

British Imperial Genocide in India

by Steve Douglas

The contrast between the course of developments that unfolded between 1765 and 1945 in the United States, which conducted a successful revolution against the British Empire, and in India, which was unable to do so, could not be more striking.

The British East India Company's subjugation of Bengal in 1765, ushered in an age of genocide for the next 135 years, that was unparalleled in human history. The British Empire's murderous policies unleashed a famine in 1770 that killed 10 million in Bengal, fully one-third of the population at that time! In subsequent years famines claimed 11 million lives in 1783; 11 million more in 1791; 1 million more in 1837; 2 million in 1860; 1 million in 1865; 1.5 million in 1868; 5.5 million in 1876; 5 million in 1896; and 1 million more in 1899. By 1900, British Empire policies had claimed over 49 million lives in India, while the United States remained famine free, as it developed into the greatest agro-industrial giant in the world.

The first famine (1770) and the last famine (1943) under British rule are perhaps the most instructive and revealing. In the 1765 Treaty of Allahabad, the East India Company (Company) was granted the right to collect the *diwani* (peasants' tribute), formerly held by the Mughal Emperor of the region, Shah Alam II. The area from which the Company was extracting tribute was enormous—roughly 650,000 square kilometers, or an area roughly eight times the size of Great Britain. Nor was this just any area—it was “the Paradise of the Earth,” according to its conqueror, Gen. Robert Clive.

Whereas, prior to 1764, the tribute paid to the Mughal Emperor had been approximately 10-15% of the agricultural output of the peasantry, the Company raised the rate to 40-50%! Moreover, it insisted that this increased levy continued to be termed tribute, rather than a tax, because they wanted the peasants to believe that the “tribute” was still going to the Mughal Emperor, which, of course, it was not.

As Baron Clive, the top Company representative in

India, said in a letter to the Board of Directors, upon his departure in 1767:

“We are sensible that, since the acquisition of the *diwani*, the power formerly belonging to the [Mughal Emperor] of those provinces is totally, in fact, vested in the East India Company. Nothing remains to him but the name and shadow of authority. This name, however, this shadow, it is indispensably necessary we should seem to venerate.”

So, in order to foster the illusion of a power-sharing arrangement with the Emperor Shah Alam, the East India Company kept him living in the lap of luxury, under virtual house arrest at his lavish palace.

What, one might ask, is the difference between this arrangement of 1765, and today's accommodations between the allegedly sovereign governments of Europe, and the dictates of the Global Systemically Important Financial Institutions (G-SIFI) that we have already witnessed in Cyprus and elsewhere?

Not only did the Company increase the tribute rate fivefold, it also insisted that the tribute be paid in cash, not produce or other farm products. The Company also had edicts issued that outlawed the hoarding of rice and other staples. This meant that the peasants had to dump their goods on a British-controlled market, and that they had no staple reserves, in the event of a crop failure or bad weather.

Furthermore, the East India Company made the growth of cash crops, such as indigo and cotton, compulsory, wherever possible.

Thus, the combination of a partial crop failure in 1768, and the abrupt halt to September rains in 1769, produced famine conditions that ravaged a population that had been robbed of its reserves by the British East India Company. Genocide—10 million dead—was the obvious (foreseeable), genocidal result.

The response of the Company? It raised the tribute (tax) rate on agricultural land to 60%!

The Indian Roots of the Boston Tea Party

As these horrific events unfolded in 1770, the American colonial press reported on them, and they became part of the discussion and debate process that led to the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the British Empire's genocidal conduct in India played a central causal role in the events leading into the December 1773 Boston Tea Party. The British Crown had granted the East India Company certain financial privileges with regard to the importation of tea into America, in order to aid it in recovering some of the revenue it had lost during

FIGURE 1



This map shows India in 1760, when it was under the rule of the East India Company's Baron Clive. Ten years later, 10 million Indians in Bengal (highlighted), perished of famine.

the period of the Indian famine that it had created.

