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Pandurang Hari and the Criticism of British Rule in India: An Assessment

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Pandurang Hari, published in 1826, is an Anglo-Indian novel belonging to the pre-Kipling era. The novel was written by an English official named William Browne Hockley. It contains a scathing criticism of Indians in general and Marathas in particular. Hence, scholars have readily recognized it as a colonialist work. What remains unnoticed is the fact that the novel also criticizes aspects of British rule in India. Focusing on this, the present article tries to show how the novel at times subverts the very discourse of colonialism it seeks to foster.

William Browne Hockley (1792 – 1860) was a pioneer in the field of Anglo-Indian literature[1]. He is remembered today mainly for his novel *Pandurang Hari*. Drawing on Elleke Boehmer's classification,[2] one may claim that Hockley was a 'colonialist writer'. His works, written for Englishmen at home, reflected the imperialist's point of view. It contained an apologia for British rule in India; as a reviewer of *Pandurang Hari* mentions, "If we have done nothing else for India, we have made such a state of things as is described by Pandurang Hari simply impossible." (*The Saturday Review* 728) This aspect of *Pandurang Hari* has drawn attention of many scholars. What remains unnoticed is that the novel also contains a criticism of the praxis of British rule in India. The aim of this article is to highlight that aspect of the work.

A brief introduction to the author is necessary. Unfortunately, not much is known about Hockley's life. In his "Introduction" to *Pandurang Hari* Sir Bartle Frere only informs that William Browne Hockley served in a judicial station at Broach, and then under the Commissioners of the Deccan, before leaving service "under a cloud." (Frere xv) Udayon Misra's account is also brief; in his endnotes he mentions:

"William Browne Hockley was born in 1792. He went to the Haileybury College in 1812. He came to India in 1813 as a member of the Civil Service but was dismissed from the judgeship in 1821. In June 1823 he was tried at Bombay and acquitted but made to retire with a pension of £ 150 a year. Hockley died in August, 1860." (Misra 60)

The exact nature of Hockley's offence remains unknown. Probably he was dismissed on charge of corruption. After retirement from service he turned to writing. *Pandurang Hari* was published in 1826, and was followed by *Tales of the Zenana* (1827), and *The English in India* (1828). It seems that Hockley did not achieve much success as a writer. By 1870s *Pandurang Hari* was almost forgotten. As evidence we may cite the reviewer for *The British Quarterly Review*, who says, "It was so nearly forgotten that Captain Meadows Taylor could find but very few copies extant, and for this reprint the publisher had to be indebted to Lord Talbot Malahide." (252) The book received more or less favourable reviews on republication, but

[1] The word "Anglo-Indian" is used in its old sense to refer to Englishmen who lived and worked in India.
[2] Elleke Boehner defines 'colonialist literature' as "literature written by and for colonizing Europeans about non-European lands dominated by them." (Boehmer 3)

this did not prevent its passing into oblivion. The fates of Hockley's other works were even worse, though critics like Edward Farley Oaten and Bhupal Singh finds *Tales of Zenana* better than *Pandurang Hari*. (Oaten 145, Singh 34)

Pandurang Hari follows the tradition of Picaresque novels. In the original "Introduction" Hockley claimed that the novel was based on a "free translation" of a manuscript in Marathi provided by a "native friend". (Hockley 19-20) This ruse failed to deceive even his contemporaries; as the reviewer for *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* remarked, "This thin disguise most probably no more deceived readers than did Scott's introduction of Sir Arthur Wardour, his oaken cabinet, and his Anglo-Saxon manuscript prevent the public from seeing the author of *Waverly* and of *The Antiquary* in *Ivanhoe*." (*The Saturday Review* 727) The plot of the novel revolves the adventures of the eponymous hero. Pandurang Hari is a foundling brought up by the Maratha chieftain Sawunt Rao Gopal Rao. While serving this worthy, Pandurang is introduced to the world of corruption and intrigue at Maratha court. In the true picaresque tradition one adventure follows another as the hero uses his wits to survive in an increasingly hostile world. In the process, he meets and falls in love with Sagoonah. Sagoonah is a beautiful maiden threatened first by the lustful Peshwa and his minister Trimbuckje Danglia[3], and then by Pandurang's devilish uncle Gunput Rao, alias Gabbage Gousala. This Gabbage is a venomous rogue. Posing as a Gossein or religious mendicant, he spins a web of intrigue to destroy Pandurang and to usurp the throne of Satarrah. After various adventures, Pandurang is finally united with his beloved, discovers his father, defeats his uncle Gabbage, and becomes heir to the throne of Satarrah. The plot, in the words of Udayon Misra, is "weak" and "rambling", though true to the picaresque tradition.

