existing schools structure.

Similarly Khwaja Nazimuddin managed the Dacca Municipality—riven as it was by faction, and the object of a sabotage campaign from a powerful outsider—with 'great courage, forbearance and tact'. The municipality was a pioneer in Bengal in promoting mass education; there was also much useful activity in the extension of water-supplies, lighting and sanitary works—despite the financial problems raised by the operation of the 'no tax' campaign.[2]

An example of a successful chairman who was not a national figure might be taken from the records of Cawnpore Municipality. For three years their affairs were disrupted by negative political demonstrations, then in 1926 the chair was taken by an energetic business man, Babu Vikramajit Singh, and within a few months Cawnpore became one of the best run cities in the U.P. As an illustration, the percentage of the tax demand actually collected rose from 78 per cent to 88 per cent, and outstanding tax arrears, amounting to one lakh, were wiped out.

[1] Cf. ISC, vii, 157–8.

[2] Cf. Bengal, Municipal Reports, 1924–5.

Even in the most backward districts, in the sleepiest towns, chairmen usually showed much more enthusiasm, and worked considerably harder than their colleagues on the board. As Harold Laski has observed, 'men who get their hands on an administrative machine become concerned to exploit its full potentialities merely by learning what they are', and so it was in Indian local government, although the potentialities of development were usually meagre and uncertain.

The importance of buttressing the prestige and power of the chairman was realised in several provinces. The chairmen of a few Madras municipalities received salaries (as at Madura, Coonor, and Ootacumund). In Bengal the influence and responsibility of district board chairmen was recognised in the convening of a provincial conference in October 1930 to consult them on the future course of local government policy. But the chairman's task always remained difficult; almost every local board, of every degree, was divided into two opposing parties. Sometimes these divisions were based upon recognisable differences of political creed or communal rivalry—but very often they arose entirely out of personalities and personal feuds. Feeling was usually intense and sustained, and the opposition would continually seek to gain power by subverting the position of the chairman; few could command an absolute majority, and the antagonism of the opposition would be unrelenting. The chairman's rôle was well described as that of 'a helmsman who tries simultaneously to steer his ship and to dodge the missiles flung at him by the crew'.[1] The situation in U.P. district boards was made particularly unstable by a private member's bill which became Act X of 1929. This made a chairman removable by a resolution of no confidence passed by a bare majority of members. In consequence, every administrative action that was in any way contentious, served as the occasion for this manœuvre. Often the chairman could only keep in office by developing a tortuous technique of evasion:

> In many cases they tried to burke these [no confidence] motions by not including them on the agenda, by placing them at the end of an impossibly long list of business . . . , or by postponing meetings at the last moment or holding them at inaccessible places far from district

[1] U.P., District Board Reports, 1929–30.

headquarters, while another favourite device was to secure a snap vote of confidence at some adjourned or hole and corner meeting. With most of the District Boards . . . divided into more or less equal parties on communal or party lines, no chairman was safe.[1]

Under such conditions there was little incentive for able non-party men to stand as district board chairmen. It was not unknown in cases of deadlock between factions for a 'rank outsider' to exploit the divisions to secure election. But his subsequent position would be 'most unenviable'—subject to constant demands for patronage, secessions, fresh alliances; 'practically all the energy and time of the chairman is thus spent in maintaining the strength of his party, and the interests of the board are neglected'.[2] There were six years of such wrangles in which the head of the district board was harassed and made to appear ridiculous, to the grave detriment of administration. Then partial relief was given by Act VI of 1936, under which a no confidence motion had to be properly considered—and if lost, further motions were automatically barred for six months.

The management of local affairs was largely conducted through long board meetings, at which business was transacted by the formal moving of resolutions and by debates, often modelled on legislative council procedure. Meetings were more frequent than in 'official' times, particularly in the early days of Dyarchy; attendance figures rose considerably in almost every province. These tendencies were healthy inasmuch as they were signs that local government had become more of a reality; in the old days so much had been transacted privately in the District Magistrate's office. But sometimes increased activity was a symptom of decline rather than of advance. Although the employment of committees and sub-committees was now more general, even in provinces like Punjab where committee government was an infant growth, a great many minor matters were still dealt with at full board meetings. Even petty details which should have been settled entirely by senior officials—such as the transfer of subordinate board servants—were debated by the board at large. This method of conducting business inevitably led to more and longer meetings. Moreover

[1] U.P., District Board Reports, 1932–3.

[2] Report of the Local Self-Government Committee, U.P., 1938–9, Part II, p. 8.

good attendance figures sometimes denoted not so much enthusiasm, as a close run contest between rival parties; at one period Agra Municipality was 'a hotbed of party faction and personal quarrels'—and three-quarters of the members attended every single meeting![1]

The committee system, which is so important in English local government, did not always develop successfully in India. It was notable that two committees of enquiry set up by provincial Congress governments independently condemned the exploitation of committees as instruments of jobbery and party intrigue.[2] An official report adds,

> The committees and sub-committees, in which the real work is carried on, are composed in almost every case of the majority party . . . and the other members have no chance of election . . . the minority councillors have no scope [for influencing policy] except to speak and vote at the general meetings.[3]

Such a situation is not unknown in a few English local authorities where political feeling has blighted normal relations between members—but it is a negation of the true spirit of committee work.

An innovation of the Dyarchy era was the attempt in several provinces to set up semi-independent authorities parallel to the district and municipal boards, to take over local responsibilities in the education field. The origins of this development have been ascribed to the desire of provincial education departments to re-assert that influence over local board schools which had been lost in these latter days of local independence; it may also be described as an attempt to evolve an instrument of control with a little more experience and understanding of the problems of education than the average district or municipal board.

The process was carried furthest in Madras: a separate district education committee with wide powers was constituted for every district. Some members were elected by local authorities and some by school managers. There was a substantial nominated element consisting of persons with special educational

[1] U.P., Municipal Reports, 1931–2.

[2] See U.P., Local Self-Government Committee, 1938–9, Part II, p. 9, and Bombay, Local Self-Government Committee, 1938, p. 62.

[3] Bombay, Municipal Reports, 1935–6.

experience or qualifications, while the Collector and the Inspector of Schools were ex-officio members. The power to open and to manage schools was retained by municipalities and taluk boards, who could also levy a special education tax. But the district education committee was empowered to grant recognition to schools, was responsible for the disbursement of grants, and for drafting the actual schemes of educational development. Thus there was created a situation in which responsibility was divided, and final authority was nowhere; it was calculated to stimulate quarrels and delays at every turn.

A similar scheme was formulated in Bengal in 1929 and '30. A separate District School Board was to be constituted (municipalities were excluded from its jurisdiction), with members representing local bodies and other rural interests, and 'somewhat under official control'. This Board was given full authority over primary education, it was empowered to impose education taxes, and to enforce compulsory education. The onset of the depression coincided with the introduction of the scheme in 1931, and its general application had to be shelved indefinitely. School-boards were set up on a voluntary basis in several districts in the mid-1930's, and were reported to have stimulated expansion.

As a result of recommendations by a committee appointed by the Minister for Education in U.P., the educational functions of district boards were, in 1928, delegated to education committees, as quasi-independent authorities. In 1931 these committees were given control over finance, after it had transpired that eleven U.P. district boards had misapplied their education funds. The new bodies acknowledged nobody as master—certainly not the Director of Public Instruction, whose brainchild they were, and within a few years there was a condition of war between the rival authorities in half the districts in the province. The education committees attached the teachers to their cause by encouraging them to defy the inspectorate. Once again a division of power resulted in a decline in the sense of local responsibility, and in the efficiency of schools.

Special school boards were also set up in Bombay Presidency. It was the intention of Dr. Paranjpye that their jurisdiction should extend over major areas such as a whole district or a

big city, but under the second minister, Mr. Jadhav, municipalities were freely constituted as education authorities, and as a result the new school boards corresponded very closely to the existing local government structure. A majority of board members were to be elected by district and municipal boards from among persons experienced in education, or representative of different interests—not necessarily from among members of local bodies; Government was to nominate additional members. School boards were intended to act as supervisory bodies; the actual management of education was to vest in an official, the school board administration officer. In practice, the Bombay school boards became the agents of their parent district or municipal boards, who elected their own members on to the new bodies with little regard for special educational fitness; the administration officers, in the absence of exact statutory definition of their functions, were treated as the members' tools. A similar system of school boards, supposedly composed of persons with educational knowledge, but actually the agents of local boards, operated in Burma. This kind of situation made it impossible for inspectors, or for the education departments to require a reasonable scholastic standard, or to exert any control, as it was almost impossible to assign responsibility to either of the two authorities.

Most of these systems of dual authority did not outlast Dyarchy; many of the 1937–9 Congress governments abolished separate educational boards, and reinforced the powers of the departmental inspectorate. In pronouncing the dissolution of the U.P. education committees in 1939, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had this to say:

> with the creation of education committees . . . the enthusiasm of the district boards abated to a great extent. The Chair of the education committee . . . became gradually degraded and has now become a marketable commodity obtainable through bargaining at the time of the election of the chairman of the district board. . . . education committees have in recent years been manned by people entirely unconnected with education . . . their motives for getting into the education committees were in many instances entirely unconnected with the progress of education.[1]

[1] Proceedings of the U.P. Legislative Assembly, xix, 784.

This 'school board' experiment, is an example of a special kind of failure in Indian local government, due not so much to the personal inadequacy of members or staff, as to a failure to create workable administrative machinery, through the hasty establishment of new *ad hoc* authorities without consideration of the stresses involved, or the provision of statutory definition of areas of responsibility.

Another institution which largely failed to survive Dyarchy was the sub-district or local board. This type of authority had been particularly commended by successive commissions and government resolutions as the best unit for rural administration, but had never achieved much vitality, simply because an elaborate structure of boards and areas to administer almost nothing could hardly hope to succeed. The district board had long held on to most of the sub-district board's proposed functions; the setting-up of village councils took away its supposed *raison d'être*, its association with local interests. Moreover a three-tier system of local government to spend the three or four annas per head of the local rural revenues was an obvious absurdity.

Sub-district boards were most moribund in the relatively compact districts of north-west India; they had some usefulness in the sprawling districts of four or five thousand square miles in south, central and east India. Punjab abolished the last of its tahsil boards in 1919. When 'official' rural local government came to an end in U.P., in 1922, the tahsil boards of this province ceased to have even a nominal existence. Madras instituted statutory safeguards for the taluk boards in legislation of 1920; nevertheless a committee appointed in 1926 and presided over by N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar recommended the abolition of taluk boards, and the grounding of the rural structure on the basis of the panchayat. These proposals were incorporated in an amending act of 1930. Thereafter taluk boards and union boards were replaced by a system of 'major' and 'minor' panchayats. This Madras experience shows that even when sub-district boards were given distinct responsibilities and resources, they still were not viable. In Bombay Presidency legislation to abolish taluka local boards was passed in 1935; fifteen were terminated immediately, and the remainder were finally abolished in 1938. Local boards came to an end in five Bengal districts in 1938 as a

result of representations by their respective district boards; the process was extended to three more districts in 1939.

The fate of these boards illustrates the impossibility of breathing life into institutions which drew no genuine vitality from a basis in the social or economic structure of Indian society.

Of equal importance with the substitution of rigid party rule for the old official despotism, in determining the course of local government, was the weakness of the staff side after the government experts—the civil surgeon, the district engineer, and the rest—had been withdrawn from local affairs. As well as a need for compromise and co-operation in the counsels of members, there was an urgent need for a professional local government service, of standing and capability, to carry out the new plans for the expansion of 'nation building' services.

Three factors stood in the way of this development; the poverty of most local authorities, a shortage of qualified personnel, and the reluctance of the boards to appoint men to their service who would talk to them in equal or superior terms.

Most rural boards, and the many small municipalities, had insufficient resources to employ skilled technical officers who would require high salaries.[1] In certain cases, such as those of medical officers, Government sometimes undertook to meet the cost in whole or part, but these were exceptions. Often it was difficult to *find* suitable qualified candidates, when financial provision was available. This was particularly true of engineers, of whom there were few in private practice. A few random examples may serve to illustrate some of the deficiencies of staffing in local government. Of the eighty Madras municipalities, in 1924, eight employed engineers, twelve unqualified supervisors, and the rest employed 'men of inferior status'. In Srirangam (population, 23,153) 'the public works continued to be supervised by a maistri [carpenter]'.[2] By 1937, seventeen Madras municipalities entertained engineers, and twenty-five employed supervisors. In the 1920's, only a handful of Bengal municipalities had paid secretaries; the majority relied on a

[1] Some representative monthly salaries are as follows. *U.P.*: Executive officer of city municipality, Rs. 300. Executive officer of district board, Rs. 150. *Bombay:* Chief officer, 'borough' municipality, Rs. 150. Secretary, district board, Rs. 50–100.

[2] Madras, Municipal Reports, 1924–5.

part-time honorary secretary and a poorly paid head-clerk or accountant. Of the twenty-five Bombay district boards, only one board in Sind and two in the Presidency proper employed health officers . . . and so the list could be extended.

The principal cause of the unsatisfactory nature of the local government service was however the attitude of members of boards towards their officers and servants. Every major executive appointment was the occasion for protracted lobbying and controversy; and every local election was the occasion for concessions to board servants in posts of political significance. A committee of U.P. politicians was agreed that

> under the present system, nepotism, jobbery and favouritism are frequently practised in making appointments and promotions and little or no regard is paid to merit or fitness of candidates. In local boards where there are party factions—and these are not a few—many servants have been forced to take part in intrigues and personal bickering of members to get themselves in the good books of the party in power.[1]

Many appointments were made for personal, communal, or political reasons; even in cases of senior technical officers for whom Government laid down definite conditions, the selected candidate often lacked the prescribed qualifications. In Agra in the 1920's, the roads were 'deplorable', and the water supply continually failed because the municipal engineer was unqualified. There was no security of tenure whatsoever for local officials; in the course of a party wrangle in one U.P. municipality, the executive officer was twice dismissed and twice reinstated within three years.[2] And yet in cases demanding disciplinary action most local bodies were hesitant and weak; even gross cases of fraud were treated as venial offences. As one instance out of hundreds, a mohurrir four times detected in petty embezzlement was still retained in district board service.

Altogether there was little in local government work to attract able or honest men, particularly in the senior posts of the smaller authorities. In the great majority of such authorities, promotion went by slow seniority, or by favour, to clerks who had no professional qualifications.

[1] U.P., Local Self-Government Committee, 1938–9, Part II, p. 3.
[2] U.P., Municipal Reports, 1930–1.

Local government service, particularly in Bombay Presidency, received some stimulus from the establishment of a Local Self-Government Institute at Poona in 1927. The Institute held courses of training for young executive officers, and those successful in its examination were awarded a Diploma. Local bodies were however slow to recognise the Diploma, or to require it as an essential qualification for the post of executive officer—although all but the more extreme Congress boards were members of the Institute. This attempt to create a recognised standard among local officials deserves mention as the first real effort to raise the status of local government service, and to encourage authorities to adopt uniform standards. Provincial local government institutes were also set up in Lahore and Calcutta. In 1936, an 'All-India Union of Local Authorities' was established; this institution convenes annual conferences and publishes a quarterly journal devoted to local government affairs.

The scope of local government activities was extended in the 1920's only to be forcibly contracted after the onslaught of the slump. By far the most important progress was in the sphere of education, in which all efforts of earlier years were completely eclipsed. Through financial necessity this expansion was largely contrived at the expense of other departments, notably that of public works.

The scale of municipal administration may be assessed somewhat, by enumerating some municipal activities in tabular form. (See Table 22.)

TABLE 22

EXTENT OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES IN 1937

1937	Number of Municipalities	Number with water-supply plant	Number with sewage disposal systems	Number with electric lighting
Bengal	115	52	3	15
Bombay	130	24	3	30 (?)
Madras	80	42	3	25
U.P.	85	20	5	43
Punjab	107	37	3	30 (?)

These sample figures indicate the very limited extent of municipal activities. An adequate service of public utilities was only provided in the larger towns; in the greater number of minor municipalities, the public services were, as in the past, almost confined to the occasional flickering oil lamp, and the sweeper with his bucket.

In district board affairs, there was a distinct change of emphasis. The pre-Reform policy imposed concentration of resources, in centralised activities at district headquarters, and perhaps at some non-municipal market towns. Now an attempt was made to take district board services into the heart of the countryside; the greatest effort was put into the extension of primary education, but there was also some expansion in medical and public health services, particularly in the provision of rural dispensaries. In this sphere the 'popular' boards did break away from previous standard practice. In place of a few masonry buildings and European-trained doctors provided at considerable expense, they introduced large numbers of more modest wood or mud dispensaries, staffed by ayurvedic physicians, using allopathic or herbal methods. This new trend—into the countryside—inevitably called down the criticism that boards were dissipating their resources on petty and ephemeral purposes. But while it was sometimes true that district boards attempted to expand their activities without regard to their financial ability to maintain the new activities permanently, and while the opening of new schools or dispensaries might be undertaken merely to placate an influential member or perhaps to humour a vocal section of the electorate, yet the new policy probably was more in tune with reality than the old concentration of services at centres convenient to the district administration but completely inaccessible to the general mass of village folk.

One widely unsatisfactory feature of rural local government was the management of roads. In the first flush of the Reforms, many provincial governments handed over responsibility for all highways, except main trunk roads, to the district boards. The process was carried particularly far in U.P. The change-over coincided with the advent of the motor-lorry in the Indian countryside, creating a complex of new needs and new problems. District boards did not prove suitable road-managers. In some

provinces, government engineers were placed at the disposal of the boards, but generally they suffered from a shortage of capable supervisory staff, and an almost complete lack of heavy modern road-building equipment. The static nature of district board finance and the desire of most boards to concentrate on education work led to steady deterioration of existing roads, and stopped any new large-scale development of communications. Some provinces attempted to meet the problem by giving the proceeds of motor taxes to the boards, but this expedient brought no improvement. Very gradually, and in the face of much political indignation, the management of main roads was resumed by provincial governments. There was a parallel trend in the United Kingdom: the Trunk Roads Act of 1936 transferred responsibility for certain major highways from the county councils to the central government.

In general, urban administration was superior to rural administration—for somewhat obvious reasons. Municipal resources per capita were considerably larger; the unit of administration was less unwieldy, and members could handle problems as they arose on their own doorstep, rather than attempt to elucidate the written evidence of reports or complaints concerning some dimly envisaged hamlet. Moreover the influence of public opinion—or rather of electoral opinion—was far more potent in town than in countryside.

Almost all local authorities (excepting for a few wealthy and progressive towns) were exhibiting certain common features by the end of the Dyarchy period. Boards had settled into a routine discharge of routine duties. They were content to keep their services going, and if they were able to expand education without seriously raising taxation, so much the better. It was, in Laski's phrase, 'government for the ratepayers'; what one provincial government report terms 'the fear of the electorate' was often the paramount influence over the actions of boards, rather than a dynamic civic spirit.[1]

Similarly in the office work, and in the 'outside' activities of local authorities, there was often a mechanical repetition of duties without the stimulus of able, keen direction from heads of departments. Every year budget estimates were completed a few

[1] Punjab, Municipal Reports, 1937–8.

weeks late, the supply of water failed at the peak of every hot weather, building encroachments on to the streets and open places multiplied. At best these characteristics represented an indifference—with which one may perhaps sympathise—to the Anglo-Saxon cult of office efficiency, and to the bureaucrat's paper world of rules and orders; but this indifference could easily be utilised as a cloak for corruption and dishonesty, as the dreary audit lists of embezzlement and defalcation showed. Any attempt to estimate the relative success of local institutions in the different provinces is bound to be arbitrary, and to be modified according to the factors which are given pre-eminence. However, a tentative assessment of progress in the Dyarchy period in the following terms may have some value.

Madras Presidency is usually accepted as having made the best all-round progress; both in town and countryside there was steady development. Most boards discharged their duties conscientiously and efficiently. There was a fair exploitation of resources—and a noteworthy development of remunerative enterprises such as light railways, bus services, municipal markets, etc.

Perhaps the most important advance in rural local government was made in Punjab. Assisted by several years of prosperity, whereby district board revenues and, to an even greater degree, government grants were substantially augmented, there was a quickening in the tempo of the public services. Despite the communal triangle, there was a good measure of co-operation between different sections of rural society, and the antagonism so often felt elsewhere between officials and the people, was generally absent. Official reports in many provinces frequently call hopefully for the association of the 'natural leaders' of rural society with local government; but over wide areas these 'natural leaders'—the landlords, were quite indifferent to local government work. In Punjab this 'natural leadership' was a reality; at different levels the great territorial magnates, the squirearchy—the 'safed posh', and the yeomen leaders of the village—the pir and the retired subedar—the saint and the soldier, all played their part in local government.

Bombay local government also enjoyed the advantage of being based upon a relatively buoyant economy which made

possible a generous measure of provincial grants-in-aid. Activity was particularly concentrated in the largest municipalities; in the thirty 'boroughs', and especially in the four largest cities (Karachi, Ahmadabad, Surat and Poona), which cities together accounted for fully half the income of the combined 156 municipalities in the Presidency. Despite a certain degree of diversion of energy for political purposes, there was a very considerable expansion of education and other services, and public utilities were operated with profit.

In other provinces it is not easy to talk of progress, without a long discussion of the contributory factors involved. Bengal was the province with the longest experience of English education and political philosophy, it was the province where English methods of local government seemed most fully acclimatised, and where local representative institutions had become the accepted form of government—at least to the highly important bhadralok, the middle class. But the local bodies of Bengal were hampered by small and inelastic resources, which it was beyond the capacity of the provincial government to augment. Moreover, civic development was continually halted by the intrusion of political and communal issues into every detail of administration. Yet the Dyarchy years were not entirely barren for Bengal; there was a growth towards realisation of the meaning of representative government as a chain of responsibility which links the public, members, and staff of the public services. In some of the industrial towns on the Hooghly there was an attempt to translate this somewhat amorphous civic consciousness into higher standards in local services, especially towards the improvement of public health and the spread of primary education.

The United Provinces were also an overwhelmingly agricultural area with inadequate provincial financial resources, and much troubled by communal clashes. Despite an important 'westernised' section of urban society, the great majority of the people of U.P. were still living in the atmosphere of past ages. Government was something absolute and arbitrary, embodied in the 'hakim' or law-giver, and the attitude of the individual was still conditioned by ideas of personal or family advantage, rather than by a wider civic sense. The proceedings of municipal and district boards did not, with some exceptions, show any

marked growth in the technique of 'government by public meeting'. Nevertheless much valuable experience was gained. The extreme backwardness in education of the rural masses of U.P. was attacked by a widespread opening of rural schools, and towards the end of Dyarchy, U.P. had drawn almost level with several more advanced provinces.

Among the smaller provinces, there was perhaps most activity in Assam. Reports from Bihar and Orissa spoke of some falling off in local government standards. C.P. boards struggled, not unsuccessfully, with problems arising from vast districts, many under jungle, and very meagre revenues.

In general, the Dyarchy period must be considered as a sort of prelude or overture. It was a time when people were laboriously discovering the possibilities—and the limitations, of this method of government, and stresses and strains were more apparent than results. It may serve to indicate the final picture which may emerge from the preliminary sketch, if a brief portrait is inserted of Indian civic life at its best. The following is a quotation from a report on the working of Ahmadabad Municipality for 1937–8.

> The work of reconstruction of Manek chowk shops was completed and shops rented. The construction of an up-to-date fully equipped Infectious Diseases Hospital outside Jamalpur gate was sanctioned and also the opening of a Tuberculosis clinic. The Municipal Venereal Diseases Clinic commenced work. The work of construction of two additional high-level bridges over the River Sabarmati is in progress. 180 acres of land for a public park are being acquired. Twelve roads were asphalted, and there are now fifty-two miles of dustless roads. Rs. 31,017 were spent on the construction of footpaths and Rs. 136,500 on paving. Several amenities were provided in Harijan [untouchable] localities, such as bathrooms, water closets, public water-tap platforms, underground drains and paving of streets.[1]

The years of Dyarchy closed with a general awareness that all was not well with local government—in which Nationalist leaders and government officials both shared. A committee appointed by the 1937–9 Congress Government of Bombay, and presided over by Professor B. G. Kale came to some valuable

[1] Bombay, Municipal Reports, 1937–8.

conclusions. The evidence before them had shown a 'conflict of opinion and a clash of view-points', nevertheless '*improved finance and a higher standard of administration* dominate the discussion'. While wishing local bodies to be 'free from undue official interference', they insisted that government control and inspection were necessary 'in the interests of efficient and progressive administration'.[1]

The framing of legislation to meet this situation, and the shaping of public opinion towards an appreciation of the needs of local government are tasks which still lie in the future.

[1] Report of the Local Self-government Committee, Bombay, 1939, p. 102.

CHAPTER XI

Village Government in the Dyarchy Years

THE plans for new types of village authorities which were embodied in the legislation after the first World War were nowhere intended to reproduce the characteristics of the old-time panchayats, but were designed to fulfil one of three purposes; to provide a smaller area as a basic unit for the existing structure of rural local government, to provide a rudimentary municipal framework for large villages or small towns, or (and sometimes in conjunction with one of the previous types) to form a simple judicial tribunal. In each case there was a hope that the new bodies would be able to mobilise that local community spirit to which the larger, more artificial units of administration could not appeal.

The constitution and procedure of the new authorities were designed to be simple and practical, and there was some attempt to make them an organic expression of community feeling. In all provinces except U.P., village councils were mainly elected bodies. In most provinces every adult male was entitled to vote, but in Bengal the franchise was confined to those paying one rupee, local cess, annually (the Bengal electorate was about one-tenth of the population). Sometimes elections were informal affairs in which the villagers gave voice to their wishes; sometimes (as in Bombay) there was a formal election with lists of voters and ballot boxes. Candidates for election might come from the general body of village dwellers in most provinces, but in Punjab and the Central Provinces they were required to be substantial yeomen, and in Bengal there was a literacy test. In some other provinces the chairman or sir-panch, the secretary, and a proportion of members had to be literate. In most provinces there were certain ex-officio or nominated members. In Bombay and the Central Provinces the village headman was a member ex-officio, in Bengal one-third of union board members were

appointed by Government; in Bombay certain classes of landlords were entitled to membership, and after 1939 one seat on each panchayat was reserved for a woman, and in some areas there were 'reserved' seats for Muslims, untouchables, and members of backward tribes. In Madras, most panchayats (without statutory direction) followed the principle of securing the representation of each important community within their areas; approximately one panchayat in twelve included an untouchable member.

The United Provinces' panchayats were appointed by the district officer. Usually a tahsildar would first submit recommendations which would be followed by a personal visit from the District Officer to ascertain the views of the village folk, and to formally inaugurate the panchayat. In the United Provinces the sir-panch was also appointed by the District Officer; in every other province he was freely elected (subject, in some cases to fulfilling certain qualifications) by the members of the village council.

The number of members which made up village councils varied considerably, but all were fairly compact bodies. The Bengal union boards consisted of six to nine members, the Madras panchayats were from seven to fifteen strong, in Bombay there were seven to eleven members, U.P. panchayats were to consist of 'not less than three and not more than seven persons'; and so on. Those panchayats which were primarily judicial bodies (such as those of U.P., Punjab and C.P.) were naturally small—concurrence in judgments becomes infinitely more difficult as numbers increase; the administrative authorities which might include several villages within their boundaries must of necessity be larger to ensure the proper representation of the different communities.

Outside control over panchayats also varied as their administrative or judicial functions were predominant. Most of the administrative authorities were partially subordinate to the district boards (as in Bengal, Bombay and Madras), and in some cases their budgets had to be submitted to the district boards, whose representatives might inspect their activities and undertakings; in addition those district boards which disbursed grants-in-aid to village councils had a potential weapon of control. The

rule in regard to the judicial panchayats of the United Provinces and Punjab (but not to those of the Central Provinces) was to exclude them from contact with district boards, but to give District Magistrates responsibility for supervision, and to invest them with power to set aside a panchayat's judicial decisions if necessary.

In many provinces both these forms of control were found in practice to be too aloof to be effective, and special whole-time inspectors of panchayat activities were often appointed. There were panchayat officers in Punjab, nominated largely from the co-operative departments and from teachers. In Bengal, junior members of the subordinate civil service were seconded to the work. The Madras panchayats were inspected from time to time by the provincial inspectorate, and a few were put directly in charge of special officers. In the United Provinces, a member of the district staff was specially responsible for supervision. The Central Provinces and Bihar also employed special panchayat officers. After the onset of the slump, these officials were 're-trenched' in several provinces; a distinct set-back to panchayat development followed in each case, and panchayat officers were re-employed from the mid-1930's.

The expansion of village councils did not fulfil expectations in most provinces. A complete net-work of village authorities was built up in Bengal, and was later established throughout wider areas of Madras; one-quarter of the rural population of the United Provinces was brought within the panchayats' orbit; in Punjab, Bombay and C.P., they covered only about one-tenth or one-fifteenth of the countryside, and in other provinces village councils affected only an insignificant fraction of the people. (See Table 23.)

The position of the Bengal union boards was much more assured than that of other village authorities. The staple of their finances—the chaukidari cess—was an established tax, it had been levied for half-a-century, and it provided a secure basic income. The boards were assigned obligatory functions under the 1919 Act, being specifically responsible for the upkeep of village police, minor roads, water-works, and sanitation. In a limited fashion, the union boards' activities foreshadowed a political advance beyond Dyarchy, as they were entrusted with

both 'reserved' subjects (police, and law and order) as well as the usual 'transferred' subjects. The expansion of the structure of union boards was carried on in the face of political opposition lasting well into the 1930's; nevertheless by 1929 there were 4,308 boards with jurisdiction over two-thirds of rural Bengal, and by 1939, 5,046 boards had been created out of the 6,478 old chaukidari unions, embracing over three-quarters of the rural

TABLE 23

VILLAGE AUTHORITIES, 1926 TO 1937

	Number of villages (1921 figures)	Number of village authorities	
		1926	1937
Bengal	84,981	2,419	5,046*
Bombay	26,528	618†	795‡
Madras	52,198	1,417§	6,250‖
U.P.	104,347	4,772	4,180
Punjab	34,119	323	1,554¶
Bihar and Orissa	84,814	270	147
C.P.	39,024	80	900

* = union boards, each covering about 10 or 12 villages.
† Comprises 343 sanitary committees, 275 panchayats.
‡ Comprises 145 sanitary committees, 650 panchayats.
§ Comprises 480 union boards, 938 panchayats.
‖ Comprises 352 'major' and 5,898 'minor' panchayats.
¶ Comprises 1,275 panchayats, and 279 (active) village sanitary committees.

(NOTE: Nearly all the statistics presented in this chapter must be accepted as approximations; the machinery for compiling village statistics was very imperfect and unreliable in all provinces except Bengal.)

areas, and a population of forty-one millions. Only in the four districts of Midnapore, the Twenty-Four Parganas, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling were there extensive tracts in which no union boards had been established.

The large scale development of panchayats in Madras may also be attributed, in part at least, to their assured status: the 'major' panchayats inherited the incomes and functions of the sub-district boards, as guaranteed by statute. There was a gradual reduction in the numbers of union boards—later styled 'major panchayats'; the poorest and least efficient were abolished, while the best boards were given extended jurisdic-

tion. A major panchayat usually consisted of a small rural town with its adjacent villages; there were 495 union boards in 1924, and 352 major panchayats in 1937, but the population under their control remained about the same—some four million persons. At the same time 'minor' panchayats were set up, consisting of one village, or two or three hamlets, to manage purely parochial subjects (there were 579 in 1924, 3,756 by 1930 and 5,898 in 1937). This patchwork of panchayats large and small was most firmly established in the Tamil districts (especially in Tanjore, Salem, Madura and Ramnad) and in the Godavari country. For various reasons, arising out of local history and financial difficulty, the new system made no progress in the Nilgiris and in South Kanara, and was but little more advanced in Malabar.

In the United Provinces where the establishment of panchayats was dependent on the prior decision of the district magistrate, the distribution of village councils was very uneven and irregular.[1] Bursts of activity were often followed by periods of quiescence or even of contraction. As an experienced Indian administrator observed 'No two district officers seem to have the same policy in regard to them. Some who are enthusiastic and take a personal interest, increase the number very greatly; but their successors find it troublesome to deal with so many. Others go to the opposite extreme and reduce the number to almost nothing'.[2] The principle of the 'single village' type of panchayat accepted at the start, was gradually abandoned—panchayats came to have authority over some five villages each, as the less efficient bodies were weeded out. Thus in Benares district, in 1927, there were 334 panchayats for a population of 487,227; by 1939 the number of panchayats had fallen to 276, but the population under their charge had risen to 552,311. Progress varied to a surprising degree from district to district, and even from one village to the next. In some places the panchayat idea took root, and a flourishing new community life grew up; elsewhere panchayats never enjoyed more than a nominal existence,

[1] Compare the situation in two United Provinces districts: *Budaun*—1929, 85 panchayats for pop. 193,029; 1935, 215 panchayats for pop. 498,346. *Fyzabad*—1926, 344 panchayats for pop. 938,257; 1936, 200 panchayats for pop. 464,125.

[2] Panna Lall, *The Junior Collectors' Handbook*, p. 138.

and after a few moribund years were abolished. On a broad view, panchayats were more successful in the west of the province in the Meerut and Agra divisions where there were strong traditions of local independence and combined action.

In other provinces the new village institutions underwent no comparable stimulus; they did not receive either steady incomes or well-defined duties as in Bengal or Madras, and their early development was left to the villagers' own efforts and was not spurred on by the District Officer and his staff as in United Provinces.

The Bombay panchayats laboured under the opprobrium of the new taxes which they introduced, and they lacked machinery to give them a good start-off. From the very year when the Bombay act came into operation—1922—there were cases of men refusing to accept membership when elected, or of entire panchayats applying to have their own authority withdrawn by government. There were 263 Bombay panchayats in 1924; not until eleven years had passed were there over 300 panchayats in the province (1934, 297: 1935, 447); thereafter a modest expansion took place, but this was partially achieved by converting moribund sanitary committees, or small and inefficient municipalities into panchayats. What progress was achieved was to be found mainly in Deccan (over half the province's panchayats were there), where the old-time village institutions had been most vigorous. Altogether the Bombay panchayats covered a population of 1,933,444 in 1935, or about one-seventh of the country-dwellers of the province.

The virile inhabitants of Punjab with their long traditions of local resistance to the conqueror might have been expected to make a great success of the new village councils, but in practice the growth of the new bodies was slow. By 1937 only one village in twenty-five had a panchayat—although there was a considerable extension of activity in the next few years.[1] Panchayats were least numerous in the extreme east and west of the province (these were also the poorest and most sparsely populated regions), and they were most widely successful in the middle districts

[1] In 1937 there were also 2,889 village sanitary committees, but of these all but 279 were defunct. *See* 'Report on the Public Health Administration of the Punjab', 1938, p. 20.

(especially in Gurdaspur, Ferozepore, Jullundur, Sheikhupura and Kangra). But, as in U.P. there were variations between districts which were only explicable in terms of the degree of enthusiasm or indifference shown by different district officers: for instance, Gujrat possessed five times as many panchayats as the next district, Gujranwala, although both have a common social and economic background. Sometimes the new panchayats were over-shadowed by already established village co-operative societies; elsewhere clan feelings or the authority of landed magnates created adverse influences which inexperienced panchayat members could not surmount. Conversely statistics do not convey the wide influence of some panchayats throughout the surrounding countryside; many panchayats in Punjab acquired a reputation for wisdom, and to them disputes were brought from miles around.

