

# LORD WILLIAM BENTINCK AND REFORMS IN INDIA

**K.Vijay Kumar**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government Degree College,  
Kukatpally, Hyderabad, Telangana State*

## ABSTRACT

*During the time that Lord William Bentinck served as governor-general (1828-1835), this text is an analysis of the relationships that he maintained with the Indian states. It takes into account his perspective on the Indian states, the concepts that he has been inspired by, and the strategies that he has attempted to use in order to achieve those concepts. Peace prevailed during Bentinck's time period. It was not disrupted by any internal or external wars of the extent that had been characteristic of preceding periods. However, there were wars that occurred. In this time period, the British government was confronted with challenges that stemmed from its position of dominance, which had a significant impact on the Indian states. Should those states, the majority of which were in a state of disorganization, be allowed to continue existing? Moreover, if this was the case, what were the theoretical and practical actions that the British government was supposed to do in relation to them? Once more, what role did the treaties play in the relationship between these two parties? In response to these inquiries, there was no straightforward response that could be provided. Bentinck made an effort to respond to them in a more tranquil manner. The utilitarian concepts that were prevalent throughout his time period served as a source of motivation for him to seek reform at the hands of the Indian monarchs. Rather than using force to compel them, he attempted to exert influence over them through the use of non-intervention, counsel, persuasion, and warning programs. In spite of the fact that it was acknowledged, the use of paramountcy was only considered as a last resort. Within the scope of this investigation, particular focus has been placed on specific examples that illustrate how Bentinck's mind functions. A combination of the official records of the Company and the private papers of Lord William Bentinck have been utilized in this investigation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Lord William Bentinck (born September 14, 1774, in Bulstrode, Buckinghamshire, England; died June 17, 1839, in Paris, France) served as the British governor-general of Bengal from 1828 to 1833 and of India from 1833 to 1835. A nobleman who endorsed numerous liberal ideologies of his period, he implemented significant administrative reforms in Indian governance and society. He restructured the financial system, made judicial positions accessible to Indians, and eradicated customs like as suttee, or widow burning, and thuggee, or ritual murder by criminal gangs. The reforms implemented during his tenure were essential in establishing a more interventionist governmental approach than previous administrations, characterized by the westernization of Indian society and culture. Bentinck, the second son of the 3rd Duke of Portland, was commissioned as an ensign in the Coldstream Guards at the age of 17, and by 1794, he had attained the rank of lieutenant colonel. Born into affluence and nobility, he was a promising, if not exceptional, young officer. His appointment as governor of Madras in 1803, at the age of 29, was unexpected. Despite adequately fulfilling his responsibilities, his rule was overshadowed by

conflicts with his council and was prematurely concluded by the revolt at Vellore. An imprudent directive from the commander-in-chief of the Madras army prohibited the native troops from donning their customary beards and turbans; Bentinck, even more foolishly, refused to revoke the order. The outcome was a significant mutiny in July 1806, accompanied by assaults on officers and British forces. The pandemic was contained at a significant cost in human lives, and the ill-advised directive was ultimately rescinded. Bentinck was deemed accountable and was removed from his position in 1807. Convinced of his unjust treatment, he advocated for the following 20 years for an opportunity to redeem his reputation via service in India.

## **GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF INDIA**

In the year 1819, he declined to be reappointed to the position of governor of Madras. He was waiting to achieve his true objective, which was to be appointed as the governor-general of Bengal, which he eventually did in the year 1827. The early instructions that Bentinck was given were to rescue India from its financial woes. At the time, the government of India was operating on an annual deficit of approximately £1.5 million. It wasn't long before Bentinck was able to successfully transform the deficit into a surplus of around the same amount. Bentinck was appointed as the first governor-general of India as a direct result of his efforts, which led to the renewal of the government of the East India Company by the Charter Act of 1833. He then moved on to the next step, which was to implement personnel changes. These reforms included increasing the number of administrative and judicial positions that were open to Indians, as well as enhancing the wages and stature of Indian judges. Additionally, Bentinck made English, rather than Persian, the language of higher courts and of higher education. He also arranged for financial aid to be provided to universities, which were to be conformed to Western patterns. By making the choice to prohibit suttee (sati), the Hindu practice of burning widows alive beside the bodies of their husbands, Bentinck demonstrated a tremendous deal of bravery and kindness. However, Bentinck was able to overcome these reservations without encountering a great deal of open opposition. Previous governors-general had been reluctant to prohibit the habit because they considered it to be an intrusion in religion and because it was particularly likely to upset the Indian army. In addition to this, he was accountable for the actions taken to prohibit the killing of unwanted children, the practice of human sacrifice, and the thugs, which were groups of thieves who were joined together by oaths and rituals and who murdered travellers who were unaware of their impending death in the name of the goddess Kali. Flogging was also eliminated in the Indian army, which was a significant amount of time before it was stopped in the British army.