The novel contains scathing criticisms of Hindus in general and Marathas in particular. In the very "introduction" Hockley attacks the Hindus stating:

"Let the Hindus be seen at variance with his neighbour, or in any situation where his hatred is excited, and he will be found relentless in his anger, and cowardly in his revenge. Watch him at a moment when he has a chance of turning a single rupee, by almost any means, and let it be said, if his disregard of all but his object, his meanness and duplicity in pursuing it, can be exceeded!" (Hockley xvi)

He adds that "even love with him is little more, if anything, than a blind instinct." (Hockley, xv) This condemnation of the Hindus is continued in the novel. Though Pandurang is the hero, he is sly, unscrupulous and greedy; in the words of a reviewer, "one who is worse than Marmion, 'quite a felon', and very little of a Knight." (*The Saturday Review*, 728) Even his relationship with Sagoonah is, in the words of Misra, "one built on convenience and deceit." (Misra 54) The other Indian characters are equally bad; all of them are governed by self-interest. Hockley's criticism of the Marathas was even more severe. He portrays them as corrupt, cunning and ruthless. Hockley, it must be remembered, witnessed the third Anglo-Maratha war first hand. His hatred for Marathas, as Misra suggests, appears to stem from "Fear Psychosis" – "Much of Hockley's hatred for the Mahrattas seem to stem from the fact that the most potent challenge to British rule in India in the early years of the nineteenth century came from the Mahratta chiefs, badly divided though they were." (Misra 44) This

[33] Trimbuckje Danglia or Trimbakji Danglia was a real person. He was the favourite minister of Peshwa Baji Rao II. "To settle some disputes between the Peshwa and the Gaikwar, the latter sent to Poona in A.D. 1814 his chief minister, Gangadhar Shastri, a friend of the English. Shastri was conducted by the Peshwa to Nasik and was murdered there apparently at the instigation of Trimbakji." (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, & Dutta 700) This event is described in the novel.

portrayal is so bleak that Sir Bartle Frere felt the need to distance himself from Hockley's views:

"While, however, I can testify to the general truthfulness of Pandurang's sketching powers, I would by no means assent to his general estimate of Mahratta character. The author appears to have been a keen-sighted, quick-witted man, who readily apprehended the leading characteristics of what he saw and heard; but who shared, with the great majority of his official countrymen, in the difficulty of arriving at impartial opinions regarding the motives and feelings of his native associates." (Frere viii)

In a work such as *Pandurang Hari* one would expect glowing portrayal of the British and their rule in India. Strangely, Hockley is unsparing even to his own countrymen. He attacked what he perceived to be their flaws. This aspect of the works has escaped the notice of the critics. It is true that Udayon Misra discerns Hockley's criticism of the "administrative lapses" of the East India Company's government in India. (Misra 57) But he treats it summarily. British reviewers were also insensitive to this aspect of the work. This article hence seeks to study Hockley's criticism of the British in details.

The events in this novel are described from the point of view of Pandurang Hari. He is the primary narrator. In the course of his adventures, Pandurang often comes across the "Topee Wallas" or the British. Such encounters allow the author the opportunity to compare and contrast the two societies. Pandurang, no doubt, finds the British way of life superior to the Indian. But there are moments when he comes across lapses that shatter the image of British superiority and brings the Englishmen closer to the Indians. Quite early in the novel Pandurang finds shelter in Bombay where "all was grand and beautiful" at first. (Hockley Vol. I 85) Soon, however, he discerns corruption and fraudulence in this ideal haven. Pandurang is employed as a government peon and he finds this job better than his earlier job as a shopkeeper's errand boy. This is because:

"Here I felt myself more at home. I could hasten or retard the business of a complainant in proportion to the rupees he put into my hand. Then, when in attendance to superintend the punishment of the rattan, I could mitigate or increase the pain, in the execution of the sentence, according to the sum given me. At night, none were so zealous and attentive as I was in apprehending rioters and thieves who could not pay; but those were sure to be let off who could." (Misra, 88)

The English were guilty of negligence. But it is certainly ironical that Pandurang's experience under the Company's Government parallels his experience under the Maratha Government. One may remember the way he fleeced a complainant named Hybatty who had come to seek justice from Sawunt Rao. Further, at Bombay, the corruption is not only confined among the natives. The police-master, an Englishman, also took bribes to protect an offender named Shackje. (Hockley 93) Pandurang's experience at Bombay thus shatters the illusion that the British had created an ideal government in India.