In the Central Provinces, development was somewhat smaller than in Punjab, and had to get round great difficulties. Villages are small and often isolated—it was hard to find suitable working units of administration; the influence of landlords or their agents is predominant in many villages, and the panchayat, except as a caste organisation, had no clearly defined past history in many areas.

To the extent that achievement can be measured in figures for income and expenditure, there were wide variations between the provinces; in general the revenues of the 'administrative' panchayats were much greater than those of the judicial bodies.

Bengal's income dwarfs all the other provinces. There was a rapid rise in the 1920's, with smaller increases in the '30's (1924, 30 lakhs; 1929, 85 lakhs; 1937, 103 lakhs). Although about one-half of the union boards' resources had to be allotted to the upkeep of village police,[1] there was a growing residuum for other services; in 1937 the union boards' expenditure included seven-and-a-half lakhs on roads, three lakhs on drainage and conservancy, and ten lakhs on water supply (or *more* than was spent by the Bengal district boards, and about two-thirds of the municipal total). These totals are impressive, but the average total income for each union board—comprising about eleven

[1] Cf. Total expenditure/Village police costs: 1924 = 25/14·5 lakhs; 1929 = 83/44 lakhs; 1937 = 103/50·33 lakhs.

square miles and eight thousand inhabitants, was only Rs. 2,000, calculated on the high 1937 figures.

The increase in financial resources in Madras was also considerable, at least as regards the 'major' village authorities: their income increased from 19·32 lakhs (as union boards) in 1924 to 24·70 lakhs in 1929 and 27·56 lakhs in 1937. About half the revenues of the major panchayats was drawn from a house-tax, and about one-fifth out of profits from markets and slaughter houses. Their most important activities were—sanitation (expenditure, 6·96 lakhs in 1937), lighting (6·82 lakhs in 1937) and roads (2·66 lakhs, 1937), and a large proportion of their expenditure went into town or suburban services. The minor authorities had much smaller funds; their income was two lakhs in 1924, but had risen to eight lakhs by 1934. In 1937 only twenty-two of the thirty-five district boards submitted information about the activities of these panchayats (an omission that was certainly significant), the incomplete figures showed an income of five and a half lakhs for 1937. Thus although each major panchayat enjoyed an average annual income of Rs. 8,500 (1937 figures) to cover a population of about ten thousand, the minor village authorities' average income was only Rs. 100 to Rs. 150.

The size of the Bombay panchayats varied greatly, and their income varied accordingly; they were constituted for towns such as Nashiabad (population, 13,000) and hamlets such as Jawalwadi (population, 325); the mean lay in large villages of about 1,500–2,000 inhabitants. Bombay panchayats were statutorily obliged to levy a house-tax, and although some authorities jibbed at this unpopular duty, its yield usually gave panchayats a fair income. Thus Palej (population, 3,193) had an annual income of Rs. 12,000. The average was about Rs. 1,500.

The panchayats of United Provinces, Punjab and Central Provinces, primarily judicial in scope had smaller incomes than the authorities previously discussed. The annual income of Punjab panchayats ranged (literally) from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1, but the average was about Rs. 40. They had no powers of taxation—income was derived entirely from fees, fines and grants, and in 1937 the provincial total was Rs. 60,000. The U.P. panchayats' sources of revenue were similar, but the general level of income

was somewhat higher than in Punjab: fines and fees were sometimes supplemented by more or less voluntary donations from the villagers. In the larger village unions the annual income was Rs. 500 or 600, but the average was about Rs. 150. The Central Provinces panchayats had an income of one and a half lakhs in 1937, or about Rs. 170 to each panchayat.

The importance of the new village authorities cannot really be measured in terms of money. The idea of this experiment was to attempt to associate local government with the life of rural communities—in which the more artificial district boards had manifestly failed. There is evidence that the new village councils, although there were many failures, did awaken many country dwellers to the meaning of local government in villages in all parts of the sub-continent.

A great deal depended on the president of the union board, or the sir-panch. If a man of real standing in village affairs could be found to take up this responsible and onerous task, a substantial step towards success was taken. The ideal chairman must be a man of parts: he should come from a long established village family of repute to ensure respect; he should possess some education and experience of the outside world to talk back to officials and to adapt modern ideas on sanitation, agricultural improvement or schooling to the needs of his village; and he must be endowed with energy and with acknowledged personal integrity which would inspire the village folk to action, and cause them to accept his pronouncements without cavil. These are high requirements, and of course in many villages no such leader was forthcoming.

> To a large extent [present-day leadership] is built upon the pursuit of self-interest. Its main strength lies in its connection with feudal landlords, petty officials and others who are in a position to injure the folk who do not tacitly accept such leadership. It is this unhealthy state of affairs which largely accounts for increasing corruption in rural life and for the growth of village factions . . . it is urgent that village leadership should derive its quality and strength from service to the community.[1]

So concludes a thoughtful Indian student of village life. Where the community was rent by faction or family feuds, or when it was

[1] Tarlok Singh, *Poverty and Social Change* (London, 1945), p. 174.

overshadowed by some local bully, then panchayats could not hope to flourish. Similarly in areas in which life was unusually hard—where the soil was barren, or where calamities such as drought or flood had been heavy, where men were almost overwhelmed by the bitterness of the struggle to live—one would usually find a dull indifference to the advantages of new forms of communal combination.

But too much of the literature of modern village government has concentrated upon its shortcomings, whereas even in the period of Dyarchy—a flash of light compared with a thousand years of Indian village history—much respectable work was done. From Bengal it was reported that the virus of faction was much less active in the union boards than in municipal affairs. A more responsible attitude to their civic duties was shown in these small bodies than in larger local authorities, as was demonstrated by the absence of serious irregularities in their handling of public money, and by the absence of defalcations. In many areas the co-operation of the general public was effectively enlisted, for instance in Chittagong district, one union board was aided in irrigation and drainage works by the voluntary labour of four thousand villagers.[1] The U.P. panchayats, although of widely varied attainments, were generally successful in eliminating petty corruption, the curse of Indian administration. Although in the early days there was a widespread hostility to the introduction of new village levies, in time people grew to realise that if they wished for improvements in their villages they must somehow find the necessary money, labour or materials, rather than wait for government to provide them. By 1939 it was possible to call the U.P. villager a 'ready' and 'generous' contributor to village improvement schemes.[2] Other provinces showed similar signs that the new village authorities were not unsuccessful in appealing to half-forgotten traditions of public spirit.

The range of functions of panchayats was everywhere much the same, but a different emphasis was placed on different activities from province to province. Judicial functions were sometimes exercised by the ordinary territorial panchayats,

[1] Bengal 'Resolutions on the working of union boards'.

[2] Dr. K. N. Katju, 'A Scheme for Local Self-government in Rural Areas', *Indian Journal of Economics*, Vol. XX, No. 1, July 1939.

sometimes by special village courts. The ordinary panchayats of C.P., Punjab and U.P. were mainly occupied with judicial functions. In Bengal there were special union benches to try criminal offences, and union courts to which civil suits might be taken. By 1937 there were 1,521 union benches and 1,338 union courts; their jurisdiction extended to all the districts except Darjeeling. Similarly in Madras there were special village panchayat courts, which took over the civil jurisdiction of the headman together with much wider criminal powers. These courts consisted of three to five members, elected by a show of hands at a general assembly of the villagers. In Bombay after 1933 village benches consisting of five members were constituted from a few administrative panchayats—first through nomination by the Collector, and later by election—the panchayat members making the choice.

In the 1920's the most important judicial activity was centred in U.P. For instance, in 1925 the cases disposed of by panchayats numbered 122,760—two-thirds being civil cases. But in the 1930's there was a steady falling off in the numbers of cases disposed of (1931, 91,476 cases; 1936, 85,399), until in 1937 only about half the cases of twelve years before were handled (67,233). This trend may partly demonstrate the success of panchayats in discouraging litigation, but it has also been attributed to delays in the hearing of cases, to Congress propaganda, and to economic conditions.[1] By contrast the number of cases handled by the Bengal union benches and courts increased from 120,000 in 1929 to 174,000 in 1937. In no other province were the activities of village courts on such a huge scale, although in Punjab and C.P. they disposed of a good deal of work, and some Madras village courts were active. In Bombay in 1937 there were four village benches who between them disposed of seventy-one cases—mostly breaches of their own by-laws.

The administrative duties of panchayats were largely confined to the upkeep of minor country roads and village streets, the provision of a few oil lamps and the employment of a few conservancy sweepers. It may be doubted whether these functions—with which modern local government in India has been so intimately linked—aroused much enthusiasm in the majority of

[1] U.P. Administration Report, 1937-8.

village folk. Where no schools existed, village authorities were often given the task of erecting new school-buildings, whereupon the district board would provide the salary for a school-master. The Bengal union boards and Madras panchayats were actually classified as education authorities, with wide powers of school management, control over teachers, and financial responsibility. The supply of water—often by means of tube-wells—was another service which aroused fairly wide-spread enthusiasm, especially in Bengal. In most provinces village authorities ran dispensaries (usually of the simple ayurvedic type) or maintained medical chests.

During the years of Dyarchy, the idea variously defined as 'rural development' or 'uplift', or 'rural reconstruction' was taken up in almost every Indian province. The movement aimed at the rejuvenation of village life in all its aspects—through agricultural and veterinary improvements, consolidation of holdings, co-operative saving and marketing, the building of roads and wells, the improvement of rural health by anti-malaria propaganda—and by many other schemes. This movement originated in Punjab in 1923; it was taken up by C.P. in 1930, then in U.P., and finally in Bombay (1933), and Bengal (1936). In the years 1935–9, rural welfare was encouraged at an all-India level, and grants to the extent of three million pounds were contributed by the Government of India. These schemes traversed almost the entire range of panchayat and district board activities, but it is a significant commentary on the current situation in Indian rural local government, and its relations with officialdom, that almost everywhere *ad hoc* district committees were set up—largely under the district officer's control—to supervise rural development. District boards had very little share in the new schemes, and when the co-operation of village authorities was called for, they were utilised as agents of the officially sponsored schemes, rather than approached as autonomous local bodies.

Panchayats were associated with the new schemes to perhaps the greatest extent in U.P.; they took on such social-service functions as debt conciliation, agricultural improvement and public health. District boards co-operated with panchayats to put four thousand village wells into repair. 5,012 dispensaries

were opened, giving service to 8,501 villages (about 7 per cent of the provincial total). Sanitary responsibilities were taken over by some panchayats, who went on to clean up their villages. In some villages the new activities gave panchayats a fresh lease of life; elsewhere panchayat members showed themselves unequal or indifferent to these wider tasks, and their functions were replaced by 'Better-living Societies'. In Punjab rural development was more often associated with co-operative societies, though some panchayats played a useful part in organising 'Safai' weeks to clean up their villages, in working for agricultural betterment, the consolidation of holdings, and the spread of education. In C.P. there was a policy of concentrated activity in an area of about forty villages—the so-called 'Pipariya experiment'; elsewhere in the province the panchayats played a modest part in village uplift. Within a limited area, the Bombay panchayats did effective work—they put village wells into repair, built gutters, sprayed mosquito breeding grounds with paraffin, moved rubbish dumps outside the village, distributed quinine, and performed other simple village improvements. Bengal was somewhat late in entering this field of activity, but once started the union boards played an important part in tackling development problems. In Hooghly District, union boards organised 'clean village' competitions, a large number of anti-malaria societies were revived, and insanitary areas cleared up. Agriculture was promoted by the holding of cattle shows and the provision of stud bulls in Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri.

However, when all is said, this activity could do no more than stimulate the villager by showing him glimpses of better social conditions; the introduction of new services only served to reveal the immensity of India's rural problems, and the inadequacy of the existing facilities.

In every province there were of course good and bad panchayats. In neighbouring villages there might be—energy—tyranny—and apathy. In one village the visitor would see clean lanes paved with masonry, a flourishing school, a village assembly place with perhaps a small library—all achieved through voluntary labour, and contributions of money and materials from the villagers themselves. Only a mile away there would be a village where the community's resources were

appropriated by the adherents of the ruling clique, while the village existed in a state of perpetual feud and unrest. There were many such panchayats which were only 'a source of mischief and further division in the social life of villages'.[1] Perhaps in another direction there would be a village community without school, dispensary or any kind of public service; the inhabitants unorganised and unrepresented by a panchayat or a co-operative society, looking listlessly to government or to the district board for the provision of any amenities.[2]

The good panchayats tended to become better, and district officers or district boards would naturally devote their limited grants to such villages as put them to the best use; services such as seed-banks or tube-wells would increase the cultivator's prosperity and so widen the panchayat's resources; a judicial panchayat with a name for wisdom would attract applicants from other villages and with this increase in their reputation, village leaders would acquire a higher confidence and self-respect. Conversely a poor panchayat would often confirm the villager's mistrust of new ideas and his nostalgia for old days and old ways. Unsuccessful panchayats would be left with a few works they could not maintain, an empty purse—and worse, an overdrawn account on the confidence of their village brethren who would decide that the new village government was only another device to impose new demands on their time and money, and to introduce new officials with new kinds of petty extortion and 'harassment'.

What were the causes of failure? Faction and division in the village, poverty, a lack of competent leadership and of the co-operation of traders and professional men to assist with problems of finance and procedure, a lack of interest shown by district boards and often by District Officers who largely failed to train up village leaders in the technique of public administration, adverse political propaganda, the revolt of sections of the village community—particularly of the menials, against traditional village leadership. It is easy to go on with the list—reasons varied from village to village.

[1] Tarlok Singh, op. cit., p. 176.

[2] For illustrative descriptions of these different situations in village life, *see* M. L. Darling, *At Freedom's Door* (London, 1949), especially pp. 163–4, 166, 214.

A broad assessment of village government under Dyarchy is not easy. The success recorded in Bengal as compared with other provinces seems to indicate that the 'union' forms the most practical unit for village administration—large enough to command sizeable financial resources and to recruit organising ability to its service, yet small enough to be identified with local feeling and community consciousness. Several provinces failed to find the right kind of organisation to give shape to the village community spirit. In Bombay the 1920 Act was almost a dead letter; it was replaced in 1933 by new legislation, which in turn failed to enlist village feeling, so again there was a burst of legislation-drafting, but the third Act—of 1939—still did not arouse village enthusiasm (partly because it was almost inoperative during the war years). But, in Sir Malcolm Darling's words, failures 'are an argument, not for giving up the attempt to re-establish the panchayat—it is too seriously needed for that—but for fresh experiments, until the appropriate form for each part of India is discovered'.[1]

Indian writers with wide differences of view-point have criticised the aims of these revived judicial or administrative panchayats, as inadequate to meet the basic necessities of rural India, with its desperate need to raise living standards and its inadequate production of food-grains.[2] Such writers have emphasised that, in the conditions of today, the combination of villagers for their mutual assistance will only become dynamic when it is devoted to an all-over re-organisation of the existing inadequate, piecemeal methods of peasant farming. Rather than a multiplicity of *ad hoc* village committees for 'village uplift' and co-operative credit, as well as a local government panchayat, the whole body of village dwellers should be enlisted in the co-ordination of the village economy as first priority; and when (or perhaps if) a higher level of prosperity is achieved, there will then be a surplus to devote to the improvement of the village and the provision of greater amenities.

This argument may appear ambitious, but it is essentially

[1] M. L. Darling, p. 315.

[2] Constructive views on village government are contained in Gyan Chand, *Local Finance in India* (Allahabad, 1947), p. 252; Katju, op. cit., pp. 2–4; Tarlok Singh, op. cit.

realistic. The problems of the village can only be solved when there is a radical change in the present attitude to a complex range of social customs and practices, bringing a desire for new standards in social services: and when there are funds and labour to carry through these improvements.

Changes in social thinking may come about through education and propaganda; increased resources may be created through new taxes. But these ways of progress have been advocated so often in the last forty years, with only very slender results. A dynamic *comprehensive* approach to rural problems might be successful in appealing to the villagers to shake off their present social inhibitions, and devote all their efforts to building up a re-organised prosperous village life. But such an enterprise would depend again upon the quality of leadership given to the villagers.

Echoes of such ideas may be seen in the planning of the new national governments in India and Pakistan today. Authoritarian administration has been put behind, and emphasis is placed on the corporate activity of the villagers. In the Indian Union the establishment of village panchayats has been written into the new Constitution (Article 40), and the 'new' system was launched in U.P. in August 1949. The structure of village government appears to be founded upon the experience gained in working the 1920 Act. There has been no attempt to go back to ancient patterns. There are 35,000 administrative panchayats for the 114,000 villages now found in U.P., and 8,000 village courts (panchayati adalat); or one administrative body for three villages, and one court for twenty villages. This follows broadly the lessons learned between the wars. The working of the system is founded upon half-yearly meetings of all members of the village—the gaon sabha. The villagers elect their panchayat for a term of three years; its powers are described as covering 'all aspects of village government—social, economic, moral and political'. An ambitious list of subjects includes: maintenance of the council-house, schools, hospitals, roads, street-lighting and fire-services; control of buildings and fairs; registration of births and deaths; child and maternity services; famine relief, agricultural development, control of grazing; the promotion of social harmony between different

communities and the encouragement of sport and recreation. If the new experiment is to succeed, its leaders might do well to consider the lessons which a study of the shortcomings and the false hopes of village government in the Dyarchy period reveal.

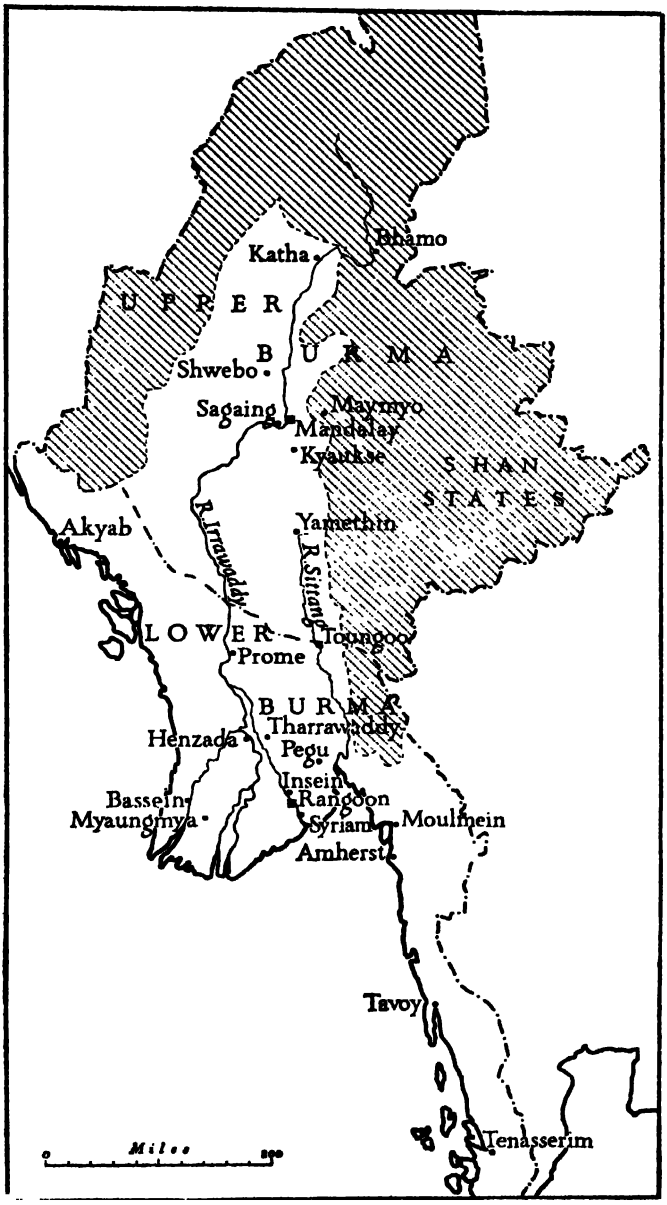
CHAPTER XII

Burma, 1923 to 1937

BURMA is not a part of India; that is a commonplace, but perhaps the extent of the singularity of Burmese society has not been sufficiently recognised, nor the degree to which the introduction of incongruous Indian administration has distorted Burma's national development. Under Dyarchy Burma was enabled to shake free of the trammels of the Government of India, and in 1937 the connection was entirely severed. It has therefore seemed appropriate to discuss the working of local authorities in Burma under popular control separately, and in a somewhat different form to that adopted in the preceding five chapters.

In India the building of representative institutions was prefaced by at least some preparation—the diffusion of higher education, the training of administrative staff, as well as material preparation, such as the improvement of communications. But Burma emerged from the complete isolation of a backward Indian frontier province into semi-independent status as a parliamentary democracy, in one enormous stride.

In the early 1900's, Burma had very few roads, higher education was on a minute scale and village education was in the doldrums, there were almost no vernacular newspapers, and no experience at all of elective institutions, except in a stultified fashion in eight municipal committees. The first introduction to the technique of public discussion of affairs came with the establishment of co-operative credit societies about 1911, and the brief experience learnt therein was the sole training of most future politicians and members of local bodies. Thereafter the expansion of communications, education and other social services was progressively accelerated during the two periods of Sir Harcourt Butler's charge of the province. Simultaneously a hierarchy of representative institutions was created. Burma's



Burma under Dyarchy. The shaded area was excluded from the working of the Rural Self-Government Act, 1921.

political education was no gradual evolution—'freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent', but a hectic forcing process in which the country was overnight transformed. But Burmans could not similarly transform their way of thinking —public opinion was confused, and a great many political gangsters saw their opportunity, and used the new resources for their own ends, whether their sphere was the Legislative Council, a municipal board, or the village street.

In the hasty business of manufacturing new representative bodies, legislation was not always carefully drafted to suit local needs; all too often, machinery was adapted from Indian or British models with little consideration for its utility in Burmese conditions. These new institutions frequently failed to arouse Burmese interest, though their potentialities for graft were seldom missed by the political racketeers. It was to be expected that a good deal of inefficiency and corruption would occur in local bodies when they first felt their freedom; it was not all loss if thereby the peoples of Burma learnt something of the working of political institutions. And there is evidence, as the Dyarchy period wore on, of considerable changes in the attitude of Burmans towards local authorities; they learnt to assess their capabilities and weaknesses, but they did not feel sufficient need for their services, to take an active interest in local affairs.

The background to the new local bodies was the sudden and violent upsurge of Burmese national feeling in the 1920's and '30's; political and social life was characterised by the desire to break Burma's ties with Britain and India. Party manœuvres in the legislature all revolved round this theme, which was reproduced in a crude form in the Rangoon riots of 1931, and Saya San's rebellion.

Burma's politicians borrowed much of their technique from the Indian National Congress. The boycott of government institutions spread from the field of education to that of politics. Then, as in Congress, so in the General Council of Buddhist Associations there was a party split over the decision not to contest elections. A non-co-operative movement was organised by the G.C.B.A. with a 'no tax' campaign as a prominent feature, and attacks upon the authority of the village headman

who personified an alien dictatorial government. These outside issues had their effect upon local bodies.

The Ministers who were now responsible for local government were without much influence upon policy—none were sufficiently acquainted with the technique of administration, or were sure of a sufficient majority in the Legislature, to take a bold new line. They were mild and optimistic in their handling of local bodies. Their chief tool was the distribution of grants; for various reasons this could not be used as a means of ensuring efficiency—municipalities only received minute assistance from Government, while district councils were almost entirely dependent upon government aid, so that its cessation would have caused a breakdown of local services. Policy was moulded by events, not by ministers.

Burma's economy depended largely upon the export of rice. In the 1920's the price of paddy stood between Rs. 160 and Rs. 180 per hundred baskets; then in 1931 came the crash. By 1933 paddy was selling at Rs. 55 per hundred baskets—the lowest price within living memory. The effect upon the national economy was all-embracing; provincial revenues staggered, and the new nation-building services had to be severely curtailed. All grants were scaled down—and in some instances this enforced economy did have the effect of compelling boards to revise their services and introduce improvements.

The new structure of rural authorities created by the Burma Rural Self-Government Act of 1921 was never applied throughout the whole province. The Shan States were of course outside its scope, while twelve frontier districts in Burma proper, with an estimated population of two millions, were also 'excluded areas'. In only seventeen of the twenty-eight districts were district councils entrusted with full responsibility for local government; altogether about two-thirds of the rural population came under the new authorities. It took the general public many years to grasp the impact of these changes; many still vaguely imagined that the new boards were the creatures of Government, and they continued to look to Government and its servants for redress of grievances against local bodies.

When the 1921 Act was being drafted, the intention was to establish the Circle Board, as a homogeneous social unit, for the

executive local authority. The older administrative areas—the Districts, were not related to the scope of local services or to the knowledge of local representatives, and the consequences of employing excessively large units had been felt in the difficulties of the divisional school boards. But circle boards were never endowed with the requisite powers; the Act left district councils responsible for delegating powers to the circles, and the new councils were very loath to hand over any of their slender resources to others. Finally, only in two districts were circle boards given any real functions; everywhere else these boards remained in a state of suspended animation, except at triennial elections. Moreover the new rural authorities were deprived of sources of support by the creation of twelve new municipalities between 1918 and 1924. These were all market towns or even villages, whose interests were all bound up with the countryside, and who were now artificially isolated from the surrounding rural areas. Rural bodies were deprived of the possible services of a body of traders and prosperous cultivators. That rural local government should function largely with inappropriate machinery, did not assist its chances.

The rural public at first understood the technique of elections very imperfectly. The first rural elections held in 1922 came under the boycott of the General Council of Buddhist Associations. There were no candidates whatsoever for one seat in every five, and no contests for one seat in every four. In the second elections (October 1925) although there was no organised boycott, results were disappointingly similar: the overall percentage of persons voting increased from 11 per cent of the electorate in 1922 to 15 per cent in 1925. (See Table 24.)

In 1928, in such elections as were contested, 26 per cent of the electorate voted; active public interest was not aroused. The constitutional structure of rural authorities in Burma worked against the growth of public feeling. Villagers elected a member of a circle board, but they had no direct say at all in elections to the district council. With the circle boards lifeless between elections, it was almost impossible for the voter to make any sort of contact with the district councils; the corruption bred by this system of indirect elections made most respectable people suspicious of district councils. The general public came to avoid

contact with them. The great majority of Burma's country people remained happily unaware of many wants in the way of social service—education was appreciated, and this did improve, but there was little demand for roads, veterinary services, public health services and so on. Unless rural Burma expected more from public services, no great stimulus to local government could arise from public opinion.

TABLE 24

	Village tracts in which candidates did not appear at all	Village tracts in which there were no contests	Percentage of persons voting in contested elections
1922	22·6%	28·3%	22·4%
1925	21%	23·8%	24·8%

Municipal life was more developed and public opinion was operative in some towns. In 1924 the elective system was extended to all municipalities other than Bhamo. Despite G.C.B.A. propaganda, 44 per cent of the electorate voted in 1924 as compared with 28 per cent in 1921. The 1922 Act for Rangoon led to increased interest in city affairs. In 1925 there were contests for all but five seats. In the 1928 elections, of the twenty-five ward seats only eleven were contested—eight of the ten Burmese members being returned unopposed. Again in 1931 there was little competition; many candidates put up, only to withdraw at the last moment (eight Burmese candidates stood down). In 1931 there were 40,253 persons on the electoral roll out of a total population of 388,000—a little over 10 per cent of the total. The electors comprised 12,332 Burmans, 10,440 Hindus, 7,425 Muslims, 5,537 Europeans and 4,519 Chinese. The franchise was not wide in comparison with most big Indian cities, but Rangoon's total population was swollen by transitory migrants. For instance in 1925, 330,212 persons entered the city and 301,846 left; the population always included about 200,000 temporary residents.

The Rangoon electorate returned a large proportion of the same councillors year after year—although sometimes very senior members met with defeat for no clearly valid reason.

A description of a Rangoon election was given to the Simon Commission by Dr. Allan Murray. He affirmed that 'it is not too much to say that there are two large [Indian] employers of labour who can return any candidates'. Dr. Murray then described the procedure employed:

> It frequently happens that before the poll opens the candidate in control of the Hindu cooly vote (or his agent) surrounds the entrance to the polling booth with a mob of labourers who have been instructed to keep out anyone not belonging to their particular class. They press en masse around the entrance and it is with difficulty that they are prevented from overthrowing the temporary structure. The educated voter has no taste for a scramble with such a mob and waits for hours but in the end has to leave without voting. The coolies who flood the polling booth carry each of them a coloured card saying his name is so and so. . . . This is for the convenience of the tellers. It conceals the fraud by the ignorant cooly, for the name on the card is not his own. When the cooly has voted he returns for a fresh card and repeats the process.[1]

Dr. Murray's account was corroborated by government officials and challenged by politicians, notably by Mr. M. M. Rafi, but his submissions served to darken the picture of fraud. He stated that it was the practice for every candidate to station ten or twelve 'agents' outside each polling booth; these men would accost would-be voters and attempt to stop all those not of their own faction from entering. These statements drew from Lord Simon the remark, 'It is the most depressing thing that I have heard . . . cases of personation must be rampant'.

Political parties did not play any real part in Burmese local government; a few Indian members with Congress affinities tried (as in Rangoon) to use local bodies as a platform, but this was confined to a few towns. Local authorities certainly reflected the growing sense of Burmans that *their* people should run *their* country. In response to these demands the constitutions of some municipalities were revised to give greater representation to Burmans at Indian expense (Mandalay in 1925, Insein in 1926). District Councils were almost entirely Burmese from the start. Local authorities were mainly agitated by national movements from the outside. In the boycott phase from 1921 to 1924, con-

[1] ISC, xvii, 367.

siderable pressure was brought to bear upon boards still linked in the public eye with Government. In Toungoo the municipal markets were boycotted. In five districts of Pegu Division, a vigorous 'no tax' campaign was directed against payment of dues. Again in 1931, local bodies felt the impact of outside forces; the administration and finance of some district councils were affected by the rebellion and the depression. In Rangoon the whole of the city's sanitary organisation was temporarily paralysed by the May riots.

The Burmese members of Rangoon Corporation were constantly pressing for a larger share in the city's administration for their own people—with ever growing success. Indian members in turn defended their interests; communal considerations even prevailed in such minutiae as the enforcement of building regulations and sanitary by-laws—and of course in all cases of appointment and preferment. Yet Rangoon local government played a not unimportant rôle as a training ground of national leaders; two of Rangoon's councillors were delegates to the Round Table Conference of November 1931, while among those who enjoyed brief years of ministerial power were such ex-councillors as Lee Ah Yain, Dr. Ba Yin, U Ohn Ghine and U Saw.

If Rangoon Corporation contained men of brains and administrative ability among its members, the general run of local bodies was not well served. An acquaintance with western education and ideas was rare among older Burmans, while the younger generation of Rangoon University graduates was largely absorbed into the civil services. In consequence few members of local authorities were adequately qualified. The great majority did not know English and were unable to understand the reports, contracts and receipts to which they put their names. Few members had business or professional experience, and they were unable to think in terms of large sums of money or to visualise the concrete results of their decisions. Local bodies, as in India, often included members whose principal motive was their own profit. There were very few real crooks, but the number of members who were entirely selfless was also not very large: the majority were in between—accepting bribes, or rather the offerings of custom—but only to a moderate extent.

The district councils were often dominated by teachers. The majority of primary schools with which local bodies were concerned were privately owned, but were almost entirely dependent upon aid from public money. It was obviously in teachers' interests, as a class and as individuals, to be well represented on rural boards. The high regard in which the Burman holds his saya—teacher, eased the way to election. Some district councils actually contained a majority of teacher-members (as in Tharrawaddy). Another notable group in rural bodies were village headmen. Under the 1921 Act, any thugyi elected to a district council must resign from his former office. Perhaps this is a further example of the unfortunate division of functions whereby 'local self-government' and 'local administration' were kept apart in water-tight compartments. It frequently happened that a headman elected to a district council would refuse to resign—while his local influence would be strong enough to deter anyone else from seeking election in his place. In such cases the difficulty would be resolved by the Commissioner *nominating* the headman for the (so called) unfilled vacancy. After the first elections, 132 of the 574 members of district councils were thugyis. Thereafter the Act was more strictly enforced: in 1925 only twenty-three headmen were thus nominated, and in 1928 only fourteen. The effacement of the thugyis from rural bodies removed from their counsels a class of men who might have contributed much local knowledge, and exercised a moderating influence.

Whereas in India, an able chairman might often galvanise a listless board into some sort of efficiency, in most Burma local bodies the chairman differed in no way from other members. This may be explained partly by the character of Burmese society, partly by the sudden acceleration of local government in the province. Before the British came the leaders of Burmese society were the Eaters of provinces or townships—quasi officials; there were no hereditary landlords. After the British occupation the old officials either entered British service, or led revolts, or quietly retired into decent obscurity. We have further observed how the myo thugyis (of whom only some eighty remained) and the taik or ywa thugyis were deprived by law of their title to leadership before entering the new local bodies.

Thus Burmese society had no 'natural' leaders great or small—no counterpart of taluqdar or safed posh, to take command as of right in local affairs. Then there was almost no equivalent of the new Indian middle class created by the law, politics and commerce; such as there were, they mostly saw bigger opportunities in provincial politics.

Again, in contrast to India there was no preparation, however short, for the responsibilities of representative government. Indian non-official gentlemen had received some training in local government, particularly in municipal affairs, in preparation for the hand-over. They had served on finance committees, assumed considerable responsibility as vice-chairmen, and in some cases had brief experience as chairmen; so that some leaders had emerged during the transition era. But in Burma, control over local bodies and local affairs had been confined exclusively to officials, and Burmans had almost no training in administrative technique or leadership.

Rangoon was exceptional in producing a succession of competent, even distinguished chairmen. Elsewhere the new men were often figures of straw. In the countryside, the office of chairman, requiring as it did tact, firmness, knowledge of local resources and needs, understanding of the staff—was of necessity held by an untutored novice. With no tradition of public duty behind the chair, it often became a source of private profit—secured initially by substantial payments to a majority of the members. Within a few brief years many irregularities among chairmen were discovered. Insein District provides perhaps the most notorious example of the perversion of the responsibilities of the chair. In 1925 the chairman of the municipality was removed after a public enquiry into grave financial irregularities; at the same time the chairman of the district school board was prosecuted for embezzlement of teachers' pay and while he was standing trial he was elected chairman of the Insein District Council![1]

These scandals were of course exceptional and their crudity is evidence of the growing pains of the new local bodies rather than of their wickedness. Corruption was not peculiar to local government—it had always existed, and assumed vicious pro-

[1] Burma, District Council Reports, 1925–6.

portions among the officials and police enrolled at the time of the pacification of Burma. The 'Report of the Bribery and Corruption Committee' (1941) was to reveal its insidious ubiquity. It must be remembered that Burmese public opinion traditionally expected public men to take presents; the majority of members and officials in following a bad custom were usually content with a moderate and customary bribe.