## **REFORMS IN INDIA – LORD WILLIAM BENTINCK**

Lord William Bentinck, as Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835, implemented significant social, educational, and administrative reforms. His key actions included abolishing the practice of sati (widow burning), suppressing thuggee, promoting English education, and introducing financial and judicial reforms.

**Social Reforms:**

The social reforms that William Bentinck implemented in India are well-known today. He liberated the people from two of the most heinous beliefs by doing away with the 'Sati' systems and human sacrifice. Suppressing the Thuggee system allowed him to alleviate one of the people's biggest worries. Complete halt to the Thuggee System occurred at the year's end 1834. An ancient belief permeated Hindu society: the practice of sati, or the widow's sacrifice on the husband's burial pyre. Many widows gladly died on the funeral pyre, hoping to enjoy heaven as much as Sati. However, in order to avoid public condemnation, they were also forced to die. The fear of dying was one side, and the fear of society was the other. In certain cases, the bewildered family insisted that the widows be executed so that they could maintain their own social status. Collecting priceless jewelry from the widows of wealthy families was another heinous act driven by avarice. That unnatural deed was perpetrated amid a number of rituals and hymns. After seeing these injustices, Bentinck decided to proclamation a regulation to end the Sati system and rescue the lives of countless widows. The great Indian reformer Raja Rammohan Ray backed Bentinck's groundbreaking venture. He intends to go so far as to visit the British government in an effort to have the scheme outlawed. The elimination of the practice of human sacrifice among hill tribes was the second notable accomplishment of Bentinck.

In 1835 AD, Bentick departed from India. As a result of his many changes, he now occupies the top position among India's Governor-Generals. His "Age of Reforms" tenure lasted seven years. "The glories of peace were Bentick's glories," argues Dr. Ishwari Prasad. Neither the years before nor the years after his reign are comparable.

**Educational Reforms:**

Bentick's work in intellectual reform was his most significant accomplishment. The Charter Act of 1813 established a yearly allocation of one lac rupees for the purpose of revitalizing and advancing the educational system in India. But this money continued to accumulate because there was no appropriate arrangement that could. Before Bentick arrived, there was a significant amount of debate going on over the medium of instruction that was being used in the educational institutions of higher learning. Either the Indian language or the English language was going to be used to deliver the notification. Those orientalists who were led by Heyman Wilson and H.T. Princes voiced their support for the use of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian as the medium of instruction in educational institutions. The ideas that were stated in favor of the English language were those of the Angliasts, which were led by Sir Charles Trevelyan and supported by Indian liberals such as Raja Rammohan Ray. Lord Macauley, who is a member of the Council and a member of the legal profession, gave the controversy a definitive form. It was decided, based on his suggestions, that the cash that had been set aside for education should be spent on the education of Indians, and that the instruction should be delivered through the medium of English. Bentick agreed with Macauley's suggestions, which were subsequently incorporated into a resolution dated March 7, 1835. The resolution stated that "His Lordship in council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and that all the fund appropriated for the purpose of education would

be best employed on English education alone." Macauley's proposals were accepted by Bentick. Educating students in English was the primary focus of the establishment of schools and universities. The people of India were able to better communicate with one another and share their thoughts thanks to the official status of the English language.

### **Financial Reforms:**

The treasury of the corporation had been decimated as a result of the Burmese war. It was estimated that the company was facing a deficit of approximately one crore as a result of the decrease in income and the increase in investments. So the first thing that Bentick had to do was to cut costs. His initiatives to improve the economy were comprehensive and stringent.