American patriots of that era were well aware of the murderous character of the British Empire and its East India Company. This statement from Rusticus¹, in *The Alarm*, a colonial American broadside published in 1773, is unambiguous on the genocidal nature of the threat:

“Are we in like Manner to be given up to the Disposal of the East India Company, who have now the Assurance, to step forth in Aid of the Minister, to execute his Plan, of enslaving America? Their Conduct in Asia for some Years past, has given simple Proof, how little they regard the Laws of Nations, the Rights, Liberties or Lives of Men. They have levied War, excited Rebellions,

1. A pseudonym, from the Latin, meaning (ironically) rustic, rural, simple.

dethroned lawful Princes, and sacrificed Millions for the Sake of Gain. The Revenue of Mighty Kingdoms have centered in their Coffers. And these not being sufficient to glut their Avarice, they have, by the most unparalleled Barbarities, Extortions, and Monopolies, stripped the miserable Inhabitants of their Property, and reduced whole Provinces to Indigence and Ruin. Fifteen hundred Thousands, it is said, perished by Famine in one Year, not because the Earth denied its Fruits; but [because] this Company and their Servants engulfed all the Necessaries of Life, and set them so high at a Rate that the poor could not purchase them. Thus having drained the Sources of the immense Wealth ... they now, it seems, cast their Eyes on America, as a new Theatre, whereon to exercise their Talents.”

Rusticus ended one of his 1773 pamphlets with the following admonition:

“I shall therefore conclude with a proposal that your watchmen be instructed as they go on their rounds, to call out every night at half-past twelve, “Beware of the East India Company.”

Today’s Americans, let alone “Tea Party” activists, should be so well-informed.

It is otherwise noteworthy and lawful that General Cornwallis, the British commander defeated by George Washington at Yorktown in 1781, was dispatched by the crown to become Governor-General of India in 1786.

Churchill and Genocide

In 1943, three million Indians were killed in Bengal, as famine ravaged the region once again. The trigger, on this occasion, was the Japanese occupation of Burma. The Japanese cut off all shipments of rice from Burma to Bengal, which had been the key to Bengal’s food-supply stability before World War II.

Winston Churchill, prime minister of Britain at the time, did everything in his power to prevent food relief from reaching Bengal. His only response to a telegram from the government in Delhi about people dying in the famine, was to inquire why Mahatma Gandhi hadn’t died yet. “I hate Indians,” he said to Leopold Avery, Secretary of State for India. “They are a beastly people with a beastly religion.” He told a war-cabinet meeting, that the famine was the fault of the Indians themselves, “for breeding like rabbits.”



In the 1943 famine, 3 million people starved to death. Prime Minister Churchill prevented food relief from reaching them; he blamed the Indians, whom he called “beastly,” for the famine. Shown: Some of Churchill’s victims.

Churchill refused to accept offers of Canadian and American food aid to India. India was not permitted to use its own sterling reserves, or its own ships to import food. As a true leader of the British Empire, he was

aiding and abetting the mass murder of millions of people.

That same year at the World War II Tehran Conference, President Franklin Roosevelt told Churchill in no uncertain terms, that the U.S. intended to work to dismantle the British Empire after the war, and that the war had not been waged for the sake of its perpetuation.

The fact that he personally contributed mightily to the deaths of 3 million Indians in the famine of 1943, did not stop Churchill from proclaiming, in his 1950 six-volume book *The Second World War: the Hinge of Fate*, that:

“No great portion of the world population was so effectively protected from the horrors and perils of the World War as were the peoples of Hindustan (India). . . . [T]hey were carried through the struggle on the shoulders of our small island.”(!)

Churchill no doubt felt that the magnitude of his crime, matched only by the dimension of his lies, qualified him for membership in the British or Dutch royal families, or both.

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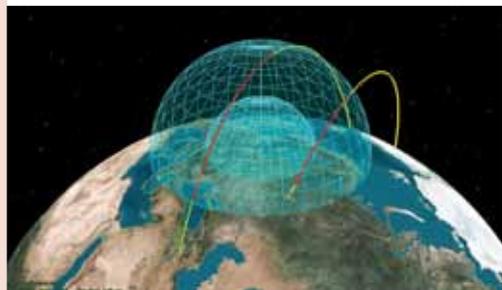
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