The new District Councils started—as did many Indian local bodies, by attempting to transact all business in full council, without delegating powers to committees. As a result, meetings were made tedious by a mass of unimportant detail, and sometimes dragged on for two or three days. After a few years' experience, most rural bodies created a Finance Committee to prepare the annual budget, and some formed sub-committees for public works, public health and markets. Limited powers were sometimes delegated to chairmen and senior officials, but boards were loath to surrender real authority and officials were subject to much interference: under at least two councils (Akyab and Shwebo) the prior sanction of the full Council was necessary for any petty disbursement, such as the replacement of a pane of glass.

Members' handling of public money was often lax. They were slow to grasp the principle that expenditure must not habitually exceed revenue, and to distinguish any significance between recurring and non-recurring income.[1] Accounts were not checked, contracts at high rates were awarded to unknown contractors in preference to lower tenders from experienced firms in order to encourage Burman enterprise. Funds were lavished upon hospitals in the early days, when other services starved. The collection of taxes was dilatory and many boards refused to revise their antiquated methods of assessment—sometimes because these rested lightly upon themselves or their influential supporters. Little attempt was made to obtain the maximum yield from bazaar rents—and always, fresh taxation was tenaciously resisted.

Reform of financial inefficiency was (somewhat paradoxically) impeded by the reform of audit practice in the early 1920's. The pre-Dyarchy audit of local funds had been very

[1] ISC, xi, 444 and 466.

perfunctory, and when the popular boards started to function, a much higher standard of accountancy was demanded. The auditors were at first excessively meticulous; local authority staffs, many untrained, were unable to maintain the desired standards; objections mounted up and remained unremedied from one audit to the next. The bulk of objections became almost overwhelming and reduced audit to futility: for along with mere technical errors in book-keeping, serious defalcation and waste of public money were left unchecked. The attempt to raise financial standards spawned new abuses instead.

Members were often quite bewildered by this mass of paper in an unknown language and many asserted that as their office was honorary they would not be held responsible for maladministration.[1] Kyaukse District Council failed to collect its dues or maintain accounts for months on end, and when warned by Government, the members refused to admit their responsibility; at last the board was superseded. The province's second city, Mandalay, habitually headed the list of embezzlements and other frauds; its board too was superseded from 1929 to 1932.

The transfer of local bodies to popular control did not produce much in the way of new enthusiasm or original thought amongst the new members. Existing services continued to function in a more or less routine fashion. Even Rangoon Corporation was disposed to ignore outstanding problems. Mr. Furnivall[2] has singled out the failure of the Corporation to deal with the problem of coolie accommodation as a prime instance of limited vision and lack of vigour. Certainly the 'Report of the Rangoon Labour Housing Conference' (1931) confirms his accusation and demonstrates the Corporation's method of meeting unpleasant problems by 'masterly inactivity'.[3]

The up-country boards remained unaware of the existence of problems of public health and housing at all. Most towns were equipped with elaborate sanitary by-laws which were very largely unenforced because boards failed to understand their necessity. When public opinion was aroused, then by-

[1] There was no power of surcharge on members responsible for misapplication of funds; a bill was drafted to create such powers but it never secured ministerial support.

[2] In *Colonial Policy and Practice* (London, 1948), pp. 149 and 156.

[3] *See* pp. 300–2 for a fuller account of this problem.

laws were usually effective. Regulations forbidding thatched roofs in a congested urban area, forbidding the washing of clothes in a drinking-water tank or penalising false weights and measures, were understood and enforced. Others controlling the sale of food stuffs, or prescribing minimum building standards would be universally ignored. In such matters the absence of initiative or leadership from outstanding members or officials, left reform in local government practice to the slow and uncertain stimulus of inchoate public opinion.

In Rangoon the old leadership of British officials and commercial men passed to that of Burmese nationalist politicians in the 1920's and '30's. The changeover was rapid, and the charge was handed to men whose quality was unproven and whose ideas and policies were sometimes diffused and ill-defined.

The extent of the change can be measured by the transformation in the senior staff. (See Table 25.)

TABLE 25

	Municipal Commissioner	Heads of Departments		
		British	Indian	Burman
1928	British	8	1	—
1933	Burman	6	1	1
1936	Burman	5	1	2
1938	Burman	4	1	4

Whereas in 1928 not one Burman filled a senior departmental post, within ten years effective control of the municipal executive had passed into the hands of Burmese officials. While certain technical services remained under Englishmen nearing their pensions, policy-making, finance, and staff matters were all controlled by Burmans who were relatively inexperienced, even if well up to the technical standards of their predecessors. The relationship between members and staff was a very critical factor in local administration everywhere. As in India many members showed irresponsibility in staff matters. There was the same failure to take disciplinary action against staff detected in gross irregularities; the sale of appointments, promotion and transfers; the conferring of favours upon staff for factious motives. Members were often careless in their appointments,

and would engage persons of doubtful character. Nevertheless, boards often did appoint competent men; as any candidate for local government service would have to pay the customary bribe for his appointment, the members would often appoint the best man available (the rake-off being the same anyway).

If the quality of staff was adversely affected by the attitude of the boards, it was finally determined by the extent of local resources. Most municipalities and many district councils could not afford to pay adequate salaries for qualified personnel. Besides, there was a general shortage of many categories of experienced officials, particularly among technicians. For some years only two district councils employed engineers, and even by 1937 less than half the districts had their own engineers; the rest relied upon unqualified and ill-paid 'overseers' or foremen. Similarly with doctors: only four of the twenty-eight district councils, and sixteen of the fifty-eight municipalities employed health officers. In general only some half-a-dozen towns could afford an adequate staff; some among the Lower Burma district councils were well-served; other rural bodies and the majority of municipalities were without trained officials. Many petty municipalities employed a poorly paid clerk for the key post of Secretary.

District councils had to build up their administration out of nothing, and many of their early troubles can be ascribed to a complete absence of experienced seniors. The Burma Government attempted to raise the standard of secretaries by the institution of a special qualifying examination which all aspirants for senior posts were encouraged to take. It was passed by many of the Lower Burma secretaries, but it was a very exceptional qualification in Upper Burma. Accountancy classes were also promoted, and the Government Engineering School at Insein trained some engineers for local bodies.

The usual judgment upon the quality of local officers and servants was that they were mostly not up to their jobs.[1] One's attention is inevitably caught by the piles of audit objections—the catalogue of scandals and prosecutions. But it seems that at least in the case of those authorities who paid their officials proper salaries, there was a noticeable improvement as the

[1] E.g. ISC, xi, 442 and 465–6.

years wore on and experience was gained. Mr. B. Swithinbank (whose knowledge of Burmese local authorities is probably wider than that of anyone else) states categorically that the secretarial and clerical work of local government was done as well as that of their counterparts in government offices: staff were as 'efficient as their employers would let them be'.

Chief officers and engineers were certainly severely limited by a host of problems. Municipal development was restricted by the poverty of existing revenues, by the difficulty of raising rates of taxation (an elaborate reference to Government which took almost a year was involved), and through the general indifference of Burmans to many public services (such as drainage and sewage disposal). Most Burmese municipalities were small static market towns, and any great expansion of resources was impossible: in fact there was a decline in their revenues after the slump. There was a nominal increase in the incidence per head of taxation over this period, but the increase was uneven and seldom sustained. In some of the more prosperous towns the level of taxation was falling: in Maymyo the incidence per head fell from Rs. 8-7 as. in 1923 to Rs. 7-13 as. in 1937, and in the same period at Akyab from Rs. 6-11 as. to Rs. 5-13 as.

Revenues from markets remained the staple of municipal finance, providing one-third of the total income. (See Table 26.) Despite the opening of new municipal markets there was no overall increase in the yield; the slump depressed trade and brought rents down, but when prosperity returned there was no subsequent increase. Markets were a fruitful source of corrupt gain both to members and staff: the post of Ze-Gaung (or bazaar headman) was usually sold by the board to the highest bidder—who himself retained any rise in profits. The house-tax, of second importance as revenue, increased slightly till 1930 and declined thereafter. Property was often undervalued for municipal taxation, either through 'influence' or bribery, or else because of antiquated and unreliable bases of assessment. Through 'unpunctual and inefficient collection' these resources were only partially exploited. Of the service taxes, the lighting tax (introduced into fifty-two of the fifty-eight municipalities) showed the best returns (2·36 lakhs in 1923; 5 lakhs in 1937). Electric lighting was one of the most popular municipal enter-

TABLE 26

INCOME OF BURMA MUNICIPALITIES (EXCLUDING RANGOON)
(in lakhs)

	1923* to 1924	1924† to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Houses and lands tax	9·92	13·63	12·54	13·06	12·66
Water tax	2·36	2·44	2·78	2·86	2·95
Market revenues	22·95	23·57	24·96	24·70	24·81
Government grants	2·69	2·79	5·00	7·68	7·79
Total income	60·14	68·15	69·10	74·57	74·18
Total expenditure	62·33	64·78	66·63	65·32	75·46

	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Houses and lands tax	13·08	13·49	12·73	12·79	13·24
Water tax	3·03	3·44	3·57	3·77	3·75
Market revenues	25·73	25·99	25·11	22·97	22·61
Government grants	8·27	2·80	3·72	2·89	2·92
Total income	76·88	75·11	73·53	68·97	68·82
Total expenditure	75·46	75·77	75·00	68·65	66·28

	1933‡ to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Houses and lands tax	12·41	12·30	12·60	12·21	12·14
Water tax	3·62	3·59	3·79	3·59	3·59
Market revenues	21·85	21·75	21·77	21·66	21·29
Government grants	2·00	1·44	1·63	1·60	1·47
Total income	66·57	66·94	68·04	67·20	66·16
Total expenditure	67·59	65·39	64·75	65·83	64·92

*1923: 56 municipalities.
†1924: 57 municipalities.
‡1934: 58 municipalities.

prises: most non-official boards voluntarily imposed this service tax without pressure from above. The revenue from pawnshops also nearly doubled (1923, 2·75 lakhs; 1937, 4·95 lakhs)—some indication of an expanding national income, for these pawnshops were the poor man's bank. Grants-in-aid which had averaged seven lakhs annually in the previous decade, were cut from 8·27 lakhs (1928) to 1·47 lakhs in 1937: following the slump, Ministers devoted their dwindled resources to the rural boards. As municipalities relied upon government assistance to carry out new schemes of drainage, water supply, etc., the drop in grants meant an almost complete cessation of all capital works in the 1930's. Very few loans were contracted by municipalities—token of the small scale of their operations, and a lack of familiarity with large-scale business enterprise.

The revenues of Rangoon Corporation were well administered; two-thirds of Rangoon's income came from taxes and less than one-tenth from market revenues, whereas the other municipalities drew two-fifths to one-half of their income from taxes, but one-third from market revenues. (See Table 27.)

It was some measure of the integrity of the Corporation that the city's public utilities—electric lighting and water supplies, were financed entirely from service taxes and did not fall upon the general taxpayer. Following the slump assessments were lowered again and collections fell off badly; whereas the total yield from taxes was over 77 lakhs in 1930, the figures declined year by year to 57½ lakhs in 1936, but thereafter they were stabilised. The Corporation's management of its fourteen markets was open to criticism: operating costs averaged two-thirds of revenue, and the new Scott Market erected at enormous cost was never a success: half the stalls remained permanently unoccupied. Most of the large-scale public works in Rangoon were financed out of loans; the Corporation carried out a successful loan programme during the 1920's, 144 lakhs being borrowed at 5 per cent interest either at or above par. The slump stopped all borrowing for a time, but in 1936 a water-supply loan of 150 lakhs (£1,120,000) was floated at par bearing 3¼ per cent interest—evidence that the credit of Rangoon Corporation as a sound undertaking remained high in the confidence of the general public.

TABLE 27

INCOME OF RANGOON MUNICIPALITY
(in lakhs)

	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Houses and lands tax	15·99	16·58	19·47	20·37	22·15
Water tax	12·29	12·52	13·69	14·20	15·53
Market revenues	5·91	6·35	6·27	5·95	8·08
Government grants	0·48	0·48	0·48	0·48	0·48
Total income	69·09	73·86	80·59	85·83	93·15
Loans	45·00	—	38·94	40·89	—
Total expenditure	69·16	97·72	102·40	92·30	102·62

	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Houses and lands tax	23·79	24·60	29·43	24·34	22·04
Water tax	16·81	17·31	17·96	16·60	15·10
Market revenues	7·58	7·26	7·23	6·71	6·57
Government grants	0·48	0·48	0·48	0·48	0·48
Total income	99·36	101·23	104·31	99·48	93·32
Loans	19·13	—	—	—	—
Total expenditure	101·94	99·87	91·45	88·85	82·89

	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Houses and lands tax	20·42	20·04	19·94	19·09	20·16
Water tax	14·52	14·08	13·77	13·06	13·59
Market revenues	6·50	6·65	6·54	6·30	6·69
Government grants	0·48	0·43	0·43	0·51	0·43
Total income	98·54	88·40	89·51	90·11	90·34
Loans	—	—	—	150·00	—
Total expenditure	78·94	81·70	78·92	87·81	92·31

TABLE 28

EXPENDITURE OF BURMA MUNICIPALITIES
(in lakhs)

	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Education	4·66	4·89	6·95	7·23	7·73
Medical services	5·92	1·34	0·83	0·69	0·52
Public works	10·26	10·38	10·85	10·60	10·82
Water supply	2·54	2·15	4·48	2·64	2·21
Conservancy	12·80	13·50	13·05	13·15	13·78
Drainage	0·53	0·74	0·67	0·62	1·06
Administration	7·15	6·90	7·14	7·93	7·98
Total expenditure	62·33	64·78	66·63	65·32	75·46

	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Education	7·42	8·11	8·86	8·19	7·85
Medical services	0·51	0·66	—	0·80	1·05
Public works	18·05	13·52	13·67	10·14	9·37
Water supply	9·12	3·94	3·43	2·96	4·04
Conservancy	14·60	14·16	13·97	13·00	12·00
Drainage	1·40	0·85	0·64	0·75	0·86
Administration	9·35	8·61	8·28	8·69	7·31
Total expenditure	87·51	75·77	75·00	68·65	66·28

	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Education	8·15	8·08	8·25	8·82	8·79
Medical services	0·97	0·86	7·18	0·84	1·06
Public works	9·39	8·87	8·61	8·49	8·52
Water supply	5·55	3·43	2·53	2·79	2·37
Conservancy	11·47	11·06	10·98	11·02	11·10
Drainage	1·09	0·90	1·03	0·90	0·73
Administration	7·64	7·46	7·57	7·60	7·97
Total expenditure	67·59	65·34	64·75	65·83	64·92

Outside of Rangoon, municipal services operated upon a very limited scale. (See Table 28.)

The only services to undergo any notable expansion were education and electric street lighting.[1] At first some of the smaller towns entered Joint School Boards with district councils, but the partnerships produced much dissatisfaction, and after a few years each municipality was established as a separate education authority. As a result, several of the smaller towns controlled only five or six schools and supervision was very slight—another evil result of the 'isolation' of the smaller municipalities. Towns showed varying degrees of enthusiasm for education. They were under statutory obligation to devote 5 per cent of their income to this head; a few towns (including Mandalay) habitually failed to spend up to the statutory minimum—others allotted up to 40 per cent of their revenues for education.

Burma municipalities showed a genuine enthusiasm for electric lighting. In 1923 only six towns had electricity; by 1937 all fifty-eight municipalities were electrified; the service being operated by private companies.

Water was still often drawn from open wells (as in Mandalay) and in the dry zone shortages and hardship were accepted as normal. Although Burmans like good water, only six towns had adequate piped supplies; some others had water pumped from tanks or tube-wells and distributed to stand pipes, but municipal poverty prevented better systems. In round terms, every year some twenty municipalities spent over Rs. 1,000 (or £75) upon drainage and Rs. 1,000 upon water supply; twenty spent under Rs. 1,000 on either service—and twenty spent virtually nothing upon either water or drains.

The scale of public services in Rangoon was in a category apart; expenditure was much higher than in all other towns in Burma put together. (See Table 29.) There was a very rapid increase in spending in the 1920's, and despite a subsequent decline there was an overall increase in expenditure of one-third, between 1923 and 1937. Yet only education and medical services showed a sustained and substantial increase.

Late in 1922 primary education in the city had been trans-

[1] Lighting expenditure was 4½ lakhs in 1923, 6¾ lakhs in 1929 and 6¾ lakhs in 1937.

TABLE 29

EXPENDITURE OF RANGOON MUNICIPALITY
(in lakhs)

	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Education	2·00	2·85	2·85	3·45	4·25
Medical services	0·95	1·33	1·68	1·27	2·01
Public works	11·82	16·44	11·59	14·46	22·79
Water supply	10·42	19·70	19·44	10·74	11·59
Conservancy	11·20	11·18	12·98	14·29	13·45
Drainage	2·57	3·19	3·84	4·20	4·66
Administration	5·50	6·30	9·03	11·75	10·00
Total expenditure	69·16	97·72	102·40	92·30	102·62

	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Education	5·00	4·00	6·25	6·25	7·49
Medical services	1·84	1·69	1·98	1·85	2·32
Public works	25·43	19·89	15·25	13·02	8·84
Water supply	7·75	10·61	8·26	7·08	6·96
Conservancy	12·98	13·92	14·72	16·01	13·55
Drainage	4·18	5·68	3·46	3·51	2·97
Administration	8·77	8·83	8·72	9·18	10·56
Total expenditure	101·94	97·87	91·49	88·85	82·89

	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Education	6·86	7·36	6·90	6·97	6·70
Medical services	2·41	3·20	3·60	3·50	3·22
Public works	8·51	8·46	7·85	7·84	7·20
Water supply	6·84	6·02	6·40	12·81	18·52
Conservancy	13·35	13·28	13·39	14·24	12·45
Drainage	2·52	2·28	2·46	2·36	2·50
Administration	8·87	11·74	9·86	11·44	9·32
Total expenditure	78·94	81·70	78·92	87·51	92·31

ferred to an Education Board to which the Corporation contributed a majority of members. The board in 1923 controlled one hundred and eight schools (only four of which were board schools, the remainder being private 'aided' schools); many were held in tenement rooms and there were 8,628 pupils. Expenditure was more than trebled by 1931: much of the increase going into paying adequate salaries to teachers. Education policy was to 'concentrate': inefficient schools forfeited their grants, and the better schools were expanded. The number of pupils was more than doubled—to 18,154, but was still only small in a city of 400,000 persons (even though an unusually large proportion were adults).

Health conditions among all but the middle classes remained deplorable by western standards, but the period saw a measurable improvement in the health of the community, brought about in some part by improved medical services. Municipal dispensaries increased from one to seven, five infant welfare centres were opened, health visitors and midwives were sent to work in the city's slums. Infant mortality figures provide a valid guide to the efficiency of civic health services: statistics over a short period may be misleading, but the figures for infant deaths were distinctly lower in the '30's than in the previous decade.[1] Yet there were many gaps in the health services, and nothing was done to improve the living conditions of the working classes among whom T.B. was ever on the increase, and epidemics of cholera and plague were almost annual visitations. There was practically no municipal provision of working-class dwellings, and a continual failure to enforce the building by-laws against the tenements provided by private interests.

Only moderate progress was made towards solving the water problem. There was a perennial shortage of water during the hot weather, and at the time of the water-festival; each year the situation seemed to become more acute and the murmur of public dissatisfaction grew louder. The matter was debated, examined, deferred for some ten years; at last in 1935, a large-

[1] *Infant mortality per 100, 1923–37.* 1923, 27·7 per cent; 1924, 35·2 per cent; 1925, 27·1 per cent; 1926, 32 per cent; 1927, 29·4 per cent; 1928, 34 per cent; 1929, 31·7 per cent; 1930, 27·8 per cent; 1931, 27·8 per cent; 1932, 28·5 per cent; 1933, 25·7 per cent; 1934, 27·1 per cent; 1935, 25·3 per cent; 1936, 24·3 per cent; 1937, 24·8 per cent.

scale project to obtain water from the Pegu Yomas (Hills) was adopted. Work began in 1937, but the plant and pipelines were barely completed before the Japanese occupation.

Perhaps this sketch will serve to indicate some of the influences in Rangoon civic development. The scope of municipal services was determined before 1923, under the stimulus of British officials and business-men. They wanted western amenities: a good water supply, clean well-paved main streets, public gardens, the regulation of nuisances. Increased Burman representation in the new Corporation brought little change; the new members—lawyers or professional men—were partially 'western' in outlook, the existing range of services was accepted, though their standards were less exacting, and a little dirt and dust was allowed to accumulate. Only in the field of education were nationalist leaders conscious of a need for wider efforts. The ideas of the ordinary public did not crystallise into a conscious demand for any public services, and were anyway unlikely to find expression under the existing electoral system. The initiative in social services had to come from the stimulus of an outstanding chief officer (and in the 1930's these were Englishmen about to retire, or Burmans new to their jobs)—or under the pressure of private individuals or societies. Only in the case of maternity and infant welfare did such outside pressure become effective. Rangoon civic life had discarded the old official leadership, but had not yet found an alternative source of vitality. In its absence public services fell into a mechanical routine which could not long be maintained without loss of efficiency.

The new rural authorities were handicapped by the meagre nature of their resources, and their inability to impose fresh taxation, even if they desired so to do. (See Table 30.)

It is difficult to trace any pattern in such apparently haphazard figures. The levy of the 10 per cent land cess was still confined to Lower Burma, and about three-quarters of the total was collected in Pegu and Irrawaddy Divisions. Altogether local sources of revenue were six times higher in Lower Burma than in the north.[1] The transfer of the cess from district

[1] Cf. *Incidence of Taxation:* Arakan, 8as; Pegu and Irrawaddy, 3as; Tenasserim, 2as; Magwe, Mandalay, Sagaing, North-West Border Division, nil. (1924–5 figures.)

TABLE 30

INCOME OF DISTRICT COUNCILS
(in lakhs)

	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Land revenue cess	20·70	12·07	32·57	36·37	27·30
Market revenues	7·48	8·22	8·71	9·40	9·65
Government grants	15·35	13·60	32·04	36·74	39·63
(Education grants)	(4 (?))	(4·47)	(19·93)	(18·84)	(18·94)
Total income	55·29	45·93	83·84	98·30	84·60
Total expenditure	56·30	51·92	71·97	76·94	83·93

	19. 8 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Land revenue cess	27·98	24·87	10·19	32·55	20·50*
Market revenues	9·49	10·06	9·73	8·27	9·12
Government grants	43·36	43·36	43·00	35·87	34·42
(Education grants)	(20·00)	(21·21)	(21·31)	(19·09)	(19·77)
Total income	88·84	86·69	70·74	82·24	69·74
Total expenditure	94·81	95·80	92·37	81·29	71·22

	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Land revenue cess	24·01	25·72	29·88	27·21	19·94
Market revenues	9·33	9·09	9·05	8·67	8·80
Government grants	34·52	31·13	33·52	33·71	39·40
(Education grants)	(20·09)	(17·95)	(19·91)	(20·14)	(20·23)
Total income	73·92	72·56	79·20	76·38	74·69
Total expenditure	70·99	66·05	70·27	74·50	79·66

*Heavy remissions of land revenue: crop failures.

treasuries to local bodies was not the smooth routine affair it had become in India. The revenue staff bungled the initial distribution of the cess, and thereafter continued to transfer funds irregularly and without warning. Few district councils knew their entitlement or took steps to claim it; in 1924 Pyapon, one of the richest districts, received Rs. 607 instead of the two and a half lakhs which were due.

The Upper Burma districts with no land cess, relied for some 80 per cent of their income upon government grants. In Lower Burma, grants formed about 28 per cent of income; four districts functioned entirely without government assistance. A typical yearly disbursement of grants was as follows: Mandalay Division—5·34 lakhs; Irawaddy Division—1·21 lakhs; Tenasserim—2·02 lakhs; North-West Border Division—5·04 lakhs; Pegu Division—1·44 lakhs; Arakan—·09 lakhs. The greater portion of these grants were distributed upon a 'poverty' basis. Aid was supposed to be conditional upon councils attaining a minimum standard of efficiency. In 1927 a 'permanent settlement' stabilised the hitherto fluctuating grants. Distribution was made through the provincial departments of Education, Public Health, etc., and although sums were not earmarked for specific purposes, councils were supposed to be amenable to advice. In practice grants were never withheld for inefficiency or refusal to heed official suggestions; such action would have supplied political tinder for the legislature. Those authorities who were wholly dependent upon grants proved the most irresponsible in their spending; resources were exhausted, and further applications for aid followed, with no plan or programme. Other resources made over to rural bodies by Government included cattle-pound receipts, fees for ferry rights, pawnshop licences, and the revenues from markets and slaughter-houses. Under popular control, the yield from markets and pawnshops increased, while ferry and cattle-pound revenues fell off due to members' lack of interest. Under the Rural Self-Government Act, councils were empowered to levy a tax on circumstances and property: but Government never provided the machinery to put this section into force, and it remained wholly inoperative.

The activity of rural bodies was thus perpetually restricted

by meagre inelastic revenues, and development could only be contrived by expedients: a new road was built by abandoning an old road, a new school opened by closing one already existing. (See Table 31.)

TABLE 31

EXPENDITURE OF DISTRICT COUNCILS
(in lakhs)

	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928
Education	17·25	19·19	28·92	34·14	35·08
Medical services	6·13	8·23	8·51	11·89	13·47
Public works	19·66	13·49	20·64	19·61	23·37
Administration	4·26	5·14	5·47	5·61	5·58
Total expenditure	56·30	51·92	71·97	76·94	83·93

	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932	1932 to 1933
Education	37·27	38·75	39·18	36·68	33·97
Medical services	14·80	14·85	15·82	12·92	12·06
Public works	28·62	28·56	26·16	19·49	15·98
Administration	7·35	6·62	6·14	6·21	5·62
Total expenditure	94·81	95·80	92·37	81·29	72·22

	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Education	33·61	31·37	33·92	34·53	35·18
Medical services	11·82	11·35	11·82	12·90	13·04
Public works	15·96	14·12	15·33	17·23	20·04
Administration	5·66	5·30	5·27	5·58	6·39
Total expenditure	70·99	66·05	70·27	74·50	79·66

There was an increase of 106 per cent in education costs, and an increase of 44 per cent in scholars. Expenditure upon education rose rapidly after 1918, and was directed largely to improving the pay and status of the village teacher, who had pre-

viously almost always been the village cripple whose only salary was an occasional gift of rice. Despite a certain amount of waste, there was a notable improvement in the calibre of teachers in this period. A planned development programme of 250 new schools a year—to be opened in the most necessitous districts—was laid down by the 1924 Vernacular Education Committee, and carried through in part, upon funds from Government. In many district councils there was very little planning; councils unable to pay even the existing cadre of teachers would open new schools to please influential members. Henzada took on 154 additional teachers between 1923 and 1925—with no means to pay for any of them; in 1924 Tharrawaddy was compelled to close fifty-four schools through funds running out. In 1932 the full effects of the depression made themselves felt, and schools had to be closed for lack of funds. In some cases enforced economy brought an increase in efficiency, and the least satisfactory schools were weeded out. Altogether the work of the School Boards 'was generally admitted to be the best feature of rural administration.'[1]

District councils devoted about one-sixth of their income to medical services, but the demands upon rural hospitals soon outstripped their resources. After the slump, councils economized drastically upon this head and many buildings deteriorated while few new hospitals were opened.[2]

As elsewhere the upkeep of roads was the least satisfactory aspect of rural administration: it was a task that was beyond their capabilities. In their early years, district councils spent considerably less than had been normal in the past; expenditure increased in the late 1920's, but roads were the first item to feel the economy axe,[3] and in many districts they began to deteriorate. The reasons for neglect were not all of the councils' making: it was necessary to build up local public works staff from nothing and councils were obliged to rely upon the provincial P.W.D. for most of their work. The provincial staff had 'run down' during 1914–18, and it was unequal to many of the district councils' requirements: in 1927 it was unable to fulfil contracts

[1] ISC, xi, 502.

[2] Cf. contributions to hospitals: 1924, 5 lakhs; 1927–30, 6¾ lakhs; 1937, 2¼ lakhs.

[3] Cf. road expenditure: 1923, 12·57 lakhs; 1929, 24·30 lakhs; 1934, 11·15 lakhs.

in nine districts. Moreover, under the rules, local bodies had to pay the P.W.D. for a job before any work was commenced. Money was tied up in advance, and then if the P.W.D. could not carry out the work there might be a two years' delay before the money was refunded. Such a cumbrous procedure meant that defects were not mended as they were noticed, planning was impossible, and budgeting was reduced to a juggling problem. It was another example of a service being crippled by faulty administrative machinery.

The transition from autocratic to democratic government in the village was hampered by badly adjusted administrative machinery, and by a fluid and crude climate of opinion. The dichotomy between 'administration' and 'local self-government' promoted disharmony in village government.

The Rural Self-Government Act of 1921 provided for the establishment of village committees who were to receive powers and funds from the circle boards. The precise nature of these delegated functions was never defined but, as district councils retained all powers and all the money, the circle boards were shadows—and village committees were sometimes not even formed. The village headman remained the pillar of village government, but in the 1920's much political activity was directed against headmen as agents of Government, their authority was undermined (more especially in Lower Burma) and village society was further disrupted. In an attempt to associate the villages with administration, and at the same time to placate the advocates of village democracy, the Burma Village (Amendment) Act of 1924 was passed. The office of headman had frequented been filled by election in the past; now elections were introduced everywhere, subject to the veto of the Deputy Commissioner,[1] while village committees consisting of four householders were also to be elected to form a judicial tribunal and to advise the headman on village welfare. These committees were also to be endowed with the (still non-existent) functions delegated by circle boards under the 1921

[1] The D.C. could reject a candidate on account of his 'standing or character or residence' and he could negative the result of an election if a candidate used 'undue influence' or could not furnish security or, in Upper Burma, if an alternative candidate with better hereditary claims stood for election. *See* Sec. 5 (2) of 1924 Act.

Act. At the same time the thugyi's duty to maintain village roads and his right to conscribe the villagers for unpaid labour were abolished.

These changes did not produce much difference in the status of headmen. Many headmen even in Lower Burma had some family claim to the post, although some were complete newcomers including several Indians and a few Chinese. Sometimes the chairman of the local Nationalist Association would be elected—and thereafter would be sure to lose favour with the politicians. In Upper Burma the tradition of 'yoya', heredity, remained strong and elections were something of a formality: families of one or two centuries' standing continued to exercise traditional leadership. But despite the appearance of continuity, under the surface, respect for the thugyi was further undermined.

The new village committees were established in all but the more remote areas of districts, but had little influence. Committees were often composed of the village riff-raff, and the ywa lugyis did not care to be associated with them. Thus there was little competition for membership, the body of the villagers did not respect their authority and their powers were confined to the judicial field in which (apart from the arbitration of the ywa lugyis in matrimonial disputes) there was no Burmese tradition.

The headman retained absolute control over many functions normally associated with local government, such as sanitation, fire precautions, public health and cattle diseases—these were still classed as 'administrative' subjects. The headman was in no way responsible to the district council and there was no link between councils and village communities.

With the abolition of compulsory labour service, villagers considered themselves absolved from all responsibility for local works. They frequently expected the district council or Government to take over such domestic matters as the upkeep of wells. Councils were in fact quite unable to maintain village works for lack of funds or technical resources, so many tracks and bridges fell into disrepair. In some places the influence of the thugyi or some wealthy resident was still sufficiently powerful to ensure that 'voluntary' labour was kept up on village works. A few

government-inspired 'village improvement societies' lived up to their names, but in many delta villages where the 'cash nexus' had atomised society and a man might not know his next-door neighbour, village government was a façade and village services were non-existent.[1]

With the exception of a few of the more prosperous municipalities, popular local government in Burma under Dyarchy had no very impressive record. Burma still felt the procrustean effect of political development upon a British-Indian model. Her new local institutions suffered from constitutional weaknesses due to careless drafting and planning; boards were constantly frustrated for want of money, Burmans were ill-prepared either for executive responsibility or for political leadership, and in the hot-house rise of parties and politicians in the 1920's and '30's, unhealthy elements seemed to choke down more sane and balanced leadership.

In short, this record is largely one of failure, but this is not to be ascribed merely to inefficiency and corruption among members and staff of local boards. Within thirty years Burma was thrust from the middle ages into the modern world, and her peoples were called upon to make impossible social and mental adjustments. An attempt was made to introduce a system of local government—a complicated piece of social and political machinery—originating in England, but passed on to Burma at

[1] The period of the Japanese occupation in Burma, so disastrous in other spheres, served to revive village solidarity in many ways. Movement and emigration became hazardous, and people did not lightly leave their village; the cessation of normal economic transactions drove the peasant back on to a simple subsistence economy. The Japanese interfered very little in the affairs of the village (except when there was active opposition to their régime) and custom ruled unchecked from above. Amidst the uncertainty of war, villagers found some security in the familiar life of the village. The independent Burma Government has adopted a policy for village government which seems to derive little from either the British period or the administration of the Burmese kings. The fifteen point programme issued by the premier, U Nu, in May 1948 provided (point ten) for the development of 'people's committees' in town wards and in the villages. This was implemented by the Democratic Local Self-government Act of February 1949, which put an end to the existing system of village administration. In place of the headman, the Act provides for village councils of eight elders (elected by secret ballot), three of whom will form a village court which is entrusted with wide powers in civil and criminal cases. The super-structure of township-officer and deputy commissioner is to be abolished, and the village council is to be entrusted with many of their powers.

second-hand through India. Hasty ill-planned paper schemes were put into practice, with little regard for Burma's needs or wishes. Such an experiment, launched in difficult times, was almost foredoomed, and it would not be right to assess Burma's capacity for local self-government from the record of these Dyarchy years.

Part III

LOCAL SERVICES, SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION

CHAPTER XIII

Education and Local Authorities

THE purpose of this chapter is to show the inter-relation of vernacular education and local government. No attempt has been made to provide a study of educational progress in the round, but rather to give an indication of the development of the Indian and Burmese attitude to education in a local context, together with a picture of the changes resulting from the transfer of control over vernacular education from officials to elected local bodies.

There was no systematic provision of education in India before the mid-nineteenth century. The most common form of indigenous school was the patshala, a small private institution, usually with only a single teacher, probably a Kayastha, and perhaps a score of boys; Brahmins, Kayasthas and sometimes banias. Education was supposedly based upon the scriptures and moral stories, but was in effect devoted to mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic. Higher education was religious or philosophical in form, in the Persian schools (maktabs) or Sanscrit academies (tols). Studies were formal, and in the early nineteenth century without much vitality; they were available only to the traditionally 'literary' castes—a minute section of the population.

Burma under the Kings provided a striking contrast. Education was in Buddhist eyes the path to enlightenment. All boys complied with the tradition of putting on the saffron robe for a period. Monastic education was entirely divorced from the ideas of the West—a training not for this world, but for the next; but within this concept, the schools gave all Burmese youths a knowledge of the traditional literature and an ability to read and write. This system continued to flourish in Ava in the mid-nineteenth century, but had to some extent broken down in

Lower Burma where many monasteries were pillaged, and monks dispersed before the British occupation.