In order to investigate the increased expenditures of the corporation, Bentick formed two committees, one of which was military and the other of which was civil. The exorbitant salaries of the civil servants were decreased by Bentick in accordance with the suggestions made by the Committee at the meeting. Additionally, he decreased the allowances that were given to both civilian and military leaders. In all of the stations that were within four hundred miles of Calcutta, he decided to make provisions for a fifty percent reduction in the bhatta. Every year, a savings of twenty thousand pounds was achieved as a direct result of this technique. The production of opium during that time period took place in Central India, and it was transported to China from Karachi. Bentick shifted the trading route from Karachi to Bombay, which resulted in the company receiving a portion of the profits in the form of duties. Since the acquisition of Diwani, public institutions and people in Bengal have been able to have access to land that is free of rent. The collectors were given the command by Bentick to investigate the rights of those individuals who were in possession of free grants of land. In the majority of instances, it was discovered that the title deeds had been faked. The administration of these areas in Bengal and Bombay that were previously free of rent was resumed by the government. The revenue of the company was also enhanced as a result of this action taken by Bentick. A further increase in revenue was also achieved through the land revenue settlement of the North Western Provinces. Furthermore, Bentick increased the company's revenue by appointing Indians to administrative positions within the organization. In comparison to their European counterparts, the incomes that the Indians received were considered to be lower. When these economic measures were implemented, the deficit of one crore per year was transformed into a surplus of two crores per year. This was the effect of the economic measures.

### **Judicial Reforms:**

With regard to the enormous backlog of cases, the Provincial Courts of appeal and circuit had been substantially responsible for the situation. The judicial process that was followed in these courts frequently led to delays and uncertainties in the outcome of the cases. These tribunals were eliminated by Bentick. He established various levels of courts in order to prevent delays in the process of bringing matters to trial. It was in Agra that he formed the Supreme Court. In this court, both the civil and criminal appeals were heard and considered. In the year 1829, magistrates earned the authority to impose sentences of up to two years in prison. Allahabad was the location where a separate Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadr Nizamat Adalat were established for the purpose of

providing convenience to the people of Delhi and the Upper Provinces. Additionally, Bentick lessened the degree of the punishment's severity. Bentick was the one who put an end to the brutal practice of using whips to beat a guy. In the past, Persian had been the language that was spoken in the court. Nobody knew anything about Persian, not even the general public or the judges. As a result, Bentick issued an order that substituted the usage of vernacular language for Persian. English has taken the role of Persian as the language of court in higher courts throughout the world. The positions of Munsiffs and Sadar Amins were filled by India's qualified citizens.

**Administrative Reforms:**

Charter Act of 1833 defined the role of the East India Company and formalized the process of centralizing India's administration. Lord Bentick was a truly remarkable reformer. In addition to demonstrating compassion for the Indian people, he was the first Governor-General to make an effort to alleviate the challenges faced by the Aboriginal people. After Cornwallis, it was Governor-General Lord William Bentick who was responsible for paying attention to any new administrative reforms and introducing certain modifications in the realm of administration. It was he who initiated the appointment of Indians to positions inside the Company's service. Cornwallis had a negative assessment of the Indian people's character, abilities, and honesty, and as a result, he had stopped appointing Indians to administration positions. Therefore, he endeavored to hold all higher positions exclusively for Europeans. It caused the Indians a great deal of offense. This strategy, however, was abandoned by Bentick in order to facilitate a more intimate relationship between the ruler and those who were dominated. As a result, Bentick appointed Native Americans to positions inside the government. Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector positions have now been made available to educated Indians who have been appointed to those positions. Bentick made a significant contribution to the process of Indianization of the civil service by taking this move.

By the time Bentick arrived in the North Western province, land revenue settlement had been implemented. The premise behind it was that it would be a semi-permanent settlement for thirty years, which would both incentivize the tenants to make improvements and enable the state to gain some of the advantages. The construction of this settlement would take ten years. Following the completion of an accurate survey of the land, the settlement was established with major landholders, cultivators, or village groups, determined by the specific location. There was an increase in the state's revenue as a result of this arrangement. It was decided to partition the Presidency of Bengal into twenty different divisions. Over each division, a commissioner was selected to that position. In addition, the Commissioner made decisions regarding cases that had been previously handled by judges of the courts of appeal and circuit in the provinces. In addition to this, they were authorized to control and monitor the activities of the District Magistrates and Judges.

**INCLUSION OF INDIANS IN GOVERNMENT**

The Charter Act also made provisions for the inclusion of Indians in government service.

Bentinck's reforms aimed to modernize Indian society and administration, while also addressing issues of social injustice and promoting a more efficient government.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bentinck was a "straightforward, homely, upright, benevolent, and sensible man." The long-standing ills that had been present in Hindu society were eradicated as a result of his social reforms, which included the elimination of Sati and the prohibition of child sacrifice. It is heartening to consider the fact that "Bentinck acted where others had talked." Additionally, he was willing to put his own position in jeopardy in order to ensure that the regulations that prohibited Sati were followed. During that historical period, administrators exhibited a level of boldness and forthrightness unlike anything before. India entered a new era upon the implementation of his educational reforms.

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