

SECTION 1

Administration of Warren Hastings (1772-85)

Like Clive, Warren Hastings also joined the English East India Company as a clerk, but due to his hard work, perseverance and great abilities he was appointed the Governor of Bengal in 1772 A.D., after the retirement of Cartier. He remained on this post for two years, and as a result of the Regulating Act he was raised to the post of the Governor-General of Bengal in 1774 A.D. In this way, he was the first to hold this post of the Governor-General of Bengal and also the first to face the difficulties attached to this high post.

When Warren Hastings took up the office of the Governor of Bengal in 1772 A.D. he had to face many difficulties both internal and external. (1) As a result of the Dual Government in Bengal there was confusion and chaos all around and the administration was completely paralysed. While the Nawab had all the responsibility he had no powers, whereas the Company had power, it never



Warren Hastings

felt any responsibility for improving the administrative machinery. This divorce of responsibility from power resulted in the complete breakdown of the administrative machinery in Bengal. (2) The servants of the Company as well as the Nawab of Bengal made money out of the miseries of the people and thus the *plight of the people* had become very miserable. (3) While the servants of the Company were making fortunes, the Company itself was getting nothing and was almost on the verge of *bankruptcy*. So much so that the Directors of the Company were forced to beg for a loan of £ 10 lakhs from the Government of England. (4) Corruption and bribery was at its highest pitch and *justice* became a by-word. While the culprits went scot-free, the poor were punished unjustly. (5) Lawlessness prevailed everywhere and the whole country was infested with thieves, and consequently the *trade and commerce* of the country was completely paralysed. (6) The system of selling 'Revenue Agencies', not only made the plight of both the Zamindars and the cultivators miserable but also *adversely affected the cultivation* of land and resulted in famines one after the other.

However, Warren Hastings proved equal to the occasion. He faced all these difficulties with full determination and did not take rest till he had completely reformed the administrative machinery of all its evils. But for him the whole system might have collapsed. According to Sir William Hunter, "*The foundation of the system of civil administration was firmly laid down by Warren Hastings, on which the superstructure was raised by Cornwallis.*"

1. Administrative Reforms—(1) First of all, Warren Hastings put an *end to the Dual System* which was the root cause of all the prevailing confusion and disorder. The Company now took up the administrative work in its own hands. (2) The *Deputy Nawabs of Bengal and Bihar* (Muhammad Raza Khan and Raja Shitab Rai) were removed and tried for embezzlement, though later on they were acquitted. (3) The *Young Nawab of Bengal* was also relieved of his work and his pension was reduced from 32 to 16 lakhs. (4) The treasury was shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta which henceforth became the chief centre of political activity. (5) The *servants of the Company* were forbidden to accept bribes, gifts and presents. They were also forbidden to indulge in private trade.

2. Revenue Reforms—(1) The practice of selling *Revenue Agencies* to local functionaries called Amil was discontinued, because under them the tenants (or cultivators) suffered immensely. (2) *English Collectors* were appointed in every district for revenue collection and administration. They were to be helped by native officers in the work of collection. (3) A *Board of Revenue* was established at Calcutta to supervise the whole organization of revenue collection. (4) In the first instance the land was given for 5 years to the highest bidder in 1772 A.D., but after five years (in 1777) the old system of

bidding only for one year was revived. It is thus clear that "*Hastings reforms were more concerned with collection rather than the removal of evils.*" (Dr. Ishwari Prashad).

3. Commercial Reforms—Since 1717 A.D. the Company had been carrying on its trade without paying any local duties but with the passage of time the servants of the Company also began to enjoy this concession. The Company had now become the Diwan and ruler of Bengal and so it could not allow its servants to carry on private trade and sell their '*Dastaks*' or free passes. Thus Warren Hastings prohibited the dishonest sale of '*Dastaks*' and thus added a lot to the revenue of the Company. (2) A large number of *customs houses*, which hampered the growth of trade were abolished. Henceforth, there were to be only five customs houses at Calcutta, Hughli, Dacca, Murshidabad and Patna (3) In order to encourage trade a *reduction* of 2½% was allowed on all goods except salt, betel nuts and tobacco. (4) Now the English and the Indian merchants began to be taxed by following one standard rate of taxing. (5) A *Board of Trade* was set up to buy quality goods for the Company. All these reforms gave a great impetus to trade and commerce in Bengal.

4. Judicial Reforms—Warren Hastings also felt the need of reforming the judicial system of the country. (1) In each district he established a *civil and a criminal court*. The collector of the district presided over the civil courts while the criminal courts were left in the hands of the natives. (2) Two courts of Appeals were established at Calcutta. The '*Sadar Diwani Adalat*' heard the civil and revenue cases while the '*Sadar Nizamat Adalat*' heard appeals of criminal cases. (3) It was made compulsory to maintain the *record of all court-proceedings*. (4) The *judges were forbidden to accept any gifts and fees and instead regular pay* began to be paid to them for the sake of impartiality. (5) A digest of Hindu and Muslim law was compiled. Thus, "*Hastings deserves the credit of having been the first to institute the rudiments of a clean and efficient system of justice in Bengal.*"

5. Measures to effect Economy—Warren Hastings fully knew that the supreme need of the Company was money, so he effected economy in many ways. (1) The pension of the *Nawab of Bengal* was cut down from 32 to 16 lakhs of rupees a year. (2) As the *Mughal Emperor* had gone over to the protection of the Marathas in 1772, Warren Hastings stopped his pension of 26 lakhs of rupees a year. (3) The two districts of Kara and Allahabad, which had been once (1765) given to the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam by Clive, were now taken over and sold to Shuja-ud-Daulah, the *Nawab of Oudh*, for 50 lakhs of rupees. (4) Again, by helping the Nawab of Oudh against the Rohillas a further sum of 40 lakhs of rupees was obtained by Warren Hastings.