British interest in primary education began in Bengal about 1815 with the founding of mission schools, and the encouragement of vernacular primary education by the Marquess of Hastings by means of grants to the indigenous schools, but the provision of primary schools as a public service was first organised in 1852 by James Thomason, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces. 'Middle'[1] vernacular schools were established at each tahsil headquarters, as well as government supervised primary schools in large central villages (the 'halqabandi' system). These schools were supported by a one-anna cess upon the land revenue. Elsewhere there was no systematic provision of primary schools; for instance in Bombay only one village in ten possessed a school, and development depended upon missionary activity. These divergences in the early days of primary education were due to the different ideas of local officials rather than to differences in the structure of society in different parts of India; nevertheless they set the pattern of educational development. For instance in the North-Western Provinces, and in Punjab where the Thomason system was followed, the schools directly administered by Government became in time directly managed local board schools; whereas in Madras and Bengal a policy of giving grants-in-aid to private schools was perpetuated into the twentieth century.

The Wood Despatch of 1854 envisaged an integrated system of education with proper provision for primary schools, high schools and universities. Dalhousie adopted the policy with vigour: a central Education Department was established, and in 1854–5 each province was equipped with a Director of Public Instruction and an inspectorate. But almost at once plans were frustrated by the Mutiny and the subsequent lack of funds.

Meanwhile, after the annexation of Pegu there was an educational vacuum in Lower Burma until the appointment of the first D.P.I. in 1866. The monastic schools, although shaken by several years of lawlessness throughout the countryside, still

[1] Middle schools are junior secondary schools, to which children may go from Standard IV or V of the primary school. They cover, roughly, the age-group 10 to 14 or 15.

provided a potential foundation for a system of public education such as did not exist in India. Sir Arthur Phayre and his D.P.I. were both firm believers in the qualities of indigenous Burmese education, and planned to base their primary system upon the monastic schools. But retirement removed them both suddenly from the scene, and new officials appointed from India failed to apply their policy. They became impatient with the unsystematic and obscurantist education of the monasteries, while the Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries were strongly opposed to the support of Buddhism. Accordingly such small sums as the Burma Government could provide were used to promote new lay schools.

During the next thirty years primary education throughout India and Burma stagnated—partly through lack of funds and largely because an agricultural society with no access to the written word, and bound by custom, had little use for formal education. In 1870 the total number of primary schools in British India was still only 16,500 with about half a million pupils. The Hunter Commission of 1883 hoped to stimulate vernacular education by recommending its transfer to the control of local bodies. Varying powers were thereafter delegated to district boards and municipalities. As a result of the Commission's stress upon the importance of primary education, the funds allotted to primary schools by the Imperial Government increased from one-quarter of total education expenditure in 1878, to one-half in 1883. In the following twenty years government contributions to primary education remained static, while the expenditure of local bodies was almost doubled; the numbers of boys at primary schools increased by only 25 per cent over the same period, and remained a fraction of the total at the turn of the century.[1] Many local bodies (especially municipalities) were more interested in furthering secondary education for which there was a real public demand, as the avenue to employment in public service or business houses.

This unsatisfactory situation was reviewed by Lord Curzon's government in 1904.[2] Centralised control over primary educa-

[1] Boys in primary schools: 1886, 2,381,217 (17 per cent of boys of school age); 1901, 3,070,191 (18·5 per cent of boys of school age).

[2] Resolution issued by the Governor-General in Council on 11 March 1904: 'Indian Education Policy'.

tion by Government was asserted once again: all budget estimates of district and municipal boards had to be submitted to the provincial Director of Public Instruction for his sanction, and teaching methods were to conform to a provincial curriculum. In many provinces (e.g. Bombay) education was already so rigidly controlled by the provincial education department that centralisation was already complete; elsewhere full departmental authority was re-established. The district boards of Madras, U.P., Bengal and Bihar had maintained their own inspecting staff, and these officials were now entirely provincialised; in Burma, schools previously managed by Rangoon and other municipalities were taken over by Government.

The education structure varied from province to province; in Madras, Bengal, Bihar and Burma the majority of primary schools functioned under private management, while in the remaining provinces local bodies largely maintained their own schools. Thus, in Bombay three-quarters of the primary schools[1] were 'board' schools, which were staffed by teachers from a provincial cadre and responsible to the (provincial) Deputy Education Inspector; although nominally they were under the control of district boards and some of the larger municipalities who were entitled to determine where schools should be located and what fees should be paid. Local bodies in fact always followed the policy of the department in these matters. Almost one-quarter of the 'recognised' schools in Bombay were private institutions in receipt of financial assistance from local boards. Bombay local boards had no share in the working of secondary education. This centralised system continued with little modification until 1923, and produced reasonably efficient schools, without being in any way a genuine function of local government.

U.P. boards had considerably greater control over vernacular education. As a result of the centralising Curzon policy, local bodies relinquished control over high schools in 1907, and most of the small towns handed over their primary schools to district boards. Two-thirds of primary schools were district board

[1] In Bombay, 'primary' schools included all schools teaching from the infants class to Class VII in a vernacular language; in U.P. and Burma a primary school teaches only up to Class IV—vernacular classes from V to VII or VIII are grouped in 'middle' schools. Allowance must be made for this variation in comparing numbers of scholars in different provinces.

schools with teaching staff and inspectors appointed and supervised by individual boards. The great majority of middle-schools were also under board management. About one-third of primary schools were 'aided' private institutions. The state of primary education in U.P. early in the twentieth century was considered by the education department to be widely unsatisfactory, and in 1911 the Lieutenant-Governor instituted an enquiry into each district board's system of management. Despite the dominance of District Officers in local affairs, the findings of the enquiry disclosed a 'want of continuity in education policy, schools have been opened and closed at haphazard', boards had developed aided schools—then board schools—then reverted to aided schools. The Lieutenant-Governor thereupon ordered a tightening-up of the control of the education department.

In most other provinces the local board schools were subject to degrees of control by the education department more akin to that in Bombay than in U.P. In those provinces where schools were mainly under private control the share of local bodies in their control was even slighter. In Madras about 75 per cent of the schools were private institutions aided by local funds. The Director of Public Education in Madras characterised the control of local boards over education in his province in 1907 as 'nominal'.[1] In Bengal over 99 per cent of the schools were 'aided' schools; and whereas the Bombay and Madras city corporations maintained 195 and 21 primary board schools respectively, in Calcutta there were only private proprietary schools to which the Corporation gave grants equivalent to ·2 per cent of its total expenditure.

Local control over education was perhaps weakest in Burma: in 1908 there was just one local board school. There were about five thousand aided schools, of which some two thousand were monastic schools; most aided schools consisted of one teacher (often the village cripple) and about thirty pupils. A system of 'results grants', long abolished in India, still obtained in these schools. In the main, primary education in Burma was no concern of local bodies: about four of every five schools were 'unrecognised' monastic schools, almost completely outside the

[1] DCR, ii, 62.

orbit of the education department. Of the so-called 'middle' vernacular schools, of which there were a large number in Burma—many being virtually elementary schools—only a few were under board management; the vast majority were private institutions. Altogether, local bodies played virtually no part in Burmese education before 1923—even the allocation of municipal budgets was entirely decided by the education department. Municipalities in Upper Burma did not have even a nominal share in education, and contributed nothing to the upkeep of schools.[1]

If the public had little positive say in local education policy in the Curzon era, it maintained a sort of passive check upon official activity, which often became bogged down in problems rooted in public prejudice. For instance, the education of girls in U.P. achieved almost nothing before the Reforms; in 1910 'stagnation is reported in Benares, indifference in Allahabad, retrogression in Gorakhpur and actual hostility in Lucknow'.[2] As a general picture, it was said in 1917 that female education was still regarded as 'the harmless if unprofitable fad of the powers that be'[3]—public feeling still expressed itself in aversion or indifference, attitudes with which the taluqdars and other territorial leaders were strongly associated. Consequently almost no respectable lady would enter the teaching profession, and girls' schools languished. In Bombay a similar situation obtained, though lightened by the energetic advocacy of a few devoted supporters of female education, and societies for social reform such as the Seva Sadan. In pre-1914 Burma also, there was considerable prejudice against the admission into monastic institutions. The untouchable communities of India were generally excluded from the benefits of education, especially when board schools were held in temples or private houses. Special depressed class schools were opened in U.P. and Bombay but caste teachers were most reluctant to work therein, and these new institutions made little headway. In these and other ways local opinion offered obstacles to the plans of education officials.

[1] Whereas in U.P. the minimum expenditure of a municipality upon primary education was fixed at 5 per cent, in Lower Burma the *maximum* expenditure must not exceed 5 per cent.

[2] U.P., District Board Reports, 1909–10.

[3] U.P., Municipal Reports, 1916–17.

In 1911, G. K. Gokhale introduced a bill into the Imperial Legislative Council to permit local bodies to make education compulsory for boys between six and ten years of age.[1] The bill was opposed by Government and rejected as impracticable—nevertheless Sir Harcourt Butler, as government spokesman, accepted perforce the principle of compulsion, and he indicated that the appropriate legislation should be introduced into provincial legislatures.

The 'Coronation Durbar' grants, and other assistance from the central government stimulated a programme of expansion, which included the raising of teachers' meagre pay, and an increase in the number of trained teachers (in 1912 trained teachers formed about one-quarter of the total in primary schools), as well as improvements in school accommodation—most schools were still held in rented rooms, rest-houses, temples, or in the open air. In 1913 the Government of India presented a plan for doubling the number of boys at school; the plan was put into operation, but soon came into war-time difficulties. From 1915 the central government was preoccupied with problems of political advance upon which it was felt the future of education policies depended. The Education Circular of 19 September 1916 was an acknowledgment that times were changing, and admitted in principle a substantial degree of local control over primary schools. During the later years of the war the central government had little surplus money for new education schemes, but in 1918, before hostilities concluded, the Imperial Government was planning a new programme of expansion, and made grants of thirty lakhs available for the purpose.

As a result of the outbreak of war in 1914, the putting into practice by provincial governments of these changes in Imperial policy was delayed beyond the usual interval, and was sometimes distorted into something quite different from the intention of the central department of education. At first the 1913 programme achieved good results: teachers' pay was raised, and new schools were opened, but after 1915, financial difficulties slowed down expansion. The check was particularly disastrous in Burma where the education department had rapidly 'recog-

[1] Compulsory education was already established in Baroda State.

nised' large numbers of monastic schools and given them financial aid—only to disregister them again between 1917 and 1922 as inefficient. This *volte-face* may have put Burmese opinion against the integration of monastic schools into the public system, and driven some of the monks into anti-government politics. In U.P., wartime failings led to the setting up of the Piggot Committee, which made proposals for a reorganisation of primary education by means of the division of the province into 'circles' of twenty-five square miles, with a large well-equipped primary school in each circle; introduced in 1916, this scheme achieved no particular success. The uncertainty of the wartime period upset all careful departmental calculations.

With the return of peace, plans were resumed with a new note of urgency in the face of popular demands for mass education.

Compulsory education was placed upon the statute book as a result of private bills in several provincial legislatures. Bombay led the way: V. J. Patel (long a protagonist of compulsion) introduced a bill which became law in February 1918. Any municipality might introduce compulsory education if it wished, provided there was a two-thirds majority of the board in favour. Compulsion was to apply to children from six to eleven, the scheme might be introduced in a limited area only, and girls or particular communities might be exempted from liability. Government contracted to meet one-half of the additional cost involved. In the next two years, similar legislation was introduced in all the provinces except Assam and Burma; Assam eventually passed a compulsory education act in 1926. Most of this legislation was broadly similar to the Bombay act: the introduction of compulsion was left to local option, and was in some provinces confined to urban areas; some governments gave local bodies a statutory undertaking to finance a stated proportion of the additional cost of schemes of compulsion.

In 1923, the management of primary education by departmental and district officials came to an end, and schools were handed over everywhere to the supervision of local authorities. The system they inherited was efficient as regards higher administration, but official control had been able to do little to offer solutions for the basic problems of primary education: the

'wastage' resulting from premature withdrawal of pupils from school, the 'stagnation' among pupils who spent years in one class, the poor quality of teachers and schools, the failure to make progress with the education of girls—and indeed with all communities other than the clerical and trading castes. These problems were now bequeathed to the local authorities, but the nature of their responsibilities varied considerably from one province to another.

In Bombay where departmental control had been all embracing, there was now a complete abrogation of government supervision. The departmental inspectorate was replaced almost entirely by local authority inspectors. It was the intention of the 1923 Bombay Primary Education Act to make education Administrative Officers responsible for the running of primary schools, leaving local authorities as makers of policy. As the Act omitted to indicate the nature of the administrative officers' powers, in practice local bodies retained all control over the day to day running of their schools—the administrative officer was a mere instrument of their orders.[1] Local accounts, and proposals for new schemes still had to be submitted to Government for approval, but in effect Government only retained advisory powers.[2]

Although such a complete abdication was not made by the U.P. Government, the resulting situation was not dissimilar. The education department inspectorate continued to exercise supervision over all board primary schools, but under the Rules[3] provincial inspectors were obliged to report, and put up all proposals *through* the chairman of the district board, so that they were unable to exert any really independent influence. Education accounts and budgets were still submitted to the U.P. Government, but the Hartog Committee came to the conclusion that 'short of suspending the whole work of a board, Government have no method by which they can insist on their orders being carried out.'[4]

Greater powers were retained in the hands of officials in Burma than in either of these two provinces. All schools continued to be inspected by members of the education depart-

[1] Hartog Report, pp. 315–17.
[2] ISC, vii, 23.
[3] U.P., District Board Education Rules, p. 2.
[4] Hartog Report, pp. 318–20.

ment (local bodies did not employ their own inspectors as in some other provinces), and inspectors were entitled to attend local authority meetings and take part in discussion—but not to vote. District Officers and Commissioners retained certain powers to alter budgets and suspend execution of boards' orders. These checks proved to be only partially effective—departmental officials were often excluded from meetings, and the powers of District Officers and Commissioners, being of a negative nature were of little use in restraining a wilful or determined board. Expenditure might be improperly incurred—new schools be opened for which there was no financial provision, and the Commissioner would have to accept a *fait accompli* which he could not change, but could only try to prevent recurring.[1]

Official control remained more effective in Madras, Bengal and Punjab. In the first two provinces only a few of the schools were actually run by local bodies, the majority were private 'aided' schools, so that the boards' functions were largely confined to providing financial assistance and general supervision. All the many problems arising from questions of buildings, equipment, and above all staff, were automatically excluded from their orbit. Nevertheless in practice the Government of Madras found itself without much *positive* power: it could not stimulate educational development along the lines it favoured, but could only control the policies of local bodies. In Bengal, Government found itself obliged to cope with the forces of nationalism, brought directly to bear upon the work of schools and scholars, if not so much with the opinions of local bodies. The Punjab position was, on paper, not dissimilar to that in U.P.; primary education was largely controlled by local bodies, whose independent powers were now greatly enhanced. However, in Punjab the district boards continued to be presided over by the district officers, while all boards continued to lean heavily upon the advice of the education department inspectorate, so that educational development was much more a partnership between officials and non-officials than in most provinces.[2]

However, throughout India as a whole, non-official in-

[1] Hartog Report, pp. 321–2.

[2] Hartog Report, p. 321.

fluence was predominant, and almost everywhere political considerations were given precedence over administrative efficiency.

Some indication of the progress of education under popular control may be gained from the following figures. (See Table 32.)

TABLE 32

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS OF SCHOOL-AGE ATTENDING RECOGNISED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	1902	1907	1912	1917	(Dyarchy) 1922	1927	1932	1937
Madras	21	24·5	28	39	42·5	59	60	64
Bombay	23·5	26	30	37	45	49	49·5	59
Bengal	22	24	28	40	37	45	49	54
United Provinces	8	11	14	19	23	30·5	37	39
Punjab	6	9	14·5	20·5	24	44·5	44	43·5
Burma	15	19·5	19	28	21	23	26	27
Bihar and Orissa	—	—	—	26	26	37	31	30
Central Provinces	14	18	22	29	27	31	32	32·5
Assam	18	24	29	36	29·5	36	39	45
Total, British India	16·5%	20%	23·8%	30·3%	31·5%	42·1%	42·2%	44·3%

(The Eleventh All-India Quinquennial Review of Education gives higher percentages for the 1937 figures; percentages given in adjoining table are calculated on the basis of boys of school-age forming 14 per cent of the male population.)

'It is necessary to observe that the validity of these figures—and any others quoted in this chapter—are even more questionable than the general body of statistics presented in this work.[1] Nevertheless this table does give a picture of the relative success of primary education in different provinces, and the progress achieved by local bodies. Madras with its greater financial resources took first place in all-India in 1937 for percentage of

[1] In 1911 in Gorakhpur, U.P., 1,200 more primary scholars were shown as attending schools than were actually enrolled; conversely a check in Fyzabad Division, U.P., revealed an enrolment of 8,303 scholars—but attendance on checking day was only 4,903.

pupils to population; U.P., which before 1918 was among the most backward of all Indian provinces, caught up considerably during the Dyarchy period; Punjab achieved a spectacular advance, particularly in the 1920's; least progress was made in Burma.[1]

During the 1920's and 1930's the attitude of the general public, and in particular of its politically active section was of considerable significance in shaping educational development. Many nationalist politicians realised that a prerequisite of constitutional progress was an educated electorate. Whereas emphasis had previously been centred in urban education, the needs of the countryside now came in for wide attention. Perhaps the most striking example of this new emphasis on rural development was to be seen in Punjab. Before the Reforms, education had been almost entirely urban in scope, and was concentrated at the secondary school level. Under the leadership of Fazl-i-Husain a deliberate change of policy was inaugurated; encouragement was given to poorer boards by a system of grading their financial potentialities. Thereby, wealthy boards might receive grants equivalent to 50 per cent of the allotment made to education from their own funds, and poor boards up to 100 per cent. Under this system such backward authorities as the Rohtak and Karnal District Boards became leaders in the educational field. The education department was strengthened to provide a backbone for the programme of school expansion, and time-tables and curricula were planned to cater for the needs of the agricultural population. There was a keen public response to the new opportunities thus provided, from Punjab peasants and farmers of all communities; perhaps this was stimulated by the many ex-soldiers in the villages, whose service overseas had taught them that education opens doors in most walks of life. Only in the sphere of female education was there a public reluctance to keep pace with the plans of ministers and officials.

[1] If boys attending unrecognised monastic schools are added to the Burma total, the percentage of those at school would be between 40 and 45 per cent. There is the apparent paradox of a small number of boys recorded as attending school, and a literacy rate of 62 per cent, compared with 18 per cent in Bombay or 9 per cent in U.P. For discussion of the literacy of Burma, *see* 7th Quinquennial Report, 1922–7, Burma, p. 25, and J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 208–9.

Post-war policy in Bombay was also substantially remodelled by a minister, Dr. Paranjpye. His Primary Education Act of 1923 was planned to make compulsory education possible throughout the rural areas, and to raise the rural schools up to town standards. Following the first non-co-operation campaign, Bombay Congress leaders were active in boycotting 'government' schools and in promoting 'National' schools run upon traditional Indian patterns. Gujarat district boards long refused to co-operate in working the Liberal 1923 Act, and two of the most uncompromising authorities only consented to take over the board schools in 1933. Nevertheless more moderate Bombay Congress leaders (including Sardar Patel) very quickly acknowledged the need to develop the existing framework of schools.

There was a definite quickening of interest in education amongst almost all communities in Bombay Presidency, which was often expressed in attempts to raise the position of their own community within society as a whole. Muslims and non-Brahmins were becoming alive to the disabilities which their previous lack of education had imposed, and were increasingly aware that under the new political conditions education was essential to progress. All classes—even orthodox Muslims—were awaking to the importance of education for their women, although this new awareness was only partially substantiated in attendance figures. The desire of educationally backward communities to improve their position often led to a very narrow outlook when they secured power in local bodies—the replacement of Brahmin teachers, inspectors and administrative officers by their own caste-fellows, was the cause of much harm to educational progress. But at least the indifference of the past was disappearing.

In U.P. as in Bombay the most constructive lead in education was given by the Liberals. After 1923, the Swarajists returned to working within the established system, and thenceforth they constantly emphasised the claims of primary education. The District Boards Primary Education Act of 1926 which extended the scope of free compulsory education to the rural areas, was passed through the Legislative Council largely through the support of the Swarajists, who at the same time opposed the Minister's schemes for the development of higher education,

arguing that all other enterprises should be subordinated to the campaign against illiteracy.

Public interest in U.P. was somewhat of a surface nature, and was largely confined to particular areas or communities. U.P. Muslims who had previously shown almost complete indifference to the needs of primary education now took up the case of the inadequate share of Muslims in education as a political issue; the increase among Muslim children attending school was not noticeably above the provincial average, although girls came forward in much larger numbers. Members of other communities often paid lip-service to the needs of education, but there was not a great deal of practical assistance towards expansion.

In contrast, there was widespread support and enthusiasm for mass education throughout Madras Presidency. Many of the castes which had no literary traditions now asserted their claims to enjoy adequate opportunities for schooling. The leaders of all parties showed themselves responsive to these demands, and the speeches and actions of Madras political leaders during the Dyarchy years were evidence of prolonged and informed study of education problems. Local bodies, particularly the district boards, were allotted a large measure of responsibility in the programmes of expansion. At the close of the period, almost all the communities were sharing in the fruits of these efforts, whereby in Madras two out of three boys were attending a primary school. (See Table 33.)

In Burma, popular aspirations in education gave no real stimulus to the work of local bodies. The Burmese movement to establish independent National schools, which developed from 1921 onwards, arose from a desire to re-assert the traditional Burmese values free from official domination, and it proved more lasting than in India. Many National schools continued throughout the 1920's and exercised an influence upon the character of Burmese primary education. Throughout the slump Burmese leaders remained 'insistent on the provision of education facilities worthy of a proud nation', although their aspirations were largely focused upon higher education.

The Burmese attitude to primary education became most coherent in a concern for the maintenance of the tenets of Buddhism. Following the large-scale recognition of monastic

schools from 1913 to 1917, local support often fell away on the argument that 'a monk who receives help (however small) from Government for his school no longer requires that of the charitable'. The attitude of the phongyis was similar; U Su, the representative on the 1923 Vernacular Education Committee of the Thathanabaing (the head of the Burmese Buddhist hierarchy), implored Government 'to leave the monastic schools alone now and forever hereafter'. Largely as a result of the recommendations of this committee, the attempt to assimilate

TABLE 33

COMPOSITION OF MALE SCHOOL POPULATION IN MADRAS BY COMMUNITIES, 1937

	Percentage of community to total male population	Percentage of community to school population
Brahmins	3%	12%
Non-Brahmin Hindus	70%	64%
Depressed classes	15%	11%
Muslims	8%	4%
Indian Christians	4%	7%

monastic schools into the education system was virtually abandoned. Lay Burmese opinion concurred with this viewpoint—the offering of assistance to monastic schools was regarded as 'an insidious attack on religion' (the experience of 1913–22 was still fresh in memory). Elected local bodies even withdrew recognition from some monastic schools already within the system. During the Dyarchy period the two systems, public and monastic, became increasingly separate, the monks actively discouraging their pupils from going on to public schools; thus the schools controlled by local authorities did not develop into a universal system of education.

In some other provinces, especially in Bengal, many public men advocated educational development in a 'national' spirit, in which local bodies were not to share. But in general, the effect of public opinion was to stimulate the activities of local bodies, even though the demands for education were often for quantity and not quality.

The goal before local authorities in the early 1920's was the attainment of universal primary education. Ministers were acquainted with the nature of the difficulties of mass education, but they did not realise their extent. Nor could they know of the hidden reefs of economic distress and political uncertainty upon which all provincial programmes were to founder. In the early 1920's it seemed that ample funds would be available, and great faith was placed in the ability of local representative bodies to find means to persuade the mass of the people to maintain their children at school.

In Bombay, the Compulsory Education Committee (1921–2) worked out a scheme for the extension of compulsory primary education, in accordance with which, 50 per cent of all boys in the Presidency would be attending school within seven years. The U.P. Education Department evolved a similar programme to secure the compulsory enrolment of 80 per cent of boys living in municipalities within three years. Both schemes were of course contingent upon the adoption of compulsion by local boards. Similar plans were prepared in other provinces, but in practice development was haphazard, not systematic; none of these plans were to be wholly fulfilled.

Almost at once things went wrong. There was an unexpected lack of continuity in direction: there were frequent changes amongst ministers, who sometimes lasted less than a year, and also among senior education officers, so that policy was continually subject to alteration. Local bodies' tenure of office was also often brief—among both administrative staff and members; there were very few examples of steady and sustained expansion. Then the slump enforced a general cut in expenditure—salaries were lowered, some staff were dismissed and schools were closed; the momentum of progress was only resumed about 1935. But the greatest drawback was the inability of local bodies to live up to the somewhat optimistic expectations of 1920. The old problems which had plagued official management remained unsolved, and new weaknesses developed from the excessive liberty with which the boards had been endowed.

Compulsion was first introduced in Bombay Presidency. (See Table 34.) In the beginning many municipalities regarded compulsion as a magic formula which would convert illiterates

into clerks overnight: eight towns in the Deccan announced the introduction of free compulsory education in 1920 without making any preliminary preparations. This sort of nominal compulsion had very little effect: Byadgi adopted compulsion in 1920—and in 1937 enquired from the Education Department what steps should be taken to implement the decision.

TABLE 34

AREAS APPLYING COMPULSORY EDUCATION

	1922		1927		1932		1937		
	Municipalities	District Boards	Municipalities	District Boards	Municipalities	District Boards	Municipalities	District Boards	Number of villages
Madras	—	—	21	3	25	7*	27	7	104
Bombay	4	—	7	—	9	2	9	1	143
Bengal	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
U.P.	1	—	25	—	37	25	36	25	1,224
Punjab	2	—	57	27†	64	28‡	63	28§	10,450
Bihar and Orissa	1	—	1	—	1	3	1	1	1
C.P.	—	—	3	7	24	7	27	8	508

* Included 206 villages. † Included 2,040 school areas.
‡ Included 2,924 school areas. § Included 2,981 school areas.

Six municipalities prepared schemes in co-operation with Government between 1918 and 1923, and four towns actually launched serious schemes providing free compulsory education for boys and girls from six to eleven. Bombay City introduced compulsion in F. and G. Wards—the industrial slums where the population was composed of 'backward communities and the labouring classes'. By 1927 the Presidency was beginning to feel new financial difficulties—whereas thirty municipal schemes were submitted to Government, it was only possible to sanction eleven, and several of these chosen towns eventually decided that their funds were inadequate to implement their plans, so that only five more municipalities actually introduced compulsion.[1]

[1] *Bombay municipalities adopting compulsion:* 1919, Surat; 1920, Bandra; 1921, Satara City; 1923, Dhulia; 1925, Bombay City (two wards); 1927, Ahmednagar, Sholapur (three wards), Broach; 1929, Poona (five wards); 1930, Karachi.

In addition, in 1929, West Khandesh District Board introduced compulsion in all villages of over one thousand inhabitants.

After 1930, slump and political disruption prevented any further advance; the ambitious plans of seven years before had to be abandoned: of the seventy-five education authorities in the Bombay mofussil, only ten actually adopted compulsion in an area covering about one-twentieth of the population of school age. This cannot be regarded as a success, especially in view of the many expressions of support given by Bombay politicians and social reformers. A share of blame must be shouldered by the Bombay Government which failed to anticipate the expense and difficulty involved, and was unable to make good its early promises.

The achievement of the ten schemes was only moderate. The carrying out of compulsion was a challenge to the leadership of the members of local bodies. To persuade parents of the labouring classes to forego the money their children could earn, or to persuade the mothers of Muslim girls to allow their daughters to mix with all sorts of strangers, were tasks which only determined and respected leaders of the community could accomplish. In most towns this lead was lacking. In Bombay City public meetings were held and social leaders gave their support, but something more sustained and personal was needed. In many cases the new schemes were hampered by industrial and political strikes and riots, and financial stringency often prohibited proper teaching or school facilities to encourage the newcomers. But even when all excuses are allowed, results were discouraging. The machinery of enforcement was hardly ever put into operation (largely because members would not risk the unpopularity this entailed). A summons was hardly ever issued, and then often in such a manner that it could not be sustained in court. The rate of increase among pupils in compulsory areas was no higher than elsewhere in urban Bombay. The average enrolment remained only 85 per cent of the children liable to register, and of these enrolled only some 75 per cent were regular attenders. Nevertheless the striking rate of increase in school-going in urban Bombay from 1922 to 1927 (over 50 per cent), shows that a stimulus was given to primary education by

the incidental improvements in schools and the growing acceptance of the idea of going to school.

Compulsory education was advanced with the greatest vigour in Punjab. The onus of introducing compulsion was placed on local authorities—indeed, district officers often discouraged its introduction when local finances did not appear adequate—but by 1930 more than half the municipalities had applied compulsion, and all the district boards had introduced schemes for selected school areas. The experiment was very successful in Amritsar, Lahore and Multan, but in general municipalities 'are much less enthusiastic than district boards'.[1] The leading districts were the canal colonies of Montgomery and Lyallpur, where about 90 per cent of boys of school age were enrolled in the late 1920's. An attempt was made under the personal direction of Fazl-i-Husain to make education more of a reality by reviving the almost moribund vernacular middle schools, and by endeavouring to keep boys at school up to the stage where their education would become a training for life, instead of remaining a half-forgotten recital of the alphabet. To this end, the number of middle schools was rapidly expanded (often out of existing primary schools), and these institutions were managed almost entirely by the district boards.[2] Over 60 per cent of the boys at these middle schools were in fact primary scholars.

The onset of the great depression caused grave setbacks in many areas; parents were often forced to withdraw their children and put them to work, and by 1937 it was reported that only 50 per cent of boys between six and eleven in compulsory areas were attending school. A feature of this regress was the change in the public attitude to compulsion. At the end of the 1920's it was possible to say in the Multan Division that 'public opinion is in favour of coercion whenever other devices have failed; but legal aid is sought only in the last resort, while persuasion by means of active propaganda is the chief agency';[3] in the 1930's neither persuasion nor coercion seems to have

[1] Punjab, Quinquennial Review of Education, 1927–32, p. 20.

[2] 1922: 672 vernacular middle schools with 95,656 pupils. 1932: 3,241 vernacular middle schools with 457,514 pupils.

[3] Punjab, Quinquennial Review of Education, 1927–32, p. 60.

received popular backing. In the Multan Division in 1934–5, out of 3,111 defaulting parents on whom notices were served, 25 per cent were prosecuted, of whom 331 (or 10 per cent) were convicted; the fines imposed—often by panchayat courts—amounted to Rs. 76/8 as., or four annas per conviction. It was no wonder that compulsion had become ineffective. The slump also necessitated wide economy measures, and forced many district boards to close their middle schools, or to reduce them to simple primary schools. By 1937, there was a decrease in the number of these schools by 289 to 2,952, and in the number of pupils by over 78,000 to 379,271, although some of the fall was set off by a small increase in numbers at primary schools. Altogether, at the close of the Dyarchy period, many educationists found it necessary to adjudge the Punjab experiment a failure.[1]

Compulsion was also applied over a wide area in the United Provinces, and with similar disappointing results.

Compulsory education was first introduced in two wards of Cawnpore Municipality in 1922, and in eleven other towns next year. By 1931 the Act was in force in 37 towns, although in some of these it was only operative in selected wards. The 1926 Act extended the principle to rural areas, and by 1931 twenty-five district boards had put on schemes in limited areas. After 1931, the prevailing financial deficiencies compelled the postponement or abandonment of all further schemes. Over one-third of U.P. municipalities, and more than half the district boards accepted the principle of compulsion, and it was brought into effect over about 10 per cent of the school population.

As in other provinces there was a gulf between adopting the Act (a popular gesture) and putting it into effect (an unpopular burden). 'The enthusiasm of some boards which introduced the scheme to the sound of trumpets died away when the opening fanfare ceased.'[2] The frequent attempts to introduce limited compulsion were not productive of much good; in some towns families would migrate to another ward where there was no compulsion. Evasion in this manner was reckoned at 16 per cent of the population in Lucknow.[3] In the countryside, progress was

[1] Punjab, Quinquennial Review of Education, 1932–7, pp. 4 and 20.
[2] U.P., Quinquennial Review, 1922–7, p. 67. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

sometimes hampered by the unsuitability of the selected material: boards would, with some justification, choose a particularly backward community or isolated area for compulsion —but such people would be the most likely to offer the strongest resistance to the enforcement of compulsion. Often rural areas were too small to provide scope for a concentrated effort: in Allahabad District, compulsion was introduced in eighty-eight villages chosen (perhaps by influential members) from all corners of the district. Success was only possible where a workable area—either a whole town, or a rural pargana—was incorporated.

As elsewhere, schemes were dependent upon the determination of local leaders—which was in general lacking. Attendance committees were constituted in all areas of compulsion but they did not often carry out their duties, and they had little positive effect in overcoming prejudices. There was almost no attempt to popularise compulsory education by propaganda or persuasion. Many committees did not meet regularly. Most committees were reluctant to issue notices to non-conforming parents. Such cases as were brought before magistrates were usually treated as venial offences: 'the poverty of the parents makes the imposition of fines a mere pretence as they cannot be paid in any case.' Cases were often handed over to the jurisdiction of panchayats who would perhaps impose a four annas fine. As non-attendance was often economic in origin—children being able to earn three or four rupees a month for their parents—such fines were no deterrent.[1] Contributory reasons for lack of success, were social and political disorder and the unattractive nature of most primary teaching which consisted of old-fashioned chanting of letters or numbers, making no appeal to the son of a Jat or a Chamar. Enrolment figures usually embraced about 80 per cent of children liable to compulsion and of these some 70 per cent would attend school regularly; individual boards' figures varied from 97 per cent enrolment and 72 per cent attendance at Mathura to 57 per cent enrolment and 64 per cent attendance at Bareilly, results which were characterised by officials and politicians alike as 'disappointing'.

In Madras more than one-quarter of the mofussil munici-

[1] U.P., Quinquennial Review of Education, 1932–7, p. 77.

palities adopted compulsory schemes for boys, and in several wards of Madras City, compulsion was applied to both sexes. Although Madras achieved the highest figures for school attendance in all-India by 1937, this was not construed in the Presidency as evidence of complete success. As elsewhere, expansion in Madras was often over-hasty and ill-considered, and the new schools were not always efficient, while far too many children never achieved real literacy. In 1934, a new Education Act gave local authorities powers not only to enforce compulsion, but also to demand that all children admitted to school must complete the elementary course, or alternatively must remain at school until they had reached the age limit for compulsion. At the end of Dyarchy, however, no municipality had taken steps to enforce the new powers.

Of the other provinces, C.P. had similar experiences to relate; compulsion was introduced in one-third of the municipalities and, despite early confidence, results were not inspiring. It was notable that in those provinces where primary education was overwhelmingly in private hands—Bihar and Bengal—compulsion had least success. It would be very difficult to enforce penalties for non-attendance when pupils were dispersed throughout thousands of petty private schools. In Bihar, only Ranchi evolved a successful system of compulsion. In Bengal, Chittagong Municipality adopted a scheme applying to boys, while Calcutta made the experiment of trying compulsion in Ward IX during the late 'thirties. Assam did not apply its Act of 1926 in any locality, largely because financial resources were said to be inadequate to support existing schools. Burma's principal problem was to find some formula to meet the dichotomy in its educational system, whereby nearly half the schools were monastic institutions. A survey undertaken in 1931 showed that compulsion could be introduced on a limited scale, but the onset of the depression cut short any further progress. Yet in some progressive villages, headmen maintained unofficial systems of compulsion for boys between six and nine.