At Bombay Pandurang also comes across the worst aspects of the British character. The shopkeeper he worked for treated him like a dog. Pandurang states, "I could perceive by his manner, notwithstanding, that he thought me a butt against which he might bent his anger with impunity." (Hockley 87) The behaviour of other Englishmen were also uncongenial. When Pandurang is sent by the shopkeeper to collect money from another Englishman, he is manhandled and kicked out. The Englishman could behave this way because Pandurang was a native. Pandurang states, "This officer seldom noticed any of the native men…" (Hockley

98) Hockley here seems to be condemning those Englishmen who treat the natives with disdain.

Even the immorality of Englishmen is attacked in *Pandurang Hari*. The military officer, who mistreated Pandurang earlier, attempts to elope with Jane Bebee, the daughter of an English colonel whom Pandurang served for some time. Pandurang, off course, foils the plot with hilarious results. Such liaisons seems to have been widespread in early nineteenth century Bombay. In his book *British Social Life in India 1608 – 1937*, Dennis Kincaid describes several such affairs. (Kincaid 45 – 53)

After leaving Bombay, Pandurang served Trimbuckjee Danglia for some time. Trimbuckjee, however, betrays his retainer perceiving his attachment to Sagoonah whom Trimbuckjee himself covets. Pandurang again takes to the road, and after much adventures, during which he loses and rediscovers Sagoonah, he arrives at Surat. Here again he comes into contact with the English. Pandurang's previous experiences appear to have disillusioned him by this time. He criticizes the administrative lapses of the British government quite openly. The English are blamed for not keeping the city clean; Pandurang states, "The English, to whom it belonged, seemed either incapable of enforcing cleanliness by their authority, or had given the object up as a hopeless task." (Hockley Vol. II 90) More importantly, by blindly trusting their native assistants the English have allowed corruption to germinate. Pandurang describes a Parsi, the judge's assistant, who "by superlative cunning and hypocrisy" became "a much greater man than his master." (Hockley Vol. II 90) He shows how the Parsi entertained the English to befool them:

"During my residence here, this obsequious and artful knave gave a grand *nautch*, or dance, to which the heads of the different departments were invited. The use of these invitations was, not to pay a compliment to the English, which they were silly enough to imagine, but designed to add to his own importance by the presence of the strangers, which fully compensated for the expense incurred in their company, as they seldom remained more than half-an-hour. The influence acquired in consequence, was used iin facilitating the extortion of money from the inhabitants, or in evading the payment of their just debts." (Hockley Vol. II 90 – 91)

This calculating Parsi reminds us of Orwell's U Po Kyin from *Burmese Days*. Like U Po Kyin, he shows off his intimacy with the British to augment his power and prestige. Hockley resented the fact that the English were letting themselves be duped in this manner. Pandurang observes:

"It was painfully ludicrous to hear how the wise and proper regulations of the Government were constantly evaded or set at nought, by the very person employed and paid to see them enforced. The confidence reposed in vagabonds with the high-sounding names of sudr aumeen, foujdar, sheristadar, vakeel, &c., exhibited a great degree of folly. Whoever has attained one of these titles is very certain to make his fortune quickly." (Hockley Vol. II 92)

It seems that Hockley was against the policy of appointing Indians to higher administrative posts. He felt that Indians were too corrupt to be trusted.

From Surat, Pandurang proceeds to Broach where he becomes "a writer under the Nazir of the udalut or court of justice at Broach." (Hockley, Vol. II, 118) This was the period after the promulgation of the Cornwallis Code of 1793. The judiciary system during this time was, as Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, and Dutta descibes:

"The lowest court was that of Munsiffs which could try cases up to 50 rupees. Next was that of the Registrars, a class of officials attached to the Zilla courts, who could try cases up to 200 rupees. From the decisions of all these courts an appeal lay to the district court." (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, and Dutta 791)

Pandurang himself states that the court at Broach consisted of a Judge, a Registrar and an Assistant Registrar – "all Englishmen acquainted with the native language." (Hockley, Vol.II, 120) His position as a writer gives him an insight into the English system of dispensing justice. He finds:

"The system adopted by the English government for the administration of justice, however admirable in theory, is in many respects liable to perversion by those who carry it into effect. The artful agents of the court-house were perpetually on the look-out to take advantage of every new regulation or decision of the judge." (Hockley Vol.II 118)

It is to be noted that only the natives bear the blame. Despite its defects, Hockley finds the English system better than the native. Pandurang states:

"Everything was done with the greatest order and regularity: no confusion, no squabbling, or pulling off turbans, or coarse abuse was allowed. All had equal access to the judge in his regular and appointed turn. O my poor countrymen of the Deccan, I used to think, how differently these matters were managed with you! No feeling or bribery was allowed at Broach, no gratuities to greedy arbitrators and potails, &c. But, with all its excellences and advantages, the good intentions of the government were too often perverted even there, and unsuspicious judges imposed upon. Still, such cases were rare, and, if detected, were severely punished." (Hockley, Vol. II, 122)

It seems that in extolling the virtues of the British system of administering justice, Hockley is answering not only Indians but also critics at home. It was alleged by some section of Englishmen that the British system of dispensing justice was complex and gave rise to much evil. While reviewing Fredrick John Shore's book *Notes on Indian Affairs*, Hockley's immediate descendant Philip Meadows Taylor observed, "From the time of Lord Cornwallis until the administration of Lord William Bentinck, the people of India suffered the extremities of hardship from the imperfect machinery of the courts." (Taylor 173)One of the charges laid against the system was that it gave rise to litigiousness. The number of cases registered increased to such an extent that it was difficult for the courts to cope up. Delay and other evils soon followed. Hockley, however, defends the system stating:

"That the establishment of the udalut, or court of justice, was the reason that cases were increased, is very incorrect. Justice had not before been attainable, and the people were obliged to endure wrong, for which they had no redress. When they found that injustice could no longer exist with impunity, they poured their grievances into the court. It might, therefore, as well be asserted that the erection of an hospital was the cause of an increase of sickness, as that giving the people an opportunity of gaining justice was the cause of the increase of applications to the courts." (Hockley, Vol. II, 123)

Meadows Taylor believed that the Indian system of dispensing justice through *punchayat* was simple and effective and better than the British system in some aspects. In one of his letters to his cousin Henry Reeve, Taylor mentions:

"Punchayets do very well in civil cases, and in criminal ones all I could suggest was that I should try the culprit and send the proceedings for confirmation. There would be more

trouble protecting an Adalut among these Bedurs than it would be worth, and the people have a horror of Company's Adaluts with all their forms and litigations." (Taylor, *The Letters of Philip Meadows Taylor to Henry Reeve*, 235)

Hockley, however, would have none of it. Comparing the two systems, Pandurang asserts:

"Trials by punchayet flourished most during the power of the great Poona minister, Nanna Furnavese, when no files of undecided suits were ever heard of. The difference between that time and more recent ones was, that then three-fourths of the declarations of suits were never allowed to be put on the file – a very simple method of keeping it clear. Under the English, almost every plaint was submitted and referred to arbitration." (Hockley, Vol. II, 168)

According to Hockley, the fact that the cases were registered to such an extent proved that the English system was more effective. Hence Pandurang calls for the abolition of punchayets:

"As to the punchayet system, it will not do, if the English wish to distribute justice to the inhabitants, and do not wish to discourage applications for redress, and thus force the people to settle their own differences among themselves." (Hockley, Vol. II, 173)

Whatever the defects of British rule were, Hockley was convinced that it was better than any Indian system. Pandurang predicts a bright future for British rule, stating:

"We shall find ourselves more peaceable, and they who will labour will have their reward. The thieves and the turbulent will be kept quiet. The spear of the Pindaree will be changed into the ploughshare of the coombie." (Hockley, Vol. II, 242)

From the account given above, it becomes clear that Hockley did not believe in sharing power with the Indians. For an imperialist writer like him, this was not unusual. What is strange is his criticism of British rule. It seems that Hockley's main purpose was reformist. He wanted Englishmen to take their responsibilities seriously. At the same time he was distrustful of the natives. He believed that in order to be effective, the Government must be autocratic. Ironically, his criticism of the British Government sometimes subverts the imperialist discourse of progress and reveals the inherent similarity between native and British systems.

The apologia for British rule in *Pandurang Hari* is therefore not seamless. Fissures occur when Hockley criticizes British rule. At such instances the novel seems to dilute the distinction between the ruler and the ruled, and become open to the heteroglossia of colonial rule.

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