The relative failure of compulsion in almost every province illustrates the shortcomings of education policy and practice under Dyarchy. All too often, governments and local authorities launched schemes without proper long-term consideration

of the financial burden involved. In most cases there was not adequate preparation in the way of building new schools, training a supply of extra teachers, or evolving a satisfactory curriculum for the new classes of pupils with no literary background. Above all, public opinion was not sufficiently in step with the ideas of educational enthusiasts; parents remained reluctant to bring their children to school, and education committees were reluctant to enforce attendance as required by law.

The searchlight which was turned upon the problems posed by compulsory education showed up many defects in the primary system. In U.P., it was calculated in 1937 that in urban areas where compulsion was operative, only 21 per cent of the boys who entered the infants' class in 1933 reached Class III in 1936 and attained a minimum of literacy; in rural areas the parallel figure was 10 per cent. This was some indication of the extent of the wastage in Indian schools. The problem of stagnation was also examined anew, for the introduction of free schooling under compulsion meant that a boy who lingered for years in the infants' class was costing a disproportionate amount to educate. The backwardness of female education, the inadequacy of schools and teaching—all these were re-emphasised.

Perhaps the feature of the primary education statistics which stands out most plainly is the remarkably large proportion of children in the lower part of the school. From one-third to one-half of primary school children were found to be in the infants' class, while only about one-quarter reached Classes III and IV. (See Table 35.) There was a small improvement during this period, as for instance in U.P., whose figures had previously been particularly poor, but no real solution was found to the

TABLE 35

U.P., PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS IN VARIOUS CLASSES

	Infants	Classes I and II	Classes III and IV
1922	62%	26%	12%
1927	55%	30%	15%
1932	44%	37%	19%
1937	41%	39%	20%

problem of wastage. The infants' class was utilized by many working mothers as a sort of crèche,[1] and as a result of the unwieldy numbers, good teaching was often impossible, the children soon lost interest and drifted away. Most parents (particularly in the countryside) were content if their boys learnt the Three R's; 'frills' such as history or geography were quite unwanted.

Had parents sent their children to school for two or three years and then withdrawn them when they had absorbed a modicum of learning, this would have been bad enough, but in fact the usual position was that children attended school very irregularly and learnt little when they were in school. School days were interrupted by constant ailments,[2] and by calls to look after animals or to assist at seed-time and harvest.

Moreover the teaching in the infants' class was particularly poor; many schools were 'one teacher' institutions where the infants would be in charge of an older child, and in larger schools the infants work was usually left to the oldest or dullest teacher. For these various reasons most boys spent at least two years in the infants' class, and some stayed till they were ten or eleven. There are few reliable statistics, but it seems probable that at most, 40 per cent to 50 per cent of children secured promotion out of the bottom class each year.[3]

The transfer of education management to local bodies coincided with a quickening of the drive for better education for classes or communities previously neglected. There were considerable increases in the numbers of girls at school; yet only in Burma did the figures for girls approach the numbers of boys in primary schools. There was a definite change in Burmese public opinion towards recognising the propriety of girls attending schools with boys. In India co-education was only tolerated up to the age of ten at the most; although about half the girls at

[1] Particularly in Burma; in 1933 it was found necessary to refuse admission to children under six.

[2] When compulsory education began in Bombay City, medical examinations revealed that 28 per cent of the children suffered from malnutrition and 10 per cent from chronic eye disorders.

[3] It has been calculated that due to wastage and stagnation, some 60 per cent of primary education expenditure was thrown away upon pupils who gained no permanent benefit from school at all. *See* Hartog Report, p. 48.

the primary stage in India—particularly in Madras, U.P., Bombay and Assam—went to boys' primary schools, special institutions for girls being largely confined to towns. The wastage amongst girls was twice as high as among boys, most girls never left the infants' class; there was little recognition of the need for a girl to possess more than the rudiments of education.

Local bodies professed to recognize the need for female education, but most girls' schools were more primitive even than those for boys. In 1937, seven U.P. municipal boards still spent nothing on girls' education; in Bengal, girls' primary schools received an average of ten rupees per school from local funds. In the countryside the prejudice against female education was never really overcome either among peasants or members of local boards.[1] Not one education committee in U.P. had invited a lady to become a member by 1932; women members were thereafter specially nominated by Government to local bodies to represent the interests of female education, but they made little impression upon their indifferent colleagues. While fair progress was seen in Punjab, Madras, and Bombay, other provinces such as U.P. and Bengal remained bound by old-fashioned ideas.

The attitude of caste Hindus towards untouchables underwent considerable modification during the Dyarchy years. Whereas previously the policy had been to provide separate (and inferior) schools for the depressed classes, during the 1920's the establishment of separate schools ceased, and untouchables were permitted to join the general schools—at first under certain disabilities, but gradually under conditions of equality with caste Hindus. In Bombay there was some opposition from orthodox villagers against the admission of untouchables, especially in temple-schools, but boards made a firm stand and closed the schools in which there was a bar, until free entry was permitted.

These problems were not matters only for the educationalist, but were associated with the changing shape of public feeling, and more particularly with the lead which local bodies were able to give. A great number of the faults described were due to the inadequacy of teachers, buildings and equipment. Many of

[1] M. L. Darling, *At Freedom's Door*, p. 341.

these shortcomings were inevitable, but good or bad management by local bodies could alleviate or aggravate the seriousness of a problem.

There was a moderate improvement in teaching in the 1920's (expressed in terms of numbers of trained teachers), due in some degree to better emoluments in the post-war period. (See Table 36.)

TABLE 36

PERCENTAGE OF TRAINED TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	1917	1922	1927	1932	1937
Madras	33%	39%	49%	59%	72%
Bombay	38%	48%	49%	48%	49%
Bengal	16%	20%	26%	28%	33%
U.P.	41%	57%	66%	66%	74%
Punjab	52%	52%	53%	73%	81%
Burma	18%	36%	43%	56%	74%
All-India (average)	30%	39%	44%	50%	57%

The substantial increases in the number of trained teachers in the first few years after the war were largely due to the incentives offered by new and better rates of pay. The pay of the village schoolmaster in pre-war days had been little more than that of a day-labourer, although he enjoyed general respect in his village, and his pay was supplemented by small customary offerings. The need for higher pay (accentuated by the war-time price rise) was tackled right at the start of Dyarchy by provincial education departments and ministers, who instituted uniform progressive rates of pay applicable to all local authority teachers.[1] Rates for qualified men were generous in Bombay and almost excessive in Burma, but only moderate in U.P., and pitiful in Bengal. Many local authorities found difficulty in sustaining these rates throughout the 1920's (in Burma many education authorities were unable to comply with the statutory scale), and when the slump came, salaries had to be drastically

[1] *Average pay of primary teachers: U.P.* 1917 = Rs. 7/8 as.; 1927 = Rs. 18/8 as. *Bombay* 1917 = Rs. 15; 1927 = Rs. 47. *Burma* 1917 = Rs. 12 (?); 1927 = Rs. 33. *Madras* 1917 = Rs. 10; 1927 = Rs. 20. *Bengal* 1917 = Rs. 6–6 as.; 1927 = Rs. 6. *Punjab* 1917 = Rs. 15/9 as.; 1927 = Rs. 25.

scaled down; for instance, there was a 30 per cent pay-cut in Bombay, a 60 per cent cut in U.P., and cuts averaging 15 per cent in Burma. Even so, many small towns in Burma were unable to pay their staff, and some teachers worked without any salary. During the slump many local authorities weeded out their untrained teachers (even in Burma there were now more trained teachers than jobs), so that by a grim paradox the quality of teachers was improved by harsher conditions.

If the general technical and intellectual quality of teachers was much better under the Reforms than before, it seems very doubtful whether any real improvement in teaching took place. Under the old official régime, inspection was reasonably thorough, and promotion went to teachers with good records and men who obtained additional qualifications for themselves. Following the Reforms the number of departmental inspectors declined, despite the large increase in schools, while the quality of the inspecting staff employed by local authorities was not always maintained. In the new political atmosphere some boards encouraged teachers to flout the government inspectors, and everywhere teachers' former respect for the authority of the inspectorate was replaced by the cultivation of the new masters, the local board.

Promotion of teachers was too often by favouritism or bribery and teachers were encouraged to spend a large part of their time in waiting upon members. There was little incentive to improve one's teaching methods and produce better examination results, when a teacher's record was frequently ignored.[1] The disregard for discipline which spread through the teaching staff infected pupils also and was stimulated by political campaigns bringing authority into contempt.

A particular impediment to better teaching was the large number of 'one teacher' schools, which in 1927 formed over 60 per cent of the total; for instance, over 55 per cent of the Bombay primary schools came into this category. More than half the primary schools in Burma were run entirely by one teacher who was responsible for four or five classes, so that pupils idled through most of the day; monastic schools were almost without exception conducted by one phongyi, with perhaps less than a

[1] Cf. U.P., Quinquennial Review, 1922–7, p. 74.

dozen pupils, all more or less following the same lessons. The problem was also acute in U.P., a land of small villages: among the total of 110,000 villages only 28,000 contained nine hundred or more souls—enough to justify a proper primary school. As there were actually only 13,295 village schools, they *could* have been distributed among the larger villages, but many schools were 'started in isolated villages because an influential man lived there'. 4,215 village schools were in charge of a single teacher, and 7,199 were incomplete as primary schools, teaching only up to Class III.[1] Some progress was made during the 1920's and '30's—particularly in Punjab—in eliminating 'single teacher' schools, by centralising and concentrating primary education, but in 1937 they still formed nearly 50 per cent of the village schools of India.

The one-teacher system may have been inevitable, but as in other aspects of education, difficulties were not alleviated by the attitude adopted by some district boards. Young well-trained teachers had a strong dislike for burying themselves in isolated villages with no congenial society. Very often district boards would yield to their objections and post old or inferior men to one-teacher schools, which to be successful needed the best men in their service.

Primary education continued to be impeded by poor buildings and equipment. In Bombay only one-quarter of local board schools were held in the boards' buildings, about one-quarter were held in rented accommodation, and half in rent-free buildings—temples, chavdis, dharmasalas and private houses. There was no appreciable change in these proportions during the years of Dyarchy—the erection of new board-school buildings barely kept up with the expansion of schools. Many new schools were financed by the Seths of Ahmadabad and other wealthy benefactors. One trust fund provided village schools in Gujarat upon the condition that the villagers contributed one-third of the money themselves; there was a good response from villages, ninety schools were erected through this system in Surat district. The great majority of Bombay schools continued to be housed in cramped quarters, ill-adapted for education purposes, and the new building of some boards was not well planned.

[1] U.P., Quinquennial Review, 1932–7, pp. 66–8, 71.

Rather less than half the U.P. board-schools were housed in buildings erected by the boards; about 50 per cent were in rented or borrowed buildings—and several hundred schools were held in the open air, which meant that education virtually had to cease for half the year during the hot weather and the monsoon. The erection and proper upkeep of school buildings was often hampered by the division of functions between district boards and district education committees. In their attempt to finance education expansion upon inadequate budgets, district boards were very liable to economise at the expense of school buildings: as an example, Sultanpur allotted Rs. 12,000 for repairs; this was scaled down to Rs. 6,500 during the year, and finally only Rs. 840 was actually spent on repairs. As local construction work in U.P. was carried out by district board overseers, much of the work was shoddy and soon became dilapidated. The education committees had no effective powers to check these failings.

Some progress was made in Madras, where about 40 per cent of the primary schools were housed in their own buildings in 1920, whereas nearly 50 per cent occupied proper school buildings in 1937, 40 per cent still being in rented accommodation, 8 per cent in temples and 2 per cent in the homes of teachers. In Bengal, with its mass of private schools, accommodation was almost everywhere cramped and unsatisfactory. C.P. was perhaps the most advanced province; 86 per cent of the local board schools had their own buildings.

Punjab local authorities built many good schools during the 1920's, but after 1931 building was abruptly halted. In some areas the popular desire for education was strong enough to make new schools possible through subscriptions to building funds. In Sheikhupura District, a school committee was formed from among the local worthies, and 'roused the enthusiasm and interest [of the people] to such an extent that at most places they supplied materials and unskilled labour gratis'.[1]

In Burma the problem of school accommodation was never considered except in the case of a few town schools. All the aided schools were invariably held in the head-teacher's house which was almost always quite inadequate to serve as a school.

[1] Punjab, Quinquennial Review, 1932–7, p. 58.

In Rangoon there were 148 aided schools and six municipal primary schools, of which only two were held in buildings constructed by the municipality as schools.

In the existing poverty of local finances, the only remedy for the poor state of their primary schools which local bodies were free to adopt, was a policy of concentration—the abandonment of sub-standard schools and the building of a nucleus of efficient institutions. So much of local funds was being dissipated in penny packets—the employment of inefficient teachers, the support of ephemeral schools, and the carrying out of temporary repairs. But a policy of concentration came straight up against the parochial attitude of the average members: the majority were only interested in the affairs of their own neighbourhood. Their aim was to secure a school for their own area, even if this entailed the closing down of an existing school elsewhere; if they already possessed a school then they devoted their energies at meetings to securing as much money as they could for its expansion, regardless of the over-all needs of the district.

As a result of the financial stringency which the depression brought, many local authorities were constrained to reduce the numbers of their schools in the 1930's, and thereby added to rather than detracted from educational efficiency. A deliberate policy of concentration and elimination was followed in Madras, between 1931 and 1937 the number of elementary schools fell from 50,121 to 41,128—a reduction of nearly 10 per cent, which was nevertheless accompanied by a rise of 10 per cent in the enrolment of pupils. During the same period over twelve hundred 'uneconomical' schools were closed in U.P. A similar planned reduction was carried out during 1937–8 by local bodies in Bengal and Orissa. But it was unfortunate that balanced development was postponed until a time of retrenchment, and was in abeyance during the years of prosperity.

Many of the reasons for the mediocre education record of local bodies are echoes of the atmosphere of local government in the 1920's and '30's. The wider interests of a public service were frequently sacrificed to party or personal struggles. When a party secured absolute power (as the non-Brahmins did in some Deccan and Carnatic districts) then they often used their power without reference to the feelings of their opponents. The

whole idea of representative government was still largely a mystery—few of the school committees established in the villages, or the attendance committees in towns perceived a call to educate their fellows towards a new attitude to learning and social customs—their ideas were often limited to interfering in points of detail. The machinery devised for local management was by no means perfect, and in no province was there an administrative framework really suited to the purposes of education. The setting up of education authorities parallel to local territorial authorities with final authority nowhere, was fatal to harmonious working. A satisfactory relationship between elected representatives and administrative officials was never worked out—there was constant interference in day-to-day affairs by members, no settled policy was built up, and the teaching staff looked to members instead of to their official superiors for advancement. Education was constantly influenced by extraneous issues of local or national politics, or communal and religious feelings. And finally, the dawn of popular education came in a time of economic instability. First came a bubble prosperity which encouraged ministers, education departments and boards to plan on an over-elaborate scale. Then before any permanent system was established, came the slump entailing the dismissal of teachers and the closure of schools—a five-year set-back to educational advance.

It can be seen now that the experiment of transferring almost complete responsibility for vernacular education to largely untried local bodies was carried to excess in the early 1920's. In the desire to give popular local bodies a political training by handing over a substantial measure of resources and responsibilities, it was overlooked that the proper working of representative democracy depends upon the electorate, and even more upon the elected representatives, being educated persons. This was not true of members or voters in 1923, and poor education facilities in the next fifteen years contributed very little to a change.

In the 1930's many Nationalist leaders frankly acknowledged the poor showing of local bodies in the education field. When Congress Governments came into office in 1937 they found that the dislike of authority which had grown up in the days of the

Dyarchy ministers was now largely directed against them. 'Several of the popular governments which attempted to introduce education reforms on a large scale found their efforts to a large extent vitiated by the apathy and incompetence of local boards.'[1]

The Congress Governments did not bear the passive obstruction of local bodies with the same equanimity as their predecessors. Thus, in 1939 the U.P. Government introduced legislation to abolish the quasi-independent education committees, and returned their powers to district boards. The Government Deputy Inspector of Schools was now made ex-officio Secretary of the District Board Education Committee, and also given definite powers over the posting, transfer, punishment and leave of teachers: all the subjects which had been so fertile of intrigue and bribery in the past. All local board teachers were in future to be drawn from a central provincial list. District boards were in effect transformed into advisory bodies in the education sphere. At the same time the Bombay Congress Government withdrew almost all the powers given to local authorities under the 1923 Act. Administrative officers and schools supervisors, hitherto the creatures of the boards, were placed on the cadre of the provincial education department, and given definite powers. The members of School Boards had now to possess minimum education qualifications (a hit at some of the non-Brahmin boards). Inspection by departmental officers was reintroduced. Post-war tendencies have reinforced this swing back to centralisation.[2]

The chief importance of the Dyarchy period in the history of local education was to provide a lesson in what could or could not be accomplished. District boards and municipalities, with their atmosphere of local personalities, were probably not the right units for managing this vital service. Some alternative form of authority, able to command the services of persons qualified to understand the problems of education has yet to be found.[3]

[1] 'Post-war Educational Development in India'; Report by the Central Advisory Board of Education, 'The Sargent Report'. 1944, p. 73.

[2] The Sargent Report recommended that local bodies be deprived of all their education functions.

[3] An appendix (*see* pages 348–51) gives detailed information concerning boys' primary schools in the major provinces for the period 1907–37.

CHAPTER XIV

Highways, Health and Water-supplies

THE division of local authority services in these two chapters (XIII and XIV) into 'education' and 'the rest . . .' is in accordance with development from 1920 to 1937. Whereas local bodies did show a genuine measure of interest in education, they were generally indifferent to—or perhaps unaware of—the needs of public health, communications, water supply and other services. The stagnation of these services was furthered by the policy of ministers who gave ever-increasing grants-in-aid for education purposes and were therefore unable to assist the other services to any great extent, so that the rapid expansion which took place in primary education in the 1920's was virtually obtained at the expense of other departments, some of which were equally important as 'nation-building' services.

A particularly heavy responsibility for the provision of social services rests upon the State and public bodies in India and Burma, because no private agency is prepared to enter into fields which in England, whether from commercial or idealistic motives, were first opened up by 'private enterprise'. Viceroys who were disciples of *laissez faire* found themselves compelled to promote state railways, and in time local bodies were given social responsibilities which included certain services (such as water-works, dispensaries or markets), for which provision was partly made by private agency in England. In India and Burma private capital was not eager to invest in public utilities, and private charity was constrained to assist hospitals and other good causes, often only under official influence. Social services had to be almost entirely provided from the inadequate resources of local bodies—although the need for these services was of course much greater than in modern England. Critics of local self-government in India and Burma have frequently

condemned them because the services they were supposed to provide made no appeal to native minds,[1] but it would be more profitable to emphasise the essential part these services should play in national development, and the urgency of educating public opinion towards a realisation of their necessity.

The principal duties of municipal boards in the nineteenth century were to pave the roads and employ sweepers; while a few large cities constructed sewers and waterworks. Rural boards were mainly concerned with the upkeep of highways and ferries. In 1888 the Government of India decided that medical relief and public health should be added to the functions of local bodies. Paucity of funds, and a lack of technical personnel kept local services down at a very elementary level. Development was entirely controlled by government departments or district officers, who concentrated their attention upon services which contributed to administrative efficiency—such as communications.

The local share in the social services varied between provinces, not so much according to their state of progress, as to the accidents of provincial government policy—the preference of Governors or Chief Secretaries for centralised control or devolution. In the early years of the twentieth century municipal boards had almost no say in any province in local medical or health services; they were responsible for public works but there were very effective checks on their freedom. Almost no municipality was able to construct a major project—a sewerage scheme or even a tank—from its own revenue; it would need perhaps to raise a loan, and usually hoped for a government grant. In such cases in English practice, Whitehall lays down certain standards as conditions for loans or grants, but the initiative—the actual decisions on the scope and nature of the project—remain with the local body. In India and Burma, government financial control was used to establish a provincial policy and programme (grants were distributed for specific purposes to selected authorities), and to impose strict limitations under which a local undertaking must be operated. There was close government (i.e. departmental) control over all rural services—roads, hospitals, public health—in most provinces.

[1] Especially J. S. Furnivall, *see Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 144–56.

Thus, the Bombay legislation of 1884 made district boards responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads, hospitals, etc., and for the provision of public vaccination. Yet all public works whose cost exceeded Rs. 2,500 had to be carried out by the provincial P.W.D. (who were thus responsible for all metalled roads and hospitals), and all vaccinators were members of the provincial public health department, although paid by local bodies. Similarly in rural Burma, all public works, including all roads except village tracks, were a P.W.D. responsibility, and vaccinators belonged to the provincial service. By contrast, in U.P. many of the minor roads were constructed under district board control, dispensaries were managed by tahsil committees, and vaccinators formed part of the district board staff. These were some of the small but significant differences in local freedom which were created by the vagaries of provincial policy.

Local freedom in pre-Reform local government meant of course the leadership of the District Magistrate or Civil Surgeon. British officials were quick to develop a local patriotism and devoted their best efforts to local needs, but in a period of frequent transfers they were often unable to accomplish much during the brief tenure of their appointments.[1] The personal factor was all-important in this era: there were 'extraordinary variations' in the standards of district sadr hospitals—one well-equipped and up-to-date in its methods, the next dilapidated and wanting the basic necessities of medical treatment. Such differences could almost always be laid to the personalities of the responsible Civil Surgeons—one energetic and able, another professionally incompetent and idle. At best, local services were 'quite inadequate for the needs of the population'.[2] District officers usually concentrated their meagre resources upon providing a nucleus of facilities at district headquarters, and connecting headquarters by trunk roads with other large centres. The more remote villages were of necessity entirely neglected.

Indian or Burmese opinion generally acquiesced; there was

[1] Cf. the advice given to a young Punjab civilian in the early 1900's. 'Make up your mind what one big work you will initiate for the district—it may be a hospital, or a school, or a stretch of road. . . . Get administrative sanction in your first year; it will take you the rest of the five years to see your project through.' Sir C. Garbett, *Friend of Friend* (Bombay, 1943), p. 38.

[2] ISC, ix, 404.

little consciousness of the need for social services either among the general public or the members of local bodies. New hospitals and dispensaries were largely erected by the subscriptions of private donors, but these subscriptions were a sign of the power of the district officer rather than of the enthusiasm of the landlords or rich merchants who were the donors. G. K. Gokhale was exceptional in this respect: he was fully alive to the significance of contemporary urban mortality figures, and every year, the greater part of his speech in the Imperial Legislature upon the annual Budget, was devoted to a plea for grants for local sanitary purposes. He persuaded Congress to consider the need for development of the sanitary services in speeches from the platform, and requests for increased government assistance to local bodies were incorporated in the annual resolutions.

From 1908, growing Imperial surpluses enabled the central government to allot annual grants of thirty lakhs to provincial governments, and this assistance was increased further with the 'Coronation Durbar' grants. Some more rural roads were built, and schemes were prepared for the repair of village wells, but the new grants were expended almost entirely in the towns—and particularly in the larger cities where 'scientific' projects of drainage and water supply were encouraged. Progress was patchy—here a storm-drain, there a new tank or model coolie-lines, and elsewhere nothing at all. One systematic development was the setting up in 1914 of a quasi-provincial service of municipal medical officers of health by the Government of India. Government was prepared to meet half the cost of their salaries, but municipalities were not keen to adopt the scheme: apart from powers of appointment and dismissal, boards had no control whatever over the selection or work of these officers. A few large towns did engage health officers who frequently brought much-needed scientific methods into the sphere of sanitation, but they 'led a somewhat peripatetic existence . . .; having no security of tenure, when they dared to produce honest reports condemning insanitary conditions, vested interests were powerful enough to have their services dispensed with'.[1] Their efforts

[1] P. 230, 'Forty years' progress in public health', pp. 229–47 of the Annual Report of the Public Health Commissioner with the Government of India for 1937.

might often only be reflected in worsening mortality figures, as a result of more careful registration.[1]

Public works and sanitary services came up against war-time difficulties in a much shorter time than did the education system. Finance was almost the least of a series of grave problems: most government engineers and medical officers were away on war service by 1916, materials and supplies were prohibitive in price or unobtainable. Whereas in education the latter war years saw a temporary check, in other services there was an almost permanent setback. The war stimulated technical progress, and aroused a demand for new amenities from those whose horizon had been widened or whose means increased through the war; but for almost four years (1916–20) services stagnated—existing plant received no proper maintenance, and no new work was started. The new 'popular' boards started their terms of office, with a legacy of arrears and work undone—as well as the responsibility for new standards and new services (such as electric-lighting and motor-roads)—altogether their burden was much greater than that of their predecessors.

The extent to which the first Dyarchy governments delegated power to local bodies was not at all uniform. The greatest amount of central control was retained by the Bombay Government (although, as noted in the previous chapter, this government admitted the greatest measure of freedom in the sphere of education). Public works, medical and public health services, all remained predominantly under provincial control. Dispensaries and hospitals were placed under the general supervision of local dispensary committees, which were subordinate to the district boards, although their actual management was still vested in the Civil Surgeon and other provincial medical officers under the direction of the Surgeon General. The statutory powers of district boards over vaccination remained in abeyance, except in four districts. The construction

[1] Health figures are among the least reliable of all local authority statistics. Every annual provincial health report contains long accounts of errors and omissions. There is no 'mean average' in the discrepancies, one town will exaggerate its deaths, another will minimise them—for quite fortuitous reasons. Cf. opinion of Sir R. P. Paranjpye—'In Poona the birth register is not worth the paper on which it is written.' ITEC, vi, 283.

and maintenance of public works stayed with the provincial P.W.D.—indeed from 1919 to 1921 several thousand miles of local board roads were again provincialised. Only in Ahmednagar District did the district board have effectual control over its own public works staff. Altogether the social services (other than education) were only a local responsibility to any genuine extent in urban Bombay: in 1925 the twenty-eight largest municipalities were classed as 'boroughs' and given enhanced discretionary powers which included the provision of houses for the working classes. Government exercised a very general supervision over municipal activities through inspection by departmental officers, and by means of a provincial Sanitary Board which was responsible for the allocation of capital grants for public works to local bodies.

Perhaps the greatest freedom was in U.P. Local control over medical services was transferred from the Civil Surgeon to the district board; additional roads were handed over to district boards in accordance with the recommendations of the special committee of 1922;[1] boards were empowered to do their own road-building and maintenance, free of government supervision. In short, local bodies were made almost entirely responsible for all social services; practically the sole checks reserved to Government, were the provincial Board of Health and the small Public Health Engineering Department. The Board allocated grants for sanitary works, and supervised their application by the boards; the engineering department (consisting only of six inspecting officers) periodically inspected all municipal water works, ensured that provincial grants were properly utilised, and advised boards on consultants when required. Their work was valuable, but limited in scope.

There was very little official control in Bengal over the services operated by local bodies; the right of Collectors and Commissioners to inspect the working of municipalities proved quite ineffective. Local bodies were virtually autonomous in their management of public health services, vaccination, communications, etc. However, in many places the voice of public opinion declared itself—after early doubts—in support of 'western' social-engineering, and although the withdrawal of

[1] ISC, ix, 517–20.

official influence was often reflected in financial irregularities, it did not result in a contraction of the public services, but rather in a somewhat unbalanced advancement.[1]

In Madras, there was a tendency to transfer local responsibilities back to the centre. Just before the Dyarchy period began, all the hospitals at district and taluk headquarters—previously under local management—were taken over by Government; in 1922 all local board veterinary institutions were provincialised, and between 1929 and 1938 several district board light-railway lines were purchased by the Government of India. Also some of the key posts in local government service, those of district board engineers, district health officers and inspectors, were transferred to a provincial cadre. But these changes still left local authorities with wide powers. District boards were responsible for the construction and maintenance of main trunk roads, as well as other important 'marketing' roads; local authorities still managed a large number of hospitals and dispensaries, as well as a wide range of 'remunerative enterprises' and other services.

Punjab boards were relieved of much of the weight of official control with the advent of the Reforms; previously it had been necessary to obtain the permission of the hierarchy from Deputy Commissioner to Government, and also of departmental experts (such as the Sanitary Engineer, or the Executive Engineer), before employing technicians including engineers, health officers or veterinary compounders, or before initiating any large-scale works. In 1919, the Governor, Sir Edward Maclagan, made proposals for the reduction of these controls—but following the adverse arguments of senior officials, Fazl-i-Husain did not adopt the proposals in entirety. Nevertheless, local bodies were given much greater freedom, particularly in the appointment of technical staff. After a few years, the board's management of certain activities was seen to have many drawbacks, and after 1926 several centralising measures were applied. District boards were relieved of responsibility for about one thousand miles of metalled roads, and from 1926 to 1931 the hospitals at district headquarters were provincialised, local responsibilities being limited to a financial contribution.

[1] Cf. ISC, viii, 75, 174.

Very wide powers were handed over to the new district councils in Burma. They were to operate public health services, to manage hospitals (through special hospital committees), and to be responsible for communications. Some continuation of government supervision was implied in the system of distributing government assistance through the provincial 'technical' departments, but in practice this procedure proved no real safeguard—if grants were withheld, services came to a halt. As in other provinces, the distribution of grants for capital works was made by a provincial public health board.

As in education after the Reform, so in these fields, very many local bodies repudiated any form of government control (although continuing to look to Government for generous financial assistance). They frequently declined to give statistical information to government departments, and even regarded the advice tendered by specialist officers as a form of control; in Burma some district councils (such as Thayetmyo) refused to co-opt the Civil Surgeon to their number. Some municipalities impatient of the quasi-independence of the medical officer of health, exerted pressure by threats of dismissal. U.P. boards sometimes omitted to consult their health officers when making policy decisions involving technical considerations.[1] Several Burma municipalities went further in deliberately restricting the powers of the health officer; he was frequently denied any authority over the subordinate health and conservancy staff (as at Prome and Pakokku), and members overruled or ignored proposals of the health officer involving purely technical matters.[2] In part these situations must be ascribed to inadequate legislation which failed to work out definite spheres of responsibility.

Many local authorities failed to recognise the need for technical or specialist officers, holding that supervision was a function of the members. Some U.P. district boards refused to appoint qualified engineers; a Burma Government proposal for district health officers (Government to contribute half their salaries) was only adopted by four districts after a ten-year delay. When in 1931, as an economy measure, the U.P.

[1] U.P., Annual Public Health Report, 1923–4, pp. 28, 59.
[2] Burma, Annual Public Health Report, 1937. i, pp. 30, 32, 33.

Government withdrew its assistance towards sanitary inspectors' salaries, many municipalities attempted to dismiss them.[1]

Altogether the build-up of local technical staff was slow, and by the end of the Dyarchy period qualified officers were still wanting in all but the larger authorities. (See Table 37.)

TABLE 37

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES, 1937

1937	Number of municipalities	Health Officers	Sanitary Inspectors	Number of District Boards	Health Officers	Sanitary Inspectors
Madras	80	56	296	39	45	305
Bombay	130	79	106	20	2	7
Bengal	118	24	105	26	45	589
U.P.	83	34	176	48	76	150
Punjab	123	18	143	29	40	48
Bihar	50	11	92	15	17	85
C.P.	65	3	75	23	—	—
Burma	59	22	124	28	4	71

Local services frequently reflected these gaps among senior specialist staff. Whereas those of the big cities with qualified chief officers and progressive boards were able to effect material improvements, the small towns could only keep up existing (usually inadequate) services in an indifferent fashion, while district boards—now shorn of the assistance of district revenue officials—usually had to discharge their wide responsibilities through the agency of men with no formal qualifications, so that many rural areas were neglected, and existing undertakings were even sometimes abandoned.

The failings of local authorities under Dyarchy have by now been sufficiently indicated, and public works, health, and medical services felt their unhappy influence. Public feeling was very seldom in accord with the technical and scientific standards of western social services. The political and economic currents of the age introduced fortuitous elements of discord. The machinery of democracy often showed only its shortcomings in the hands of novices, the development of services was slow—almost

[1] U.P., Annual Public Health Report, 1931, p. 19.

always slower than the growth of people's needs. Administration was uneven and unduly dependent upon personal factors: activity was piecemeal and frequently interrupted, dependent on elusive funds and transitory enthusiasm. The attitude of the public was also very changeable; the writings of Mr. F. L. Brayne have familiarised the truth that in India it is not so difficult to get an undertaking started, as it is to keep it going. And finally there was the poverty: inadequate funds either for the multiple requirements of the city or the simple wants of the village.

The barrier of custom, which insulated the ordinary Burman or Indian from the aims of the civil engineer or health officer, may be illustrated by a method used to acquaint the people of Burma with the need for measures against the plague. The public health department attempted to capture public co-operation by representing the plague as a 'wicked nat' (or evil sprite) who might be avoided by certain (as it were) ritual observances.[1] It was this kind of barrier which impelled one Burmese municipality (Pakokku) to prohibit the destruction of stray dogs suspected of being rabid (in contravention of an order by the Commissioner), because Buddhism absolutely prohibits the taking of life. Similar religious scruples caused some Indian municipalities to round up strays, and release them some miles outside town, an entirely useless measure.

These may be extreme instances, but a lack of harmony between social habits and the techniques of the West was general. As an example of urban problems, the waste of water through leaking connections and taps left running was a constant worry to municipalities with water installations. Yet boards and public were very slow to appreciate that water shortage, breakdowns of plant and excessive cuts were directly caused by the public failure to restrict water consumption. Taps might flow all night, bursts might be left to mend themselves; if municipal inspectors should attempt to check these things there would be an outburst of indignation—why was there a water supply, if not to flow until it ran dry? British administrators stigmatised this attitude as 'careless' or 'selfish', but this failed to recognise a fundamentally different outlook, in which water was part of Nature's bounty.

[1] Burma, Annual Public Health Report, 1923, p. 40.

In the countryside there was an even greater dichotomy between custom and the new services. Of U.P. villages it was written in 1912 that 'it is easy to get drains built but very difficult to get anyone to keep them clean'—the cultivator looked on the job as menial's work. Twenty-five years later conditions were largely unchanged: 'The provision of soakage pits in village houses . . . has made headway, but their upkeep is a problem. When they get choked . . . villagers are unwilling to undertake the cleaning themselves.'[1] No lead was given by the heads of society—the zamindars, and district board members made little attempt to take a personal interest in these matters. In the absence of another Socrates, local services were often only an artificial veneer on village life.

Members and citizens were not always bound by custom, or the acceptance of things as they were. Some municipalities were prepared to enforce unpopular plague measures in face of public opposition.[2] Sometimes members of the public would voice a demand for better services. An unusually forceful expression of public feeling was a strike of tonga-drivers in the U.P. town of Pilibhit in protest at the state of the roads! But such examples of public opinion coinciding with the technical standards of the specialist were rare.

Political and economic forces exercised a casual but often decisive influence upon local services. Gandhi's insistence upon a rejection of the West, and a return to the inspiration of India's indigenous culture had its effect. Western medical officers were replaced by ayurvedic practitioners; in some districts (notably Surat) an anti-vaccination campaign was carried on—vaccination being a western abuse of mother cow. But more important were the effects of economic boom and slump. From 1931, as local bodies were overtaken by financial crisis, hasty 'retrenchment' was carried out, and many authorities began by reducing their sanitary and public-works staff, often below the level of minimum service. Upon such fortuitous circumstances did local welfare depend.

The disabilities which the introduction of democratic government released hardly need repetition. Few boards appreciated

[1] U.P., District Board Reports, 1911–12 and U.P., Annual Public Health Report, 1937.

[2] Cf. Burma, Annual Public Health Report, 1930, p. 25.

the necessity for continuity in their work, all too often their interests were ephemeral; this was particularly noticeable in connection with roads and public health. Few boards had any long-term plan of road building or repair: sections of new road would often be built for no better reason than to please an influential member, existing roads would be left until they actually began to break up—when repair would be most costly. Similarly in the sphere of public health delays were common, and achievement only temporary. In 1930 the Satara District Board would only sanction measures to check a cholera epidemic two months after the outbreak of the disease. Schemes for village water supplies in Bombay dragged on for years without completion. The organisation of village sanitation was often put on 'for the benefit of the public health staff' only: as soon as they departed the system would lapse.[1] And present in every situation, every expedient, and every decision deferred, was the inevitable shortage of funds.

This survey is necessarily selective and inadequate: in order to provide a more connected picture of the inter-relation of these influences with the progress of local services, a study of the working of the Rangoon municipal services is given in an appendix to this chapter. Rangoon has been selected because its civic life is particularly well documented. Among the great cities its municipal administration was probably less efficient than (for instance) that of Bombay City or Ahmadabad, and more efficient than that of Surat, Benares or Mandalay. But the purpose is not so much to weigh Rangoon Corporation's efficiency, as to demonstrate the basic social, economic and technological problems to which all cities, and in simplified form other authorities in India and Burma, were subject.

A general comparison of local services (other than education) as they were before and after the Reforms does not reveal fundamental changes: some services were a little better, some perhaps a good deal worse, but in aggregate their effectiveness was in neither period very substantial.

Urban public services underwent their greatest development from about 1910 to 1915 when much new work was completed. A period of inactivity followed, then from about 1920 to 1928

[1] Cf. Burma, Annual Public Health Report, 1937, i, 38.

there came a second active phase which fell away almost to nothing during the slump years. A third period of development was again beginning about the years 1935 to 1937. The installation of piped water supplies for the cities was largely complete by 1914, while in the 1920's many medium-size towns were able to provide piped water. By 1937, among those Indian towns with a population of 50,000 and over, 78 per cent had 'protected' water supplies; of those towns between 30,000 and 50,000, about 56 per cent belonged to this category; while of the many towns whose population was less than 30,000 only 13 per cent had proper supplies. Progress was most complete in Madras, where more than half the municipalities had waterworks by 1937; most medium-size towns in Bombay and Bengal also had fairly adequate supplies, but in U.P. and Punjab, proper systems were found only in the large cities and in the hill-stations.[1]

The performance of these different undertakings varied from chronic breakdown to fair reliability, although almost none got through the hot weather without a few days of crisis. A huge proportion of the water consumed was in fact wasted: in Cawnpore 50 per cent of the supply was estimated to run to waste, in Lucknow perhaps 70 per cent was wasted. Those municipalities who ran their systems at a loss appear to have permitted some of the worst wastage.[2] Very often an excessive consumption in one part of the town meant a complete water-famine in the outer suburbs.[3] There was a somewhat uneven improvement in financial management under Dyarchy. Whereas only one U.P. municipality made a profit in 1922, by 1932 twelve boards made profits and only five incurred losses. In Bombay no such improvement resulted; only Surat and one or two more towns made profits on their undertakings. As very little renewal of plant was made under Dyarchy, there was of necessity a loss in working efficiency towards the end of this period. Most boards seem to have expected their plant to

[1] Percentage of urban population having 'protected' water supplies, 1937: British India, 54 per cent; Madras, 71 per cent; Bombay, 67 per cent; Sind, 64 per cent; Bengal, 62 per cent; Punjab, 54 per cent; Bihar, 51 per cent; U.P., 33 per cent; C.P., 33 per cent.

[2] Cf. U.P., Municipal Reports, 1934–5.

[3] As in Benares: *see* U.P., Annual Public Health Report, 1923–4, pp. ii and iv.

produce the required supply without any particular care or maintenance.

Whereas the members of many municipal boards were well aware of the utility of piped water supplies, very few were persuaded of the need for sewerage schemes or thorough arrangements for refuse disposal. Conservancy methods hardly made any advance, apart from the introduction of motor refuse lorries in a few cities. Some municipalities (the majority of those in Punjab and Burma) made arrangements in the 1920's for refuse disposal by private contractors: this method was sometimes (but not often) cheaper, and always less satisfactory. Most of the Dyarchy boards considered sewage plans—only to postpone them *sine die*. A drainage scheme was prepared for the Agra Municipality in 1917: no action was taken until, in 1939, the undrained city was flooded—and a few greybeards remembered the earlier scheme.

Municipal roads were only well-surfaced in a few towns: the majority of boards were reluctant to spend money on roads, many small municipalities did not even disburse the statutory minimum amount upon their maintenance.

The manner in which most municipalities discharged their responsibilities for housing and planning provides another example of the divide between the outlook of society and western local government methods. For centuries houses had been erected in Indian towns without any sort of external control, except for the customary division of the town areas between different trades or castes. In the cities, new building had often been concentrated in the town centre, rather than in the suburbs, so that the density in central urban areas was often overwhelming. Prior to the nineteenth century, town planning was almost unknown, huts and tenements would huddle round the very walls of palaces, and such control of buildings as was introduced by the British in the nineteenth century was often for extraneous purposes (such as the military re-planning of areas in Delhi and Lucknow). Rangoon was the only nineteenth-century city which was developed according to a plan.

In the present century, several successful town-planning schemes have been carried out, such as New Delhi, and Bombay's 'Back Bay', but apart from these 'show pieces', planning

and housing activity has been slight. Public housing was an adoptive function of municipal boards, but most towns kept out of this activity—except in some cities, where lines were provided for municipal menial staff. Bombay Corporation was active in the 1930's in constructing working-class chawls; the only other authorities to assume this responsibility, up to 1938, were Ahmadabad and Cawnpore, which erected a few hundred tenements. But municipal activity was on a much smaller scale than, for instance, that of the mill-owners in these two cities.[1]

If the failure to provide municipal housing can be explained on the grounds of inadequate resources, neglect in the enforcement of building regulations was less excusable. Model by-laws were framed by public health experts in every province, but in many cases local authorities did not take any steps to promulgate them. In Bengal, up to 1937, out of the 118 municipalities only 19 had put by-laws into operation. But even when by-laws were introduced, it was the exception for them to be enforced with vigour.

The Medical Officer of Health of one Punjab municipality complains that though there are excellent by-laws to control the erection of buildings, and all building applications are dealt with strictly in accordance with them, no effort is made to see that the buildings actually constructed are in accordance with the sanctioned plans, and the result is simply a waste of time of everyone concerned.[2]

This situation could be duplicated in almost all the provinces. Some boards might be under a genuine misunderstanding as to the connection between by-laws and overcrowding, but often members were representatives of the landlords, and the idea that public needs should transcend private interests was barely recognised anywhere—even in theory.[3]

Health services and hospitals were not frequently encouraged; although district board hospitals were usually located in the sadr, municipal boards were reluctant to increase their grants-in-aid beyond the sums allotted before 1914, though prices and municipal incomes had since doubled or trebled:

[1] Cf. Annual Report of the Public Health Commissioner with the Government of India, 1937, p. 110, and 1938, p. 92.

[2] Punjab, Municipal Reports, 1924–5.

[3] The Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931), criticised municipal inactivity in housing matters. *See* Report, pp. 285–6, 293.

as in other instances, when an authority did not directly control a service or personnel, they had little interest in them. Some towns ran their own health services providing maternity aid, tuberculosis dispensaries, and other treatment for diseases of social origin, but the enthusiasm of members (who themselves were unlikely to utilise such services) was not often high.

There was a small but distinct improvement in the figures for infant mortality (the basis accepted by U.N.O. and other social statisticians as the best index of social well-being) from 19·5 per cent in 1920 to 16·2 per cent in 1937. The urban figures remained considerably higher than those of the countryside, a clear indication that rural life despite its lack of social services was healthier than life in the crowded towns. (See Table 38.)

TABLE 38

REPRESENTATIVE INFANT MORTALITY FIGURES, 1922–37

	1922		1937	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Bombay	26·1%	14·2%	21·7%	14·8%
U.P.	25·5%	17·7%	20·5%	13·2%
Burma	29%	18·4%	26·1%	19·5%

Cf. Bombay City: 1922, 41·1%; 1937, 24·5%. Rangoon: 1922, 32·8%; 1937, 24·8%. Ahmadabad: 1922, 34·4%; 1937, 28%. Cawnpore: 1922, 49·5%; 1937, 33·9%.

The 1922 figures for the industrial cities (and worse still, those for 1910) are terrifying: between one-half and one-third of all infants born, died within one year. By 1937 these had been reduced to between one-third and one-quarter. This improvement was due in part to the opening of health-centres, and the employment of health-visitors and midwives. (See Table 39.)

But as with all the statistics for local services, the tabulation of the extent of maternity services only goes to demonstrate the feeble resources available. Very often the attempt to provide a service merely revealed the existence of vast problems previously only half suspected. Local authorities at best could only select the most pressing cases for relief; at worst the slender

local funds were dissipated in tiny sporadic ventures from which no permanent benefit was derived.

The rural authorities' services were even more piecemeal than those of the towns. Expenditure was greatest upon public works (after education) but this department was generally considered to be the least satisfactory. Before 1914, in most provinces, the Public Works Department had maintained the metalled roads in fair condition on behalf of district boards, who had themselves looked after kachcha roads through local

TABLE 39

MATERNITY SERVICES, 1937, OPERATED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

	Health Centres		Health Visitors		Trained Midwives		Trained Dais	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Madras	65	112	40	8	675	934	—	—
Bombay	10	15*	10	2	134	36	52	55
Bengal	18	7	9	6	103	24	751	2,634
U.P.	146	144	22†	1	184	144	57	27
Punjab	19	17	61	24	17	7	801	500
Bihar	4	—	7	—	37	30	39	24
C.P.	7	—	60	11	1	4	378	42
Burma	2‡	4	24	3	137	166	—	—

*13 in Sholapur District. †Plus 19 lady doctors.
‡Plus 36 centres managed by charitable societies.

board overseers. Traffic had been very slight: light tongas and ekkas, and on the side roads the lumbering country carts. After 1918 traffic greatly increased; the overloaded bus was taken up anything called a road, and landlords soon developed a taste for luxurious motor-cars. The increased wear on roads was met by decreased attention. After the Reforms, district boards in most provinces maintained all roads either by their own staff, or often through a local contractor. The boards' chief aim was to save money; thus in Burma half the district councils habitually underspent their road budgets.[1] Whenever Government pointed out the need for better standards the boards retorted

[1] Burma, District Council Reports, 1927–8.

(with much truth) that their funds were inadequate. In 1931 a committee was set up in U.P. to examine the problem: it recommended the levy of a new tax on motor-vehicles to produce a road fund, from which assistance would be given to district boards. This supplement to their funds impelled some boards to larger expenditure and a measure of improvement; but before many years boards were reducing their own contribution to the extent of the road fund grants, and conditions became as unsatisfactory as before. This situation was repeated in other provinces. Although communications were probably the worst feature of local government in India and Burma, it must be remembered that in Great Britain also, local bodies have not really proved equal to keeping up the main roads in the motor age.

The next most important department (in terms of expenditure) was the medical service. Before the Reforms, the responsibility of district boards was largely confined to the upkeep of the sadr hospital, but under Dyarchy a more strenuous effort was made to take medical services into the countryside. An attempt was made to induce board-subsidised doctors to set up rural practices, but these schemes were never a real success. Doctors were reluctant to 'bury' themselves in villages, and the villagers imagined that as they were subsidised there was no need to pay fees. Dispensaries were opened on a limited scale but most district boards professed themselves unable to support them, while after 1918 private donations were very rare indeed. Indigenous doctors—ayurvedic physicians, or se-sayas in Burma—were sometimes substituted for sub-assistant surgeons; they were cheaper, and therefore more could be employed.

Rural health services were often on a very modest scale; in Punjab and U.P. only 3 per cent or 4 per cent of district boards' income went on this head, and expenditure was mainly upon vaccination. Grants to villages for sanitary works, such as drains and wells, were often so minute that it was impossible to find projects small enough to come within their scope.[1] Vaccination formed a fairly satisfactory feature of local government. Acts were introduced in most provinces during the early 1920's to permit local authorities to make vaccination compulsory, and it

[1] Cf. U.P., District Board Reports, 1921–2.

speaks well for the sense of responsibility of the members of most boards that, by the end of Dyarchy, vaccination had been made compulsory in about half rural India and in the great majority of the towns. In Bengal and Madras, compulsion was adopted by every authority: by all municipalities and district boards. In Punjab, and also in Burma, almost all municipalities and a majority of the district boards enforced compulsion. The U.P. Vaccination Act was introduced by all the municipalities but not by the district boards; enforcement was also widespread in C.P. and Bihar. It is curious that in progressive Bombay, compulsion—although of long standing—was in force in only seventeen towns up to 1936, when it was extended to fifty-three municipalities, or one-third of the total.

The unsatisfactory nature of most local services was constantly reiterated in provincial reports: governments dwelt upon the interference of boards in technical and administrative detail, the frequent infringement of rules and of standards, the need to utilise proper staff and equipment. Nationalist politicians and sociologists for their part did not claim any great achievement for popular local bodies, but they dwelt on the inadequacy of existing financial resources, and objected to the continued 'interference' of officials whether commissioners, district officers, government engineers or inspectors.

Those provincial governments which had surrendered their powers most freely in 1920 soon began to consider the resumption of some functions. In 1927, the U.P. Government drafted proposals for the handing back of certain district board roads to provincial management. The plan was 'vehemently condemned' by Congress leaders in the provincial legislature as an 'insidious' attempt to resume control over local bodies, and although this view did not receive the unqualified support of all parties, Government was discouraged from putting the proposals into effect.[1]

When Congress governments came into office in 1937, their early policy was to staff 'village improvement' schemes with Congress workers, and to stimulate 'national' activities—as by expanding the numbers of ayurvedic doctors. But provincial governments soon discovered that if their programmes were to

[1] ISC, ix, 521–2.

be completed, they must be able to exert some direct control over local affairs. Gradually the advice of specialists and administrative officers was given more attention. No new services were handed over to local bodies (in Bombay, and other provinces, Nationalists had long been calling for the transfer of public works and health services to local agency), and in U.P. where the process of devolution had probably gone farthest, many miles of major roads were resumed by the provincial government.[1]

It seems certain that some modification of the existing system of local services in India and Burma had become necessary. The delegation of wide powers to local bodies was useless, unless adequate machinery for their discharge was also provided. The existing framework of authorities offered many obstacles to the realisation of a proper working of local government: the synthesis of the technical expertise of the specialist official with the local knowledge and influence of the elected representative, in a policy that balances the needs of the whole and of the parts.

The area of the district was far too wide for chairmen or members to know the problems of more than a small portion of one sub-division. Yet the resources of the district board were barely adequate to the support of the qualified technical officers who could build up effective services. The small municipality was an excellent unit for the operation of local knowledge, but in existing circumstances, it would often contain antagonistic elements who would be unable to agree on a common policy, moreover municipal resources were often inadequate for the employment of any qualified senior staff at all. The 'market town' type of municipality would be better united to its surrounding rural district, so that the necessity of duplicating senior staff would be eliminated. The city municipality seems more promising—it sometimes contained civic leaders who were able to take a disinterested view of municipal needs, while financial resources were adequate for the entertainment of properly qualified chief officers. Would there be a possibility of making large towns the nucleii of local government areas? But large towns were not sufficiently numerous to fulfil such a

[1] *See* U.P., Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, xix, 810—the introduction of the new road programme.

rôle, and moreover they were almost always divorced from their surrounding areas—their problems were separate and distinct. City boards had their own difficulties; they were often occupied with political considerations, and their problems were multiplying at a much more rapid rate than in the market-town or village.

The proper balance between local leadership and technical or administrative efficiency is difficult to discover: perhaps the solution in India, Pakistan and Burma would be to place technicians and equipment in a provincial pool, and to co-ordinate the programmes of local bodies through closer supervision by a provincial local government department.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XIV

Municipal Services in Rangoon

THE history of Rangoon contains many examples of that inadequate solution of social problems which was typical of so many local bodies in India and Burma. The treatment of the city's milk supply, labourers' dwellings, refuse disposal and the water supply particularly deserve consideration.

In 1906 as a result of public expressions of disquiet, Dr. Blake (then municipal veterinary officer) wrote a damning *exposé* of the filthy conditions in which milk was transported and sold to the people of Rangoon.[1] The matter rested for some years, but in 1912 a sub-committee was appointed by the municipality to prepare plans for improvement; they made full proposals for control of the sale of milk, and these were submitted to the Burma Government with a request for the necessary powers to put them into force. Government replied the following year by stating that the municipality already had adequate powers to control the spread of disease and the contamination and dilution of the milk. In reply, the legal adviser to the municipality insisted that the existing powers were insufficient, so Government asked for a detailed draft of the proposed plan. In 1915, Government confirmed its previous opinion that municipal powers

[1] Quoted in 'Report on the Public Health of Rangoon', 1927, i, 26–7.

were already sufficient so, in 1916, by-laws were drafted to require a milk-vendor to bring his milk to a municipal testing-depot, and thereafter to retail it from sealed cans. The setting up of the depot and its staff was, however, judged by the municipality to be an impossibility in wartime, so the enforcement of the by-laws was postponed 'for the duration'.

In 1918, the municipality returned to the scheme, concluded that its merits were 'doubtful', and decided to continue not to enforce its own long debated by-laws.[1] So matters continued until 1923, when 'throughout the whole of the year nearly everything connected with the milk supply of the city . . . [was] subjected to a continuous fire of criticism' from newspapers, social workers, politicians and others.[2] The Corporation were stung into activity, and in the following year established a model co-operative dairy—an offshoot of the municipal health department, with corporation capital, and chairman and secretary from the corporation. This venture was short-lived:

> In spite of ample aid . . . the co-operative society became bankrupt, and had to be wound up within little more than a year of its formation. . . . The final report . . . discloses an amazing record of incompetence and dishonesty on the part of the officials concerned.'[3]

So ended the municipality's efforts to improve the milk supply. In 1927 a very moderately phrased report on the city's health found that conditions were 'no better' than when Dr. Blake wrote his note in 1906. But no action followed. Then, in 1935 the whole subject was again reviewed by the Corporation, and a new scheme of inspection was prepared. But this in turn yielded 'no spectacular results' and the inhabitants of Rangoon continued to drink milk subject to every sort of accidental and deliberate pollution and adulteration.[4]

The story of the coolie slums follows the same lines. Following the prompting of Government, the municipality took up the problem of accommodation for immigrant labour in 1904. Finally in 1910 the municipality came to a decision—to do nothing; a proposal to build municipal housing was ruled out.

[1] See Rangoon Municipal Report, 1918–19, p. 16 for lengthy resumé of the municipality's conclusions.

[2] Rangoon Municipal Report, 1923–4, p. 25.

[3] ISC, xvii, 364–5.

[4] Rangoon Municipal Report, 1939–40, p. 19

Yet in the same report, the housing department indicated plainly that the housing by-laws were being infringed every day, new buildings were going up which in no way conformed with the building regulations, and the municipality was urged to utilise its powers to enforce its own rules.[1] In 1910, 1,726 notices for contravention of by-laws were issued, but the number which were enforced is not recorded. This wholesale flouting of municipal rules continued, and was assisted by internal friction and corruption in the housing department, some of whose inspectors deliberately condoned irregularities.

In 1920, there were further discussions on housing problems, and in subsequent years there were attempts to introduce fresh building rules to provide more adequate standards of light and ventilation, but the slum landlords were not without representation upon the Corporation, and there were several years of abortive discussion in which the draft rules were subject to modification by different interests. Although over one thousand prosecutions were made annually under existing regulations, in fact these rules remained largely a dead letter. The municipality professed itself unable to enforce the rules because any sort of 'raid' became known to the lodging-house keepers as soon as operations began. There seems to be considerable doubt as to whether the difficulties of enforcement were in fact so insurmountable.[2]

A survey of slum lodgings was made by the Rangoon Social Service League in 1927, and their report gives a detailed account of the foul and degraded conditions under which the immigrant coolies lived. A strong recommendation was made in the special Health Report of that year for the provision of government assistance, or extra taxation to finance municipal housing,[3] but the Corporation were by no means eager to assume this new and heavy task. The 1927 proposals were in due course followed (in 1931) by a bill to make municipal housing a function of the Rangoon Development Trust, but this measure was never implemented. In 1932 another housing conference was called by Government; the members (who ranged

[1] Rangoon Municipal Report, 1909–10, p. 16.

[2] Opinion expressed by the Report on the Public Health of Rangoon, 1927, i, 32–3.

[3] Report on the Public Health of Rangoon, 1927, i, p. 35.

from academic economists to Congress leaders) found themselves unable to come to any definite conclusions because of inadequate data, but the conference insisted that the 'responsibility of the Corporation of Rangoon in regard to the sanitary conditions of houses for labourers should be immediately and strictly enforced'.[1] But the impact of the slump enabled the Corporation to postpone any action even further, and this problem was left to be solved by pestilence and death.

The sequence in the fields of refuse-disposal, street cleaning and water supply was similar. Problems accumulated to the point of crisis, then sub-committees were appointed and elaborate enquiries were held; but if the crisis passed, then things went on unchanged.

Municipal rubbish was dumped in swamps in Ahlone and Mill Road. These had originally been right outside the built-up area, but the city had expanded to their margins even by 1908. The growing nuisance to the public from these dumps called forth a protest from Government in 1910; enquiries were thereafter made in Singapore and Penang, the following year, to try to discover better methods of conservancy and refuse destruction. No action followed these enquiries. In 1920 the Railway Company brought a suit against the municipality on account of the stench emanating from the Ahlone dump which was invading railway workers' houses. The municipality renewed its enquiries in Penang in 1923, but the expense of burning or otherwise destroying the rubbish was said to be prohibitive. Tipping went on as before and after 1923 became even more haphazard and careless. In July 1926 there was the worst epidemic of dysentery and cholera for twenty years. The committee of enquiry suggested alternative methods of rubbish disposal and concluded 'that the present system of dumping 800 tons of rubbish daily inside the City of Rangoon must be stopped at the earliest possible moment'.[2] Alternative methods of disposal were considered by a special municipal committee for some four years, and eventually the committee recommended the 'continuance for an indefinite period of the present methods'.[3]

[1] Report of the Rangoon Labour Housing Conference, 1933, p. 21.
[2] Report on the Public Health of Rangoon, 1927, i, 24.
[3] Rangoon Municipal Report, 1931–2, p. 32.

Nothing else was done, the dumps grew higher and more pestiferous, and only Providence saved the city from more hideous epidemics.

Rangoon refuse-collection was based upon the 'back drainage spaces' behind each row of tenements; the inhabitants threw away every sort of waste matter behind their houses, where it was shovelled up by the municipal sweepers and carted away. Sewers were installed in the centre of the city in 1890, and in a few suburbs between 1906 and 1915; they were merely open gullies which in the hot weather became clogged breeding-grounds of disease. Large areas within the city had no system of sanitation whatever.

Before any improvement could be made there must be a sufficient supply of water. A better water supply was the key to almost all municipal problems. With adequate water the back drainage spaces could be washed down daily and kept clean; with water the drains could be flushed and would fulfil their proper purpose. Until more water was available there could be no extension of the drainage (which in 1939 was still confined to a small section of the city), nor could the municipal markets be kept sanitary, nor could the problem of the slums be solved, for new housing estates could not be erected in healthy open areas without drains and water. The inadequacy of the water supply was demonstrated in a manner all could understand in 1930, when the greatest temple in Burma, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, caught fire. The Rangoon Fire Brigade were unable to quench the blaze, very largely because the water pressure was quite inadequate, and twenty lakhs' worth of damage was caused.

The problem of insufficient water was perennial in Rangoon: to go no further back, there was a state of crisis in the opening years of the twentieth century. The city then depended upon local supplies, water collected in Victoria Lake and Royal Lake which had become 'alarmingly low'. A new reservoir was planned at Hlawga, seventeen miles distant from the town. This 'miracle of inefficiency' was opened in 1904 at an actual cost of forty-seven lakhs as against the estimate of thirty-one lakhs.[1] It was meant to provide an adequate supply for many years, but

[1] B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 271–3.

trouble followed quickly. There were bursts and breakdowns in pumping-stations and mains, culminating in the complete stoppage of all water for three days in 1912. An expert advised the need for a new twenty-million gallon reservoir, new mains, new pumps, new filters. But the water fund was already thirty-three lakhs in debt: there was deadlock. The municipality welcomed the opportunity offered by the war to postpone a decision indefinitely.

Meanwhile there was an attempt to check the waste of water which was consuming untold millions of gallons daily: in 1918 it was calculated that the average daily consumption of each man, woman and child was seventy gallons! Most of this poured out of the public hydrants. A Waste Section was set up to check this unnecessary consumption, but as the Municipal Report observed: 'The real remedy is to create an educated opinion and a public conscience on such subjects. So long as the masses of the population consider the existence of a tap absolute proof of an inexhaustible supply of water, waste will continue.'[1] The Waste Section must have exerted some influence, for the daily consumption of the city fell from fourteen million gallons in 1918 to eleven million gallons in 1922, and ten million in 1930; nevertheless this did not eliminate shortage, which became acute every hot weather.

In 1923 Government appointed a committee to re-open the question: the committee reported in favour of new installations at Yunzadin which 'affords a prospect of an unlimited supply', but its cost (some eight or nine crores) was beyond the municipality's capacities. Moreover a powerful section of councillors maintained that any large-scale project was unnecessary; a sufficient supply could be secured locally from tube-wells. A decision was again postponed. In 1932 another consultant engineer was asked to prepare a report. He considered that an extension of the Hlawga supply was the only practical project, but 'owing to strong religious objections to the removal of pagodas and mosques situated within this area the scheme has had to be abandoned'.[2] In the 1930's the demand upon the municipal reservoirs became even heavier, and consumption began to rise again. A new proposal for conveying water from a

[1] Rangoon Municipal Report, 1920–1, p. 10. [2] *Ibid.*, 1932–3, p. 20.

reservoir at a distance of forty-three miles in the Pegu Yomas was recommended by the Government Engineer in 1934. Next year this scheme, which was to afford a supply of twenty-five million gallons a day, was adopted at an estimated cost of nearly twelve crores (50 per cent more than for the scheme which was turned down in the more prosperous 'twenties). Work upon the new reservoir began in 1936, and was partially completed in 1941. The new supply was only just in time. Although over one thousand new meters had been installed (against the prolonged opposition of the usual bloc of conservative Burmese and Indian councillors), consumption had reached a new maximum of 16,500,000 gallons a day by 1938.

This dreary recital of delay and indecision has not been introduced merely to demonstrate the incompetence of the Rangoon Municipality, but to illustrate the impact of the problems of today upon the structure of British-imposed local government. A similar record might be produced in respect of all but a few progressive eastern cities. To condemn Rangoon Municipality for inefficiency is not enough—there are deeper causes at work.

The machinery by which the Corporation arrived at its decisions was certainly not conducive to speedy action. The municipality was in the habit of delegating special problems to *ad hoc* sub-committees, whose ten or twelve members attempted to work out complicated administrative or technical questions which could only be resolved by a technical officer as a full-time assignment. In consequence the preparation of reports and recommendations frequently consumed months and even years. Matters were then debated again in full committee; a procedure which allowed opponents of change constantly to refer points back for further consideration. Another inevitable cause for delay was the necessity to refer all major proposals to Government (even after 1922 all schemes involving a loan required this sanction) and the habits of the Secretariat were not always brisk. Delay is inherent in democratic government, and in Rangoon the opponents of change exploited procedural devices time over again.

As elsewhere, problems were created and their solution was retarded by cross-currents of social custom, selfish interests or

the continuation of the habits of the village in the setting of an industrial city. The scattering of refuse broadcast in the back-drainage spaces, the primitive milk supply, an attitude to piped water as to the village spring, the opposition to new reservoirs, the difficulty of discovering a catchment area agreeable to religious and social opinion, the closing of windows and crowding of rooms in slum tenements: all these were the result of diverse forces inimical to the technical considerations of municipal activity. There was much passive opposition to municipal policy—and very little opinion in its support.

There was a great need for sustained development; from time to time the municipality would be galvanised into activity by an epidemic, a disastrous fire or a sternly worded report; but usually the consequent spasm of sub-committees and blue-prints would be short-lived. After a few months the municipality would relapse into its usual routine.

At the root of all difficulties was a lack of funds. Financial wealth would not have eliminated all of the social problems described above, but without financial reserves, reform could not begin. Although public opinion can do much, in urban conditions even a lively public conscience needs to be supported by funds to provide the elaborate plant, transport and personnel necessary for modern municipal activity. Each of the problems considered above hinged upon finance; the milk-testing laboratory, municipal workers' dwellings, a modern refuse-destruction plant, more rubbish lorries, proper underground sewers, and above all an adequate supply of water. In the absence of funds none of these urgently needed amenities could be constructed.

CHAPTER XV

Local Finance

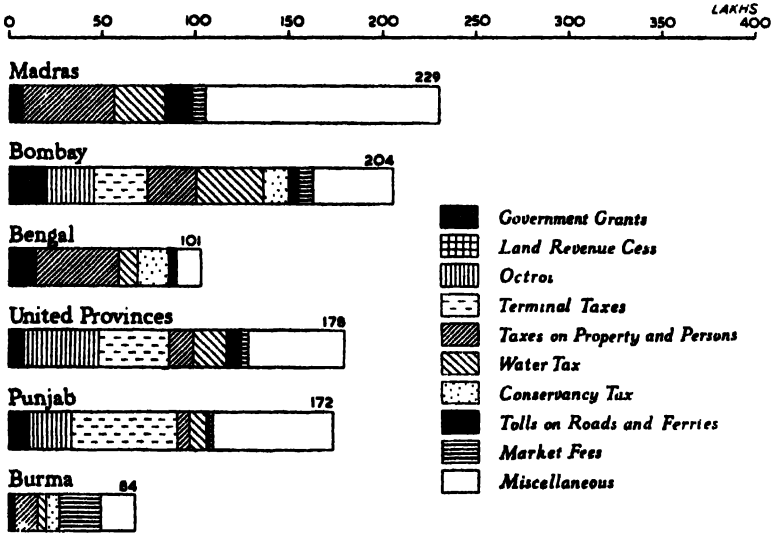
FINANCIAL policy and practice in the local government sphere emerged as the result of two major influences; first, the policy of Government and its servants, and second, public opinion. In the 'official' period the former was dominant, but in the early years of Dyarchy Government relinquished its hold over local authority finance to the control of (mainly middle class) non-official boards.

The principles of Gladstonian finance remained dominant in India long after they were discarded in England, and in the early years of this century, economy[1] was still the overriding consideration. One of the prime reasons for the development of local bodies after the Mutiny was to shift some of the country's financial burdens on to local resources; for many years municipal boards were compelled to pay for the town police—entirely outside their control—while village authorities were constituted in Bengal and elsewhere for the sole purpose of paying for the village chaukidari police. Provincial levies were a 'first charge' upon local funds: in the early twentieth century many Bombay boards were semi-bankrupt through having to meet the costs of plague services operated (it was alleged upon an extravagant scale) by the Bombay Government.

Of equal importance in local finance was the machinery of higher control centralised under the Supreme Government (the minute check exercised by the Treasury over British government departments under the Gladstonian system is in some ways comparable). Even though the control of the centre was gradually relaxed, it still remained necessary at the close of the nineteenth century for local bodies to submit all proposals for

[1] Sir George Schuster (one time Finance Member of the Government of India) calls it 'parsimony'. *See* Schuster and Wint, *India and Democracy* (London, 1941), *p. 281.*

new activities or appointments to the provincial government, and thence to Simla. There was a close government check upon the annual budget; grants were awarded for specific purposes and were often liable to be surrendered if the grant was not expended within the current financial year. This system encouraged the heads of local bodies to concentrate upon financial

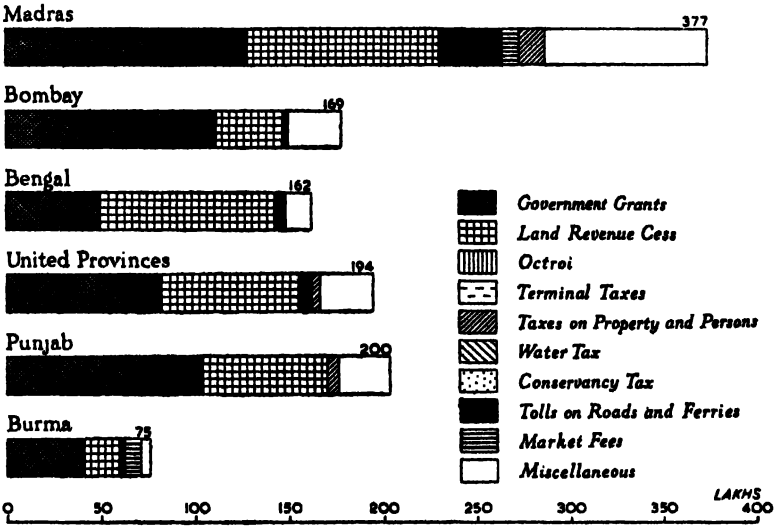


Sources of municipal boards' income: some provinces compared (1937 figures).

and accountancy problems to the detriment of practical development. It also encouraged that habit of automatically turning to Government for assistance—that lack of local initiative, which was to persist right into the Dyarchy period. Government tried to encourage local bodies to develop their 'productive' resources, such as rents from property, market fees, waterworks and other public utilities. Higher taxation—the bogey of Gladstonian finance—was very rarely encouraged: as late as 1909 the Lieutenant-Governor of Burma vetoed a proposal by Rangoon Municipality to increase the city's rate of taxation.

From the beginning of the twentieth century the Imperial

finances began to show surpluses, while after Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty a more positive concept of public finance began to appear. The emphasis upon elaborate financial control and elaborate accountancy was if anything intensified, but harnessed to a sense of the obligation of the Imperial Government towards the welfare and custom of Indian society. The prevail-



Sources of district boards' income: some provinces compared (1937 figures).

ing climate of opinion both in contemporary English Liberalism, and in Congress under Gokhale's leadership, gave strong support to the development of government-sponsored social services, and this bore fruit in the 'Coronation' and other grants towards primary education and public health development between 1909 and 1915. These grants were very generous in comparison with anything that had gone before, but were still modest in terms of post-1918 government assistance.

The effectiveness of these pre-war schemes was hampered by the elaborate structure of centralised control which still imposed a long time-lag between policy decisions in Simla, and their application by local bodies, so that many pre-war schemes

were halted uncompleted in 1915, when Indian resources were concentrated upon the war effort. This era of centralised financial direction, of planning by experts and management by district officers and departmental officials, had its achievements in the field of public works—in good roads, piped water supplies, public buildings, slum clearance and town-planning schemes.[1] But purely official control was less successful in fields where public co-operation was an essential ingredient—such as public health and education. The failure of the 1918 primary education scheme, for example, showed that centralised financial planning was a sufficient substitute for public support only in the promotion of social services within the scope of the engineer and surveyor.

Centralised control over local finance was succeeded by the almost complete abrogation of any official share in local affairs. There was almost a revolution in financial *practice*—carried through within the space of a year or two. The change in *policy* was not quite so precipitate: since 1909 the Government of India had been considering modification of the hierarchy of official financial control, and it was recognised in principle that in such matters as the planning of budgets, increases in rates of taxation, the entertainment of new staff, etc., greater freedom might be granted to local bodies, particularly to municipalities. But Edwin Montagu's constitutional settlement outran the cautious deliberation of the Government of India, and the financial devolution of 1920 to 1923 was carried through not by I.C.S. officers but by elected ministers—and far exceeded all previous proposals.

This remarkable increase in financial freedom is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that a sudden change *towards* centralisation took place in English local government almost simultaneously. In Great Britain, local bodies had been created in place of the old oligarchic administration during the years 1830 to 1890, when standards in public service were relatively elementary. In the twentieth century the increasing complexity of local government, new technical problems, the inadequacy of existing administrative areas, together with a

[1] Such as that carried out in Lucknow, involving the rebuilding of sections of the old city, the laying-out of parks and the planning of new residential suburbs.

growing sense of the need to attain a better 'national minimum' in social services, all helped to make for centralised control. After 1918 British government grants amounted to 50 per cent of local bodies' income, and they were increasingly required to conform to statutory standards, and to submit their plans and programmes for ministerial approval. In the case of some functions (especially in connection with 'public assistance') local autonomy was severely curtailed, and in certain matters abolished.

The emancipation of Indian and Burmese local bodies was delayed until the advent of the internal combustion engine and of political democracy. Liberation from official control and the call for higher standards in social services came together. There was the paradox of government policies of improved services, particularly in the field of education, the provision of government financial assistance upon an unprecedented scale—and the almost complete elimination of government control. Municipalities were given almost complete independence in the sphere of expenditure of public money; periodical government audit could not be used as a means of control, and there was no provision for the surcharge of members. Machinery to permit increases in rates of local taxation was also created, but proposals to raise taxes still had to receive government sanction, and the procedure was generally slow and uncertain. District boards were also emancipated from higher control, but although the Reforms' legislation provided them with increased financial powers, the machinery for implementing these provisions was frequently lacking; for instance, the Burma Government never drafted the necessary rules to make it possible for rural councils to increase taxation, although legislative sanction for such increases was introduced in 1921.

As a result of this unbalanced freedom and of their inexperience, the new popular boards tended to build up expenditure faster than income, and almost always fell back upon the easy solution to balance their budgets—by appeals to Government. The elected ministers could not entirely shake off the shackles of the past, many vestiges of the old official financial outlook still lingered in provincial Secretariats. Economy was often the prime motive for policy decisions, grants for public works were still allocated on a yearly basis for particular pro-

jects, involving a more or less unbalanced scramble for money, excess surpluses were still liable to be surrendered to the provincial funds. But in the 1920's grants were, in general, much more freely available, especially for the development of primary education. The relative ease with which money was obtainable sometimes militated against proper care in spending or sound financial policy; the drastic curtailment of grants which followed the slump did in some cases prove beneficial in promoting efficiency through enforced economy. But such economies were often effected only by arbitrarily curtailing unpopular services, especially in the upkeep of communications.

The financial consequences of the emancipation of local bodies fulfilled neither the prophecies of the advocates, nor of the opponents of self-government. Freedom did not appear to stimulate increased activity and thereby create a fuller development of financial resources; but neither did local authorities try to decrease taxes below existing levels; very few boards actually became bankrupt, and some did attempt to exploit additional sources of revenue.

We have seen that local boards were very largely composed of members of the new urban middle classes—mostly lawyers, with some traders and teachers; financial policy clearly reflects this predominance. Almost all boards fiercely resisted the placing of additional burdens upon the property-owning or income-tax-paying classes, and managed to shift a large share of the onus of local taxation upon the general public—that is, the lower classes. Hence a definite preference for indirect taxation such as market-fees, and above all octroi; or for fixed levies such as pilgrim taxes, tolls, animal or vehicle taxes. Hence also the resistance to new categories of taxation such as the various taxes 'on circumstances and property' or 'on professions and trades'—local variants of income or land taxes. The most important taxes, and their degrees of unpopularity among members of boards, and the vocal section of the public, are best understood in terms of their impact upon the middle classes.

Least objection was voiced to octroi. It had the sanction of antiquity; authority for its levy was claimed from Manu, certainly the 'changi'—levy of a handful of grain—was well established in the Muslim period, and 'an old tax is no tax'. In principle

it was a tax on articles consumed within the town only: goods in transit were taxed, but the sum was returnable on export. In practice refunds were paid only upon 75 per cent to 90 per cent of exports. The burden might fall not only upon the townspeople but also upon the peasant coming to market, on the passing traveller and even on some distant purchaser or manufacturer.

It was sometimes claimed as a virtue of octroi that it was equitable in forming a tax on prosperity, its yield increasing with the growth of trade. But whereas in many instances income certainly contracted under adverse trade conditions,[1] there was no automatic increase with prosperity. Most traders paid a *douceur* to the octroi mohurrir, whereupon they understated the amount of goods they were importing, and their declaration was accepted without demur. The loss in potential revenue to the municipality might easily be as large as 30 per cent to 50 per cent of that collected.[2] Although an increase in trade would mean a larger *douceur*, it might be reflected only slightly in the octroi returns. Sometimes when attempts were made to tighten up octroi administration and enforce full payments, the traders would feel sufficiently outraged to move their business outside municipal limits; but generally custom was observed by mohurrirs in their demands on behalf of the municipality and for themselves, and then octroi was not actively resented by merchants.[3] Nevertheless the system was wasteful and bore particularly hard upon peasants and small traders who endured hours of delay and harsh treatment.

The history of octroi in the nineteenth century is of a recurring contest between the Government of India and provincial governments, the former constantly pressing for its abolition, and the latter steadily extending its operations. If a student were to calculate the extent of the correspondence concerning this subject in the thick leather volumes of the old India Office Records, devoted to the proceedings of the Government of India, Home Department (Municipalities), he would probably find that at least half of the volumes of letters, orders, resolu-

[1] A decline in octroi income for 1908–9 was explained by some U.P. municipalities as due to the year being inauspicious for marriages.

[2] *See* ITEC, iii, 358: evidence of Sam Higginbottom.

[3] Gyan Chand, *Local Finance in India*, pp. 55–7.

tions and despatches are taken up with this one subject—octroi.[1]

Octroi (or 'town duties') was levied as a central tax from 1808; it was abolished after Trevelyan's condemnatory report, in Bengal Presidency in 1835; Bombay followed suit in 1844, but transit duties continued to be levied in Madras until 1861. Meanwhile, under local arrangements, the Sikh 'dharat' was revived in many Punjab towns soon after the annexation as a specifically municipal tax, and octroi in its now familiar form was introduced in Oudh and the North-Western Provinces (including those districts which were formed into the Central Provinces), from about 1860. The system was later extended to the municipalities of Bombay and Sind.

The central government objected on economic *laissez-faire* grounds to the revival of these 'evils' in 1864. Sir Charles Trevelyan made it clear that the tax would only be tolerated if it bore solely on the internal consumption of towns, and if it did not operate as a form of transit duty. In 1870 the 'reduced rates' system (the forerunner of the terminal tax) was started in Mirzapore: duties were levied at much lower rates, but there were no refunds on goods subsequently exported elsewhere. This system spread throughout most of the North-Western Provinces and Punjab, but the Government of India was firm in demanding its suppression. In the 1870's octroi accounted for about 85 per cent of the municipal income in Punjab, about 65 per cent in the North-Western Provinces, 50 per cent in the Central Provinces, and about 40 per cent in Bombay. During the next twenty years there was little change. From time to time the central government would press for octroi reform or abolition (especially in the smaller towns), and the provinces would profess themselves satisfied with existing arrangements.[2] There was no further extension of the octroi system to other provinces. In 1888, Moulmein Municipality in Burma was given permission to levy the tax, but took no steps to carry this out; the Madras municipalities were circularised in 1889, with a view

[1] A useful summary of the various decisions and recommendations of the central government from 1860 to 1925, from the view-point of the Punjab Government, is given in ISC, ix, 166–75.

[2] Cf. the 'Note on Octroi' of the Government of the North-Western Provinces, in 1886. The inhabitants were said to suspect other municipal taxes, and to regard octroi as relatively just.

to the introduction of octroi throughout the Presidency, but all except five of the fifty-four municipalities strongly opposed such an innovation, and the proposal was abandoned. British India remained divided into two almost equal halves, one largely dependent on octroi, the other supported by house-taxes and miscellaneous revenues.

The U.P. Government appointed a committee in 1908 to examine the working of octroi in the province, and to make proposals for alternative sources of income. The 'Report of the Municipal Taxation Committee, U.P., 1908–09' was based upon the evidence of traders and others in all the important provincial towns; the undesirable features of the system were exposed, octroi was condemned 'as an oppression and an abuse' and its abolition strongly recommended. To fill the inevitable financial deficit, the Committee first suggested (in terms characteristic of this period) that economies should be effected in municipal expenditure;[1] then, rejecting alternative taxes on incomes or property, the Committee proposed the introduction of the Terminal Tax, already operating in Cawnpore.

The Terminal Tax was imposed on goods arriving in a town by rail; it was realised by the railway company on behalf of the municipality, on a commission basis. There was no refund system, but in consideration of this, the rate of levy was required to be substantially below octroi rates. The tax might be evaded if goods were brought into town by carts; this could be defeated by imposing a Terminal Toll on road traffic, but this was levied at flat rates (e.g. eight annas for a cart drawn by one bullock) without enquiry as to the nature of the cart load. This toll was supposed to exclude the worst features of octroi, such as inspection delays, and bribes to the staff to accept false estimates of cart-loads.

The U.P. Government accepted the principle of octroi abolition, but could not accept the terminal tax as a satisfactory alternative. Plans were put forward for the abolition of octroi in forty-four municipalities and its substitution by tolls or direct taxation. The fate of this attempt to substitute direct for indirect taxation is of considerable significance in an appreciation of Indian local finance. (See Table 40.)

[1] Report of the Municipal Taxation Committee, U.P., 1908–09, p. 30.

TABLE 40

TAXES IN FORCE IN U.P. MUNICIPALITIES, 1908–37

	1908 to 1909	1909 to 1910	1910 to 1911	1911 to 1912	1912 to 1913	1913 to 1914
Octroi	75	74	74	74	68	51
Terminal tax	1	1	1	1	1	1
Circumstances and property tax	5	6	6	13	13	23

	1914 to 1915	1915 to 1916	1916 to 1917	1917 to 1918	1918 to 1919	1919 to 1920
Octroi	37	35	35	35	35	34
Terminal tax	1	1	1	1	1	8
Circumstances and property tax	32	31	31	31	35	35

	1920 to 1921	1921 to 1922	1922 to 1923	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926
Octroi	37	29	30	31	33	34
Terminal tax	11	16	18	18	19	19
Circumstances and property tax	36	39	39	39	37	35

	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932
Octroi	38	38	38	40	42	44
Terminal tax	19	19	20	20	20	20
Circumstances and property tax	31	29	27	25	25	23

	1932 to 1933	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936 to 1937	1937 to 1938
Octroi	44	45	45	45	45	45
Terminal tax	20	20	20	20	20	20
Circumstances and property tax	20	19	16	16	14	14

At an early stage considerable public opposition was voiced to the proposed changes; nevertheless many boards went ahead, either under official pressure, or because of a genuine progressive spirit and willingness to adopt a better system. In place of octroi, towns were encouraged to introduce direct taxes, but neither the provincial government nor local bodies had any clear idea of the probable yield of the new taxes. Schemes were 'somewhat tentative and provisional . . . not based on any clearly thought out economic principle.'[1] In many cases, assessment was haphazard and the yield fell far below expectations, producing temporary crises in municipal finances. The provincial government therefore decided to introduce the terminal tax in large towns instead of direct taxation. An application to this end was made to the Government of India in 1914, permission was received in 1917, and the operation of the terminal tax finally began in 1919: such was the working of centralised financial control in pre-Reform days.

Conversion to the terminal tax was only fruitful in commercially active cities, it was not likely to be productive in Lucknow or other dormant towns where trade in commodities continued on traditional small-scale lines, and merchants could evade taxation to a large extent by unloading goods at the next station up the line, and bringing them into town in carts. Evasion was further simplified by the arrival of the motor-lorry. By 1920, Government realised that the attempt to change to direct taxation had failed through the passive refusal of the smaller boards to collect the alternative taxes, and the lack of any really profitable substitute for octroi.[2] The attempt to discover alternatives to octroi went on a little longer, virtually under the momentum of past policy, but during the years of Dyarchy when boards were given greater financial freedom, there was a gradual return to octroi which no minister felt able to oppose.[3] By 1937, sixty-five towns again depended largely upon indirect taxes, as compared with only thirty-six in the war years, and seventy-five in 1908.

The Report of the U.P. Municipal Taxation Committee was considered by the Government of India to be sufficiently important to be brought to the attention of other provincial

[1] U.P., Municipal Reports, 1914–15. [2] ITEC, iv, 450. [3] ISC, ix, 451–2.

governments, who were required to consider the reform of local taxation. In 1910, the Bombay Government sounded Commissioners and Collectors, and reported a general satisfaction with the existing system;[1] Ahmadabad and two other towns expressed their willingness to change to the terminal tax. In 1911 the Government of India directed the Bombay Government to try out alternative taxes; conversion to terminal tax was acceptable only if this did not constitute the principal source of revenue. As an experiment, the Bombay Government instructed Commissioners to arrange for three municipalities in each Division to change to the terminal tax. (See Table 41.)

In 1916 the abolition of octroi was begun. Efforts to induce boards to make direct taxation their staple resource were even less successful than in U.P. and were dropped after 1920, when political discontent seized upon the attempt of Government to impose 'new burdens' as a grievance likely to make a ready appeal to the public.[2] However, the substitution of the terminal tax was a considerably greater success in commercially progressive Bombay than in the United Provinces, and in 1924 district officials reported decisively in its favour. In U.P. only the Cawnpore Board spontaneously adopted the terminal tax in place of octroi,[3] elsewhere changes were due to official pressure; but in Bombay there was a definite desire among boards with a majority of members in trade to adopt the new system, and by 1937 less than half the municipalities still clung to octroi: one-third had changed to terminal tax which had far outstripped its predecessor in its financial yield. Middle-class resistance within the Bombay boards also prevented any large-scale application of direct taxation.

The Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee in its Report (published in 1926) repeated the weighty arguments against indirect taxes on trade,[4] and restrictions upon them were written into the 1935 Government of India Act (item 49, list 2, schedule 7), but in the provinces where these taxes are already established, it seems probable that they will long remain.–

In Madras the only tax closely corresponding to octroi was a

[1] Whereas octroi was usually levied over a wide range of articles, it generally consisted in Bombay of one heavy tax on cotton.

[2] ITEC, vi, 335. [3] ITEC, iv, 470. [4] ITEC i, 290–1.

TABLE 41

TAXES IN FORCE IN BOMBAY MUNICIPALITIES, 1908–37

	1908 to 1909	1909 to 1910	1910 to 1911	1911 to 1912	1912 to 1913	1913 to 1914
Octroi	130	130	130	130	130	130
Terminal tax	—	—	—	—	—	—

	1914 to 1915	1915 to 1916	1916 to 1917	1917 to 1918	1918 to 1919	1919 to 1920
Octroi	130	128	126	113	106	106
Terminal tax	—	—	2	15	20	20

	1920 to 1921	1921 to 1922	1922 to 1923	1923 to 1924	1924 to 1925	1925 to 1926
Octroi	95	91	91	82	82	80
Terminal tax	31	33	33	49	49	49

	1926 to 1927	1927 to 1928	1928 to 1929	1929 to 1930	1930 to 1931	1931 to 1932
Octroi	79	79	76	76	76	76
Terminal tax	49	49	50	51	48	48

	1932 to 1933	1933 to 1934	1934 to 1935	1935 to 1936	1936* to 1937	1937 to 1938
Octroi	74	74	70	65	61	61
Terminal tax	52	52	54	54	40	40

*Sind separate.

tax levied on all timber imported into Madras City, but a tax upon trade which was in some ways more irksome was the network of toll gates throughout the Presidency. Not only were tolls levied upon all vehicles entering municipal limits (in exactly the same manner as the U.P. terminal tolls), but also tolls were operated by rural boards, and their barriers stood upon all main country roads at intervals of a few miles: they might be as few as five, and were hardly anywhere as much as twenty miles apart. Municipal tolls represented about 14 per cent of the total municipal income; receipts averaged about fourteen lakhs a year in the early 1920's, and were 17·84 lakhs out of a total income of 163 lakhs in 1929. They were particularly important in the Coimbatore District; Dharapuram Municipality derived almost half its income from tolls. The district boards drew about 12 per cent of their income from this source; over thirty lakhs annually in the early 1920's and as much as 45·15 lakhs in 1929. In no other province did the revenue from tolls amount to more than three or four lakhs a year.

The ubiquitous toll barriers were admitted by all concerned with their working to be a nuisance at best, and to constitute a real burden upon traders and consumers, but as in the case of octroi, local bodies professed themselves financially unable to forego these revenues. However, the rapid expansion of motor transport in the 1920's brought about the imperative necessity for abolition. As long as the tax fell largely upon slow moving bullock carts the system was considered by those not directly involved to be tolerable. But when cars and lorries had to submit to five- or ten-minute halts, for every ten or twenty minutes of driving, then the weight of criticism became irresistible. In 1931 a portion of the provincial motor tax was allotted to local bodies, and in return they were required to abolish their toll barriers, although the new compensation only partially replaced the old revenues (in 1937 the contributions to municiplities amounted to 12·82 lakhs, and to district boards, 28·23 lakhs).

Burma municipalities also drew between half and one-third of their income from levies upon trade in the form of market fees. The only major province whose municipalities were not dependent upon a form of trade tax was Bengal. It is difficult to dis-

cover any historical reason for this singularity, unless it was that the headquarters of the Government of India was located in the heart of Bengal, and any attempt to introduce taxes on trade, or other devices to avoid direct taxation, would have at once come home to the champions of orthodox political economy upon the Governor-General's Council.[1]

A reliance upon trade levies which were not felt directly by individual householders was to some degree inevitable, in view of the inadequate and often inequitable nature of many of the alternative taxes. The great objection to almost all forms of direct taxation was the poor quality of the assessing and collecting machinery of all but the largest cities. Except in some half-dozen cities, the taxpayer's liabilities were determined not by standard rates but by the vagaries of the municipal committee.

There is, unfortunately, an overwhelming body of evidence to show that assessment work was perhaps the least satisfactory aspect of municipal life. In almost every province the municipal board either themselves fixed the liability of individual householders or else heard appeals against the decisions of an official. Almost always, boards' decisions were influenced to some extent by class feeling or by a need to propitiate the electorate. Everywhere there were examples of unfair discrimination between different properties or persons, and in most towns there was a general tendency to make light assessments, so that the potential sources of income were hardly ever made to yield the fullest possible income.

A special exception to this rule of light assessment was made for public property, particularly in Bengal. In Great Britain Crown property is not liable to pay local rates; this rule is applicable even to nationalised undertakings, such as the electricity supply services with their numerous buildings and plant, even when they make use of local authorities' services, although the Crown does make some contribution (often inadequate and in arrears) in lieu of rates. In India, however, government property *is* liable to pay rates, and municipalities

[1] There is much evidence that many members of Bengal municipal boards would have preferred an octroi system; cf. opinion of S. T. Forrest, an expert on municipal affairs in Bengal, ITEC, v, 152.

usually had no qualms about fixing their demand at the highest figure possible.[1] It was common practice for municipalities to attempt to extend their boundaries, expressly to include government property for taxation purposes. This was often the fate of railway colonies, marshalling yards, etc., which were saddled with a large share of municipal taxation, although as regards municipal services the railways were almost entirely self-contained. By these means some towns were able to secure an additional, but concealed, subsidy from Government.

In some cases the shortcomings arising out of members' assessment methods were made worse by the limitations of the taxes at their command. The tax or rate on real property was the only tax which was in general free of restrictions; there were usually no arbitrary limits to the values at which municipalities might assess houses, although the low rental values prevailing in most Indian cities, except for the lodgings of unskilled labourers, effectively imposed a low ceiling upon calculations of rateable value. In U.P. municipalities the levy of the house-tax was actually subject to restrictions; for instance, the maximum liability of a household to this tax was Rs. 72 in Cawnpore (where several residents were millionaires) and Rs. 48 in Allahabad: in smaller towns the maximum was even lower.

The other direct taxes were almost all restricted in operation. The U.P. tax on circumstances and property was confined to one rupee for every hundred rupees of income, and to a maximum of twelve rupees, so that all persons earning over Rs. 1200 a year were taxed exactly the same. Many of the professions taxes were limited; under the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1920 the highest annual levy was Rs. 50, which might be paid by a vakil of the High Court making Rs. 5000 a month, or by a pleader earning Rs. 500. In other Bengal municipalities the limit to a person's liability was Rs. 84, so that all who earned over Rs. 700 a month were taxed alike.[2] These restrictions were presumably originally imposed in order to safeguard citizens from undue exploitation by municipal boards, but the precaution seems to have been unnecessary. In Madras the District Municipalities Act of 1920 provided for a professions tax to be levied on a progressive scale up to monthly incomes of Rs. 2000,

[1] Cf. ITEC, viii, 614–15.

[2] ITEC, vii, 305–6.

which were liable to tax at Rs. 100 per annum. In 1920, of the 2,293,948 persons residing in the Madras municipalities, 82,413, or 3·7 per cent, were assessed for the tax—at an average of Rs. 4/8 as. a head, and it seems certain that no incomes were assessed at the maximum of Rs. 2000.[1]

When boards are criticised for their failings however, it should be recalled that they had no proper staff with which to frame estimates of taxability, and they were not permitted to demand details of their income from assessees or to see the files of the income-tax authorities, so that their calculations were of necessity superficial and therefore, in equity, had to be calculated on the low side. When municipalities were empowered to levy taxes with a broader scope and a greater potential yield, their shortcomings were often by no means so obvious. A water tax was imposed by a number of large towns, and despite a good deal of unauthorised tapping and evasion, the revenue from this head increased substantially under Dyarchy. By 1937 this tax was important in most large towns, and was actually the largest single source of municipal revenue in Bombay Presidency.

Rural finances were particularly cramped since, through the nature of the Indian fiscal system, they were denied the potential revenue from taxation of real property which almost every western country gives to local bodies. So long as land revenue was accepted as the payment of rent to the State for the tenancy of state land, so were rural boards excluded from all but a minute share of this revenue. In Gokhale's words 'now there we have a really serious grievance . . . if we could get for our local bodies a much larger share of the contribution from the land—even if the proportion was not so high as in the West, most of the financial troubles of these [rural] bodies would disappear.'

The Decentralisation Commission reported in favour of large assignments to local bodies, the Lawrence Committee in Bombay recommended in 1915 the allocation of 10 per cent of land revenue to local bodies, and the Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee suggested that the provincial demands for land revenue should be stabilised at a low level, and that all further increases in its yield should be credited to local bodies.[2] But the

[1] Professions taxes were in force in all Madras municipalities, in 104 in Bengal, 15 in C.P., 49 in U.P., 30 in Bombay, and in 6 in Punjab. [2] ITEC, i, 254.

continuing difficulties of provincial finance, even after the 'Meston Award', ruled out any such development.

Attempts to induce rural bodies to introduce alternative types of direct taxation met with very little success. Provincial governments urged boards to adopt a tax on circumstances and property, but this was resisted almost everywhere. Only in U.P. did a substantial number of rural bodies adopt the tax and the subsequent yield was meagre in the extreme. There was active resistence to the tax in some districts (as a result in some part of 'no tax' campaigns); assessment officers had to be escorted by police, and even then were not always safe from assault. Other forms of rural taxation were not capable of development as major sources of income. Some, such as the tolls and taxes on animals and vehicles for road maintenance, were of doubtful morality,[1] while the system of maintaining village cattle pounds was sometimes exploited only as a means to create jobs for the dependants or supporters of members of district boards. Revenue from such sources was small, inelastic and uncertain.

Thus both in town and countryside the expansion of revenue by tapping local wealth through direct taxation of incomes or property was frustrated. It was further noticeable that in the cases of a great many taxes and a great many local bodies, an attempt was made to 'shift the burden' from the ratepayer to some other party. The most obvious example is that of octroi, which was paid very largely by the cultivator or manufacturer.[2] Among municipal taxes, the house tax was almost invariably passed on by the owner to the occupier, both in India and Burma,[3] more particularly in industrial cities, where any rise in tax would be followed by an equal (or greater) rise in rent. The staple of rural taxation, the land revenue cess was also passed on by landlords to their tenants except where the latter were protected by law. In U.P. about two-thirds of the agricultural land was held by occupancy tenants who were fairly well protected against unauthorised exactions; but landlords were entitled to recover three-fifths of the cess from all other tenants,

[1] Cf. remark of the Commissioner of Benares Division, U.P., 'the average district board road does far more damage to a motor-car than a car can do to a ruined district board road'. U.P., District Board Reports, 1932–3.

[2] According to Sir Percy Thompson, ITEC, iv, 478.

[3] Cf. ITEC, vi, 161, 213, 336.

and 'in practice [the landlord] recovers a good deal more'.[1] Wherever the cess was raised above 5 per cent in U.P., the landlord was entitled to recover three-fifths of the additional demand from *all* classes of tenants. The landlords of Bengal and Bihar were entitled to recover the entire cess from their tenants; the actual cultivator is supposed to pay only half of the cess, the intermediary tenants paying the remainder. In the ryotwari areas of Madras and Bombay, the cultivator was of course responsible for the whole cess, but when land was let to tenants there was legal provision for shifting a part of the burden.[2]

In provinces where the position of tenants was not defined at law, the onus of taxation was often transferred to them. In Burma the whole of the cess was said to be passed on to the tenant, there being no tenancy law or control of rents in the province. Very often in practice, in many of the over-populated provinces all legal safeguards were ignored, and the local cess was used by the landlord as an excuse to wring extra rent from the tenant—it might be much in excess of the sum to be paid in tax.[3]

Some cities derived a portion of their revenue directly from country people. Market towns which imposed taxes or tolls on animals would profit from trade between rural buyers and sellers of animals. The big fairs such as the Magh or Kumbh Mela at Allahabad would benefit from stall-rents, traders and public being mainly outsiders. Religious centres such as Benares and Gaya would levy a small toll upon the thousands of rural pilgrims.[4] The justification for such exactions lay in the supposed use of municipal facilities by the country people; but apart from the municipal markets so common in Burma, there were few genuine cases for reimbursement to the townspeople for services rendered to their rural visitors.

The general pattern of local taxation and the burdens it imposed is fairly clear. Municipal taxation was imposed more or less uniformly, with little regard for the varying capacity to pay

[1] ITEC: iv, 450; v, 27; vii, 321; etc. [2] ITEC: v, 508; vi, 336; vii, 355.

[3] Gyan Chand, *Local Finance in India*, pp. 119–20.

[4] Pilgrim taxes were introduced into four U.P. towns in the early years of Dyarchy (they operated in three others before). It was some indication of the casual incidence of this tax that it fell off, as country bus services developed, being collected only at the railway station.

of rich and poor: houses in the town centre would be assessed at much the same rates as those in the outer suburbs beyond the range of public amenities.

It seems certain that the middle classes, particularly shopkeepers and merchants living in the cramped houses of their forefathers, paid very much less than might be expected from them both in respect of their capacity to pay and of the special benefits they derived from municipal services (such as secondary schools). Evasion of their obligations was assisted by their predominance upon municipal boards, so that assessment of middle-class properties and enforcement of collections thereon was often mitigated in their favour.[1] This evasion was aggravated by the nature of municipal taxes which were exceedingly limited in their application, often failed to include special 'service' taxes or charges, and were invariably levied at a standdard rate: there was no principle of gradation or progression, so that contributions from the prosperous middle classes were never proportionate to their incomes.

More than their fair share was often paid by the poorer clerical classes (those with salaries from Rs. 15 to Rs. 50 *per mensem*) whose houses and incomes might just qualify for municipal taxes, but whose resources were petty and inelastic.[2] Sometimes ancient families with tumbledown palaces paid (or were asked to pay) disproportionate property taxes; no persons of this class would be members of municipal boards, and they would not ingratiate themselves with social inferiors, so assessments might be very high although they would derive very little advantage from municipal services. Large industrial and business properties, and properties in the 'civil lines' would often be disproportionately highly assessed, and contributed a sizeable proportion of municipal revenues. But in general taxation was spread over the whole mass of the urban poor in the form of higher costs of living: dear food, and high rents —which in big industrial cities might be three or four times higher than the countryside, thanks in part to the demands of indirect taxation and the 'shifting of the burden' of much of the house tax on to their shoulders.

In the countryside, local taxation cannot really be said to

[1] ITEC, iv, 450. [2] Cf. ITEC, i, 345.

have 'burdened' anyone. As has been noted the land cess was borne largely by the cultivator who provided the bulk of the rural income. The landlords were frequently vocal in their opposition to increases in the land cess, but this probably arose from their determination to oppose any infringement of their privileged position with regard to income tax and other fiscal liabilities. The amount paid by them in land cess represented only a minute part of their wealth. Many big landlords, from various motives, were induced in the days of the old 'official' boards to endow schools and hospitals bearing their names, but such inroads on their wealth very largely lapsed in the Dyarchy period. As district board finances were based almost entirely upon agriculture and land, those few persons living in the dehat who were not concerned with the land, such as teachers, officials and more particularly village traders, escaped from any call whatever on their pockets. The position of rural industries varied. In Bengal, Bihar and C.P., the provinces where most of the mineral resources of the sub-continent are found, district boards imposed heavy special levies upon coalmines and other industrial undertakings; often without bestowing any great benefits in return. In Madras, Punjab, U.P. and Burma, a cess was levied only on the surface rent of the land occupied by rural industries. Thus the sugar refineries of U.P., the oilfields of Punjab, the goldmines of Madras and the oil-wells and tin-mines of Burma contributed very little to the district boards whose roads and other services they utilised.

This brief survey may serve to indicate the arbitrary and haphazard nature of local taxation. Pressing unequally upon different members of society, devised upon no scientific or even empirical basis, local taxation merely represented what influential voters or members would put up with; it was not calculated to yield a fair share of even the inadequate wealth of the society of India or Burma. Provincial committees appointed to enquire into local finances were often content to reiterate the plea for increased government aid,[1] they seldom indicated that

[1] Cf. the Committee of the U.P. Legislative Council appointed to enquire into district boards' finances—December 1927. From the Report (1930): 'the future of district boards' finances depends mainly on the method of distributing government grants'.

some reforms might be effected through improving the efficiency of existing sources of revenue.

Before local finances could hope to prosper it would be necessary to tackle the unsolved problems of the poor yield of local tax-collection, and the high costs which existing types of taxation seemed to impose. Some of the obstacles to a fair yield from existing taxes have already been noted: statutory restrictions, and the opposition of middle-class members to vigorous collection. The machinery for assessment and collection was imperfect except in a few leading cities; many small towns were in no position to appoint qualified staff, others could, but would not. In the absence of any established code of procedure or effective regulations and penalties for non-payment, the successful realisation of the tax demand depended largely upon the influence of a strong personality (as in Ahmadabad under Sardar Patel) or the response of local finance to outside economic stimuli; for instance, in 1927 the revenue from pawnshop licences in Mandalay rose from Rs. 5,313 to Rs. 81,000—due entirely to fierce bidding following a profitable year for the local pawnshops.

The collection of their demands was perhaps the weakest aspect of local bodies' working. Members considered that it was no responsibility of theirs, and the staff made only perfunctory attempts to enforce payments in the absence of a lead from the board. Apart from the land cess collected by revenue officials, hardly a single local tax was collected in full. Even when local bodies sold facilities from which a financial profit was derived by the lessee (such as market stalls or ferry rights), the boards were often lax in enforcing their claim to a share.[1] Sometimes in the case of taxes which affected members and their friends, no enforcement was even attempted; as an extreme instance, in 1913 Agra Municipality collected Rs. 512 on account of house tax as against a demand for Rs. 25,000. Partial methods of assessment often left prosperous persons virtually untaxed. And always any suggestion of an increase in taxation served as a bond to unite the most divided and weakened board. Even leading cities would consider any expedient, before having recourse to higher rates of taxation.[2]

[1] Cf. Panna Lall, *Junior Collectors' Handbook*, pp. 134–5.

[2] As in Rangoon. *See* Rangoon Municipal Report, 1936–7, p. 4.

The yield from local taxes was further reduced by heavy costs of collection (excepting only the land-cess which cost nothing). Among municipal taxes, octroi was perhaps the most wasteful method of raising money. Although the staff of mohurrirs and clerks was miserably paid, costs of administration accounted for about 15 per cent of the yield. All imported goods not consumed within municipal limits qualified for refund. This refund system was perhaps the worst feature of octroi in its effects upon municipal finance, it formed an incalculable drain which might upset all estimates. Many items (such as grain, timber, or cloth) might remain in store for long periods, until a favourable market elsewhere induced re-export. A town which was an entrepôt of trade (such as Karachi, Surat or Agra) might expect refunds to form a major proportion of total collections; in 1911 Hathras in U.P. was almost made bankrupt by unforeseen demands for refunds when high prices in Bombay stimulated sudden exports, and almost every year the refunds at Surat formed one-half of the total collected. It was even possible for refunds to exceed income: as in Bareilly in 1924 in respect of sugar and oil-seeds. In Bombay Presidency refunds regularly averaged only 5 per cent of total collections, but this was largely achieved by a technique of making the claiming of refunds as difficult as possible for the merchant —introducing the maximum vexation and delay, so that he only attempted to secure repayments in cases involving substantial sums of money. In U.P. this technique was practised with less success, and refunds formed some 10 per cent of total collections. Altogether about one-quarter or one-fifth of the octroi yield was wasted in collection costs and refunds.

Attempts in the countryside to impose taxes upon non-agricultural incomes were vitiated by extraordinary collection costs. Some 30 per cent of the tax on circumstances and property introduced by U.P. district boards was absorbed in administrative costs. Individual boards' figures were much worse: in some districts, collection costs were actually higher than the income received.[1] Cattle pounds were similarly operated with

[1] In 1930 Benares District Board collected Rs. 10,318 on account of the circumstance and property tax at a cost of Rs. 9,162; in 1931 Azamgarh collected Rs. 3,361 at a cost of Rs. 4,013; and in 1932 Fyzabad collected Rs. 2,716 at a cost of Rs. 2,884.

a decreasing return in revenue during Dyarchy, and several boards spent more on the pounds than they realised in fines and sales of cattle.

Although efficient administration might mitigate the cost of these taxes, high collection expenses were inherent in the nature of much local taxation. To operate an octroi system, posts had to be maintained upon every side-track into a town, and numerous inspectors employed to restrain the corruption bred by the system; even a small town had to employ a staff of perhaps fifty persons. Similarly to introduce a rural tax on circumstances and property meant the engaging of a small army of assessors and collectors, as district boards were not allowed call upon the revenue or income-tax staff.

As a result of all these factors—middle-class opposition to direct taxation, resistance to new or higher taxes, heavy costs of collection and inadequate exploitation—the revenue available to local bodies was everywhere small. J. C. Jack, in his classic account of rural India, *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*, showed conclusively (pp. 120–35) that local taxation claims only a minute share of the income of the Indian countryside: he put it at ·5 per cent of total income. No comparable detailed estimate of the onus of municipal taxation has been compiled, but it would in all probability not exceed 2·5 per cent of the town-dweller's income.

Of the total revenue from all sources of taxation in India and Burma, local taxes amounted to 8 per cent in 1884, 10·5 per cent in 1894, 10·75 per cent in 1904, 14 per cent in 1914, 22·7 per cent in 1924, and 25 per cent in 1934. Local government took an ever-growing share of the national income, development being particularly noticeable in the years before and after the first World War. Of this increase, municipal finance accounted for the greater part. The Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee of 1924–5 calculated that the average urban wage-earner (that is, a labourer) paid annually Rs. 4/10 in direct or indirect taxation, of which municipal taxes accounted for Rs. 3 in the years 1911 to 1914. In the years 1922 to 1925 his annual contribution to taxation was reckoned at Rs. 8/7, including Rs. 5/10 to municipal funds—a notable increase. But the country labourer (the counterpart of the urban wage-earner)

was said to pay only as. 13/5 pies in taxation, of which as. 1/9 pies went to semi-local taxes, in 1911 to 1914. The total increased to Rs. 1/10/11 in 1922 to 1925, but the semi-local taxes remained only as. 1/10 pies![1] The same committee observed that in 1924 the burden of local taxation in India was $\frac{1}{124}$ of that in the United Kingdom, and $\frac{1}{18}$ of that in Japan; while in 1927 the Simon Commission estimated that the yield from all the taxes raised by urban and rural authorities in India and Burma was equal only to the income enjoyed by the London County Council alone.[2]

TABLE 42

INCIDENCE OF LOCAL TAXATION, 1884–1937

INCIDENCE PER HEAD OF MUNICIPAL POPULATION

	1884	1894	1908	1918	1926	1937
	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
Calcutta	6 6	6 5	7 14	10 10	14 10	14 12
Bombay City	3 14	6 12	8 11	15 11	23 3	23 10
Madras City	1 6	2 2	2 8	6 13	7 10	7 12
Rangoon	3 5	3 12	10 14	12 2	16 5	15 0
Other municipalities:						
Bengal	0 12	0 13	1 7	2 9	3 1	3 6
Bombay	1 3	1 10	1 15	3 4	5 11	5 9
Madras	0 12	0 14	1 14	1 15	2 3	2 14
U.P.	0 10	1 0	1 10	2 5	3 7	3 9
Punjab	1 1	1 13	1 15	3 5	4 2	3 8
Burma	1 11	1 0	1 15	2 14	2 11	3 10

INCIDENCE PER HEAD OF RURAL POPULATION

	1889	1894	1908	1918	1926	1937
	as. pies	as. pies	as. pies	as. pies	as. pies	as. pies
District Boards:						
Bengal	0 11	1 0	1 2	2 6	2 9	3 2
Bombay	2 9	2 5	2 10	2 7	4 6	4 6
Madras	2 7	2 7	3 3	4 2	4 9	4 11
U.P.	0 9	0 8	1 2	2 4	2 9	3 0
Punjab	2 0	1 11	2 3	4 7	4 11	5 3
Burma	—	—	—	—	4 0	3 0

[1] Or about 1½d. *See* ITEC, i, 342, 344, 352.

[2] ISC, i, 336.

Within the confines of this deplorable local poverty, there was a definite increase in the rates of taxation and of income, especially as regards urban authorities, during the first two decades of the twentieth century. (See Table 42.)

These figures expose the hollow nature of the increases in income recorded in previous chapters. Although rates might be doubled or trebled they still remained quite inadequate. Only Bombay City with a tax income of about two pounds a head had anything like satisfactory financial resources; most municipalities could only look for two or three shillings from their inhabitants, and most district boards for two or three pence, and the public services were necessarily geared to the motive-power provided by such finances. Within these limitations, the increases recorded in the twentieth century by the Bombay municipalities and by the district boards of Punjab, Madras and Bombay gave some hope for the attainment of better standards in local public services.

In general, large cities with a comparatively high level of income were able to provide at least a minimum standard of public services, whereas the resources of small towns and rural boards were quite inadequate to maintain even the most elementary sort of service. Development was only possible through a deliberate or casual neglect of a wide range of activities, and concentration upon spending money upon the most useful projects. Progress in local government can be seen as very largely dependent upon that degree of financial impotence with which local bodies in different provinces were compelled to struggle.

CHAPTER XVI

Conclusion: The Place of Local Government in National Development

WHAT are the chief conclusions which arise from this history of local authorities in modern India and Burma? That their comparative lack of success has been due partly to failures in British and Indian leadership, and partly to certain other adverse factors which were both fortuitous and yet inescapable (such as poverty, political ferment, social flux, and economic chaos). As regards leadership, British administration had its Ripon and Indian public opinion had its Gokhale, but apart from the efforts of a few men like these two, the challenge offered by local government did not bring forth a courageous response from either British officials or Indian and Burmese leaders, in the formative half-century leading up to the first World War.

Although there were examples of British vision and enterprise in the sphere of local government, the policy of the Government of India was often pedestrian and sometimes out of touch with realities, while its application by provincial governments and district officers was often directed to ends quite different from the original intentions. The English were certainly not laggard in endowing their Indian territories with self-governing institutions. Madras received a municipal charter investing the town with the machinery of representative government a full one hundred and fifty years before the same privilege was extended to Manchester. If this was to some small extent due to extraneous issues in Stuart royal policy, there was no hidden reason for the drafting of Act X of 1842, which sought to establish municipal committees in India only seven years

after the Municipal Corporation Act, introducing the principle of representation of urban ratepayers, had become law in England. Ripon's reforms even gave comprehensive powers to rural representative boards in India several years before county councils were first established in England. At a time when English rural administration was entirely paternal, dominated as it was by landlord Justices of the Peace, Indians were invited to initiate the political experiment of rural local authorities. There can be few comparable examples of a governing power offering political innovations to a 'colonial' people at the same hour, or even before, they were established in the home country.

But these were the peaks of British policy in India; in general the elaborate framework of the Government of India was more conducive to conservatism than to progress in the sphere of political institutions. Except when a Viceroy or a Member of Council with original ideas and a forceful personality pressed on with new plans, the aim of policy was consolidation rather than experiment. This tendency was accentuated by what appeared to be the lack of response from Indians to the opportunities offered by local self-government in the nineteenth century. Official policy became increasingly cautious and less certain of its objectives. Policy-making was further restricted by the narrow interpretation which was given to local government. It was conceived in terms of sanitation, roads, and 'improvements'; of chairmen, committees, minutes and resolutions. It was all as incongruous as the bizarre Victorian Gothic Town Halls which adorn so many of the larger Indian cities.

Whereas in the development of district administration there was a fusion of Indian and English tradition and usage, in the building up of local bodies almost no concession was made to native prejudices or ways of thinking. There was the great difficulty that no separate indigenous local government tradition existed (except for the village organisation) distinct from the centralised administration of the state, upon which nineteenth-century officials could build. But to confine local government policy to the introduction of an entirely alien and unknown political technique, allowing no room for compromise with Indian or Burmese ideas, seems to display a certain lack of political imagination.

The application of a central policy by provincial governments and District Officers produced further deviation from the idea of local self-government. Nineteenth-century officials were fully alive to the potentialities of local government as a practical method of meeting some of the manifold needs of their charges. Their best efforts were devoted to building roads, schools and dispensaries. They constantly importuned Government for grants-in-aid, they cajoled subscriptions from local men of wealth, they pressed all the resources of the administration—revenue and public-works staff, village labour and whatever materials were available—into the building up of public services on a scale never seen before.

To most District Officers this much-needed material progress was decidedly more important than the 'political education' of a few lawyers and landlords. Indeed the non-official members of boards might appear to the District Officer merely as impediments to the carrying out of his plans. He was concerned with the district as a whole, he wanted trunk-roads, hospitals and schools at focal points; or perhaps services to supplement the district administration, such as a dispensary near to a police detachment. The non-official members often appeared to show interest only in their own sectional or parochial requirements: a high school for the middle classes, or a road which would link up a zamindar's estates with the market. As a result the proposals of the non-official members were often brushed aside, and some District Officers (always busy men) might be tempted to draw their nominated members from amongst dignified yes-men, to provide them with an acquiescent majority. Despite the clear directive given to official policy by Lord Ripon, and periodically re-affirmed thereafter, neither the central government nor its officers in the districts, gave a sustained impetus to the development of the ideal of local responsibility in the period ending with the first World War.

The Indian and Burmese response partly supplied the reason for lack of progress. Public indifference and sometimes hostility to the workings of local government, furnished conservative-minded British officials with a constant theme: there is no native demand for local self-government. It was true that the share of responsibility open to non-officials was slight, that the

procedure of boards and committees was unfamiliar, and that the attitude of the East towards local bodies' services—sanitation, public works, education—was diametrically opposed to the methods of the West. But this does not wholly explain the lack of enthusiasm of the Indian middle classes for local self-government. They were not deterred by unfamiliarity or lack of opportunity from conforming to the requirements of other alien institutions. Indians were prepared to go to the university and study abstractions completely outside their world, poems about daffodils and the activities of Angevin kings. They were not slow to learn the tortuous procedure of an antipathetic legal system. In due time they were quick to adopt the techniques of the party caucus and of the English parliamentary system. The case of Burma is separate: before 1920 there were only a minute number who had enjoyed even remote contact with western education or political thought, the majority of Burmese (including their leaders) could not yet establish contact with the idea of representative government. But in India the middle classes might perhaps have been expected to grasp the potential contribution of local self-government towards national development.

The leaders of the educated Indian middle classes constantly emphasised the opportunities offered in local bodies to obtain training for eventual self-government. The leading men in Congress from the time of its inception up to 1916, were mainly gentlemen who had made their names in local affairs: S. N. Banerjea in Calcutta suburban government, Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta, who for many years dominated the Bombay Corporation, and G. K. Gokhale, President of Poona Municipality. Sir Sayyid Ahmad the veteran Muslim leader was continually urging his community to play a worthy part in local bodies. Before the days of Dyarchy, local bodies offered the only opportunity for politicians to put their ideas into reality. G. K. Gokhale possessed a constructive practical grasp of social problems, a knowledge of public finance and an administrative flair which has never been excelled among Indian public men: his gifts were given their widest scope in reorganising the management of Poona's civic affairs.

Looking back upon the deterioration of British-Indian political understanding in the twentieth century, up to 1947, one

must particularly regret, in the field of local government, the delay which occurred in implementing the recommendations of the Decentralisation Commission. For a quarter of a century the importance of the demand of the Indian middle classes for a share in political power had been minimised. Ripon had foreseen this demand and had planned to meet it through local government reform, but his plans had been subordinated to the preservation of efficiency in the services. The growing social unrest of the early 1900's, and then the Morley-Minto reform of the Councils, gave a new urgency to Ripon's thesis and underlined the Decentralisation Commission's proposals. If the demands of the politically active classes were to be met by greatly increased representation in the Legislative Councils, it was surely only wise to enable them to learn at first hand something of the problems and difficulties of government, by allowing them real responsibility in the management of local affairs.

Yet, instead of being handled promptly as a matter of first importance by the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, consideration of the Commission's report was left to the leisurely routine procedure of reference to provincial governments and departments. The central government did not draft a formal Resolution until eight years had elapsed, and even then caution prevailed when wartime expectancy demanded generous gestures. The final emancipation of local authorities only came about in the backwash of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and was completely overshadowed by developments in the spheres of national and provincial politics. By that time the whole attentions of Indian public men were fixed upon the national stage, and even Gokhale's disciples, the Liberals, were concerned almost exclusively with the larger problems of participation in provincial government. It was inevitable that their interest in local affairs should lapse when broader opportunities were offered; but it was unfortunate for future national development that the transfer of the entire structure of local government from official to non-official management should have been treated in the early post-war years as an issue of only minor importance.

If the early years of this study form a record of British shortcomings in statesmanship, the Dyarchy years saw many Indian

and Burmese political leaders inflict damage on the development of local government services by the tactics they adopted in the struggle for independence. In 1921 the Congress leaders were persuaded that they could best achieve their goal by isolating the British administration through a nation-wide boycott of government institutions, cutting off the government's revenues by non-payment of taxes, and the setting up of an alternative 'national' administration which would assume all the functions of the government services. In subsequent years tactics were somewhat altered and Congress tried to make the task of administration impossible by disrupting British rule: by sabotaging the services, and overwhelming the courts and jails with a flood of satyagrahis. Such campaigns at irregular intervals might demoralise the services, bewilder the government and force a transfer of power. If such tactics were to be adopted, it was only logical for Congress to order those of its followers who were members of local bodies to carry out parallel disruptive tactics. If as a result local bodies *were* disorganised, and local board staff demoralised, Congress policy can only be accounted successful. But while this may have been effective political tactics, it was disastrous to the stability of local government. Sporadic disruption of local services went on for a period of fifteen years, and even in the periods of 'truce' a spirit of non-co-operation continually affected the work of members and staff.

Party tactics in Burma were not so thorough-going or so sustained, but their effect was equally damaging to the more immature structure of Burmese local government. The National Boycott in 1920 seriously delayed the development of local services for two or three years, and subsequently the activities of the non-co-operating political associations contributed to a rejection (both by local bodies and by the general public) of government control, to non-payment of taxes, and in some districts to militant opposition to the work of village headmen and local government services.

Both British officials and the political leaders of India and Burma failed to evolve policies which had a final goal clearly in view. The Government of India and the provincial governments, by their reluctance to transfer any real measure of power

to non-officials because of the fall in efficiency which might ensue, were eventually placed in a position where they had to sanction the abandonment of *all* official control. As a result, government supervision of local bodies became weaker in India and Burma than in any other major country; weaker even (since about 1935) than in the United States.

Indian and Burmese politicians by encouraging the public boycott of services run by local bodies, the non-payment of taxes, and a general hostility to established authority, opened up floodgates which they were unable to close at will. When the Nationalist politicians became responsible for government in due season, defiance of superior authority by the boards and the public was, in some part, turned against them. Both officials and politicians had thus discovered in turn that they could not shake off the results of past policies when they wished.

The shortcomings written into the machinery of local government by the inadequate planning and drafting of legislation were a factor of less obvious significance which, nevertheless frequently made the difference between success and failure. Local government legislation almost never arose from a popular demand (except in respect of the adoption of separate communal representation); it was the outcome of an official policy-decision, or perhaps it was the child of an enthusiastic Minister or Secretary; in consequence it was frequently doctrinaire and sometimes tentative in form. As legislation was not drafted in answer to public demand, its effect might be miscalculated. Examples of the artificial development of local self-government from the outside, are the attempts to base local administrative areas upon revenue units; the district, or if this proved unworkable, the tahsil, taluka or circle. A measure which badly misfired was the setting up of separate school boards, which produced several years of administrative chaos. Before the granting of provincial autonomy, the central government frequently selected the local board Acts of one province to provide a basis for legislation elsewhere. Acts which were efficiently framed for one type of society might be applied to others, quite different, for instance, municipalities in Berar were organised under the Punjab Act of 1873. Burma was particularly ill-used in this respect: the Municipal Act of 1884 was a copy of the

North-Western Provinces Act XV of 1883, and the Rangoon Municipal Bill of 1921 was professedly modelled upon the City of Bombay Act of 1888.

Local government legislation was often badly drafted, particularly in the early days of Dyarchy. Almost all acts were deficient in the following respects: powers of taxation were not fully defined, and the machinery for introducing new taxes or varying existing rates was often never provided; government officials were given 'emergency' powers over boards, but no standing in normal circumstances; departmental audit was not backed by any power to enforce its decisions, it was not possible to surcharge members for improper expenditure; the relation of boards and staff, and the responsibilities of senior local officers were left undefined. Many of the difficulties of local government in the 1920's and 1930's originated in hasty and loose drafting as well as in ill-conceived amending legislation which frequently created new problems without solving the old.

The lack of any sort of adequate local government service provides one of the chief reasons for the poor showing of many local bodies. Most of the small authorities were unable to employ highly paid and technically qualified senior staff, and almost all local boards failed to get the best from their officials through members' constant interference in staff matters; but these shortcomings do not acquit the provincial governments from facing the necessity to build up a local government service with a recognised status and an administrative tradition.

Before 1920 there were virtually no senior local government officers as such, outside the Presidency towns and Rangoon. For the district boards and smaller municipalities, the District Officer usually acted as chairman or policy-making head of the executive, while a Deputy Collector (or in Burma, the Township Officer) normally acted as honorary secretary, and supervised the everyday affairs of the board in addition to his magisterial or revenue duties. In the big towns there was sometimes a chief officer; in a few cities this was an I.C.S. appointment, but usually the chief officer was a retired government servant, a tahsildar or deputy collector, or sometimes an engineer who would always be on loan from government service, for there were very few engineers in private practice in

India. As a result no cadre of senior local government officers was built up, the work was regarded as an interlude from 'the regular line' of government employment, or as a means to supplement a pension. After 1920, most boards objected to employing a government servant as chief officer, as a form of government control, although there was virtually no alternative source of qualified candidates. Boards either promoted subordinates (head clerks, accountants or overseers) or more usually regarded the senior posts as 'spoils'; frequently no appointment of chief officer was made at all; the supervision of the board's affairs was vested either in the chairman, or sometimes in the whole board. When a senior post was specifically provided by Government Order, with perhaps the granting of financial assistance as a condition of appointment, boards frequently exploited the lack of precision and comprehension in local government legislation to reduce such officials to underlings.

Haphazard conditions of appointment, employment and promotion obtained for the subordinate staff throughout the whole structure of local government; some authorities established provident funds for their employees, but only a minority were properly managed. Few authorities had time-scales of pay, or graded their posts; many employees dragged out their years in the same job with no hope of promotion except through intrigue or party or family influence. Altogether there was little in local government service either in the senior or subordinate ranks to attract honest men of ability. Staff discontent was often shown in indifference to the public. Under district boards a further cause of poor service was the recruitment of staff from the urban classes (of which district boards were themselves mainly composed) so that few teachers or vaccinators had a genuine fellow-feeling for the peasants among whom they worked.

Raising the standards of conditions of service could have been undertaken by the old official boards; it should have been possible to lay down uniform terms of service with periodical promotion and a pension on retirement. Standard qualifications might have been demanded of candidates for senior posts, and their further progress made conditional upon the passing of professional examinations. Senior officials such as chief

officers, health officers and engineers, might have been placed upon a provincial cadre, and the appointments in various types of authority graded at different rates of pay upon some basis of comparative responsibility (such as population). In the absence of a recognised convention of relations between members and staff, their respective spheres should have been strictly defined. Senior officers could have been encouraged to build up their status by combining in professional associations which could both protect their interests and help to raise the standards of administrative and technical development in local government. But the old official régime found no place for such reforms and when 'popular' rule began all hope of strengthening the position of the executive was past.

Although local government took the wrong turning in many ways, it may be doubted whether the cumulative effect of these failings was decisive. There is evidence on almost every page of this work to show that many difficulties were quite inescapable and arose from the constant pressure of inadequate funds, and the constant lack of harmony between social prejudice and custom, and alien administrative and technical methods. It is perhaps superfluous to describe again the pervasive influence of these twin features of Indian and Burmese local government. They still exist as the most implacable barrier to future success. It is also necessary to recall that some of the worst set-backs in this field have been due to entirely fortuitous circumstances. After 1910 the way seemed to be opened for a period of steady progress; municipal activity in particular appeared to be working towards a more satisfactory standard of public services. But all was thrown back into disorder by the 1914–18 war. In the 1920's expenditure on social services reached unprecedented heights; only to crash under the impact of the slump. These outside shocks would have inflicted only temporary delays to a well-established system, but they were disastrous setbacks to the still immature local bodies of India and Burma.

This study has dwelt much upon the shortcomings of local government, and perhaps more weight should have been given to its successes. The large-scale expansion of primary education, the introduction of compulsory education in many towns, the extension of compulsory vaccination throughout most of the

countryside; the success of individual boards in developing health-services, electricity and water supplies, even town-planning and slum-clearance schemes: all this would come as a great surprise to the less well-informed critics of Indian and Burmese social services.

The first half of the twentieth century was a time of rapid change, of progress under great stress: it will probably eventually be seen as an apprentice-period of trial and error in the history of Indian and Burmese local bodies. In the last analysis their chief contribution was to provide training for politicians and electorate as Ripon had visualised.[1]

It must be admitted that early expectations of the value of local government as a school of political education have not been fulfilled. We can follow the steady decline in the hopes of administrators and public men, from the almost lyrical expectations of Ripon's day, to the sober, cautious phrases of the early 1900's, the peevish, chiding tones of Hardinge's Resolution, and at last the disgusted condemnation of abuse and inefficiency by politicians and officials on the eve of the second World War.

Why was the nineteenth century faith in local institutions not realised? For a variety of reasons, many reformers, Utilitarians, Liberals and Radicals, as well as political fundamentalists like Toulmin Smith, placed undue emphasis upon local self-government as the bedrock of English society. And when the first tentative steps were taken to endow India with political institutions, it was assumed almost automatically, that training in local self-government was the essential beginning. Most of the difficulties painfully related throughout this book were ignored, and it was anticipated that artificially imposed boards and committees would develop as organic institutions. However, in twentieth-century England local government has not exerted

[1] Although many of the younger generation of politicians ignored local authorities, nevertheless many of the architects of Independence served an apprenticeship in local government. Among statesmen of the first rank there are Vallabhbhai Patel, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan and H. E. Khwaja Nazimuddin. Behind them stand Sir S. G. H. Hidayutallah, Dr. K. N. Katju, Sri Prakasa, M. L. Saksena, H. S. Suhrawaddy, and S. P. Tandon, to name only a few. Several of Burma's leading politicians also gained experience of public life in Rangoon municipal politics.

that vital influence in public life which was anticipated by Victorian Liberals, as the introductory chapter of this work attempted to show. And in India and Burma, for reasons which have been examined at length, local authorities' potentialities and shortcomings were never effectively exploited.

Beside the rash expectations of the Victorians and the disillusionment of their successors, must be placed the impact of the social custom of the East upon the new institutions. Underlying the preceding chapters there has been the question of the extent to which the existence of caste and religious discord in India worked against the development of local community feeling, and whether their absence in Burma produced any measurable disparities. Certainly, caste divisions and Hindu-Muslim antagonism continually cramped the work of local bodies, and played into the hands of sectional interests to the detriment of wider needs. Moreover, local affairs would seem especially at the mercy of communalism; religious and caste prejudices were exhibited in a particularly crude form in many smaller authorities during the Dyarchy years. Yet it seems unlikely that communalism assumed a unique magnitude in local bodies when compared with the legislatures, and public life in general. Any comparison with Burma is vitiated by the difficulty of coming to an equitable assessment. Burma was at a different level of development, it came into contact with the West at a much later date and it was treated for many years as a backward frontier province; its political experience was extremely brief. The introduction of western political and administrative measures was further complicated by the additional penalty of having to absorb institutions which had undergone a double adaptation: to Indian conditions, and then to the peculiar circumstances of Burma. Moreover, the communal incubus entered Burmese affairs through the domination during the early days of Europeans and Indians upon the local bodies, a domination challenged by the Burmese with the rise of nationalism, so that the sectional struggles common to Indian local government appeared also in Burma; while in the background, minorities such as the Karens were trying to claim a share, on communal lines, of power in local and national politics. Thus, in Burma as in India, local civic life continued

to be based upon a particular community rather than associated with a particular area, while the matters of common interest continued to be those of tradition: religious endowments, festivals, charities and the observance of social conventions, rather than the local authorities and their western 'improvements'.

The first reaction of contemporary observers of local bodies at work was to condemn the whole experiment as unsuccessful, or as in the case of some Indian and Burmese writers, to hold the administrative machinery responsible for the shortcomings of those who worked it. The disillusioned supporter of representative institutions often adopts this attitude: if a system of government fails, then it must be abolished and a better form of government devised. It is possible that present-day Indian and Burmese politicians, when they find local bodies unfit for the discharge of their programmes, or when they find their political opponents utilising local bodies to build up opposition to the government (as is happening in West Bengal today) may react by restricting local boards' powers, or even by abolishing them.

Certain trends in present-day Indian government policy point to an increased centralisation of powers, and it would not be surprising to see a considerable transfer of powers from local bodies to district officials under ministerial control, on the grounds that local bodies do not represent the people as a whole (which would at present be hard to gainsay).

There is no definite movement in this direction; certain provisions in the Indian Constitution re-emphasise the importance of local government, and local bodies will elect one-third of the members of the Legislative Council (the upper house) in such provinces as have two chambers. The left-wing groups in Indian politics may well attempt to build up popular support by capturing large numbers of local boards. The effectiveness of this technique has been demonstrated in the post-war years by De Gaulle in France, and even more emphatically by the Communists in Eastern Europe.

But the local bodies of India, Pakistan and Burma have seen enough of politics: if their areas and functions can be reformed they may play a more constructive rôle in the new society. One of the successful features of the better Dyarchy panchayats was

to abate the tyranny of the petty official in village society. A healthy system of local government offers almost the only method of keeping a check on the new bureaucracy created by the growth in the activities of the State (as in the United Kingdom). Vigorous local authorities could also take a useful part in the coming struggle in Asia to raise precarious living standards. Perhaps the magnitude of the challenge may awake a bold response.

Appendix

BOYS' PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE MAJOR PROVINCES
(Types of schools, number of pupils, 1907 to 1937)

MADRAS

	1907	1912	1917	1922
District board schools	3,077	4,079	6,095	7,385
Pupils therein	141,603	223,814	357,255	413,603
Municipal schools	278	312	500	848
Pupils	18,586	24,423	44,671	61,807
Aided schools	12,694	15,194	18,334	21,909
Pupils	404,576	569,053	714,160	794,364
Unaided schools	5,192	4,285	3,753	2,901
Pupils	121,229	114,648	105,271	76,148
Total—Schools	21,379	24,044	28,881	33,635
Total—Pupils	692,409	940,689	1,232,182	1,372,661

BOMBAY

	1907	1912	1917	1922*
District board schools	4,916	6,251	7,073	7,895
Pupils therein	250,602	338,055	371,778	456,895
Municipal schools	670	718	786	906
Pupils	75,832	90,554	112,565	125,554
Aided schools	1,678	2,035	1,655	2,267
Pupils	70,574	89,422	77,106	102,349
Unaided schools	120	130	109	65
Pupils	5,974	6,502	6,935	3,720
Total—Primary schools	7,400	9,145	9,645	11,170
Total—Pupils	414,339	525,892	570,354	693,103

*Excluding Sind (1937, Sind = 2,022 schools; 126,627 boys)

MADRAS

1927	1932	1937	
12,306	15,650	15,441	District board schools
671,245	844,852	932,275	Pupils therein
1,130	1,116	989	Municipal schools
98,169	122,148	136,066	Pupils
28,815	27,564	22,674	Aided schools
1,081,186	1,200,999	1,335,458	Pupils
2,448	676	664	Unaided schools
70,167	23,323	27,080	Pupils
46,389	46,692	41,141	Total—Schools
1,986,645	2,265,960	2,494,357	Total—Pupils

BOMBAY

1927	1932	1937	
8,934	9,523	8,463	District board schools
553,832	623,908	617,971	Pupils therein
1,057	1,156	1,063	Municipal schools
184,832	222,794	233,406	Pupils
2,203	2,232	1,612	Aided schools
105,449	119,327	98,059	Pupils
87	168	263	Unaided schools
4,193	6,082	11,357	Pupils
12,313	13,110	11,423	Total—Primary schools
852,569	975,866	964,082	Total—Pupils

BENGAL

	1907	1912	1917	1922
District board schools	95	1,351	2,803	3,046
Pupils therein	8,550	70,873	128,347	119,565
Municipal schools	7	7	6	8
Pupils	455	386	323	519
Aided schools	26,963	22,906	25,700	28,918
Pupils	804,757	871,691	910,343	942,178
Unaided schools	6,406	4,197	3,959	3,541
Pupils	129,327	125,114	116,218	99,659
Total—Schools	33,962	28,606	32,595	35,621
Total—Pupils	954,027	1,074,100	1,060,177	1,165,063

U.P.

	1907	1912	1917	1922
District board schools	5,243	5,233	8,233	12,419
Pupils therein	274,220	326,920	554,875	666,654
Municipal schools	193	159	290	517
Pupils	11,722	13,456	23,154	38,663
Aided schools	3,944	3,652	1,885	2,422
Pupils	127,611	130,565	66,195	74,562
Unaided schools	160	163	128	133
Pupils	4,817	5,900	4,767	4,686
Total—Schools	9,545	9,528	10,540	15,496
Total—Pupils	418,480	480,544	649,227	787,737

BENGAL

1927	1932	1937	
3,616	3,954	4,072	District board schools
163,850	188,410	221,586	Pupils therein
167	257	316	Municipal schools
18,051	30,084	39,554	Pupils
29,994	34,725	35,343	Aided schools
1,077,401	1,302,585	1,529,008	Pupils
4,323	4,705	4,302	Unaided schools
136,587	157,804	151,854	Pupils
38,197	43,724	44,113	Total —Schools
1,399,535	1,682,503	1,945,897	Total—Pupils

U.P.

1927	1932	1937	
13,759	14,533	13,295	District board schools
822,286	884,887	920,612	Pupils therein
737	809	829	Municipal schools
69,788	93,446	106,128	Pupils
4,200	4,286	4,220	Aided schools
141,230	151,772	166,586	Pupils
107	126	147	Unaided schools
4,208	5,457	7,195	Pupils
18,817	19,768	18,506	Total—Schools
1,038,406	1,136,601	1,201,540	Total—Pupils

PUNJAB

	1907	1912	1917	1922
District board schools	2,186	2,445	3,305	4,422
Pupils therein	98,733	129,737	168,888	203,744
Municipal schools	86	73	107	180
Pupils	6,969	7,451	10,595	17,411
Aided schools	724	744	1,335	867
Pupils	28,875	34,915	58,167	42,876
Unaided schools	142	146	163	137
Pupils	5,608	6,081	7,047	5,166
Total—Schools	3,151	3,417	4,918	5,627
Total—Pupils	141,559	179,588	245,819	270,704
Total, including boys in primary classes of secondary schools	183,177	239,330	309,211	378,695

BURMA

	1907	1912	1917	1922
District board schools	—	—	—	7
Pupils therein	—	—	—	220
Municipal schools	1	6	3	1
Pupils	53	302	114	46
Aided schools	4,925	4,751	6,777*	4,360†
Pupils	154,604	160,490	251,560	172,084
Total— 'Recognised' schools	4,951	4,764	6,788	4,374
Total—Pupils	155,884	161,236	222,486	172,698
Unaided schools	(?)	(?)	(?)	18,100
Pupils	(?)	(?)	(?)	216,000

*Includes approximately 3,500 monastic schools
†1,890 monastic schools.

PUNJAB

1927	1932	1937	
4,454	4,191	4,546	District board schools
285,733	260,943	254,393	Pupils therein
260	313	320	Municipal schools
39,054	52,164	54,246	Pupils
986	1,003	823	Aided schools
59,091	68,547	61,815	Pupils
192	89	113	Unaided schools
7,987	3,902	5,569	Pupils
5,912	5,611	5,811	Total—Schools
393,178	386,870	376,687	Total—Pupils
723,204	784,292	717,380	Total, including boys in primary classes of secondary schools

BURMA

1927	1932	1937	
14	15	16	District board schools
578	809	873	Pupils therein
2	8	8	Municipal schools
242	971	736	Pupils
3,741‡	3,945	4,139	Aided schools
201,111	247,242	268,311	Pupils
3,781	3,996	4,203	Total— 'Recognised schools'
203,398	250,529	271,702	Total—Pupils
18,003	17,458	19,634	Unaided schools
202,000	184,046	192,796	Pupils

‡1,124 monastic schools.

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This bibliography cannot claim to introduce the reader to a compact body of authorities; rather, its function is to reveal the poverty of the literature of the subject. The serious student will be obliged to go straight to official papers and documents for further material. The best introduction to local government problems is to be found in the seventeen volumes associated with the report of the Simon Commission, especially vol. i (pp. 298–315), and vol. v (pp. 1053–1143).

Among non-official sources, there is a general account of municipal activities by H. T. S. Forrest, intended only as a practical *vade mecum* for members and officials of municipalities. There are several detailed accounts of civic life in particular areas, the best-known being R. P. Masani's history of the City of Bombay. Other such works are those of Amar Nath (relating to Punjab), W. S. Goode (Calcutta) and B. R. Pearn (Rangoon). Village community life has a wider literature, although many studies are derived from literary sources and are not based upon personal observation, field work or historical comparison. Matthai's pioneer work, *Village Government in British India*, is open to such criticisms. Among more recent studies, those of Sir M. L. Darling and Tarlok Singh demand mention. Full references to all the above books are given in the list of secondary works.

In general, the student is compelled to pursue references to local government throughout a wide field of writing: administrative and judicial studies; biographies, narratives, diaries and accounts of political life; works concerning economics, education, public health, social services and public finance. This bibliography is designed to indicate the kinds of material which may prove useful. It is not comprehensive in that no attempt is made to include all the books containing fugitive references to local government. Those works in which some aspect of the subject is accorded comparatively full treatment are indicated by an asterisk.

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India Office Records

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After 1910, these Proceedings are included under the Department of Education and Local Self-Government. A miscellaneous collection, concerned rather with the *minutiae* of administration than with the formulation of policy.

Signposts to the evolution of policy are provided in the principal Resolutions issued by Governors General in Council on the following dates:

5 April 1862 (Elgin)
15 September 1864 (Lawrence)
14 December 1870 (Mayo)
30 September 1881 (Ripon)
18 May 1882 (Ripon)
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The student will find that the above reports do not furnish him with a detailed, coherent picture of local government activities. It is necessary to collate and compare a great mass of annual or other periodical reports of various authorities, and the proceedings of public bodies. Some of the classes of material which must be consulted are as follows:

District Gazetteers, which contain brief histories of all municipalities and rural boards.

The Administration Reports published annually by the different provinces.

The Proceedings of Legislative Councils and Legislative Assemblies.

The annual 'Resolutions' reviewing the working of municipalities, district boards and village authorities, issued by every province.

The annual reports of the larger City authorities.

The annual and quinquennial reviews of the progress of education, issued by every provincial D.P.I.

The annual reports of the Director of Public Health in each province.

The value of these compilations is uneven and uncertain. The various provinces do not present their material in similar form, so that statistical or other comparison is not always simple. The value of many series of reports varies through the years, according to the ability of the current Secretary to Government or other responsible official. Many are bare statements of the obvious; others show critical faculty and occasionally learning and wit. The annual reports of the Presidency towns and Rangoon are the most detailed and complete. The annual Resolutions of the Governments of Bengal and the United Provinces maintain a high level of information and comment.

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